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Hi and welcome back to A Practical Approach to Teaching Creativity. This is the third

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podcast, Training Divergent Thinking with Creative Writing Games. So this podcast is

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in association with the University of Savannah, the research project, Literary Games in the

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Classroom, and research funding for Literary Games as Innovative Pedagogy. I'm Alan C. Jones,

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your host. So the last podcast, podcast two, I introduced free writing, a variety of free

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writing techniques and approaches. These are very concrete techniques for training divergent

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thinking, but they are also a way to teach the concept of creative mind to students and to teach

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the movement from creative mind toward directed thinking or from divergent thinking to convergent

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thinking. Remember that I'll use divergent thinking and creative mind interchangeably.

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In this podcast, once you've developed the basic skills of free writing and done some training in

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navigating and understanding the spectrum that moves from divergent thinking or creative mind

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toward convergent thinking, there are fun creative writing activities that will help develop these

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skills further while building collaboration, developing students' identity as writers,

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and undoing the hierarchy of genius that gets in the way of creativity, especially in writing. And

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by this I'm referring to that myth of creativity I talked about in the very first introductory

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podcast, that certain people are creative, certain people aren't, and that creativity comes from

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genius. And so therefore if I'm not creative or if I'm not a genius, then I can't be trained in

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creativity. And people self-define as non-creatives and then lose the interest and lose the ability to

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believe that they can be trained in creativity when we know that they can. So these games that

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I'm going to introduce today can also be used as divergent practices that seem like nothing more

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than quote fun creativity, as they are more gamified, more gamified, excuse me, than some of

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the other more advanced tasks we'll do later in the next podcast. And these can

be learned very

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quickly and easily and typically engage a high percentage of students who are open in a class

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that's open to some creativity. Both free writing and these short games can be a way to develop

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divergent thinking skills over time, little by little, before taking on the more significant

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project of divergent reading games, which is presented in the next podcast and is the heart

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of this project of really developing divergent thinking into a practical use for developing

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critical thinking, critical reading. Okay, so I'm going to mention, I'll mention some goals for each

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of these games or exercises, but all of them develop a willingness to participate, collaboration,

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and presentation or sharing skills. One key to all of these is to discuss the process and share

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the product so students can see how they are developing creative mind and you can talk about

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this because the goal is less to produce perfect products, but to use those products and use the

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process to help students navigate their use of divergent thinking or creative mind. So the first,

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the first game is less of a game and more of an extension of free writing. So this is, we're going

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to use the technique of free writing. This is one way you're going to take free writing and use that

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skill in other arenas, in other tasks. It becomes a building block. This is the first step in doing

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that. And this is, it's a free writing, but it's called a nonsense paragraph. So students will do a

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free writing, which is the same rules as a regular free write, one minute. Don't stop. That's the only

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rule. But in this one, there is going to be one rule. It's gonna be directed, kind of like the

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catchphrase free writing, where they wrote, I remember, that was directed, right? In some ways,

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they directed them towards memory. In this one, it's going to go the opposite direction, though.

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It'll be direction, but the direction is to not make sense. So trying to write words, but not to

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make any sense. In some ways, this is an extension of closed-eye free writing, because it's taking us

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away from convergent thinking, from directed thinking, to a place of nonsense.  
At the same

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time, to not make sense is very challenging linguistically, because words put  
together simply

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start to make sense. And so it makes this divergent movement more conscious,  
and it makes us as writers

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more aware of ways in which we might create combinations of words that don't  
make traditional

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sense. Now, the key here is after doing this, they'll do it, it will be  
strange, they won't quite

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understand it yet. And this is one challenge with creative work, is that, like  
learning a sport or

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learning an instrument, when you first begin, you don't understand what you're  
doing. And through

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doing it, through training, you begin to learn what you're doing and understand  
what you're doing.

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For example, if you try to explain a scale to somebody who doesn't know  
anything about music,

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it makes little sense. Once they've played a scale and listened to a scale and  
tried it out,

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it starts to make more sense. So the key here is really to talk about, after  
you've done this,

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what things students did, writers did, other than making sense. What did they do? What systems they

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use? What practices did they use? And typically, they will actually discover techniques for doing

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this, for moving against sense. The next phase, once you've done this, is to do a non-freewriting

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nonsense paragraph. So the first one was a free-writing nonsense paragraph. The second one

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is a non-freewriting nonsense paragraph. This is a nonsense paragraph where students take their

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time and they think about what kinds of things they're doing, other than making sense. So I

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recommend starting with the free-writing version, so students can play their way into the experiment.

