

# Creative Writing:

Finding Character, Finding Place

*A collection of short texts*

*English for Native Speakers, 10th grade*

*Ecole Alsacienne*

*April 2020*

## About

Hello! We're members of English for Native Speakers (2e) at Ecole alsacienne, and are currently studying South African literature, mainly through the novel *Cry, the Beloved Country* by Alan Paton. We first started studying South-African history and the important events that occurred in the country. We then discussed racial segregation, social and religious differences, and racism. But this was just the beginning. We've also gained a small introduction to a new type of literature and inspiration for our own creative writing.

Considered as one of the greatest South African novels, *Cry, the Beloved Country* was first published in the United States in 1948, bringing international attention to South Africa's tragic history and the potential threats which led to Apartheid. This heartbreaking story of a father looking for his missing son in Johannesburg, describes the different environments and classes, exposing racial and social inequalities.

As our class was reading the novel, we also started working on our own creative pieces, inspired by the book (in addition to excerpts by other South African writers, including Nadine Gordimer and Breyten Breytenbach). We explored how these authors build characters and settings, and how these two elements of fiction can be inextricably linked. Our class wrote short works where our goal was to build a character or a setting (often showing that a place itself can be a character). We found this exercise to be very helpful in developing our own writing styles, and so we encourage you to read our pieces for inspiration, and even try this exercise on your own!

*Bonjour ! Nous faisons parti du cours d'anglais pour locuteur natif (2e) à l'Ecole alsacienne. Nous étudions actuellement la littérature sud-africaine principalement à travers le roman Cry, the Beloved Country d'Alan Paton. Nous avons d'abord commencé à étudier l'histoire sud-africaine et les événements importants qui se sont produits dans ce pays. Nous avons ensuite discuté de la ségrégation raciale, des différences sociales, religieuses et du racisme. Mais ce n'était que le début. Nous avons eu une petite introduction à un nouveau type de littérature, et de l'inspiration pour nos propres récits.*

*Considéré comme l'un des plus grands romans sud-africain, Cry, the Beloved Country a été publié pour la première fois en 1948 aux États-Unis, attirant l'attention internationale sur l'histoire tragique de l'Afrique du Sud et les menaces potentielles qui ont conduit à l'apartheid. Cette histoire déchirante d'un père à la recherche de son fils disparu à Johannesburg, décrit les différents environnements et classes sociales, exposant les inégalités raciales et sociales.*

*Pendant que notre classe lisait le roman, nous avons également commencé à travailler sur nos propres œuvres, inspirées par le livre (ainsi que des extraits d'autres écrivains sud-africains tels Nadine Gordimer et Breyten Breytenbach). Nous avons exploré comment les personnages et les décors étaient construits, et comment ces éléments de fiction pouvaient être*

*inextricablement liés. Notre classe a écrit de courts textes où notre objectif était de construire un personnage ou un décor (montrant souvent qu'un endroit lui-même peut être un personnage). Nous avons trouvé cet exercice très utile dans notre propre style d'écriture, et nous vous encourageons donc à lire nos travaux afin de vous inspirer, et même d'essayer cet exercice par vous-même !*

- Chouchane and Harri V.

\*\*\*

### **Lorenzo's Brother**

He was two years younger than me and was still my best friend. Lorenzo lived in the best spot in Hong Kong, in the southern part of the island. He lived in a place named Manhattan next to the Stanley district. Lorenzo had a little brother named Maxime.

Maxime was very nice but was maybe a bit too curious. They had a beautiful house next to the sea. Every evening, the sunset would shine inside the house. We could see the glowing sun in every reflective gold or silver object, in jars, in mirrors, in pans. From the house we could admire the never ending ocean, full of limitless unknown lands to discover. Each day after school, Lorenzo and I would go to the beach to play rugby or soccer. He sometimes dove into the ocean when the water wasn't too cold or dirty. He always tried to reach as far as possible into the ocean, trying to discover unknown lands and creatures. Swimming as far as possible, swimming hundreds and hundreds of meters.

