Videos 1–6	Writers on Writing
	33 contemporary authors that talk face to face about writing

Dannie Abse
Chinua Achebe
Brian Aldiss
Martin Amis
Maya Angelou
Margaret Atwood
JG Ballard
John Berger
Raymond Briggs
Elaine Feinstein
Maggie Gee
Nadine Gordimer
Mary Gordon
George Higgins
Kazuo Ishiguro
PD James
Lena Kennedy
Robert Leeson
Deborah Moggach
Wendy Perriam
Marge Piercy
Harold Pinter
Christopher Priest
Ruth Rendell
Michèle Roberts
Salman Rushdie
Maurice Sendak
Mongane Serote
Janice Shinebourne
John Updike
Mario Vargas Llosa
Fay Weldon
Arnold Wesker

A creative writing course with six videos and a study guide designed to develop literary appreciation and to bridge the gap between the professional author and the student writer

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1–6 writers on writing

creative writing course study guide

with 48 tasksheets

1 Beginnings – Inspiration – The role of the writer
2 Writing from personal experience – Subjects
3 Methods – Drafting – Research
4 Character – Setting – Plot
5 Form – Genre
6 Language – Audience

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Introduction

Writers on Writing is a major new resource in video and print designed to stimulate creative writing and literary appreciation. It is based on conversations between contemporary writers discussing their work at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London. The conversations, recorded by the ICA and available in the video series *Writers Talk Ideas of Our Time* (distributed by The Roland Collection), have been re-edited to form the basis of the *Writers on Writing* creative writing course, designed for teachers of English and students aged fifteen and over.

The course aims to bridge the gap between the professional author and the student writer by raising shared issues such as methods, themes, language, genre and form. It provides:

- source material on the writing process to encourage reflection and discussion about how to write
- supporting materials for course work or for the independent student to develop the craft of writing
- insight into the work of contemporary writers; their discussion of their own writing will encourage students to read with greater understanding

Course structure

The course is modular. It consists of six twenty-minute videos, in which contemporary authors discuss different aspects of the writing process, and a study guide with 48 tasksheets. A teacher could build a year's course around these materials, or the videos and tasksheets can be used individually. This flexibility also makes the course ideal for adult evening classes and self-study.

The study guide covering the whole course is supplied with each video. Additional copies can be obtained from The Roland Collection (see order form p102).

Before beginning

Before beginning the course all students should complete an extended piece of creative writing – a 'specimen' story, play or long poem. The tasksheets then encourage students to review and improve this piece of work in the light of what they learn from the videos.

Before watching the videos students should also consider what 'ingredients' are involved in writing; the first tasksheet asks 'What is a story?' 'What is a

continued

play?' to make students focus on the concepts of character, structure, setting, style and language, and on their own strengths as writers.

Teachers are strongly advised to watch the videos before showing them to a class. Because of the dense nature of some of the material, a whole video should not be shown at one sitting. On-screen subtitles have been used to clarify meanings.

Following up the course

The discussion in the videos could be followed up by organizing meetings between students and authors – through 'book weeks', 'writers' days', residential writing workshops or simply by inviting writers to come and talk about their work or to work with students. Most Art Associations offer advice and financial support for schools and colleges wanting to put students in touch with professional writers. Publishers, journalists and booksellers can also help to put writing in context.

Writing for the traditional school or college magazine may encourage students to experiment and to develop their writing skills, but national competitions for young writers also provide an opportunity to be published. Local companies, bookstores, publishers and banks may be willing to sponsor regional writing competitions and events in schools and colleges, while local newspapers may publish students' writing or allow them to produce a feature, which will teach them about deadlines, editing and the publishing process.

Beginnings – Inspiration – The role of the writer

Dannie Abse
Kazuo Ishiguro
PD James
Lena Kennedy
Marge Piercy
Harold Pinter
Michèle Roberts
Salman Rushdie
Maurice Sendak
Mongane Serote

The authors in Video 1 talk about how and why they began to write, where they found their 'inspiration' and how they see their role as a writer, both in personal and in public terms. They are mostly talking about fiction – 'creative', 'imaginary', 'expressive' or 'poetic' writing.

The first accounts written by young children are usually of this type; they are encouraged to write expressively in language that closely parallels their speech and from personal experience. By the age of about fifteen, some students have mastered the art of turning ideas, thoughts and imaginative experiences into a narrative construct; some can write only in a rather limited, banal way in the first person; and others shy away from the idea of writing anything imaginative or creative, convinced they are not good at it.

Students need to develop their writing skills so that they can produce writing which informs, instructs, persuades, analyses, etc. Tasksheet 1.2 looks at different types of writing by asking students to consider why they write, what they write and the differences between writing for oneself and for others. This exercise can help them confront any prejudices they have about their ability as writers and raises questions of how much importance students attach to different types of writing; how an awareness of audience affects style; what styles they adopt – *informal, formal emotive, personal, informative, discursive, expository, persuasive, poetic*.

Tasksheet 1.3 asks questions about the first section of the video; 1.4 follows up the discussion about inspiration in the second section. Tasksheet 1.5 asks students to write a comparison of three different accounts of the same event, looking at purpose, audience and style.

The third section of the video, 'The role of the writer', is more complex and may be of most interest to more mature students. Tasksheet 1.6 suggests ways in which these ideas might be developed.

continued

Follow-up to video 1

The writers' comments about younger children acting as an audience could be followed up in a number of ways. It inspired this extended writing project for fourteen-year-olds:

Students were asked to remember stories they enjoyed as children, and to classify them as fairy tales, myths, legends, frightening stories, amusing stories, etc. They then brought in their favorite stories and read and discussed them in small groups.

The teacher asked the class to think what made the stories appealing. The positive elements they identified included journeys and quests, good overcoming evil, happy endings, the resolution of conflict, conflict between parents and children, sibling rivalry, and coming to terms with real and imagined fears.

A group of students then visited a local elementary school and conducted a survey of seven-year-olds' favorite stories. The appeal of these stories was analyzed and the positive elements of both sets of stories distilled into objectives for the students' own writing. The class put them into practice by writing a series of stories, and inviting the younger children to a reading.

The students then produced an extended piece of writing for their course work, which included an account of their survey, the stories themselves, an analysis of their children's responses to them, and a discussion of the value of story-telling and story-writing.

The younger children produced illustrations for the stories, which were then printed and the books presented to the elementary school library.

The project had an additional teaching dimension. In the initial discussions of children's stories the teacher had introduced the idea of traditional sex-role stereotyping. One of the criteria for the stories the class wrote was that they should have non-sexist protagonists, themes and plots, and the younger children's reactions to this were monitored. Some of the class used these findings to write about bias in writing of all kinds.

continued

The project was successful because:

- students had a real purpose for their writing
- they had a real audience, which encouraged drafting and redrafting (as did the public reading and printing the stories)
- they became more conscious of the importance of structure and language in their work, and were anxious to collaborate to produce work of high quality
- they developed critical skills that could be applied to the study of literature
- their motivation was high!

The ingredients of writing

Writing is a bit like cooking: different ingredients give you different results.

Make a large copy of the table below. Jot down all the things you associate with the words *novel, play, poem, short story, letter, newspaper article*.

- How do they differ – in length, who reads them, their subject matter, how they are written, etc?
- What elements do they have in common?

	Differences	Similarities
Novel		
Play		
Poem		
Short story		
Letter		
Newspaper article		

When you decide whether a story or poem is any good, what do you look at?

Think of the sort of writing you enjoy reading and make a list of the 'ingredients' that make it good or bad. For example, if you like humorous writing, what makes it funny – the ideas, situations, characters, dialogue or language?

If you are working in a group, compare your list with someone else's. Did you come up with the same things?

- Which ingredients do you use in your own writing?
- Which ones work well and which ones don't?

Tasksheet 1.2 — Keeping a writing record

Pre-screening

You probably use writing far more frequently than you realize. For work, study, in our leisure time or our social life, we write all kinds of things, for different reasons, which are read by different people, or 'audiences'.

Some things take only a few minutes to write – a note to a family member, a message for a friend. Some things can be either a bore or a pleasure to write – a 'thank you' letter, a letter to a close friend, an entry in a private diary.

Make a list of everything you have written over the last three days (including short notes) at work, in class, or at home.

1. How much time did each one take?
2. Why did you write it?
3. Who read it?
4. Who did you write it for – yourself, a teacher, a relative, a friend?

Number the pieces of writing in order of their importance to you.

Tasksheet 1.3 — Beginnings

In the first section of the video a number of authors talk about how they started to write. Some of their reasons may seem rather odd, so you may need to watch the video a second time before answering these questions.

1. What reasons do they give for wanting to start writing?
2. Some authors started to write very early, others very late in life. What reasons do they give for this?
3. Which reasons for writing appeals to you most? Which do you identify with most?
4. Which are the most amusing and the most serious reasons for writing?
5. Lena Kennedy and Michèle Roberts both talk about the very secret nature of some writing. What examples do they give of private and personal writing?
6. Do you find this sort of writing appealing? Why?

In a group discuss your answers. Here are some more questions to stimulate your discussion.

1. Were you surprised by any of the personal reasons the authors gave for writing? If so, why?
2. Before watching the video did you have a picture in your mind of what 'authors' are like?
3. Did any of these writers not fit that picture?

Look back at your list of reasons for writing in Tasksheet 1.2. How do these writers' reasons compare with yours?

Many people imagine that authors get a flash of inspiration and then write their book, play or poem. It may be comforting to hear that being 'stuck' for an idea is common to all writers. **Watch the second section of the video, where writers talk about how they get going.**

All sorts of things can provide inspiration: a conversation on a bus, a murder read about in a newspaper, etc. We need to be aware all the time of things which would make a good story, poem or play if we are to overcome a lack of ideas. Many writers, like Harold Pinter, jot down ideas or snatches of conversation in a note book and sometimes do not use them for many years.

Think back over the last twenty-four hours. What have you read, heard about, seen or taken part in that would make a good story?

Michèle Roberts describes how she was 'inspired' by the sentence 'There is a dead nun in the school chapel' – she wanted to know what it meant. Her novel *A Piece of the Night* begins:

There is a dead nun in the school chapel. She lies on a velvet-covered bier inside a dusty glass case surrounded by wax flowers and the stumps of nightlights winking in ruby glass containers. Sister Veronica contemplates her from the nuns' stalls behind the black wrought-iron grille. The novices are cleaning the chapel. They fight for the priviledge to do so ...

Here are some other opening sentences by writers on the video:

I was born in the city of Bombay ... once upon a time. No, that won't do. There's no getting away from the date: I was born in Doctor Narlika's Nursing Home on August 15th, 1947.

Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*

It was 1894, the age of gas lights and horse-drawn buses, large flowery hats and trailing skirts.

Lena Kennedy, *Autumn Alley*

Dr. Paul Steiner, consultant psychiatrist at the Steen Clinic, sat in the front ground floor consulting-room and listened to his patient's highly rationalized explanation for the failure of his third marriage.

PD James, *A Mind to Murder*

continued

The first thing of which she is aware is the dark. Formless, seemingly endless. Inconceivable space within which she hangs.

Michèle Roberts, *The Visitation*

Imagine how these stories continue and jot down a brief outline of a possible plot. (You might like to compare your prediction with the real novel.) Choose one of these beginnings and write a story of your own.

Dannie Abse says that political events and the political poetry his brother Leo showed him inspired him to write.

Read these three accounts of the Jarama Offensive in 1937, an important battle in the Spanish Civil War, and answer the questions about each text.

On 12 February ... The newly formed XV International and 17 Brigade was thrown into the breach ... to face Saenz de Buruaga's troops. They consisted of a British battalion, commanded by Tom Wintringham, the Dimitrov battalion and a Franco-Belgian battalion.

The British bore the brunt of the attack on the south of the road and lost over half their men in capturing, and then defending, 'Suicide Hill'. The French 'Sixth of February' battalion on their right was forced back, without warning, allowing the British machine-gun company to be captured by a group of *regulares* from the exposed flank. 'Suicide Hill' could be held no longer.

Anthony Beevor, *The Civil War in Spain*

The planes had finished turning, were drumming straight up the road. 'Jeez!' groaned Hank. 'Are they trying to kill us, or what?' Again the bomb-scream tore through my head and back and seemed to reach, white-hot, to my guts. A man afraid curls himself round his guts to protect them: poor protection, our knotted muscles and tubed bones, but under bombing or shell-fire most men try to cover somehow eyes, with their hands, stomach and sex with their legs. Hank's knees, like mine, were almost up to his chin. But the Bohunk lay between us flat, straight, square on his solid belly.

Six bombs this time, none quite so near us, but one struck high up on the earth approach to the bridge and burst our way. A great lump of earth knocked me on the back and winded me: I gulped air; whining, Hank got his share of the dirt. But the Bohunk's legs and backside were ripped by flying metal that had passed just beyond our curled up toes. The back of one thigh was mashed spouting redness. I saw it just at my elbow as I fought to stop sobbing and free my eyes from the tears and shooting stars.