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This is more effective at creating immersion and intrinsic engagement. The goal of this is similar

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to the free-writing version, but as it is a thoughtful and slow activity, it is really aimed

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at having students think about what they're doing. And so it's key to discuss this, and not only to

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discuss it, but to list with the students or with the writers what approaches and techniques they

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used to move away from sense. This can then be included as part of the task as you move forward

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to the next step, by developing this and giving students specific different nonsense techniques

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to practice. And this is interesting because it's very directive. So for example, you might say,

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use rhyming, but don't make sense. So then they have this guide, which is rhyming, which is

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physical, which is the shape of the word in their mouth, the sound that it's making. And yet they're

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putting together these linguistic pieces, these words, so they're navigating both divergent and

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convergent thinking. Or for example, the first word that comes to mind, or things you see, or a

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subject area like skateboarding, where they're writing about skateboarding, so they're saying,

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you know, deck, wheels, skate park, but they're trying not to make sense. And what I just did was

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to do nouns, right? So I'm picking a category of word to try to not put together sentences,

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which is another technique. And you really want them to discover these, and

then if you would like

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to develop this further, give them these techniques and have them practice not making sense while

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having directed writing in this non-free writing nonsense paragraph. So to summarize, you would

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start with a free writing nonsense paragraph, move to a slow writing nonsense paragraph, and then move

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to a directed nonsense paragraph, where students try out the techniques that classes come up with

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through experiment. The next game is a game, more of a game, and this is Surrealist Question and

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Answer. This is a game that comes from this directly from the Surrealists. Many of the Surrealist games

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were based on French parlor games, where people would sit and play writing games in the parlor.

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Apparently in France they did this, and maybe you're familiar with some of these. They've been

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modified to some degree to help develop them into divergent thinking tasks, but some of them are

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untouched, like this one. So Surrealist Question and Answer is a game where one student writes a

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question. About what? They always ask. And you just tell them anything. There's no rules. It simply has

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to be a question. So once again you have the parameters, you have it's directed, it must be a

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question, but it's a very divergent about anything. Note that once they have done it, once they

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play this game and seen the effect, they will learn by playing how to play better, and they

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will try to be more original in their questions and answers. If you lack time, you can simply tell

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them to be original, but quite often they don't have training in what that means. They don't have

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training in divergent thinking. So being original, you know, there's a sort of common explanation,

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you know, idea of what it is, but sometimes this will intimidate students, and they'll think to

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themselves, I'm not creative. I'm not original. And so be careful with that, just jumping straight

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into that without explaining what it means. Once the first student has written a question, for

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example, what time is it? They fold the paper so the next person in the circle can't see it. The next

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person then writes an answer. Answer to what? They always ask. To whatever. They have no idea, right? Same

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process here, but it's an answer. So you have a framework, but it's divergent. Then the second

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writer unfolds the paper and sees what they have created with their partner. For example, what time

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is it? Answer, I think the cops are here. You'll get all kinds of answers, but as you go around and

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share them, the class will react to some and not to others, typically with laughter. Do not encourage

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judgment, but do allow reaction. This is the most effective way to develop audience awareness. As you

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play more, students will figure out ways to improve their divergent or creative skills by writing more

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divergent questions and answers and seeing the responses that they get. And so they'll begin to

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basically game test their games using the audience for feedback, which is a much more immersive, much

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more interactive way of developing these techniques for divergent thinking in these questions and

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answers. This works surprisingly well. You'd be surprised how well this works to produce moving

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texts. They're typically funny and more poetic. And this high level product is rare for non-professional

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writers. So simply experiencing, producing moving texts like this is useful for student development.

