

the writer's guide



a step by step guide to
creating a piece of writing

SHELLEY MCNAMARA

Quiller

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1. Developing ideas for writing

Writers use memories and recollections constantly in their writing but you cannot tell what is fiction and what is fact. This allows the writer to maintain privacy while exploring their life in an entertaining way. Because you are writing fiction, you can add to your story whatever aspects of the narrative you want to develop - setting, characters, plot, description, etc. It's up to you.

The following modelled response is a memory from my childhood. Playing games with my family was one way I felt a sense of belonging and connection to others. There are elements of this story that are true and elements that I have added for effect. One of the reasons why I found this easy to write was because I could imagine this scene as parts of it actually happened.

You will notice that this form of writing is very visual. Creating clear visual images in your reader's mind is one way to engage your audience and recreate a sense of time and place for them.

This extract comes from a larger piece of writing. The extract was written to develop my character, who had just lost his father. Through the memory extract I was aiming to explore the sense of loss the character would be feeling at that particular time. Read the modelled response, take note of the effective writing skills and complete the writing activity below.

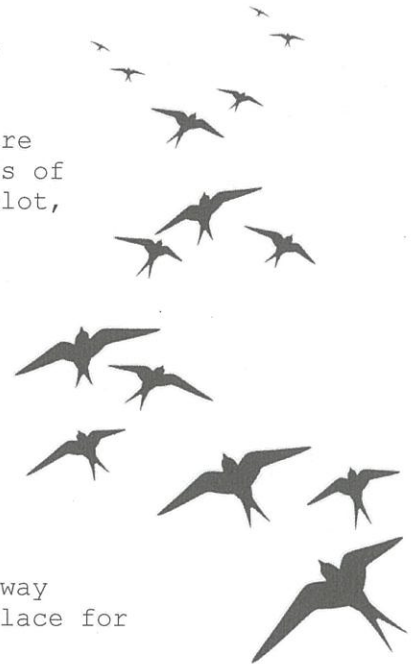
Modelled response

We are in the garden, and I am digging a hole with a stick fallen from the fig tree that shelters our entire front yard. My Dad is with me, lying in the dirt. He wipes his face with his hand, leaving a smudge of brown on his cheek. He is my war hero and we are about to go into battle. He tells me to shift the dirt into a mound. I follow his commands like a drill sergeant. We can use it for the hills he says. Bonus points if you go over the top of them. First one to hit all their marbles in the ditch wins. We both nod.

My mum calls us in for dinner. I hold my breath as my Dad hollers to her that we need another half an hour. He looks at me and I try my best to conceal my smile. This is man's business, he tells me.

He pulls out a bag of marbles from his pocket and spills them onto the dirt. They look like chocolate jaffa lollies decorated like Easter eggs. He brushes the dirt from the tops of the marbles. I have something special for you, he says. He pulls out from his other pocket a larger marble. We call it a boulder. I squirm inside, ecstatic. It's shiny red and has two black lightning bolts crossing each other. He holds it in between his thumb and pointer finger and twists it back and forth in front of my eyes. I let out a deep sigh. Where did you get that from? I have connections, he says. Let's play ball.

My mum is calling now, louder and more forceful. I shrug off the interruption, jerking my shoulder up toward my ear like I'm warding off a fly. Still the noise. It's piercing my ears, drilling a hole through my head. I look to my father, but he is gone.



Effective writing skills

- Clear visual imagery is created through description and figurative language.
- Clear feelings of characters are shown.
- Easily identifiable relationship between a son and father is explored.
- Combinations of sentence lengths are used to describe the incident and show a variety of character thoughts, feelings and desires.
- Self-contained scene means that it could stand alone.

Activity 1: Developing ideas for writing



Time: 10 minutes

1. Write a description of a scene from your childhood where you felt a strong sense of connection to other people, animals and or a place.
2. Write in the first person using the present tense. Add aspects to your description that may not have happened, like the setting or people involved. Slowly develop the scene through creating clear visual images, which demonstrate your characters' thoughts, actions, desires, attitudes and beliefs.

2. Playing with language

Playing with language is an effective way to develop ideas for writing creative pieces. The idea is to allow your subconscious to go with the flow of the ideas and thoughts that come into your mind. Try not to judge the words and phrases that come, just let the words appear on the page.

The following activity can be useful in developing particular ideas or phrases or concepts that stand out to you. You can use these ideas in creative pieces you are already working on or turn them into something greater. Whatever you choose, have fun playing with language and meaning.

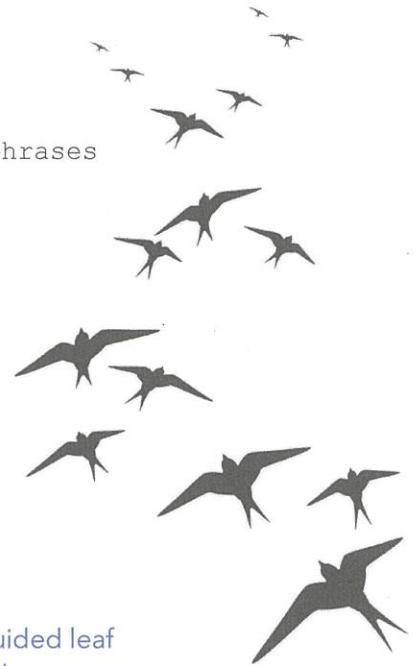
Read the modelled response, take note of the effective writing skills and complete the writing activity below.

Modelled response

Along the river shop plants float freeing commotion peaceful orangutan, guided leaf flower frosted gamete gloat greedily car crash dreamed frosted orange petal camera cox carrot juice flow degrade furrow tunnel under ground sleep slumbering safe caress quake Carly name hat goat company titled fellow goat foot flow foreign come said the forest ground to a harrowing hollow empty wholeness forming happy walk groan **I remember when** the dog died Benny howled hell core quavering she crawled sheepishly next to the body, shy rice dad on the brink fell hole well rise your neck up in to the emptiness of solitude door handle window pain rain dripping, sliding down the glass like a snot she was the most unusual girl in the class styling fingertips were rested on the bottom of the foliage forever fun to be home in the snow cool touch great hair for hole deep welling in the socket of her checks mouth rich ruby raw crouch up float waft like incense burning coming down slipping hole fear following tripping toes slow frown grove to the gate growing sliding open pulling out **he had changed so much** at the airport gliding out of his body standing beside the postman checking for ants on the envelopes sleeping awake to the torrent gushing out there where grace learns to sew her dowry of brilliant silk into a blanket for her daughter or her monkey friend since birth **in her imagination** keeping faith and restoring hope for the beauty of the ka they laughed from their bellies fulling up on the fruit of the nectar life subtle force nudging on the bear who kissed the ranger on the head just like that and ate his breakfast he was hungry after sleeping furrowed in the cave.

Effective writing skills

- Clear visual imagery is used.
- Words are used for their sounds, rather than meaning.
- Ideas are randomly put together.
- Grammar and sentence structure are ignored.
- Ideas and word combinations can inspire other ideas and stories.
- Some words are made up, like 'fulling'.



