

**New Zealand Post**

# **National Schools Writing Festival Handbook**

**29 - 30 August 2009**

**AUGUST 2009**

**Welcome to the**

**NEW ZEALAND POST NATIONAL SCHOOLS WRITING FESTIVAL**

Lots of people talk about creativity as a key enabler of our future. It is great in this Festival to celebrate people who don't just talk about it, but in their poetry, prose and scriptwriting present ideas about us and our future in new and challenging ways.

New Zealand Post is privileged to work with Victoria University's International Institute of Modern Letters to help develop the writing skills of young New Zealanders and to acknowledge talent. Literacy remains fundamental to a successful society and we are delighted to foster this through a broad programme of support which includes the Children and Young Adults Book Awards and the National Schools Poetry Awards.

This weekend of workshops and seminars, held in conjunction with the Poetry Awards, provides a great opportunity for young people to hone their skills under the guidance of some of our most successful writers.

I know they will return home inspired with new ideas.

John Allen  
Chief Executive  
New Zealand Post

## **PRACTICAL THINGS**

1. This programme has been put together to help you get the most out of the Festival. Please read it!
2. Wear your name badge at all times during the Festival.
3. Be punctual to all sessions.
4. Please make sure your mobile phones, pagers and alarms are turned off during all workshop meetings and Festival sessions.
5. The main toilets are down the stairs at the Quad end of the Maclaurin foyer.
6. In an emergency, please evacuate to Kelburn Parade.
7. Need help? During Festival hours, see Rina at the administration desk. After hours contact Rina on 027 511 6551. If you are ill, or for some reason can't come to the workshops or sessions, please let Rina know on the above number.

## **HOW TO MAKE THE MOST OF YOUR FESTIVAL EXPERIENCE**

1. Talk to us! Writers, panellists and current MA writing students will be around through the weekend.
2. Network! This is your opportunity to meet other young New Zealand writers. We encourage you to swap email addresses and contacts with those you meet at the Festival sessions and in workshops so that you can continue to share your work and support each other in the future.

## CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

### Saturday 29 August

- 8.30 am Registration
- 9.00 am Official opening and welcome – Maclaurin Foyer
- 9.30 am first round of small group workshops for students, and teachers who have registered for Bill Manhire's teacher session (morning tea included)
- 12.30pm Lunch Vic Books stall operating
- 1.30pm *Write Out Loud*. Workshop convenors Damien Wilkins, Kate Duignan and Marty Smith discuss work from the morning
- 2.10pm *Writing for Performance*: Scriptwriters and playwrights Dave Armstrong and David Geary discuss making work for the stage
- 3.10pm Afternoon tea
- 3.30pm James Brown talks to Chris Price about the intersection of poetry and song
- 4.30pm End of Day 1

### Sunday 30 August

- 9.15am Meet in Maclaurin Foyer – please be punctual
- 9.30am *Second round of small-group workshops* (morning tea included)
- 12.30pm Lunch Vic Books stall operating
- 1.30pm *Write Out Loud*: Workshop convenors David Geary, Vivienne Plumb and Eirlys Hunter discuss work from the morning's workshops.
- 2.10 Afternoon Tea
- 2.30pm Brigid Lowry and Paula Boock discuss the creation of character with chair, Linda Burgess
- 3.30pm End of Day 2

## **AFTERNOON PANEL SESSIONS**

Panel sessions are a bit like a focused conversation for the benefit of an audience. Panel members will discuss the panel topic generally to begin with, and will then answer questions from the audience. Please raise your hand to ask a question when the chair opens the discussion up to the audience.

## **WORKSHOP COORDINATORS AND VENUES**

Below is a list of workshop coordinators and venues. To find out which workshop group you are in, please check the lists up on the pin board near the administration table in the Maclaurin Foyer. Please note the name of your coordinator and the room number of your workshop.

You will meet with your workshop coordinator in the Maclaurin Foyer at approximately 9.15am on Saturday after the registration and welcome. Meet at the same time on Sunday. Workshop coordinator names will be posted around the foyer; please stand near the coordinator's name of the workshop you are in.

Please be on time so that you can make your way to the right workshop room with your coordinator and the rest of your group. If you are unavoidably late and don't know where to go, come to the administration desk for help.

### ***Writing for the Page (poetry and prose)***

<b>Coordinator</b>	<b>Room number</b>
Chris Price	COTTON118
Damien Wilkins	COTTON116
James Brown	KIRK201
Kate Duignan	COTTON333
Linda Burgess	KIRK103
Eirlys Hunter	COTTON340
Mary McCallum	COTTON523A
Vivienne Plumb	HUNTER317
Bill Manhire	HUNTER221
Marty Smith	COTTON403
Brigid Lowry	COTTON228
Louse Wallace	KIRK 202
Kate De Goldi	KIRK203

***Writing for Performance (playwriting and scriptwriting)***

Dave Armstrong

Murphy 107

David Geary

Murphy 108

## WORKSHOPS

### How workshops operate

The workshops begin at 9.30am and run until lunch break at 12.30pm. You attend the same workshop with the same workshop coordinator both days. Workshops focus either on Writing for the Page (poetry and prose) or Writing for Performance (scriptwriting and playwriting). Each workshop will be provided with morning tea for a refreshment break sometime during the morning.

