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FRAMEWORK OF IDEAS



WRITING
ABOUT
COUNTRY

by Anica Boulanger-Mashberg



Framework of Ideas

Writing about country

Anica Boulanger-Mashberg

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CONTENTS

Exploring the key idea	4
Exploring ‘Gooseberries’	18
Exploring Chapter 2 of <i>The Hate Race</i>	26
Exploring ‘The conquest of land and dream’	34
Exploring ‘Split’	41
Creating your own writing about country	51
Sample responses	69

EXPLORING THE KEY IDEA

The notion of 'country' can encompass both concrete physical realities and also more abstract meanings. Two important definitions given in the *Macquarie Dictionary* are:

a relatively large area of land occupied by a group of people organised under a single, usually independent, government; nation; state; land

and

any considerable territory demarcated by geographical conditions or by a distinctive population.

Furthermore, the word 'country' can take on varied meanings and associations depending on its grammatical usage. Specifically, the impacts of adding an article ('a' or 'the') or capitalising the 'C' are significant. The resulting four key grammatical uses of the word are quite different, although there are overlaps between and exceptions to the general rules discussed below.

The varied meanings of country

When using 'country' as a noun without an article, and with a lower case 'c' – for instance when it simply appears in a sentence as 'country' – the term has its broadest meaning, as described in the dictionary definitions above.

Adding an article ('a' or 'the') narrows the possible meanings. When used with an **indefinite article** – 'a country' – the word almost always refers to a nation or a land that is defined politically and culturally. It relates to ideas of national and cultural identity; international relations and issues; and political, geographical and historical concerns. When used with a **definite article** – 'the country' – the intended or implied sense is normally rural areas or landscapes, in contrast to urban areas or landscapes. When used in this way, the word is relevant in discussions of land use, environmental conditions and landscape features.

Finally, **when written with a capital 'C'**, the word Country is widely accepted in Australian usage as having very specific meanings for First Nations people. The *Macquarie Dictionary* describes 'Country' as meaning 'traditional land with its embedded cultural values relating to the Dreamtime'. 'Country' here

describes not only land but waterways and oceans too; it also refers to all living creatures, including humans. The word 'Country' carries complex connotations and meanings about 'law, place, custom, language, spiritual belief, cultural practice, material sustenance, family and identity' (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies). Note that this meaning is sometimes also associated with the word when it is presented in lower case. (This guide will always capitalise the word when it is intended to refer to First Nations understandings of Country.)



Scan the code or click [here](#) to read and hear about the importance of Country from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies website.

Explore variation in usage and meaning

Re-create the following table and add to it.

- 1 Complete the empty cells.
- 2 Write more examples in the 'Examples' column.

Usage	Meaning	Examples	Notes
a country	A particular land defined by geographical boundaries and political/governmental leadership	A country may contain many nations. Japan is a country made up of more than 14 000 islands. Visiting a country very different from the one in which you live can broaden your mind.	A country could be real or imagined. Countries (including their physical borders and cultural characteristics) can change over time.
country (noun)		That's rattlesnake country. Which part of this country did you grow up in?	
country (adjective)		country towns country music country ways back country	This usage can sometimes indicate bias or a generalisation.





the country	A region that is rural rather than urban; may be used for agricultural or mining purposes; may be residential		
Country		on Country Welcome to Country connection to Country respect for Country	

Furthermore, the idea of 'country' is associated with numerous other concepts, including:

- belonging (in terms of landownership as well as feelings of attachment to a place)
- migration
- home and homeland
- dispossession, displacement and exile
- identity and community
- race, evolution, species diversity and habitats
- multiculturalism, multinationalism and multiple citizenship
- songlines (physical pathways and journeys as well as stories, songs and performances in First Nations cultures)
- landscapes (both physical and imagined)
- geography, space and mapping
- nationalism, patriotism and associated conflicts and histories
- agriculture, mining, sustainability, environmentalism and climate change
- spirituality, pilgrimage and religious experience.

