



The roads
to the brains
we live in

Guidance for creative
writing workshops

About the facilitator

Louise Hale aka Curly Wordy is a London-based integrative holistic play therapist, creative writer, spoken word poet and primary school teacher. She has worked in education for over a decade with a specialist background in early years' education and child development. Prior to that she was a journalist for 12 years, often focusing on education, social news and humanistic stories.

Young people's mental health and wellbeing is at the heart of everything she works for and she passionately believes that children deserve a mental health curriculum as much as an academic one.

She facilitates poetry and creativity writing workshops in a variety of educational setting, spanning primary through to post 16. She also runs CPD for fellow therapists and twilight sessions for teachers.

If you are interested in finding out more about Louise and her work please visit www.curlywordy.com or find her via her social handle @curlywordy across all platforms.

All of the artwork in this supporting document was created by Year 6 student at The Jenny Hammond Primary School, London. With permission from both pupils and parents, I have used their work and photos in this document.



Guidance Notes

This supporting document is intended to help teachers, teaching assistants, SEN assistants, learning mentors, counsellors, trainee teachers, parent, carers and just about anyone else interested in encouraging children to use creative writing and poetry as a tool for self-expression, mental health and wellbeing.

I will outline five of the activities I did during the ThriveLDN creative writing workshops, launched during Children's Mental Health Week. I consider these activities inclusive of all abilities, age, ethnicity and gender. Whilst I did them with a group of Year 6 students, such activities are highly transferrable and prove to be affective with teenagers too.

I can confidently say these would work with children in both primary and secondary settings. I also feel they could be adapted for post 16, if some of Bloom's Taxonomy higher order question stems were applied.

Instead of listing all the potential academic objectives and outcomes children would get from these activities and there would be many. I beckon you to think of the outcome more as getting to know the self, managing self, learning to read and decode the inner self, which ultimately helps us build a stable self-image, manage our feelings, wellbeing and understand that who we are is allowed to take up space and place in this world. A priceless outcome that holds no grade or score.

I am a strong advocate that we are never too old to play. Play continuously births imagination and wordplay is no exception. So, please let them be playful with it. The freedom of being able to do what they wanted in whatever style or theme they wished was the backbone to this project.

The success rested on the young people having control of their learning power, owning the pen, expressing through their eyes, with their feelings and with their truth.

The only restriction on the children was time. I believe with more time each child could have easily produced their own individual eBook.

Whether you wish to create a creative writing wellbeing club at school, try these activities with your class as a creative mindset lesson, encourage your child to give it a go at home, do it with a small intervention group indoors or outdoors, all I ask is you remember to let the children lead the play.

I hope the activities go some way in assisting you with helping children explore the roads to the brains they live in and maybe our roads will cross one day.

Louise Hale (CurlyWordy)

Never underestimate the power of a pen and a notebook

Firstly, and VERY IMPORTANTLY, a writer never leaves home without a notebook. A key piece of kit that is required here is that each child has their own journal.