### What is the purpose of writing workshops?

As writers, you need to understand what good writing is so that you can learn how to improve your own work. You need to read widely and think about what makes different writing good or bad. What techniques do writers use? Are they effective? Ask yourself not just whether you like a particular piece of writing, but WHY.

This same process can be used in workshops. If you have prepared work in advance, you may be asked to share it with the group so that they can give you feedback. Remember: what others think of your work is NOT the most important thing. The workshop process is designed to teach you how to recognise and articulate the strengths and weaknesses of the writing of others. If you learn how to be an attentive reader and a constructive critic, then you will be able to continually assess and improve the quality of your own writing.

Workshops are also invaluable because they constantly remind you of the importance of *audience*. Every successful piece of writing has a reader in mind. Workshops bring writers face to face with actual readers.

### Tips for participating in workshops:

1. Sometimes it can be nerve-wracking to share your writing with others. Be brave. Everyone is in the same position as you.
2. If you are asked to give feedback, try to be constructive – whether you like a piece of writing or not, try to explain WHY. Everyone learns from this process.
3. Be generous – not just with your constructive comments, but with your attention. It is important to let everyone have a say.
4. Remember that you are discussing texts – words on a page – not the personalities of their authors. The whole aim is to make those texts better, as true as possible to their intentions.

### WORKSHOP PREPARATION EXERCISES

Everyone has been asked to complete the set preparation exercises below and to bring 13 copies of each piece of work to the Festival for discussion in workshops.

## WRITING FOR THE PAGE (POETRY AND PROSE)

### EXERCISE ONE 1: POETRY

#### IN PRAISE OF PRAISE

'...Poetry can do a hundred and one different things, delight, sadden, disturb, amuse, instruct ... but there is only one thing that all poetry must do; it must praise all it can for being and for happening.'

—W H Auden *The Dyer's Hand and other Essays*

#### The exercise

Read the poem 'For the Sleepwalkers', by the American poet Edward Hirsch (below). Then write your own poem of praise for an unlikely group of people, things, ideas – whatever or whoever you think has gotten short shrift or a bad rap. Do as Hirsch does, and about halfway through the poem insert a colon and then leap off and dare to say something overtly beautiful or poetic or bizarre or funny. Then return to the poem and tell us what this group has to teach us about ourselves. Also, notice how Hirsch uses the letter 'w' throughout his poem and how, like a thread, it helps to pull us through the poem. Choose a letter and try weaving it into the language, but don't be overly alliterative – be subtle.

— **Important: bring 13 copies of your poem with you to the workshops.**

#### *For the Sleepwalkers*

Tonight I want to say something wonderful  
for the sleepwalkers who have so much faith  
in their legs, so much faith in the invisible

arrow carved into the carpet, the worn path  
that leads to the stairs instead of the window  
the gaping doorway instead of the seamless mirror.

I love the way that sleepwalkers are willing  
to step out of their bodies into the night,  
to raise their arms and welcome the darkness,

palming the blank spaces, touching everything.  
Always they return home safely, like blind men  
who know it is morning by feeling shadows.

And always they wake up as themselves again.  
That's why I want to say something astonishing  
like: *Our hearts are leaving our bodies*

*Our hearts are thirsty black handkerchiefs  
flying through the trees at night, soaking up  
the darkest beams of moonlight, the music*

*owls, the motion of wind-torn branches.  
And now our hearts are thick black fists  
flying back to the glove of our chests.*

We have to learn to trust our hearts like that.  
We have to learn the desperate faith of sleep-  
walkers who rise out of their calm beds

and walk through the skin of another life.  
We have to drink the stupefying cup of darkness  
and wake up to ourselves, nourished and surprised.



## Other poems of praise

### *Pied Beauty*

Glory be to God for dappled things –  
For Skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow;  
For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;  
Fresh-firecoal chestnut falls; finches' wings;  
Landscape plotted and pieced – fold, fallow and plough;  
And áll trádes, their gear and tackle and trim.

All things, counter, original, spare, strange;  
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)  
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;  
He fathers forth whose beauty is past change:  
Praise him.

–Gerard Manley Hopkins

### *The Stars*

For we are the stars. For we sing.  
For we sing with our light.  
For we are birds made of fire.  
For we spread our wings over the sky.  
Our light is a voice.  
We cut a road for the soul  
for its journey through death.  
For three of our number are hunters.  
For these three hunt a bear.  
For there never yet was a time  
when these three didn't hunt.  
For we face the hills with disdain.  
This is the song of the stars .

–Passamaquoddy Indian

## EXERCISE TWO – Prose

Part 1: Make a list of foods that have some significance for you. This list might include your favourite foods or the foods you can't eat. The foods might have a special place in your family, or be connected with important events; or they might be humble everyday foods. Your list might also include foods that are totally invented.

Part 2: Select one item from your list and write a quick page of free-associating prose. What does the food look like, feel like, taste like? And who is involved with it? Is someone preparing it, eating it, ignoring it, dreaming about it? (Don't worry about making this piece of writing a polished, finished piece - the idea is to get the language going.)