Many of these ideas are embedded in the four mentor texts discussed later in this guide.

Ways of writing about country

There are many forms of writing that can explore or address the idea of country, and different text types can be used to achieve different purposes. Some examples are shown in the table below.

Text reference	Elaboration
To express	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> : Short story about a real location : Speculative fiction set in a fantasy landscape : Poem about a special place
To explain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> : Essay examining human connections to place : Article on changing attitudes to landownership over time : Blog post on geology : Feature article about land management : Travel guide : Educational materials about ecology or the natural world
To reflect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> : Memoir about a time spent in a place : Travel memoir : Feature article about how a landscape painter represented particular locations over their career
To argue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> : Opinion piece about the need for land conservation : Commercial tourism brochure : Protest or scientific writings about climate crises

As you can see from these examples, this key idea provides wide scope for exploration, not only in terms of content but also in terms of different text structures and styles. Texts that are concerned with ideas of country might be practical (e.g. relating to agriculture) or emotional (e.g. about human relationships with place). They may depict real landscapes or imagined locations, and be written in either a formal (e.g. land titles information, essays) or an informal (e.g. letters, diaries and blog posts) register.

Australian literature and writing about country

Much Australian literature explores ideas about country. Perhaps this is partly because Australia is physically large and diverse, with many different iconic landscapes (from coastal to central desert to rainforest to urban), so there is

a broad range of relevant physical stimuli to generate inspiration and interest. Perhaps also, as a nation with numerous immigrant cultures and a large proportion of its population born overseas, many individuals are invested in exploring a country that might be new to them. The landscape may be brand new, as for recent immigrants, or it could still be relatively ‘new’ to a family even after many generations. A person with deep ties to multiple places will naturally observe their current surroundings and make comparisons with their past or ancestral context. This allows people to explore ideas of history and identity in relation to place.

These arguments can account for colonial and postcolonial Australian writing. However, the country’s long pre-invasion history is also intimately linked with land, place and belonging. First Nations connections to Country are deeply significant: they are often a fundamental element of identity and can help shape and define values and understandings of the world. As Professor Michael ‘Mick’ Dodson (Director of ANU’s National Centre for Indigenous Studies; barrister, academic and land rights activist; Yawuru man; and past Australian of the Year) has noted:

Country is a word for all the values, places, resources, stories and cultural obligations associated with that area and its features. It describes the entirety of our ancestral domains. While they may all no longer necessarily be the title-holders to land, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are still connected to the Country of their ancestors and most consider themselves the custodians or caretakers of their land.



Scan the code or click [here](#) to learn more about First Nations understandings of Country as well as ways to respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural protocols.

This conceptualisation of Country is perhaps another reason that Australian writing is so often concerned with ‘country’ and associated ideas. Much contemporary writing sets out to uncover the impacts of deep associations with Country, and to address the traumas of past invasion and ongoing dispossession. In doing so, such writing also often seeks pathways towards healing, understanding, reconciliation and future balance in this area.

Your own work

In creating your own writing about country, two primary concerns are likely to be central to anything you generate: physical landscapes and emotional

connections to place. However, these two concepts can be expanded in limitless ways, incorporating and combining ideas such as those in the bullet lists and tables on pages 5–7. Certain aspects of the key idea will naturally lend themselves to particular modes, tones and styles. This will in turn influence your decisions about language choices, vocabulary, text features and structures.

For example, nature writing, which generally focuses on chronicling landscapes, natural formations, flora and fauna, is often in the form of poetry or prose – whether personal and informal, or more objective and formal. It is likely to employ techniques such as heightened and rich language, descriptive imagery and a cohesive structure. In terms of purpose, writing about this aspect of the idea is usually writing that intends to express or reflect.

