

MODULE 1 FICTIONAL REALITY

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UNIT 1 THE GERMINAL IDEA**CONTENT**

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In this unit, you will be introduced to the first step in creative writing. Generally, good writers in all fields, especially in journalism, write creatively to enhance their ability to secure special and vantage positions in their chosen profession. In this course however, we are concerned with creative writing in literature. In this unit, we will concentrate on those areas from which you could generate ideas and materials for creative writing. A writer could get his idea from inexhaustible sources, but we will treat just a few of them.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit you should be able to:

- see and evaluate your environment differently;
- list possible areas that could generate ideas for your writing; and
- list some ideas that you could develop in your writing.

HOW TO STUDY THE UNIT

- a. Read this unit as diligently as possible.
- b. Find meaning of unfamiliar words in the unit using your dictionary.
- c. As you read, put major points down in a piece of paper or jotter.

- d. Do not go to the next section until you have fully understood the section you are reading now.
- e. Do all the Self-Assessment exercises in the unit as honestly as you can. In some areas where it is not feasible to provide answers to Self-Assessment exercises, go to the relevant sections of the unit to derive the answers.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

Fictional reality in literature is the ability of the writer to adopt or choose an idea which she/he presents in a technique that enables him/her capture and hold his/her readers' emotion as the events in the work unfold.

3.1 Ideas/Concepts

Basically, creative writing is an imaginative art. But before you can imaginatively create a story or a poem, you must have been struck by an idea or concept. However, in some cases, especially in poetry, the poems flow in the poet's imagination and he/she only records what is in the imagination. This is inspired creativity. Some writers claim to have written while in a trance. So creativity here is spontaneous creativity which is not based on idea but the idea emerges after the work is complete.

A writer could also be inspired by an idea or a concept. Let us look at corruption. Almost every day we hear of corruption. In the civil service, in government, in schools, on our roads, in recruitment and even at gates and reception areas of public places the story is the same. If you want to explore the idea of corruption in your work, you will ask yourself the following questions. What do you want to say about corruption? Is your intention that of condemnation, exaltation or to give information? Do you just want to let your audience know that corruption exists or does not exist in certain places? Your decision here will determine the content and form of your story. Hence, it influences your writing.

Having taken the decision on your perspective on the idea, the next step is to imaginatively create a story to suit your purpose. Can you think of a perspective, that you would like to adopt in an exposition of an ill in the society? Remember, the creative writer is the conscience of the society so should reflect the society objectively. You should be able to extol when necessary and criticize where criticism is required and condemn despicable acts.

Class stratification and its attendant entrenchment of inequality/ oppression in the society is another common area of discourse among Nigerians. Where do you work? Revisit the organization with the eyes, ears and mind of a creative writer. Are there forms of oppression, inequality or corruption there? Do you think you can tell the story of what happens?

By the end of this module, hopefully, you may be able to tell the story with fictitious names and some embellishments to make it realistic and interesting.

3.2 Environment

A writer is a product of his background. The environment of the writer has a great influence on his/her writing. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* would not have been written by him if he were not from Igboland. A non-Igbo man or woman who has lived in Igboland could depict the Igbo culture in a novel but not with much detailed information on an aspect of the culture of the people and its significance. Let us consider the following excerpt from the novel.

The missionaries had come to Umuofia. They had built their church there; won a handful of converts and were already sending evangelists to the surrounding towns and villages. That was a course of great sorrow to the leaders of the clan; but many of them believed that the strange faith and the white man's god would not last. None of his converts was a man whose word was heeded in the assembly of the people. None of them was a man of title. They were mostly the kind of people that were called efulefu, worthless, empty men. The imagery of an efulefu in the language of the clan was a man who sold his matchet and wore the sheath to battle. Chielo, the priestess of Agbala, called the converts the excrement of the clan, and the new faith was a mad dog that had come to eat it up. (p. 130).

In the above passage, Achebe presents the incursion of the Whiteman to Umuofia which is heralded by the advance group, the missionaries. In this short piece, he shows not just the activities of the missionaries and their converts but also the feelings of the elders, and the class of people that embraced the new religion. They are somehow outcasts, people of no consequence in the towns and villages. The elders believe this group of people could not achieve anything. On the other hand, the converts who belong to this class of people who are rejected and looked down on by their kinsmen, found solace in the new religion. Achebe contends that the callousness of the society towards this class of people contributed to the success of the new religion contrary to the expectations of the elders and the priestess of Agbala.

As a creative writer, you have to keep your eyes and ears 'wild, wide open' like one of my lecturers, Domba Asomba, used to say. This is the only way you could see and hear beyond everyone else in that environment. The filth in your surrounding acquires new meaning for you, new significance and a symbol of something, you could explore. This could be as a result of the people's way of life or attitude to public utilities which in turn could be a consequent of neglect, bad leadership or lack of patriotism. These alternatives will help you to build the structure of your story which must have some semblance of life. It is very important.

3.3 Events

Closely related to environment is events and maybe individuals, inter-personal relationships. An event could spark off the creativity/spirit in you. You may not build an entire story on it but it could form part of the story. Your ability to situate that event appropriately in the story is what matters. This helps to make your story coherent. Good novels, plays, short stories and poems thrive on coherence.

Think of an event – a birthday party, a wedding, a naming ceremony. Can you relate that event factually? Try to recount specific details and of that event. Think of the significance of some specific acts and include them in the story the way you recalled it. Have you ever been a bridesmaid or a bestman in a wedding? Can you recount vividly as much as possible, the preparation from home, the ceremony in the church, the exchange of consent and rings, the prayers, the dressing of the couple, the bridal train, the priest, the guests? Can you go beyond the bridal white gown? Was the gown flowing, were there sequins? Was the neckline too deep or too high? Can you describe her beyond “she looked beautiful” can you tell how beautiful, noting the minutest details of her make-up? Did she engage a make up artist? Was it worthwhile? If you can give these details in one, two or three paragraphs, read it again and the story is not drab, or boring but interesting you are getting close to your mark. Compare your write up with the one below.

Dusk was already approaching when their contest began. The drums went mad and the crowd also. They surged forward as the two young men danced into the circle. The palm fronds were helpless in keeping them back.

Ikezue held out his right hand. Okafo seized it, and they closed in. It was a fierce contest. Ikezue strove to dig in his right heel behind Okafo so as to pitch him backwards in the clever ege style. But the one knew what the other was thinking.

The crowd had surrounded and swallowed up the drummers, whose frantic rhythm was no longer a mere disembodied sound but the very heart-beat of the people.

The wrestlers were now almost still in each other's grip. The muscles on their arms and their thighs and on their backs stood out and twitched. It looked like an equal match. The two judges were already moving forward to separate them when Ikezue, now desperate, went down quickly on one knee in an attempt to fling his man backwards over his head. It was a sad miscalculation. Quick as the lightning of Amadiora, Okafo raised his right leg and swung it over his rival's head. The crowd burst into a thunderous roar. Okafo was swept off his feet by his supporters and carried home shoulder-

high. They sang his praise and the young women clapped their hands:

*'Who will wrestle for our village?
Okafo will wrestle for our village
Has he thrown a hundred men?
He has thrown four hundred men,
Has he thrown a hundred Cats
He has thrown four hundred cats.
Then send him word to fight for us.'*

In the passage above, Achebe presents an aspect of life of the people in Igboland through a detailed presentation of an event – a wrestling match. The reader can easily feel the excitement and the physical movements of the spectators and the wrestlers. He likens the rhythms of the drums to the heart-beat of the people. In another excerpt below, Festus Iyayi, in *Violence* through Idemudia's illness, and the attempts to admit him into the hospital presents the inability of the government to provide basic social amenities for the people.

Even in that early hour, the University Hospital was crowded. It was a pitiable sight. So many people were sick and in need of the doctor. The long benches were full. The porch outside was filled with patients who were able to stand. Some of the patients coughed violently.

Mothers who carried sick children moved agitatedly. The faces that waited were grim serious and preoccupied with worry (Violence, p. 61).

Festus Iyayi could have simply said "There were many sick people waiting to be attended to in the hospital". But he did not. Instead, he included minute details that recreate the pitiable sight in the minds of the readers. Initially, Idemudia and Adisa could not pay the required fee for registration and when they eventually managed to do so, they fail to get any reasonable service and attention from the hospital. The doctors are incapacitated by the misplaced priorities of the political or elite class.

The doctor put on his glasses again but his mind went back to the dark tunnel of numberless sick, their abject poverty and from that to the helplessness of their position. He couldn't understand why in the midst of so much disease, the government concentrated on building hotels instead of hospitals (Violence, p. 63).

You can see from the above, that a creative writer does not just see events on the surface but gives details, analyzes situations, adduces possible reasons for such situations or events or their consequences. They also seek underlying meanings to the surface events or use words that emphasize or highlight the message that is

being conveyed. In the first passage, note words like “long benches” “...filled,” “porches... full”, “coughed violently”, “moved agitatedly”, “faces...grim, serious.., preoccupied with worry”. These help to evoke the deplorable, near-desperate, and hopeless situation the patients find themselves.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Identify such words and adduce reasons why the writer has used them. Have you ever been to a General Hospital before? Try to recall your experience and compare it with the one above.