One day, while we were having fun playing soccer on the beach, his caregiver told us to stop playing and start packing up. We were very upset, we wanted to continue playing. When we finally finished packing up our backpacks and were ready to go back home, someone was missing. Maxime had disappeared. At first we weren't too scared, what could possibly happen to Maxime on this calm and peaceful beach? At first, we thought nothing. We searched, and searched, and searched, all over the beach, we asked everyone if anyone had seen him, nothing... After an hour of searching and asking random people, we started to panic, thinking of things that could have happened to him, of his kidnapping, thinking of his death. We were going to call the police, when we received a mysterious call. The person started to speak very slowly, we could easily hear her.

An old woman had just found Maxime walking along the road. Fortunately, he had memorized his caregiver's number. He had gotten lost and was trying to go back home.

- Antoine (2e1)

\*\*\*

### **The Man in Black**

He was a war veteran from Iraq who came from a small town near the beach, in California. When he was a child, his parents died in a car accident. He was adopted and, when he was a teenager, he wandered from foster home to foster home, never fitting in. Very early on, a bunch of typical Californian "Bad Boys" influenced him. Drugs, fights, skipping school and gangs were involved. The skaters he hung out with had cliché blond hair with beach-wave curls that flew to the rhythm of the wind. But he was different. His dark, curly hair fell on his forehead and his eyes were as blue as the crashing waves, full of mischief. Dimples indented his cheeks every time he smiled, even though that only occurred on rare occasions. Years went by and he still kept his bad attitude.

One morning, on the first day of Senior Year, a beautiful girl, whose hair was the color of the sand and whose eyes were different shades of green, like the leaves during autumn, walked in through the door. When he saw her, our Bad Boy instantly found in her a light and brightness like the sun on a summer day tickling your face every time you look up. Her long hair ran all the way down to her lower back and flowed like a calm mountain stream. She would walk into a room and light it up with a simple full-toothed smile.

- Chouchane (2e3)

\*\*\*

### **In Memory of Willow**

Encore/Coda music camp, USA, Sweden, Maine. That's where Willow felt at home. On the 15th of August 2019, she stood on the beach, staring at faces that had been a part of her family at camp during the previous weeks. She began to sing an original song accompanied by the smooth vibration of the strings of her ukulele. The sound of her voice was as soft as the sizzling noise of the fire that rose in front of her, reflecting shadows of light upon her face as it danced

in the wind. Her hair blended in with the orange sunset going down behind her. It flowed subtly in the air just like the warm water of the lake behind her. The small waves reached for her feet, as she swayed back and forth in rhythm to her song.

She was like a bird in a tree, humming from her heart in her own little nest into the setting beams of light. She looked up at the sky, her freckles became constellations and her cinnamon eyes filled with stars. As her ukulele strings resonated to the last chord, a shooting star fell down her cheek, looking back at the many memories she would never forget, from Encore/Coda music camp, USA, Sweden, Maine.

- Fanny (2e2)

\*\*\*

## Untitled

In Mid-Wales, there lies a big stretch of upland moorland. Locals call it the “desert”, which is ironic because you won’t find many places that are wetter. What makes it a desert, is that there isn’t any natural vegetation, no inhabitants, just sheep, conifer plantations and peat bogs. These are the Cambrian mountains.

Driving into this wild land, you don’t realise immediately how the scenery changes. You’re in lush green countryside valleys on a small minor road, and then suddenly you realise that you’re in the middle of nowhere, without any farmhouse or building to be seen, on an old single lane road, the wind is howling, the rain pounding on the car’s window, falling from a foggy grey sky. Once you realise where you are, you feel amazed, staring out of the window at a landscape you wouldn’t imagine could still exist in the XXIst century. You feel like you’re in a landscape from a fantasy film, straight out of *Lord of the Rings* or *Harry Potter*. Driving what would normally take twenty minutes takes over an hour on one of these small winding roads, partly because you keep looking at the scenery. And all that is by car. Some people might be brave enough to step out of their cosy seats. There is a very eerie feeling in this empty but dramatic place. The Cambrian mountains offer the occasion for wonderful walks. But they shouldn’t be underestimated. They aren’t really high mountains, just hills, they aren’t that far from civilisation. But the rugged terrain, the wild cold weather and the fog is enough to kill you. If you don’t know how to use a compass, or if you don’t have an excellent sense of direction, you will get lost easily. And with the fog, it’s impossible to know where you are. Even on a sunny day (which is rare) the fog can come in out of nowhere, extremely quickly. And if you’re lost, things could get bad. The cold rain and wet boggy soil will dampen you, especially your legs and

feet. You could suffer from hypothermia, which is when your body temperature cools really fast. There is no phone signal, and passing the night here would be pretty impossible.

