

**TEACHERS' CREATIVE  
WRITING RESOURCE**  
READING MUSEUM



WRITTEN BY  
CATH EDWARDS



# TEACHERS' CREATIVE WRITING RESOURCE

## INTRODUCTION

This resource is designed to help teachers to make use of the Museum and Abbey to inspire their KS2 pupils to engage in creative writing. It comprises a number of suggested lesson starters and outlines as well as 'extras' that can be added to a lesson or used to help individual children. The lesson ideas are written as if addressing the child directly; this is to make the resource accessible to families as well as teachers. The ideas could even be used by children on their own.

There are sessions available to book, [here](#), that you may find useful before your creative writing activities.

Please make sure to book your visit to the museum as some galleries may not be available.

## PROMPT SHEETS

THE FOLLOWING PROMPT SHEETS CAN BE USED WITH THE SUGGESTED LESSON IDEAS IN THE SECOND HALF OF THIS DOCUMENT.

### **THE CHARACTER OUTLINE**

The Character Outline helps pupils to think more deeply about their characters and to get to know them better; the information they write about their character may or may not find inclusion in their final piece, but they are likely to find that writing in general and plotting in particular becomes easier with a fuller knowledge of their character.



## **THE CHARACTER OUTLINE SUPPLEMENTARY QUESTIONS**

The Character Outline Supplementary Questions may be used to spark further and deeper thought. This list can be given to individual pupils who want to increase their understanding of their character; it can be used for small-group discussion; for whole-class discussion; or for hot-seat questions, where one pupil takes on the persona of their created character and answers questions from the list, posed by the rest of the group.

## **DESCRIPTION PROMPTS**

The Description Prompts invite pupils to observe, whether directly or in their minds' eye, some of the elements in their piece of writing and to create for themselves a small vocabulary to draw on in their writing. It also asks pupils to begin to consider which words or combinations of words work best to create the effect they want.

## PLOT OUTLINE

The Plot Outline invites consideration of the value of planning and of simple story structure. It suggests a basic method of plot outlining. It is certainly not the only way of structuring plots but it's a good place to start. Although use of the Plot Outline sheet can help to avoid pupils running out of steam when part way through a piece of writing and so has its uses, it must also be remembered that many highly successful authors do not plan their plots in advance.

## WHAT IF?

The What If? list is a series of prompts for pupils to use if or when they 'get stuck' with their writing. Pupils can read the prompts until they find one they like, then incorporate it into their writing. It can also be fun to choose a prompt randomly (close your eyes and put your finger anywhere on the list) and find a way of weaving it into the piece. Another alternative is to choose two prompts and use them together. Using the What if? list can be an alternative to writing a Plot Outline.

# CHARACTER OUTLINE

CHARACTER'S NAME \_\_\_\_\_

AGE \_\_\_\_\_

· WHAT DO THEY LOOK LIKE?

· FAMILY (BROTHERS, SISTERS, WHO ELSE?)

· WHAT SORT OF HOUSE DO THEY LIVE IN?

· WHAT WORK DO THEY DO, IF ANY? IF THEY DON'T  
WORK, WHAT DO THEY DO WITH THEIR TIME?

· WHAT MAKES THEM HAPPY?

· IS THERE ANYTHING THAT WORRIES THEM?

· WHAT ELSE DO YOU WANT TO SAY ABOUT YOUR CHARACTER?

# CHARACTER OUTLINE

1. What do they do when no-one is looking?
2. What is their proudest moment?
3. What is their worst memory?
4. What is their darkest secret?
5. Are they a good friend? What makes them so?
6. What is the best advice they have ever been given?
7. What is their favourite time of the year? Why?
8. What would they do if their house caught fire?
9. What would they do if they were accused of a crime they did not commit?
10. What would they do if they were accused of a crime they did commit?
11. If they found or were given a large amount of money, what is the first thing they would spend it on?
12. What is the second thing they would spend it on?
13. What is the best meal they have ever had?
14. Describe their perfect day.
15. What makes them laugh?
16. What makes them cry?
17. What is the one thing they would really like to do?
18. Have they done it yet? If not, why not?
19. What does your character dream about?
20. Does your character prefer to take the lead, or do they prefer others to take the lead? Why?
21. Who is their best friend? What do they like about their best friend?



