

# “So I suppose you want to ask me why I spared the werewolves”

## Collaborative Creative Writing as a Motor for *Languaging* in the English L2 Classroom, Using Born-Digital Prompts

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**Abstract:** Given the premise that the core skills for future education are creativity, communication, collaboration and critical thinking (Fadel et al., 2015), the case for making (collaborative) creative prose writing a central activity in the English classroom is stronger than ever. In the quest to express and shape their own meanings, learners are propelled into “languaging” activities (Swain & Watanabe, 2013) that drive effective language learning. Scaffolding with a strong appeal to learners in the digital age can be provided by online tools of various kinds. Some are explicitly designed to support creative writers, no matter what their L1, others are tools the L2 creative writer can access online. I will present examples of these resources and argue that online tools such as text generators or writing prompts represent a specific kind of born-digital text, often serving as a draft, skeleton or stem for a new creative text. I will also argue that, with guidance from teachers and used purposefully in collaborative settings, such born-digital texts (exemplified here by a blurb produced by a text generator) can give learners experience in working with the kinds of “substantial texts” that Martín Alegre (2021) fears might be displaced by an overemphasis on digital media in the English Language classroom.

**Keywords:** creative writing in the L2 classroom; digital creative writing aids; text generators; collaborative creative writing



## 1 Introduction: 21st-century skills and digital creative writing tools

One remit in the second *New Horizons* conference's Call for Papers was to consider the following: If the core "21st-century skills" identified by Fadel et al. in their 2015 paper for the Center for Curriculum Redesign are communication, collaboration, creativity and critical thinking, what concrete material or subject-matter are we going to use to develop these competences in the foreign language classroom? I argue here that Creative Writing (CW) has great potential for developing precisely these skills in English L2 instruction, whilst also being a highly effective vehicle for language learning. I also fulfil another remit from the Call for Papers, since I show how CW in the English classroom can be substantially scaffolded with digital tools. My main focus will be on text-generating tools, which, I argue, create a specific type of "born-digital text" (Becker et al., 2023). In this contribution I suggest ways of working with such tools to develop the higher-order skills of communication, collaboration, creativity and critical thinking, and of course also to build language skills.

It is important to note at the outset that CW in the English L2 classroom, as discussed here, is expressly not understood as the preserve of so-called "creative" individuals. Rather, it is done by anyone for its own sake, with the primary purpose of moving, amusing, intriguing or entertaining oneself and others. In this, it differs from the kinds of writing typically done in the English classroom, be they to summarise a text or express an opinion on an ethical question or practise using conditionals. By contrast, CW in language-learning contexts is characterised by "a playful engagement with language, stretching and testing its rules to the limit in a guilt-free atmosphere, where risk is encouraged", combining "cognitive with affective modes of thinking" in the process (Maley, 2009, n.p.).

## 2 The affordances of collaborative Creative Writing in the English L2 classroom

The core skill of creativity is evidently fostered when deploying CW in the classroom, but it has other affordances as well, which make it such a valuable technique for English L2 learning and teaching. In speaking of "affordances", a concept developed by the perceptual psychologist J.J. Gibson (1979, p. 127), I want to emphasise that positive effects do not occur automatically if we do CW in the English L2 classroom, but that there is a range of possible positive effects that accrue from carefully conceived and carefully facilitated creative writing activities.

From my experience teaching CW classes at university level, in which students write exclusively for expressive and aesthetic purposes, I believe that assuming ownership of writing can strongly support developing L2 mastery, as learners are far more invested in their own texts than in tasks or exercises imposed by teachers or textbooks. Maley (2006, 2009) maintains that writing creatively and seeking to express one's own meanings requires a deep and attentive processing of language, with, potentially at least, strong language learning effects. This is because when learners

"manipulate the language in interesting and demanding ways in their attempt to express uniquely personal meanings (as they do in creative writing), they necessarily engage with the language at a deeper level of processing than with expository texts. The gains in grammatical accuracy, appropriacy and originality of lexical choice [...] are significant" (Maley, 2006, p. 35).

