

Writing Activity: Writing a short story

“The British had, understandably, expected something a little more like ‘proper’ refugees: people suffering, hardship visible on their faces, clothes torn and wrinkled, children’s eyes crusted with tears. Dragan wove through the crowd, closely inspecting everyone’s outfits by pinching a shirt, a skirt or a trouser between two fingers, rubbing it to feel its quality, a look of disgust on his face. It seemed we were well below standard. But the unspoken motto of these Bosnian mothers was: ‘If we are going to be refugees, let’s not advertise our misery, let us at least look good’, and I could understand how they felt. It’s not easy suddenly becoming a refugee.”

~ Bluebird: a memoir, by Vesna Maric (2009)

You might also like to read:

- 'The Colour of Home' by Mary Hoffmann (KS1/2)
- 'Zlata's Diary' by Zlata Filipolic (KS1/2)
- 'When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit' by Judith Kerr

Write a short story about your first day at school. Can you remember how you felt that morning? Who brought you to school? Who were the first people that you met?

What was the best thing about the day? Did anything go wrong? How was your English language? Were there any subjects that were new to you? How was this for you?

Get into small groups and share your stories. Did anyone have similar details to you? In your group, think of some imaginary difficulties you might have faced on your first day.

Now come up with a character or object that comes into your stories to help you during the day. If you choose a character, it can be someone you know from your everyday life, a superhero or a TV character- it's up to you!

Rewrite your story with the character or object in the story. How does it change your day for you? What does it make you feel better about?

People who have had to leave their home and start a new life elsewhere might not start school from reception, or may join in the middle of the school year, which can be very difficult.

If they have moved to new country they might not speak the language, or know how the school system works.

Next time a new person joins your class or your school, think about the qualities of the character or object in your short story and how they helped you.

Could you take on a similar role for your fellow classmate, welcoming them and making them feel safe and accepted? You never know, you might make a really special new friend! And you will definitely reach superhero status for your kind efforts!

Writing Activity: The whole world is deranged

“The whole world is deranged. Though most people haven’t noticed yet, Everyone looks normal but when he breathes in, Serge can detect it; a faint wiff of madness in the air”

~ Various Pets Alive and Dead, by Marina Lewycka (2012)

Marina Lewycka uses her writing to think about the complexities of the world, exploring the vast range of cultures, traditions and languages that can exist among different countries and communities, and even within families.

Humour helps her confront some of the difficult experiences refugees face as they attempt to rebuild their lives in strange new lands. In presenting the world as a ‘deranged’ place full of strange, mad people, perhaps Marina is thinking about how we could be seen as strangers to one another, leading very different lives due to our different backgrounds and personal interests.

The book's character Serge doesn't seem to trust what he sees, and certainly doesn't trust what he can't see. He seems to think that everyone is ‘mad’, and therefore that he is the only sane one.

Did you know that rules to control immigration used in the UK used to be called 'The Aliens Act'. The **Aliens** Act. Do you think you would like to be called an alien if you had to move to a new country to ask for support? Why/ why not?

Write a poem that introduces a new country only you know about.

What do you see when you walk down the street? Are there streets? Who lives there? Are they human or are they aliens? Do they fit in the space?

As you walk through the space, do you feel as though you belong there? Why? Do you feel as though the people that you cross paths with live there? Can you explain?

Spend a few minutes thinking about this and then write a poem which describes your new country.

Share your poem with the group. What similarities and differences do you find? Were there any places that your friends described in their poems that you liked or could relate to? Were there any situations or people that you related to or found difficult to tolerate?

What style of poem did you go for? Did you try using humour? If so, tell your group how it went - did it help you to think differently at all? Did you feel more or less attached to the poem and the scenario that you wrote about?