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Creative Writing

SYLLABUS OVERVIEW
16-18 YEARS OLDS

immerse
EDUCATION

About Immerse

Immerse Education is an award-winning academic summer school provider offering programmes for 16-18 year olds in centres of academic prestige.

The aim of these programmes is to provide participants with academically challenging content that develops their understanding of and passion for their chosen discipline. Through 40 hours of academic sessions, the programmes also offer young students unique and valuable insights into what it would be like to study their chosen subject at university.



This Syllabus Overview provides a summary of the topics and subject areas that participants can encounter during their studies with Immerse. It has been carefully created by our expert tutors who are current members of world-leading universities, and who have experience in teaching undergraduate students.

Academic Sessions

The academic sessions at Immerse are arranged into modules to enable participants to explore a broad range of topics over the course of two weeks. The modules included in this syllabus overview are indicative but not prescriptive.

Tutors are encouraged to include their own specialisms and also focus on any particular areas of interest expressed by participants within the class. They may choose to provide further detail on a specific topic, or they may include new material and information that builds on the knowledge already developed during the programme.

Personal Project

Each programme includes an element of individual work, generally termed the 'Personal Project'. This can take many forms but is commonly an essay or presentation delivered on the final day of the programme. Participants will receive feedback on this work which may also be mentioned in the participant evaluation which is provided in writing by the tutor once the programmes have ended.





Preparatory work

Some tutors may ask participants to complete some preparatory work, such as reading or a series of exercises in advance of the programme. Participants are strongly encouraged to complete this work since it will be included in the opening sessions of the programme. Any preparatory tasks will be provided in advance of the programme directly to the participant.

Academic Difficulty

As all of our programmes are designed to provide a unique introduction to advanced material, the syllabus will be academically challenging at times.

This is something to be excited about and all of our tutors will encourage and support participants throughout the programme. Immerse Education aims to develop every participant regardless of ability, and our tutors will adapt their teaching to individual needs.



Aim of the Creative Writing Programme

The Immerse Education Creative Writing programme is designed to build upon the existing writing skills that participants have gained through a traditional classroom environment and their own practice. Participants are encouraged to explore new tools in-depth and to develop the variety and complexity of their own writing through a series of exercises. By the end of the programme, participants will have developed a series of extracts or short stories based on varied writing techniques and themes to form a portfolio that showcases the breadth of their writing ability. Beyond this, participants also explore the career options available to graduates in this field and the opportunities that are open to an accomplished writer.

The Blank Page

Beginning a creative project can often be daunting, even for experienced writers. In this session, we will look at some techniques for overcoming the fear of 'the blank page', including a range of warm-up exercises and quick-fire short assignments, as well as using the work of other writers as a starting point for our own ideas. This first session will cover some of the 'fundamentals' of creative writing, such as 'show don't tell', 'avoiding cliché', and 'authenticating details'. For many, this will be our first opportunity to have studied creative writing in an academic setting, and so we will also reflect on the history of creative writing courses.

The Flat Tyre Story

In this session, we will try a version of one of the most famous creative writing exercises, in which we are given only a basic situation for a plot. The session will reveal the creative opportunities afforded by working within such strict limitations, and how the most rudimentary of plot devices – in this case, a flat tyre – can offer the chance to really get a story moving.

This session will also offer an initial introduction to another important component of creative writing courses – the workshop. Here, students will experience the benefits of detailed group work.





First and Third

The point of view from which a story is told invariably changes the story itself. Deciding between writing in the first and third person can be difficult, so in this session we explore the opportunities afforded, and the restrictions imposed by each perspective. Taking the characters and plot outlines we have begun to develop, we will experiment in changing the narrative's point of view – and discuss how this can be a useful exercise for a writer to find out more about their characters. This naturally leads us to discussion of character development and complexity.

Dialogue

All characters talk in different ways, and in a series of exercises we will experiment with becoming attuned to the rhythms and syncopations of how our characters speak, and explore methods of making voices sound convincing on the page. We will discuss the conventions of writing dialogue by looking at a range of examples from contemporary fiction, and put this into practice through a number of short exercises. In the afternoon session we will attempt a 'reverse adaptation' – that is, converting a film script back into a short story, and thinking about what this process reveals about the differences between how characters speak on screen and on the page.

Creating a Character

As Honore de Balzac lay on his deathbed, he is said to have called out for Doctor Bianchon – who unfortunately wasn't a real doctor, but a character from one of his own novels. Creating a character who lives on beyond the page in the reader's mind can be one aspect of writing an engaging piece of fiction. This session looks at a variety of techniques for building a memorable character. Creating CVs and family trees for our characters, we will explore the importance of 'mapping' each character's network of relationships, and using this information to identify potential sources of tension in their lives which we might use in plot development.

Developing a Character

This class delves deeper into a range of techniques and exercises for creating a compelling character. In this session, our characters will write letters to their mothers, have telephone conversations with their ex-lovers, report valuable items missing at the local police station, and reveal to the reader a favourite place that is a secret to the rest of the world. By doing so, we will explore how fiction writers strive to craft 'round' characters of emotional depth and complexity, with believable fears, ambitions, and weaknesses, while building our own strengths as writers.





Place

This session explores the ways in which writers create a sense of space and place in their work. We will look in detail at one short story, investigating the ways in which the author creates and describes locations and settings. Our aim will be to explore how no piece of fiction, whatever its genre, happens in abstract space; every good story, whether it unfolds in Manhattan or on Mars, can be accurately mapped and located. We will put this into practice by creating believable, detailed landscapes and places for our own developing characters.

Plot

In this session, our attention turns to crafting a readable and engaging plot that is driven by our character work. We will think about the importance of moulding 'tension points' and 'turning points' in our stories, as well as the creative possibilities of 'plot twists'. In our class reading, we will discuss how a good plot need not be full of cinematic action scenes or epic acts of revenge; often, good plots are driven by small but tightly packed moments of decision making, in which characters we care about take wrong turns or false steps.

TOPICS LIST

Repetition and Omission

This session looks at the role repetition plays in many of our most basic and fundamental stories, such as religious parables, or children's stories. We then examine how this technique continues to be creatively used by fiction writers today. We move on to explore the role of omission in the editorial process. The first and most obvious kind of omission is the excising of superfluous words – in short, how to trim the fat. The second kind of omission we will explore is subtler. It concerns how we create intriguing ambiguities that allow our reader to infer meaning and emotion, rather than be simply told information.



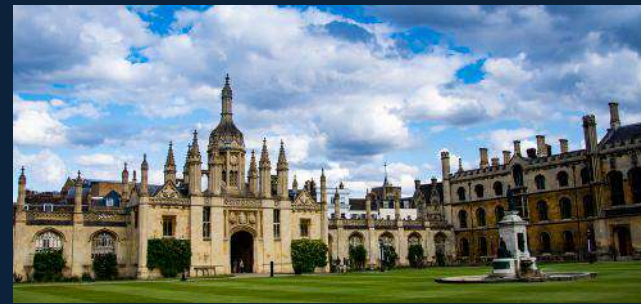


Personal Project

Throughout the fortnight, participants will be working on their own personal project. For the Immerse Education Creative Writing programme this comprises of either a novella or a portfolio of work based on the exercises we begin in class. Participants are encouraged to continue their work independently of the lessons and bring excerpts to class for review and critique with their peers and tutor. By workshopping their writing as they go, participants can expect to leave Immerse with a good foundation upon which to build their portfolio. Your tutor will review the work that you have produced and may comment upon this in the personal written evaluation shared with participants after the programme has ended.

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