

Creative Writing



International Labour Organization

SCREAM

Stop Child Labour

Supporting Children's Rights through Education, the Arts and the Media



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Aim: Create a story on a simple theme and then flesh it out. Use the same technique to write a story about child labour.



Gain: Develops literary and communication skills. Provides a means to express innermost feelings on child labour. Supports the work of other modules, such as drama, in which a script needs to be developed.



Time frame

2 double teaching sessions

Motivation

It's a strange paradox in today's new, so-called "knowledge" economy that literary expression is fast being consumed by information technology. Computer programmes will check grammar and spelling, leaving little to a young person's literary discipline or knowledge. Some programmes will practically write the story for the user, by prompting a series of words – nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns. Where is the fun in that? Where is the creativity, the imagination? Young people need to be allowed to give their creativity and imagination free rein.

Some of the modules in this series focus on the visual arts. However, literary expression is just as critical to a young person's development. Young people need the tools to express themselves with, tools that do not purport to do the work for them, but which stimulate their own inherent capabilities. Given the right support and environment, young people can tell the tale of child labour and all its evils





in a form that their peers around the world will understand and identify with. They can develop stories, appeal for help and call on others to take action, all through the written word.

To be able to write and to have the unfettered freedom to explore the realms of one's imagination are liberating tools for young people. Other modules in this series will look to young people to write role-play exercises, pieces of drama, songs and letters, solidarity appeals and press releases. This module is specifically designed to tap into young people's huge potential to write and to write creatively. We want them to express their innermost thoughts and emotions on paper. The best way for them to do this, while hiding behind their self-consciousness (which they must be allowed to do), is to write in the third person, to tell a story and develop their own fictitious characters who will express what they really feel.

Many young people have the gift of writing well and creatively and do not even know it. To watch this gift emerging is a magical experience. By liberating them, we are moving along the path to liberating those children in labour, in bondage, in poverty and in danger.

It is relatively rare that young people are called upon to take responsibility for important issues. Given their potential as agents for change in society, this is an unfortunate oversight. This module offers them a two-fold opportunity. First, they will be called upon to search their inner-selves for creative and imaginative expression. Second, they will be given the responsibility of explaining an issue of global importance to their peers and to representatives of other communities through their literary abilities.

This module deepens the personal development process and will help establish a closer-knit structure within the group. Implementing this activity will assist you in assessing the potential and the character of the young people you are working with. It will bring out such qualities as leadership, communication and sensitivity. It can also be a very moving experience as you will recognize the depth of feeling in their writing.

Preparation

In preparing for this module, you will want to consider whether you are going to implement the module by yourself or seek the help of a specialist.

If you are confident enough to proceed by yourself, equip yourself with some handy reference books on creative writing, which will provide some additional guidelines. You'll find these books in libraries or other institutions or in bookshops.

For the first activity you will also need to arm yourself with a simple book of silly rhymes. A library or bookshop should have a good selection of such books, particularly in the children's section. Take the time to browse through them and choose one with rhymes that you know will appeal to your group.



Note for the user

We suggest seeking external support for the implementation of this module. It is a key module as it provides young people with the wherewithal to participate fully in other modules that require writing abilities. It is also an important module in terms of an individual's personal development and, therefore, it is worth extra effort and investment if possible.



If you have a colleague experienced in teaching creative writing or know of someone in the community who is and would be willing to offer his or her services, it is well worth availing yourself of such support.

External support

In addition, a number of countries operate a system of co-operation between institutions and the literary community. These systems involve writers and poets being invited into schools and youth groups to talk about writing and developing the art of creative writing. If such a system is in operation in your country, it is well worth

investigating further. The cost is usually minimal, as the system is often state-subsidized. Given the age group you are working with, it would be advisable to ask the body in question to identify an author who writes books or poetry for this group. He or she will be able to relate better to this age group and the dynamic will be more effective in the teaching sessions.

These individuals will be able to help the young people in their literary expression, which is critical for the outcome of this module. Young people can be self-conscious, and artistic expression will not come easy to most of them. They need to be encouraged and supported as they express their emotions in the form of words. Young people are not particularly comfortable about baring their soul to all and they need to be reassured that their efforts will not be mocked or belittled.