Part 3: Now write a complete story of no more than 750 words based around a specific moment connected with this food. Remember to think about who is narrating the scene, as well as who is involved with the food, and where it's happening. Let the food trigger the story and see where this takes you.

Bring all three parts of this exercise to the workshop. Make sure you have 13 copies of your exercise.

Damien Wilkins

## proposal

They pulled the kayak up from under the river, took the picnic stuff out and sat under some trees. The top of the long grass carried the day's heat but the ground was cool. He opened the wine while she took out the sandwiches. Birds made the only sound above the sound of the water. This was the day he'd chosen.

But not yet. He would pour the wine first. He filled the two cups and gave her one. Still it wasn't quite the moment, he thought. Better to have the wine first. She gave him a sandwich. He was hungry from the kayaking and he ate the sandwich in about three bites. He looked at her and she was chewing – better to wait until she'd finished. She was already passing him another sandwich. It was her thoughtfulness and kindness that got him. He wasn't nearly as nice. Sometimes the difference bothered him. Then again, to be with her would be instructive. He'd learn and improve. If that didn't sound too dull. She was in that army of female fans of Shane McGowan for instance. She could drink. He'd held her and put his hand on her back in a public toilet while she was being sick. Great days.

Then they heard voices downstream. Two men in waders, carrying fishing rods were approaching. The men stopped nearby and began to make their casts, whipping their lines out over the river. The picnickers sank lower into the grass. Her ear was right beside his mouth – clearly an opportunity – but he thought: not now, not with the fly fishermen there.

He'd never caught anything himself, excepting the gaffing of cockabullies off the pier when he was eleven or twelve, which, if he thought about it, was more akin to wholesale slaughter.

Inevitably one of the men had a strike. He played the fish for awhile – and reeled in a large trout. As it came out of the water, she gasped. The men inspected the fish, holding it up in the sunlight; from a distance it appeared perfectly still, a varnished wooden model. She held his hand. The men bent down and lowered the fish into the water, and for a moment the trout's dark shape was motionless – then it was gone. After that the men waded up the river and disappeared from sight.

They sat up and she asked for more wine.

Did you see it? she said.

Yes, he said.

Did you?

Amazing, he said.

She said, wasn't it wonderful they let the fish go. And he said yes, but if it had been him he would have had a hard time deciding; the trout would have made a beautiful dinner. But you would have let it go, she said. For a moment he thought about telling her of the cockabullies. You threw a three-pronged hook into the water, waited for the little fish to surface, then you yanked up from underneath, snaring them through the belly. Sometimes they landed beside you on the pier, ripped open.

I know you would have let it go, she said. I know you too well. That's what's wonderful about us.

She had, he noticed, a few pieces of grass in her hair. Why did that bother him? Yes, he said, you're right, and poured himself more wine and he forgot to pour some for her. Then he remembered and she said thank you darling. They listened to the river and the birds. He was already thinking of the next day. He could wait, couldn't he? They both could. Actually, when he considered it, they were pretty young.

All the way home they looked for trout. She said, the first person to see one wins a prize. It was a slow trip. She'd lift her paddle and look fixedly, grimly into the water. One time he thought he saw something – a kind of shadow, that moved alongside the kayak, then drifted off – but in the end he kept his mouth shut. After all, he wasn't sure he'd seen anything down there, and also she seemed to want to win so badly.

This story is from *for everyone concerned* by Damien Wilkins (Victoria University Press, 2007).

## **WRITING FOR PERFORMANCE (SCRIPTWRITING)**

### **David Geary's workshop**

All students attending David Geary's workshop must complete 'The Map Exercise'. Come with 13 copies of your exercise.

#### ***The Map Exercise***

Draw a map of where you come from. It should show what you believe to be the important features and characters in your neighbourhood. It should have geographical, social and any other information you feel would be relevant to a stranger to this place who only had this map as a guide. It can include people, animals, buildings, and any other objects of interest. It should have arrows pointing off the map to places of importance beyond the map's border. And you should make another larger map of the suburb, town, city, district, province and country that this smaller map fits into. All students should come prepared to be representatives of the land that their maps depict.

## WRITERS' CONTRIBUTIONS AND BIOGRAPHIES

Discuss a favourite writing exercise, or something you have done/like to do to kick-start a new piece of writing. Without being prescriptive

- 1 describe the exercise or trigger
- 2 explain why it worked/works - why it's useful for generating writing
- 3 (optional) give an example of writing produced in response to the trigger. If it's been published say where it can be found. Also say what pleases you about it.

### Dave Armstrong

#### *About Dave*

Dave's television credits include *Shortland Street*, *Spin Doctors*, *Skitz* and *The Semisis* as well as *Seven Periods with Mr Gormsby*, which he co-created and co-wrote. Dave was also script editor for the first series of *Bro'Town*. Dave's plays include *Niu Sila* (co-written with Oscar Kightley), *King and Country*, about New Zealand soldiers in World War I, and *The Tutor*. *RPM*, a play about boy racers, recently featured in Wellington's 2008 Young and Hungry Festival. Dave recently adapted Samoan writer Sia Figiel's novel *where we once belonged* for the 2008 New Zealand International Arts Festival. Dave was Writer in Residence at Victoria University in 2007 and has recently completed a novel, *The Speechwriter*, a chapter of which won a place in last year's *Six Pack Two*.

