

DEPTFORD LITERATURE FESTIVAL AT HOME

Four Deptford Literature Festival writers and artists, Leone Ross, Carinya Sharples, Laura Barker and Ella Frears, have created writing and creative activities for you to do at home, based on their events at Deptford Literature Festival.

Deptford Literature Festival celebrates Deptford and Lewisham’s creativity and diversity through words, stories and performance and takes place on Saturday 19 March 2022.

www.deptfordlitfest.com

#DeptfordLitFest



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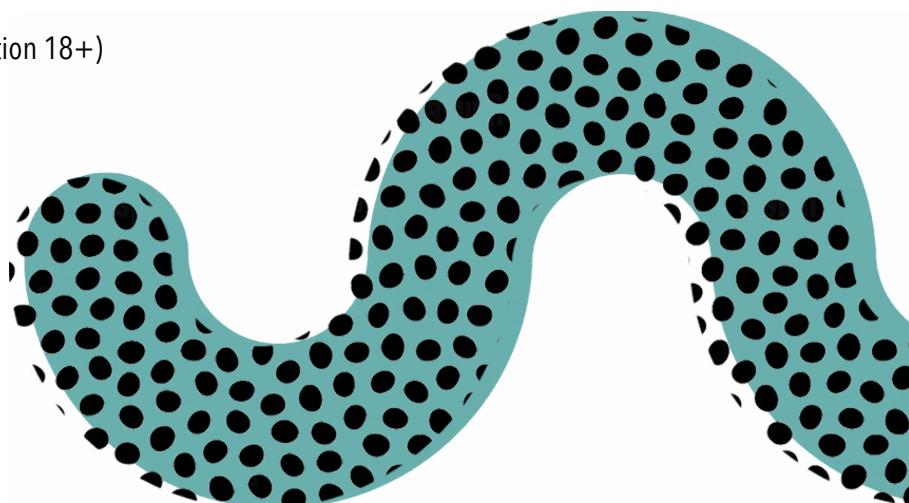
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*(contains adult references, age recommendation 18+)



THE FOOD ON OUR TABLE

by Carinya Sharples and Laura Barker

Hungry to write? Tuck into this tempting menu of creative-writing prompts and activities.

MENU



ENTREE

Bad food list (5 mins)

Write a list of as many bad foods as you can think of. Here are some examples to get you started:

- Burnt pasta
- Mouldy carrots
- Jamie Oliver's jerk rice
- Undercooked chicken
- Awkward Christmas dinner
- Your ex's rice and peas
- Food left on the seat of the bus



STARTER

Choose from one of the two starters below:

A is for Apple (10 mins)

Pick a letter from the alphabet. Write a list of describing words (adjectives) beginning with that letter, and a list of doing words (verbs) beginning with that letter, and pick a food beginning with that letter. Using your food as a starting point and your doing word and describing words as inspiration, write in the style of a children's alphabet book. Here are three examples:

Letter A

Describing words: acidic, acrid, amicable, angelic, affordable, adamant, adoring, adequate,

Doing words: Apprehend, abandon, accrue, ache, air, accentuate, anger, anchor, audit

Food: Apple

Alphabet poem: A is for apples, their adequate acidity, their affordable ache of anger, their adamant auditing

Letter O

Describing words: Old, oily, orchestral, oozing, opulent, occasional, opportunistic

Doing words: Open, operate, organise, overjoy, outclass, offer, originate, occur, outspan

Food: Okra

Alphabet poem: O is for okra, their opportunistic oily oozing, their old orchestral opulence, their open and occasional operations

Letter C:

Describing words: Cranky, crispy, chronic, crass, creamy, cruising, crepe-like, critical

Doing words: Crumple, crinkle, cradle, crank, crack, crawl, cram, creak, crop, crutch, cry

Food: Crisps

Alphabet poem: C is for crisps, their chronic crinkle, the way they crawl and cruise with critical crank, their crass crumple, their crepe-like cry, their creamy cradle of carbs

OR

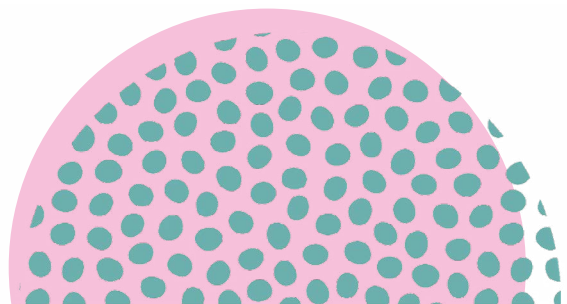
What's in your fridge? (10 mins)