3.4 Individuals

Specific individuals in your society could ignite the creative impulse in you. Your story could revolve around this individual or he/she plays a significant role in the story or has a significant impact on the character of your protagonist. There is a saying that anyone who survives childhood has, at least a story in him or her. The individual could therefore be you or any other person who has played a significant role in your life or the lives of others. (It could be how this individual you admire or hate behaves). It could be how this individual relates to the people around him or her that inspire you.

In your writing, you present the society through such individuals. Their interpersonal relationships with others became sources of germinal ideas for you. In Festus Iyayi’s *Violence* for instance, the relationship between Obofun and his wife, Queen and others highlight the idea that excessive wealth generates excessive desire for material possession and sex. He associates opulence with moral laxity. Queen exhibits lack of sanctity for the marriage institution and sleeps with men to get contract awards or to gain one favour or the other.

In Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, his admiration for Unoka is obvious. Unoka’s presented as lazy and cowardly but Achebe’s attitude to him is not that of condemnation. He wants us to appreciate his qualities which if Okonkwo had possessed; his life may not have ended in catastrophe. Read the following passage on Unoka carefully.

He was very good on his flute, and his happiest moments were the two or three moons after the harvest when the village musicians brought down their instruments, hung above the fireplace. Unoka would play with them, his face beaming with blessedness and peace. Sometimes another village would ask Unoka’s band and their dancing egwugwu to come and stay with them and teach them their tunes. They would go to such hosts for as long as three or four markets, making music and feasting. Unoka loved the good fare and the good fellowship, and he loved this season of the year, when the rains had stopped and the sun rose every morning with dazzling

beauty...Unoka loved it all, and he loved the first kites that returned with the dry season, and the children who sang songs of welcome to them. He would remember his own childhood, how he had often wandered around looking for a kite sailing leisurely against the blue sky. (pp. 4-5)

Unoka is an artist, an actor and a musician. He is good natured, generous and humorous. He enjoys good fellowship and lives in harmony with his kinsmen and the forces of nature. His son, Okonkwo, lacks his warmth and humanity. Although his society sees Unoka's life as a disaster, he is useful to the society through his life.

3.5 Myth

Writers, from the origin of literature, have taken their germinal ideas from myth. The myths are either central to the works or are reflected in the works. We have explained the meaning of myth and the fact that it provides materials for creative writing has been treated in the course material ENG 210: Creative Writing II.

The myth of Moremi has been reflected in several literary works. As a writer, you will decide to reflect a particular myth the way it is or restructure it to suit your purpose. In the novel and the play, it is a bit difficult to base the entire work on a particular myth. Writers, often depict the myth as part of the story to help illuminate certain character(s), ideas or incident(s). In *Morountodun*, Femi Osofisan restructures the Yoruba Moremi myth to show Titubi's resolve to align with the oppressed class. In *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe presents the myth of Ogbanje as part of the belief system in Igboland. In both cases, the myths are presented as part of the stories.

In poetry, the most concise genre of literature, a myth could be the germinal idea and an entire poem becomes an exploration of that myth. Ogbanje in Igbo is Abiku in Yoruba. Read Wole Soyinka's *Abiku* to assess the explication of that belief system in Yorubaland.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 2

Read this poem two or three times and also read another poem with the same title "Abiku" by J. P. Clark. Compare it with Soyinka's 'Abiku' and see if you can write a poem based on that concept.

3.6 Legends

Legends deal with communal heroes or heroines. They are men and women who have performed certain feats in the past. A good example of such heroine is Queen Amina of Zaria. Ngugi Wa Thiong'O is an African writer who portrayed a legendary hero of the celebrated Mau-Mau anti-colonial rebellion freedom fighting in Kenya. In one of his plays, *The Trial of Dedin Kimathi*, he presents the

celebration of such a hero. However, in *A Gain of Wheat*, he presents such presumed legendary heroes who fought for uhuru-Independence as traitors. Some of them are Mugo, Gikonyo, Karanja, and Numbi who presumably played heroic roles in the struggle.

Uhuru demands herambee (unity) and on the eve of Independence, it is expected that these heroes and heroines work together for the progress of Kenya. Unfortunately all of them are burdened with guilt, shame and envy as they ruminate on their activities during the Mau-Mau emergency. One of them, Mugo who betrayed Khika is seen as a hero but his sense of guilt has tormented him so much that he felt that only a confession could liberate him from his torment.

Why should I not let Karanja bear the blame? He dismissed the temptation and stood up. How else could he ever look Mumbi in the face? His heart pounded against him, he felt sweat in his hands, as he walked through the huge crowd. His hands shook; his legs were not firm on the ground. In his mind everything was clear and final. He would stand there and publicly own the crime. He held on to this vision. Nothing, not even the shouting and the songs and the praises would deflect him from this purpose. It was the clarity of this vision which gave him courage as he stood before the microphone and the sudden silence. As soon as the first words were out, Mugo felt light. A load of many years was lifted from his shoulders. He was free, sure, confident (p. 267).

Here it is not an event or incident that is described. The passage presents what goes on in Mugo's mind, before his confession, the confession and his sense of relief thereafter.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 3

Can you think of a heroic exploit of a legendary hero? Try to imagine what goes on in his or her mind at a particular incident in his life, and recount it in a paragraph.

3.7 History

History and legend are interrelated. Both are set in the remote and immediate past of the people. This is unlike myth which is set in the primordial past. Many Nigerian writers have drawn the inspiration for some of their works from history. Many Nigerian writers especially novelists have written novels on the Nigerian Civil War. Each writer presents his own perspective on the war.

Poets and dramatists are not left out in recounting historical experiences imaginatively. One could say that each writer mediates history in order to present an artistically satisfying experience. Ola Rotimi's *Kurunmi*, *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi* and *Hopes of the Living Dead* are historical plays.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Creative writing is an art and a talent, which a writer may compulsively write while another writer makes a conscious effort to write. The important feature is the urge to write, the availability of what to write about and the ability to write fluently to present a coherent story. The art of fiction does not begin until the writer thinks of his story as worthy of presentation. When you have an idea, incident, event or relationship you want to portray, you must make sure that it will interest your audience, that it is worthy of exhibition.

In doing this, the first consideration is the establishment of “a fictional reality, or mimesis (the imitation of real life) or verisimilitude (semblance of truth). This consideration relates more to drama and prose which present stories. Poems also present stories but in a very special way as you will see in Module 3. To make your idea and story a creative work, it should be presented or dramatized in such a way that it will evoke the reader’s emotion as we see in some of the passages above. Before writing, the events exist only in your imagination so your task is to present them alive and vividly for your audience to not only view them the way they are in your imagination but also react to your character and events that are not real as if they are real.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit you have been taken through the first step in creative writing – the identification of what to write and their possible sources. We have used some excerpts from renowned writers to demonstrate this. We have taken more illustrations from the novel because story telling or recounting events in prose is part of our everyday life.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

List the seven possible areas that could generate ideas for a creative writer and indicate which of them you think you can utilize easily?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

Achebe, Chinua (1962). *Things Fall Apart*. London: Heinemann.

Ngugi Wa Thiong’O (1968). *A Grain of Wheat*. London: Heinemann.

Ngugi Wa Thiong’ O and Micere Mugo (1976) *The Trial of Deddan Kimathi*. London: Heinemann.

Osofisan Femi (1982) *Morountodun and Other Plays*.

Rotimi, Ola (1993). *Hopes of the Living Dead*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books.
(1998) *Kurunmi*. Ibadan: University Press.

(1974) *Ovonramwen Nogbaisi*. Ibadan: Oxford University Press.

Iyayi, Festus (1989) *Violence*. Ibadan: Longman.

UNIT 2 THE PROCESS

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the last unit, we discussed how and where we can get the germinal idea for a creative work. Once you have decided on what to write, the next step is to start the story. This appears to be the most difficult aspect of creative writing especially for the playwright and the novelist. The poet could be inspired and instantly, he/she produces a poem. The novelist and the playwright are usually uncertain as to how to start their works.

In some cases, the works are started but are not completed. In this unit, we will discuss how to start a creative piece and complete it.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- identify an idea;
- plan your writing;
- develop a story based on that idea;
- identify how you could stick through it; and
- try to write the first paragraph of your story.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

Some writers are born. Some may come from a family of writers and others have the innate talents. Some however are forced into writing by circumstances while others have their creative talents ignited through an encounter with people or influenced by a course in creative writing.

3.1 Planning

Creative writing depends on two different kinds of planning. First, you prepare to write by making an assessment of what is involved in expressing your idea and conveying it to your audience in a captivating manner. The next step is to plan the time and structure of how to get the job done. Creative writing timetable is practical, not theoretical. Although you will want to establish the timetable for your whole project before you set out to write, the technique for planning writing time depends to a large extent on your profession, the time you could spare for the project and on your inspiration.

The concept of writing with confidence or pleasure is somehow mysterious and it is believed to be reserved for “born writers”. This myth or illusion is reinforced by our cultural belief that “creative writing can’t be taught”. Yet, most of us have learnt to write creatively; and we strive to improve by the day with less frustration and more control. Fortunately, common sense tells us anyone can learn to write well, with both energy and satisfaction.

