



TalkforWriting™

Talk for Writing Home-school booklet

DREAMS

Working at greater depth

by Jamie Thomas



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www.talk4writing.com



Introduction

Dreams are one of those things in the world that I find hard to explain. Your dreams can flash back into your past, submerge you in the present or also transport you into worlds not yet seen. Some are immensely realistic and some are utterly surreal. But what are dreams? Are they visions of our imagination? Are they a subconscious way of processing the world we live in? Are they a vehicle for our minds to offload? Whatever the answer, they are a fascinating thing to explore and provide authors with a fantastic stimulus for writing.



Preparing to write

As an author, it is highly recommended that you keep a jotter or notebook, otherwise known as a *magpie book*, by your side to capture any ideas you may have as the unit unfolds. This book can be used to make notes, jot down ideas and draft initial thoughts. And, given the way dreams can seem all very real and then melt like mist from your mind even as you try to recall them, you might like to keep your notebook next to your bed. Jot some of the weird elements of your dreams down before they disappear.



Throughout this unit, we will be playing with language and sentence construction in order to create new, innovative ideas. Great writers understand how to manipulate writerly tools for a desired effect. Having a magpie book will therefore be an essential part of the writing process as it will allow you to test out and rework your ideas.



And don't forget – great writers are influenced by other great writers, so raid your wider reading and become inspired by all of the amazing authors there are out there.

Activity 1: Connect with your dreams

The past few months have been some of the most crazy in many of our lives. The world momentarily stopped to take breath, to search for the right path. For many of us, things that we treasure have been stripped from our lives: our friends and families, our passions and hobbies. All of us have dreams and aspirations. These may be things that we long to do, to see or experience. They may be the things we long to become or to achieve in our lives.

With such chaos in our lives, it is easy to lose sight of these dreams.

- ★ Take a moment to write freely about your dreams and aspirations. What do you want to achieve in life? Who do you want to become? What are your goals and ambitions? Let the words burst out of you in whatever form they decide to take. Don't worry about spelling, punctuation, grammar or sentence construction. Just focus on the words that spill out of you and find themselves assembled on the page. You may like to reflect on this as the unit unfolds. After all, what better stimulus to write about than your own dreams.

Activity 2: Poetry response - Dream Poem

- ★ Listen to Pie Corbett reading his *Dream Poem*. Highlight or underline any ideas that intrigue you.

You can listen to this being read aloud here:

<https://soundcloud.com/talkforwriting/dreampoem>

Dream Poem

I dreamed I saw an anteater inspecting an anthill,
a camel tucking into a plate of gooseberries,
a metal hammer melting in the sun ,
a shoe filled with smarties and mouse sauntering across the
path.

I dreamed I saw a flock of furious feathers,
a cluster of curious clocks,

a library of luxurious lakes,
a swarm of silent serpents,
a school of serious sand dunes,
a class of cracked cliff edges
and a crowd of chameleon
curtains changing colour.

I dreamed I witnessed the difference between
a scream and a silence,
the difference between red and black,
the difference between nothing and everything you know
and the second that yes became no.

I dreamed I heard a silence explode,
a car braking to a full stop,
a door slamming open,
a Siamese cat purring,
a hand waving hello,
a friendship breaking in two
and the moment when the world began.

I dreamed I touched a furnace made of snow flakes,
a lake made of sawdust and sadness,
a mountain made of pillows
and a spider's web made of steel girders.

All these things I have dreamed.

© Pie Corbett 2020

★ Now write down your initial responses. You may like to consider:

1. What did you like about the poem?
2. What was your favourite line and why?
3. How did the poem make you feel?
4. Which line in the poem did you find the most interesting and why?
5. Does anything puzzle or intrigue you?
6. What questions would you like to ask the poet?

Activity 3: Short-burst writing - dream poetry

Let's now have a go at writing our own Dream Poem, drawing on Pie Corbett's model as inspiration. Before we begin, let's have a look at some tools that we can use.

