



MINISTRY OF STORIES

# Fiction Writing

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## Teachers' pack includes

- 3 x 1-hour sessions
  - Extension Ideas
  - Resources
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## Objectives

- to create characters and settings using props/ bags as stimuli
- to engage reluctant writers
- to encourage resilience in writing
- to introduce students to the art of editing.

Students are expected to complete some tasks at home; if you would rather do this in class, we recommend that they are given access to computers where possible. This makes the editing process much easier and helps prevent loss of work.

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This scheme of work is taken from the Fiction Writing project, which took place at St Mary Magdalene Academy in Highbury, 2015.

From an original concept by Joe Dunthorne, Nick Hornby and Vicky Price.

Developed by Emma Joliffe, Creative Learning Manager and Tim Clare, Facilitator with teachers Kat Earle and Nick Martin.

Props sourced and created by Nicola Block.

Illustrations by Deni Cherneva.

## Session 1: Bags

**Note:** Here you can ask the students to examine the photos (see resources section) of the bags and objects. For each image, they can write a list of questions that the bags inspire.

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It's useful to break the ice and get brains going with a fun warm-up game, we chose '*I Don't Believe You*'. A pair (person A and person B) must take turns to trade quick-thinking lies.

Person A might start by saying:

*"I was walking to school this morning"*

Person B might then interject:

*"I don't believe you".*

Person A will then have to admit:

*"Alright, I was skateboarding"*

*"I don't believe you"*

*"Oh, alright, it was a hoverboard."*

Person B will need to understand that for the game to be interesting, they should probably now let person A continue.

*"I was going on my hoverboard and I went past an ice cream van"*

*"I don't believe you"*

*"Alright, it was an alien space craft disguised as an ice cream van."*

It's really helpful to model this for the class so that you can explore the idea that if you interject too much, the story will be lost, but not enough, and it risks being boring. The aim of the session is to engage, inspire and get the students generating lots of ideas.

Activity (Teacher/facilitator)	Activity (Students)	Timings	Resources
<p>Introduce aims of project.</p> <p><b>Warm up:</b></p> <p><i>I Don't Believe You!</i></p> <p>(Can model with another adult or prime a student)</p>	<p>Watch game modelled by teacher and chosen by student. Try it out in pairs.</p> <p>If students are keen to, some pairs can share/show their work.</p> <p><b>Discuss:</b></p> <p>What does it tell you about storytelling?</p>	10-15mins	
<p>Give students images of objects and bags. Can manage this in several ways- give everyone pictures of each, and let them choose, or just give one bag per group/ table.</p>	<p>Students look at what is in each bag.</p>	1-3 mins <i>(depending if students are looking at all or just one).</i>	Images of bags and objects ( <i>see resource pack</i> ).
<p>Ask students to write down any questions that the objects generate.</p>	<p>Write down questions in notebooks. As many as you can think of.</p>	3-mins	Notebooks/paper and pens
<p>Ask students to work with a partner / organise transition if need be.</p> <p>After 5 mins, swap over (questioner becomes questioned).</p> <p>Get whole class feed back- any interesting ideas come out of that?</p>	<p>In pairs, ask a question. Say the first answer that comes into your head. Keep asking along that line of questioning.</p> <p>Then after 5-mins, swap.</p>	5-mins per partner. 10 in total.	Notebooks/paper and pens
<p>Ask students to write down as many as they can. This is about quantity of ideas, not quality.</p>	<p>Still in pairs, students write as many characters as they can who might own that bag.</p>	12-mins.	Notebooks/paper and pens

<p>Write on board:</p> <p>Name Age Occupation.</p>	<p>For each they must write a name, age and occupation, as well as any other juicy details.</p>		
<p>Travel around room to listen to characters. Ask students who prefer active/kinaesthetic learning - or anyone getting restless - to take up a freeze frame as their favourite character.</p> <p>Maybe give them a catchphrase. Lots of questioning.</p>	<p>Students to feedback to teachers their favourite characters.</p> <p>Character development.</p> <p>If giving prizes, award these to pairs who have ten characters.</p>	<p>7-mins</p>	<p>Can use whiteboard to record ideas</p> <p>Prizes</p>
<p><b>Plenary</b></p> <p>Draw together students. Praise: imagination, ideas, engagement.</p> <p><b>Homework task:</b></p> <p>Write a first line.</p>	<p>Give positive feedback.</p> <p>Set task.</p>	<p>5-mins</p>	<p>First Lines sheet.</p> <p>Homework journals or similar</p>

## Session 2: Openings

In this session, students are asked to share their opening line. Students discuss what makes a great opening line.

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We explored the idea that a first sentence should get progressively more interesting. For example, at St Mary Magdalene, one student's first line was:

*"One late night, Amber went to take out the rubbish for her mum, when something ran past her."*

The most interesting part of the sentence is saved for the end. It creates intrigue and sets the ominous tone for the tale. It's almost like a joke, with the punchline or payoff at the end.

Compare with some of those in the resource pack:

*"It was a bright, cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen"*

What does it tell you about the story?

Openings usually establish character, setting, mood, genre or all of the above.

Which does yours?

If you wish to do a warm-up - get brains going, get thinking about the mechanisms of story - then 'Fortunately/ Unfortunately' worked well at this point.