Most writers share some unpleasant experience in the course of writing. Sometimes, what you want to write does not seem to flow in the way you want it. At other extreme cases, the mind is blank and the inspiration is not there, consequently, some works have remained uncompleted even by some renowned writers. Most often, we write to explore an idea; to understand a concept; and to demonstrate certain experience or make your reader understand certain issues or adopted a particular way of looking at an issue. We should try to write with a sense of self-discovery and try to engage and entertain our audience.

In planning, you must remember that literature is words set apart in some ways from ordinary everyday use. Unlike, oral literature, written literature is a private art that serves as a vehicle for the exploration and expression of emotion and the human situation. It is described as a lovely art, so make your writing lovely.

In your planning, you may start by giving a brief presentation of what the work is all about or the social influences that inspired you. You could give the synopsis of what you want to write about through the presentation of an outline, character sketches and the setting. Try to relate your idea or imagery to human experience or use it to define human personality or relationship. Let us try to use the water imagery to define the character of a woman.

“Water ebbs and flows, sparkles, reflect and evaporate.

It can carry a vessel, or take the shape of any vessel that holds it. Water can form deep pools, impenetrable, may be mysterious, or puddle into shallowness. It wears many faces-snows, sleet, and ice and can fall from the eyes as tears, it can mirror the self, it can quench thirst” (Hall, 1989:146).

Charlotte Bronte uses many of these characteristics of water to capture the elusive Lucy Snowe in the 1853 novel *Villette*”.

Try to see if you can use some of the above characteristics of water to describe someone you know. Then in your imagination, create a character that you could relate to some of the characteristics. Note everything that “seems to connect with character and theme, allowing the imagination to flow freely” (Hall, 1989:147).

The method below could help you in drawing your outline. Choose an idea/object and list at least ten things that come to your mind concerning the idea. Let us look at the example below generated at a creative writing workshop at the National Theatre, Lagos.

There are protective things that prevent danger.
 Doors can be open to anybody,
 To enter a secret place.
 Doors can be coverage from evil.
 There are various types of doors
 Gold, Silver, Bronze, Wood.
 Doors could lead to anywhere.
 A room containing anything.
 Doors also mean privacy.
 Doors could lead anywhere,
 To prison, heaven, land of beauty,
 Or even to a disastrous place
 Doors could be of wisdom
 And sorrow, success and failure
 Doors could also lead to a room filled with idealism
 And imaginations of the impossible.
 Doors could mean eternity.
 Doors could bring an end to your problems
 Doors could bring a sad moment or happiness.
 Doors can make you see and feel the wonderful things of the world.
 And worst of all, they could bring death
 Which is an end to life.
 Doors could lead to slavery and destruction.
 Doors could love you and keep you safe,
 And doors could despise you and keep you locked.
 They could lead to the path of your heart.

- Onyenachi Ahumba, 15yrs, International School, UNILAG, SS1

From this list you can use the door imagery to explore human experience.

3.2 Starting

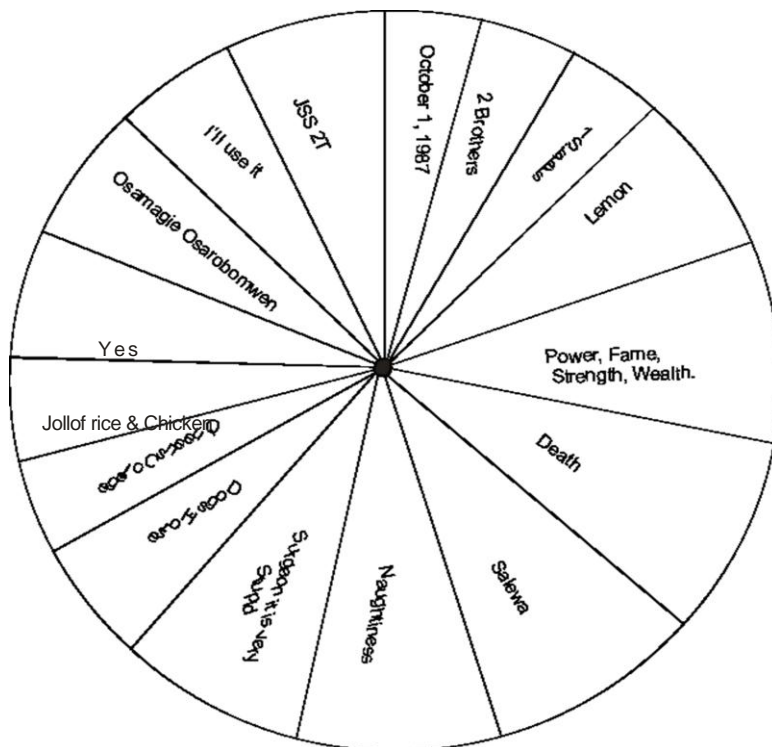
By now, you have the idea and an outline and you are confronted with the problem of how to begin. You stare at the blank sheet and you have the pen in your hand with a thousand and one options in your head. Even some renowned writers encounter this problem. In fiction, as in life, no venture no success, so take the plunge. Just start the story, what will be uppermost in your mind will be to rouse the attention of your reader, so that he or she can hardly wait to reach the end of the story to find out what it is all about.

I said earlier that anyone who survived childhood has at least one story in him or her. You may start with the story of yourself. Try to recollect a significant and interesting event in your life that you could start with. Read the paragraph below which is the beginning of a novel, *African Child* by Camara Laye and later get the novel and read it.

I was a little boy playing round my father's hut. How old would I have been at that time? I cannot remember exactly. I still must have been very young: five, maybe six years old. My mother was in the workshop with my father, and I could just hear their familiar voices above the noise of the anvil and the conversation of the customers.

Suddenly I stopped playing, my whole attention fixed on a snake that was creeping round the hut. He really seemed to be 'taking a turn' round the hut. After a moment I went over to him. I had taken in my hand a reed that was lying in the yard – there were always some lying around; they used to get broken off the fence of plaited reeds that marked the boundary of our compound – and I thrust this reed into the reptile's mouth. The snake did not try to get away: he was beginning to enjoy our little game; he was slowly swallowing the reed; he was devouring it, I thought, as if it were some delicious prey, his eyes glittering with voluptuous bliss; and inch by inch his head was drawing nearer to my hand. At last the reed was almost entirely swallowed up, and the snake's jaws were terribly close to my fingers.

You may decide to present your ideas in a circle like the one below. Study the circle below by Osaronomwen Osamagie on herself.



Osaronomwen Osamagie, Queens College, Iwaya, Yaba, Lagos. JSS 2T

Now, draw your own circle, call it ‘you’ by name. Divide the circle into sections and in each write the following:

- Your name
- The number of sisters and brothers you have
- The country you live in
- What you like about your country
- What you do not like about your country
- Your favourite food
- What you like the most
- What you dislike the most
- Who you love the most – who your favourite person is
- Who your best friend is
- What you want to become
- What you fear the most
- What you think of the world
- What you like about the world
- What you dislike about the world
- What you think about nature

- What will you do with your money if you are rich
- What you will do if you have power to do something
- The books you like to read the most
- The most important thing you have been told
- Your favourite subject
- Your favourite colour

Use what you have in your circle to write a poem or short story

You could start your story by narrating an incident like the one or above, or describing a character as in the one below from Chukwuemeka Ike's *Toads for Super*.

The opening point of your work is very important. Try to introduce your principal characters at the earliest opportunity. You could start with a dialogue, narration or description, the important thing is to ensure that you are consistent with your choice. Ensure that when you start the writing and continue, the tempo or "pace is not slowed down immediately after the lengthy narrative introducing the characters and putting across other background information" (Ike, 1991:136).

His Royal Highness, Ezeonuku III of Onuku, arrived at the pre-fabricated temporary residence of the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Songhai in a manner intended to leave the Vice-Chancellor in no doubt that he was the First Class Chief for Onuku Province, member of Songhai's Upper House, the most influential personality for miles around, and the bossom friend of the Governor – General, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Educational Affairs, and every important personality you could name in Capital City. Never was a title more becoming to its bearer. His Royal Highness, nearly six feet in height and over two hundred pounds in weight, exuded royalty and dignity as he walked, and he talked, and in the slow and seemingly deliberate manner in which he rolled his neck from side to side. On this occasion, he brought with him his court musicians, who rarely accompanied him except on very major occasions such as the opening sessions of Parliament. This was a sure means of adding the Vice-Chancellor to his ever growing list of V.I.P friends and admirers.

The court musicians travelled in a black Morris Minor which preceded His Royal Highness. By the time his milk white Buick Electra stopped in front of the Vice Chancellor's log hut, the three-man ensemble was already praising him to the skies, forming a manilla in front of him as he stepped out of the car. He stood his full height in front of them, looking vacantly and majestically into

the distance and failing to notice the smiling Vice-Chancellor who had moved up for a handshake. When he raised his beaded right hand which carried the regal fan, the little man with the oja skipped in front of him to pay special tribute with his instrument. H.R. H. absorbed the encomiums with the dignity of his office, nodding slowly but continuously as encomium toppled over encomium in quick succession. Occasionally a touch of humour earned the flutist a dignified half-smile.