But if you know you're trying to do a difficult, challenging hike, the Cambrian Mountains are amazing, an experience you wouldn't think could still exist today. Driving on one of the mountain passes is one of the best drives you can do. And before you even realise it, you're back on the other side of the mountains, back in civilisation, in known territory.

- Harri A. (2e3)

\*\*\*

## Untitled

The air was cold... the arctic wind was flowing through the dancing snowflakes, free falling to the ground, each of these mesmerizing and unique statues tumbling to their deaths, serving as foundation to a future snow. The blizzard was blinding, the air was whistling, the landscape might have been perceived as repetitive or constant, though the monochrome white painted in the air mirrored the pure beauty of the moment.

The land reflected the snowflakes collapsing through its crystal snow.

Following a trail of footprints, anchoring the unbreakable snow, was a polar bear. He was resting and lying in the snow, his fur camouflaged through the blizzard. His whole expression was neutral, as if he was unaware of the threatening storm growing with every snowflake. Nevertheless, he showed off one tooth, one tooth that was coated in blood. There was no mistake in the showing of the tooth. The bear seemed to address the blizzard directly and try to threaten him, glorifying his image, through the innocent yet bloody image of a tooth.

The bear seemed to complete this image perfectly, showing danger in a place of beauty and instability.

The snow was falling, the land was crystal clear, and the tooth a red star in a sky crowded with moons.

The snowflakes were falling, and the air was now colder.

- Harri V. (2e2)

\*\*\*

### **7:53 in the city**

It was approximately 7:53, he was late as always. He lived not so far away from me and we had met on the first day of school and from then we walked together every day. I could see his red puffer coat from afar slowly getting closer, running towards me. We took a minute of our day to hug each other hello and started walking at a rather quick pace. One foot overtook the other before it had the time to rest. The sun shun through the narrow gap at the end of the mile-long block, between two buildings. The bright light hitting our faces was like a soothing slap across our still unawakened faces. His bright smile would stare at me as he talked; it made me nervous but still made my day. He would comb his unbrushed hair with his fingers and rearrange his golden caramel curls. It was 8:01, rush hour, if you've ever lived in the city you'll know how to recognize a New Yorker at rush hour. Crosslights flashing from red to green, cattle speeding through the white-striped road and yellow cabs and school buses racing to the next light. Cars would honk acute screams and tires left creases on the road. What was rush hour for New Yorkers was a rave for others. Muting all outside noises, our conversations seemed to be the only thing happening in the world. What seemed to be the most random subjects of discussion took precious time out of our lives and captivated us each time. We were alone; alone in one of the densest cities in the world: the city that never sleeps. Sometimes you could almost hear some birds chirping and the current of the Hudson. Those morning walks were what stopped time before it would pick up again. Surrounded by the tallest skyscrapers, if you raised your head up you could see a small snip of the sky on a still young day. The beaming light bouncing off the metallic facades blinded pedestrians. As we walked, he would look straight into my eyes as he talked to me about his latest adventure. His brown eyes adorned with thick lashes batting every few seconds gave him an intimidating but unexpectedly comforting look. His bushy eyebrows danced as he laughed and let out a dainty little snort. His arm sprung around me would make me feel like nothing could happen to me and I was protected from all the threats the city had to offer. Before we knew it, we could hear the echo of the school bell ringing and we would start running to get to first period. That bell was the shatter of my daydreaming. What was the busiest time of the day in the city for others was my most peaceful.