The tasks we do in my CW seminars often initiate writing that is simultaneously more ambitious and more careful than that which I see in students' expository writing. If the students are invested in the task, it requires more attentive planning, more willingness to

use dictionaries and thesauruses to find more precise, sophisticated and expressive lexis (which means that lexical resources are extended), more attention to structures and accuracy and more willingness to edit and polish the text. As Andres Morrissey (2003, n.p.) notes,

“Creative writing involves playful but rigorous work with language. A lot of people seem to associate creative writing with an ‘anything goes’ mentality. However, in order to produce a good text, poem, short story or dramatic scene, the language needs to be correct and it needs to work”.

In teaching CW to L2 students of English at university level, Andres Morrissey has noticed that they are impelled towards much more careful choices of expression than in other kinds of writing required by their studies, as they are keen to ensure that their intended meanings are rendered with sufficient precision (Andres Morrissey, 2003, n.p.). And as Maley (2009) observes,

“the interesting thing is that the very constraints which the rules [of a specific genre or form] impose seem to foster rather than restrict the creativity of the writer. This apparent paradox is explained partly by the deeper processing of thought and language which the rules require”.

These are good arguments for making CW a far more central activity in the English L2 classroom than it usually is, if it is done at all. Indeed, for English learners at school, “creative writing can play a crucial role; not as the occasional ‘fun and games on Friday afternoons’ but as an essential dimension of what can be learned in and through a foreign language” (Lutzker, 2015, p. 134). Lutzker believes that CW in the classroom can potentially have wider-reaching effects still, to the extent that

“learning to express oneself creatively is a highly individual process deeply rooted in one’s inner imaginative and emotional life. [...] When adolescents are given opportunities to become engaged in such artistic processes, what they can learn both about themselves and the world goes far past what most traditional schooling generally offers” (Lutzker, 2015, p. 134).

While Maley’s depth-of-processing explanation for the language learning effects of CW is rooted in cognitive theory, a sociocultural explanation also suggests itself: unlike typical language practice tasks, CW offers scope for original input and the active construction of knowledge. It propels learners into the Vygotskian process that Swain and Watanabe (2013) term “*linguaging*”. The goal of *linguaging* is “to solve a complex cognitive problem using language to mediate problem solution”, either by communicating with others in speech or writing, or indeed by speaking or writing to oneself (p. 3218). Merrill Swain has long argued that *linguaging* drives second language acquisition (e.g. Swain, 2006; Swain & Watanabe, 2013).

While doing CW as such fosters creativity in the L2 classroom, using a collaborative approach to CW activities promotes the other three 21st-century competences, communication, collaboration and critical thinking, by means of a specific form of *linguaging* that Swain and Watanabe (2013) term *collaborative dialogue*. Although collaborative dialogue is by no means limited to the L2 classroom, Swain and Watanabe regard task-focused target language dialogue between learners as a particularly rich and effective form of *linguaging*. In collaborative L2 dialogue, “speakers are engaged in problem solving and knowledge building”, during which they “may refine their knowledge or come to a new or deeper understanding of a phenomenon” (Swain & Watanabe, 2013, p. 3218). Drawing again on Vygotsky, Swain and Watanabe note that the participants in a collaborative dialogue use language as a “cognitive tool” which mediates their thoughts. An utterance by one participant, they explain, invites various kinds of responses on the part of the other participant(s): questions, additions, refutations and so on, and it is in this process that knowledge is co-constructed (Swain & Watanabe, 2013, p. 3218). In terms of 21st-century skills, critical thinking is a necessary component of this process.

Collaborative CW activities of the kind proposed in Section 4 require a good deal of collaborative L2 dialogue to carry out the tasks, and thus offer opportunities for developing creative, communicative, collaborative and critical thinking skills in a series of immersive activities.

### 3 Text-generators as scaffolding and sources of substantial “born-digital” texts

Tools such as text generators used to prompt and scaffold collaborative creative writing in the secondary English classroom enable learners to create more sophisticated and “writerly” texts than they could unaided, potentially moving them into their zone of proximal development, the next stage they are likely to master in acquiring a particular skill (ZPD). “Scaffolding” here designates anything or anyone (a digital tool or resource, a peer, a more proficient language user, a teacher) that enables someone to successfully carry out a task beyond their current developmental level in a given skill (see Swain & Watanabe, 2013) so that they perform within their ZPD.