3.3 Continuing

Once you have started your story, it is usually better to follow your outline. It helps you to get focused and avoid unnecessary digressions. Once you have chosen the genre, and adopted your style, your task is to continue your story. You may decide to present your story chronologically from the beginning to the end or make use of flashbacks to knit your story together to achieve the desired cohesion.

As you write, you may develop new ideas or have reasons to modify the existing ones, do not hesitate to do that. Alternatively, you can prune everything at the point of revision. You may be aware of some gaps, if you can correct immediately, do so but if not, go ahead with your writing.

You may or may not have a time table. I observe that it is difficult in creative writing to adhere to any time table though some writers do. The length of time the work will take depends on the time you can spare for it and, most importantly, on how readily the ideas come. Sometimes the characters engage in a dialogue in the writer's mind yet he/she may not have time to record it immediately. In some case after that moment, he/she may not be able to recall the ideas or how they flowed in his/her mind. Some literary works take many years to complete while some are written in a month or two.

As you continue with your writing, you may become barren of ideas. This means that you have time to write but you cannot do so because nothing comes to your mind. But you should not give up at such times. You may need to revisit your outline, joggle some ideas and plan more thoroughly. You may skip a particular troubled area and move on to the next chapter, scene or stanza. You may even change the direction of your story or take a long rest.

As you write, the story is bound to be revolving in your mind even at odd times and odd places. The inspiration bug could bite you at any time. If you can, as soon as it comes, record it and revise latter. In a short story titled "Inspiration Bug" by Akachi Ezeigbo, Chiny was in the church and while the preacher preached with eloquence, powerful ideas struck her. She started comparing the writer and the preacher and ruminated that both preacher and writer, exhort, criticize and even entertain. "Both

are interpreters and in a sense also prophets ...” (p72). As these thoughts impinged upon her consciousness she realized that she has been bitten by “Inspiration bug”. She exclaimed:

What a time! What a place!

“No...no... not here, please” I whispered

“What ...? Asked the woman sitting by me.

“Nothing...” I replied hastily. (p72)

As the preacher was talking, his words gradually faded from her consciousness and in their place “was this beautiful story line which I immediately thought could form the framework for my next novel” (p73). As she thought about it, an overpowering avalanche of ideas stormed her brain. As she muttered to herself her neighbor tried to find out if she was alright. She left the church, went straight to her house to complete the story before the inspiration bug left her.

This could happen to anyone. For instance, when I was writing *The Regal Dance*, I was smiling to myself as I wrote. It was in the office. A colleague entered and I did not take notice of him because I was engrossed in my writing. I was enjoying the fictive world and oblivious of the real world around me. The man stood for a while and called, O-nye-ka. I was startled. I looked up, wanted to ask him to leave but could not since he was a senior colleague. He swore that I was an ‘Ogbanje’ or a little bit insane. If not, how could I be sitting in an office alone and smiling to myself. I tried in vain to explain; later showed him my earlier manuscripts. He was not only convinced but collected them – *Sons For My Son* and *Into The World* and helped me to get them published.

Once you have started writing, and momentary flashes come to you, please capture them on paper or record them in a tape as soon as they come before they vanish and may not reappear again. Do that, even if it means packing your car, stepping out of bed in the middle of the night or “stepping out of shower half soaked or interrupting a tête-à-tête with a possessive friend” (Ike, 1991:87). This means that you need a lot of discipline for you to stick to your work, continue it till you get the first draft.

3.4 Completing

The ending of your story is as important as the beginning. You must ensure that your story ends at the appropriate point and not stretched to an anti-climax. If you are not careful, your story will never end but it has to end. Ensure that all the conflicts are resolved and that you end at the point where you will achieve high dramatic effect. Then revise your work. Some writers claim that they do not revise their works. You should at this stage, revise your work; tie the loose ends to

ensure that you produce a work that is worth reading. At the point of revision, try to assess yourself by providing honest answers to the following questions:

1. Have I told an interesting story?
2. Is it convincing?
3. Is my perspective on the theme clear?
4. Have I achieved the objective I set for myself?
5. Have I created convincing characters?
6. Are my characters memorable?
7. Is the environment suitable for the characters?
8. How is my language?
9. Are there irrelevances that could be cut?
10. Do I like the way it ends?

You can revise your work as many times as possible before you send it to a publisher.

3.5 The Title

Sometimes, you give your story a title before you start and it ends up with that title. However, at other times, the title evolves from the story. As you write your story and titles come to your mind, write them down and later review all of them and choose the best.

The titles may change from the first draft through other drafts until you get the final piece. My play *Sons for My Son* started as *Ndidi* (My third year exam play) and later metamorphosed to “Obiefuna”, “An Only Son” before I settled finally for *Sons For My Son*.

You should choose a title that will give your reader an idea about your subject matter. If you choose an appropriate title before you start writing, it will help you to ensure that your characters, events, and other incidents in the play revolve around it.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Creative writing is the arrangement of words artistically to tell a story, relate an experience or recreate an event or a situation. It is written in form of drama, poetry or prose. A creative writer is an ordinary human being who imaginatively creates a new story, recreates an existing story, or relates an experience. The story or experience could be based on real life experiences, history, myth, legend or folklore.

Creative writing therefore is a product of imagination. The writer goes through a process whereby he conceptualizes an idea, fertilizes the idea, moulds it in a

desired form and produces a perceived perfect work. As a writer you need an organizational ability that would enable you to organize the conceptualized idea into a coherent and comprehensive form. The first step in this process is to draw your outline, plan your outline with a stimulating introduction (beginning), an interesting body (middle) and a build up to a reasonable and effective conclusion (end). In this way, you will be able to create an imaginative or fictional world that is very close to reality.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit we have taken you through the process of creative writing. We have tried to teach, through copious illustrations from the works of some renowned creative writers and learners like you. You have seen that some people are writers by accident while some came from a family of creative artists. Either way, you need to learn some of the rudiments of the art for you to excel. You have also learnt that you need a lot of discipline for you to start and end a creative work.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Why do you think that you need discipline to produce a good novel, play or poetry?

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READING

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UNIT 3 YOUR MOUTHPIECE

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the last unit, we tried to take you through the process of creative writing. You were taught how to plan, start and complete your story. In this unit, we will introduce you to how you would present that story. Who will tell your story - your point of view and why you should choose a particular point of view.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you will be able to:

- identify the various points of view;
- list different genre of literature;
- list various modes of presenting your creative work for each genre;
- identify the most appropriate perspective for your writing; and
- apply perspectives appropriately.

HOW TO STUDY THE UNIT

- a. Read this unit as diligently as possible.
- b. Find meaning of unfamiliar words in the unit using your dictionary.
- c. As you read, put major points down in a piece of paper or jotter.
- d. Do not go to the next section until you have fully understood the section you are reading now.
- e. Do all the Self-Assessment exercises in the unit as honestly as you can. In some areas where it is not feasible to provide answers to Self-Assessment exercises, go to the relevant sections of the unit to derive the answers.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

In creative writing, you tell a story or relate an experience. It is necessary for you to know how to do that. You need to decide whether you will tell the story by yourself or you will tell it through somebody. Each genre of literature has its unique characteristics which influence the way it is presented.

3.1 Dialogue

Dialogue is a conversation between two or more people. It is the ultimate medium of presentation of action in drama. However, it is used sparingly in poetry prose where it is used to inject action but in drama the action is presented through dialogue. In whatever genre, you should need Hamlet's advice to the players in the "Mouse Trap". "Suit the action to the word and the word to the action". For effectiveness, dialogue should be tight and move swiftly.

Dialogue is used to convey information, to reveal character, to crystallize relationships, to propel the plot and "precipitate revelation, crises and climaxes" (Hall, 1989:94). It means that dialogue should not be static but must be moving forward in such a progressive manner that it should lead to a change of heart or plan or a resolution of an action.

You should bear in mind that you must take pains to consciously create dialogue that is as close as possible to everyday speech. Avoid irrelevances; you should play down on the use of obscenities even when it is used to depict particular environment or people. Excessive use of profanities tends to bore the audience. Try not to use slangs in dialogue except when it contributes to the depiction of a character.

In creating your dialogue, try to be as concise as possible and ensure that your dialogue expresses one thought at a time and try to keep the lines short. Lengthy dialogue tends to slow down action, while short ones make the action brisk, racy and lively. In prose fiction, try to keep your dialogue minimal but at the same time it should be able to give the reader enough hints, information to fill out ensuing scenes from his/her own imagination. Dialogue should be informative but not propagandist except for special effect. You should not turn your characters to preachers of specific ideologies. Your character's dialogues must sound convincing and true to life and must conform to the characters as presented in the work.