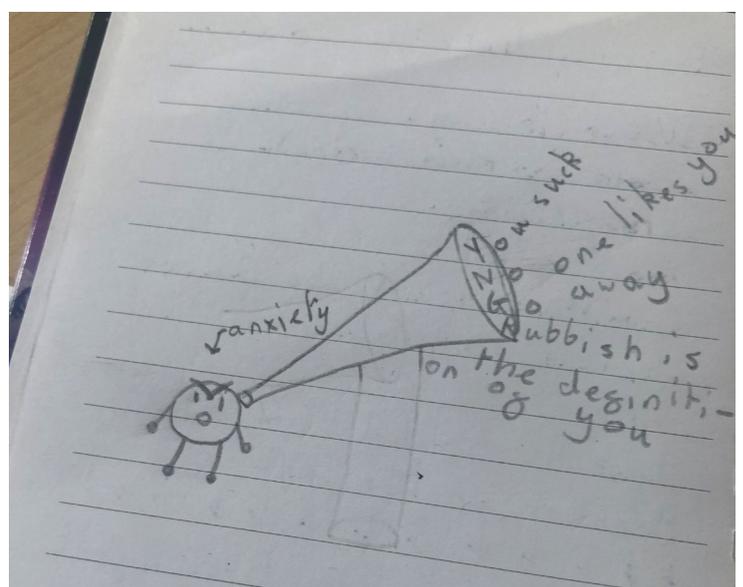
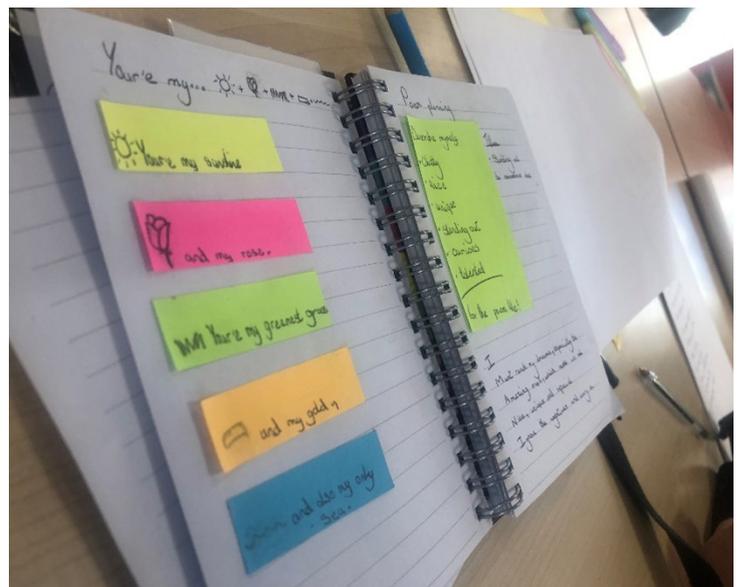
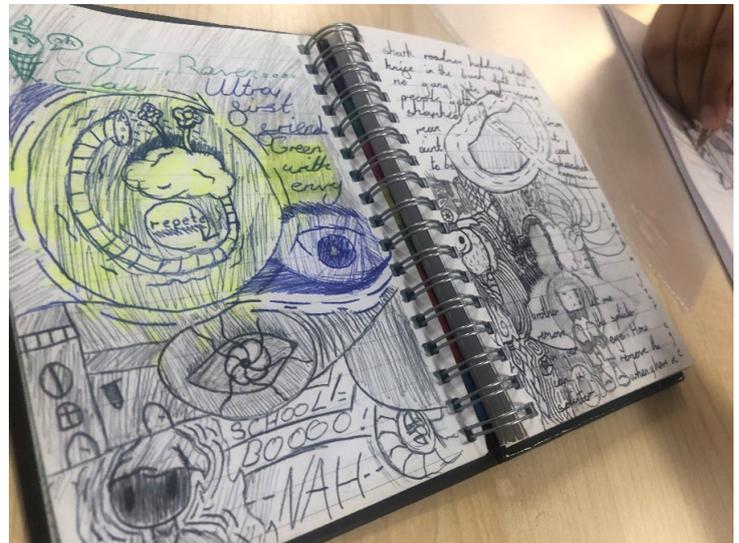
Journals and diaries are not to be underestimated. A pen and a pad are potent tools. The more children are encouraged to reflectively journal, the more they can tap into their goals.

When we use journals to write down our goals and ideas, it helps us keep better track of our intentions, promotes mindfulness, tracks progress and growth, helps us gain confidence in our ideas, Improves creative thinking, births critical thinking, consolidates writing and communication skills, stretches our vocabulary, deepens empathy, reduces stress and anxiety, develops self awareness, strengthens memory, helps us manage streams of consciousness, which in turn helps reduce rumination and lessen obsessive thoughts. The list, as we know, could go on.

I gifted the participants a journal each as a workshop resource and I think it held so much currency. Gifting the children a journal, that has no affiliation to schoolwork, sets it apart from a normal school textbook and affirms that their words are their own, to own.

