

Teaching Resources



# LESSON 1:

## Writing about real life

### OBJECTIVES



- To achieve critical engagement with a text
- To provide focused opportunities to discuss a text
- To consider which resources are helpful in finding out about real-life events
- To learn more about the refugee crisis
- To develop the skills associated with persuasive letter writing, and use them in association with the new information learned



### STARTER ACTIVITY

In groups, ask pupils to think about the different ways in which they can find out about real-life events. Then ask them to consider how reliable the resources are, and why.

- Discuss resources like: books / TV / newspapers / videos / social media / posters / what people say / Wikipedia
- How reliable the sources are may depend on: where the information comes from / whether the source is biased / if it is based on opinion or fact / how up to date it is / how expert the writer is / whether the source is checked by others / if they are witness accounts. Discuss the accuracy of different resources and rank them using a pro/con list.



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## TASK 1

Watch this Newsround video (Syria: What's Going On: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/newsround/16979186>) to provide pupils with background information and a general overview of the current situation in Syria.

In groups, ask students to define what a refugee is and report back to the class. Following their feedback, share the following official definition with them:

Refugee: A person who has been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster.

Then, as a class, consider questions about refugees which the video might have covered – for example:

- How widespread is this problem?
- What causes people to leave the place they call home?
- Why might a refugee choose a particular country to move to?
- What are some of the challenges of refugee life?



## TASK 2

Thinking about the information they have been given, students should draft a persuasive letter to someone who is in a position to help refugees. It could be to a head teacher, to a charity worker or to the government. Pupils should use **Resource 1** (an extract from Sami's Silver Lining) below to help back up their arguments.

- Ask pupils what it is that makes a piece of writing a letter. Help them to understand the layout of a letter and the formal language that may be used.
- Pupils should consider persuasive techniques using the acronym PERSUADE: Power of three / Emotive language / Rhetorical questions / Say again / Undermine opposing views / Anecdotes / Direct address / Exaggeration

## RESOURCE 1

*By the time we got to Austria, things were falling apart. Joe got sick and although the charity volunteers managed to get him to a hospital his rattling cough turned into pneumonia. We waited outside for him for three days, the kids and me, our little dome tent pitched on the grass at the edge of the hospital grounds.*

*On the third day I went in to see him with a handful of Coke-can stars I'd made from thrown-away tins, but Joe's bed was empty. His journey had ended there, alone in an Austrian hospital with nobody to hold his hand as he gave up the fight. Nazz vanished a few days later – nobody knew where he'd gone. Amira was silent after that. She stopped singing, stopped dancing.*

*Getting to London no longer seemed possible. We'd heard rumours about the Jungle camp at Calais – it was supposed to be wild, dangerous, a kind of refugee war zone, always under threat of being shut down. No place for children, everyone told me. Was it fair to take a bunch of little kids all that way when there was no guarantee we'd get any further?*





## LESSON 2:

### Examining the opening text of Sami's Silver Lining



#### OBJECTIVES

- To achieve critical engagement with a text
- To provide focused opportunities to discuss a text
- To explore the impact of using personal flashbacks in a narrative text
- To discuss and evaluate the author's use of language



The activities in this lesson draw attention to how Cathy Cassidy, the author of the novel Sami's Silver Lining, opens her story with a flashback to a day burned in Sami's memory. This theatrical opening acts like a framed memory – a memory, it seems, that will never be forgotten.



#### STARTER ACTIVITY

You will need a copy of **Resource 2** for each pair of pupils.

- Ask pupils to work with a partner on **Resource 2**, considering each missing slot in the text and choosing words that would be most appropriate to complete the passage. Following their discussion, ask them to fill in their choice of words.
- Ask pupils to then compare the words they have chosen with the choice of another pair of pupils.
- Finally ask the group of four to agree on and compile a list of their most appropriate word for each slot.



