

UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE

Creative Writing Newsletter

September 2019

Subject Adviser:

Marcia Humphries
2, Seawinds,
Rest Bay Close,
Porthcawl CF36 3UN

u3awriting@hotmail.co.uk

U3A National Office:

The Third Age Trust,
52, Lant Street,
London SE1 1RB

Tel: 020 8466 6139
www.u3a.org.uk

Michaelmas term is when groups start to think about performances of their work at Christmas. Our 3 groups in Porthcawl have for years held a morning of readings in December. On page 2, there are some tips for performing work in public. You need a different approach from that taken when you read to your group.

Autumn is a good time to settle with a book, or take an on-line course to improve your writing. On page 7, I've set out some ideas for what to choose, including a book by Jane Wenham-Jones. Another of her books, 'A Problem Shared, Vol 1' based on her column in Writing magazine, may be downloaded free from Amazon. Jane is now available for Study Days or to speak at U3A meetings (see back page).

Belfast is buzzing..... see pages 2 & 4. If any UK group is interested in a joint writing project with them please email Lena McCann. The address to use is:- chairperson@Belfastu3a.org

Writing prompt : The Garage

Marcia

Change of contact details ?

Please let me know if your postal, or e-mail address or group leader changes, or you no longer wish to receive Newsletters, I will alert U3A National Office, which sends them to you.

E-mails are the simplest way to collect Newsletter entries. Please find someone willing to copy your work and e-mail it to me if you have no access to a computer.

If you write a letter that needs a reply, please remember to enclose s.a.e.

Marcia

DOING IT IN PUBLIC

Sandra Whitnell, Tweeddale U3A

I'd done it before, but in a marquee in a soggy field in Melrose, Scottish Borders, with a good friend. It had been challenging - but exciting, although we did feel self-conscious about being watched. This time was different.

My short story had been published by an online publishing company, Aether/Ichor, who'd not only polished the story but paid me for it! So when they asked me to read an extract at an event organised by Shoreline of Infinity, I felt obliged. OK, you're right, I was flattered, so I agreed. Which is how I ended up in the bierkeller in Frankenstein's bar in Edinburgh one Thursday evening, waiting to perform again.

My brief was to read anything - as long as it only lasted about ten minutes. I decided to read the second half of the published story, 'The True Account of the Pied Piper', prefaced by a short introduction to bring the audience up to speed.

But how do you prepare for something like this? I looked at a YouTube recording of a previous event, which helped. To check the timing, I read the story to myself out loud a few times. One of my main fears was losing my place, so I printed the extract in size 14 font, single sided. I underlined a few words and put in a few emphasis marks.

About 60 people turned up. I was on first. I felt strangely calm. This was it. You've done all you can to prepare, there's no turning back. Try not to trip up getting on stage. Try to ignore the microphone. Smile.....breathe..... and read.

Then applause, thanks from the MC, and back to my table to a large glass of Merlot. I listened to the others reading their funny, witty, moving, inspiring stories. An evening I could never have envisaged being part of, when I started exploring ideas and relationships through storytelling about 5 years ago.

Would I do it again? Bring it on!

You can read Sandra's story at www.aetherandichor.com/2018/12/31/pied-piper

CONGRATULATIONS

Congratulations to Dorothy Byrne (Belfast) who won first prize in the Adult Section of the Lagan Navigation Storytelling festival. Prior to the annual competition the Laganside Trust offered free workshops to Creative Writing Groups in the area to encourage writers to take part by submitting a poem or story on the given theme.

At the festival itself, Dorothy & Belfast U3A Chair, Lena McCann, met writers from Foyle U3A & arranged exchange visits between the Writing groups.

You can read Dorothy's story on the Belfast U3A website.

Foreshadowing

Author does not want to be named

Foreshadowing is a literary device* by which an author hints at a plot development to come. It can be used directly or indirectly, by making explicit statements or leaving clues about what will happen. Foreshadowing should not be mistaken for red herrings....misleading clues to throw the reader off the scent.

Subtle Foreshadowing: a detail the readers don't notice until something happens in the story that makes them look back and say, "Ah, of course!"

Mysterious Foreshadowing: reveals only partial or some details about what will happen. *I thought that was enough trouble for one day; how wrong I was.* Increases suspense/anticipation; the reader wonders how.