Activity 2: Playing with language



Time: 5 minutes

1. I have chosen a number of phrases for this activity but any phrase can be used. Begin with the first phrase and then after one minute continue your writing with the second phrase and so on until all the phrases have been included in your writing piece. Don't worry about punctuation, spelling or grammar. Just write.
First phrase: 'Along the river ...' – write for one minute, then write the
Second phrase: 'I remember when ...' – write for a further one minute, then write the
Third phrase: 'he had changed so much ...' – write for a further one minute, then write the
Fourth phrase: 'in her imagination ...' – write for the last minute. Stop writing.
2. Underline some of the phrases, ideas, concepts you particularly like. Try to use these in other pieces of writing you have already written or in future pieces of writing. Perhaps your thoughts may inspire a new or greater piece.

3. Developing character

Characterisation is the total of all we can see in a human being. It encompasses all aspects of humanity we could scrutinise in a character. To make characters real to the audience, you can give them emotions and mannerisms that people can relate to.

One way of developing character is to free write about your character based on either chosen or given headings. These headings can inspire a history of your character. This activity is a way to get to know the character that rests in your mind. Your short writing pieces can be used in a larger piece of writing or they can inform your character's reactions to and attitudes about certain things that happen in the story.

You could also rewrite this activity into a journal. To do this, change the narrative to first person and see what happens.

In the narrative below, my character is a man from the forest in a sort of fairytale like setting. When I was writing about this character, I was thinking about the woodchopper in *Little Red Riding Hood* and the old woman from the confectionary house in *Hansel and Gretel*. These headings just popped into my head and I began to free write about them without judging my writing or my thoughts.

Read the modelled response, take note of the effective writing skills and complete the activity below.

Modelled response

The cauldron

He bought the cauldron from a local shepherd. It took several attempts to move the cauldron to his cottage. Carrying it with his bare hands was impossible, even cushioning the bottom with linen towels did not work. Pushing it like a boulder up a hill killed his back and so he made a sort of pulley on wheels, much like the Egyptians used to move stone blocks from the quarry to the pyramid.

Teeth

The old man's teeth were in good condition despite the amount of sweets he'd consumed over the years and the terrible state of the medical system. As a baby, his mother fed him honey when he refused to suckle from her boob as a way of soothing his relentless screeching. His sweet tooth grew from there into a thriving confectionary business. Today he preferred the organic ingredients from the forest surrounding his cottage, although he imported sugar cane from the far north. He worked alone these days, squeezing the sugar cane meticulously, preserving the taste and grainy texture.

Failed recipes

For the old man, deviating from his mother's recipes for delicate sweets was a bruise to the ego so large that he would remain in his bed chamber for days. Once, his attention was drawn temporarily away from the melting of the sugar cane by a swallow tapping on the door. The slight disruption allowed the syrup to burn slightly. Although you or I would not be able to tell, the smell of burnt toffee lingered in his subconscious for days to come.



Effective writing skills

- Clear visual imagery is used.
- The writer has used the headings as inspiration for ideas.
- There is a sense of wonder around the character – his relationships with others, his childhood and what upsets and motivates him.
- The backstory for the character is explored.

Modelled response: changed from a story to a journal

The cauldron

The other day I bought the cauldron from a local shepherd. It took me several attempts to move the cauldron to my cottage. Carrying it with my bare hands was impossible, even cushioning the bottom with linen towels did not work. Pushing it like a boulder up a hill killed my back and so I made a sort of pulley on wheels, much like the Egyptians used to move stone blocks from the quarry to the pyramid.

Effective writing skills

- Narrative changed from third person, omniscient narrator to first person narrator to make the writing more personal.
- The imagery remains the same.

Activity 3: Developing character



Time: 10 minutes

1. Write down 3-4 random headings that you could connect with a character you have in your mind. Let these headings inspire ideas about your character's desires, motives, family background, relationships, hopes and fears.
2. Write about your character under each of the headings. Allow the history of your character to unfold as you write.
3. Rewrite each piece of writing into a journal entry for the character. Change the narrative to first person and add details that only your character would know.

4. Characters in your life

Characters in our lives can inspire characterisation in our own stories. You can either use a character or characters and a common experience related to them from the past as inspiration for a writing piece or you could allow the thought of this character to inspire a completely different story to what happened in real life.

Below is a piece of writing about an imaginative childhood experience inspired by the thought of my grandfather.

Read the modelled response, take note of the effective writing skills and complete the writing activity below.

Modelled response

My grandfather sat on the verandah, watching over his horde of grandchildren who descended on his quiet lawn every summer. For years he had watched us with that half smile, half frown that I had inherited from him.

The call had been made by my boisterous cousin, the one with the wicked temper who chased my brother up the street the day before for telling him he couldn't ride a bike to save himself. All the kids chased after the two of them, my brother being too quick, thankfully, avoiding another almighty display of roguery on the quiet suburban streets.

The call echoed through the house. I dropped my toast on the table, beside the plate, and raced to the front lawn to be the first on one of the two bikes.

To the lake, the chanting grew as the momentum for the adventure sank in. I roughly picked up the handle bars and while in motion, jumped onto the seat. I rode low on account of the youngest cousin being the last to use it. My knees pushed up beside my torso as I struggled to move past the letter box at the end of the concrete driveway.

I zig-zagged my way out of the street across the neighbour's front lawn, turning back to see my cousins flying out the front door, jumping over the verandah, crashing into the small garden my grandmother tended meticulously.

My grandfather laughed, elated by the excitement. My grandmother stood half way in between the creaky screen door, with a tea towel in one hand, calling out to leave her precious garden alone. More grandchildren rushed passed her following the same route as the last.

Out in front, I peddled madly, turning constantly to ensure they had not made enough ground to catch up. I knew the drill, first to be immersed in the lake was the winner and everyone else was a rotten egg. Having been a rotten egg many times before, this was my chance.

By this stage I was out on my own, not a relative in sight. I arrived at the foot of the lake, swung the bike from under me, ripped off my smock and dived into the water.

When I surfaced in front of me was a black swan, bobbing up and down in the water like a buoy, disturbed by my sudden entry. Its rounded body glossed in the sunlight, an oily black of beauty and serenity. Above the mound of its belly a tiny patch of red bled in the sunlight.



Effective writing skills

- The scene is slowly developed through description.
- There is lots of action in the scene which maintains interest.
- Backstory is added about the characters to show a connection to the past.
- Figurative language is used to enhance the description, such as 'bobbing up and down like a buoy'.
- The story ends in an unexpected way.

Activity 4: Writing about characters in your life



Time: 20 minutes

1. Write a list of the most influential people in your life. They could be your family, friends, community members or school teachers.
2. Write briefly why they have been influential.
3. Choose one person. Imagine that person. Think about a time that symbolises what that person means to you.
4. Draw/sketch/doodle/write notes about that person.
5. When you are ready, write about that person and the memory of them.

5. Developing conflict for characters

Characters in stories are driven by a strong desire for something, just like people are in life. You may have noticed that in some of your free writes that 'you' either did or did not achieve what you wanted.