#### RESOURCE 2

*The sun rises slowly over the island in a blur of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ – I think it will be the last thing I ever see.*

*My breathing is \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and I'm struggling to keep my head above the \_\_\_\_\_ waves. I think that I have swallowed half the Aegean Sea, that I might as well stop fighting, give in to it, let myself sink down beneath the surface and die.*

*I am \_\_\_\_\_, so cold my limbs feel like \_\_\_\_\_, and the salt that crusts my lips feels like \_\_\_\_\_. The island looks closer now, but it might as well be a million miles away because I have no more fight left in me – I have nothing at all. Another wave lifts me and carries me forward, leaving me face down in the shallows. My hands claw at \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ sand, and I lie \_\_\_\_\_, frozen, \_\_\_\_\_ for air.*

*All is lost.*





## TASK 1

Show **Resource 3** on the whiteboard and tell pupils that this is the full opening passage written by Cathy Cassidy, then read it aloud to the class.

Ask pupils to compare the author's choice of words with their own, focusing particularly on grammatical fit and achieved meaning. Ask them to be prepared to contribute to the whole-class feedback session that follows. They should think about any distinctive variation between the writer's text and their own and also consider their response to the original passage as an opening to a story.

## RESOURCE 3

*The sun rises slowly over the island in a blur of red and gold – I think it will be the last thing I ever see.*

*My breathing is raw, ragged, and I'm struggling to keep my head above the crashing waves. I think that I have swallowed half the Aegean Sea, that I might as well stop fighting, give in to it, let myself sink down beneath the surface and die.*

*I am cold, so cold my limbs feel like ice, and the salt that crusts my lips feels like frost. The island looks closer now, but it might as well be a million miles away because I have no more fight left in me – I have nothing at all. Another wave lifts me and carries me forward, leaving me face down in the shallows. My hands claw at wet, gritty sand, and I lie exhausted, frozen, gasping for air.*

*All is lost.*

## TASK 2

With the opening text still on the whiteboard, use some of the questions below (or similar) to generate a class discussion about the author's choice of language, encouraging pupils to judge how her words have matched or changed the mood and the action.

- The two first sentences suggest an exotic but terrifying scene. Which words support this image?
- Writers may at times show a repeated action to draw attention to a character's feelings. Which repeated movement does the author describe here, and what do you think this tells us about how Sami is feeling?
- Point out that this is a good example of show not tell, where a writer reveals a character's emotions without directly saying how they feel. Tell your class that this is a useful approach for them to use in their own narrative writing.
- We are shown a scene that seems sad – what else gives the reader the idea that Sami might be heartbroken or worried?
- The writer tells us that Sami feels like he's swallowed 'half the Aegean Sea'. If you know where the Aegean Sea is, does this carry a message? What might this tell us about Sami's background, where he's come from, and where he might be going?
- Repetition is often used by writers to emphasize important phrases or feelings. Can you spot any examples of repetition in this passage? Why is this more effective than just using a word or phrase once?
- Do you think this passage is like the setting of a scene for a stage production? Can you say why it seems theatrical?





## LESSON 3:

### Writing a framed memory

#### OBJECTIVES

- To capture in writing a happening from the past
- To provide a writing task that engages interest
- To use writing as a tool for reflection
- To select appropriate vocabulary and grammar



#### STARTER ACTIVITY

Ask the pupils to get into pairs, then issue a copy of **Resource 4** and a red and a blue pen to each pair.

Explain that they will now look at an extract from the main story alongside a passage from another of Sami's flashbacks.

- Ask pupils to underline any verbs they recognize as past tense in red and any present tense verbs in blue.
- Ask pupils to identify whether the passages are written in the first-person narrative style, or the third-person narrative style. They should write their answer under each column.
- Now ask the whole class for a show of hands on the narrative style of each passage to gain a majority decision.
- Guide the class to a recognition that the writer, Cathy Cassidy, distinguishes between a flashback and the present day by using different tenses, but also by using first-person narrative in both.
- Explain how sometimes Cathy also distinguishes between memories and core text by using different narrative voices (as in *Love from Lexie*).




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## RESOURCE 4

### Passage from the main story:



They say I am lucky, the luckiest boy alive. They say that I must be brave and strong to have survived the hardships life has thrown at me, that I have been given a chance for a new beginning and must grab that chance with both hands.

I am lucky, lucky, lucky . . . or so they tell me.

I didn't choose any of this, and new beginnings feel empty and hollow when you have nobody to share them with.

