

# White Water Writers

Information and booking for schools

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## The Project

White Water Writers is a literacy project that provides young people with the opportunity to write and publish their own novel within five days. The project has had success with a great many groups, from gifted and talented students, to young people with Special Education Needs, from first year Secondary school to those who have been identified as disadvantaged (i.e. eligible for free school meals). This project has particular benefit to those in the latter group, particularly where literacy levels (and aspirations) are a focus for improvement (see Research section below).

White Water Writers aims to raise achievement and attainment levels through combining several teaching methods: Focused collaborative learning; peer feedback and the use of digital technology. The technology is used to enable the young people to develop collaborative working practices, improve literacy skills and increase attention to detail. It also acts as a platform to initiate teamwork and develop communication skills within the group. The end result is that every participating young person becomes a published author and will hold in their hands a book that they have written.

Young people are divided into groups of to ten, and each group will devise their storyline, write their story, proofread and design their cover entirely by themselves. The published book forms a concrete achievement that they can share with family, friends and teachers.

***"To publish a book, truly is a dream come true. This project has enlightened me in many ways and will be a memory I will treasure"  
Hidayah Mustafa, Year 10***

The project is facilitated by fully trained university student volunteers whose role is to help the young people structure their ideas and use the software. Adults do not offer their opinions on any element of the plot or character development - they simply help young people to discuss their options. This method ensures the young people have complete responsibility and control over the book. Indeed, during the first morning with White Water Writers participants often do not believe that they really are going to publish a book and that it really will be entirely their own work.



### ***Students at Wilmington Academy with the first copies of their book***

The programme, which began in 2009, has been developed by literary experts and psychologists at Royal Holloway, University of London and Keele University. It uses unique proprietary software to enable the collaborative writing process. The methods, processes, and formulae are tried and tested and previous projects demonstrate positive results with participants. As well as improving attainment, the project engages young people, giving them a voice and channelling it into a concrete achievement.



***"On an almost completely practical course, the writers explicitly developed skills of teamwork, specialisation, communication, working under pressure, giving and receiving feedback and keeping track of a rapidly changing and developing knowledge base. All these skills were embedded within the overall project goal allowing the students to experience and experiment individually within the processes."***

***Dr Joe Reddington, Founder of White Water Writers***

## **The Camp**

The week-long, non-residential, writing 'camps' are held at your school and fits into the typical hours of the school day. Although not a camp in the traditional sense, the experience is certainly a break from your pupil's normal routine. Camps involve up to ten participants typically around 11-18 years, usually comprising young people of a similar age in each group. We may also work with pupils from Years 5 & 6 providing you think they are up for the challenge. Each day is facilitated by specially selected student volunteers from Royal Holloway (one of the country's leading universities).

If you choose to host a camp during term-time then pupils will need to miss lessons for a week. If you choose to run a camp as a mini summer school then lessons will not be affected. It is important that students understand the importance of catching up on their work that they have missed because of the camp. Although it is a huge privilege to be part of the camp, it is also a very challenging and tiring experience. It is important to pick pupils who will be able to cope with the extra workload.

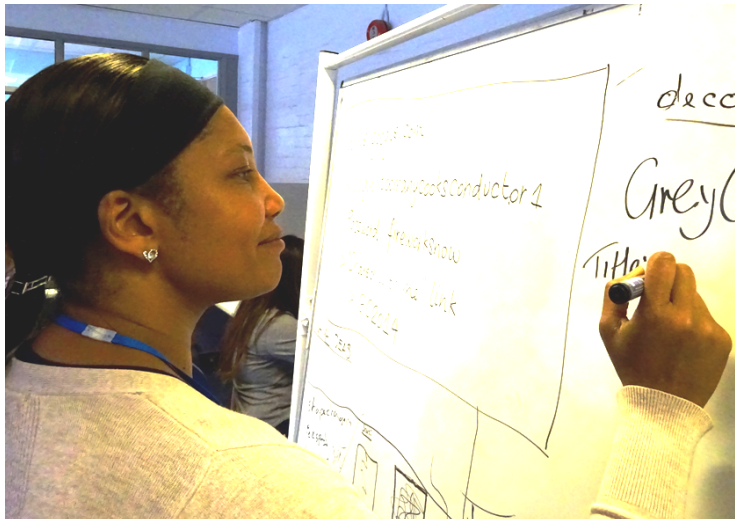
The young people you choose to be involved in the camp is completely up to you, however we do advise that pupils are selected on the basis that they will be able to focus on the project solely for an entire week. The group engages in a very focussed set of structured tasks across the 5 school days.

***"So much effort goes into books; I now understand how much. I feel so much more confident in writing novels."*** Ryan Jones, Year 10

Participants identify characters, and plan the storyline and chapters on day 1. They then draft the content on days 2 and 3, and on days 4 and 5 proofread, refine and complete the work. The software

scaffolds the collaborative writing process and actively involves all participants at every stage and the workload dynamically adjusts so that the stronger writers are stretched just as much as their peers. The finished book is usually available for purchase for e-readers on the Friday, a few hours after the group has completed the text. Hard copies are usually available, and sent to schools by the end of the following week.

