



# HOW TO TEACH CREATIVE WRITING

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# GENERAL



# How to Teach Creative Writing Activities

Students may feel reluctant and threatened by a blank piece of paper and a request to write a story about a given topic. However, with some inspiration and fun activities, reluctant writers gain confidence and eager writers gain the skills to create higher quality writing. Use these activities as building blocks to improving student writing and as tools to help you teach creative writing skills. Once learned, the activities serve as tools that your students can keep using as they write in the future.

## Show students how to use graphic organizers

- Show students how to use graphic organizers such as story maps to think through their writing before they start. A story map is a tool, often used in both reading and writing instruction, that helps students to understand the important elements of a story. Before beginning a story, have kids plan out story elements such as character, plot, setting, theme, problem and solution on a story map so they have it to refer to as they write the story. Fill in the graphic organizer together with your students the first few times to help them through the thinking process of coming up with the story elements that should be in the organizer.

## Read to your students

- Read to your students, no matter how old they are, so that they know what high-quality writing sounds like. Utilize a list such as the one linked below to find books that focus on one or two characteristics of quality writing. Before reading the book, introduce a characteristic of writing, such as unique word choice, and then ask students to listen for samples of it in the book as you read. Later, have them mimic the characteristic of the book you read in a creative writing piece of their own, focusing on improving it in their writing.

## Write poetry with your students.

- The short, fun nature of some poems makes them perfect for the hesitant beginning writer. Start with something simple such as one-verse, simple ABAB pattern rhymes where every other line ends with a rhyming word. Always write an example with your students on the board, chart or overhead so they have a model or frame of reference. Use fun poems by writers such as Dr. Seuss or Shel Silverstein to spark interest. As students gain confidence, teach them about longer, more complex poetry.

## Write letters

- Students love writing notes, so formalize this and teach students how to write a proper letter. Give students a meaningful task that requires writing a letter. They might write to ask someone to come and speak to their class. Older students might write letters convincing someone in authority to allow something not yet allowed. With a meaningful task and some instruction in proper letter format, students take writing a note to a friend and turn it into a meaningful creative writing challenge.

## Choose some familiar fairy tales, stories or nursery rhymes.

- Choose some familiar fairy tales, stories or nursery rhymes. Write a list and ask students to tell you from whose point of view the story is written. Discuss which story elements tell you who is telling the story. Discuss that character's voice or personality characteristics and identify those in the story. Have students pick a story

and retell all or part of it from a different character's point of view using that character's voice and personality in their writing.

### **Use circle-writing activities**

- Use circle-writing activities from time to time for a quick, fun and non-threatening creative writing exercise. Place students in groups of four to six people. Each group needs one pencil and one piece of paper. Give students a strange topic or story starter such as "Yesterday, on the way home from school I saw the strangest creature. It had..." Each group chooses one person to start the story. The student begins to write the story when the teacher says, "Go!" and continues to write until the signal to stop is given. At that point, students pass the paper to the next person in the circle who reads aloud the story so far to his group. The activity continues for a given time period or number of rotations around the circle. Always give the signal to the group when the last rotation arrives so they begin to end their stories. Writing a story together with their group gives hesitant writers some peer assistance and a less threatening environment for creating a story.

### **Tips & Warnings**

- Use a word wall with different list categories such as seeing words, hearing words, tasting words, family words, action words, feeling words. Teach children to think about an object or place through all their senses when describing it. How does it feel, taste, smell, sound and look.

# Ways to Teach Writing Creatively

Teach your students the fun aspects of writing. Students of all ages write short stories and papers, from younger elementary-school writers through college-age students. When you teach writing, you want creative ideas and methods that keep the students interested in the lesson and eager to record their own stories. Different ways of teaching writing creatively include ideas with a basis in reality and fantasy-based ideas.

## Use Past Experiences

- Use a memoir or biography-based assignment that gets students excited about writing. Combine the project with an art lesson, asking students to include photographs or drawings of their past experiences. Base the size of the project on the age of the students, asking for a one-page report from younger students and longer papers from older kids. Brainstorm the project in class, asking the students to record the top five moments of their lives and expand those moments into small stories for the finished book.

## Humorous Writing

- If you want your kids interested in writing, then opt for writing assignments that have a humorous or funny slant. Give your students a short prompt and ask them to write a story based on that prompt. For example, have the students write a story on what they would do if they found a bag of money or gold on the way home from school. With older students, use the prompt as inspiration for short stories not based on themselves. Give your students a short opening sentence that has no ending and ask for a story that finishes the sentence. For example, tell the students, "I never believed that unicorns existed until ... " and ask them to finish the story.

## Work With Groups

- Divide your classroom into small groups and ask the groups to write a short story based on a prompt you give them. Sometimes students suffer from writer's block and have difficulty creating a story on their own. Putting the kids into groups lets them brainstorm and bounce ideas off each other, until they create a story that shares elements from each student.

## Share Stories

- Share the stories that your students create in the classroom. Make small books from pages wrapped with ribbon through holes on the sides. Let the students pick their favorite stories and create pictures for the books. Give the students one prompt and ask each one to create a story with the same theme or idea for the finished book. Get the students excited about creating stories for others. Send home copies of the books for the parents.

# How to Teach Creative Writing to Children

## Start with the Six Traits of Writing

- Ideas, Organization, Voice, Word Choice, Sentence Fluency and Conventions. These six traits provide a way to assess students' writing. When students understand the traits, they know what is expected of their writing. Using and teaching the traits gives you a way to provide specific feedback about each student's skills and needs. Go to [http://www.thetraits.org/scoring\\_guides.php](http://www.thetraits.org/scoring_guides.php) to print out rubrics with detailed feedback for each trait. Use the rubrics to score student's work.

## Begin each class with an engaging prompt

- These prompts could be used for short stories, journaling or oral stories. Vary the types of prompts. You could use famous quotes, paintings, photographs, comic strips, passages from novels, poems, story starters or anything else students might relate to. Visit <http://www.creativewritingprompts.com/#> to view more than 300 prompts to get students started writing.

