

CREATIVE WRITING IN PRISON: A COURSEBOOK

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Arts & Humanities
Research Council



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WELCOME!

This coursebook is designed to be used in conjunction with 'Creative Writing in Prison: Tips and Activities from Around the World', a collection of short video explainers in which writers, rappers and publishers give tips for new writers and ideas that might spark inspiration in old hands. If you don't have the possibility of access to these videos, however, it may also be used on its own to great effect.

Why follow this course?

Many people throughout history have used their time inside to develop as writers, from St. Paul the Apostle, through Oscar Wilde to some of the contemporary writers that feature in this book, like Lady Unchained and Jason Smith. Prison writing can have many benefits, allowing you to:

Express yourself creatively
Tell your stories
Get yourself heard beyond the prison walls
Relax or pass the time productively
Keep in touch with loved ones
Develop your key skills

Sometimes, like some of the artists that appear in Chapter One, prison writers go on to win prizes and become well-known writers and performers. At other times, the benefits are more communal, and communities of writers have developed within prisons, like the Sisters in the Shadows we'll introduce to you in Chapter Two.

In creating this course we have got together examples, tips and activities from a diverse group of writers and creators from around the world - some of whom developed their writing whilst in prison - to show that, no matter who you are and where you're from, you can use writing to express yourself. And people will want to hear your story. Throughout the book, you'll see examples of published writing by imprisoned or formerly imprisoned writers to inspire you.

The course is structured in the following order, though you are welcome to skip sections, mix and match or go straight to the comics chapter if that's your thing!

In **Chapter One**, six **rappers** and **spoken word artists** share some of their poems with you for inspiration, and their top tips and favourite activities to help you produce your own.

Chapter Two offers eleven different **writing activities** to get you started (or re-started!), using a range of techniques, styles and genres, from sense poems to life writing, flash fiction to letter writing. Some of these might seem quite simple to start off with, but they can help you produce really effective, powerful writing that readers from all around the world can connect with.

In **Chapter Three**, we introduce you to four amazing artists who share tips and activities for producing illustrated **children's stories and comics**, whether or not you think you're good at drawing.

Lucy Bell & Joey Whitfield (15th February 2021, #Lockdown2021)



What is Koestler Arts?

Koestler Arts is a charity which helps ex-offenders, secure patients and detainees in the UK to express themselves creatively. Each year over 3,500 people in custody and in the community share their creative work by taking part. The Koestler Awards take place every year (normally in April), and offer participants the chance to win cash prizes, to receive written feedback and certificates, and - in some cases - to publish and exhibit their work.

What can be entered?

Koestler Arts currently accept original artworks across 52 different categories. The categories most relevant to this course are:

Writing (e.g. life story; poem; poetry collection; flash fiction; short story)

Performance (e.g. spoken word; Hip hop, rap and grime)

Visual art (e.g. graphic novel; comics)

How do I enter?

Contact the team at Koestler Arts for more information on the Koestler Awards, tips and entry forms:

0208 740 0333,

info@koestlerarts.org.uk

FREEPOST KOESTLER ARTS

You can enter up to five pieces of writing, music, visual arts, craft or design every year - good luck!

Chapter One:

**RAP &
SPOKEN
WORD
POETRY**

“

Free-flow and share it
with the world!

”

-Kingdom Rapper

1. KINGDOM RAPPER

Benjamin Howard, AKA Kingdom Rapper, is a rap artist from Nottingham who's been using rap as a way to express himself since his teens.



I used to go by the name of Benny Blanko, very gangster. I was involved in a lot of roadside activities. Rolling around, smoking weed, selling weed, linking girls, turning up late for my jobcentre appointment, arguing with girls and arguing with my friends, for many years. 2015 I had a gun put to my leg and I prayed, & I didn't get shot and I felt God answered my prayer and I felt I owed it to Him & to my family to change the way I was doing things.

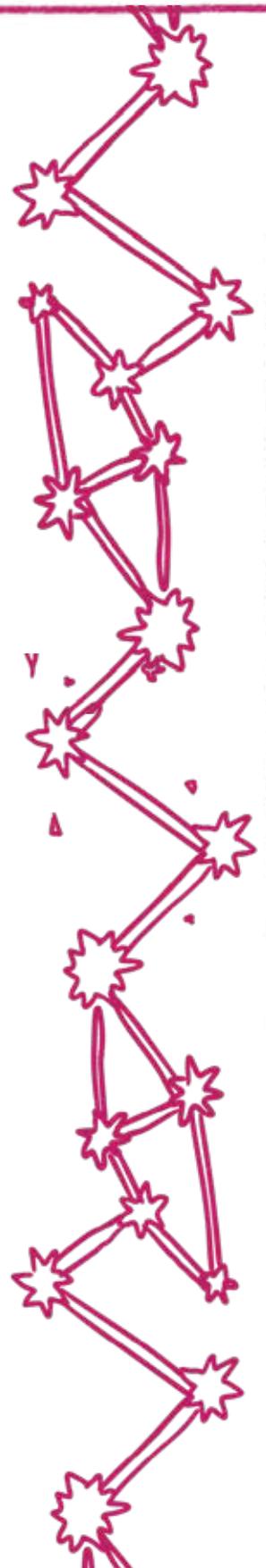


Since then he's turned his life around, and started using his talents for good: he works on community projects, in schools, in rehab centres & prisons.

“Playground”

By Kingdom Rapper

Next time someone says they love me they better mean that,
'cause I'm too old to waste years on some playground stuff.
Been there and done that, tryna go and raise the next mans kids.
I got my head split right open trying to raise that kid.
I've got emotions on my sleeve, please excuse that drip.
I mean it when I say I've learnt from my darkest trips.
For I can find relaxation when I move to the sticks,
but if you don't change yourself you stay the same way you sit.
I thought I had some best friends until they one day switched.
I was sofa surfing, I was dodging screeching whips.
Got into some bad circles that I came out quick,
for over ten years the enemy paid my quids.
I did youth work thinking I could save my ship.
Toxic relationships had me smoking bags of piff.
The family only saw me high for five years or something.
Hitting church on a Sunday for a rest or something.
I mean it when I say at 26 I thought about death,
needed a heart to heart with someone but I had no friends left.
At 14 I was getting beat and bled in the shed,
hiding under cars so I didn't risk my neck.
My mum and dad's drinking left my pilow case real wet,
but I'm still here working with the time that I've got left.
This redemption music, lord give me time to invest.
This redemption music, lord give me time to invest.
I always think about my brother on a late night sesh.
I pray no matter where he is the lord keeps him safe.
I murked his son on the FIFA, he thinks he's brave.
You win some, you lose some, we pray they see new days.
I'm in the moment and then we know that I don't need no stage.
Right here where I am standing I can bring that wave.
I broke bones, I lost homes, I dodged two early graves.
I had to rob ASDA one time to fill my plate,
but to see others come to Christ, that's one thing I crave,
but I can't kill myself doing it, I must think straight.



BENJE'S WRITING TIPS

1. First steps to... freestyle!

*What thoughts are running through your brain?... **Rap it!***

*What's your heart saying to you right now?... **Rap it!***

To get started, don't worry if it rhymes or not. The point of the exercise is to get your brain working, to **get your thoughts flowing**. Once you're in the groove, you might start trying out some techniques like rhyme, wordplay, images... But for now, don't worry - we'll come back to that later!

2. Just be yourself!

Just be yourself, talk about yourself, don't talk somebody else's life or don't be a copycat because people want to hear your story, you're unique, you're your own person. He can do him or she can do her but what about you? Who's gonna do you if you do someone else? So just always keep it real.

3. Brainstorm to get your thoughts flowing!



Once you get yourself - your truths, your ideas, your thoughts, your memories, your feelings, your experiences, your sufferings, your hopes - down on paper, that's your content. That's how people are gonna connect with you. That's how people are gonna hear what you're saying. That's how people are gonna hear your story. People are gonna see where you are coming from and they're not just gonna judge you.

4. Detail, detail, detail: paint the whole picture!

Instead of saying go to the shop, how did you get to the shop? Why did you need to go to the shop? What time did you go to the shop? Paint the picture, let us visualise that as you're spitting it so we can go on that journey with you.

ACTIVITY: BRAINSTORMING A RAP

Have a go at brainstorming your ideas to work out what you might want to write or rap about. Here are some questions to get you started:

What do you wanna talk about?...

What's going off in your life?...

Where are you at right now?...

What's gone wrong?...

What's gone alright?...

Who are you missing?...

Have you had a crap day, a crap week, a crap year?...

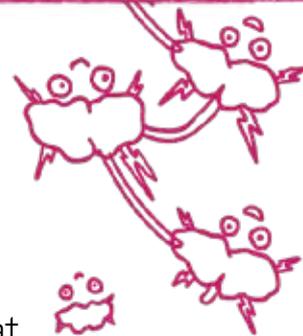
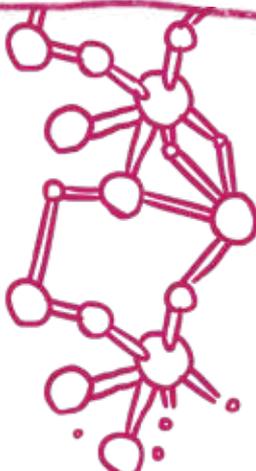
What do you want when you get out?...

How's life gonna change?....

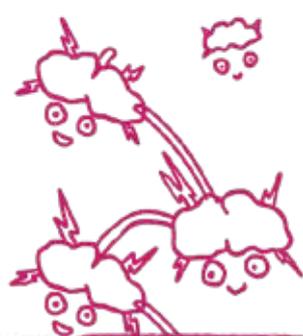
How did you get here?...

How do you get outta here?...

Once you've got those down on paper, that's your content, and you can start organizing them into a rap, trying out how the words sound, and how they fit with the beat.



To give you an idea, here's a brainstorm that helped me put *Playground* together:



Bullet Point
yours Highs
and lows

PLAYGROUND

VERSE 1

KEEP IT SIMPLE, RAW, effective

- * My HURTS
- * EXPERIENCES (orn) that shaped some of my actions
- * Things I've learned from.
- * Make or BREAK MOMENT
- * CENTERED THE 1st VERSE ON MY FIRST HALF OF life (15 years old onwards)

[DONT ALWAYS HAVE TO RHYME LINES THAT ARE STATEMENTS]

END THE VERSE WITH A BANG
(my 5 family only saw me HIGH for 5 YEARS OR SOMETHING)

HOOK - IS THE JAM IN THE SANDWICH
(LESS IS MORE / NOT COMPLICATED)

VERSE - 2.

Listen to the kicks in the beat and drop your EARS ON THEM

- * PICK UP WERE YOU LEFT OFF.
- * THIS VERSE INCLUDES HOPE + A WAY OUT.
- * 26 YEARS OLD AND ONWARDS.
- * MATCHING UP THE PAST TO THE PRESENT.
- * ENDING THE SONG ON WERE YOU WANT TO BE

(TIME TO COMMUNICATE, ELEVATE ETC)

2. BRENDA BURUNGI AKA LADY UNCHAINED

Brenda Burungi, AKA Lady Unchained, is a poet, facilitator, mentor, founder and creative director of Unchained Poetry, an artistic platform for artists with lived experience of the criminal justice system. In 2009, she went to prison for two and a half years. Now her mission is to prove that there is life after prison.



“

My life ended and began with a prison sentence, those metal doors awoke the faith in me.

”

“Road to Victory”

By Lady Unchained

*I await sentencing,
Scared and confused but there's no praying.
If God loved me then I wouldn't be in this mess, that's all I'm saying.
“You're female with no previous, you'll get off, you've got this so stop fretting,”
I hear my friends saying,
Yet my solicitor's voice rings loud,
“You're looking at three to five there's no doubt, so just
make sure you pack a bag each time you take that stand.”
And still I just can't quite understand,
But the judge soon made it clear, he screamed,
“Two and a half, take her away.”
“Take me where?” I scream, but there's no sound,
The water falls from my eyes kiss my cheeks.
Farewell to me trying to look hard,
The life I once knew was no more,
Shattered dreams, future plans all just taken in a flash.
Dark shadows and angry voices in my head telling me this is the end.
This is the end Brenda, so just end it.
I left a piece of me on that stand,
I felt her leave as I began to walk down them steps,
I swear I never even looked back.
You see I had to free her from this journey that we was about to take,
Because she was the me with the dreams and the ambition,
She was the me who still had faith in the so-called justice system,
She was the me who prayed,
She was that 11-year-old girl who sang in Sunday choir,
She was the me who still cared about life,*

continued on next page...

“Road to Victory” continued...

By Lady Unchained

*And all she was gonna do was hold me back
With her dreams of the life that we once had,
Dreams I knew were just a thing of the past,
Because where I was going dreams are for the weak.
Forget love, I need respect because I ain't trying to be no one's chick.
Media perception of life behind bars playing through my head
Like an episode of Prison's Most Shocking Moments.
My beautiful future was no more.
And so I began my life behind bars,
Broken and defeated with no feelings.
Days are long, nights are longer,
Weekend bang ups feel like a lifetime.
I I year old me, where are you, I need you, where are you?
She returns to me in a form of a prayer,
Not long now girl, just stay strong,
Pray to god and I promise you a better day,
Pain and tears may be felt at night,
But rejoicing comes in the morning.
Snap.
It all of a sudden just made sense,
You see, this is the journey that was written for me to take,
So I can teach my fellow brothers and sisters that it's not about anger, it's about
peace.
It's not about power, it's about grace.
It's not about hatred, it's about love.
These are the lessons I learnt whilst in prison, so you don't have to go there to
learn the
same lessons.
The choice is yours.
I choose to be unchained.*

ACTIVITY: ONE WORD, ONE MINUTE

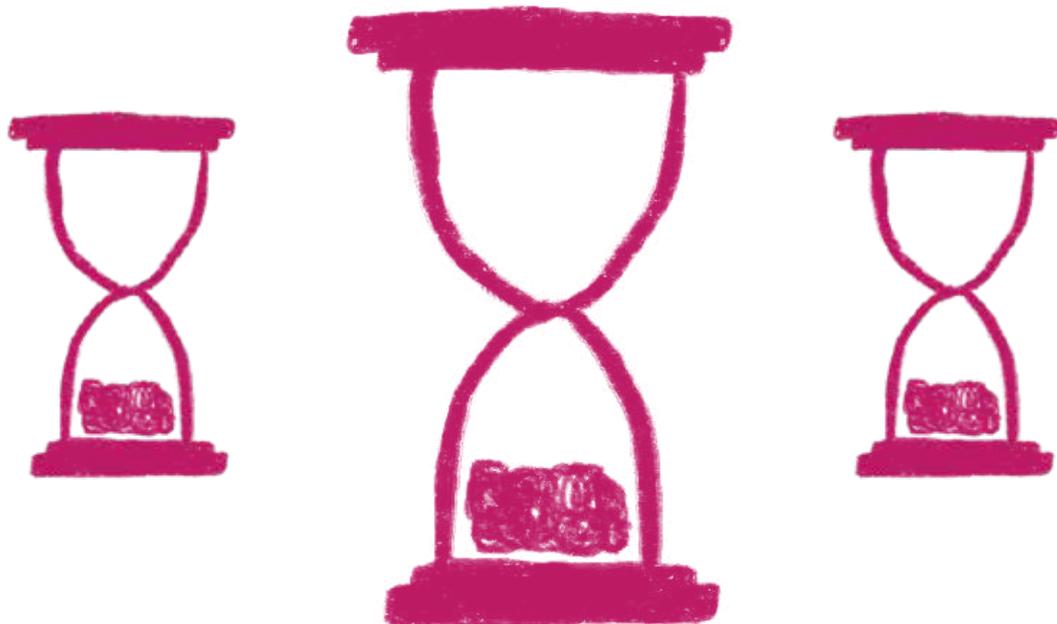
The activity I want to suggest, which I use to spur myself on, is very simple, and very quick. Just give yourself one challenge: one word and one minute.

Take, for example, the word change. What does change mean to you? Take a minute to write it down. I know time is a bit crazy in prison, but just time yourself.

Give yourself a minute

and just think, 'You know what, in this minute I'm gonna write what change means to me.' Then go onto another word. And then the next. And the next. The goal is just to write something; that's called free-flow writing.

Once you have these notes, you can start putting them together, in different ways, different orders. I'll be honest, 'Road to Victory' was written through notes: those little notes that I wrote to myself in prison became my way of creating poetry.



ACTIVITY: ONE WORD, ONE MINUTE

Here is a list of words, themes and topics to get you free-flowing:

Racism, Anarchy, Space Exploration, Favorite Movies and TV shows, Alien Visitation, Alone on the Ocean, Hiking in the Mountains, Prison Reform, Freedom Plans, How to Treat Others, Different Kinds of Drugs, Jealousy, Relationships, Communicating with Others, All Kinds of Music, Poverty, Adultery, Lying, Frustration, Monotony, Depression, Encouragement, Curiosity, Silliness, Introverts, Show Offs, Health, Mental Health, Prison Friendships, Adult Correction Officers, Perseverance, Relaxation, Conjugal Visits, Peace, Challenges, Obstacles, Mind Games, All Kinds of Pain, Beauty, Death, Saying Goodbye, Humility, Prejudice, Childhood, Tattoos, Fathers, Actors, Government, Fighting, God, The Soul, Fakes, Nature, Romance, Salvation, Wind, Rain, Sand, War, Peace, Earth, Friends, Fun, Sun, Music, Swimming, Bikes, Toys, Fear, Love, Gangs, Sorrow, Joy, Pain, Loss, Holidays, Water, Heaven, Clouds, Computers, Acting, Fighting, Teachers, Parents, Relatives, Travel, Animals, Sports, Players, Art, Technology, Internet, History, Heroes, Sunsets, Flowers, Gifts, Jealousy, Anger, Space, Crime, Confusion, Exhaustion, Power, Beaches, Hurricanes, City Lights, Halloween, Christmas, Summer, Sailing, Diving, Hate, Work, Honesty, Wild Animals, Accidents, Nightmares, Snow, Sight, Churches, Faith, Lightning, Cars, Airplanes, Sickness, Cartoons, Paddling, Family, Waterfalls, Dirt Bikes, Donuts, Tennis, Kids, Ghosts, Death, Skateboarding, Rock and Roll, Memories, Stars, Movie Stars, Money, Monsters, Happiness, Vacations, Hurts, Babies, Goals, Responsibility, Respect, Pollution, Resourcefulness, Reading, Rap, Religions, Volley Ball, Hiking, Kayaking, Fishing, Camping, Praying, Meditating, Prayer, Headaches, Dentists, Clouds, Fire, Eating, Games, Sports, Embarrassing Moments, Mistakes, The Cosmos, Space Travel, Jobs, Brexit, Homophobia, Cities, Country Living, Boredom, Hope, Grief, Time, Scars, Silliness, Jokes, Pranks, Aging, Relatives, The Future, Thanks, Forgiveness, Global Warming, Terrorists, Questions, Driving, Fireworks, Failure, Deforestation, and Freedom.

Source: Rod Martin, "A collection of Creative Writing Workshop ideas and poetry"

3. JASON SMITH

Jason N Smith is a passionate spoken word poet from Stoke-on-Trent. While in prison, he developed his writing and spoken word skills and won three Koestler Arts platinum awards for his poems. Since he was released in 2015, he's published two books, and performed at The National Theatre, Roundhouse, Tate Modern and Stoke City's Bet 365 Football Stadium. His first book, *Beyond Words*, is a collection of poems about life inside prison and life experiences. He has also worked as a community support worker for CRC probation, and as a development coach for young people in care.



Jason Smith understands that there is an escape tunnel in every blank piece of paper, and he leads the listener and reader carefully through it to freedom. Poetry is justice returned to those who have had their words stolen. Read this book, and understand the journey of one human to free himself.



– Joelle Taylor.

