



Creative writing in schools

An evidence review of the benefits of introducing creative writing for pleasure in a school setting.

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Evidence review

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Attainment through creativity

'The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice' (Article 13, United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child).

There is a solid base of evidence which suggests that creative writing can have a significant positive impact on school pupils (Bernardes & Menzies, 2017). An enjoyment of writing and positive attitude towards writing is linked to higher mental wellbeing scores which take into account confidence, life and coping skills, and satisfaction for young people (Clark, 2018).

Scottish Book Trust's fully funded Live Literature [author visits](#) or [school residencies](#) are the perfect opportunity to introduce your class to the benefits of creative writing.

'Writers visiting schools can make a significant difference to children and young people's attitudes to and enjoyment of writing, offering new perspectives on writing and what it can do' (Horner, 2010).

Boosting confidence and imagination

Research shows that the creative and imaginative aspects of an activity are key to allowing pupils to reap the benefits from creative writing. These expressive elements increase pupil confidence, enthusiasm, and creativity in their own ideas and abilities.

- 'In our focus groups, teens said they are motivated to write when they can select topics that are relevant to their lives and interests, and report greater enjoyment of school writing when they have the opportunity to write creatively' (Pew Research Center, 2008).
- 'One of the reasons young people enjoy participating in creative writing activities with writers is the space it gives them to develop and explore their own ideas, build their confidence and overcome their initial fears of writing' (Millard et al 2019).
- Pupils who enjoy writing 'Are more likely, on average, to rate themselves as better writers (mean 7.69/10 vs. 6.11/10)' (Clark and Teravainen, 2017).
- 'Young people feel creative writing is worthwhile because it helps them learn new things in school, and because it is enjoyable and fun' (Millard et al 2019).
- 'More children and young people who had a writer visit have high reading (45.3%) and writing (32.3%) attitudes compared with either the sample as a whole (31.6% and 24.8%) or their peers who didn't have a visit (26.1% and 21.6%).' (Clark & Lant 2019).

Nurturing wellbeing

Studies from the National Literacy Trust found that there is a high correlation between positive attitudes to reading and writing and a high level of mental wellbeing (Clark & Teravanien-Goff 2018). Evidence collected through Scottish Book Trust evaluations during the 2021 Live Literature author residencies in schools suggested that pupils found the experience of writing creatively soothing and empowering. Learning professionals described how the residency particularly benefited marginalised pupils such as LGBT+ or neurodiverse pupils, as well as reluctant readers.

- '... writing provided a lifeline for many during the pandemic, with children and young people telling us that they started writing in the pandemic to cope with anxiety but also to stay connected with people' (Clark, Best & Picton, 2021).
- '2 in 5 (38.3%) children and young people agreeing that writing makes them feel better' (Clark, Best & Picton, 2021).
- 'Writing to support mental wellbeing also emerged as an important theme, with 3 in 10 saying that they write because it helps them relax, and nearly 1 in 4 saying they write because it makes them feel happy or feel more confident. One in 6 write to support causes and issues they care about, and 1 in 7 write because it makes them feel connected to the world' (Clark, Best & Picton, 2021).

Improving skills

Skills improvement reported through engaging in creative writing include social skills, resilience, communication, and critical thinking (Bernandes & Menzies 2017).

Scottish Book Trust findings from creative writing in schools programmes also suggest that the enthusiasm and confidence gained through writing creatively has a positive impact on pupil literacy.

- 'One pupil increased his reading age by over 4 years!' (Learning professional, feedback on a Scottish Book Trust writer residency, received by email in 2021).
- '[...] seven times as many children and young people who enjoy writing write above the expected level for their age compared with those who don't enjoy writing (23.2% vs. 3.2%)' (Clark and Teravainen-Goff, 2017).
- 'Creative writing aids language development at all levels: grammar, vocabulary, phonology and discourse. It requires learners to manipulate the language in interesting and demanding ways in attempting to express uniquely personal meanings' (Tok & Kandemir, 2015).
- 'It's absolutely worth it. Pupils and staff will have a wonderful experience with an author which will have a huge impact on their writing skills' (Learning professional end of project survey, Scottish Book Trust, 2021).

Sources

Find out more about the evidence underpinning the benefits of creativity and writing in schools.

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