- Jeanne (2e2)

\*\*\*

## Untitled

He was a teenage boy in a city where people only thought about money. Because he was a teenager, he also attended school. It was this one-of-a-kind school in NYC, that his family had gone to for generations. It was like a tradition to keep in the family, and that's why if he had a child he or she would obviously attend that same school. If not, it would create a crisis in the family. This young boy was half childish and half mature. He could manipulate people with one snap of his fingers. He loved spending time with his friends, loved his family, he thought he was extremely good looking and in all honesty, he had every right to think that. He had hair the colour of the earth which could remind us of his family's business: potato growing. His jawline was as sharp as a knife, his curls would remind us of Hokusai's Japanese wave. He had something in his face that would create a spark in your eyes. Speaking of which, he had eyes as green as an olive tree with a slit of grey around the pupil. His eyelashes were long and curved everytime he looked at something in admiration. To return to his life, as it was said above, he loved his family, had good grades, but something was missing. Deep, deep, inside of him, something was missing. He didn't know what it was and as days went by, this feeling of emptiness grew, bigger and bigger, in his heart.

Until one day, he met this girl, with silk-like blond locks, freckled cheeks and luscious lips. His heart bumped out of his chest, a smile appeared automatically on his face. The girl noticed him, smiled back and that feeling of emptiness disappeared suddenly. He immediately understood what he was missing. That special someone to brighten up his days with just one smile. What he was missing was love.

- Leilie (2e3)

\*\*\*

## Troubled Mind (or) Agony

"Do you have a light?" — These words, for some obscure reason, kept resurfacing in my mind. This took me by surprise as everything seemed to be a bit of a blur. I would in normal terms argue that I tolerate liquor quite well but given that I had woken up sprawled on my kitchen floor and had just received an alarming message from my wife demanding a divorce, this could well be debated.



The everlasting sound of the ominous and disturbing rectangular object that is the alarm clock, also known as public enemy number one, made me moan, groan, sob, wail, pant, sigh, curse, until the fun stopped and I sent it flying through the open window. "Curse that little bastard!" I chuckled. Gazing around the rooms and sighing constantly at the mess that lay before my eyes, I had to sit down and take a puff of smoke. What's the expression? Ah yes, Carpe Diem, "Seize the day." Something was to be done of this day. Well, what was left of it. The massive overlooking sombre clock had just struck two, its vibrations resonating in the spacious room. Silence. The Tremeloes would argue silence is golden but I think not. Probably the reason why I even organise these wild frantic parties is to distance myself from the agonizing pain of a subdued world. When all is well and is taken care of with silence at its utmost best, those are the times I feel a frightful chill up my delicate spine.

Perhaps it was the effect of the smoke or the stench of life, anyhow, a shower was to be taken. I gradually convinced myself that of a chaotic mess comes the revelation of inner beauty. In other words, it was merely another pretext not to tidy up. Having my head in an unclear state, it was time to leave the house in order to reach civilisation. But before doing so, I had one long look at myself through the mirror. Of course all the attributes were there, my sinister looking eyebrows, my flamboyant blond hair that resembled more of a ragged mop than anything, and by all means, my intense blue eyes that held the heat of passion. The only thing that had differed was my innocent and kind hearted look, swept away by the solid and hard reality of life. Everything seems to be barely a step away when you are a child though it is in fact a colossal journey to the peak of a snowy mountain that is bound to push you down on numerous occasions from the brute force of the wind, making you endure the hardships of life. Without suffering, there is no knowledge of blessing.

A vivid picture that was however still in my mind was that of a man present at the party last night who spoke little but whose powerful presence and calm demeanour were particularly intriguing. He was a tall black figure wearing splendid white apparel and whose radiant and sincere smile made one feel warmth in his heart. Though why him in this instant? At that precise moment, the front oak door swung right open from the astonishing force of the wind, revealing behind it the man in the white apparel. The Sun had started to showcase its beaming rays of light as the man pronounced, "There was an accident." Silence. Not a single word was said as the agonizing pain of silence came back to haunt me. Long after did I respond to the information of the dreadful statement. My world had crumpled beneath my fragile feet as it pushed me down to a never ending fall. "Very well," I responded, as he led the way.

