

Area of Study

Creativity, Personal achievement, Top up in English

Overview

This unit aims to introduce students to the process of creative writing. The emphasis is on writing as a “craft” with distinct stages. Students discover these stages leading to the creation of their own short stories, poems and short drama pieces.

Related learning

This unit seeks to build upon and reinforce knowledge and skills students have acquired in Junior Certificate English.

The skills students will practice and develop will provide a foundation for the essay question in Leaving Certificate English as well as deepening their critical responses to literature.

The unit links well with other areas such as the school magazine, drama, debating, local and global citizenship and I.C.T skills.

This unit can also link with the wider community through a library visit or a school visit by a writer.

Outline of the unit

The process employed in teaching this Transition Unit involves teaching the students about the stages of writing.

The main idea is to break the writing process into identifiable stages; Gathering material, organising material and finally editing material. Each stage requires its own methodologies. In order to provide some “scaffold” for students to work with in the initial stages, modelling of students writing on the sample texts is carried out. Here the teacher may use the plot structure of a story or the rhyming scheme of a poem to provide students with some structure to work within. This principle of providing students with a framework is important in this module. Modelling involves the use of a well known text which can provide structure for the students writing.

For the “Gathering materials” stage class discussions, brainstorming, responding to external stimuli such as photos, film clips, songs or other poems and stories are all useful in providing “springboards” for writing. I also use writing games and exercises to stimulate random associations in this stage. The students are encouraged to see their own lives and experiences as sources of material for writing. An example of this with which I have had some success is where they are asked to set a story wherever they carry out their TY work-experience, and of course their own memories are often the most productive hunting ground for material. TY trips can also be exploited to this end. I encourage students to keep a writing diary to write down observations and ideas which can later be used in their writing and I ask student to begin each class by writing a brief entry in this diary. I have found that the model texts are more useful if they have themes which the students can relate to directly: “Making choices,” “a Personal Crisis”, “Relationships”, “Rebellion” have all proven effective.

In the ‘Organising stage’ students are beginning to shape their stories and poems on paper and here exercises such as free association or writing games are also useful. The employment of writing models and frameworks is useful at this stage. I have used the plot structure of the story “Trio” by Jennifer Johnston with good results here for example, asking students to come up with their own trio of characters and a dash of suspense. Pair-work is also useful here especially in the writing of the drama sketches.

In the final stage, the ‘Editing stage’, teacher feedback, class discussion and peer review are employed to help students decide what to cut and what to keep from their first drafts

Using this approach the Unit is divided into three parts

Part 1

- Students will read three model short stories.
- Students will examine the following aspects of these short stories; Theme, Character, Setting, Mood, Tension/Conflicts.
- Students will create their own story paying particular attention to characters, settings and conflicts, emphasizing the “telling details” and use of imagery.

Part 2

- Students will be introduced to model poetry forms including Haiku, Tanka , Ballad/lyric, Sonnet
- Students will examine these forms with a focus initially on Voice and Image.
- Students will write their own poems modeling the examples provided.

Part 3

- Students will be introduced to several model drama sketches.
- Students will examine these models and identify aspects of dramatic writing with a focus on credible character and writing dialogue.

Each of the above 3 sections includes different stages which may include

A: warm up activities, brain-storming activities, word games and writing exercises aimed at stimulating ideas and springboards for writing

B: Students writing time when students will work on their own drafts and also help each other in peer editing of each other's work in draft format.

At the end of the Unit a class scrapbook of all the chosen pieces could be compiled or samples could be submitted for publication in the school magazine. Student could also consider organising an evening of readings for an invited audience.

Breakdown of the unit

This unit could be timetabled for 4 English classes for half the year (approx 34 hrs class contact time)

Visit to Dublin Writers Museum, schools visits or Library visits - 5hrs

Independent writing time for students - approx 6 hrs may include use of I.C.T facilities to enable students to type and format their work.