Given the nature of the project, it is unlikely that third parties would refuse their help and support, even if you were unable to cover their costs for whatever reason. In such cases, take the time to negotiate with the body co-ordinating such programmes. You might be able to get a reduction or even a total waiver. The writer might offer to come in for free – however, it is difficult enough as it is for writers and artists to make a living and it would be unfair to ask too much of them.

It is also possible that you might be able to find a sponsor willing to cover the costs of the writer for the sake of the project. This could be a task to develop with the young people in the group. Work out how much is needed and then contact potential sponsors and put the case to them. Young people respond well to responsibility and it would be worth the effort if they were successful in getting the costs covered.

What you'll need

- ✓ Paper and pens or pencils.
- ✓ Books of silly rhymes.
- ✓ Black/whiteboard or flipchart.



Getting started

The approach you adopt will depend on a number of factors:

- Whether or not you have invited a literary personality or specialist to come in and take the sessions;
- Whether or not you have a colleague or another teacher who would be qualified enough to take the session and willing to do so;
- Whether or not you have been able to obtain effective reference books on creative writing.

Failing the above, the approach described below should be sufficient for you to be able to implement the module, particularly if it could be supplemented by any of the above approaches as well.

The idea is to eventually encourage the young people in the group to express themselves individually and not as a group. However, the initial exercises for this module would be best served if the young people were organized in groups of two to four, but no more. The exercises will help the confidence-building process and young people will need this before they move on to the more demanding exercise of writing their own piece of prose or short story.

Once the group is ready to work individually, the optimum setting is a classroom, i.e., where each young person has a writing surface in front of them and writing materials. They will need their personal space for this exercise.



Group organization





Note for the user

If you are successful in recruiting a writer or expert to assist with this module, you might not need full recourse to the methods described. However, you might find certain elements useful. If you are relying entirely on your own resources and do not have much experience in teaching creative writing, you should study the methods described here.

The sections on "Silly rhymes" or "The 4 squares method" can be implemented individually or consecutively. It is entirely up to you and the time you have available.

Activity one: Silly rhymes

20 minutes (or half a teaching session)

A good introduction to creative writing is to break down the myth that writing is difficult. Many young people believe that they are unable to write anything more than a letter to a relative or friend. They certainly will not believe that they can write poetry or rhymes of any kind.

Silly rhymes can be a good, fast and fun way to begin to chip away at this psychological barrier. Reading out loud some of the funnier rhymes will relax the atmosphere. The mood will be light-hearted and this will stimulate the involvement of the group. Talk to the group in between reading out the rhymes. Point out how simple the language and the words are and how, with humorous poetry, the standard rules can be broken. Young people should not become obsessed with rules at this stage, what is important is rhythm and rhyme. By taking out most of the rules, poetry suddenly becomes more accessible. If any young person wanted to progress to classical poetry from silly rhymes, of course the rules would have to apply. But this exercise is just fun and spontaneity.

Having introduced the concept of a silly rhyme and read out examples of it and talked around the subject, tell the group that you are now going to create a rhyme with them. Rather than be daunted at the prospect of a full poem, explain that most rhymes are made up of around two or four line sections, with the first and last lines rhyming on the last word. Annex 1 gives you an idea of the sort of rhyme you will be looking to achieve and how to go about it.

Once you have been through the exercise with the full group, see how well the lesson has been learned by asking each smaller group to come up with their own silly rhyme. Keep it down to two lines as this is the most simple form. This could be done in two ways:

- Ask each group to come up with their own idea for a last word for the last line and then develop the full rhyme.
- Get the full group to come up with an idea for the last word of the last line, which each smaller group should then use to develop their individual silly rhymes.

Don't give the group too long as this is meant to be fast and snappy. Move among the groups and offer your help and support to those who need it. Call out general advice to the groups and maybe come up with an idea of your own that could be included with the final selection at the end.

If appropriate and to help maintain the pace of the exercise, you can create a small competition between the groups, for example:

- A prize for the first group to finish.
- A prize for the rhyme that is voted the best by the full group.