Tool 1: Draw upon the senses

Each stanza begins by tuning in to one of the senses:

I dreamed I saw / witnessed
I dreamed I heard
I dreamed I touched
I dreamed I tasted
I dreamed I felt
I dreamed I smelled



★ **Brainstorm a list of things you may see, hear, touch, taste, feel or smell in your dreams. You may like to give yourself a time limit, say 1 minute, for each. Jot down whatever comes into your mind. Remember, dreams can incorporate anything, the real to the surreal.**

Tool 2: Extend ideas with action

One of the ways the poet brings the dreams to life is through his choice of verbs. In a poem such as this, every word needs to earn its place. Verbs can contain a depth of meaning through inferred emotion.

★ **Raid the poem for powerful, emotive verbs. Make a list in your magpie book and then add to the list. You may like to raid other poetry and literature to build the word bank. Remember – push for words that you find intriguing and charged with meaning. e.g. inspecting, tucking, melting, sauntering, etc.**



Tool 3: Extend ideas with similes or kennings

Another tool we could choose to explore is to develop our ideas using similes or kennings. To extend using a simile, you need to make a comparison with another thing of a different kind, making the description more emphatic or vivid. e.g. I dreamed I saw a cat sneaking by with eyes like emeralds.

A kenning is the process of using a two-word phrase in the place of a one-word noun. For example, a cat could be referred to as a milk-sipper or a sun-worshipper. The line in the poem would then read:

I dreamed I saw a milk-sipper.

- ★ Choose some of the things that you listed in your brainstorm. Have a go at extending them with similes or kennings. Don't forget to add in the powerful emotive verbs.

Tool 4: Create your own collective nouns

In the second stanza, the poet plays around with new weird and wonderful collective nouns. A collective noun is the name given to a group of things. To help bring this to life for the reader, the poet also plays with alliteration, pairing words with the same initial sound. For example:

I dreamed I saw a **f**lock of **f**urious **f**eathers,
a **c**luster of **c**urious **c**locks,

- ★ Try creating your own collective nouns by pairing a word for a group (e.g. a class, a swarm, a library) with the object in your dream. You may like to include alliteration as exemplified above.

Tool 5: Include some 'opposites' or 'impossibilities'

One of the joys of dreams is that there are not right or wrong ideas – the opportunity for creativity is endless. Throughout the poem, Pie Corbett explores things that oppose one another, such as 'the difference between nothing and everything you know.' He also pairs impossibilities, e.g.

I dreamed I heard a silence explode,
a car braking to a full stop,
a door slamming open,

- ★ Make a list of opposites and impossibilities. You may find it helpful to categorise your ideas, e.g. sounds, sights, objects, feelings, etc.
- ★ Now have a go at writing your own dream poem, drawing upon the tools we have explored, your brainstorms, as well as your own imagination for inspiration.

Activity 4: Dream Art



The artwork above was inspired by French-Russian artist Mark Chagall, whose work anticipated the dream-like imagery of Surrealism.

You can read more about Chagall here:



<http://www.chagallpaintings.com/dream/>

★ Follow this link for a tutorial with art specialist, Mrs. Gallagher, on how to draw your own dream art, taking inspiration from the works of Mark Chagall:



<https://youtu.be/ArP1apSilHQ>

If you are interested in art, an amazing book to read is *Art and Illusion* by E.H. Gombrich. Its subtitle is *a study in the psychology of pictorial representation* so, as you may have guessed, it's not an easy read but it is full of fascinating ideas illustrated by the images that inspired the thinking and the interpretation.

Activity 5: Déjà Rêvé

You have probably heard of the term **déjà vu** before; it is French for 'already seen.' It is the phenomenon that a person experiences when they feel that they've experienced an event in their past.

Déjà rêvé means 'already dreamed.' It is the ability to recall a dream or have a dream-like feeling whilst awake.

