IT'S OUR WRITE

A practical guide to engaging Roma and other pupils with English as an additional language with creative writing at secondary school.

Developed by Romany writer Richard O'Neill at Babington Community College (Leicester) with support from Writing East Midlands and The Mighty Creatives.



WRITING EAST MIDLANDS

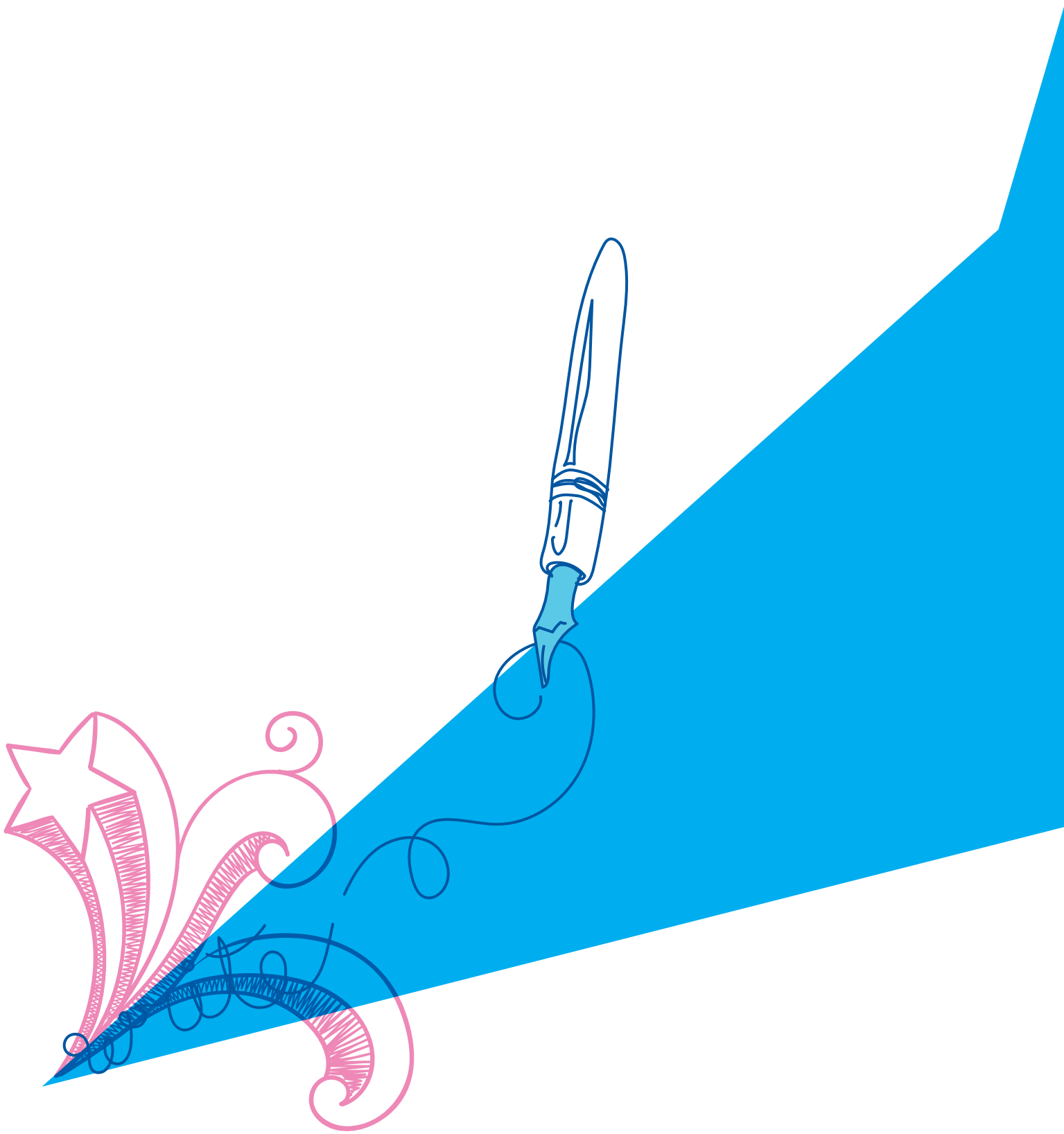
Babington Community College

LOTTERY FUNDED

Supported using public funding by ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

Bridge Organisation
Working with Arts Council England to connect young people with great art and culture

THE MIGHTY CREATIVES



CONTENTS

P4: INTRODUCTION

P5: WHO ARE THE ROMA?

P5: SO WHAT DID WE DO?

P6: WHY HAVE A WRITER-IN-RESIDENCE?

P7: THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF A GREAT PROJECT

P9: BUILD YOUR OWN STORY FRAMEWORK BY RICHARD O'NEILL

- 1• NON-VERBAL STORY-TELLING
- 2• STORY-SHARING
- 3• THE ORDINARY BECOMES EXTRAORDINARY
- 4• PERSPECTIVE
- 5• DESCRIPTION
- 6• CREATING A PIECE

P17: AN EXCERPT FROM *LATE ONE NIGHT IN LONDON*, BY RICHARD O'NEILL

P18: WHO WE ARE

P19: USEFUL CONTACTS



INTRODUCTION



Between July 2012 and September 2014, Romany writer and story-teller Richard O'Neill was writer-in-residence at Babington Community College in Leicester. Working with staff and pupils in years 8, 9, 10 and 11, he created two full length plays and one film that were staged and screened in city centre arts venues.

The original objective of *It's Our Write* was to specifically engage Roma pupils, whose families began to arrive in number in Leicester some years ago. Over time, and with additional funding, the project expanded to take on a whole-class approach in order to facilitate integration and cohesion between different groups of pupils.

Over the course of the residency, we learnt a lot about writers working in schools, about working with young people for whom English is an additional language (EAL), and about schools and arts organisations working together.

Perhaps most importantly, we also learnt that if teachers and organisations have the courage to give young people responsibility for their own learning, making them the architects of their own creative projects, helping them to create opportunities that are exciting and inventive, the results can be like an adrenalin shot across the curriculum.

This toolkit brings our learning together and offers hints, tips and practical exercises for teachers, writers and arts organisations seeking to engage EAL pupils in creative writing.

ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS WE LEARNT IS THAT ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL, SO IF YOU ARE LOOKING FOR 'THE MODEL TO END ALL MODELS' WE'RE AFRAID YOU WON'T FIND IT HERE (OR ANYWHERE ELSE, PROBABLY). *IT'S OUR WRITE* WAS DESIGNED IN PARTNERSHIP WITH THE PUPILS, IT WAS THEIR IDEAS WHICH BROUGHT IT TO LIFE, DEVELOPED IT AND FINALLY ARTICULATED IT ON STAGE AND ON FILM. WHILE THE PROCESS WAS CLEARLY INITIATED BY THE TEACHERS AND THE WRITER, THE RESULTING CONTENT AND IDEAS WERE CO-CREATED BY ALL THE PARTICIPANTS. WHAT WE HOPE THIS TOOLKIT WILL DO IS GIVE YOU LOTS OF STARTING POINTS (OFTEN THE HARDEST PART!) FOR A CREATIVE WRITING JOURNEY LED BY YOUR OWN PUPILS.