Draw four columns. In the first column, write down the items of food in your fridge (maybe stop at 10). In the second column, write the type of packaging it is in. In the third column, write a one- or two-word description of the food. In the fourth column, write a brief memory attached to it e.g.

curry	tupperware	congealed	dinner for a cold night
oat milk	carton	near empty	banana pancakes for a romantic breakfast
carrots	salad drawer	wrinkled	intended to be a healthy snack
kidney beans	bowl	mysteriously frosted	a quick hunger fix
fresh noodles	packet	instant	Thai green curry meant to feed four
pastry	cardboard box	soggy	a rare treat from Mum

Finally, mix them all together to create a poem e.g.

*A Tupperware of congealed cold nights
A carton of near-empty romantic breakfasts
A salad drawer of wrinkled good intentions
A bowl of defrosted quick fixes
An instant pack of overeating
A soggy cardboard box of kindness*





FOOD FACTS

While you digest your starters, we hope you enjoy these Lewisham food facts:

Marlowe's Murder in a Deptford House

Elizabethan poet and playwright Christopher Marlowe was murdered after dinner in Deptford. Dame Eleanor Bull, whose sister was goddaughter to Elizabeth I's nanny, hired out her Deptford house for rooms and food. After being arrested in connection with his friend Thomas Kyd, Marlowe went to Eleanor Bull's house for food and drink and was killed under suspicious circumstances on Wednesday 20th May 1593.

Deptford Victualling Yard

Now part of Pepys Estate, this area of Deptford dockyard was a victualling yard (a storage place for food) in the 1700 and 1800s. On site was made ship's biscuit, mustard and chocolate (the chocolate using cocoa beans and sugar gathered by people enslaved in the transatlantic slave trade). Later the victualling yard included a slaughterhouse, medical supplies, and rum.



MAIN COURSE

Bite-sized histories (1 hour)

Read one of the three blogs below – each about a rather unusual food-related event in Deptford history. Imagine you were there at the time and write a short snapshot of the event in the first person (i.e. using 'I'). Aim for about 500 words, and try to capture a moment in time rather than telling a complete story.

Think about:

- *What year is it?*
- *Who are you?*
- *What role do you play in the story?*
- *What can you hear/see around you?*

1. *A thieves supper:*

<https://www.olddeptfordhistory.com/2010/11/>

2. *The bread riot:*

<https://pasttenseblog.wordpress.com/2016/01/23/today-in-londons-radical-past-a-bread-riot-in-deptford-1867/>

3. *The Deptford cheesecake... and the Devil:*

<https://deptfordpudding.com/2011/10/13/the-devil-at-work-in-deptford/>
(you can stop reading at 'Cheese has a very long history...')



DESSERT

A day in life of a sin eater (25 minutes)

Sin eating is an old custom, probably originating in Wales, where a person would be paid by the relatives of a recently deceased person to eat the deceased's sins, symbolised by a piece of bread or a beer. This would enable the deceased to depart life more smoothly and would reduce the likelihood of them haunting anyone.

Imagine being a sin-eater is your main gig and describe a typical day.

Here are some things you could describe:

- *A typical breakfast*
- *What the sins taste like*
- *Your clients*
- *How you hear about new jobs*
- *How you got into sin eating in the first place*
- *What you wear to work*



HOT DRINK / DIGESTIF

Tea, coffee or spirits? Choose one of the following after-dinner digests:

Lewisham libation (20 mins)

Lots of food in Lewisham doesn't get eaten, it gets libated. It might be the first swish out of a bottle of rum offered for the ancestors, it could be a bowl of rice on a veneration altar, or it might be an entire elaborate meal for the gods.

Imagine you are a food or drink that has been libated. What happens to you?
Here are some questions to get you started:

- *What are you?*
- *Who are you left for?*
- *Who eats you?*

OR

Tea for two (20 mins)

Imagine a meeting between two people in a Deptford cafe/restaurant, ideally a place you already know. Feel free to use online photos or menus to help describe the scene and drinks/food.