Realistic dialogue does not mean "copying down everything you might pick up with a tape recorder at a social gathering" (Maxwell – Mahon, 1984:36). You should be able to prune the superfluous aspects of everyday speech from the dialogue and present only the "sense and sentiments" that carry your plot through its stages of development. That notwithstanding, you should reflect the real-life mutual conversation that involves lots of interruptions as the speakers butt into

each other's argument with noises of approval or disapprovals or cut-ins with counter-arguments. Sometimes, normal conversations are disjointed, so try to reflect this disjointed nature of everyday dialogue especially at the emotional crisis moments in your work. Let us look at the dialogue below and see if it reflects some of the characteristics we discussed.

Matron: Back! I said go...

Inmate: (in Edo) Ikhianyasa amen ye etevben.

Matron: What was that?

Nweke: He wants some hot water for his sores.

Matron: Not now, Sorry.

*Nweke: (to patient, in Edo) Yato ta.
(Meaning go and sit down)*

(Patient returns sheepishly to his mat).

Matron: Now, would anyone care to explain what all that merriment was about?

Nweke: We had just finished choir practice, Madam. Since we still had some time left before curfew, we were only keeping ourselves..er...keeping ourselves going.

Matron: With drumming and dancing! Where do you think you are?

Editor: (with malevolent calm)

In the hospital. The General Hospital of his Imperial Majesty King George V of England; situated in the land of Port Harcourt, in the Colonial Territory of Nigeria, West Africa, the World.

Matron: Is that supposed to be plain rudeness or a display of high intellect in geography?

Cat: It's neither.

Matron: Beg you pardon!

Cat: you asked a simple question, and he gave you a simple answer.

Matron: (curtly) No one is seeking your opinion.

(turns again to the Editor)

In the first place, I was addressing him...

(indicates Nweke)

Since when did you become the spokesman for the ...

(restrains herself from describing the group)

Or who do you think you are?

Cat: Another question

Editor: Leper, madam. I am a leper – like the rest...of them. ...(with a sweep of the arm taking in the entire inmates) lepers, lepers all – at the mercy of the hospital authorities.

Matron: You could be –

She is cut short by a querulous appeal from an inmate still in dance tableau.

Dancer: (in Ibibio) Ami ndi da keutom mi tutu idaganke? (meaning: For how long am I supposed to hold this position?)

Matron whirls round reproachfully: for the first time her calm is visibly rattled.

Cat: The fellow wants to know how much longer he is to remain like that... (raises his eyes over the newspaper to glance at Inmate: he chuckles, and suppressing the rest of the impulse, adds)...Like a smoked he-goat.

Matron does not respond, starts pacing about.

Editor: Well, how long?

Matron: Till the Senior Medical Officer himself comes to witness the extent of your latitude.

Hannah: (breaks off her tableau) Well, we can't wait forever! You hear? (in a frenzy)The night watchman you sent is too slow for our pains. Go yourself quickly and carry the SMO here on your back.

Matron: (shocked beyond belief) Miss Hannah!

Hannah: Don't Miss Hannah me! What's the matter! Don't we have a right to live in this land – just because we are like this?

(displays her body) Everything we do – (crosses from inmate to inmate releasing them from their tableau) Sit down! Relax, all of you. The SMO? We can wait for him sitting down

You can see the fast pace of the dialogue above. In prose fiction, you could start your novel with an exciting dialogue instead of in a narrative form. The exposition presented in dialogue is usually more dramatic and effective than it could have been done in a narrative form.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Study the dialogue above carefully and note the emotional crisis generated in it.

3.2 Monologue

Dialogue is a conversation between two people while monologue is a one man conversation. We talk of monologues more in drama where it is referred to as dramatic monologue. However there is monologue in poetry especially in the 19th century English poetry perfected in the narrative poetry of Robert Browning and others. Dramatic monologues help to give more information on action and character. Soliloquy is a type of monologue but soliloquy is like thinking aloud so the character is oblivious of the audience. In dramatic monologue on the other hand, the character is aware of the audience and in actual sense, speaks and dramatizes to the audience. A very good dramatic monologue is the one we have in the opening scene of Athol Fugard's *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*.

Get the play, read it and compare the monologue with the one presented below from Efuwa Sutherland's *Edufa*.

Seguwa: (Returning) This is what we are living with. This weakness that comes over her, and all this meandering talk. Talk of water and of drowning? What calamitous talk is that? When will it end? How will it end? We are mystified. How

wouldn't we be? Oh, we should ask Edufa some questions; that is what I say. You should all ask Edufa some questions.

(She goes to the fire, throws in more incense, and withdraws from it as if she hates it)

I wish I could break this lock on my lips

Let those who would gamble with lives.

Stake their own.

None I know of flesh and blood

Has right to stake another's life

For his own.

Edufa! You have done Ampoma wrong.

And wronged her mother's womb

Ah, Mother! Mother!

The scenes I have witnessed in here,

In this respected house.

Would make torment in your womb

Your daughter, all heart for the man

She married, keeps her agonies from you

Ah, Mother! Mother!

Edufa has done Ampoma wrong

Tafrakye!

Some matters weigh down the tongue

But mother, I swear

Edufa does Ampoma wrong

He does her wrong.

(She returns angrily to the incense burning).

3.3 The Persona

Persona is the voice used mainly in poems. However, persona means the person the artists fronts in presenting his or her work. It is the writer's mouthpiece. The writer may be a man, an adult but presents his work through the experiences of a child. The persona is like a mask which the writers wear to camouflage him/herself to make the experience presented vivid and more realistic. In "Abiku", Wole Soyinka uses an Abiku child as a persona.

3.4 Point of View

We talk of point of view in the novel and the short story. Basically, there are three types of point of view – first person point of view, second person point of view and third person point of view.

3.4.1 First Person Point of View

In presenting your story, and you may decide to relate it in such a way that your reader will feel that you are presenting your personal experiences. It must not necessarily be a story of your real life – an autobiography. In this point of view

you will use the first person pronoun ‘I’ and this ‘I’ in the story is called the narrator. In the first person narration, the story is viewed as authentic and reliable especially where realistic landmarks and dates are mentioned.

The only constraint is that it has its own limitations because the narrator can only relate the incidents he/she witnessed, or state his source of information. In multiple narrations, the story is told by different characters in the novel. In the letter narration also known as the epistolary like Mariama Ba’s *So Long a Letter* is presented in form of a letter. The narrator, Ramatoulaye starts the novel with “Dear Assiatou” and ends it with “Ramatoulaye”. She recalls the incidents that are familiar to both of them and narrates the ones her friend, Aissatou, is not aware of.

Other advantages of this point of view are that it is the most personal point of view as the reader identifies easily with the narrator. It conveys the impression of a firsthand account and through it the author reaches the reader in an informal yet more intimate manner as though the reader was sitting beside him and seeing the story unfold. (Ike 91) Telling the story through the same person (often the hero) also helps to hold the story together.

3.4.2 Second Person Point of View

This point of view makes use of the second person pronoun, you. It is really difficult for someone to tell another person (2nd person) a story by saying “you did this, you did that...” The argument here could be that, there is no point for you here (the narrator) to tell me (2nd person) what I have done and what I have not done. It does not make sense. The insertion of dialogue in this point of view is difficult I have not read any novel that is written in this point of view but I have seen a short story that is relayed effectively in the second person point of view. Here is an excerpt from Akachi Ezeigbo’s “Fractures”.

Wetness is to winter as dryness is to harmattan; winter spawns snow as harmattan hatches dust, two climatic conditions you detest. Dry leaves falling to litter the earth, everything brittle, breaking to the touch, trees shedding their leaves, naked and dying to the world. Features common to both seasons in varying degrees.

You exchanged the harmattan for winter because you wanted to, nobody forced you and you cannot claim persecution drove you away as so many exiled souls. You have asked yourself time and time again why you chose this as your country of self-imposed exile. You have learnt to live with the cold and get on with your life. The job you are doing is not the best but it is a job you are lucky to have and keep. The holiday was a bonus you received with gratitude. But things did not quite go the way you expected. They ended in an anticlimax

You ask, “why do things go wrong at the time one is happiest”? This question creeps into your mind because you are suffering. You are in pain; you have lived with pain for twenty-four hours. You are sitting in the waiting room, in an orthopedic hospital, waiting for the surgeon to see you. One thought dominates your mind and it is not a happy thought. You feel you have fractures in your knee. The pain is unbearable and you think only a fracture could produce so much pain. Extremity in anything is morbid, so you allow hope to curl up inside your heart like a green snake, whispering that you might be wrong, that you are wrong. Should there not be some swelling if a bone is fractured?

You cling to this hope, as you train your gaze on the paramedical staff engaged in getting patients ready to see the doctors. One of them has scrutinized your papers, your insurance cover and taken other details from you.

3.4.3 Third Person Point of View

You may decide to use the third person point of view, in which case you will use the third person “he/she” or the character’s name in the third person narrative, and we have the omniscient point of view and the objective point of view. The omniscient narrator sees and knows everything that happens in the story. This means that the author knows what each character is doing at any point and when necessary presents a character’s innermost thoughts and feelings. It is the most popular form of narration. Most novels you read are in the omniscient point of view which is also referred to as “the Eye of God”.

Objective point of view is also told in the 3rd person but unlike in the omniscient narration, the objective narrator does not intrude in the story, does not try to describe the characters, probe their inner feelings and thoughts, or comment on their actions. The reader is left to interpret the characters words and action and draw conclusions or make his/her judgment.