Ask the children to take it home or leave it in school, whatever they are comfortable with. Tell them there is never a bad time to write and to jot down random musings, thoughts, feelings and words that spark similes, metaphor and idioms. Never ask to see it, wait for them to offer for you to browse for ideas with them.

Affordable notebooks can be sourced in most shops.



Activity One

Guided Wordplay Association

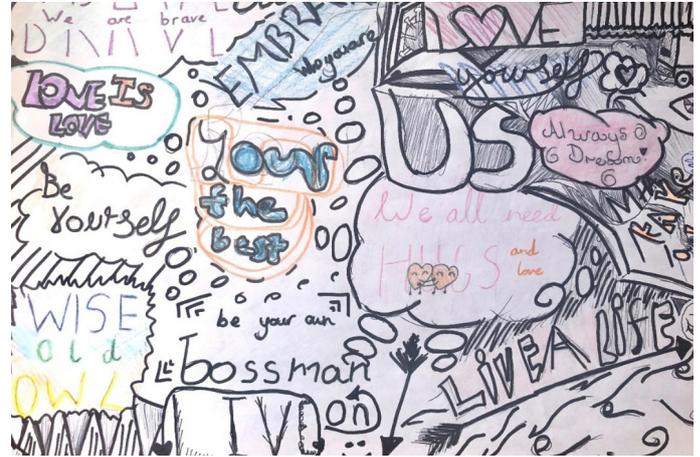
Ask the child to close their eyes and take ten deep breathes. Ask them to imagine that they have a bag nearby and they are going to empty their mind of everything and everyone in it. Then encourage them to visualise zipping the bag up and placing it somewhere out of mind they feel it will be safe. This goes some way in helping them leave their worries for others and non-essential things at the door. This can also be done physically with pebbles in a bag.

Explain that you will say a series of words and you wish for the children to write down the first thing that pops into their mind. Everything is accepted, right and wrong doesn't exist here. It's ok to write down a repeated word because this may help form the structure to their poem later on. Give each word around 20 seconds to land so the children can write the word association down, for example 'life' **(pause)** 'seed' **(pause)** 'nest' **(pause)** 'mother' **(pause)**

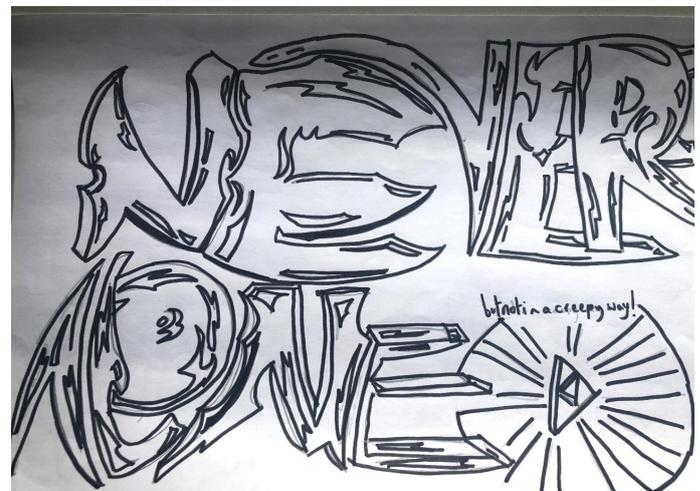
If you wish you can theme this around a certain topic, or you can be totally spontaneous and say words at random or pick words from a bag. The children could also take it in turns to come up and be the facilitator.

By the end the children will have a word map of sorts, showcasing a series of words connected to words and may be able to derive some metaphoric writing from this imagery. Encourage them to construct a short poem using the words listed, to experiment with poetry. They can return back to these words at the end for the final writing process.

