

# Letters for Palestinian Childhoods Exhibition



## Key Stage Three

## Teaching Resource Pack



'Letters for Palestinian Childhoods' is an Arts Project; art by young people in Gaza, elsewhere in Palestine and based in the UK, together with letters written by scholars and activists who have worked with Palestinian children. Its goal is to draw our attention to the full lives that young people in Palestine experience: their hopes, dreams, joys, relationships, aspirations, and everyday realities. In doing so, we hope to counter the widespread dehumanisation of Palestinians within mainstream political and media narratives that predominantly present them either as aggressors or as faceless victims.

This teaching resource pack was created by Priyanka Soni, an English teacher with a PGCE (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.

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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

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.

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### Task 2: Journal.

Have students journal about a time they experienced loss, change or uncertainty in their own lives and how it made them feel.



Interactive:

Invite volunteers to share.

Introduce the writing prompt:

Imagine you are a child who suddenly must leave home and live somewhere new. Write about what you would miss most and how you would cope with this big change in your life.

## Lesson 2: Descriptive Writing

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

Here are some examples of photos you could use in Lesson 2 to inspire descriptive writing:

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



Figure 1 Published 10 May 2021. Free to use under the Unsplash License.

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

### Model Example Paragraph:

The narrow alleyway was alive with the laughter and shouts of children playing soccer. The warm afternoon sun cast long shadows across the worn cobblestones, as the old stone buildings seemed to lean in close, watching over the game. The air was filled with the tangy scent of spices drifting from nearby kitchens, mingling with the dusty smell of the street. A little girl in a bright blue headscarf dribbled the ball past two boys, her dark eyes sparkling with determination. She kicked the ball with all her might, and it soared over the makeshift goal, bouncing off a crumbling wall. The children cheered and raced after the ball, their bare feet pattering on the stones, as the alleyway echoed with their joy.

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.



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### 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 peaceful country, 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

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### 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.

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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