- Miles (2e2)

\*\*\*

### **From a Garment Factory in Industrial London (1896)**

Her eyes were sore from having to watch her work so attentively. Her fingers were calloused and rough, cracking at the joints, a result of the rigour required to insert extremely thin threads in microscopic needle holes. Her back was bent and her neck ached, due to the twelve-hour work days she endured without rest. Her salary was low, thus she could not afford much aside from the small amount of food she ate and the room she rented in an old, rusty pension located on the outskirts of the city. Her clothes were worn and thin, she had to wash them often and fix them up using scraps she would gather from the factory at the end of her shift. She was exhausted by the long days she had to spend at the factory and deceived by the dark, gloomy atmosphere of the city. Being from the countryside, she had hoped, by coming to the city, to get a healthier, modern life. The kind of life you see women live in the fancy ads pinned on the train station's filthy walls that she had seen when she stepped off the train, filled with the prosperous illusions young souls dream of when they come to the city.

- Nina (2e1)

\*\*\*

### **Mayola**

He had been waiting a long time for this. He had been working a long time for this, taking any job, any money he could get his hands on, no matter how tediously, arduously or disgracefully it was obtained. He had made many sacrifices for this, sometimes depriving himself of food for days on end. He had gone through painfully hard times, the kind of hard times people don't believe exist, the kind of hard times people don't want to believe exist. He had suffered, alone, unnoticed, invisible.

But today, after having swapped fourteen years, a hundred and two days and three hours of his life for the one ticket he is holding dearly in his left hand, he knows it was worth it. Two hours until the plane leaves, but he is already trembling with excitement. Memories of Mayola flood his head, the knots in his stomach intensify. He has to sit down, or he'll faint. He starts thinking of the place of his birth, of his childhood, of his past life.

Standing on top of the Kuranu, he can see Mayola in its entirety. Running from below his feet, all the way down to the bottom of the mountain, crossing the vast forest of yellow trees, he can see the stream. On its left, he can see the only entrypoint there is to the valley, a long, narrow, dark corridor with walls of rock so high the sun is only visible once a day. At the end of this passageway, he can see the wooden tree gate covered in moss that opens up to the valley. From the top of the mountain, all he can see of the valley is an ocean of colour, an unwashed painter's palette. The green, sometimes yellow, occasionally orange grass merges into the light blue bushes, surrounded by the deep red flowers on one side, and cornered by the bright purple ones on the other. In the four corners of the valley are fields of cacti, all of a different colour, size and shape. Patches of pink moss are scattered everywhere, absorbing the light gently brushed over the valley by the sunset.

As his vision gets blurry, he regains consciousness. He is on the floor, next to a can of soda and a dirty tissue, still holding his bag in his right hand. Suddenly, a sense of terror takes hold of him. He scrambles desperately in his pockets, searches every inch of his body, gets up and looks underneath himself, looks everywhere for his fourteen-year-old ticket. The sense of terror is slowly replaced by a growing sense of desolation, until he spots a corner of the ticket under a bench that was behind him. A sigh of compressed air and relief escapes from his dry mouth. He searches for his gate and then goes to wait by it. After sitting down on one of the many empty benches, he wonders why he's the only one in advance. He turns around to look at the gate, and sees two words above it, two words that he can't comprehend. He looks down at his ticket, and a quick glance at the clock in front of him lets him know he is doomed. His head starts spinning, his vision gets blurry, he is gasping for air, until he falls to the ground. His heart stops beating, he won't wake up. He won't wake up from Mayola.

- Noé (2e3)

\*\*\*

## **Winter in Paris**

You could mistake him for an angel. He is a Parisian teenager of sixteen, one of those tall mysterious boys that everyone seems to know for no particular reason. An unreadable face, pale and bright as winter skies. He has bewildering eyes, the good kind, large blue globes. Soft, yet icy and intimidating. He always displayed this tender adolescent smirk that probably often got him into trouble. This childish smile seems to mean: "You'll never know. You'll never know what I'm thinking. You'll never know if I am the purest soul or the most dangerous being, to ever have surfaced this earth." I met him in January. As I was passing by the cold, sleepy

