



TalkforWriting™

Year 6,7&8

Talk for Writing Home-school booklet

Doors – the world of possibility

Working at greater depth

by Jamie Thomas



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Doors

-the world of possibility

Working at greater depth
workbook

For Years 6,7&8
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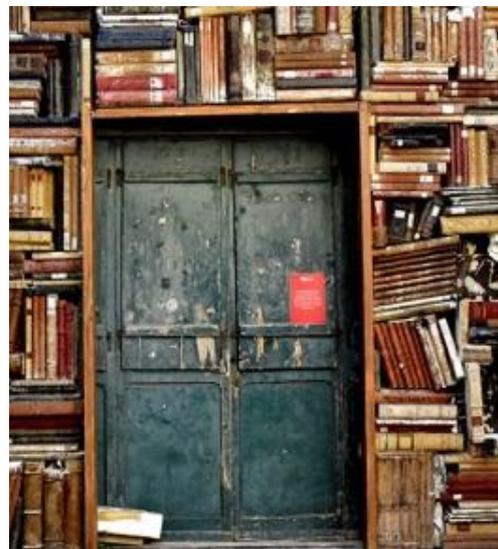


Introduction

Have you ever looked at a door and wondered what might be on the other side? Where may it lead? What may be hiding within? At first glance, a door is just a piece of wood, glass or metal that is opened and closed so that people can get in and out of a room, a vehicle or a space. But in the hands of an author, a door represents a world of possibility, a world where things are not only hidden but often closed off and restricted. Together, through poetry, textual analysis and narrative, we shall explore the potential that a door offers an author. To paraphrase Walt Disney, if you are curious, you keep on moving forward and opening up new doors. Such curiosity leads you down new paths. **Let's open some imaginary doors together.**

Before we start, a moment's reflection

As I write this, the world is in lockdown, shut behind doors for our own safety and wellbeing. Each of our experiences will be very different, but at the heart of the matter is the fact that we are, in a sense, being locked away. I personally long for the day when the doors are open once again and life returns to normality. But how do you feel? Before we start, you may like to draw on your own personal experience of the situation you find yourself in. How are you feeling and what is running through your mind? Let the words burst out of you in whatever form they decide to take and then reflect on these as the unit unfolds. After all, what better stimulus to write about now than a sense of being locked in and the desire for the doors to be open again. You might want to jot down a few thoughts now.



Activity 1: A door is ...

In order to open up our minds to the world of possibility, it is important that we allow ourselves time to think creatively. As a writer, I have learnt a great deal from the poet Ted Hughes. He tells us that, when writing, we have to allow our minds to wander and explore the world of possibility. We must not worry about what comes out or fear that it may be wrong. The joy of writing is that it allows us to explore our thoughts, or interests, our imagination. This activity is designed to let you lose your inhibitions and explore the world of possibility.

Step 1: Find a stimulus

You may like to help your imagination by searching online for 'magical doors' – you will be able to see a wide variety of doors that should help trigger your imagination. Here are two doors that I love and got me thinking.



Step 2: Prepare to write

Set yourself up in a quiet space if that's possible at the moment, with a blank piece of paper and a timer. When you begin to write, make sure you follow Hughes's guidelines: write hard, fast and in silence. Give yourself 10 – 15 minutes to complete the task.

Step 3: Starting to write

Begin with the simple opening:

A door is ...

This could be a repeating phrase that is revisited through the poem (see example below).

Then let your imagination run wild and free. Whatever pops into your head, jot it down. Don't worry about spelling, punctuation, grammar or sentence construction. Just focus on the words that spill out of you and find themselves assembled on the page.

Here is my own version, which you may like to refer to as a model:

A door is ...

*A door is a barrier between can and can't,
Sometimes opened in intrigue,
Often slammed shut in defiance.*

*A door is hope, an escape from reality,
An escape to happiness,
A hidden sanctuary.*

*A door is protection, it locks and encases,
It bars and isolates,
It secludes and forgets.*

*A door is a portal to an imaginary world,
A passage to the unknown,
To journeys unexplored.*

*A door is magic, conjuring possibility,
Endless passageways and avenues,
In the labyrinth of our mind.*

*A door is the end, locked and secure,
Waiting for the prisoners,
To break out from their cells.*

Top Tips:

Remember – do not overthink this – let the ideas run free.