When they use online text generators of the kind demonstrated in the next section, learners provide their own input, which is then transformed into more complex text by the generator. Thus, the text is at least partly owned or masterminded by the input-givers, and since they are invested in the text which the tool generates and likely to engage with it intensively, the learners are likely to notice, remember and internalise formulations and structures from the text. This assumption draws on Schmidt’s (1990) “noticing hypothesis”, which holds that conscious and active processing of input is necessary for input to be transformed into “intake”, which may facilitate the acquisition of language items or structures from the input. By prompting this kind of noticing, the tool functions as scaffolding and may help learners to progress into their ZPD. When scaffolding is provided by a digital resource rather than a teacher or school-book, learners can elect to use whatever aspects of it they choose, and for members of a generation that is highly adept at utilising digital content this in turn imparts greater autonomy and agency. Working collaboratively when using the text generators means that the pressure of thinking of input or monitoring language accuracy and appropriacy is distributed, and learners pool their ideas and knowledge. Collaborative work with the tools also prompts intensive collaborative dialogue as discussed in Section 2, thus acting as a source of L2 development, and also mediating it (Swain & Watanabe, 2013, p. 3218).

A further area proposed for scrutiny in the second *New Horizons* conference was the affordances of born-digital texts in the FL classroom. The creations emerging from the text generator to be discussed shortly certainly qualify as born-digital texts, since they come into existence online, may be shared there, and are unlikely to ever be transformed to printed text (Ryan & Sampson, 2018, p. 2). After participating in the symposium “Born-Digital Texts in the Foreign Language Classroom” organised by Christian Ludwig and Saskia Kersten in January 2021, Martín Alegre (2021) noted in her blog her unease about learners failing to engage sufficiently with “substantial texts” if the texts they read, but above all write, increasingly lean towards born-digital formats. Her fear is that the kind of short, attenuated texts youngsters produce or read when (to use her examples) using social media, gaming or watching and responding to YouTube content will not promote the ability to read or write longer and more complex texts, with the demands, I suggest, that these make on the ability to create or follow the coherence of highly-organised discourse over longer stretches. Working with the generator counters this concern. The creative texts described in the next section are generated by a digital tool, albeit with some human input and certainly with human editing, but the resulting text has undeniably had a digital birth. The generator produces, amongst many other kinds of texts, pastiches of short stories, movie scripts and blurbs for novels in a wide range of popular genres, and

so the texts it generates are complex, dense and literate. That is, they are “born-digital” but also “substantial”.

#### 4 Collaborative writing in the English classroom with *Masterpiece Generator*

So as to make the specific form of collaborative writing with born-digital texts envisaged in this contribution more tangible, a practical classroom application will be described in some detail in this section, showing how the competences of creativity, communication, collaboration and critical thinking are addressed in the course of this complex CW activity.

These proposals make use of the plot generator tool provided by *Masterpiece Generator*, an ever-expanding set of entertaining text-generator tools based (to judge by the URL) in the UK. Apart from short stories, short film scripts and blurbs, there are tools to generate (amongst other texts) fairy tales, picture books, poems, letters, memes and song lyrics in a wide range of styles, as well as useful tools for more practised creative writers such as first lines, story ideas, characters, names and plot twists. According to the blurb on the website (<https://www.plot-generator.org.uk/>), it started as a student magazine project with the song lyric generator twenty years ago and continues to evolve, as regular users can confirm. As for the content used by the generators, some of it “parodies existing styles and artists” while other material is “based on original structures” (<https://www.plot-generator.org.uk/>). The attraction of *Masterpiece Generator*’s material is its clever, satirically humorous approach and the gratifying aha-effect when one recognises specific pop-culture tropes in the texts it generates, be these based on Brontë novels or rap songs.

Some teachers might be scandalised by the idea of letting algorithms do the writing for the students, but utilised purposefully in the classroom – say in Year 9 at a Gesamtschule – this digital resource affords rich opportunities to develop language skills and 21st-century competences. The digital tools are not conceived primarily for educational purposes, but as entertaining support for aspirant creative writers; nor are they aimed at L2 learners. Thus, the material they offer is authentic in that it uses real-world English without modifications for the L2 user (Reckermann, 2018).