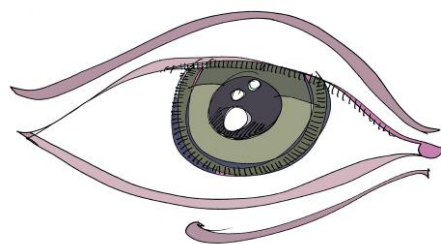
The concept of reliving a dream, or seeing your dream materialise in front of you, provides a fabulous stimulus for writing. It helps us break the 'then I woke up and realised it was all a dream' cliché. I imagine the iconic moment for someone experiencing déjà rêvé is the second that the dream becomes reality – the moment they know what is about to happen next. As dreams are often surreal, this could inflict an array of emotions, from sheer ecstasy to absolute trepidation.



Let's play around with the idea of moving a dream into reality. The focus I would like us to explore is how a character reacts at the moment this happens. By showing how a character reacts, we can hint at what the dream means or represents, without having to explicitly describe it in great detail.

To help us with this transition, we may need a bank of linking sentences or phrases. Here are some I have come up with that you could magpie. Do also add your own ideas to the list.

I had seen _____ before.
I couldn't believe my eyes, ...
Something was strangely familiar.
There it was, just as I had dreamed.
I knew what was in/behind/beneath ...
My nightmare was coming to life before my eyes.
I had never been here before, yet somehow I had seen every feature before.



Now have a read of the examples below. In them, I have focused on showing how the character feels through their actions.

Example 1:

As my eyes darted back and forth, a sudden realisation washed over me - something was strangely familiar. Silence fell upon the room. But there it was, the metronomic ticking of the grandfather clock. Tick...tick...tick...it had haunted me for weeks...tick...tick...then everything disappeared to black.

Example 2:

There it was, just as she had dreamed. A surge of excitement rushed through her body as the adrenalin roared. She ran, arms flailing. The freedom felt better than that of her dreams - she was flying and no one could stop her.

- ★ The first example is written in the first person, with the author in role as the main character. In comparison, the second example is written in the third person, almost from an outsider's perspective. Which do you feel has a greater impact on you as a reader? You may like to explore this as you draft your own ideas.
- ★ Now have a go at writing a few short paragraphs in this style. Consider the emotion you want to explore and the actions that help you to reveal this to the reader. Try out different dreams, considering how you would react as they come to life before your eyes.

Activity 6: Reflecting on the nature of your dreams

Do you have recurring dreams? Do you have nightmares as well as dreams that just don't make sense? Do you sometimes go to sleep with unanswered problems and find that you wake up with the answers? Dreams are incredible hard to explain – they are an anomaly.

- ★ Reflect on the type of dreams you tend to have. How would you describe them? How would you explain them? What do you think dreams are and how would you explain the inexplicable?

Activity 7: Poetry response - The Dream Catcher



A dreamcatcher is a symbol, used to protect people from nightmares and bad dreams. Many believe that a dreamcatcher acts like a spider's web, trapping the bad dreams or nightmares while allowing the good ones to filter through.



★ Listen to Pie Corbett reading his poem *The Dreamcatcher*. Highlight or underline any ideas that intrigue you.

You can listen to this being read aloud here:

<https://soundcloud.com/talkforwriting/dreamcatcher>

The Dream Catcher

The dream catcher caught -

Sly sunlight
 lingering on a hot roof,
 like a sleepy, marmalade cat,
mist easing itself through the backstreets,
 the fingertips of a breeze creasing
 the school's pond,
an aeroplane tearing the silence apart,
 a teacher's voice circling
 above the children's chatter,
the clatter of distracted chairs.

The dream catcher caught
the moment when
a hawk falls like a feathered stone,
the axe smacks bare wood,
the sudden crack of a whip's lash,
the squeal of brakes
as a bus shudders to a full stop,
and an awkward silence erupting.