“I am unstoppable”

By Jason N Smith

*I am unstoppable, not quite like a locomotion's fast paced hurtling motion, no.
I am unstoppable, since being unbound from the blood bled and shed and fears for
years unfolding paths ahead.*

*From my past's aftermath are things I did and said, while not understanding nor
believing in the concept of being, I am.*

But now, now I am the dream being reworked,

*The dream that innovates, that creativity to create, that perception perceives, I'm
unstoppable, believe that in being, I am.*

*But I am also the spiralling, spinning, tumbling downs, drowning beneath deep waves
of depression.*

*I'm the deepest and shallowest thoughts, expression, and all of the love that I sought,
and hateful rejections.*

*I am a collection of connectivity coalescing to connect the entire universe, in a verse,
To be birthed amongst shouts of jubilant joy where we dance exuberantly as every
whispered revolutionary word can be heard raising up the dust to heights,
Flying higher than every exploding rocket bright, and blazing brighter than all of the
fires on Guy Fawkes and Bonfire nights.*

*I am the paradise lost, and the paradise found, amongst bookshelves and life's
cordite clouds.*

*I am the beginning and the end, revived and thrustforth to
reunite this riven kingdom from inner schisms, divisions,
until I,*

*I am no longer divided but a united kingdom
become a given gift manifested in this present,
A gift manifested through life's refining fires of highs
and lows and undertows until an unstoppable
masterplan when I rise and soar from the ashes,
Simply being,
I am.*



ACTIVITY: BUILD A POEM ON A QUESTION

Start by asking a question:

Why...? What...? Who...? When...? If?...

It could be **philosophical:**

“Why am I here?”

“What’s the meaning of good and evil?”

“Are human beings really free or is free will just an illusion?”

It could be **funny:**

“Why does it smell so bad in here?”

“If I had to give up a body part, which one would I choose?”

“If coffee was illegal, what would its street names be?”

It could be **outrageous:**

“If I were a pack of Immodium, what would I say?”

... Well... we’ll leave you to think of your own!!

Most importantly, your question has to provoke interesting answers, thoughts and ideas!

Ask that one question and then write down a list with as many answers as you can: these are the **building blocks** for your poem.

Once you’ve done that, you can work on everything else: on the rhythm, repetition, rhyme. Use your five senses - taste, touch, hearing, sight, smell.

(see Chapter Two, Activity 2) Use metaphor, similes, assonance.

And if you don’t know what those things are, don’t worry: you’ll find out in the coming sections by Wanda Canton and Robert Kiely!



Here are a couple of examples of mine, where questions turn into spoken word poetry - read them aloud, and you'll get the idea!

What is England?

By Jason N Smith

*Bus stops,
lolly pops,
chased after ice cream vans
in jim-jams,
Rockets & bangers,
mash & splashes of
Daddy's sauce
While having a giraffe.
Barbers taps,
kick the can,
knock and run,
BBC,
mushy peas,
chip shops,
Sunday roasts,
marmite on toast!*



If I was the Kyoto treaty, what would I say?

By Jason N Smith

*My name is Kyoto,
and I intrigued
Protocol treaties
calling for missions
to cease,
coz species
are finding CO₂
too hard to breathe
and I'm becoming diseased
and extinct for humanity's greed.*

4. KOLEKA PUTUMA

Theatre Director | Playwrite | Poet

Koleka Putuma is an award-winning poet, playwright and theatre director from South Africa. Her bestselling debut collection of poems, *Collective Amnesia*, has taken the South African literary scene by storm. Since its publication in April 2017, the book is in its 10th print run, has won multiple international awards, and has been translated into seven languages. Koleka is also the Founder and Director of Manyano Media, a creative company that produces and champions the work and stories of black queer artists and queer life.



BLACK JOY

©KolekaPutuma, 2017

*We were spanked for each other's sins,
spanked in syllables and by the word of God.
Before dark meant home time.*

*My grandmother's mattress
knew each of my
siblings,
cousins,
and the neighbour's children's
morning breath
by name.
A single mattress spread on the floor was enough for all of us.*

*Bread slices were buttered with iRama
and rolled into sausage shapes;
we had it with black rooibos, we did not ask for cheese.*

We were filled.

*My cousins and I would gather around one large bowl of umngqusho,
each with their own spoon.
Sugar water completed the meal.*

We were home and whole.

*But
isn't it funny?
That when they ask about black childhood,
all they are interested in is our pain,
as if the joy-parts were accidental.*

*I write love poems, too,
but
you only want to see my mouth torn open in protest,
as if my mouth were a wound
with pus and gangrene
for joy.*

ACTIVITY: TORN UP WORDS

If you feel intimidated by the thought of writing or feel stuck when you look at a blank page, this is a trick for you that I like to use.

Write down a bunch of words on a loose sheet of paper. Don't think about it too hard, just write down some words that pop into your head.

Tear up those pieces of paper, fold them up and throw them all on the floor or on your bed as if you were throwing them into a fish bowl.

Shake them up or mix them up.

Set a timer, or a period of time, that you can spend on each word.

Close your eyes, pick a piece of paper and open it up.

Whatever word you pick, use that as a prompt to start you off.

Start "free-flow writing" - if you can't remember what that is, look back at Brenda's tips (Section 2).

Then pick the next word, and let the thoughts and the words continue to flow.

Then the next, and so on, until you have a set of sections, which you might put together in different ways, in different orders, to make a poem.

Try saying it out loud and hear what it sounds like.

Make some changes to make it sound better.

5. SIMAR SINGH

EMOTION POETRY

“

Hi, I am Simar Singh, a spoken word poet from Bombay, India. I am the founder of UnErase Poetry, a movement to promote and produce spoken word poetry. I write a lot of spoken word pieces around gender issues, around things like toxic masculinity, mental health in young boys and the importance of challenging gender norms.

”



This poem that I have for you is a poem very close to my heart. As a kid, I was always told by people around me that men don't feel pain, boys don't cry, and as I grew up to be a young adult, I realised that a lot of these notions are wrong. So this poem is called 'How to be a Man', and it's inspired by a very famous Bollywood dialogue in India that goes, "mard ko dard nahin hota", which basically translates to "men do not feel pain", which is how I open the poem.

“How to be a Man”

by Simar Singh

Men don't feel pain.

We've been brought up in households, which made us preach such false teachings.

They told me I will soon be the man of the house

While I was just 6 years old.

It's not their fault you see.

This is what they've been taught since centuries, that men don't feel and men don't cry.

Man up they told me, man up young boy.

And as a kid, I once cried in public, and people laughed as if they actually loved it.

And then that kid wiped his eyes, his smiling face was full of lies.

He'd make a decent writer but an engineer sounds more wise.

When can we finally talk mental violence?

So that I can finally break this silence?

So that I can unlock my door and let you in

Don't ask me why was it shut so long and why is it so dark in here?

So this is about the men in your life?

And contrary to popular belief, this still is feminism.

This is for every father, every brother, every son

Who has wet his pillow so many times and yet he's woken up just fine.

He's broken down yet and yet he's smiled, he's owned his moustache, but he's still a child.

He wishes he could talk to you about this, but he wouldn't know where to begin.

He's a product of a failed social system, where expressing himself was considered a sin.

And he's buried them all inside and look, he's alive and yet he carries his kin.

Look at the tears drip from his silence, you need to break this silence and talk to him.

So go, talk to your dad.

Ask him what his dreams were, what he really wanted to pursue.

Talk to your elder brother, ask him what he is going through, how he landed up in this job he never wanted to.

Tell him you miss him, and that he could spend more time at home. And that he doesn't need to hide his notebook anymore.

Talk to your son, who might be really young, but tell him he needs to speak and that crying in public won't mean that he is weak.

But he can't cry himself to sleep every night because the world is running out of dry pillows.

Talk to them.

They might not speak up about they have been through and it might take them a while to actually share.

But it will be comforting for them to know that someone's there for them to listen, someone will help them take care.

And most importantly, talk to yourself.

Look into the mirror, smile.

#UnManYourself

SIMAR'S WRITING TIP: **Focus on yourself and your emotions**

Don't try to think of any technique, any technicality. Forget about metaphors and similes, rhyme and assonance. (That can come later if you feel it would improve your writing). Instead, focus on yourself, on your why's, on who you are, on your emotions.



At the end of the day, what good writing is, is just putting down your emotions on paper, and the craft of it is something that you just learn eventually. But it's very important to find your 'why's', to know who you are, to know what you're saying, to know why you're saying it. This is the question that I always ask myself before I start writing a poem, and I'd suggest you try it too, to get you started. It's just one question with three parts to it.



1. **WHY** are you writing this?
2. Why are **YOU** writing this?
3. Why are you writing **THIS**?

If you can answer these three questions, the **why** the **you** and **this**, I think you'll have a decent piece of poetry or writing within you.

ACTIVITY: EMOTION POETRY

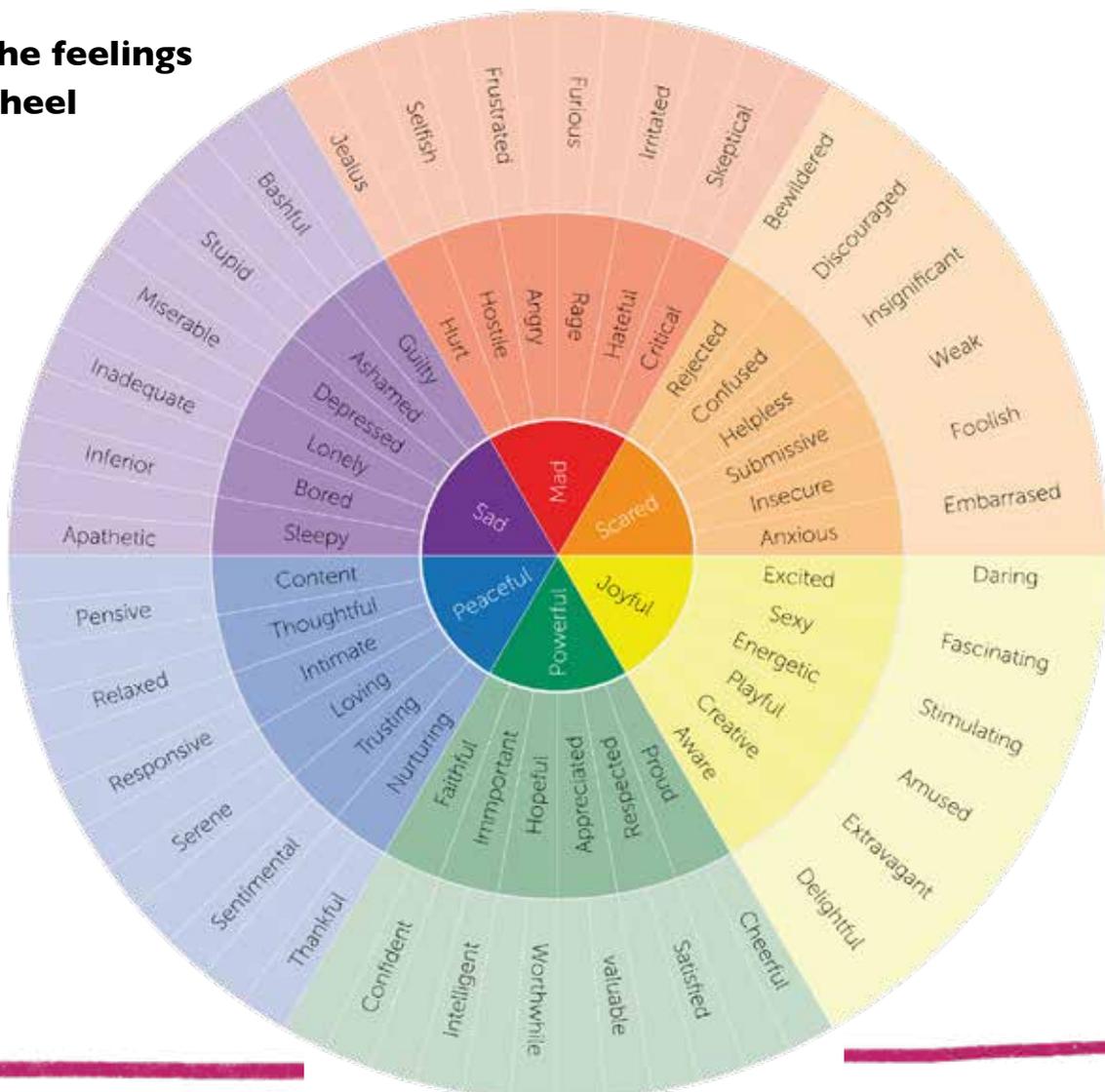
1. Below is another spoken word poem based on feelings, by J.G. from HMP Nottingham. Read it (preferably aloud) and, focusing on the feelings he expresses, have a go at working out:

- What **feelings** he expresses in this short rap
- Why** J.G. wrote it. Why **J.G.** wrote it. Why he wrote it in **rap form**.
- Examples of poetic techniques he uses (e.g. rhyme, imagery, etc.)

Prison Rap

*I may have lived a life of sin
 And I hide my pain through a golden grin
 There's hate and shame from built up guilt
 And when the lights go dim I clench my quilt
 Yet there's sleepless nights and hopeless dreams
 All that shines ain't sweet like cream
 The days seem dark and the weeks feel long
 And when times get hard there's no phoning mom*

The feelings wheel



ACTIVITY: EMOTION POETRY

2. Have a go at your own emotion poetry/rap.

Using the feelings wheel to help you, think about which emotions you most relate to right now. It might help to take notes about some of the following questions:

- Is something making you angry? Why?
- What led to this feeling?
- What's your story?
- Why might you want to communicate it through a spoken word poem?
- What are you yearning for? Why?
- Are you missing someone or something?
- Why do you want to turn this into a spoken word poem?
- Are you feeling powerful or vulnerable?
- Energetic or exhausted?
- Miserable or hopeful? Or both?
- Why do you want to share these feelings?

Once you've identified the emotion(s) you're feeling, have a go at answering some of these slightly trickier questions:

- Where has this emotion landed, where does it live in your body?
- If that emotion had a shape, what shape would it be?
- If it had a voice, what would it be saying, and how would it be saying it? Would it be whispering, screaming, moaning or laughing?
- If that emotion had an appearance, what would it look like? Beautiful or ugly? Like a gnarled old tree or a blossoming tulip?
- If it had a taste, what would it taste like?

3. Take these notes and use them to build a poem or a rap.

4. If your emotions don't easily come out in poetry or rap form, have a go at writing in prose form (i.e. normal writing, not poetry). You may take inspiration from the two extracts overleaf from prose pieces written by imprisoned women in Mexico, whose writing expresses fear, frustration, anger, love, and many more complex emotions..

Roots

By Julia

The fear of the unknown is a constant in our pilgrimage around this world. Could this ever be different? I don't believe so. Since we were in our mothers' womb, we have been receptive to positive and negative emotions. Or on your first day of school, you feel a dread that your teachers, your classmates won't like you. A constant fear; and then arriving here was no different: first the noise of the sirens when they brought us to this place, my status as a "legally married lesbian" was a constant source of fear. In this women's prison, the gazes of 453 fellow women turning towards me... yes, of course, it scared me to death. From the movies you have a very negative impression of what a prison is like, you would never imagine that the strongest bonds of friendship could form in this place, nor would you dream that this place could inspire the most beautiful "wishes" for your loved ones.

Being a woman

By Erika

Sometimes I get tired of being a woman. That's it, BEING A WOMAN.

I'm not an important person and my story is nothing extraordinary, it is just of a person who has been stripped of their freedom.

I lost clarity, smiles faded, fears arose, guilt, no reason to breathe. Then, that absurd and blunt sentence, 50 years. And this is where I resurge, wrapped in anger and in all the negative emotions. It seems absurd and unfair to me that I should have a longer sentence than a man. That's where I think it's a matter of inequality, it's a gender problem and I want to scream, I want to be heard! Why are men favoured by the law, whatever their crime? It doesn't seem fair to me and it's not simple. I'm not a feminist, but my reasoning tells me that this system is fucked up and our laws are rotten.

Who is to say what is good or bad, what is true or false, what is correctly established?

Hormones, menstruation, good days, bad days, skin blemishes, stretch marks, flabbiness, the ticking of the biological clock, being a working woman, being a professional or not, the idea of being a woman and not thinking about procreating is, like other issues, what frightens both women and men. And I don't know why it is thought necessary for all women to carry a child. NO. I don't want to be a mother! Not all women chose to have children, please don't label me, it's simple, it's not going to happen. They label us, they stigmatize us, they violate us, they separate us, they defeat us. We need to stop, to raise awareness, to recognize this new society, not just by raising our voices but daring to live as we wish, exercising our freedom in every moment.

I love being a woman but there are times when I am sick of it.

6. WANDA CANTON

Spoken Poetry | Mental Health | Social Justice

“

Hi, my name is Wanda Canton. I am an artist, facilitator and researcher. I'm particularly passionate about how we use music and spoken word to facilitate a sense of freedom or movement, even where we have none. Below I'll share with you a rap I wrote specifically for people in prison.

”



“Born to a Story”

by Wanda Canton

*Born to a story
Already written,
Part of the piece
Is a part of the whole
For the hole
Is a path towards peace,
Enlightenment frightening,
Silence that thinks.
Inciting a violence,
In minds that don't speak.
Subliminal loathing
Got the best of me.
In the past, I was dark
Discarded the pain,
But my card was marked,
Last chance in the game.
Poker face in a guard,
“Fall in love on a first date, take a chance.”*

*My armour the worst of me,
Scars like a map,
Made a road of me.
Hard shoulder.
Heavy-weighted champion,
Facing extinction
Like the tunnel isn't premised
On the bridge that it's building,
Trouble is a triple threat,
Trebled by the prism, imprisoned,
Visionaries lost to the scripture,
Someone else has written
A prayer for the godless,*

*Rap for the wordsmith,
We were speechless
Before we screamed.*

*They told me it wouldn't last,
So the time is worse than the lie.
The friend become foe,
You forget the reason why
But it snowballed,
Till slowly the lonely is only
Comfort in company
Can't bear the skin we're in;
Won't see sh** for the truth
Pudding is proof
The fat will protrude
Like the muscle is cold
And it can't keep me strong,
But it soothed.*

*Nightmare recycled
Wish she escaped,
Wish she had learned
The extent of her rage,
Words take my breath,
I question what's left
No language,
I'm stranded,
Lost to my mess.
Lately I'm failing,
I'm flailing, I'm hailing,
Caught up in a storm - like my head;
Always raining.*

WANDA'S WRITING TIP: **concentrate on the sound of your raps or spoken word poems**

Although some of these poetic techniques have fancy names you might not have heard before, it's likely that you're already using some of them - even in your everyday speech.



Hopefully that will give you a bit of a confidence boost because I bet you any money you're using a lot more linguistic strategies than you actually think.



I. Homonyms

Homonyms are words which are spelled or pronounced the same but have different meanings. Here are some examples:

Bark - a tree's outer layer / the sound a dog makes

Die - to cease living / a cube marked with numbers one through six

Lie - to recline / to tell a falsehood

Pound - unit of weight / to beat

Rock - a genre of music / a stone

Rose - to have got up / a flower

Well - in good health / a source for water in the ground

“This can be quite an interesting way to engage your audience, because you're giving them an opportunity to try to decipher the different meanings.”

2. Alliteration, assonance and consonance

Alliteration – repeated initial consonant sounds in multiple words

“A **s**kunk **s**at on a **s**tump. The **s**tump thought the **s**kunk **s**tunk. The **s**kunk thought the **s**tump **s**tunk. What **s**tunk, the **s**kunk or the **s**tump?”

“**T**orn **t**urned and **t**attered/ **B**owed **b**urned and **b**attered / I **t**ook unt**t**ensed **t**ime by the **t**eeth / And **b**ade it **b**ear me **b**anking / **O**ut **o**ver the **w**alled **w**elter / **c**ities and the **s**ea.” - Robert P. Baird

Assonance – repeated vowel sounds in multiple words (A, E, I, O, U)

“**F**leet **f**ee**t** **s**w**e**e**p** by **s**l**e**e**p**ing **g**ee**s**e”/“Hear the **l**ar**k** and **h**ar**k**en to the **b**ar**k**ing of the **d**ar**k** fox gone to ground” by Pink Floyd.