On the other hand, nonfiction writing about climate crises is more likely to be persuasive writing, such as opinion pieces or journalistic reporting. It frequently uses evidence, concrete language and factual details – although it may also take advantage of more emotive language or techniques in order to maximise its impact on a target audience. Such writing is most commonly aligned with the purposes of explaining or arguing.

Importantly, you will need to maintain an awareness of the appropriate connections between the subject matter, the form you choose, the purpose you have in mind, the context for your piece and the audience you are writing for.

Useful vocabulary

Other related words and terms that are likely to come up when writing about country include the following.

exploration	wild, the wilds, wildness	ownership	management	representation
nature	pastoral	soil	mainland, island	coastal, coasts
public, private	cartography, maps, mapping	earth	continents	rustic, bucolic
bush, forest, woods	eco, ecoculture, ecology	nation, nationality, nationalism	patriotism, parochialism	adventure





territory	imagined	contested, conflict	origin	residence
location	belonging	scenery	geography	culture
geology	history	knowledge	travel, traverse	surroundings
situation, context	agriculture	real estate	fatherland, motherland	independence
remote	antipodes	metropolitan, urban	state, empire, colony	lost
boundaries, borders, borderlands	citizenship	local, domestic, national, international, continental, global	topography	space, spaces

When you are discussing mentor texts or creating your own texts for Unit 3, Outcome 2, you may find it easy to accidentally overuse the key idea term and related words. It is useful to develop a word bank for yourself, to help you maintain variety and interest in your writing. You can come up with word banks by brainstorming, doing word association exercises and, of course, referring to dictionaries and thesauruses.

Remember, though, that when you look up synonyms for a term, none of those words have exactly the same meaning, so you should choose carefully and be sure you are aware of their possible connotations as well as strict definitions – do not use a thesaurus without a dictionary, even if you think you know the exact meaning of the word. For example, while the word ‘nation’ might technically be a synonym for country, it would not be an appropriate choice in many situations, because of its connotations of unity (or sometimes, contrastingly, *conflict!*) and its association with political power.

Synonyms and terms you might use to bring variety to your writing include:

- countryside
- place
- land
- landscape
- homeland
- environment
- terrain
- area
- location
- territory
- wilderness
- domain
- dominion
- world
- province

Another useful way to add to your word bank is to take note of any relevant words and terms you come across in your mentor texts as you read and re-read them – keep a notebook beside you or a document open on your computer as you read so that you can jot them down. Again, use a dictionary and a thesaurus to check their specific meanings later, to help broaden your thinking about the key idea.

Work with key vocabulary

Lists like those on the previous pages can make good starting points for writing exercises.

- 1 Choose a term from the list on pages 9–10 and brainstorm as many word associations as you can think of.
- 2 Write a sentence that incorporates two words from your brainstorm.
- 3 Repeat steps 1 and 2 for two more terms from the list on pages 9–10.

Using the mentor texts

The mentor texts have been selected – in part – for the different ways that they address the key idea and create meanings, and the varied decisions their authors have made about style, tone, voice and character. They are designed to expose you to a wide range of possibilities in terms of writing about country. Reading broadly (including your set mentor texts) will enrich your understanding of not just the key idea but of effective writing in general.

Keep in mind the following dos and don'ts when studying your mentor texts.

Dos:

- Do read the mentor texts closely and carefully. Take note of the language, structure and techniques used by the authors.
- Do analyse how the authors use the idea of country in their writing. Think about how they incorporate it into their themes, characters and plots, but also how the language and style contribute to their exploration of the idea.
- Do use the mentor texts as inspiration for your own writing. Think about how you can adapt and apply the techniques and ideas you have learned to your own work.

Don'ts:

- Don't copy the mentor texts word for word. Plagiarism is unacceptable and can result in serious consequences.
- Don't rely too heavily on the mentor texts. While they can be helpful models, they are not a substitute for your own creativity and originality.
- Don't limit yourself to the mentor texts. Explore other sources of inspiration and develop your own unique ideas and writing style.
- Don't *respond* to the mentor texts. There is no need to explain how another author has approached the idea.

