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Department of English and Literacy

S1 BGE Independent Writing Activities

Practising your writing skills on a regular basis allows you to use your prior knowledge in new contexts. It also gives you the opportunity to identify your strengths and areas of challenge so that you can make improvements in the areas where you really need it.

**Instructions:**

* **Complete one task at a time and upload to your teacher via Teams.**
* **There is no upper word-limit, but you should try and write at least 100 words for each one.**
* **Remember to proofread your work carefully using the *Tools for Writing* success criteria before handing in.**
* **Remember that these are independent tasks, and you should try your best to complete them on your own. If you have any problems with a particular type of writing, you can add a short note for your teacher.**

1. **What makes an attention-grabbing opening to a story? Read the two examples below:**

Alex was sure he was going to suffocate. Crouched in the tiny, pitch-black bucketing space, legs drawn up to his chin, sweat running down his face, handkerchief sodden, head pounding, the panic raged inside him. He wanted to scream and beat at the plastic walls. Instead, he remained petrified by the continuous vibration, the sour smell of his tomb.

*‘Day of the Dead’ by Anthony Masters*

On a cold, fretful afternoon in early October 1872, a hansom cab drew up outside the offices of Lockhart and Selby, Shipping Agents in the financial heart of London, and a young girl got our and paid the driver.

She was a person of sixteen or so – alone, and uncommonly pretty. She was slender and pale, and dressed in mourning, with a black bonnet under which she tucked back a straying twist of blonde hair that the wind had teased loose. She has unusually dark brown eyes for one so fair. Her name was Sally Lockhart; and within fifteen minutes she was going to kill a man.

*‘The Ruby in the Smoke’ by Philip Pullman*

**Now create an exciting opening to a story using at least one of these four items:**

A bunch of keys with a ring around them

Description automatically generatedA rusty key A close-up of a coin

Description automatically generatedA foreign coin A pair of yellow tickets

Description automatically generatedA bus ticket A black button with two dots

Description automatically generatedA button

1. A person looking at a ship sinking

   Description automatically generated**What needs to be included in an eyewitness account? Use the *Titanic* example below to help you understand:**

The Titanic: From A Lifeboat, 15 April 1912 Mrs D H Bishop

We did not begin to understand the situation till we were perhaps a mile of more away from the Titanic. Then we could see the rows of lights along the decks began to slant gradually upward from the bow. Very slowly the lines of light began to point downward at a greater and greater angle. The sinking was so slow that you could not perceive the lights of the deck changing their position. The slant seemed to be greater about every quarter of an hour. That was the only difference.

In a couple of hours, though, she began to go down more rapidly. Then the fearful sight began. The people in the ship were just beginning to realise how great their danger was. When the forward part of the ship dropped suddenly at a faster rate, so that the upward slope became marked, there was a sudden rush of passengers on all decks towards the stern. It was like a wave. We could see the great black mass of people in the steerage sweeping to the rear part of the boat and breaking through into the upper decks. At the distance of about a mile we could distinguish everything through the night, which was perfectly clear. We could make out the increasing excitement on board the boat as the people, rushing to and fro, caused the deck lights to disappear and reappear as they passed in front of them.

This panic went on, it seemed, for an hour. Then suddenly the ship seemed to shoot up out of the water and stand there perpendicularly. It seemed to us that it stood upright in the water for four full minutes. Then it began to slide gently downwards. Its speed increased as it went down head first, so the stern shot down with a rush.

The lights continued to burn till it sank. We could see the people packed densely in the stern till it was gone…

As the ship sank we could hear the screaming a mile away. Gradually it became fainter and fainter and died away. Some of the lifeboats that had room for more might have gone to their rescue, but it would have meant that those who were in the water would have swarmed aboard and sunk her.

**Now describe an event which you witnessed from beginning to end *or* an imagined first-hand account of a significant historical event about which you have some knowledge.**

1. **Why is it so important to explain things clearly? How should you lay information out so that it is best understood? Study the example below:**

A poster with different types of objects

Description automatically generated with medium confidence

**Now write a short report to explain how people can help protect the planet.**

1. **Writing to persuade takes skill. Read the two examples below and identify the persuasive techniques used:**

**In Praise of … Pencil Cases**

One of the small, reliable pleasures of returning to school is a pencil case. A wooden, brassbound model with sliding trays and a lid would be perfect, but even the tattiest plastic model with a film tie-in princess for decoration holds some of the magic inherent in the form. A pencil case holds the promise of a new and better-organised life. To hold it is to have faith that starting this term, everything will be different. Our minds will be sharp as a fresh pencil, our thoughts as straight as rulers, and our resolutions firm as the strokes of an unblemished rubber when it erases even the faintest memory of a wrongly drawn line. The natural state of all writing instruments is quiet insurrection. They are constantly rolling and sidling towards freedom and concealment. But a pencil case holds its treasures securely and in order, even the free-rolling Biro. If only we could organise our own thoughts – or even our children – quite as simply.

