



Creative Wordshops

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Writing Letter

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re-story, re-create and re-imagine your life and work

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for this letter, ongoing opportunities + 'what's on.'

Dear seeker of words and images

Images, Triangles, You and Me

The tale is often wiser than the teller.

Recently I was storytelling in Namibia engaging with therapists teachers and counsellors who work with children at risk - courtesy of the Carl Schlettwein Foundation. The theme ? How creativity and imagination offer a path to healing.

In one of the exercises I offered one of my ballads, *Night Flight*, which Erna Buber illustrated. The guiding question - how could you use this with children? Here is the poem and two of the images.

Night Flight

Last night as I lay dreaming
A Zebra came to visit me.
I jumped upon his stripy back.
We soared towards our tree.

The tree grew near the window
of our house in Donkeydraai
It rose so high above the ground
Its fruit reached to the sky.

"What is your name?" I asked her.
"and why did you come for me?"
"My name is Zeb," she answered,
"and just you wait and see."

Just as we passed the branches
Zeb picked an orange with her teeth.
"If we are travelling all this night,
We'll need a bite to eat."

"Now you must keep this orange."
She rolled it on her back.
I caught the juicy orange moon
and put it in my sack.

I held on to the Zebra's mane.
As we rose, I stroked her pelt.
I could not see our donkey
who grazed the nearby veld.

We rose above the village
Where people sighed and snored.
Up away in the cool night air
Zeb flapped his wings and soared.

"I think dear Zeb you chose me
Because my shirt is striped?
My granny made it for me
In rows of black and white."

"You are so kind to the donkey
that lives in the village below.
By the time that morning comes
There is a lot that you will know."

The moon was full and golden
As we rose up through the night.
"If we get any nearer, Zeb
We'll soar beyond its light."

As Zeb and I jumped the moon
she wore a smiling face.
"Molo, dear sister" we greeted her
"Tonight you shine in space."

Then we flew back above the veld
Near river, jackal and hare.
"These are your family too" Zeb said.
They all looked up to stare.

So we flew on in silence
as I peeled the orange moon.
We made up a song to thank the tree
And then we made up the tune.

Just as the sun was rising
we headed back to Donkeydraai
I still could not see our donkey
We dropped down to land nearby.

"The spirit of life is in everything,
in the tree, the moon, the hare."
And as Zeb spoke she vanished
And the donkey stood right there.

And as I climbed back into bed
In the village of Donkeydraai.
I opened my arms to my family
in the river, earth and sky.

Dorian (Feb 2004)





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We made up a song to thank the
tree
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Responses

Here are some of the participants' observations that even I, as author, had not been conscious of. This is the mystery of the writing process.

The story begins with an isolated child and ends with him being connected to a wider family. It connects the child beyond other human beings to a river, the full moon and creatures. This breaks down the sense of loneliness as the child belongs to a wider reality.

I introduced them to Chuang Chou and Coleridge. In a dream the boy enters the world of Chuang Chou. 'Once upon a time, I, Chuang Chou, dreamt I was a butterfly, fluttering hither and thither, I was conscious only of my happiness as a butterfly, unaware that I was Chou. Soon I awaked, and there I was, veritably myself again.'

What of Coleridge?:

What if you slept
And what if
In your sleep
You dreamed
And what if
In your dream
You went to heaven
And there plucked a strange and beautiful flower
And what if

When you awoke
You had that flower in your hand
Ah, what then?

The child identifies with the zebra as they are dressed' alike. It is a ballad (in this story zebra and boy make up a song and a tune) and so it is easy to choose a tune they know and sing it. Singing raises our spirits. Participants also discovered that the zebra is intentionally both a he and a she. People also spoke about the mysterious identity of the zebra who might be the donkey that the boy has befriended. So the story also speaks to the possibility of transformation.

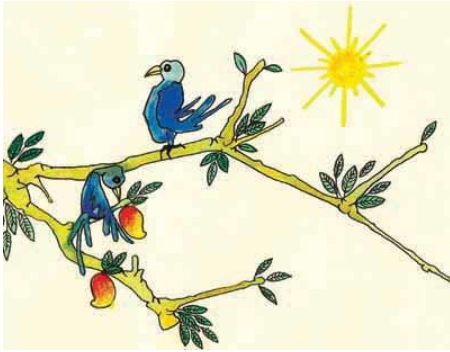
While in the story such as the moon, the orange and tree are all objects, they are also symbols that speak to us beyond rational understanding. We spent time exploring how images connect us to a larger conversation. When a child looks down-hearted and overwhelmed, a therapist could talk about a tree in a time of drought when leaves and roots have withered. This connects the child to nature cycles. It can help move the concept of my suffering to **the** suffering. The child is part of a wider cycle.

Can a therapist and child both be a flying zebra for each other?

Creating Triangles

I spent time looking at how when we set up, what I call triangles, the therapy experience is enriched. A therapist and a child plus a story is one example where the therapist and child communicate through the story which creates the third part of a triangle. Looking through pictures together also creates the same triangle effect. There is the therapist, the child and a picture and the communication is through the picture. This offers a child safety for through the picture he or she reveals information that the therapist needs to know and the child is not able to disclose.

A childhood memory drawing based on a piece of material also created a triangle. They were present in the room with other students while being present in the memory and interacting with me at the same time.



In Hindu scripture there is a text:

Two birds, each the friend of the other, perch upon the same tree. One eats the sweet fig while the other simply looks on without eating.

I shared the image and text and we discussed how when we develop the witness to our interactions, we also create triangles.

So a counsellor or a therapist can watch himself or herself interact with the child. The paradox is that when I watch (witness) myself with compassion, I am more intimately involved in the moment. It is like watching myself on a movie screen.

One of my favourite Biblical stories? The Emmaus road journey when a mysterious figure joins the two disciples, creating a third illuminating presence. TS Eliot: 'Who is the third who walks always beside you? When I count, there are only you and I together. But when I look ahead up the white road. There is always another one walking beside you.' This too is the mystery of the story triangle.

Stories travel to a place in the psyche where most needed. Story can be used as a medicine that once taken can remain and act within the psyche...long after the last word has been spoken." (Clarissa Pinkola Estes)

Dorian