



Key Stage Three

Teaching Resource Pack:

Palestinian Childhoods

This educational resource has been inspired by the Letters for Palestinian childhoods project.

Letters for Palestinian childhoods project is an online and in-person travelling exhibition of letters, poems, and artwork dedicated to the children of Palestine. It aims to counter dehumanising narratives about Palestinians, showing solidarity by attending to the names, stories, experiences, dreams, and struggles of Palestinian children and the actions of the Western-backed Israeli state which are so violently shaping their lives.

Please visit <https://reimaginingchildhoodstudies.com/letters-for-palestinian-childhoods/> for further information on this wonderful exhibition.

*This teaching resource pack was created independently by Priyanka Soni, an English teacher with Postgraduate Certificate in Education and currently a postgraduate student at the University of Oxford.

Key Stage Three Teaching Resource Pack Guide

This lesson sequence, 'Palestinian Childhoods', is designed to align with the KS3 English creative writing curriculum while fostering empathy and understanding among students. The lessons aim to explore themes of childhood, family, loss, and resilience through the lens of Palestinian experiences, using age-appropriate materials and engaging creative writing tasks.

Alignment with KS3 Creative Writing Curriculum:

- **Descriptive Writing:** The lesson sequence includes activities that encourage students to use sensory details, figurative language, and vivid descriptions to create immersive and evocative texts. By analyzing and writing about photos and artwork, students develop their ability to capture settings, characters, and atmospheres in their writing.
- **Narrative Writing:** Students engage in narrative writing tasks, such as crafting a short story or personal narrative from the perspective of a fictional Palestinian child. This aligns with the curriculum's focus on creating well-structured, compelling narratives that explore characters' experiences, emotions, and development.
- **Varied Writing Styles:** The lesson sequence incorporates different writing styles, such as descriptive paragraphs, diary entries, letters, and poetry. This exposure to diverse forms of creative expression aligns with the curriculum's aim to broaden students' writing skills and adaptability.
- **Editing and Feedback:** The lessons include opportunities for peer feedback and self-reflection, encouraging students to refine their writing based on constructive criticism. This supports the curriculum's emphasis on the editing process and the importance of revising work for clarity, coherence, and impact.
- **Fostering Empathy and Understanding: Personal Connection:** By engaging with firsthand accounts and creating their own characters, students can connect emotionally with the experiences of Palestinian children. This personal connection is crucial for building empathy and understanding.

- Exploring Universal Themes: The lesson sequence focuses on themes such as childhood, family, loss, and resilience, which are relevant to students' own lives. By exploring these themes through the lens of Palestinian experiences, students can develop a deeper understanding of our shared humanity and the impact of difficult circumstances on children and families.

Through creative writing tasks, students can imagine and express the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of others. This imaginative engagement helps foster empathy by encouraging students to step into someone else's shoes and consider different perspectives.

Reflection and Discussion:

The lessons include opportunities for reflection and discussion, allowing students to share their insights, questions, and emotional responses to the material. This collaborative exploration fosters a sense of community and shared understanding within the classroom. By combining engaging creative writing tasks with age-appropriate materials that explore Palestinian childhoods, this lesson sequence aims to develop students' writing skills while cultivating empathy, global awareness, and a deeper appreciation for the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity.