Think about:

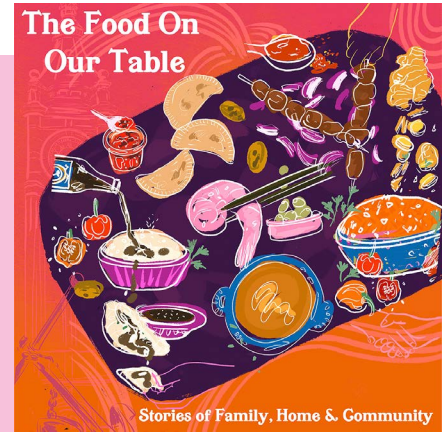
- *How do they know each other?*
- *Why are they there?*
- *What is the atmosphere like?*
- *What are they talking about?/Are they talking?*
- *What is each one eating/drinking?*

SUBMIT YOUR WRITING

Like what you've written? We'd love to read it! Send your writing from one (or more) of the activities to hello@spreadtheword.org.uk with 'The Food On Our Table' in the subject line. We may contact you about sharing your work online or in another published form.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The Food On Our Table is a creative-writing project with bite. Throughout the series, local writers have been popping up in independent cafes/restaurants around Lewisham to gather stories and sample food from around the world as 'writers in residence', before producing their own poems and other writings. The project also includes free creative-writing workshops for local community groups who have a connection to food. The project is produced by local writer Carinya Sharples, in partnership with Spread the Word, with funding from the Lewisham Creative Change Fund for London Borough of Culture 2022.



Graphic image by Tinuke Illustration

ABOUT THE CREATORS

Carinya Sharples

Carinya (she/her) is a writer and workshop facilitator, born and raised in Lewisham. Her creative writing has been published by *The London Reader*, *The Guyana Annual*, *Commonwealth Writers' adda*, among others. She has been short/longlisted for Mslexia's Short Story Competition 2022, Rebel Women Lit's Caribbean Reader's Awards 2020 (Non-Fiction Individual Pieces) and the Flipside Festival's GAWP! Green Alphabet Writing Prize 2017. She co-edited the 2020 book *Inspire: Exciting Ways of Teaching Creative Writing*.

www.carinyasharples.com



Laura Barker

Laura (she/her) is a Lewisham-based writer and workshop facilitator. She recently facilitated This Is Our Space nature writing partnership with Spread the Word and London Wildlife Trust. Laura's writing has appeared in *The Guardian*, *Apparition Lit*, *midnight & indigo*, *The Other Stories*, *Planet Scumm*, *Free Black University*, and *Middleground* and her YA novel *Picnics* was shortlisted for the Faber Andlyn BAME (FAB) Prize.

Follow her at @LauraHannahBar



WHEN THE TIDE GOES OUT

by Ella Frears

Hello, Ella here.

I've put together a series of low-pressure writing exercises and a little reading; this is similar to the workshop I'll be running in and around Deptford Creek as part of Deptford Literature Festival 19th March 2022.

You'll need something to write on and with, something to time yourself with, and access to the internet.

It's important you feel comfortable, so write on whatever is easiest for you – a notebook, computer, phone, whatever!

This should take you around 2 hours to complete, but do it at your own pace – in one go or over a few days, weeks, or even months if you like.

Happy writing!

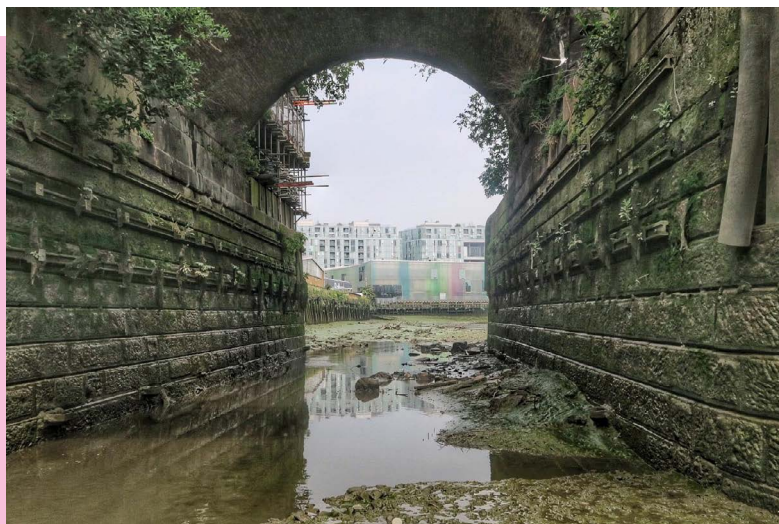


EXERCISE 1 – FREE WRITE

I like to start with a Free Write, a stream-of-consciousness exercise that I see as a sort of gentle exorcism – of your worries, thoughts, preoccupations, etc.

At the top of your page write: The river knows...