A lost list of your character's life is a good way to think about what has been important to your character. The reader wonders if the character will end up 'finding' those lost things. Or perhaps your character finds something valuable unexpectedly because of the search for the 'lost things'. Why they are valuable and how the character came across them are interesting to readers as they gain insights into qualities of the character. The readers can connect with your character because they can appreciate his/her motivations and behaviour.

Read the modelled response, take note of the effective writing skills and complete the writing activity below.

Modelled response

I have lost the smell of cinnamon. I hold the stick in my hand, but I can no longer imagine its rough texture or smell its warm nutty fragrance. It upsets me beyond belief, my favourite smell.

I have lost my child. She was taken from her bed chamber in the night, while she slept peacefully as she did every night since her mother left her with me.

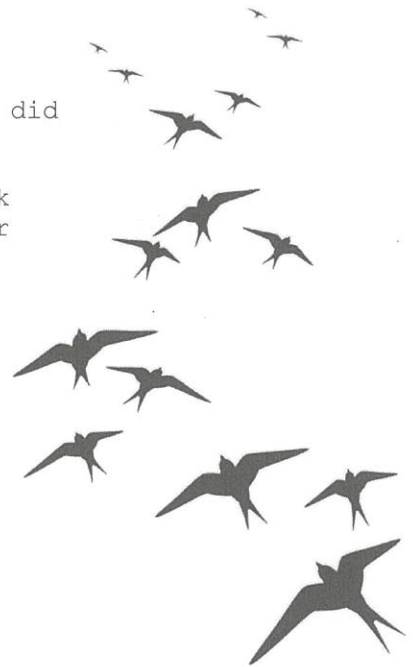
I have lost my father's shoe. The only remnant of him that I had been given from my mother. A reminder of how he travelled through the world.

I have lost my will to create confectionary. It passed through the window at night, seeping into the cool air, screeching over the top of the canopy of trees that engulf my cottage. For some time it had threatened to leave, but I foolishly thought it never would. I believed that the creation needed me as much as I needed it, but it seems that my beliefs have come to nothing.

Instead in that place in my heart, where the ability to create confectionary once rested, lies an empty hollow. The air swishes around longing for a place to rest comfortably, the movement much like a dog looking for the best place to sit. At night I dream of it coming back, knocking on the door and begging for forgiveness, which I would gladly offer.

Effective writing skills

- Physical items are described as being lost, as well as smells, abilities and precious people.
- Figurative language is used to describe what is lost and the effect on the character.
- Reflections are made about past experiences, which develop character.
- The lost list can be used as a background to the character or can form the basis of the conflict or complication that drives the story.



Activity 5: Developing conflict for character



Time: 10 minutes

1. Write 10 things that your character could lose that are valuable to him or her.
2. Free write about all of those things on your list.

6. Point of view in writing

The 'point of view' of an audience when reading, viewing or listening to a text refers to the position from which the audience view the events of the story. Usually, an audience's point of view allows them to perceive the protagonist and follow their interactions with other characters and situations.

Read the modelled response, take note of the effective writing skills and complete the writing activity below.

Modelled response: First person - my point of view

I remember I cracked my chin open. Jeesh it hurt. We were at the local pools. My aunty took us there in the holidays when Mum and Dad were at work. My brother had decided to jump off the highest diving board in the complex. I was about 6 years of age so the board looked like a tower jutting out of the ice blue water below. I was frightened of the water on account of being pushed in a pool at my grandma's place by my cousin. Consequently, I refused to learn to swim.

My brother was about 8 and his courage astounded me. I was baffled that he would even contemplate such a daring feat. My confusion expressed itself in a jumping fit of nervousness at the edge of the pool. As my brother stood up at the end of the board, presumably convincing himself that flying through the air was a good idea, I slipped. My chin caught itself in between the water and the edge of the pool. My fall must have corresponded with my brother's jump as I saw the heavy splash in front of my face and my brother bobbing up out of the water like a discarded bottle.

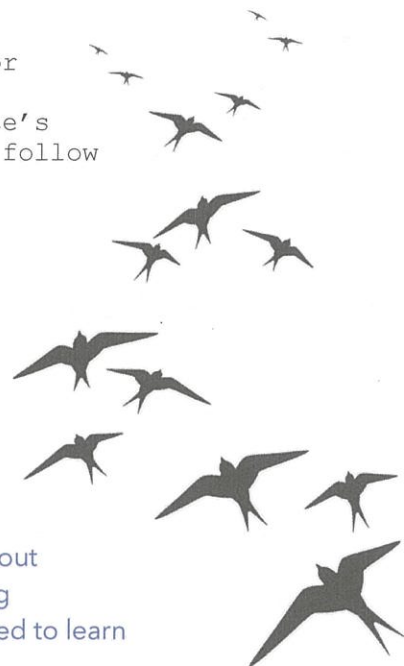
Effective writing skills

- The first-person narration creates a clear sense of the writer's thoughts and feelings.
- Clear description of the event is given.
- The ending is unexpected.

Modelled response: Third person - brother's point of view

He remembered walking up the slippery steps of the diving tower. He had made this journey many a time, but this time he stopped at the half way mark. Usually he would exit here, take his position behind the jumpers in front of him and look up toward the giant board in the sky. There he saw older guys, flexing their muscles, warming up for their dive.

Today he decided to join the big guys, waiting his turn till he stood on the edge. He looked down at his aunt and sister. His silly sister was jumping around like a jack in a box, popping here and there. His aunt was sheltering her eyes with her arm, frowning. He looked from his family, to his feet, to the water below. All the while his body vibrated with fear. Breathing became difficult. Behind him men grumbled to hurry up. He was with the big boys now and the only way was down.



Effective writing skills

- Third person narration creates an overall picture of the event.
- Third person narration allows for a mainly objective representation of the events, so that the audience can decide how to interpret narrative elements.
- The perspective of the character is shown through interjections of thoughts, such as 'my silly sister'.

Activity 6: Writing from a point of view



Time: 15 minutes

1. In first person, write a description of a scene from your childhood where you felt a strong sense of connection to others. Write in the first person using the present tense. Add aspects to your description that may not have happened, for example the setting or people involved.
2. Write the same paragraph, but from a different character's point of view. Compare and contrast the effect of each paragraph.
3. Write the same paragraph, but in third person. Compare and contrast the effect of each paragraph.

7. Developing a scene

A scene in a story refers to a significant incident that involves characters, setting, and usually tension or a turning point. Scenes are important because they allow the reader to visualize what is happening to your characters.

The following scene is inspired by the fairytale *Hansel and Gretel*. Read the modelled response, take note of the effective writing skills and complete the writing activity below.

Modelled response

The mornings are flippant, so my mother told me. The way I hung my head upside down over the edge of the bed and dangled my arms from side to side when I was supposed to be getting dressed for the day ahead. How my mother washed in the bucket, scrubbing vigorously the ginger soap up her arms, under her arm pits. The water splashing out suspended in the air before zooming into the rough mat that signified the washroom. Her skin shiny and sore, like a burn after months of healing. How my brother flew his imaginary airplane along the sparse furniture that occupied the single room in our cottage, leaping and bounding through the space, knocking the rickety chair that he caught with his spare hand just before it hit the ground. He held the airplane in one hand and chair in the other, still in anticipation.