### Linda Burgess

#### Exercise: What if..?

1. Spend a few minutes jotting down something that has happened to you (or to someone you know) that you think would make an interesting story.
2. In groups of four: Orally present your story. Discuss in the group how each of you could have a different take on your story – you are being asked to make something up rather than just present it as it was. What if something else (different, but just as interesting) had happened? A different person was involved? It took place in a different environment?
3. Write the story as you imagine it rather than as it was.

Writers, young ones in particular, can be trapped by writing things as they happened, rather than playing with fictionalising it. This exercise asks you to use what you know, then play with it.

#### *About Linda*

For many years a secondary school English teacher, Linda Burgess now writes full-time. She is a television and film critic for the Dominion Post, but has also published 3 novels, a collection of short stories, a travel memoir and a book on New Zealand's historic houses, and has written for television. In 1997 she was Massey University's Writer in Residence. In 2006 she was one of the three judges of the Montana Book Awards and also judged the novice section of the Katherine Mansfield Short Story Award. A graduate of VUW's MA in Scriptwriting (2008) she is currently working on a TV series and a filmscript.

### James Brown

#### The Time of Your Life

At first glance this poem probably appears demanding because many of the standard handholds we tend to use when reading – an identifiable narrator and characters, 'concrete' details, narrative – are missing. The poem simply consists of two lists of recycled references to periods of time, so to get something from it you have to engage your imagination. The main challenge is deciding how the lines might relate to one another, and one way to do this is by imagining possible protagonists, narratives, and dramas that might help join the dots.

The poem came about while I was experimenting with list poems. I particularly like list poems in which the links between the items are never entirely straightforward or fathomable. I love

Mark Levine's list poem 'The Holy Pail', and probably Donald Barthelme's short story 'To London and Rome' and David Markson's novel *Vanishing Point* are influences, too.

The poem conforms to a number of self-imposed rules, but I altered some of these as I worked on it, so I don't know if it quite counts as an Oulipo poem. I started out by simply writing down common phrases about periods of time that were expressed in the form of 'the/a (something) of (something)'. I quickly found that these divided into those beginning with definite articles (the) and those beginning with indefinite articles (a). Initially, I thought a sonnet would be a good length to aim for, but I soon had well over fourteen definite-article phrases alone. Indefinite-article phrases, however, seemed scarcer.

I put the phrases together so that each sonnet zeroed in from lines referencing longer time periods toward those delineating fleeting moments – the cruxes of the respective dramas – and then broadened out again. The final four lines of each sonnet are intended as a kind of summation of the preceding ten. The process was like a word game, and took many months of shuffling – especially since I kept coming up with new phrases that fitted the governing construct. At some point I decided to allow phrases that weren't in common use, like 'The winter of our discontent' and 'The knell of parting day', to introduce variety and jostle the clichés. The first sonnet also concludes with three 'transition' phrases, which begin with the definite article but include an indefinite article.

I'm not at all sure how my imagined narratives for the two sonnets relate to each other, or even if they do, though the last two lines of the first sonnet are also intended to lead into the second. The poem is open to many different readings, but, to my mind, the first sonnet's crux is an attempted murder – 'The moment of truth / The nick of time' – whereas the crux of the second sonnet is a sexual indiscretion. I like the second sonnet more because the movement between the time periods is more evenly managed, plus I enjoyed breaking the governing rule with 'A stitch in time' – the crux, the 'stitch' being a joining or moment of conception – and getting in a joke with 'A term of endearment'.

I had also come up with some nice phrases that didn't fit my definite/indefinite article division, and these became the final four lines of the poem. They neatly sum up how, if you're not thinking straight, a momentary indiscretion can lead to a brief period of notoriety followed by a lifetime of anguish.

Once I'd nailed the ending, I felt the poem was a going concern, though I still don't think I ever quite got the first half right. It's a hard poem to judge. Is it just a clever word game that finally isn't that engaging as poetry? No identifiable narrator or characters, no concrete details, odd tonal shifts ... at the end of the day, it's a sign of the times.

#### *About James*

James Brown's four poetry collections are *Go Round Power Please* (winner of the NZSA Jessie Mackay Best First Book Award for Poetry at the Montana New Zealand Book Awards in 1996), *Lemon*, *Favourite Monsters* and *The Year of the Bicycle*. He is the author behind the useful, non-fiction booklet *Instructions for Poetry Readings* and, in 2005, edited *The Nature of Things: Poems from the New Zealand Landscape*. He has been a finalist in the Montana New Zealand Book Awards three times. He lives in Wellington with his partner and two children.

#### **Kate Duignan**

##### *About Kate*

Kate Duignan is a Wellington writer. She published a novel, *Breakwater*, in 2001, and has published short fiction and poetry in various collections and journals. She has taught at secondary schools, and at Massey University and in 2008 taught in the MA Creative Writing programme at the International Institute of Modern Letters at Victoria University.

#### **David Geary**

##### *About David*

David Geary is an award winning writer for theatre, film and television. He's also an actor, poet, teacher and fiction writer. Victoria University Press published his collection of linked short stories, *A Man of the People*, and his critically acclaimed play about how to survive boarding school, *Lovelock's Dream Run*. David first went to Victoria University as a student in 1982 to fail Law and pass English. He returned in 2008 as the Writer in Residence, where he's a writing a play about Mark Twain's tour of New Zealand in 1895 and a children's play about tuatara.