Student volunteers take part as a university placement subject to appropriate selection processes and security checks. They are reimbursed only for their travel and out of pocket expenses.



***"Volunteering for White Water Writers was an invaluable learning curve during my time at University, and I always make a point of including it on my C.V. It not only helped me to develop creatively whilst under pressure, but it also allowed me to develop a whole host of other transferable skills, of which teamwork in particular, played a vital part."***

***Gillian Boyd, Student volunteer***

We only require one member of staff from your school to assist us during the week. It will be their responsibility to maintain control and behaviour within the group so that the student volunteers are able to focus on facilitating the workshops. Generally, teachers take a back seat in the project and are happy to simply watch the book unfold... how much or little they want to be a part of the process is completely up to them.

***"It was amazing. I never expected myself to be doing this. It is a great experience and I've enjoyed it extremely. I can't wait to see what happens next. Thank you very much." Bleona Murani Year 8***

## **Research**

Raising the literacy levels of disadvantaged young people is vital to give them the best chance of succeeding later on in life. The National Literacy Trust states that "One person in six in the UK lives with poor literacy. This holds them back at every stage of their life. As a child they won't be able to succeed at school, as a young adult they will be locked out of the job market, and on becoming a parent they won't be able to support their child's learning. Lacking these vital skills undermines their wellbeing and stops them making a full contribution to the economic and cultural life of our nation."

High on the government's agenda is the commitment to raising the achievement of disadvantaged children. This agenda is driven by the belief that a child's success should not be driven by their

circumstance and that the gap of achievement needs to be closed between disadvantaged youth and their peers. White Water Writers aims to contribute towards closing that gap and offers a unique high impact, low cost programme. The collaborative learning method utilised during the programme has been widely researched and proven to have positive outcomes.

Jonson et al (2000) conducted a meta-analysis of collaborative learning methods and reviewed the current research and literature available on the subject. They found “164 studies investigating eight cooperative learning methods. The studies yielded 194 independent effect sizes representing academic achievement. All eight cooperative learning methods had a significant positive impact on student achievement. When the impact of cooperative learning was compared with competitive learning, Learning Together (LT) promoted the greatest effect”.

For more information please see Johnson, D. W., Johnson, R. T., & Stanne, M. B. (2000).

Cooperative learning methods: A meta-analysis. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota.

[jamyang.wikispaces.com/file/view/Cooperative+Learning+Methods.doc](http://jamyang.wikispaces.com/file/view/Cooperative+Learning+Methods.doc)

Similarly, Puzio & Colby (2013) conducted a meta-analysis on “the effectiveness of cooperative and collaborative learning to support enhanced literacy outcomes. Interventions considered were provided in regular education settings (i.e., not pull-out in struction) with students from Grades 2 through 12. Reviewing more than 30 years of literacy research, [they] located 18 intervention studies with 29 study cohorts. Included studies primarily used standardized assessments to report on students’ reading, vocabulary, or comprehension achievement, which were analyzed separately. Overall, students had significantly higher literacy achievement scores when instructional interventions utilized cooperative and collaborative activity structures.”

For more information please see Colby, G & Puzio, K (2013). Cooperative Learning and Literacy: A Meta-Analytic Review. Routledge.

[http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/19345747.2013.775683#.U\\_9BrLdOWot](http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/19345747.2013.775683#.U_9BrLdOWot)

The collaborative learning technique is used by White Water Writers by assigning structured tasks for the group but with slight variations for each individual. There is also the opportunity for the quicker writers to take on more work allowing time for the slower writers to catch up. Students also have no choice but to work together as they are not allowed to proof-read their own pieces of writing.

***“The students learned how to establish a working relationship rapidly with others, they planned and co-operated in the development of the novel and were forced to listen closely to one another and reach compromises. From an English perspective, I don’t think the students will ever read a novel in the same way again! I could probably talk for hours on the learning that went on in 5 days. It was an absolute joy to see students finding out for themselves the intricacies of telling a story, I thank you sincerely for allowing us to be part of such a fantastic project.” Head of English, Strodes College***

The positive impact of the camps has also been widely demonstrated through rigorous analysis of quantitative data by psychologists, Professor Leman (Royal Holloway) and Dr Skipper (Keele

University). As a result of their involvement in the camps, participants show increased self-esteem, literacy skills, better social relationships and communication skills, autonomy and aspiration. Teachers, parents and peers show increased engagement with literacy and creative writing too. These demonstrable benefits are substantial, significant, and enduring and they distinguish the White Water Writers project from other similar initiatives in schools.