For the teaching proposal in this contribution, I chose the blurb generator tool. This will generate back-cover blurbs for a range of genres, including Romance, Fantasy, Crime, Horror, Mystery and Science Fiction, but also some more left-field genres such as Dystopian, Paranormal Romance, Vampire, Brontë Sisters or, tantalisingly, Smelly Trolls. Teenage learners will thus have a good range of genres to choose from, and quite apart from the CW activity envisaged, these categories present a fine opportunity to focus on genre conventions, literary styles and tropes. In a lesson prior to the CW unit proper, the class is asked to think about the typical features of some of these genres, talk about books, films, series or games they know that represent the genres and match genre labels with short excerpts from typical or celebrated examples of those genres, and discuss features of the respective writing style. Towards the end of this preparatory lesson, the learners consider all the blurbs on offer and discuss their preferences, then vote for five genres they would most like to work with. The teacher will be providing worksheets for the first input stage, and so needs to know which blurb templates to copy. The class discussion on genres and debate on which five genres to choose (possibly in smaller groups initially) provides a good warmup for the collaborative dialogues in the L2 that will be needed in the CW phase.

The advantage of generating blurbs in a classroom setting is that the user input is about 25 words (which will require debate and use of dictionaries and thesauruses), and the blurb it yields is a coherent, relatively complex text about 150 words long in typical

back-cover blurb style. The process of deciding on input is thus not too lengthy and taxing, leaving time to work on the text produced.

Counter-intuitively for a digitally-scaffolded text, the first step on the part of the teacher would, as suggested, be to have the class choose four or five genres for blurbs, copy the forms provided by the generator for entering input into Word documents, and print them on paper. There are two reasons for this: one is that if they work with a paper worksheet and not the digital tool, the learners can focus on the task at hand without being distracted by the many other attractions on the website. The other is that although the generator tool invites users to enter their own input, it also has a seductive green button that will provide ready-generated input if desired. This would be counter-productive in the classroom context.

For a better idea of what the worksheets would look like, Figure 1 shows part of the online input template to generate a blurb for a “Mystery” plot, copied into a Word document.

Three types of crime or sin (e.g. robbery, gluttony, murder)
<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>
Three adjectives that could be used to describe places
<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>
An adjective that could describe an object
<input type="text"/>
Four positive adjectives to describe somebody’s character
<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/>
An event
<input type="text"/>

*Figure 1:* Input template for “Mystery” plot blurb (excerpt). Source: <https://www.plot-generator.org.uk/create.php?type=5>, 26.04.2023

As this example shows, the initial work with the generator is strongly lexis orientated, and the learners should be encouraged to use dictionaries and thesauruses (online or print). At the same time, the prompts use grammatical terms like “adjective”, “adverb” or “singular noun” or concepts from literary studies such as “protagonist”, so the teacher should check in advance what terms appear in the prompts for the chosen blurbs, and

write examples on the board to help the learners remember what they mean. Working with the generator thus has the bonus of revising grammatical and literary metalanguage.

The learners work in groups of three or four, and each group only gets one worksheet with the input prompts. This means the learners *have* to collaborate to complete the task. To foster collaboration and communication in the target language (in keeping with the principles of Cooperative Learning; see Johnson et al., 1994), the teacher should distribute roles within the small groups; one person may have more than one role. Key roles and functions needed to facilitate autonomous collaborative work in this CW activity are shown in Figure 2.

<i>ROLE</i>	<i>FUNCTION</i>
<i>Task Manager</i>	Keeps group members focused on task Ensures everyone contributes and all contributions are treated with respect Ensures task is completed
<i>Language Expert(s)</i>	Use(s) a dictionary and thesaurus to ensure good lexical choices Ensure(s) the grammatical forms required by the prompts (adverbs, present participles, etc.) are entered correctly Monitor(s) language accuracy Ensure(s) all collaborative dialogue takes place in the L2
<i>Good Taste Guru</i>	Vetoes suggestions that are in bad taste

Figure 2: Essential roles in collaborative work with the blurb generator

These roles are particularly important in developing the competences “communication” and “collaboration”. When their members take these roles, the groups assume responsibility for their own effective communicative and collaborative functioning, rather than the teacher having to cajole the participants into speaking the target language and staying focused on the task. Given the claims made by Swain and Watanabe (2013; see Section 2) for the powerful languaging effects accruing from collaborative L2 dialogue, the Language Expert’s function of ensuring everyone uses the L2 is crucial. The role of Good Taste Guru is not a conventional cooperative learning role, but some learners may be tempted to make unacceptable suggestions if prompted to fill in a “body part” or an “activity two people could do together”.