### **Eirlys Hunter**

#### **The five objects exercise**

Some writers just get on and do it. Others, like me, get paralysed by the infinite choices of an unstarted story. Who will it be about? Where are they? What do they want? We chew our pencils and stare at the blank plain of unlimited possibility. Which way to go? My favourite exercise seems to provide this direction. It's the one in which a number of given elements have to be incorporated into the story. It's paradoxical perhaps, but having a constraint like that can liberate the imagination. The plain of endless possibility is no longer featureless because the objects act as landmarks that must be visited as the story unfolds. The trick is to devise a natural route between the landmarks so that the journey feels spontaneous and the objects don't stand out from the surrounding landscape of the story.

The first time I met this exercise was in the undergraduate short fiction course; I was astonished by how easily a broken typewriter, a friend of Janet Frame's, a child standing in water and so on led to a story of a journalist on her way to a Romanian orphanage – a character and a destination that I'd never have invented without those prompts. So when I was stuck for ideas for a children's story I asked two friends to provide an object each. Once I'd been given 'an apple with a bite out of it' and 'a small purple planet', the story of *The Astonishing Madam Majolica* (Scholastic, 1996) fell into place in a few hours.

When I was doing the MA in Creative Writing in 1998 Bill challenged the class to write a story incorporating a dictionary of sign language, a surface with something missing, a senior moment, a theatrical tribute to Invercargill and Mrs Vengalaers' babies. Those disparate elements slid together to form the diaries of the pompous Montgomery Cadwalader, showman, in a story that was more fun to write than anything else I've done, because, I'm sure, the objects sent my imagination to places it would never have managed to get to by itself. (See 'The Cadwalader Papers' in *The Picnic Virgin*, ed. Emily Perkins, Victoria University Press, 1999).

Since then I've often used this exercise with students and I've found that it usually inspires about half of any group to write a story that is better than anything they have written before: more original, more interesting, more formed. The students always protest when they get the assignment – it appears impossible - and then they say how easy they found it. And how surprised they are by what they end up creating, and by how different each journey around the list of objects turns out to be.

There's more about this exercise, and several terrific examples of stories which grew from these constraints, in *Mutes & Earthquakes*, edited by Bill Manhire (Victoria University Press, 1997).

#### *About Eirlys*

Eirlys's first published work was a play in the *School Journal*. Since then she has written books for young children (*The Robber and the Millionaire*, *The Astonishing Madam Majolica*), and for older children (*The Quake* and the *Finn's Quest* trilogy). Eirlys has written one novel for adults (*Between Black and White*) and lots of stories. She is currently coming towards the end of another adult novel, and thinking about her next project. Eirlys teaches the Writing for Children workshop at the International Institute of Modern Letters.

## **Brigid Lowry**

### **Getting Started**

Write for ten minutes about the place where you are. It can be a room, a cafe, a park, a railway station, a beach, a library, a train, anywhere really. Just describe what you can see, hear, taste, touch and smell. Don't get too fancy. Then take the words "I am" and, using those words as a refrain, make a poem or a piece of writing with fragments selected from the earlier ten minutes of writing. This works with writers of any age, and you will be surprised at what emerges. This exercise is adapted from a wonderful book called *Sing Me the Creation*, by Paul Matthews.

#### *About Brigid*

Brigid Lowry was born in and raised in Auckland, lived and raised in Australia for 27 years and currently resides in Nelson, with as much travel as she can manage. Her seven young adult titles sell internationally and are much acclaimed. *With Lots of Love From Georgia* won the Children's Post Book Awards in 2006, *Tomorrow Will Be Beautiful* won the YA section of the Victorian Premier's Awards in 2008, and her first non-fiction title *Juicy Writing: Inspiration and Techniques for Young Writers*, was shortlisted in the 2009 Children's Post book Awards. Brigid also writes poetry and short fiction, and teaches creative writing. She loves to read, walk, cook, meditate, idle and muddle.

## **Mary McCallum**

### **Text poetry exercise**

Text messages have a wonderful tossed-off, caught-in-the-act energy. They kick aside consonants, elide vowels, and try to do away with the very things they are reliant on to get the message across. One job of poetry is to capture the fleeting and intangible in the best, most precise language.

#### *Part One: Writing it down*

1. Think of a THING you are like. It can't be an animal or a person. Think of the way other people describe you, think of things you use everyday, look around the room. This thing doesn't have to sum up everything about you or be too personal. Be inventive. Have fun.
2. Turn on your cell phone – don't answer any texts – go to 'compose message' and type in the cell phone number of your teacher or the classmate you are paired with for this exercise.
3. Compose a short text poem using text language in this format:
4. TITLE: Your first name  
LINE 1: The thing you are like  
LINE 2-4: A short sentence describing economically why you are like the thing you have chosen. Again, be inventive, have fun.
5. Send the text to your teacher or classmate.
6. Be prepared to discuss your text poem with the class.