'Billy,' my mother shouted. 'How many times do I have to tell you?'

She rose from her squatting position and put her wet hands on her hips, the liquid dripped down her bare legs. She stood there till my brother delicately returned the chair upright, patting it a little, smiling nervously at the wall, avoiding my mother's eyes. 'Go and get dressed, both of you.'

Her hands flung the air about as she sighed.

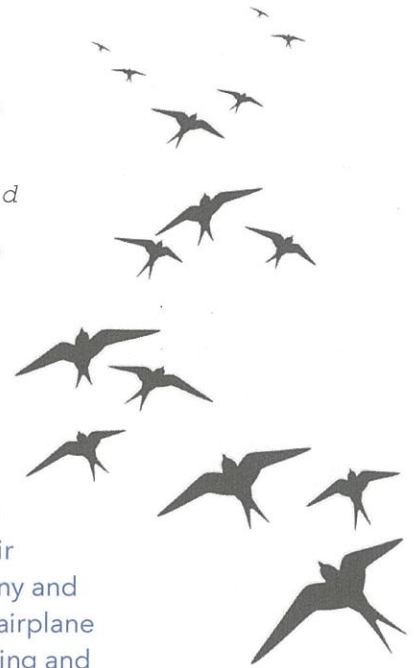
My favourite dress was neatly laid out on the crocheted red rug my grandmother hand made when I was born. When I wore it I rubbed the lace at the trim so purposefully, that holes like moth bites had grown over the years. Bits of lace hung down to the ground, I refusing to tear them off even though I tripped often. My brother already dressed. Always first.

He placed his rucksack on his back and moved toward the front door open to the wilderness. My mother wrapped a shawl around her body and moved about the cottage, tidying up evidence of breakfast. 'Late for work again,' she said. 'To the door, Rose.'

My mother helped me put the rucksack on my back and tapped me on the bottom toward the door. I joined my brother, facing my mother who leaned down in front of us. She cupped our chins with the palms of her hands and squeezed tenderly. 'To your father's now,' she said.

I followed her gaze to my brother's face as she intensified her hold on his chin. 'No going off the path, do you hear?' My brother's head bobbed up and down in her palm.

My mother, satisfied, stood up as we turned to the path leading from the door to the edge of the forest. I heard her good bye as we ran down the path with our bags jiggling on our backs.



Effective writing skills

- Lots of movement in the scene shown through a description of the event, dialogue and internal thoughts.
- The relationships between the characters are shown through what they do and how they do it.
- A clear sense of a connection between the characters is shown through a common situation, such as getting ready for the day.

Activity 7: Writing a scene



Time: 10 minutes

1. Write a scene involving a character you have written about or a character that is in your mind that you would like to develop further.

8. Writing memorable settings

The setting of your creative piece tells the reader a lot about your characters: how they are feeling, what is troubling them and possible conflicts. It is important that your setting connects with the characters and events you depict and develops these aspects in a meaningful way.

Read the modelled response, take note of the effective writing skills and complete the writing activity below.

Modelled response

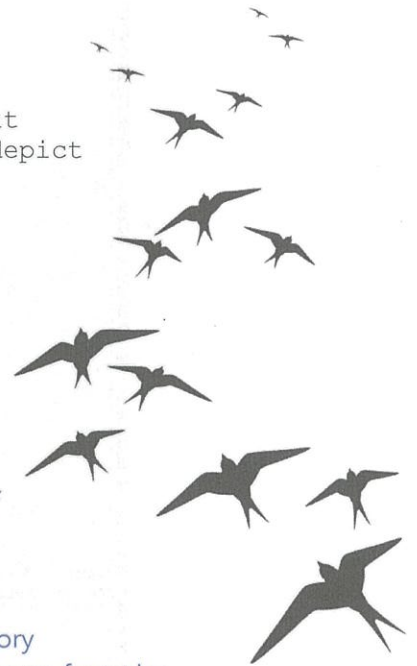
Holly looked around the bedroom. In the corner, opposite the bed, two windows almost joined in a 90-degree angle. They created a sense of space despite the close proximity of the building to the neighbour's block of flats.

The leaves from the frangipani and avocado trees almost covered the entire windows providing privacy not available in other rooms of the tiny second story suburban flat. You could see a number of trees, one behind the other. The leaves from the avocado tree had burnt tips that would crumble in your hand if you scrunched them. The frangipani tree was in full bloom. It was in the early morning when the frangipanis and their fan like leaves were at their most glorious.

Usually, in the morning, the sun's glare grabbed Holly by the shoulders and shook her awake with its warmth. Its rays, like a flashlight searching for a focus, forced her eyes to open. But of late, as she sensed a change, she closed the curtains and blocked out the sun.

Effective writing skills

- Clear description of the setting is given.
- The description of the setting is used to show how the character is feeling.
- The setting shows the character's financial circumstances.