Luxembourg park, with its trees and their naked twisted branches shivering from the northern wind, I saw him. He was walking towards me and he didn't seem edgy or peculiar in any way, but as I observed him I realized he looked uninterested in the world surrounding him, as if his own fully sufficed. I felt disturbed by how smoothly he merged with the sad, cold aura of the city. Paris in the wintertime. How can the iconic and heavenly city of love feel so sad, blank and emotionless? It seems like the capital falls asleep as the leaves progressively descend from the trees, the days become darker and shorter and the streets slowly empty themselves. This boy was like that, dormant, he seemed uninterested, undisturbed by anybody or anything surrounding him. He didn't like Paris in winter but effortlessly made one with it. He incarnated the city against his own will. As he passed by me, he looked right at me with his arctic eyes and his rosy cheeks and he grinned. I realized I was Incapable of choosing how to feel about his unconcerned yet innocent gaze and his tender smile. At that very moment, surrounded by the sleepy, cold park and it's complete bleakness, the warmth and the comfort of his childish smile was so cheering that I could've mistaken him for an angel.

- Olympe (2e2)

\*\*\*

## **A Dream in Iceland**

Seen from above it is nothing more than a speck floating in a vast tormented ocean of iceberg and wave. As I draw near, gently falling, the speck grows larger and larger, revealing a banal, arid landscape. As I draw even closer, falling-swimming to the ground, this boring land stuck in the middle of nowhere starts to take on another aspect, a new meaning and, finally, as I come close enough to not only contemplate it but to touch it as well, this little lost jewel unveils its true nature to me, the very essence of peace.

All around me the land is as black as the feathers of a giant raven flying through your worst nightmare. And yet I am not afraid, but rather at peace. On either side of me, the tall and dark slopes of the volcano hold me prisoner, unless they are saving me from the outside world. I cannot go forwards, nor backwards. Or I could, but my feet refuse to move. I'm afraid that if I do that, the peace and tranquility I have found here would melt and disappear forever. And yet I am drawn to the blue mirror that lay at my feet. I don't know if I desire to waft in the fiery sky reflected by the pond.

As I dive into the hot spring pool that lays dormant in the heart of the crater, I spot a white furry ball with bland but still adorable eyes staring at me, nonchalantly munching on... I have no

idea what it was munching on, for there is no vegetation to be found within a thirty mile radius, only black lava and pumice stones. There is something eerie in the way the sheep stands there, immobile, steam rising from the still water, rising from the melting snow, rising and flowing and twirling about without a sound. That sheep is the only fluff of white I can see for the bright red sky is absolutely cloudless. I feel as if I'm in a dream full of forgotten memories of happy childhood summer days by the lake near my Grandma's chalet in Switzerland. As I stare back at the animal, I feel my memories and feelings raging a quiet yet fierce battle in me. Happy memories of the past, sad feelings for what was lost. Fond memories of the people I loved, sad thoughts as I remember being... "Oh my God, this water is absolutely freezing!" is all I can think of as I'm slipping down on a piece of ice and falling head first into the depths of the world: "Darn! 'thought this was a hot spring!"

- Oscar (2e1)

\*\*\*

### **The Human Mine**

The Atlantic mine in Michigan has existed through generations and generations of workers who went down with empty carts and came back with their cart full every day, they continuously went down and up, down and up. The mine was old and tired, it had already given everything to the miners but they relentlessly continued to pierce through the mine's rocky flesh with their sharp pickaxes and their dynamite always greedy for more. But as time passed, fewer and fewer miners went down to the mine. At first, the mine was happy that the miners stopped mining and ripping it's flesh apart but as time passed and very few miners remained in the mine, she started to feel lonely and missed the old times when hundreds of excavators went through the tunnels with their pickaxes like worker ants going through their colonies' tunnels. And although this time was riddled with pain, it was a time where the mine never once felt lonely and during this time, the mine did not regret giving everything she had for the miners' company. But now that she had given all she possessed to feel useful and important to those who had caused her decades of suffering, she no longer had any of these qualities. In a desperate attempt to feel the warmth and pride of being important, the mine decided to gather her last forces and offer all the copper that was left in her, and as the miners began mining away all that was left of the mine, she grew weaker and weaker until she couldn't even stand and she collapsed, taking the ones she craved attention from with her.

- Winston (2e3)