Mentor texts

In order to get the most out of the mentor texts, be open-minded about your preferred style of writing. You may think that you only like fiction or only like nonfiction, but you should be prepared to experiment with different styles and forms. The four set texts are summarised in the table below.

Author	Title	Form	Useful for
Anton Chekhov	'Gooseberries'	Short story	Exploring urban versus rural values and attitudes; the physical landscape; the relationship between land and class
Maxine Beneba Clarke	Chapter 2 of <i>The Hate Race</i>	Extract from a memoir	Exploring a sense of belonging to a country; migration; how histories impact people and place; personal histories of place
Yumna Kassab	'The conquest of land and dream'	Essay	Exploring colonial violence and land dispossession; power and ideas about country; habitation of a landscape
Cassie Lynch	'Split'	Short story	Exploring creation histories; connection to Country; dualities of identity and experience

Supplementary texts

The texts listed below might be useful alongside the set mentor texts as extra resources and examples of ways to write about country.

Longer works

Death of a River Guide by Richard Flanagan (novel that links country, story, adventure and history)

The Secret River by Kate Grenville (historical fiction; see particularly 'Part Two: Sydney'; explores developing connections to new landscapes and loss of old, sense of home, physical place)

South Pole: Nature and Culture by Elizabeth Leane (nonfiction; see particularly the chapters 'Where is the South Pole?' and 'Maps and Mythologies'; explores a wild place through history, science, exploration and imagination; makes use of imagery, historical documents and other visual information)

Landmarks by Robert Macfarlane (nonfiction; travel and nature writing, connection between physical features of land and language; see particularly some of the chapter glossaries, collecting unusual terms for British land features; forms an interesting example of an innovative way to approach writing about country)

My Place by Sally Morgan (autobiography tracing an exploration of heritage, place and family)

Swallow the Air by Tara June Winch (novel exploring family, identity, First Nations identity, belonging and connection to place)

Anthologies

Growing Up Country in Australia edited by Rick Morton

Words for Country: Landscape & Language in Australia edited by Tim Bonyhady and Tom Griffiths

Words are Eagles: Selected Writings on the Nature and Language of Place by Gregory Day

Writing the Country, Griffith Review #63 edited by Ashley Hay and Julianne Schultz

Songlines: The Power and Promise by Lynne Kelly and Margo Neale

Essays, articles, short stories and extracts

'Letter to America' by Margaret Atwood (in *Curious Pursuits: Occasional Writing 1970–2005*; creative nonfiction; experiments with form; uses a letter to address a place directly)



Scan the code or click [here](#) to read this text.

'A dreamer' by Barbara Baynton (short story; returning to a familiar landscape but facing challenges of environment, weather and temporal separation)



Scan the code or click [here](#) to read this text.

'Coming home' by Bill Bryson (biographical writing; navigating multiple nation-based identities, and outward expression of this; uses humour to develop a relatable persona, and sensory imagery to convey place)



Scan the code or click [here](#) to read this text.

'Firewood harvesting threatens forests' by Sophie Cunningham (essay; human impact on environment)



Scan the code or click [here](#) to read this text.

'King of sweets' by Atul Joshi (short story; cultural identity and 'home'; the impact of the pandemic on homesickness and sense of place)



Scan the code or click [here](#) to read this text.

'Greta Thunberg on the climate delusion: "We've been greenwashed out of our senses. It's time to stand our ground"' by Greta Thunberg (persuasive article; examines climate change, global inequity, activism)



Scan the code or click [here](#) to read this text.

'The drive to be back on Country' by Tara Gower (personal essay with photographs; explores connection to Country and how this relates to body, self and artistic practice)



Scan the code or click [here](#) to read this text.

'The view from Castle Rock' (short story; fictionalised biography; migration, family origins, historical geography)



Scan the code or click [here](#) to read this text.

