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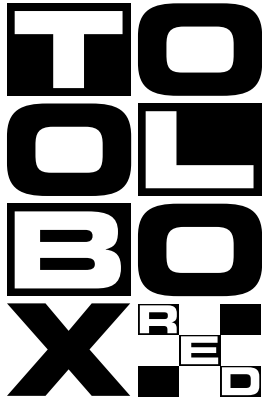
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Tool Box: Red

Ideas, Inspirations, Games

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Introduction

Hello.

Cheers for picking up Tool Box: Red. It is the first in a series of three Tool Box books which are named after colours. Look out for the other books in the Tool Box series, which will appear shortly.

I am a writer and producer who has been trying to make creative things happen behind bars for nearly 20 years, in over 40 prisons. I got into this because I am dyslexic and found out how many prisoners are dyslexic too. As Covid-19 continued to be a problem and was limiting the opportunity for me to run projects in prisons, I decided that I would help put together a series of books with interesting ideas and activities to send in for you. I asked people to contribute who I have taken into prison, that I knew because of my prison work, or worked with in some other way. They are artists, scientists, writers, comedians, curators, producers, and editors. I hope you find some of their ideas and activities fun or useful. There are some blank pages and spaces in this book, so why not have a go at filling them up?

Over the years I have encouraged people to send in writing to *Inside Time*, it is always a good place to start if you want to get something published. There is a piece in this book from Erwin James, the Editor of *Inside Time*, explaining the kind of things that they look for. I have also worked closely with National Prison Radio and am pleased to include a piece about their activities.

All the contents of this book were uniquely commissioned for it and you. You might want to try to combine some of the activities you find within it. Ideas you come up with in one piece, might give you ideas for another. There is no right way to read it. Flick through it at random or work your way from front to back or back to front. I hope you enjoy it.

Alistair Fruish



Rob Gee qualified as a psychiatric nurse in 1994 and worked for twelve years in mental health units around the UK and Australia before becoming a stand-up poet. He's performed at a hundred fringe festivals across the world and won over twenty awards for his solo shows. Rob is patron of Leicestershire Action for Mental Health Project (LAMP) and lead artist for the Comedy Asylum: comedy shows written and performed by people receiving mental health treatment. He returned to nursing during the pandemic.

What If...

by Rob Gee

This is the freestyle game where anything can happen. It works just as well as a verbal exercise: you simply make up rhyming couplets, every line starting with the words “What if”.

For the written version, either write in this book or get a sheet of paper. Write “What if” repeatedly down the left side of the page...

What if
What if
What if
What if
What if
What if
What if
What if
What if
What if

Then fill them all in with rhyming couplets. Forget quality, go for quantity – fill the sheet of paper! For example:

What if people laughed when they were cross?
What if my head sprouted purple moss?
What if people couldn't talk without crying?
What if we had signs that lit up when we were lying?
What if my legs were trees?
What if bananas grew out my knees?
What if no one's gun was loaded?
What if my head exploded?
What if you could sunbathe in a blizzard?
What if we died and came back as lizards?

If you're feeling particularly bold, go for the triplets:

What if people laughed when they were cross?

What if my head sprouted purple moss?

What if everyone dined out on dental floss?

What if a chicken became a banana?

What if my dog turned into a piranha?

What if vodka only made me calmer?

What if I was the living dead?

What if I didn't have a head?

What if there was an octopus in my bed?

Remember, you're after quantity, not quality. The more "what ifs" you can come up with, the better.

Any piece of writing is only as good as your idea. If you've got a great idea, all you have to do is communicate it, and it'll work. When we have writer's block, it doesn't mean we've forgotten how to write. It just means we haven't had the idea that tickles our pickle.

The sheet of "what ifs" you've written isn't just a poem (although it is a poem). Each line is also an idea.

Look at all your "what ifs". Imagine each line is a title. Pick your favourite and write about it. You can delete the words "what if", if you like.

So, for example, looking at the previous page, my favourite "what if" might be: "What if my head exploded." I could then write a poem called "The Day My Head Exploded" all about my head getting bigger and bigger until one day it eventually goes pop; and now I'm trying to grow a new head.

"What if" is a great way of generating ideas that you would never otherwise think of!



Rowan Mackenzie is Artistic Director of Shakespeare UnBard and facilitates a number of theatre companies for those with experience of the criminal justice system (both inside and outside the walls of prison): The Gallowfield Players, Emergency Shakespeare and Beyond the Walls. These are the first permanent theatre companies of their kind in the UK; entirely collaborated between Rowan and the participants, with all decisions made democratically as they work together to edit and perform full-length Shakespeare productions. Actors from The Gallowfield Players and Emergency Shakespeare have also contributed to this piece through providing stunning illustrations. Rowan is described by one of the actors she works with as “a force of nature who saves lives, rebuilds lives, sees beyond the labels and creates hope”.



Shakespeare UnBard logo

Design by: Graham, *The Gallowfield Players*

Masks

by Rowan MacKenzie

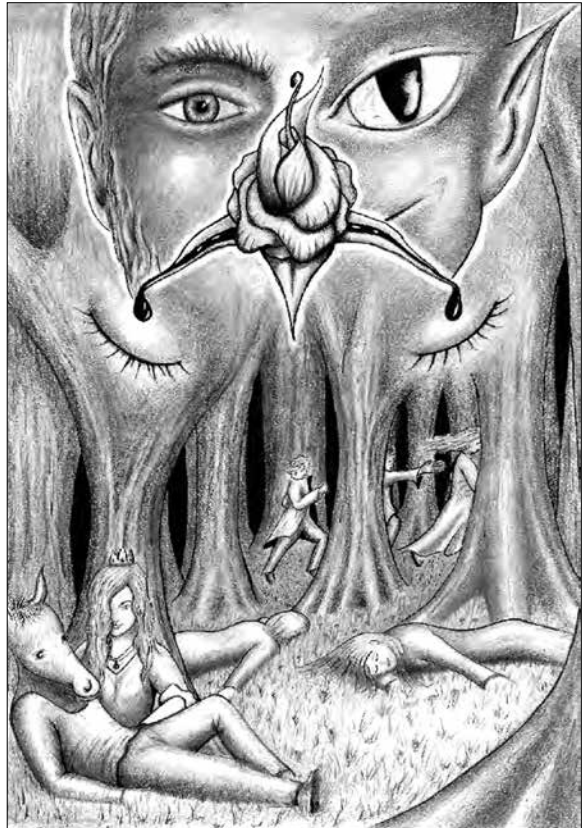
Shakespeare wrote some of the most famous plays in the world. You will have probably heard of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*. These activities are all based around Shakespeare and masks.

Masks have been part of life as far back as 7,000 BC (so at least 9,000 years ago) and were first used for rituals and religious ceremonies. Nowadays, they are often used in theatre, circus shows and children's dressing up play.

Shakespeare had lots of people who wear masks in his plays –

Romeo and Juliet meet at a masquerade ball (big party) where Romeo's mask hides the fact that he is from a household that hates the household that is holding the party (gangs are a big part of this play).

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the magic fairies (more like sprites than fairies as we think of them today – the fairies could be quite mean) wear masks. There is a masquerade ball to celebrate the wedding that takes place at the end.



A Midsummer Night's Dream
Illustration: Stuart, *Emergency Shakespeare*

When King Lear is angry with Kent and tells him to leave, Kent dresses in disguise so he can carry on working for Lear. He stays with him all the way through the play in disguise.



The Tempest
Illustration: Mikey, *The Gallowfield Players*

Think of all the kinds of masks you can.

Why do people wear disguises?



Portia and Shylock, *The Merchant of Venice*
Illustration: Mikey, *The Gallowfield Players*

Portia dresses as a male lawyer in *The Merchant of Venice* so she can save Antonio from Shylock taking his pound of flesh.

The Tempest has a masked dance where the gods appear in a big, magical display.

Draw your own mask – choose a theme and draw/colour in the outline below – make it as detailed or as simple as you like.



At Masque balls people often wear masks to cover their eyes only. These always put me in mind of super-heroes like Batman and Superman. Design your own superhero character –

- What will they be called?
- What will their superpowers be?
- What will they look like?
- What will be on their mask?

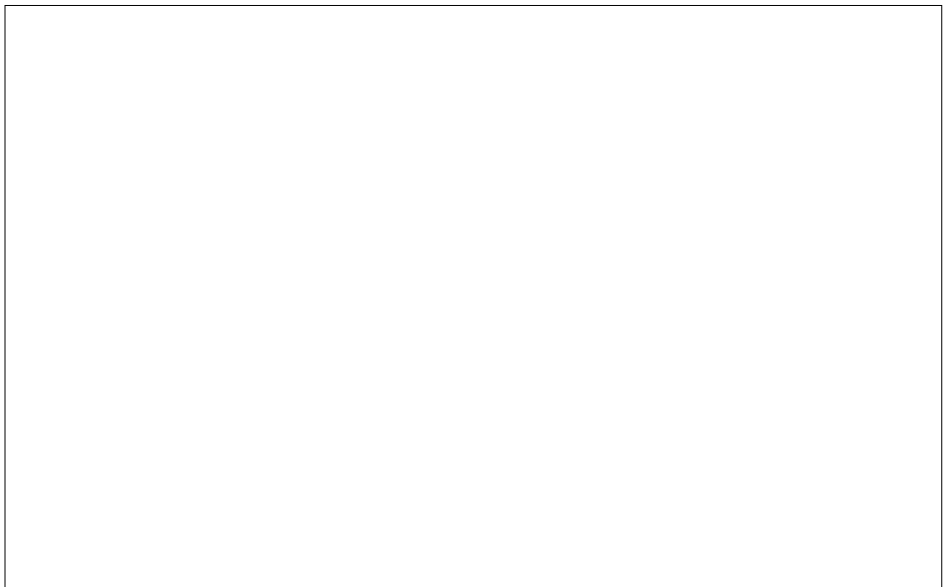
SUPERHERO NAME:

SUPERPOWERS:

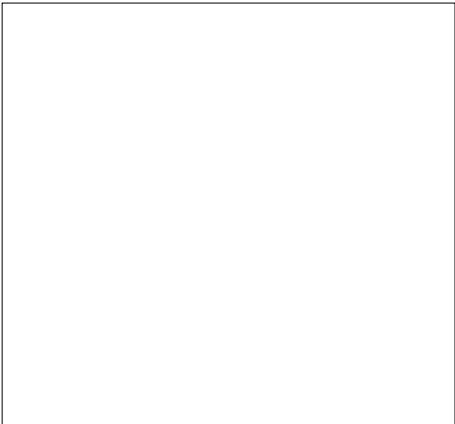
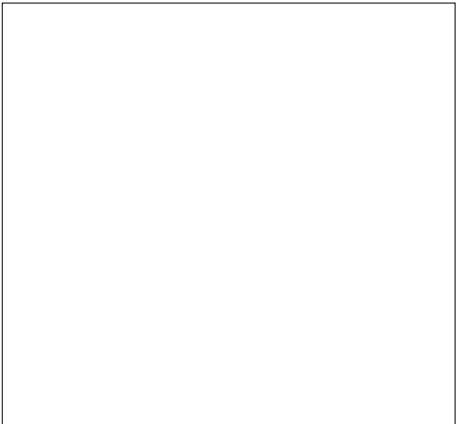
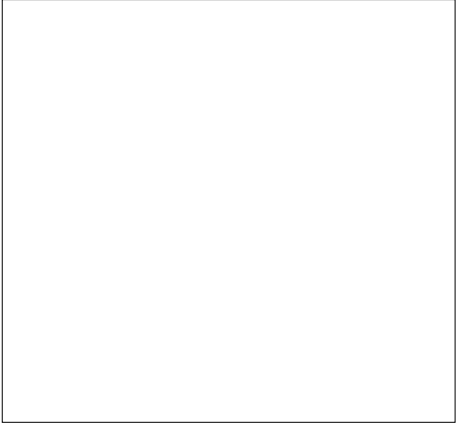
MASK:



IMAGE:



Draw a comic strip of what your superhero does.

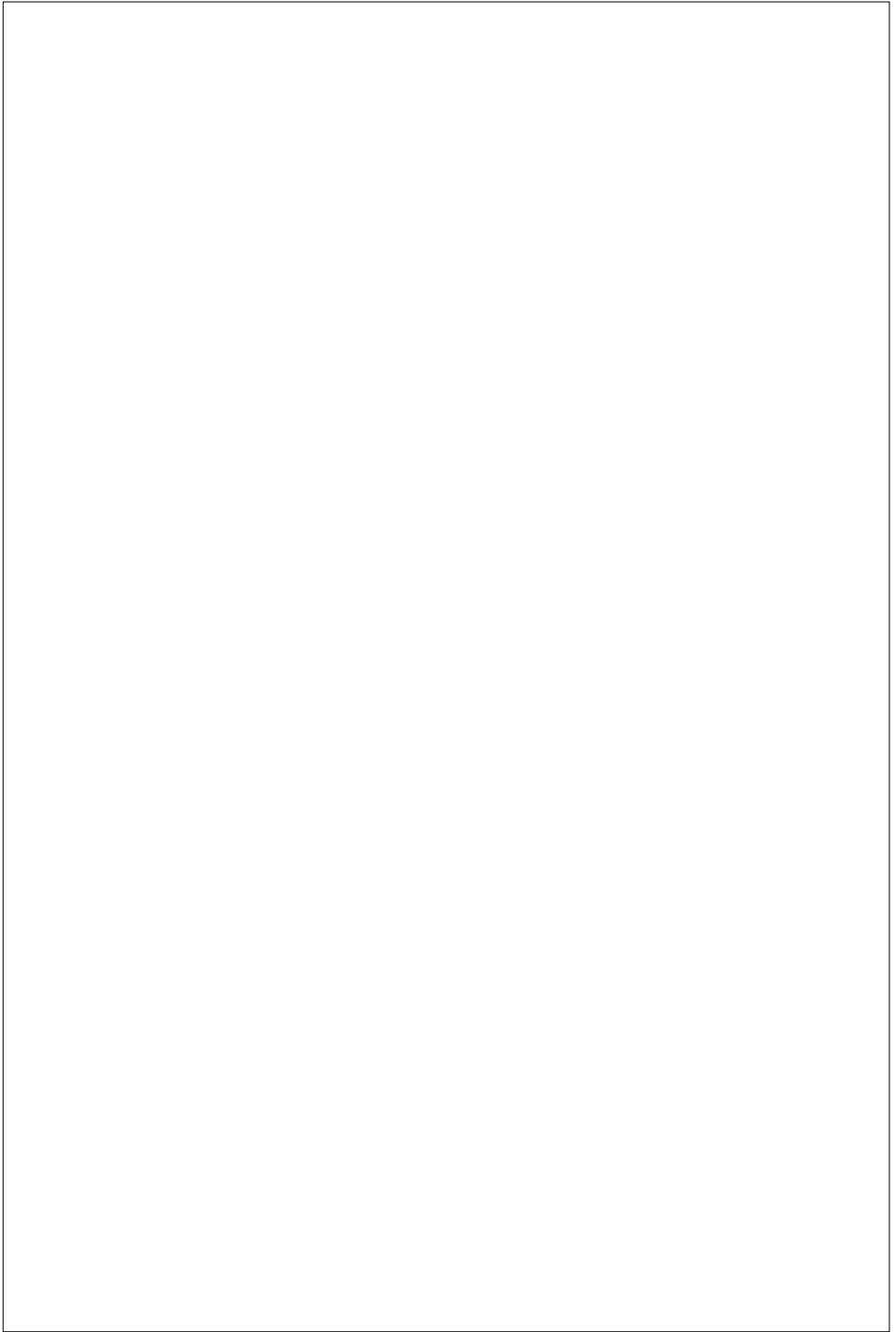


Masks are one way of disguising yourself. What other ways can someone disguise themselves?



Have a go at writing a short story about someone who disguises themselves... Is your person in the story a hero or a villain? Why are they dressing as someone else? What happens when they are in disguise? Do they reveal who they really are?







Geoff Thompson is a BAFTA-winning screenwriter. As the author of fifty books, he has appeared on the Sunday Times bestseller list several times. Extracts from his first book, *Watch My Back*, have been adapted into a stage play, a BAFTA-nominated short film, and a BIFA-nominated feature film.

Geoff has penned several multi-award-winning films and stage plays for luminaries such as Ray Winstone, Paddy Considine, Orlando Bloom, Maxine Peake, Anne Reid, Alison Steadman, and James Cosmo.

Geoff's musical for theatre *We'll Live and Die in These Towns* was staged at the Belgrade Theatre Coventry in 2018 to great acclaim. He is also one of the world's highest ranking (8th dan) martial artists. *Black Belt* magazine (USA) named him "the most influential martial artist in the world since Bruce Lee".

The Fear Pyramid

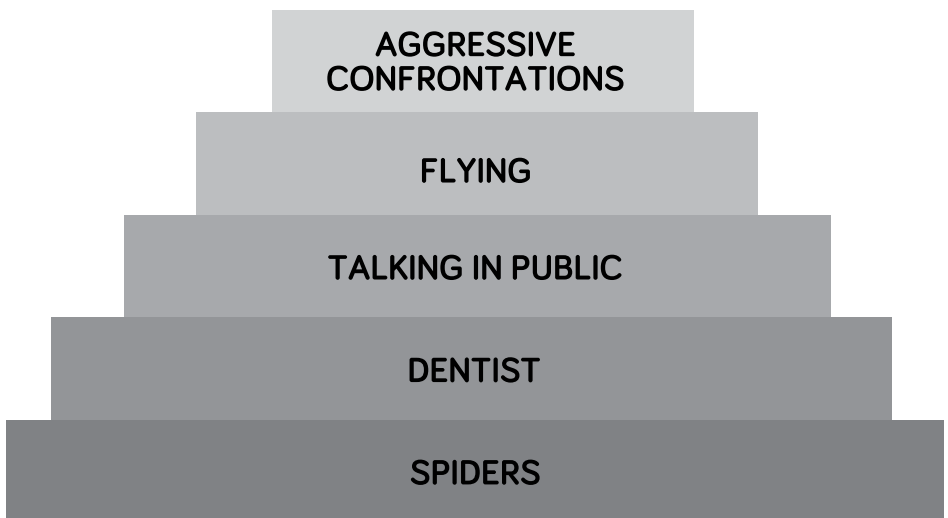
by Geoff Thompson

Everything we want to achieve in life is possible: success is available for everyone, of this I am certain, but not all of us reach hard enough for it because it lives just beyond the line of fear; a terror barrier that few people dare to cross.

I realised this truth early on: I wanted to be a professional martial arts teacher, but I was too afraid to try. I desperately wanted to write books, but the very idea of standing out from my class, 'being noticed' terrified me. I wanted to escape menial employment, the oil and the shit and the factory porn, but I didn't know where to start, and my lack of knowing made me feel thick; it made me feel dirty and stupid and unworthy. In my youth I was afraid of everything, especially knowledge. Some days – when the darkness cornered me – I was afraid of being alive.

I'd like to share with you a universal system that I developed to help me overcome these fears and enjoy the kind of free life I live today.

The fear pyramid is a technique I was divinely gifted in my early twenties (some forty years ago), and I have been using it successfully ever since.



When I say it's "universal", I mean it in the broadest and most literal sense: this gift can be used anywhere, whether you are working in a factory, sitting in a Bond Street office, or cell-sharing for 23 hours a day at Her Majesty's pleasure. Wherever you are, these principles will work for you... but it is important that you don't take my word for this: you have to be your own proof.

All you need to do for now is trust me enough to test the pyramid for yourself: proof will be the reward for all your labour.