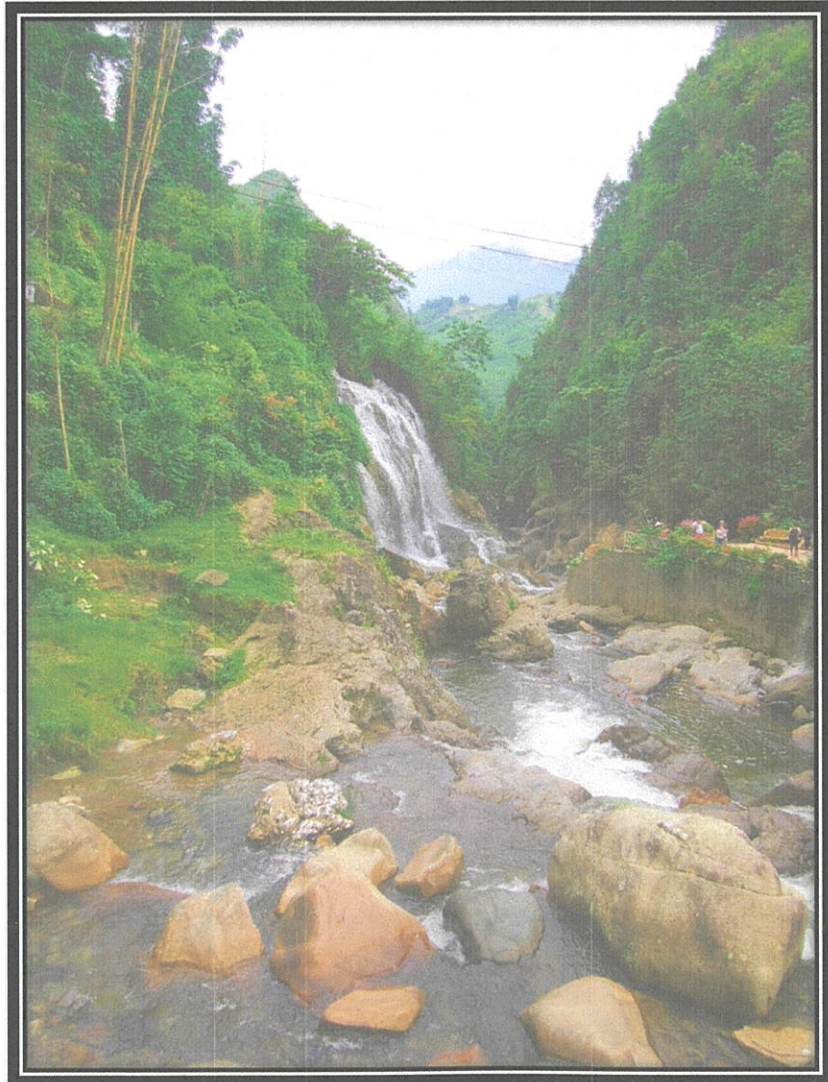


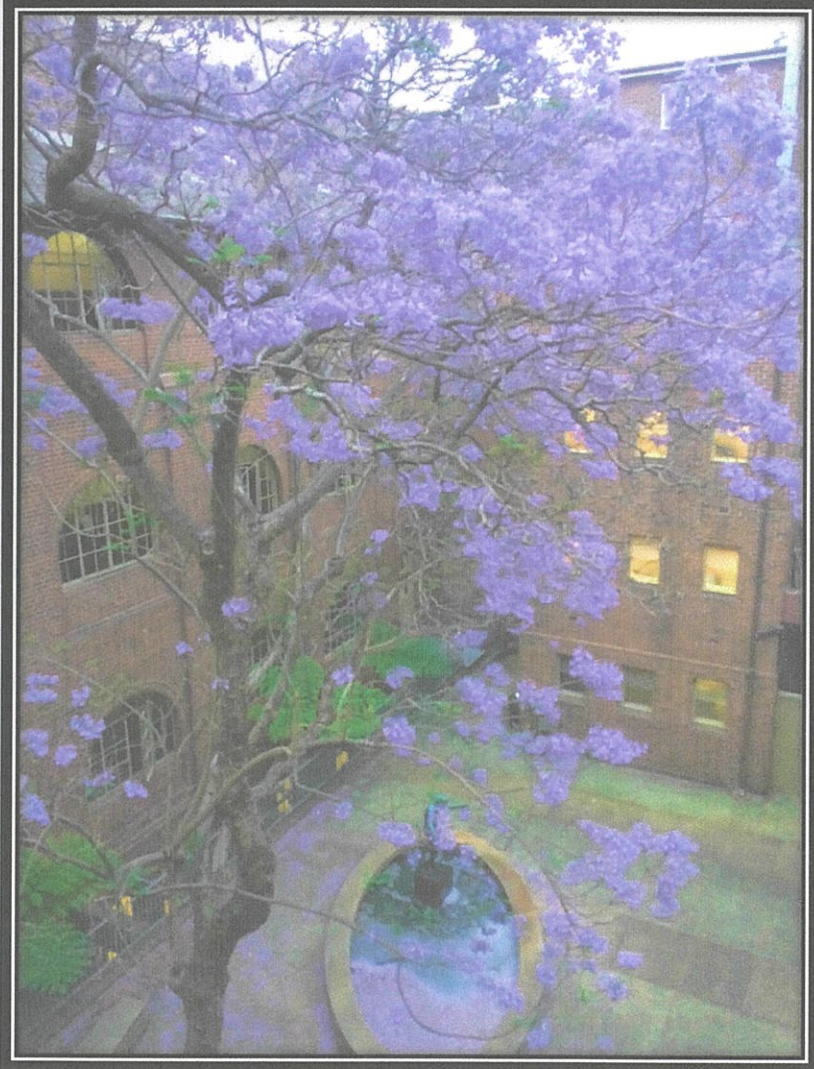
Activity 8: Writing setting



Time: 15 minutes

1. Imagine the following still images reflect the setting of a potential narrative. Write a descriptive paragraph about the setting for one or all of the images. Alternatively, find an image yourself.
2. Before you begin, brainstorm the following:
 - a. place name and details about the physical appearance of the setting
 - b. what the setting tells the reader about the character's circumstances
 - c. character name and description
 - d. conflict or potential conflict of character/s
 - e. how the setting reflects the feelings of the character experiencing this conflict.





9. Writing stylistically

Writing style refers to the way a piece of writing is written, rather than the subject of the writing. Style refers to the voice of the writer which is explored through word choice, tone of writing and syntax (rules of grammar which determines how phrases, clauses and sentences are written).

The following extract written as a fictional news report comes from a narrative titled *The Maisy Hill Witch Trial*, and is inspired by Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, about innocent people being charged with witchcraft for heinous crimes. Read the modelled response below, take note of the effective writing style and complete the writing activity below.

Modelled response

Men to be tried for Witchcraft

Three Maisy Hill men accused of planning a witch attack have been ordered to stand trial.

The men are charged with belonging to a witchcraft sect. Two are charged with funding or providing support to a witchcraft organisation or possessing items connected with an act of witchcraft.

Their alleged leader, James Divine, 38, of Maisy Hill, is also charged with directing the activities of the alleged witchcraft cell and recruiting for the group.

An agent had infiltrated the group and discussed details of blowing up the shed of Mr Fraser, a respected farmer and local council member

After a six-week hearing, the magistrate, Donald Eggly, said yesterday there was enough evidence for convictions to be possible.

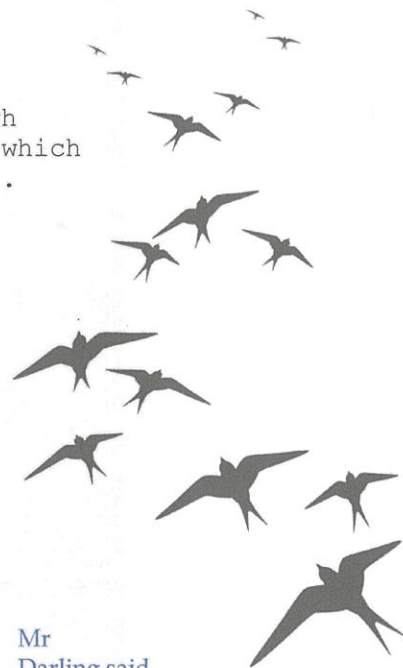
The men sat calmly as Mr Eggly announced his decision. One of the

accused refused to stand when asked to by Mr Eggly, but the magistrate continued to read the charges and ask for their pleas.

Police say the men were in the early stages of carrying out an act of witchcraft when three of them were arrested in pre-dawn raids in Maisy Hill last December.

The arrests were part of a one-year counter-witchcraft investigation called Operation Eradication of Evil. An undercover police agent had infiltrated the group and discussed details of blowing up the barn of Mr Fraser, a respected farmer and local council member, the court was told.

The officer, known as "security operative 69", had accompanied Mr Divine to his farm to witness a trial explosion, the prosecutor, John Darling, SC said.



Mr Darling said the group was inspired and influenced strongly by the witchcraft group and the teachings of its leader Nicole Carla

All three men committed to stand trial pleaded not guilty. They are James Divine, 38, of Maisy Hill, William Cox, 37, of Lidcoat and Brian Fanning, 35, of Maisy Hill.

Outside court, Divine's estranged wife Alison Divine, said the men were innocent and the case was a "trophy trial".