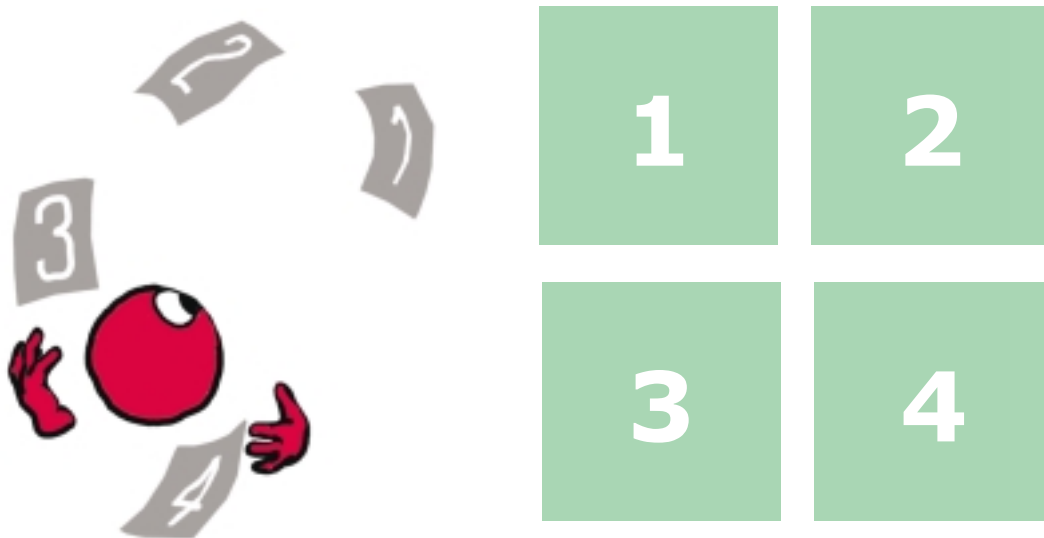


Activity two: The 4 squares method

60 minutes (or one and a half teaching sessions)

As mentioned earlier, there are numerous different methods of and theories on introducing creative writing. The 4 squares method is just one of these. The method is very simple and makes a good introduction to writing for the group, on the basis of which they can move on to more ambitious stories.

The 4 squares method is based on the structure depicted in the following diagram:



The idea is that each square represents a section of the story. Square 1 is setting the scene; squares 2 and 3 are the body of the story; and square 4 is the end. The story is the progression from 1 through to 4. Once again, for the session with the group you should keep the atmosphere light-hearted, funny and fast. What you have to do with them on the board is to develop a story using this method before setting them the task of making up their own story.

Being as simplistic as possible for the sake of example, square 1 should present a character (a name), a description of this character and an emotion. These three items should be one word only and it is always best to start with the emotion "sad" for the benefit of this exercise. So, in square 1 on the board, write in something like the following: The story is about "Joe" (name, character). He is an "elephant" (description). He is "sad" (emotion). This is the start of your story.

The next stage is to write up the end of the story in square 4. In this exercise, square 4 should contain the same character, who should still have the same description, but this time should be feeling an opposite emotion. By keeping everything simple and relatively amusing, you should write in square 4 the following: The story is still about "Joe" (name, character). He is still an "elephant" (description). But now he is "happy" (opposite emotion). This will be the end of your story.

As you can see, squares 2 and 3 must now put in some of the detail and lead logically from the situation in square 1 to that in square 4.

Square 2 should contain just a couple of details as to *why* Joe the elephant is sad. So, by asking the group why they think he is sad, you should write down three reasons. For example, they might say that Joe is sad because: He has no friends. He smells. He is hungry.

Again, using logic, the next stage is to identify responses to these three reasons for his sadness, which would lead Joe the elephant to becoming "happy". So, square 3 will contain the three reasons why Joe the elephant has now become happy. Ask the group for responses to the three reasons for his sadness. They might say: He finds some new friends. He does not smell anymore. He is no longer hungry. These are three opposites to the feelings he had in square 2.

In this way, in square 4, Joe the elephant is happy. You have now created a "skeleton" onto which you can add the flesh.

By filling in the details, you create a full and more complete story. This is done by using the Who? What? When? Where? Why? (5 W's) and How? method. By asking these six questions in each of the four squares, the writer will inevitably create more detail which then needs to be welded together using appropriate language. And so in this way, we create our story. For example, how did Joe the elephant find new friends? Who are they? Where did he find something to eat? Why does he smell? How did he manage not to smell anymore? And so on. Each time a result is reached, the story can be further extended by asking similar questions of the result. However, for the sake of this exercise, keep things simple and short.