But why should you trust me? (I hear you ask.)

Because I am like many of you. I was brought up as a working-class kid in Coventry, England, I was poorly educated, I learned just enough to secure employment in the factories sweeping floors: menial labour for fifty hours of my week, moving shit for fifty years of my life just to get by, just to get on, just to get me the promise of a gold retirement watch at 65.

I suffered from depression for most of my early life. Later (in a bid to overcome my fear of violence) I spent a decade working as a nightclub doorman: 'the bouncer'. In my time on the doors, I was up for three section 18s (wounding with intent), that were either thrown out at police station level, or dismissed by the Crown Prosecution Service. That I didn't kill anyone was pure luck. That I avoided several heavy custodials (and I am not living in a prison cell right now) can only be put down to divine providence.

I am very ordinary, like all of you.

I am *extraordinary*, just like all of you.

I was gifted the fear pyramid in the middle of a galling depression in my early twenties. These attacks of the 'black dog' saw me either smashing up my house in spills of uncontrollable rage, or crying up the curtains, too scared to get out of bed, and too frightened to leave the house.

This life-changing idea fell into my mind like a coin falling through water: a quite inner voice spoke: *write down all the things you are afraid of, and confront them, one by one.*

I'd tried to run away from my fears: they got fat on my running.

I tasted Prozac, but it left me wandering through my world like cast member of *The Walking Dead*.

I dabbled with drink and sex: the fix they promised was an ugly lie, it

offered a short-lived pleasure, that was followed by a misery that was lower than the third button on a snake's waistcoat.

I had tried all these 'fixes', but they fed the beast of my anxiety, so I thought, why not?

This one decision yanked me out of depression, it placed a bridle and rein on my fear, it allowed me to leave the factories and break out of my working-class conditioning: in short, climbing the fear pyramid enabled me to experience my fullest potential.

The concept is simple enough: draw a pyramid on a piece of paper. On each step of the pyramid write down one of your fears, working from what you least fear on the bottom step, right up to your worst fear on the top step (see illustration).

My biggest fear when I was younger was actually admitting that I was afraid. I felt as though I had somehow failed as a human being because I experienced that drip-drip of adrenalin every time I faced uncertainty, so I would lie and say, "I'm not afraid of it...I just don't want to do it." This was the kind of self-deception that kept me in a small unhappy marriage, a small job, living a poor excuse for a small life.

Just writing down my fears was the first fear overcome right there.

I was no longer afraid to tell people that I was afraid. I felt a heady rush the moment I wrote the words on the first step of my pyramid.

I was afraid, but I was no longer afraid to admit I was afraid.

The rush I felt was power: I discovered that every one of my fears contained a pocket of vital energy that I could not access until I'd broken the fear. When the fear was defeated, the imprisoned energy was released, and it surged through me like rocket fuel. That injection of power gave me the confidence and the courage and the belief and the technique to take on the next fear, and overcoming that gave me more power, extra resources, and on it went until the kid that was afraid of spiders in the bath, was suddenly facing down bona fide monsters on night club doors and being paid four times the day rate of skilled workers for my effort.

Picking a spider out of the bath and working as a bouncer might seem completely unrelated, but they are only separated by degree; they may each have their own individual step, but they share the same pyramid. If I could muster the courage to overcome even one small fear, then it stood

to reason that I could develop the courage to stand before every fear, even my greatest fear.

As the sword master Miyomato Musashi said: “If you can master one thing, you can master all things.”

Initially you may feel embarrassed to admit some of your fears because they seem a little silly now that they are written in ink. Remember two things: 1) just exposing the fear to the light of a page, bleeds it of its power 2) embarrassment is itself a fear – bang that on the pyramid too.

My initial fears were workaday things like spiders, going to the dentist, competing in a karate contest etc. But as I started to climb the pyramid and remove the more obvious anxieties, other more subtle and damaging terrors started to present themselves: I was afraid of standing up to my mum (even though I was a grown man). I was afraid of my wife, if she said, “Jump” I'd say, “Can I just finish the hoovering first?”

I was afraid of middle-class professionals. Where I came from these were the doctors who determined our health, the employers who decided if we got to work or not, they were the policeman and the law enforcers who held our liberty in the palm of their hands. I realised much later that all of these fears were nonsense, they were just concepts (ideas that I blindly believed) that I had never thought to challenge.

I understand now, post pyramid, that there is not a force on this spinning planet that can stop you from being free if you are prepared to challenge your own beliefs and shatter those unfounded perceptions.

The truth (I discovered) is equally available to everyone, no matter where you come from.

But, at the time, I did believe in limitation, and for a long time these unfounded beliefs were the shackles and chains that kept me imprisoned in a tiny, fearful life.

I added these new fears to the pyramid as they presented themselves and, one by one, I overcame them. Some fell quickly and easily, others I had to confront several times before they released their grip on me.

The Technique.

This is simple enough in principle, all you need to do is continually confront the fear in question until it dissolves. This takes courage. Prepare to be

uncomfortable. The more tension you can cope with, the more likely you are to succeed.

This process is called *desensitisation*: we keep facing our fear and the associated feelings of adrenaline, until we become familiar with them, until they no longer disturb or control us. When I was afraid of spiders, for example, I simply found a spider, and kept picking it up and putting it down again until I no longer felt any revulsion. This took several attempts. With the fear of dentists, I booked myself an appointment at the local clinic and the fear was wiped out in one session. Sometimes all I had to do was write the fear down, and it disappeared into the ink as soon as it hit the page, without any further effort from me. If the fear felt too overwhelming, I would close my eyes and imagine myself successfully confronting the fear again and again.

The unconscious mind does not know the difference between a real experience and a strongly imagined one. The act of visualising myself facing down a fear, lessened its impact when I actually came to do it for real.

I overcame some of my fears just with imagination alone.

You can go through this process as slowly or as quickly as you like, there is no time limit.

Flooding.

Alternatively, you could practice ‘flooding’: you literally flood your mind/life with the object of your fear until it dissolves. I managed to remove one of my greatest fears with flooding. I was afraid of public speaking, so I decided to do as many talks as I could in fast succession: I travelled to 32 cities with a book I was promoting and held over sixty public talks. I managed to master my fear, through full immersion into it.

My daughter Lisa, who shared the same fear actually took classes in public speaking, where she was able to practice, practice, practice until her fear was managed.

I find too that it is a good idea to educate yourself and learn as much as you possibly can about your particular phobia; **knowledge dispels fear**, information helps to shrink a three-dimensional fear-monster into a silly cartoon. Why not make your cell your own personal university: some

of the foremost experts in the world in various subjects have done their learning from the confines of a prison cell. Do you know how many people would absolutely love to be able to dedicate their every hour to bettering themselves with dedicated study? Some of you lovely people out there in prison land will currently have 23 hours a day of cell-time available to you, why not use it.

It is also good to talk to people or read about people (especially people who you associate as being like you) who have overcome the fear that you are currently wrestling with. These people will act as 'first proof', they will show you that what you are aiming for is possible.

Guinea Pig A.

Be curious about your fear. The brain has a strange quirk, in that it cannot process curiosity and fear at the same time, so if you become massively curious, your fear will be proportionately diminished. You can become Guinea Pig A in your own life. In other words: experiment on yourself; study yourself; look at the feelings that come up when you are afraid; see what happens when you observe them, see how they react when you lean into the sharp edges instead of turning away; see how they shift when you call them out instead of covering in their shadow.

Become a prison mystic.

This is what monks and mystics do, they put themselves into a small room (a monk's quarters is actually called a *cell*) and dedicate their whole lives to self-study.

This is good for you, it is also good for your friends, it is good for your children *it serves them*, it is good for the whole world, because when you become fear-pioneers and go through the door marked terror, when you become more courageous and adventurous it automatically allows others to do the same.

Even if you feel physically separated from the rest of the world by the bars and walls of your cell, you can still affect the people of the world (especially your own people) in a powerful and positive way, simply by bettering yourself.

When we succeed, we become the example of what is possible.

This is what I have done and continue to do, because once I reached

the top of my pyramid of fears, I was automatically at the bottom of another pyramid, a new mountain calling to be scaled, a whole other set of challenges looking to be overcome.

I found this exciting.

Not because I discovered new fears to face, rather, I was inspired because I knew that every single fear contained a pocket of golden energy, and when I mastered that fear, the booty was mine to keep.

One thing I have learned and one thing I know is this: I am absolutely, definitely and without question no different from you or from anyone else: if I can do this, you can do this too.

Once we have removed the fear, we not only become empowered by the newly released energy, but we are also able to gain access to all the opportunities that exist beyond that wall of terror. When I overcame my fear of public speaking, I was able to suddenly earn a lot of money doing talks about my life. When I overcame my fear of flying, I was able to visit other countries and learn from different cultures: it expanded me. When I overcame my fear of becoming a writer, I was able to write books and films and stage plays (I even wrote a musical). It was exhilarating. Ultimately, I was able to take a hammer to my naïve belief that ‘people like me’ (working-class people) could not be successful. Most of all, by becoming Guinea Pig A in my own life, I was able to set myself free.

They say that if you love people, you should set them free... but before you can set them free, you need to set yourself free.

Conclusion.

I am greatly inspired by the Jewish mystic Hillel who asked me once in a reading meditation, “If not you then who, if not now then when?”

If I may, let me ask the same questions: why not you? Why not now?



Alan Moore hails from a working-class area of Northampton. He is a writer, performer, recording artist, activist, and magician. He was expelled from school, and prevented from joining any others, after having been accused of dealing drugs. This had a huge impact on his life. Ultimately, he overcame these setbacks becoming the creator of some of the most influential books in comics history including *From Hell* (1991) with Eddie Campbell and *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* with Kevin O'Neill. His novels include *Voice of the Fire* (1996) and his epic *Jerusalem* (2016).

Fun With Maths and Magic

by Alan Moore

Since suddenly telling everybody that I was now a proper spell-casting magician – it was while celebrating my fortieth birthday at a local biker pub, if that helps – I've had a lot of people ask, understandably, if I can do a magic trick for them. I always tell them that no, I can't. I mean, if I do magic, then that isn't a trick. And if I do a trick, then that isn't magic.

Now, if they'd asked me if I could do a trick that looks like magic, it would have been a different story, because I can do loads of them.

My favourite trick is one used by the stage-performing 'mind-readers' of the 1920s and 1930s. As long as you pull it on somebody who can manage basic addition and subtraction with three-figure numbers, or who owns a calculator, it's infallible. Pull it on somebody who can't manage this and you'll both end up looking like idiots, so be warned.

What the old stage performers would do is have a little blackboard, turned so the audience couldn't see it, on which they'd already written the number **1089**. What I do, just for the extra flourish, is write this number on a scrap of paper or a beer mat or something. Then you leave it around your room, face down, somewhere where it's in plain view all the time but where nobody is going to pay it any attention. You do all this before you pull your trick, ; before the person you're pulling it on enters the room.

The trick works like this: first you ask your victim or audience member to come up with a three-digit number without telling you what it is. The only rule is that they can't use zero as a digit, and the first and third digits of the number have to differ by at least two. So, for example, 247 would work, but 243 or 241 wouldn't. In order to demonstrate the trick, I'm going to stick with 247 as our randomly -chosen example.

The first thing you ask your victim to do is to reverse the number that he or she has come up with. So, reversing 247 gives us the number 742. You next ask them to take the smaller number – in our case 247 – away from the larger number, 742. This, in our example, gives us the number 495.

Next, you tell them to now reverse this new number, which in our example gives us the number 594. Finally, you tell them to add the last

two numbers – 495 and 594 – together. Then, before they can tell you the answer, you ask them to pick up the face-down beer mat or scrap of paper on which you'd written **1089**, and turn it over. You then ask if this is their answer, and watch their jaws drop in bewilderment – unless they've got the answer wrong, in which case, as pointed out above, you're both going to look pretty stupid.

The point is that any three-digit number of the kind described, if put through the sequence of reversals, additions and subtractions outlined above, will end up as the number **1089**. Try it yourself with a number that you've chosen if you have any doubts. The sequence of reversals etc. is what is called an algorithm, and is the same mathematical process that decides what other goods to advertise to you if you've bought something on the internet, or that decides to put an advert for British Airways next to an online news feature about an air-crash that has left hundreds dead. In short, most algorithms are there to sell you something, and are pains in the arse. But with this one, you can have a bit of fun, and convince your friends that you have supernatural powers into the bargain. It's a win-win situation, and a lot easier than summoning demons. Enjoy



Julian Earwalker is a freelance writer and magazine journalist. He was a prison writer in residence for ten years and recently joined The Reader charity to run shared reading in prison.

Follow Your Nose...

by Julian Earwaker

“All our knowledge begins with the senses...” Immanuel Kant

Far back in history, the philosopher Aristotle (384-322BC) lists the five main human senses. But modern scientists recognise at least nine senses (and no, that doesn't include a sense of direction or common sense!). Some classify 21 senses, including the senses of heat, pain and balance. One expert lists an incredible 53 human senses (including a sense of colour). If that seems too many, if one is enough for now, well, perhaps just follow your nose...

All good writing uses the human senses. What we see, hear, smell, taste, touch and, sometimes, simply sense (intuition and instinctive awareness) is an important part of how we experience life – and a vital part of our storytelling.

Our senses are often linked to memories. Try the following two-minute exercise using the sense of smell:

DRAW a line down the middle of a piece of paper.

Label the left side GOOD and the right side BAD.

Generally, we describe smells as 'good' (flowers, perfume, tasty food) or 'bad' (sewage, bad breath, vehicle exhaust). Write your own list of smells, placing them in either the 'good' or 'bad' smell column.

Think about why you have placed them there. Did you have difficulty choosing a 'good' or 'bad' label for any of them? Maybe your selection is influenced by memories...

Take a new piece of paper and WRITE down a list of smells that you associate with strong memories.

What sort of memories come with the smells you have listed? Do your smells conjure up images of people and places? Do your other senses start to get involved (sound, taste, touch)?

Try completing the following lines:

The smell of _____ is like _____

The smell of _____ reminds me of _____

When I smell _____ I think of _____

I always smelled _____ when I went to _____

_____ smells of _____

The smell of _____ is _____

Writers like to join senses and memories to help readers understand the lives of characters in their stories. But it's not always easy to describe particular smells...

Did you know? English speakers in particular often describe smells by explaining which other things they smell like. For example, people may say that a smell is like "chocolate" or "grass" or "perfume". One recent study asked people to identify 24 everyday smells, and most got only half or less of the answers right.

How good are you at explaining and describing smells? Why not try a five-minute exercise...

READ the following sentence:

"Leon could smell his own sour sweat, could feel his T-shirt sticking under his arms..."

Try to picture the character, Leon, and where he might be...

Why is Leon sweating? Is he scared or nervous? Fearing discovery? Just come out of the gym? Has he been caught doing something he shouldn't? Is he waiting in the hot sunshine for someone? Meeting his father for the first time ever? Just finished a work shift in a pizza kitchen? You decide...

WRITE a short scene (or poem if you prefer) using one or more of your 'memory' smells from above. Try to link your smell(s) to an imaginary place and person/people.

Think about why the smell is important to your scene. What does it tell the reader? How do people (characters) in your scene react to the smell(s)? What memories or feelings does (do) the smell(s) bring for them? And don't forget to include other senses in your piece of writing too...



Oliver Senton is an actor and a teacher of acting. He likes to help people discover what they didn't know they could do. He has been lucky enough to act in 50-hour-long shows, improvised musicals, shows on water and many other adventures. He's appeared in the West End with the RSC and in *Mamma Mia!* and on TV in *EastEnders*, *Call the Midwife*, *Casualty*, *Doctors* and stuff like that. His last acting work before Covid arrived was recording new radio plays for National Prison Radio in HMP Leicester.

Storyheads

by Oliver Senton

Our heads are full of stories. I don't mean stuff that actually happened to us – and I don't mean changing the facts about the stuff that happened to us! I mean our imaginations. Fantasy isn't outside us: it's part of us.

Creating stories is an adventure. Anyone can do it, and no-one can take it away from us.

Try this: make a sentence beginning:

“Once there was...”

For example:

Once there was a little boy/giant wolf/car salesman/ugly giant/homeless woman.

Once there was a field where nothing ever grew. Once there was a deserted house.

That sentence is the beginning of your story.

What does a normal day look like when this story begins? Your second sentence starts:

“And every day...”

Take that deserted field, for example; “Once there was a deserted field. And every day the farmer would water it, hoping something would grow.”

Or: “Once there was a deserted house. And every day it would sigh and creak because it felt so lonely.”

Okay, something's gotta change now if we want to make this an interesting story. The third sentence starts:

“Until one day...”

For example:

Every day the farmer would water it, hoping something would grow. Until one day he saw that a strange plant had appeared in one corner of the field.

And now the story can unfold. Every sentence after this (until the last one) starts:

“And because of that...”

Each part of the story makes the next one happen.

For example:

“And because of that, the farmer gave all of his time to this new plant. And because of that, he forgot all about the rest of his farm. And because of that, he lost everything. And because of that, he became an expert in rare weeds to make money. And because of that, the United Nations asked him to solve the world's farming problems.”

It's all connected, you see? A not-so-good example might be: “And because of this unusual plant, the farmer went on holiday. And because of that, his wife left him for his brother. And because of that, Bill Gates bought his farm...”

Hang on, what? Are any of those things connected? Just ask yourself, when you're creating that next sentence: “What would happen because that last thing happened?”

And then, after maybe six or seven “...and because of that's” (there's no real rule here, stories have their own life, and they'll be whatever length they want to be!), you'll come to a natural end.

Your last sentence starts:

“Until in the end...”

As in, “Until in the end, he was earning more money than ever, and the unusual plant had become his best friend.” Okay, I admit, I'm putting this story together as I write this, but that's the point! Anyone can make great, fun stories with a bit of structure!

And as you can see from the words in bold, it's simple:

Once there was...

And every day...

Until one day...

And because of that... (as many as you want of these!)

Until in the end...

Making things up means you've made something.

Sometimes we make meals, sometimes we make furniture.

You're gonna make stories.

Have fun.



Testament is a rapper, writer and world record-holding beatboxer. He has performed for BBC 1xtra, ITV and BBC Two as well as supported rappers Pharoah Monch, George the Poet, Mos Def, Talib Kweli, and MF Doom. Testament has also collaborated with MOBO winners Soweto Kinch, Grammy Winner Corinne Bailey Rae, US legend J-Live and the godfather of Hip-Hop himself, DJ Koolherc. His poems and essays often involve rap and his play *Black Men Walking* has been nominated for Best Play UK Theatre Awards and Best New Play at The Writer Guild Awards in 2018.

Writing Rap Punchlines

by Testament

I've been blessed to teach rap for both BBC 1xtra and the MOBO Awards outreach programmes. I always believe in pushing ourselves so we can make our bars as great as art. Or maybe I should spell it A-R-T. (Like it's Advanced Rap Technique.)

So, questions:

What makes a good rap line?

How do you come up with lines that will make people react?

Or bars that they'll remember?

Obviously there are lots of ways of writing a dope line and everyone will have different lines that are their favourites. You may have a line that you've heard from your favourite rapper that has stuck with you. In the rap game we call them "punchlines".

Sometimes a rap "punchline" can be funny (just like a punchline to a joke), or clever, or deep, or sometimes it just sounds cool.

Here are examples of some the techniques successful rappers have used (and perhaps you can see how you can apply it to your own bars):

Similes

"Rock the house like rock 'n' roll. More soul than a sock with a hole" – MF Doom, *Rhinestone Cowboy*.