The learners discuss, check and agree on a word or phrase for each prompt on the form, a process which involves all four of the core competences: choosing expressive or unusual lexis is creative, ensuring that the word or phrase is in accordance with the semantic and grammatical categories specified in the prompt requires critical thinking, and proposing and discussing the lexical items is communicative and collaborative. Since all this is done in collaborative dialogue, an intense form of languaging is taking place throughout the input phase.

Once they have filled out the form on paper, the groups can enter their input in the actual online generator (via class tablets or their smartphones) and generate their blurbs. (For a clearer idea of how the generator works, see the appendix for a complete set of input prompts and an example of a blurb generated on the basis of input.) The members of each group copy and paste the blurb into a text document, which they print out or save on their devices for the crucial editing phase which is to follow. In their groups, the learners read the blurb and enjoy the text the generator has produced from their input, as well as the cover of their “novel” and the hilarious automatically-generated reviews. The respective Language Expert checks and clarifies any unknown words or expressions used by the generator. The groups also proofread their blurbs, as there are occasional mistakes

of concordance or even spelling in the generated texts. Here and in the subsequent work with the newly-generated blurb, the core skill of critical thinking is foregrounded.

The learners do not know in advance just how the generator will use their input or what combinations it will create. Some parts of the resulting text are likely to be poetic or hilarious, but others may be weak or simply illogical: intriguing though the generator's output is, human writers will still be able to construct more logical texts. Thus, in the next step, the group members work together or individually and suggest changes and additional input that will make the machine-generated, born-digital text work better, both logically and aesthetically. For example, a student who experimented with the generator to provide data for this paper was asked by the generator to supply a place name and then two adjectives. This resulted in *The boring, explosive town of Sabbington holds a secret* when the text was generated. The group could decide to work on the adjectives so they are not contradictory, and change the description to e.g. *boring, rainy town* OR *explosive, corrupt town*. As before, this phase is scaffolded by peer input, by dictionaries and thesauruses, and by the teacher who is facilitating the work.

Given that the group is editing and augmenting the blurb to make it more aesthetically pleasing as well as more logical, in addition to critical thinking, creativity is also fostered in this phase. At the same time, the group assumes greater ownership of the text, and this increased investment ideally results in more careful and ambitious use of language (Andres Morrissey, 2003; Maley, 2006) as the group members arrive at decisions about how to improve the blurb via collaborative dialogue. Further language-learning benefits accrue if, while working intensively with the generated text and reading it repeatedly, the learners notice and internalise structures, lexis and text-organising devices from the blurb, enhancing their own expressive repertoire in the L2. (In the fragment above, such an expression might be "to hold a secret".) To consolidate these language gains, the learners read through the edited blurb again as homework, select and write down some of the words or expressions that they would not/could not have written themselves and would like to remember and use themselves in future.

Once the groups have edited, enhanced and polished their blurbs, they read them aloud to the rest of the class. The teacher could also collect the final, edited versions and type up a clean version of each group's blurb (in a class of 32 working in groups of 4, this only means eight short texts), unobtrusively correcting language mistakes, and pin them up in the classroom. This gives the class members the chance to read the texts repeatedly, internalising formulations, lexis and structures from other groups' work as well, and also fulfils an essential criterion for meaningful CW work in the classroom – having one's work read by an audience (Maley, 2013).

## 5 Well, why *did* you spare the werewolves?

That question will have to be answered by learners doing collaborative CW with digital prompts in an English L2 classroom at some point in the future; but the example of such a lesson in Section 4 demonstrates, I believe, how rewarding and immersive such a project can be. This detailed example of a CW lesson based on digital input and the suggestions for working with the input to maximise language learning opportunities fulfils *New Horizons II's* remit of considering what concrete material might be used to develop the four core competences for the 21st century in the language classroom. Figure 3 on the next page gives an overview of how the experiences afforded by the lesson map onto the competences.

<i>Mapping the affordances of the digitally-scaffolded collaborative creative writing task onto the core competences for 21st-century education</i>	
<i>COMPETENCE</i>	<i>AFFORDANCE</i>
<i>Creativity</i> ⇄	expressive and aesthetic production; connection to inner imaginative and emotional life
<i>Communication</i> ⇄	making the imaginative and expressive accessible to others through narrative; communication on creative and editorial decisions in collaborative dialogue
<i>Collaboration</i> ⇄	with peers and teacher – choosing blurbs, deciding together on input for text generator, collaboratively editing, extending and improving the generator's output
<i>Critical Thinking</i> ⇄	evaluating, editing and extending machine-generated texts to ensure textual coherence and logic and to enhance their aesthetic appeal, humour, affective impact, etc.