WHO ARE THE ROMA?

The Roma are recognised by the United Nations as a people without a country. They are Europe's largest single minority community. They are a newly arrived community in Leicester (and in many other cities in the UK), often arriving due to discrimination elsewhere, with low levels of literacy and low levels of age related prior learning. Some may not have been in school anywhere for some considerable time. In Leicester, many pupils live up to 5 miles away from the school they attend, and poor attendance is a key barrier to their academic success at school.

Roma pupils share many common experiences with the children of other newly arrived communities. They have often experienced a chaotic and traumatic upheaval and are learning to adjust to life in a new culture, city and school and learn a new language. They may already speak two or three languages, and like many of the pupils we worked with, be accomplished musicians and performers.

SO WHAT DID WE DO?

In the first year of the residency, a group of Roma pupils worked with Richard O'Neill to write a musical based on their experience of arrival in Leicester. The project drew on their strengths in the performing arts whilst helping them to develop their English language skills, confidence and general self-esteem. Importantly, the message was also that the school was interested in their experience, and that it merited being shared more widely. 25 pupils performed the resulting show – Af Nevo - in front of 260 people.

"Pupils engaged with writing and recognised that they were in the driving seat and that they had a good map reader with Richard. For staff, the project enabled collaborative planning and moved lessons away from step by step blocks and into the realm of true creation."

Adam Richards, Subject Leader for Performing Arts

The following year, the opportunity to work with the writer-in-residence was extended to pupils of all backgrounds. With additional funding from The Mighty Creatives, the Bridge organisation for the East Midlands (see useful contacts on pg 19), pupils were given the opportunity to work with a professional lighting and sound engineer, an animation company and a stage make-up artist. This provided backstage opportunities for those that weren't comfortable on stage, and broadened the experience so that the project had greater links to vocational education and fed directly into the Btec for Performing Arts. The final play – *It's Our Write* – was performed at a professional theatre to an invited audience of 150 people.

In the final year, the project moved from drama to film to expand the range of media forms experienced by the pupils. Richard and the staff at Babington Community College introduced many more improvisation techniques to generate dialogue for the film, which resulted in a much more student-generated script. The film – Full Circle - was screened to an audience of around 60 family and friends.

"Roll up, roll up, for the grand mystery tour.
Whenever someone searches for a truth –
up jumps the Trickster:

To confound! To confuse!
To irrefute! To absolutely and totally and utterly pollute!"

(an example of student-generated dialogue from the film, Full Circle)



WHY HAVE A WRITER-IN-RESIDENCE?



IN A CLIMATE OF EVER-TIGHTENING BUDGETS AND CLOSE MONITORING OF ACADEMIC TARGETS, IT'S IMPORTANT TO ARTICULATE WHAT A WRITER CAN BRING TO THE CLASSROOM AND HOW A RESIDENCY CAN STRENGTHEN, SUPPORT AND EXTEND CURRICULUM LEARNING. *IT'S OUR WRITE* PROVED THAT A WELL-MANAGED, CULTURALLY-SENSITIVE WRITER RESIDENCY CAN:

- support community integration between groups of newly arrived EAL pupils and others
- support language learning and confidence
- increase parental engagement
- increase opportunities for creativity in the classroom
- facilitate creative exploration of contemporary issues

There is value simply in the writer being a "newcomer in the classroom." Moreover, they are a newcomer who isn't a teacher. This can introduce a whole new dynamic to the classroom, as Richard O Neill discovered:

"There is something important about the writer coming 'in' because it puts me in a similar position to some of the kids. I am coming into this place where I don't know anybody, I don't belong here, I'm just a freelancer coming in for a certain period of time. It's about how you [the pupils] make me feel welcome and how we then work together."

Richard O Neill

THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF A GREAT PROJECT



SO WHAT ARE THE FOUNDATIONS OF A REALLY GOOD WRITER RESIDENCY? WHAT SHOULD YOU CONSIDER, WHAT RESOURCES DO YOU NEED, WHO SHOULD YOU WORK WITH, AND HOW MUCH WILL IT COST? HERE ARE WRITING EAST MIDLANDS' TOP TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL PROJECT:

GET YOUR TEAM RIGHT

Make sure all the right people are involved. *It's Our Write* started as a partnership between a skilled writer and a committed teacher. Over time, Writing East Midlands and The Mighty Creatives came on board, bringing with them additional funds and the opportunity to work with artists across a range of disciplines.

At the back of this toolkit you will find a full list of the regional writer development agencies who may be able to support you to identify appropriate writers and advise you on current accepted rates of pay for writers working in education so that you can budget accurately for your project. In some cases, they may even be able to support your project financially.

You'll also find a list of Bridge Organisations – creative development agencies working with children and young people, schools and cultural organisations in your region.

TOP TIPS FOR SCHOOLS:

- Make sure that your writer has visited your school and met with key staff before their first session in the classroom. Identify your writer early in the planning process and involve them in it as closely as possible – unconstrained by the limitations of curriculum targets, they may well come up with creative solutions to issues that you haven't even considered!
- Make sure that the writer is aware of any school protocols such as child protection procedures and that they know who the key person is to contact should they have any concerns. Do not assume that they will automatically know this, and remember that procedures change from school to school.
- Allow time at the start and the end of each session to discuss aims and next steps with the writer-in-residence. It is likely that your budget will mean the writer will only be with you for a certain number of sessions, so you may want to extend and develop work initiated by them in between sessions.

TOP TIPS FOR WRITERS

- Remember that schools run like clockwork so make sure you arrive in plenty of time to sign in and be escorted or directed to the correct room before the class is due to start.
- Be as flexible as you can – schools are fast moving environments and your planned work may have to change to accommodate new learning targets, an unexpected event or a dreaded last-minute inspection.
- Remember to retain your identity in the classroom as a writer! Often, after a residency has been running for some time and you are familiar with the setting, it can be easy to become absorbed in the fabric of school-life. But your role is that of writer-in-residence, which carries value as discussed on page 6. You are not teacher or classroom assistant.