Aims

This transition unit aims to:

- encourage students to write their own stories, poems and dramas
- develop students' understanding of writing as a "process"
- deepen students appreciation of literature.

Learning Outcomes

On completion of this unit students should be able to:

- recognise some of the basic techniques of creative writing
- apply some of these techniques to their own writing
- create their own pieces of written work, including one story, one poem and one piece of drama
- evaluate their own writing and those of their peers.

Key skills

How evidenced

information processing	Reading, listening to and analysing a range of stories poems and drama sketches. Editing their own work.
critical and creative thinking	Analysing sample texts, reviewing their work, organising, preparing, drafting and editing their own work, and assessing their peers work.
communicating	Writing stories and poems. Classroom discussion of model texts Giving feedback on their peers work Group work in co-writing exercises
working with others	Co-writing activities. Peer reviewing of work. Class discussion of texts.
being personally effective	Students will produce their own work. They will work through several drafts of their stories and poems hopefully achieving several poems and stories as “finished” pieces. Students will learn to give and receive constructive criticism.

Learning approaches

Several methodologies are employed in this module including brainstorming activities, mind mapping, journal work and other methods for generating ideas. Independent research and independent writing can be supported by pair work for peer editing and peer reading.

A guest writer can be invited into the class to describe how they write and read some of their work or students might take a visit to a library or the Dublin Writers Museum (www.writersmuseum.com)

Assessment approaches

Throughout the unit the students will learn how to provide feedback to each other on draft pieces of work. They will also learn how to ‘critique’ their own and their peer’s written work in a sensitive and constructive manner.

Students will keep a portfolio of all their work and select their best piece for assessment. The teacher will assess these taking into consideration the student’s self-assessment.

Evaluation methods

Student evaluation questions and class discussion will facilitate the students’ evaluation of the TU. The teacher will be engaged in ongoing evaluation of the TU as it is being taught and will also use a final teacher evaluation sheet (see attached).

Resources

Imagination, paper and pen!

Dorothy Parker said profoundly that the art of writing is the art of “applying ass to seat” which I think may provide the hardest challenge at times but given that we can overcome initial resistance I am providing below a summary of stuff I found that works.

I have found Pat Boran’s book “A Portable Writing Workshop” excellent for word games and spring board ideas.

Nicky Jackowska’s “Write for life” is also full of writing exercises which I found helpful. Models for the different forms can be found in most anthologies but I have used the “Signals” short story anthology and in particular the stories “Trio” by Jennifer Johnston “WildWood” by John Banville and “A Talk in the Dark” by Derek Mahon with good results.

For the poetry section I again use Pat Boran’s book, and John Fahy’s “Time For Poetry”. The last section ‘Get Writing’ is useful. The Leaving Certificate text book “Endeavour 2” by Edel O Donovan and Fiona Kirwan has some good modeling exercises in its creative writing section. I have found the Poetry anthologies “Being alive” and “Staying Alive” full of challenging poems as are the “Rattlebag” and “Schoolbag” collections compiled by Ted Hughes and edited by Seamus Heaney (Faber and Faber).

A great book on a general approach to writing poetry is Ted Hughes book “Poetry in the Making”, (Faber and Faber); a collection of radio talks he gave for educational programmes on helping children to write poems which is very accessible.

For the drama script section “Class Acts” has some good material as does “Another 100 ideas for Drama” by Anna Scher and Charles Verrall with some good ideas for spring boards and situational drama.

In general, with regard to resources, I have to say that I have found that the best resource is the students themselves and their own life experiences and that their best writing always seems to come from this.

**Student's Evaluation of Transition Unit
to be completed at the end of the TU**

Title of transition unit _____

Please complete the following sentences

The thing I most enjoyed about this transition unit was....

The most interesting thing I learned was....

This will be useful because...

The thing I least enjoyed about this transition unit was...

The things I found most difficult were...

If this transition unit was being taught to another group of students what changes, if any, would you suggest to make it better?