Figure 3: Affordances of the task and 21st-century competences

In regard to the remit to consider the potential of born-digital texts, the sample lesson works with blurb-style texts that are born digital, to the extent that they are generated by an online tool on the basis of creative input from the learners. Their particular benefits for language development are realised when the texts are used to scaffold further creative production: they provide lexico-grammatical structures and discourse-organisational elements that the learners could not produce unaided, but nevertheless only become logical, coherent and aesthetically satisfying blurbs when the learners edit and augment them. Significantly too, these blurbs are born-digital texts that are substantial and literate; this addresses Martín Alegre's (2021) concern that learners may not develop sufficiently sophisticated writing and reading skills if there is an over-emphasis on born-digital material in the classroom. At the same time, the text generator, with its algorithm-based output, has an appeal and fun-factor that will engage learners accustomed to using digital media for recreational and educational purposes. Although the texts are not entirely their own, the learners take ownership of them via their initial input and subsequent editing. They are invested in the blurbs and engage with them closely, with potential learning effects. The texts play humorously with genre clichés, so they may also help the learners to develop greater awareness of genre conventions and so become more sophisticated readers and writers, able to differentiate between stereotype-ridden platitudes and strong, original fictional writing.

Further language-learning benefits from the proposed lesson accrue from the intense languaging that takes place in collaborative dialogue as the group members work together with the generator. The creative and cognitive demands of the task should be appealing enough for the learners to become immersed in tackling it; and as they can only do this in consultation with one another, mediating their solutions via language, the resulting L2 dialogue should act as a motor for languaging, at times propelling the learners into their ZPD: that is, moving beyond their current level of mastery and what they can normally do unaided in the L2 as they seek to express their intended meanings.

These learning effects are all the more pronounced because the dialogue focuses primarily on language itself. This is true of the initial phase, when the learners debate interesting input for the blurb generator whilst bearing in mind the grammatical and semantic constraints imposed by the prompts, and for the editing phase, when they rework

the blurb. In the post-task homework, the learners do deliberate *noticing* (in Schmidt's, 1990, sense) by identifying and noting lexis or structures they could not have produced unaided and choosing some items to learn and use in future. This, too has the potential to accelerate acquisition and move learners into their ZPDs.

This contribution has, I hope, provided convincing arguments for doing collaborative, digitally-scaffolded CW in the English L2 classroom, where it has considerable potential to foster higher-order skills as well as to build language mastery – even if the reason for sparing the werewolves remains a mystery.

## 6 Coda: Further online impulses and aids for CW in the English L2 classroom

Despite the editing phase in the example lesson, one critique of this activity could be that the learners are too passive. Since they do not produce much of the text itself, they do not have to construct a coherent text from scratch or draw on their full range of lexicogrammatical resources. A blurb is a short and specific text-type, so the next stage for the learners as they develop their CW skills could be to collaborate on generating a more conventional narrative with the *Masterpiece Generator's* short-story tool, fairy-tale tool or movie script tool, which require more input and produce much longer texts than the blurb generators. Again, crucial post-production tasks are editing the narratives and noting words, expressions or structures to use themselves in future. From here, the learners could graduate to writing their own short creative texts (singly or collaboratively), using prompts and input from the *Masterpiece Generator* website (<https://masterpiece-generator.org.uk>), such as the character generator, the name generator or the opening line generator. The title of this contribution, “So I suppose you want to ask me why I spared the werewolves”, is an example of an opening line generated by the eponymous tool (<https://www.plot-generator.org.uk/opening-line>).

Picture prompts can also function as writing prompts. There is a daily picture prompt accompanied by a question to guide the writing in the “picture prompt” section of *The Learning Network* (<https://www.nytimes.com/column/learning-picture-prompt>), an online resource provided by the New York Times. According to the information on *The Learning Network's* website (<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/24/learning/how-to-use-the-learning-network.html>), the materials are aimed at English L1 learners from the age of 13 and up, but as the prompts are visual and the questions no longer than a sentence, this resource is suitable for the L2 classroom as well.

