

Creative Evolution

The Arts Education Department Newsletter 2004

Special Schools Wow Audiences at Eastern Cape Eisteddfod

by Keryn Fairley

The 2004 Eastern Cape Eisteddfod saw record numbers of entries from disabled and special needs participants, giving fellow entrants and audiences a rare and inspiring experience and proving the highlight of the event.

Schools catering for the disabled or for learners with special education needs (LSEN) enthusiastically responded to organizers' invitations to participate in the event. Entries streamed in for the visual arts, dance and choir categories.

In total, nine schools from all over the province - Umtata, Bizana, King William's Town, Port Elizabeth, East London, and other centres - participated in the Eisteddfod. The event saw mentally disabled and visually impaired learners participate alongside mainstream schools - and blow them away with what they had achieved. Zamokuhle School for the Visually Impaired in Bizana stunned their audiences with their masterful choir performances, while McClelland Special School from Amalinda showcased their abilities as performance singers.



Performance singers from McClelland Special School in Amalinda

Jill Rothman of Kuyasa Special School in Grahamstown was delighted to have some of her learners participating. "I am very excited about the opportunity for special schools to take part, because it's a platform for our learners to participate alongside mainstream schools and be included," she said. "Seeing the outstanding work from the other special schools was a highly emotional, thrilling experience - in many cases the quality was as good or better than that of mainstream participants."

Arts Education Director, Louisa Clayton, is hugely excited about the inclusion of greater numbers of special schools. She points out that there are enormous artistic benefits for everybody involved and commends the dedication of special education teachers. "This is one of the most exciting things we've done in Arts Education," she says. "Anyone who witnesses the participation of the special schools cannot fail to be inspired when they see the effort and discipline exerted in the performances and the amazing results achieved by these special people with very challenging disabilities. It takes art appreciation and emerging artists to another level altogether."

If you don't know what that means then make sure you grab the next opportunity that comes your way to see integrated work or the work of the physically challenged. Integrated theatre (meaning work in which disabled and abled bodies are integrated onstage), although fairly new to South Africa, is well-established elsewhere with over 24 integrated companies existing worldwide. Local companies that are exploring art with special needs and physically challenged artists include Remix Theatre Company, and Agulhas Theatre Works.



Combined Special Schools participants with adjudicator Gwen Preston - making the 2004 Eastern Cape Eisteddfod a more inspiring experience than ever.

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Mind-Blowing Moments from the 2004 Schools Festivals

Everyone comes back from a Schools Festival with a headful of phenomenal memories - just imagine what it's like if you went to all nine! Here are some of the Schools Fest teams' memory highlights from the 2004 festivals.

- ▶ *Generations* actor and cutting edge film maker **Akin Omotoso**, who garnered awards for his first film *God is African*, delivering the Keynote Address at the Standard Bank National Schools Festival. He gave us a humble, honest account of how he succeeded in filming the movie through sheer determination when the dollars were non-existent! He made us feel inspired to reach for our dreams with hard work, commitment, and a stubborn refusal to give up!
- ▶ Comedian **Marc Lottering** speaking humbly and straight from the heart at the Western Cape Schools Festival. Recently involved in a drunken driving incident, he really made us think about the importance of making wise choices.

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Schools Festival highlights cont.

- ▶ The stunning **"New Day"** presented at Artscape in Cape Town, a sometimes joyous, sometimes poignant, always spectacular celebration of how far South Africa has come in ten years. We loved the powerful backing of the full-scale live orchestra!
- ▶ Sitting in a theatre in Secunda listening to the highly unfamiliar and amazing sounds of **Korluren**, a masterful choir group all the way from Norway, accompanied by Norwegian fiddle, accordion and saxophone. Like us, Mpumalanga delegates loved this unique experience!
- ▶ The huge pride we felt in the Standard Bank National Schools Festival delegates when they responded so intelligently and sensitively to **"Happy Endings Are Extra"**. They engaged maturely with this brilliant yet disturbing and challenging play dealing with complex sexual themes, and told us how grateful they were for this stretching experience. We feel confident to keep bringing them powerful and demanding theatre!
- ▶ Chris Weare's sumptuous production of the modern classic **"Mephisto"** at Nationals, telling the poignant story of a group of German actors during the Hitler regime. The ingenious and devastatingly effective set and lighting design showed delegates how it's done.
- ▶ That rocking and oh-so-cool little production **"The Cool Beat of Urban Heat"**, which we carted all over the country so delegates could enjoy its potent take on