## Teach students how to hold peer conferences with each other

- During these evaluations, students read each other's writing and give feedback. Model or script an effective, valuable conference for the class to see. Vary how the partners or groups are organized; choose a friend, teacher's choice, student to the left, etc. Give students a sheet of questions to ask each other and turn in for a grade or credit. Questions could include: What is your favorite part of this story? Is there anything that is confusing to you, if so what? Go to [http://oregonstate.edu/~petersp/ORST/WR121\\_files/course%20resources.htm#grading%20and%20peer%20review](http://oregonstate.edu/~petersp/ORST/WR121_files/course%20resources.htm#grading%20and%20peer%20review) to learn more about peer evaluation and download examples of student work.

## Demonstrate how to do a story or character graphic organizer.

- Students use these to plan out their ideas, characters, plot, main idea and direction of the story before writing. These graphic organizers take brainstorming a step further. They begin to take their ideas and develop them. Go to [http://www.educationoasis.com/curriculum/GO/character\\_story.htm](http://www.educationoasis.com/curriculum/GO/character_story.htm) to download graphic organizer templates.

## Show students how valuable the writing process is by giving multiple opportunities to edit and revise their work.

- According to Alice L. Trupe, author of "Revising Practices," "As he [the student] internalizes the feedback, he becomes a better critic of his own writing and progressively incorporates those critical insights into his own drafting and revising processes when writing outside of the classroom."

## Teach mini-lessons at the beginning of each lesson.

- Focus the lessons on a small topic like using adjectives to replace the word "good." Teach other mini-lessons about strong verbs, fragments and run-on sentences, figurative language and good leads and conclusions. Go to <http://www.jmeacham.com/writers.workshop/writing.mini.lessons.htm> to see primary grade mini-lessons.

## **Start a writing club to join together students who already enjoy writing.**

- Don't limit it to "good" writers, open it up to anyone who wants to join. Let students choose their topics on some assignments. Some students may be discouraged or frustrated if they are always told what to write.



# Creative Writing Teaching Ideas

Instructors of creative writing classes are happily situated, as the instruction calls for some of the most inventive and interesting pedagogy around. Writing exercises for poetry, fiction and nonfiction are many, and there is a wealth of fantastic essays on writing and workshops. Teachers will find a healthy supply of ideas and may wind up developing some of their own.

## Writing Exercises: Poetry

The list of writing exercises for poetry (and all genres really) is exhaustive. Here are some of the most successful:

- **Translation exercise:** Bring in a poem in a language unfamiliar to your students. Without giving them any ideas about the poem's content, have them "translate" the poem by mimicking the lines and line integrity--the spacing of the poem. In terms of language, the students may do their best to divine subject matter and imagery. The result is a selection of poetry from students that is wildly different in focus, but which holds the original shape of the poem. When the exercise is completed, read the original out loud. Occasionally, students will happen upon the actual subject matter, so do not let that surprise you. A poem in German about a deer has yielded, for instance, five poems about deer in a class of 12. The object of the exercise is to examine pacing and tone.
- **Found poetry exercise:** Find an old book and select a page of text. Write a poem using only the specific lexicon on that page. Some poets choose to mark out words with a marker, leaving behind words that form an unexpected poem. This exercise is particularly useful when discussing language, as so many of us call upon the same vocabulary over and over again. Borrowing language pushes writers outside of their own self-imposed limitations.
- **Photograph exercise:** Hand out the same photograph (or image) that features at least two people to all students and have them write a poem based on the picture before them. Encourage varied approaches (first person point of view, dialogue, etc.), but limit the length. Restrict space to an index card or drawn square that is the same size as the photograph. Have students read their poems out loud, one after the other, with no commentary between poems. The idea behind the exercise is to encourage focusing on a particular image, voice or character.

## Writing Exercises: Fiction

- **First line exercise:** Select a first line from a previously published work that appeals to you--the sentence can be one that is gripping or one that simply presents opportunity. Have students begin a short story using this common starting point. The idea is to take something small and specific and begin with that, as opposed to entering a story with more universal ideas in mind.
- **Fortune cookie exercise:** This exercise requires a nominal purchase by the instructor, but bringing in fortune cookies for the class can produce surprising results. Once you have handed out the cookies, have them use the fortune inside as a first line for a story.
- **Second person exercise:** Ask students to develop a short story told entirely from the second person point of view. Discuss the advantages, which include producing a sense of immediacy or urgency and intimacy with the reader born of the direct address form. Caution students against didactic, imperative sentences that may

push readers firmly out of the story. The exercise is useful as it encourages writers to experiment with point of view; you could also, for example, assign them first person plural or third person limited.

### Writing Exercises: Nonfiction

- **Voice exercise:** Students will pick a family member or close friend whose character fascinates them in some way. Have students begin an essay by doing a character sketch of this person. Suggest that they include traits unique to the person and passages of dialogue that showcase that person's voice.
- **First sound exercise:** Have students work on the difficult task of teasing out early memories by focusing on the first sound they remember hearing. Afterward, ask students to begin an essay that both describes the memory and explores the significance of it. An entire essay can be constructed around memories of something specific, like sound. Often, writers will go regularly to the same memories for inspiration and neglect the small memories which can sometimes inform the entire character or crisis of the narrator.
- **House as character exercise:** Tell students to begin an essay with a description of a house or room. The space should function as character and reveal something of the people who inhabit the space. Imagery should address all the senses and communicate the appropriate mood for the story.

# Ideas for a Creative Writing Course Plan

Creative writing is a way for students to express themselves in new and exciting ways. A creative writing student can gain a greater sense of community and creativity when he writes with his peers, and he can also enhance his introspective skills while writing by himself. Having unique creative writing activities can make the difference between a good class and a great class.

## Writing Cycles

- The focus of a writing cycle is to give students a sense of collaboration with other classmates as they create stories together. Seat the students in a circle and give each student one or two blank notebook pages. Instruct the students to start a story from a prompt of your choice. An example prompt is, "It was noon and the sun was hot..." Allow the students to write from that prompt for two or three minutes, then instruct the class to pass their stories to the person sitting to the left. Repeat the three-minute cycle, passing stories to the left until each story has gone around once. Once students receive their own stories back, ask them to conclude the story with another three-minute time slot of writing.