A further resource designed for young L1 writers which could be used with L2 learners up to the age of about 13 is the “Creative Writing Exercises for Children” section of the British website *Writing Exercises* (<https://writingexercises.co.uk/children/>), which provides resources such as “Story First Line”, “Story Plot”, “Story Title” and “Random Picture”. An example of a story plot generated by the tool is: “A shy boy – A clever girl – On some stairs – Someone is looking for her friends” (generated 07.10.2022). This example shows that while the language is of an appropriate level for L2 learners, the content is orientated towards somewhat younger children. Thus, for L2 learners of 14 or up, the resources on the main site, “WritingExercises.co.uk” (WritingExercises, 2021), which are aimed at teenagers and adults, are more appropriate.

The Language Experts in the groups might use tools such as for instance the *Cambridge Online German-English Dictionary*. The *German-English Dictionary* links to the *English-English Dictionary*, which has examples of typical collocations and usage in sentence contexts, authentic examples of usage from corpora, and grammar notes where required. A further multi-purpose tool is the *Word Hippo* online thesaurus which provides inter alia synonyms, antonyms, translations (albeit sometimes unreliable ones), typical collocations and usage, examples from corpora, a rhyming dictionary, word formation and pronunciation support.

## Thanks

Thanks to my CW classes of the summer and winter semesters 2019–2020 for finding and evaluating such a wide range of digital CW tools and aids. The practical proposals in this article owe a good deal to the input of workshop participants at the 2021 *Medienbildungstag* for future language teachers at Bielefeld University, and to the suggestions from my Argumentation, Communication and Critical Reading classes in the online winter semester 21–22 at Bielefeld University.

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## Appendix: an example of the *Masterpiece Generator* in use

The input prompts for a blurb for a mystery story (<https://www.plot-generator.org.uk/create.php?type=5>, 26.04.2023)

Create a Mystery Plot in Seconds Please keep your input family friendly.

Your protagonist / amateur detective

Name    Male  Female

Two love interests

Name    Male  Female

Name    Male  Female

Name your mysterious town

Three types of crime or sin (e.g. robbery, gluttony, murder)




Three adjectives that could be used to describe places




An adjective that could describe an object

Four positive adjectives to describe somebody's character





An event

An activity two people could do together (e.g. singing, dancing)

Two jobs



Something you can become addicted to

An object

And finally, what's your pen name?

This is what the generator produced on the basis of the student's input:

The Marvellous Space Station

A Mystery

by Daisy Cockroach

The boring, explosive town of Sabbington holds a secret. Alan McXanting has the perfect life working as a hardware salesperson in the city and clubbing with his envy-invoking girlfriend, Beatrice de Loure. However, when he finds a marvellous space station in his cellar, he begins to realise that things are not quite as they seem in the McXanting family.

A carnival leaves Alan with some startling questions about his past, and he sets off to advantageous Sabbington to find some answers. At first the people of Sabbington are charming and captivating. He is intrigued by the curiously super special awesome executive producer, Donald Galuze. However, after he introduces him to hard fame, Alan slowly finds himself drawn into a web of not paying your taxes, exploitation of labour and perhaps, even screaming at children.

Can Alan resist the charms of Donald Galuze and uncover the secret of the marvellous space station before it's too late, or will his demise become yet another Sabbington legend?

[12.01.2022 20:39]

REVIEWS (generated by the tool)

"Who wouldn't give up a life of clubbing with their envy-invoking girlfriend to spend a little time with a curiously super special awesome executive producer?"

– The Daily Tale –

"About as mysterious as finding a poo in a public toilet. However, The Marvellous Space Station does offer a valuable lesson about not getting into hard fame."

– Enid Kibbler –

"The only mystery is, why did I keep reading after page one?"

– Hit the Spoof –

"I could do better."

– Zob Gloop –

## Information on the article

**Citation:**

Skorge, P. (2023). "So I suppose you want to ask me why I spared the werewolves". Collaborative Creative Writing as a Motor for *Languaging* in the English L2 Classroom, Using Born-Digital Prompts. *PFLB – PraxisForschungLehrer\*innenBildung*, 5 (3), 282–295. <https://doi.org/10.11576/pflb-6390>

Online accessible: 05.06.2023

ISSN: 2629-5628



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