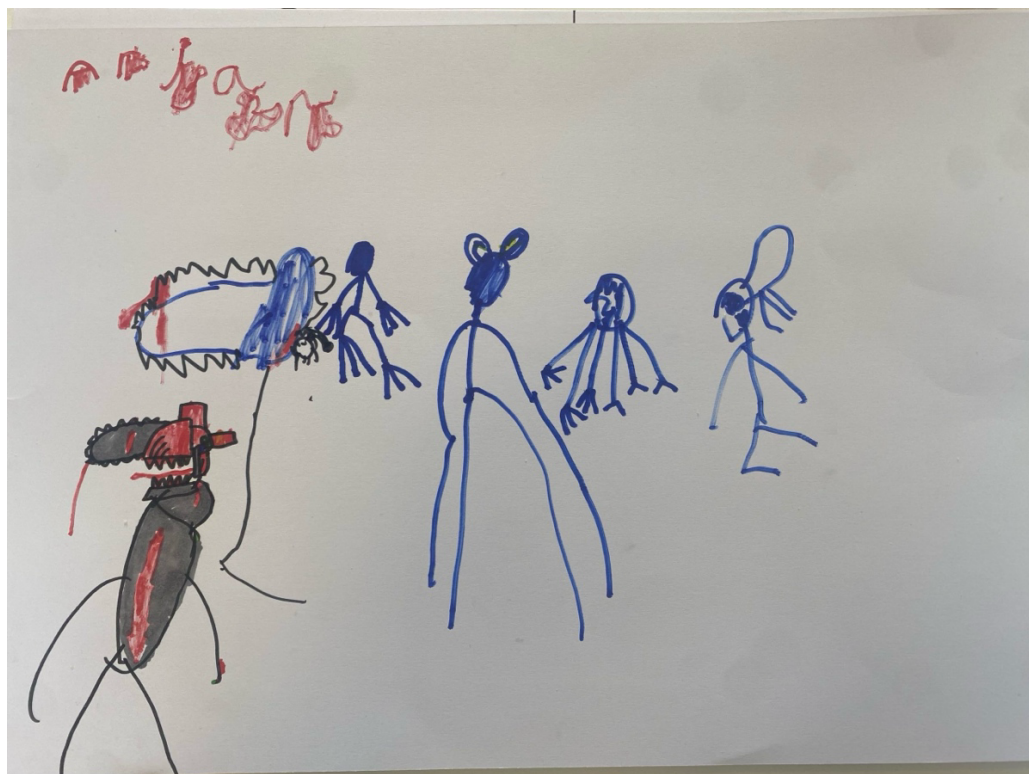
Lesson 1: Introducing the Theme

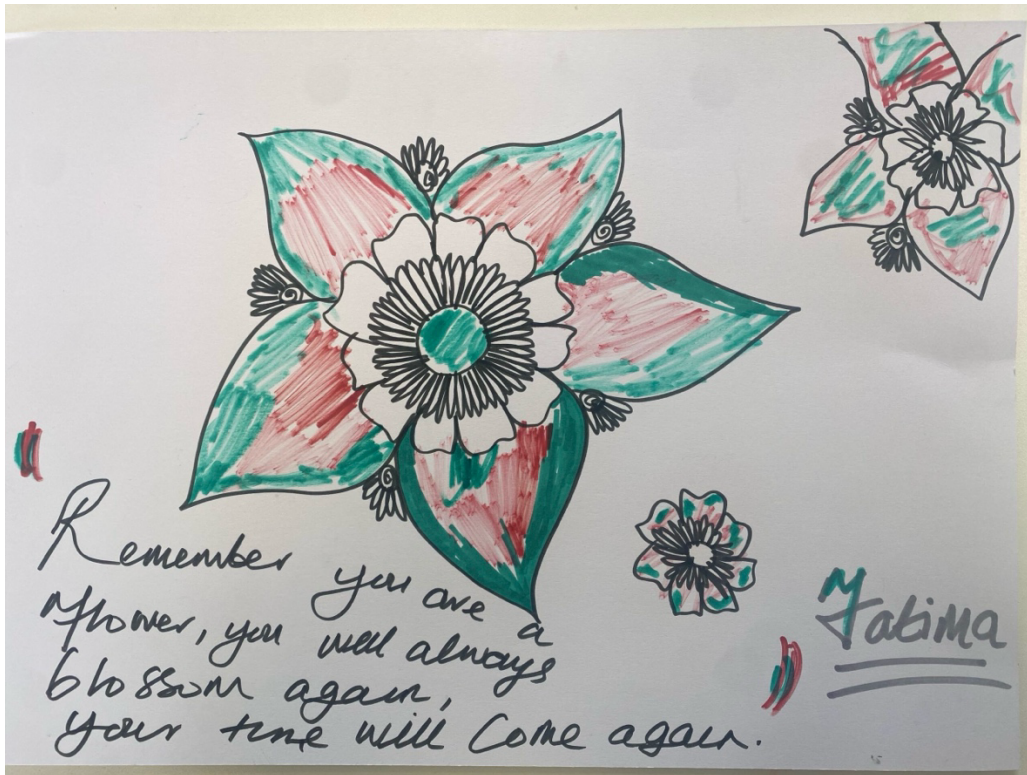
Resource used: Letters from Maa Shanti family workshop.