Rappers love similes. And use them all the time. A simile is when you compare something to something else. Revered US rapper MF Doom uses two similes back-to-back here. Usually you use the words "like" or "as" or sometimes "more than". Here MF Doom rocks the house like what? – like Rock 'n' roll. But he also has more soul than what? – a sock with a hole. This is a kinda funny line too – cos he's using the word "soul" with a double

meaning, cos it sounds like two different types of “soul”. “Sole” like the bottom of your foot AND “soul” like deep emotion. Which brings us to the other rapper’s favourite...

Play On Words (or Pun)

“We go back further than Craig David’s hairline.” – Ghetts, *Real Friends*.

When words have a double meaning. Here Grime icon, Ghetts, plays with the meanings of “go back”, and makes his simile super funny by also dissing a pop singer’s change in haircut too.

“I’ll run your brain around the block, to jog your memory.” – Eminem, *313*.

Eminem takes the saying “jog your memory” and flips it. This comes from Eminem’s first album before he got signed by Dr Dre.

Flow

“More serious than Vietnam, the atom bomb, Saddam and Minister Farrakahn.” – Lauryn Hill, *War in the Mind*.

Legend Lauryn Hill describes how serious something is with a crazy list of similes. She lists various things from history like the Vietnam war and Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, all to make her point. And they rhymes all flow together quickly one after the other. Its sounds fire!

Real Life Experience

“Wonder why Christmas missed us?” – Biggie, *Juicy*.

Biggie’s going deep here and talking about hard times during his childhood. The flow is sick when he rhymes both parts of “Chris-tmas” and “Missed us.” But its mad how he describes how his family couldn’t afford to celebrate Christmas, and all the kids being sad about it in just one bar!



Using your personal experience in your bars can be really powerful. Sometimes this is because people feel like they are learning about someone else's life, and at other times it reminds us that we are no alone in our pain. Biggie's a storytelling master on the beat – there's a reason there's films about him, innit?

Metaphor

“Real life, my movie don't come with actors.” – Lil Durk, *Action*.

The Drill and Trap American rap star Lil Durk swags out with this line. A metaphor turns one thing into something else. Here Lil Durk's life becomes a Hollywood movie and the fakes and liars become “actors”.

Juxtaposition

“You’re tryna win a high score on Flappy Bird, meanwhile I’m trying to win a Grammy.” – Lady Leshurr, *Queen’s Speech 2*.

Juxtaposition is when you highlight the difference between one thing and another. Like ‘I’m a Lexus you’re like a tricycle.’ Midlands MC Lady Leshurr disses her haters here showing how basic they are in their thoughts, compared with her ambition and work rate.

Deep Bars

“The Governments sending kids to sleep with no dreams.” – Wretch 32, *Fire in the Booth Part 3*.

Wretch here is criticising the government, but also uses the idea of ‘having a dream’ or a goal for your life, uses a play on words to make the point. Using your verses to point out facts about the world, or some words of wisdom that we need to remember, takes rhymes to another level and can inspire those who hear it.

All these techniques are great, and you may find others that work for you or even combine techniques to elevate your lyrical style.

Do it!

1. Pick one of the techniques.
(If it’s tough, start with Juxtaposition or Simile.)
2. Think of something you’d like to say.
Example: *I’m focussed*.
3. Then use the technique to upgrade your line.

Simile Example: *I got more focus than a Ford*.

Juxtaposition Example: *While you were getting distracted. I got focussed*.

4. Do it a bunch of times! And turn it into a verse that rhymes!

When you have written some of your own punchlines you can put them in your verses.

Most rappers put them at the end of section in the verse. For example Jay-Z usually has one every four lines.

Next Levels

Find the lines that stand out to you from your favourite rapper. Write out their lyrics and try and work out why they work.

Where in the verse do they put their punchlines?

Figure out what techniques and tricks they use in their punchlines – and see if you can use them in your own lyrics.



Arne Richards is a composer, performer and music therapist. With his group The Oxford Concert Party he has directed concerts and music workshops in many prisons throughout the UK and Ireland for over thirty years.

The Soundtrack of Your Life

by Arne Richards

The format for this idea is taken from a well-known BBC radio programme called *Desert Island Discs*.

The basic idea is this. You are about to become a castaway on a desert island. You have a choice of eight tracks of music to take with you. Each piece of music or song will represent an important event or milestone in your life.

What would you choose and why?

This could be used as a simple writing exercise or as a more detailed project. If you have access to your music, you could plan for and play each track and note down all the memories attached to them and how the music makes you feel. You could also share and compare your programme with another person.

Another way to start might be to note down important events in your life as a timeline. Did certain songs or music help you through some difficult times? Did certain songs or music celebrate some times in your life?

After you have chosen the tracks and the memories which go with them, perhaps you can imagine presenting them as a talk to other people or even for a radio programme.

If you could choose a luxury item to make life more bearable on the island, what would it be? It could be anything from a good bed to an endless supply of your favourite chocolates – it's up to you!

In addition to your luxury item and eight tracks, you can also choose a book or an audio book and a film. What would they be and why?

Have fun with this – you can be as creative as you like – I have used this idea with many groups and individuals. It can give you great insights into many aspects of your life both in the past and going forward.



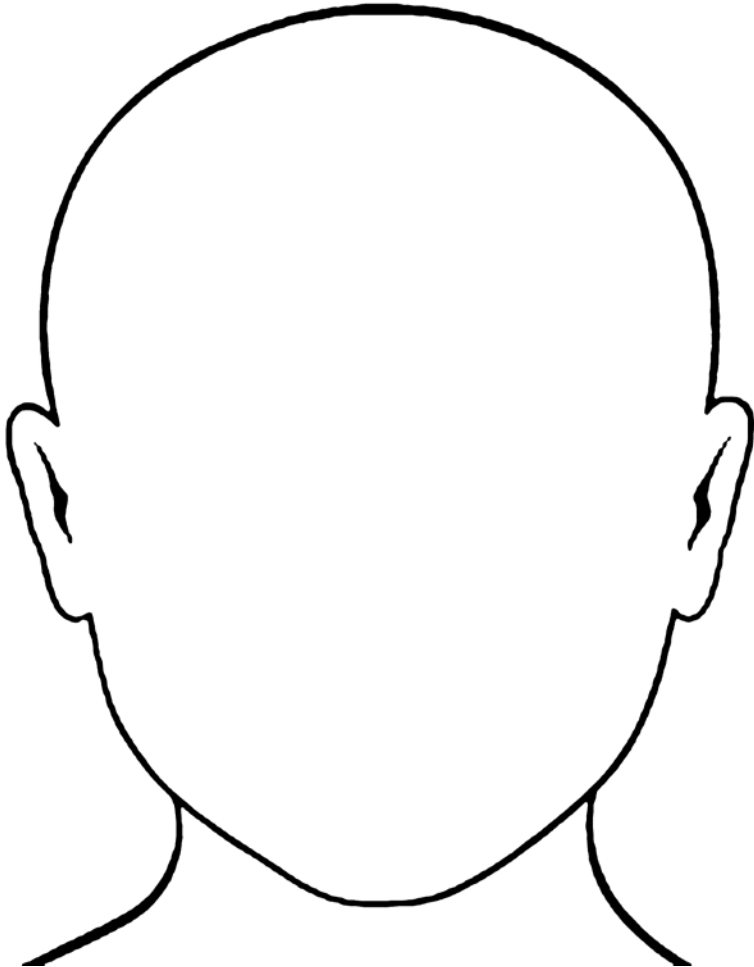
Michelle Watson (aka Moksha) is a performer, writer, producer and educationalist living between London and Liverpool. She has produced many transformative theatrical events, including Daisy Campbell's *Cosmic Trigger the Play* and *Conferestival*, and *It's a Thought Crime* Cabaret nights, which ran in London for many years.

She is a strong believer in social justice and creativity as a tool for change. She has developed and facilitated programs for both teenagers and young adults to encourage creative self-expression, and to find a voice in the world. She continues to write and perform both as a spoken word artist and singer-songwriter.

Developing Characters for Writing

by Moksha

Start by adding features to this face template.



What does your character look like? – Are they male or female? – Old or young? – Do they have any distinguishing features, like tattoos or piercings, etc? – What does their appearance reveal about them?

Next, create a character profile for them.

The more detail you give, the more material you will have when you start writing.

Name:

Age:

Family background:

Where they live:

What they do:

Who is most important to them:

What they most want:

What their biggest obstacle is:

You should now have quite a solid character to base a piece of writing on. This could be a story, or a script, and you can repeat the process to create as many characters to add into the mix as you want. Two-hander scripts work particularly well using this technique, especially if the two characters are really different.

Once you have them, think about a situation where they could potentially meet and away you go...



Marcus Orlandi writes, performs, sews and makes things. He is interested in creating artworks that help us change our ways of seeing everyday objects and situations. He writes a lot of scripts and plays about characters from working class backgrounds. He thinks there should be more of these voices out there on TV, in films and in art exhibitions.



Photo: Joanna Silman

Hands

by Marcus Orlandi

Here are some drawings of my hand in different styles.

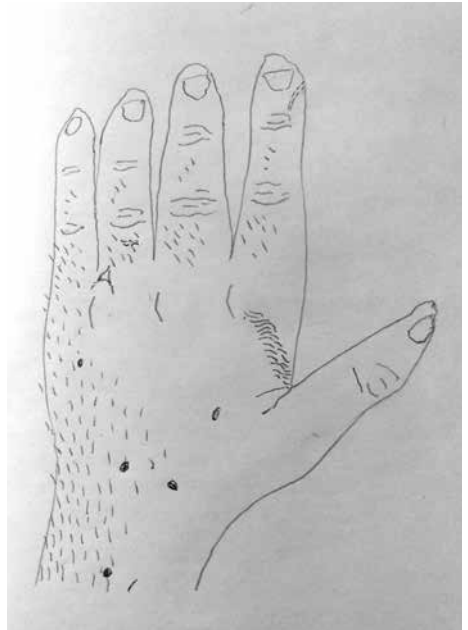
Our hands tell the stories of where we've been and what we've done.

On mine you can see three scars. One on the top of my index finger where I nearly took my finger off with a drill. Near the bottom of my thumb, you can see cracked skin from an allergic reaction. At the bottom of my ring finger is a small triangle. It's been there for as long as I can remember, and I have no idea how it got there.

Hold your pencil and look at your other hand. What can you see? Are there stories you could tell someone? Tattoos? Missing digits? Scratches or scars?

Using the empty page, draw a portrait of your hand. You don't have to be good at drawing. If you find it difficult, draw around your hand as a starting point and fill in what you see. If you're more comfortable at drawing, have a go at including all the details and extra shading.

Don't worry, no one is expecting you to be the next Rembrandt!



Hands



John Row is a poet and storyteller who was told he was unlikely to pass any exams at school. He found it difficult to concentrate and his spelling was terrible.

Despite this, after dropping or being kicked out of a couple of colleges, he went to university as a mature student where his lecturers told him they did not expect to do his proofreading for him. Later he found he had Irlen Syndrome which makes reading hard.

Between bouts of scrap dealing, rubbish clearance and van driving he has made his living as a writer and storyteller for about fifty years. He runs the storytelling area at

Glastonbury as well as half a dozen other festivals. During Covid he has been curating (running) a global storytelling website, worldstorytellingcafe.com, putting on a programme for and by adults and children from all over the world. He is director of the first Marrakesh International Storytelling Festival in 2022.

He has been visiting prisons since 1986. In 1999 he was the first storyteller in residence in a British prison and, inspired by Clive Hopwood, pioneered an early Storybook Dads scheme. Since then he has been a writer in residence or a visiting artist in over thirty prisons and YOIs in the UK and America.

Photo: John Row

Getting by the Blocks

by John Row

My name is John Row and I have been getting past the blocks my whole life. For the last forty years I have made my living as a writer, storyteller and poet. I really enjoy writing, but I always find it difficult to get around to starting.

Late in life I found I had something called Irlen Syndrome. Among other things this means I get very tired reading and writing. I also miss out things when I am reading. I used to think this made me stupid but then I thought, how can I be when I have made my living as a writer for years?

When I thought hard about it, I realised I used very simple ways to help me write.

Every time I sit down to write I use a simple starting point and create a few rules for that particular piece of writing. That way I do not feel my brain is exploding, but if it ever does feel like that, I get up and walk round the room.

When someone says “this is doing my head in” I know exactly what they mean.

These are a few of the things I do:

I might take one word and see what story or poem comes to me from that.

I might decide to create another version of myself on the page. One I wished I had been, or one I am glad I wasn't. I would write the piece in that voice.

I might invent someone totally new, or make a person up out of parts of other people I have met. I would write the piece in their voice.

I have given a few examples of things to do. I hope you find them useful. Have fun with words, don't be afraid of the blank page and above all don't let them 'do your head in'.

One simple word.

One simple word can help you build a story, or a poem, or lyric.

It is easiest if you choose a word you use all the time.

It can be what the story or poem is all about.

It can be repeated as often as you like.

It can open a door to an imaginary world, or it can help you explore a world you know all about.

Here I have used the word 'IT'.

The story and the rhyme are obviously not finished.

You might like to carry them on, or you might like to choose your own word and begin a new story or rhyme.

You might like to make a rule, i.e. *the word I choose must not be longer than four letters.*

Here is the beginning of the story:

He never quite got *it*. To tell you the truth he didn't even know what *it* was. *It* seemed to be forever changing depending on who he was speaking with. Just when he thought he knew *it*, he became aware that he wasn't getting *it* at all, and it occurred to him he was never being told the whole story. It wasn't that he didn't have any friends, in fact he had so many that people who didn't know him were convinced he possessed the mysterious *it*. This made some of his friends uncomfortable, they knew all about *it* and often slipped him a portion of the proceeds from whatever *it* was they had been doing, legal or otherwise. He was always grateful but wished they would tell him a little more about where these treats came from. He wasn't stupid, he knew if he knew too much, he might accidentally open his mouth to the wrong people. People who grasped what *it* was and wanted nothing to do with *it*, or worse still people who had devoted their lives to stopping *it* happening ever again. People whose one aim in life was to catch the people who were doing *it* and bring them before the courts, before sending them to that place where there were even more *its* to know about.

Here is the beginning of a rhyme:

I don't know what it is
But I know it doesn't please me
I don't know how to work it
But I know it isn't easy
I don't even want it
It's driving me crazy
Every time I get it
It makes my mind hazy
I could understand it
If it made me more clever
But it doesn't, so should I only lose it
My life would change for ever.

The First and Third Person

You have probably heard the phrase 'writing in the first person' or 'writing in the third person'.

You probably know what this means but in case you don't it is very simple.

First person is when you write as if the person in your story is yourself, using 'I, me; my, mine, myself' or 'we, us, ours, and ourselves.'

Sometimes it is fun to use an imaginary you.

You could choose a life you wished you had.

For instance:

I was born in a large house on the edge of Sherwood Forest. My family was not just well off, they were minted. I could have whatever I wanted. I remember passing a motor bike shop one day. We were in Dad's Aston Martin at the time. There was a quad bike in the window. Dad saw my eyes light up at the sight of it. The next day when I came downstairs for breakfast, Mum told me to go out to the front drive. There was Dad standing proudly next to the very same quad bike. He nodded and with a wide grin said, "I thought you might like this."

Third person is when you write as if the main person in your story is someone else using him, his, himself, her, hers, herself or they, them, their and themselves.

Here is the same opening to a story written in the third person:

He was born in a large house on the edge of Sherwood Forest. His family was not just well off, they were minted. He could have whatever he wanted. He could remember passing a motor bike shop one day. He was with his dad in the Aston Martin his dad owned at the time. There was a quad bike in the window. His dad saw his eyes light up at the sight of it. The next day when he came down to breakfast his mum told him to go out to the front drive. There was his dad standing next to the very same quad bike. He nodded and with a wide grin said, "I thought you might like this."

Write a story, or even a lyric, in the first person. Make it about an imaginary you.

Write a story in the third person.

You might like to give your characters a name.

You can introduce the names right at the beginning.

The first-person story might start, "My name is Michael" or "My name is Michael but people have called me Mick for as long as I can remember."

Write a story in the third person.

The third person story might start, "His name was Michael" or, "His name was Michael, but people had called him Mick for as long as he could remember."

Building a Character

When people read a book, they sometimes think the writer is writing about them because they see a lot of themselves in the main character (known as the protagonist if you want to sound really good). This is because characters are usually made up of a mix of different people.

Try looking at ten or twelve people on the landing and taking one thing about each of them and putting them in your main character.

If we are writing about how they look, you might take one person's hair colour and a different person's style. You might choose a particular walk, or the way one person leans when they are talking, or the way someone curls their lip. Soon you will have a character you can believe in. You can make them do things that make them either a hero or a villain.

Keeping the story going

All of us run into a brick wall sometimes when we are writing.

It seems to be going so well when all of a sudden, we run out of ideas.

One simple way to get out of this is to turn life on its head for your main character. Have something happens that changes their life forever.

If they are having a great life with no worries, drop in a disaster: a partner leaving, losing a job, being evicted or even getting arrested for something they didn't do. Write about their new life until you run out of steam again. Then turn their life upside down again and everything gets better, they get back with their old partner or find an even better one, get a fantastic job, inherit a house, or are found innocent on appeal and walk away with a small fortune in compensation. You can put as many of these ups and downs in a story as you want.

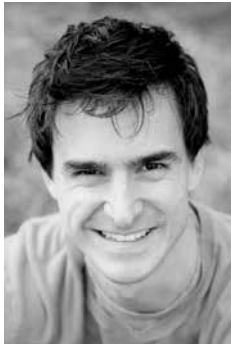
Once you have one person's story you might like to write one or two other character's stories.

Once you have a few characters you could start a story where they all meet up for the first time, at work, at a rave, prison or anywhere.

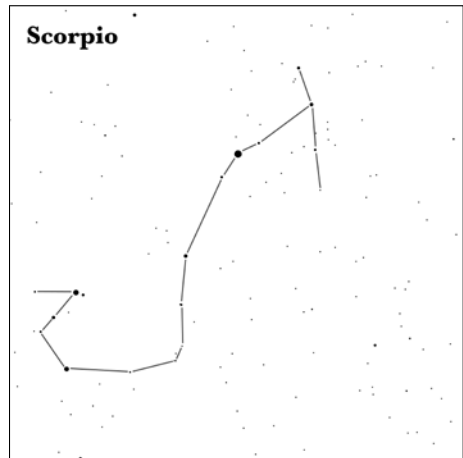
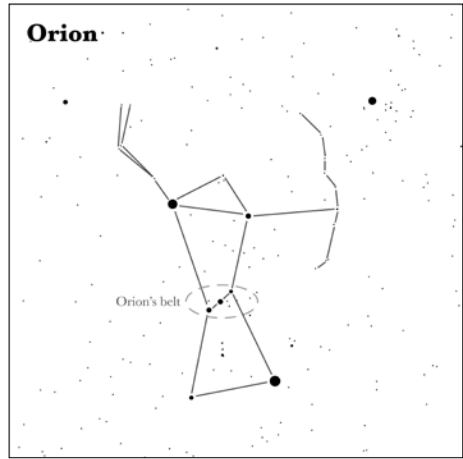
You can take this as far as you want, anything from a few pages to a full-length book.

Hopefully, you have found some of this useful. I know I have enjoyed writing it. It is always a personal achievement when we have once more 'got by the blocks' and got down to writing.