## Six-Sentence Paragraphs

- This activity takes a special attention to detail and concentration. Instruct each student to write a six-sentence paragraph without repeating any word twice. This includes contractions, such as "do not" and "don't." Tell the students that the paragraphs must make sense and not be a random mixture of ideas. Once the students are finished, gather each paragraph and read it aloud to the class without revealing the names of the authors.

## Journaling

- Spend a week with your students in a journaling unit. Each student should have at least seven pieces of paper available to use for journaling. During each day, starting on the first day of class for the week, instruct the students to fold each piece of paper in half, writing the titles "What I Saw" and "What I Thought about What I Saw." Ask students to journal once or more a day about the things they see throughout the day, and then to reflect upon what they experienced. The purpose of this activity is to form a greater sense of introspection and reflection and to show students the value of keeping a record of daily thoughts.

## Marathon

- This activity is exactly what it sounds like: a marathon. This is a good assignment for classes that seem to be "stuck" or experiencing writer's block. At the beginning of class, instruct students to take out a notebook and pen or pencil. Explain to them that you expect them to keep the writing utensil on the paper for the entire class period. The point is for students to simply write in a continuous stream. Some students may become tired during the activity, but it is important to encourage them to continue writing, even if what they write does not make sense. This stream-of-consciousness style of writing can help break writer's block and help students find new inspiration.

# Creative Writing Lesson Plans and Activities

Creative writing lesson plans and activities should be as varied as the participants who undertake them. After all, the outcomes will be slightly different for every student. One of the goals of any creative writing class is for students to learn different ways of expressing themselves through writing and to gain exposure to different forms of writing. Creative writing lesson plans and activities should incorporate a variety of instructional methods that encourage students to practice and perfect writing as a form of artistic expression.

## Spoken Word Poetry

- Spoken word or "slam" poetry units typically consist of modeling or observation followed by drafting and performance pieces. Students listen to spoken word poetry and may even attend a spoken word poetry workshop or poetry cafe. The teacher then instructs on different techniques for writing poetry. Students may use the "empty vase" technique where they write a paragraph and then erase filler words, keeping the essence of the paragraph with just a few words that are the beginning of a poem. Another technique is to use sensory imagery only to capture the feeling of a moment in time or an event. After drafting poems, students perform them in front of one another, or in small groups after which they edit and polish their pieces continually in preparation for a public performance.

## Writing from Art

- Students may begin a creative writing piece by writing about a piece of art or a photograph. The instructor shows a photograph or painting and without any discussion, students write about what feelings or mood the piece inspires in them. Then, students share their ideas and thoughts to brainstorm ideas for a piece of writing. The teacher might give a short prompt such as: "Write as though you are one of the people in this photograph." The teacher might also ask students to draft a list of words they would use to describe the piece of art and then use those words to create a short story or poem about the piece.

## Drafting from Imagination

- Elementary students in particular love telling the story of ordinary objects that surround them; for example, the story of a dollar bill -- who has handled it, what has happened to it, where it's been. The teacher might instruct students to tell the story of one of their favorite objects from home and to write as though they are that object. Teachers can also provide story prompts to students starting with "What if..." Another way to craft a lesson around imagination is to have students alter the end of a well known story or put themselves into a famous tale. Children have vivid imaginations, and creative writing is one place where expressing that imagination isn't only encouraged, it's essential.

## Personal Narratives

- Personal narratives are most intriguing when the reader feels a connection to the author. Beginning personal narratives works best when students can recall a story that they felt a connection to and why. Sensory detail, metaphors and similes are essential parts of personal narratives because they bring the reader in to the writer's experience. Teachers might start with asking students to create lists of similes and metaphors that apply to their lives. The students might identify with being as hungry as a wolf or as angry as a bull and then craft a story around that

simile or metaphor. Personal narratives are windows into the soul and snapshots into a moment in time that may have passed but lives on forever in memory.

**PRIMARY/  
ELEMENTARY  
SCHOOL**

Be nice to other people and be  
COURTEOUS.

I'm going to the Ballet on Sunday. I'll  
will be lot's of fun for me and my sister.  
My sister hates me now because of  
Aloha. Aloha's a libby. They make me cry. Lots  
of tears. I like my birthday. It's fun take  
myself because I've not an idea of  
It's fun to be me. I can't have to be  
me so I make it lots of fun. In the  
sun lots of. Lots of. We are watching  
my favorite movie in choir today.  
Savan is cool. And Aloha is cooler.  
I feel very happy. I really like someone.  
He is very nice and too many people  
know about it. It made me mad  
but fun to see him and I am happy.  
Oh so happy happy happy happy.  
I'm very happy with my. I feel pretty  
oh so pretty. I feel happy and light and  
good. We are partying together. All  
my family and I on December 2nd. It  
will be fun. Yeah. There is one takes my  
best of my room cause if they do I will  
scream a lot a lot and drink my mom crazy.

# Creative Writing Activities for Primary School

Plant the seed, then watch them grow. If you were to ask any bestselling authors when they started writing, you can bet many would say they found their passion back in primary school. Their inspiration may have come from a certain assignment or an outgoing teacher. Stretching a child's imagination at an early age will help her in the future. All you need are a few writing activities that are creative and fun.

## Using Picture Books

- One advantage of using picture books is they show the link between reading and writing. Choose books that have the words positioned away from the pictures. This makes it easier to cover up the words. Once the words are covered, have the students look through the book and write their own stories, based on what they see. You will be surprised by how many different stories the students will write. Then read the book and have them compare the original story to their versions.

## Journals

- Not only are journals a way to have students practice writing every day, they are also a way for the students to keep a memento of their school years. You can have the students make their own journals using construction paper and copy paper, or buy premade journals from an office supply store. You can give the students a topic to write about or they can write about what they learned that day.

## Idea Box

- An idea box is simply a shoe box covered in paper and stickers. Cut an opening at the top large enough for a child's hand to fit through. Fill the box with different objects. You can use anything from items about your next lesson, to trinkets you find around the house. Let one student pull out an item, and then have the class write a story with that item in it. Have the students add pictures and share their stories.