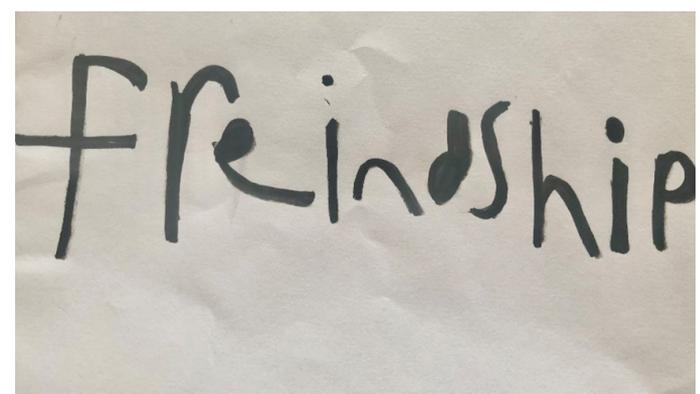
Discuss with the children how they found it and open the floor for the children to share if they wish.



Pen play: this artwork was born from a word association game. Each child added a word born out of the activity.



Wordplay: writing takes many shapes and forms



Activity Two

Puppetry Storytelling

Everyone loves a puppet, but fun aside, puppets hold strong projective power. Often a puppet is a safe bridge that allows children to project their thoughts and feelings onto a character whilst creating some distance.

Ideally you want each child to be able to select a puppet. Once the child has settled on one ask them to spend some time getting to know the puppet.

What kind of characteristics does the puppet have?

What is the puppet's backstory?

What was it about that puppet that drew them to it?

Create a story using the puppet as the main character. Give it a name, an accent, a location and create an oral story. Encourage them to think with reflective questioning using the Who? Where? What? When? Why? How?

Give them around 15-25 minutes for this. They can write it down, draw visual reference, brainstorm key words. Encourage them to select whatever expressive form they are keen on and when they are ready offer them the chance to present the puppet story, if they wish. Remind them that they can refer back to the story and material at the end when they enter the final writing process.



Puppets: A varied selection of puppets to enhance the diverse range of imaginations and emotions are best. Let them explore and take their time with selection.

Activity Three

3D Brain Sand Stories

This does require some sand and a tray as well as some accompanying figurines. Loose parts such as pebbles, stones, feathers, cork, can also be incorporated to represent the metaphors. If you wish to facilitate this with a class, split the children into groups and give them each the task of creating a 3D projection in the sand tray of a 'happy brain' 'angry brain' 'sad brain' 'calm brain'. Add in or omit your own variations if need be.

If used during group play, discussion, review and negotiation is important so they agree on a shared creation. This is also a powerful solo activity, when a child is left alone to create their interpretation, in some ways it is much more potent and powerful. The metaphors created in the sand create good visuals for creative writing.

When finished, ask them to sit with the creation for 5 minutes. When the floor is opened, children can choose to share as little or as much as they wish.

Again, encourage them to note down any key words that jump out that can later draw on in the creative writing process.