In my poem, I began by thinking what a door may represent (e.g. a barrier, hope, protection, a portal, magic, the end) and I then let my mind wander around each idea. To get the initial idea, ask yourself: what is a door like? Once you have the simile, turn it into the metaphor by saying that the door is that.

e.g. *A door is like a barrier* (simile)
A door is a barrier (metaphor)

Then extend the metaphor with some added detail. I did not worry if some ideas were abstract or if some were more literal. I just let my mind run free.

Your turn:

Either using your own visual stimulus, one of the doors below, or taking inspiration from your own personal experience, write your own 'A door is ...' poem.

Artistic challenge:

A few years ago, a derelict area of Funchal in Madeira was transformed by local artists who decided to bring the dead doors and windows to life again. The beauty of the art opened new doors, and soon homes, shops and restaurants flourished there. Here are a few of those doors.



Your turn:

Have a go at drawing, painting or creating your own door. What design would you choose? What would it represent?

Activity 2: Idioms

An idiom is a common word or phrase which means something different from its literal meaning but can be understood because of its popular use, e.g.

Idiom	Meaning
Beat around the bush	Avoid saying what you mean, usually because it is uncomfortable
Bite the bullet 	To get something over with because it is inevitable

Your turn:

Below is a list of idioms about doors. Can you work out or find out what they mean?

Idiom	Meaning
as one door closes another opens	
at death's door	
beat a path to somebody's door	
behind closed doors	
be on the door	
through the back door	
close/shut the door on something	
close its doors	
dead as a doornail	

door to door	
early doors	
foot in the door	
keep the wolf from the door	
knocking on heaven's door	
lay something at somebody's door	
leave the door open	
never darken my door again	
open doors for somebody	
out of doors	
the revolving door	
show somebody the door	
slam the door in somebody's face	

Artistic challenge:

Can you turn your favourite door idiom into a poster? Think about the meaning and how this could be represented through your design.

Session 3: 'The Door'



Now let's consider the importance of fluency and expression when we read. Begin by reading Miroslav Holub's poem *The Door*. Consider how you would read this out loud and try performing it. Think about the poem's meaning and how you can use your voice to capture this.

Things to consider:

- Where should you add emphasis?
- Where should you pause?
- Which lines or words should be loud/soft?
- How does silence add to the reading?

Having had a go at performing the poem, compare these two recitals of the poem:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bazJvnuOLMM>
- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p011kx3r>

Decide which reading you prefer and why and jot down your response.

Your turn

Reflecting on ways other people read and recite poetry and great literature is an essential part of becoming a fluent, expressive reader. Having thought about these two performances, now decide how you would want to read the poem. You may like to consider how you could use music or sound effects to enhance your recital. You may also like to consider any connections this has with your own personal experiences, as explored at the beginning of the unit. Once you are ready, perform this to an adult and discuss the choices you made and the impact they had on your audience.

The Door

by Miroslav Holub

Go and open the door.
Maybe outside there's
a tree, or a wood,
a garden,
or a magic city.
Go and open the door.
Maybe a dog's rummaging.
Maybe you'll see a face,
or an eye,
or the picture
of a picture.

Go and open the door.
If there's a fog
it will clear.
Go and open the door.
Even if there's only
the darkness ticking,
even if there's only
the hollow wind,
even if
nothing
is there,
go and open the door.

At least
there'll be
a draught.

Miroslav Holub, 'The door' trans. Ian Milner, *Poems Before & After: Collected English Translations* (Bloodaxe Books, 2006)
www.bloodaxebooks.com

Session 4: Through the door

Using Miroslav Holub's poem as inspiration, create your own poem based on what may be through the door. Here are two poetry activities to explore.

Activity 1: Go and open the door

Writing in the style of the poet Miroslav Holub, write your own poem entitled 'The Door'. You may like to use some of these sentence starters to help you:

Go and open the door.

Maybe there is a world that is upside down,

Maybe there is a sweet treat paradise.

Maybe there is a labyrinth of mirrors.

You could make the doors more interesting by having them associated with more intriguing concepts, e.g.

Through the door of hope,

I found a key that unlocked the future.

Through the door of hatred,

I found a bitter, twisted lie.