## Round-Robin Writing

- Round-robin writing is a way for students to put their heads together to create one story. Give the students a starter sentence, such as "Tommy was late for school," and have the students write for three minutes. Next, have the students rotate their papers in a group. Those students will read the story and continue writing it for three minutes. Do this for three rounds. The students will read their final story to see how it has changed.



# How to Teach Creative Writing to Elementary School Students

Coming up with good creative writing lesson plans for elementary school students can be an absolute joy. Elementary school creative writing classes allow you as the teacher to harness the creativity of young minds and use it to inspire a lifelong passion for learning.

## Getting Them Writing

- **Make it fun!** Take them on a walk to write poems about a particular tree. Have them shout out onomatopoeia words, write them on the blackboard and use them to construct a sound poem as a class. There are probably hundreds of creative writing lesson plans you can start with. The important thing is that you choose one that will show your elementary school students that writing can be a lot of fun.
- **Bring in examples.** Starting is often the most difficult part of the writing process for elementary school students. Allowing them to imitate a particular poem or a passage from a story will get them going.
- **Consider doing "copy change" assignments.** In a copy change, students select a favorite passage from a story and rewrite it, keeping the structure the same while changing the content. For example, they can rewrite a paragraph about how happy a character was so it shows another emotion such as sadness, anger or sleepiness.
- **Bring in as many senses as possible.** For example, have them describe a favorite place using sight, sound, touch, taste and smell. Alternately, you could turn off the lights and have each of them come up with an observation about the classroom that doesn't involve sight.

## Improving their writing

- **Allow each student to choose a favorite assignment to polish and perfect.** This will give your elementary writers a sense of ownership over their compositions.
- **Use group feedback.** Have each student say two things they like about each piece of writing and one that could be improved.
- **Use partner editing to catch spelling and grammar mistakes.** This will help your students learn how to catch their own errors through learning to spot the mistakes made by other students.
- **Compile all of the finished pieces into a class writing book.** Give each student a copy. Make them feel proud about what they have accomplished, both individually and as a class.

# Ways to Teach Elementary Creative Writing

Creative writing gets original and innovative ideas flowing in a child's head and puts those imaginative ideas on paper. It also teaches students how to express themselves and allows them to demonstrate solid vocabulary skills as well as practice their abilities in grammar and sentence structure. Some creative writing assignments can give students the opportunity to create characters, settings and plot while others allow them to write creative nonfiction.

## Prompts

- One of the easiest and best ways to get students to begin the creative writing process uses prompts, which can work at any age. Writing prompts start students with very little information or just a beginning sentence, and then allow them to finish the story. Starting with "what I did on my summer vacation," "why I like my best friend so much" and "the place I love to visit most" are all areas that can get students writing creatively. Older students can write about the difference between write and wrong or giving alternatives to popular stories. Asking students to write about an event they remember most or something that affected them deeply can also begin a creative writing project.

## Storytelling

- At a very young age, children listen to stories regardless if they come from a grandparent, movie, book or theater production. The basis of creative writing begins with good storytelling, where students get their introduction to characters, plot, setting and conflict resolution. Children's authors typically address many of the issues that children face, including going to a new school, living with a new pet and cleaning up their room. By exposing children to as many stories as possible, this helps them learn good structure and what makes a good story.

## Field Trips

- Taking students out of the classroom and letting them observe human behavior, visuals and scents forces them to take note of the details that play a vital role in the creative writing process. Teachers can take students to a farmers' market, park or even a school library where, with notepad in hand, the students can write down what they see and observe. Instead of the student just writing down that the student sees "a woman in a red dress," teachers can press the students for details, such as asking about the person's height, color of hair and if she wore a hat. While students can write down as many adjectives they can think of, just a few allow the students to get into the habit of taking notice.

## Pictures and Photographs

- As the old saying goes, "A picture is worth a thousand words." Allowing students to write about what they see in a picture or even a photograph gives them the opportunity to write about what they see and what they feel. Picking photographs of landscapes or people that may contain multiple meanings allows students to create their own story. Picking out artist drawings can also create the same effect. This exercise also begins to develop critical thinking skills at a young age by letting students make connections and create words from things they see or infer.

# Ideas for Creative Writing Activities for Preteens

Creative activities show your students that writing can be fun. Get your preteen creative writing students excited about writing and thinking with a creative mind. Incorporate individual or collaborative learning activities into your lesson plans. Your students are more likely to be attentive to your teaching if you provide lessons that are rich in hands-on activities for your young writers.

## Basket Writing Prompts

- Assign your students to write a creative writing piece in response to a writing prompt hand-picked from a basket. Have students get into groups of three to four people. Give each student three small pieces of paper: one blue, one red and one yellow. Each student should write the name of an interesting place on the blue paper, the name of an interesting person or thing on the red paper and an action or event on the yellow paper. Have students fold and toss the papers in the basket. Each student should grab three pieces of paper from the group's basket --- one of each color. Each student is responsible for writing a story that incorporates the ideas written on each of the three pieces of paper.

## Headline Poems

- Have your preteen creative writing students create poems based on popular newspaper or magazine headline topics. Assign your students to look through newspapers and magazines individually or in pairs and select a main topic as seen often in the headlines. The students will then create an original poem about that topic. The poem can be free-verse or rhyme. You can also assign a specific type of poem to be written, such as a cinquain. Once students have finished, host a poetry reading in your classroom so students can share.

## Magazine Picture Writing

- Assign your creative writing students to write a story based on five photos clipped from a magazine. Students can work individually or collaboratively with a partner. The students should cut out magazine pictures that appear to be interesting or have the potential to generate a creative piece of writing. Provide students with phrases on the front board like, "Once upon a time," to help jump start the writing process. Once each student or pair has finished a story, allow students to share with the class or compile the stories into an anthology that you can read aloud to the class.

## Collaborative Story

- Provide your students with the opportunity to create a collaborative writing piece while working on the progression of a story. Each student takes out a blank sheet of lined paper and writes his name at the top. Give the student five minutes to write the beginning of an original story. Remind students to keep it appropriate and not include the names of any students in the class. The student then passes the story on to another student who adds on to the story for five minutes, creating the plot. The story is passed on one final time to another student who spends five minutes writing the conclusion to the story. Return stories to the original writer to read. Completed stories can be read aloud.