TOP TIPS FOR CO-PRODUCTION WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

- Be genuinely open about collaborative working so that you can accommodate the needs, ideas and interests of the pupils you are working with. Include their ideas in the final product wherever you can. Remember, without the pupils, there would be no residency.
- With teachers, writer and pupils working together, produce a timeline that charts your project's anticipated development so that you become equal partners on the journey to the final product.
- Create leadership opportunities for your pupils wherever possible. Where natural leaders emerge, give them responsibility for a group or a specific area of work, and work with them to bring the more reticent pupils with you.
- Understand that there may not be people at home with the language or curriculum skills to help learn lines or develop work in between sessions, so consider introducing supportive peer mentoring to keep up the creative momentum.
- Make it vocational so that you can draw on the many different skills and strengths of your pupils. Cross reference to other curriculum areas - for example, producing posters and programmes may support graphics and computer studies, selling tickets and budgeting may support business studies learning outcomes.

MORE GOOD PRACTICE

It's important to note that *It's Our Write* was delivered in the wider context of a suite of practical solutions that were put in place at the school at the same time, to increase the Roma children's likelihood of educational success. Other measures included:

- Bulk-buying bus passes from the local bus operator and selling them to pupils at a discount, to encourage attendance by those pupils who live up to 5 miles away from the school
- Engaging parents and families through sponsored English language classes
- Using community ambassadors such as Roma-speaking attendance officers
- Allowing staff to take part in knowledge sharing visits to Roma communities in the Czech republic and Slovakia

ENGAGING FAMILIES

Families who have recently arrived in the UK often have chaotic lives with many competing priorities. They may not have any experience of engaging with their children's schooling in their country of origin, and they may just simply be very busy. So there are lots of barriers. Happily, there are some ways of overcoming them. Below are a few of the ways that we supported parents to come and see their children in brilliant action on stage. They are simple things, but they made a big difference:

BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT	HOW WE OVERCAME THEM
COST	The final performance was always free of charge. We found it useful to ticket the event as it gave us a good idea of how many people to expect, and it gave the pupils the experience of running a box office, but we made sure that cost was no barrier to families coming to see their children perform.
CHILDCARE	The whole family was invited – parents, siblings, aunts, cousins, whoever could get there was more than welcome. If they wanted to dress up, bring food and make a party out of it, even better. Buggies welcome!
LANGUAGE	Engaging a Roma writer and having teachers who could speak even just a word or two of a community language really helped put the audience at ease as they came in through the door.
RELEVANCY	Using the broad experience of 'arrival' as a theme for the productions ensured relevancy, while involving a Roma Writer ensured cultural sensitivity. We knew that Roma communities have a strong musical tradition, and that there are many brilliant musicians among them. At our first sharing we gave space for a collective of Roma musicians (some of them parents and pupils) to perform after the sharing.
UNFAMILIARITY WITH VENUE	For us, it was really important that the project helped communities access city centre arts venues, places that they might normally feel are not for them. A personal invite from the school, and a friendly welcome from teachers they recognised on arrival at the venue helped here. We set the auditorium up cabaret style so that families could sit together and younger siblings could move about more freely than they would have been able to if we had used traditional theatre style seating.

A FRAMEWORK FOR BUILDING YOUR OWN STORY, BY RICHARD O'NEILL



RICHARD O'NEILL WAS BORN AND BROUGHT UP IN A LARGE ROMANY FAMILY IN THE NORTH OF ENGLAND. HE IS AN AWARD-WINNING STORY-TELLER, WRITER AND WORKSHOP LEADER WHO TELLS STORIES IN OVER 100 SCHOOLS EACH YEAR.

OVER THE FOLLOWING PAGES, RICHARD O'NEILL SHARES PRACTICAL AND EASILY IMPLEMENTABLE CREATIVE WRITING AND STORY-TELLING EXERCISES THAT TEACHERS CAN USE IN THEIR OWN SETTINGS. RICHARD HAS DEVELOPED, TRIED AND TESTED THESE EXERCISES WITH RELUCTANT WRITERS OF ALL BACKGROUNDS INCLUDING THOSE THAT HAVE ENGLISH AS AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE. THE EXERCISES HAVE BEEN DEVELOPED ON THE ASSUMPTION THAT THE PARTICIPATING PUPILS WILL HAVE HAD LITTLE OR NO CREATIVE WRITING EXPERIENCE, SO SHOULD BE REGARDED AS ENTRY LEVEL. THE SELECTION SHARED HERE INCLUDES IDEAS FOR STARTING POINTS, WARM-UP EXERCISES, CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT AND BUILDING DESCRIPTIVE SKILLS. THE EMPHASIS IS ON GROUP WORK AND HAVING FUN, BOTH TRADEMARKS OF RICHARD'S WORK.

"Inclusion and confidence-building are the keystones - once pupils feel included and confident, that's when they can really tap into their creativity and then begin to express it. Then you can move onto process, allowing many of our pupils to better understand what they are writing for and how the individual exercises help towards creating an overall piece."

Richard O'Neill

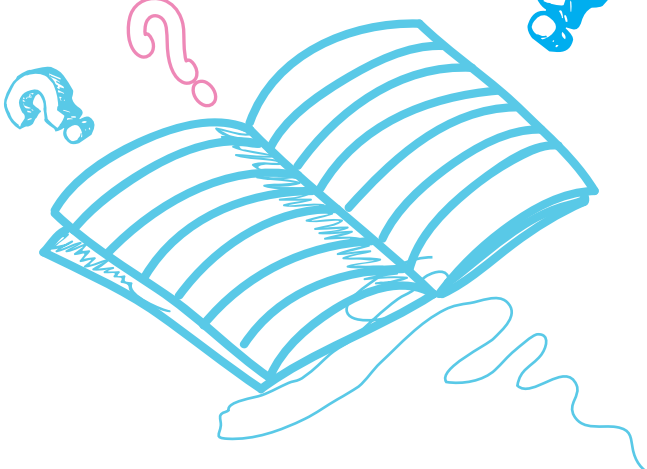


Image credit: **Pamela Raith Photography**

1. NON-VERBAL STORYTELLING



GREAT FOR: *WARMING UP, GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER, STARTING TO THINK ABOUT CHARACTERS, LEARNING ABOUT STEREOTYPES AND AVOIDING CLICHÈS*

SO MUCH STORY-TELLING IS NON-VERBAL. GESTURES AND EXPRESSIONS ARE USED AROUND THE WORLD AS AN INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE, MEANING THAT EVEN THOSE WITH LIMITED ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS CAN TAKE PART IN THIS EXERCISE.

"Although many gestures aren't universal, as I discovered when I thought I was impersonating a Hollywood star by using an exaggerated outstretched hand, and it was interpreted by some non-English pupils as shoving mud in my enemy's face! This gives rise to lots of opportunities for discussion around cultural difference as a natural part of the creative process which is really valuable, but it's important to set out at the start of the session that no-one is to intentionally use gestures that they know to be insulting or offensive to others."

