

Case Study: Lucy Davis, LRC Manager, Tomlinscote School, Frimley, Surrey

The introduction of "Free Writing Friday" sessions with the students in the LRC

Lucy Davis is the LRC manager at Tomlinscote School and introduced "Free Writing Friday" sessions. These were available for any students in the school wishing to sign up and took place during the lunchtime every Friday in the LRC. The sessions allowed the students to write (and draw) freely without their work being marked or assessed.

The project was introduced because the school has a focus on raising achievement and developing independent learners. It also has a focus on literacy and developing creative thinkers, and these sessions encouraged an environment within the school that promoted writing for pleasure. It was based on the following resources:

- Cressida Cowell – "Free Writing Friday" initiative as featured in her World Book Day 2019 SKYPE classroom session (www.hachetteschools.co.uk/blog/2018/04/24/cressida-cowells-free-writing-friday/)

The sessions were widely advertised throughout the school, via the parent newsletter, the weekly Staff Bulletin notice, posters for all KS3 Tutor Group classrooms, posters for all English classrooms and through the LRC twitter account.

The English department were kept informed as to the purpose and process of the sessions, and were kept up-to-date on a regular basis as the sessions progressed; this included the amount of students attending as well as the positive feedback from the students. The English staff were incredibly supportive of the sessions and proactively engaged in conversations with the students within their English lessons. Some of the English staff participated in the sessions.

There was a dedicated "Free Writing Friday" display in the LRC which was constantly updated and showcased the students work in progress; this attracted a lot of attention from students and staff and became a regular talking point!

The Senior Leadership Team was supportive of the project and regularly visited the sessions.

Between 35 and 40 students (from YR7 to YR10) attended the weekly sessions, and a large number of them chose to take their "Free Writing Friday" books home to continue working on them in between each session. Students worked freely within the sessions and they collaborated with each other when they felt they needed to. Supportive guides (as provided by Cressida Cowell through www.hachetteschools.co.uk/blog/2018/04/24/cressida-cowells-free-writing-friday/) were available to all students that attended.

It was explained to the students that the sessions were for creative writing (and drawing) and that any work produced by them would not be assessed or graded.

During some of the sessions we watched various authors, talking about their writing techniques, through online SKYPE sessions, online videos and the Authorfy resources. The students found this very motivational and interesting. By doing this it also demonstrated to the students that writing is a very individual process and that many different techniques could be used.

Discussions were actively encouraged throughout the sessions, and the environment was welcoming, neutral and motivational. The students created a positive atmosphere and encouraged each other from the very first session. The students' techniques, ideas and abilities were varied but everyone felt liberated to be able to write (and draw) so freely, without judgement, that was the key driving factor. All necessary resources were provided for the students i.e. writing (and drawing) books, colouring pencils, colouring pens, rubbers etc. and lots of students were very excited to be given their own A5 exercise book to use.

Responses to the student feedback survey:

Q1. Why did you sign up to the "Free Writing Session?"

Caitlin, YR8 : *"I've always loved creative writing. I've been writing my own books and stories ever since I could write. "Free Writing Friday" is a great opportunity to explore your imagination and put your ideas to paper in the best way possible."*

Jas, YR8: "I thought it was a smart idea to store memories and ideas through story writing."

Cristyn, YR8: "to have space to do writing creatively."

Evie, YR7: "because it makes me happy to write private things."

Amelia, YR7: "I love English and it's so nice to relax, draw and write with nobody telling you what to do!"

Isabelle, YR8: "Because me and my brother always create ideas and make stories together and sometimes writing calms me down."

Kaia, YR7: "I thought it would be fun."

Maddie, YR7: "I enjoy writing and drawing."

Jacob, YR8: "To improve my drawing and writing skills."

Jessica, YR7: "I like writing books and using creative ideas."

Annabel, YR8: "Because all of my friends were doing it and I write books in my free time."

Q2. What have you most enjoyed about the sessions so far?

Caitlin, YR8: "Being able to take part in it with my friends, and discuss and explore my ideas with them."

Charlotte, YR8: "The fact that it is really quiet and I can come up with more ideas in this environment."

