

Facilitating Bibliotherapy
A Complementary Section to
Facilitating
Groups / Writing / Reading / Speaking / Listening

Variations for Groups That Use Writing, Story-telling or Literary Resources

Types of Groups

The Writing Group

For some the focus is almost exclusively on the writing or story-telling.

Personal questions, personal feedback, and emotional or cognitive sharing is limited. The feedback, IF, IF, requested or a norm of the group is about ways the writing can be improved.

The Literary Support Group

(meaning that everyone knows that writing or literary prompts are part of the process)

Literature prompts or writing exercises are used to both strengthen writing skills and discipline AND to support people in giving voice.

Feedback may be limited to “Thank you”, pause, “Do you want to say anything about your writing?”

Personal feedback is limited to on request only.

A Support Group

It may or may not be known in advance that writing or literary prompts will be utilized. The focus is on support for uncertainty, disruptive changes, new ventures, personal development, and the like.

For this model, the facilitator uses writing or literary prompts as a TOOL to prompt personal reflection, discernment and / or development.

Workshops

Workshops can be any combination of the above. The key is advertising what will occur. Truth in advertising.

******IMPORTANT ******

Except for The Writing Group and advertised workshops, there is little if any attention to grammar, punctuation, or critical feedback about the writing!!

Use Of Literary Resources, Especially Poetry, In Group Settings

Poetry Can Be A Tool For:

Assigning A Name

Creating Metaphors

**Restoring The Person's
Sense Of Control**

Establishing The Person's Authority

**Exploration And Acceptance
Of Living with Uncertainty**

From *The Healing Art* By Rafael Campo

Two Quotes that Address Use of Literary Resources

Once a book is published, it no longer belongs to me. My creative task is done. The work now belongs to the creative mind of my readers. I had my turn to make of it what I would, now it is their turn. I have no more right to tell readers how they should respond to what I have written than they had to tell me how to write it. It's a wonderful feeling when readers hear what I thought I was trying to say, but there is no law that they must. Frankly, it is even more thrilling for a reader to find something in my writing that I hadn't until that moment known was there. But this happens because of who the reader is, not simply because of who I am or what I am doing.

from *A sense of wonder: on reading and writing books for children* (1995) by Katherine Paterson. New York: Plume Books, pp. 34.

Someone might read what I wrote and discover something there that I myself did not see but which might just as valid as my original thought. It seems important to allow this to happen. If I were to try to prevent people from drawing "wrong" implications from my thoughts, I might fall into the temptation of thinking that I know already what all the implications are. Maybe I should be happy that I do not know them. In this way, many people with quite different stories can move between the lines of my hesitant ideas, opinions, and viewpoints and there create their own.

from *Seeds of hope: a Henri Nouwen reader* (1989) edited by Robert Durback: New York: Bantam Books, p. 3.

Reading Appreciation Steps for Small Groups*

1. Copies of the chosen text are handed out to each participant, who reads silently, reflecting on paper their first impressions, responses, likes & dislikes.
2. One person reads the work aloud without any introduction.
3. If the text is short another person reads the piece aloud. If it's a very short piece, a third member of the group reads the piece aloud.
4. If the chosen text is long, go around the group taking turns reading following the natural punctuation, stanzas, paragraphs.
5. The group discusses what the piece is about – no agreement or consensus is needed, the more diverse the opinions, the more fruitful for the writer. Try turning your questions to a statements – guessing what the writer intended. Are there any gaps in your understanding?
6. What immediately touches you about this piece of writing?
7. The group discusses what they, specifically, like about the writing – How the piece achieves its effects? Voice / viewpoint; line endings, rhythm, rhyme; the language, imagery; layout, stanzas, white space, punctuation; beginnings and endings
8. How does the title work with the main body of the piece?
9. Finally, if this was your piece of writing, can you think of any way you could make it better? What changes would you make? Again no agreement or consensus is needed, the more diverse the opinions, the more fruitful for the writer. Be specific in your suggestions
10. The piece is read aloud again.

* *This process is based on the workshops facilitated by Professor Philip Hobsbaum who taught at both Belfast and Glasgow University (Seamus Heaney was a student in the first group); and further suggestions from Larry Butler and Linda France who teaches on the creative writing Masters at Newcastle University.*

Why Writing?

It says the unsayable.
Gives voice to the voiceless.
It's a lifetime's work –
Handwork, whole body work.

It gives form to chaos.
It reflects the present moment,
Changes the past
And creates the future.

It can exist forever
Or completely disappear.
It is what it is.
It can always be changed.

It's where the impossible
Becomes the possible.
It takes us out of ourselves
And into ourselves.

It is where we live our unlived lives,
Where we can surprise ourselves.
It is fire.
Only we can write our writing.

(by Victoria Field from Writing Works, a resource handbook
for therapeutic writing workshops & activities)

“That’s the way writing often starts, a disaster or a catastrophe of some sort, as happened to me . . . And I think that’s the basis for my continued interest in writing, because by writing I rescue myself under all sorts of conditions, whatever it may be that has upset me, then I can write and it relieves the feeling of distress.”

William Carlos Williams, MD

Storytelling Ideas for Workshops

- 1) Invite participants to sign their name on a flip chart and tell the story of their name. If they don't know the story of how they got their name, invite them to say a few words about whether they like the name or not, or if they have a nick name, to tell about that. Good icebreaker activity. Everyone always has something to say about their name.
- 2) Bring a bag of coins, with a variety of dates on them. Let participants choose a coin by simply taking one from the bag, get them to look at the date. Ask them to think about their life during that year. Did they go on a memorable holiday, were they at school or college, what music did they listen to, clothes they wore, etc. If it's a year they don't wish to contemplate, then allow them to choose another coin.

Ask everyone to stand up, move around a little and find a partner. Explain that each person will have 1/2/3 minutes (depends on the size of the group and how much time you wish to spend on this) to describe their life during the year of their coin. When they hear a bell (or whatever sound you care to make), that is their time up for that pair. They should then exchange coins and find a new partner and repeat until the bell sounds. Repeat as many times as you wish. Have spare coins that people can exchange if they don't like the year or perhaps they hadn't been born by the date on their coin!

Also good as an icebreaker, however this could be developed into a writing exercise by asking participants to write about the memories stimulated during the exercise, with a writing prompt of '1988....' i.e. writing the year that was memorable and free flow writing for 8 mins.

- In pairs, ask participants to take a few items from their pocket or bag and tell the story of the item to their partner.
- Tell, read, or listen to a story, to get the creative juices flowing. To assist in telling a 'group story', take a bag of items (an interesting collection of items, weird and ordinary) and place them in the centre of the room. Begin an improvised story, e.g. 'Once there was a sailor, who loved to dance', pass the story to the next person in the circle, for them to tell a few lines of the story. If they wish they can use the props bag to help inspire the next part of the story. The story passes around the circle until the last person finishes the story. (Participants just put their hand inside the bag and bring out whatever comes, they only choose by feeling around the bag and not by looking).

- Tell, read, or listen to a story or song. Choose a phrase, or image or feeling inspired from the story or song, that comes to your mind and free flow write about this for 8 mins.
- Tell, read or listen to a story. Write a letter to one of the characters in the story e.g. write a letter for sleeping beauty to read when she wakes up.
- Tell or listen to a story, pause the story at a point where the protagonist is faced with a dilemma. Write a letter, to the character in the story, offering advice.

Stories may be read or a recording listened to, however ideally they should be told orally; 'eye to eye, heart to heart and soul to soul' in the true storytelling tradition, (proverb from the Scottish travellers community) Lesley O'Brien