Direct Foreshadowing: narrator/character makes an explicit declaration about what will happen later. *That cherub grew up to be a successful comnan.*

Foreshadowing by concern/apprehension: eg a teenager's mother begs her to be back before midnight & worries.....

Foreshadowing by naming an upcoming event: *It would be his first meeting with his birth mother.....* This gives a sense of anticipation.

Foreshadowing through omens/prophecy/premonitions: A magpie/broken mirror.

Foreshadowing with a pre-scene. A man walks out of a bar. Another customer exchanges a look with a third man, who nods slowly. The reader understands the next encounter won't be so uneventful.

Foreshadowing through opinion: When the leading character in a story or novel states an opinion, readers believe them. *I told myself there would be no more bodies, but I didn't believe a word of it.*

Why do writers use foreshadowing?

To encourage readers to focus on specific key details.

To create a sense of surprise when subtle foreshadowing becomes clear.

To create a sense of mystery or tension.

To give scenes a special significance.

To unite a work's beginning with its ending.

To create a thematic connection between different parts of a book.

To create a sense of fate by revealing the ending, putting the focus on the character's struggles against that fate.

*When my own group explored literary devices, there was an unexpected bonus. They found it easy to give feedback when specifically looking for whether a device had been used successfully or not.

Marcia



NEWS FROM THE GROUPS

Sandbach

Our group started 3 years ago & we have a membership of 13 including me as leader. We started off slowly with various prompts for story writing. Confidence grew, & we are now tackling a more varied programme. Last autumn, the Photography group supplied us with a number of images we took as inspiration for short stories, poems, articles about the photos without any knowledge of when & where they were taken. This all became a display by our two groups at the U3A meeting in March which showcased what groups do. Following that we were approached by the Play Reading group to ask if we would write a play for them. We are finding this challenging, but are determined to succeed! Current thoughts involve about 6 characters & it is based on fictional (!) events at a U3A with what we hope will be a dramatic ending. One member has signed up for an on-line writing course & is sharing information with us all, which is interesting & useful. Mostly we just enjoy writing & get pleasure from listening to each other's work each month.

Jinty Pyke

Llandrindod Wells

We marked our 5th birthday by producing an anthology. We put forward work we had appreciated since we started, but no-one was allowed to nominate their own work. The Art group provided illustrations. Kirsty Williams AM, Welsh Government Minister for Education, provided a £250 grant towards publishing costs from a fund supporting charities with educational aims. The result is "The Art of Creative Writing" featuring 34 stories & 23 illustrations. It costs £7.75 (inc p&p) & profits go to Welsh Air Ambulance. To purchase contact kathieerjones@btinternet.com

Kathie Richards-Jones

Witham & District (Essex)

Miall E James

We recently ran a joint project with the Photo Group. This was as a result of reading about another U3A doing something similar. The Photographers provided pictures which were allocated, sight unseen, to the Writers. A picture of a War Memorial turned into a poignant story about a soldier killed in Iraq. One of a showgirl generated a grandfather's reminiscence about life in 1930's Berlin. Another, of a seashore, brought forth a dark tale of mutual betrayal! We tried going the other way, with photographers illustrating stories, but that didn't seem to work quite as well. Some of the stories & pictures were showcased at the full U3A's monthly meeting & there was a lot of interest. We are thinking about either producing a book or repeating the exercise again....or, both!

Belfast

Lena McCann

For the second year running, we did a joint project with the Photography Group. They presented photos from which we made a selection & wrote stories either about or inspired by them. All Belfast U3A members were invited to a photo display, where we read our stories & gave copies to the photographers. In June, Adrian Ross, Convenor of the Photography Group & I led a similar project at the NI Regional Summer School. It was extremely well received & members of other U3As present invited us to visit them & help set up similar projects. Some of our writers have read stories on BBC Radio Ulster's "Time of Our Lives" programme. We continue to seek new ways & ideas to keep our group vibrant.



BASIC RULES OF PLAYS & LAYOUT

Maggie Smith*

Create a realistic world. Write conflict that builds as the play progresses & characters who want something, with a consequence if it is not achieved. Create a ticking clock; put characters under pressure. It's not enough for them to talk; there needs to be a reason we're watching them. Write dialogue that illuminates your characters & advances the plot; give each a distinctive voice plus something to justify their existence & make them attractive for an actor to play. Do not have a character tell something he can show. Punctuate carefully. Punctuation tells the director & actor how your characters speak & makes a difference to actors' inflection.

Cover: Title & duration, author's name & contact details at the bottom.

