

NOTES ON THE RESOURCE

In general, I loathe icebreaker exercises of the ‘meet someone new and find out six things about him/her’ variety. In the first place, a new student might go through most of these exercises a dozen times during Week One of a new college; in the second place, these activities normally have almost zero relevance to the course content; and in the third place this sort of thing is seriously prejudicial against introverts, which is what a good number of your Creative Writing students will be.

Nevertheless, as a Creative Writing teacher, your first priority is to build trust in the group. All your students need to feel comfortable enough with each other to share their work, explore their ideas and voice their opinions.

This simple resource is an icebreaker I’ve often used successfully.

What I like is the way it gently introduces students to each other through an activity that is obviously *about* writing. It’s also a wonderfully effective way for everyone – including the teacher – to learn the names of students in the group. The version here is designed for a group of twelve students who have mostly not met each other before, but you can modify the grid and the instructions to suit your own class as you wish.

There is an editable MS Word copy of this document [HERE](#)

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

Introduction: Make sure you have enough printed copies for the class!

Hand out resources and check everyone can follow the instructions. Emphasise that (apart from the ‘myself’ part) they are creating fictional characters based on people in the room. They are not trying to guess what those people are ‘really like’.

Allow an appropriate amount of time to complete the grid – encourage them to do it reasonably quickly.

Exploration:

You have many options –

Simplest is to ask each person in turn to read out the true ‘myself’ from the grid and let group members silently compare their fictional characters with the real person.

Or, after the truth has been revealed, you might encourage others in the group to volunteer their fictional version(s) of the person who has just introduced him/herself. Typically, people will be a little coy to begin with, but the volunteering will snowball as the session progresses.

An alternative is to treat it as a game. Ask a number of students each to read out **one** fictional character. Others in the room have to guess who it’s based on.

Plenary:

The discussion can go in many directions, introducing key ideas for the Writer’s Toolkit. Two natural starting points would be:

- What is imagination – where do ideas come from?
- What are characters? How do fictional characters’ physical appearances reinforce or contradict their personalities?

You might also decide to give your students a story structure, and ask them to write a flash fiction including two or three of the characters they’ve invented for this exercise.