“**S**tr**i**ps of **t**in**f**oil **w**in**k**ing like people” - “The Bee Meeting” by Sylvia Plath

Consonance – repeated consonant sounds in multiple words

‘**P**eter **P**iper **p**icked a **p**eck of **p**ickled **p**eppers’

“A **s**kunk **s**at on a **s**tump. The stump thought the sk**nk** **st**unk. The skunk thought the **st**ump **st**unk. What **st**unk, the sk**nk** or the **st**ump?”

“I talk about assonance and consonance a lot because often we find ourselves focusing on the rhyme at the end of the sentence and not so focused on the middle. Assonance and consonance, however, can help us create melody and rhythm throughout, so it has a consistent kind of flow, which again can be more interesting for your audience and also keep you occupied as a performer.”

5. Try an alliteration poem in four simple steps:

i. Pick a consonant.

ii. Think of as many words as you can that start with your letter and write them down. You'll need:

- **Nouns** (objects, people, places, ideas), e.g. pants, porridge, poetry, Peter, Paris;
- **Adjectives** (descriptive words), e.g. pretty, proactive, pernickety;
- **Verbs** (doing/action words), e.g. prancing, placing, pondering, pandering, playing, pooing.

iii. Form your first two lines of poetry - they could be sentences, but don't have to be.

iv. Try adding another two, four or six lines, not worrying too much about meaning, just having fun with the sounds.

This can be a really fun activity to get you used to thinking about, and enjoying, the sounds of words as well as their meaning. And it can be a very nice form to use for children's poems, like the Mother Goose poem below.

Betty Botter Mother Goose

*Betty Botter bought some butter,
"But," she said, "the butter's bitter;
If I put it in my batter,
It will make my batter bitter;
But a bit of better butter,
That would make my batter better."
So she bought a bit of butter,
Better than her bitter butter,
And she put it in her batter,
And the batter was not bitter;
So it was better that Betty Botter
Bought a bit of better butter*

“

A book is an instrument you can use to achieve visibility, to share your ideas with others.

”

- Lúcia Rosa

Chapter Two:

WRITING IDEAS AND ACTIVITIES

“

Writing helps us create our own links with the world, no matter how cut off we are, no matter how isolated we feel, no matter what difficulties life in prison throws at us.

”

- *Sisters in the Shadows*

LUCY BELL

Lucy Bell teaches at the University of Surrey and is a researcher in Latin American Studies. Her work centres on community-based literature and art. Her recent projects have involved working with a wide range of community groups from rural leaf-pickers and female waste-pickers in Brazil to imprisoned people in Mexico and the UK.



The four activities that follow – and most of the examples – are taken from a writing project I ran with Joey Whitfield at HMP Nottingham in 2019. Over five sessions, we facilitated different creative writing activities, from writing sense poems and rap lyrics to discussing what it would take to have a world without prisons. It was a very emotional process that resulted in a published book called *Unlocked*: a selection of poems, raps, micro-fiction, biographical snapshots, and short discursive pieces by 17 participants. As you'll see, some of their writings are sad, others are fun, and others are more reflective. But they all show the writers' desire to reach and touch individuals or communities they've been separated from, whether close family, loved ones, or society as a whole.



ACTIVITY 1. ACROSTIC POEMS

An acrostic poem is a poem where the first letter of each line spells out a word or message. It's a simple but powerful technique.

Here are two examples, written by imprisoned men at HMP Nottingham in 2019.

NATASHA,

By J.G., dedicated to his girlfriend Natasha

Not knowing how long I've got is a killer
Another day done when I wake up
Tash I'm sorry and I promise to change
Angry with myself full of shame
Soon be home I long for your loving touch
Happiness is around the corner I feel it
Another court date no bail I'm going to appeal it

MOTIVATION,

By Leigh

Money in my pocket, build it up enough to fill and safe and lock it.
Obtain all the goods for me and find my honey, start straining off the duds, brim up
my heart till my feelings are funny.
Time to aim so much higher, no more nickel and dime, as I'm sick of being the sigher.
Intellect, time for self-education, instead of complete self-neglect.
Voids, I know it's time to fill them, instead of following the droids.
Attack and move forward, no more rear-view mirror, no more looking back.
The start of my new day, starters gun quick off the line, I must, this time, dart not yawn.
Intuition isn't always right, even with what I've been told, in spite of all the times to fight,
this time I must hold my judgment and anger, and pick tuition.
Overcome my personal hills, now I can freewheel all my way back down, it gives me
time to stop and look at my stills.
Now it's time to move on from life bitterness of lime, now I must find my own stride
and groove.

REFLECT & WRITE



What is the most powerful word or name for you? It could refer to an object, idea, topic, person or place.



Brainstorm a few ideas and then choose the word or name that most inspires you.



Write it vertically down the page in capital letters.



Then write phrases about that thing or person or place, starting with each of the capital letters.



If you're stuck for ideas, here are some possible words to get your own ideas flowing:

PEACE - EARTH - FRIENDS - FUN

MUSIC - PAIN - TIME - ANGER

PRISON - FAITH - MONEY - SORROW

FREEDOM - CLIMATE CHANGE

FUTURE - HUMAN RIGHTS

The name of a loved one

ACTIVITY 2. SENSE POEMS

A sense poem is a poem built on the 5 senses: taste, touch, sight, smell, hearing. It could be about anything or anyone that brings up a really sensory experience for you.

Below are four, very different examples:

1. A young girl's powerful depiction of depression
2. A beautiful, highly-evocative dedication to a girlfriend
3. A light-hearted, humorous illustration of prison life
4. A joyous celebration of romance and eroticism

I. "I'm Dying On The Inside" ,

By Ashley

*You see a smile on the outside,
But that's all you can see.
What if tears run down my face on the inside?*

*You hear a laugh on the outside,
But that's all you can hear.
What if I'm crying out for help on the inside?*

*You smell the scent I wear every day on the outside,
But that's all you can smell.
What if it smells of death on the inside?*

*You feel soft, smooth skin on the outside,
But that's all you feel.
What if I'm being torn apart on the inside?*

*You taste sweet lips kissing you on the outside,
But that's all you can taste.
What if my lips taste of blood on the inside?*

*You can tell I'm happy on the outside,
But what if you can't tell I'm dying on the inside?*

2. **“Bee Ree B: The Beauty I See”** ,

By Leigh (HMP Nottingham, 2019), addressed to his girlfriend

*Every street I choose to go down, every walk with attitude and
beat, it's you I see, which helps wipe away my frown.*

*Every breeze that blows carries your smell, which makes me stop,
turn, and my yearning for you is all that grows.*

*In the chaos of the crowd, like the chiming of the midtown bell,
stripping from my ears the shroud, your distinctive yell drops out of
the cloud, calling out to shout my name.*

*Like your saltfish and ackee, as I close my eyes, it's you I taste,
which drives me wild, and turns me totally whacky.*

*It's when I'm lying next to you, as you stroke my hair strand by
strand, and you pick and touch your way through, it's your hold and
touch that I miss so so much.*

3. **“Sharing a Cell”** ,

By J.G. (HMP Nottingham)

I saw my pad mate head towards the toilet

His ass touched the ring of the bowl

I heard a fart and I heard a plop

I smelt shit and could taste it on the tip of my tongue

That's the downside of sharing a cell.

4.

“When I think of you” ,

By Enedina (Puente Grande Prison, Mexico)

*In this mirror
I gaze upon the marine blue
of your skin
through your dark eyes
that are my eyes...*

*Desire walks around
barefoot...
her soft hands like the golden
wind
that crosses the doors of your temple
and takes possession of the Sanctuary
that inhabits you at the heart of your
two worlds.*

*The other night
the scent of your fantasy
delicately found its way into my nostrils
and bumped into my libidnal
excesses...*

*The crimson of
the luminous mountains
are the infinite opening
to savour with this ritual of words
your divinity...
as you laugh...*

REFLECT & WRITE

1. Look at the 4 examples above and underline words or phrases that evoke one of the 5 senses.
2. What is the effect of using the five senses in each poem?

Over to you!

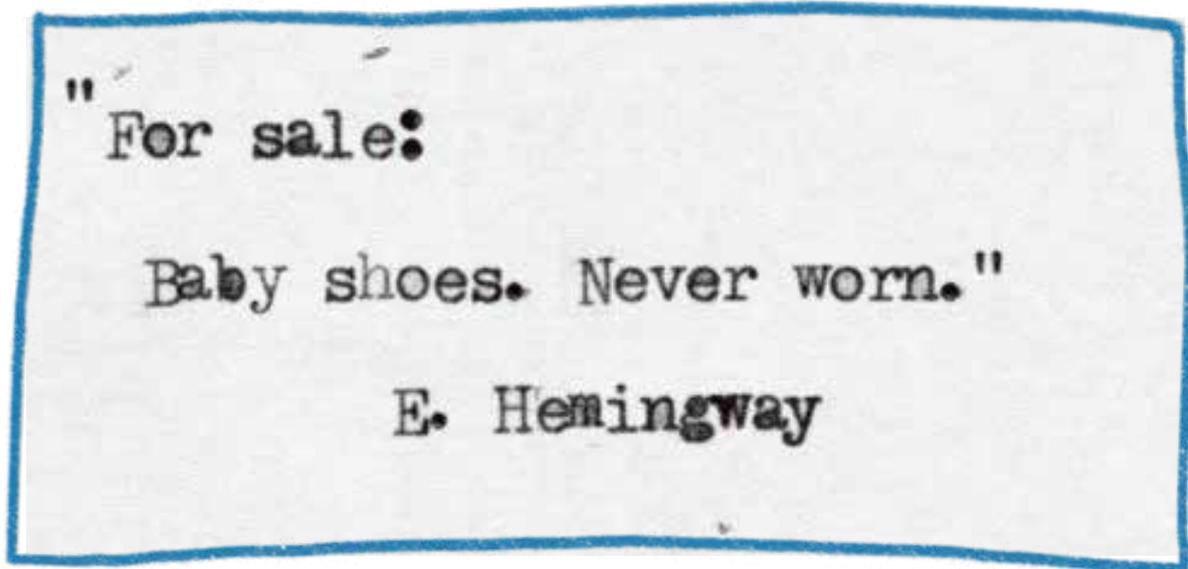
3. Think about a topic that could be described using all your senses. It could be:

- A place from your childhood.
 - A person you love.
 - An event that you remember vividly.
 - A feeling that you're experiencing right now (love, hope, anger or depression) - look back to the feelings wheel in Chapter One.
- Note down each of the five senses and any word, phrase or sentence that describes your topic using those senses.
 - Build these up into a poem.

ACTIVITY 3. FLASH FICTION

Flash fiction is a very short fictional work that still offers at least two of the three main elements of fiction: character, plot and (sometimes) setting.

The most famous example is by Ernest Hemingway, and it's only six words long. It goes like this:



Flash fiction often has the following characteristics.

1. Brevity. 6 to 1,000 words!

2. A plot. It should have a beginning, middle, and end - though you might well not "give it all away." Hemingway calls this the "tip of the iceberg technique", which means that you reveal only part of the story, and leave the rest to the reader's imagination.

3. Surprise. Try to incorporate surprise, or a twist of some kind, maybe in the form of an unexpected last line. In Hemingway's example, the tragic twist is in the last two words – "never worn" – which hint at (without describing) the death of a child.

Here's another very very short example, by Mexican short story writer Augusto Monterroso, called "The Dinosaur":

When he awoke, the dinosaur was still there.

Yes, that's it!

And here's a slightly longer one by Melanie J Kirk

"The Prisoner"

He reaches out a hand to the beckoning light, but the glass comes between him and the outside world. He closes his eyes and feels the golden warmth on his face, enjoying the way the light shimmers through his eyelashes. It's been so long since he has been outside, he has forgotten what the unfiltered sun feels like on his skin. He longs to feel it again, but he knows it is a dream for another lifetime.

He turns from the window and his eyes rest on the remains of last week's takeaway dinner. He will have to clean it up soon, or his flatmates will start to notice the smell. He knows this, but it takes more courage than he has to open his door and face the hallway and his demons. Let alone make it all the way down the corridor and outside to the bins.

He will do it tonight, when everybody is asleep and he can slink out, unnoticed. A phantom of the night.

With this resolution made, he pulls his curtains shut, shrouding himself in the dark. His own self-made prison.

REFLECT & WRITE

1. Have a closer look at “The Prisoner”, the very-short-story by Melanie Kirk. Think about the three main elements that make it an example of flash fiction.

- a. How many words is it, approximately?
- b. What’s its plot? Who’s its character? What’s the setting?
- c. What’s the “surprise” or twist?

2. Have a go at writing your own flash fiction.

3. If you don’t know where to start, one way to write flash fiction is to decide on the words you’re going to use before you start writing.



Write down no more than 10 words that pop into your head right now.



Then piece them together to produce your own flash fiction, remembering the three rules of thumb:

1. Keep it short.

2. Give it, or hint at, an **interesting plot** (a story of some kind, with a beginning, middle and end).

3. Try to finish it with a **surprise**, which might turn the story on its head.

Below are two examples from HMP Nottingham, created using that technique.

EXAMPLES

Ten words selected:

**Love, Sunshine, Jail, Keys, Running,
Doors, Locks, Freedom, Time, Drugs.**

These ten words generated lots of flash fiction, including these two examples:

“Lads in grey”

By Mike, edited by Lucy (HMP Nottingham)

*Well I am in **jail**, yet again, **locked** in my cell behind the **door**, yet again away from my **loved** ones, doing **time** yet again. But I'm glad to get away from **drugs**. I lie on my bed listening to the screws jangling their **keys**, thinking that all I want is my **freedom**. I look outside and see the **sunshine**, then see three lads in grey and smile.*

*I so want to be with you, my sons. **Love**, Your dad.*

“Sunshine/Locks”

By Sunny (HMP Nottingham)

*I was outside enjoying the **sunshine**. There was nothing better than **freedom**. I was pushing **keys** I did it with **love**, **drugs** paid my bills but little did I know **time** was running out. Now I'm in **jail** with all the other inmates, all behind our **doors**, all waiting for the **locks** to be unlocked.*

ACTIVITY 4. FOUND TEXTS

Found poetry is a type of writing created by taking words, phrases, and sometimes whole passages from other sources and reframing them by making changes in spacing and lines, or by adding or deleting text to give it your own personal twist, your own style and meaning.

So in HMP Nottingham, we gave our participants this passage from Jack London's *White Fang*:

Dark spruce forest frowned on either side of the frozen waterway. The trees had been stripped by a recent wind of their white covering of frost, and they seemed to lean toward each other, black and ominous, in the fading light. A vast silence reigned over the land. The land itself was a desolation, lifeless, without movement, so lone and cold that the spirit of it was not even that of sadness. There was a hint in it of laughter, but of a laughter more terrible than any sadness — a laughter that was mirthless as the smile of the Sphinx, a laughter cold as the frost and partaking of the grimness of infallibility. It was the masterful and incommunicable wisdom of eternity laughing at the futility of life and the effort of life. It was the Wild, the savage, frozen-hearted Northland Wild.

And here is a story drawn from that text:

“Enlightened by the Dark”

By Leigh (HMP Nottingham)

As I stumbled across the seemingly dark spruce forest, which seemed to feed on my own inner fear, dark and lifeless, it made my veins feel like a crossroads of frozen waterways. I ventured inside.

As I did, I began to feel as lifeless as the forest, and colder than the frozen waterways of blood running through me. I was now stripped of all warmth, feeling like it had stripped me even of my clothing.

As I dared to venture deeper, now stripped back to my bare self, I could see in my breath so much evil. I felt as if my clothes were covered in frost, so much cold in front of me. The sunlight had started to struggle to penetrate the foliage. It got dark quickly, one could almost say black.

Any possibility of leaving this forest began to feel ominous. The further I looked, the deeper the light was fading along with the noise, it began to feel like the silence was deafening.

I had now reached a depth of complete desolation, a lifelessness beyond compare. Decomposition could be seen all around. Sunk in such a depression, it produced a spirit the likes of which couldn't even be blessed with the name of sadness.

It pulled a cloth of mirthlessness over my whole being, making my complete presence there have no meaning, making me lose any sense of self-worth. I could not see this spirit, but I knew it carried the smile of a sphinx. A smile as cold, if not even colder than the frost.

I felt so lost, so little, spinning around, even the trees laughing at me. For the first time in my life, I felt the grimness of their infallibility.

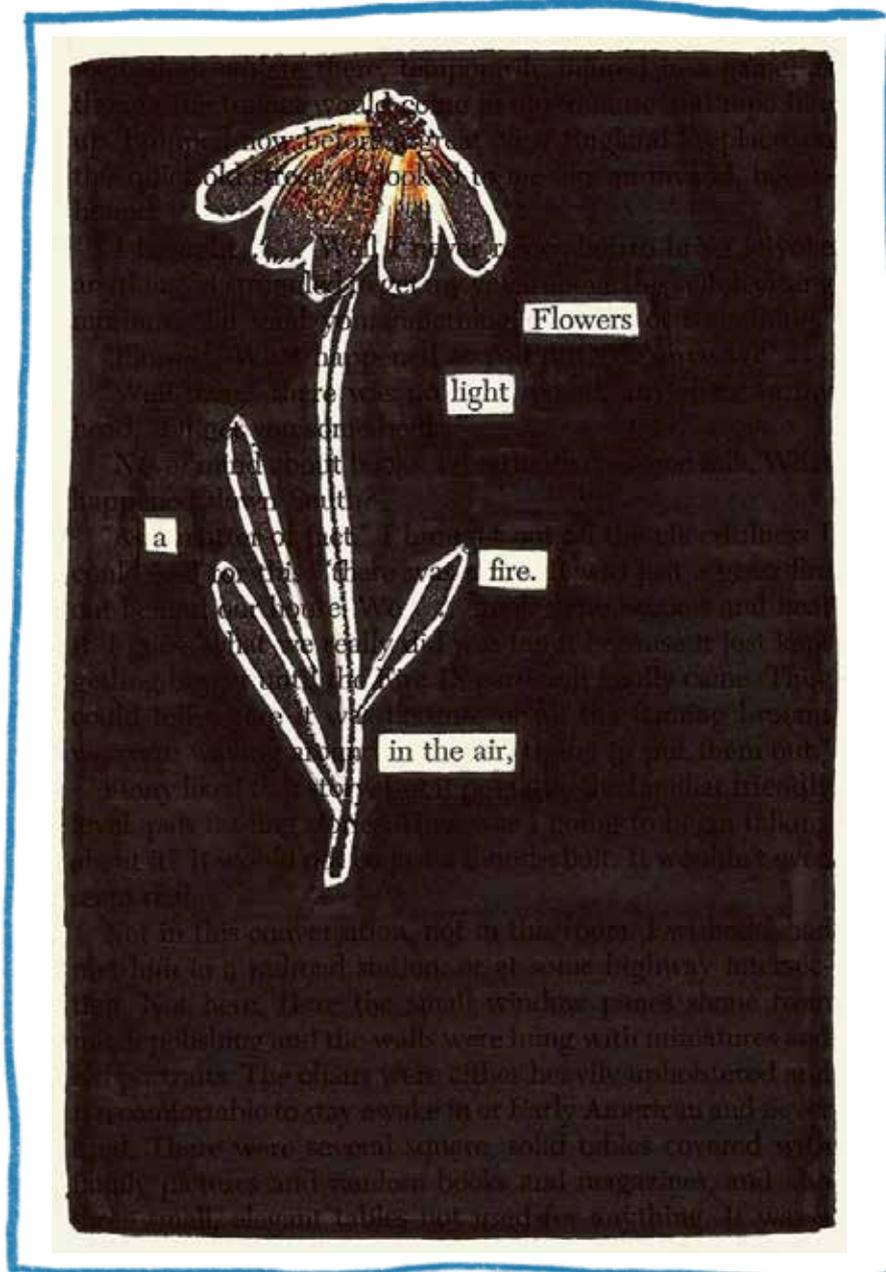
I felt so weak, the control over mind, body and soul had been taken from me....