# How to Create Creative Writing Lessons for Elementary

Encourage your students to write what's on their mind each day. Creating writing exercises stimulate students' imagination and enhance their ability to express themselves in words. In the early years of a child's education, creative writing exercises must be enjoyable for students so they're engaged in the lesson. The exercises also have to teach students about creative storytelling and the fundamental components that make up a story.

## **Make journals a daily or weekly part of the classroom experience.**

- Each week, give students daily or weekly journal prompts and encourage them to think creatively about their answers. Some possible questions include, "What would you do if you woke up and saw a dinosaur in your backyard," or "If you could sit down to lunch with a someone famous, who would it be and why?" Creative journal writing prompts that encourage students to invent stories or describe family members and pets are also effective.

## **Have students create a "jumble story."**

- Ask students to pick three numbers between one and 10. Each number corresponds to a specific character, setting and situation that you've selected. Students match their chosen numbers to find out what elements they need to use in their stories. For example, a student may need to write about an alien at a shopping mall late at night or a new mom at a city park during a concert.

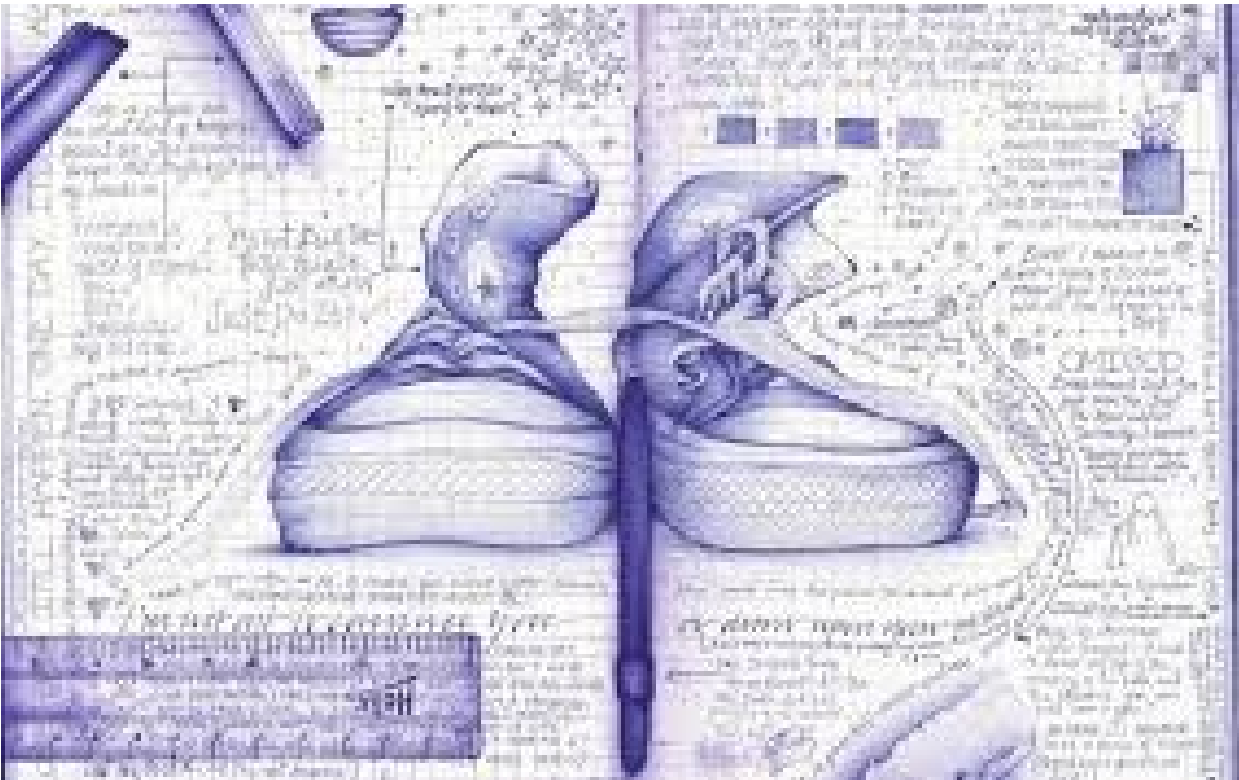
## **Turn a creative writing exercise into a history lesson**

- Turn a creative writing exercise into a history lesson by having students write about a historical figure. It can either be a historical figure you've assigned to them or a person of their choosing. Students write from the perspective of the historical figure and examine questions such as the accomplishments they are most proud of, their most regrettable moment and their favorite childhood memory.

## **Tips & Warnings**

- In the beginning of the school year, students can create and personalize their own journals with a stack of white-lined paper tucked between two pieces of card stock or construction paper. Have these journals professionally bound or simply staple them in place, depending on your classroom resources.

# MIDDLE SCHOOL



# How to Teach Creative Writing to Middle School Students

Coming up with creative writing lesson plans for middle school students can be a little tricky at times. High school students are often mature enough to strive for artistic, polished writing, and elementary students have an unvarnished imagination that is easy to direct towards learning, but getting middle school students to open up requires careful planning and good classroom control.

## Preparations

- Make a list of your goals. You should include educational standards in your creative writing program, but you should not be ruled by them. Teaching your students to open up and express themselves is every bit as important as teaching them correct grammar and organization of ideas.
- Divide your writing assignments into two categories: "loosen up" and "tighten up." "Loosen up" lessons are designed to help your students free up their inner voices. Free writes, brainstorming and sound poetry are some examples of "loosen up" writing. "Tighten up" lessons are geared towards helping your students polish and improve their writing.
- Combine "loosen up" and "tighten up" lessons into each assignment. For example, you can start a poetry assignment with a free write. Then, you can have them select a passage from the free write to develop and turn into a polished poem.
- Connect the writing assignment to the core curriculum. For example, if your students are learning about the gold rush, you could create lesson plans which allow them to write a journal from the point of view of someone living through events from that era.