The great thing is to have fun with words, it is a world where you can do what you like, and if you like the result show it off. Read it to a pad mate or enter it into the Koestler Awards – and if you are not satisfied there is no need to show it to anyone, but just have it as part of your journey. One day you might produce a jewel.



Lewis Dartnell holds the Professorship in Science Communication at the University of Westminster. His science research is in the field of astrobiology and the search for microbial life on Mars. He is very active in delivering live events at schools and festivals, working as a scientific consultant for the media, and has appeared in numerous TV documentaries and radio shows. He has also published four books: *The Knowledge* was the *Sunday Times* 'New Thinking' Book of the Year and an international bestseller, and his latest *Origins: How the Earth Made Us* is a *Sunday Times* top history book.



Make Your Own Constellations

by Lewis Dartnell

The night sky is one thing that people all around the world have in common.

The stars of the night sky are a beautiful sight – like sugar sprinkled on velvet, or a thousand tiny diamonds. And sailors can use the stars to navigate by, even when they are far from any landmarks.

Ancient stargazers didn't just admire the night sky; they also drew shapes between the brightest stars. It's like an ancient game of 'join the dots'. These shapes made up of stars are called 'constellations'. And through time people have told stories about these heroes and goddesses and monsters they could see in the heavens.

For example, the constellation of Orion is one of the easiest to recognise – especially the line of three bright stars that make up 'Orion's belt'. In the myths told by the Ancient Greeks, Orion was a gigantic hunter who once boasted that he could kill every animal in the world. This angered the gods, so they sent a scorpion to kill Orion. You can also see this scorpion in the night sky as the constellation Scorpio. In fact, Scorpio is one of the signs of the zodiac. It is your 'star sign' if your birthday is in November (like me!). The signs of the zodiac are a stripe of constellations stretching right around the night sky that the sun and the other planets seem to move through.

You can see what the constellations of Orion and Scorpio look like on the next page. I've drawn the stars as black dots – the brighter the star appears in the night sky, the bigger the dot. To draw a constellation, you simply join the dots to create a shape or outline that looks a bit like something in particular.

Can you see the shapes?

Orion is wearing a tunic, with a tight belt around the middle. On the right-hand side he is holding up a shield, and on the left hand side his arm is holding a thick club up in the air.

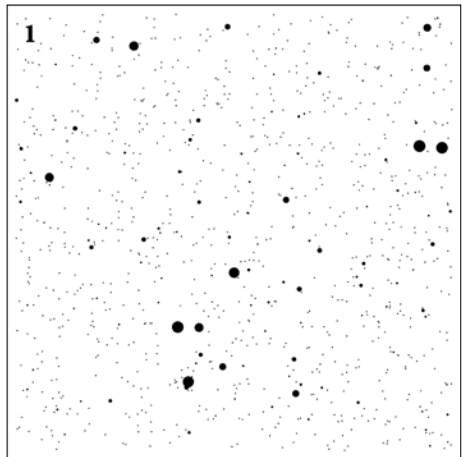
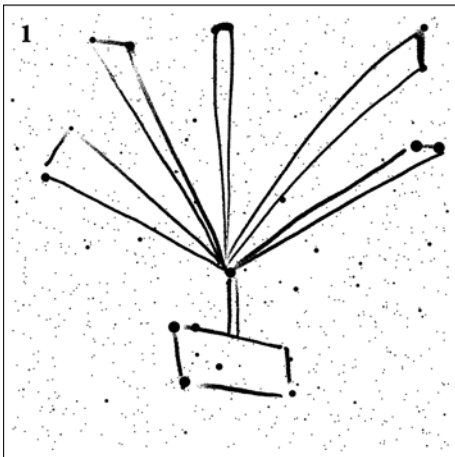
Scorpio's head is at the top right, with a big pincer sticking out on either side. It has a long tail curving round along the bottom, with a sting on the end of the tail.

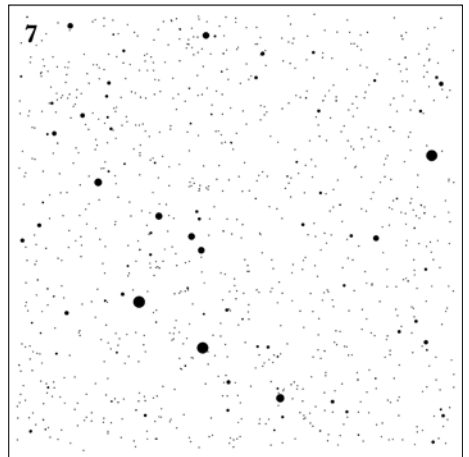
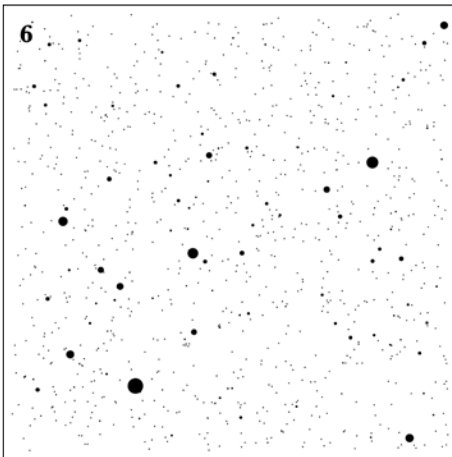
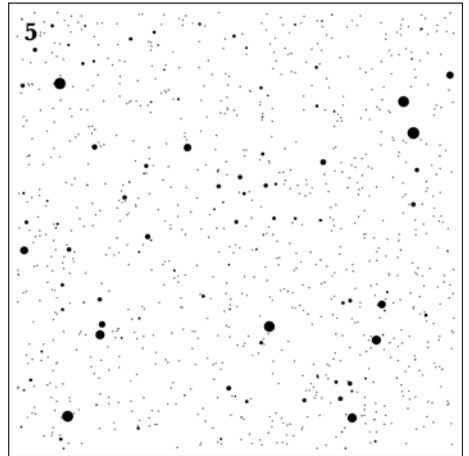
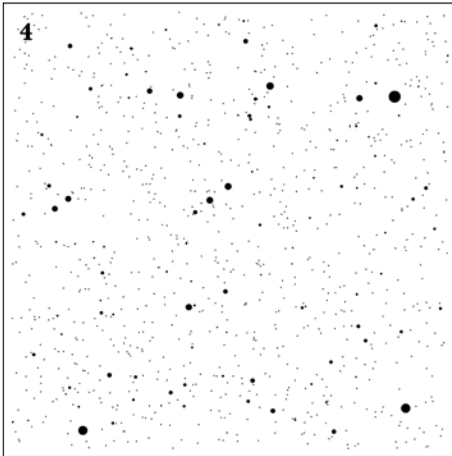
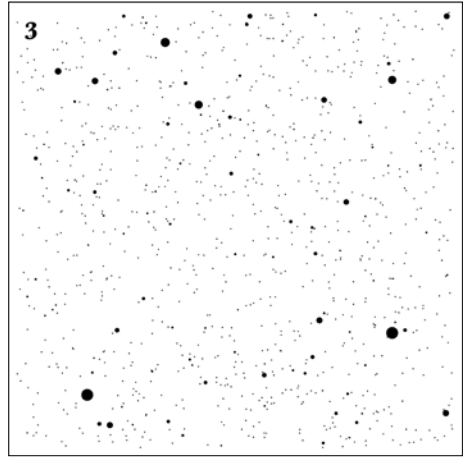
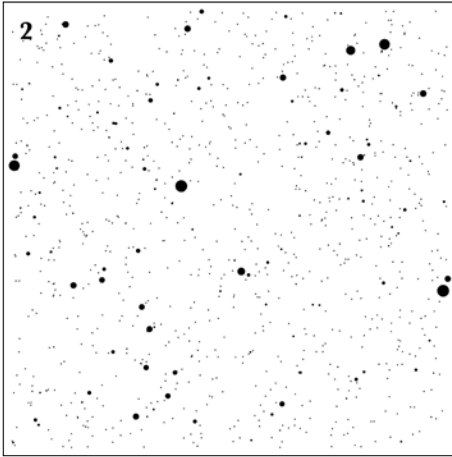
People living in the northern hemisphere, like in Europe and Asia and North America, can all see the same stars at night. But that doesn't mean that everyone drew the same constellations. For example, the ancient Chinese and Indian civilisations drew different constellations from the same patterns of stars.

Now you can have a go at making up your own constellations! On the next few pages you'll find lots of blank star maps. I've created these fake night skies to have the same pattern of brightnesses as the stars in our actual night sky, but they're all randomly scattered around. No one has ever tried to make constellations from these patterns of stars before.

Look at each picture of a different night sky and see if you can spot any shapes made up of the brighter stars. You can draw lines on the page between the stars to show the outline of your new constellation. Give your constellation a name. And if you like, you can make up some stories or myths about who or what your new constellations are, and how they relate to each other – just like Orion and Scorpio.

I've had a go on the first star map. I think it looks a bit like the spreading leaves of a big palm tree growing out of a plant pot. What do you think? Have a go with your own!







David Kendall is a writer, and workshop facilitator who has worked on a wide variety of creative projects with prisoners (and their families), young people in care, and rough sleepers. He is co-director of Penned Up – a two-week arts & books festival created with, and for, those in prison. He edited both *The Mammoth Book of Zombie Comics*, and *The Mammoth Book of Best War Comics*. His short fiction and essays have been published in numerous magazines and anthologies.

Poetry and Comics

by David Kendall

The idea is simple enough. Choose a poem and, keeping the original words, add your own pictures in comic book format (panels). Great words will put images in our heads; make us follow new paths of thought. You can decide how to arrange the lines. I use words a lot, but my drawing skills are well, you can see... (on the following pages) but this exercise is not about drawing skills. It's about making the thinking process visible. If you are good at drawing then crack on, but for me it's about seeing what my brain makes out of the words. If it's a favorite poem (could be lyrics too) then it's like creating a cover version, a new arrangement, and like all good cover versions it will reinvent the original and make it new.

The first poem here, *The Divine Image*, I thought it would be fun to use emoji-style icons as so much was about faces, hearts etc. Using the images, thinking about them, pulled me closer to the original. For the second, from Shakespeare, the images of atoms and space came to mind. The idea that things were ending and being pulled apart and yet were built from what "dreams were made on" fascinated me. I made several versions and still haven't reached one I'm totally happy with, but it's certainly made me think about what it means to me. Grab a book of poetry, and give it a go.

THE DIVINE IMAGE - William Blake

CROSBY HAS A HUMAN HEART



JEALOUSY HAS A HUMAN FACE



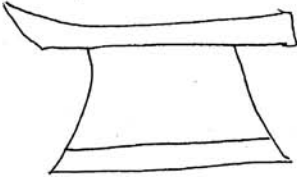
TEAROR THE HUMAN FORM
DIVINE



AND SECRECY, THE
HUMAN DRESS



THE HUMAN FORM
IS FORGED IRON



THE HUMAN FORM, A FIERCY FORCE

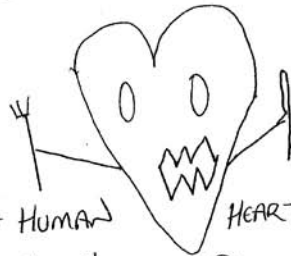


THE HUMAN FACE



A FURNACE SEAL'D

THE HUMAN HEART
IT'S HUNGRY GORGE



OUR REVELS NOW ARE ENDED.
THESE OUR ACTORS, AS I FORETOLD
YOU WERE SPIRITS AND ARE MELTED
INTO AIR, INTO THIN AIR:



AND, LIKE THE BASELESS FABRIC OF THIS VISION,
THE CLOUD-CAPP'D TOWERS,
THE GORGEOUS PALACES, THE
SOLEMN TEMPLES, THE GREAT
GLOBE ITSELF.



Yea, ALL WHICH IT INSPECT, SHALL
DISSOLVE, AND LIKE THIS
INSUBSTANTIAL PARENT FIGED. LEAVE
NOT A RACK BEHIND.



WE ARE SUCH STUFF AS DREAMS
ARE MADE ON, AND OUR LITTLE LIFE
IS ROUNDED WITH A SLEEP.



—WILLIAM
SHAKESPEARE



Erwin James is the Editor in Chief of *Inside Time*, the national newspaper for people in prison, and has been a *Guardian* columnist and contributor since 1998. He became a writer in prison where he served 20 years of a mandatory life sentence.

Erwin is the author of three books: *A Life Inside – A Prisoners Notebook*, (Atlantic, 2003), *The Home Stretch – From Prison to Parole*, (Atlantic, 2005) and *Redeemable – a Memoir of Darkness and Hope* (Bloomsbury, Feb 2016). He has been a Trustee of the Prison Reform Trust and the Koestler Trust and is now a patron of the charities: Create, Human Writes, the Forward Trust and the Prison Phoenix Trust. He is a Fellow of the RSA and an Honorary Master of the Open University.

Inside Time

by Erwin James

Inside Time exists primarily to provide a voice for incarcerated people in the UK and beyond. Of course we also work to bring information and entertainment to our readers, but most of all we want anyone with something to say and who wants their voice heard from behind bars to have the chance to say it. If you would like a letter published in *Inside Time*, it's best to keep it between 250-350 words. Our letters pages – the 'mailbag' – is one of the most popular sections of the paper. (We are pleased to receive several hundred letters a month from our readers, so there is a lot of competition to get published.) Letters best pitched to catch our attention are letters of hope, encouragement, optimism, and gratitude – we recognise that people in prison need to experience all of these. Whatever your circumstances, positivity is infectious.

You may want to write more than a letter, however. As a long-term prisoner, I found that writing allowed for more than just the escape of thoughts from my head. Trying to make sense of the perplexing and confounding vagaries of prison life can be emotionally and psychologically exhausting. But the key for me was trying to make sense of myself. How did I get here? Where am I going? Am I who I want to be? I found the answer through writing. Writing allows you to live more than a little outside your head, to get a perspective on your situation. Thoughts became words on paper. For me, thoughts became words on paper; memories and dreams became poems and narratives that I could form and fashion, and upon which I could reflect. Writing in prison can raise a crushed spirit and reignite dying embers of hope. It helped me to get to where I wanted to be – and more importantly helped me to become who I really wanted to be. And I saw many examples over the years of personal enlightenment amongst my fellow prisoners through discovering the power of writing.

Inside Time does not pay for articles, but we can certainly provide a platform for prisoners to display their writing talents. We do, however, pay £25 for the Star Letter each month. If you have something to say about a challenge or a difficulty you have managed to overcome, or if you feel

strongly about an issue – prison related or otherwise – you might want to try your hand at an Inside Voices piece. These slots are for letters of around 800 words. The best pieces always have a beginning, a middle and an end. The most compelling writing includes a good balance of narrative, description and dialogue. Remember to do your best to ‘show, not tell.’ Budding journalists take note – in Inside Time you have a global stage (our website and app attract several hundred thousand visitors every month), and fine print space on which to develop and hone your skills.

All submissions are read – and should be sent to:
Inside Time, Botley Mills, Botley, Southampton, Hamps SO30 2GB
<https://insidetime.org>

In the space below, make some notes about what you might write to *Inside Time* about.

National Prison Radio

National Prison Radio is on air 24/7 to help you make the most of your time inside. You can tune in on your In-Cell TV and see what we're broadcasting every month on the back of *Inside Time*.

My name is Anthony, I joined National Prison Radio in 2019 after serving some time in prison in 2012/13. I was super interested in the idea of a round-the-clock schedule which catered to music lovers, podcast lovers and book readers.

One of our listeners described NPR as the fourth emergency service recently, and I get what they mean. It serves many purposes and provides an outlet for a range of people living in prison. Whether you're a first timer or you've served 12 years; whether you're a rock fan or an R&B fan, there's something for everyone.

NPR is unique and provides a service which is necessary in prison – keeping people company. It can get lonely and it can be easy to withdraw and isolate for various reasons. In my time working with NPR, I have seen the interaction that takes place between the listeners and the radio hosts. People listening to National Prison Radio can call and leave a message for a particular show/host on our phone line and these contribute to 'shout outs' or talking points during shows.

It's a beautiful feeling knowing that the benefits go both ways; making an impact on someone's day because they turned on the radio is hugely rewarding, and I believe listeners also feel a sense of community and belonging with others who might be listening at the same time. I can imagine how it feels when your favourite song gets played and your message gets read out on air, or when your pad-mate wishes you a happy birthday through a shoutout on our daily breakfast show, Porridge!

Not only is NPR a source of entertainment for listeners, it is also supportive and offers advice, updates, news and key information relating to life in prison. It's an all-round service which really stepped up for people during the Covid-19 outbreak when most services within prisons were put on hold. Tim in Isle of Wight captures this sentiment perfectly: Is it possible to keep this number ongoing after Covid? It opens NPR up to more people,

it brings us together as a community, it's phenomenal and it's good to be able to communicate with each other.

Tim is a prime example of why the work that the team and I do at NPR is so rewarding and continues to serve a purpose beyond the scope of traditional radio. There are thousands like Tim, showing gratitude, pouring out love and support for our staff and members of NPR who continue to work hard to deliver shows on a day-to-day basis.

The messages we receive are a true reflection of the atmosphere and community all our listeners have helped us develop at NPR. Respectful, supportive, understanding and patient as we all try to do our best for each other. Dabs in Garth sums it up: Thanks for all you're doing for us. We're all locked down so it's nice you're making the effort to keep the show going, it keeps morale high for prisoners. I think we'd all like to say thank you with all this going on.

So please keep listening and keep writing to us. NPR is nothing without you. National Prison Radio, HMP Brixton, London, SW2 5XF.



**National
Prison Radio**



Sheila Mulhern has been a writer in residence in three prisons and makes things out of wood. The finish can be rough, a bit like her writing and also her personality.

Seven Points of Change

by Sheila Mulhern

Move around, throw rolled up socks at the wall, shake yourself up a bit.

Then think of three things that made you smile.

Three is a high bar (it's the rule of three, our brains like threes).

If it's a stretch, you can just make up what would have had to have happened to make you smile three times. (The point is to help you clear your head.)

This exercise can help you get a handle on yourself or anyone else. If you want to write your life story, it takes you a long way without too much effort. The purpose of it is to scan the life of anyone or anything – you, someone else, your dinner, humanity etc.

Take three deep breaths and relax.

Think back and write down seven points that have mattered to you from your life, or mark changes that have made you who you are today.

Some examples:

- 1 Being called a liar by Sister Albert.
- 2 C dying.
- 3 The baby.
- 4 Meeting PJ.
- 5 Letting the moment pass.
- 6 Winning the Grand National.
- 7 Getting out.

They can be big or small, good or bad – a divorce or finding a hedgehog... These are not cast in concrete, and you may have a different set tomorrow. Just allow yourself to go with whatever comes to mind without judging.

If you want to go further, underline one of the points that is most 'live' to you and write down whatever comes to mind.

Variations

Write down seven points in your future. Make it as good as you can possibly imagine. It might happen.

Ask someone you know well to list what made them who they are now (you never feature as much as you expect, if at all).

Write down seven points in the life of someone who annoys you.

Write down seven points in their future (you can make it quite bad)

It gives a sense of the span of your life and maybe lets you see things in a different light. It can also remind you of forgotten moments and suggest patterns.

If you write seven points of someone else's life, even if what you imagined is completely off the mark, it can help you understand them. It can cut bullies down to size and stop us taking everything personally.

You can also use it to flesh out characters and give you plot ideas if you're writing a novel, short story, play, film script, or as inspiration for poetry.



Kate Alderton is writer, performer, theatre producer and dream researcher.

As an actress she trained at LAMDA; as a dreamer with The Centre For Social Dreaming and with Dream Tending expert Stephen Aizenstat.