Title page: A list of characters' names, & brief descriptions if necessary. The location, & any essential elements of the set. Act/Scene Heading (unless only 1) - description of opening setting - the place & time, as well as who & what's in the space when the play starts.

General Layout: Title of play/page number at top of every page after the cover. A4 paper, preferably 3 hole punch. Top & bottom margins about 1" Right margin & left margins approximately 1.5". Page numbering starts on page 2, upper right hand corner (in the header). Unless font is specified, use 12 point Times New Roman. Characters' names may appear before & in the stage directions. Names that precede dialogue are always capitalized.

Continuing dialogue: If a character's dialogue is interrupted by a page break, repeat the character name set-up on the next page with (cont'd) after the name. When a character walks offstage while speaking either note this as part of the stage directions, or alongside the character's name. If the character is offstage, write "Offstage" or "Off."

Simultaneous dialogue. If characters speak at the same time, create columns, placing names above their columns. Indent any stage directions 1" instead of 2".

MAN Say it with me: only diamonds do it.

MAN BEN

Only diamonds do it. Only diamonds do it.

Stage directions: Make them concise & readable. Indent them (except for opening scene) 2" from the left margin, & let them wrap at the right margin. Stage directions always follow a blank line, & are either inserted single spaced, preferably in italics, within dialogue or on their own between speakers, preceded & followed by a blank line. The terms right, centre & left are theatrical shorthand for Stage Right, etc. Right & left always refer to the actors' right & left. Sometimes you'll see terms from early theatre "upstage" or "downstage." Stages were raked. Walking towards the back of the stage, literally meant walking up; toward the audience was walking down.

End the play with: Lights fade; Blackout; or Curtain.

*Maggie Smith was of course my predecessor as Subject Adviser for Creative Writing, holding the post for 11 years. She is still living life to the full & the second volume of her memoirs, 'Miles to Go' is now available from Amazon, or via her blog at <https://gettingitdownonpaper.wordpress.com/>

Marcia

INSPECTOR ALUN RYGA

Pauline Rowson on how she came up with her new Scotland Yard detective

I wanted to feature the sea - my trademark/brand - so created former Merchant Seaman, Inspector Alun Ryga who is called on to solve coastal murder mysteries around the country. He had to be different from DI Andy Horton & Art Marvik, who feature in my other books. I chose to make him a former prisoner-of-war whose merchant vessel had been seized by a German Raider in 1941, so that he spent the rest of the war in MILAG. Here he had to cope with the uncertainty, fear & deprivations of incarceration, with no option but to pray that the war would end in Nazi defeat. That experience made him observant, analytical & reflective. He witnessed compassion, cruelty, cowardice & heroism, mental breakdown & despair, giving him insights into his fellow man. He promised himself that in future he'd keep an open mind & never judge.

After the war, Ryga was able to make the transition from the Merchant Navy to the Thames River Police. After 2 successful criminal investigations at the Port of London using his knowledge of men & the sea, he was catapulted into the Metropolitan Police, then into CID in Scotland Yard.

Hailing from Wales, he started off as Inspector Rees. It wasn't until I heard another character, Eva, a forthright war photographer, address him as Rees that it sounded wrong. I changed it to Regan, then Rega & then Ryga, rhyming with tiger, it sounded good coming from Eva.....sharp, edgy. (Another example of a character making changes was when I discovered that Ryga was a good pianist!)

Death in the Cove is set in 1950, when memories of the war are strong, austerity & rationing still in place, & fears of more world conflicts haunt people. Society & policing in the 1950s was vastly different to today, no mobile phones, no dashing about, no computers, so it was fascinating to research & write. (Some of the research was quite basic. I wrote that a character was making tea with a teabag.....checking revealed they were not in general use here until 1953!)

Ryga's experiences have made him unique in his approach to solving coastal based crimes. Now he is being called on to use his knowledge of the sea on his first solo investigation outside London, to discover why a man in a pinstriped suit has been stabbed in the neck & ended up dead on the beach of a cove on Portland on the Dorset coast.

Death in the Cove is published in paperback, e-book, Amazon Kindle, Kobo & as an audio book this month.