The Cool Beat of Urban Heat, the show that's got teens everywhere hooked on poetry!

poetry. Everyone loved UBOM! Eastern Cape Drama Company's supreme slickness and the show's flawless understanding of the lives of South African teens.

▶ **Andrew Tracey**, head of the International Library of African Music, introducing us to the

marvellous music of Africa in his presentation **"Ukutya kwendlebe ukutya kwenyawo"** ("Food for the ears is food for the feet") at Nationals. Delegates began to appreciate the incredible skill involved when they had a go at playing some of the instruments themselves.

▶ The shyest of delegates ending up "dancing like no-one's looking" in the legendary **"Mixed Masala" dance workshop** with Daisy Spencer. Daisy's awesome enthusiasm meant everyone had a ball and she always had crowds streaming to her sessions as word got out that they rocked!

▶ The **"Clowning Around 101"** workshops with Luke Rous (star of "Spilling Beans" and "Fly"), where delegates threw themselves hilariously into the world of clowns, from Arlequino all the way to Jim Carrey.

▶ Getting down as we celebrated **21 years of Standard Bank sponsorship** of the

National Schools Festival. Hot local music outfits **The Finkelstiens** and **Prime Circle** came to the party, and Standard Bank were generous as always, presenting each delegate with a special commemorative CD featuring tracks from everyone's favourite South African bands.

Thanks for making memories with us!



Spectacular Afro-Indian fusion in New Day performed in the Western Cape Schools Festival

Olympiad Entrants get the Bard's take on love

This year, 4 200 South African teens got another opinion on one of their hottest topics: they put away the *Seventeen* magazines and boy band lyrics and checked out what Shakespeare had to say about love. The 2004 De Beers English Olympiad had as its theme "Shakespeare on Love", and got learners all over the country delving into the great poet's ideas on this eternally fascinating phenomenon.

In preparation for the 2nd March examination, candidates engaged creatively with a specially published anthology. It included sonnets and excerpts from eight of Shakespeare's most popular plays, including *Romeo & Juliet*, *Twelfth Night*, *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Othello*.

The revelation of the final results had the city of Grahamstown celebrating wildly: the winner was local Graeme College Deputy Head Boy Christopher McConnachie. Christopher is the first Grahamstown winner in the history of the competition. He pipped his Cape Town, Durban and Jo'burg peers at the post with a witty satire that placed two well-known South African political figures in an Antony-and-Cleopatra-style political romance!



2004 De Beers English Olympiad Winner: Christopher McConnachie

Christopher and his fellow Top 3 winners, Ingrid von Glehn of St Stithians Girls College and Katherine Barrow of Jeppe High School, enjoy a glorious 2-week winter tour of England as their prize. Accompanied by Elaine Hyland, Deputy Head of Rhenish Girls High School in Stellenbosch, the bright young English buffs will take in Canterbury, Bath, Oxford, Cambridge, Stratford-upon-Avon, and the excitement of London, sightseeing and enjoying plenty of brilliant theatre.

Meanwhile, the other entrants will be thinking back on the 2004 Olympiad as a stimulating, creative experience, and starting to tackle the 2005 theme of "War and Indifference".