Tom Wintringham, *It's a Bohunk*

Jarama Front

I tried not to see
But heard his voice
How brown the earth
And green the trees.
One tree was his.
He could not move.
Wounded all over,
He lay there moaning.

continued

I hardly know:
I tore his coat
It was easy –
Shrapnel had helped.

But he was dying
And the blanket sagged.
'God bless you, comrades,
He will thank you.'
That was all.
No slogan,
No clenched fist
Except in pain

T A R Hyndman

1. What is the writer's purpose in writing?
2. What kind of audience is the writer aiming at?
3. How would you describe the style of each passage?
   - formal
   - poetic
   - emotional
   - informative
4. How would you describe the choice of vocabulary?
5. Which piece works best?
6. Which is the most powerful?
7. Which seems the most realistic?

Is there a social or political issue you feel strongly about and would like to write about? **Describe one such issue or event.**

- What is your purpose in writing about it?
- What audience are you aiming at?

Tasksheet 1.6	The role of the writer

Many writers, like Salman Rushdie and Mongane Serote, feel that they should be involved in public affairs, because of the nature of their work. Other writers feel that they must be impartial 'outsiders' to events. **Watch section three of the video and decide what you think.**

1. Which sort of writers do we expect to be impartial?
2. Is it possible for a writer to be impartial?
3. Do we, the audience, read all writing in the same way?
4. Look back at Tasksheet 1.5. Did you read the three accounts with the same expectations?
5. How is the role of the writer related to their purpose in writing?

One way to pursue these ideas is to look at how particular authors perceived their role in society, through reading their work and finding out about their lives. Here are some groups of writers you might like to research:

- Writers who influenced the social and political awareness of their readers, such as Charles Dickens and Emile Zola. Their fiction had a more far-reaching effect than direct political action.
- Contemporary writers who have been imprisoned or tortured for exposing the political and social ideals and change public opinion through their writing.
- Authors writing about World Wars I and II, who actively sought to influence political and social ideals and change public opinion through their writing.

1. Which writers appear to ignore political events and social change?
2. Are some forms (eg poetry, plays) more suitable for writing about social events than others?

Video 2	Writing from personal experience – Subjects

Martin Amis
Maya Angelou
Mary Gordon
Wendy Perriam
Maurice Sendak
John Updike
Fay Weldon
Arnold Wesker

Using this video

'What shall I write about?' is a familiar cry, common to both the professional and the student writer. This video and the tasksheets look at some subjects other writers have written about and try to help students discover what it is they have to say.

Tasksheet 2.3 introduces the four main sources of material for writers:

Things, people, places and ideas they know well	Fiction is very often overt or disguised autobiography. Most students are used to writing straightforward autobiographical accounts, and Tasksheets 2.2 and 2.7 aim to develop this material into other forms. Through textual analysis of a short story Tasksheet 2.6 explores Maya Angelou's point about how personal experience can be made universal.
Things, ideas and causes they feel strongly about	Many writers seek to change their readers' awareness of a subject. Tasksheet 2.8 suggests ways of putting over an argument in fictional writing.
Things they know little about but would like to explore in their imagination	Genres such as science-fiction or historical novels are examples of fantasy writing. Some students find it hard to 'write from the imagination', so Tasksheet 2.9 provides some lighthearted fantasy exercises.
Painful events, problems and difficulties they hope to resolve through their writing	Personal or 'cathartic' writing often takes the form of diaries and letters. Because of its private nature, it is hard to practice as part of a creative writing course, but Tasksheet 2.10 suggests interesting ways of using the diary and letter form.

Tasksheet 2.1
Pre-screening

The ingredients of writing

Writing is a bit like cooking: different ingredients give you different results.

Make a large copy of the table below. Jot down all the things you associate with the words *novel, play, poem, short story, letter, newspaper article.*

- How do they differ – in length, who reads them, their subject matter, how they are written, etc?
- What elements do they have in common?

	Differences	Similarities
Novel		
Play		
Poem		
Short story		
Letter		
Newspaper article		

When you decide whether a story or poem is any good, what do you look at?

Think of the sort of writing you enjoy reading and make a list of the 'ingredients' that make it good or bad. For example, if you like humorous writing, what makes it funny – the ideas, situations, characters, dialogue or language?

If you are working in a group, compare your list with someone else's. Did you come up with the same things?

- Which ingredients do you use in your own writing?
- Which ones work well and which ones don't?

Tasksheet 2.2	Writing from personal experience
Pre-screening	

All fiction contains elements of personal experience. For example, if we try to describe an emotional farewell between two characters in a story, we think of our own experiences of saying goodbye and our observations of other people's goodbyes at airports, bus stops, etc. Our aim is to make the description ring true – to make the reader think, 'Yes, that's what saying goodbye is like.'

Such authenticity is the most important quality of fiction, and this is why students are urged to write about 'what you know'. But this is not always as easy as it sounds.

- Consider, or discuss with a partner, why you might find it harder to write a story called 'The time I couldn't stop crying' than one called 'The time I couldn't stop laughing'.
- Would it be easier to write a story called 'The person who couldn't stop crying'? If so, why?

Writing from personal experience does not mean writing in the first person; more often it means using your understanding of life to give authenticity to your writing.

Try this experiment to help you apply your personal experience to your writing:

1. Make lists of *places*, *people*, and *events* that you know well, can describe accurately, and that you care about.
2. Choose one place, character and event from each list – preferably ones which don't naturally belong together – and write a title for a story involving all three. (This need not be serious, eg, 'The day grandfather went fishing behind the bicycle shed'.)
3. Do this with several combinations, then choose the title which appeals to you most and write a story, poem or just some dialogue. Add the details that will make the writing authentic for the reader, but use your imagination to change some details. You are not aiming to reproduce a person, place or event exactly; you are using your experience to make the story come alive.
4. Give what you've written to someone to read. Ask them to guess which bits are 'taken from life' and which bits are the work of your imagination. Ideally, of course, it should all 'ring true'.

Tasksheet 2.3	Finding subjects to write about
Pre-screening	

There are four main sources of material for writers:

1. Things, people, places and ideas they know well.
2. Things, ideas and causes they feel strongly about; many writers seek to change their readers' awareness of a subject.
3. Things they know little about but would like to explore in their imagination.
4. Painful events, problems and difficulties they hope to resolve through their writing.

Most works of fiction draw upon one or more of these sources, which correspond to four categories of writing: *autobiographical, political* or *polemical fantasy*, and *personal.*

1. Which category or categories do these imaginary titles belong to?
   - *Forty Years in Solitary*
   - *The Amazon is Dying*
   - *Voyage to Alpha Centura*
   - *Mud and Gas: A Memoir of the First World War*
2. Make up four other titles in the same way.
3. Write down the titles of three books you have read recently. Which categories do they fall into?
4. Are you interested in political, fantasy or personal writing? Make a list of subjects you could write about in each of these categories.
5. Are you using these sources in your specimen story, poem or play?

Tasksheet 2.4 Subjects and themes

Watch the first section of the video' 'Writing from personal experience', and answer these questions.

1. What does Maya Angelou find so inspiring she wants to write about it?
2. How did John Updike use his upbringing in his work?
3. How did the advertising slogan 'We bake while you sleep' lead Maurice Sendak to write *In the Night Kitchen?*
4. Writers' work is often not understood in the way that the author intended. What is Arnold Wesker's experience with this?
5. Does this 'misunderstanding' matter?

Watch the second section of the video, 'Subjects'.

1. Martin Amis says that writers are becoming more and more interested in the grubby details of life; they no longer inspire their readers with stories of gods and heroes. Do you agree?
2. How should writers decide what to write about?
3. Make a list of the subjects which interest the writers on the video.
4. Look back at Tasksheet 2.3. From what the following writers said on the video, decide what their main sources of material are:
   - Fay Weldon
   - Wendy Perriam
   - Mary Gordon
   - Martin Amis
   - John Updike
   - Maya Angelou
5. Different subjects appeal to different generations. Make a list of subjects which you think people of your age-group:
   - feel strongly about
   - like to dream about
   - have nightmares about
   - find funny
6. Plan a story or poem based on one of the subjects.

Tasksheet 2.5 Discovering what you have to say

When the writers on the video discuss what they want to write about – the subjects of their books – it all sounds very simple, but in fact the themes in a writer's work may not be clear even to the author.

As a student writer you may have a preference for form – 'I like/hate writing poems' – but you may not know what it is you 'have to say'. Writing in response to other people's demands ('Write a story about...', 'Write a report on...') is good for practicing the *craft* of writing and often uncovers subjects of interest, but as writers we need to find out what we want to write.

Try this exercise to see whether a subject interests you. Complete each stage before reading the next instruction.

1. Write down two of the subjects mentioned on the video, *money* and *children*, as column headings.
2. Jot down *any* words you associate with these subjects, no matter how crazy, without thinking for long. Stop when you have about twelve words in each column.
3. What feelings do you have about the words you have written down? Write P (pleasant), U (unpleasant), or N(neutral) beside each one.
4. Look at the result. Is either subject predominately pleasant or unpleasant?
5. What does the result show you about your attitude, and society's attitude, to *money* and *children*?
6. If you got a neutral result on both these subjects, try the exercise again with *death* and *old age*.

As a writer, what qualities interest you in people? For this psychological game you will need a partner and two pieces of paper.

Cut each piece of paper into eight and number them 1–8. You both then write a name on each, as follows:

1. a parent
2. a brother or sister (or the person most like a brother or sister to you if you are an only child)
3. a friend of the opposite sex
4. a friend of the same sex

continued

5 someone you admire

6 someone you find hard to work with

7 yourself

8 your ideal self (eg Batman)

Swap pieces of paper with your partner. Your partner then shows you your names in the following groups of three:

- 1 7 6
- 2 5 6
- 4 5 7
- 5 1 7
- 1 2 3
- 4 8 2
- 3 4 7
- 8 3 6

For each combination answer the question, 'What do two of these people have in common but not the third?' Your partner notes down your replies.

Swap roles and ask your partner the same question about their names.

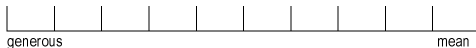
You will end up with two lists of answers. **Write down the *opposite* of each word on your list.**

- Do any of these pairs of opposites occur more than once?
- Which qualities do you consider pleasant?
- Are these qualities that you consider important?

If you are working in a group, compare lists.

- Do you have any pairs of opposites in common?
- Are there personal qualities that are important to everybody and others that are unique to your view of relationships?

Write your 'qualities' and their opposites in two columns. Draw a line between each pair and divide it into ten equal sections, like this:



generous mean

continued

Think of a character you invented in a piece of writing and put a cross at the appropriate point on each scale to show what they are like.

If you do this with a number of characters you have written about, you may find that a pattern emerges. You may be interested in, say, *friendship, intolerance, strength and weakness*.

Think about stories or films you have enjoyed.

- Do the characters fit into this pattern?
- Do the themes correspond to the qualities you identified in the game?
- Are these things you want to write about?

Mayo Angelou talks eloquently about the subjects and themes that concern her as a writer: 'I write through the Black experience,' but she hopes she is also writing about the human condition – what makes us 'stumble, fall, and rise again'. She says, 'I write in the first person singular; I hope I am always talking about the first person plural.'

Here is a short story by Jamaica Kincaid. **Read it and answer the questions.**

Girl

Wash the white clothes on Monday and put them on the stone heap; wash color clothes on Tuesday and put them on the clothes line to dry; don't walk bare head in the hot sun; cook pumpkin fritters in very hot sweet oil; soak your little blouse, be sure that it doesn't have gum on it, because that way it won't hold up well after a wash; soak salt fish overnight before you cook it; is it true that you sing benna in Sunday School?; always eat your food in such a way that it won't turn someone else's stomach; on Sundays try to walk like a lady and not like the slut you are so bent on becoming; don't sing benna in Sunday School; you mustn't speak to the wharf-rat boys, not even to give directions; don't eat fruits on the street – flies will follow you; *but don't sing benna on Sundays at all and never in Sunday School*; this is how to sew on a button; this is how to make a button hole for the button you just sewed on; this is how to hem a dress when you see the hem coming down and so as to prevent yourself from looking like the slut I know you are bent on becoming; this is how you iron your father's khaki shirt so that it doesn't have a crease; this is how you grow okra, far from the house because okra tree harbors red ants; when you are growing dasheen, make sure it gets plenty of water or else it makes your throat itch when you are eating it; this is how you sweep a corner; this is how sweep a whole house; this is how you sweep a yard; this is how to smile to someone you don't like too much; this is how to smile to someone you don't like at all; this is how you smile to someone you like completely; this is how you set the table for tea; this is how you set the table for dinner; this is how you set a table for dinner with an important guest; this is how you set a table for lunch; this is how you set a table for breakfast; this is how you behave in the presence of men you don't know very well, and this way they won't recognize immediately the slut I have warned you against becoming; be sure to wash each day, even if it is with your own spit; don't squat down to play marbles – you are not a boy, you know; don't pick people's flowers – you might catch something; don't throw stones at blackbirds, because it might not be a blackbird after all; this is how to make a bread pudding; this is how to make doukona; this is how to make pepper pot; this is how to make good medicine for a cold; this is how to make good medicine to throw away a child before it even becomes a child; this is how to catch a fish; this is how to throw back a fish you don't like and that way something bad won't fall on you; this is how to bully a man; this is how a man bullies you; this is how to love a man,

continued

and if this doesn't work there are other ways, and if they don't work don't feel bad about giving up this is how to spit up in the air if you feel like it, and this is how to move quick so it doesn't fall on you; this is how to make ends meet; always squeeze the bread to make sure it's fresh; *but what if the baker won't let me feel the bread?;* you mean to say that after all you really are going to be the kind of woman who the baker won't let near the bread?