"We have looked at a number of outcomes such as self-esteem, initiative, conceptions of success and interpersonal skills including team work. We asked young people questions about their skills and feelings at the beginning of the week and again at the end to allow us to examine how participating in the project may influence them. One of our key measures is locus of control – whether students believe they are in control of their life or if things just happen to them. We have examined whether working on a project like this leads students to feel more in control over what happens to them and that they can succeed if they are willing to put in the effort to do so. We would expect that in the future they would be more likely to take the initiative to make things they want happen for themselves. Our findings suggest that this sort of project can help to raise aspirations, initiative, and social skills. It has been brilliant to watch the students working together, developing their ideas and skills through the course of the week." Dr. Yvonne Skipper, Royal Holloway.

The most marked improvements were in terms of writers' understanding of how to write a novel, the ability to work under pressure, the ability to communicate their ideas both in writing and verbally, working in a team, and giving and receiving constructive feedback.

***"It was immensely rewarding to see what writers go through, it was really enjoyable, we felt like a team. To see what we could create in a week was fantastic" Oliver Muck Year 8.***

### **Summary of key research findings**

#### ***White Water Writers' Self-evaluations before and after the camps...***

We asked the writers (N=36) to evaluate their knowledge and skills before, and then after the writing camps on a 6-point scale... All but one of the measures ("how good are you at researching", which is not a skill linked to the camps) showed statistically significant improvement over time ( $p < .05$ ). The most marked improvements were in terms of writers' understanding of how to write a novel, the ability to work under pressure, the ability to communicate their ideas both in writing and verbally, working in a team, and giving and receiving constructive feedback.

#### ***Locus of Control***

A key measure of interest was what psychologists refer to as "locus of control". Locus of Control (LoC) refers to the extent to which individuals believe that they can control events that affect them. For instance, individuals with a high internal locus of control believe that events in their life derive primarily from their own actions: for example, when receiving test results, people with an internal locus of control would tend to praise or blame themselves and their abilities, whereas people with an external locus of control would tend to praise or blame an external factor such as the teacher or

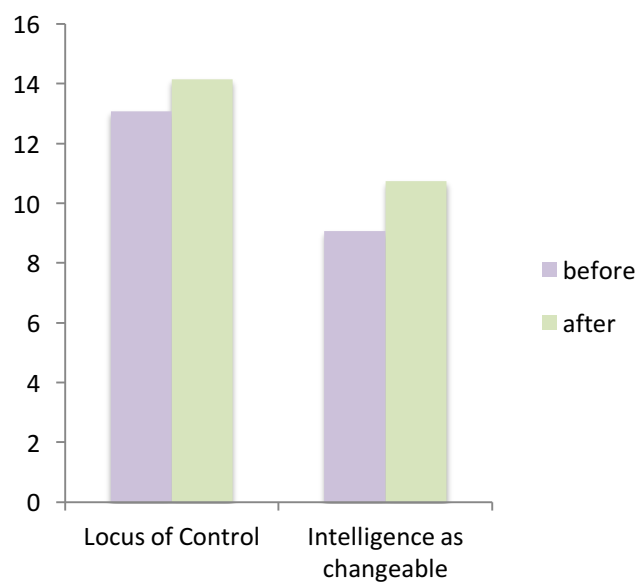
the test. We anticipated that completing the task would leave to significant improvements in this measure because writers will have a greater sense of responsibility and confidence in their abilities after the camp. The hypothesis was confirmed ( $p < .05$ ).

***"I used to be really unconfident and now my confidence has risen. It would be nice to have an opportunity like this again." Laura Ash, Year 7***

***Intelligence***

We also explored, related to LoC, if writers changed in how they viewed their intelligence. Psychologists have found that thinking of intelligence as something that can be changed, through effort, is important because it motivates individuals to work and helps them to view their ability to learn new things in a more positive light. Considering intelligence as something non-fixed is a key predictor of engagement.. Our writers, over the course of the week, showed a huge improvement on this measure. That is, they were more likely to judge that intelligence was something that can be changed, through effort, than something that is fixed and unchangeable. Again, this measure was associated with significant positive change in before and after measures ( $p < .05$ )







Skipper, Y., Leman, P. J. & Reddington, J. (2014). White Water Writers: Giving young people the chance to become published authors in a week, Poster presented at the *British Psychological Society Developmental Section Annual Conference*, Amsterdam, Netherlands, September 2014.

## Funding

White Water Writers is a not-for-profit social enterprise. There is a fee to schools to cover the following costs of running a camp: Training of the student volunteers, printed support material, reimbursement of student expenses, costs of publishing online and books plus central administration fees. The cost to a school for a White Water Writers camp is £120 per pupil (in groups of ten, exclusive of VAT). This includes:

Use of the unique computer software (to enable the collaborative writing process), the time of the student volunteers, x70 copies of the published books (copies for pupils, parents, teachers and the school library) and the book uploaded and sold on Amazon. There will also be a central administrator available at all times during the project to assist with any technical / administrative matters as required.