

# SA Writers Centre

## Exquisite I: Support for Educators

A creative program a multilingual and multicultural environment.

**Exquisite I** is a collaborative project for culturally and linguistically diverse young people to engage with and reflect on how they construct their identity. The participants are supported to narrate their experiences through story and the written word, capturing a diverse range of languages and literacies.

Educators are encouraged to refer to *We Are*, an anthology of writing developed from this project in 2016.

### Process

Facilitators must be committed to establishing confidence in the participants that their voices are unique and important, and that they are sophisticated storytellers. The process described below is designed to allow participants to shine and see their individual language, voices and stories reflected back to them, and their new community.

Sessions described here are of 2 hour duration, over a 20 session period. In the main, sessions consist of writing prompts, call and response exercises, free writing time, the generation and discussion of ideas, the reading of texts, and performance of participants work. There is very little formal writing or grammar work in the sessions.

Every participant should be supported to write a new piece at every session. The facilitator should collect and keep all writing (or transcriptions of work orally presented) in individual folders, to be referred back to at appropriate stages of the process. However, students must never feel pressured to submit work for the final anthology or reading event.

All participants should be encouraged to see the positive qualities that exist in their work, even if it is light on technical expertise, or contains errors or inconsistencies.

### Session 1

#### Introduction

After introductions, begin the process with a group exercise. Do not have to commit to pen and paper as many of the participants may have particular challenges in spelling, grammar and confidence.

In the group exercise, the facilitator uses a prompt and response technique to create a group work on the theme **HOME**. The facilitator transcribes the ideas and words, and during the break compiles these snippets into a pastiche poem or story. This is then read to the group.

This has three functions:

- To identify the level of spoken English of students
- To introduce students to each other and to identify and understand their cultural heritage
- To create a completed, polished piece of writing that celebrates individual voice. This motivates students and reflects back the amazing qualities of the students' voices, giving them confidence in the process.

This is also an opportunity to identify any students who had particular issues.



## Session 2

### Finding Voices

Introduce the session by performing a short work and discussing it. This helps to identify levels of comprehension.

Suggested poem:

“Everything Changes” by Bertolt Brecht.

*Everything changes. You can make  
A fresh start with your final breath.  
But what has happened has happened. And the water  
You once poured into the wine cannot be  
Drained off again.  
What has happened has happened. The water  
You once poured into the wine cannot be  
Drained off again, but  
Everything changes. You can make  
A fresh start with your last breath.*

Individual activity: Use a simple, universal prompt e.g. love, fire, sunshine etc.

Students respond with just a few notes on the page or verbally. Facilitators scribe these ideas for them. Sharing might be just talking about an idea rather than reading a complete piece. Students are offered multiple ways of submitting work at this stage.

They can:

- write complete pieces for an edit at a later stage.
- share verbally and facilitators would scribe
- submit notes that facilitators would photocopy and collate
- make no submission at all

## Session 3

### Introducing Writing

Introduce and discuss the possibility of any anthology / podcast / other outcome at this time. The idea of producing work for a professional outcome will inspire them. Stress that the group itself will be making the selection for the anthology, not adults or teachers or others.

Work hard to persuade the young writers that every idea has potential and that short, simple forms can be powerful.

Suggested Short Story:

“Asthma” by Etgar Keret (note this is the full story, in translation from Hebrew)

*When you have an asthma attack, you can't breathe. When you can't breathe, you can hardly talk. To make a sentence all you get is the air in your lungs. Which isn't much. Three to six words, if that. You learn the value of words. You rummage through the jumble in your head. Choose the crucial ones – those cost you too. Let healthy people toss out whatever comes to mind, the way you throw out the garbage. When an asthmatic says 'I love you,' and when an asthmatic says 'I love you madly,' there's a difference. The difference of a word. A word's a lot. It could be stop, or inhaler. It could even be ambulance.*

Continue to identify the students who need the most support at this stage.

During free writing time work with the less confident participants and look through the notes in their workbooks/ folders. Work with these fragments as the beginnings of poems/ stories.

Never pressure the participants to submit a piece of work before they are ready. Submission of final, polished texts is not the aim at this stage.

#### **Session 4**

##### **Introducing spoken word**

Spoken word technique is used to further develop and refine works.