The dream catcher caught -
the silence between each
heartbeat before a test,

the spark trapped inside the darkness of a stone,
the shadow of a whale echoing
in the ocean's mouth -
and the snail's
frail shell.

The dream catcher caught -
The sweet taste of frost,
glittering crazily
like a solar system
trapped on the pavement's grey.

The dream catcher created -

a map of ladybirds
like scarlet buttons,
a map of rosebuds
like soft crimson fists,
a map of fear
with oars made from a lizard's claws,

a map of apologies
carving through

the ocean's relentless, restless
rolling hills of water...

The dream catcher caught -
The fingertips of trees
scratching the sky's effortless blue,
the tale of a story wagging
its tongue,
the sudden sneeze exploding
in the silence of a court,
the thistle's green fist
thrust through the earth,
the carp in its dream
gilded with scales of gold,
a folded napkin with a secret
trapped inside
and the hillside
like a knuckle bristling
with coconut gorse.

The dream catcher caught -
the moment just before
a swan dipped its black beak
into the river's icy fist,
an antler of lightning spread
its electric veins
across the night,
a letter slips from a Mother's hand,
a baby's first paces - like words faltering,
altering its world,
stuttering footsteps
stammered across the writer's page,
as a story unfolds its arms,
and a charm of goldfinches
like wind chimes
chattering....

The dream catcher caught -
the computer's purr
as it downloads,
the phone's sudden ringtone,
and the words of frost
as it spills its spell,
pressed to a stranger's ear,
tapping a foot,
drumming fingers
and waiting for the voice
to finish
its bitter, swollen taste.

The dream catcher caught -
Peacocks, panthers,
Porridge and pancakes,
Peapods, paddles,
Punkrockers and a pinch
Of paprika.

The dream catcher caught -
the sound of a cathedral praying,
the taste of snow flakes,
the touch of honey, glowing in a jar,
the scent of a city asleep
and the glimpse of a dream's tail feathers
flickering like fireflies.

For the dream catcher
threw out nets of wonder
and snared dreams
like so many glittering fishes.

© Pie Corbett, 2011

★ Now write down your initial responses. You may like to consider:

1. What did you like about the poem?
2. What was your favourite stanza and why?
3. How did the poem make you feel?
4. Which line in the poem did you find the most interesting and why?
5. Does anything puzzle or intrigue you?
6. What questions would you like to ask the poet?

Activity 8: Writing 'Dream Catcher' poems

We are now going to have a go at writing our own 'Dream Catcher' poem, drawing on Pie Corbett's model as an inspiration.



★ In your magpie books, jot down a list of categories that you may experience in your dreams. You may like to have another read through Pie Corbett's poem to spot some of the categories that he explores.

Here are some ideas to get you going:

sounds, smells, tastes, pictures, visions, feelings and emotions, music, memories, wishes, desires, lies, fears, destinies, significant events, magical places, real places, animals, fantasy creatures ...

To write your own 'Dream Catcher' poem, you may like to use the following model. In the example below, I am exploring sounds.

The dreamcatcher caught -

name something you fear and add detail (e.g. strangled screams)

add in further detail or action (e.g. tormenting innocent souls)

but it welcomed

name something you love (e.g. laughter)

add in further detail or action (e.g. dancing on a spring breeze)

★ Now read the poem below, putting this model into practice.

The Dream Catcher

The dreamcatcher caught
strangled screams,
tormenting innocent souls,
but it welcomed
laughter,
dancing on a spring breeze.

The dreamcatcher caught
barren lands,
void of life,
but it welcomed
fresh shoots,
stretching to sun-dappled skies.

The dreamcatcher caught
the scorpion's sting,
the black widow's bite
and the cobra's venomous spit,
but it welcomed
the cat's precious purr,
the cricket's click
and the sky lark's sweet song.

The dreamcatcher caught
the endless sleep,
the silent worlds,
but it welcomed
family and friendship,
glasses charged in celebration.