Our Readers Don't Read

by Stacy Hardy

The boardroom of a magazine I worked for, this was a few year's back, a stifling hot day. My editor sat across from me. A big round table. I had to concentrate to keep my eyes from slipping from his face to the magazine covers on the wall. Every inch of wall space. Literally filling the room. The Sex Issue. The Summer Issue. The Party Issue. My editor repeated what he had just said: "Look, our readers don't read." I stared back at him. The statement was sinking in. He was still talking, some new thread, lips moving but I was stuck back there in those four words: our readers don't read. A perfect contradiction. Ludicrous, obviously. I mean just try switch it round: our cooks don't cook, our hunters don't hunt, our reports don't report (well, maybe actually). Flick back to my editor's face. He was using terms like: short, snappy, bite sized.

It wasn't long before just about every magazine in the country was working to the same formula. Everything was reduced to a sound bite. Abbreviated, abridged, curtailed, decreased, diminished. A new approach for a new generation. A new formula for a new attention span. Ad-break sized. Text as a pop song. A three minute ditty. News as an SMS. At first I railed against it. I wrote a bitchy column about my editor. I made fun of the contradiction. As it turned out he was right. The readers didn't read. No one read the damn column - except him, of course. Nothing changed except I didn't work for his magazine again.

But is the trend towards compacting and cutting down necessarily a bad thing? A few years later and I'm less sure. What about less is more? What about poetry where the skill lies precisely in the ability to condense down to an "intense or enduring impression"? It wasn't long before a new breed of fiction writers picked up on the trend and starting using it towards their own ends. A new genre was born.

Flash fiction, A.K.A. sudden, micro, and short-short fiction, is an old form of fiction and at the same time, new genre all its own. A flash fiction story is typically between 200 and 1000 words (though I did find a website that specialises in two word long stories). It's a direct response to the age of information overload. As Mark Strand puts it: "It can do in a page what a novel does in two hundred. It covers years in less time, time in almost no time. It wants to deliver us to where we were before we began. Its aim is restorative, to keep us young."

Where to find it? All over the internet for one thing, but local journals are also catching onto the trend. The new *Laugh It Off* annual asked its writers to keep it snappy. 1000 words or less please. See, the crucial thing in sudden fiction is economy. It's the magic mixture of suggestion, innuendo and insinuation, packed tightly into precise, concise word choice. All the classic elements of the plot may be outta plain sight, or, may not even be present, but the well-written sudden fiction piece is complete. It's said all that it needs to say. And it is much bigger than the sum of its parts. "It is highly calculated - its effects, its timing. In most cases it contains a novel," says author Paul Theroux.

Sure, flash, micro or sudden fiction will never replace or even compete with the novel but it does offer a new space of readers and writers more comfortable with smsing than penning a letter. Our readers don't read. Fair enough. But we aren't going to get them to read by lamenting the fact. As the magazines are proving, many readers will read something that reflects their hyper-speed, rapid-sample world. I guess the key here, as always, is recognising that popular culture's not the enemy. To ignore it, is to ignore what's going on in the real world.

Stacy Hardy is a writer, journalist and theatre practitioner living and working in Cape Town.

The Healing Power of Psychodrama



*Drama can be more than just fun and games – an important branch of therapy called Psychodrama uses it to help people understand their problems and find ways to deal with them. Here, registered psychologist **Charissa Bloomberg** offers an introduction to this exciting technique which is still virtually unheard of in South Africa.*

What is Psychodrama?

Psychodrama is an action and experimental form of group psychotherapy that uses role-play to help people gain insight into their problems. It brings play, spontaneity and creativity to therapy. "Show me, don't tell me" is the guiding principal of psychotherapy, developed by psychiatrist Jacob Moreno about 80 years ago. Moreno believed that spontaneity and play were curative and that people could help themselves by getting in touch with their creativity.