Richard O'Neill

INTRODUCTION (TEACHER LED):

To introduce the idea of non-verbal communication, the teacher demonstrates a few simple actions for the pupils to identify, for example: kicking a football, scoring a goal, using a fishing rod, filling a trolley with shopping.

Next, move on to more subtle expressions that start to help you think about character-building. We are starting to get "under the skin" of the characters we might want to include in our plot later. Ideas might include a bully, a clown, a thinker or a snob.

MAIN ACTIVITY (PUPIL LED):

Now it's the pupils' turn to come up with as many non-verbal impersonations as they can, in pairs or in small groups, for 2 or 3 minutes. This is fast, thinking-on-your-feet stuff. At the end of the 3 minutes, each group demonstrates their gestures to see how many everyone else can guess.

This final part can be lots of fun and illicit lots of laughter but there's usually also the starting point for a serious discussion about stereotyping, which can be very revealing when working with a group of children from diverse backgrounds.

Often, the people we choose to mimic as part of this exercise are based on stereotypes, because they are easy to identify and often quite funny. But, ask your pupils to think about why stereotypes might also be harmful? What are they based on? And how might they limit the characters we want to build in our story? Is anyone truly like their stereotype, or aren't we all many-sided individuals with lots of different qualities? In order to build really original, authentic characters, and to avoid clichés, we need to avoid the stereotype.

Most characters in fiction are at least partly inspired by the people the writer knows or has met at some point in their life. Discuss common human characteristics and personality traits. Use one from someone you know, share it with the pupils and then get them to work in pairs and find out a few characteristics that some of their friends/family have, then share them with the group. This is the starting point for great characters.

2. STORY-SHARING

GREAT FOR: *CONFIDENCE BUILDING, DEVELOPING ORAL STORY-TELLING SKILLS, INTRODUCING THE EDITING PROCESS, UNDERSTANDING THE STRUCTURE OF A STORY, PEER REVIEW*

IT ALL STARTS WITH A STORY. EVERYONE HAS ONE. INCREDIBLY, ANTHROPOLOGISTS TELL US THAT CIVILISATIONS HAVE EXISTED WITHOUT THE WHEEL, YET ALL HAVE HAD THE STORY. SO STORY-TELLING IS IN OUR BONES, WHEREVER WE COME FROM. SOME OF US MAY BE A BIT OUT OF PRACTICE, SOME OF US MAY NEVER HAVE FELT "LISTENED TO" BEFORE, SOME OF US MIGHT THINK THAT WE LEFT STORIES BEHIND AT PRIMARY SCHOOL, OR IN OUR HOMELAND. OUR TASK IS THEREFORE TO UNEARTH AND GIVE VALUE TO THE STORIES IN OUR STUDENT'S IMAGINATIONS.

The objective of story-sharing is to prove to your pupils that believe it or not, we all carry stories inside us. Practising our stories orally takes away the dreaded fear of the blank page that we all suffer from. It removes all those barriers associated with spelling, punctuation and word count. If you are working with Roma pupils, this exercise also plays to the strong story-telling tradition within the community. Traditionally, as in many cultures, stories have been told and retold from generation to generation. We can use the retelling to build confidence, develop peer review skills and to work on our editing process.

Stories have structure: a start, a middle and an end, but as in life, stories don't have to, and very rarely do, take this linear route. One way of explaining story structure is to ask pupils to think about their journey to school; ask them to think about the landmarks they pass - particular shops, pubs, or crossroads, for example. Does the landscape change along the way? Do different characters join and leave them at certain points of the journey (plot)? For instance, who gets on and leaves the bus? Do we know them? Is there something interesting or odd about them? Do they impact on the story? Does the bus route make the journey more interesting or frustrating? Does the journey take place on one straight route, or does it have twists and turns along the way? This should help pupils to think about how a good story is also a journey and not just a straight dash from A-B.

In Leicester, many of the young people we worked with lived up to 5 miles away from Babington Community College, in a community that was completely different to the one in which the school is situated, so this exercise resonated with them. Landscapes, landmarks, faces, all changed on the way to school.

INTRODUCTION (TEACHER LED):

A good way to introduce this session is for the teacher to "share" a story. Not read one from a book – but share one from your own imagination, or your own life.

MAIN ACTIVITY (PUPIL LED):

Next, ask the pupils to pair up and tell each other a simple story from their own life. It doesn't have to be true, extraordinary, or out-of-this-world, (although if you are working with a group of young people from all over the world, their own lives are rich resources for extraordinary stories). It might be about something that happened to them, a family member, a neighbour, a school friend or teacher. It might be about their journey to school, or to the UK.

Ask partners to give each other feedback. How could they have made their story more compelling, more universal, longer, shorter, more exciting or moving? How could the characters be better brought to life? What could have been included in the story to help the listener understand it better?

Following the feedback, ask them to re-tell their stories in pairs again, thinking about the feedback they have received. This re-telling is important – it introduces the editing process which is such a vital part of successful creative writing (and often, we find, the least beloved part by new writers!) - and gives more shy/ reluctant pupils an opportunity to expand their story and gain confidence in the safety of their "pair".

You may want to invite more confident story-tellers to share their story with the wider group and undertake a further round of peer review and re-telling.

"You may be surprised at some of the stories that your pupils come out with - some of the young people we worked with shared the most wonderful stories about their journeys to the UK, including interesting stories about having to act as translators for their families."

Richard O'Neill

3. THE ORDINARY BECOMES EXTRAORDINARY

GREAT FOR: *LIMBERING UP THE IMAGINATION AND THINKING 'OUTSIDE THE BOX!'*



THE OBJECTIVE OF THIS EXERCISE IS TO START LOOKING DIFFERENTLY (AND THINKING DIFFERENTLY) ABOUT ORDINARY OBJECTS AND SITUATIONS, AND TO START REFLECTING THIS IN OUR WRITING. WE WANT OUR YOUNG WRITERS TO BELIEVE THAT THEY HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY, AND THAT WE ARE INTERESTED IN IT. WE WANT THEM TO UNDERSTAND HOW EXTRAORDINARY THEY ARE ALREADY, AND THAT BY TWEAKING EVEN THE MOST MUNDANE SUBJECTS AND SITUATIONS THEIR STORIES CAN BECOME EXTRAORDINARILY GOOD TOO.

INTRODUCTION (TEACHER LED):

Start by reading *Late One Night in London*, a new piece of writing by Richard O'Neill developed specifically to be read aloud, and for working with reluctant writers (see pg 17).

Late One Night in London demonstrates that you can start with 'ordinary life,' in familiar settings – a few short months ago, Callum and Jared were just ordinary boys in an ordinary school, leading ordinary lives. But, just a few misjudged decisions land them in extraordinary trouble – proving that ordinary isn't always so bad after all!

