

Writing for Wellness

Creative Writing workshops

Facilitated by Felicity Tattersall

Overview

Wiltshire Museum's Community Curator worked with Re:Think, a local mental health charity to provide 5 creative writing workshops with the aim of improving wellbeing through creative writing practises. This was in response to the Museum's exhibition, Eric Walrond – a Caribbean writer in Wiltshire.

Participants were invited to attend the workshops via Re:Think's links within the local community and via Wiltshire Museums website and digital newsletter.

Felicity Tattersall is a creative writer and illustrator, she has worked on several community focussed projects and facilitated creative writing workshops and is currently writing a play.

Felicity designed each of the workshops to be relaxed and friendly, each one stand alone, so that if participants could not attend all the workshops, it would not matter. Each workshop explored writing exercises in response to local Caribbean writer, Eric Walrond's life and work. Focussing on his fantastic descriptions on nature, responding to place and his wonderful use of language. Positive and constructive feedback was encouraged, and there was no pressure to share work or contribute further to the sessions.

The Community Curator ensured each workshop was a welcoming place, ensuring everyone felt included in the sessions and felt at ease – this was vital to ensure participants got the most out of the sessions and felt comfortable, as for many attending something like this was a huge milestone.

Workshops

1 – Introductions and creative writing starting points

- Community Curator gave overview of Eric Walrond's life and work, particularly focussing on his time in Wiltshire.
- Tour of exhibition
- Creative activity – write down 10 words from the exhibition for discussion
- Using an excerpt from Eric's work, cut out ten words and develop/re-order into a poem, creating new connections and meaning.

2 – Nature writing

- Nature writing and links to wellbeing
- Example from Eric's writing – excerpt from Panama Gold (Tropic Death) – closed eyes during reading - share images that came to mind
- Outdoor activity – Nature Observation Diary
- Writing activity – impact nature had on you – use emotion wheels for descriptive inspiration

- Share work, give constructive feedback and responses to others work

3 – Place

- Visit Devizes Gallery to explore Devizes story
- Looking at historic maps – create your own map that tells the story of Devizes as viewed in your eyes, use large scale drawing and mark-making, the dominant features, interesting place names, pattern of the streets, how transport links have altered the town over time,
- Draw and write about a local landmark or object from the Devizes gallery – write down everything you know about it, everything you don't, use your imagination as to what story it could tell. What does it tell you about Devizes, your experience of Place, how is it part of the wider picture of Devizes?
- Share work, give constructive feedback and responses to others work

4 – Language

- Black out poems – using the exhibition panel print out, chose a page, select 20 words from the text, cut them out and play around with re-ordering them to create a new piece of writing that conveys a message about Eric, his life and work.
- Sunsets – 10 associated words – from those words create a list of synonyms linked to these words. Create a piece of writing about sunsets – but do not use the original ten words we listed!
- Feedback, give constructive feedback and responses to others work
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5 – Final workshop

- Celebration of writing
- Write a letter to Eric Walrond – what have you learnt from his life, his work, his time in Wiltshire? How has this affected your writing, inspired you?
- Sharing of writing participants have been working on
- Feedback, give constructive feedback and responses to others work
- Next steps for writers

Feedback from participants

“I really enjoyed the sessions and they have given me lots of inspiration and determination to keep writing and exploring around me to gain new ideas and perspectives. Please pass on my thanks to Fliss, she was really kind and gave great, constructive feedback. I would encourage anyone with an interest in writing and creativity to join any future workshops you run. I found as someone who struggles with mental health illness that doing something I was passionate about gave me great motivation to attend. I haven't sat in a group of people for years so was proud of myself for attending both sessions.”

“Thank you to you and your colleague Fliss for making the workshops such an encouraging and welcoming environment it is very rare in my life that I have found such positive atmosphere.”

“Thank you again for unlocking the writer’s block and bringing me so much joy.”

“I’d like to thank you and Fliss for all the planning and effort you’ve put into the workshop and to Wiltshire Museum for kindly hosting it.”

“It’s been lovely to reconnect and meet new people. It’s also been super helpful to me as part of my rehabilitation so thank you.”

Other feedback received:

- Give further thought to workshop title, particularly when delivering for an audience who already struggle with their health and wellbeing. A title such as ‘writing for wellbeing’ could be seen as a negative and could stop some people from attending because of the stigma attached to not being well or having poor mental health. A simpler title like ‘creative writing’ with a more detailed explanation of the workshops content and aims would be more suitable.