1. Who is telling the story?
2. Is there another voice in the story?
3. Could it be said to be written from two points of view?
4. How do you know that the writer has tried to make the writing sound like spoken language?
5. In which country do you think the story is set?
6. What details in the story show that the author is writing from personal experience?
7. Although the author is writing about the black female experience, what is there in the story that we can apply to any girl's experience in any culture or country?
8. Is there anything about the story that is true of anybody's experience – male or female?
9. What is the subject of the story?
10. What is the theme of the story?

Rewrite the story from the point of view of a father's advice to his son, using a culture and background you are familiar with.

Tasksheet 2.7 Autobiographical writing

Student writers often dismiss their own experience as 'too boring'. In fact a good writer can make any experience interesting through the authenticity of the writing, the style, form, point of view, etc.

Here are some ideas for developing your use of personal experience in your writing.

Early childhood

1. Find an old photograph of yourself, preferably in a group – like the one John Updike mentions. Ask someone who does not know you well to ask you ten questions about it. **Write an account of the event in the picture using both your memories of the event and the experience of showing it to somebody.**
2. What sort of child were you at eight? Ask three people who have known you since then simple questions about your likes and dislikes, behavior, etc, as if you were researching a complete stranger.. There will probably be differences between their view of what you were like and your own. **Write a description of yourself in the third person, using their answers and highlighting any disagreements about what you were like.**
3. Do you remember a television commercial that impressed you, scared you or drove you crazy as a child – like Maurice Sendak? **Use the idea to write a fantasy in which a child's dream or nightmare comes true.**

Family life

Relationships between relatives and family conflict are a rich source of ideas for stories. **Think how members of your family react to the following:**.

- going on holiday
- losing a job
- a death
- a marriage
- a divorce
- someone leaving home
- a guest coming to stay
- receiving a letter
- receiving a present
- family reunions or parties

Write a story based on one or more of these ideas.

Tasksheet 2.8 Writing to persuade

A subject that provokes strong feelings is often difficult to write about. If a book is labelled 'propaganda', it may not reach as wide an audience as a novel, so many writers use subjects such as *the rights and wrongs of individual behavior, religion, law and order, the rights of individuals and groups, environmental issues and politics* as a background to their stories.

1. Consider each of these subjects and make a list of issues you feel strongly about. Put them in order of importance to you.
2. Look at the top three on your list. Do you feel any aspect of these issues is morally wrong? If so, work out why, perhaps in discussion with someone else – get them to defend the opposite point of view to help you rehearse your arguments.
3. Write a short piece entitled 'The trouble with...'
4. Take the subject a stage further by imagining two characters who hold opposite points of view about this issue.
   - How have they reached their conclusions?
   - Does their stand have anything to do with their background, family, education or financial position?
5. Build up details about these characters: what they look like, what they wear, where they live, what they do, etc.
6. Imagine a meeting between the two characters.
   - Where will they meet?
   - Do they meet by chance or by design?
   - What will happen when they meet?
   - Will they mention the subject about which they disagree?
7. Develop the idea of a meeting into a story. Write it from the point of view of the character you agree with; you could use the first person, but don't write it about yourself. Remember to include thoughts as well as dialogue.
8. Compare the effect of the story with the plain argument you put forward in 'The trouble with...' Ask someone to read them both. What have you gained or lost by treating the subject you feel strongly about as fiction?

Writing fantasy

All fiction writing involves imagination, but some genres contain more fantasy than most; science fiction, for example, deals with recognizable situations in a fantasy setting. many writers enjoy the challenge of answering the question, 'What if ...?', drawing upon a mixture of personal experience and imagination. This can be a useful starting point if you are stuck for something to write, or for a new angle on an old subject.

Here are some ideas to experiment with.

1. Write down in five minutes as many uses for an ice cube as you can. **Write a story using all of them.**
2. All the water on the planet has been replaced by a weak solution of acid. **Describe what you did yesterday in a world where they are now drilling the sea bed for drinking water.**
3. Make a list of social situations you try to avoid. **Write a story about someone you dislike finding themselves in one of those situations.** How do they respond?

A lot of 'pure fiction' starts form a completely normal situation; indeed, establishing the characters in a normal setting helps to make the fantasy world acceptable.

1. Think of a book or film that switches from ordinariness to wild fantasy. List all the ordinary elements in the story, and all the imaginary elements.
2. Make up a story based on the lists below, introducing the fantastical elements gradually:

- a hamster
- a girl called Molly
- an apartment in a high-rise block
- a personal stereo that won't work
- a bad-tempered neighbor
- a hair-drier that speaks
- a nine-foot gate-keeper
- invisibility
- the Queen of the Dark

continued

Here is another fantasy exercise. **Read all the questions before answering them with as much imaginative detail as possible.** The answers must tell a coherent story.

1. What is an Asdril?
2. Why does it fear for the Nargilators so much that it never goes out at night?
3. Who is Grace?
4. Why is she Asdril's only hope of salvation?
5. How does Jannah trick her into going on the journey to the City of Lights?
6. Describe her arrival.
7. What does she find there to help her rescue the Asdrils?
8. What three traps do the Nargilators lay to prevent her departure?
9. Why does Jannah give her the stone and the key?
10. What is zoddichart?
11. What method of transport does Grace use to leave the City of Lights?
12. Describe her voyage to Krakennor.
13. How are the Asdrils set free?
14. Make up your own question and answer it.

Novelists often use letters or an extract from a diary to let the reader know what their characters are thinking; *Eighty-four Charing Cross Road* by Helene Hanff is an example of a novel written entirely in letter form.

Here are some ideas for experimenting with this sort of writing:

1. Think of a recent argument you had with a friend. **Write an account of it as an entry in your diary, and then try to write about it as an entry in your friend's diary.**
2. Think of a difficult decision you have to make in the next six months. **Write a letter to a friend asking their advice. Be sure to give all the information that will affect your decision.**
3. Many people have irrational fears of things like spiders, feathers, snakes. **Use your experience of this to write a story about a person with an irrational fear of something commonplace, such as mirrors or electricity. Resist the temptation to be comic.**
4. Things which upset children are often dismissed by adults as 'a lot of fuss about nothing'. **Describe an incident from your childhood that you remember vividly but that your parents would hardly recall.**
5. Losing something is always irritating, but it is worse if it has 'sentimental value'. **Write a poem, story or essay called 'A great loss'.**
6. Unexpected pleasure sometimes leads people to write to someone they have never met. **Think of a pleasant surprise you have had recently and write a 'thank-you' letter to the person or organization who made your day.**
7. Whole novels have been written as an exchange of letters. **Imagine this scenario:**

A brother and sister are evacuated to different parts of the country during a war. Their father is in the navy and their mother has remained in the city to look after their sick grandmother.

Write a letter from four different characters to the fifth.

John Berger
Raymond Briggs
George Higgins
Kazuo Ishiguro
Lena Kennedy
Marge Piercy
Ruth Rendell
Michèle Roberts
John Updike

Using this video

The first section of the video encourages students to consider their *method* of writing – how and where they work best (in class, at home, or in a library), and how they can review their own work critically. Tasksheet 3.2 and 3.4 look at the best way of writing, and how different forms of writing should be tackled, with follow-up practice in 3.7. Tasksheet 3.3 asks questions about the video itself.

While writing to deadlines is important, more time spent on planning and drafting their work may enable students to write in the second section of the video – George Higgins describes how a novel went through many transformations before it was ready to be published – while Tasksheets 3.4, 3.6 and 3.7 show how planning and rewriting can improve a piece of work.

In the third section of the video authors discuss whether accuracy is important in depicting the world of their imagination. One of the dangers of researching stories is that endless amounts of detail may not create a sense of life – writers may fail, as Lena Kennedy says, to 'bring their characters into the world'. Tasksheet 3.5 uses the idea of a distant historical and geographical setting to show how research can be transformed into a piece of creative writing.

Tasksheet 3.1

Pre-screening

The ingredients of writing

Writing is a bit like cooking: different ingredients give you different results.

Make a large copy of the table below. Jot down all the things you associate with the words *novel, play, poem, short story, letter, newspaper article*.

- How do they differ – in length, who reads them, their subject matter, how they are written, etc?
- What elements do they have in common?

	Differences	Similarities
Novel		
Play		
Poem		
Short story		
Letter		
Newspaper article		

When you decide whether a story or poem is any good, what do you look at?

Think of the sort of writing you enjoy reading and make a list of the 'ingredients' that make it good or bad. For example, if you like humorous writing, what makes it funny – the ideas, situations, characters, dialogue or language?

If you are working in a group, compare your list with someone else's. Did you come up with the same things?

- Which ingredients do you use in your own writing?
- Which ones work well and which ones don't?

Planning a piece of writing

Look back at a story you have written recently.

1. How did you set about writing it?
2. Did you have a clear idea of what was going to happen in the story or did things just develop as you were writing?
3. Did you plan your story?
4. How similar is this story to others you have written in the past few months?
5. What prevents you being more adventurous in your writing?

Read your story again. Mark the sections that you think are good and those you think do not work so well. Then ask a friend to read it and to mark which sections work and which don't.

1. Why do some sections not work?
2. Do they sound 'false'?
3. Would any of these things improve it?

- more detail
- better choice of detail – how could you find out about what you need to add?
- better use of language
- language that is more like your own – are you assuming that the reader expects a certain style?
- more ideas, actions or images
- more genuine feeling in the writing – have you chosen the right words to express what you feel?
- better planning
- rewriting

Nine times out of ten the answer to the last two is 'yes'. *All* writers feel that their work can be improved by better planning and rewriting. By starting with a plan – a summary of the plot with a note of where you should include descriptions – you will be able to write a story that is far more interesting for your reader.

continued

Look at the basic outline of a story for children aged eight to ten.

Charlie Carrot goes market

1. Description of the vegetable patch where Charlie lives.
2. Charlie is picked by the farmer.
3. Charlie goes to the market in the truck.
4. Charlie is put on the stall.
5. Nobody buys Charlie.
6. Charlie is taken back to the vegetable patch.

Written like this, it is not very inspiring. What would you add to make it more 'readable' and interesting?

Watch the first section of the video.

1. What are the differences in the ways Lena Kennedy and Michèle Roberts work as writers?
2. Writing 400-500 words a day may not sound like much. What advantages are there in writing slowly?
3. John Berger says, 'It has to be a very good joke to survive twenty rewrites.' What advantages are there in drafting your work several times?
4. What does Raymond Briggs mean when he says that a major difference between writing and drawing is that 'you can't muck it up'?
5. John Updike talks about the 'music' of the prose and trying to 'hear' your writing as you write it. How does this relate to thinking about your reader as you write?

Watch the second section of the video.

1. Why does Kazuo Ishiguro do his research after he has written a section of a book?
2. What other reasons do the writers give for doing research?
3. Why do the writers say that it is important to 'create a world' in their writing?
4. What sort of research can you do, like Ruth Rendell, by 'looking out of the window'?
5. Give an example of a piece of research one of the writers had to do to create a feeling of accuracy.
6. Give an example of something you have written which involved looking things up in books or asking other people.

Consider what these people have written about the 'creative process':

The writing table is perfect. I have never been so content with anything. And the blue wing-back chair is wonderfully comfortable ... I think that if I can be relaxed, the book has a chance of being very relaxed, and I have a very strong feeling about the book being completely at ease and comfortable ... My choice of pencils lies now between the black calculator stolen from Fox Films and this mongol 2F which is quite black and holds its point well – much better in fact than the Fox pencils. I will get six more or maybe four more dozens of them for my pencil tray.

John Steinbeck on writing *East of Eden*

The problem of creative writing is essentially one of concentration ... Concentration, of course, for the purpose of writing poetry, is different from the kind of concentration required for working out a sum. It is a focusing of all the attention in a special way, so that the poet is aware of all the implications and possible developments of his idea, just as one might say that a plant was not concentrating on developing mechanically in one direction, but in many directions, towards the warmth and light with its leaves, and towards the water with its roots, all at the same time.