Set your timer for 6 minutes and write without stopping until that time is up. Try not to think too much about what you're writing – let anything surface. If your mind is blank, keep writing the word nothing nothing nothing... until something pops into your head. There's no wrong way of doing this.



EXERCISE 2 – MUDLARKING

A mudlark is someone who searches in the mud of creeks and riverbanks for interesting objects.

You're going to become a poetic mudlark.

Set your timer for ten minutes, then use that time to scavenge found text. This could be:

- *A phrase overheard on the radio/TV*
- *Something from a food packet.*
- *A phrase taken from a book opened at random*
- *A line from a recent text or email you've received.*
- *A shopping list*
- *A phrase from an old notebook*
- *A note from a lover/friend*
- *The names of colours of lipstick/eye shadow*
- *A random thought that pops into your head while you're searching*

Write all of these down and return to your writing space when the 10 minutes are up.

EXERCISE 3 – POETIC COLLAGE / A CENTO

A cento is a form of poetry that uses found text. A sort of collage.

Here's a cento by Emily Berry that she made using lines from Freud's letters.

Read the poem, think about why she's chosen those lines.

Why this order?

Look at the first line, what impact does it have? Does it draw you in? Set the tone?

What is the atmosphere of the poem?

Look at the last line. How does it leave you feeling?

Freud's Beautiful Things

By Emily Berry

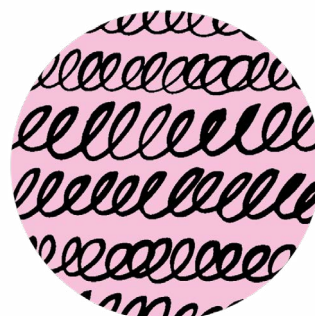
A cento

I have some sad news for you
I am but a symbol, a shadow cast on paper
If only you knew how things look within me at the moment
Trees covered in white blossom
The remains of my physical self
Do you really find my appearance so attractive?
Darling, I have been telling an awful lot of lies lately
If only I knew what you are doing now?
Standing in the garden and gazing out into the deserted street?
Not a mermaid, but a lovely human being
The whole thing reminds me of the man trying to rescue a birdcage from the burning house
(I feel compelled to express myself poetically)
I am not normally a hunter of relics, but ...
It was this childhood scene ...
(My mother ...)
All the while I kept thinking: her face has such a wild look
... as though she had never existed
The fact is I have not yet seen her in daylight
Distance must remain distance
A few proud buildings; your lovely photograph
I find this loss very hard to bear
The bells are ringing, I don't quite know why
What makes all autobiographies worthless is, after all, their mendacity
Yesterday and today have been bad days
This oceanic feeling, continuous inner monologues
I said, "All the beautiful things I still have to say will have to remain
unsaid," and the writing table flooded

Set your timer for twenty minutes.

Using the words you've found, and also anything you find interesting in your free write, write your own collage poem. Think about what you will use as your first and last lines.

Think about where you will break your lines. Have fun with it!





EXERCISE 4 – DIGITAL NATURE POET

Here's a live stream of a river <http://cowlitzriverlive.com> in the US.

Follow the link and have the live video playing full screen.

Set your timer to 6 minutes and use that time to write down any observations. These can include:

- *What can you see?*
- *What colours are there?*
- *What is moving and what is still?*
- *What is the light doing?*
- *What is the water doing?*
- *What is the weather like?*
- *What temperature do you think it is?*
- *What sounds do you think are there?*
- *What is under the water?*
- *What is out of shot?*

Once you have that imagine you are there and take another 5 minutes to answer these questions:

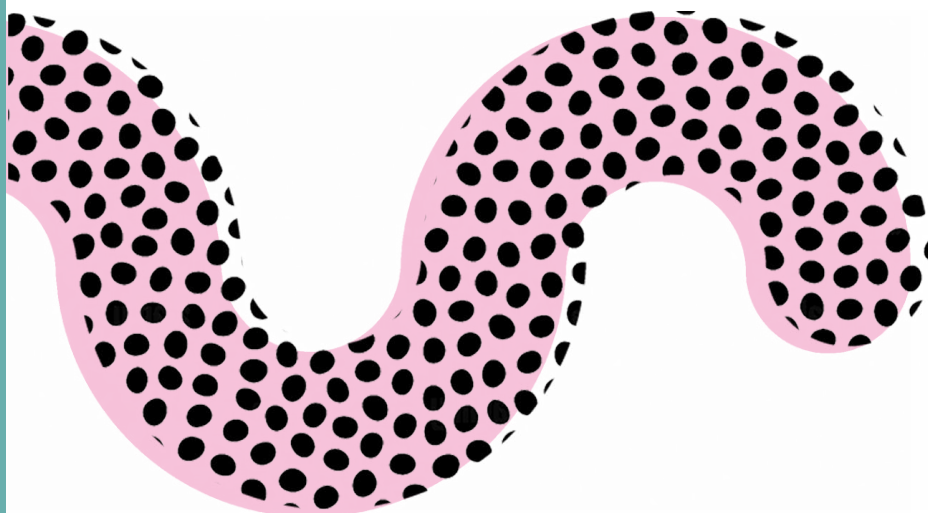
- *Where would you stand?*
- *How would you feel?*
- *Does it remind you of somewhere else?*
- *Who are you with?*
- *What do you imagine you would do there?*
- *Is it day or night?*
- *Why are you there?*

