**ESOL Creative Writing in Prison Project**

**Notes for workshop leaders**

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13. **Background and rationale**

These notes are for workshop leaders – teachers, librarians or other mentors – wishing to run workshops in creative writing for prisoners whose first language is not English (ESOL).

The 12 activities we have suggested were trialled over the course of six workshops in three UK prisons between May and July 2018. The joint Reading Agency and NATECLA project was funded by The Bell Foundation. The main outcome of the project was a collection of original writing, which can be downloaded from <https://readingagency.org.uk/resources/?programme=ahead>

We hope that ESOL learners who are in prison will enjoy reading original work by other prisoners whose first language is not English as an alternative to books written, predominantly, by native speakers. The collection features texts at a range of levels from beginner to advanced.

We hope that readers of the collection, whether prisoner or potential workshop leader, will be inspired to ask for/put on creative writing workshops in their prison. This can be very productive on many levels:

* there is scope for language work around the activities;
* learners can work at their own level;
* the activities promote discussion;
* activities can be chosen for relevance and interest to the participants;
* learners develop pride in the pieces they have written, particularly if the pieces can be displayed or printed in a booklet;
* there is an opportunity to integrate the writing workshop with illustration and word processing workshops.

An additional benefit from producing original texts, particularly for learners at lower levels, is that the text will exactly match the level of the learner and so can be used for teaching purposes at a word, sentence and paragraph level. For ideas on how to work with beginner writers see [British Council ESOL Nexus - The Language Experience Approach](http://esol.britishcouncil.org/content/teachers/staff-room/continuing-professional-development/language-experience). To ensure the workshop is accessible to learners at all levels, it will be necessary to have someone to scribe for people with limited literacy.

1. **Translation**

It is likely that some learners, not necessarily only the ones at a low level, will feel more comfortable writing in their own language first, if they are literate in that language. The advantage of this is that they get the ideas onto paper first and can then, with the help of a workshop assistant or teacher, or a fellow prisoner, concentrate on finding the words in English. This can be beneficial for language development, but it can also increase the writer’s confidence and give recognition to the proficiency of that individual in another language, particularly if the alphabet is different.

1. **Working with mentors**

Our workshops were greatly enhanced by the presence of workshop assistants – in our case mentors from the Shannon Trust and librarians. If possible, the assistants should be briefed on their role before the workshop takes place (see Guidelines for workshop assistants).

1. **Workshop management**

**Introduction:**  We recommend showing the group a collection of writing and having a discussion about the value of writing and sharing texts.

**Activities:** We recommend a maximum of six activities per workshop**.** These could be presented in two ways:

* in a carousel style, where pairs or groups of learners choose what they would like to work on and move from one activity to another, with support from the leader and assistants;
* as a whole class activity, with everyone working on the same task, and with pair and group work incorporated as appropriate. This is particularly suitable for smaller classes. If the workshop leader is an ESOL teacher, this also enables the language component of the activity to be exploited more easily than in a carousel.

Learners could be grouped according to level of ability in English. Alternatively, they could be in mixed level groups with a common first language so that the more able could translate for the others.

**Review and evaluation:** We recommend thateach workshop finishes with a review of the activities and reading of the work produced. Participants can be encouraged to produce more contributions on their own. They could also type up their work, if they have access to computers, or produce illustrations.

1. **Materials pack**

These notes are part of a pack of materials consisting of:

* Notes for workshop leaders
* Notes for workshop assistants
* Instructions for activities for participants on powerpoint slides, which can be printed or shown on a screen
* Additional worksheets and flashcards

**Warmer**

**Instructions for participants**

* Pair up with someone who speaks a different language.
* Teach your partner ‘hello’ in your language.

Teach each other five other words from the topics of weather, jobs, leisure, food, festivals.

**Notes for workshop leaders**

Find pictures on the internet to act as prompts. Participants feed back on a language they have learnt.

**Activity 1 This reminds me of…**

**Instructions for participants**

* What do certain smells remind you of? We’ve brought in some things for you to smell, but please think of more.
* Think about your other senses… *the sound of, the taste of, the feel of, the sight of…*
* Read some of the examples. Then write your own text in English, or in your own language. Translate if possible.

**Notes for workshop leaders**

Take in a bag of objects that have interesting smells or tastes such as chocolate, scented flowers, teabags, soap (having checked with the prison that this is allowed). Prepare some sentences about the memories smells conjure up for you to read to the participants.

**Activity 2a Sayings**

**Instructions for participants**

* Do you recognise these sayings that people often use in the UK when they want to describe a common situation? Do you have something similar in your own language?
* Write some examples in English, or in your own language. Translate if possible.

**Notes for workshop leaders**

Download cartoons or other images of typical English expressions, for instance from [www.pinterest.co.uk/TheGrammarClub/proverbs-idioms-and-sayings](http://www.pinterest.co.uk/TheGrammarClub/proverbs-idioms-and-sayings) Use our flashcards (pages 1 and 2) to match the saying with the meaning. Elicit similar sayings from participants’ cultures to add to the collection and encourage them to illustrate them. Tell them not to just translate from the English.

**Activity 2b Sayings**

**Instructions for participants**

* With a partner, discuss these sayings from different countries. What do you think they are saying about life?
* Write some sayings from your country

**Notes for workshop leaders**

Use page 3 of the handout ‘Flashcards of sayings’. Some have been collected from ESOL learners. The meanings could be discussed before participants write sayings from their own cultures. Many cultures have some sayings in common, but with variations such as ‘butterflies in your stomach’ are ‘caterpillars’ in French and ‘Don’t put all your eggs in one basket’ is ‘Don’t put your all your eggs under a sack of potatoes’ in Albania.