NOTE

In Leigh's case, what he did was use some of the words, settings and ideas from the Jack London extract to produce a story that captured his own feelings of depression and hopelessness. He did it, as you've seen, in prose (a story) rather than in verse (a poem).

But you can also use this technique to produce poetry. In fact, the easiest way to do this is simply by circling and/or deleting words to produce your own poem with your own personal twist.

You can also turn it into a poetic art work, as with the example below (also called “Black out poetry”, as it’s produced by blacking out all the words apart from those required to form the new poem).



Source: *A Separate Peace* by John Knowles

Black Out Poetry: c.b.w. 2017

REFLECT & WRITE

1. Compare Leigh's story to the extract from Jack London's *White Fang*.

- * What has he kept?
- * What has he taken away?
- * What has he added?
- * What feelings are expressed in Leigh's story?
- * Thinking back to Simar's three-part question, **why** do you think **Leigh** wrote **this** story?

2. Using Jack London's text, or one of the examples below (*True History of The Kelly Gang* by Peter Carey and *The Dispossessed* by Ursula K Le Guin), write your own found poem or story.

3. You could also do this, of course, with a section from your favourite book - or any book you can get your hands on.

From *True History of The Kelly Gang* by Peter Carey

I lost my own father at 12 yr. of age and know what it is to be raised on lies and silences - my dear daughter you are presently too young to understand a word I write but this history is for you and will contain no single lie may I burn in Hell if I speak false.

God willing I shall live to see you read these words, to witness your astonishment and see your dark eyes widen and your jaw drop when you finally comprehend the injustice we poor Irish suffered in this present age. How queer and foreign it must seem to you and all the coarse words and cruelty which I now relate are far away in ancient time.

Your grandfather were a quiet and secret man, he had been ripped from his home in Tipperary and transported to the prisons of Van Diemen's Land. I do not know what was done to him he never spoke of it. When they had finished with their tortures they set him free and he crossed the sea to the colony of Victoria. He were by this time 30 yr. of age, red headed and freckled with his eyes always slitted against the sun. My dad had sworn an oath to evermore avoid the attentions of the law so when he saw the streets of Melbourne was crawling with policemen worse than flies he walked 28 mi. to the township of Donnybrook and then or soon thereafter he seen my mother. Ellen Quinn were 18 yr. old she were dark haired and slender - the prettiest figure on a horse he ever saw - but your grandma was like a snare laid out by God for Red Kelly. She were a Quinn and the police would never leave the Quinns alone.

From *The Dispossessed* by Ursula K Le Guin

There was a wall. It did not look important. It was built of uncut rocks roughly mortared. An adult could look right over it, and even a child could climb it. Where it crossed the roadway, instead of having a gate it degenerated into mere geometry, a line, an idea of boundary. But the idea was real. It was important. For seven generations there had been nothing in the world more important than that wall.

Like all walls it was ambiguous, two-faced. What was inside it and what was outside it depended upon which side of it you were on.

Looked at from one side, the wall enclosed a barren sixty-acre field called the Port of Anarres. On the field there were a couple of large gantry cranes, a rocket pad, three warehouses, a truck garage, and a dormitory. The dormitory looked durable, grimy, and mournful; it had no gardens, no children; plainly nobody lived there or was even meant to stay there long. It was in fact a quarantine.

The wall shut in not only the landing field but also the ships that came down out of space, and the men that came on the ships, and the worlds they came from, and the rest of the universe. It enclosed the universe, leaving Anarres outside, free.

ACTIVITY 5. METAPHOR POEMS

BY ROBERT KIELY

Robert Kiely grew up in Cork, Ireland, and now lives in London. He is a poet, writer and teacher. His chapbooks include *How to Read* (Crater, 2017) and *Killing the Cop in Your Head* (Sad, 2017). He is Poet-in-Residence at University of Surrey for 2019-21, where he runs creative writing workshops and seminars.



In this section, you'll learn how to write a poem that *literalises a metaphor*. But we'll tackle this one step at a time.

First of all, what is a metaphor?

If I say that something is like/as something else, that would be considered a simile (e.g. she was light as a feather; his eyes were cold as ice), but if we say something is something else, that is a metaphor (e.g. the world is a stage, you are a rock, he is a pig).

Common metaphors in English

We have common metaphors in the English language which people use all the time:

- 'time is money'
- 'it's raining cats and dogs'
- 'fit as a fiddle'
- 'silent as the grave'

What does literal mean?

If you take something literally, you take words in their usual or most basic sense without metaphor or exaggeration - the opposite of a metaphor. So if you literalise a metaphor, you turn an image into something concrete, descriptive: a real experience.

How do you literalise a metaphor to make a poem?

So this is a model of writing poetry which says, "I'm not going to find something and then create another metaphor, I'm going to do the reverse: I'm going to take a very common metaphor or phrase or saying and I'm going to make it very literal, very real". You can imagine that would be quite amusing if we literalised the metaphor of 'raining cats and dogs', if they were actually falling out of the sky.

An example

Below is an example I wrote, which literalises the metaphors “building bridges” and “burning bridges” to talk about relationships.

“You build a bridge”

By Robert Kiely

You build a bridge, and then you burn it.

You build a bridge, and then you burn it.

You build a bridge and then you burn it because you have to relocate.

You build a bridge and then you burn it because of a war.

You build a bridge and it is shut down because the economy tanks and the maintainance cost is too high, and then it is burned.

You reopen another birdge but the same thing happended before, it just didn't burn.

You build a bridge, and then you burn it.

You build a bridge and then you bury the workers who built that bridge in the foundations of the next bridge and you burn the last bridge and don't talk about that bridge anymore, no one does.

The new bridge is good though.

You build a bridge and then you burn it because they're sending nothing worthwhile your way.

You build a bridge, and then you burn it.

You cross a bridge.

You cover the bridge up again because you have to move.

The physical land you're occupying moves elsewhere and that bridge isn't there anymore.

They built a bridge and then you burn it.

You switch sides.

You build a bridge and then you burn it.

You build a bridge, and then you burn it, just because.

The bridges are out of use.

You forget what bridges are for, you think they are for burning.

You burn the bridge because you think they might burn the bridge first.

It's ridiculous, but there it is.

TWO TIPS FROM ROBERT

My poem, as you'll have seen, is quite repetitive. It takes the same phrases over and over, and makes small changes which alter the meaning and bring in new perspectives and ideas. And when you think about it, some of the best songs (which are sung poems, if you like) have lots of repetition. So don't be afraid of repeating yourself or writing down the same or similar things one after another in a kind of chanting way.

If you feel that you would like to distance yourself from feelings that you're exploring, you could always change 'I's for 'you's (like I did in this poem) or 'I's for 'we's. But you may also want to stay with your own perspective, which is also good.

REFLECT & WRITE

1. Take another look at Robert's poem.

- How has he literalised the metaphors of building and burning bridges?
- What meanings does the bridge take on in this poem?
- What new images does this conjure in your head?
- What do you think the poem is saying? What's its meaning/message?

2. Have a go at your own poem that literalises a metaphor, possibly referring to a personal experience or something you've read about or heard about or imagined.

You can either write it in the first person (I), or in the second person (using a You) or even the third person (She/He/They). See if one of the below common metaphors jumps out at you and give it a go!

- Missed the boat.
- Night owl.
- Blanket of stars.
- Wheel of justice.
- Silent as the grave.
- This task is a breeze.
- Choices are crossroads.
- Anger is bottled up inside.
- I feel under the weather.
- This is the last straw.
- Bite off more than you can chew.
- Bolt from the blue.
- Fit as a fiddle.
- Time is money.
- Happy as a clam.
- She is an old flame.
- Dull as dishwater.
- Sharp as a tack.
- Silent as the grave.
- Time is money.
- He's just blowing off steam.
- That is music to my ears.
- You are the light in my life.
- He has the heart of a lion.
- Am I talking to a brick wall?
- He has ants in his pants.
- Beauty is a fading flower.
- She has a heart of stone.
- Life is a journey.
- He's a late bloomer.
- He is a lame duck.
- You've given me something to chew on.

ACTIVITY 6. FOUND OBJECT-WORDS

BY NATASHA TANNA

Natasha Tanna is a writer, researcher and teacher whose work centres on queer, feminist and anti-racist literature in Spain and Latin America. She is currently based at University College London.

Sometimes people think that to write their own poem, something “original”, they have to come up with something totally new. But actually, sometimes, you can make a really good story up by rearranging existing things or existing words, rewriting, recycling.

A lot of the writers that I work with rewrite the stories of other writers and take the words of other writers, sort of scramble them and include them in their own work, as a form of creative plagiarism if you like. I prefer to think of it more as a kind of collaborative creation and a way of working with found words in the way that a lot of artists have worked with found objects.

One of the things that you could do, especially if you feel stuck in your thoughts, or in a bit of a rut, to escape from that and free your thoughts up a bit, is this kind of found word exercise. The stories that come out of it are often really fun, and can be turned into great **children’s stories**, or just more **light-hearted pieces of writing**.



So the exercise is very simple:

- * Look around you or go through some of your stuff.
- * Note down the first three objects that you see that aren't books or pages of writing, but just objects with words on them.
- * Use those three words to start off a story.

This is an example of mine, which was inspired by:

- ☁ A cup with HELLO written on it
- ☁ An Amazon delivery envelope
- ☁ A Beatles 'Help!' CD

Help!

By Natasha Tanna

*"Hello, you're through to **Amazon** returns. How can I **help** you today?"*

"Hello, I'm calling to return my Alexa. My grandchildren got her for me a few weeks ago – they said they got her on Amazon and I've had trouble ever since. The other week I asked her to order a mac and instead of a raincoat I was landed with a £2000 computer! It was a right pain to return it, had to call my grandchildren round. Same thing happened when I tried to buy an apple. She's causing me all sorts of bother, this Alexa. I'm not getting on with Siri and that cleverphone either. He keeps talking to me, frightened the living daylight out of me in the middle of the night last week."

"You can't return Siri and Alexa, Sir, they are installed on your devices – you'll have to uninstall them. In any case, Siri is Apple whereas Alexa is Amazon – so I can't help you with Siri."

"You what?"

"You've called Amazon – I can pass you onto the Alexa team to guide you through the uninstall. For Siri, you'll have to call Apple."

"No way I'm calling apple, if I say that word anywhere near Alexa I'll land myself with another computer."

"Where do you have Alexa installed, Sir."

"She hears me everywhere. My grandchildren thought that was best."

"So you have Echo in your home?"

"It is a bit echoey, aye, but she seems to hear my every word."

"I mean the speaker."

"You what? I'm the speaker, they set her up to recognise my voice, they did, my grandchildren."

"No, Sir, I mean the physical device, the Echo speaker."

"You what? I'm fed up with these echoes, amazons, apples and alexas. I don't want any of them!"

REFLECT & WRITE

1. Take another look at Natasha's story (which is also great example of flash fiction, covered in Activity 3).

- How does she connect the three words - Help, Hello & Amazon - in her story?
- What techniques does she use to make the story fun and light-hearted?

2. Write your own story with “found words”:

- Look around you or go through some of your stuff
- Find objects with words on them
- Note down the first three words you see
- Use those three words to start off your own story



WORDS

ACTIVITY 7. DEFINING LIFE

BY LUCIA ROSA

Lúcia Rosa is a Brazilian artist and co-founder of the waste-picking publishing collective called Dulcinéia Catadora. Lúcia works with waste-pickers (*catadores* in Portuguese) in a recycling cooperative in the centre of São Paulo, the largest city in Brazil.

“

We get together once a week to paint cardboard covers and turn them into colourful hand-made books written by different writers and groups. The books are sold, and the income is shared among those who made them. A book is an instrument you can use to achieve visibility, to share your ideas with others.

”

On the next page, Lúcia Rosa tells us about one of her book projects, which involves taking words that are relevant to you right now, and defining them as you have experienced them. Let's explore Lúcia's project in more detail, and then you can have a go at creating your own version.



What was this project?

The idea was to make a book with homeless people - well thankfully no longer homeless at that point, because they lived in a squat, an occupation in São Paulo. While I was involved in artistic collaborations in this occupation, we created a book called *Vocabulario Vivido*, that in English can be translated as *Lived Vocabulary*, because it takes words out of the dictionary, and gives them back to the people - so that they can define the words as they have lived them, as they have experienced them.

How did this project come about?

One day, after a workshop in the occupation, the participants gave me a copy of a newsletter published by a social movement that fights for the right to decent housing for all. That newsletter was about housing and the rights that homeless people have to occupy an abandoned building. I read it and wondered how the squatters would interpret the contents of those articles. How would they define terms which appeared in the newsletter, like occupation, social justice, inequality?

How did you carry out the book project?

I started to ask the residents to give me their own definitions of those terms. In the book, there is a page dedicated to each word. At the top of each page is the dictionary definition, followed by the definitions given by the squatters.

Why do you think this is a valuable project for people in prison?

By defining terms related to your everyday life, you can create a book individually or collectively. You can begin choosing the words you are going to define, like prison, crime, punishment, minorities, equality, privileges. And you can also consider writing what some of the important things in life mean to you, like family, freedom, future, friendship, love, and dreams. It can give you an opportunity to express yourself to the outside world. Such a book will certainly be valuable reading for people interested in issues like incarceration, crime, human rights, racial discrimination, minorities and so on. I hope you like this idea and **start your own project right now!**

How could an imprisoned person go about this?

You can ask your cellmate or your friends in prison or even your family members to write their definitions down. You can write your own definitions too. Each term can be defined by two, three, or four people - as many or as few as you like.

This project was trialled in HMP Nottingham, and here are some of the "lived definitions" that came out of it...

Canteen: *one of the only things that makes prison bearable, the crux of the week. (Paul)*

Pad: *prison cell, generally a small square box that stinks of farts housing two unfortunate individuals. (Paul)*

Prison: *a form of incarceration which keeps your body banged up. Your mind can run free in dreams but you still wake up in the slammer. (Tuf:Honk)*

Police: *are necessary but can use their own egos a lot and when they step out of line their fellow officers are always there to back em up. That's why we always have a wide range of names for them... I personally am wary of them and can spot em a mile away. (Tuf:Honk)*

Cannabis: *I can't see myself ever giving it up. Gets me to sleep, calms my volatility. I smoke an 8th a night. Gwarn, weed or green are other words for it. (Tuf:Honk)*

REFLECT & WRITE

Give this a go, either on your own, or as a bigger, collective project with people you're in contact with in or outside prison. Remember that nobody wants to read a generic, dictionary-style definition - that's the point of the activity! What you want to get down on paper is what these words mean to you: *how you've experienced them, what you've felt about them, how you've dealt with them, how you've been affected by them, etc.*

Here are some examples of words to get you started, but you will have plenty of your own ideas too - you could even challenge yourself to define one word for each letter of the alphabet!

prison cell time

punishment minorities

equality privileges trial

family freedom future

friendship love dreams

work justice injustice

ACTIVITY 8.

A WORLD WITHOUT PRISONS

BY JOEY WHITFIELD

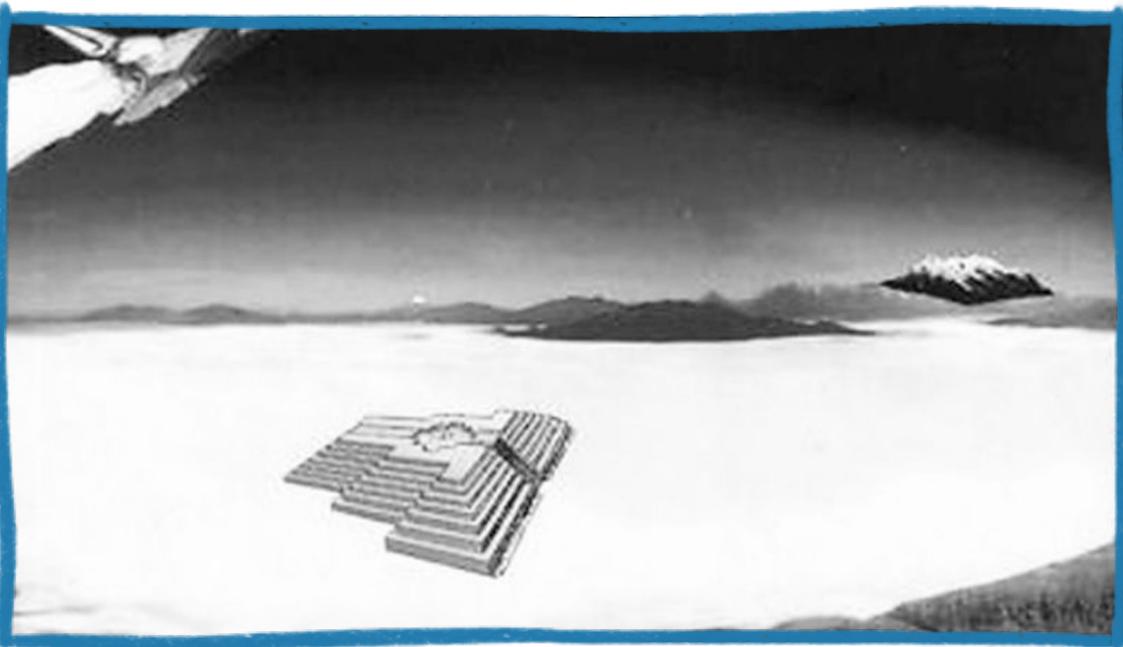
Joey Whitfield teaches Latin American literature and film at Cardiff University. He does research on justice and prisons and has written a book called *Prison Writing of Latin America*. He teaches 'Inside Out' courses in HMP Cardiff and also researches the 'war on drugs'.



This exercise is more about creative thinking than creative writing. It is based on the idea that if we want to improve society it is important to imagine, envision, the kind of society in which we would like to live.

So start off by trying to imagine what a society without prisons could be like. This is meant to be a positive, even utopian society, not a return to the brutal physical punishments and eye-for-an-eye logic of the past, but rather a society in which harmful activities or behaviours either are prevented in the first place, or dealt with in ways that guarantee justice for everyone and a reduction in harm overall.

Prison might seem a strange place to imagine a utopia but there are examples of writers who have used their time in prison to do just that. When she was in prison in Bolivia, Alison Spedding wrote a utopian science fiction novel called *Saturnina from time to time* set in a future version of Bolivia in which there was only one prison. Most social harms were dealt with on an interpersonal basis, with people who have harmed others required to undo or make reparations for the harm to the satisfaction of their victims. There was only one prison, a place for people who had caused harm to others but were unable to undo the harm or repay their victims satisfactorily. It is a place partly designed to protect them from the people they had harmed rather than to keep them against their will.



Saturnina from time to time Cover

Wales used to have a similar system of laws, based on monetary reparation where every crime was given a value and people had to pay back amounts to victims or their families based on the **seriousness of the crime**, rather than going to prison.

In some parts of the world, community and restorative ways of dealing with crime emphasise the importance of **healing and transformation** rather than punishment and pain. Many people now practice what is called transformative justice, based on the idea that for a crime to have occurred, something must have been wrong in the circumstances of the perpetrator. Transformative justice sees the need for the circumstances of perpetrators to transform as just as important as securing the needs of the victims. In New Zealand and in parts of the youth justice system here in the UK, aspects of transformative justice have been used regularly.

So imagining alternatives to prison is not the only goal of this exercise, the other aspect is to imagine the kind of society in which harms — crimes — did not take place in the first place. **Writing in prison, you are ideally placed and have expert knowledge of the issues at stake**, the root causes of harm, and consequently also expert knowledge of the kinds of changes that would need to take place for those root causes to be solved.