<https://reimaginingchildhoodstudies.com/letters-from-mashanti-family-workshop/>

These images were created by children in London.

Task 1: Discuss what you see in each image in pairs.





Each image uses colours and shapes, to express and emote a feeling. Create a brainstorm of themes that emerge.

This activity can inform the fictional reading in the next task.

Task 2:

Read an age-appropriate excerpt from *Tasting the Sky* by Ibtisam Barakat about her childhood memories in Palestine.

Sources:

- You can find the link to the extract here:
<https://images.macmillan.com/folio-assets/book-excerpts/9780374357337EX.pdf>
- Or use the audio version of the author reading a short extract here:
<http://www.ibtisambarakat.com/listen-to-author-reading.html>
- Or provide students with a copy of pp.3-7 of the book, Ibtisam Barakat, *Tasting the Sky: A Palestinian Childhood*. United States, Farrar, Straus and Giroux (BYR), 2007.

Task 1: Language.

Discuss unfamiliar words and concepts.

For example, from page 3:

Surda: Surda is a town located between the Palestinian cities of Birzeit and Ramallah in the West Bank.

Pen pals: Pen Pals are people who correspond with each other regularly by mail, often across long distances.

Land mine: A land mine is an explosive device buried in the ground that detonates when stepped on, causing injury or death.

Throw the question like a rock: This is a metaphorical description, suggesting the soldier aggressively or forcefully asks the question.

Task 3: Journal

Objective: Reflect on personal experiences of loss, change, or uncertainty, and explore feelings associated with these experiences through art interpretation.

Instructions:

Journal Reflection: Have students spend 10-15 minutes writing about a personal experience related to loss, change, or uncertainty. Encourage them to describe what happened, how it made them feel, and what, if anything, helped them cope or adjust to the situation.

*Students can be creative and imaginative; they do not need to share real life personal experiences.

Prompt: Think about a time when something significant in your life changed or when you lost something or someone important to you. How did you feel? What thoughts went through your mind?

Art Interpretation: Show the students the image "Rahem" created by Nyssa Myeda Mirza (below). Explain that this artwork is related to the themes of loss and displacement. Ask the students to observe the colours and shapes used in the artwork. Discuss what feelings these elements might represent.



Created by Nyssa Myeda Mirza, LSE (UK)

Resource: <https://reimaginingchildhoodstudies.com/into-oblivion/>

Discussion on Artwork 'Rahem': Model Analysis:

The artwork predominantly uses dark shades and stark black-and-white contrasts, which might symbolize the stark realities and the emotional weight of loss and displacement. The figure within the artwork appears enshrouded and possibly in motion, which could symbolize the ongoing journey and turmoil of those affected by such circumstances. The outline of the geographic shape in the background might represent a specific place related to the figure's identity or story, suggesting a deep connection to a homeland or a place of belonging that is missed or being left behind.

Guided Discussion:

How do the colours and the use of shading in the image make you feel?

Do these choices by the artist enhance the feeling of the poem read earlier?

What do you think the figure in the artwork represents?

How does this relate to your own experiences of change or loss?

Connecting Art and Personal Experience:

Encourage students to think about how art can express complex emotions and situations in ways that words sometimes cannot.

Ask them how creating or viewing art might help people process their feelings during tough times.

Conclusion:

End the session by summarising the key points discussed and any insights students shared about their own experiences and the artwork.

Encourage students to think about other forms of art as tools for expressing and coping with emotions.