Observing children who don't always talk about their problems, but act them out, Moreno reasoned that as adults we become "stuck" and lose the spontaneity and creativity we once had. Through role-play and specific action techniques the problem of trauma is relived which releases the individual from its power. By re-enacting the scene, you access the emotion. Insight and healing are more readily achieved after emotions have been stirred and there is cognitive or emotional shift as long as it is "contained" and closure is achieved afterwards. There is a closure section in each therapy session where the group shares what has taken place in a supportive environment and what it meant for them.

How can psychodrama help adolescents?

Psychodrama enables adolescents to 'act out' and explore themselves, the problems in their environment, and their difficult relationships. It allows one to react to one's discoveries and in turn learn from them.

Adolescents often hide their feelings due to the pressures placed on them by themselves and their peers. If not given an outlet (which psychodrama offers) they can feel stifled, frustrated and angry. Psychodrama provides a social context where it is appropriate to share emotions. It is in this context that one's fears and feelings, which were being suppressed, can now be accepted.

Role-play is also used to teach adolescents the skills to be assertive and say no. Different scenarios are role-played in which adolescents are put into difficult situations and can learn to negotiate assertive communication skills and say NO. It also provides therapy and support to those adolescents who have been involved in drug-taking or prostitution. It empowers them to take responsibility for their lives and gives them the life skills to do so. It also helps them to integrate values and morals into the learning process. Adolescents can sculpt how they would like their image to be ideally represented. They are then encouraged to look at how they would need to change their situation to make it closer to the ideal. Through the medium of psychodrama, adolescents are able to express themselves, learn new skills, test them in a safe environment, gain insight into themselves and learn to support each other. Psychodrama is therefore an evocative medium that aims at encouraging expression.

It is very sad that Psychodrama is an important form of therapy in the UK and USA, but we in South Africa are 80 years behind - if anyone wants to study it, they must travel overseas to do so. We offer courses to people in the helping professions to teach them the basics of psychodrama and how to it apply in their field. We have also been proactive in helping adolescents with all their issues through the medium of psychodrama at various schools and have offered 6 successful

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The Healing Power of Psychodrama continued ▶▶▶

workshops at the Western Cape Schools Festival for grade elevens entitled "Soul Expressions".

And did the teens find these sessions helpful? Here are some Schools Festival delegates' responses:

- ▶ "The most amazing experience I've ever had! Really lets you open up and say what you feel."
- ▶ "Amazing, I learnt how to deal with situations and get closure on my problems."
- ▶ "I learnt a lot about myself."
- ▶ "We learnt new ways of interpreting and solving problems."

Charissa became interested in psychodrama while practicing as a drama teacher, and was inspired to return to university to gain her MA in Psychology. Living in Cape Town, she now heads up Hidden Dimensions, Corporate Training Consultants offering workshops in negotiation and assertiveness skills. She is passionate about introducing as many South Africans as possible to the healing power of psychodrama. She can be contacted for more information on tel 082 737 8988 or email hiddendimensions@absamail.co.za

On writing "Happy Endings Are Extra"

by Ashraf Johaardien

*This year, Schools Festival Director Louisa Clayton took a bold step in choosing to present "Happy Endings" at the Standard Bank National Schools Festival. The production is a delicate treatment of complex sexual themes, and was bound to make huge demands on the young audiences in terms of maturity of response. Clayton's faith in the delegates was vindicated when they rose to the occasion, engaged thoughtfully with the work, and eventually voted it one of the highlights of the festival. Here playwright **Ashraf Johaardien** shares some of the thoughts behind the creation of this extraordinarily insightful and complex play.*

"Dying is easy, it's living that scares me to death..." – Annie Lennox

We are living in a time where sexual violence seems to haunt all South African communities. Cape Town is the rape capital of the world. Adding insult to injury is the fact that a woman living in this country is more likely to be gang raped by a group of between 3 to 30 men than by one man on his own. The hidden danger of this bleak scenario is that it often invites a kind of sensationalism in the media which so easily encourages us to root for the good girl and jeer the bad guy without needing to think too hard about where 'good' and 'bad' lie in the intimate life of human beings.