She said her estranged husband was a good father to his children and that he had been locked in solitary confinement for 200 days.

'The local government has a lot to answer for,' she said.

Several of the men would appeal for bail in the coming weeks, their lawyers told the court.

Effective writing skills

- Journalistic style of writing is used to create a sense of authority and realism.
- Short sentences and paragraphs explain the facts.
- The formal and factual writing in the narrative encourages the reader to wonder about the truth of the events and how justice has affected the characters involved.
- The formal structure of a news report has been used for authenticity.

Activity 9: Writing stylistically



Time: 15 minutes

1. Write a news report about the facts of a narrative you have been writing or about one of the following situations:
 - a. a young boy is expelled from school for brandishing a knife
 - b. bodies found in the local park
 - c. an ancient discovery
 - d. a topic of your choice.
2. Brainstorm the following for your report:
 - a. What happened?
 - b. Who was involved?
 - c. When did the events occur?
 - d. Where did the events occur?
 - e. Why did the events occur?
 - f. How did the events occur?
 - g. What is expected to happen in the future?

10. Developing plot

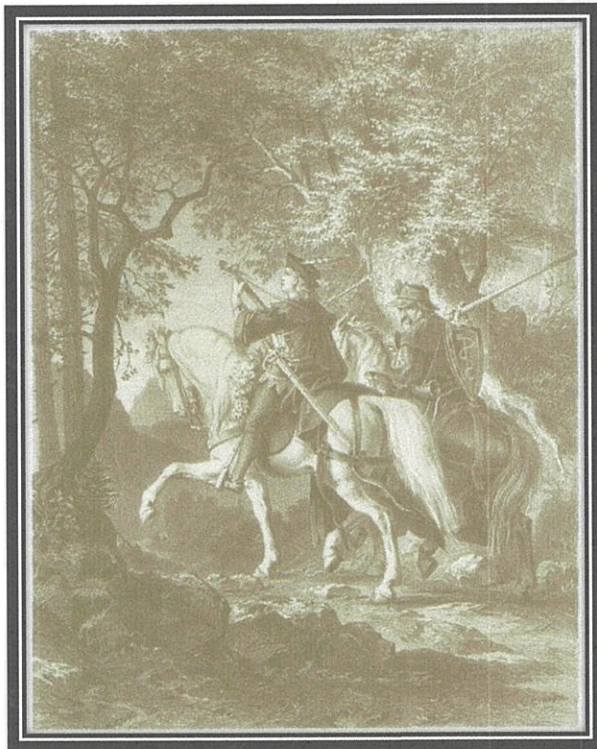
Plot refers to what happens in the story – the action. Things happen to various characters in particular settings.

The following strategy will help you to see how the plot of a story can develop. By writing short pieces about a series of seemingly unrelated images, your plot will take shape. Perhaps the ideas you come up with could inspire you to develop the narrative further.

Read the modelled response, take note of the effective writing skills and complete the writing activity below.

Modelled response

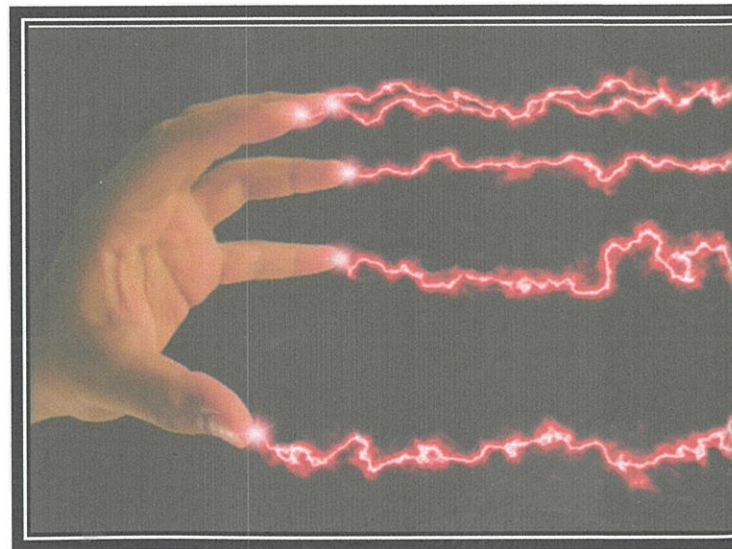
Hotel

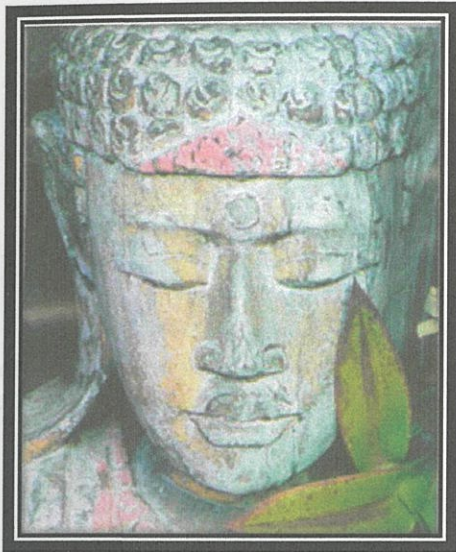


After reading the numerous guests books, it became obvious the hotel was cursed. In 1869, every window in the hotel smashed suddenly on a calm summer's night. Guests reported Jeffrey Roderick, known for creating lightning from his fingertips during the after dinner talent show, was responsible for the disturbance.

The only way to the hotel was on a horse. People had been making the slow journey through the woods for centuries. Guests were attracted to the hotel's isolation and eerie silence. In the evening, just before sunset, the trees guided the guests along the makeshift path towards the hotel with their swinging branches manipulated by the wind.

The hotel was originally owned by my great-grandfather. People say he was found hanging in the woods at the top of one of his beloved trees. His neck had been wrapped several times with a hanging branch. Out of fear, the locals dumped him in the lake at the back of the hotel. Years later when the lake dried up, his body was found, fully preserved.

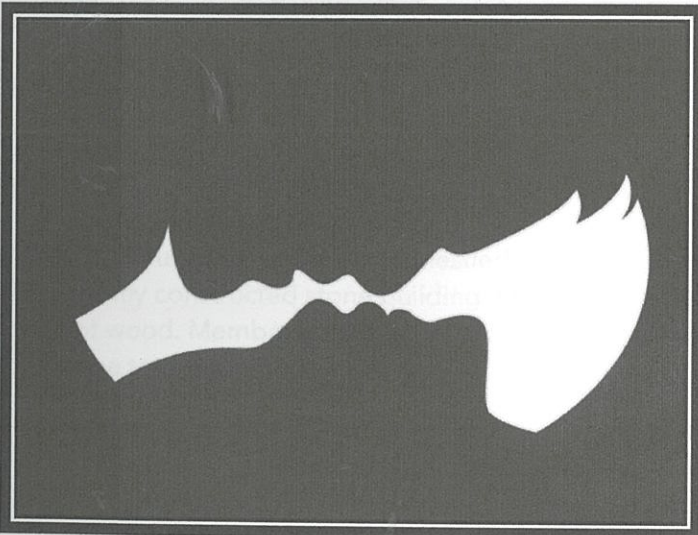




Around my great-grandfather's neck was a small wooden bust of an unknown deity in meditation. Splattered over the totem's headdress and shoulders were red indentations replicating stains of blood. On the evening of the lightning strike, apparently the deity's eyes magically closed in shame. Mr. Roderick was never invited back to the hotel.