Alternatively, imagine that you are on an adventure and have arrived at the end of a corridor where you are faced with lots of doors of different colour. What may lie behind each? e.g.

Beyond the purple door –

Lavender tears trickle down a pallid face.

Beyond the red door –

Anger and frustration swell.

Beyond the black door –

A rook caws,

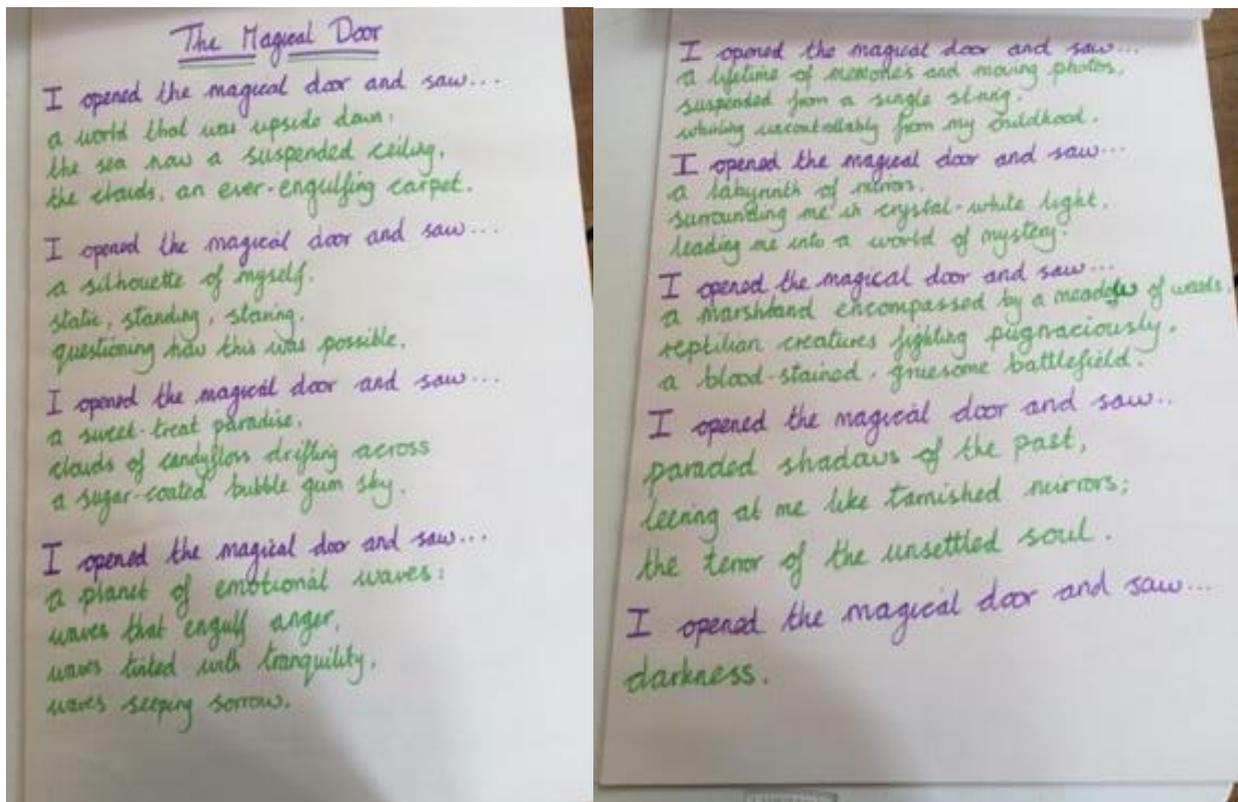
Shadows silently gather.

Activity 2: I opened the magical door and saw ...

This is an idea inspired by Kit Wright's poem 'The Magic Box'. In the poem, Kit imagines what may be contained inside a magical box. We can use this idea to connect to what could be behind the magical door. Before you begin:

- brainstorm a list of possible ideas for what might be behind the door
- brainstorm lists of words that help you describe these ideas (e.g. what they look like /how they are made/what they are doing)

Here is an example of a poem I created with some Y6 children:



Your turn:

Using Miroslav Holub's poem as inspiration, create your own poem based on what may be through the door. Again, you may like to draw upon your own personal experiences as an inspiration for your writing.

