

NEW WRITING
NORTH
YOUNG WRITERS

WRITING
FROM
HOME



'The Interchange'

This is the first of several online workshops exploring travel and characters involved in journeys. Focusing on the Gateshead Interchange we will look at some photographs and respond to them by writing notes and observations, then explore how to restructure the notes into some short poetic forms.

Stage One

Work through the images slowly, using the suggested activities to focus your attention and produce some rough notes.



Picture One – Write down a brief description (50–100 words) of what you see in this photograph, including colours, shapes, objects, signs.

- What are the doors into the interchange like?
- What is reflected in the glass?
- What is in the distance?
- Imagine it as a piece of film footage and describe two movements.



Picture Two – In no more than three sentences, describe the sculpture and what you think the different parts of it represent. What do you imagine the two faces are saying to each other?



Picture Three – Pick out one detail of this picture and describe it using as simile or a metaphor. Think about what it reminds you of or what it is like.

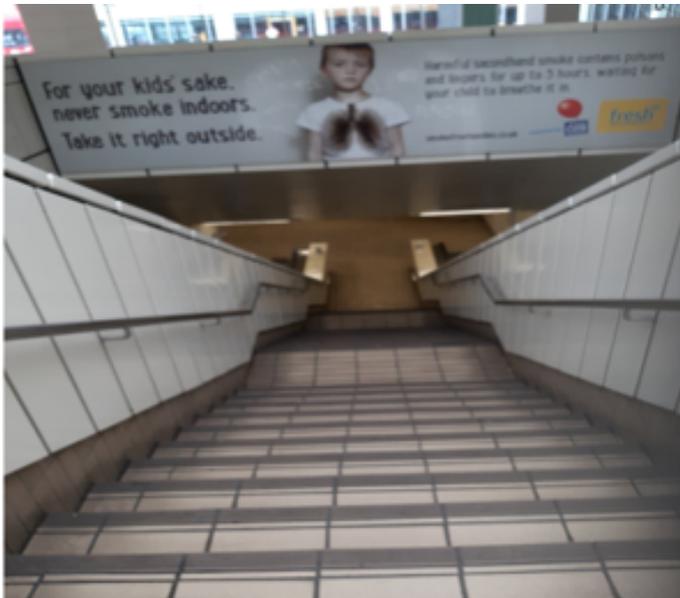
Remember that metaphors and similes draw comparisons between things and this can be done through similarity of shape, colour, size, function, material, mood or any other connection you can think of.

One famous, unusual and very striking simile is found in the opening lines from T.S. Eliot's poem *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*

*“Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherized upon a table;...”*



Picture Four – Write a description of two sounds you might hear if you were standing in the spot where the photograph was taken from. Describe something you can imagine is on the floor near your feet, and a movement that might catch your eye (for instance, I noticed some pigeons that were flying around inside the interchange).



Picture Five – In one sentence describe this picture and write down a feeling that this photograph triggers in you and why.

If this photo was from a film what genre do you imagine the film to be? (e.g. a horror, a comedy, a spy movie, a romance, a superhero film, a science fiction film, social realist film).

Write down an incident that you would expect to happen in that movie.



Picture Six – Write down a question you might wonder about if you were there. Write down a phrase you might overhear someone say.



Picture Seven – Write a brief description of one of the people in the photograph, noting age, gender, details of appearance / clothing and what it is they are doing.

Write down something you imagine is in the person's pocket or bag.

Write down where you imagine they are going to and why.

Write a thought they might be thinking in that moment.

Now read back through all of your notes to see how they capture a sense of setting. Do your answers suggest or give you any ideas for a story?

Stage Two

One method of condensing your notes and honing images is to rework your notes into fixed poetic forms. To do this, look at **Appendix One: 'A Scattering of Haiku'**.

Haikus are minimalistic poems that originated from Japan in the 17th Century. They are like little snapshots of life that focus on concrete sensory details and observed impressions of the world, often recording small changes. As you can see from the examples, they are written in three short lines and should be read aloud in one breath. A strict translation from the Japanese into the English haiku form should make the whole poem seventeen syllables with five in the first line, seven in the second and five in the last line. However, it is more important to take the essence of haiku as short fleeting observations, and as you can see, some of the examples shown in 'A Scattering of Haiku' do not meet this strict syllable count.

Task – Look through your notes again and underline some of the most interesting and striking sentences or phrases. Use these underlined phrases and have a go at reworking them into a sequence of haiku, each with three short lines which can be spoken in one breath.

Stage Three

Look at **Appendix Two, titled 'Cinquain Examples'**.

The cinquain, as you can see, is another short syllabic form of poetry. They are called cinquains because they have five lines (cinq being five in French). You will see that some of the lines are longer than others. This is because of the strict syllable count appointed to each line, which creates a wave of sound with a sudden drop at the end. Have a go at reading some of the examples out loud, pausing slightly at the end of each line.