# DESCRIPTION PROMPTS

Think about the thing you would like to describe. It may be an object, a person, a place, an animal, a building. It may be indoors or outdoors. It may be real or imaginary. Perhaps you are looking at it now.

Now, write down briefly what it is that you are going to describe. Write something short, like 'It's a big oak tree.'

What colours do you see? Look for as many different colours as you can and also look for different shades of the same colour. See if you can write at least some of the colours in a descriptive way, e.g. rather than 'brown' you could write 'chocolate brown' or 'reddish brown'.

Write about the textures that you can see. If possible, touch the object and write about how it feels. If it is not possible to touch it, then imagine touching it and write down what your imagination tells you.

What shapes do you see? If it is a small object, it may be easy to describe the shape of the whole thing. With a bigger object or a whole scene, you may be able to describe a few of the parts, e.g. if it's an oak tree you might describe the shape of the trunk and the shape of a leaf.

What sounds can you hear? If it's a small object, you might think about how it would sound if you tapped it with a pencil or dropped it on the floor. What else could you do to create a sound? With a bigger object, you can imagine the possible sounds, e.g. an oak tree may have creaky branches and rustling leaves in the wind.

Does the object have a smell or taste? Are there any smells or tastes associated with the object? E.g. an old biscuit tin will at one time have smelled of biscuits and the biscuits would have had a taste.

Now write a description of your object using some of the words that you have noted down. And now, write a second description of your object using some of the words that you have not already used.

Which of the two descriptions do you think is best? Why?



# PLOT OUTLINE

This is a very basic plot outline. It will help you to write a short story. Remember that each story and each writer is different, so you may want to change the story as you write it. You may want to add extra stages or scenes in your story or you may want to leave some things out. If you complete this plot outline, though, it will give you somewhere to start your story and it will give your writing a sense of direction.

Usually, stories are about people overcoming problems. Often the problem gets worse before it gets better. Sometimes the person with the problem manages to overcome the problem by themselves. Very often, they get help from other people. To make your story interesting it's a good idea to write about the problem early on in the story. Then your reader will want to know what happens next and how the story ends.

**WHO ARE THE MAIN CHARACTERS? YOU MIGHT FIND IT HELPFUL TO FILL IN A CHARACTER OUTLINE FOR EACH CHARACTER.**

**WHAT PROBLEM DO YOUR CHARACTERS HAVE? PERHAPS ONE CHARACTER HAS A PROBLEM THAT IS CAUSED BY ANOTHER CHARACTER.**

**THINK OF THREE POSSIBLE WAYS THAT THE PROBLEM CAN GET WORSE. (YOU DO NOT HAVE TO USE ALL OF THESE IN YOUR STORY).**

**CAN THE PROBLEM GET EVEN WORSE? HOW?**

**WHO IS ABLE TO HELP? WHAT CAN THEY DO TO HELP? DOES YOUR CHARACTER NEED TO ASK FOR HELP?**

**HOW IS THE PROBLEM EVENTUALLY SOLVED?**

**HOW ARE YOU GOING TO END YOUR STORY?**

# WHAT IF?

If you are stuck with your writing, thinking about the answers to some of these questions can help to get you started again. 'What if?' questions can often send you and your writing off in a direction that you hadn't thought of.

1. What if your characters find a lost dog?
2. What if there is a sudden thunderstorm?
3. What if a friendly ghost appears?
4. What if an unfriendly ghost appears?
5. What if your character feels very tired and can't go on any longer?
6. What if something funny happens?
7. What if something sad happens?
8. What if your character decides to be very brave?
9. What if your character finds that they are stronger than they thought?
10. What if there is an earthquake?
11. What if the weather is very, very hot?
12. What if your character finds a key? Where is the lock that the key fits?
13. What if there is a rockfall and a road becomes blocked?
14. What if your character loses something very important?
15. What if your character finds something very important?
16. What if your character is given a magical power that they can use only once?
17. What if your character is given a magical power but they have to pay a high price for it?
18. What if robbers come at night?
19. What if your character becomes very scared?
20. What if you are not allowed to use the letter 'i' in the next three sentences you write?
21. What if you have to, absolutely have to, finish the next three sentences within five minutes?
22. What if you open a dictionary and use the first word you see in the next sentence you write?
23. What if you write the next two sentences with your 'wrong' hand? So if you are right handed, you use your left hand.
24. What if you invent another character and add them to the story now?
25. What if you write a conversation between two of your characters where they say things they would not usually say?
26. What if you make up the next five 'What if?' questions yourself?