## Teaching Creative Writing

- Vary your classroom setup and teaching style. On some days, lecturing from the front of the room is just fine. On other days, arrange the desks in a circle or in small groups to allow students to share their projects.
- Make your students feel comfortable. For some creative writing assignments, it is best to not require the students to share their projects. Everyone should participate sometimes, but no one should have to participate all the time.
- Participate in the creative writing class. Middle school students love to see their teachers required to do the assignments! In addition, it gives them an example of polished writing that they can follow if they want to.
- Give your students options. Instead of focus on drilling many different creative techniques into their heads, allow them to choose what kind of poem, essay or narrative they want to write.
- Demand excellence. The best stories, poems and essays often start as sloppy free writes. Real writers take a piece from humble beginnings, through several revisions, to a perfect final draft. Your students should learn to as well!

## Tips & Warnings

- Free writes are a great way to get middle school students writing. To hold a free write, tell your students to write continuously for five minutes. They can write

about anything they want to during that time but cannot edit their writing or stop before their time is up.

- Never require students to share free writes or other raw, unpolished writing. This kind of writing is meant to be very spontaneous and personal, and students need to feel safe when things come out that they don't want to share.

# Creative Writing Ideas for Teens

Look for unusual ways to view the world, then write it into words. Creative writing comes from inside yourself. It is your highly individual response to the world around you. Writing begins with observing the world and storing away images to be recorded later, then sharing the best bits with others. It can be in the form of poetry, short stories, essays or even factual accounts. Your unique, personal view will shape your written work. Even when you write in response to an assignment, your viewpoint makes the work your own.

## Journals

- A good journal is a writer's springboard for future projects. Writing in a journal is a way to practice recording events, try out a turn of phrase, jot down new vocabulary and record ideas that might otherwise escape before they can become a story or essay. Write down descriptions of objects, record conversations and note major events that happen in your life. This is not for sharing or true confessions; this is your practice area.

## Poetry

- Poetry isn't just for greeting cards. The best poetry describes strong feelings and goes straight to the essence of a situation. There are a lot of different poetry forms. Get a book of poems from your local library, and try imitating some of the rhyme schemes or rhythm patterns. Play around with them until you get a feel for how they work. Read a local newspaper; select three articles. Write a poem about each one, using a different poetic form for each.

## Short Stories

- Short stories range from incredibly short pieces designed to fit from start to finish on one computer frame to about 30 typed pages, double-spaced. Watch vehicles go by or around you as you travel, and make up characters that you think would drive certain types of vehicles. Imagine what would happen if some of these characters were to meet; add a problem they need to solve and walk them through to a solution. Add some conversation, a little scenery and turn it into a short story.

## Formal Essay

- Essays are a way of talking about things that are important to you. Topics can range from a homely diatribe against the quality of school lunches to something as serious as racial prejudice. Ideally, they should present an opportunity for the reader to share something important to you or to gain a more enlightened point of view through reading your writing. Read some famous essays, such as "A Helpless Situation" by Mark Twain, or one of the State of the Union addresses by John Quincy Adams. After reading a few, try writing your own essay.



# The Best Writing Prompt Ideas for Middle Schoolers and Teenagers

"Low stakes" student writing, such as journal entries, can help students digest class material. Teachers should expand their use of writing in classrooms, according to Dr. Peter Elbow, professor of writing and pedagogy at the University of Massachusetts. According to "Writing for Learning," Dr. Elbow's signature National Teaching and Learning Forum publication, "low stakes" writing without teacher evaluation can be a strong pedagogical device within the context of a balanced lesson plan. Consider using writing prompts that encourage creative and abstract reasoning for classroom journal writing, daily writing practice or student evaluations at both the middle school and high school level.

## Self-Reflection

- Writing prompts that ask students questions about themselves promote self-reflection and critical thinking. After reading a story about a boy with a mischievous pet lizard, ask student to write on the prompt, "How I Would Take Care of a Pet Lizard." Asking questions that relate subject matter to students' personal lives -- even if only through the imagination -- can help students relate with central story characters and better understand the nuances of story plots or character motivations.

## Conceptual Relationships

- Conceptual relationship topics ask student to think about similarities and differences, cause and effect or other abstract relationships. These questions encourage students to grapple with class material at a higher level than simple fill-in-the-right-bubble exams or worksheets. Writing prompts that focus on conceptual relationships might prove especially beneficial in the physical and natural sciences. For example, after viewing the transformation from caterpillar to butterfly, present students with the writing prompt, "How Does a Caterpillar to Become a Butterfly?" or "What Causes a Caterpillar to Enter Metamorphosis?" Having student write for themselves the causal mechanisms of a natural process can help them to learn the details of those processes.

## Metanarrative Observations

- For movies, plays and books, give students the opportunity to get inside the writer's or creator's head by asking questions that take a step back and look at the creative process. Why did the author choose a certain name, birthplace or personal history for a character? What is the relationship between the creator's own biography and that of her main character? These questions helps students conceptualize the creative process and can add to their appreciation and understanding of the literary or cinematographic work.

## Changing Elements

- Combine critical thinking with creative writing and writing prompts that ask students how situations or events may have turned out differently if one or more variables had been different. These prompts work well in history and government lessons. After reviewing the history of a major invention like the printing press, for example, present student with a prompt like, "How Would the World Be Different If the Printing Press Had Never Been Invented?" Learning experiences that engage

students' creative sides and their analytical sides are often more effective than learning experiences that engage strictly one or the other.

# Creative Writing Ideas for Middle School Students

Motivating middle school students to write requires well-chosen topics that appeal to their growing sense of independence and individuality. Topics that may have held their interest during early elementary years suddenly appear lame or childish. An experienced teacher knows that encouraging middle school students to write means loosening the strings and allowing them to write about issues and concerns that are meaningful to their lives. Finding those meaningful topics takes some exploration on the part of the teacher, but the results outweigh the effort.

## Get to Know Students

- Implementing a successful writing program depends in part on getting to know your students and their interests. Although there are always one or two students who do not share the same interests as their classmates, each age group tends to focus on specific interests depending on the environment and the social climate in your community. Knowing your students interests provides the basis to form writing assignments. While one group of students may be interested in nature-related-activities like hunting, fishing and camping, another group may be more concerned with personal safety and current issues in their communities. Knowing the concerns and interests of the specific group helps you to design writing activities that are relevant to their lives.