And finally take 5 minutes to write about how it feels to be watching a river online. This can be a list of observations or another stream of consciousness, or a paragraph or two.

What does it mean to be indoors, watching the outdoors?

What is it like to experience a river this way – what is lost? What is gained?

Write anything that comes to mind however silly or seemingly trivial.



EXERCISE 5 – SHORT TALK

Here is a poem by Anne Carson from her book *Short Talks* (in which every poem is a short talk on something).

Read the poem.

Short Talk on Trout by Anne Carson

In haiku there are various sorts of expressions about trout—"autumn trout" and "descending trout" and "rusty trout" are some I have heard. "Descending trout" and "rusty trout" are trout that have laid their eggs. Worn out, completely exhausted, they are going down to the sea. Of course there were occasionally trout that spent the winter in deep pools. These were called "remaining trout."

How does it make you feel? Do you find it interesting? Funny? Confusing?

Do you think she knows anything about trout?

Do you take this poem to be factual?

What makes this a poem and not an encyclopaedia entry?

Could we read the trout as symbolic for something else?

Set the timer for 20 minutes.

Using your notes from the river webcam exercise, write your own 'short talk' e.g. Short talk on rivers. Short talk on watching a river while sitting at your desk. Short talk on live streaming nature... etc. It's up to you where you take this. Think about the tone of authority in the Anne Carson poem.

This is your poem. Even if you are saying something surreal, or untrue, say it with absolute conviction.

EXERCISE 6 – WHAT LIES BENEATH

Deptford Creek is home to many creatures and plants. Among these is the Chinese Mitten Crab, the European Eel, the Mute Swan and the Flounder.

Here are the wikipedia entries for those species. Pick one and read as much or as little as you like.

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_mitten_crab
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_eel
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mute_swan
- <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flounder>

Now read this poem by Jo Shapcott

Set your timer for 20 minutes.

Write a poem in which you transform into one of those species.

Your poem can describe the transformation like Jo Shapcott's or it can be about life as that animal post-transformation.

Don't worry too much about being anatomically or scientifically correct.

This is a poem, being this animal can feel however you like, you can still talk or live at home in the poem as this animal, or you can live in the muddy creek.

See where it takes you.

The End.

Thanks for writing with me!

Goat **by Jo Shapcott**

Dusk, deserted road, and suddenly
I was a goat. To be truthful, it took
two minutes, though it seemed sudden,
for the horns to pop out of my skull,
for the spine to revolutionise and go
horizontal, for the fingers to glue
together and for the nails to become
important enough to upgrade to hoof.
The road was not deserted any more, but full
of goats, and I liked that, even though I hate
the rush hour on the tube, the press of bodies.
Now I loved snuffling behind his or her ear,
licking a flank or two, licking and snuffling here,
there, wherever I liked. I lived for the push
of goat muscle and goat bone, the smell of goat fur,
goat breath and goat sex. I ended up on the edge
of the crowd where the road met the high
hedgerow with the scent of earth, a thousand
kinds of grass, leaves and twigs, flower-heads
and the intoxicating tang of the odd ring-pull
or rubber to spice the mixture. I wanted
to eat everything. I could have eaten the world
and closed my eyes to nibble at the high
sweet leaves against the sunset. I tasted
that old sun and the few dark clouds
and some tall buildings far away in the next town.
I think I must have swallowed an office block
because this grinding enormous digestion tells me
it's stuck on an empty corridor which has
at the far end, I know, a tiny human figure.