Exactly one year after the lightning catastrophe, a couple was murdered in their honeymoon suite. The assumed murder weapon, a bed lamp, was found at the side of their bed standing up, ready to be switched on.



The couple was found in an embrace in their bed. They were locked together tightly like hands cupping in the cold. When they were discovered, a day later by the chamber maid, they had begun to melt into each other. Their skin became translucent. In the guest book, after first observing the bodies the detective wrote, 'I swear I saw two souls float over to the window, join into one and disappear into the night.'

Effective writing skills

- The images inspire ideas about the characters and their relationships, the plot or storyline, the setting and conflict or complication.
- Mainly long sentences are used to convey what happens in the story.
- Complex sentences are used where dependent clauses are placed at the beginning of sentences for emphasis.
- Figurative language is used to create clear images.
- The ending is thought provoking.

Activity 10: Writing plot using images



Time: 25 minutes

1. Collect 4 - 6 images that seem to be unrelated. The more unusual they appear the better. For example, images of a lamp, a sheep, a cockroach and a baseball cap do not seem to relate to one another.
2. Put your images in an order that seems logical to you.
3. Under each image write a short piece (about 150 words) through free writing inspired by that image. Although the images may not seem to relate, try to connect each image when you write by creating a story which includes characters, setting and conflict. You may choose to incorporate some or all of the aspects of the image into your story.

11. Structural features of narratives

Although narrative structure varies from story to story, common features include the following.

- ❖ **Beginning/orientation:** this sets the scene, creating a visual picture of the setting, atmosphere and time of the story. Characters are introduced and clues are set in place for the coming complication.
- ❖ **Conflict/complication:** this is where the conflict or complication occurs that affects the setting, time or characters.
- ❖ **Series of events:**
 - **conflict seems to be resolved/minor resolution:** this immediate conflict seems to be resolved, but leads into another conflict
 - **new conflict/conflict:** the conflict or complication is now often worse than before.

The length of the series of events will vary, depending on the word limit of the narrative.

- ❖ **Climax:** this is the height of the story.
- ❖ **Conflict solved/ending/resolution:** the conflict is solved and the questions are answered, leaving no loose ends. The story ends.
- ❖ **Moral:** there may be a moral or message at the end of the story.

The following extract continues the narrative *The Maisey Hill Witch Trial*. Read the modelled response, take note of the narrative structure and complete the writing activity below.

Modelled response

Maisey Hill Council Chambers were nestled on the top of the mound, overlooking the town of the same name. The recently constructed stone building was unlike any other in town as the rest of the public buildings were made of wood. Members of the council chambers assured the community that it was the most splendid addition to our fine town and that the extra levies on our council fees we were forced to pay was our civic duty.

The council chambers were unique in that as well as containing a ballroom temporarily available for mass until the new church was built, there was a centre for youth to drop in at their leisure. The centre also provided activities and programs specifically designed to keep the youth of today entertained and off the streets. The councilors hoped that the days of random markings, symbolic of delinquent youth behaviour, we were led to believe, all over the town hall and court house were well and truly past for our most gracious city.

The council chambers were scheduled to be opened for business on the 16th of June 1850. It was expected that as well as prominent officials and businessmen in the community, mothers and their children of non-school age would also be in attendance. Since the burning of the church it was our obligation to support local families and promote community spirit in whatever way we could.

Tea was to be served on the verandah on the south side of the building overlooking the river at 10.30am and proceedings would begin promptly in the ballroom half an hour later.

Recently several small children had fallen seriously ill, coughing sporadically and breaking out in a nasty rash.



When they died, the town broke with the tradition of the country and began burying these small children on the hill behind the chambers instead of the yard of the local church, which no one had bothered to get around to building yet. The councilors assured us that our beloved children were in safe hands and that they would look after them in death as they had done in life. At the back of the chambers, at the bottom of the hill, sheep wandered aimlessly in the green pastures and the cattle slept under the scattered trees.

An open drain, a feat of innovation we were told on account of the green sterilising liquid flushing out unwanted waste, ran from the council chambers down the dusty road to the river at the front which ran along the bottom of the hill through to the main part of town some 500 meters below.

The local children would strip off naked and paddle in the cool water at the bottom of the hill on a warm summer's day. As a child, my brother and I swam there daily in the summer months. It was our only relief from the heat. Since the opening of the council chambers all that had changed.

The children avoided the area from that day forward, even though it was the deepest part of the river and you could jump off the rocks on the side into the water without fear of hitting the bottom. The lack of life caused a slimy fluorescent green film to grow over the water and our fine city.

On the grand opening day, during councilor Fraser's glorious speech in the heady heat about the benefits of community spirit and the value of a solid work ethic, a strange smell like rotten eggs wafted through the proceedings, distracting the usually attentive constituents.

A counselor rose from his chair to close the windows. A young boy from a neighbouring farm slipped from his mother's arms to go to his father, so she thought, but instead the boy made his way down the dusty road to the river. While we coughed and congratulated ourselves on the generous contributions we had made to the building of the council chambers, the boy disappeared into the river.

Later, as the body was dragged over the rocky bank up onto the grass where a large group of people looked on furtively, the boy's skin sizzled like a cooked sausage, offering temporary hope that he was still alive. When he was buried in the churchyard, the town breathed a sigh of relief.

Effective writing skills

- Figurative language is used to develop characters and plot and describe the setting.
- The conspiracy theory about the practices of the Council Chambers creates interest.
- There are interesting themes such as community justice and protecting the environment.
- A variety of complex sentences are used to develop the story in a sophisticated manner.
- Traditional narrative structure is used.

Activity 11: Identifying structural features of narratives



Time: 15 minutes

1. Fill out the table below, where you identify the structural features of the modelled response narrative.

Narrative structure

Narrative Structure	Narrative ideas
Orientation:	
When?	
Where?	
Who?	
What situation?	
Why are they in that situation?	
Complication:	
A conflict that must be solved by the end of the story	
Series of Events:	
A conflict seems to be resolved	
New conflict that makes the situation worse	
A conflict seems to be resolved	
New conflict that makes the situation worse	
Climax:	
What is the height of the drama?	
Resolution:	
The conflict is resolved	
Moral:	
What is the lesson?	

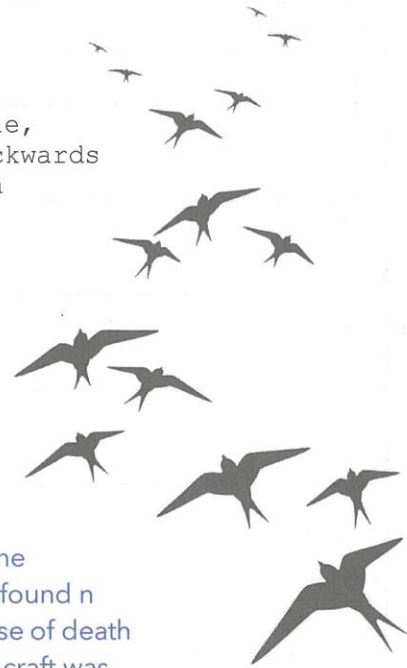
12. Experimenting with narrative structure

Narratives can be structured in different ways. For example, you could begin the story with the resolution and work backwards or try a non-linear structure by including flashbacks or a series of thoughts in a diary or journal. You could also create pieces of writing under seemingly random headings.