**Activity 3 Jokes and riddles**

**Instructions for participants**

* Here are some jokes and riddles that people in the UK like to tell. Do you think they’re funny?
* People have a different sense of humour in different countries. Write some jokes and riddles from the country you grew up in. Write in English, or in your own language. Translate if possible.

**Notes for workshop leaders**

See ‘Jokes and riddles’ worksheet for examples to use in the workshop. These could be made into flashcards to match the question and answer.

If you get a lot of responses, the group can ask each other the riddles or tell the jokes and then have a vote on which are the funniest.

**Activity 4 Reflections on learning English**

**Instructions for participants**

* When did you first hear English? When did you first speak English? Did you go to a class or learn it from people around you? Tell us more.
* Write in English, or in your own language. Translate if possible.

**Notes for workshop leaders**

Use the worksheet ‘Reflections on learning English’ which has questions and space to write the answers.

**Activity 5 Poems**

**Instructions for participants**

* Have you ever read a poem in English? Or in your own language? Why not try writing one? First read some examples written by ESOL students.
* Before you write, look at how you can plan your ideas using a spider diagram. You can write about the subjects we suggest, or choose your own.
* Now write your own. Write in English, or in your own language. Translate if possible.

**Notes for workshop leaders**

This activity needs support from a teacher or a librarian rather than a mentor. Choose a topic, for example ‘Spring’ and show participants how you can use this to brainstorm ideas. If possible, show examples of poems from a collection, such as the one associated with this project.

**Activity 6**  **Alphabet poems**

**Instructions for participants**

* Can you write some sentences about things beginning with the different letters of the alphabet?
* Look at the examples and then write your own. Write on the cards and stick them next to the letter you’re writing about, or use the handout. Write in English, or in your own language. Translate if possible.

**Notes for workshop leaders**

Use our ‘Alphabet poem’ handout, or cut out the letters from an alphabet poster,   
e g from [www.giftofcuriousity.com](http://www.giftofcuriousity.com) Participants can choose a letter and stick it on a flipchart next to an example ‘A is for … ‘ Show examples of alphabet poems from the collection.

**Activity 7** **When I am old!**

**Instructions for participants**

* Read the poem about ‘when I am old’.
* What kinds of things are the writers looking forward to?
* Can you write a poem like this?

**Notes for workshop leaders**

This is only suitable for certain groups, possibly younger and female. Use the poem ‘[When I am old I shall wear purple’](http://www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk/poetry/poems/warning) by Jenny Joseph, or start a group discussion to stimulate ideas.

**Activity 8 The sea**

**Instructions for participants**

* Work with a partner.
* Look at the objects connected with the sea.
* Read the poems about the sea.
* Which do you like best? Why?
* Can you write a poem about the sea? Write in English or your own language or both.

**Notes for workshop leaders**

Take in pictures and objects associated with the sea, for instance a model boat, a shell, a pebble, some sand in a toy bucket.

Show poems about the sea from the collection.

**Activity 9 International etiquette quiz**

**Instructions for participants**

* Do you find that things people do in England would be rude in the country where you grew up? We want to know what they are.
* Look at some examples and write your own and we’ll make them into a quiz. Write the question on a post-it note. Write the answer on another.

**Notes for workshop leaders**

Use the examples on the slides in the materials pack. Discuss the ‘dos’ and ‘don’ts’ of behaviour conventions in the UK. Encourage participants to write questions about accepted and unaccepted customs in their own culture for others in the group to answer.

**Activity 10 Someone great**

**Instructions for participants**

* Write about someone you admire. It could be a famous person or someone you know.
* Write about why you admire them.

**Notes for workshop leaders**

Use examples from the collection. Show them the texts about people who aren’t famous, just important to the writers who knew them. Take in photos of some famous people whom the participants might admire.

**Activity 11 My home town**

**Instructions for participants**

* How would you describe the place where you grew up? Or another place you know?
* Think of an adjective for each letter. For example:
* B - big
* R - riverside (River Avon)
* I - industrial
* S -stunning suspension bridge
* T - tottering (Totterdown district)
* O - old
* L - lovely

Can you use the words to write a paragraph about the town?

**Notes for workshop leaders**

Use an example of a town you know, or the town where the prison is. Show examples from the collection. You could do this activity using their names or other words.

**Activity 12 Fold-over story**

**Instructions for participants**

* Write the name of someone everyone knows in a sentence at top of the paper next to ‘Who?’ **–** a famous person, someone in your class, a teacher. Fold the paper over once so no one can see it, then pass it to the person on your right.
* Write a sentence about what the person did on the next line beside ‘What?‘ Make it funny. Fold over your sentence and pass the paper to the person on your right.
* Write a sentence about how they did it on the next line beside ‘How?‘ Use adverbs, for example nicely, happily, quickly. Fold over your sentence and pass the paper to the person on your right.
* Continue with ‘Where?’ Fold and pass the paper. Then ‘When?’ Fold and pass the paper. Finally, write a sentence beside ‘Why?’ Start your sentence with ‘Because...’ and pass it on one more time.
* Unfold the paper and read it to a partner or to the class.

**Notes for workshop leaders**

Write the words **Who? What? How? Where? When? Why?** along one side of the board. Explain that you are going to write a sentence story about someone they all know. Ask for suggestions. Use one of the sample sentences or make up your own. Explain what they are going to do and ask for suggestions for the first couple of sentences. Then write or dictate a new sentence with a blank space for a name and ask the class to copy it on to their piece of paper with the name of their character in the blank space. They could do the activity in pairs or small groups.