Optionally, students can be invited to create their own piece of art that represents their journal entry about loss, change, or uncertainty.

Lesson 2: Descriptive Writing

Look at photos and artwork depicting daily life, natural scenes, family scenes, cultural traditions from Palestine. Have students choose an image that resonates with them.

Here are some examples ideas you could use to inspire descriptive writing:

1. A sunset over a field (Image and model example provided)
2. Shelter as a cultural embrace (Image and model example provided)
3. A bustling outdoor market in a Palestinian city, with colourful stalls displaying fresh produce. You can also imagine textiles, and handicrafts.
4. Children playing football in a dusty alleyway between stone buildings, their laughter echoing off the walls.
5. A family gathered around a table for a meal, sharing dishes of hummus, falafel, and fresh pita bread.
6. An elderly woman in traditional embroidered clothing, her face lined with wrinkles, sitting in a sunny courtyard.
7. A view of terraced olive groves and ancient stone buildings perched on a hillside, with the Mediterranean Sea in the distance.



Image: Sunset in West Kerry, by Jacqui O’Riordan (Ireland)
<https://reimaginingchildhoodstudies.com/to-the-children-of-palestine-who-are-living-in-fear/>



صورة: ملجأ رسمتها ملك مطر (2021) (2021) Malak Mattar created by
<https://reimaginingchildhoodstudies.com/ill-meet-you-in-a-dream/>

Model using vivid sensory details and figurative language to describe the sights, sounds, smells, emotions evoked by the image.

Descriptive Paragraph Model (Based on the First Image)

The day draws to a close. The sky above the rolling hills ignites with an orchestra of colours, painting a symphony of carotly pink, and lavender across the horizon. The sun, in its final act, casts a radiance that blankets the earth, transforming the ordinary into the extraordinary. The silhouette of the distant mountain stands as a patient guardian, its outline softened by the fiery backdrop that lights up the heavens. The air is filled with the crisp scent of the evening breeze, carrying with it the cool whispers of the night soon to follow. In this moment, the world seems to pause, holding its breath as the day's worries melt into the sunset. The swooshing of the grass harmonises with the calls of the evening birds, creating a melody that soothes the soul, inviting one to dream along with the descending sun.

Descriptive Paragraph Model (Based on the Second Image)

A mother and daughter are cradled in a tender embrace, their faces a tapestry of deep reds and gentle earth tones that whisper tales of enduring love and cultural heritage. The mother's eyes are closed in a serene expression, as if listening to the gentle hum of the wind that dances through their flowing hair, dark as the midnight sky but speckled with golden dots like distant stars. Her protective hold around the young girl, whose eyes hold the depth of ancient stories, creates a sanctuary vibrant with patterns that bloom like a wild meadow in spring. These patterns, adorned with a riot of colours—fiery reds, lush greens, and deep blues—sing of the rich Palestinian traditions, each petal and leaf a symbol of resilience and beauty. The scent of jasmine seems to waft from the canvas, mingling with the warmth of shared whispers, binding the moment in the timeless dance of tradition and familial bonds.

Students now practice descriptive writing (25 minutes)

In pairs, students share their writing and give each other feedback on what stood out, what else they want to know.

Success Criteria:

- Uses sensory details (sight, sound, smell, touch) to create a vivid picture in the reader's mind Includes specific, concrete details that evoke a strong sense of place and culture.
- Employs figurative language (simile, metaphor, personification) to add depth and meaning.
- Creates a sense of mood or atmosphere that matches the scene being described.
- Uses varied sentence structures and precise word choice to engage the reader Shows rather than tells, allowing the reader to make their own inferences and emotional connections.

Lesson 3: Creative Writing

Here is a fictional example of an eye-witness account from a Palestinian child's perspective, written for a KS3 audience by Priyanka Soni:

*This account was generated for a KS3 audience using some assistance from AI. I created an initial story and asked AI to imagine they are a KS3 class and to highlight what they might find challenging or distressing. I then adjusted some of the descriptions accordingly to ensure the content is appropriate for the target age group. However, it is best to read through this account in the context of each individual KS3 class/group of students to determine if it is safe and appropriate for all to read.