Since, as the author using this point of view, you would not comment on or interpret actions, you will need to inject a lot of action in the story which is realized mainly in dialogue for it to be successful. One episode leads to the other; consequently, the story tells itself in a dramatic form. The advantage here is that the story moves at a faster pace. The disadvantage is that the scope is limited to only the words and actions that the reader can hear or see physically. The reader is not exposed to the thoughts or motives of the characters and so may not be able to understand a characters growth or transformation or unravel some complications in the plot. Sometimes this objective point of view forms part of the omniscient point of view.

4.0 CONCLUSION

Creative writing is an imaginative art that is presented to entertain, to inform and to educate the reader. The artist chooses the genre to write and chooses a particular medium to relay his/her message while at the same time entertaining the reader. Each genre of literature has its own peculiar mode of presentation and it is important for you to learn the different modes of presentation to enable you choose the best one for your work.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have exposed you to various ways of writing your creative piece. We used some illustrations from renowned writers to make our points. You cannot be a good writer if you do not read wide. If you intend to write a novel, start reading as many good novels as possible. Try to spend at least an hour a day on the genre of your choice. You will benefit from the masters but please do not copy what someone else has written.

6.0 TUTOR-MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Read the passage below that is presented in the first person narrative and try to present it in the third person point of view.

I was born in the year 1632, in the city of York, of a good family, though not of that country, my father being a foreigner of Bremen, who settled first at Hull. He got a good estate by merchandise, and leaving off his trade, lived afterward at York, from whence he had married my mother, whose relations were named Robinson, a very good family in that country, and from whom I was called Robinson Kreutznaer, but by the usual corruption of words in England we are now called, nay, we call ourselves, and write out name, Crusoe, and so my companions always called me.

I had two elder brothers, one of which was lieutenant-colonel to an English regiment of four in Flanders, formerly commanded by the famous Colonel Lockhart, and was killed at the battle near Dunkirk against the Spaniards; what became of my second brother I never know, any more than my father and mother did know what was become of me.

Being the third son of the family, and not bred to any trade, my head began to be filled very early with rambling thoughts. My father, who was very ancient, had given me a competent share of learning, as far as house education and a country free school generally goes, and designed me for the law; but I would be satisfied with nothing but going to sea; and my inclination to this led me so strongly against the will, nay, the commands, of my father, and against all the entreaties and persuasions of my mother and other friends, that there

seemed to be something fatal in that propension of nature tending directly to the life of misery which was to befall me.

My father, a wise and grave man, gave me serious and excellent counsel against what he foresaw was my design. He called me one morning into his chamber, where he was confined by the gout, and expostulated very warmly with me upon this subject. He asked me what reasons more than a mere wandering inclination I had for leaving my father's house and my native country, where I might be well introduced, and has a prospect of raising my fortunes by application and industry, with a life of ease and pleasure. He told me it was for men of desperate fortunes on one hand, or of aspiring, superior fortunes on the other, who went abroad upon adventures to rise by enterprise, and make themselves famous in undertakings of a nature out of the common road; that these things were all either too far above me, or too far below me; that mine was the middle state, or what might be called the upper station of low life, which he had found by long experience was the best stage in the world, the most suited to human happiness, not exposed to the miseries and hardships, the labour and sufferings of the mechanic part of mankind, and not embarrassed with the pride, luxury, ambition and envy of the upper part of mankind. He told me I might judge of the happiness of this state by this one thing, viz, that this was the state of life which all other people envied; that kings have frequently lamented the miserable consequences of being born to great things, between the mean and the great; that the wise man gave his testimony to this as the just standard of true felicity, when he prayed to have neither poverty or riches.

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UNIT 4 YOUR STYLE

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In the preceding units, we have discussed the idea, the planning of the work and how to present it. We will now discuss the style in this unit. Your style is your own unique way of presenting your story. An analysis of any literary piece is hinged on content and form. Content is the subject matter, and the theme, the central idea or that message you want to relate to your reader. Form includes the way you arrange the incidents – plot; the way you create your characters – characterization; the vehicle of communication – language; the environment where the action takes place – setting, and other literary devices you use to embellish your work.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

By the end of this unit, you should be able to:

- Tell a story creatively;
- Identify different ways you could arrange your story;
- differentiate language use as it is related to each literary genre;
- be able to delineate characters through language;
- identify the setting for your story;
- create characters appropriately;
- create suspense in your story; and
- insert flashbacks appropriately.

HOW TO STUDY THE UNIT

- a. Read this unit as diligently as possible.

- b. Find meaning of unfamiliar words in the unit using your dictionary.
- c. As you read, put major points down in a piece of paper or jotter.
- d. Do not go to the next section until you have fully understood the section you are reading now.
- e. Do all the Self-Assessment exercises in the unit as honestly as you can. In some areas where it is not feasible to provide answers to Self-Assessment exercises, go to the relevant sections of the unit to derive the answers.

3.0 MAIN CONTENT

3.1 The Story

Creative literary writing is primarily an imitation of human life. It is generally referred to as “a mirror held up to nature”. The writer creatively or artistically renders and arranges the story in such a way that it would instruct and give artistic pleasure to the reader. We talked about ideas in Unit 1, but ideas alone cannot make an interesting reading. You build a story around your idea. Your personality and background influence your writing because “writers, however talented they may be, are conditioned by their human nature... based on their interests, goals and life experiences, make choices on what to write about” and how to write it. Your intention might be to simply tell a beautiful story; to tell a story to teach the audience a lesson; to tell a story that would stir the audience to an invariably revolutionary action; the choice is yours. The important point to be made here is that you are trying to tell a story.

Let us try to tell a story in this unit. As we go along with our story here, create your own story and try to tell it side by side with us. A managing director of a bank is sacked. Surprisingly, he does not have money to pay back /refund the money he is said to have embezzled. He is forced to leave his posh duplex apartment with boys’ quarters to live in a two bedroom apartment. He could not get another job and in despondency and desperation he commits suicide. We will use this short story to illustrate style in creative writing.

3.2 Plot

Plot is the arrangement of incidents in a story. You should be able to present your plot in such a way to arrest your readers’ interest and sustain it till the end. You could arrange your story to run chronologically from beginning to the end or you could start from any point and through flashbacks present a coherent story. Whichever style you choose, employ a technique to “take a grip upon the reader’s sympathies and imagination; dramatizing it” (Hall, 1989:62).

Plot according to Henry James is characters in action. These characters must be able to engage in an action that can hold the readers, raise their expectations as it progresses for them to desire to know what happens next. Your plot determines if your reader will pick your book and would not put it down until he gets to the end or abandon the book after struggling to read one or two chapters.

So organization or the arrangement of the incidents is very important here. Let us go back to the story of the bank manager. How do we organize the story? Shall we pick him as the major character, from childhood through secondary school to the university, to the job, the sack and the consequence of the sack? Shall we just start the story from the bank, his promotions and the sack? Shall we organize it in a chronological order or in another order to achieve our aim to tell an interesting story? Whichever one we choose, we must bear in mind that “a plot is a story plus causal relationships in a meaningful sequence (Hall, 1989:60). With this as a guide, try to draw an outline in ten sentences or phrases to show your arrangement of this particular plot.

SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE 1

Now compare your outline with this one below.

This bank manager is Mr. Bayo

1. Mr. Bayo is in his office
2. His cousin visits asking for job or loan to start a small business
3. Bayo refuses to help. He claims to be a born-again so would not touch bank money
4. He prays every morning with his staff, cautions them against embezzlement
5. He is a deacon in his church and is in charge of the money collected during offering
6. Sacks a staff instantly for receiving a tip from a customer
7. His children are studying abroad, visited them and just returned
8. In his sitting room, he is arrested for embezzlement
9. Arraigned in court – found guilty
10. From Grace to Grass

In developing the story, we must give some indications that he could commit the crime in such a way that the suspense is maintained. We should try to inject humour in the story. We should also create plausible and credible story/sequence of events.

My outline above is not detailed. You can create a more detailed outline. In my own case, sometimes, I create a detailed plot outline but at other times, a skeletal outline was sufficient. This happens more when a story is in my head and is begging to be poured out. My play, *Into the World* for instance, was initiated by my elder sister who teaches French in a secondary school. She needed a short play as an entry by her students for a competition. I drew a sketchy outline and started immediately but the play “refused to stop”. In a week I had written a full-length play. That was the fastest play I had ever written. I abandoned it, drew another outline, and produced a playlet that served her purpose. My purpose was to provide insights into the activities of unserious students and make useful suggestions to both parents and students. I believe that I achieved my aim in both

plays but in the full-length play extended the theme of laziness and unseriousness to the slothful housewife who was unserious a student.

3.3 Characterization

In our outline, we mentioned Mr. Bayo. Mr. Bayo is a character in the story we intend to write. But he alone cannot carry our story so we need to create other characters. I already mentioned his cousin, his staff and his children. These are all characters.