Stephen Spender on writing poetry

When I am, as it were, completely myself, entirely alone, and of good cheer – say, travelling in a carriage, or walking after a good meal, or during the night when I cannot sleep; it is on such occasions that my ideas flow best and most abundantly. Where they come from, and how they come, I know not; nor can I force them. Those pleasures that please me I retain in my memory, and I am accustomed, as I have been told, to hum them to myself ... Provided I am not disturbed, my subject enlarges itself ... and the whole, though it be long, stands almost complete and finished in my mind, so I survey it, like a fine picture or a beautiful statue at a glance ... All this inventing takes place in a pleasing lively dream ... When I proceed to write down my ideas, I take out the bag of my memory ... and the committing to paper is done quickly enough, for everything is, as I have said before, already finished.

Letter from Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, 1789

1. How do you prefer to write?
2. Do you prefer to use pencil or pen?
3. Where do you prefer to write?
4. Does it depend on what sort of writing you are doing?
5. Do you have any superstitions about writing?

There are many ways of writing. Do you:

1. Write very fast and rewrite many times – up to twenty?

continued

2 Spend a long time thinking about what to say and planning how to say it; write very slowly with only a little revision; dislike other people reading it?

3 Brainstorm ideas on paper; prepare an outline plan; write with few revisions; need 'feedback' from people who read it to tell if it is any good?

4 Start straight in – ideas only come when you're writing; go where the writing takes you; spend a lot of time redrafting work to make it 'tighter'; like the opinions of others at all stages of writing?

5 Find it hard to get started, so write *anything* to begin with (like warming up a car on a cold morning) and later go back to the beginning to redraft the start, which is always weak?

6 Write at great length, and find it hard to end things; find writing the end first helps; dislike showing the work to others until it is as perfect as possible?

- Which method suits formal exams?
- Which suits preparing coursework for assessment?
- Do you have a different method for writing, say, a poem than a story?

All writers find they work best under certain conditions – the playwright Schiller said he wrote best when he had the smell of rotting apples in his study.

Write a short paragraph describing how you are best able to write. Mention:

- where you like to be
- what you like to write with (and on)
- whether you like silence, or music or conversation around you
- what time of day suits you best
- any rituals or superstitions that help you to write
- any other details about what sort of writer you are

If you are working in a group, share your views with others. How could the group help you to become a better writer?

Using research

Look back at some of the stories you have written recently.

1 How many of them deal with the same topic?

2 How many of them are set in the present?

3 If most of them are, why do you think this is?

Writers need to be able to write imaginatively, and authentically, about a variety of settings and periods of history. They need background information and details that make the story 'come alive' and so often have to do historical, scientific and geographical research.

Imagine you are asked to write a story set in another country or time. Make a list of the things you would need to know about the place or the period before you started writing. Now choose one of these situations as a setting for your story and find out about the period or place:

- a medieval tournament
- a slave ship taking slaves from Africa to the West Indies
- a family house on the eve of World War II
- a street in your own town or city in 1928
- a Hollywood film set in 1922
- a small village in Vietnam
- a fashion show in 1966
- a voyage by the Vikings to America
- the funeral of an Indian prince
- a trip through England in 1803

When you have done your research you will have a lot of facts. How do you get these facts across to the reader in an interesting way? One way is to have a character who, like the reader, is unfamiliar with the setting.

Before starting to write, plan what information you are going to include; then try to write a page of your story that gets across a fair amount of your research without giving long lists or endless descriptions.

continued

You also need to think through the consequences of what you have found out. For example, if the place is hot, people will sweat; a description of the smell or of someone sweating could convey the fact that it is hot without having to state it.

Assess what you have written using the criteria in Tasksheet 3.5. Reread it, mark it for interest or poor writing and then rewrite the parts that are not very good; you may have to change other parts of the piece to fit in with your redrafting.

If possible, find someone else who has written about the same topic and swap stories.

- How have they approached the problem?
- Do their techniques have any advantages over yours?

Look at your piece again. Is it written in the first person ('I') or the third person ('he' or 'she')? **Try to rewrite it in the other person and see if this makes a difference.**

Looking at other writers' work

Good writing can appear so effortless that we imagine the author or poet has merely written down what we see on the printed page. In fact, as George Higgins points out, this is rarely the case. Many drafts of a novel or poem have to be written before it says exactly what the writer wants it to say in the right way.

Wilfred Owen wrote four versions of his famous war poems, 'Anthem for Doomed Youth'. **Read the two versions reprinted here and then answer the questions.**

First draft
Anthem for Dead Youth

What passing-bells for these who die so fast?
– Only the monstrous anger of the guns.
Let the blind insolence of iron mouths
Be the requiem of their *requiem*
Leave choristers and organs for the old;
Nor any voice of mourning, save the wail
And the long hiss of lonely-sailing shells.

What candles may we hold to light these lost?
– Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes
Shall shine the many holy candles flames:
And women's wide-spread arms shall be their wreaths,
And pallor of girls' cheeks shall be their palls.
Their flowers, the tenderness of rough men's minds
And each slow Dusk, a drawing down of blinds.

Fourth draft
Anthem for Doomed Youth

What passing bells for these who die as cattle?
– Only the monstrous anger of the guns.
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle
Can patter out their hasty orisons.
No mockeries now for them: no prayers nor bells;
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs' –
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;
And bugles calling for them from sad shires.

What candles may be held to speed them all?
Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes
Shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes.
The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;
Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,
And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.

continued

Tasksheet 3.6

1. Underline all the differences between the two poems, even down to punctuation.
2. Is the mood of each poem the same?
3. What difference does the change of title make?
4. Choose five important alterations.
   - Why do you think Owen made them?
   - What difference does each make to the poem?
5. Which version do you prefer?

Tasksheet 3.7 Follow-up work

1. **Turn the research you did for Tasksheet 3.5 into a full-length piece of writing.** Plan your story carefully and think about the *characters*, *settings*, *language* and *events* before you start to write.
   - What does each character look like?
   - What is their relationship to each other?
   - Where will the events take place?
   - Do you need to describe each place or only the important ones?
   - Will you try to catch some of the language of the period or place in which the story is set? If so, you must be consistent throughout the story, otherwise your fictional world will not be believable.
   - Write a basic outline of the events, like that for 'Charlie Carrot Goes to Market' in Tasksheet 3.2.

   Take your time in writing the story. Show your first draft to a friend or your course tutor and ask for their comments. Do not be afraid to rewrite the piece on the basis of their advice.
2. **Write three companion pieces to the 'Charlie Carrot' story.** You probably introduced other characters when you expanded the outline in Tasksheet 3.2. Develop some of them so that they can have their own adventures. Remember to use appropriate language for your audience – a child of eight.
3. **Start a notebook for ideas, images, snatches of conversation, jokes or newspaper articles.** Every day put something in it that captures your imagination, without thinking too much about *why*. After a few weeks you may find that one of these things has stuck in your mind. Next time you can write 'what you want', use this idea.

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4

Chinua Achebe
J G Ballard
Raymond Briggs
Maggie Gee
Nadine Gordimer
Harold Pinter
Ruth Rendell
Janice Shinebourne

Using this video

This section of the course aims to make students realize how characterization, description and structure can make a story more interesting for the reader.

As preparation for watching the video Tasksheet 4.2 defines the terms *character*, *setting*, and *plot*, while Tasksheet 4.3 looks at what the authors say about using these elements in their work. An analysis of descriptions by Maggie Gee and J G Ballard in Tasksheet 4.4 and by Charles Dickens in Tasksheet 4.6 shows how a sense of character, place and atmosphere can be achieved. Tasksheets 4.5 and 4.7 provide imaginative exercises to help students put these ideas into practice.

Tasksheet 4.1

Pre-screening

The ingredients of writing

Writing is a bit like cooking: different ingredients give you different results.

Make a large copy of the table below. Jot down all the things you associate with the words *novel, play, poem, short story, letter, newspaper article*.

- How do they differ – in length, who reads them, their subject matter, how they are written, etc?
- What elements do they have in common?

	Differences	**Similarities**
Novel		
Play		
Poem		
Short story		
Letter		
Newspaper article		

When you decide whether a story or poem is any good, what do you look at?

Think of the sort of writing you enjoy reading and make a list of the 'ingredients' that make it good or bad. For example, if you like humorous writing, what makes it funny – the ideas, situations, characters, dialogue or language?

If you are working in a group, compare your list with someone else's. Did you come up with the same things?

- Which ingredients do you use in your own writing?
- Which ones work well and which ones don't?

Defining the terms

We expect a story to have characters, a setting and a plot, but what does that mean? **Answer these questions to clarify your ideas.**

Character

The characters in a novel or play are often described as 'true to life' or very 'believable'.

1. What do you think this means?
2. What makes a character 'true to life' and 'believable'?

Setting

1. How important is the setting of a story?
2. Do we always need to know where a story is taking place?
3. What do settings add to a story?
4. If a story is set in the present day, do we need as much description as for a historical novel?
5. How much can authors take for granted about what their readers will understand?

Think about a story you have read recently.

1. What was the setting at the beginning of the story?
2. Did the story take place in the present day?
3. How did the writer convey the historical period?
4. Did the setting change to emphasize changes in the character or plot?

Plot

1. Do you think that a story must have a beginning, a middle and an end?
2. What things do you expect at the beginning of a story?
3. What happens in the middle?
4. What happens at the end?
5. Is it possible to start a story with the ending and build up to the beginning?
6. Does a story need to have an ending?

You may expect the ending to tie up all the loose ends or to answer all the questions raised during the story, but does it have to do this? Can you think of a story that does not 'give all the answers'?

Think of a story you enjoyed. How was the plot structured?

continued

Now look at your specimen piece of writing and answer these questions:

1. How 'believable' are your characters?
2. Did you want to make them believable?
3. Have you described the setting?
4. Do the descriptions give a good idea of where the action takes place?
5. Does it have a beginning, a middle and an end?
6. Does it need all three?

Tasksheet 4.3 Using character, setting and plot

Watch the video and listen to what the authors say about using these elements in their work. Don't expect them all to agree!

1. How do they invent characters?
2. Are real-life people important in creating the characters in their novels?
3. How do they use real-life people?
4. Do the authors think the settings of their novels are important?
5. How do they decide where to set their novels?
6. Do they write their stories starting at the beginning and working through to the end?
7. What other methods are used?
8. How does a 'complete' story differ from an 'open-ended' one?

Tasksheet 4.4 Looking at other writers' work

Read these two descriptions and then answer the questions.

The single most material fact about Lottie is that she is extremely rich. Lottie both knows it and forgets to notice. Sometimes she remembers and uses it.

The poor are acutely aware of being poor; not so the rich.

Lottie's life is pleasant, in normal times, because she doesn't have to work. She is quite without guilt for not working. Her father had worked till he died to make money. He seemed abstracted, bowed down with work. Lottie knows that work doesn't make people nicer. (Men had to do it; women did not. It was one of the reasons feminists were crazy. Why would it be better if women were like men?)

Lottie uses her money to buy things. This time she had bought herself something alive, something very small and very golden, a Brazilian monkey, twelve inches long, a Golden lion Tamarin, *Leontopithecus rosalia rosalia*.

Maggie Gee, *Light Years*

At the end of the creek they entered the next lagoon, a wide circle of dark green water almost half a mile in diameter. A lane of red plastic buoys marked a channel towards an opening on the far side. The cutter had a draught of little more than a foot, and as they moved through the flat water, the sun slanting down behind them opening up the submerged depths, they could see the clear outlines of five- and six-story buildings looming like giant ghosts, here and there a moss-covered roof breaking the surface as well as the swell rolled past it.

Sixty feet below the cutter a straight grey promenade stretched away between the buildings, the remains of some former thoroughfare, the rusting humped shells of cars still standing by the kerb. many of the lagoons in the centre of the city were surrounded by an intact ring of buildings, and consequently little silt entered them. Free of vegetation, apart from a few drifting clumps of Sargasso weed, the streets and shops had been preserved almost intact, like a reflection in a lake that has somehow lost its original.

The bulk of the city had long since vanished, and only the steel-supported buildings of the central commercial and financial areas had survived the encroaching flood waters. The brick houses and single-story factories of the suburbs had disappeared completely below the drifting tides of silt. Where these broke the surface giant forests reared up into the burning dull-green sky, smothering the former wheatfields of temperate Europe and North America.

JG Ballard, *The Drowned World*

1. How do you feel towards Maggie Gee's character?
2. What is JG Ballard's attitude to the place he describes?
3. Underline the words that build up these impressions. For example, if you think the character is unpleasant, which words give you this idea?

continued

4 How does each of the underlined words contribute to this impression?

5 What feelings are attached to these words?

If you are working in a group, compare your ideas.

1 Did you underline the same words?

2 Did you have the same feelings about the character and the place?

By changing the words you underlined, is it possible to alter the feeling of the passages?

Tasksheet 4.5 Characters and settings

Two of the authors on the video suggest that their characters almost choose the setting of the novel as they write. **Using the extracts in Tasksheet 4.4, try putting this idea into practice:**

1 Write a description of the place where Maggie Gee's character might live.

2 Write a description of someone who might live or work in JG Ballard's setting.

Bear in mind the descriptive words you underlined in Tasksheet 4.4 as you write and think carefully about your choice of words.

