

Hello!

Welcome to It's All In Your Head, a series of online writing workshops to inspire mindfulness and clear some space in what might be a busy head! I'm Eimear. I'm a writer, facilitate writing and drama classes, produce festivals for young audiences and have just curated Waterford Writers Weekend 2020.

Having a creative practice is what has kept me sane(ish) over the years and it's why I love to help others create one for themselves. Allowing yourself to get lost in making or creating something has the potential to soothe, and root you in the present moment, and for me that's always the best way to get me out of a funk and improve my mood.

I LOVE READING. I always have, it is my means of escaping, and in a way, it helps me make sense of the world. At the moment I've devoted myself to reading books by black authors and it has given me a much greater understanding of a world I'll never inhabit and how black people have to navigate the world. Reading builds empathy and empathy makes the world a better place. Reading is also essential to becoming a better writer. So, we'll look at work by other writers and share some favourites over the next few days that will hopefully inspire.

You don't need any special equipment, but if you could dedicate a copybook or notebook to this so that all your notes and writing could be kept together that can be helpful. You can write anywhere – at the kitchen table, under the covers in bed, in the bath if you like! Just find a comfortable spot where you can focus for a bit.

EVERYONE has a story to tell. Writing is not a special gift that only some people have. It's for everyone, and just requires some patience, some practice and the willingness to make mistakes. (I have made a LOT of mistakes)

Today's work is very straight forward – a warm up, a poem to read through, and a short writing exercise to start you off. Have fun!

A note on phones and the Internet

Listen – I love my phone, I am somewhat of an Instagram addict and have spent an inordinate amount of time playing Candy Crush, but just while you're writing and trying to focus, try put your phone (or whatever device you use most) on airplane mode. The internet is the greatest distraction ever invented and if I'm not strict with myself I'll find myself in an Instagram Deep Dive of Harry Styles new girlfriend and no one needs to be doing that with their time. Give yourself a break from the constant noise of the internet and take a breather. It'll make you feel better. Honest!

Warm Ups – AKA things to get you writing.

Like any physical activity, writing requires a warm up, a stretch of your creative muscle that prepares you for the writing and imagining ahead. There is no right or wrong way to do this, there'll be no one checking your spelling, or whether your writing is legible or not. It's just about moving the pen across the page. Sometimes a great idea might emerge from your warm ups – more often than not though warm ups will be a mish mash of words, half formed ideas and won't be worth revisiting. That's the point though! It will leave space for the great stuff to come through.

This warm up is the one I use most often – when I'm writing myself and when I'm teaching. It's inspired by an exercise from book called *The Artist's Way* by Julia Cameron.

Free Writing

1. Open your notebook and grab a pen
2. Set a timer for 3 minutes
3. Choose a topic. It can be anything at all. Here are a few you can use if you're stuck for inspiration – autumn, ice cream, happiness.
4. Start your timer and write about your chosen topic **NON STOP** for 3 minutes. Try not leave your pen leave the page. If you get stuck and don't know what to write, write anything: words, numbers, gobbledigook. Just write.

This won't be a work of art; I'd recommend not even reading through it straight away.

Congratulations – you are now officially a writer!

Scaffolding

Seamus Heaney, 1939 - 2013

Masons, when they start upon a building,
Are careful to test out the scaffolding;

Make sure that planks won't slip at busy points,
Secure all ladders, tighten bolted joints.

And yet all this comes down when the job's done
Showing off walls of sure and solid stone.

So if, my dear, there sometimes seem to be
Old bridges breaking between you and me

Never fear. We may let the scaffolds fall
Confident that we have built our wall.

Seamus Heaney was an Irish poet, and most of you will probably have heard of him and might even have studied his poems in school. Scaffolding is one of my favourite poems, I asked my brother to read it at my wedding in fact! To me, it's about love. But also, about writing, and putting the time in to make something beautiful. Read it and have a think about it. What does it mean to you? Do you like it? Maybe read it to someone in your family or a friend and see what they think. Jot down any thoughts about it in your notebook.

If poetry sometimes scares you, Heaney is a great place to start!

The Prompt

A character is digging in the garden and finds a fist sized nugget of gold. What happens with this unexpected windfall?

Use this prompt to inspire you. Write a story, a poem, an essay. It can be 100 words long, or a 1000. There are no rules, just write. This first exercise will be the scariest one to start – but as the old saying goes, a blank page won't edit itself. Words can be changed and tidied up but only if you write them first.

Don't forget – everyone has a story tell!

Until tomorrow!