Session 5: Quote Analysis

A saying is a short, commonly known expression which generally offers advice or wisdom. Here are some famous sayings about doors:

“The door on which we have been knocking all our lives will open at last.”

C. S. Lewis

“A very little key will open a very heavy door.”

Charles Dickens

“Look on every exit as being an entrance somewhere else.”

Tom Stoppard



“The will to win, the desire to succeed, the urge to reach your full potential... these are the keys that will unlock the door to personal excellence.”

Confucius

“When one door closes, another opens; but we often look so long and so regretfully upon the closed door that we do not see the one which has opened for us.”

Alexander Graham Bell

This session focuses on how to analyse a quote using a four-step model:

Step 1: Quote

Write the quote you wish to discuss, e.g.

“The door on which we have been knocking on all our lives will open at last.”

Step 2: Paraphrase

Take the quote and replace the text with your own words. Make sure that you maintain the same meaning, e.g.

In other words, if you remain persistent and strive to achieve something, eventually you will be successful.

Step 3: Analyse

Break up the quote into chunks and explain why the author has chosen certain words and figurative techniques (metaphors, similes, imagery, alliteration, onomatopoeia, personification), for example:

By referring to the fact that we have been knocking on the door all our life, the author suggests that we have shown an ongoing persistence to achieve something, even though the prospect looks less than likely. The words ‘at last’ add a sense of accomplishment – the author suggests that this is the payoff for being dedicated.

Step 4: Evaluate

Show the importance of the quote with respect to your argument, e.g. *What C.S. Lewis is suggesting is that life will throw us many challenges, many that cannot be easily accomplished. However, with grit and determination these can be overcome. A door is merely a temporary barrier that, if we continue to knock and chip away at its exterior, will eventually open and allow us to reach our goal.*

The whole analysis:

“The door on which we have been knocking on all our lives will open at last.” In other words, if you remain persistent and strive to achieve something, eventually you will be successful. By referring to the fact that we have been knocking on the door all our life, the author suggests that we have shown an ongoing persistence to achieve something, even though the prospect looks less than likely. The words ‘at last’ adds a sense of accomplishment – the author suggests that this is the payoff for being dedicated. What C.S. Lewis is suggesting is that life will throw us many challenges, many that cannot be easily accomplished. However, with grit and determination these can be overcome. A door is merely a temporary barrier that, if we continue to knock and chip away at its exterior, will eventually open and allow us to reach our goal.

Your turn:

Choose one of the other sayings above and complete your own quote analysis. Remember to follow the structure as shown:

1. Write the quote you wish to discuss.
2. Write a paraphrase (use your own words but keep the same meaning).
3. Write your analysis (look for the subtle, key parts of the quote).
4. Write your evaluation (explain why the quote is important).

Challenge:

Consider another famous quote that has significance or importance for you. Complete a quote analysis of it to delve into the deeper meaning and writer’s intent. Share this with an adult and discuss your evaluation. You may want to choose some of the things people are saying now about how they feel about being locked in and isolated etc.

Session 6: Narrative – through the eyes of a character

One of the things I love playing around with as a writer is a character's voice. There are so many avenues available to an author – a character's spoken words, their thoughts, their inner conscience, as well as pathways into their past and previous experiences. Whenever I read great portal stories, I always try to put myself into the shoes of the character, to try to imagine how they must be feeling as they discover this passageway to a new world. How must Alice have been feeling as she fell through the never-ending tunnel into Wonderland?

Today's writing task is to compose a short piece of descriptive writing based on seeing a mysterious door through the eyes of a character. To help you, I have included a mini-toolkit that you may like to explore. I have also included a worked example to illustrate how these tools could be used for the desired effect. You may like to use this model as a scaffold for your own writing.

Character Toolkit: I could ...

- Show how the main character (MC) feels by what they do or say.
- Reveal a character's thoughts.
- Explore the range of voices available to an author (narrator/character's spoken words/character's thoughts/direct address to the reader).

In the model below, the tools I have used follow this pattern:

- **Paragraph 1:** Describe the scene & show how MC feels through actions
- **Paragraph 2:** Reveal MC's thoughts through internal monologue
- **Paragraph 3:** Advance action through first person narration
- **Paragraph 4:** Reveal MC's thoughts through internal monologue



Samantha stood still, her eyes transfixed upon the door. All rational thought had disappeared; her mind was now plagued with hundreds of questions. For you see, this was not the first time she had seen this door ... but this was the first time she had seen it here. And the last time had left her lost, tormented and alone.