## IDEAS FOR CREATIVE WRITING LESSONS

You can of course adapt these ideas to suit your own classes. Please feel free to use just part of a suggested lesson, to combine ideas from different lessons or to make any other changes that work for you.

Don't forget to use the Character Outline, Description Prompts, Plot Outline and the What if? question sheets as and when they suit your purpose.




## FOR USE IN ANY MUSEUM GALLERY

**Areas of Focus:** Imagination, description, character creation

Note for teachers: this activity uses the museum's exhibits to focus attention on a simple method of creating fictional characters. As an extension activity, the Plot Outline will help your pupils to create a story from their characters. If you wanted a historical emphasis, you could specify which period of history the character lived in.

1. Look around you at the museum displays. Choose one item that appeals to you.
2. Now, imagine a container. It is on the floor in front of you and it can be any sort of container - a box, a backpack, a suitcase, a tin, a bag: you decide. The only rule is that the container must be big enough to hold the item you chose.
3. Take a little time to create a clear picture of the container in your mind. Think about its colour, texture, size, the material it is made from, whether it is old or new and anything else that you might be able to think of. Write a description of the container.

- 
4. The container does not belong to you; it belongs to someone else. The question is, who? Looking again at your description of the container, imagine what sort of person it might belong to. Also, the container is intended to hold the item from the museum display, so think about why the person would want that item. Write a description of that person. It may help to fill in a Character Outline.
  5. Now, thinking again about the item you chose from the museum display, imagine that it is in the container. Notice how much space there is left in the container with the item inside it. Thinking about the person who owns the container, decide what else that person has put in the container. Write it down.
  6. Can you add anything to your description of the person now you have thought about the things they have put in their container? Think about each thing and what it might tell you about the person.

# THE GYPSY CARAVAN 1

**Location:** Riverside Museum at Blake's Lock

**Areas of Focus:** Observation, description, empathy, plot creation

1. Look at the painted decoration. Observe it carefully then take a few minutes to write a description.
2. Imagine the person who painted the caravan. First, describe what the person looked like, then write about the sort of person they were. Were they kind or unkind, happy or sad? What else?
3. What were they thinking while they were painting?
4. Imagine the surroundings while the person was painting. Was it indoors or outdoors? Write a description of the surroundings, including the objects that you can see in your imagination.
5. Choose three items from the surroundings. Now imagine the painter telling a story about something unusual that happened to them while they were painting, including the three items. Write the story.

## THE GYPSY CARAVAN 2

**Location:** Riverside Museum at Blake's Lock

**Areas of Focus:** Observation, description, imagination

1. Look inside the caravan. What can you see? Write a short description.
2. Imagine there is a family living in the caravan. There are two young children. Write down the names of all the people in the family. Include any animals they have. Write a description of each member of the family.
3. Now imagine they are all sitting outside the caravan around a fire of sticks that they have collected. It is nearly the children's bed time. One of the adults tells the children a story.
4. Think about the sort of story that young children might like to hear at bed time. Perhaps you can talk to the person next to you about it.
5. Imagine that you can see the family in the evening, sitting in the flickering light of the fire, all listening to the story. Write the story that the adult told the children.





# THE BAYEUX TAPESTRY

**Location:** Reading Museum, first floor

**Areas of Focus:** Co-operation, observation, empathy, imagination

Have the children in small groups of three or four, and allocate each group a short section of the tapestry (about two metres)

1. Take a few minutes to look carefully at your group's section of the tapestry. Then quietly discuss what you see. Who is in the tapestry? What do they seem to be doing? Are they saying anything? If so, what? What are they thinking? What are they feeling?
2. Each person in the group, write down your own ideas in answer to those questions.
3. Now look at the tapestry again and see what you can describe. Think about colours, textures, the clothes the people are wearing, the other objects.