Well, I have my aunt, my uncle and two grown-up cousins I've barely met. But although they have opened their arms and their hearts to me, I cannot do the same. I cannot let myself care any more, because I am not as strong as people think.




### Passage from a flashback:

My father liked to look at the stars. He would sit on the flat roof of our old house in Damascus, where the railings were lined with terracotta pots of tomatoes, aubergines and peppers, and the warm breeze was heavy with the scent of jasmine, and we'd gaze at the big dark canopy of the night sky.

'Play the flute for us, Sami,' my father would say, and I'd work my way through my scales yet again, squeaky and slow. I got better, of course, until I could play pretty well, until I could provide a soundtrack for my father to look at the stars.



## TASK 1



Having examined, in their last lesson, the long-ago memory that still haunts Sami, pupils will now work on a framed memory of their own. Pupils should work individually. They will each need a thesaurus.

- Reassure pupils that the memory does not have to be sad or life-changing: it can be a happy memory or a funny memory or a dramatic memory – or, of course, it can be a sad memory if they feel like writing about it.
- Like Cathy Cassidy, in just 150 words they should try to capture the events, the feelings, the mood of that day.
- Remind them of the power of show not tell in their writing.
- Emphasize that because they are limited to 150 words, they need to select each one carefully.
- Pupils need to write succinctly. Explain that this means writing very concisely, condensing all the feelings, the happenings, the atmosphere, the colours of that day into just 150 words. This piece of writing will definitely need some planning and redrafting.



## RESOURCE 5

Drafting your framed memory:



A large rectangular box with horizontal lines for writing, surrounded by decorative illustrations of leaves, stars, musical notes, and a paper boat.

Some teachers may wish to introduce a modelling on the board to aid the process of writing succinctly. You may choose to display a pupil's work in progress on the whiteboard and discuss word choices, adding and taking away and moving parts around.



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## RESOURCE 6

Final framed memory for display:

A large rectangular frame with a blue border and horizontal lines, intended for a final framed memory for display. The frame is empty and occupies the central portion of the page.

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# LESSON 4:

## Writing letters to friends and family



### OBJECTIVES

- To work collaboratively with team members
- To address a character as if real
- To add detail to an original text
- To write imaginatively, focusing on the creative use of language



Sami's dad  
Sami's mum  
Sami's sister  
Sami's Uncle Dara and Aunt Zenna  
Marley – best friend and lead guitar player  
Lexi – love interest and singer/songwriter  
Bobbi-Jo – keyboard



Displaying these names on the whiteboard, introduce these characters as key people in Sami's story. (Point out that Sami himself is not included because this lesson deals with characters who are not fleshed out to the same extent as Sami, who is of course writing as first-person narrator).



For the tasks that follow, split the class into six or seven working groups. Each group is to be given the name of one of the characters listed above – or each team could pick the name or number of a character out of a box.



### STARTER ACTIVITY



Tell the groups that their task will be to write a three-paragraph letter to their chosen character, from Sami's point of view. The letter should express Sami's emotions towards them, so encourage the groups to think about their character's involvement with Sami and how Sami might be feeling. They can choose, if they wish, to fill in gaps left by the text, so there is an opportunity to use the imagination by referring to additional aspects of the character's life.



Tell them that they have 15 minutes to research their given character, making a list of any key traits they spot (or remember) and anything Sami mentions about his relationship to them. Each group could share out different parts of the novel in order to save time.



### TASK 1

Explain to the teams that they must write the letter from Sami's perspective. Which emotions does Sami display throughout the book? Which of these emotions relate to the group's given character? Ask the teams to come up with a list of emotions that they might want to convey in their writing.



## TASK 2

Give a copy of Resource 7 to each team, but urge pupils to discuss ideas before mapping out the content/detail of their three paragraphs here.