Writing "Happy Endings Are Extra" was to some degree a personal response to the sexual violence of our times overlaid with a very personal response to the Sizzlers Massacre. Sizzlers was a male massage parlour that operated in an ordinary unmarked suburban house in Graham Road in Sea Point, Cape Town. Most of the staff of young men stayed on the premises. At 4 a.m. in the morning on Monday 20 January 2003, seven employees, a client and the owner were massacred. They were found tied up and shot execution-style - in the back of the head at close range. Most of them also had their throats slit. A tenth man survived. I felt somehow responsible. I felt that I had done nothing to prevent this from happening in my city, in my country. And I felt compelled somehow to commemorate these boys, to tell their story in some way. And yet, at the same time it seemed in really poor taste to even attempt to recapture the details of the Sizzler event. I opted instead to explore some aspect of the world these young men inhabited: a world of casual encounters for cash, of hidden identities and also a world of people looking for love they somehow lost at some point.

Years ago I had been told the story of a man who returns to South Africa after spending more than a decade in the UK. The man in question picks up a boy at a famous gay cruising spot on the Durban beachfront. They go back to his hotel-room and, after making the beast with two backs, they figure out that the boy is his son. Apparently the older man threw himself from the window of his room which was on the tenth floor. These things happen. But more than the events or the circumstances surrounding them what really interested me, what I wanted to explore, was how a human being can survive something of such devastating magnitude. That tenth man...the boy who killed his father...

Presenting "Happy Endings" at the Standard Bank National Schools Festival in 2004 was a big risk and took a great deal of courage on the part of Festival Director, Louisa Clayton. Though I might have told her differently at the time, in retrospect I will admit that presenting this subject matter to a young South African audience did somewhat scare the living daylights out of me. But the risk paid off. We had an overwhelming response from the learners who came to see the production and in the space of two or three days the play achieved a kind of cult status that was immensely satisfying. They got it. They went out at the end of each performance and argued their particular standpoint on the piece with their friends. They were interested in the nuances and multiple truths of this piece. They patiently queued for seats for more than an hour in spite of a power failure which threatened to cancel our final performance. At one particular moment in the play – the pivotal moment where the young boy's identity is revealed - I vividly remember how the audience audibly gasped as one organism. Wow! And then they sent my cast home with their first standing ovation. Little did they know that they were sending me home with my first standing ovation too...totally wow...thanks guys...

Ashraf Johaardien is a published playwright and his work has been produced at mainstream theatre venues and festivals both locally and abroad.



Ashraf Johaardien

Here are some of the Standard Bank National Schools Festival delegates' responses to "Happy Endings Are Extra":

"The most disturbing and brilliant production I've ever seen."

"Mind blowing. I was very stretched, I would personally never have chosen something like that, but I'm so glad I did."

"Very shocked! My comfortable shell feels dented. Wouldn't watch it again, but fantastic acting!"

...oving piece of theatre I have ever seen. Wow! This production has truly changed my life forever

...ntful."



Grahamstown Township Dancers Shine in their Exams!

by Keryn Fairley

2004 was a year of triumph for the Grahamstown Township Dance Project, as 85 talented and hard-working young dancers took the strenuous AIDTA ballet exams, all passing with flying colours and most earning coveted awards.

The Project seeks to provide holistic development and empowerment for disadvantaged young girls through formal dance training. The training instils confidence and self-esteem while promoting self-discipline, commitment and the pursuit of excellence. In 2003 none of the girls, despite their dedication, were able to take exams due to lack of funding. This year, however, an NLDTF grant made entry possible. 25 out of the 29 Seniors who entered achieved the highest award possible (Honours with Distinction), while most of the Juniors were also awarded highest honours. These are the largest exam entry numbers in the history of the project.



