

Creativity Prompt Ideas for Literature

As part of our recent work with Hull City of Culture's "No Limits" strand, which aimed to improve the engagement of children & young people with culture, we created a series of creativity activity ideas. These ideas are practical, adaptable to different ability groups and easy to incorporate into a wide variety of settings. They're very effective at inspiring pupils to think creatively, generate new ideas and use their imagination.

Mud smells. Smells as Stimulus.

Gather a selection of strong-smelling goods: coffee, vinegar, basil, cheese, chocolate, etc. Students line up with eyes shut. Walk down the line with one smell at a time. Students sniff and go with whatever their physical reaction is and exaggerate it and freeze. When all frozen, get students to move as this new shape should (shuffling, marching, crawling). Freeze again. If this shape is a person, who is it? If it's a monster, what is it? What do they sound like whilst adopting this position? Move again, this time greeting others in their new voice. What's their back story? Who are their friends? Write the monologue of their life. Put these new characters into groups and interact over a given circumstance: stuck in a lift, hostages, arriving at their first day at a new club, etc. This can be linked to the Comedy & Circus prompts.

Mud Sound Story

You/ your students record various sounds of mud and it being manipulated, dropped, thrown, etc. Imagine these sounds now as:

- Sounds from the earth as it prepares for a major event – volcano, avalanche, landslide, etc., and what it's trying to tell the people in the nearest towns. Write as if the sound and what it's trying to say. Is it making noises for good or ill purposes...? This can be linked to Geography.
- Voices of monsters preparing for battle. What are they saying and why are they ready to fight? What can change their mind? What will be the consequences if they fight? This can be linked to creative writing.
- Human sounds. Yes, reference to poo will inevitably be made...! But, what else maybe makes a sound? What does the liver sound like, for example? The heart? What is it trying to say? This can be linked to Science.

Mud Characters

Get mud or clay and mix with water. Students cover hands and forearms in it and tell a friend what it feels like: at first, after 2 minutes, after 10 minutes. Meanwhile the friend describes the look as it dries. Together they try to find faces in the cracks and create characters together. Why are these characters on his/her arm? What are they trying to achieve? When we wash the mud off and the faces disappear so the characters fade/hide or die. What sounds do they make? Where do they go? If they slip back into mud, what do they do down there? What's their house like? And so on...

Transformation Masks

Get some cheap face masks or use mud if no skin sensitivity issues. Students put on face masks. Now ask them to consider: what if your face is completely transformed when you remove it? Suggestions for how it might be changed; different colour; has grown fur or feathers; has become invisible; has given you superpowers. Lots of discussion about ethnicity, looks vs qualities, etc.

Mud Experiences

In small groups, each student thinks up (either) one good and(/or) one bad experience of mud per person. Oracy: each then tells their group members the story(ies). They then experiment with different tones, pitches and paces that suit the good/bad narrative. Then exaggerate: turn the bad experience into a ghost/horror story. Turn the good experience into a life-changing moment of joy. Encourage the listeners to react accordingly with shrieks and gasps where appropriate. Turn it into writing, or not!

Sound Poems

Grab some objects and hit them! Get students to list onomatopoeic sounds and make up new ones. Get some squelchy things and squelch them! Students do the same. Encourage creative responses. Get them to write a limerick or equivalent regular and rhyming poem that is made up entirely of onomatopoeias and verbs.

School Rhythm

Students tour the school and its grounds and note down interesting, remarkable, disgusting things that either familiar or unfamiliar. Create phrases that simply describe these notable things. On returning to the learning space, they must start grouping these phrases together not in terms of content but in terms of rhythm and rhyme. Thus a poetic description of the school emerges:

Declan's playing pick-up sticks,

Suki's on her BMX,

Crisp bags flying everywhere

Wind is messing up her hair.

This can remain a poem or could be adapted to fit something like 'Subterranean Homesick Blues' by Bob Dylan. It could become a whole class song, a celebration of the school. This can be linked to Music. Use tour as stimulus for whole curriculum: create buildings in art, examine window to wall ratios in geometry, why locations are chosen for certain buildings (geography), etc.

Playing in Mud as Metaphor

This will encourage lots of discussion and reflection. Examples of metaphors for playing in mud:

- Walking without destination: students are encouraged to walk around a familiar or unfamiliar space (indoor or outdoor). They are given a specific time for this walk and must continue to walk throughout. Experiment with 30 seconds – 5 minutes. What do they notice about their thinking and mood before and after? Can you prepare some before and after questions for them?
- Free-writing. Take them on an adventure but only start them off. You could begin with a forest and a person and an animal and a quest. Tell them that they must keep writing for the allotted time (and they should be allowed to continue once the time is up if they wish). There are no rules of grammar, spelling or syntax for this task. They can go wherever their pen takes them but too much thinking is banned...
- Cooking without recipe. Potentially messy but this could be scaled down to simply playing with dough and let them go where their creativity takes them.
- Playing with numbers without an equation. Invite the students to play with six numbers appropriate to their skills level. They can add, subtract, multiply, divide and square to their hearts content. Or they can make them into poetry, interesting shapes, etc. The important thing is to allow them to play and possibly break down some fears of number.
- Playing without structure but in the learning space, not just the playground, and not just at primary level.
- Putting clothes together without rules (get students to bring in random clothes and put them on so they look ridiculous but see what drama and thus stories emerge).
- Wriggling around not sitting still.
- Talking for the love of talking (particularly good for boys – challenge to keep a conversation going for 5 minutes, etc – have a starting point but no destination).

Once you are all comfortable with this 'play', you can experiment with providing stimuli for work before the physical tasks and see how the physicality affects the creativity. But you don't have to.