4. Each person in the group, write your own descriptions.
5. Now look at the lower border of the tapestry. There may be people or animals or birds. Can you see anything else?
6. In your group, choose one of the people or creatures in the border. Imagine you are that person or creature and you are observing the people and events that are taking place in the main picture.
7. Quietly discuss, as if you are the person or creature in the border, what you are seeing and what you think and feel about what you can see. Are you happy, frightened, sad? Are you perhaps impressed, or disgusted, or maybe feeling something quite different?
8. Write some notes about your discussion.
9. Each person in the group, write the story of what you imagine is happening in the main part of the tapestry. Write it as though you are the person or creature in the border.

# THE HUNTLEY & PALMERS GALLERY 1

**Location:** Reading Museum, second floor, next to the Window Gallery

**Areas of Focus:** Observation, description

This writing exercise is based on the display of ornamental biscuit tins.

1. Spend a few minutes looking at the display of biscuit tins. Choose one of them. Observe it carefully: the size, shape, colours, design. Now turn your back on it.
2. Write a description of your tin without looking at it again, if you can. You can take another look if you really need to, but first, see how much you can write and how much detail you can remember before looking again.





3. Find a partner. Take turns to read your descriptions to each other. It should be quite easy for your partner to identify which tin you are describing.
4. Now choose another tin, one that is designed to look like some other object. It might look like a book or a bus or a basket of fruit - there are lots to choose from.
5. This time, you can look at the tin while you write a description. But what you must not do is say what the tin represents. So, if you were describing a tin that is shaped like a car you could say it has wheels and windows and lights on the front and back and doors, and you would describe all of those things, but you would not use the word 'car'.
6. Find another partner. Take turns to read your descriptions to each other and see if your partner can guess which tin you are describing.


## THE HUNTLEY & PALMERS GALLERY 2

**Location:** Reading Museum, second floor, next to the Window Gallery

**Areas of Focus:** Imagination, creativity, empathy, plot creation

This exercise depends in part on being able to imagine working in the Huntley and Palmers factory, so the pupils would need to tour the gallery and look carefully at the exhibits first. The Character Outline and Plot Outline sheets might be useful.

1. Many biscuits are made with flour, butter, sugar and eggs.
2. In groups of three or four, talk about each of these items, and try to think of other uses for them. You can be as imaginative as you like. One example: you could use flour as fake snow, sprinkled on a Christmas tree. Write down your ideas as you go along.

- 
3. On your own, think about three people who worked at the biscuit factory. They might be people whose photos you have seen in the gallery. Decide what their names are and write a short description of them. They are going to be the heroes of a story.
  4. One day, when the three people are all at work, a gang of robbers burst into the factory and demand to be given all the biscuits. They are jealous of Huntley and Palmers' success and they want to stop the factory making any money.
  5. Firstly, write this scene in more detail. Show the three workers doing their jobs and describe what happens when the robbers burst in.
  6. Now think about what might happen next. The three workers want to defend the factory, but all they have is flour, butter, sugar and eggs. What can they do to hold off the robbers?
  7. Write the rest of the story.

# THE MAIWAND LION

**Location:** Forbury Gardens

**Areas of Focus:** Imagination, description, plot

1. Imagine the lion statue has come to life and he is friendly.
2. He will let you ride on his back, but he is still huge. How do you manage to climb onto his back?
3. What is it like? What does his fur look and feel like? What are you thinking?
4. Starting in Forbury Gardens, you can ask the lion to take you anywhere you like.
5. What does it feel like when the lion starts to move? What do you see?
6. Describe the journey - what do you see along the way? You are a lot higher up than you usually would be. What difference does that make to the things you can see? You can write about what you are thinking as well. Do you talk to anybody on the way?
7. What happens when you arrive at your destination? Are there any people there? If so, how do they react?
8. You have now written a story. Is there anything you need to add to complete your story or improve it? Is there anything that would make it more fun to read or more exciting?



# THE ABBEY CHAPTER HOUSE 'SUMER IS I-CUMEN IN'

**Location:** In the Ruins, through the tunnel in Forbury Gardens

**Areas of Focus:** Description, verse writing

1. On the wall of the Chapter House is a plaque bearing the words and music for an old song, 'Sumer is i-cumen in'.  
This song was written down about 800 years ago in a book kept in Reading Abbey. It is the oldest known 'round'; this is a song in which several singers sing the same words and tune, but each starting at a different time. (Teachers: see 5 below)  
In the Story of Reading Gallery in the museum, you can hear the song being sung.
- 2 'Sumer is i-cumen in' is written in the way people would have spoken in the 13th century. Here it is in more modern English:

Summer has come in,  
Loudly sing cuckoo,  
Grows the seed and blooms the meadow  
And springs the wood anew  
Sing, cuckoo!