**In Praise of: Charging for Plastic Bags**

We've all seen them: plastic carrier bags clinging to bushes, trees, street signs and railway lines. They're ugly. They're annoying. They ruin our landscapes, clog up our kitchen cabinets and, worse, end up in our landfills and waterways, harming wildlife and taking up to 1,000 years to decompose. And yet we can't seem to stop using them without an incentive. That's why New York City is eminently sensible to propose that stores charge 10 cents (or just over 6p), for every plastic bag a customer uses. It's a small fee, but it can have a big impact, as Ireland, which began charging in 2002, has shown. Plastic bag usage in the republic is down over 90%. From countries to cities, from Wales to Washington DC to Portland, Oregon, there have been similar successes after their bans. Even China has a ban on certain types of bags. Reducing our reliance on plastic bags is a little step, but one we're ready to get carried away with.

**Now write persuasively about something you appreciate or admire.**

1. **How would you put forward a convincing argument for something you believed in? What are the benefits of a later school start for secondary school pupils for instance? Read the example below for details.**



**Now write a convincing argument for later school hours.**

1. **Think about films you have watched that have left you disappointed. How would you get this across to someone in a review? Look at the extracts below to see how these reviewers convey their unhappiness:**

**Van Helsing: Philip French**

There are exciting moments - especially a carriage chase while Van Helsing and Anna are attempting to transport Frankenstein's sweet-natured monster back to Rome for his safety. But the yawning gaps in the landscape down which characters plunge are accompanied by yawning gaps when the audience (though not the restless film) pauses in an attempt to make sense of what is going on. The movie has no soul, no magic, no feeling for character, nothing for us to care about. At the end, when the director makes a stab at elegiac pathos, we realise how far short of the often deeply moving 1930s Universal classics his film falls.

**Spiderman 3: Peter Bradshaw**

SM3 has its moments, but it's over-long and messy with a number of disjointed storylines. There's no clear villain to boo and, by the end, no clear hero to cheer. Instead of one obvious, compelling enemy, there are two. Or three if you count another who pops up right at the end.

The series is now beginning to resemble the Christopher Reeve Superman movies at their later sequel stage: a fair bit of zip, and some terrific-looking Manhattan streetscape battle scenes, but no satisfyingly unified story, and muddied by the fact that the love interest now knows the hero's secret identity.

Worst of all, it's crippled by an inflation of villain-value. Where once a single baddie would do, now you need two or three. As he scampers around the bathtub of popular culture, Spidey is beginning to exhaust everyone's patience. The time has come for someone to produce a rolled-up newspaper the size of a subway train and bring it down with an almighty crash.

**Now write a review of a film you really hated.**

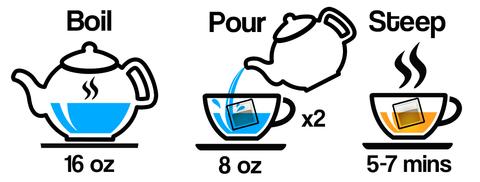
1. **A close-up of a guitar

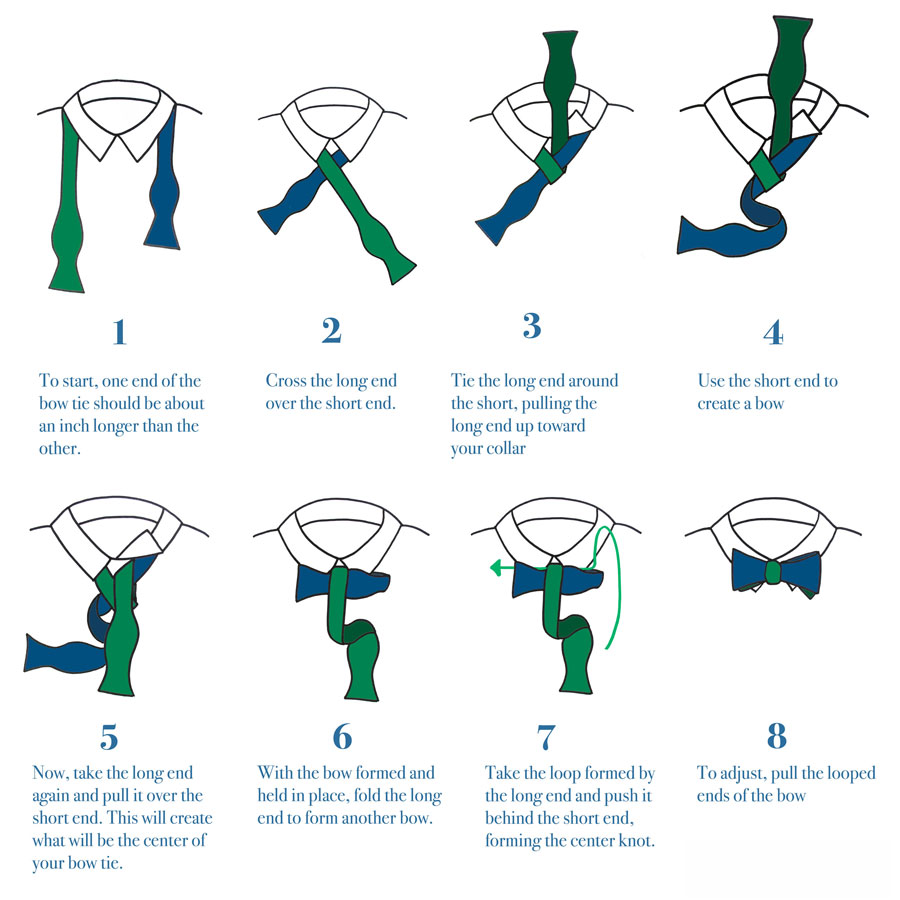
   Description automatically generatedWhat prompts a strong memory? What techniques are used by the writer below to show how important the object was/is:**