She co-produced and co-starred in *Cosmic Trigger: the Play* at The Cockpit and has appeared in many TV, film and stage productions including Sky's recent Joe Barton thriller, *Extinction*.

Her dream artwork *The Oneironautica* was recently exhibited as part of The International Association of the Study of Dreaming 2021 Dream Conference.

Her last project before the pandemic was working as an actress on a theatre project for HMP Leicester.

How to Use Dreams to Kickstart Creativity

by Kate Alderton

Working with dreams can be an amazing way to kickstart your creativity. If you play with the images and ideas that turn up in dreams, you can end up with some surprising results that you may never have discovered in any other way.

Whether you prefer writing, drawing, or making music, dreams can be an amazing resource to inspire you, help you make art, or just make you think.

Did you know that all through history, scientists, artists and writers have used their night-time dreams to inspire them in their art and work?

Here are some examples:



Yesterday

Paul McCartney from The Beatles composed the tune for the famous song “Yesterday” in a dream. He said: “I woke up one morning with a tune in my head and I thought, ‘Hey, I don’t know this tune – or do I? [...] I went to the piano and found the chords to it, made sure I remembered it [...]”



Double Helix Structure of DNA

Nobel laureate Dr James Watson, co-discoverer of the structure of DNA, developed the idea of the double helix image for the DNA chain after seeing a spiral staircase in a dream one night!



Frankenstein

In 1816, writer Mary Shelly had a nightmare about a “hideous phantasm of a man” The next morning, she started writing a story, which became Frankenstein. She went on to become one of the most famous gothic writers of all time. All because of a dream.

First things first. Remembering your dreams.

The more often you try and write down your dreams, the easier it is to remember them.

Four ways to remember your dreams.

- When you wake up, don't jump out of bed if possible – take it slow, even drift in and out a little bit.
- Always keep a pen and paper close to your bed.
- Write your dreams down as soon as you wake up, or whenever you can.
- Even if you can only remember a tiny bit of a dream, write it down often the rest will come along once you start writing.

Write about people, places, things that happened, objects you discovered, sounds you heard, colours you saw. Write them like wild stories of the night.

Once you have three or more dreams collected, you can start to play with them

- Read through your dreams and give each of them a title. Here's some examples of mine: The Car Made of Light / The Hummingbird in the Lake/ The Woman Who Became a Willow Tree

Pick one of your dream titles and use it as inspiration to write a short story. Start writing and just see where the title takes you.

Grab a magazine you can rip up and find images to make a dream collage to go with your dream title.

- Make a list of some of the dream characters you meet. They might be animals, people, aliens – who knows?

Pick a few and spend some time describing them in fine detail. What

do they look like? What are they wearing? How do they move through the world? Where's the most likely place you'd find them? Where's the least likely place? What sounds might they make? If you could ask them a question, what would it be? What might they answer? Have a go at writing a script for them.

Draw or paint one of your dream characters, see what else you might discover about them once you get them onto the page.

- What have you been up to in your dreams? Flying? Meeting people? Exploring wild and unusual landscapes? Read through your dreams and circle some of the words and sentences that leap out.

Once you've collected a few, write them out again on another piece of paper and cut them out. Try arranging and re-arranging them and turning them into a poem.

Don't worry about it making too much sense. See what happens if you choose quickly. The less you think about it, the more surreal they can get! Here's a quick one of mine made from four different dreams:

I'm dressed as a tomato,
In a meadow on the edge of town,
A magical mist rolls back to reveal a deep blue and star filled sky,
It was sweet and tasted like honey.

Maybe your dream poem will give you a fresh idea for a drawing, sketch, or lyrics to a song?

We sleep for around 1/3 of our lives and have around 3-5 dreams a night: that's over a 1000 night-time adventures filled with images and inspirations every year!

Imagine all the art, ideas and inspiration that could come from all that dreaming.

Imagine if Paul McCartney couldn't find his pen, paper or piano the morning after he dreamed the tune for "Yesterday"...

Grab your pen and get dreaming!



Andrea Hadley-Johnson is a creative producer who develops and delivers exhibitions and creative interventions in museums and galleries. Her approach is experimental, kind, playful and quietly activist in approach. Andrea works closely with people to coproduce projects that bring people together to discover and share perspectives. Her projects focus on including and representing creative experiences and voices that are less heard, or those that have been marginalised or ignored.

Formally head of coproduction and display at Derby Museums, Andrea has led the creative development of award-winning exhibitions. She is currently the artistic programme manager at the National Justice Museum and is coproducing creative projects with people outside the museum to shape and inform what happens inside the museum. Current projects amplify the lived experience of people living in or impacted by the criminal justice system.

Making Marks and Celebrating the Lines You Craft.

by Andrea Hadley-Johnson

Take a moment to make a mark, draw a line or doodle a doodle.

Choose a drawing tool – a pen, a pencil, a crayon, anything that will make a mark. Even your fingernail can be used to inscribe a line.

Select one of the five drawing prompts to start with and then move through them in any order you'd like to.

Use the blank spaces on the page to draw on. Try making marks on other materials around you too: card, recycled packaging, or empty containers.

Watch carefully as the lines emerge and embrace what happens. These are your lines, and this is your drawing.

Reclaim the joy of drawing, making marks feels good!

Drawing prompts.

- Close your eyes and draw your face. When you open your eyes, you'll see a wonky self-portrait to make you smile.

- Draw your mood right now.

Notice the feelings you are experiencing and represent them in lines, textures, shapes, and marks.

Your mood drawing might be abstract or be represented by something recognisable.

- Draw something that makes you smile.

Share your drawing, it might make someone else smile too.

- Listen carefully to the sounds around you.

Draw what you can hear.

Try slowing down or speeding up the lines you are making.

Press hard on the surface with your pencil and then softly to match the intensity of the sound.

- Draw the minute detail of something that you're wearing or an object that is close by.

Sketch it to scale. Then draw it again as if it were magnified.



Barry Hale left school a week after his 16th birthday with no qualifications worth mentioning. He was a printer for a while, but he was made redundant a couple of times and spent some time on the dole. While he was working, he used the money he earned to promote a rock band and release their first single. When the band split and Barry was made redundant again he bought a £30 film camera and taught himself to make films. He screened them as backdrops at gigs while bands were playing and after a few years that led to him making music videos for MTV. He gave all that up at the age of 31 to go to university and do a degree in Film Theory and Practice and a

Masters degree in Screenwriting. For the last 25 years he has run an arts company that opens the doors to the creative industries for people from a working-class background just like him, who might have an interest in making art and film but don't know how it all works, have no contacts, no training or formal qualifications, and no private money to fall back on. Last year he gave that up to become a full-time writer. None of these were easy decisions – they all took personal sacrifice and a lot of hard work – but he does these things because he wants to, because they make life interesting and because he believes no one gets to tell him that he can't.

Photo: Barry Hale

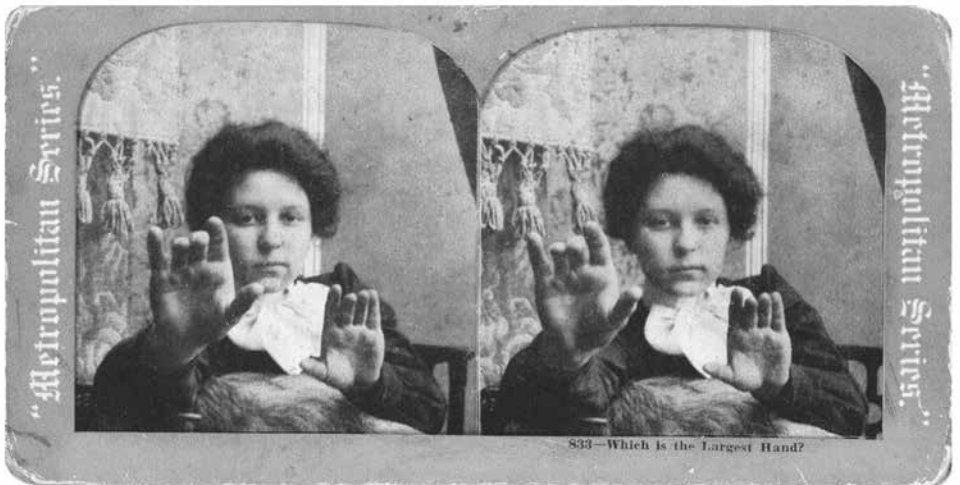
How to Draw in 3D

by Barry Hale

To draw in 3D you need to draw two pictures of the same scene. Keep them about the same size as the picture below.

1. Place some objects on a table.
2. Look at them through just your left eye.
3. Now look through just your right eye.
Notice the difference? That's what makes the real world look 3D.
4. Sketch the objects as they look through your left eye.
5. Make another sketch as they look through your right eye.
6. Put the two images side by side like the photo below.
7. Get close to the drawings until your left eye can only see the left image and your right eye can only see the right image.
A piece of card held upright between the two pictures might help.
8. It may take a moment to focus. You might have to go a little cross-eyed for it to work. When it does the picture becomes 3D.

Practice viewing 3D images with this 3D photograph.





Mark Steinhardt is a performance storyteller. He spends his time reading hundreds of folk tales and legends to find the ones he wants to work on. He doesn't stay close to the originals. He cares much more about making the stories work in the here and now. And even more than the stories, he cares about making a powerful connection with small audiences packed into small spaces. It doesn't always happen. Ah, but when it does...

A Blank Sheet of Paper

by Mark Steinhardt

It could be a lump of clay,
it could be a blank sheet of paper,
or it might be silence.

All three are terrifying. They can suck away your confidence. But if you shape the clay, write the words, make the music – if you shape the clay, you write the words, you make sound where there was only silence – then you will have something where there was nothing, and that’s a great feeling. It doesn’t have to be good (whatever that means), but it does have to be as good as you can do.

It’s called being creative. I think it should be part of everyone’s life. Even if it’s just turning a bucket of dirt into a miniature garden. Too easy to just watch other people doing stuff. Can’t spend your whole life in the audience.

I write, and I tell stories. My achievements are modest, but I’m having a good time. I once heard a writer on the radio talking about his new book. He admitted it wasn’t terribly original. “Yes,” he said, “it’s been done before – but not by me.” It’s something I repeat to myself when I’ve been fighting with an idea till two in the morning and wondering why I’m bothering.

Story – often in its simplest form – is my particular interest. So what have I learned? What makes a good story?

An event is not a story. Two events aren’t a story. All the events of my day or your day – there may be a dozen of them – don’t make a story.

In a story, the events are connected. One thing leads to another. The events follow on from each other. If one didn’t happen, then the next wouldn’t. The events affect each other. That’s why a good story feels like a satisfying whole thing, not just a bag of bits.

I believe there has to be a moment – one moment will do – of powerful emotion. You have to give the reader or listener that ‘hit’ of feeling. And the emotional moment has to come out of the things that happen. The person or people in the story have to feel the things they feel because of what has happened to them.

But I asked, what makes a good story? There's no clear answer to that question. All I can tell you from my own experience is that every so often I come across a story that gives me a stab of excitement. It might be thrown away in a paragraph and badly told, but there will be something about it that makes me want to get to work on it.

I'd better give you an example – something to practise on while your own ideas rise to the surface. As far as plot is concerned, this is about as simple as it gets. I'll tell you now that this story happens to be true.

The Mole

There is a small Muslim community in Oklahoma City. There are several mosques. In 1995 there was a massive car-bombing of a government building, killing 170 people. All the media assumed Islamic terrorists must be responsible. Very quickly, local white extremists were arrested, but suspicion of the Muslim community remained.

The Imam of one of the mosques was Imad Enchassi. His aim was always to reach out to the majority population. The mosque ran all sorts of charitable programmes – food banks, medical aid, advice centre and so on – for anyone who needed help. Anyone. Including people who objected to Muslims living in their city. Even so, there were frequent demonstrations outside the mosque. Racist militias would parade their weapons, shout abuse, daub offensive slogans.

One day, Enchassi decided to go out and talk to them. He approached a big guy waving his M16 and asked him what he was demonstrating about.

“Islam.”

“Why?”

And the man started into why he hated all Muslims and Islam...

But then Enchassi noticed a large mole on his left cheek. “Hold on a minute! That mole on your cheek. You need to have that checked out.”

“Yeah, I know, but I've got no money...”

“No. You don't understand. We have a free clinic right here at the mosque. I want you to have it checked out right away. Come with me.”

Enchassi took the man, still with his M16, round the back of the mosque to the clinic. And the mole was cancerous, and the clinic treated him for free. And now that man runs security for the mosque.

So, I gave you a bit of background. I put the clinic in there, so you're prepared for what happens next. (We all know there's no NHS in the US.) Then we have the brave Imam going out to challenge the armed demonstrators. Then we have the coincidence (God-given, Enchassi might say) of picking the man who needed the medical help. And finally, the pay-off. The man is changed by his experience.

I hope by now you're imagining the scene – the demo, the Imam, hands loose and open, unthreatening, the conversation, the walk round the mosque, the rifle swinging, maybe everyone watching through the windows, perhaps scared, confused. Then the change in the man as he spends time at the mosque, over weeks or months. At some point there's enough trust, enough change, for a job to be offered and accepted. How does that happen? Of course there's a moral here, but you don't have to beat the reader over the head with it. It's there in the story.

Why not give it a go? It'll get you in the flow. Then try one of your own ideas. Use your own experiences and memories, but remember, real life isn't very often a story. It's not usually neat enough. So don't worry about telling the truth. Change what you need to change. The Truth is much more interesting than the truth.

Take your time. There's no hurry. The world isn't waiting for your stories. Make them as good as you can. You owe that to yourself. You'll have turned the blank sheet of paper into a story. From nothing to something.



Jamie Delano was addicted to The Word at an early age. He blames his mother for reading him all those bedtime stories. He always expected that he would one day be a writer, but he dodged the hard work involved for years, distracting himself with a variety of jobs (and periods of unemployment) – including: librarian, bookseller, woodyard worker and taxi driver – before starting to write professionally in the early 1980s.

Comics provided him a way to earn a living as a writer for the following few decades.

Among many others, Delano's work includes scripts for *Captain Britain* (Marvel), *Hellblazer: John Constantine*, *2020 Visions*, *Outlaw Nation*, *Ghostdancing* (DC Comics).

Around 2010, Delano decided it was time to have a go at writing novels, which he published via his own imprint Lepus Books.

So far he has managed three: one a black-comedy called *Book Thirteen* and two near-future dark fantasies featuring an old weirdo called Leepus. He may have another few left in him, if he has enough life left to get them onto paper...

One Word After Another

by Jamie Delano

Writing is easy. One word after another, until you reach The End: that's what clever-dick writers like me say.

But it isn't easy, is it?

There's a mess of thoughts in your head you want to get out onto paper, but you can't get past that blank-page terror and get started.

Way back in the dim distant, when I was first getting addicted to The Word, I needed to sometimes play games to free up my imagination... clear the logjam... encourage words to freefall from my brain onto a page.

I'll describe a simple game that worked for me. Poets call it enjambement (or so I'm told). Richard Osman's *House of Games* calls it Answer Smash.

We all have phrases chattering away all day in the backgrounds of our conscious minds: slogans, cliches, song titles, catchphrases, quotes from books or poems...

Say one out loud at random.

Maybe, I don't know:

Blue sky thinking.

Without dwelling too long on it, take the last word and let it inspire the next phrase...

Thinking of you.

And again...

You know what I mean.

So you get:

Blue sky thinking of you know what I mean...

Just keep going until you run out of steam.

Try it. You might find it helps unlock your thoughts. Or not. Either way, what's to lose?

Here's one I made just now.

Day after day in the life and death valley of the kings of England expects every man to do his duty of care in the community centre of the earth wind and fire in the hole in one way or another fine messing about on the river runs to the sea to shining sea shanty town planning for the future shock and awe inspiring hope and anchor in the storm front and rear view mirror mirror on the wall street of shame about the face to face off with her head for the hills of the north star material witness for the defence of the realm of possibilities are endless questions and answers on a postcard from the edge of tomorrow never comes and goes gentle into that good night sleep tight as a gnat's arsehole to breakfast time slips by your leave me alone in the dark days ahead of the game of chance your arm in armed to the teeth of the wind in the barley wine dark sea of troubles come in threes a crowd surfing the wave goodbye to all that glisters is not gold command and control the impulse buy now pay later than you think before you leap year's end of the line...

Good luck!



Sandra Hall trained as a performer/artist in Paris, Indonesia and London. From a career in plays, TV/film, she changed direction and became a performer/facilitator with Geese Theatre Company in the early 90s, and has worked in over 100 prisons UK wide. She co-founded Friction Arts with Lee Griffiths; they've been described as "making extraordinary art work in awkward spaces". They are committed to making responsive, site-specific work; finding different creative ways to record and tell stories with people and communities at the Edges. Friction Arts are based in Birmingham, in their own building, The Edge; home of the brave and awkward events. Sandra

and Lee are also regularly commissioned Internationally and have collaborated with artists in USA, South Africa, Australia, Indonesia and Brazil, making political and joyful work through the lens of the outsider. Friction Arts were in the final 10 shortlisted organisations for the Gulbenkian/London College UK Civic Arts Awards 2021 for their pandemic work. They set up a 'directory of creative enquiries' at foodbanks offering people bespoke arts, crafts, games and philosophies for pandemic family life; created music, drama and arts on/offline for children and families throughout 2020/21, and provided free space for 80+ artists to rehearse, experiment and make work.

Would You Rather...

by *Sandra Hall*

Talking can be a source of ideas and creativity. Either with others, or with yourself.

Here is a game that works well in pairs and with children, who know better than we do how to leap into the impossible.

This game is great before writing, performing, or drawing.

Think about it on your own, or discuss with someone else. Use often, share widely.

‘Would You Rather...’

Swim like a fish or fly like a bird?

‘Would You Rather...’

Be able to see in the dark, or hear in a storm?

‘Would You Rather...’

Be a lizard or a giraffe?

‘Would You Rather...’

Have two sets of knees or two sets of elbows?

‘Would You Rather...’

Pilot a dinosaur or a flying saucer?

‘Would You Rather...’

Be a lake or a tree?

‘Would you rather...’ is designed to let your imagination loose and wild.

It can make you laugh faster and wilder. It can help you to riff and chat.

There are no right answers.

Have a go at creating a few more wild choices like the ones above.



Robin Ince is a stand-up comedian, actor and writer. He presents the BBC Radio 4 show *The Infinite Monkey Cage* with physicist Brian Cox. His books include *I'm a Joke and So Are You: Reflections on Humour and Humanity*, *Robin Ince's Bad Book Club: One man's quest to uncover the books that taste forgot*, *How to Build a Universe: An Infinite Monkey Cage Adventure*, written with Professor Brian Cox.

Amplifying Your Imps

by Robin Ince

This book is filled with people with skills.

Let's get this out of the way before anyone else tells you, I have no special skills.

I can't draw, juggle, or calculate the distance of a star with a bamboo cane and an old pair of tights.

I talk rubbish for a living.

I keep rubbish in my head.

It builds up and then I have to let it out.

It really does give me a headache if I don't manage to get it out of my head some way or other.

Sometimes when I am throwing the rubbish out of my head, I get paid for it too.

Sometimes people rummage through the rubbish in my head as I am throwing it out and they even find something useful for them. It is like going to the tip and finding a TV that works or a table that will be just fine once you have wiped off all the bird poo.

I think we all have a lot of rubbish in our brain, or at least what we think is rubbish, but when someone else finds it, they can see it from another angle. They can wipe the bird poo off your thoughts.