If you don't know the game, it's best played in a circle. You can give the student next to you an opening line such as:

*'It was my first skydiving attempt, and there I was in the plane wearing my parachute.'*

The student must say 'fortunately...' and then continue the story with a sentence, for example:

*'Fortunately, I had spared no expense on the parachute.'*

The student after will follow 'unfortunately', for example:

*'Unfortunately, a mouse had chewed through the rip cord.'*

Each student must react to what's come before.

This can be a good way to introduce ideas such as continuity, action and expectation.

Activity (Facilitators/Mentors)	Activity (Students)	Timings	Resources
<p><b>Warm up (optional):</b></p> <p>Fortunately/ Unfortunately</p> <p>Analyse afterwards:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How did it go?</li> <li>● What was hard?</li> <li>● What was funny?</li> <li>● What does it tell you about stories?</li> </ul>	<p><b>Game:</b></p> <p>Fortunately/ unfortunately.</p> <p>Think about climax, action, plot, continuity.</p>	<p>10-mins (depending on class size)</p>	
<p>Remind group of expectations regarding giving positive feedback.</p>	<p>Students share their first lines in small groups.</p> <p><b>Give feedback.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Does it make you want to read on?</li> <li>● What is interesting about it?</li> <li>● What does it tell you about the story?</li> </ul>	<p>10-mins</p>	<p>Opening Paragraphs resource</p> <p>Students' first lines</p>
<p>Ask students to share some great first lines. You can ask them to nominate people in their group and say why it makes a great first line.</p>	<p>Listen, discuss.</p> <p>Think about what makes a great first line.</p> <p>Appreciate the work of others.</p>	<p>10-mins</p>	
<p>Stories can go down many different paths.</p> <p>What might happen next in your story?</p>	<p>What might happen next to your character?</p> <p>Discuss in writing groups.</p> <p>Get feedback.</p>	<p>15-mins</p>	<p>Notebooks/paper and pens.</p>

Discuss in small groups.			
<p><b>Plenary</b></p> <p>Bring group together. Ask what they have learnt about openings, and how stories are progressing.</p> <p>Set challenge for next week of writing 250 words.</p>	Report back thoughts/feelings.	5-mins	<p>Character sheets (optional)</p> <p>Homework journals or similar.</p>

### **Session 3: Editing**

In this session, students start to think about editing. We start with the work of others, so that it's impersonal and students' feedback can be as tough as they like.

The students may have wildly different opinions on the same extracts - emphasise there is no right answer here - some people love detailed description chock-full of adjectives, whereas others might prefer more direct, concise writing - the 'burly detective' extract caused a divide for this reason.

Encourage discussion and draw out the ideas of overly-expositional writing such as 'folded napkins' and seemingly lazy writing such as 'two men'.

They can share their 250 words, in the manner of a creative writing group, or they can work individually to edit their own work using the attached crib-sheet.

If working in groups, some may be reticent to give feedback. We found using a structured system - the lover/ builder roles which students had to take turns playing - helped to alleviate some of this self-consciousness.



Activity (Teacher/Facilitators)	Activity (Students)	Timings	Resources
<p>Welcome students</p>	<p>Settle down. Get print outs of work/ pieces of writing.</p> <p>Editing game. Given piece of terrible text. Asked to spot the clichés and decide what they'd change and why.</p>	<p>5-mins</p> <p>20-mins</p>	<p>Editing resource</p>
<p>Reassure students that editing is something everyone has to do to their work.</p> <p>Emphasise that clichés are hard to avoid, and every writer has bad days. The need to edit is universal.</p>	<p>Present the first 250 words to small working groups.</p> <p>Read aloud, get feedback- what they liked, what could be improved.</p>	<p>20-mins</p>	<p>Student work</p> <p>'Lover/ Builder' cards if needed</p>
<p>Help students capture useful feedback.</p>	<p>Write down feedback that's useful to you. (or ask group members to capture via post-it/speech bubbles)</p>		<p>Post-it/speech bubbles/stickers</p>
<p><b>Plenary</b></p> <p>Draw students together as a big group</p> <p>Ask: How hard/useful did you find it?</p> <p><b>Task for next session:</b></p> <p>Edit your work.</p>			<p>Homework journals or similar</p>

### To extend this project:

Students should now have a piece of writing. It may be a complete short story, or the start of something longer.

You could divide lessons into **sharing** - using a 'creative writing group' style of giving constructive feedback - and **writing/ editing** (access to computers is really helpful here.)

You could ask students to:

- write with a limited number of words, eg. 1000 or fewer,
- collate their work- either a series of 'zine' style pamphlets or as one whole collection. If you have a budget, you could even use an online book-making tool such as [Blurb](#).
- publish their work on a class blog.
- enter their stories into a national competition. [First Story](#) run regular ones.
- Share stories with us too! Drop us a line at [info@ministryofstories.org](mailto:info@ministryofstories.org) or Tweet us [@mini\\_stories](https://twitter.com/mini_stories)

### Resources:

- Mysterious items
- First Lines sheet
- Opening Paragraphs sheet
- Editing Sheet
- Lover/Builder feedback tool
- Proust's Character Questionnaire