The most valuable possession in my room is an old, slightly warped cherry red guitar-the first instrument I taught myself how to play. It's nothing fancy, just a Madeira folk guitar, all scuffed and scratched and finger-printed. At the top is a bramble of copper-wound strings, each one hooked through the eye of a silver tuning key. The strings are stretched down a long, slim neck, its frets tarnished, the wood worn by years of fingers pressing chords and picking notes. The body of the Madeira is shaped like an enormous yellow pear, one that was slightly damaged in shipping. The wood has been chipped and gouged to grey, particularly where the pick guard fell off years ago. No, it's not a beautiful instrument, but it still lets me make music, and for that I will always treasure it.

**Now describe your favourite possession. It could be a book, a musical instrument, or a childhood toy. Reflect on the significance of it to you and the memories it holds.**

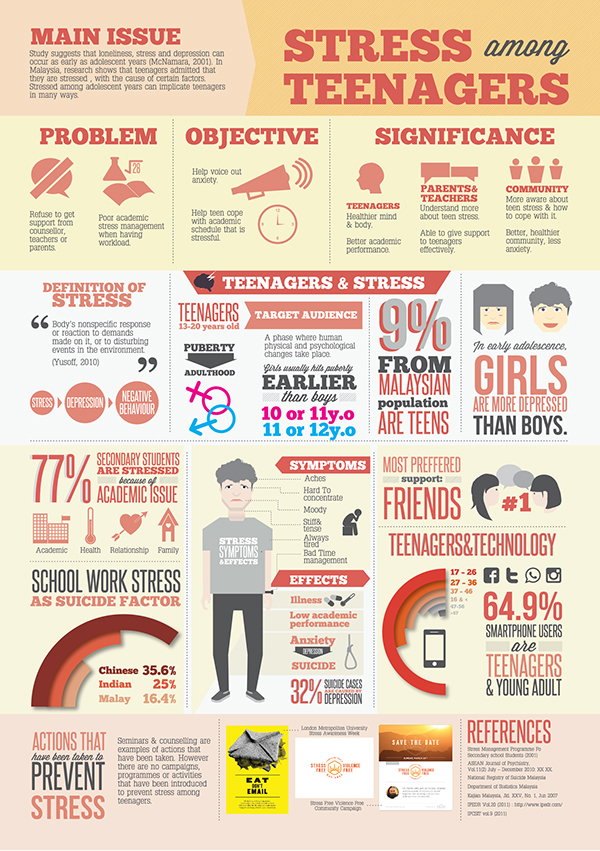
1. **What makes a good set of instructions? Look at the sets below:**





**Now write a set of instructions for how to make the most scrumptious snack possible.**

1. **What causes stress in teenagers and how can it be reduced? Look at the information below:**



**Now write a report on the main causes of stress in teenagers. Include a section on potential solutions to each of the problems.**

1. **Think about how you become successful. What sorts of things might get in your way of achieving your goals:**



**Now write a comparison of the behaviour of successful people versus the behaviour of unsuccessful people.**

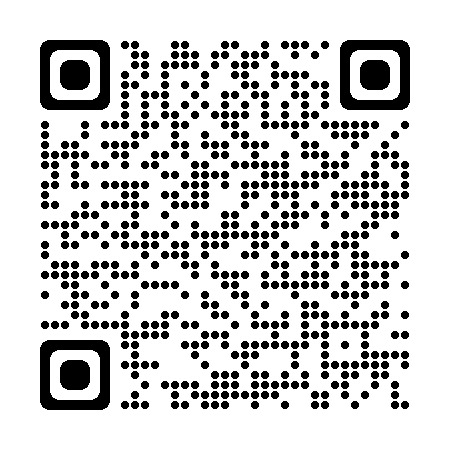
1. **What makes an inspirational speech? Read and watch the speeches below:**

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate – we cannot consecrate – we cannot hallow – this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember, what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us – that from these honoured dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion – that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain – that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom – and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

Abraham Lincoln – The Gettysburg Address, November 19th 1863

****[We Choose to go to the Moon - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g25G1M4EXrQ)

**Now imagine you are a football manager or other sports coach before an important final.**

**Write the speech you will give to motivate your team or imagine you are a leader who has just come to power. Write your speech to your people, telling them what sort of ruler you are going to be.**