My career is being confident, the rest of my life I am very anxious.

When I am walking through towns, I look down a lot.

I know my shoes well.

I know the cracks in the pavement better than I know the clouds.

I slouch, hands in pockets, trying to make myself small and inconspicuous.

Then, at night, for sixty minutes or more, I make myself very conspicuous.

I stand in a spotlight on a stage or, sometimes, four beer crates, and I meet the eyes of all those people I might have walked by invisibly just a few

hours before. A few hours later, I might pass by them again as invisibly as possible, but at 8pm, I want all eyes on me. All shyness is exchanged for showing off loudly and stupidly.

Now I am in control of the world for a little while.

Now, my imagination is in charge of the room.

I can let out all my weirdest thoughts with the excuse that it is a show. Things that said out aloud on the street might see you sent to the asylum can get called art when you are making things up in the spotlight.

I can let the inside out.

Technically, I am a comedian.

Even though I have made a living from it for thirty years, I still feel a bit weird typing that.

The trouble with being a comedian is that if someone doesn't find you funny then you are not a comedian, you are just someone who has spoiled their night by shouting over it.

Being a comedian, I have learnt about one of the problems of being human.

It is a problem that is unlikely to be an issue for snails, marmosets or funnel-web spiders (though we can't be sure of that). We are two things. There is who we are on the outside and there is who we are on the inside and sometimes they can be very different.

Sometimes, frightening people are secretly scared, confident people are secretly anxious, happy people are really very sad. You know all that and yet, despite the fact that we know we are not who we might seem to be, we often spend a lot of time trying to make sure people think we are what we seem to be. We build a shell around us, and we pretend it is who we are, and we get more and more anxious that someone will find out what else is going on in our head.

What I have found out from over 30 years is that however strange the thought in my head is, if I turn it into stand-up comedy, more often than not, someone will come up to me afterwards and say, "I am really glad you told that story about when your mum died/how you talk aloud to yourself

in lots of different voices/ why you sometimes imagine jumping in front of trains” etc. because I thought it was only me.

When a comedian does a joke that doesn't get a laugh, they might say “just me then”.

What I have found out is how rare it is that the thoughts in your head are just you then. It is very easy to think you are a freak, especially when so many people hide the weird stuff. A lot of the best comedy comes from things that are really true, especially when it takes people by surprise — and what a lovely surprise it is when you find out that you are not the only one.

It doesn't just have to be comedy; it can be poetry or stories or drawing.

When I started stand up, I did stuff that I thought was the kind of things comedians were meant to be. This is true of my writing too. The older I have become, the more I have taken the risk of saying and writing things that I worry might be “just me then” and it has become more and more rewarding.

One of my favourite David Bowie albums is Ziggy Stardust.

There is a song called “Rock 'n' Roll Suicide” and it builds up to a crescendo when Bowie passionately sings, “Oh no, Love, You're not alone!”

It gets me every time.

That is what I think sharing what you write and create can do: not only can it make you feel less alone, it can make the people who read it feel less alone too.

Imagination is often seen as **a wild thing**,
a thing without **limits** or **borders**, or **end**.....
and that, quite frankly can be **TERRIFYING!!!**

Where to begin? So much blank paper. So many ideas.

Or.
None.



Ella Simpson spent much of her youth avoiding jail and a large part of adulthood breaking into, working in and researching those very same prisons. Ella was a librarian at HMP Holloway for eight years and has facilitated creative writing in many other prison libraries and classrooms since. For a day job, Ella now works as a criminology lecturer at Bath Spa University, but her preferred students are still those she meets inside prison, from whom she has learned more than all the books in the library. Ella's own publications include half a dozen academic articles on the creative arts in prisons, which no one ever reads and a small number of poems and short stories, which she'd like to think people do.

Starting at the End: A Storyboard

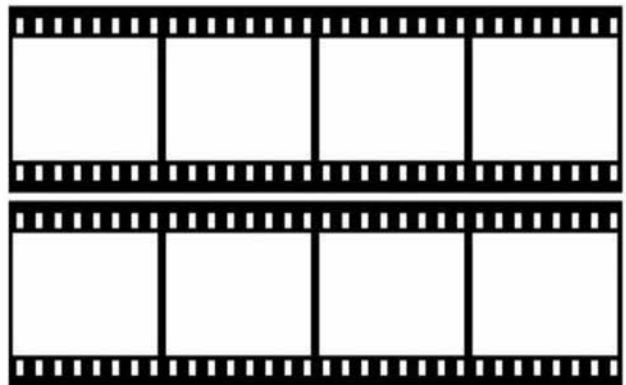
by Ella Simpson

Sometimes the best place to start a story is at the end. Decide your destination and then tell us how you arrive. This is what the storyboard exercise allows you to do. Follow the quick instructions below and set your imagination free.

What to do:

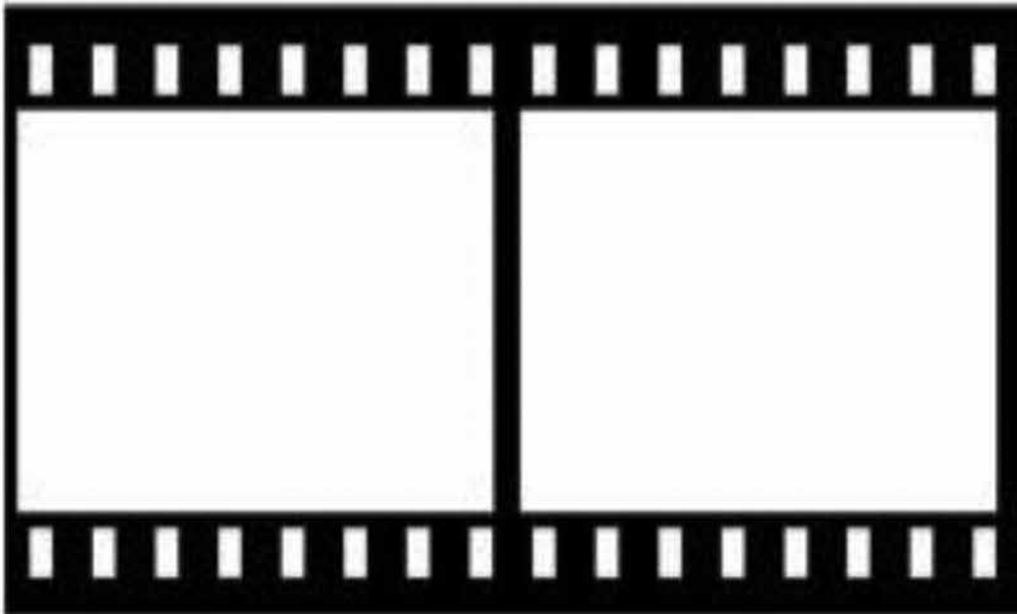
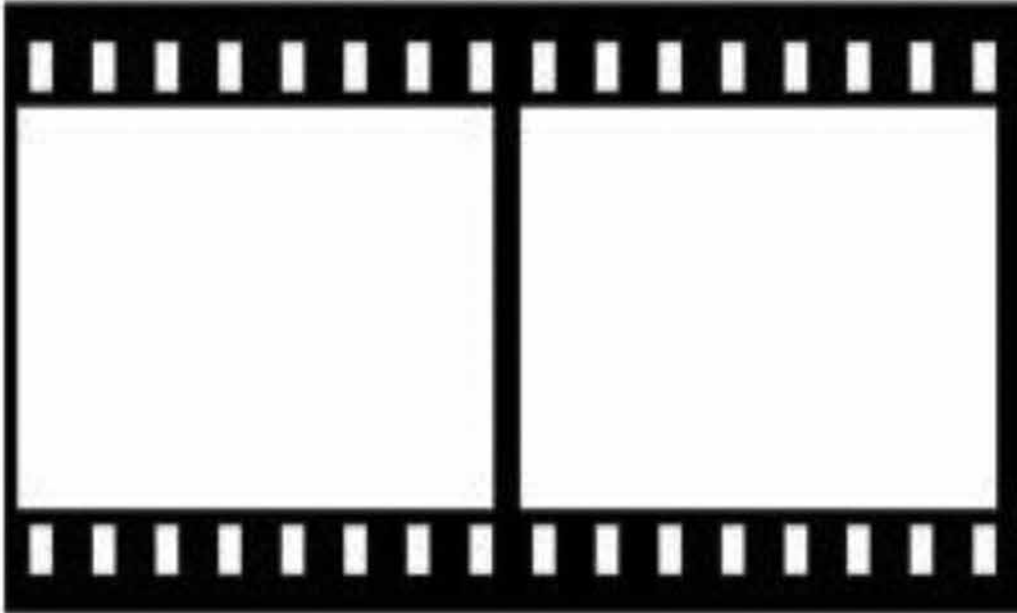
- You can either write or draw your storyboard (see next page) or use a combination of words and pictures. You don't have to be a Leonardo Da Vinci – stickmen drawings are fine. Or you can write the entire thing. It's up to you.
- Begin with the final frame and write or draw the end of your story in the eighth frame. It can be a true story – your story or someone else's. Or it could be completely made up: a car revving off into the sunset; two deckchairs beside a swimming pool – or perhaps it's not a happy ending at all? A freshly dug grave... some prison bars. Again, it's up to you.
- Once you have filled in the eighth frame of the storyboard with the ending to your story, go back to the first frame and work out the rest of the story one frame at a time. How did the story arrive at the ending you gave it? What are the key events? How does one lead to the next? By the time you reach frame seven, you'll have a whole story.
- Give it a title.

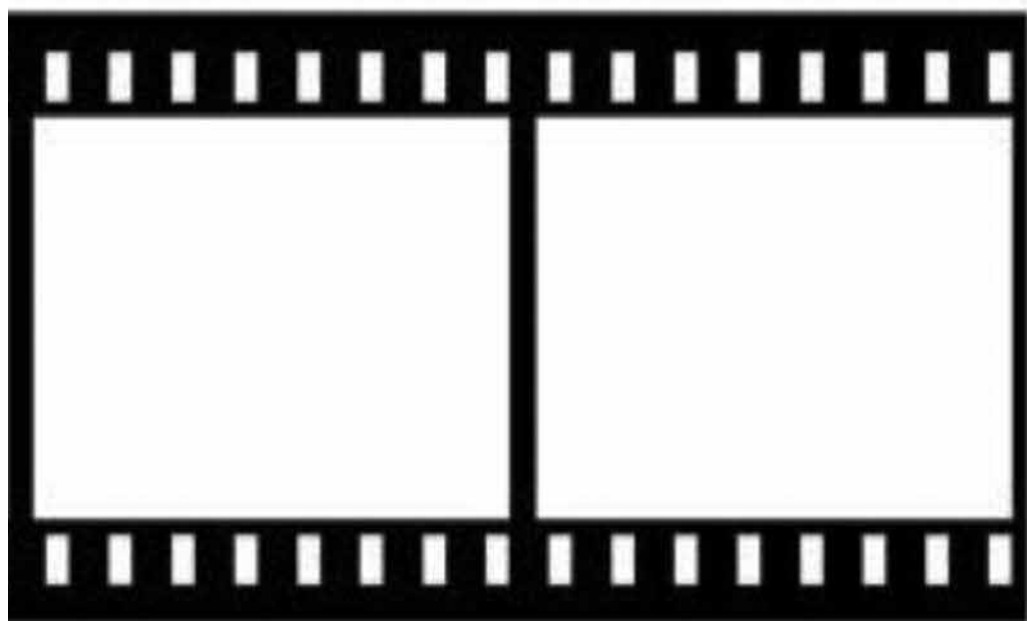
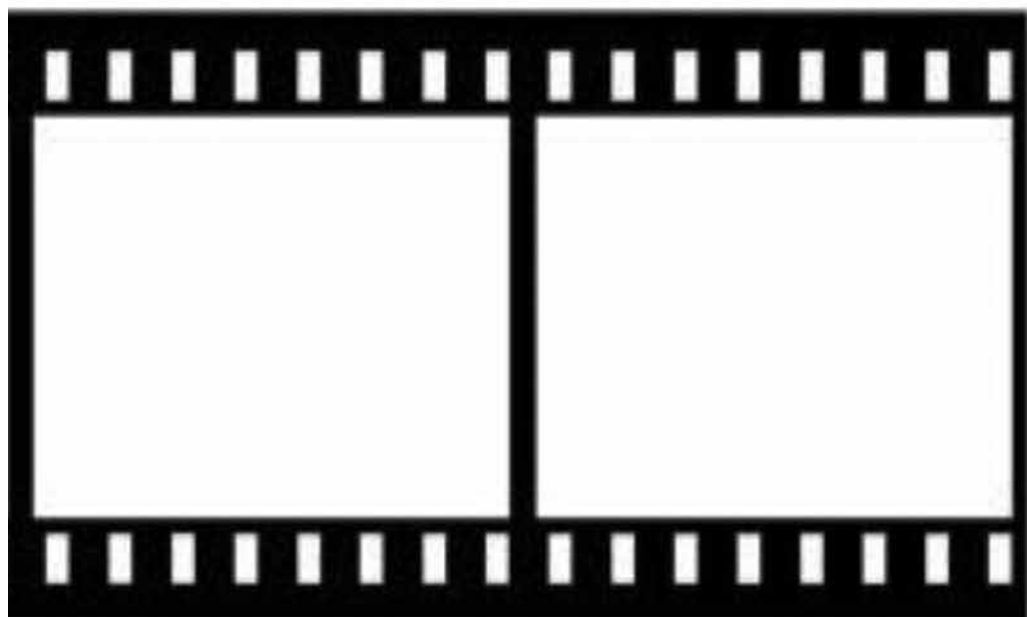
Title:



There's a bigger storyboard on the next page

Title:







Daisy Campbell wrote and directed *Cosmic Trigger*, a play about the counterculture, which was performed in Liverpool and London. She wrote, directed and performed a one-person show, *Pigsport's Daughter* in 2018. She has been involved in a number of radio productions at Leicester prison, working with prisoners to write and perform their own scripts for prison radio. She loves learning as much as she can about storytelling.

TV Story Bingo

by Daisy Eris Campbell

All stories are made of building blocks.

When you watch films and TV drama, you can look out for the story building blocks. This will help you see how the screenwriter actually wrote the script.

That is the first step to writing a script yourself!

It's easy to forget that everything you watch started life as words written on a page...

So play TV Story Bingo, and train yourself to notice the building blocks of stories. You don't have to keep score – but beware, if it's a good story you'll get sucked right in!

ORDINARY WORLD

We meet the characters in a world that's ordinary to them. It might be far from ordinary to you – but to them it's what they know.

It might be the world of high-flying business, or living on the streets, or being a member of the Royal Family – or trekking in the Himalayas.

Whatever it is, if it's at the start of a story and it's what the characters are doing when we first meet them, then it's known as 'Ordinary World.'

Score 1 point for spotting Ordinary World.

CATALYST

A catalyst is a scientific word for a substance that starts a chemical reaction. When it comes to story, it means the moment something happens to force the story to begin.

It might be a small moment: a person makes a careless mistake at work – or huge: a meteor is heading straight for Earth! Either way, without this event the story would never get going.

The catalyst usually happens in the first 10 minutes of a story. Sometimes the story begins right as the catalyst is happening, and skips out The Ordinary World.

Score 2 points for spotting the Catalyst.

WANTING

Characters want. And they take action to get what they want. That's what makes them so interesting to watch.

Sometimes they begin by wanting one thing, and what they want changes as they go – but they always want.

Often the Catalyst upsets the life they had, and so they begin by simply wanting to get their life back again. Then one thing leads to another, the story gets crazier, and they find themselves just wanting to survive the night (for example) ...

Sometimes they want something that is bad for them, and they slowly realise that what they really, truly want is something else completely.

Sometimes they deeply want two opposing things – and they are forced to decide between them. (Love or money, family or duty, respect or friendship.)

Score 1 point for spotting Wanting. Score another point for noticing how their Wanting changes.

GAPS

A Gap (in writer's jargon) is when the character is expecting one thing to happen, and something else happens instead.

Often the Catalyst is also a Gap, because it's not what the character was expecting to happen, but there are usually lots of other Gaps further on in the story as well.

Some examples:

- A husband is led to expect a 'surprise party' from his wife. Instead she asks for a divorce. GAP!
- A woman is pulled over for speeding. She is expecting a fine as the cop approaches the car. But the cop is her first love from school days, and they gaze at each other starry-eyed. GAP!
- A bank robber breaks into the vaults, but they've already been emptied. GAP!

Any time you see a character standing open-mouthed in shock, you can be fairly sure they've just experienced a GAP!

Score 2 points for each Gap you notice.

FORCES AGAINST

So characters want stuff, right? And they take action to get what they want, yes?

But what would happen if they took action to get what they wanted, and then they got it? Answer: a very boring story. And a very short story too.

So there have to be Forces Against them to make it an interesting story.

The forces against them might be coming from inside themselves: they might lack confidence, or they don't have the knowledge or training that they need...

The forces against them might be those they're closest to: their family might think they're crazy, their husband might threaten to leave them, they might be under loads of pressure at work...

The forces against them could be at the level of organisations, criminal gangs, governments or secret police...

The forces against them might even be from beyond space. Remember that meteor that's about to hit Earth?

And the forces against them might be supernatural: ghosts, aliens, zombies or demons...

Or it could be a bit of all of the above! The more forces against them, the more exciting it will be to see if they can still get what they want.

Score 1 point for each of the Forces Against you can spot.

CHOICE

Characters may say all sorts of things about who they really are, deep inside. They may even believe what they say. But until they are put to the test, who knows for sure?

It is only when a character is forced to make a choice that they reveal what their true nature actually is.

So good writers force their characters to make hard choices.

It might be a choice between two things they really want, as mentioned above (love or money).

It might be a choice between two things they really don't want (kidnap my wife or kidnap my son).

Or it might be a moral choice – which means between good and bad.

So they have to choose either: something they really, really want but know will cause harm – or – to do the right thing..

Often you will see them face one choice near the beginning, and a similar choice at the end. If they make a better choice when faced with it again, it shows that they really have changed over the course of the story.

Those are often the ‘tear-jerk’ moments. What? No I’m not crying – I’ve just got something in my eye..

Score 3 points for a big choice that reveals the true nature of a character.

Score 1 point for any smaller choices along the way.

So there you have it, TV Story Bingo. Once you get your head around it, you can make up your own story. Write a script, even.

Or if not, you can at least watch TV like a pro!

Wayout TV

Knowledge is freedom

- Wayout TV is in 64 prisons in England
- Simply retune your TV to find us
- Wayout TV, PO Box 679
Grimby, DN31 9LD



A national networked in-cell TV channel for UK prisons



Holly T Burrows studied graphic design and specialised in illustration. By luck, fate and chance she has found herself working in museums and galleries for over ten years. Her own work often focusses on wildlife and nature, and she has produced work for ZSL London Zoo and Extinction Rebellion.

Photo: Holly T Burrows

Drawing Exercise

by Holly T Burrows

A lot of artists, writers, designers and illustrators often find themselves staring at a blank page, unsure of what to write or draw. When this happens, it can be useful to try some quick drawing exercises to help warm - up the creative part of our brains!

This exercise, or 'warm- up' helps you to think up new ideas for characters that you can use in stories, loosens up your 'drawing muscles' and can be used to create abstract patterns and shapes, which can be fun to colour in.

Try each stage of this activity. You can copy the ideas in the examples or make up your own:

On the next blank page, draw around your hand.



What does it look like or remind you of? Perhaps a tree or a bird? Can you add details, so it looks like these things? Or something else?