3D brains: creates ample visual prompts for creative writing

Activity Four

Memory Lane Timelines

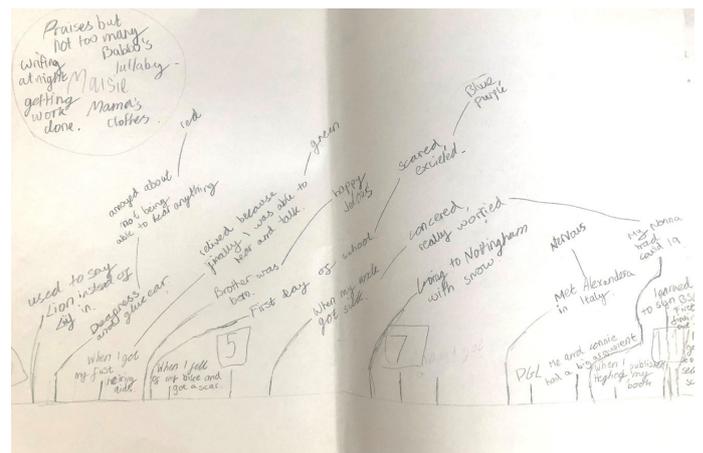
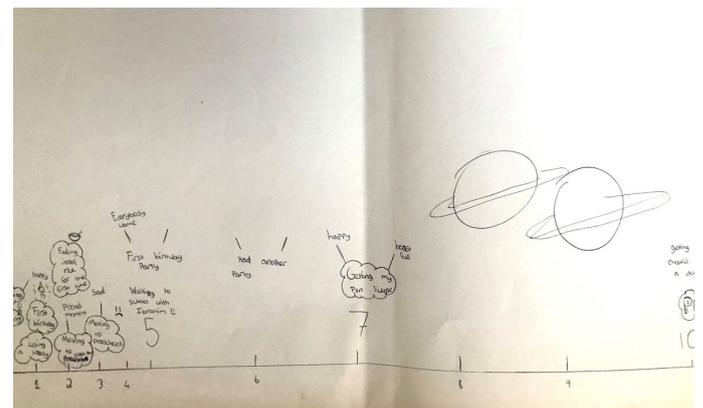
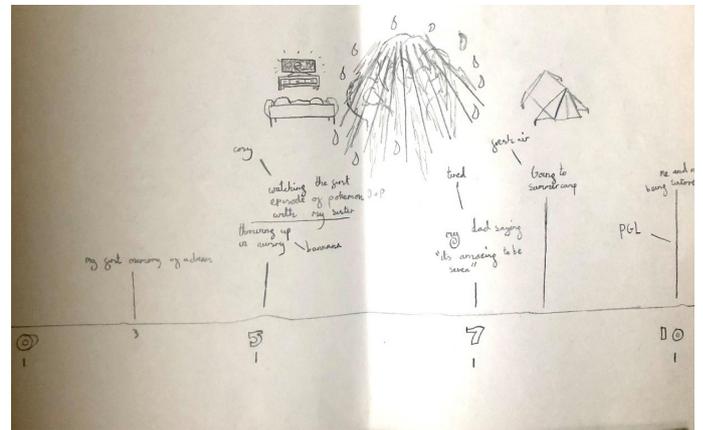
Provide the children with an assortment of paper and let them choose the size and colour. Ask them to draw a line east to west (left to right) across the page. Ask them to mark off 0-4 years, 4-8 years, 8-12 years 12-16 years along the bottom (age dependant, add more ages if needed).

Give them 15-20 minutes, in silence to jot down all memories that spring to mind that they remember from the present day back to their earliest memory. Define memorable, explain it can often be associated with an emotion, so let them know its ok if it's a troubling memory, which may have created some fear or sadness, as well as some happy memories, which evoke love and joy.

Give children the option to write or draw, so it lends itself to being more inclusive. Ask them at the end to create artwork which has a drawing for each age bracket. Remember all is accepted.

If it helps give some examples, such as a holiday, the first toy you loved, when your sister was born, a broken arm, when your pet died, etc.

Create a discussion at the end, ask if they wish to share anything that surprised them, startled them or evoked a different reaction. Remind them to spend some time journaling



Memories: Three examples of timelines here. By writing and drawing it out, children can pause, reconnect, review and reflect on past memories more clearly.

Activity Five

Who Am I Not To Be?

As a concluding activity, encourage the children to close their eyes and do a creative visualisation for 5-7 minutes. Ask them to imagine their brain is a multiverse of corridors with doors and each of them houses a vision of the potential person they could become. Walk the corridors for a bit. They are free to knock on any of the doors.