Two little stars waiting to do their AIDTA ballet exams

The brilliant exam results were not an isolated success for these phenomenal young women. At the Eastern Cape Eisteddfod, they were one of only two dance groups in their section to receive gold awards. They were selected to present a vibey dance programme entitled "Hellfire!" as part of the Eastern Cape Schools Festival line-up, and wowed 1000 delegates and VIP's with an electrifying performance at the official opening of the Standard Bank National Schools Festival. The girls also performed at the Rotary National Conference, the Rhodes University Centenary Celebrations, and Dance Fest 2004 alongside professionals, students and established community groups from all over the Eastern Cape.

And if there could ever be any doubt about the girls' dedication and commitment, this was completely dispelled when they gave up their school holidays for long days of training, with the result being a stunning new work choreographed by Terra Puwane of the Guild Theatre, East London. The programme was showcased at the Fizz Theatre event in Grahamstown.

The girls' incredible progress this year has been so inspiring that Professor Gary Gordon, artistic director of First Physical Theatre Company, has vowed to start a Youth Company. These beautiful young dancers are testimony to how dedication, commitment, hard work and passion can beat seemingly insurmountable odds.

Getting Antigone out of The Argus??

You want to give your drama students inspiration and stimulation to be creative, but how? Look no further than yesterday's newspaper, says Carol Ashman. Former Head of Drama at the Mbabana Cultural Centre in Mafikeng and then Drama Teacher at the International School of South Africa for twelve years, Carol shares some great ideas from her wealth of drama teaching experience...

I enjoy teaching Drama and, in particular, being one of the workshop leaders at the North West Schools Festival. I believe in the power of Drama to change lives, encourage growth, build confidence and to help us understand ourselves and our world. To this end, my teaching has always been *participatory*.

Drama is *doing* and *being*, and, in teaching drama or holding workshops, I believe in joining in the activities wherever I can. In warm-up sessions, concentration games and language games, as well as activities to encourage lateral thinking and thinking on your feet, I take part to show the level of energy and focus that I want from the class. I make a point of showing - to general laughter - my "Drama muscles" (my biceps!), so that the group realise that Drama needs mental *and* physical fitness and vitality.

Once we have warmed up, loosened up physically and imaginatively, we can get down to the purpose of the workshop, which is to create a piece of theatre for performance. Drama transcends cultural limitations and boundaries, so we need a stimulus with which learners can identify to trigger the creative process. We have to get our ideas (stimulus) from somewhere, so why not from what's happening around us? Wherever there are people, there's Drama - life, death, accidents, news items, articles in magazines - the human condition is always interesting. If we use what is current, relevant or interests us, then we have an excellent starting point for Theatre. My starting point is always a photograph, headline or article in a newspaper. Then we go on a journey as we map out a storyline/plot to fit the picture, identifying characters, situations and twists to bring it to life.

The chosen picture could be the start of a story, which needs to be fleshed out by developing plot and characters. It could also be the middle of a story, which means you could have flashbacks to where it all started. Then let it run to your chosen conclusion. It could also be the final curtain on a story that started weeks, months or years ago. This too can be dramatised with flashbacks and a narrator/s.

There is so much that one can say or do, that at some stage we have to sit down with the learners and look objectively at what we have done, and then cut it down to what we feel is our real message to an audience. What do we want them to know, what do we want them to think about and feel? Our piece of Drama must have focus and impact.

Teenagers must be able to identify with the characters and situations, and *want* to send a message to their peers, families or communities. What they have to say, and how they say it, I have found to be an eye-opening experience.

Each actor in the group could write a short monologue and history of their character which helps to develop the drama and deepens their understanding of who they are and where they come from. At various stages throughout the play they could introduce a monologue/soliloquy to reveal to the audience events or facts that will give greater meaning or understanding of the plot. This way, the characters become more 3-dimensional and human.