Here are some examples from HMP Nottingham (2019):

*If people were given chances to turn their lives around when they have done wrong, with the right help and motivation to guide them down the right path and help them to be where they want to be then there would be fewer crimes and fewer depressed people around the world. We could do this by offering rehabilitation to people who need it, by helping people with addictions or money problems, or just finding the root of the problem in the first place, whether that be trouble at home with family or whatever the case. We could support them just by being there. Another option could be offering college courses to help people find what they want to do in life then at the end helping them get into apprenticeships leading to a lifelong job that they could aspire to do well in. I think if more support was offered to young people with no inspiration then the world would be a better place. **(James)***

*Replace jail with community service. People could avoid prison by learning about ways to reduce crime in a school-type environment. Teach criminology to people who might commit crime instead of just to people in universities. Youth clubs at young ages should be invested so people can get into sport or music or cooking skills instead of committing crime. **(Raq)***

*I think for minor crimes, people should be put in community service or manual labour starting from 3 months and up. This method might reduce the percentage with mental health problems. Most crimes are committed when people have mental health problems, and may not know they have them. So help needs to be available to these people. Jail also causes mental health issues. You wouldn't keep your dog caged up, so why do it to humans. **(Sunny)***

REFLECT & WRITE

1. Think about a world without prisons.

2. What would have to change to make such a world possible? You might want to consider issues such as:

- Economics
- Equality
- Gender relations
- Employment and work
- Drugs
- Addictions
- Religious conflict

3. Write what your utopian, prisonfree society would be like. You may wish to write in the form of bullet points or like a political manifesto.



ACTIVITY 9. A LETTER THAT SOMEONE WROTE TO YOU

BY ELENA DE HOYOS (FOUNDING MEMBER OF “SISTERS IN THE SHADOWS”)

The Mexican publishing collective “Sisters in the Shadows” is a feminist group that, since 2007, have been working with imprisoned and formerly imprisoned women, helping them to learn to read, write, and become writers. Their aims are: to fight against social discrimination against imprisoned women; reeducate society through texts generated from prison (“the shadows”); reveal the violation of human rights of imprisoned people, especially women and minorities.

My name is Elena De Hoyos, and I’m writing to you in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic, 2020, surrounded by a mountain in Morelos called Tepoztlan. This is a special message from another continent - Latin America - to the people, men and women that are imprisoned in the UK.

With our collective called Sisters in the Shadows of which I am founder, we have published more than seventeen books with writings from people in prison. We use literary techniques to dig inside ourselves. Sometimes we find jewels, sometimes hard stones, but they are ours: they belong to us. Whether we decide to give it away, or to keep it, or to transform it, writing is a great tool to overcome difficulties and adversity.

The activity I’m going to share, which I’ve used a lot in my work with imprisoned people, is to

write a letter to yourself:



Now I know that many of you do not receive many, or any, letters. These days, our mail systems don't work well, and one of the features of prisons all round the world is to sever imprisoned people from society, to cut them off. So letters are a very beautiful link, and we're going to create our own links with the world no matter what difficulties life in prison throws at us.

So let's write a letter as if someone else has written it to us. I would like to hear from that ex-boyfriend or girlfriend that left without saying even goodbye, or from my best friend that I lost touch with, or from my mother that I let down, that I haven't treated as well as I should, and I would like to listen to what they have to say, to what they think of me now.

There is a part of myself I can tap into to create these letters. We have our special place inside of us and we can create anything with writing, so why can't I receive a letter from my mother who passed away in 1986? I know she has things to tell me and through writing I can reach other realms, other dimensions, other personalities, identities, things that are not possible in our material world... **but through writing you can reach the impossible.**

With that letter, you can be transported over prison walls, or even back in time if you want. And if you send it out, maybe in a published book, you can also **reach the hearts of many people outside the prison** who you'll touch with your feelings, with your truth, with your words.

It has been very nice to share this with you. I hope I have been clear and I hope someday we can meet, in whatever dimension, maybe on the page of a beautiful book. I'll leave you with the letter that I wrote to myself from my mother.

“Letter from my mother which I had not dared to read”

by Elena de Hoyos

Dear Elena,

You were the daughter I did not expect. You were born with volcanic strength. Your siblings welcomed you with love. The little tumour or menopause were playing tricks on me when you were baptised. When you arrived, covered in hair and with a penetrating gaze, you became the centre of attention in our family.

The presence of your siblings and your nanny Yiyo, as you christened her, allowed me to continue with my life projects: to finish a university degree in public accounting, and to continue with my sales business. When I married your father, I was 19 years old and had never finished primary school. I always wanted to study, and marrying a stable doctor was the perfect way out. A dedicated family man, he was 59 years old when you were born. You spent many afternoons sitting on his lap, and while he read the newspaper, you learned to read. You saw him as an old man, compared to your friends' fathers, and now that you have reached that age yourself, you find it hard to call yourself an old woman.

You always had a sharp tongue, you started speaking when you were 9 months old and nothing has ever stopped you saying what you think or believe. We differ in that rebelliousness. Unlike you, I always submitted to patriarchal authority, to what I was ordered to do or forbidden from doing. But remember how, from a very young age, I used to say to you: "You have to agree with your husband and then you can do whatever you want." A maxim you applied to all your husbands.

I was the one who asked you to find a husband so that I could die with peace of mind, knowing that you would be guided by a good man. You listened to me. In several husbands, you looked for the world. For someone to match your strength, your passion and your rebelliousness. Although you were harsh and merciless in your judgements of me, I know you obeyed me. You married a man of higher social rank than our family. I always thought that social rank determined a person's worth to a large extent. Although not exclusively.

Elena, thank goodness you had a daughter, you made it to the point you could have her in a "respectable" way, through marriage. Thank goodness you threw yourself into the search for a man who would give you a daughter when plan A didn't work out. This daughter you now have is healing the wound of the separation between you and me.

You never respected me. Your brothers were impertinent towards me and I pretended to ignore them. A fine woman doesn't take offence or defend herself, she pretends nothing is wrong. Women in my family didn't rebel. In your father's family there were divorced women, in mine only widows.

Your free spirit tormented me. From a very young age, I was afraid of you, and your brothers were on your side, against me. At the age of 11, when I tried to slap you on the mouth for speaking back to me in the car park of a department store, you hit me back. I never hit you again. I used to lock myself in my room and shout out of the window at the frustration of not being able to help you, of not being able to protect you, because I couldn't even protect myself after I was widowed.

The last daughter, the youngest, is the one who stays with her mother, preferably single. But you never held that belief. As soon as you could, you left with a man. You didn't make me proud by leaving the parental home in a white dress. It was very humiliating for me. I didn't know how to explain to the family that you no longer lived with me and that you chose "free love" as you called it, but it was dishonourable behaviour for a widowed mother, it was clear that I never got through to you. I never got through to you.

At the age of fifteen, when I called your brothers to help me with you, because you came home in the morning straight from a party, had a wash, and went to school, still drunk, you told me: "If in fifteen years you didn't take care of me, don't come now and try to tell me what to do."

And I silently accepted your rebellion. When you left for Europe, I was relieved. Our relationship grew stronger through correspondence. Even now, you daren't read the letters I send you because of the great amount of love they contain. I was always there for you. I know you regret that you were not there for me at the time of my death. I never wanted to force you to love or care for me. I didn't feel entitled to demand anything from anyone, least of all my children.

I am proud of you and your siblings. Their value isn't in taking care of me in my later years, which they didn't do either. It's in preserving the legacy of love and closeness that your father and I lavished on you. I am glad you remain close and are so loving to each other. That is my only inheritance.

And that inheritance is carried by your daughter. It is as if I were alive to love and protect you. Don't feel guilty about me. Simply accept this offering of love, which I lavish on you through your daughter. She loves you in the way that you wish you could have loved me.

REFLECT & WRITE

1. Think about who you would like to receive a letter from.

2. What kind of letter would you like to receive from them?

You might want to consider issues such as:

- A letter of apology
- A letter of farewell
- A love letter
- A family news letter

3. Write that letter: think about all the things you deeply want to hear from them, the things they have to tell you, and maybe some of the more difficult or hurtful things you need to hear as well, so that you can accept those things, and move on.

TIP:

Look back to the feelings wheel, and think about the feelings that person might have towards you, that they might want to share with you.

ACTIVITY 10. WRITING YOUR LIFE

BY DANIELLE STRICKLAND

Danielle Strickland is an academic from the US who teaches at the ITESO University in Guadalajara, Mexico. Since 2017, she has been coordinating a writing project in a high-security state prison. The project is run through the Inside-Out International Prison Exchange Program, which brings university students into prisons to take courses alongside imprisoned people. The group publishes a bi-annual literary journal primarily composed of autobiographical narratives of the group members.

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With these life-writing workshops, what we are seeking to do is share the stories of the authors involved in organised crime to help the general public understand the causes of the cartels growing power in Mexico, and at the same time reduce the stigmas and social barriers that these men face before, during, and after their imprisonment.

In 2013 I had the opportunity to become certified as an Inside-Out professor and then offered the first Inside-Out course here in Mexico. About three years later, I was invited to take the programme to the Reclusorio Metropolitano, which is the newest prison here in the state of Jalisco, designed specifically for high-profile cartel members with the idea of reducing their power in the rest of the state prison system. I found a lot of interest in the programme, and a lot of talent in the students, so I've continued there ever since.

At the end of the second semester, the students proposed the journal, Rompemuros, and it was approved by the authorities, and a little less than a year later we published the first number and opened a website where you can access all of the articles that have been published by both inside and outside participants. As of the end of last semester (Spring 2020), we had published four numbers of the journal.

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Here are some of the things Danielle and her students work on, which might help you develop your own writing:

1. Detailed description

If you want to write about your life, it's useful to work on detailed description. The idea is to develop an image in the minds of your readers, so no matter what you're describing, no matter how different it is to what the reader has experienced and known, the reader will be able to picture it.

-  Describe the main character (yourself), how you're dressed, but also, crucially, how you're feeling. Describe the other people in your story - what they look like, how they might be feeling.
-  Describe the setting, the environment - the different places where the events you are describing took place.
-  Describe the action - what's happening, how people are moving, what they're doing, the way they're doing it.

2. Relatable themes

Try to base your life writing (or any of your writing, really!) on themes that others can relate to, even if it's not directly. As human beings we've all felt scared, alone, exhilarated, overwhelmed, confined, happy, so if you focus on your feelings, or your characters' feelings, it's likely that you'll hook your readers in so they can relate to the story that you're telling. (Look back to Simar's tips and the feelings wheel in Chapter One, Section 5)

3. Adjectives, adverbs and detailed physical description

As well as describing emotions, you also want to generate emotions in your readers to keep them hooked. A good way to do this is to look for adjectives and adverbs that are more descriptive.

-  An **adjective** is a word to help describe people, places, and things (e.g. a **cold** cell, a **sadistic** grin, a **cruel** man)
-  An **adverb** is a word that describes a verb - a doing word (e.g. I ran **breathlessly**, I looked back **fearfully**, I listened **patiently**)
-  So instead of saying 'I was scared':
 -  You could use an adjective (e.g. 'a **crippling** fear took over my whole body')
 -  You could use an adverb (e.g. 'I was **completely** terrified')
 -  You could use a physical description ('the palms of my hands were running with sweat')

That way, you're not just naming the emotion, you're describing the physical effects of the emotion that you're experiencing at any given moment in your story.

Here are some extracts of life writing from the *Rompemuros* journal (www.rompemuros.mx), translated from Mexican Spanish by Danielle, and adapted for the activity below:

*I attended [elementary school] with a lot of problems, a lot of skipping school and a lot of slaps from my mother's flip-flops, because I hated school... When I was ten years old, I became friends with an older boy from the neighbourhood who asked me to run an errand for him going to his cousin's house to pick up a toolbox, to which I said yes. He lent me an old, creaky bicycle and told me not to open the box on the way. I already knew where that house was, so I arrived quickly and immediately returned with the order to my friend's house. He opened it in front of me and pulled out some bags with a powder like flour. When he opened one of them with a knife, he made two lines and with a straw he put them up his nose. Then he took out ten pesos and gave them to me as payment for the errand. So, I continued bringing him the box, collecting my ten pesos and seeing how my friend snorted the lines up his nose, until one day I picked up the box and went straight to my house, opened it, took powder from a bag, made two lines like my friend did and took it in. I liked how I felt and that's where my addiction to 'coke' began, and I started needing more money for my growing addiction. - **Fernando***

*"I was only 16 years old and a person older than me wanted to intimidate me by hitting me, to which I responded and threw him to the ground. But after a second, I felt an immense chill run through my body when I saw that he was pointing a gun at me. I was paralyzed, but I did not change my position, my face did not show fear, only courage... I heard someone yell: 'Leave the kid alone, you bastard, that little boy has more balls than you'... a light-skinned, green-eyed, robust man approached me and patted my back saying, 'everything's fine.' He offered me a beer and asked where I was from... he offered me money, told me that he had a good feeling about me and offered me a job without giving me many details, although with the little he said I could imagine what it entailed." - **Alberto***

*"He kept telling me, 'see how I live, if you work with me we will do even better.' Everything seemed to be real, everything was a fabulous party, I didn't see him doing anything difficult. For two years he insisted repeatedly and my refusal was firm, but without a job my vision was distorted and I started rolling with him. A part of me wanted to participate, I was tempted by the exciting adventure, the adrenaline and the money... it is easy to deviate from a good path when there are possibilities to accelerate a process, having a dream in between. You can lose your dream on the way and you can also lose your way longing for a dream." - **Jorge***

*"The house where I lived [with the Cartel] was one of the benefits of work. It had a big pool. 10 meters long and 5 meters wide, with a built-in Jacuzzi. The bedroom where he slept was the fifth one at the end of the second-floor hallway, with central air-conditioning, overlooking the garden that had several ficus trees trimmed as dove figures, rose bushes of various colours and eight dwarf palm trees that lined the path to the entrance. The wall was covered with jasmine flowers, the kind that intoxicate you with their fresh scent when it rains. The garage fit two Lobo trucks, a Trail Blazer, a Cheyenne, and an Avalanche..." - **Pedro***

REFLECT & WRITE

1. Identify in the above extracts any cases of:

- a. Detailed description
- b. Relatable themes and emotions
- c. Adjectives and adverbs

2. What do these features add to the passages? What effect do they have on you as the reader?

3. Now have a go at your own life writing. You don't have to start at the beginning and get to the present, like in a biography. Pick an event that marked you and that you can picture in great detail. And keep Danielle's tips in mind as you write.

FURTHER WRITING PROMPTS

If you're stuck, here are some writing prompts suggested by Danielle to get you started with your own life writing:



Write a letter to your younger self.

- Retrospective vision is 20:20, so what would you have done differently?
- What are you proud of?
- What is your advice to your younger self?



Write a life story (from your perspective) and then write it again from another character's point of view.

- Try to put yourself in their shoes
 - How did they interpret and react to the same experience?
 - What were they feeling?
- This is a great way to work on developing your description.



Describe the first time you rode a bicycle, or drove a car.

These are things that most human beings have been through, and so they're easy to relate to and also give you a lot of opportunity to practice detailed description.



Start a story with a line from your favourite song - or any song! This can be a lot of fun. As in Natasha's "found word" technique, it can also help you free up your mind to write something completely different. Or tell the same story in a really different way, with a different tone, and in a different mood.



Describe a typical day for you.

This can be very interesting for people (and there are lots of them out there) who are interested in the prison system but know very little about what is actually going on inside.



Start keeping a diary!

As Lady Unchained said back in Chapter One, it's from notes that she scribbled down in her diary while in prison that many of her first poems and raps were created. Use the below extract from Erika's diary from *Wind & Mirrors* to a/ inspire you to keep your own diary, or b/ create a "found text", poem or rap! (see Activity 4)

Sadness is but dust,

By Erika (Puente Grande Prison, Mexico)

Monday 11th February 2019

When this stupid nightmare began almost thirteen years ago, I thought that I'd die, and I said to myself: after all, I had some good times. The monster of nostalgia invaded me. I know now that I'm not the same. I have grown, improved, the breakdowns have stopped. I have defeated all my fears; the monsters have gone. I know that there is calm. Everything happens. Even the most terrible things. The events that moved me, even those that shook me inside out have not lost their emotional charge. Life is constantly changing, every moment. I'm swallowing this reality and I know what I must do.

Monday 18th February 2019

I am in the dining room watching a film on the television. It's sunny and there's a great hubbub in the air as today is visiting day. I have everything, love, beauty, youth and I often escape to another reality as if I were touching another dimension. The only thing I don't have is FREEDOM. That's why I can't jump in the sand, feel the hot sun on my back, feel the air of freedom on my face... that's why I settle for the sweet smell of popcorn. I still think I have a life, right now I am with several women watching the television, chatting ironically and laughing at a game in the dining room of dorm C.

Sunday 24th February 2019

Sadness is but dust. It is like the colour sepia, it's dry, it doesn't have any flavour. It penetrates your nose, your eyes to reach the grey matter of your brain. But above all it lives in your mouth, once it has set up camp you can't swallow it, if it takes hold, it will settle in your being leaving you with no nose, no tongue, no grey matter and you will become those dust particles, you will become sadness.

Thursday 28th February 2019

Every time I drink coffee, it's as if each sip takes away a bit of the nostalgia. It cleanses me, it tries to bring back the colour of reality to my life.

Sunday 3rd March 2019

My Mum is a great woman. She makes me feel a lot of things and I have great admiration for her. When talking about her, lots of memories full of nuances come to the forefront. On the dark days she cries with me, she consoles me. Her unbreakable strength sometimes makes me uncomfortable, her faith unbreakable.

Tuesday 5th March 2019

My happy moments arise when I include the snippets of the past and see life as a whole. Happy moments can be built in any context, whatever life brings you. Meditation and yoga are very rewarding and seem to be key, I will try to express this in words. I'm breathing and I realize that breathing is my only job; inhale, exhale, these modest ups and downs known as life.

ACTIVITY 11.

WRITING TO YOUR LOVED ONES

BY LUCY BELL

inspired by the texts and authors of *Wind & Mirrors*

It can be really hard to stay connected with family members and loved ones when you're in prison. There are of course many ways to do this, like visits, phone calls, and letters, but sometimes these are very difficult or impossible to keep up for different reasons: practical, financial or emotional. For many men and women, writing is a means of connecting - or reconnecting - with their loved ones. This is very apparent in the *Wind & Mirrors* collection.

Wind & Mirrors, A Women's Literature Collection - Espejo y viento in Spanish - was the first book published in Puente Grande women's prison in Jalisco. The texts are the result of a series of writing and book-making workshops run by Israel Soberanes, Irene Ortiz Ruelas and Sergio Fong in early 2019. In this book, the nine participants - Erika Ivonne, Claudia, Griselda, Julia, Erika, Sonia, Enedina, Edith and Bogarin - put in writing some of their most intimate stories, feelings, and reflections.

The texts by the nine imprisoned writers are very varied, reflecting the diversity of backgrounds and life experiences of the women involved, but one of the genres that stands out in the collection is a kind of text - a dedication or prayer - written to a loved one. Below are some examples that may help inspire you to write to, and for, your loved ones.

“True Love”

By Claudia

*For the love of my life,
my driving force, my inspiration
to be a better and better person
the person that brightens my days, for you, my son.*

*Thank you for being my son, the most beautiful
and sacred thing
that God has given me.*

I love you!

*Forgive me for not being with you physically
at this time, but it won't be long, and I promise you
we will never be apart again, sweetheart.*

*I want you to know that you are always in my heart,
we are always united, son, in soul and heart.*

*I want to dedicate this book to the greatest love of my life:
Pablo Emilio.*

“Always Smile”

By Griselda

I LOVE you:

Carlos, Iriss, Kity, Jorge and Graciela.

*It's so difficult to understand God's plans that there are times when we complain, not
knowing that when something happens that we don't like, good things are going to come.*

We must accept life as it comes, every cloud has a silver lining.