Ask someone to read your descriptions and to tell you how they feel about your character and place.

- Did they react as you had intended?
- Which words made them feel as they did?
- Do you need to change any words to make your ideas clear to the reader.

Tasksheet 4.6 Place and atmosphere

Descriptions of places that are important to a story usually make the writing more interesting and atmospheric. **Consider the opening of this nineteenth-century novel:**

Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping, and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex Marshes, fog on the Kentish Heights. Fog creeping into the cabooses of the collier-brigs; fog lying out on the yards, and hovering in the rigging of great ships; fog drooping on the gunwales of barges and small boats. Fog in the eyes and throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners, wheezing by the firesides of their wards; fog in the stem and bowl of the afternoon pipe of the wrathful skipper, down in his close cabin; fog cruelly pinching the toes and fingers of his shivering little 'prentice boy on the deck. Chance people on the bridges peeping over the parapets into a nether sky of fog, with fog all around them, as if they were up in a balloon, and hanging in the misty clouds.

Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*

1 What sort of atmosphere does the passage create?

2 Which words and phrases create this atmosphere?

Try using descriptions of the weather to build up atmosphere:

1 Think of somewhere you know very well.

2 Write three descriptions of this place, making it feel very different in each:

- when it is raining
- when it is very hot
- when it is snowing

3 Does each description create a different mood?

Weather is not the only thing that affects a scene. The time of day, the time of year, and point of view can all be used in the same way. Describing a setting subjectively, through the eyes of a character looking at it, rather than objectively, through the eyes of the author or narrator, can give the scene a different meaning. For example, a beautiful landscape might be viewed differently depending on whether the character was happy or sad. If they are so miserable they cannot see the beauty of their surroundings, you could use the description to reinforce the idea of their sadness.

Look at your snow scene.

- Would it be the same if it were described by a child and by an elderly woman?
- How would you convey this difference?

Tasksheet 4.7 Building a character

As Maggie Gee points out, the characters in a story are not always people like the writer. To imagine being someone very different can be hard, so although our stories may have different settings and plots, the characters are often similar (remember what Raymond Briggs says about the main characters in *When the Wind Blows*).

Conveying a sense of character can be particularly difficult if you are writing in the first person. **Look at how these extracts achieve this.**

It was certainly nice to get out of the house and, come to think of it, I did feel quite braced and manly walking the nut-strewn lanes to the village. The Oxford bus wasn't due to leave for another quarter of an hour, so I had a well-earned half in the pub and chatted with the landlord and his wrecky wife, Mr and Mrs Bladderby. (Interestingly, Mrs Bladderby had an even wreckier mother, who was eighty and had, moreover, got her left leg slurped into a dreadful piece of agricultural machinery; she was far too ga-ga to die of shock, had indeed never mentioned the fateful picnic since. Now Mrs Lockhardt resided in the room above the saloon, clubbing the floor with a warped billiards cue whenever she needed attention.) As Mrs Bladderby disappeared to answer just such a summons, Mr Bladderby wagged his head at my suitcase and asked whether I was off on holiday again.

Martin Amis, *The Rachel Papers*

I left that old hag tied up like a Christmas turkey behind the furnace. I wanted to kill her, I really felt like it, but now I'm glad I didn't or things would be a lot worse for me. I couldn't believe how easy it was to get out of The Centre. In that brown outfit I just walked straight through. I kept right on going as if I knew where I was heading, till I was out of sight. I didn't have any great plan; it wasn't an organized thing, like they thought, though when they were trying to get it out of me I made up a lot of stuff. You do that, when they use the electrodes and the other things. You don't care what you say.

Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid's Tale*

1 What sort of person is the character telling each story?

2 What do you suppose they look like?

3 If the stories were read on the radio, what sort of voices should the characters have?

4 How does the writing give you these impressions?

Write two descriptions of the room you are sitting in, as it would be seen by completely different people, using the first person. Your reader should realize that the two 'I's describing the scene are quite different.

continued

Tasksheet 4.7

Raymond Briggs gives a good account of how he built up the character of Father Christmas. **Watch this section of the video again and make a list of the questions he asked himself about Father Christmas.**

1 **Imagine a man and a woman who are both factory workers. make notes, using Raymond Brigg's method, to build up a picture of each character.**

- What are the 'key' things in their lives?
- Does a decision about one 'key' thing lead to another? For example, if you decide that the man has four children, will this determine the other characteristics you give him?

2 **Choose a short newspaper account of an event and build up a character on the basis of the details it gives – age, where they live, etc.**

- Are these factual details the 'key' things in creating a character?
- What details will you add?

Dialogue

Another way of building up a character is through what they say. **Imagine how the characters you invented in 1 and 2 above would speak.**

- How would you capture this in dialogue?
- Would they speak in dialect?
- In a first-person account would you tell the whole story in dialect?

Tasksheet 4.8 Plot structure

The way in which a story is put together is very important. Even if the characters and settings are described well, unless the plot is well structured, the reader may lose interest. How do you plan what will happen in a story?

Here are three opening scenarios:

1 A small boy loses his parents during the Japanese invasion of Shanghai in World War II. He hides from the Japanese in deserted houses.

2 An assassin is hired to kill a famous politician but does not know who has hired him.

3 A woman discovers that her parents are talking about getting divorced, and her husband has lost interest in family life.

- How do you think each story will continue? Try noting down possible events as a flow chart.
- How would you end each story?

If you are working in a group, compare the plots people have come up with.

Did the opening of the story determine the rest of the plot? **Choose one of your plot outlines and see what happens if you start with the ending rather than the beginning.**

- How would you move from the ending to the earlier events?
- Would you have to change anything to create suspense?

Follow-up work

Here are some more ideas to develop your use of character, setting and plot:

1 Use one of the characters you have described as the starting point for a story.

- What could happen to them?
- What sort of story would they be involved in?
- Write an outline of the plot.

2 Describe yourself from the point of view of someone who likes you and of someone who doesn't.

3 Choose three of these settings and describe both the rooms and their occupants:

- a bedroom
- a workshop
- a bathroom
- a kitchen
- a cabin on a small boat
- a prison cell
- a cave
- a tent
- a garden shed

4 Read this description and answer the questions:

It had hardly occurred to him the door might not be locked. He tried the handle and it gave. Fleetwood felt a bit of a fool – which, in a curious way, helped. He opened the door, not flinging it; it flung itself, being the kind of door that always swings open to hit with a crash the piece of furniture immediately to the right of its arc.

The room burst into view before him like a stage set: a single bed with blue covers and a blue bedspread thrown back, a bedside cabinet with on it a lamp, a mug, a book, a vase containing a single peacock feather, walls papered in more green and blue peacock feathers, wind blowing through the broken window, lifting high the emerald green silk curtains. The man with the gun stood with his back to a corner wardrobe, pointing the gun at Fleetwood, the girl in front of him, his free arm round his waist.

Ruth Rendell, *Live Flesh*

continued

- How does the author convey the sense of urgency in this description?
- The room is seen through the eyes of the detective, Fleetwood. What do we learn about him as a character?

5 Choose two of these characters and describe a bus station waiting room seen through their eyes:

- someone on the run from the police
- someone waiting for their girlfriend or boyfriend
- a tramp trying to get warm
- the station supervisor

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5

Brian Aldiss
Maya Angelou
Margaret Atwood
Elaine Feinstein
PD James
Robert Leeson
Deborah Moggach
Christopher Priest
Ruth Rendell
Fay Weldon

Using this video

Student writers may feel most at home with the story format, but often they have had little opportunity to write anything other than stories or poems. The first section of the video and the tasksheets encourage students to experiment with other forms of writing, and focus on the different demands these forms make on the writer and the reader.

The second section of the video introduces the idea of genre and looks at science fiction and detective novels. A discussion of the types of books students enjoy reading is a good way of introducing the concept of genre and often shows that they are familiar with it as readers, if not as writers. As well as identifying content – the dark street of the detective story, the lonely castles of horror stories – it is important to examine the underlying assumptions of each genre. For example, the motives of the criminal are usually a mystery in the detective story, whereas in other types of fiction the reader needs to under-stand characters' motives in order to appreciate the significance of events.

English literature has always included genre writing – from the 'tragic curve' of Shakespearean tragedy to the 'serialized' format of the Dickensian novel; the course extends the idea into the area of popular culture by considering such things as the plot conventions of romantic fiction.

The development of a genre, as new ideas are added by different authors, is one of its most challenging aspects, and ideally students should experiment within a genre rather than just relying on familiar plot devices.

A discussion of television or film genres – soap operas, westerns, crime series, etc – is another way of making the topic accessible and opens up different styles of writing for students.

Tasksheet 5.1
Pre-screening

The ingredients of writing

Writing is a bit like cooking: different ingredients give you different results.

Make a large copy of the table below. Jot down all the things you associate with the words *novel, play, poem, short story, letter, newspaper article.*

- How do they differ – in length, who reads them, their subject matter, how they are written, etc?
- What elements do they have in common?

	Differences	Similarities
Novel		
Play		
Poem		
Short story		
Letter		
Newspaper article		

When you decide whether a story or poem is an good, what do you look at?

Think of the sort of writing you enjoy reading and make a list of the 'ingredients' that make it good or bad. For example, if you like humorous writing, what makes it funny – the ideas, situations, characters, dialogue or language?

If you are working in a group, compare your list with someone's else's. Did you come up with the same things?

- Which ingredients do you sue in your own writing?
- Which ones work well and which ones don't?

Tasksheet 5.2	Form and genre
Pre-screening	

Tasksheet 5.1 asked you to think about the differences and similarities between six different forms of writing: novels, plays, poems, short stories, letters, newspaper articles.

- Can you think of any other forms?
- What topics would you expect each form to deal with? For example, you might expect poems to be about daffodils ...

Next time you are in a bookstore, look at how the books are displayed. The non-fiction section will be divided into subjects – cookery, history, travel. How is the fiction organized – in alphabetical order by author, or are there other categories? You will probably find there are 'genre' categories, such as romance, science fiction or thrillers, as in some libraries.

- List as many categories of books as you can.
- Why do booksellers and librarians divide books up in this way?

As readers we tend to categorize books in a similar way. When recommending a book to a friend we normally refer to it by its author or say what type of book it is:

- 'I've just finished the latest PD James'
- 'I've just read a really good detective novel'

The first presupposes that the friend has heard of the author, whereas 'a detective novel' is a well-understood phrase that conveys a lot of information. This is one reason why it is useful to think in terms of types of fiction, or 'genres'.

Write down everything you associate with detective novels.

1. What types of character would you expect to find?
2. What events would you expect to take place?
3. Where are they often set?
4. Who tends to read detective stories?

If you are working in a group, compare your lists.

- Are your ideas similar?
- If so, why do you have the same expectations?

Tasksheet 5.3	Choice of form and genre

Form

Watch the first part of the video. You may need to see it more than once to answer these questions.

1. What forms of writing are mentioned?
2. What other forms can you think of?
3. What differences are mentioned between writing poetry and writing novels or stories?
4. What are the requirements of writing plays and screenplays?

Genre

Watch the second part of the video.

1. What attracted P D James and Ruth Rendell to the genre of the detective novel?
2. How do they define a good detective story?
3. What do you think of this genre?
4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of being labelled a 'science-fiction' writer?
5. Which elements of a story seem to be common to all myths and legends?
6. Do you think these qualities are common to *all* stories?
7. How have school stories changed over the years?

Tasksheet 5.4 Thinking about form

A popular story may be turned into a film, a television series or even a musical. Douglas Adams originally wrote *The Hitch-hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* as a radio series, then he wrote the first book, then it became a television series and now it is a successful computer game. These are all different 'forms' writing may take.

Fay Weldon mentions that *The Fat Woman's Joke* is both a television play and a novel. **Make a list of stories that have appeared in more than one form. Choose one where you are familiar with both versions.**

- What were the differences between the two versions?
- Was one more successful than the other?
- Why?

A story is sometimes 'adapted' for film or television by another writer.

- What did Deborah Moggach and Fay Weldon say about this?
- Do you think writers are always happy with these kinds of adaptations?

Think how you could adapt a story you have read recently. Which of these forms would it suit? Say why or why not for each case.

- radio play
- strip cartoon
- television serial
- television play
- stage musical
- computer game

The writers on the video explain that they use a variety of forms to create different effects and to express different emotions. **Look back at your specimen piece of writing.**

1. Are you happy with your choice of form?
2. Does it fit what you wanted to say?
3. Do you always choose the same form of writing?
4. If so, do you always choose to write stories? Why?
5. Which forms of writing would you like to experiment with?

Tasksheet 5.5 Thinking about genre

How do we recognize what genre a story belongs to – from the characters, the setting, or the plot? Tasksheet 5.2 explored our expectations about these elements of a detective story, but are language and style also important in identifying genre?

Imagine this scene: it is 4 am in the city; there is no one about. Develop this idea into three short pieces of writing in different genres:

- a romance
- a detective story
- a horror story

1. What mood do you want to create for each story?
2. What kind of words are typical of each genre?
3. Will you include dialogue?
4. Will you write any of the stories in the first person?