ABOUT ELLA FREARS

Ella Frears is a poet and artist based in Deptford. Her collection *Shine, Darling* (Offord Road Books) was shortlisted for the Forward Prize for Best First Collection and the T. S. Eliot Prize for Poetry. She's had work published in *The London Review of Books*, *The Guardian*, and *The Telegraph* among others. Ella has been poet in residence for Tate Britain, the National Trust, Back from the Brink, Royal Holloway University physics department where she was writing about the Cassini Spacecraft, and The John Hansard Gallery. Her poems about the St Ives Modernists are currently on show at Tate St Ives.



THE ORDINARY IS EXTRAORDINARY

by Leone Ross

Improving Sentences With The Senses At Home

Hello! This material has been created for you to work with at home.

As a writer working with fibromyalgia, which is a condition of pain and fatigue, I am often empowered by the fact that even when my condition flares up, I can still get so much done on the page or in my imagination by using certain helpful principles of description and language. I'm going to share some of those principles here, and take you through about two hours of activity.

Obviously, you are welcome to rest or stop - or leave things for later if that works for you. The ideas shared here are relevant for an entire writing career, not just a single session. But do try to keep to the timeframe suggested for each exercise.

You will need a writing implement and a dedicated notebook, or if you prefer, type into a computer.



EXERCISE 1 — THE LITTLE BLACK DRESS

This one can be quite fun if you grab a pen or pencil and sketch it, but you can also just think about it and make notes.

Instructions Part 1 - 3 to 5 mins

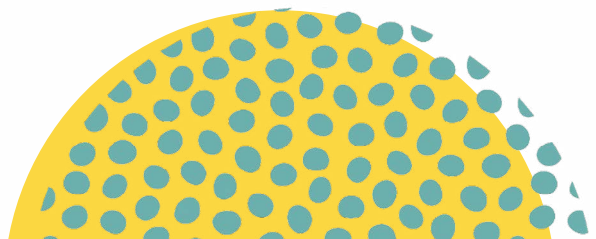
Imagine a little black dress. Regardless of whether we wear them or admire them, most people have come across the iconic black dress in some context.

I'd like you to sketch or imagine a basic black dress, with plain lines and no extra frippery. You can imagine this black dress as an item that you would wear - or someone else would wear. You can imagine it on someone who exists or someone that you're making up. Just go with what interests you.

Ask yourself some questions.

Does the plain black dress have sleeves or not? How long are the sleeves? How long is the dress skirt? Above-the-knee? Below? As far as the ankle? How does the dress fit? Is it billowing and roomy? Cut close to the body? Or something in between? And what kind of material is it made of? You don't need to know names, just ask yourself: is it cooler, stiffer fabric? Is it soft? If you wore this dress, how might it feel against your skin?

Take about five minutes to really think about or sketch the specifics of this plain black dress. Remember, you're not getting fancy. It should be really specific, but basic.



Instructions Part 2 - 10 mins

When you have the specifics of your plain black dress, I'd like you to add some embellishment. Do this by choosing at least three of the five senses, which are: sight, touch, smell, taste and sound.

The most obvious you've already used will be sight - how this dress looks. For others, it will have been easier to use texture and touch. Now I would like you to take it a little further.

Make notes, or continue sketching on your piece of paper. Imagine yourself leaning forward, looking carefully at this black dress, as if it is something that you love most in the world. What other details do you see? Perhaps there are small black jewels at the collar. Perhaps the sleeves are made of a different material to the skirt. Perhaps the skirt has an under slip that pulls against the skin of the top of the thighs. Perhaps the skirt feels heavy, or so light it is barely touching the body. Throw details at the dress: add earrings, a hat, a sash, other jewellery, shoes, tights, bags. Something else? Really go for it, take your time until you can't think of anything else.

PRO TIP

If filling in the details of what you see or touch is difficult, it can help you to imagine what kind of person is wearing this dress. A mischief-maker might have chosen to put a scarlet tulle ruffly skirt underneath that peeks out from behind the black chiffon.

Instructions, Part 3 - 15 mins

All of my experience as a writer and editor shows me that descriptive writing benefits from specificity and detail. We take time to be as particular as possible, so we don't say fruit, we say mangoes or bananas. We don't say little black dress, we say little black dress, knee length, with bright green stilettos, yellow striped popsocks, the ebony skirt as soft as butter. We can deep in that particularity by working with senses that are less obviously associated with a garment. The ones we have left are smell, sound, and taste. This is where the imagination can be invited into really special places. Imagine your black dress again, with all its embellishment. If it had a smell, what would that be? Is the heavy velvet black dress that is soft against your ankles smelling like lavender? Does it smell like your eight-year-old daughter who kissed you before you left for the job interview? Does the dress smell like the blood of your enemies? As you can see, you are welcome to go as cheerful or sentimental or dark as he would like.