*You should always feel confident in yourself, always fight for what you want in this life. I am
living this new opportunity that God has given me. Love is a tonic that has the power to
heal, to make life blossom from its radiant core. Love is the key that opens all doors. It is the
therapeutic reality that drives every desire for truth and all hope.*

To want is nothing,

to love is already a bonus,

to worship is the real prize.

Value what you have right now, not when you lose it.

“A prayer for my wife Chary”

By Julia

I pray first of all that you will love,

And that in loving you will be loved in return,

And that you don't harbour resentment towards me,

And that you will soon forget the years spent in this place.

I pray for it to be that way,

And that, if you still have painful memories of me,

You will know how not to live in despair.

*I pray also that you will be useful,
Though not irreplaceable, and that, in the bad times,
When nothing is left, this usefulness will be enough
To keep you strong in the face of adversity.
I wish also that at some point in our lives,
We will be able to travel together once again.
I wish for you to have money too,
Because you have to be practical.
And that at least once a year you will return to a women's
Prison to help them, and that you won't forget that here,
In a place like this, you found Christ in your heart.
If all these things come to pass,
I have nothing more to wish for you.*

Your wife: Julia

“My story”

Sonia

The story I am about to tell is for my children and my sisters, from the bottom of my heart. I hope this helps them understand the many things that I have not dared tell them or show them; about how I truly think and feel, which I stopped myself from showing them on so many occasions. I hope they understand – I love them all. Thank you

I, Sonia Guadalupe, will share with you a part of my life, the painful memories, but the happy ones too. I was 5 years old, I remember it like it were yesterday, we were a family of 9 (7 girls and 2 boys) and I was mum and dad's youngest and favourite. I was so happy, I felt like I was living in a fairy-tale, in a little pink bubble. I remember that nobody was as happy as us and that my happiness was very short-lived, because this bubble burst and blackened. My mum died, my dad, grief-stricken, drowned his sorrows in alcohol, leaving me practically orphaned. It was so shocking to see her in a coffin, I had no idea what was going on. Why wouldn't my mum wake up? Since that day I have cursed and blamed God for taking my mother away. I grew up with so much lovelessness around me until each took their own path. [...]

Children, please forgive me. There is no way for us to go back in time, but I'm so disappointed in myself and now that I don't have you by my side, I yearn to be with you, to hug you, to hear you uttering words of forgiveness for all the harm I have caused you. I ask that you rid me of the chains that I drag along with me and hope that you won't make the same mistakes as I have. They come at a price, as the harshest judges are your own children. For this reason, I beg your forgiveness from the depths of my heart. I am sorry, children, I love you.

Sisters: I thank you for helping me grow. None of you are to blame. I just went down the wrong path and some of the things that seemed minor to you wounded me forever. I thought that a fake life was better, but I was wrong. I ask your forgiveness and I too forgive you and love you equally. I have learned this hard lesson. Farewell

REFLECT & WRITE

1. Why do you think Claudia, Griselda, Julia and Sonia wrote these texts to their loved ones?
2. What kind of feelings are expressed in these extracts?
3. Do you relate to any of those feelings?
4. What aspects of the texts do you like, and what would you do differently?

Over to you!

5. Who would you like to write to, dedicate a text to, or pray for?
6. Take some notes or brainstorm the things you would want to tell them or write to them.
7. Use those notes to create a very special, unique and personal piece of writing. You can write it in whatever form feels most natural to you. It could be a letter, a poem, a prose text, or a prayer. You may want to use some of the techniques covered so far: e.g. the feelings wheel, the five senses, metaphors and similes, consonance or assonance, detailed description or even literalising a metaphor.

Chapter Three:

COMICS & CHILDREN'S BOOKS

“

When you're honest with people and you're really putting your heart on the line, people find a way to relate.

”

- Joe Latham

1. WRITING CHILDREN'S BOOKS

INNOSANTO NAGARA



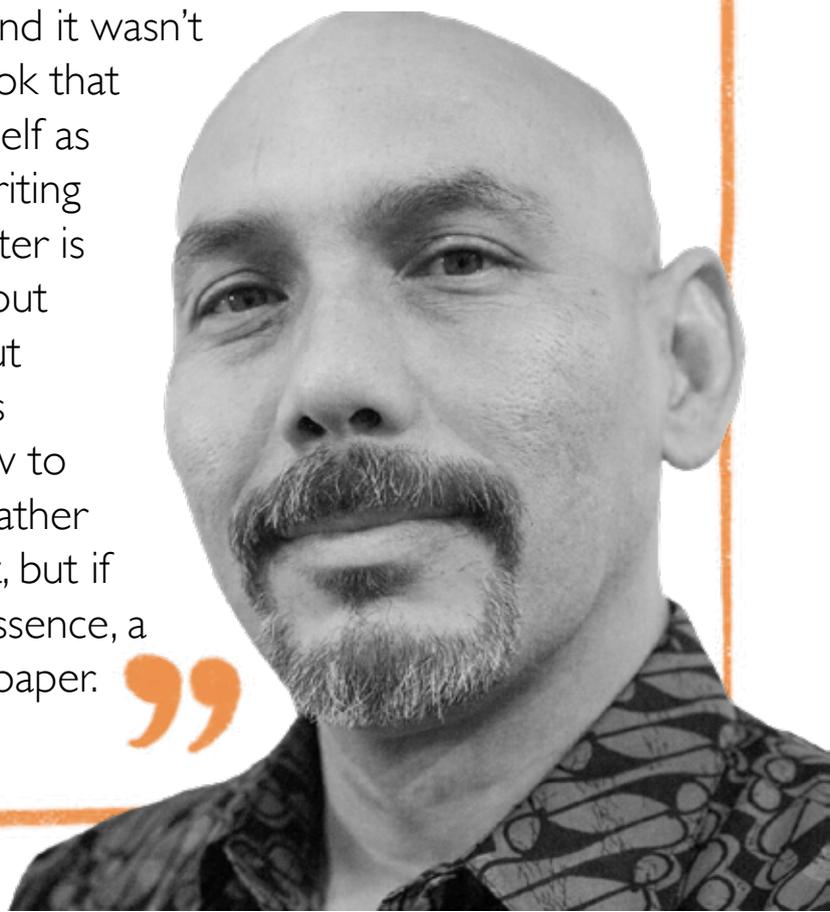
Page from Innosanto Nagara's *A is for Activist*, published by Triangle Square (2016)

Innosanto Nagara was born and raised in Jakarta, Indonesia, and moved to the U.S. in 1988 to study zoology at UC Davis. But instead of becoming a zoologist he became an activist and a graphic designer. He also writes and illustrates social justice themed children's books. He is the author of the bestselling alphabet book *A is for Activist* as well as other children's books like *Counting on Community*, *My Night in the Planetarium*, and *The Wedding Portrait*.

“

My story is that I'm somebody who didn't really think of myself as a writer when I first started. What happened was I found myself looking for the book that I wanted to have for my kid when he was born, and couldn't find it. So I ended up writing *A is for Activist*, and it wasn't until maybe my fourth or fifth book that I could really start thinking of myself as a writer. I basically started with writing what I know, you know. Every writer is different. Other people are all about being storytellers. Many of you out there are storytellers and then it's just a question of figuring out how to make that into a writing project rather than just the storytelling part of it, but if you have the stories you are, in essence, a writer, once those stories get on paper.

”



INNO'S WRITING TIPS

1. Just start writing

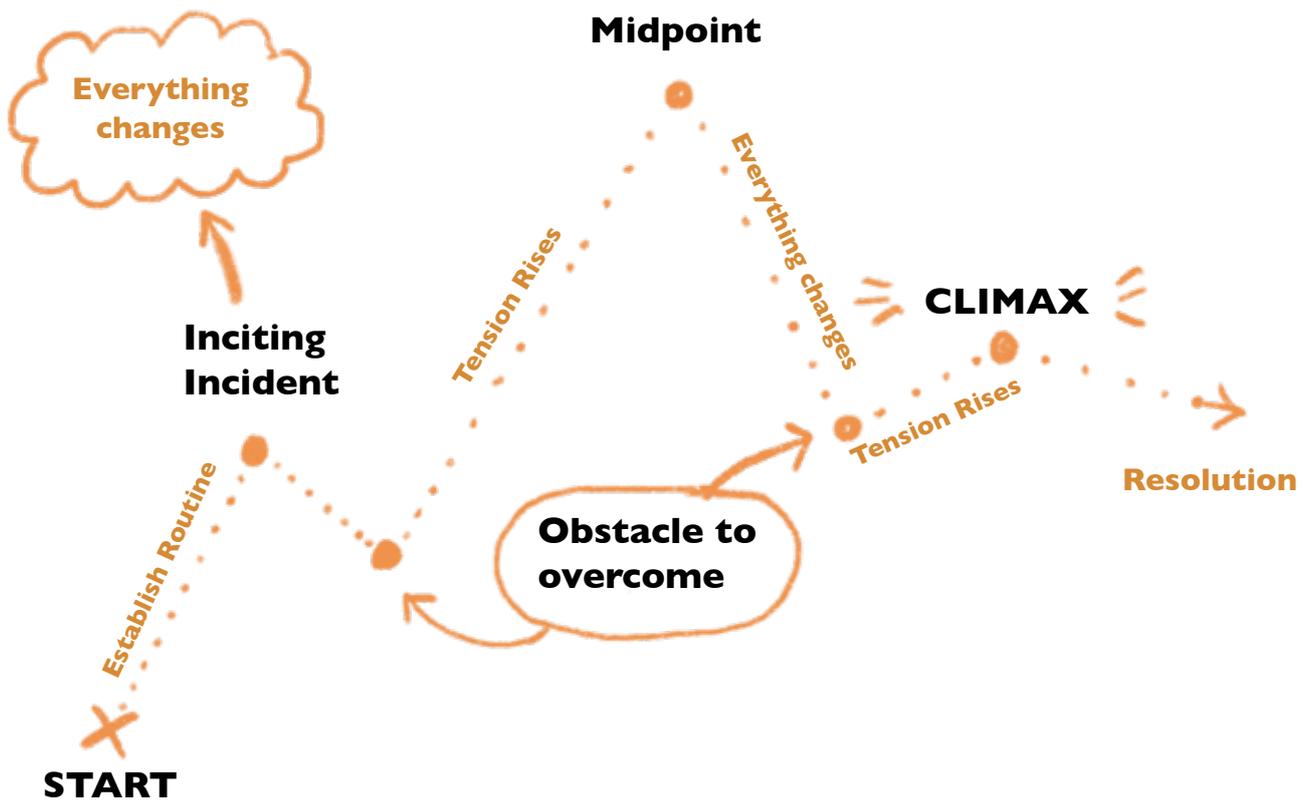
When you start writing, try not to get too hung up on where this story is gonna start and end. Just start writing what you know. Just start writing as if you were talking to a kid - your kid or a cousin or a niece or nephew. You don't need to know where it's gonna go.

2. Don't worry about spelling and grammar!

Don't worry about whether the words sound good, **don't worry about spelling**, grammar, all this kind of technical stuff, don't even worry about whether you know there's gonna be a good **story arc** by the time you've finished.

3. Think about a narrative arc

Once you've got something on paper, you can have a think about your story arc, or **narrative arc**. A narrative arc refers to the general shape or structure of your story. The shape of an arc is a visual way of showing that from the beginning of almost every good story, the **tension** builds and builds - there are **obstacles** to overcome, there's **conflict** between characters - up to a peak, and after that the story settles back down, the obstacles are overcome and the conflicts are **resolved**.



4. Redraft, redraft and redraft again

Then once you have that first draft on paper, you can go back and change it. So for example, you can start with a true story (something that really happened to you), because that's already in your head, and then by the time you're done with it, it's no longer a true story, it's a fictional story.

5. Let go of it!

Once you reach that stage, and you've illustrated it or got a mate to illustrate it for you (like many published children's writers do!), it's become its own thing: once it's out in the world it's no longer your book, in a way, it's how other people who read it, receive and understand it.

ACTIVITY: PLAN, WRITE AND ILLUSTRATE YOUR OWN CHILDREN'S STORY

If Inno's free style doesn't work for you and you need more structure and planning, try following these steps suggested by a children's book editor:

1. Develop your idea

"The trick is to have one twist for your story that makes it different. If it's a story about bullying, perhaps your book tells the story from the point of view of the bully. Or if it's a story about a dog, make this dog a stray or blind in one eye."

2. Develop your main character

"The best books have unique characters. They are quirky in some way. They have a funny habit. They look strange. They talk differently than everyone else."

3. Start the story quickly

"If your story is about a child joining a circus, they should join on the first or second page. Don't give a backstory about this child's life. Don't set the scene or tell us what season it is. Just have the circus come into town, and as soon as possible, have the child become a clown or tightrope walker or lion tamer."

4. Figure out the main problem

"Every character has a problem. It could be a mystery, it could be a person, it could be a crisis of confidence. That problem is what they will struggle with for the entire book. The majority of the book will be obstacles the main character has to hurdle before they can solve their problem." (Think back to Inno's narrative arc: the problem is a set of obstacles that build to a peak or climax until the story reaches its resolution).

5. Use repetition

“Children love repetition! Parents love repetition! Publishers love repetition! Everybody loves repetition! If you’re not repeating something in your children’s book, it’s not going to be a great children’s book.” (e.g. repetition of a word or phrase on a page or across the whole book).

6. End the story quickly

“Once the main problem of the story is resolved (the porcupine is found, the bully says he’s sorry, the two frogs become friends again), you only have a page or two to finish the book. Since the story is done, there’s no longer any tension for the reader, which means they don’t have an incentive to keep reading. So do them a favor and end the book as quickly as possible!”

7. Write for illustrators

One of the main jobs of the writer is to set up the illustrator for success. So...

- Choose fun buildings for your setting (put it in a greenhouse rather than a school)
- Think of funny-looking main characters (a lemur is much more fun to draw than a dog)
- Set it out in the open rather than being inside (wheat fields are more entertaining than a bedroom).

8. Choose a great title (once you’ve finished your story!)

“Most readers decide whether or not to pick up your book from the title alone. That means choosing a title might be the most important thing you do.”

Possible title techniques:

- Use alliteration: *The Mouse in the Meadow*
- Use description: *How to Live Forever*
- Use action (with a verb): *Captain Johnny Defeats Dr. Doom*
- Use mystery: *Olivia Saves the Circus* (How? We want to know!) or *How to Catch an Elephant* (Tell me more!)

9. Revise & cut!

The shorter and faster paced the story, the better. Try out this technique called Walk the Plank to revise your book and make every single word count:

Hover over every word/phrase/sentence (this is the “walking the plank” moment) and ask yourself: ‘if I cross this out, will the story no longer make sense?’

If the story will still make sense, then PUSH that word/phrase/sentence off the plank and cross it out.

Tips adapted from “How to Write a Children’s Book in 12 steps”

<https://thejohnfox.com/2019/02/how-to-write-a-childrens-book/>

If you’re still stuck for ideas, here are some prompts:

- ✿ a young boy who loves magic tricks
- ✿ a group of friends who win a trip to France or Italy or any other country you might have visited that inspired you
- ✿ a class that reluctantly volunteers at a soup kitchen and learns something new
- ✿ a naughty kid who becomes principal of the school
- ✿ a young girl who loves race cars
- ✿ traveling back in time to see the dinosaurs
- ✿ traveling to the future to your city 300 years from now
- ✿ a friendly alien who comes to Earth
- ✿ a group of friends who learn a dangerous secret about their school
- ✿ a porcupine with magic powers

2. PLANNING YOUR FIRST COMIC

JOE LATHAM



Page from Joe Latham's *A Seed named Hope*.

Hello! My name is Joe Latham. I'm an illustrator and designer based in Bristol and I make comic books. Comics can be a beautiful way to express things that just don't seem to fit any other shape. One of my most successful comics to date is a short comic that I made called *A Seed Named Hope*.

“ *A Seed Named Hope* is about two cats, who are the smallest cats in the world. They're these tiny, tiny little woodland creatures and one of them disappears one day. When they come back, they're carrying a seed and they're both very excited to see what this seed brings, so they plant it and see how it grows, and they're discussing what their hopes and dreams may become with this seed as it gets bigger. And then one day it gradually withers and dies and the pair of cats have to come to terms with this and find a way to keep going, and find a way to be thankful for the hope that this seed brought and, you know, keep going and see what comes next.

It's about myself coming to terms with a loss that me and my partner had and it's about finding shape for that, because sometimes words don't do it justice and pictures don't do it justice, but when you have this unique combination it can become so much more.

”



The value of honesty

When you're honest with people and you're really putting your heart on the line, people find a way to relate, and even if their experience isn't the same, even if you're talking about a different kind of loss or a different pain, they find a way to connect it to them, they see something that's so familiar to them. **That connection is what you should strive for** when you're creating anything, because if you're being honest the chances are that there are a lot of other people who have had similar experiences and they feel similarly to you, and it makes you feel less alone and it helps you express these things that your soul will want to be expressing but don't know any way to do it.

THREE COMIC WRITING TIPS FROM JOE

1. Start simple

Fully-fledged humans are hard to draw, but even to tell the most human stories, you don't have to draw human characters or cartoon characters or realistic people.

- You can use simple shapes: circles, triangles, rectangles and squares
- You can use animals: cats, dogs, birds

2. Be honest, be yourself & be true to your emotions.

- Tell a story that happened to you and touched you (because it was sad or happy or funny or joyful or tragic).
- But again, you don't need to draw yourself. "I" for example, in *A Seed Named Hope*, was one of the tiny cats. "You", in your comic strip, could be an animal, a stick figure or even an abstract shape.
- Give your emotions and experiences that shape through simple techniques.
- Faces are useful here, especially eyes, eyebrows and mouths:



3. Keep it short

Choose a single moment, a single experience, something that happened to you, and see if you can turn it into a one-page or two-page comic strip. (see Shofela's activity at the end of this chapter).

3. CONQUERING YOUR FEAR OF DRAWING

SOPHIE MARSH

Hi, I'm Sophie, and I make comic books. I started off making a colouring-in book for my sister as a joke for Christmas and it ended up going viral on the internet, and from there that gave me an inflated ego to carry on making more silly books!



Comic from Sophie Marsh's *50 Days at Sea*

“ One of my comics was created when I was on a boat with my older brother, who is very annoying. We were on this boat for 50 days and we shared a cabin. Needless to say, we irritated the hell out of each other, and my way of coping with it was to write my comic.

I did this because by drawing what was making me angry, it meant that I could then laugh about it. The comic is probably the main reason that neither of us ended up overboard. Every time we would argue, I would whip out my notebook and start scribbling down what was being said and what was happening.

In a way, my comic is just a diary of all of the arguments we had while we were at sea.

”



The steps to making my comic:

So **first**, I would scribble down either notes of conversations or little doodles just to remind me of what was happening at the time.

The **second** step would be to look at my notes and see if there was anything funny or interesting, or anything that captured a moment, that I would want to share with other people.

From there, the **third** step is drawing my panels. They would start off quite rough, just trying to figure out how many panels I would need to tell the story, what kind of dialogue there would be or whether there would be any at all.

In the **fourth** step, I would draw them out, and then redraw them and redraw them until I was happy with how they looked.

The **fifth** step is to colour them in (on the computer in my case, but I could also have done that by hand).

ACTIVITY: FUN DRAWING PRACTICE

- * Look around your cell, the room, or wherever you are, and see if there's something you want to draw
- * It could be a chair, it could be a door, it could be a person
- * Have a go at drawing it, however long it takes
- * Then have another go, in one minute
- * Then draw it again with your eyes closed
- * Then draw it again without looking at the paper
- * Then draw it again without taking your pen off the paper so it's a continuous line drawing

And so on... Just keep doing things like that, setting yourself fun challenges, so that you end up with a page of doodles or scribbles. It doesn't matter, they don't have to be perfect drawings, the idea is just to get those first drawings out of the way and then you can move on, feeling more comfortable and more at ease with your drawing.