The dreamcatcher caught
sins of greed and jealousy,
charged with malice,
but it welcomed
tears of happiness, falling freely
into pools of pleasure.

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You can listen to this being
read aloud here:

<https://soundcloud.com/talkforwriting/dreamcatcher2>

Top Tips:

Remember – do not overthink this – let the ideas run free. Play with the words and the way they sound; this is the joy of poetry.

When I sat down to write this, I began by taking a category and letting my mind wander freely. I found that this helped me focus in on the detail and truth of what I wanted to describe. It helped, asking what I feared and what I welcomed within each category.

As you grow in confidence, let go of the model – it is a scaffold that is there to support you but must not become a constraint.

Be true to yourself as a writer. Write down whatever comes naturally as this will always hold more truth and will therefore have a greater impact on the reader.

★ Now have a go at writing your own 'Dream Catcher' poem, drawing upon the poems we have explored, your brainstorm, as well as your own imagination for inspiration.

Activity 9: Design a Dream Catcher

Dream catchers are beautiful in so many ways. From the way they are made, to the way they move in the breeze, there is something captivating in their meticulous design.



★ Have fun drawing and designing your own dream catcher. Here are some basic ideas I created with my own children. If you are feeling adventurous, have a look at the web links I have posted at the bottom of the page.



<https://youtu.be/AwRC8U-uapc>

<https://youtu.be/PGpiHxooTo>

Activity 10: "I have a dream ..." - 1963



On August 28, 1963, Martin Luther King stood in front of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. and delivered a speech to the world that addressed racial equality and discrimination. The following is an extract from that speech:

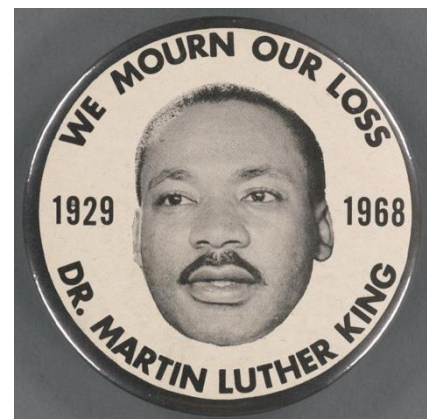
"I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.' I have a dream that one day on the red

hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit down together at a table of brotherhood. I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a desert state, sweltering with the heat of injustice and oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today." - Martin Luther King, 1963: I have a dream.



<https://youtu.be/vP4iY1TtS3s>

- ★ Take a moment to reflect on the dreams Martin Luther King identified in this speech. You may like to take each line in turn to consider the depth of meaning. If possible, have a discussion about the vision King had for the world. How do you think this compares to the reality of the situation we find ourselves in today?



Activity 11: "I have a dream..." – 2020

Recently, we have seen people coming together to protest and be heard in their fight against racism. Newsround released a special programme that offers lots of helpful information about what is happening and why.



<https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/52978346>

- ★ In light of what is happening in the world today, write your own 'I have a dream' speech, outlining your own vision for the world. Whilst we have been discussing the fight for fairness and equality, you may also like to think about other global issues, such as poverty, or global warming. Once you have written this, be sure to share it as it is important that your voice is heard.

Extension tasks: other writing opportunities

Whilst I have mapped out a number of activities that you may like to explore above, there are many other writing opportunities that you may like to engage in, including:

★ Dream Narrative

Writing an extended narrative where a character enters a world of their dreams. You may like to go back to activity 5 and extend one of the paragraphs you wrote.

★ Diary writing

Write a series of diary entries discussing your dreams. Think about including some of the ideas we have developed through poetry, as well as including the implicit emotions (show not tell).

★ Graphic novel

Represent a dream through a graphic novel. Illustrate the main character entering the world of dreams / nightmares. What may they find?

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Jamie Thomas, Deputy Head and Head of Warren Teaching School Alliance, now works with Talk for Writing to help schools develop the approach.

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