Workshop Introduction to Creative Non-fiction

Described as the fourth genre, Creative Nonfiction is the term applied to nonfiction stories that are told in a creative way. Lee Gutkind, the ‘godfather’ of Creative Nonfiction, defines this form of writing as “true stories well told.” Creative Nonfiction may appear in the form of a personal essay, journal article, biography or memoir but, as a nonfiction piece, the material included has to be factual and carefully researched; the reader has to trust that you are telling the truth. The means of conveying your ideas is what gives the piece its creativity. Approaching nonfiction writing creatively allows for greater freedom in the use of dialogue, first person narrative, contractions, particular points-of-view and ways of looking at the world. Imagery or metaphor may be included, and the structure need not be linear. Instead of a works cited list, a less formal series of notes, which allows for the addition of further information, might appear at the end. “The goal,” says Gutkind, “is to make nonfiction stories read like fiction so that your readers are as enthralled by fact as they are by fantasy.”

For this piece we are looking at a ‘walking’ piece’ which is similar to travel writing / memoir but is based in our own backyard so to speak, somewhere that has personal connections and that can be researched

The samples from my work are all walking pieces. With each of them the idea is that, if someone were to follow your walk using a map, it would be accurate / logical. They should be able to follow it without you giving too many markers in the piece.

Ways this could be used:

Senior writing folio

Senior Information Literacy as there is a need for research and personal commentary / opinion.

So, having set out to use this with my Senior students this year, and not getting much of a hook in I’ve been thinking about how we can set our students up so they can write like this. My plans for next year are to introduce it at a junior level – take them on a walk armed with notebooks, cameras etc, visit the places, take notes from plaques, organise a guided tour if it suits where you are, record their responses in the field.

Then back in class they can do further research, plan everything they want to include on a map – to make sure the walk is possible, and then write – possibly a collaborative piece.

For today I’ve given you a few starting photos and assumed that you know Napier reasonably well.

25 minutes in twos / threes research each of the photos and any other iconic buildings etc that you are aware of – plan your walk on the map. Find an alternative map if you want to go further afield / use a different local area etc but make sure the things you pass can easily be connected. Consider the importance / relevance / significance of the points you pass by on your way as you do your research.

5 minutes - Start with an occasion / reason for being there eg Blossom parade / Anzac Dawn Service / Market Day / Art Deco Weekend. Consider also whether you are alone / with people, will they feature in your writing? (At this point, let them split as a group so they can write individually / as a groups – maybe a mixture of both depending on your students)

Consider - is there an underlying aspect to your piece that is significant to you – eg although not evident in the Cannock Chase extracts the underlying idea was the importance of family / memories in the making because of Dad’s failing health, whereas they do not feature in the Stratford piece, even though they were with me as this was written for the English in Aotearoa April issue where the focus was Shakespeare not family.