Here's what happened when I tried...

Normal drawing



Drawing in 30 seconds

Not looking at the paper



Drawing in 10 seconds



Eyes Closed



Continuous line drawing



Everything but the subject



SOPHIE'S TOP TIPS

1. Don't worry about having a perfect drawing

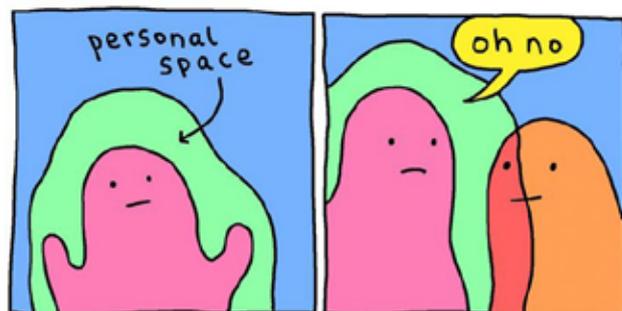
There are loads of artists out there, loads of different styles, and there's not one correct way to draw. Drawings don't have to look like a photograph image of real life. There is no right style for a comic, they can look however you like. Just do whatever is best to tell your story, whatever you can do.

There are some really great artists that demonstrate this. Here are two examples.



Untitled (It's ok to run away)
David Shrigley 2011

There's David Shrigley. So, artists like David Shrigley are famous for capturing the humour in ordinary moments. His illustrations feature crossed out words, scribbles, and uneven lines.



Violated, Alex Norris 2016

Another great comic is by Alex Norris. These use very simple drawings and only a few panels to very cleverly capture an idea.

2. Unleash your sense of humour!

Humour is a really great tool for dealing with things that make you angry, for looking at things from different perspectives, and comics and cartoons are a really great way of sharing that humour with everybody else.

4. A ONE-PAGE COMIC

SHOFELA COKER



Outcasts of Jupiter, Shofela Coker

Shofela Coker is an Illustrator/Art Director born and raised in Lagos, Nigeria. In 2005 he moved to Memphis, Tennessee and attended the Memphis College of Art and graduated with a BFA in illustration. He then moved to Chicago, Seattle and San Diego where he worked for Activision and Sony as a character designer on games like Tony Hawk and Planetside. He has published *Outcasts of Jupiter* (2014), a sci fi adventure comic, and worked on the animated documentary, *Liyana* (2017), which has won several awards including Best Documentary at the LA Film Festival and Grand Prize at the New York Children's Film Festival.

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One of the projects I have worked on is called *Outcasts of Jupiter*. Me and my brother Kickstarted it, which is a crowdfunding platform that allows people around the world to send you money to support you to create the project of your dreams. The story is about these four misfits who are trying to break their friend out of prison in Morocco. It's set in the future, in Africa, and that is something me and my brother really want to try and do. We want to tell more stories about Africa, because when we were growing up in Nigeria, there were not many stories about Nigeria or Nigerians, so we're trying to bring that into the world.

The one thing about comics that's amazing is that you don't need very many things. In fact, I'd like you to try to create a story of your own that's just made on one page.

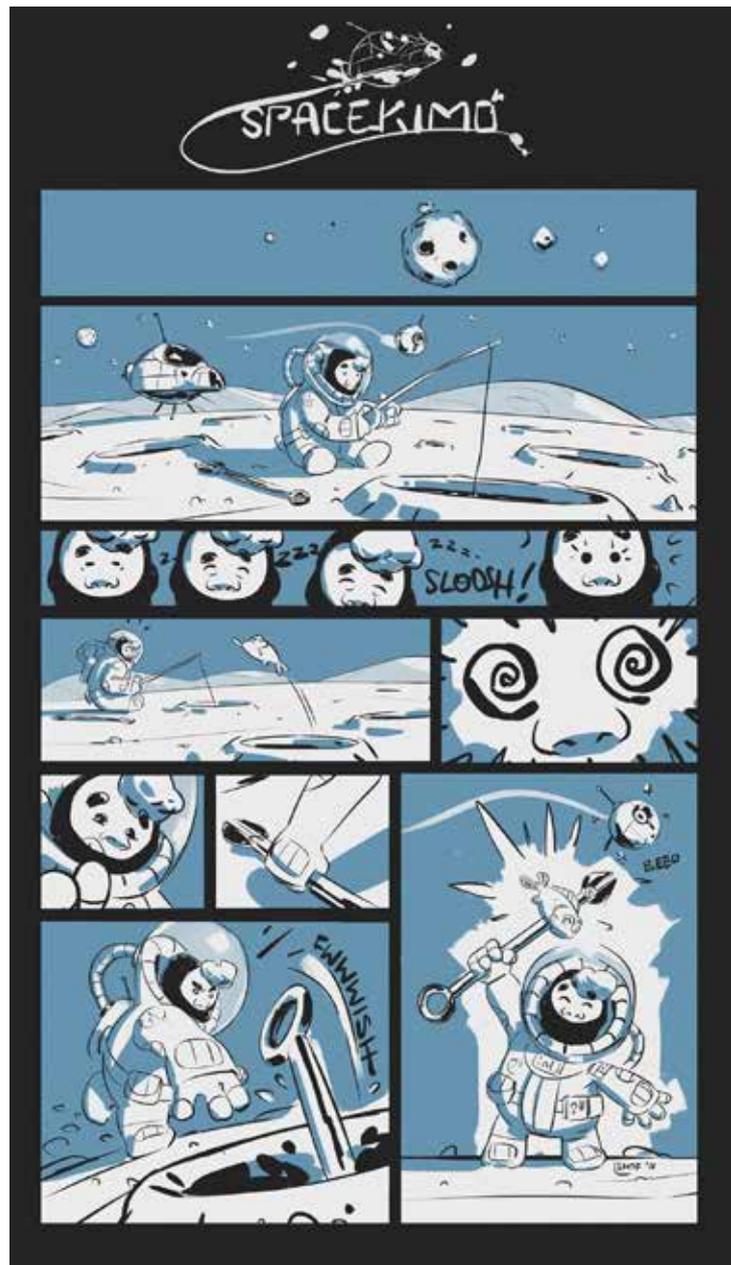
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Here's one that I created with my friend who's from Alaska.

It's about this indigenous inuit astronaut, who has a mission to find fish on the moon. He's falling asleep because it's so boring. Then all of a sudden, a fish jumps up and teases him. And he gets excited and uses his spear and catches the fish. Victory! And that's the end of the story. It's very basic, it's very simple, it's very charming.

And that's what I love about comics: you have a very unique dialogue with the reader. And you don't even need to use words.



SHOFELA'S TOP TIP:

Always try to show that you're having fun with your comics. So if you really like drawing cats or cats in funny clothes, you should not be afraid to show that kind of thing in a comic, because that's what's beautiful about it.

ACTIVITY: PLAN AND DRAW A ONE-PAGE COMIC

Create your own one-page comic using the strips overleaf.

1. Plan it out in writing

- Create one or two characters with strong personalities: are they happy or sad? super chilled or very angry? fragile or powerful?
- Create a simple storyline by giving your character(s) a purpose: a job or a mission that they will achieve by the end of the page. You could base this on one of your lived experiences, or something you have imagined or dreamt.

2. Have a practice at drawing the characters. Remember:

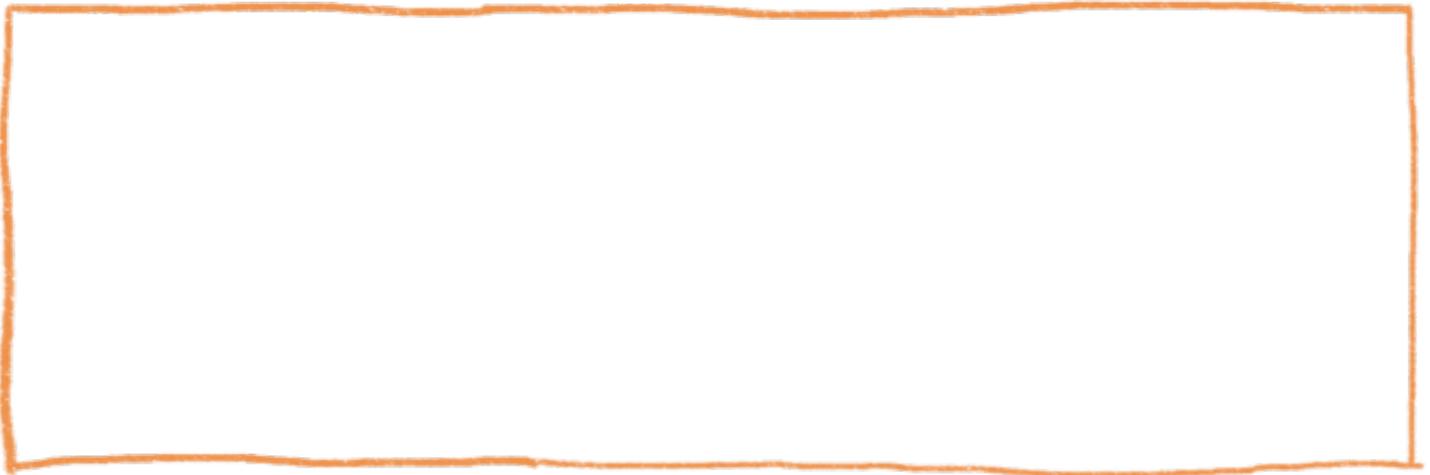
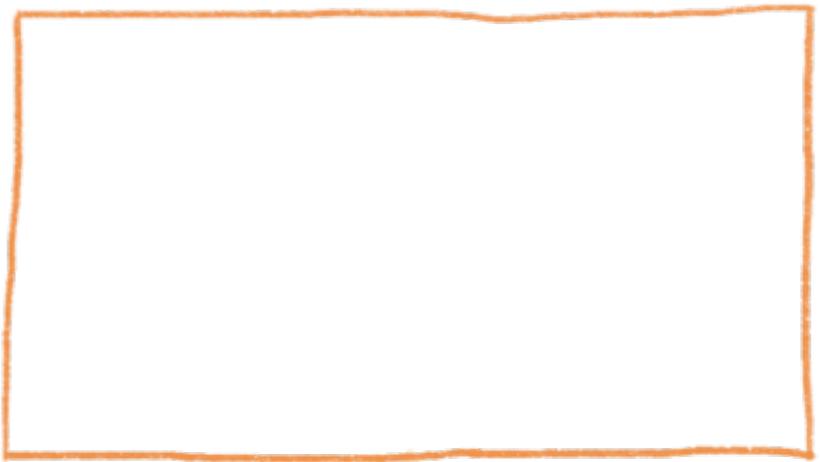
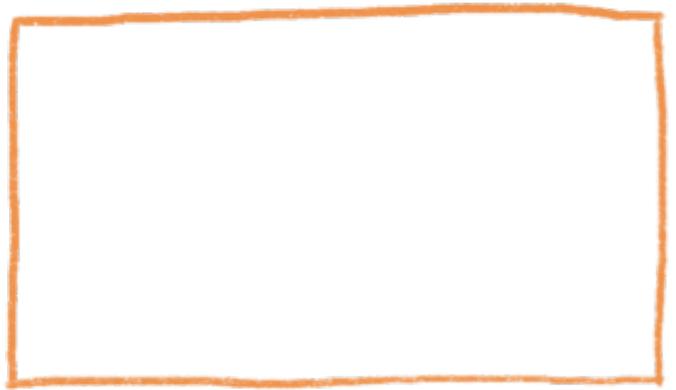
- You can use shapes or basic animal figures
- You can use the drawing practice technique suggested by Sophie in the previous activity

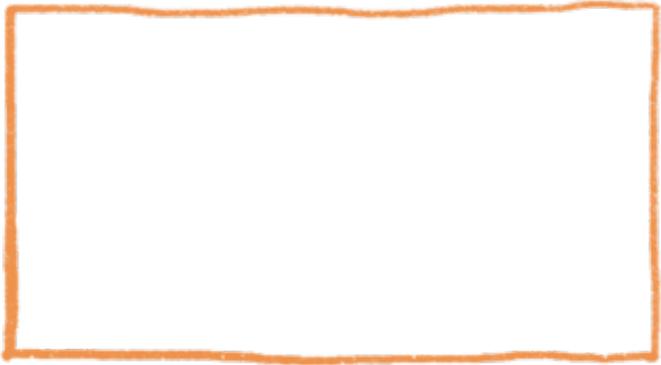
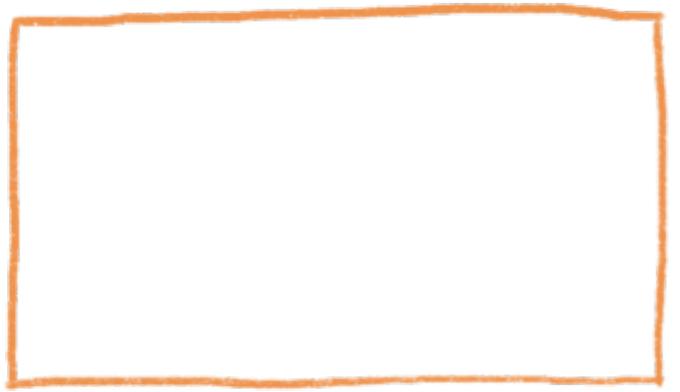
3. Plan out the different steps of the storyline, and how they are going to be structured across the page.

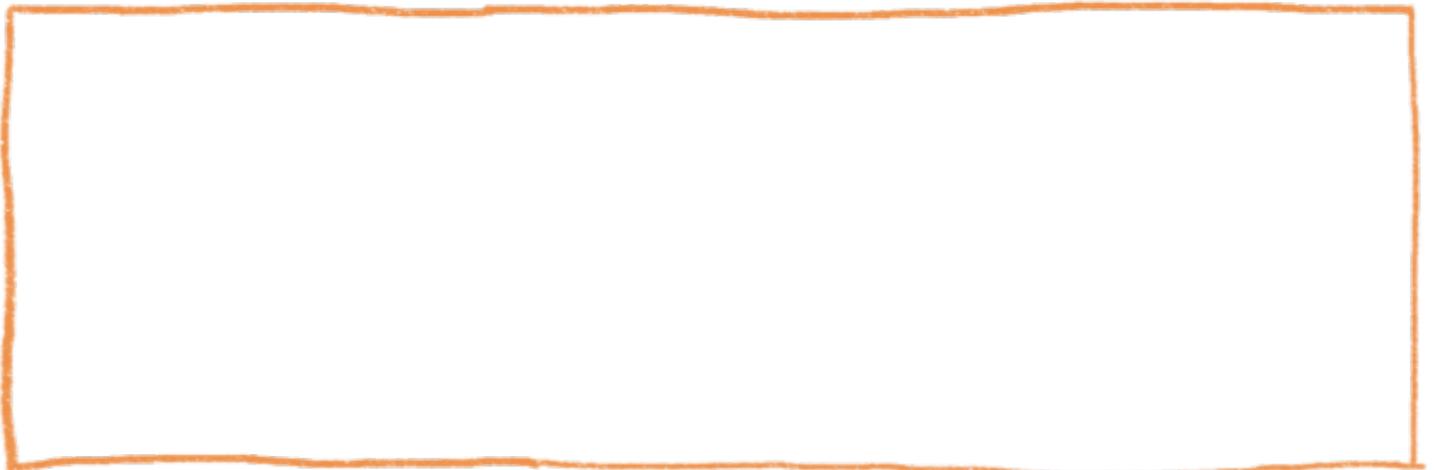
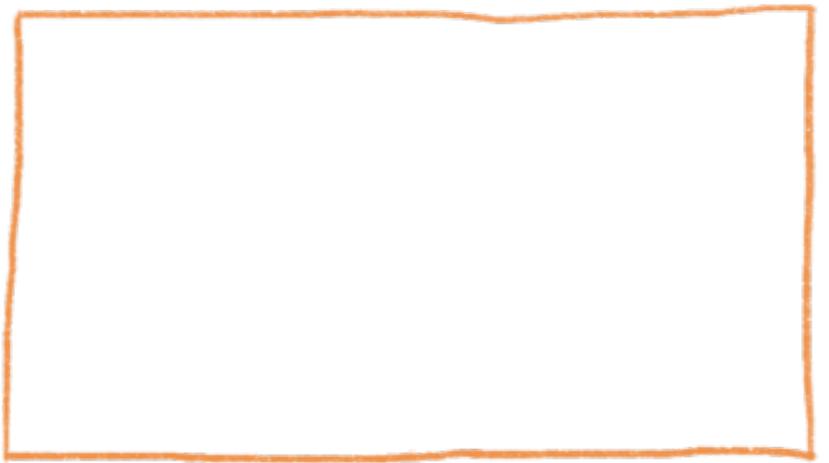
4. Have a go at drawing your one-page comic, perhaps add speech bubbles for dialogue and any starbursts for sound effects.