After going through the 4 squares method with the whole group, split them up into smaller groups and set them a story line to develop within a time limit. You should provide them with the details of squares 1 and 4. You can either think of an example yourself or brainstorm with the group to set up an example. Square 1 could be Harriet the horse and she is sad. Square 4 would be Harriet the horse who is now happy. It would be up to the individual groups to complete squares 2 and 3 as above and also ask them to develop the storyline a little bit by using the 5 W's and How? method.

Give the groups about 5 to 10 minutes, but no longer. It will produce a much better result if the young people are kept under pressure and the idea is still to keep the exercise light-hearted and fun. When time is up, ask each group to read out their story.

Just to add to some of the general excitement and speed up the pace of the session, tell the group that there will be a small competition for:

- The funniest story that is created in the time allowed.
- The best story that is created in the time allowed.

Activity three: A story of a child labourer

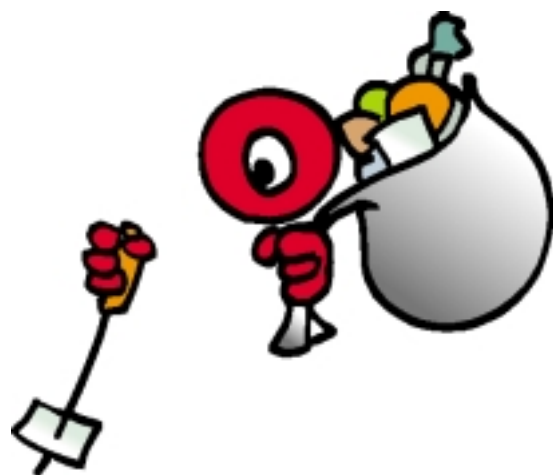
1 teaching session

Having gone through the fun part of this module and stirred the interest of the group and shown them how “easy” it can be to write stories, it is now time to reel them in and get everyone back on track with the essence of the project – child labour. For this part of the module, arrange the group in individual classroom style, with each person in a space where he or she can write comfortably. This next section is best done individually as opposed to in small groups, but use small groups if it will help. For example, if some of the young people in the group suffer from learning disabilities, such as dyslexia or even illiteracy, then it is important to create small groups where these young people can still contribute to the exercise verbally. Be aware of any issues such as these among the group.

This time, you are going to ask each person to write a short story about a child labourer. This exercise can be launched in one of three ways:

- Each individual chooses a name, an age and an emotion for the child labourer in square 1 and then sets the parameters for square 4 as well.
- With the whole group, you could write up the details of squares 1 and 4 so that everybody writes about the same child labourer.
- You could let individuals choose whether to go their own way or follow the format set by you with the whole group.

You should tell the group that the emotions in squares 1 and 4 do not have to be complete opposites for this exercise. For example, a person may start the story sad and finish the story sad. However, these modules are based on the premise that we want to develop a message of hope for the world and particularly child labourers. So, if the child labourer starts off the story sad, it would be a



bonus if he or she could finish the story a bit happier for whatever reasons are developed.

Annex 2 gives a simple example of the kind of result you will be looking for. Only use such an example as a last resort. You want the group to develop their own stories, explore their own imaginations and express their own deep emotions. As they work, walk among them and remind them to use the 5 W's and How technique for every "square". By constantly asking themselves questions about every detail, they will slowly build a story and, before long, they will not even have to ask themselves questions – the words will come all by themselves. Once they have reached this stage, they are already budding writers.

By walking among them, you will be able to identify those to whom the words come easily and those who are still struggling with their inhibitions and self-consciousness. Sit with those who struggle. Help them by suggestion and prompting. Help them define their character and their character's lives and feelings. Talk to them about the situation this character is in. Does it concern a girl or a boy? How did he or she get there? What country are they in? What form of work are they doing? By starting with very simple questions, young people will begin to grow in confidence and ask themselves more detailed questions, allowing their character to grow and develop on the paper.

Some writers say that you should enter into your character. The writer should become a camera. Imagine the opening scene of a film. Place your character in the scene and then play the role of the camera but talk the details out to develop the film. Where is your character standing? How is he or she standing? Is it day or night? Is it the town or the country? If it is dark, why is it dark? What time of day or night is it? If the character is sad, why is he or she sad? Also, how is he or she sad? Is he or she crying? Does he or she cry inside? Is he or she hurt? And so on.