## Jackdaw

- A jackdaw is a bird that like to collect and horde shiny objects. In the educational setting, a jackdaw is a collection of objects (or words and images to represent them) that symbolize the students talents and interests. Whether you choose to use actual objects or simply to create visual representations in a folder for students to share depends on the maturity level of the students and your personal preferences. Early middle school students may benefit from a jackdaw of physical tokens to represent concepts. A small chess piece to symbolize a love of chess, a scrap of fabric for crafty teens, a fishing lure or a favorite book all illustrate the student's interests. By eighth grade, a decorated folder with images and words can be used successfully. Include requirements that the jackdaw include the student's interests, concerns, dreams, activities, talents and relationships to others.

## Jackdaw Writing

- Middle school students enjoy writing about themselves and about their interests. Challenge them to review their jackdaw and select one of their talents. Direct them to write about their talents and how they can use those talent for help others. This activity encourages students to think about how they connect to the outside world, strengthens thinking skills and develops writing skills.

## Writing Prompts

- Writing prompts can be effective tools if used properly. Avoid trite and overused prompts like "My Summer Vacation." By the time students have reached middle school, they have already written to the topic many times and have most certainly lost interest. Try prompts that engage higher level thinking skills such as "If I could choose a new talent I would choose \_\_\_\_\_because \_\_\_\_\_." Instruct students to

complete the sentence and write about how that talent would change their life and the lives of those around them.

### **Student-Created Writing Prompts**

- Allow students to suggest writing prompts and create a master list. Students often suggest intriguing prompts that are likely to engage their peers in the writing process. Edit the list for appropriateness and use for future prompts. Placing the prompts in a jar and randomly selecting them makes writing fun, as students anticipate their prompt being chosen.

# HIGH SCHOOL



# How to Teach Creative Writing to High School Students

A relaxed environment in class helps students get creative. Teaching your high school students to be great writers is not just a matter of drilling them in formal essay writing techniques. Techniques can be learned, but if your students do not develop a passion for the written word, they will never become truly great writers. A creative writing class is the best way to show high school students why learning to write matters.

## Make the creative writing class as relaxed and informal as possible

- High school students in particular will feel more comfortable expressing themselves in an informal environment. Set up the desks in a circle. Allow your students to choose whether or not they want to share their writing. Let the students lead the discussions as much as possible.

## Pick approaches to writing that your high school students may not have tried before

- For a fiction assignment, you could have your students rewrite a favorite story from the perspective of a different character. For a poetry assignment, you could have them describe a favorite place by its smell, sound and texture.

## Show examples

- Bring in a favorite poem or an excerpt from a story to demonstrate the kind of writing you assign.

## Participate in the creative writing process

- Do the assignments yourself, and share your own writing with the students. By opening your own writing to the students, you can make them feel more comfortable sharing with you. They will also benefit from having the voice of a more seasoned writer.

## First loosen up, then tighten up

- When the class is first starting, the goal is to make your creative writing students feel comfortable expressing themselves. Once they feel comfortable, you can teach them lessons about writing tighter prose, using more creative imagery or whatever other writing techniques you may want to include.

## Tips & Warnings

- Keep the assignments flexible but not too open-ended. If students are given too little writing guidance, they will have trouble starting. If, on the other hand, they are given too formal a structure, they will not be able to loosen up and get creative.
- Although plagiarism is never acceptable, derivative writing is. Some students may need to feel comfortable with a style of writing before making it their own. Allow them to use the examples you give them as a template.

# Creative Writing Activities for High School

Creative writing can be both incredibly fun and incredibly terrifying for high school students. It is incredibly fun because it gives students a break from formal essay writing and vocabulary tests. It can be incredibly terrifying if the students are uncertain of their writing ability or creativity and imagination. However, learning to write creatively is imperative for future success in college and the job market. Here are some creative writing activities suitable for high schoolers to help get the creative juices flowing and make the process seem less threatening.

## Simple Poetry: Haiku

- Introduce high school students to haiku poetry. Haikus are three line poems consisting of a first line of five syllables, a second line of seven syllables and a final line of five syllables. The small poems feature two parts, with a turning point usually occurring in the middle of the poem. Since haiku poems are most commonly a personal reaction to an everyday occurrence, the students needn't worry about coming up with something profound.

## Craft a Story Based on a News Item

- Ask students to find a story that interests them from the news. Have them clip it from the paper, print it from the Internet or write a summary of it from television news and bring into class. The students should compose a short story that uses the news item they found as a springboard. Encourage the students to add or delete from the story as they wish, making something that is reflective of who they are.

## Use Another Story As a Springboard

- Have students read a story or novel in class or as a homework assignment. Then encourage them to write their own story using a similar theme or in the same style as the original story. This activity works particularly well when students are reading genres such as horror or science fiction. Alternatively, have students read a poem and then write their own poem in the style read. For instance, if the students are reading Shakespeare's sonnets, have them compose their own sonnets in response.

## Playwriting

- Playwriting is a great way for students to really play with both language and imagery. Challenge students to write a play using alliteration, by focusing on a word chosen at random from the dictionary, or by setting it in an unusual place. A full length play may be too daunting for young writers while a ten minute play or one act may be the perfect length. Playwriting is also great for learning to develop characters. Encourage students to think of what makes them and their friends unique and assign those characteristics to their characters.

## Exquisite Corpse

- Exquisite Corpses are a fun, simple way to introduce students to collaborative creative writing. Created by the Surrealists in the 1920s, exquisite corpses are pieces of writing created by a group of people. The first student writes a sentence or two, conceals what has been written and passes the paper to the next student, who writes another sentence and so on. There may be rules regarding the sequence or the students may be allowed to see the last thing written but nothing prior to it. The activity helps to open students up since the end product is guaranteed to be nonsensical.

# High School Creative Writing Topics

Many high-school students do not enjoy writing. Writing essays and book reports is often seen as a boring chore that cannot be escaped. Teachers can help students enjoy writing by giving them creative writing assignments. Creative writing activities help students strengthen their writing skills while helping to instill a love of writing.