The arrangement of syllables in a cinquain is as follows:

2
4
6
8
2

Task – Use some of your underlined notes about the Interchange to write a couple of cinquains. You may choose to use the same notes you reworked into your haiku or you may wish to use some of the descriptions and phrases you haven't reworked yet.

What is the effect of using this cinquain structure on your descriptions?

Do you prefer the haiku or the cinquain form?

Stage Four

Look at **Appendix Three: 'Description of Mirkwood'**.

This is a short extract from *The Hobbit* by J.R.R. Tolkien, which describes the moment when the characters enter the forest of Mirkwood.

Read the extract carefully and note the details of the description (colours and sounds) as well as the contrasts (light and dark / big and small) as well as the use of movement (verbs, adjectives and adverbs), which all contribute to create a mood and threatening atmosphere for this setting.

Task – Look back at your original notes written in response to the photographs of the Interchange. Note what genre you identified while looking at Picture 5 (horror, comedy, spy movie, romance, superhero, science fiction, social realist, fantasy).

Drawing on your notes, write a detailed description of the Interchange as if it was a setting in a novel written in this genre. Introduce some characters who are moving through the setting (approximately 300 words).

Appendix One: A Scattering of Haiku

With every gust of wind,
the butterfly changes its place
on the willow.

Basho

Octopus catching jars-
summer's moonspun dreams,
soon ended.

Basho

On a branch
drifting down river
a grasshopper, singing

Issa

In this mountain village,
shining in my soup bowl,
the bright moon arrives

Issa

The Vanity of men
They would like to retain
This passing winter moon

Issa

this road,
through autumn nightfall-
No one walks it

Basho

Watching my daughter
Watching her daughter
Washing her doll's white socks

Louise Bevin

I

Among twenty snowy mountains
The only moving thing
Was the eye of the blackbird.

II

I was of three minds,
Like a tree
In which there are three blackbirds.

IX

When the blackbird flew out of sight,
It marked the edge
Of one of many circles.

Wallace Stevens (extracts from *13 ways of looking at a blackbird*)

Appendix Two: Cinquains

Long Shadows

Maples
in the morning
sunlight cast long shadows
upon the snow like a roadmap
of limbs.

Empty

Empty
like bottled air
clinging to nothing real,
except to slippery inside walls
of space

Resurrection

Early
Summer heat wave...
Spring dies a searing death
only to rise from the ashes
next year.

The One That Survived

She stands
in the graveyard
where he sleeps forever
beneath the heavy weight of all
her tears.

Appendix Three: Description of Mirkwood

They walked in single file. The entrance to the path was like a sort of arch leading into a gloomy tunnel made by two great trees that leant together, too old and strangled with ivy and hung with lichen to bear more than a few blackened leaves. The path itself was narrow and wound in and out among the trunks. Soon the light at the gate was like a little bright hole far behind, and the quiet was so deep that their feet seemed to thump along while all the trees leaned over them and listened. As their eyes became used to the dimness they could see a little way to either side in a sort of darkened green glimmer. Occasionally a slender beam of sun that had the luck to slip in through some opening in the leaves far above, and still more luck in not being caught in the tangled boughs and matted twigs beneath, stabbed down thin and bright before them. But this was seldom, and it soon ceased altogether.

There were black squirrels in the wood. As Bilbo's sharp inquisitive eyes got used to seeing things he could catch glimpses of them whisking off the path and scuttling behind tree-trunks. There were queer noises too, grunts, scufflings, and hurrying in the undergrowth, and among the leaves that lay piled endlessly thick in places on the forest-floor; but what made the noises he could not see. The nastiest things they saw were the cobwebs: dark dense cobwebs with threads extraordinarily thick, often stretched from tree to tree, or tangled in the lower branches on either side of them. There were none stretched across the path, but whether because some magic kept it clear, or for what other reason they could not guess.

This workshop was devised by Bob Beagrie for New Writing North Young Writers.



Bob Beagrie has published numerous collections of poetry and several pamphlets, most recently *Civil Insolencies* (Smokestack 2019), *Remnants* written with Jane Burn (Knives, Forks & Spoons Press (2019), *This Game of Strangers* written with Jane Burn (Wyrd Harvest Press 2017), and *Leasungspell* (Smokestack 2016). His work has appeared in numerous anthologies and magazines and has been translated into Finnish, Urdu, Swedish, Dutch, Spanish, Estonian and Karelian. He is a founder member of the experimental poetry and music collective Project Lono. He lives in Middlesbrough and is a senior lecturer in creative writing at Teesside University.

New Writing North Young Writers is a programme for young people aged 12-19. We run creative writing groups, masterclasses and programmes in schools across the North East. We support young people to express their ideas, to work with professional writers and artists, to create and share new work, and to meet other young writers.

We would love to read your writing! Share it with us on social media using #writingfromhome or by emailing youngwriters@newwritingnorth.com. Search for New Writing North Young Writers on Instagram, Facebook or Twitter, where we will also be sharing regular writing prompts. Each week we will select a Young Writer of the Week whose work will be shared on our channels.

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