Everyone will recognise something familiar in *Late One Night in London* (perhaps the volatile relationship with an adult, perhaps the feelings of regret and remorse), even if the story is completely extraordinary and very unlikely to happen to any of us!

MAIN ACTIVITY (PUPIL-LED):

In pairs or small groups, ask the pupils to identify and discuss what was ordinary and what was extraordinary about *Late One Night in London*? At what point did the ordinary become extraordinary, and what occurred to make it change?

Ask them to apply a series of 'what if' questions to the piece. For instance, what if the boys had decided to stay in the club? What if they had decided to stay at home altogether, and not go to London at all? What if they'd been a bit more aware of what was happening? What if they'd told a parent or even a friend where they were going?

These 'what if?' questions can be applied to other situations, for example;

What if that friend of ours became an overnight celebrity? What if they abolished school? What if my burger came alive? What if we ran the school for a day? What if time started running backwards?

A wealth of different stories can start in simply asking "what if?" Ask your pupils to apply it to their own lives over the next few days. They don't need to write anything, just get into the habit of being aware of their situation and using their imagination to take them to new places. What if the bus had wings? What if it rained Gold?

4. PERSPECTIVE

GREAT FOR: *GETTING UNDER THE SKIN OF OUR CHARACTERS, DEVELOPING EMPATHY, COMEDIC WRITING AND WRITING FOR AN AUDIENCE*

THIS EXERCISE ENCOURAGES US TO THINK AND WRITE FROM SOMEONE ELSE'S OR SOMETHING ELSE'S PERSPECTIVE. AS WRITERS, THIS GIVES US AN IDEA OF WRITING FOR AN AUDIENCE, GETTING OUT OF OUR USUAL WAY OF THINKING, AND MORE IMPORTANTLY, ALLOWING A CHARACTER TO TELL HIS, HER, OR IT'S STORY.

INTRODUCTION (TEACHER LED):

Reading the short piece below by Richard O'Neill is a great way to introduce the idea. See how long it takes your class to realise it's a pair of trousers:

"Here he is, strutting down the street showing me off, more like the label on the back pocket! It's alright for him, he doesn't have to sit on those bus seats or benches and those fast food stools, errrghhhh! So greasy! I'm weighed down with coins, a mobile phone, grotty tissues. Then there's this leather thing which goes all the way round me and pulls in tight! It feels as if it's strangling me!"

MAIN ACTIVITY (PUPIL LED):

Ask the pupils to generate their own piece imagining that the voice of the narrator is someone or something else – something or someone that we usually take for granted, hardly spare a thought for. If they can't think of a person or object from which to write, feel free to give one to them (a telephone, a cat, a classroom wall, a football goalkeeper, the carpet, a seagull, a flute, a kettle).

Are they happy? Lonely? Busy? What do they have to put up with? What secret skills do they have that perhaps no-one knows about? Do they wish they were someone/thing else? Somewhere else?

Give them 5-10 minutes to develop their ideas and then share them with the group and see if you can guess whose perspective each piece is written from.

Next, pick an issue and ask the pupils to write about it from a range of different perspectives. For example:

- Ask a rat, a bin-man, a local resident, a burglar and an MP to talk about a rubbish dump
- Ask a camel, a snowman, a gardener, a child, an office worker and an ant to talk about the long hot summer



5. DESCRIPTION

GREAT FOR: *STRENGTHENING DESCRIPTIVE SKILLS USING ALTERNATIVE LANGUAGE, DEVELOPING PERSUASION TECHNIQUES*

INTRODUCTION (TEACHER LED):

SHARE THE FOLLOWING STORY OF SAM THE STUNTMAN, WRITTEN BY RICHARD O'NEILL, WITH THE GROUP:

SAM THE STUNTMAN – PART ONE
RICHARD O'NEILL © 2015

Sam is a stuntman. Not a very good stuntman, it has to be said, although in the 1980s he was the best! Since then, he's just let himself go. Nowadays, he lives by taking on the jobs that no one else will do. You only phone Sam if there's no one else to do it.

A film crew was on location in Leicester, shooting a low-rate action adventure movie. The budget was tiny but they'd got everything in place, even renting a Bond-style Aston Martin. Large wooden ramps had been constructed on either side of the canal for a gravity-defying scene in which the Aston would spectacularly leap across the open water.

The film crew was ready to shoot, but the hired stuntman had taken a much better job in America and now the production team were frantically phoning around for a replacement. They tried everywhere but another stunt person was not to be found. The producer and director looked at each other and in desperation both uttered the same name: Sam.

They phoned Sam at home in Manchester, and even though he was eating a large pizza (one of his many favourite fast foods), through the chewing and slurping sounds, they were able to make out that he was available. With the help of his trusty pick-up, he would be with them the next morning and the fee for his services would be £150, a fraction of what other stuntpeople charged nowadays.

The next day, Sam turned up in his beat up truck, rattling to a smoky stop in front of the crew. He squeezed himself out from behind the steering wheel and shook hands with the director who immediately asked him if he'd ever driven an Aston? Of course, Sam told him, and offered to demonstrate. He lumbered over to the Aston, crammed himself in, revved the engine, made the wheels spin, did figures of eights, handbrake turns, and really put the car through its paces. A wave of relief swept over the film crew, and when he finally came to a stop, they welcomed him onto the team.

The technicians fitted him with an ear piece so that he could hear their directions before and during the stunt. The message came through that they'd be ready to jump in 10 minutes, so he was to remain on standby.

Sam was warming up the engine and preparing for the big stunt when a message came through that it was so cloudy that the lighting wasn't good enough to continue filming. Filming wouldn't now start for another hour.

Sam's stomach rumbled. He decided to go and get some food at the nearest drive-through. Despite many attempts though, his pick-up just wouldn't start. Off he sped in the Aston and was soon at the drive-through, ordering not one but two burgers, and a coffee.

When the order was passed through the window into his car, no one knows whether the coffee cup was greasy or whether Sam simply didn't get hold of it properly, but what we do know is that the steaming hot coffee spilled all over Sam's lap!

The stuntman simultaneously screamed and pressed his foot hard on the gas pedal, causing the Aston to lurch forwards with such force that it went up and over the Mini in front, only stopping when it became embedded in the huge illuminated sign advertising the restaurant. Oil and steam escaped from the smashed bonnet.

Sam was a little shaken, but not so shaken that he couldn't eat his burgers. He was a stuntman after all, a little steam and oil wasn't going to phase him, and he'd never been one to waste good food. Sitting there, he realised that he was in trouble: no car, no job and no money to get the truck fixed and get back home. And wet trousers.