You will know when a young person has entered the writing “zone”. You will see it by their intensity, by the light in their eyes as they play different scenes in their heads, by the speed at which they write, by the way they gaze into the middle distance as a scene unfolds. It is a magical transformation to observe. Their empowerment is so subtle that they do not notice it – but you will. You will see it and you should take pleasure in it. You have helped them discover one of the greatest gifts a young person can have.

If necessary, extend the time limit to allow people to finish, but do not let them have too long. The finished product will be more “real” if the group works to a deadline.

Do’s and don’ts

- Do make sure that every individual takes part in every exercise. Young people can be inhibited and you must use this exercise to begin to break these inhibitions down. Make sure that everyone writes something, no matter how short or sparing in detail.
- Do use humour and light-hearted banter within the group to help the session along. It is a fun module, but also a very empowering one. The young people will not realize how much they have learned until they begin to use these tools in other modules or areas of their life and education.
- Don’t allow criticism or strong language during the session or other members of the group to make fun of finished pieces of work.
- Do encourage individuals to read out their stories to the rest of the group. By the same token, do not force anyone to read their story out loud if they do not want to. If they want their efforts to remain anonymous, respect that wish.
- Do keep all short stories that the group produce.



Final discussion

1 teaching session

The final part of this module, when people write short stories about a child labourer, is a very intense and emotional time. It can also be quite exhausting. Some of your group will not have been through such an exercise before and they will need some support as they come to the end of it. When emotions come through as powerfully as they do through creative writing, you almost need to protect your young charges as they come out of the writer's "zone" and rebuild their emotional defences.



Therefore, create a calm and peaceful environment as you "debrief" the group. Let them talk their emotions out and describe in detail what they have been through. If some of the group want to read out their stories to the others, let them do so. However, they should do it from wherever they are seated so that they do not feel too much under a spotlight. Discuss the details of any stories that are read out. Open the floor to everyone in the group and encourage them to ask questions of each other. It is interesting to know how and why individuals create certain characters and what these characters do. It can tell you a lot about the person who wrote the story. Talk about each story after it is read out until you feel the discussion has gone as far as it can.

It is likely that some of the stories will be of a very high quality and everyone's attention will be drawn to these. However, it is important that each and every story is examined and appreciated for its honest value. They are an insight into what a young person really thinks and how he or she "visualizes" child labour.

Talk to the group about the idea of publishing these stories in some way or other (see Evaluation and follow-up). See how individuals feel about this and respect their wishes. If they prefer their stories to remain in your possession, do not publish them. It is important that you are honest with the group and that they recognize this and trust you.

If you consider that any members of the group are particularly talented in terms of writing and especially in terms of the story they have written, you might consider asking them if they would like to develop their story in more detail. The short story could develop into a longer, more detailed narrative that may really capture the attention of the wider community and promote the project and its work on child labour.

Note for the user

There will be occasions in the process of implementing these child labour modules when works of art and literature will be extremely useful and effective for enhancing various environments. For example, if you do eventually implement the drama module, you may want to put up some of the short stories developed during this module. It will help people to understand the issues involved and appreciate the depth of creativity, imagination and commitment that can be generated among young people given the right circumstances. These stories will enable you to fill the drama space as fully as possible and create a true child labour theme for the event.

Therefore, make sure you keep all the stories safely and use them in as many ways as you can.



Evaluation and follow-up



In terms of measurable indicators for this module, there are indeed specific outcomes that are measurable in so far as they will either have occurred or not. Each young person in the group will have produced a short story depicting a situation of child labour. The quality of these works will depend somewhat on the individuals concerned, but also on how well the module has been implemented and the relationship that you or, in the case of outside support, another person have been able to establish with the group.

In terms of follow-up, you might explore with your group the possibility of publishing some or all of the short stories. They could either be published in a school magazine or simply put on a public notice board where different members of the community can read them. Perhaps a local newspaper or magazine would be interested in publishing some of them. Contact the editors and find out. Reassure those who might feel very self-conscious about what they have written by emphasizing that names will not be put on the pieces of paper so that the authors cannot be identified without their consent. It is likely that many of these short stories will be very good and will appeal to the peers of these young people. It is also likely that adults will be impressed with the quality of these stories — so get them out into the community. This is part of the community integration and awareness-raising process.