What about sound? How does your black dress sound when you put your ear close to it? Does it sing softly against the nape of your neck? Is it the kind of dress that retains the bass sound from last night's dance? Maybe it whispers hymns or insults as you walk down the street.

Make notes about your ideas.

And finally, if your dress had a taste, what might it taste like? Here many writers will have to push themselves the furthest. While it might be fun to dribble a whole load of spaghetti sauce onto the front of the bodice, this is not quite what we're after. Given the character of your dress, given what it looks like, sounds like, feels like, what might it taste like? The short, light cotton, T-shirt black dress that you are wearing to see your best friend down the road for a spot of shopping on the High Street may taste like the bubble gum of your shared youth, or it might remind you of the taste of black cake that you had at Christmas time with her for the last 10 years.

It's interesting how many stories and relationships begin to occur to us on the basis of a simple black frock.

Instructions - Part 4 - 15 mins

Finally, I'd like you to take a few minutes to write down how you felt about this exercise. What is your reaction? Does paying this kind of attention amuse you or please you? Was it difficult? What part? Did anything surprise you? Can you take any of these experiences away from with you as a writer to be used in other ways? Some writers may want to imagine applying any of the five senses to different objects: what might happen if you took a car through the stages, of sensory description, Or the dinner on your plate, or the sky? What might a sky taste like? What might dinner sound like? What is the texture of a car? Notice how I have combined each object with the least obvious sense - that invites brave and unexpected ideas.

BREAK

Go and do a small activity for 10 minutes – make a cup of tea, dance around your living room, maybe just look through the window. You're not working hard here, you're just taking a break. But I encourage you to gently, almost absent-mindedly, remain aware of your senses. Breathe in the cup of tea, feeling its heat prickle your nose. Feel the carpet under your feet. Be softly aware of the sound of your neighbours talking to each other. What do you smell?

EXERCISE 2 – FINDING THE EXTRAORDINARY IN THE ORDINARY

Instructions Part 1 - 10 mins

To begin, I'd like you to take a few moments to read a description from my magic realist novel, *This One Sky Day*. In this scene, a woman is holding her entire vulva (genitals) in her hand after this part of her body has come loose and fallen away from her body.

See what she makes of it:

"Her vulva was surprisingly hot to the touch and damp, like a piece of aromatic sod. She could trace pubic bones through the skin, they met just there, part of the hip girdle. Labia parted as she probed, giving her a pleasurable shock at the colour of her insides. Red or pink, she couldn't decide. Below that, her anus, a twinkling brown-pink thing itself. She drew back, amused at her own reservations, then leaned forward again... She smoothed the curly, dark hair trickling down and around the aperture, letting her embarrassment die away. She smelled fine, just fine. She took a deep breath and used the first two fingers of both hands to part the outer lips so she could study the colour more closely. The hood of her plump clitoris peeled back with the movement: an infinitesimal motion that made her jump... She rubbed her finger just above the hood, feeling for the rubbery, movable rod under the skin. It reminded her of chicken cartilage, the shaft connected to the bone by a suspensory ligament... She imagined the entirety of the clitoris, hot red flesh under the skin, thrumming and bubbling. She spread her labia further, both sets of lips protecting the vestibule, the delicate area between them. She liked that word for this part of the body. A chamber. A channel, opening into another place. A waiting room. Vestibule: it was also the name for the central cavity of the inner ear and for the space between the cheeks and the teeth. There was a vestibule inside the heart... Her vagina was a tiny winding road. The wet walls wrapped around her careful, exploring fingers. She giggled. She had never considered how truly magical this flesh was, producing liquid if tickled."

I'd like you to notice two things about the excerpt. First, I'm utilising many of the senses - writing like this has become a habit. The woman is looking at different parts of her body, touching and smelling them, seeing colour, feeling temperature and shape and feeling texture of hair. Second, it is a list of absolutely true things about the body. While my novel is set in a magical place where strange things happen, this description of female genitalia is all scientific fact - there are vestibules or chambers all over the body, the vagina does indeed produce liquid!

As a writer, I am fascinated by all the wonderful things that can be found in ordinary things if we pay close attention. The human body is not the only source of almost magical in the mundane.

This second exercise asks you to improve your ability to notice and describe by beginning with the things around you.