Jas, YR8: "Being creative about writing."

Cristyn, YR8: "Writing what I want with no restrictions!"

Catherine, YR7: "Spending time with my friends and having a creative atmosphere."

Amelia, YR7: "Writing as much as I want."

Isabelle, YR8: "Writing out my creative ideas."

Kaia, YR7: "Getting good ideas and being able to share them."

Maddie, YR7: "I have enjoyed the creativity."

Jacob, YR8: "The freedom to draw and write."

Q3. What has surprised you when attending the sessions?

Caitlin, YR8: "That everything was provided! Oh my god, we get books, pens and paper, and inspiration from Cressida Cowell."

Charlotte, YR8: "The amount of people that have turned up to the sessions!"

Jas, YR8: "That so many of my friends also attend."

Cristyn, YR8: "How much fun it is."

Evie, YR7: "That I enjoyed it so much."

Isabelle, YR8: "Reading my stories to friends repeatedly to find more ideas."

Maddie, YR7: "How enjoyable the sessions are."

Cassandra, YR8: "That we can talk and discuss ideas."

Jessica, YR7: "I didn't realise it was so fun."

Annabel, YR7: "I ended up writing more."

Q4. What do you hope to achieve by attending these sessions?

Caitlin, YR8: "To write a full book. I can never finish a good story (at least that what my lovely mum teases me about!) so I want to write a whole and complete story for her in time for her birthday."

Charlotte, YR8: "To write a story and have better ideas for the other ones I write."

Oliver, YR8: "I want to be better at writing."

Jas, YR8: "A good end story or a ton of ideas!"

Cristyn, YR8: "To produce one creative story."

Catherine, YR7: "A story that I can build upon."

Amelia, YR7: "Lots of new ideas and a broader vocabulary."

Isabelle, YR8: "To have written more stories."

Kaia, YR7: "To be able to draw better."

Maddie, YR7: "Becoming a more developed writer."

Jacob, YR8: "I hope to finish my own story."

English teacher feedback

English teacher 1: "The sessions are very exciting and a lovely idea. I have found that students do struggle with imagination and having a safe space to explore ideas and concepts. This allows students of all abilities to feel included and involved. I also feel it will help students to build on their vocabulary as the LRC space allows them to have access to resources and minds they may not ordinarily access. The chance to engage with new topics (prompts) will allow and benefit them in both English and cross curricular. I look forward to exploring the opportunities that I could develop and support students with free writing in my lessons."

English teacher 2 : *"This sounds like a great idea. As an English teacher, it is going to develop students imagination, vocabulary and give them a more developed understanding of writing creatively: structure, characters and setting. We have a lot of students who say they don't know what to do, so hopefully this will get students to become more independent with creating ideas."*

The "Free Writing Friday" sessions have become a talking point within the school both with staff and students, and a writing culture is developing within the school. Students can be heard discussing what they've been writing at home in between the sessions, and seeking out teachers and LRC staff to show them what they've been writing!

In order to sustain this project, the "Free Writing Friday" sessions will continue to run in the school and become a permanent extra-curricular opportunity for the students. The sessions will continue to develop (in student numbers, range of resources available to the students, and links with the English teaching staff) with the LRC Manager continuing to highlight and showcase the work produced by the students to the English teachers and SLT. The LRC Manager will also gather regular feedback from the students attending the sessions at the end of each term to ascertain student enjoyment and help guide developments for future sessions. The LRC Manager will promote the initiative to the local Primary schools with a view to them adopting a similar format in their schools for their students.

Tips:

1. Don't be too prescriptive with how the sessions should run - it's important that the students are allowed to be creative and mistakes are encouraged!
2. Have some helpful tips, advice and resources available for the students to use if they need guidance. Cressida's World Book Day 2019 SKYPE session was used in the second week to outline the principles and background of the sessions. Inspirational writing quotes were created which were displayed on the tables each week and 100 "story starter cards" were available for students to use if they got stuck for ideas.
3. Provide everything the students will need: a book (for them to draw and write in), colouring pencils, drawing pencils, rubbers etc.