#### *Part Two: Editing [optional] – do one step at a time.*

1. Write the text poem on paper.
2. Consider the poem. What's the best thing about it? Can words be expanded, deleted or moved around? Should you use normal spellings? What about the layout? Does it make sense?
3. Rewrite the poem with changes and read aloud to see if they work.
4. Question the poem. Is the person happy with the 'thing' s/he is compared to, does s/he change, is there something else coming through the language?
5. Keep the energy of the original text poem. Delete anything unnecessary.
6. Change the title so it expresses the feeling at the core of the poem or the reason for writing it.
7. Share the poem in class.

*NOTE: No cell? Use a friend's phone or pen & paper. And rather than sending a text poem, it can always be written on a phone and read out.*

#### *About Mary*

Mary published her first novel *The Blue* (Penguin) in 2007. *The Blue* was shortlisted for the 2008 Prize in Modern Letters and won the Readers' Choice Award and NZSA Hubert Church Best First Book Award for Fiction at this year's Montana New Zealand Book Awards. Mary was awarded the Lilian Ida Smith Award for a draft of *The Blue* and has since been awarded the Louis Johnson Bursary to work on her second novel, *Precarious*. Mary has an Masters in Creative Writing with distinction from the International Institute in Modern Letters. She lives with her family in Wellington, and when she's not writing she works as a reviewer, bookseller, manuscript assessor and creative writing tutor.  
Find out more on her blog: [www.mary-mccallum.blogspot.com](http://www.mary-mccallum.blogspot.com)

### **Bill Manhire**

#### *About Bill*

Bill was New Zealand's inaugural Te Mata Estate Poet Laureate, and is a four-time winner of the New Zealand Book Award for poetry. His prize-winning fiction has been published in Britain and the USA, and he is also well known for such bestselling anthologies as *100 New Zealand Poems*, *Six by Six*, and *Some Other Country*. His *Collected Poems* was published by Victoria University Press and Carcanet.

In 2004 he held the Meridian Energy Katherine Mansfield Memorial Fellowship in Menton. In 2005 he was made an arts laureate by the Arts Foundation of New Zealand, and received an Honorary Doctorate of Literature from the University of Otago.

Publications in the last 2-3 years include the short memoir, *Under the Influence*; an anthology of imaginative writing about Antarctica, *The Wide White Page*; a collection of poems, *Lifted*; and the anthology *121 New Zealand Poems*.

Most recently Bill has been involved with the editing and publication of Janet Frame's posthumous collection of poems, *The Goose Bath*, and has been joint project leader of *Are Angels OK?*, a sci-art collaboration between leading New Zealand writers and physicists.

Bill's book, *Lifted*, won the Poetry Prize in the 2006 Montana New Zealand Book Awards.



### **Vivienne Plumb**

Trying to sit still and concentrate and write can always be hard. It is good to try and practise actually doing it as often as possible so that you get a routine going, a rhythm.

A good kickstart can be to write about something else first – a kind of warm up. You could try writing about what sort of a day you had the day before (one page) and then what sort of a day you wish you'd had (one page). Make sure you go into a bit of description. These warm ups can go anywhere and be for as long as you make them.

Lists can be useful. You can always make lists of subjects you would like to 'freewrite' about. In my play *Oyster* (part of the 2009 Young and Hungry Festival), the character of Velma talks about 'twelve places of peace and tranquility'. She has been making a list.

VELMA: ...I guess the final ones on my list are the usual offenders.

DOLORES: The usual suspects.

VELMA: My own bed, my own room. Then there was this dream I had once. I woke up, in my dream. I thought I had really woken but I was still dreaming. And when I went outside the house the back garden had become this huge glade, very green and lush, with dew on everything. And I began to rise above the ground and looked down and could see that I was slowly gliding through the glade.

This dialogue probably came from my own belief in lists being useful resources. I like lists so I made Velma like them too.

My own most recent list of things I wanted to remember:

Coffee at Renata's. Renata drinks a lot of Nescafe Instant.

Renata's Alsation dog, Bella, and the way she won't put her fesh bone down but holds it in her mouth.

Renata and I discuss our favourite Polish food.

The sound of the train on the tracks near Renata's apartment.

Renata likes to watch 'New Boys on the Block' on tv.

She never turns off her tv.

Her red lace table runner.

The lover she left in Poland. He must go to his sister's in Gdansk to ring Renata from there.

Now this list has just about become a story.

### *About Vivienne*

Vivienne Plumb is a poet, playwright and fiction writer. She has been the recipient of many awards and fellowships including the Hubert Church Prose Award, the Bruce Mason Playwrighting Award, the Buddle Findlay Sargeson Fellowship and international writing residencies in Hong Kong, the U.S. A. and Australia. In 2008 she was guest reader at CUIRT, the annual literary festival of Galway, Ireland. Her play *The Cape* was published during 2008. Another play, *The Wife Who Spoke Japanese In Her Sleep*, premiered at the Auckland Festival. *Oyster* is part of the 2009 Young and Hungry Festival. She is presently working on a Doctorate of Creative Arts.

### **Chris Price**

### *About Chris*

Chris teaches Writing for the Page in the MA programme at the International Institute of Modern Letters. She is the author of *Husk*, which won the NZSA Jessie Mackay Best First Book Award for Poetry at the Montana New Zealand Book Awards 2002, and *Brief Lives*, a book which she describes as having 'the heart of a poet, the skeleton of a biographical

dictionary and the flesh of prose'. Her third book, *The Blind Singer*, published by AUP was launched on May 11 at the Gus Fisher Gallery in Auckland. due from Auckland University Press in 2009.