If you are working in a group, compare the language you have used for each piece. What sort of language and style do you expect in a detective novel and in a horror story?

Writing that imitates the style of a particular genre in order to make the reader laugh is called 'parody'. **Are any of your three pieces a parody?**

As well as having recognizable characters and settings, a genre often relies upon certain plot 'conventions' or situations, particularly at the beginning or the end. For example, at the end of a detective story the detective will explain how the mystery was solved.

1. What other conventions are used in detective stories?
2. What are the conventions of horror stories?
3. What expectations do you have about the plot of a romantic novel?

Often the most effective stories challenge the conventions of the genre by not doing exactly what the reader expects. Humor is one way of doing this. Think of:

- a funny horror story
- a funny detective story
- a funny romance

Could you write one?

Form Look at how the same subject is treated in these three different forms – poem, prose and screenplay.

The sound of her silk shirt has stopped.
On the marble pavement dust grows.
Her empty room is cold and still.
Fallen leaves are piled against the doors.
Longing for that lovely lady
How can I bring my aching heart to rest?

Wu Ti (87 BC), translated by Arthur Waley

There was nothing more that could be done. The room was as he had left it, papers lying piled on his desk, a book with a piece of paper in its pages waiting to be found, a letter, peeping from its envelope, to be answered. All could remain for ever unread. That strange smell of tobacco and damp, so characteristic of both the place and him would soon fade as the mould overtook the lower wall and the pipe hung, unused, in the rack. These things would fade, just as a photo fades over the years from its crisp colours to an ageing sepia, becoming history which, unless written down, is quickly forgotten.

I closed the door and went down the stairs. Outside looking up at the window, I imagined the times that I had stood in the same place, gazing at the lamplight shining out like some strange beacon, attracting me like a moth to its source. In a month, in a year, I might walk past this house again, see a light shining from the same window. But the attraction would be gone. I would pass, shrug – a window like any other. Only the memory would remain.

Close up of a photo on mantlepiece.

Cut to middle shot of **Frank** sitting in chair. He is dressed in black, reading a letter. The room is empty. It is obviously a woman's room, decor and fittings giving this idea.

Close up of Frank's face. A tear falls.

Close up of letter.

'Dear Frank,
When you read this, I will no longer be with you'

Long shot of **Frank** looking round the room. He stands up and walks to the door. With one last look, he opens the door and exits.

1 How do they differ in their approach to the subject?
2 How do they differ in terms of language? Think of what is left unwritten as well as what appears on the page.
3 What types of words are used in each piece?
4 What types of words are not used? Why is this?

continued

5 Do you think that some forms are more suited to certain genres than to others?
6 Would it be possible to write a detective poem?
7 Would it be interesting for the reader?

Genre **Can you say what genre these extracts come from?**.

Once upon a time there lived a widow with two daughters. The elder was often mistaken for her mother, so like her was she in both nature and looks, parent and child being so disagreeable and arrogant that no one could live with them. The younger girl, who took after her father in the gentleness and sweetness of her disposition, was also one of the prettiest girls imaginable.

The dorm feast surpassed Sally's expectations, Jane provided ginger beer from the plant that bubbled in a crock in the prep room, Clare brought a box of chocolates, sent to her from London by her aunt, and Sparrow had made sandwiches.
'There's plain and fish paste and jam,' she whispered in the torch-light.
'Not together, surely?' said Dorothy. Somebody started to giggle, and Jane had to sound awfully firm to prevent the whole thing getting out of hand.
'Ssh! Matron's got ears like a bat,' she hissed.
'Is one, you mean,' said Clare. The giggling started all over again.

Claudette frowned. 'You are riding again this morning? In the heat?'
'The heat don't signify. Why, a gallop on Firefly will cool me off. Besides –' She paused, and one eyebrow shot up in what Claudette recognized as an unconscious imitation of the Colonel. Her eyes widened mischievously.
'Here's a piece of tittle-tattle for you.' She lowered her voice to a dramatic whisper: 'I'm going to meet a young man, very handsome, in the woods across the lake!'
'Daisy!' Claudette sounded shocked. 'I cannot permit it.' Then, with a laugh, 'I shall have to accompany you.'

'But what about the extra tea cup?'
'I was fairly certain that it was Mrs Thornton who had hidden it, but I had to make sure. That's why I arranged the little deception with the sugar lumps. The count had come to the same conclusion. If he could find an extra tea cup anywhere, his ladylove would be in the clear.'
'One thing more. What did the countess mean by her dying words?'
'They were an accusation against her husband. The maid heard correctly, but it was the wrong language. "Morder" in German means "murderer"!

1 How are you able to recognize the genres?
2 Underline the words or phrases that allow you to do so.

continued

Tasksheet 5.6

3 In what ways is each passage typical of its genre?

Genre writing sometimes contains conventional attitudes that some readers may want to challenge. What do you think of the role of women presented in these extracts? **Rewrite one of them to make the women characters more modern.**

Tasksheet 5.7 Experimenting with form

Consider this scene:

A young soldier is walking down a country road. He is returning to his village after a war. It is a warm summer's evening. He is going to the house of the girl he was engaged to. He wasn't seen her for three years.

As a writer you might want to develop many different aspects of this bare outline:

- the sense of peace after war
- the soldier's mixed feelings – relief at having survived combined with sadness for all his friends who did not
- the beauty of the countryside he thought he would never see again
- memories of childhood, triggered by familiar things
- pleasure and anxiety at the thought of the reunion with his girlfriend

1 Which of these aspects interest you?

2 Choose two forms that will emphasize them:

- a poem
- dialogue from a play (who is the other character?)
- stage directions from a television play
- a letter, written may years letter (who is writing to whom?)
- an article in the local newspaper

3 Describe the scene in both your chosen forms, adding whatever details you like.

Ask someone to read both pieces.

- Which form works best?
- What effects were you trying to achieve through your choice of form?

The video and the tasksheets have looked at the following genres:

- detective fiction
- science fiction
- fairy stories
- folk tales
- school stories
- horror stories
- romantic fiction

Read this outline, written in the language of fortune-tellers – vague and with few details.

A girl discovers a beautiful object on her way to work. She knows she ought to hand it over to somebody in authority, but it is so beautiful that she decides to keep it for herself. A few days later she loses her pet, then she receives some bad news. Finally she has an accident. She starts to suspect that the object is bringing her bad luck. But there might be other reasons. She decides to confide in someone whose advice she respects. With this wise person's help she discovers that the solution lies with the owner of the object she found – a tall, dark stranger. She also finds out that his life is in danger. Through an act of great courage the situation is resolved.

Rewrite the story in one of the genres listed above. Before you start, ask yourself these questions:

1. What are the characters like?
2. How will they relate to the genre?
3. Who is the girl?
4. What is her work?
5. Who will the 'wise person' be?
   - a witch (fairy story)
   - a detective (detective story)
   - a space-ship captain (science fiction)
6. Where will the action take place?
7. Is the story set in the present day?
8. Does it have happy ending?
9. What is the 'act of great courage'?
10. Would it help to write the end first?
11. Does your chosen genre suggest the style?

If possible, compare versions of this story written in different genres.

Dannie Abse
Chinua Achebe
Martin Amis
George Higgins
Robert Leeson
Marge Piercy
Michèle Roberts
Mario Vargas Llosa

Using this video

In the first part of the video the writers talk about language – how they pitch their style and choose vocabulary and grammatical constructions that convey their meaning and literary intentions. This opens up interesting linguistic issues, such as the relationship between language and our view of reality, and the construction of meanings in a dynamic relationship between the writer and the reader.

The second half of the video discusses the author's inextricable yet removed relationship with the reader. The tasksheets make students aware of the link between language and audience in a variety of ways.

Tasksheet 6.2 provides examples of the following styles of writing:

- instructional or expository
- informative
- discursive
- specialist journalese
- descriptive
- children's story
- emotive journalese
- personal writing (taken from Evelyn Waugh's diary, 1920)

Tasksheet 6.3 aims to make students aware of the differences between the spoken and written language and the problem of writing authentic speech. Tasksheet 6.6 develops these ideas through textual analysis. An exploration of dialect can sometimes help students stuck in the personal or colloquial mode of writing to write in a more 'public' way.

Tasksheet 6.4 is a comprehension exercise to introduce the idea of audience and readership. Tasksheet 6.5 looks at dramatically different translations of Homer; the first is from an abridged version for children; Chapman's, written in 1616, is the oldest; and Richard Lattimore's is the most recent (1965). Tasksheets 6.7 and 6.8 provide more ideas for experimenting with language and audience.

Tasksheet 6.1 — The ingredients of writing

Pre-screening

Writing is a bit like cooking: different ingredients give you different results.

Make a large copy of the table below. Jot down all the things you associate with the words *novel, play, poem, short story, letter, newspaper article*.

- How do they differ – in length, who reads them, their subject matter, how they are written, etc?
- What elements do they have in common?

	Differences	**Similarities**
Novel		
Play		
Poem		
Short story		
Letter		
Newspaper article		

When you decide whether a story or poem is any good, what do you look at?

Think of the sort of writing you enjoy reading and make a list of the 'ingredients' that make it good or bad. For example, if you like humorous writing, what makes it funny – the ideas, situations, characters, dialogue or language?

If you are working in a group, compare your list with someone else's. Did you come up with the same things?

- Which ingredients do you use in your own writing?
- Which ones work well and which ones don't?

Tasksheet 6.2	Style and audience
Pre-screening	

Read these passages and answer the questions about each one:

Mix four tablespoonfuls of olive oil with one tablespoonful of lemon juice. Add one crushed clove of garlic, a teaspoonful of mustard powder, a pinch of sugar, a pinch of salt, some freshly chopped basil leaves and freshly ground pepper. Mix thoroughly and pour over sliced tomatoes and chopped spring onions.

The glycocorticosteroids are important drugs which have become widely used for their anti-inflammatory effects, but it must be remembered that these bear no clear resemblance to their metabolic effects. In fact the latter may limit their use.

Advances in science and technology, or in reproductive biology alone, could, within a short time, smash all the orthodox ideas about the family and its responsibilities.... When babies can grow in a laboratory jar, what happens to the very notion of maternity? And what happens to the self-image of women in societies which have taught her that her primary mission is the propagation and nurture of the race?

Clean-limbed knitted separates with a modicum of stretch are coming through in strength.. Nicole Farhi, of much the same sensibility as Donna Karan, produces a seductive working style, clothes that cut across the seasons, like her short swing charcoal coat.

It will probably rain and you can test the popular theory that it is warmer in than out. Everybody will be thrown about by the waves and come out, teeth chattering, to eat soft white rolls with jam and butter and big pieces of crumbling fruit cake. Then you climb around the rocks poking at sea anemones.

'Terrible Ida,' the goblins said. 'We're dancing sick and must to bed.' But Ida played a dancing jig, a hornpipe that makes sailors wild beneath the ocean moon.

Four American women were among thirteen people injured as a series of bomb explosions rocked four Tunisian hotels packed with American holidaymakers. One of the women is believed to have had a foot amputated after the blast in the bar of the Beach Hotel in Monastir.

To my tailor's this morning. The suit is divine. It could hardly be better if it had cost eighteen guineas in Savile Row. After an early lunch Mother and I went to stand in the pit for Galsworthy's *Skin Game* at the St Martin's. We got very good seats. It is the most terrible tragedy I have seen and most magnificently played. Father made a remark worth recording. The new puppy was howling dismally, during supper, in the bathroom. Father said, 'He's unhappy and wants to tell us about it, which, after all, is all that most literature is!'

1. What is the writer's purpose?
2. Who is the intended 'audience'?
3. How can you tell? Consider:

- the vocabulary – is it technical, colloquial?
- the sentence structure – is it easy to read, or complex; does each sentence contain a lot of ideas?
- the style – is it persuasive, descriptive, informative?

Tasksheet 6.3	Language

Watch the first part of the video

Michèle Roberts talks about the 'authenticity' of language: she says one of the writer's duties is to use language honestly, 'catching all the meaning'.

Language that is authentic 'rings true' – we can identify with it and relate it to the language we use in our head all the time or the language we hear at home or one the street. It seems to convey 'what oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed', as the eighteenth-century poet Alexander Pope put it.

Here are some ideas to help you improve the authenticity of your writing.

Dialogue

Novelists use dialogue to reveal character, to explain what has happened or to move the plot along. For playwrights and scriptwriters it is even more important. Part of the success of a television series like *Cagney and Lacey* lay in the way the script captured New York speech and humor.

- Think of other television or radio series that use authentic language.
- Make a note of authentic expressions and their 'standard' English equivalents.

