

BEN MELLOR

Creative Writing & Spoken Word in Schools & Colleges

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I'm a socially-engaged creative writing facilitator and project manager with over twenty years of experience working in schools, libraries, arts centres and community settings across the UK. I hold a Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching Creative Writing from the University of Cambridge, awarded with Distinction in 2025.

I believe that, at its heart, writing is an act of exploration and discovery. In environments that focus relentlessly on grades and outcomes, I try to cultivate a space where young people can lose themselves in the process of creating, find their own voice, and experience the genuine pleasure of writing as an end in itself. Much of my practice draws on flow theory: designing sessions in which participants become so absorbed that the writing which emerges surprises even them.

I specialise in writing for the stage as well as for the page, working with the voice and body to bring words to life. I bring many years of varied experience as a theatre-maker, spoken word and music performer and slam poet to how I teach composition and reading aloud. Many of my sessions move between writing and speaking, treating oracy and literacy as inseparable.

I work flexibly with schools and colleges: single workshop visits, half-day or full-day sessions, and longer-term programmes. Everything can be tailored to your students, your circumstances and your goals.

SAMPLE WORKSHOPS

Silence & Sound: Writing from John Cage's 4'33''

We begin by listening to John Cage's legendary 1952 composition: four minutes and thirty-three seconds of a pianist not playing the piano. Students free-write for exactly that duration about everything they can hear in the silence around them. This becomes raw material for a poem, exploring how language can capture and play with the noise of everyday life. Poems by Norma Farber and Karla Kuskin provide contrast and inspiration.

Curriculum links: creative writing, poetry, music. KS3–5. 60–90 mins.

Unnecessary Obstacles: Constrained Writing & Creative Play

Inspired by Bernard Suits' definition of a game as "a voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles," this session invites students to write using self-chosen formal constraints: univocalism (using only one vowel), abecedarian writing, Fibonacci poems, haiku, cinquains, or a rule of their own invention. Constraint often tends to unleash creativity.

Curriculum links: poetry, form and structure, grammar, creative play. KS2–5. 60–90 mins.

Writing Out Loud: Spoken Word & the Performing Voice

Lawrence Ferlinghetti believed that poetry should be composed on the tongue, not the page – that the voice is the primary instrument, and writing simply a record of what the mouth already knows. Students begin by speaking and listening rather than writing: improvising phrases aloud, noticing rhythm, breath and emphasis, before moving to the page to capture and develop what they find. Students then read their pieces aloud to a partner and revise in response to how they sound rather than how they look. The session draws on the spoken word tradition: John Cooper Clarke, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Kae Tempest, or others chosen for the group. It builds public speaking confidence as well as creative skill.

Curriculum links: spoken word, oracy, performance, poetry, public speaking. KS3–5. 60–90 mins.

PROGRAMMES

Single workshops are a great starting point, but the deepest work tends to happen over sustained time. I offer longer programme models, and am always happy to design something bespoke. Here are two examples of extended projects I have recently delivered:

The Long Game

Six sessions delivered over a term or half-year, spaced to allow reflection and re-writing time between them. Sessions cover a range of forms: poetry, flash fiction, autobiographical and constrained writing, building towards a final public sharing and an in-house printed pamphlet of the group's work. The group decides the title, structure and contents together, and as far as possible produce and host the event themselves.

Suitable for KS3–5 and FE. Groups of 8–20. Bespoke rates: get in touch to discuss.

Ink Tank | Spoken Word, Music & Poetry

A programme for older students exploring the crossover between spoken word poetry and music, with a deliberately diverse stimulus canon: Gil Scott-Heron, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Self Esteem, Kae Tempest, Dr John Cooper Clarke, Danez Smith, and others. Each session pairs a text with a creative writing task: epistolary writing, didactic voice, place-based poetry, political lyric, treating the tongue and the page as equal starting points. The second half of the programme focuses on editing, peer feedback and preparing work for a public sharing or digital recording. Works well with students who engage with music and find conventional writing tasks difficult, and delivers strong oracy as well as literacy outcomes.

Suitable for KS4–5 and FE. Eight sessions minimum. Bespoke rates: get in touch to discuss.

TEACHER CPD

I offer CPD workshops for English and literacy staff: one hour to half a day, drawing on current research and my postgraduate work at Cambridge. Sessions are practical, hands-on and immediately usable:

- Creating the conditions for flow: designing writing tasks that get the best work out of a group
- Giving and receiving feedback: working with adolescent writers' sensitivity to criticism
- Widening the range of texts your students encounter: a decolonised approach to stimulus
- Constrained forms and creative games: using formal constraints as liberation, not limitation

WHAT PEOPLE SAY

"Ben has now delivered two long-term creative writing programmes for us and has been excellent in every respect. He is as skilled and passionate a teacher as he is a writer."

— Luke Richardson, English Department, Trinity Catholic High School, Manchester

"Ben delivered our project just how we wanted, while adding his own unique blend of talents. He's really great with children and teachers, and very sensitive to their needs."

— Elvie Thompson, Lead Learning Producer North, British Library

"All of us – the WoW staff, the school staff and the pupils enjoyed a friendly day of first-class creativity, and were inspired by how many young people went from workshop to performance in a matter of a couple of hours."

– Mike Morris, Co-Director, Writing On The Wall Festival

"Ben has been coming to us for over ten years, and over that time we've developed our work together from one-off workshops to a programme culminating in a performance each Spring. He creates a warm, humorous and welcoming creative space, responds flexibly to the students he has in front of him, and shows them the value of crafting a piece over time through redrafting. Every year I'm so proud to see what the students have done and watch their confidence develop. The school would be a less creatively rich place without him."

– Annabelle Lloyd-Hughes, English Teacher, Manchester Grammar School

Enhanced DBS (current) · Designated Safeguarding Lead · Mental Health First Aider (Youth) · First Aid at Work · Arts Award adviser (all levels)

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