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It also seems highly collaborative and develops a communal and collaborative feel of collaboration,

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but the writing itself is actually sequential. So by sequential, I mean first one person writes,

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then the next person writes with absolutely no connection. So there is no actual interaction in

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the writing. But this is useful as having a common product, right? You've produced this game, question

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and answer together. However, it's not attached to either individual alone, makes sharing it much

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easier. So this helps develop a communal creative space and confidence in sharing. So it acts as a

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stepping stone to true collaborative writing. Also note that the process of writing an answer

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without a question is a divergent task, the task that develops divergent skills. It asks the writer

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to invent any question they like. The more they play and hear others play, the more it will push

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their training in thinking beyond singular questions and answers. It sort of forces them

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to do that. And the moment of unfolding is key. In that moment, the students are asked by the

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construct of question answer. It pressures us to put these two random phrases together into a

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logical question and answer. And this connection is really precisely the skill that moves divergent

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thinking toward directed thinking. What time is it? I think the cops are here. We have to try to

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figure out, okay, how does this answer that question? It requires comparison and it requires

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interpretation. Oh, it must be time to go. It must be time to go, excuse me, as the cops are here.

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Right? Cops are here. Uh-oh, we better run away. That's one way to interpret this. If you're a kid

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from America, you might interpret it that way when cops show up at parties. Maybe they do in

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Norway also. If you're an older person, maybe what time is it? I think the cops are here. It's harder

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to say what time is it. It's time to tell the cops what happened in the fender

bender you had in your

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parking lot. So this ability to connect these ideas is at the heart of critical thinking. And

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so what I just did was I came up with two answers. One is house party, cops show up to break it up.

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The other one is fender bender, cops come to help. Divergent thinking, I get a two. My score is two.

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The more connections you can think of, if you can think of 10 of these, then you're a very advanced

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divergent thinker. At the same time, being able to argue that these two things are connected,

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that the cops do come in a fender bender, that's at the heart of critical thinking because you're

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developing connection between ideas, putting them together and interpreting what they mean.

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And this will be developed much more in the advanced reading games in the next podcast.

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The next game is really a variation on question and answer. It's called conditionals. So it's the

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same thing, but you use the conditional. So it's if blank, then blank. So the first student might

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write, if the sky is blue, and the second student might write, my dog has fleas. Because this has a

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more causal connection, the grammar here says, if this, then this, it means it tells us that one

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thing causes another. It pushes the answers more toward the feeling of directed thinking. So this

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directed thinking program into the game pushes us towards a particular interpretation. However,

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because the phrases are random, that interpretation is not clearly there. So this is often easier for

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students to interpret, or the pressure to interpret is more clear because the task for

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interpretation is more clearly set. Take, for example, the question and answer from before.

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What time is it? I think the cops are here. This is far more divergent as the answers are so vast.

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There's so many different connections you could make. But if we took this same game and turned it

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into an if-then statement, if it's five o'clock, then the cops are here, this is less divergent.

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The problem is to figure out where are cops at five. Very specific. Doesn't make the answer any easier,

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but it does specify the task more specifically. And the answer in America traditionally was the

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donut shop. But perhaps we can't say that anymore. The next game is called problem and solution with

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word bomb. So as you gain facility with these different techniques, you can use them and build

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on them. So we used free writing in the nonsense paragraph. Now we're using word bomb in problem

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and solution. So basically this works like this. You give writers a problem. For example,

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how do we get Lily to do her homework? A simple problem, getting Lily to do her homework. Then

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you use the idea of the word bomb to train them to use creative mind or divergent thinking in

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their solution. So how to get Lily to do her homework? You can let them try once without the

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word bomb, or you can just start right off the bat. How to get her to do it? Okay, encourage her to do

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it. Great. Now the word bomb, we drop the word, for example, elephant in there. Now the solutions

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have to include an elephant. For example, tell Lily if she does her homework, she gets to ride

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the elephant. But in divergent thinking drills like this, we want to see fluency. How many answers

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can people think? And here's where a competitive aspect can come in here, because this competition

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is driving divergent, open-ended, non-judgmental thinking. And I typically don't focus on who got

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the most. I use that to drive the task, but then you focus on people sharing the one they think

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they like best. And so it's more the judgment and assessment more becomes have they created

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something original and interesting, and they get to decide on that since they pick their favorite

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one. So for example, the elephant will step on Lily if she doesn't do her homework, etc., etc.