Try this exercise:

1. Play the first section of the video several times *without showing the picture* and transcribe what the first three speakers say: write down everything, including 'ums' and 'ers', false starts, repetitions and pauses. Invent symbols to show how certain words or phrases are emphasized and to indicate tone of voice. Give yourself plenty of space to add extra details.
2. Now *watch* the video. Add any other details that contribute to the meaning:

- changes in the speaker's facial expression
- gestures
- 'body language'

If possible, compare your version with other people's. Then consider these questions:

1. What difficulties did you have in making a transcription?

continued

2 What sort of punctuation did you use?
3 What symbols did you invent?
4 What details did you add when you watched as well as listened?

Ask someone to read your transcription aloud.

- Does it sound different from dialogue in a play or a novel?
- In what ways?

Dialogue that sounds 'authentic' does not have all the features of spontaneous spoken language – the writer must condense what a person says through an 'editing' or 'drafting' process.

Write a short scene for a play based on three writers at a party finding themselves interviewed by a well-known journalist. Invent the part of the journalist but use the material in your transcript to make the scene sound as authentic as possible. Do not give stage directions or a descriptive beginning – let the dialogue set the scene.

1 Which parts of your transcript did you leave out? Why?
2 Which parts did you expand? Why?

Now assess an earlier piece of dialogue you have written.

1 Does it say what you want it to in as few words as possible?
2 Have you included any of the language 'defects' – repetition, incomplete sentences, etc – you recorded in your transcript?
3 Have you indicated the vocal aspect of dialogue – tone of voice, the emphasis of certain words, etc?
4 Have you conveyed the physical aspect of communication – how people sit, their expression, their reactions, etc?

Watch the second half of the video.

1 What do the writers say about the author's relationship with the reader?
2 George Higgins talks about the need to make his stories as 'accessible' as possible.
- What does he mean by this?
- How does he try to do it?

3 What does Robert Leeson mean when he says children's stories are 'a coded message from one generation to another'?
4 Why does Marge Piercy say that when a book is finished it 'belongs' to the reader?
5 What is Martin Amis' image of the 'ideal reader'?
6 Who is likely to read the things you might write:
- a story for your college magazine
- a piece of course work
- a letter of complaint
- a note on the kitchen table
- a comprehension exercise set as part of your course

7 How does knowledge of your 'audience', or readership, affect the way you would write each of these things?
8 What is the difference between telling friends about a vacation and writing about it as an exercise? Why may the first account be livelier than the second?

Looking at translation

Understanding the problems of translation can help you express what you want to say and emphasizes how drafting can improve your skills as a writer.

Watch the first half of the video.

1. What do Chinua Achebe and Mario Vargas Llosa say about the process of translation?
2. What, in your experience, are the main difficulties of translating from one language into another?
3. Are some forms of language more difficult to translate than others?

As Mario Vargas Llosa says, one word can change the meaning of a phrase or a whole text. The problem of finding the right word is common to translation and the writing process in general.

Here are four translations of the same passage form Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey*, written c.1000 BC (Book XXI, lines 85-95). The plot so far: Odysseus, the son of Laertes, and his warriors are journeying home from the Trojan War. Odysseus' wife Penelope, although faithful to her husband during his long absence, is besieged by suitors who want to marry her. To play for time she agrees to marry any man who can shoot with the powerful bow that belonged to her husband. Two of Odysseus' faithful servants weep as they present the bow to Antinous, the treacherous leader of the suitors. This is what he says to them:

'Fools and clods,' he cried. 'Stay here and keep quiet or go and cry outside. Leave the bow where it is. It will be a hard test for us, for I do not think that anyone will string it easily. No one among us here is quite the man Odysseus was. I know, for I saw him myself, and I remember him well, though I was only a child at the time.'

translated by George Kerr

'Witless peasants, short-sighted creatures! What do you mean, misguided pair, by shedding tears and troubling the queen's heart further when it is sunk in grief already at the loss of her beloved husband? Either be quiet or sit and eat your meal, or else go outside the house to weep. leave the bow with its arrows here to plague the contesting suitors – since I think this bow will not let itself be easily strung; among all those here there is no such man as Odysseus was. I myself have seen him, and still remember him, though then I was a little child.'

translated by Walter Shewring

continued

'You foolish countrymen, who ever think of tomorrow, poor wretches, why are you streaming tears and troubling the lady now, and stirring her heart, when she has enough already of sadness her heart rests on, now she has lost a dear husband. Go sit in silence and eat, or else take your crying out of the door and be gone, but leave the bow where you put it, a prize for the suitors to strive for; a terrible one; I do not think that this well-polished bow can ever be strung easily. There is no man among the lot of us who is such a one as Odysseus used to be. I myself have seen him, and I remember him well, though I was still young and childish.'

translated by Richard Lattimore

And said: 'Ye rustick fooles! that still each day
Your minds give over to this vain dismay,
Why weep ye, wretches, and the widdowe's eyes
Tempt with renew'd thought, that would otherwise
Despose her sorrowes, since her Lord is dead
And teares are idle? Sit and eate your bread,
Nor whisper more a word; or get ye gone,
And weepe without doores. Let this Bow alone
To our out-match'd contention. For I feare
The Bow would scarse yeeld draught to nay heere.
Heere no such man lives as Laertes Son
Amongst us all. I knew him; thuoght puts on
His looke's sight now, me thinkes, thogh then a child.'

translated by George Chapman

1. Which translation do you think is closest to the original Greek? Why?
2. Which translation has been written for children? How can you tell?
3. Which is the most modern translation? How can you tell?
4. Which has the most archaic vocabulary?
5. Do you think translators need to use archaic vocabulary to capture the spirit of a classical text?
6. Compare the effects of the verse translation with the prose versions.
7. Underline three phrases or sentences in each passage that illustrate the differences between the translations.
8. What are the effects of these choices of expression?

- Is the expression likely to date?
- Does it convey the meaning clearly?
- Does it 'fit in' with the translator's choice of words?
- Is it suitable for a classical poem?
- Which is the most appropriate expression?

Looking at other writers' work

In novels and plays dialogue can be used to reveal character; if the language rings true, we build up a mental picture of how a character thinks, acts and reacts to others. It can also be used to show the reader what culture , social background, place or period of history the character belongs to.

Read these extracts and answer the questions about each of them.

'The boss likes me,' he boasted. 'Says he is going to send me to night school. You see, Aunt Liz, he is always a bit drunk, and when he hollers for a boy all the others duck out, but I always turn up. 'Ere 'e ain't 'arf a lad,' Charlie added humorously. '"Spell this big word," he hollers at me. 'Gor blimey!' says I, "I can't." "Bugger off," he hollers again, "and don't come back till you can." So I go off to the library room, finds it in the dictionary and writes it down. Then when he calls out, "Boy! Boy!" I dashes in and before he starts on me I spells it out loud to him. You know, he don't 'arf laugh and I think he likes me.'

Lena Kennedy, *Lizzie*

'I come whenever I can,' I added.

'Then don't make appointments you can't keep,' he promptly responded. 'Brother's keeper bet your bottom dollar. If your father saw you stealing apples, you'd have a hiding to make your britches glow. Did you bring me any booty?

'How would this do? A box of Schrafft chocolates bought at a drugstore in a shopping center on the way. His spotted hands tore at the cellophane like a raccoon's paws ...

John Updike, *A Month of Sundays*

Stan: Hell! Thaas what kep' me goin' look. Almost always None of them young 'uns'll do it, hell if they will. There ent much life in the young 'uns. Bunch o' weak-kneed ruffians. None on 'em like livin' look, none on 'em! You read in them ole papers what go on look, an' you wonder if they can see. You do! Wonder if they got eyes to look around them, think they know where they live? Corse they don't, they don't you know, not one. Blust! the winter go an' the spring come on after an' they don't see the buds an' they don't smell breeze an they don't see the buds an' they don't smell breeze an they don't see gals, an' when they see gals they don't know what to do wi' 'em. They don't!

Arnold Wesker, *Roots*

1 What kind of person is speaking?

2 Where do they come from?

continued

3 If there were no inverted commas, how could you tell this is *spoken* language?

4 How can you tell that the dialogues would be spoken with regional accents?

5 Which grammatical structures differ from 'standard English'?

6 Rewrite the extract from *Roots* in 'standard English'. You will have to change some words, phrases or grammatical structures to make the meaning clear. Which version is more effective as 'realistic' speech?

Tape-record people you know who speak in dialect or with regional accents and transcribe their speech. Use some of this material in a piece of writing you are working on.

Tasksheet 6.7 Experimenting with language

1 Pick a place you know well and are fond of. Write three different accounts, each with a different style and purpose.

- informative – to describe what it is like
- persuasive – to persuade someone to visit it
- expressive – to say why you like it

You could imitate the language of:

- a newspaper article
- an advertisement
- a letter to a friend

2 Imagine you are trying to sell a house. Write three advertisements for the same property, using abbreviations, if appropriate:

- a small ad in the local paper (maximum 30 words)
- a description in a realator's window to encourage passers-by to call in for the details (maximum 150 words)
- the details available in the realator's

Tasksheet 6.8 Writing for different audiences

1 Watch a young child you know well and then write up your observations for these audiences:

- the child's mother
- the child's teacher
- the readers of a book on child development

2 A girl of sixteen decides that she can no longer live at home. She writes four different letters about her decision:

- to her mother
- to her sister
- to her boyfriend
- to a magazine

Write two or more of these letters, bearing in mind how the audience will affect the style and the content of each letter.

3 The title of a novel is often a key to the audience it is intended for. Sensational titles and the publisher's blurb on the back cover aim to sell the book to a wider audience.

- Chose two books, plays or films that have a specific audience – *The Dictionary of Sailing* and *Paddington* Bear are examples – and write a brief informative description of them.
- Now imagine that you are the publisher or publicist. **Write two blurbs to encourage more people to buy them, changing the title if necessary.**

4 Write a letter from a character in a novel or a film to yourself, asking your advice. Think about the sort of language the character uses and why they are writing to you.

5 Making a speech fills most people with terror, partly because the writer has to confront the audience directly. What sort of language would be used in the following situations?

- a politician addressing a rally
- the father of the bride addressing wedding guests
- a headteacher addressing the school
- someone proposing the health of a relative at a seventieth birthday party
- a barrister summing up the defense to the jury

Choose one of these and write a short speech.

Dannie Abse

Dannie Abse was born into a Jewish family in Wales in 1923 and is a practicing doctor as well as poet. His first volume, *After Every Green Thing*, was published in 1948; *Ask the Bloody Horse* was a 1986 Book Society choice. He also writes novels, including *Ash on a Young Man's Sleeve*, plays and autobiography – *A Poet in the Family, A Strong Dose of Myself. Journal from the Ant Heap* is a diary of the events of 1984-6. He is president of the Poetry Society of Great Britain and a fellow of the Royal Society of Literature, and lives in London.

Chinua Achebe

Chinua Achebe was born in 1930 in eastern Nigeria. he studied medicine and literature at the University of Ibadan and later at London University. From 1961 to 1966 he was director of the Nigerian Broadcasting Company in Lagos, and from 1973 to 1981 was professor of English at the University of Nigeria. His first novel, Things fall Apart (1958), has sold over two million copies and been translated into thirty languages. It was followed by *No Longer at Ease, Arrow of God, and A Man of the People*. He also writes children's books, short stories, essays and poetry; *Beware Soul Brother* won the 1972 Commonwealth Poetry prize. He writes in English and Ibo.

Brian Aldiss

Brian Aldiss was born in Norfolk, England, in 1925. He served in the army in the Far East from 1943 to 1947. he has worked as a bookseller, editor and critic, but the publication of his first novel, *Non-Stop* in 1958 established his reputation as a science-fiction writer. Titles include *Hothouse, The Dark Years, Greybeard, Frankenstein Unbound, The Hand-reared Boy, A Soldier Erect, A Rude Awakening* and his *Helliconia Trilogy*, which took seven years to complete. *Billion Year Spree* is a history of science fiction.

Martin Amis

Martin Amis was born in 1949 and educated in Britain, Spain and the United States. He is the son of Kingsley Amis. He has worked as an editor, critic and reviewer. His first novel, *The Rachel Papers* (1973), won the Somerset Maugham Award. It was followed by *Dead Babies, Success, Other People*, *Money* and *London Fields*. His non-fiction includes

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The Moronic Inferno and *Other Visits to America*, and *Einstein's Monsters*.

Maya Angelou

Maya Angelou was born in 1928 in St Louis, Missouri.. She was raped when she was eight and became mute for five years. Since her first child was born she has been a waitress, singer, actress, dancer, black activist and mother. While living in Ghana, she was editor of the African Review. She is best known for her five volumes of autobiography: *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, Gather Together in My Name, Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas*, *The Heart of a Women and All God's Children Need Traveling Shoes*. She also writes poetry and now teaches American Studies at Wake Forest University in North Carolina.

Margaret Atwood

Margaret Atwood was born in 1939 in Ottawa, Canada, and was educated at the universities of Toronto, Radcliffe and Harvard. She was writer in residence at York University, Toronto, from 1972 to 1973. Her first volume of poetry, *The Circle Game*, appeared in 1966 and her first novel, *The Edible Woman*, in 1969. Other novels include *Surfacing*, *Lady Oracle*, *Life Before Man, The Handmaid's Tale*, and *Cat's Eye*. *Murder in the Dark* is a book of short stories and prose poems. Other volumes of short stories include *Dancing Girls* and *Bluebeard's Egg*.