Searching for a solution, Sam remembered his old stunt friend Karen, who lived locally. He quickly phoned her but the only thing she was prepared to lend him was her daughter's pink Barbie bike!

"I've got something that might interest you..." she said to Sam down the phone, "Come and take a look, it's..."

MAIN ACTIVITY (PUPIL LED):

How does Karen describe the bike to Sam, to make him think that it is the perfect vehicle to replace the Aston Martin? What would make him go rushing over there to pick it up?

This exercise can take as little as 10 minutes or as much as an hour depending on how involved the discussion becomes. If you can, bring up a picture of a child's bike on your screen, to help focus attention.

Challenge your pupils to come up with as many descriptive features as you can for this little bike. The object of the exercise is to encourage pupils to think differently about this familiar item. This will help them understand how as writers we can describe objects in really convincing and alternative ways (whilst still telling the truth!). Words, when used properly, are powerful things, making people believe even the most unbelievable things, if used effectively.

It's also about exploring language, finding different words in order to present things in a different light. For example, perhaps Karen forgot to mention to Sam that the vehicle in question was a child's bike, but did describe it to him as having a 'responsive braking system' (rather than a hand operated brake), 'four wheel drive with chunky tyres,' (rather than having stabilisers) and a 'comfortable driver's seat' (rather than a standard bike seat).

Consider what the bike is made of (lightweight aluminium frame ideal for gravity-defying stunts?), the fact that it is an eco-friendly way to travel (carbon neutral engineering?), a real head-turner (stunning design by one of world's leading fashion icons?). This little bike is starting to rival the Austin in Sam's imagination!

To test your descriptive skills, invite another teacher into the classroom and ask your pupils to read their work to them. What kind of vehicle do they think is being described? Very few will ever guess it's a child's bike. Sam certainly didn't. Read on, to finish the exercise:

SAM THE STUNTMAN – PART TWO

Sam hitched a lift to Karen's house. She showed him into the garage and presented the vehicle to him. On first seeing the bike, he tried to protest but quickly realised that Karen had told the truth – it did indeed have four wheel drive (although they weren't exactly chunky), a responsive breaking system and a driver's seat (albeit not a comfortable one for a fully grown stuntman!).

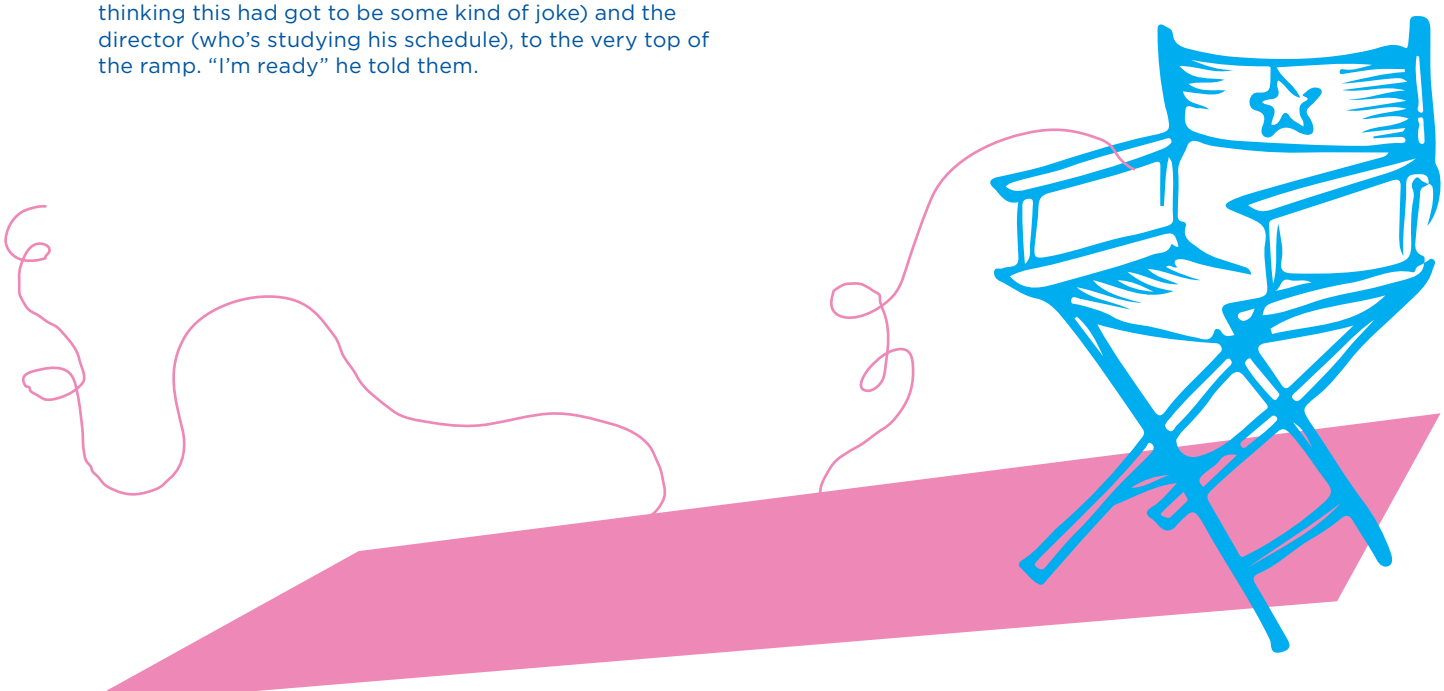
Realising he was out of time and that the bike was his only hope, Sam pedalled off, receiving great interest from people out on the streets, who were soon staring, laughing and filming this spectacle of a large man on a Barbie bike.

Sam was still wearing his earpiece. Through it, he heard the call from the director that he was now dreading – the clouds had parted and stunt would take place in less than five minutes.

Pedalling furiously, Sam arrived at the film set, riding straight through the middle of it, past the lighting crew (studying cloud formations) and the camera crew (open-mouthed, aghast) and the technical team (laughing, thinking this had got to be some kind of joke) and the director (who's studying his schedule), to the very top of the ramp. "I'm ready" he told them.

The director gave him a countdown, only turning to look once Sam was pedalling down the ramp as fast as he could go. The bike took off, up into the air. Hundreds of eyes followed the progress of the big man on the child's bike as he sailed through mid-air with remarkable ease, before coming down onto the landing ramp with the terrifying sound of screeching rubber and clanging metal. A brick wall some way down the towpath finally caused Sam to come to a stop.

Unsurprisingly, this turned out to be the last stunt job Sam was ever to be offered, but was enough to secure him a front-page headline in the Leicester Mercury and a place in stuntman-folklore forevermore!