### **Marty Smith**

"Poetry is real toads in an imaginary garden." Marianne Moore.

I have to read a lot of student writing, and it's easy for me to tell what's good. It's good if I read it because I want to, not because I'm paid to. The best pieces I read are rich with the life and language of the writer, and usually they keep strictly to the truth of what happened. What if you started with the truth and then went on and subverted your actual experience in some way? What if you used yourself as a character in fiction, rather than non-fiction? You could bombard your reader with the sensory, the concrete details of your life, and then compress and alter or arrange those details to give an emotional kick. You can intensify the flavour by adding in other people's voices.

Try accessing your memory for the starting points. Like this: go back to a remembered space, eg. go back to the room of a house you remember. Sketch the floor plan, and fill in the details – the furniture, any special objects.

Choose an object, and using free association, write what you remember. Don't try and censor yourself, because it will interfere with your process. Use first person, for immediacy, for urgency, so things start happening.

Write down everything as it comes, and if you relax and let it, something odd thing will happen. Something about being in the room will stir up an emotional layer so the objects of the room will choose and order themselves into your memory, from way back in your back brain. (I like the idea of the back brain – it's just a slightly bad translation from German, which I enjoy.) In English, we call it the subconscious.

You want to get into your subconscious, because then stuff insinuates itself into your writing that you're not even aware of. The subconscious is a repository of ideas, a language bank, a rubbish heap that delivers stuff up with a weirdly pervasive logic – words, landscapes and people come from nowhere.

The trick is to notice the things that fascinate you, and to learn to trust that part of the imagination that chooses. It's not beauty, it's something else, some kind of charge that calls your attention. That's what the objects have, that float up into your memory. So you should go digging for what it is that really interests you and investigate it as hard as you can. If you're lucky, the image which has intrigued you will become a metaphor that will add depth and meaning, will become insight.

The act of writing is the balancing up of the conscious, and the subconscious. Once you have finished the process of accessing your memory, you can start compressing and adapting, adding and subtracting, which is the best part of all.

When I wrote *Dracula*, I had in mind some horse business, so I started with the saddling up stalls at the race course. The horse in this piece is not any one horse, he's a conglomerate of all the awkward, useless or downright dangerous horses I've been told to climb on. But the poem is emotionally true, it's how it feels like any number of times I've ridden out onto the course and hoped to get round. Alfie is a real person, but he's in Newmarket, in England, and this poem is on a New Zealand racecourse. And I put someone else's words in Alfie's mouth. It was a Kiwi hobby trainer who said this, when he was trying to teach me how to stop a hard pulling horse. Alfie appears in poems when I want someone to say something, to talk like a stable-hand, to be the colourful, good-hearted and wise old man who might save us all.

I was pleased with this poem, because it makes me a bit nervous every time I read it. I also like how I let it end when the horse is let go, and I'm not tempted to write any more about what happens next.

**Dracula**  
(Crimson Saint- Shocking)

Still dark outside,  
I fight to get the bit in.  
He pulls me off my feet.

*Get over you bastard,* says Alfie  
knees him in the guts  
to make him let air out

drags the girth up tight—  
Dracula savages the air  
shakes it up in shock waves—

I'm too scared to admit I'm scared.

Alfie throws me up.  
The horse sinks on his hocks, lurches against the wall  
rattles the chains like snakes.  
I snap the clip of my skull cap shut.  
*alright?* asks Alfie.  
I nod. He unclicks the chains—  
explosive swing away  
underneath  
the back muscles bunch—  
we let loose this way, that way  
in leaps across the yard.

Trackwatchers flatten back.  
*Just sit quiet on him* Alfie says

jig, jig jig goes the bit as Dracula worries  
at steel, pull-jerks my arms  
jolts us towards the open grass the course proper  
we're coming out on  
wide wide green

*If he gets away on you,* says Alfie, *don't fight him.*  
*When you try and fight, they just pull harder. If you get in trouble*  
*kick him up hard along the straight*  
*make him think he's had a race, he might ease up*  
*once you're past the post*

horses go snorting past, Dracula sinks down  
like a cat

little prayers keep leaking out  
I put my feet in the irons, cross  
the reins to get a good hold

Alfie lets the bridle go

If you're reading this poem on Turbine, the other poem, *Cuchulainn wins the Great Northern* also has roots in the real world. The racing commentator's words come from a real race call (I keep notes, if I hear a good one, I write it on any old envelope lying around), but I have never seen nuns on a racecourse, though I hear they are keen punters. I was drawn to the sound of their names, so the poem started from the names and a mental image I had of them arriving, with stiff little veils. Then I added in a mixture of a real horse, his real jockey, and let the nuns loose at the races.

#### *About Marty*

Marty Smith completed a Masters in Creative Writing at the International Institute of Modern Letters in 2004, where she was working on a collection of poetry. Her poems have been published in *Sport*, *Landfall*, *The Yellow Medicine Review*, and in on-line magazine, *turbine*, and the poetry website *The Page*. Her short stories were finalists in Huia Short Story Awards 1997 and 2001.