## Describe a Memorable Event

- Instruct students to think of a memorable event that had a considerable impact on their lives. Have them describe the event in detail and how they felt while it was happening. Encourage them to not name the feeling but use words to paint a picture of how the experience felt. For example, sweaty palms, dry throat, tight muscles and flushed face are all acceptable descriptions.

## Alphabet Story

- Have students write a short story that is exactly 26 sentences long. Each sentence should begin with the next letter of the alphabet. Give strict guidelines -- as to the theme, character types and the title students must adhere to -- or you can allow the class to come up with the topic and characters.

## Monologue or Letter to a Loved One

- This is an opportunity for students to express their innermost feelings to someone they are unable to see. The loved one can be a deceased relative or friend, or someone who moved away and lives in another state or country; all that matters is that the person is special to the student and that the student has something important to say. Allow students to write freely, expressing whatever they would like to say to the person. Once students have written their monologue or letter, they may volunteer to share them with the class. Students should not be forced to share -- especially if the monologue or letter is personal in nature.

## Pet Story

- This creative writing activity allows students to view the world from their pet's perspective. Instruct students to write a story about a typical day at home but write what the day looks like through the eyes of their family pet. Have them include details about how the pet views the family members.



# Creative Writing Ideas for High School

Creative writing can be a fun and valuable skill for high school students to learn. If you teach creative writing and need some ideas to spruce up your curriculum, consider ideas for writing in a variety of genres to let your students flex their creative muscles.

## Short Story

- For short story writing, one of the most essential skills is character creation. Help your students learn to create characters by having them make up social networking profiles for a character. They should imagine that the protagonist of their next story is creating a page for MySpace or Facebook; what would the character include in the profile? Ask your student to include an image, quote, list of friends, list of groups the character would belong to, photos to upload or online interests. This gets your students thinking about the characters they create on a deeper level. Remind them that not everyone is totally honest online. They should make adjustments for lies their characters might tell the world so they can appear "cooler" online. Another way to boost characterization is to have students work in groups to brainstorm character traits, both physical and personality-related. Have students write each trait on an index card (four traits or more per student) and place them in a group pile. Then each member of the group should choose two physical traits and two personality traits and write a character profile paragraph about the person who would have all of those traits.

## Poetry

- Give students opportunities to read a lot of poetry and talk about the elements they see. Then ask them to write poetry that mimics the style of the poems they read. Have them put together a portfolio that combines these skills. They should include some published poetry and a written analysis of it, as well as their own original poetry. Let students use song lyrics, too. This is poetry that is a part of their daily lives, and it might be easier for them to understand than classic literary poetry.

## Film Study

- In a creative writing class, films can provide a break from writing as well as a way to study creative elements. Show fairy tales or a film such as "The Princess Bride" to discuss stock characters and plot archetypes. Have students list and explain the archetypes they find in the films, and then practice writing a fairy tale or fable of their own using some of those archetypes. Another film for creative writing class can be "Stranger than Fiction." In this movie, Emma Thompson's character quite literally interacts with the protagonist in her novel. Talk about the ways in which a character can take over the plot of a piece of writing, and how a writer needs to be able to adapt a story as it progresses.

# Creative Writing Activity for

Creativity stems from the right side of the brain, and learning to access it improves creative writing. Before children reach the age of eight, they operate from the right side of the brain, the creative, feminine side. When they draw pictures, these images appear more natural; and when they write, they "sound like they feel." Dr. Gabriele Rico describes a process to help high school students regain their natural voice, accessing the creativity hidden within what she terms the "design" mind, discovering the patterns of meaning, releasing creative inhibition and putting an end to writer's block once and for all.

## Discovering the Current Voice

- This process, taken from Rico's book, "Writing the Natural Way," will go through several stages to help students discover their "inner writer." The first process in this creative writing activity starts with four quick writing assignments. Limit students to five minutes for each of these four exercises to establish their writing style. This is not for critique but for informational purposes. For the first writing, have students write something about themselves. They may do so from any perspective desired. In the second writing, have students describe a feeling, such as fear or love, sadness or joy. In exercise three, have students write about someone for whom they care. In writing exercise four, have students write anything they can about the topic of writing.

## Review

- More than likely, some students had trouble with one or more of these writing projects. Yet once students get started, by the fourth entry, the writing will begin to flow. More than likely, students found that when writing about themselves, they experienced more trouble while writing about someone they cared for flowed. When it came to describing a feeling, more than likely, it left students feeling somewhat frustrated. By the time they completed the last entry about writing, students could chronicle their writing experience with the first three writing exercises. As a result of this exercise, students may feel very negative about their writings, but continuing on, they can grow to realize options exist to express themselves differently.

## Accessing the Design Mind

- Using a process called "clustering," Dr. Rico teaches writers how to enter the doorway to the design mind. Right brain writing follows natural patterns of meaning, uses all senses in the process, inspires creativity and releases inhibitions. To start the clustering process, take a blank piece of paper and a nucleus phrase or topic and write it in the center of the page. Place a circle around it. Without thinking about it, begin to write words that come immediately to mind, branching off the original phrase with lines, words at the ends of the lines and circles around the words. If a particular word leads down another path, branch out from that word. It doesn't matter how the page looks; this isn't about making it pretty: it's about writing what comes to mind quickly. This process takes approximately two to five minutes. Have students quit when they feel they're done. The page should look like an extended spider's web.

## Writing Naturally

- Immediately after students complete the clustering process, have them switch to their writing piece. Students will inherently feel the "internal" shift after the clustering is complete; when this happens, encourage them to write what comes out. Invariably, because of the clustering process, just writing what comes to mind will give students a better sense of what they want to say, and the writing will seem to flow. After about

five minutes, tell the students to finish up quickly. This part of the writing process only takes a few minutes.

## Results

- Because "clustering always unfolds from a center, like ripples generated by a rock thrown in a pond," Rico says, the nucleus phrase in clustering becomes the kernel or the seed that contains the potential growth of the writing. When the nucleus phrase or word is allowed to filter naturally through the student's personal experience, it generates -- almost all of the time -- writing that is expressive of the student's distinct consciousness. It allows the expression of the student's authentic voice, in essence, an expression that is natural but unique to the writer.