The following extract continues the narrative *The Maisy Hill Witch Trial*. Read the modelled response, take note of the unusual narrative structure and complete the writing activity below.

Modelled response

In 1851, a number of children mysteriously fell ill in the town of Maisy Hill. One day Mr and Mrs Carter's baby daughter died of asphyxiation. The only thing found in the child's possession was a doll made out of clay. No other evidence of cause of death was found on or near the body. The local sheriff's office suspected that witchcraft was responsible and began arresting women deemed responsible. Anne Divine was one of the women arrested. Here are accounts of witnesses at the Maisy Hill Witch Trial.



The confession of Alison Crawford as recorded by Timothy Small, the clerk of the court at the trial of the Maisy Hill witches.

Note: Alison is referred to throughout as the "witness".

Alison explains how her friend Anne Divine concealed a 'picture of clay'

The witness saw Ms Divine, some eighteen months ago, sitting in her garden with a picture of clay made into the likeness of a child in her apron. The witness said Ms Divine hid the clay doll in her apron when the witness surprised her. The witness said that her own child later saw that clay doll and described its face as being that of Mr and Mrs Carter's child, who fell sick soon after and languished about half a year and died from deprivation of oxygen some two months just past.

Alison explains Anne's account of how to take the life of someone using 'pictures of clay'

And further this witness confesseth, and sayeth, Anne told her that the speediest way to take a person's life away by witchcraft is to make a picture of clay into a doll unto the shape of the person whom they mean to harm and dry it thoroughly by placing it in the sun for several days. When they would have them to be ill, then take a thorn or pin, and prick it in the throat. Thereupon by that means, the sounds made by the voice box will subside and the breath will slowly fade.

The confession of Anne Carter as recorded by Timothy Small, the clerk of the court at the trial of the Maisy Hill witches.

Note: Anne is referred to throughout as the "witness".

Anne Carter explains a supernatural feast at the home of the Divines, where Anne lived with her family.

The witness said that she saw many things being delivered to the house of the Divines during the day in question: butter, cheese, bread, carafes of wine, red and white, and on one tray she swore she saw the hand of a man, peeping out of the cloth covering it.

The witness crept in closer to the house. The time was past midnight and so the witness found it difficult to locate the house, especially considering the only light coming from the house was a flickering candle in the middle of the living room. In the center of that room, the guests sat in a circle around what could only be described as a cauldron.

Effective writing skills

- Each character adds more details about the death of the child.
- The old style of writing is reflective of the time the story is set in.
- Unusual events are relayed to add to the complexity of the crime.
- The reader is uncovering a mystery, which draws the reader into the story.
- Unusual narrative structure shown through witness accounts of a trial.

Activity 12: Experimenting with narrative structure



Time: 40 minutes

1. Choose a situation that has caused two or more characters to be in conflict. Write a description of that situation.
2. Choose a different narrative structure. For example, a non-linear narrative where you work backwards, a police or court account of an incident, a diary, journal or flashback.
3. Write about that situation from two or more character's perspectives. Each time you write, add details about the incident that are unknown so that interest is developed.

13. Putting it all together

One way to help you organise your ideas and make sure you have all the elements of imaginative writing included, is to plan your story by writing a narrative outline.

Activity 13: Writing a narrative outline



Time: 40 minutes

1. Plan a potential story by completing the narrative outline below.
2. Use your ideas from the various writing activities already completed.
3. Using your ideas from the narrative outline, write a 1500-word short story.
4. Once you are satisfied with your story, try experimenting with the structure.



Narrative Outline

Narrative Structure	Narrative ideas
Orientation:	
When?	
Where?	
Who?	
What situation?	
Why are they in that situation?	
Complication:	
A conflict that must be solved by the end of the story	
Series of Events:	
A conflict seems to be resolved	
New conflict that makes the situation worse	
A conflict seems to be resolved	
New conflict that makes the situation worse	
Climax:	
What is the height of the drama?	
Resolution:	
The conflict is resolved	
Moral:	
What is the lesson?	

14. Editing your writing

Editing refers to the process of improving a piece of writing by correcting errors in relation to spelling, grammar and sentence clarity. Editing also ensures the writing is developed in an engaging manner.

Read the modelled response, take note of how editing improves the quality of the piece of writing and complete the writing activity below.

Modelled response

Perhaps just say 'In 1851' to add precision

Draft copy

The year was 1851 and a number of children became ill in the town of Maisy Hill.

'Asphyxiation' sounds more sophisticated.

One day Mr and Mrs Carter's baby daughter stopped breathing. The only thing found in the child's possession was a clay doll.

Instead say 'made of clay' to enhance that the doll was created by someone.

No other evidence of cause of death was found.

Add 'on or near the body' to make the writing sound like a coroner's report.

Sheriff is spelt with one 'r' only

The local sherriff's office suspected that witchcraft was responsible and arrested the women deemed responsible.

Anne Divine was one of the women arrested. Here are accounts of witnesses at the Maisy Hill Witch Trial.

Edited copy

In 1851, a number of children mysteriously fell ill in the town of Maisy Hill. One day Mr and Mrs Carter's baby daughter died of asphyxiation. The only thing found in the child's possession was a doll made out of clay. No other evidence of cause of death was found on or near the body.

The local sheriff's office suspected that witchcraft was responsible and arrested women deemed responsible. Anne Divine was one of the women arrested. Here are accounts of witnesses at the Maisy Hill Witch Trial.



Effective editing skills

- Recommendations are made to change words and phrases to improve clarity and sophistication of the piece of writing.
- Spelling and grammatical errors are identified and suggestions for improvement made.
- Polite language, such as 'perhaps' used to make suggestions.

Activity 14: Editing your writing



Time: 30 minutes

1. Swap one paragraph or the whole narrative with another creative writing student. Answer the questions below for the paragraph/narrative and record suggestions. Talk about your suggestions also.
 - a. Is the writing showing and not telling? Which sections are 'showing' the action and which sections are 'telling' the action?
 - b. Do the sentences make sense? Which ones could be improved?
 - c. Is the correct punctuation used?
 - d. Could more sophisticated punctuation be used? Where?
 - e. Are there better words or phrases that could be added? Can you offer alternative words or phrases?
 - f. Are paragraphs used properly? How can they be improved?
 - g. Are there spelling mistakes? Which words are spelt incorrectly? How do you spell these words correctly?
 - h. Do the ideas flow smoothly? Which ideas flow smoothly and which ones could be improved?
 - i. Are the story ideas interesting enough? Which ones are interesting and which ones could be improved?
2. Write your final draft. Read it out loud. How does it sound? Can you make any more changes to improve it? Rewrite your story.