6. CREATING A PIECE

GREAT FOR: *ENABLING YOUR YOUNG WRITERS TO JUST GET WRITING WITHOUT HAVING (AS ONE STUDENT SAID) 'TO GET STRESSED ABOUT HAVING TO DO A START.'*

EVEN NOW, WE MIGHT NOT BE ABLE TO JUST GET STARTED! THIS EXERCISE HAS BEEN DESIGNED FOR ALL THOSE WRITERS AND PLAY CREATORS WHO JUST CAN'T GET STARTED, THOSE PEOPLE WHO SPEND ALL THEIR TIME TRYING TO THINK OF A GOOD TITLE AND A GREAT FIRST LINE (AND THAT MEANS, MOST OF US). FEAR OF THE BLANK PAGE IS THE MOST COMMON BARRIER TO GETTING STARTED AT ALL!

SO LET'S START AT THE END.

INTRODUCTION (TEACHER LED):

Read your class the following paragraph, which is, for the time being, the 'end' of the story:

A luxury sports car has stopped on a country road. It's dark - it must be late at night, or very early in the morning. The engine is still running, the driver's door is open and the interior light is on. There's a person slumped half in, half out of the car.

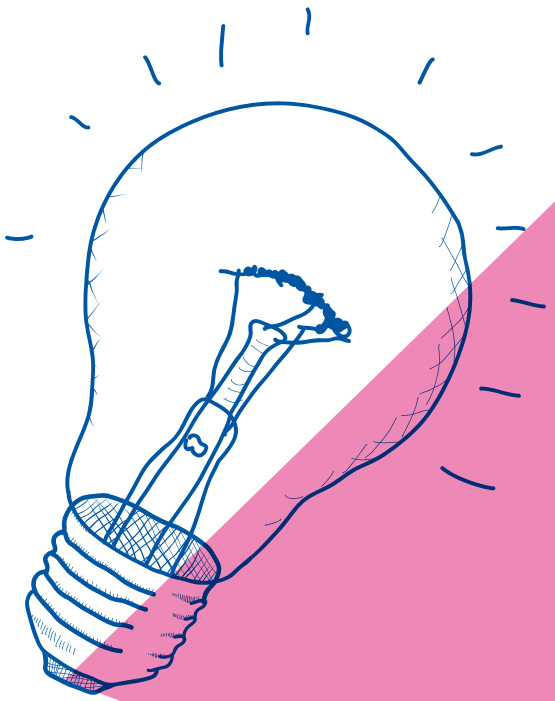
MAIN ACTIVITY (PUPIL LED):

Ask your pupils to work the story backwards to the beginning. What happened one hour before? A day before? A year before?

Compare how different or similar each story becomes.

To further develop this exercise, ask your pupils to come up with their own "endings" of a similar length to this one. Put the endings in a hat and ask each pupil to choose one to work backwards to the start (if they choose their own, pick again!). Alternatively, read to them the final paragraph of any book and again work backwards to their own beginnings.

IF YOU HAVE WORKED THROUGH THE PREVIOUS FIVE EXERCISES TO GET TO THIS POINT, REMIND YOUR YOUNG WRITERS TO THINK ABOUT WHAT THEY LEARNT AND TO INCLUDE THOSE TECHNIQUES IN THEIR WRITING. REMIND THEM TO WATCH OUT FOR CLICHÉS AND STEREOTYPES, TO ASK "WHAT IF" QUESTIONS OF THEIR CHARACTERS AND PLOT SO THAT THE ORDINARY BECOMES EXTRAORDINARY, TO USE DESCRIPTIVE LANGUAGE TO MAKE THEIR STORIES MORE INTERESTING AND VISUAL, AND TO PRACTICE TELLING THEM TO EACH OTHER BEFORE WRITING THEM DOWN. MOST OF ALL, REMIND THEM THAT WE ALL HAVE A STORY, THAT IT IS STORIES THAT BRING US TOGETHER, AND THAT ALL OVER THE WORLD, STORIES WERE MADE TO BE SHARED!



LATE ONE NIGHT IN LONDON

BY RICHARD O'NEILL

©2015

***TEACHERS NOTE; THE PIECE IS IN FIRST DRAFT AND READY FOR PUPILS TO ADD TO/EDIT AND ENJOY PLAYING AROUND WITH LANGUAGE AND CHARACTER.**

Hampson was right, that's all Jarrod can think. A voice going round and round in his head, like a fly inside a bottle. Fat necked, belly over his too tight trousers, hair dyed, total divvy Hampson, was right.

'You're not thick, so why do you act like such an idiot?' That's what Hampson said on a regular basis. Jarrod had just brushed it off, knowing that Hampson was wrong. He wasn't an idiot, he just wasn't interested in school, school was pointless, especially for him, he had bigger and better plans.

The trip to London would be the start of his new life. He'd never been to London before. He'd lied about that. He'd lied about a lot of things. Now, standing in this car park at four o'clock in the morning, he realised that really was an idiot thing to do. He realised that if he was at home, safely tucked up in bed with that poster of Miley Cyrus staring down at him, it would be an ordinary day and he would be up and in school within four hours, ready to do battle with Hampson again. Instead, here he was in the car park, shivering with cold and fear.

His mind kept going back to Hampson - round and round like a never-ending loop, occasionally changing course to include his mum and his little sister, before going back to Hampson. Hampson, the world's worst English teacher.

He hears a cry of pain from Dex which brings him back to the present. Almost as quickly he forces his mind away, shutting out what is happening right in front of him, casting his mind back to how it all started. It started with a couple of detentions, that was all. He and Callum had thought they were so bad, the big men, they boasted about it to anyone who'd listen. And now here they were in London, on a supposedly all-expenses-paid trip, with just one little stop-off in Birmingham to pick something up for Dex, or so they'd thought.

Another sound. A sharp crack, and Dex was being held up by the men, blood streaming down his face and dripping onto the floor. The man with the piece of wood wasn't screaming. He was controlled, calm, almost relaxed, which made it all worse. Jarrod looked across at Callum who was crying softly, the tears just bubbling out of him like a mountain spring.

Why had he been such an idiot? Why did he not realise that it was all wrong? All dodgy? Hampson was right, he was an idiot. He didn't know which was worse - being in this situation, or having to admit that Hampson was right. For some reason he started to laugh a high-pitched laugh. They all looked at him and he felt sure then, that he was going to die.

Avoiding the horror of the present, Jarrod withdrew to his memory again, which took him from Birmingham to London and to Dex's flat, where he and Callum had been greeted by Dex's girlfriend. 'Did you see her?!' they had both said, almost at the same time. The girl was gorgeous, she must have been about 19 and looked like someone out of a music video. Man, they were living it large now. Whatever was in the bag they'd picked up in Birmingham, Dex was happy with it, soon patting them on their backs and giving them a twenty pound note each.