My name is Layla, and I am 12 years old. I live in a city in Palestine that has been at war for as long as I can remember. Every day, I wake up to the sound of explosions and gunfire in the distance. It's scary, but I try to be brave for my little brother, Amir. Last week, the fighting came closer to our neighbourhood than ever before. My parents decided it was too dangerous to stay, so we packed a few bags and left our home behind. As we ran through the streets, I saw buildings crumbling and people crying. Smoke filled the air and made my eyes sting. We took shelter in a crowded school with other families who had fled their homes. I miss my room and my toys, but I know we are lucky to be safe. Some of my friends have lost their homes or even family members. At night, I dream of a peaceful life, where I can go to school without fear and play outside with my friends. I hope that one day, the fighting will end, and we can return home. But for now, we wait and pray for better days ahead. Despite everything, I still have hope. I see the strength and kindness in the people around me, even in the hardest times. We share what little food we have and comfort each other when we feel sad or scared. I know that as long as we stick together, we can get through anything. I want the world to know what it's like for children like me, growing up in a place where war is always present. I want people to understand that we are just like any other kids – we have dreams and fears and families that we love. I hope that by sharing my story, I can help make a difference, even in a small way.

This account aims to capture the perspective of a Palestinian child living through war, in a way that is relatable and age-appropriate for KS3 students. It touches on themes of fear, loss, displacement, resilience, and hope, without going into graphic details or political arguments. The goal is to encourage empathy and understanding in young readers.

Task 1: Diary Entry

Imagine you are Layla, the girl from the eye-witness account. Write a diary entry about a day in your life during the war. Include details about your surroundings, your feelings, and any challenges or moments of hope you experience. Try to use descriptive language to help the reader visualize your experience.

Success Criteria:

- Write in the first person, as if you are Layla Include sensory details (sights, sounds, smells, etc.) to create a vivid picture
- Describe your emotions and thoughts about the events of the day. Use a clear, engaging writing style appropriate for a diary entry
- Aim for 200-300 words

Task 2: Letter to a Friend

Write a letter to a friend who lives in a country not subjected to violence, explaining what life is like for you as a child living through war in Palestine.

Share some of the challenges you face, but also describe the things that give you hope and strength.

Think about what you would want your friend to understand about your experience.

Success Criteria:

- Begin with a friendly greeting and introduction.
- Describe some specific challenges or experiences related to living through war
Share some of your feelings and thoughts about your situation.
- Mention some things that give you hope or help you cope.
- End with a friendly closing and sign off.
- Aim for 250-350 words

Task 3: Found Poem

Create a found poem using words and phrases from the eye-witness account.

A found poem is made by taking existing text and rearranging it into a new, poetic form. See over the page for an example of a found poem. Choose words and phrases that you find powerful or meaningful and arrange them in a way that captures the essence of Layla's experience.

Success Criteria:

- Use words and phrases from the original eye-witness account.
- Arrange the words in a way that creates a poetic rhythm or flow.
- Choose words that evoke strong images or emotions.
- Give your poem a title that reflects its theme or message Use line breaks and spacing to enhance the poem's impact.

Aim for 10-20 lines

These tasks are designed to engage students in creative writing and critical thinking, while also building empathy and understanding for children living through difficult circumstances.

They can be adapted or extended based on the needs and abilities of your students.

An example of a found poem created from the eye-witness account:

Title: Fragments of War
Explosions and gunfire
Wake up to the sound
Scary, but I try to be brave
Buildings crumbling
People crying
Smoke filled the air
Took shelter in a crowded school
Miss my room and my toys
Lucky to be safe
Dream of a peaceful life
Go to school without fear
Play outside with my friends
Fighting will end
Return home
Wait and pray for better days
Strength and kindness
Hardest times
Share what little food we have
Comfort each other
Just like any other kids
Dreams and fears
Families that we love
Share my story
Make a difference Small way