No-one believed me...the last time. I can still see their judgmental glances and hear the muffled sniggers. 'Mad', 'delusional' ... yet here is the truth - it was real ... it is real. She can still be saved.

As I stared at the door, I felt my stomach knot inside of me. Bile rose and stung the back of my throat as bitter tears welled up, blurring my sight. It had returned as the prophecy had promised - but why now? Why here? Sinking to the ground, the argument that erupted inside of me became almost uncontrollable.

Don't do it! Remember the last time - you cannot live through this again! But what is there left to live for? And what if this time I find her? What choice do I have?

Character Toolkit: I could ...

- Show how the main character (MC) feels by what they do or say.
- Reveal a character's thoughts.
- Explore the range of voices available to a writer (narrator, character's spoken words, character's thoughts, direct address to the reader).

Your turn:

Imagine your main character is walking along the beach and then comes across this mysterious doorway. What would they feel or think? What might they do or say? Play around with the toolkit above to compose a short piece of descriptive writing based on seeing a mysterious door through the eyes of a character.

Here is something to get you going:

Jack stopped in his tracks and stared. There, rising up out of the cliff, stood ...

Session 7: Comprehension & Sentence Work

The following extract is from the prologue of *The Snow-Walker's Son* by Catherine Fisher.

The door was the last one in the corridor.

As the flames flickered over it, they showed it was barred; a hefty iron chain hung across it, and the mud floor beneath was red with rust that had flaked off in the long years of locking and unlocking.

The keeper hung his lantern on a nail, took the key from a dirty string around his neck, and fitted it into the keyhole. Then he looked behind him.

'Get on with it!' the big man growled. 'Let me see what she keeps in there!'

The keeper grinned; he knew fear when he heard it. With both hands he turned the key, then tugged out the red chain in a shower of rust and pushed the door. It opened, just a fraction. Darkness and a damp smell oozed through the black slit.

He stepped well back, handed the stranger the lantern, and jerked his head. He had no tongue to speak with; she'd made sure he kept her secrets.

The stranger hesitated; a draught moved his hair and he gazed back up the stone passageway as if he longed suddenly for warmth and light. And from what I've heard, the keeper thought, you won't be seeing much of those ever again.

Then the man held up the lantern and pushed the door. The keeper watched his face intently in the red glow, and his great hand, as it clutched a luck-stone that swung at his neck. The man went in, slowly. The door closed.

Our thanks to Catherine Fisher for granting us permission to use this extract.

Comprehension:

- ***The door was the last one in the corridor.***
1. What is the significance of the word 'last'?
Can you think of any other contexts where the word last has such a significant meaning? e.g. the last chance.
 2. How does this opening line set the mood of the story? What are your immediate impressions?
- 
- ***As the flames flickered over it, they showed it was barred; a hefty iron chain hung across it, and the mud floor beneath was red with rust that had flaked off in the long years of locking and unlocking.***
3. Having spent a great deal of time reflecting on the significance of doors and their appearance, what does this description suggest to you as a reader?
 4. Why has Fisher described the iron chain as being 'hefty'? What could the significance of this word be in the context of the story?
- ***Darkness and a damp smell oozed through the black slit.***
5. How does this make you feel as a reader? What is the relevance of both darkness and a damp smell? Do these surprise you; if so, why?
- ***What I love about this prologue is the way that Catherine Fisher hooks the reader in and builds immediate tension.***
6. Make a list of all of the ways she captures the reader's interest, e.g. the ambiguous reference to the characters (the keeper/the stranger/she). Make sure you find examples in the text to support your point.

Grammar & sentence work

a. Pattern of three:

Fisher uses the pattern of three to advance the action and inject a sense of pace into her writing. This helps to balance description, action and dialogue. e.g.

- *The keeper hung his lantern on a nail, took the key from a dirty string around his neck, and fitted it into the keyhole.*
- *With both hands he turned the key, then tugged out the red chain in a shower of rust and pushed the door.*
- *He stepped back, handed the stranger the lantern, and jerked his head.*

Can you come up with three of your own sentences using this skill?

b. Semicolon for independent clauses

A semicolon can be used between independent clauses that are closely related in theme. In the following sentences, Catherine Fisher chooses to use semicolons in both of these sentences rather than a conjunction (e.g. because).