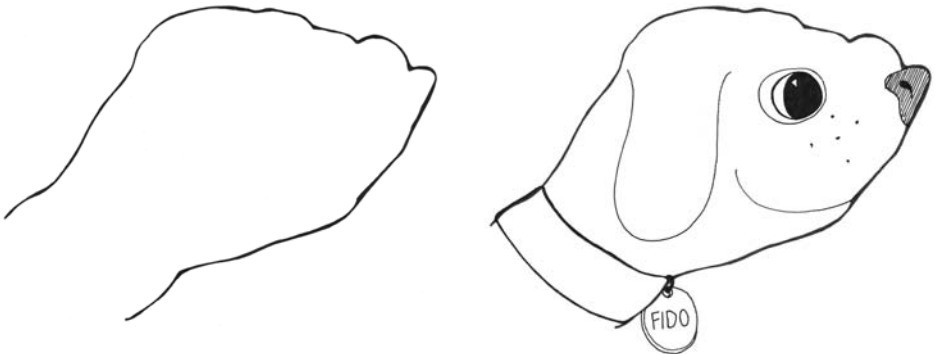
Draw around your hand below:

Try drawing around your hand in different positions.

For example:

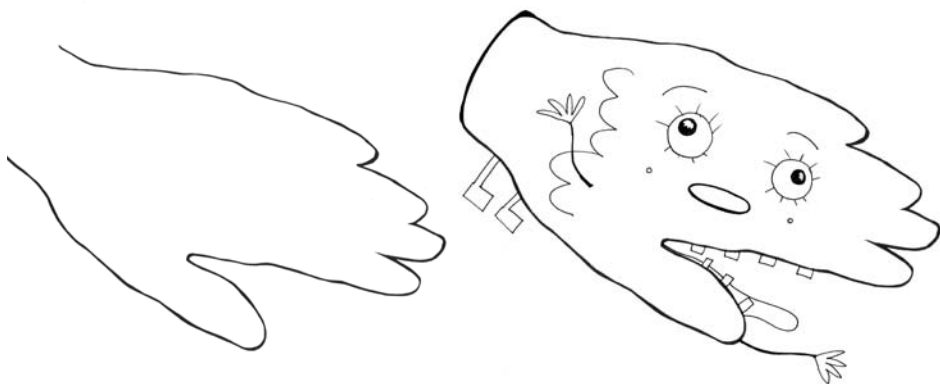
Clenched fist

What does it remind you of? Add details. We created an example below:

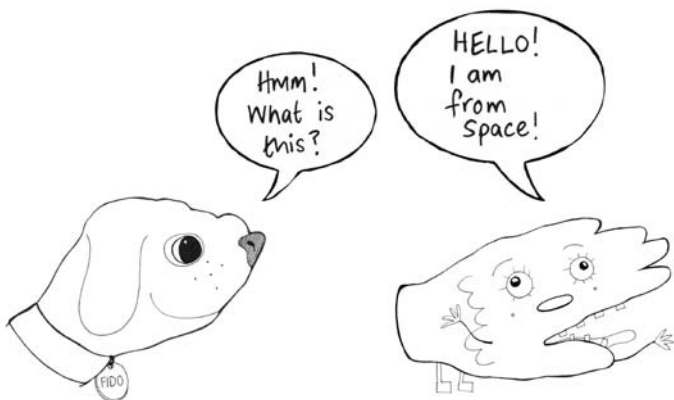


Now try relaxing your hand, and resting it lightly on the paper:

What does it remind you of? Add details. We've created an example below:



When you have created more than one character, can you make them interact with each other? If you add speech bubbles, they can have a conversation. (You don't need to keep drawing around your hand – you can just copy your creations freehand if you prefer.)



Draw yours here:

You don't have to create characters or a story. You may prefer to create a pattern. You can do this by overlapping the different shapes that you make with your hand and colouring in different areas. It will soon start to look like a piece of abstract art.

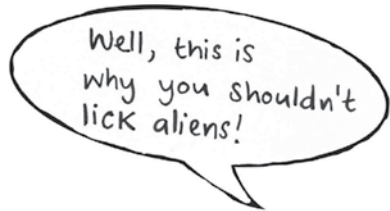
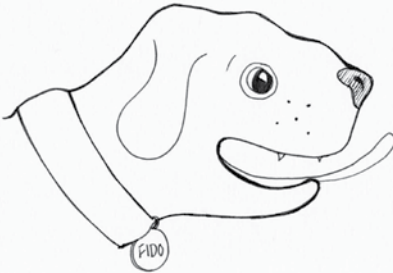
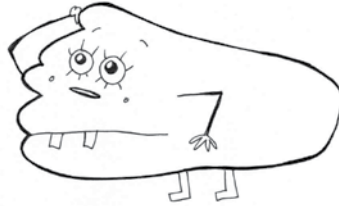
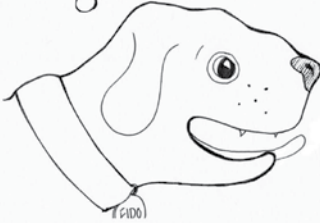
Creating images like this was something that the very first humans did on the walls of the caves they lived in. They painted around their hands and created images of the animals they hunted. It's also believed that they covered their drawings with lines and patterns so that when the cave was lit with burning torches, the flickering light from the flames combined with the patterns they'd drawn to make it look as though their artwork was moving.

Here's an example I made:



Use this space to create your own patterns. You can colour different parts of the patterns and leave the outlines thin or thick.

Perhaps you can combine the patterns with your characters. Keep drawing and writing – you have created the beginning of a story! What will happen next?



Start your story here...



Sharmila Chauhan is a screenwriter, playwright and prose writer. Her work is a transgressive meditation on love, sex, power and an exploration of the diasporic experience. Her plays include *The Husbands*, *Born Again* and *Be Better in Bed*. Both of her short films (*Oysters* and *Girl Like You*) were produced by Film London. She is currently working on a feature film, *Without You*, and her novel, *Rasa*. She lives in East London with her husband, their two children and their cat, Tashi.

Seven Wonders: Connecting the Mind, Body and Soul.

by Sharmila Chauhan

Connecting the body,
breath
and your subconscious or energetic self
can be both healing and inspiring.

This exercise will take you through parts of your body. We will use breath, word and visual prompts to help you to connect to different parts.

What you need to do:

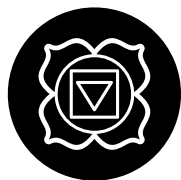
- Complete one section at a time.
- Read the title word and take time to look at the name.
- Take a look at the visual prompts (image) for the entry.
- Place your palm on the part of the body described and breathe into this place.
- There will be a colour for each you can visualise.

Remember you can use all the ideas or just one of them in each section. For instance, you might prefer to just think about the word or the colour or just use your hand. Or you might like to use all the suggestions. Remember you can do this in any way you prefer.

Afterwards, grab a pen and paper and write for two minutes.

Keep writing, try not to censor or think too much about what you are writing. Keep connecting to your breath, the word or the visual image. See what happens.

I'll meet you back here afterwards!



1. THE ROOT

Close your eyes, place your palms on the small of your back.

Visualise the colour RED.

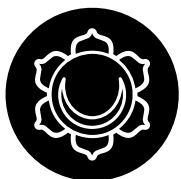
You might also imagine a RED SQUARE at the base of the spine.

Imagine your breath coming into your body, right to the base of your spine. Bring your attention here and imagine a RED LIGHT glowing in this place.

Imagine the light getting bigger.

Stay here for a few moments as long as is comfortable.

Now you can write for two minutes or for as long as you like. Try not to censor yourself, just keep writing, it doesn't matter what you write or what it is about. Just go with what comes out.



2. CREATIVITY / CREATION

Close your eyes and place your palms on the lowest part of your BELLY.

Visualise ORANGE.

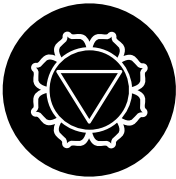
You can imagine an ORANGE CRESCENT MOON slung between your hips.

Imagine your breath filling up this place.

Imagine an ORANGE LIGHT glowing in this place. Imagine the light getting bigger.

Stay here for a few moments, or as long as is comfortable.

Now you can write for two minutes or for as long as you like. If you get stuck, you can just write – and, and, and until something new comes to you.



3. SOLAR PLEXUS

Close your eyes and place your hands just above your BELLY BUTTON.

Visualise the colour YELLOW.

You might also imagine YELLOW TRIANGLE pointed downwards.

Bring your breath to this place.

Imagine a YELLOW glow in this place. Imagine the light getting bigger.

Stay here for a few moments, or as long as is comfortable.

Now you can write for two minutes or for as long as you like.



4. HEART CENTRE

Close your eyes and place your palm onto your HEART or HEART CENTRE (This is the space in the middle of your chest, just to the right of your heart.)

Bring your breath to this place.

Imagine a GREEN LIGHT glowing in this place.

You might imagine A GREEN STAR in this place.

Imagine the GREEN light getting bigger.

Stay here for a few moments, or as long as is comfortable.

Now you can write for two minutes or for as long as you like.



5. EXPRESSION

Close your eyes and bring your palm and breath to the FRONT OF YOUR THROAT.

Bring your attention here and imagine a BLUE LIGHT glowing in this place.

You might imagine a BLUE TRIANGLE facing downwards.

Imagine the BLUE light getting bigger.

Stay here for a few moments, or as long as is comfortable.

Now you can write for two minutes or for as long as you like. Remember to just keep writing, it doesn't matter if you come off topic. You can write about anything.



6. INTUITION

Close your eyes and bring your palm and breath to your EYEBROW CENTRE.

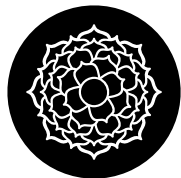
Bring your attention here and imagine an INDIGO LIGHT glowing in this place.

You might imagine an INDIGO LOTUS flower

Imagine the INDIGO light getting bigger.

Stay here for a few moments, or as long as is comfortable.

Now you can write for two minutes or for as long as you like.



7. CROWN

Close your eyes place a palm on the TOP or CROWN of your head.

Bring your attention here and imagine a VIOLET LIGHT glowing in this place.

You might imagine a VIOLET thousand petal LOTUS.

Imagine the VIOLET light getting bigger.

Stay here for a few moments, or as long as is comfortable.

Now you can write for two minutes or for as long as you like.

8. To end, bring your breath from the base of your spine slowly up to the crown and out your head. Repeat this three times.

9. Now you have completed the writing tasks, please take some time to look back and underline anything that looks interesting or surprises you.

10. Make a list of these things on your paper

11. Now consider these questions:

- How did what you wrote about, or felt, change as you moved through your body?
- Were there any patterns in the part of the body you were bringing attention to and what you wrote about?
- What might different parts of your physical body or energetic body be communicating to you?

12. Can you create a poem or a small paragraph linking these words and phrases together?

You can also use the colours or word prompts to help.

For example, you might want to talk about the colour red: Red is...

Or you could you a part of the body: My heart says...

Or maybe you can put the words together in an abstract or mysterious way.

I hope you enjoyed the exercise. I use this as a way to connect to myself or my thoughts and feelings. A lot of things can be trapped in our body and sometimes bringing some time and attention to these things can help them to be released.

Take a moment to bring some compassion and kindness to anything that felt difficult.

Thank you for being part of this.



Gerry Ryan is a writer and tutor who has worked in prisons since 2000, including three writing residencies over a period of 12 years in HMP Rye Hill, HMP Littlehey, and HMP Full Sutton. She has devised and project-managed scores of arts activities in prisons with groups and individuals, as well as training writers and artists to work in secure settings. In 2017 she received a Butler Trust Award for her work in HMP Full Sutton. She is not a cook.

How to Cook Up a Story

by Gerry Ryan

Preparation Time: it's all in the preparation.

Cooking Time: as long as you've got to give.

Serves: anyone who fancies it.

Ingredients:

- One main dude with loads of flavour
- A sprinkling of others
- A time and a place
- One juicy plot
- A ton of prickly problems

Method:

1. It all starts with your main dude. Mix together a load of traits from different people you know. Like shyness and lying or falling in love at the drop of a hat. To add spice, blend traits you wouldn't expect, like being reckless but scared to take risks. Or cold and quiet with a wicked sense of humour. Give them a name and leave to soak overnight.
2. Once they're soaked full of flavour, roast the dude. Ask a load of questions, like: Where do they live? How do they talk? Who do they love? Who do they hate? What do they do? What have they done in the past? What music do they like? What films do they watch? What's their favourite food? Do they drink? Are they an early bird or a night owl? Who broke their heart? What are they scared of? What's their guilty secret? What do they dream about? Keep roasting until you're sure they're done.
Tip: save yourself time and let the reader imagine what they look like.
3. Put your dude into a saucepan with a sprinkling of others and add a time and a place. This could be your hometown today, a foreign city a hundred years ago, or Mars in the future. Any time or place. It's up to you.

4. Choose one or more of the seven juicy plots out there and add it to the mix. Like Overcoming the Monster (Godzilla), Rags to Riches (Cinderella), The Quest (Lord of the Rings), Rebirth (A Christmas Carol), Innocent Abroad (Small Island), Tragedy (Requiem for a Dream) or Comedy (Bridget Jones' Diary).
5. Spark the flame with a trigger – an incident that starts the story cooking. Like setting sail on the Titanic, Harry Potter finding out he's a wizard, or Macbeth killing the king. Keep turning up the heat.
6. As the mixture heats up, stir in the ton of prickly problems. Whatever it takes to stop your dude getting what they want or need, from having no money for a pint of lager to getting stuck on the third floor of a burning building. Bring to the boil.
7. Once boiled, turn off the heat and allow to cool. Your story is ready to serve.



SELL THE BIG ISSUE. MAKE CASH. AND FRIENDS.

When The Big Issue was launched in 1991, it was a revolutionary act. It allowed those with nothing and without any clear future to have a means of making a legitimate income, rather than an illegal one. This was radical in publishing and radical earning potential for so many people.

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Dr Bruce Wall is the Executive Director of the London Shakespeare Workout. Established in 1997, it has taken professional performers behind bars to engage in interactive participation with those serving time.

Be Your Own Bard

by Bruce Wall

This piece has many words and phrases coined by Shakespeare.

They are all presented in speech marks, “like this”.

Pick a few of them. Remix the Bards words. Make them into a new work.

Shakespeare’s language is yours.

Shakespeare had to make money. He had to make it fast.

Times were different and the British population’s ‘headcount’ was much smaller. Shakespeare’s plays had to pull punters in. They had to be mass entertainment. If ever they ended up in the red, Shakespeare would be out. No questions asked. The door was there for all to see. There was no subsidised sector. Producers weren’t committed to runs of plays, as some famously were in our pre-pandemic world.

In the world Shakespeare knew there was only ever a constantly churning number of performances. There was nothing sentimental about this environment at all. It was entirely survival by the fittest. All were ruled by a bottom-line and each playwright persevered not just by their talent and the element of always-necessary-luck but by tricks through which each could effectively seek to engage. Without engagement you can never entertain. Without engagement you can certainly never educate. That same remains true today.

One of the tricks that the Bard used was coining language. By employing his imagination he sought to make his literal constructs the world’s own. Much of his invented sayings are still used today in our verbal currency. These words and phrases were the rappers’ hit parade of their time. See how many words – how many confabulations in quotation marks – you actually have used yourself. The proof lies in their pudding.

Have you ever been “elbowed”? That comes by way of our Bard. So too if you have ever been “lonely” or felt your surroundings “lacklustre”. Perhaps you have shared a cell with a “bandit”. That title too was bestowed by Shakespeare. As was “critic” – a journalistic legion that once left theatrical producers huddling in anxious corners. Have you ever admired

someone's "swagger" or felt "uncomfortable" within yourself? Thanks be to Shakespeare for that jargon. So too if you "undress" before bed or find something on telly wholly "unreal". Perhaps you enjoy "skim-milk". Even that phraseology is the Bard of Avon's. As he might have termed it – given that he coined the phrase in *Julius Caesar* – "Right on"!

And it's not just words, but phrases too. We are all – often unwittingly – Shakespeare citers. We can't help it. Of course, most of the time it is "without rhyme or reason". If you are "in a pickle" because you have been "eaten out of house and home" and even your "salad days" have "vanished into thin air" then you are quoting Shakespeare. Perhaps you've been well and truly "hoodwinked" or "more sinned against than sinning". No wonder you're not "playing fast and loose" and haven't "slept a wink" and are probably "breathing your last". Indeed you might well feel now it's "cold comfort" that you're quoting Shakespeare.

If you "point your finger" at me, "bid me good riddance" when you "send me packing" and call me a "laughing-stock", "the devil incarnate", a "sorry sight", "eyesore" and a "stone-hearted", "bloody minded", "blinking idiot" and wish I were as "dead as a doornail" then I would say you possess neither a "heart of gold" nor the "milk of human kindness", especially considering that we are all "flesh and blood". So, now that we've gone "full-circle" and you sit there waiting with "bated breath" since I have not been able to make you "budge an inch", it is "fair play" for me to quit this sermon since Shakespeare taught us all that "brevity is the soul of wit". Somehow, I always end up thinking that Shakespeare knew it might well be a "foregone conclusion" that we ALL would speak his language. After all he informs us that "All the world's a stage ... and all the men and women merely players".

Now's your chance to step-up-to-the-plate and become a player – a star – à la the Bard. Now is your opportunity to squeeze new meaning out of old words by combining or fashioning them so they sparkle anew. The more you do, the more you will stand apart; the more you will give people a reason to pause and think in your own regard – whatever it might be; the more you will engage their attention. Who knows you too might – like the Bard – end up in the dictionary. You just need to get people to trade in your lingual coinage; in your own unique lingo. Shakespeare – a man of humble birth – shows that you too can do it.

vanished into thin air

CIRCLE FULL

Right On!

barefaced

bloody minded

In my mind's eye

Thought is free

slept a wink

eyesore

eyeball

breathing your last

sorry sight

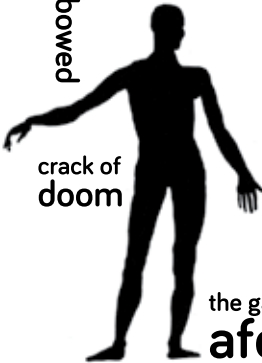
blinking idiot

bated breath

set my teeth on edge

flesh and blood

elbowed



crack of doom

point your finger

the game is

afoot

wear my ♥ upon my sleeve

♥ of gold

stone ♥ed

faint ♥ed

in my ♥ of ♥s

dis♥en

dead as a doornail

“The game is afoot” and you can put “all our yesterdays” aside if not behind should you choose. You can make yourself the “be all and end all” of attention grabbers “as good luck would have it”. Let this be your “brave new world” given that “conscience does make cowards of us all”. Let this be your moment of “admirable” fortitude. Set aside the “crack of doom” and prove yourself “a dish fit for the gods”. Why not? Be not “faint-hearted”. Show yourself to be “fancy free” “forever and a day”. “For goodness’ sake” you now can “give the devil his due” and hopefully see him “hoist with his own petard”.

“In my mind’s eye”; “in my heart of hearts”, I hear you “set” your “teeth on edge” “the live-long day” as you “kill with kindness”. I may “wear my heart upon my sleeve” but you definitely have the edge in this “wild goose chase”. In “one fell swoop” let your pointed wit’s architecture prove “as merry as the day is long”.