You may recall that we said that as a creative (fiction) writer, you use your imagination to create an imaginary world. This world is inhabited by imaginary beings who, through their interactions and inter-personal relationships, present an imaginary story. You have the power to create virtuous and vicious people in your story. To a large extent, your reader's interest in your work depends on "how much he can identify with the characters in the story" (Ike, 1991:58). When you are watching a film or home video for example, your interest is mainly on certain characters, what they do or what you anticipate them to do, the consequence of their actions in relation to other characters and on themselves. So in your fiction, you should try to create credible, authentic and life-like characters to give your story the desired "slice of life".

As a budding artist, you should try to structure your story around one character and make your characters as few as possible. The guiding principle in characterisation is to "...exclude anybody who does not contribute to the central idea of the story" (Maxwell-Mahon 1984:4). It is usually better to introduce the character around which your story revolves early so that the story unfolds as he develops.

You must try to develop your characters very well. Before you create a particular character, ensure that you know him/her very well. Remember that although in real life, we may not be able to decipher the inner workings of a person; in fiction you must present both the external manifestations and the inner lives of your character if he/she is well-drawn. For your character to be real to your reader you must know and reveal everything about the character. You must, therefore, arm yourself with a "thorough understanding human nature and human behaviour" (Ike, 1991:58) especially the characteristics of the particular character you are creating.

We have chosen a bank manager. He is not just a bank manager but a hypocrite and tyrant. Have you worked in the bank before? Have you encountered a hypocrite before? Have you worked with tyrant before? If you have, you will have more insights into his character. This insight will help you to create characters that are consistent and whose actions are well-motivated. In his case, you would check his background; he could have come from very lowly background, so is prepared to grab what does not belong to him. He may have come from a wealthy

background or have friends who are very rich so strives to keep up with their level (to keep up with the Joneses). These are part of what may have motivated him to embezzle the money.

As you move about and interact with people, you will come in contact with different members of the society. Your relationship with them or their relationship with others helps to expand the scope of your knowledge of human nature without any conscious effort.

Just as you draw an outline for the plot, you need a character sketch. First of all, list the major characters, name them and assign roles to them. After that, give some essential details like profession age and physical attributes to each of them. In doing this, bear your story/plot in mind so that the characters can fit in very well in the story.

E.g. Bayo – Mr. Bayo Olufemi. A chartered Accountant, has worked in the bank for fifteen years, and has risen to the rank of a Managing Director. Age 40 He is talk, light in complexion, clean-shaven, handsome and over-bearing. Always in well-cut suits

At this stage, the characters are like clay in the hands of a potter. You can create your characters to be pretty or ugly, educated or illiterate, rich or poor. The important factor is that each character should act within the ambit of his/her status and temperament. Please resist the temptation of depicting a character to be exactly like someone you know in real life. Use your imagination and creative ability to create unique characters to suit specific roles in your work.

If you are writing a novel or a short story, this outline will help you in the description of your characters as the novel progresses. Remember that these descriptions are inserted appropriately so that they will not be out of place or cause an unnecessary distraction. These descriptions about a character are sometimes given in bits to explain certain actions of a character. The reason for Okonkwo's sternness and overbearing attitude in *Things Fall Apart* is because he is afraid of being considered weak or of being a failure like his father.

...his whole life was dominated by fear,
The fear of failure and of weakness...it
was not external but lay deep in himself.
It was fear in himself, lest he should be
found to resemble his father (pp. 12 -13)

Earlier in the novel, Achebe tells the reader that when Okonkwo walked "his heels hardly touched the ground and he seemed to walk on springs, as if he was going to pounce on somebody... He had a slight stammer and when he was angry and could not get his words out quickly enough; he would use his fists (pp. 3-4). This shows that he is a hot tempered man. He is also impulsive unlike Obierika

who Achebe tells us was “a man who thought about things” (p 113). It is necessary for you to cultivate the habit of reading good novels, plays and poems with renewed interest. As you read, pay more attention to the issues we are raising in the course materials on creating writing. They will help you in your own writing. Learn from the masters but do not copy from or ape anybody.

In the course material, Creative Writing I, we dwelt mainly on motivation and consistency. Ensure that you create characters whose actions are properly motivated, and are consistent in their behaviours. Let us take Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*, his hidden sense of insecurity, his “restlessness, over abundance of nervous energy, vile temper, fierce emotionalism and the predisposition to violence we discern in his character” (Palmer, 1972:54) are motivated by his fear of failure and weakness.

3.4 Language

In creative writing, you try to send a message to your readers. You can only do that through communication. We all know that communication is at the core of literature. You may wish to write in vernacular, English or pidgin. Most writers use English, some mix pidgin with Standard English sometimes to delineate characters. Pidgin is becoming popular among literary artists. The reason is twofold: firstly, they intend to reach a wider audience and secondly, it arouses humour. Whichever medium of communication you choose, ensure that you write coherently, accurately and beautifully. Ensure that you comply with rules of grammar in the language you have chosen. Apart from the rule of grammar, you could write beautifully if you have a “rich vocabulary and the capacity to put it to effective use, utilizing the figures of speech and other devices characteristic of the language (Ike, 1991:18). In this case you will not over- use certain words and expressions. You will be in a position to use the right words or expressions in the right places. Apart from good dictionaries, the computer is very helpful because you can check the synonyms of certain words as you write (if you are writing straight with the computer) and choose the most appropriate words. However, always refer to a regular dictionary where you could get the exact meaning of the words before you use them because some synonyms could be misleading. Also avoid using clichés.

3.5 Setting

Setting is the environment where your characters operate. Your setting or background or environment for your story could be imaginary or realistic. In choosing your setting, choose an environment that you know very well personally. It is difficult to situate your story in an environment you are not familiar with through personal experience. You will be in a better position to create a more convincing story by drawing on the things you have heard and seen.

According to Maxwell-Mahon (1984), there are three important things any good writer must remember while locating a story.

- a. The setting must be located as quickly as possible and with minimum words.
- b. The setting must be factually and temporally credible
- c. The setting must form a unity with both character and action so as to produce the overall effect or idea that you want to convey to the reader (p. 7).

Assuming that you want to set your story in an environment you are not physically familiar with but have heard so much about, you should visit the place. If for instance you have heard so much about the wild life park in Jos or Tinapa in Calabar and you want to set your story there, you cannot give an accurate account of the environment until you have visited the place. You need more information the setting or present incidents that take place in that venue because you will find it difficult to give accurate account of for instance, which roads leads to it, the guides, and many other things. If you are writing a novel, you may need to give a vivid description of the scenery in and out of the place, the animals, events and the people you encounter there. Did you stay in a hotel, or stayed with a friend or a relation? In answering these questions, you may find some interesting incidents or event that you could incorporate in your story.

3.5.1 Physical Setting

The physical setting as the name implies is the physical environment where the action of the story takes place. Whether your setting is imaginary or real, you must endeavour to reflect the physical environment. This includes the scenery, the prop, (drama), the houses, the roads and other physical aspects of that environment that help to situate your narrative.

In case you want to use a realist setting, you must include notable landmarks like names of towns or locations in the towns. A very good example of such realistic setting is found in Ola Rotimi's *Hopes of the Living Dead* and *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, and also Festus Iyayi's *The Heroes*. Sometimes the names of characters and interjections of vernacular in the forms of exclamations, phrases or dialogue are useful pointers to the physical setting in your work. You should therefore take this into consideration while writing your own fiction. As stated earlier, read the works of the literary masters to help you improve on your style in the literary genre you wish to write.

3.5.2 Historical Setting

Historical setting refers to the time frame or possible date/period/year when the events of the story take place. The historical setting can be discerned in your work in several ways. You could insert specific dates as we find in Bernard Shaw's *Arms and the Man*. It could be through historical incidents as we find in the same play or in Festus Iyayi's *The Heroes* and other novels that deal with the Nigerian Civil War. In this novel, for instance, his characters are fictitious but

General Gowon's wedding is mentioned, so you may decide to include specific historical events.

However, you may decide to discard specific historical events and concentrate on some incidents that could happen at any time. When you set your story in the past, please check your facts very well to ensure the authenticity of your setting. This is very important. When you are not sure of a particular setting, discard it.

3.6 Publishing

Any creative writer looks forward with eagerness to the day s/he will see his works in print. The joy of seeing one's works published is inexplicable. Unfortunately, the objective of writing differs from one writer to the other. Some writers write because they want to share with the readers their perspectives on certain social issues. Some others simply want to make money. Agreed, writers are expected to earn some money from their works. Actually, there are full time writers who earn their living through their writings. Economic consideration is therefore important in creative writing. In that case, you must ensure that you produce qualitative works that can sell and also can be relevant at all times. These are hallmarks of good works. Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* and Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People* deal with corruption in Nigerian politics. These books were written many years back but the issues treated are still relevant in contemporary Nigerian politics.

The economic crunch has forced a lot of people to write. This crop of writers, write whatever they have in mind, with little or no consideration to literary devices or grammatical rules. They rush to state Ministries of Education (Curriculum development units) and push these works into the list of books for students. Self publishing has become the order of day. Consequently, there are many substandard works in our markets. Some of them are hawked on buses and streets.