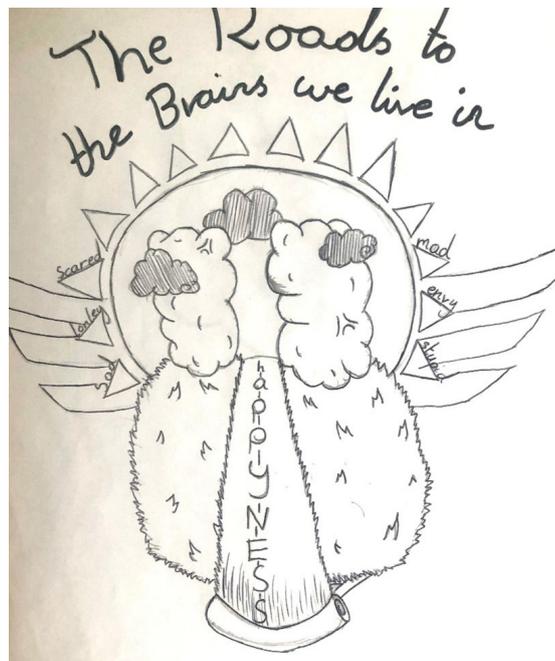
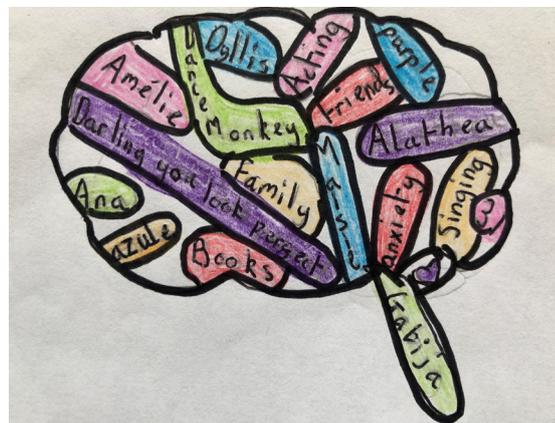
Some suggested question prompts are:

- What do you see?
- Who do you meet?
- What does the persons/beings say?
- What feeling did you come away with?
- Where does the road/corridor lead you?
- What does it look like?
- What can you smell?
- Can you touch anything?
- Can you hear anything?

Give them the option to stay for a while where they are or move on to other doors. Ask them to say goodbye to who/what they meet and continue exploring doors.

Once they open their eyes, encourage them to make some immediate reflective notes in their journal. Once finished, ask them to create an image of their brains and the world they saw.

Give them 15-25 minutes to create this image. When finished, they can share if they wish.



Bold brains: The brain images in the eBook were created after this visualisation.

And finally

Please remember to have fun. Put little limits on their creative freedom, keep them safe and keep track of the time.

Each of these activities can work as a standalone activity, or as I did, can run over a series of weeks and end up with not only generating brilliant idea along the way, but a vibrant pot of ideas to create one or two pieces of creative writing, artwork and poetry at the end.

Please never under estimate the therapeutic value of creative writing. It is therapy, it has incredible healing properties and is a powerful tool for healing.