The process of reading out loud gives a new perspective on the writing, and students are able to edit in a new way, using sound and rhythm and aural impact to influence their works. Very little writing on the page is done in these sessions, beyond a few notes.

The first guest performer/ writer is important at this stage. Ask them to bring something to read and then to just encourage the students to play.

After a reading/ performance, the guest artist works with the students to create short pieces of writing and practice performing it. Collect this piece from every participant during this session to work with the individual at a later point to develop it for the page.

In this way students are experiencing a two way development of texts – from page (written) to performance (oral), but also the other direction, from performance to page.

#### **Session 5**

##### **Writing workshop**

Focus on creating a regular workshop process of ideas generation, group work, individual writing time and discussion of development of ideas. Encourage students to recognise work that has potential to be expanded, but also that all writing is important, even if it is never looked at again.

Alternate the sessions between reading a piece of work from the page and discussing the ideas behind it or a physical warm up to prepare for a spoken word piece. Participants are encouraged to give each other feedback.

Only at this stage is it time to start exploring some simple technical and writing craft ideas.

For example, the facilitator could introduce the ballad, or explain alliteration. This is must be presented in a simple and engaging way, rather than presented as writing rules, or in any way that might discourages students. All students must continue to be supported to give personal responses and know that all their language and stories are valued.

#### **Sessions 6 – 15 (10 sessions, but length can be adjusted)**

##### **Writing workshops / Guest artists**

Prompt every student to write a new piece at every session. It might be inspired by another piece of literature or it might be free writing after a physical warm up. Give all students the choice to read or to include the work in their folder.

Identify those who are least prepared to read, and provide extra support in the next session.

Collect **all** writing at the end of every session. Photocopy it for future development and return originals to students. Students may choose to throw some pieces of work away.

Bring in **guest writers and performers** every second session.

Selection of artists will depend on the make up of the participants, and the project budget. It is crucial to invite people from a diverse range of linguistic and cultural backgrounds to both support the group (artists who can reflect similar experiences to those of the students), and to challenge the group (artists who can reflect very different experiences). Select guests who write and perform in a broad range of styles and use a distinct vocabulary.

Every visiting writer should generate a short piece of writing from the group, and end with a performance. Collect all the writing and store in individual folders.

If there publishing outcome required, this process has to be extended to ensure adequate material. Only quite late in the process are students asked to write independently of the workshops (ie 'homework'), and it must be presented as optional only.

Visiting performers and workshop sessions continue for as long as is necessary for the project timeline, desired outcomes, and budget.

### **Session 16** **Choosing the piece**

By now the group has worked with a range of writers and performers in a range of styles. The group will now be cohesive and vocal in support of each other's practice, and will have all written and performed a range of literature. Students will have produced a body of work with great potential.

At this stage it is time to work with individuals on their writing. The facilitator will now support them to develop their favourite work through redrafting and editing. Works will be prepared for publication.

### **Session 17** **Feedback and Editing**

Begin by presenting each work to the group. The group is encouraged to review and give feedback to each other, thinking closely about word choice, structure, meaning and presentation.

Then work with individuals on the nuts and bolts of their writing – supporting them to change grammar, punctuation and spelling where necessarily. Ask them to think about how their work will look on the page in terms of fonts, layout etc.

Ensure the group (and facilitators) know that the final editorial judgements lay with each of the students.

### **Session 18** **Editing**

Close editing work continues. All work submitted for first draft of anthology by end of session.

### **Sessions 19 - 20** **Proof reading and performance**

Students work on construction of the anthology. Show examples of anthologies to compare how work is collated and presented, including multilingual examples.

Make curatorial and editorial decisions about how works are to be presented, ie thematically etc. Select order, discuss cover design, introductions and other creative decisions.

Bring in workshop facilitator to support students to perform their work.

Plan book launch/ reading events. All students must be able to select their own work and present the ones they are most comfortable with. Ensure family/ friends/ peers are invited to celebrate.

### **Ongoing support**

The SA Writers Centre is committed to supporting the voices and stories of young people from diverse backgrounds to be heard and to find their way into the literary community.

SA Writers Centre encourages teachers using *We Are* in the classroom to make contact with us and discuss ways that our staff and writing community can support them.