As a means of reinforcing the confidence of these young people, you could suggest that they are the ones who might find a way to publish the short stories. Depending on the environment in which you are working, the group could decide to publish them within that environment, for example, the school, or they might decide to seek an external publication such as a local newspaper or community magazine or newsletter. This is an indicator of considerable success and will significantly enhance the sustainable aspect of your module.

Once you have completed this module to your satisfaction, move on to a new module. We recommend that the next module you tackle develops the group's writing abilities further, for example, in the development of a media campaign (Media: Press module).

Annex 1

Silly rhyme exercise

A good way to start writing a silly rhyme is to create a simple two-line section, deciding what the last word of the last line will be and then working backwards.

The Hippopotamus

In this example, the final word of the last line is "Hippopotamissus" – already a non-existent word, but which makes rhyming easy and introduces the concept of being silly at the outset. A "Hippopotamissus" is simply the wife of a Hippopotamus! Write this word in the middle of the board with enough space before it to write in the rest of the line as it develops. Your group will already be smiling at the word and thinking of all the other words that rhyme with the last section of the word "missus".

Indeed, the next task is to think of the words that rhyme with "missus" and select one as the last word of the first line to follow the basic rule of rhyme. Encourage the group to shout out the words they think of and write them down in a list. Make it fast and fun and they will respond accordingly. The most obvious word (and one which you should aim for as it will make your life easier as you write the rhyme!) is "kisses". So, write up this word at the end of the first line.

You will now have the two most important elements of a silly rhyme – the two final words of the two lines. All that the group needs to do now is to come up with the other words to fill in the rest of the lines. Your job is to guide the discussion so that it does not get out of hand and to make sure that the lines make sense together. It is like creating a short story out of rhyme and in two lines. For example, ask the group what type of kisses a Hippopotamus would give. In all likelihood, they would come up with the word "sloppy" or one similar. Continue in this vein to create the rest of the rhyme, asking such questions as "Who likes giving sloppy kisses?", "Why?", "Who to?", and so on.

For example, the husband of the “Hippopotamissus” might be the subject concerned and his name might be “Harry the Hippo”. This is only an example and there are many more possibilities. The main thing is to have a lot of fun doing it and at the end to come out with a silly rhyme that your group will realize they have created out of nothing but one word. Your final rhyme could look like this:

Harry the Hippo was fond of giving lots of sloppy kisses
But the one who got the least of these was his Hippopotamissus!¹

1 Source: this annex is based on the poem “Harry the Hippo” by Larry and Aisling O’Loughlin, Dublin, Ireland

Annex 2

Sultana's story

The following story has been constructed using the 4 squares method.

- Square 1: Sultana is 8 years old. She is a child labourer. She is sad.
- Square 2: She is sad because she has been taken away from her family and abandoned. She is also sad because she is hurt and sick.
- Square 3: Sultana is rescued and cared for.
- Square 4: Sultana is reunited with her family. She is happy.

The story that will develop will fill in the details of Sultana's life from when she was taken from her family and forced to work to when she was rescued and returned to her family. Using the 5 W's and How principle, we can develop a story of poverty in a specific country somewhere where young Sultana is sold into an "apprenticeship" in a small garment factory far away from her family's village. Owing to poor treatment and abuse from the owner and his family, Sultana falls sick and faints while working on a machine and injures herself badly. Sultana tries to escape several times and once makes it back as far as her family village before the owner sends a gang of thugs after her. These men beat her mother and father and take her away again. She is severely beaten by the owner and falls dangerously ill, close to death.

Time passes by with continuous ill treatment and abuse. Eventually, a human rights group operating in the country comes to hear of this factory employing small children. This group organizes raids on such places of work, liberating the children and bringing the factory owners to justice. One night, such a raid is carried out on the factory where Sultana works. She is freed along with 15 other children and, several weeks later, after being cared for in hospital to recover from her chronic illness and injuries, she is reunited with her family.

The factory owner is taken to court and subsequently imprisoned. The human rights group helps Sultana's father to develop his own business as a fruit farmer and he is now able to support his family. Sultana has made a full recovery. She is, of course, very happy.