Make Shakespeare proud. “Make not your thoughts your prison”. You can free yourself as much as others. Shakespeare was never “barefaced”. His literary courage proved not to be “overblown”. He was “auspicious” because he understood your plight. “Thought is free,” he proclaimed. No need now to “castigate” yourself. Be your own “watchdog”. Let your internal wordsmith “dawn”.

Don’t “dwindle”. Be proud to own your Bard. It will “dexterously” – as it has before – “set you apart”. Let this be a telling aspect in the wealth of your own personal character’s portfolio.

Write it

Below are a set of prompts to inspire you to write lines, letters, poems and songs. These were put together by Dr Martin Glynn and Andrea Hadley-Johnson, taken from their Write It project created for the National Justice Museum.

Play with the words written in bold as nudges to get you creating. All you need is something to write with a surface to write on. Let the words flow!

FEAR

List the things that you
will fear no longer

Try writing key words
in different colours

Read them out loud
in a fearless voice

STRENGTH

Write a supportive message to
yourself, full of words you need
to hear now.

Think about your strengths, list
them in capital letters

Try writing a supportive
message to your past self and
your future self.

FUTURE

Draw as slowly as you can,
an outline for each letter of the
word future

Make it as large as you can.

Fill in each letter with
smaller words that describe
your ideal future.

HOPE

Write a letter of hope to the world

Tear or cut out the lines from
the letter, jumble them up.

Then turn them into a poem or
song lyrics.

Edit them to make them to rhyme
if you are feeling super creative.



Russ Litten is the author of the novels *Scream If You Want to Go Faster, Swear Down* and *Kingdom*, the short story collection *We Know What We Are* and a volume of poetry, *I Can See the Lights*. He has collaborated on spoken word / electronica recordings and performance as part of Cobby & Litten and Oddfellows Union. He also plays bass and contributes lyrics to the Hull band Oceaneers. Russ spent ten years as a Writer in Residence at various prisons in the north of England. He continues to hold writing workshops in the local community.

This story was inspired by a news item I saw a few years ago that reported a prank played by a couple of American students. They basically threw a load of fake money off a roof and caused chaos. I took that central idea – throwing money off a roof – and changed the details to make a new story.

Perhaps you could have a go at writing a short story, poem or rap based on something you heard about in the news.

What if We Gave it Away?

by Russ Litten

What actually happened on that morning has become, inevitably, a matter of public debate. The official estimate is that there were around fifty to a hundred people there. That number is generally agreed upon, although some accounts have the numbers up in the thousands. People like to embroider the facts; you know this. They like to gild the lily. You can't believe half the things you've heard repeated. Some versions of the tale feature a bloodthirsty mob going feral. Others mention a cult, some sort of religious protest. "An act of terrorism," one idiot down the pub said. Terrorism, ha! As if.

You soon put him right on that score.

In your line of work, you tend to pick up on the slightest movement, anything that feels odd, or out of place. Your spider sense tingles. It can be the quickest, most indefinable thing. On the actual morning in question, Harry was working the screens and you were idly perusing the sports section of the paper, but you happened to glance up and you latched onto it immediately. Something was happening at the front entrance to the Centre. A subtle swerve of the in-coming crowd, like fish suddenly startled and darting within the shoal. Something had happened, or was happening. People were moving quickly, stepping around each other. You could see the ripples of agitation. You scanned every screen. People were going in all directions at once, some of them picking up pace, breaking into a run.

"Harry," you say, "something's going on."

Harry toggles the cameras, scans the crowd.

What's all that... *stuff*, he says.

If you look closely, you can see it spiralling down from the top of the screens, like a scatter of dark sleet. This is what's causing the commotion. Amongst all the hurrying around, you notice that people are stopping, bending down, picking stuff off the ground. Some of them are stooped over, like crabs, literally scurrying back and forth. Other folks are looking upwards, shading their eyes, and pointing. There's a guy in a suit, leaping up and down, snatching at the sky. A crowd of kids are hopping up and down off the flower bed walls, chasing fluttering dark shapes, these dirty snowflakes.

"No idea," Mike says.

He looks closer.

"Not cinders, is it?"

"Something burning? Shouldn't be."

Harry zooms in on a huddle of teenage lads near a bin. They're stuffing their pockets with bundles of notes: money. It was money. You could tell it was money by the way they were acting, all of them up on their toes, glancing around all furtive.

"Money," says Harry.

He pans the camera around and it's not just young lads, it's everyone: young, old, middle-aged, pensioners. They're all grabbing up handfuls of money – from the floor, the flower beds, from out of thin air. Another big flurry comes spiralling down on the left-hand side and you see a section of the crowd veer as one. Across all of the cameras, everyone's swarming around. It's raining down money. A young student girl is knelt down, stuffing her rucksack. Two old women are filling their shopping bags. A guy is almost falling off his mobility scooter, trying to reach down and grab himself a handful.

"Jesus," says Harry.

"It's coming off the roof," you say.

Harry swings around to some sudden commotion on the right-hand side. An argument has broken out; someone is being jostled. Arms are raised, fingers are pointed. A woman tries to come between a man and a younger lad. The lad is trying to snatch something from the man. More people gather around them.

"Get Kevin," says Harry.

You put the call out for Kevin, but there's no answer.

"I'll go down there," you say.

"I'll come with you," says Harry.

You are both on minimum wage. You are overdrawn by four hundred pounds and living above a chemist. Just in the last week, you couldn't afford to put your car through its MOT. You have not been on holiday for five years. There must be thousands of pounds down there. Tens of thousands, maybe hundreds.

As you both head into the stairwell, you change your mind.

"I'll go up top," you tell Harry, "and you bounce up the four flights of stairs that bring you out onto the top parking deck."

It's still early, so there's only two or three cars. At first glance, there's nobody else about, but the sun can blind you up there, when it comes in low across that rooftop. It takes your eyes a couple of seconds to adjust after the gloom of the stairwell.

Then you see him at the guard rail, on the other side of the level. He's got his back to you. A man – big, tall fella it looks like. He's digging into this holdall, pulling out bundles of notes and emptying them over the side. He leans over and looks down, then pulls out another fistful, shakes them all loose.

Shouting from down below. A woman's voice.

"Mate," you call out. "Oi, mate! Hey! Excuse me?"

As you quicken your pace, you try to think what the hell you could say. Is it illegal to throw money away? What's the offence, here? Littering? Causing a public disturbance? Throwing stuff off the roof? Yeah. There you go. Doesn't matter what it is, money, or whatever, it's against the shopping centre rules to throw things off the roof.

You can't believe your brain is working like this.

You get about five metres away from him.

"Mate," you say again, and this time the fella spins round and you throw the brakes on, stop right where you are, on account of the gun this fella's got jammed up against his head and the look he's giving you. His eyes beseech you. You know by the jump of your heartbeat that this isn't some sort of prank. This is not something you can apply rules to. This is beyond reason. That look on his face, Jesus.

Don't come near me," he says.

Thing is, you spent twenty-seven years on the force. Drugs, drink, domestic rage, violence. You've seen your share. You once spent an entire night shift persuading a man not to burn down his house with his wife and three kids

trapped inside. You've managed to persuade people that the television isn't telling them to kill themselves. You've seen people cut themselves to ribbons, launch themselves through plate glass windows, smash a room to pieces with whatever came to hand. You are no stranger to dealing with delicate situations sparked by people whose state of mind is in disrepair. And you know when somebody is no longer responsible for their actions. This man has reached the end of his rope; run full pelt into the brick wall, the complete full stop. This has already gone beyond negotiation. You are looking into the eyes of a man who has made up what is left of a tormented mind.

"You can't stop me," he says.

"I don't want to stop you," you say.

"Good," he says, "cos you can't."

As if to prove his point, he leans backwards and flings the handful of twenties he's clutching in his other fist. Most of them disappear overboard, but a few are whipped back by the wind. They join the scattering of money on the concrete between you. There's a good few grand in twenties just on the floor, right there. More money is spilling out of the holdall at his feet – twenties and the brick red fifties – and you see there's another identical holdall next to it, zipped up tight as a drum.

He's a young fella, not much more than thirty. He's got what could be called an open face – a kind face – but right now he looks like there's not much kindness left in him. He's acquired about two weeks' worth of beard, looks a bit unkempt, a bit scuffed round the edges. Whatever he's being going through, it's ending here. You want to check his pupils, but at the same time you need to avoid overt eye contact, avoid anything that could be construed as aggression. You don't want to trigger his fight or flight. He doesn't seem drunk or drugged. What he looks to be, is utterly haunted.

The gun is trembling in his hand.

"Mate, what's happening?" you ask him.

"I'm giving it away," he says.

"Why?"

"Why not?"

You can't think of an answer to this, or at least one that won't agitate him further.

"You can't throw stuff off the roof, mate," you tell him.

“I can do what I want,” he says. “You can do anything you want, when you’re rich.”

Impatient stabs on a car horn below, one, two three, followed by another longer blast.

“What’s your name, pal?” You ask him.

“Why?”

He squats down and scrabbles around in the holdall, not lowering the gun, never once taking his eyes away from you. He pulls out another bundle and straightens up.

“My name’s Alec,” you tell him. “I’m not the police. I work here. I’m here to help you, you tell him. What’s your name, mate?”

“TJ,” he says.

“TJ? OK, nice one. Alright TJ, listen... throwing stuff off the roof... it could, er... it could be a hazard.”

“How? They fucking love it,” he says.

More raised voices from below. Angry voices. More car horns blasting.

You point to the money on the floor between you.

“Is that actually real?” you ask him.

“Yeah,” he says.

You gesture towards the edge.

“Can I look over? Just to check nobody’s hurt?”

“OK,” he says, “but go further up there.”

He points to where he wants you to go. You side-step half a dozen paces to your left, then slowly move forward, gently up against the guard rail. He’s swivelled himself around to watch you, the gun still pressed to his temple.

You don’t look at him or the gun. You grip the rail and peer over, down to the street below.

People are running everywhere. There seems to be at least twice as many people as there were on the screens just a few minutes ago. Cars are stopping and parking up in the middle of the road, the drivers jumping out and joining the scramble for money.

People are looking up. They can see you both. They start yelling: “MORE! MORE! MORE! MORE!”

This fella, this TJ, he tears at the bundle with his teeth, flings another handful of twenties over.

Huge cheer from down below.

“MORE! MORE! MORE!”

“Jesus,” you say.

“See,” he says. “They fucking love it.” He throws more money over.

“Who’d have thought this would happen, eh?” he says. “Who down there would have thought, when they got up, that today would be the day that all their worries and cares would be over? Things like this just don’t happen,” he says. “Things like this don’t happen in real life, never ever in this miserable fucking shitty life,” he says.

“How much is there,” you ask him.

“Two million,” he says.

“You are fucking joking,” you say.

You look at him, his burnt-out eyes and the set of his jaw and the gun held up to his head and you can see that he is not.

“Do you wanna have a go?” he says.

Two million quid. You are fifty-two years old. You have got one pair of boots and one jacket. You had spaghetti hoops on toast for your dinner the last three nights. You’ve cancelled your last two dentist appointments because you can’t afford to pay for them.

“Yes please,” you say.

He picks up the holdall and swings it over to you. It lands on its side, spilling more money. You delve inside and start pulling bundles of notes out. They’re shrink-wrapped in cellophane. You rip them open. You pull the bundles apart. You start throwing them over the side. You fill the sky with money. A roar of approval from below. You keep going. You scoop up armfuls of loose notes from the floor and empty it all out into thin air. A blizzard of money swirling down. People are shouting and screaming. There’s a huge scuffle near the roadside, a swarm of bodies being pulled around. Someone falls and gets trampled and tripped over. Punches are swung, arms flailing. A man dives in and starts pulling people to their feet.

Sirens, now, louder, and louder. Two police cars pull up and the uniforms get out. They hesitate as they survey the rolling mob of bodies, then run in and start pulling people apart.

You keep flinging money over as fast as you can, not bothering to pull apart the bundles, just hurling them down to the outstretched arms. A huge

cheer goes up and you look round to see TJ leaning over the edge, shaking the other holdall empty, the thick bricks of money tumbling down on the people below, then there goes the holdall itself, cartwheeling through the air. It lands on the pavement near a rubbish bin and is immediately leapt upon and ripped to pieces. There's a small circle of people stood around a figure laid out on the floor. It's a woman. It looks like an old woman. There's a walking stick and a bag, items of shopping scattered and a pool of something dark around her head. You can see clumps of money stuck fast and fluttering in the breeze.

This needs to stop. You need to stop. You straighten up and turn round to tell him.

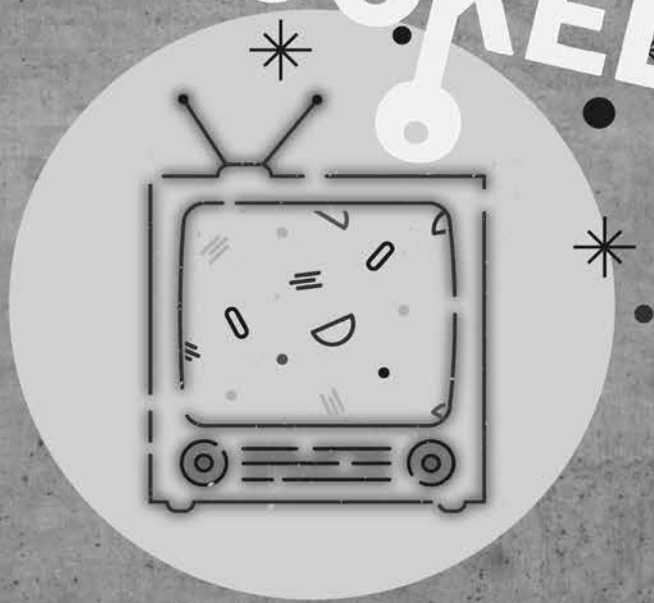
“TJ,” you say, but he's not there.

Later, after the police and ambulances have gone, you watch the CCTV back. If you look carefully, you can see it all unfold. The first person to notice what's happening is a young boy strapped into a push-chair, out shopping with his mother and grandmother. The note flutters past the women's heads and lands in the boy's lap. You can see, if you zoom in, that it's a twenty. The little lad picks it up, peers at it, this strange message from above, and then it's gone, whipped out of his sticky little fingers by a quick change in the wind. You zoom out, and the note is then picked up by someone following ten paces behind, a man in his mid-fifties, who swoops, snatches, and straightens up again, almost without breaking stride. He furtively regards his windfall, then pockets it, promptly. You can almost see the smirk on his face. You follow him along for a few more steps, then you see him stop dead and pick something up from the small wall that borders the flower beds. Now he's looking around at the floor and down the other side of the wall. Now he's hunting among the flowers. Now he's on his hands and knees as the first wave comes drifting down. You can see it all... if you look.

I would like whoever reads this story to think about the guy throwing the money off the roof – who is he? Where did he get the money? And why he is giving it away?

After you've had a think, have a go at writing something based on your own ideas.

TALENT UNLOCKED



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Talent Unlocked

by *Simon Bland*

Someone once told me, “Luck is the crossroads where opportunity and preparation meet.” That was certainly the case for the birth of Talent Unlocked. It was June 2017, and having worked at HMYOI Glen Parva for 15 years, I’d just been granted the chance to show that the arts could have a positive impact on the justice system and was beginning to split my time between the soon-to-close Glen Parva and HMP Leicester. As I knew of volunteers and incomplete projects from Glen Parva that needed a home, I approached the then Deputy Governor at Leicester, Ralph Lubkowski to ask if he’d let me bring them over.

“That sounds lovely, but I’d like a festival,” was his response, and so began our journey towards what we believed to be the first in-prison arts festival – two weeks of activities, workshops and performances in any space we could find. With the full backing of Governor Phil Novis, and ‘how to’ knowledge from Jacqui Norton, associate professor in Arts and Festivals Management at De Montfort University, the opportunity was clear. Unknown to me at the time, 15 years of running groups, wandering around the wings, and generally pushing my luck at Glen Parva had been my preparation.

Somehow, we pulled it off. The festival was a success, and it was quickly decided that it should be an annual event, which we repeated in 2018 and 2019, each time getting more buy in from staff, internal and external, uniformed and non-uniformed, with the prison being happy to security clear certain partners, meaning they could have keys which, in turn, meant more activities could be put on. Unfortunately, in 2020 the pandemic struck, derailing any plans we had. However, not to be beaten, Jacqui contacted WayOut TV and the festival went digital, providing a series of episodes that were aired weekly in early 2021, then repeated later in the year. It was at the same time that Alistair Fruish, HMP Leicester’s writer in residence, varied his ‘Working Class Artists’ project into the first *Toolbox* book.

As much as I loved the festivals, they never fully encapsulated what I wanted Talent Unlocked to be about, as they only took up two weeks out of 52. They certainly provided some wonderful moments, and hopefully inspired people to try something new, but change and growth are gradual. They require sustained input and work – how could we inspire that?

The first thing was to agree on what exactly Talent Unlocked was, and what it stood for, especially as we'd been approached by another prison, asking if they could use the Talent Unlocked brand. I was also using it on a regular basis, on homemade CD wallets and my (work-ish) Twitter account, so it was developing a life of its own, albeit a small one. The simple meaning we came up with was that Talent Unlocked meant “sustainable arts for all in prisons.”

I'd like to take you through what that means to me.

Sustainable – whilst this might seem somewhat contrary to the idea of a two-week festival, we all believed it's so important that anything arts related is continually available, with a focus on long-term regularity over short-term intensity. Firstly, this acknowledges the above-mentioned concept of gradual, but continual, personal growth, in your own time and on your own terms (we're all ready to take things on board at different times and speeds). Secondly this would make better use of the involved professionals' time, as activities could be created to make use of in-cell time – call it homework if you will. For example, the recording sessions I've run in prison should be the realisation of the writing and practice a lyricist has already done, not when they start writing.

For all – we have no desire to exclude anyone, regardless of outside perceptions, offence, unofficial status and so on. We don't care if you're an amazing artist, or it's your first attempt, what matters is that you're prepared to give it a go, and even then there's no rush. That simple step says that you're prepared to grow, which is a pretty rare quality in adults anywhere. Also, where possible, activities should also be available to staff. The arts can bring people together to find and develop shared interests and break down barriers. All of these are just as important between staff and prisoners as they are between prisoners.

The arts – this is, naturally, the big one. There are so many selling points for using arts in prisons – often they're the same selling points for using

them in society at large. My main selling points have always been: they teach the same values we want to instil in ourselves for success in any walk of life, these being that discipline and hard work are rewarded, and that we can come to be valued by ourselves and others for what we can do and what we represent rather than what we own; they are (generally) a cheap way of spending your time; the activities themselves do not judge us, and do not care what might be on our criminal record, risk profile, or any of the other paper-based assessments so beloved by the systems we exist in. Finally, the arts can introduce us to new ideas, new people, new ways of approaching things, and help us to find out new things about ourselves.

I like to think that all of these values are espoused in this, and the other Toolbox books Alistair has compiled. I'm proud to be a small part of them, and hope they will have a legacy in prisons way beyond anything I did. No matter where, or when you are, thank you for getting this far, both in terms of reading my words and picking up this book. What you do with it and where it takes you is entirely in your hands.

**TALENT
UNLOCKED**

Big thanks to all the book's contributors; to Slim Smith for his design work and to Donna Scott for proofing; Dorigen Hammond for her help; Alan G Smith and Jusytn Caie; Jim Donaldson, Louise Dowell and Simon Bland; Anthony Lawton and the Joyce Carr Doughty Trust; National Prison Radio and Inside Time, and of course to Arts Council England for their support with this project. To everyone who has ever helped or backed me in my work in jails, or taken part in a prison related project with me, I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude.

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