Here, we advise you to ensure that you write well, do not be in a hurry. There are novels that took years to complete. When you conclude your work, revise it very well and send it to a publisher. Your manuscript may be rejected but do not give up; try other publishers. Many of the renowned writers suffered rejection by publishers but they persevered. However, some of the manuscripts are rejected because they are badly written (Maxwell-Mahon, 1984 Introduction 2). Send your manuscript to reputable publishers. Some of the publishers may ask you to pay fully or partly for the publishing, perhaps because they are afraid that it will not sell. If you can afford it, pay but insist that your work be sent to an evaluator. The evaluator's report helps the writer to effect some corrections. At the end of this unit, I will include the evaluators report for one of my plays *Whose Fault* to give you an idea of what an evaluator's report looks like. You can, before sending your work to the publisher, give it to someone who is knowledgeable in the area to assess for you. If you write a play, look for an opportunity to put it on

stage. There is this general saying that a play is not a play until it is seen 'live' on stage. Try also to align yourself to a creative organization like Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA). This association has branches all over the country and they organize reading sessions for their members. During these sessions, you could present your work and get objective criticisms and suggestions on how to improve your work. Below is the evaluator's report.

WHOSE FAULT: A REVIEW

1. Theme

Whose Fault is a play that questions the source of man's adversities. Is it the potency of traditional gods in an age when science and Christianity have done much to sustain a contrary point of view? Is it man's unbridled surrender to dirty passions of various kinds that plague humanity in contemporary times? A thematic statement of the play could be that any discourse on the source of man's adversities is inconclusive. Put more bluntly, in apportioning blames for man's calamities, one has to be very cautious for man's ruin emanates from reasons that are personal, sociological, political, religious, cultural as well as fatalistic. Is it Beka's refusal to be Udo's priest that ruins him? Is it his wife's adulterous relationship with Bassey, an act which she proudly protects, ostensibly to sustain the loitering economy of a once prosperous family that precipitates Beka's predicament? One is even reluctant to consider Adaku's (Beka's wife's) adulterous relationship with Bassey as part of Beka's punishment for refusing Ude priesthood. This is because immediately we meet her in the play; she cuts the figure of a no-nonsense, insatiable wife who drives her husband very hard. Nor is one very ready to consider Kene's death in a car crash. In the same regard for even the boy believes that people die when and how God (not gods) wills. These are enigmatic aspects of the play that keep the audience contemplating the real cause of Beka's fall. Ultimately, the play contains the story of a prosperous man who dies (for insanity is a kind of death) after a tortuous fall from grace to grass. The play also touches on the issue of government's insincerity in instituting and using the results of celebrated inquiries, the national economic crunch that discourage youths from marrying and the Christian's resistance to superstition. But these are not major concerns.

ii. Plot and Structure

The play opens as two women, Osodi and Oyidi are returning from market. There are four movements in the play three of which are divided into parts. The use of movements is adequate especially as lights will be used for scenic delineation. The women discuss first, the prevailing immorality in their village, Umuogom and later settle on the "beer-parlour" business and its results exemplified especially in the ruin that has overtaken the family of Beka Emenike. When the play ends they are again on their way to market and are discussing the same issue. Perhaps, the suggestion here is that the major part of the play is a flashback that reveals the

reason, for the initial story the market women were telling. The women hurry home when hasty movements of strong men suggest that something unusual has happened in the village. The unusual thing, we discover later, is that Beka is mad and is being sought by the strong men of the village. This is the end of the first movement.

In the second movement, Beka refuses the entreaties of the traditional village council that he should become the new priest of Udo. Beka feels that this office will reduce his chosen life style in the city. It is also against his Christian faith. But his community, his friend, Obiora and indeed his father, Enuka bring a lot of pressure on him to accept the priesthood. Beka and wife insist and ask the community to leave them to face the wrath of the gods.

In the third movement, neighbours are consoling Adaku and are pondering over the fire that razed Beka's store, the first in his woes. A policeman arrives, and, contrary to everybody's anticipation, he announces the death of Kene, Beka's second son in a car crash. Many months later, Adaku is piqued by the dwindling standard of living of the Beka family into proposing that she would start the beer parlour business.

Unknown to Beka, his friend, Bassey now Adaku's lover, makes satisfactory arrangements for the take-off of the business. Adaku's beer parlour attracts many customers. Some discuss the sponsorship of Adaku's business and one of them informs Beka of Adaku's infidelity. Bassey is foolhardily thirsty for romance with Adaku when Onyechi (I suppose the author means Beka, p. 79) moves into the beer parlour and fires a pistol at him. A bullet hits Beka's son, Okey instead. Bassey runs away.

Fourth movement begins with a comic scene in which a drunken customer gives more details of Adaku's/Bassey's affair. Comedy derives from the fact that the customer is talking to Adaku in her beer parlour while insisting that he was going to Adaku's beer parlour to talk to her. Obiora confronts Bassey in Adaku's beer parlour. Bassey runs away and brother-in-law, Obiora, and sister-in-law, Adaku engage in a heated discussion on the fate of the Beka family. Each tries to apportion blames as they try to answer the title question, whose fault? Adaku will not return to the village to help her mad husband. She will not show her son, Okey to anyone. Okey had escaped death from his father's bullet. She insists that her family should be left to face the Udo, an expression of the fact that Udo is not responsible for her predicaments.

In part II of this movement, Bassey is in a love prattle with Adaku when Beka rushes in, tries to strangle him and drags Adaku into the inner rooms to forcefully take her to bed. She is saved early enough by two policemen who handcuff Beka. Bassey is still alive and is carried to hospital.

In part III, Umuogom village women are going to market. Osodi and Oyidi discuss Beka's madness that has defied treatment by all reputable herbalists around. While Oyidi believes that Beka's lot is a consequence of his refusal to be Udo's priest, Osodi argues to the contrary. The play ends with nobody being able still to ascertain whose fault Beka's predicaments are.

iii. Characterization

The author displays a good knowledge of characterization. Characters are plausible, consistent, convincing and well-motivated. The protagonist develops. There is nothing for which any character could be faulted. As will be expected in a play, a few major characters like Beka, Adaku, Bassey and Obiora carry the story while many others are used and quickly dispensed with.

iv. Technique

It has already been pointed out that movements 2 and 3 and in fact 4 are flashbacks that reveal the reason for the Eyidi/Osodi story about Beka's family in movement I. An interesting feature is that at the end of the play, the women are still telling the Beka story. Movement I is an interesting exposition that intimates the audience with sociological details, important characters as well as the important issue of succession to Udo priesthood. The transition from one movement to the other is logical and the plot is coherent. Conflict, for example, arises when Beka refuses the priesthood. The climax of the play is the movement 3. Movement 4 is essentially a resolution. Even part I of movement 4 which could have been less relevant carries the weighty information of Beka's madness and Okey's safety. In all, there is a well-knit plot that flows to the end.

There are no conscious efforts to create beautiful figures of speech. Dialogue is interesting but the author loses his initial intention to differentiate status of characters by their language. Muoneke's speech on p. 19 is exemplary in its carriage of traditional speech patterns. Osodi and Oyidi, the market women regrettably lose their traditional speech patterns as they suddenly speak the language of university graduates. (compare language on p.1 and p.7).

Many spelling, punctuation and other errors exist. A few examples will suffice. All identified errors have been indicated and corrected in the manuscripts. Run (p.37, line 16) is written for ruin. Please (p.2, line 26) is written for pease, greeted (p. 12, line 4) is written for greeted; especially (p.26, line 17) is written for especially. As for grammatical errors here are a few examples. "He dare not" (p.9, line9) is written for "He dares not". "If I were chosen, I will – (p.36, line 16) is written for "If I were chosen, I would ... There are other grammatical errors which have been identified in the manuscript.

v. Publishability

This play is publishable. It provides an interesting reading and I dare say production will be easy and entertaining. The theme is relevant as well as philosophical. It can be a good addition to your titles especially for the interest of the general reader and drama students. Please publish when some editorial work has been done.

When your work is being sent out to an evaluator, your name and all indicators to you as a person are erased. This is to enable the evaluator to give an unbiased and objective assessment of your work. In the same way, the publisher gives you the evaluator's report without the evaluator's name and other pieces of information about him/her.

4.0 CONCLUSION

You are a novelist, a playwright or a poet because you have something worth saying and have an idea of how to say it. Some people have the talent to write but may not realize that they have it. It is not only those who read English are creative writers. Cyprian Ekwensi for instance was a pharmacist. Each writer has his/her own style but there are basic devices/techniques that are expected in a good literary piece. The basic aspects are the theme, the plot, the language, characterization and the setting. However, each genre has its own unique characteristics. So before you write, arm yourself with the basic requirements of the genre you have chosen.

5.0 SUMMARY

Creative writing is a disciplined exercise. You need to plan and structure your work carefully to ensure the fusion of content and form. We have deliberately left out television, radio and film scripts. For now, let us concentrate on the general literary works such as the short story, the novel, drama and poetry.

6.0 TUTOR- MARKED ASSIGNMENT

Draw a character sketch for Mr. Bayo in our story and suggest a title for that story.

7.0 REFERENCES/FURTHER READINGS

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