"Hellfire!" - The Grahamstown Township Dancers blow their audience away at the Eastern Cape Schools Festival



Carol Ashman in action at the North West Schools Festival

Getting Antigone out of The Argus continued ▶ ▶ ▶

The learners could give their play a title, then, using the first letters of the words in the title, write a poem which could be performed as choral verse in the play. Music, song and dance can become an integral part of the Drama, bringing home a point, shocking the audience into an awareness of something, or just entertaining and providing relief from tension. The possibilities are endless. There are no hard and fast rules: if it works (and the audience is involved and engaged with the actors and their story), it's GOOD!

Remember, every picture tells a story. Try it, and I hope that your results will be as worthwhile and exciting as mine have been. There are many interesting stories to tell, and we need to build up a body of work by encouraging our young people to dare to be part of the new generation of South African playwrights producing first class South African theatre.



Louisa Clayton -
Director of Arts
Education

A Message from the Director...

Cue: Applause!

**Will all the teachers out there
please take a bow!**

Without fail, every year, the Arts Education team is humbled and inspired by the dedication and commitment of the teachers who motivate, drive, and administrate the participation of the thousands of learners that take part in these projects. We are well aware of the effort involved in ensuring that your students seize every opportunity available to them to explore their potential and discover themselves and their talents. We feel very proud when we learn of the achievements of learners and their teachers who have participated in some of our programmes. Believing as we do in the value of these projects we trust that in some small but very significant way the experience with us has played a positive role.

It is an honour and a privilege to be so closely involved in the business of life changing experiences, and we feel the responsibility keenly. It is equally an honour to be associated with the learners and teachers who give themselves so completely to the experiences we offer and who enrich our work and our lives.

Will all the teachers out there please rise, and take a bow!

Louisa

ps: And why DID we include the sexually complex, risqué show "Happy Endings" in the Standard Bank National Schools Festival? Because Ashraf Johaardien took a perverted media event back down to the ordinary lives of the real people that give life to those stories and reminded us in the most sensitive, delicate and powerful way that love is too rare a commodity and should never be taken for granted. The script was beautiful.

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DE BEERS
A DIAMOND IS FOREVER



Ruth Everson's Poetry Corner

Don't tell me to narrow my vision of heaven.

I love lying in the sun but whenever I do, there are always those with the voice of reason who nag me to sit in the shade or to smother myself with sun block. A block or screen is not what I want and I have used this idea to extend beyond the cream to the creative life.

Writing is about being alive to the world but somehow when we are young, in creative terms, it is so hard to hear our own voices. We hear the voice of reason, the voice of the teacher, the indulgent parent, all combining in an attempt to give direction to the budding poet. The only direction I ever wanted was no direction at all. For me, it has always been part of my creative journey to find my own muse.

The danger is this : sometimes kids are so afraid of letting go that they hold on forever. I have found it liberating, every now and again, to treat poetry with disrespect! Ask your learners to write the worst love poem that they can. Read rubbish to them. Remove the mystery. Bring them out from beneath the pale umbrella.

Let your classes journal the things that narrow their vision. Type up extracts so that they are anonymous and then give them back to the class at random and get them to read them out loud. You might be amazed at how profound and powerful this can be for individuals when they begin to realise that others feel the same way that they do.

You might like to spend some time talking about a Factor 30 for the soul after the exercise above. Soul poems always appeal and can be cathartic. Have a poetry picnic and read the poems in a 'hot hug of sun'. Over-indulge in soul food!

Sunscreen

Don't tell me to wear sunscreen,
To crouch cold beneath a pale umbrella
While the sun dances on beaten earth.
Don't tell me to wear sunglasses,
To narrow my vision of heaven
While a van Gogh sky runs over the horizon.
Let my body suck on the sun
Until I am smolten-golden
Fat as an orange, fine as a seed.

But if there is a factor 30 for the soul,
Give me smotherings of it
To keep burning cold words
And indifferent breezes away from my skin.
Let me die in a hot hug of sun
Above the coolcovered world.

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