- *The keeper grinned; he knew fear when he heard it.*
- *He had no tongue to speak with; she'd made sure he kept her secrets.*

In your opinion, why has she made this choice and what impact does it have on you as the reader?

Can you write two or three sentences of your own that illustrate the power of the semicolon over the use of a conjunction?

c. Adverbs – roving reporters

In the sentence below, the adverb 'slowly' is used to describe how the man enters the room. Adverbs are like roving reporters – they can be moved around the sentence, e.g.

- a. The man went in, slowly.
- b. Slowly, the man went in.
- c. The man went slowly in.
- d. The man slowly went in.



By manipulating the position of the adverb, we can often either alter the meaning or add emphasis to a sentence. In this instance, by placing the slowly at the end, we infer that the character has a heightened awareness of the situation they are in and therefore deliberately enters with caution.

Try playing around with position of the adverb in the following sentence. Consider how it alters the meaning and where the emphasis is best placed.

Cautiously, Samantha crept towards the door that stood before her.

Now try this out with a sentence of your own.

Session 8: Planning a portal story

There are only a few underlying story types, and a portal story is somewhat iconic. Nearly all portal stories follow a similar pattern:

• Main character (MC) finds magical portal and enters new world
• Describe new world
• MC explores this new world and encounters a problem
• MC has to escape and return through the portal
• MC cannot find portal again (sometimes has brought back a memento of new world)

Once you have identified the pattern of the story, the possibilities are endless. Let your imagination run free as the aim is to brainstorm lots of ideas and then decide which captures your interest as a writer. In today's session, see how many different portal stories you can come up with. If you want, you could base our story on what is happening now, where suddenly we seem to have walked through a door and found ourselves in a completely new world where we are trapped behind our front doors. Before you start, take a look at my top tips.

Top tips for story writing:

- Start in a world/a setting that you know well – it is far easier to describe something familiar to you, e.g. a garden, your school, your local town, etc.
- Aid your imagination by using a stimulus for the new world – an image will help you focus in on the detail and describe what is there.
- Either choose an everyday character or one that you are familiar with (e.g. one you have written about before or one based on one you have read about in another story).
- Let your ideas flow – don't worry about spelling, handwriting or presentation ... you can go back and edit this later.



Here are a couple of ideas to open your mind to the world of possibility:

Underlying Pattern	Story idea 1	Story idea 2
Main character (MC) finds magical portal and enters new world	Ellie is playing in her Grandmother's garden and notices a small fairy door. Touches door and shrinks/ enters.	Josh and Archie playing hide and seek in their house. Archie opens hatch to eaves and discovers new world.
Describe new world	Arrives in an underground world full of caves, giant toadstools and magical creatures.	Transported to life onboard HMS Victory in Tudor England.
MC explores new world and encounters a problem	Ellie explores new world and enters an area strictly forbidden. Picks magical flower.	Ship is thrown into battle.
MC has to escape and return through the portal	Alarms sound and Ellie runs. She is chased through the magical world by unknown threat and escapes.	Archie desperately searches for portal and way back to own world.
MC cannot find portal again (sometimes has brought back a memento of new world)	Ellie cannot find fairy door again, but the cut flower lives on forever reminding her of her journey.	Archie escapes with small pouch of gunpowder in his pocket.

Your turn:

Using the boxed-up pattern above, plan a few portal stories of your own. How many different stories you can come up with? You may like to draw upon your own personal experience as well as your wider reading and imagination.

Session 9: New worlds

One of the challenges facing an author of a portal story is when the new world is one outside of our own reality and our world that we know. Whilst fantasy allows us to tap into the world of possibility, it also can lead to low-level writing. The trick is to use an image or stimulus and look closely at it, noticing the elements that catch your eye and are interesting to you as the reader.

The following worked example, based on my story idea 1 above, will show you how to generate ideas, build description and imagery, and then turn this into a setting description.

The stimulus:

Step 1: Focus in on the detail

Look closely at the image and decide what elements are worth describing and exploring further. These will normally be things that you find your eye being naturally drawn to. In this image, I would want to explore the toadstools, the scaffolding staircase, the cave and the light.