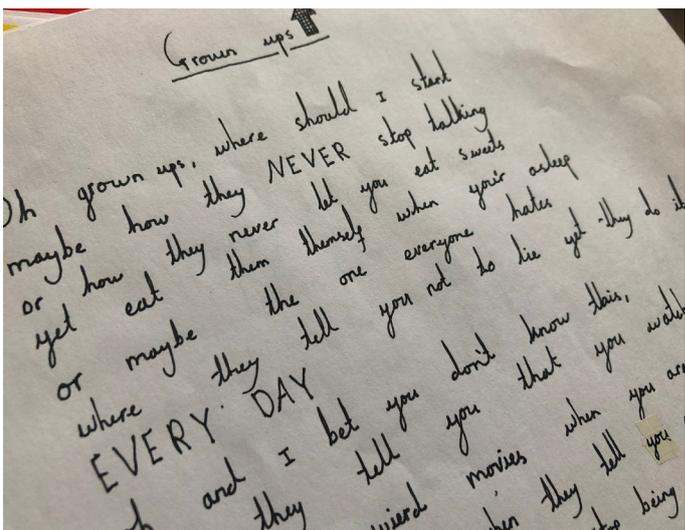
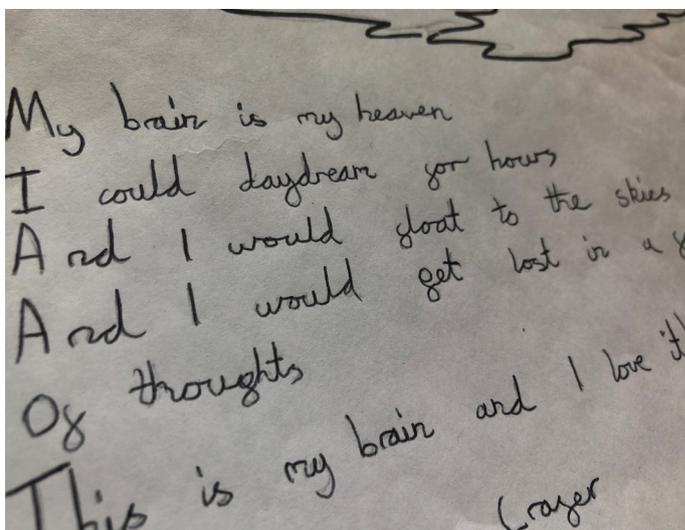
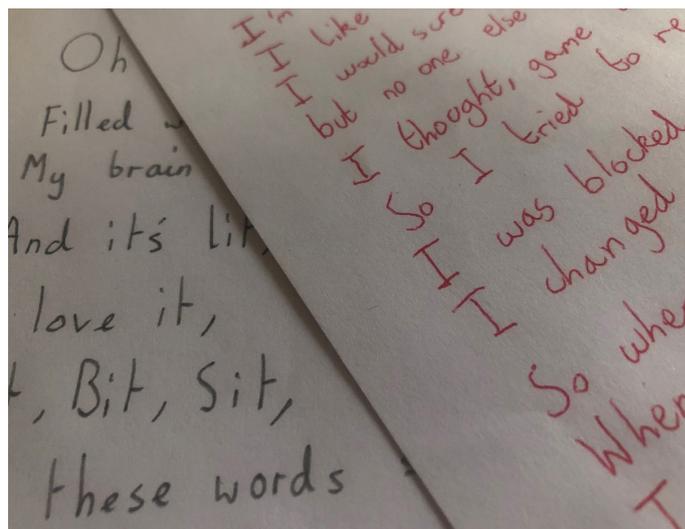
Creative writing offers a bottomless pencil case of benefits.

But not all of us take to it so easily, I didn't, but I loved words and rhyme. Speaking was my superfood. If you know of a child or young person who doesn't like reading or writing, then encourage them to write with their tongue first. Speaking is the backbone of writing. Oral storytelling underpins everything in life, so a love of words in a playful way will go a long way once the child is ready to pour their stories out of their head and on to the page.

By writing out how we feel and what we observe, it helps develop our imagination whilst confirming to ourselves that what we feel and believe matters.

Seeing the physical shape of graphemes and words on a page can helps us feel more connected to our emotions and the world around us.

These workshops were an incredible way of reaching children and supporting them with how to link their imagination and wellbeing. It created talk for writing, talk for mental health and ultimately helped young people find their voice in feelings and navigate through them.



This project was made possible by:

Thrive LDN

Thrive LDN is a citywide movement to ensure all Londoners have an equal opportunity to good mental health and wellbeing. We are supported by the Mayor of London and London Health Board partners.

Thrive LDN
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Workshop facilitator

Louise Hale aka Curly Wordy, is a spoken word poet, integrative holistic play therapist, educator and author from east London. She has been writing since she was 14, spent over a decade as a regional and national journalist, ten years as teacher and most recently began working as a play therapist to help children find their voice in feelings.

Louise is a regular on the London poetry scene and has performed as a headline act at an array of different events. Louise's poetry is emotional and empowering, offering a strong storytelling nature that pays homage to lived experiences, family, self-image, London life, social mobility, education, thriving through adversity, overcoming traumatic experiences and all the quirky bits in between that build our bones.

Louise's work celebrates the unsung heroes in all of us.



The Jenny Hammond Primary School (JHPS)

JHPS is a small, two-form entry, multicultural community school situated in Leytonstone, in the London Borough of Waltham Forest. The 14 children who participated in the workshops were in Year 6. It is a UNICEF gold Rights Respecting School and has Artsmark status.





A huge thank you to the Year 6 pupils and teachers at The Jenny Hammond Primary School for sharing your thoughts, efforts, words and art with us.

Louise Hale aka CurlyWordy

www.curlywordy.com



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Photography by Peter Rutherford.



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