Pauline Rowson is a regular speaker at U3A groups. You may confidently recommend her to your committee as a speaker at main meetings where she can talk about her life as a crime writer. She would also be ideal as a speaker at Study Days and can be contacted via her website: www.rowmark.co.uk The website is worth a look (you can also sign up for her free newsletter) even if you don't want to contact her quite yet. She also has a You Tube Channel showing videos of her interviews and talks. <http://www.youtube.com/paulinerowson13> You can follow her on Twitter & Facebook.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

Back to Creative Writing School, by Bridget Whelan. This is like having an informal chat with an expert. It shows you the basics & makes you believe you can write.

Wannabe a Writer?, by Jane Wenham-Jones This book is chatty & full of humour, but the author really knows her subject. It is packed with sound, practical advice, delivered in a way that makes the book a good, enjoyable read.

A Novel in a Year, by Louise Doughty A frank and funny approach to the practicalities and techniques of novel writing.

FREE ON-LINE RESOURCES

U3ACW Our own on-line forum, containing lots of material for writing groups.

TED (Technology, Entertainment & Design) Search for TED talks on Creative Writing.

MOOCS (Massive open on-line courses). Search for MOOCS on Creative Writing.

FUTURE LEARN: Short courses supported by O.U. Some on Creative Writing.

WRITING EXERCISE

Bridget Whelan, author of the first book listed above, has kindly provided the following exercise you may try in your groups.

Answer these questions - put down the first thing that comes into your head:-

1. If you were a colour what colour would you be?
2. If you could listen to any piece of music what would it be?
3. If you were a plant, flower or tree what would you be?
4. Write down a sound that reminds you of being a child.
5. What time of day do you prefer?
6. What's your favourite smell?
7. What's your favourite flavour?
8. What kinds of weather do you like best?
9. If you were to put your hand out what would you like to touch?

Turn your answers into a passage of writing. You don't have to keep to this order or reveal that you're writing about yourself. In fact you could write about someone else (a grandchild or even a pet) Add detail, but don't explain unless you want to. It could be a poem, or prose.

STUDY DAY SPEAKERS

Charles Whittaker has led Henley U3A Writing group for some years. He is available to speak at Study days and may be contacted at :- Xanadu212@gmail.com

Jane Wenham-Jones (see front page & page 7) is an entertaining speaker, presenter & author of 9 books who gave her first talk to a U3A group in 2018 & thoroughly enjoyed it. Jane is an experienced creative writing tutor & agony aunt for Writing Magazine. See her website www.janewenham-jones.com or look her up on twitter, facebook or youtube. She has interviewed top authors & celebrities & has tales from the world of publishing as well as sound writing advice.

COMPETITIONS

Free e-mail bulletin Chainlinks is a good way to keep abreast of what's on. E-mail Maria Owen and ask to be put on the mailing-list. maria.owen@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk

NEED HELP GETTING PUBLISHED?

Maghull & Lydiate member, Dr Alan Corkish, has experience as a senior editor & in typesetting & cover design. He is willing to advise U3A members or groups (including editing) free of charge.

www.erbacce-press.com

HELP FOR PLAYWRIGHTS

Player Playwrights has provided space for writers to try out work since 1948.

Professional actors read your work before a knowledgeable audience. This London-based group also holds regular play competitions & talks with agents, casting directors & other theatre professionals.

www.playerplaywrights.co.uk

tonydiggle@cainct.co.uk

In My Own Write showcases writing by U3A members. It has moved to its own U3A Facebook page. <https://www.facebook.com/U3AInMyOwnWrite/> & is able to include short stories from U3A writing groups, so they reach an audience outside the groups themselves. For details of how to have your stories featured, contact the editors via Facebook or email simmsmaggy15@gmail.com (put IMOW as the subject).



USEFUL INFORMATION

Sources: An educational magazine on the U3A national website.



U3A Resource Centre: A collection of material (not books) to borrow free of charge, apart from return postage. email:resource.centre@u3a.org

Among its most requested items are the online courses in creative writing and poetry writing.

Handbook for U3A Creative Writing Groups £2.50 (inc p&p) from National Office (address page 1) Cheques payable to The Third Age Trust

Subject Adviser

Please feel free to contact me for help. My contact details are on the front page.

Study Days

I have a useful handout for groups thinking of hosting one.

ARTICLES FOR NEXT ISSUE



Please send me items, however brief, as attachments to an e-mail unless there is no-one in your group who can do this and you have to send by post.

Please include: group news, comments, ideas, useful websites, magazines, books, competitions, anything worth sharing.....

U3Awriting@hotmail.co.uk

DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE
15th December

Marcia