### RESOURCE 7



#### Tips for success:

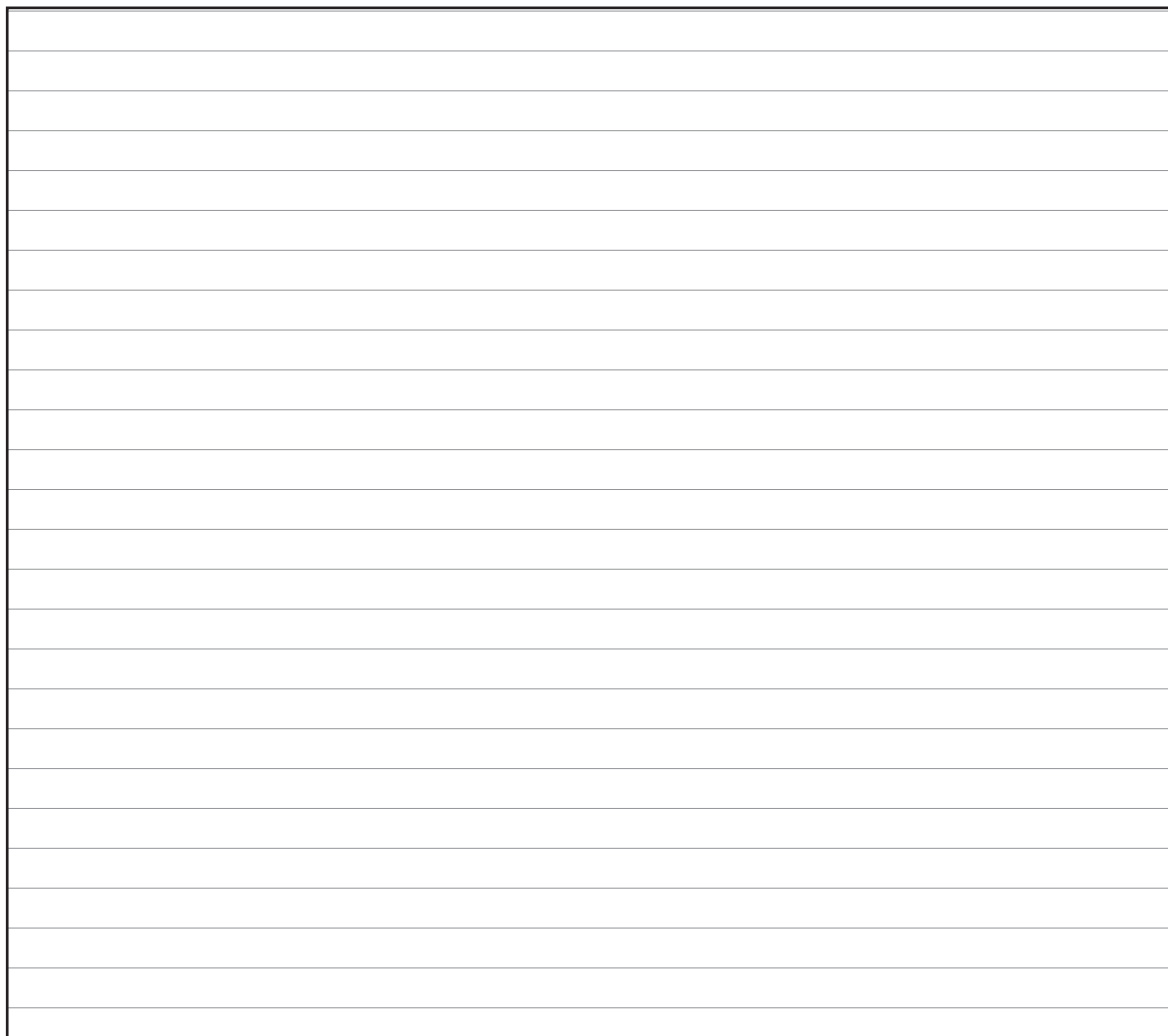
- Craft your opening sentence carefully to capture the attention of your reader.
- Use the personal pronoun 'I' as you write in role.
- Remember that this is an informal letter rather than a formal one.
- Use a variety of sentence types.
- Make full use of a dictionary and thesaurus.
- Try to include something surprising.
- Use of humour could be effective.





Finally hand out **Resource 8** so that teams can write the final version of their letter.

## RESOURCE 8



### Optional follow-up activities

- Each group could practise reading out their letter, preparing to present it to the whole class. Open by introducing the character it is addressed to, and Sami's relationship with them.
- Pupils could have a go at writing a similar letter to a real family member or friend from their own perspective.
- The letters could form part of a class display, along with the framed memories.