Instructions Part 2 - 20 mins

Choose an object nearby. Start with something small and maybe familiar - the sofa you're sitting on, your pencil, the curtains, the carpet, a favourite sculpture or plant. Deliberately choose something very ordinary, but also something that you can see clearly, preferably that you can move about and touch. Don't think about this too much, I'm going to randomly choose the small backpack on my desk right now.

(A) examine the object really closely. Rub your fingers over it. Bring it up to your nose and smell it if you can, or go down to its level and sniff it. Try to look at it in microscopic detail. What is its colour? What is its texture? What does it smell like? If it doesn't have a smell, give it one.

Does it sound like anything? Can you shake it or rattle it or tap it? My backpack is thousands of red, green yellow, white and brown threads weaved together. I noticed its dull buttons, its sharp buckles, how it smells faintly of my lunch from yesterday. I find a lost key at the bottom, I notice that the bottom left corner is fraying, I bring it up to my face and take a deep breath, I rub it against my cheeks.

Make notes of what you notice about this ordinary object, using all of your senses.

(B) Now, expand the limits of this object by imagining what else it could be used for, besides its ordinary purpose. My bag is used to carry things, but it could also be pulled apart and made into a small outfit for a child, or folded several times and used as a pillow, or re-gifted as a present, the ties that hold it together could be taken off, then used to hold up a ponytail. What other life could your object be living?

(C) Get even more curious about this object. You don't have to do research (even though you can if you want to) but I do want you to get really interested in where it came from. What do you know or imagine about its origins? How many people were involved making it? Can you see their fingers and faces? What histories might all of its different component parts have? Make notes about where your object might have been before it got to you. Really try to conceive of it from the beginning to the end.

For example, I don't know how a backpack is made, but I can imagine its component parts being formed and brought together in a factory, I can imagine someone deciding and sketching its design and two people excitedly deciding on its colours.

The more I think about it and the more I honour the tiny details of its existence, the more magical and extraordinary my backpack becomes. How do you feel, making notes about your object? Has it become more wonderful?

Make all the notes! Google if that helps!



EXERCISE 3 — DOING SOME SENSORY WRITING

I hope by now, more than anything, you've had the experience of slowing down and paying attention. Of allowing your curious child self to notice small things. Writing is in some ways, nothing more than a series of small things - words, observations, images, sounds. And your capacity to notice them. This last exercise is the optional part of this experience - or you may want to do it at another time. However, if you're up for it, I'd like you to write something longer, based on

the work that we've already done.

You can choose to write a poem, or a small story, or even a song. Aim for one or two pages. The form is up to you. There are just a few guidelines.

Instructions - 30 mins

Put your black frock, with all its particularities, on a human being who would wear this kind of dress. Then take this person for a walk in a specific place, in their black dress. Your person is looking for the object that you have paid close attention to in exercise 2.

So in my case, I will take a 65-year-old divorced woman called Ivy - dressed in a heavy black velvet frock with yellow popsocks and green stilettos - for a very short shimmy down the highroad looking for a backpack for her teenage goddaughter.

All you have to do is describe the next 20 minutes of that person's life, experienced through their senses.

What does my 65-year-old woman see? What does she feel under her fingers and her toes and those shoes? What does she smell, as she enters the market looking for a backpack? How does she want the backpack she chooses for her goddaughter to sound? She wants it to be soft and full of murmuring, comforting songs because her goddaughter is suffering from depression. And while she chooses the backpack, what does she see, what does she hear, what does she smell, what does she taste, what does she touch?

Try doing this and see what happens. Set yourself a timer and just write without judgement, remaining aware of all your senses.

FINALE

At the end of the session, it could be good to finish off with another five minutes of journaling, reflecting on your experiences, and asking yourself what you enjoyed and why, what wasn't so easy and why, and how you might use any of these experiences, as a writer going forward.

ABOUT LEONE ROSS

Leone Ross is a writer, editor and academic. She was born in England and grew up in Jamaica. Her first novel, *All The Blood Is Red*, was longlisted for the Orange Prize and her second novel, *Orange Laughter*, was named by *Wasafiri* magazine as one of the most influential British novels of the last 25 years. Ross's first short story collection, *Come Let Us Sing Anyway* (Peepal Tree), was shortlisted for the V.S.Pritchett Prize, the Jhalak Prize and the Edge Hill Prize 2018. She is a Senior Fellow of the UK Higher Education Academy.

Her third novel *This One Sky Day* is published by Faber in the UK and FSG in the US. It was shortlisted for the Goldsmiths Prize 2021.