3. The person or people who wrote the song were thinking about the things that happen at the start of summer. What is your favourite season of the year? Write down the things that make that season different from the others. Think about the things that you can see, hear and feel. Are there different smells or tastes at your favourite time of the year?
4. Pick a simple tune that you already know. One example would be 'Happy Birthday' but you can no doubt think of something more interesting.
5. Write a song about your favourite season using some of the words you have already written. See if you can fit the song to the tune you have chosen. Note for teachers: An example of a new song written to the tune of 'Sumer is i-cumen in' can be found on YouTube; it is the 'Mouse Mending Song' from the animated television series 'Bagpuss'. The 'Mouse Mending Song' is also an example of a round.
6. Find a partner and either read or sing your song.



# THE ABBEY DORMITORY

**Location:** In the Ruins, near Chestnut Walk and the River Kennet

**Areas of Focus:** Imagination, empathy, description, genres, plot

1. The Abbey dormitory was where the monks slept. It is large; how many monks would you think slept there?
2. The monks spent a good deal of time every day in prayer. In summer, they would pray at 2am, dawn, 6am, 9am, 12 noon, 3pm, dusk or sunset and 8pm. At dawn they would wash and change into their daytime clothes, and their bedtime was after the 8pm prayers. During the day, while they were not praying they spent their time working and reading. They had a meal after the 12 noon prayers and another meal before their dusk prayers.
3. Imagine you are one of the monks. Write one or two sentences on what it's like to have to wake up at two in the morning for prayers.

4. Imagine again that you are one of the monks. You are in the dormitory at night and you are awake while all the other monks are asleep. Look around you. What can you see? Remember it will be quite dark; perhaps there is enough moonlight shining through a window to let you see a little. What do your other senses tell you? Write it down.
5. Think of three things that might have woken you up. Make the first thing realistic - something that could have happened in those times. Make the second thing strange or magical. Make the third thing scary.
6. Which is your favourite of the three things? If it was a story, what would have happened just before the thing that woke you? Write it down. What might have happened next? Write that down too.
7. You now have part of a story. Perhaps you could write the rest of the story.

# THE ABBEY WHARF

**Location:** Chestnut Walk, the River Kennet

**Areas of Focus:** Description, imagination, character.

**Note for Teachers:** There is a diorama of a lively wharf scene in the Story of Reading Gallery. It shows some typical boats, how different goods were unloaded and some methods of transporting the goods to the Abbey. The human figures are wearing medieval costume. It may be helpful for pupils to view the diorama before visiting the Abbey wharf to help them to picture the wharf in medieval times. For this lesson you will need the Character Outline; the Description Prompts may also be useful. This activity could be developed further by using the Plot Outline to lead into story writing.

1. On the wharf, standing by the river, what can you see and hear? Write down the sounds you can hear and the things you can see and then think about the sights and sounds there might have been in the Abbey's time. It might help to think about the work that people did at the wharf, whether there were any animals and what kinds of boats there were. Write down your ideas.
2. What about smells? Write these down, both now and in the Abbey's time.
3. Now picture the wharf with people working in the Abbey's time. Perhaps there are also people passing by, going about their business. Choose two of the people and write about them. Use a Character Outline sheet to help you.
4. Draw a picture of the people you have written about. Show each person either doing their work or at home with their family if they have one. Write two or three sentences about each person, explaining what they are doing and who they are with.





## **GALLERIES IN THE MUSEUM**

### **The Story of Reading Gallery**

Look here for information about Reading Abbey.

### **The Green Space**

A gallery about the insects, animals and wildlife from the local area.

### **The Silchester Gallery**

An exploration of the Roman City of Calleva that used to occupy Silchester.

### **The Huntley & Palmers Gallery**

A collection showing the history of the famous Huntley & Palmers Biscuit Company.

### **The Window Gallery and Art Gallery**

Artwork from the Reading Museum Collection is displayed here.