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So the last game, and probably the most well-known in terms of these kinds of writing games that come

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from surrealism, is called Exquisite Corpse. In this game, each writer writes part of a sentence,

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then folds the paper, so the next writer can't see what the previous writer has written. The

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original sentence produced by the surrealists was, the exquisite corpse drinks the new wine.



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So the formula can vary. If you're working on a certain area of grammar, you know, you can make a

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different grammatical sentence. But basically, to start out with, you can base it on that original

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sentence. So writer 1 writes an article and an adjective, the exquisite. Writer 2, a noun, corpse.

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Writer 3, a verb, drinks. Writer 4, article and adjective, the new. Writer 5, a noun, wine. So the

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exquisite corpse drinks the new wine. The final student then reveals the sentence, much like

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question-answer. The answers for this one are usually silly, but like the other games, it builds

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collaboration. The grammar structure makes it more collaborative than question-answer, even though

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it's mostly sequential. You know, people writing in a row without connection. But unlike question-answer,

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there is more form here. There's a more complex form that does put the pieces into more interaction

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at the end. It also builds interpretation, like question-answer, and thus moves us from divergent

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thinking to directed thinking, as the final sentence must be interpreted by the

group. We have

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to make sense of it. Finally, it builds engagement as each person in the group is invested in that

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final sentence. And remember, it's key here, since these things are fun, and they can be used as fun

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activities, but if you are teaching creativity, you want to make it very clear that students are

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focusing on developing their ability to navigate from divergent to directed thinking, from creative

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mind to finding the answer, finding the best answer, and having them start to be able to use

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those muscles and know which muscles they're using, know which part of their brain they're using, so

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they can turn it on and off, so they can navigate those things. Okay, so that's podcast three.

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Here's my summary of podcast three. In this podcast, I have talked about fun and creative

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writing activities that help develop divergent skills while building collaboration, developing

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00:21:01,520 --> 00:21:07,400

students' identity as writers, because we have this myth about writing that only Shakespeare

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00:21:07,400 --> 00:21:14,120

can do it, or only, quote, creative kids can do it. So this develops a sense of collaboration,

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00:21:14,120 --> 00:21:20,280

so that we're all writers, and it's not technically hard. You simply have to think of a noun,

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00:21:20,280 --> 00:21:26,680

dog, and you become part of a relatively funny, interesting sentence, because these games simply

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00:21:26,680 --> 00:21:32,440

produce interesting and funny combinations. So it's an easy way in, especially for people who

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00:21:32,440 --> 00:21:39,000

don't self-identify as creative. These games undo the hierarchy of genius, you know, which I've sort

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00:21:39,000 --> 00:21:43,800

of been talking about, but the idea of letting everyone become a writer and writing. The next

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00:21:43,800 --> 00:21:50,040

podcast is the big one, I might say. A lot of this has been, I'm trying to develop, in the first

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00:21:50,040 --> 00:21:55,480

podcast, I introduced these ideas, defined divergent thinking. You know, second one, I introduced

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00:21:55,480 --> 00:22:01,320

free writing, this drill, this technique for building skills. The third one, I've talked about

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00:22:01,320 --> 00:22:06,040

some games for developing divergent thinking further with things that seem more like games,

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00:22:06,040 --> 00:22:12,840

and perhaps more, quote, fun. All the free writing students typically enjoy. In the next one,

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00:22:13,960 --> 00:22:19,480

I'm going to explain creative reading games. These are at the heart of this project for teaching

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00:22:19,480 --> 00:22:26,360

creativity. While the creative writing games have writers producing original text, and focus on

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00:22:26,360 --> 00:22:32,360

teaching divergent writing habits, creative reading games focus on using these skills to read

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00:22:33,320 --> 00:22:41,400

and analyze texts that we have chosen for study. So, they are really moving towards a way to teach

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in-depth reading and thinking through divergent thinking. So, it's the step towards how do we

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make this useful, how can we make this work, how can we use it in our curriculum, how can we help

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00:22:52,280 --> 00:22:58,440

develop students' advanced thinking beyond, quote, just fun, because that myth will never go away.

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00:22:58,440 --> 00:23:03,880

And so, we can use it. We can say, yeah, this is fun, and now we're going to develop it further

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00:23:03,880 --> 00:23:10,600

beyond that.