

FILL YOUR CREATIVE CUP

Sarah Davies has help for all of us who lost their writing mojo during lockdown (or before)

Are you one of those people who got things done this year? Did you start lots of new hobbies? Did you finish a novel or find yourself writing reams?

Or did you, like me, find it hard to find inspiration and were pleased just to keep your head above water and make it through day by day?

One thing I heard from lots of writers was that they simply couldn't come up with ideas. There was nothing going on in real life, nothing was open, and there was no escape from homeschooling their children, let alone their working-from-home partners – they couldn't find the quiet time alone to think.

In this feature I'll offer you some ways to re-fill your creative cup, even if you still don't fancy getting back out into the world for anything other than essentials. First, I'd like to recommend two practices from American writer and teacher Julia Cameron's 1992 book *The Artist's Way*.

MORNING PAGES

Morning pages are simply three pages of longhand stream-of-consciousness writing that are done first thing in the morning. They can be literally anything – a brain dump of whatever is swirling through your mind. And they are only for you. They do not need to be considered, or pretty. No one else will ever see them.

The idea is to clear your consciousness of all the 'stuff' that's fogging your mind during the day. Morning pages aren't designed to inspire you, but they might. You might see the germ of an idea for a story or a character within them, so don't dismiss what you write out of hand.

Don't be too upset, though, if they are just a clearing process for you, because that in itself is really useful.

Do this

Buy yourself a nice notebook and schedule time every morning to complete three

pages. If you can, make it something you do as soon as you wake up. If you can't, do it as early as possible in the day.

And try your very best to write in longhand rather than on the computer, because the very act of putting pen to paper will help free your mind and boost your creativity.

2 ARTIST DATES

Cameron also encourages us to go and have fun once a week in a playful way. There are two key elements to the date:

- You go on your own
- You do something that is fun to you

You don't have to go to a museum, gallery or show (although you can do those things). You could go to an art supplies shop, a craft workshop, to a garden or to a bookshop. The idea is you go and find something that you can explore playfully to add experiences to your own well of creativity.

You go on your own because this experience is about nurturing you, and you don't want the distractions of looking after your children or being with your partner. You want to be totally focused on the important work of playing.

Do this

Set aside time in your schedule each week to go on an artist date. Be specific about what you're going to do and when you're going to do it. And treat it like you would any other appointment or meeting. That means don't cancel it – turn up on time and well prepared, take it seriously and come away with something new in your mind.

If you still aren't ready or able to go out in these uncertain times, look for opportunities to access the arts through books or the internet, or take the opportunity to play with some of the crafts materials you've bought for your



children or grandchildren (or order some for yourself and have them delivered to your door).

3 LOOK OUTSIDE YOUR COMFORT ZONE

Read widely: anything and everything. Listen to the radio, particularly stations and programmes you might normally avoid. Try your hand at drawing, painting, knitting. Aim to do something different on a regular basis to both challenge yourself and to gain new experiences.

Make notes about your reactions, the feelings you encounter, any ideas for possible projects/characters/scenes or further research that might spring from your adventures.



4 CARRY A NOTEBOOK

Always carry a notebook or a means of recording your thoughts and ideas. (You might find the notes app on your phone useful.) Don't forget to do something with this resource though. Make some time in your schedule to go through your notes regularly to see if you have anything that will spark a new project or add to a work in progress.

5 MAKE A SCRAPBOOK

Did you create collages or scrapbooks as a child? I remember collecting pictures from magazines, postcards from holidays, photographs and drawings, and then arranging them on the pages of

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the cheap scrapbooks you can still buy in stationery shops, before sticking it all down in the most pleasing pattern to me. I still do it today, but now I use scrapbooks as an inspiration for my writing.

Do this

Collect a large pile of newspapers and magazines and flick through them, tearing out any images, stories, words or

headlines that catch your eye or pique your interest. Spend some time arranging them on the pages of a scrapbook. You might arrange them in themes, or by colour, or just in a combination that seems somehow right to you.

Don't worry if this activity doesn't immediately prompt some writing. Keep adding to it and revisiting it often to draw inspiration for your work.

6 LIE BACK AND STUDY THE SKY

Seriously. Take a break, go outside, lie on the ground and look up at the sky. Let your mind wander and see what it comes up with. What shape are those clouds? Where is that bird or plane going? Why is there a helicopter circling over a particular area on the ground?

7 LOOK AROUND NOT DOWN

We're so used to watching where we walk that we forget to look around us. You can see all sorts of unexpected things: fancy windows and architectural features; plaques with building dates or information about historical figures or events that took place in certain buildings or areas; windows full of unusual objects; buildings or parks or squares that you've never really noticed before... In short, a whole host of things that could inspire your writing.

I hope I've given you some inspiration in this article to look for ways to refill your creative cup by engaging with the creative work of others and by moving outside your own comfort zone and pushing your own boundaries to explore different creative activities to inspire your writing.

I've suggested things I hope aren't too hard to find – items you may already have access to or can pick up quite cheaply – giving you the opportunity to get back into the world or to do from your own home, depending on your own personal circumstances.

The most important thing to remember is that we can't keep drawing from our internal well of creativity without refilling it, and we do that by engaging in new experiences and sharing in the creations made by our fellow artists.

My list of suggestions is by no means comprehensive, but I hope it inspires you to go on some adventures and try some new ways to be creative.

• You may also like to read Sarah's article in issue #224, 'Walking: the word factory'.