Step 2: Generate language and ideas

Take each item in turn and brainstorm any vocabulary that each evokes. Jot down all of the ideas, no matter what pops into your head. Remember, it is often the random ideas that eventually prove to be the most fruitful.

Cave	Toadstools	Scaffolding staircase	Light
vast	neon	entwined	blistering
secluded	domed	snaked	bright
empty	jellyfish	spiral	piercing
hungry	umbrellas	helter-skelter	penetrating
jagged	glisten	swirl	blinding
brittle	glow	whirl	harsh
rough	charred	twirling	intense
lonely	leathery	steely	severe

Step 3: Extend the imagery, focusing on words and their effect

Once you have tuned into the vocabulary that surrounds the image, play with creating short poetic lines. To do this, consider what the items are like or what they are doing. By playing with these ideas, you are in fact exploring figurative techniques such as simile, metaphor and personification. Remember – this is poetry, so focus on each word and make sure it earns its place. Here is an example based on the brainstorm above:

Hungry and alone, the **cave** waits;
Jagged teeth poised in anticipation.
Neon **toadstools** glow;
Jellyfish umbrellas glistening in the darkness.
Like a helter-skelter, a snaked **staircase** swirls,
Seeking solace from the harsh, blistering **light**.

Step 4: Turn the poetry into prose

Now the trick is to hang the narrative onto the poetry. To do this, practise telling the story orally first without the worry of sentence construction, spelling and transcription. It helps if you try to show the new world through the eyes of the main character, as we explored in session 6. In this instance, I am describing what Ellie can see as she enters her underground world. Notice how the opening sentence helps to set this up and how the references from the poem have been used to lead the narrative (shown in bold below).

Ellie gazed upon the world that lay before her. There, swallowed within this monstrous cave, was the only sign of life. Giant **neon toadstools** rose up out of the water like **jellyfish umbrellas**, their rings of purple light illuminating **the darkness**. **Like a helter-skelter, a snaked staircase** entwined itself around shards of rock that seemed to bore down like **jagged teeth, poised in anticipation**. A shiver ran up her spine; she knew this was not the world she longed for in her dreams, but the **harsh, blistering** heat from the sun behind her left her with no choice – she had to go on.

Your turn: Either using an idea from one of your plans from session 8, or using one of the images below, create a short poem that focuses on the interesting detail. Then, have a go at turning this into a short piece of prose, as illustrated above.

Session 10: Writing the story



You now have all of the tools required to write your own portal story. You may like to write about a more traditional portal that leads you to a magical world, or you may prefer to draw upon your personal experiences, as we have explored throughout this unit.

To recap on all of the prior learning:

- a. Consider what the door represents in your story. Not only is this a portal into a new world, it is often an exploration into a character's personalities, their flaws, their inner thoughts. Reflect back on sessions 1 – 3 and consider what the door in your story represents and make sure this is pivotal in the story.
- b. What lies on the other side of that door is up to you. Allow yourself the opportunity to write about what interests you and what is important to you. Look back at your plan and make sure that this is the story you want to tell. If not ... change it! Remember – use a stimulus to help you tune into the detail and bring the new world to life for the reader. Reflect on sessions 4, 5, 8 and 9 as inspiration.
- c. A portal story explores the relationship between a main character and a door that presents itself in their life. This can be both physical and metaphorical. Help the reader empathise with the character by tuning into their thoughts, their decisions, their inner conscience. Look back at session 6 for inspiration.
- d. Great writers 'magpie' and learn from other great writers. Reflect upon the portal stories that you have loved reading and consider what made these so engaging. Try to bring in some of these skills and techniques into your own work. For example, the prologue to *The Snow Walker's Son* – session 7.

- e. Finally, enjoy it. Writing is all about sharing a passion for words, stories and the world of possibility. If you love the story you are writing – so too will your reader.

Your turn:

Now write the portal story that is brimming inside of you, drawing on all that you have learned. Don't forget to share or publish your work – great writing deserves an audience!

This workbook has helped me learn ...

Happy reading and writing!



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Jamie Thomas, former Deputy Head and Head of Warren Teaching School Alliance, now works with Talk for Writing to help schools develop the approach.

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