Showered, dressed and fed on delivered meals from a local take away, the boys were ready for their big night out in London. They had built their hopes, dreams even, on it being the best night of their lives. And it didn't disappoint, at first. There was a queue of people outside the club with the usual big necked bouncers letting some in and others being turned away. Jarrod started to panic. What if the bouncers saw through the fake ID that he and Callum had both got on the internet? He was starting to walk towards the end of the line when Dex shouted and waved him back, smiling and patting him on the back, then laughing, as the bouncers waved them and the model girlfriend through.

Once in the club, which resembled a scene from *The Fast and the Furious*, Dex led them into a raised area marked VIP. Dex was smiling, people kept coming up to him and shaking hands. Life was good! More drinks, more dancing, more people coming up to Dex, and then suddenly he was on his phone, shouting at whoever was on the other end. In a rage, he threw the phone down. He ordered the boys to leave, but they refused.

They walked out of the club and stood awkwardly in silence, knowing instinctively that they should not say anything, still disappointed that the best night of their lives had ended so abruptly. A car with blackened windows pulled to a stop beside them. Two men hurled themselves out of the car and before they knew it, grabbed Dex, who looked like he was getting ready to run.

The boys were bundled into the car with Dex. When they came to a stop they were taken into what looked like a storage unit. There was a dim light, a concrete floor and a man waiting for them. The man smiled at Dex. It was a smile filled with malice. The set-up felt familiar to Jarrod. He'd seen it in the movies a hundred times. He knew the script: the gangster taunts his victim, playing with him like a cat plays with a mouse, before it eats it.

Jarrod only realised that he was crying when he saw his tears making marks in the dust on the floor. His mind takes him out of the room and back to school. He's sitting at his desk. He's turning round. He's ignoring Hampson. He wishes he was back there.

WHO WE ARE

WRITING EAST MIDLANDS

Writing East Midlands is the writer development organisation for writers working in Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire and Rutland. Writing East Midlands supports, promotes and champions writing to create opportunities for practising writers and to discover new writers of quality.

www.writingeastmidlands.co.uk

THE MIGHTY CREATIVES

The Mighty Creatives is the East Midlands Bridge organisation (EMBridge). We are part of a national network of organisations, funded by Arts Council England to use our experience and expertise to help more children access more great art and culture more of the time. We believe that every young life should be rich in play, creativity and culture. To achieve our mission, we are committed to being a source of innovation in young lives, using our unique role to find creative solutions to the opportunities and challenges children and young people face. To do this, we work with children and young people, their friends, families, communities and professionals to build a better world for themselves and others.

www.mightycreatives.com

ARTS AWARD

Arts Award offers young people an inspiring arts journey. Each path can take a different direction – from fashion to film-making, from dance to design, from photography to poetry. Whichever route they choose to follow, young people are always in the driving seat.

Arts Award's unique qualifications support young people to develop as artists and arts leaders. The programme develops their creativity, leadership and communication skills. Open to anyone aged up to 25, Arts Award embraces all interests and backgrounds. Through working towards an award young people learn to work independently, helping them to prepare for further education and employment.

Arts Award motivates and celebrates young people's artistic achievements. Young people can achieve an award through any arts, media or cultural activity, developing knowledge and understanding of their chosen art forms.

If you are a school or organisation wanting to start offering Arts Award yourself or have opportunities that could support young people to achieve their award or would just like to find out more information please contact The Mighty Creatives, the East Midlands Bridge Organisation:

Bridge@themightycreatives.com

ARTSMARK

Artsmark is Arts Council England's flagship programme for schools to ensure all children and young people have access to high quality arts. Artsmark encourages and supports schools to celebrate the strengths in their arts and culture provision, and to celebrate the impact of their arts and culture activities on their community.

The new Artsmark award, launching in September 2015, is designed by schools, for schools and will support deeper connections with schools' own strategies, align with school curriculum and planning cycles and will help provide evidence for Ofsted.

If you are interested in Artsmark or to find out more please contact The Mighty Creatives, the East Midlands Bridge Organisation:

www.artsmark.org.uk

BABINGTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Babington Community College is an 11-16 secondary school on the outskirts of Leicester. 61% of pupils at Babington are classed as having English as an additional language (EAL) from 36 countries of origin. Babington Community College was rated 'Outstanding' by Ofsted in March 2013.

www.babington.leicester.sch.uk

RICHARD O'NEILL

Richard O'Neill was born and brought up in a large Romany family in the North of England, is an award winning storyteller, writer and workshop leader who tells stories in over 100 primary, secondary and special schools a year across the country. He also visits museums, libraries and theatres throughout the UK. His storytelling skills workshops are delivered across a range of settings from prisons to corporate headquarters.

He grew up with the storytelling tradition, learning his storytelling skills from some of the best travelling storytellers from England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales. He is the author of nine children's' books and his stories and plays have been broadcast on numerous radio stations including BBC Radio 3 and 4. He is the recipient of the 'National Literacy Hero' award for his work in schools across the UK.

www.richardthestoryteller.weebly.com

USEFUL CONTACTS

WRITER DEVELOPMENT ORGANISATIONS

Each region in England is home to a writer development organisation, a publicly-funded organisation set up to nurture, support and champion local writers at all stages in their career. Your regional writer development organisation may be able to offer you support and advice on hosting a writer residency.

SOUTH WEST	Literature Works	*www.literatureworks.org.uk*
SOUTH EAST	New Writing South	*www.newwritingsouth.com*
LONDON	Spread the Word	*www.spreadtheword.org.uk*
WEST MIDLANDS	Writing West Midlands	*www.writingwestmidlands.org*
EAST MIDLANDS	Writing East Midlands	*www.writingeastmidlands.co.uk*
EASTERN REGION	Writer's Centre, Norwich	*www.writerscentrenorwich.org.uk*
NORTHERN REGION	New Writing North	*www.newwritingnorth.com*

BRIDGE ORGANISATIONS

Arts Council England funds a network of 'bridge' organisations to connect children and young people with arts and culture.

SOUTH WEST	RIO	*www.realideas.org/*
SOUTH EAST	Artswork	*www.artswork.org.uk*
LONDON	A New Direction	*www.anewdirection.org.uk*
WEST MIDLANDS	Arts Connect	*www.artsconnectwm.co.uk*
EAST MIDLANDS	The Mighty Creatives	*www.mightycreatives.com*
EASTERN REGION	Norfolk and Norwich Festival	*www.nnfestival.org.uk*
SOUTH EAST	Royal Opera House	*www.roh.org.uk*
NORTH EAST	Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums	*www.twmuseums.org.uk*
NORTH WEST	Curious Minds	*www.curiousminds.org.uk*
YORKSHIRE	Cape UK	*www.capeuk.org*