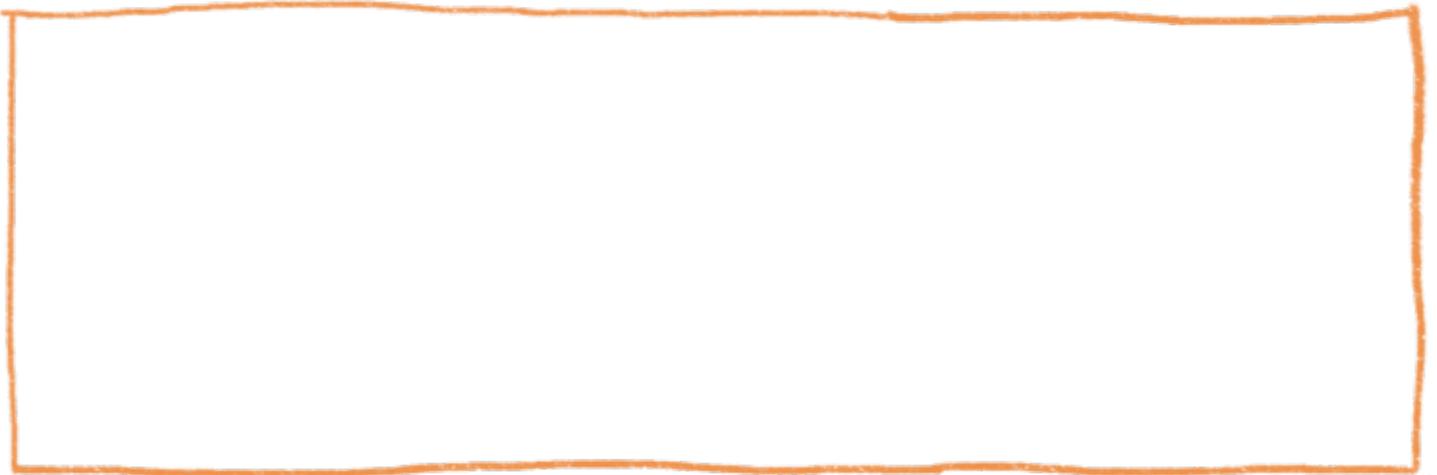
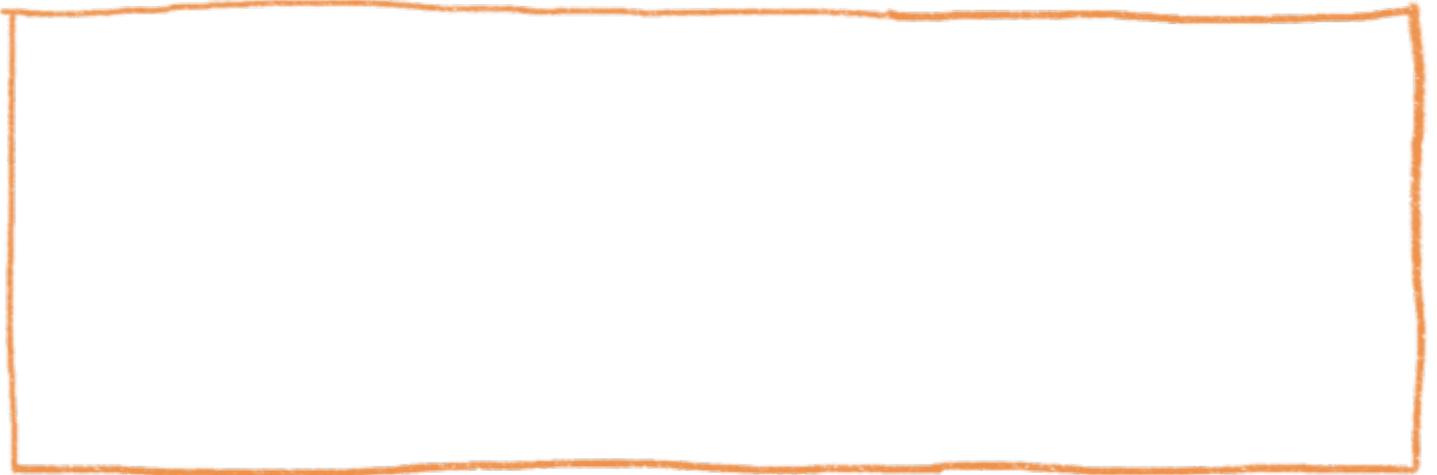
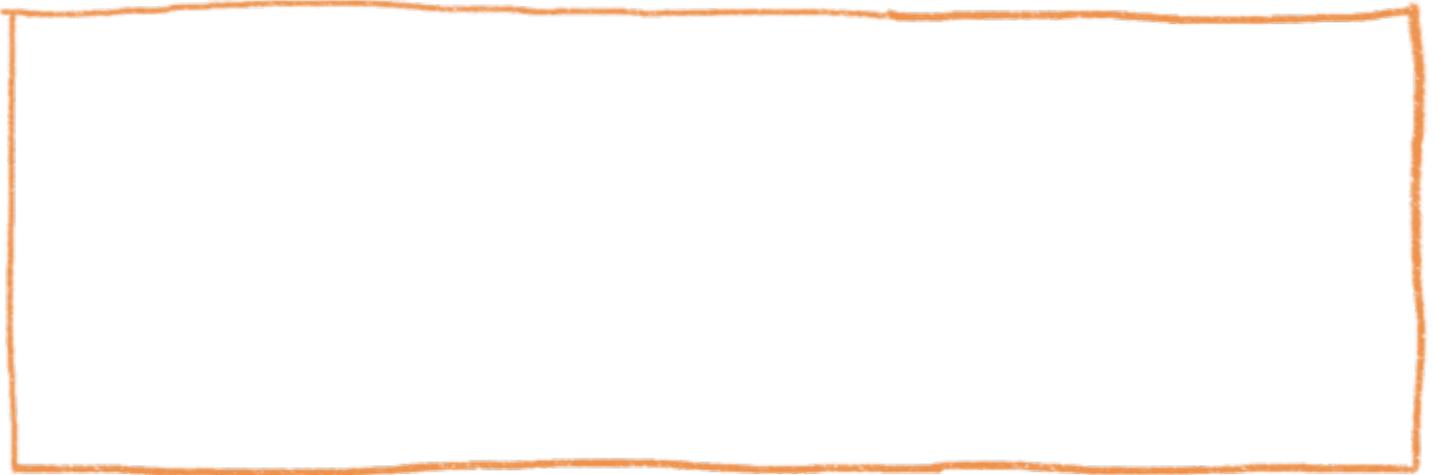
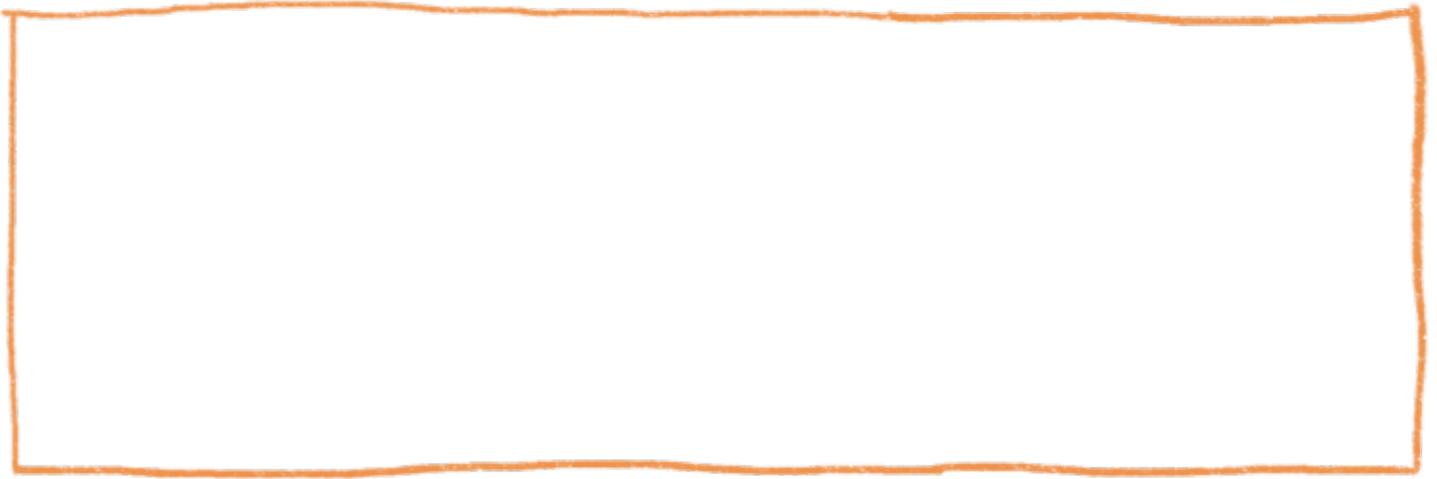
5. If it doesn't come out quite the way you wanted, try again... and again.... and again... We've given you a few pages of strips to practice!

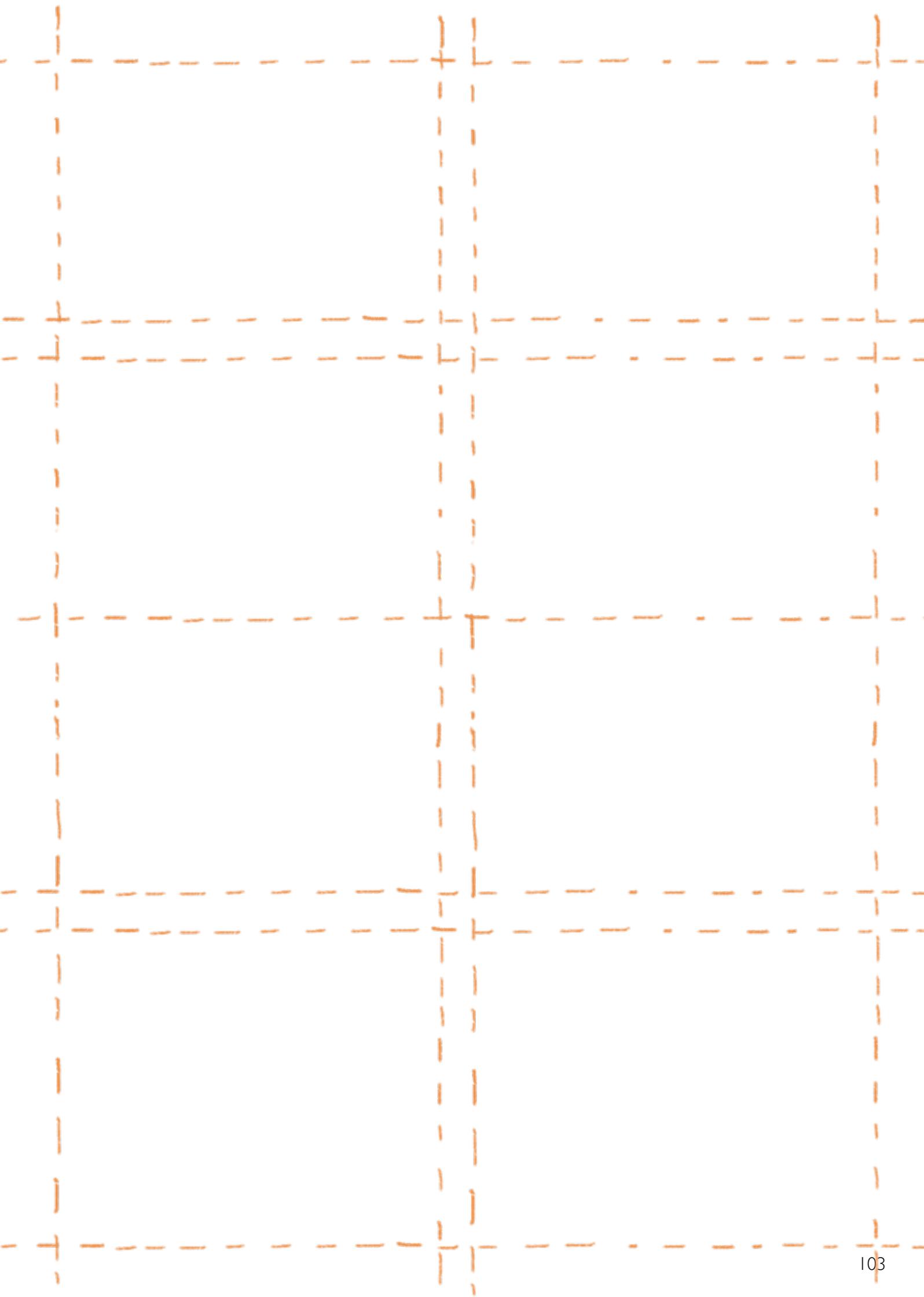
6. Once you've nailed your first one-page comic, you can start having a go at some longer strips. Before you know it, your notebook will be the next Koestler award-winning comic!

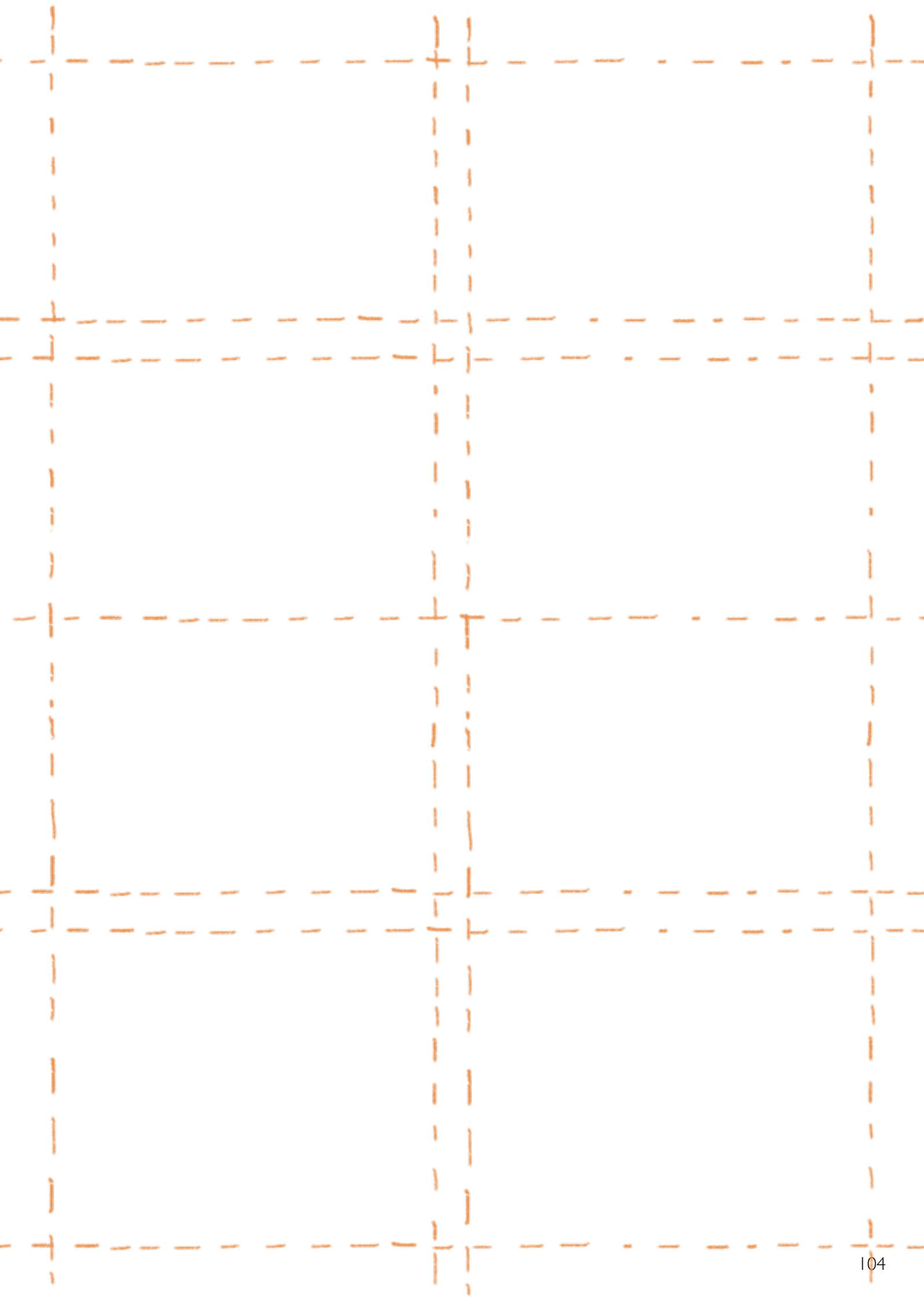


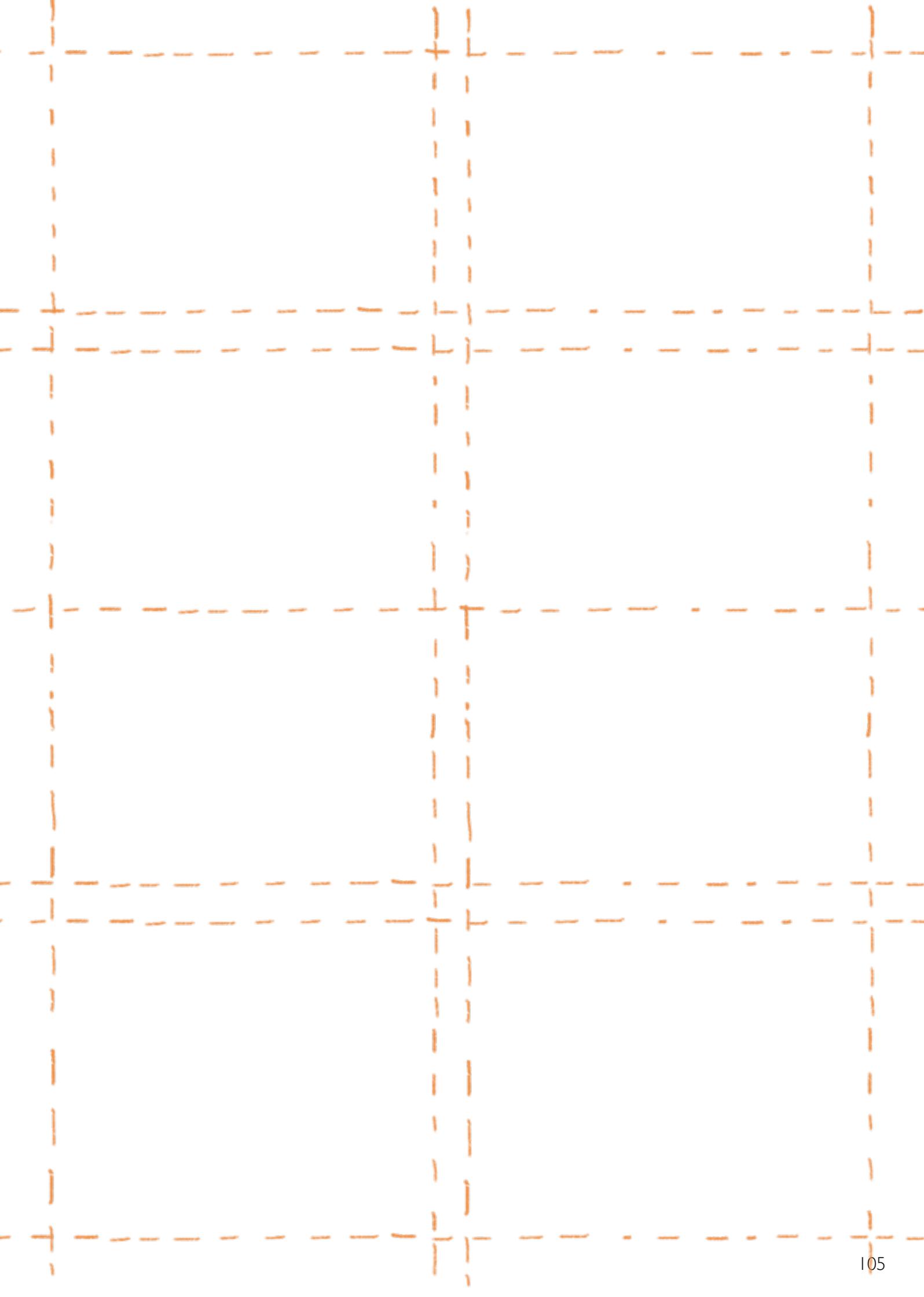












ABOUT THE EDITORS, THE PROJECT AND THE DESIGNER

Lucy Bell teaches at the University of Surrey and is a researcher in Latin American Literary and Cultural Studies. Her work centres on grassroots and activist collectives who use literature, art practice and publishing as a means of giving a voice to vulnerable, marginalized or invibilized communities. Her recent projects have involved working with a wide range of community groups from rural leaf-pickers and female waste-pickers in Brazil to imprisoned people in Mexico and the UK. She is committed to carrying out her research not on, but through collaboration with, the collectives and communities with which she works.

Joey Whitfield teaches Latin American literature and film at Cardiff University. He does research on justice and prisons and has written a book called *Prison Writing of Latin America*. He teaches 'Inside Out' courses in HMP Cardiff and also researches the 'war on drugs'.

Prisoner Publishing (2020-21) is an action-based research collaboration between academics (Lucy and Joey), grassroots activist and feminist collectives, prison arts and education charities, imprisoned and formerly imprisoned people, librarians, and prison staff - particularly librarians and learning & skills teams. Working across the UK and Mexico, the project's main objective is to strengthen the resources, skills and networks required to run sustainable writing and publishing programmes for imprisoned or formerly imprisoned people in both countries, and to build collaborations across Europe and Latin America in which knowledge and experience is shared in both directions. The project is funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council through the Global Challenges Research Fund.

Sophie Marsh is a freelance artist who makes animations, silly books and general nonsense. She has recently worked with Lucy and Joey on a short animated film, for BBC Arts and the Arts and Humanities Research Council, called *Writing in the Shadows*, about publishing within prisons.

This coursebook is designed to bring the benefits of creative writing to people within the criminal justice system - especially imprisoned or formerly imprisoned people. It offers accessible examples, tips, and activities to help new writers to get started and to spark inspiration in old hands. The book features writers, rappers, publishers and teachers from India, Indonesia, South Africa, Nigeria, Mexico, Brazil, US, Ireland, England and Wales. Some became writers while in prison themselves. Others are founders of grassroots, feminist and prison writing collectives, others are experts in prison poetry, literature and writing, others are best-selling authors or young writers who use their writing to fight for human rights, mental health awareness and social justice. What unites all the contributors, is the belief that writing by prisoners is a valuable tool not only for imprisoned and formerly imprisoned authors themselves, but also for the ongoing collective struggle to achieve equality, justice and freedom for all.

This course will preferably (but not necessarily) be used in conjunction with the DVD or Vimeo series *Creative Writing in Prison: Tips & Activities from Around the World*.

A great resource to inspire new writers. If you think writing's not for you – look inside and think again! Fiona Curran, Director of Arts, Koestler Arts