J G Ballard

J G Ballard was born in Shanghai in 1930. At the age of thirteen he was interned by the Japanese for three years. He was then educated in England and studied medicine at Cambridge University. He became a full-time writer after his first novel, *The Drowned World*, was published in 1962. His books include *The Crystal World*, *The Atrocity Exhibition*, *Crash*, *The Unlimited Dream Company* and the short-story collections *The Terminal Beach*, *The Disaster Area*, and *Vermilion Sands*. His autobiographical novel *Empire of the Sun* has been made into a feature film.

John Berger

John Berger was born in London in 1926.. After attending the Central School of Art and Design and Chelsea School of Art he began working as a painter and art teacher. His first novel, *A Painter of*

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Our Time, was published in 1958. His work spans may forms: other fiction includes *The Foot of Clive*, *Corker's Freedom, Pig Earth* and *G*, which won the Booker Prize in 1972; *A Fortunate Man* and *The Seventh Man* are documentary essays; while his best-known book on art is *Ways of Seeing*. He has also written for the theatre, television and the cinema and has translated several European poets into English, including Bertolt Brecht. He lives in France.

Raymond Briggs

Raymond Briggs was born in 1934, the son of a milkman, and went to Wimbledon School of Art and then to the Slade. He established his reputation as an illustrator with such books as the *Fairy Tale Treasury* and *The Mother Goose Treasury*. Since 1961 he has taught part-time at the Brighton College of Art. His enormously successful *Father Christmas* (1973) was followed by *Fungus the Bogeyman*, *Gentleman Jim,* and *The Snowman*, which was made into an animated film, as was *Where the Wind Blows*. Other books include *The Tin Pot Foreign General* and the *Old Iron Woman* and *Wally*.

Elaine Feinstein

Elaine Feinstein was born in 1930 in Lancashire, England. After leaving Cambridge University she worked as an editor and lecturer until 1970, when her first novel, *The Circle*, appeared. later novels include *Children of the Rose*, *The Shadow Master* and *The Border*. She also writes for radio and television but she is best known for her poetry. Her collections include *Poems of Eurydice*, *Some Unease and Angels*, and *Badlands. A Captive Lion* is a biography of the Russian poet Marina Tsvetayeva, whose work she has translated.

Maggie Gee

Maggie Gee was born in 1948 in Dorset, England. After leaving Oxford University she worked as an editor and research assistant. She was awarded a writing fellowship at East Anglia University after her first novel, *Dying, in Other Words*, was published in 1981. This was followed by *The Burning Book*, *Light Years* and *Grace.*

Nadine Gordimer

Nadine Gordimer was born in Transvaal, South

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Africa, in 1923 and graduated from the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. Her first collection of short stories, *The Soft Voice of the Serpent*, appeared in 1953. She has expressed her strong opposition to apartheid through her novels, which include The *Lying Days*, *Occasion for Loving*, *The Conservationist* (joint winner of the 1975 Booker Prize), *Burger's Daughter*, *July's People* and *A Sport of Nature*.

Mary Gordon

Mary Gordon was born in 1949 in Long Island, New York. Her parents were of Irish and Jewish descent. After graduating from Columbia University she worked as an English teacher. Her first novel, *Final Payments*, was turned down by several publishers until she rewrote it in the first person. It was published to great acclaim in 1978. Since then she has written *The Company of Women*, *Men and Angels*, and *Temporary Shelter*.

George Higgins

George Higgins was born in Massachusetts in 1939. He studied at Boston College and Stanford University and then became a reporter. After obtaining a law degree in 1967 he worked in the Organized Crime Section and the Criminal Division of the Massachusetts Attorney General's Office. His first novel, *The Friends of Eddie Coyle* (1972), became a best-seller and was made into a film. His other books include *The Digger's Game*, *Cogan's Trade, Year or So With Edgar*, *The Rat on Fire*, *The Patriot Game*, *The Choice of Enemies* and *Penance for Jerry Kennedy*.

Kazuo Ishiguro

Kazuo Ishiguro was born in Nagasaki, Japan, in 1954 and moved to Britain in 1960. He attended Kent and East Anglia universities and now lives in London. His first novel, *A Pale View of the Hills*, was published in 1982; his second, *An Artist of the Floating World*, won the Whitbread Book of the Year Award for 1986 and *The Remains of the Day* won the 1989 Booker Prize.

P D James

P D James was born in Oxford in 1920, the daughter of an Inland Revenue official. In 1949 she began to work for the National Health Service in London. In 1968 she entered the Home Office, where she worked in the Police Department and in

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the Criminal Law Department. She retired early in 1979 to devote herself full-time to her writing. Her books include *Cover Her Face* (1962), *A Shroud for a Nightingale, An Unsuitable Job for a Woman*, *Death of an Expert Witness*, *A Taste for Death*, and *Devices and Desires*.

Lena Kennedy

Lena Kennedy was born in the East End of London in 1914 and left school at fifteen. Her first novel, Maggie, was accepted for publication when she was sixty-five. She went on to write many best-sellers, including *Autumn Alley*, *Nelly Kelly*, *Lady Penelope*, *Susan*, *Lizzie*, and *Lily, My Lovely*.

Robert Leeson

Robert Leeson was born in 1928 in Cheshire, England. His father was a chemical worker and his mother a domestic servant. After graduating from London University he worked as a journalist for over thirty-five hears. He is best known for his children's books and for his television series *Grange Hill*. Titles include *Beyond the Dragon Prow*, *The Third Class Genie*, *The Demon Bike Rider*, *The White Horse, Challenge in the Dark, Silver'Revenge* and *It's My Life*.

Deborah Moggach

Deborah Moggach was born in 1948 in London. Both her parents were writers. After graduating from the University of Bristol she worked as a librarian for Oxford University Press and then lived in Pakistan for two years, teaching and working for local newspapers. Her first novel, *You Must be Sisters* (1978), was followed by *Close to Home*, *A Quiet Drink*, *Hot Water Man*, *Porky* and *Driving in the Dark*, *To Have and to Hold* has been made into a television series.

Wendy Perriam

Wendy Perriam was born in 1940. She graduated from Oxford University and worked as a nanny, barmaid, artist's model, carnation debudder and researcher before starting a career in advertising. She has been writing full-time since she began her first novel, *Absinthe for Elevenses* (1980). Other novels include *Cuckoo, After Purple, The Stillness, the Dancing, Sin City and Devils, for a Change*. She also writes poetry and short stories.

Marge Piercy

Marge Piercy was born in Detroit, Michigan, in

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1936, into a family suffering extreme poverty. She was the first person in her family to go to college, winning a scholarship to the University of Michigan. Her first book, a collection of poetry, was published in 1968. She has been an active campaigner in the civil rights, peace and women's movements. Her novels chronicle our times: *Braided Lives* is set in the fifties, *Vida* in the sixties, *Fly Away Home* in the eighties, and *Gone to Soldiers* in the forties. Other novels include *Small Changes* and *Woman on the Edge of Time*.

Harold Pinter

Harold Pinter was born in east London in 1930. After leaving school he became an actor, working mostly in repertory. Other jobs included bouncer at a dance hall, waiter, dishwasher and salesman. In 1957 he wrote his first plays, *The Room*, *The Birthday Party* and *The Dumb Waiter*. He achieved world- wide success with *The Caretaker* in 1960, which was followed by *The Homecoming*, *Old Times*, *No Man's Land* and *Betrayal*. He has also written for radio, television and the cinema; his screenplays include *The Servant, Accident, The Go-between* and *The French Lieutenant's Woman*.

Christopher Priest

Christopher Priest was born in 1943 in Manchester. After leaving school he worked for a firm of chartered accountants, and started to write in 1965; *Indoctrinaire* appeared in 1970. His early books were science fiction but he now prefers to think of himself as an 'imaginative' writer. Titles include *The Darkening Island, The Inverted World, The Space Machine, The Perfect Lover, The Affirmation, A Dream of Wessex* and *The Glamour.*

Ruth Rendell

Ruth Rendell was born in 1930 in London. After leaving school she worked as a reporter on a local newspaper and became managing editor of the *Chigwell Times*. Her first book, *From Doon with Death* (1964), introduced the character of Chief Inspector Wexford. Her many other novels include *No more Dying Then, A Sleeping Life, Tree of Hands*, *Talking to Strange Men* and *The Bridesmaid*. Under the pseudonym Barbara Vine she has written *A Dark-Adapted Eye* and *A Fatal Inversion*.

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Michèle Roberts

Michèle Roberts was born a twin, of an English father and a French mother. After doing various temporary jobs such as a charwoman, teacher, researcher, and pregnancy adviser, she began her first novel in 1974. Her novels include *The Wild Girl*, *A Piece of the Night*, *The Visitation* and *The Book of Mrs Noah*; *The Mirror of the Mother* is a collection of her poetry. She divides her time between London, Italy and Boston, Massachusetts.

Salman Rushdie

Salman Rushdie was born in Bombay in 1947 and was educated in India and in England. After leaving Cambridge University he worked as an actor and as a freelance copywriter. When his first novel, *Grimus*, was published in 1979, one reviewer advised him to give up writing, but his second novel, *Midnight's Children*, won the 1981 Booker Prize and achieved world-wide success. This was followed by *Shame* and *The Satanic Verses*. He has also written *The Jaguar Smile: A Nicaraguan Journey* and screenplays for television.

Maurice Sendak

Maurice Sendak was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1926. He has illustrated more than eighty books and began writing his own stories in 1956. *Where the Wild Things Are* established him as a major artist and won the Caldecott Medal in 1964; it has now sold over two million copies, although it was banned in some American libraries when it was first published. Other books include *In the Night Kitchen*, *Outside Over There* and *Higgeldy Piggeldy Pop*, which has been turned into an opera.

Mongane Serote

Mongane Serote was born in Sophiatown, South Africa, in 1944. He went to school in Alexandra Township, in Leribe, Lesotho, and in Soweto. In 1969 he was imprisoned in South Africa and held in solitary confinement for nine months; he was then released without being charged. Serote won a Fullbright scholarship to Colombia University and was awarded his degree in 1979. Since then he has lived in Botswana, attached to the Nedu Arts Ensemble. The first anthology of his poetry, *Yakhal'Inkomo*, was published in 1972. This was followed by *Tsetlo*, which was banned in South Africa, *No Baby Must Weep* and *Behold Mama*, *Flowers*. His novels include *To Every Birth Its Blood*.

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Janice Shinebourne

Janice Shinebourne was born in Guyana and has lived in Britain since 1970. She began her first novel *Timepiece* (1986) when she was eighteen, and *The Last English Plantation* appeared in 1987. She works in London as a lecturer and a reviewer.

John Updike

John Updike was born in 1932 in Shillington, Pennsylvania. He studied at Harvard College and then at Oxford University. His ambition was to be a cartoonist, but his career as a writer began when he started contributing stories and poems to the New Yorker. His fiction includes *Couples* (1968), *Centaur*, *Bech: A Book*, *Rabbit Redux, A Month of Sundays*, *The Poorhouse Fair, Rabbit is Rich* (1982 winner of the Pulitzer Prize for fiction), *Bech is Back*, and three collections of short stories. He has also published two volumes of poetry, *Tossing and Turning* and *Facing Nature*.

Mario Vargas Llosa

Mario Vargas Llosa was born in 1936 in Peru, where he studied literature and law. His first stories offered him the opportunity to study in Paris and Madrid. His first novel, The Time of the Hero, was published in 1962. After eighteen years of exile in Europe and the United States, he returned to Lima in 1980. His may novels include *Aunt Julia and the Scriptwriter*, *The War of the End of the World, The Green House, The Real Life of Alejandro Mayta*, and *Who Killed Palomino Molero*.

Fay Weldon

Fay Weldon was born in England and brought up in New Zealand. After graduating from St. Andrew's University, Scotland, she worked as a journalist and advertising copywriter. Her first novel *A Fat Woman's Joke*, was published in 1967. Her books include *Down Among the Women, Praxis, Puffball*, *Watching Me Watching You, Leader of the Band* and *The Life and Loves of a She-Devil*, which was adapted for BBC television. Her work as a screenwriter includes an adaptation of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

Arnold Wesker

Arnold Wesker was born in 1932 in east London, of Jewish immigrant parents. He left school at sixteen and worked as a furniture maker's apprentice and as a pastry cook – the basis of his play *The Kitchen*

continued

(1959). He is best known for his trilogy of plays *Chicken Soup with Barley* (1958), *Roots* (1959) and *I'm Talking About Jerusalem* (1960), which revitalized British theatre. His other plays include *Chips with Everything*, *The Four seasons*, *Their Very Own* and *Golden City*, *The Merchant*, *Caritas* and *Annie Wobbler*. he has also written essays, screenplays and short stories.

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