



Young Writers Online

Year 7 & 8 students with Dianne Wolfer

What is included?

6 x Creative Writing Sessions

Session 1 - Meet Dianne and Let's Get Started

Dianne introduces herself, her books and talks about ways unusual life experiences have led her to different ways of seeing and writing different perspectives.



Using *Photographs in the Mud* as a practical example, Dianne shows how a WWII setting along the Kokoda Track sparked this picture book, and how illustrators can extend and deepen a story theme. Dianne writes across genres and for different ages from picture books to YA novels. She gives a brief background to *Lighthouse Girl* (historical fiction), *Granny Grommet and Me* (picture book) *Munjed Al Muderis from refugee to surgical inventor* (creative non-fiction) and also speaks about collaborating with other creatives, including playwrights, translators and scriptwriters.

Ideas are all around us. They are the raw materials of stories. Dianne shows her 'ideas book' and gives suggestions for finding and capturing ideas, using specific examples from *Nanna's Button Tin*, the *Light* series and a work-in-progress. She then talks about building a writing system and introduces her favourite Warm-up Activities. This will give us raw material to use in the next sessions.

Session 2 - Digging for Ideas and Different Points of View

In this session, Dianne leads a Timeline Writing Activity using moments from students' lives to spark fiction, including examples from her life and a reading from *The Dog with Seven Names*. Students write, then identify which POV they've used. Dianne explains some benefits of 1st versus 3rd POV then students rewrite their draft using a different perspective. Readings from *The Shark Caller*, *Lighthouse Girl* and *Light Horse Boy* give practical examples of using different POVs to help illustrate this. Students are encouraged to share their thoughts/readings in pairs and to the class. Then we explore setting and writing about known places. Dianne shares a practical example of how she shaped a life incident at Greens Pool into a fictitious scene of *The Shark Caller*.

A fun POV quiz ends this session.

Session 3 - Using Themes, Characters and Plot to Build a Story

Do you approach story writing via character or via theme? Either is okay ...

Dianne usually starts with a theme. She cares passionately about marine pollution and this concern is explored via both humans and sea creatures in *The Shark Caller*. After short readings showcasing two very different voices, Dianne shares another thematic example, this time linking the theme of bullying with her Aussie STEM Stars title, *Munjed Al Muderis - from refugee to surgical inventor*.

A Thematic & Character Writing Activity begins with students nominating an issue they feel passionate about. These themes are collated with the class then broken down to more specific and manageable writing subjects.

In pairs, students select one theme. They add characters then flesh them out. Next, students decide: What does my character want? And what is blocking them from achieving that?

Dianne shares 'blocking' examples from her books and explains how that helps create plot. After more plotting tips and examples, students now have the core ingredients to write; theme, character, plot (including notes for a beginning and end). They're also encouraged to explore their own 'voice'.

Session 4 - Research and Sensory Writing

Dianne loves visiting story settings and using archival objects to help bring fiction to life. This involves research trips, photographs, WWI postcards and leggings, shark skin and even collecting shark eggs! These can act as prompts for sensory writing in Dianne's books.

Lighthouse Girl began in 2005 when Dianne read a newspaper article about a young woman signalling to departing WWI troops from an island off Albany in 1914. She shares photographs and background details that helped bring the 'Light' series to life.

Research from *Lighthouse Girl* led to a second WWI title, *Light Horse Boy*. Dianne talks about 'primary sources' and her fascination with the animal mascots and horses that went to war, giving examples from *Light Horse Boy*. This war-animal fascination and a wallaby called 'Jimmy' sparked the third book in the *Light* series, *In the Lamplight*. Themes from this title include resilience and the suffragette movement. Dianne gives examples of how research and WWI photographs enriched this story, as well as sharing illustration and design examples.

For Dianne, hands-on sensory objects are valuable prompts, no matter the genre. This is demonstrated via a piece of shark skin which helped Dianne research *The Shark Caller*. Then students begin their own Sensory Writing Activity using a stimulus photo and their senses to brainstorm. After that Dianne shares images from her 10 day research trek walking the Kokoda Track, comparing that process with research undertaken via film and the Internet for the book, *Munjed Al Muderis - from refugee to surgical inventor*.

A final example revolves around research for the WWII setting of *The Dog with Seven Names*. Links and images include remote WA communities, the Royal Flying Doctor Service, pedal radio communication, Port Hedland, Broome and the secret Corunna Downs airstrip. Dianne explains how she used this research and different senses to write anthropomorphically.