Damien Wilkins

#### **Louise Wallace**

I find my ideas for poems in the 'real world' – from people and conversations and things I experience, so my best advice for locating inspiration is to get out and hunt it down. 'Writer's block' is a myth!' At a workshop I attended about seven years ago in Gisborne, Kate Camp suggested we each visit a second hand store and look for old postcards – preferably with writing on the back. I still like this idea – using other people's stories and lives for a spark. Often just the aesthetics of the card or the style of handwriting can plant the seeds of an idea. Who were these people and why was one writing to the other? Where were they when they wrote the card? What story might there be to tell? Ask yourself these kinds of questions and see where they lead. Similar to this is the concept of *ekphrasis* – something written in response to a work of art. A very famous example is Keats's 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', or, for a more modern illustration, 'Heroic Simile' by Robert Hass. Go to a local art gallery and visit an exhibition, or see a film on a Sunday afternoon, then go home and try to get something down on paper. Follow what it might trigger. My advice is to thief from real life. Go for a walk, but go for a walk with your eye for poetry *on*. Never leave home without it! Poems can begin in the most ordinary of places, it's your job to take them somewhere special.

#### *About Louise*

Louise Wallace's poetry has previously appeared in literary journals including *Meanjin* and *Snorkel*, and she has work forthcoming in *Sport*. In 2008 she completed her MA in Creative Writing at the International Institute of Modern Letters, was an editor of *Turbine 08*, and received the Biggs Poetry Prize. She spent the first half of this year teaching Creative Writing at Massey University in Wellington, and is at work on her first collection of poems.

## **OTHER RESOURCES**

### **Creative Writing at Victoria**

Contact the International Institute of Modern Letters

Address IIML, Victoria University  
P O Box 600, Wellington

Tel (04) 463 6854

Fax (04) 463 6865

Email [modernletters@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:modernletters@vuw.ac.nz)

Website [www.victoria.ac.nz/modernletters](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/modernletters)

### **Festival Proceedings**

The festival programme and other information will be posted on the festival website  
[www.victoria.ac.nz/moderletters/](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/moderletters/)

### **New Zealand Book Council**

Promotes New Zealand books and reading.

Email [admin@bookcouncil.org.nz](mailto:admin@bookcouncil.org.nz)

Website [www.bookcouncil.org.nz](http://www.bookcouncil.org.nz)

### **New Zealand Society of Authors (NZSA)**

Provides advocacy and support for New Zealand writers.

Email [nzsa@clear.net.nz](mailto:nzsa@clear.net.nz)

Website [www.authors.org.nz](http://www.authors.org.nz)

### **New Zealand Electronic Poetry Centre**

A site dedicated to New Zealand poetry. Includes sound files.

Website [www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz/](http://www.nzepc.auckland.ac.nz/)

**New Zealand Writers Guild**

Represents and supports New Zealand screenwriters.

Email	<a href="mailto:info@nzwritersguild.org.nz">info@nzwritersguild.org.nz</a>
Website	<a href="http://www.nzwritersguild.org.nz/">www.nzwritersguild.org.nz/</a>

**New Zealand Film Commission**

Helps provide funding and support for filmmakers.

Email	<a href="mailto:info@nzfilm.co.nz">info@nzfilm.co.nz</a>
Website	<a href="http://www.nzfilm.co.nz">www.nzfilm.co.nz</a>

**Playmarket**

Agency and script and advisory service for New Zealand playwrights.

Email	<a href="mailto:info@playmarket.org.nz">info@playmarket.org.nz</a>
Website	<a href="http://www.playmarket.org.nz">www.playmarket.org.nz</a>

## THANK YOU

We are very grateful for the generous support of New Zealand Post, who sponsor and provide practical support for the National Schools Writing Festival.

New Zealand Post also sponsor and provide practical support for the National Schools Poetry Awards, which are run in conjunction with the Festival. The Poetry Awards are an annual poetry competition for Year 12 and 13 students. This year saw the inauguration of two equal prize categories: Best Poem and Best Lyric. This year's winning poems and reports by the competition judges, Paula Green and Samuel Flynn Scott, will be published on the International Institute of Modern Letters' website [www.victoria.ac.nz/modernletters/](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/modernletters/) in the week following the Festival.

New Zealand Post sponsor the main cash prizes for all winners plus the laptop for the Best Poem prize and recording of the poem for the Best Lyric prize. Additional prizes are donated by the following Festival prize partners: the New Zealand Book Council; the New Zealand Society of Authors; Booksellers New Zealand, and the literary journals *SPORT* and *Landfall*. *Tearaway* magazine and LOOP Recordings Aot(ear)oa also sponsor the Poetry Awards by providing practical assistance. We appreciate our sponsors' and partners' support for young New Zealand writers.

The National Schools Writing Festival and the Poetry Awards are coordinated by Victoria University's International Institute of Modern Letters, home of Victoria University's creative writing programme. Victoria University supports the Festival by sponsoring the venues for the Festival. We would like to thank all of the participating writers, student volunteers and support staff at Victoria University.

Finally, we thank you, the participating students and your teachers for contributing time and enthusiasm to this Festival.