Session 5 - Anthro-what?

Dianne's favourite word is anthropomorphism and she loves animal characters. For her PhD research Dianne created two novels, *The Shark Caller* and *The Dog with Seven Names*, using differing degrees of anthropomorphism. Her linked exegesis explored 'Crafting Animal Characters in Fiction'.

Animals can be used as windows to challenging themes like war, even for very young children. Using PowerPoint examples, Dianne shows examples of anthropomorphic characterisation, linking to the environment and human emotions such as jealousy, trust and grief. Animal characters are also useful as they can be gender, racial and age neutral.

Writing Anthropomorphically Activity: students brainstorm emotion words as a group and define simile and metaphor. They link animals to stereotypical similes/metaphors; loyal as a dog, quiet as a mouse... then try extending this to more unusual creatures. Dianne gives examples from *The Shark Caller* then students choose an animal to develop and weave into a story. They consider emotive and sensory words that link to their character, giving their animal purpose and conflict. A reading from *The Dog with Seven Names* reinforces and concludes the activity.

Session 6 - Shaping, Editing, Show not Tell and Beautiful Words

The pen is mightier than the sword inspires this final session. We recap previous activities and different elements of story writing: Ideas and getting started, brainstorming themes, developing characters and giving them purpose, setting, plotting and building anthropomorphic characters. Then Dianne shares techniques she used to develop characters in some of her books, explaining the importance of knowing what your character wants and what is blocking them.

Building Character Activity: Students construct a character by making lists about physical attributes and habits, something a character is self-conscious about and something they like about themselves. They move onto abilities, deciding what their character is good at and what qualities they need to work on. Building multi-layered characters like this brings stories to life. Students then write a scene that 'Shows not Tells' something about them.

This activity is reinforced by a reading from *Munjed Al Muderis – from refugee to surgical inventor*.

In the next part of this session, Dianne shares her process, beginning with writing ideas on scraps of paper which she keeps in an 'ideas book'. She shows the first scrappy idea and button tin that inspired *Nanna's Button Tin*. Dianne explains the 32 page industry format of a picture book, the ways she approaches writing in this genre and the importance of editing.

Activity: Illustrations reflect the theme/feeling/emotion of a book. Students list picture books they loved and discuss links between text and illustration.

Activity: creating strong opening sentences. Dianne shares ways to create a 'hook' then students have a go.

After sharing examples of illustrative drafts, Dianne talks about working with an illustrator, plotting and planning a novel, giving specific examples from her book drafts. The session ends with Dianne show 'almost ready to publish' drafts and giving examples of final editing.

Each session:

- Is a tailored pre-recorded writing workshop for students presented by WA author, Dianne Wolfer. They are designed to be used in sequence.
- Can be used at the teacher's discretion; one session at a time or together, as six private video links are provided. Privately enrolled students can watch as they wish.
- Includes a writing exercise and a short reading by the author from one of her books.
- In keeping with the writing program, Dianne's books are available for purchase from the Centre.

About WA Author Dianne Wolfer

Dianne is author of 20 books, including 2019 Speech Pathology Award-winning, *The Dog with Seven Names* (recently published in Chinese), and CBCA Notable *In the Lamplight* the third title in her 'Light' Series. *In the Lamplight* joins *Lighthouse Girl* and *Light Horse Boy* (which inspired Black Swan Theatre's, *The Lighthouse Girl* and Perth street theatre, *The Giants*). Dianne writes across genres. Her fantasy quest novel, *The Shark Caller* was sparked by the ancient practice of calling sharks and is optioned for film. *Nanna's Button Tin* a gentle picture book story is about searching for a special button. Dianne completed PhD research into anthropomorphism and loves talking about Animal Characters in Children's Literature.

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As this is a new and exciting venture for The Literature Centre, your feedback on our Young Writers Online program is appreciated. We know there may be improvements and adjustments needed along the way. As always, the content and presentation style of each of our award-winning authors will differ. A short feedback survey will be emailed to all participating teachers after sessions are released.

Full details on our Website

See our website for all the online program details including the fee, registration forms, timetable of authors, what to expect, and more www.thelitcentre.org.au. The Young Writers Online is suitable for school classes or individual students (home-school or privately enrolled) keen to write.