Poems and songs

'Shadows' by Briggs featuring Troy Cassar-Daley



Scan the code or click [here](#) to read this text and listen to the song.

'From Little Things Big Things Grow' by Kev Carmody and Paul Kelly



Scan the code or click [here](#) to read this text and listen to the song

'Antarctica' by Andrew Sutherland



Scan the code or click [here](#) to read this text.

'Indexing' by John Kinsella



Scan the code or click [here](#) to read this text.

'My Country' by Dorothea Mackellar



Scan the code or click [here](#) to read this text.

‘Song for Autumn’ by Mary Oliver



Scan the code or click [here](#) to read this text.

‘Yamaji Kin Songline’ by Charmaine Papertalk Green



Scan the code or click [here](#) to read this text.

Podcasts

Conversations with Richard Fidler and Sarah Kanowski



Scan the code or click [here](#) to access the podcast.

Conversations on Country with Elders of the Gumbaynggirr, Biripi, Dunghutti and Worimi nations



Scan the code or click [here](#) to access the podcast.

‘No Place Like Home’ with Ira Glass (from the *This American Life* podcast)



Scan the code or click [here](#) to listen to this text.

Our Place with Myf Warhurst (episodes such as ‘Welcome to Country’)



Scan the code or click [here](#) to access the podcast.

Images, art works and digital resources

'Unidentified man in an Antarctic cavern, Antarctica, 1929?' by Frank Hurley (photograph; ideas of country not dominated by humans; adventure; historical exploration and documentation; climate change)



Scan the code or click [here](#) to view this photograph.

Google Earth (a way to visualise any part of the earth in various levels of resolution and representation)



Scan the code or click [here](#) to view this website.

'AIATSIS map of Indigenous Australia' (map representing Australia by language areas; ideas of socio-geographical boundaries, Country, visualising place and identity)



Scan the code or click [here](#) to view this map.

'Not titled [Ghost Gum, Mt Sonder, MacDonnell Ranges]' by Albert Namatjira (painting reproduced by Australia Post on postage stamps in 2002; ideas of Australian outback, colonisation and appropriation, Country, landscape representation)



Scan the code or click [here](#) to view this painting.

EXPLORING 'GOOSEBERRIES'

This section looks at the first of the mentor texts for Writing about country: the short story 'Gooseberries' by Anton Chekhov.



Scan the code or click [here](#) to read 'Gooseberries'.

About the author

Russian playwright and writer Anton Chekhov (1860–1904) is sometimes considered the father of the modern short story. He was a realist writer whose work was often concerned with the human condition and the social realities of the immediate world around him. In his late teens and early twenties, while studying at medical school, he supported his family (he was one of six siblings) with earnings from his journalistic, commercial and comic short texts. Chekhov then began to write more serious literature and was prolific, completing over 500 short stories as well as novellas, plays and a novel. It was not until some decades after his death from tuberculosis that he was recognised internationally for his work, with translations into English helping his writing reach broader audiences.

Chekhov is known for his adherence to his own belief that everything in a story should be there by necessity – he is quoted as having written that authors should 'remove everything that has no relevance to the story'. This tendency resulted in a sparse naturalism to his stories and plays that he felt was sometimes misinterpreted as being overly serious and heavy. His advice to his own contemporaries was expressed roughly as, 'If you say in the first chapter that there is a rifle hanging on the wall, in the second or third chapter it absolutely must go off.' Essentially, this is the idea that any plot detail, even if it may seem irrelevant at first, should ultimately become key to narrative or dramatic events. It describes a form of foreshadowing, or setting up and then following through on expectations for the audience. This is the now famous dramatic principle commonly referred to as 'Chekhov's gun', and directly relates to his own play *The Seagull*, in which the main character uses a gun to kill a bird but, ultimately and much more significantly, turns it on himself. This principle forms an interesting tension with one of the other common features of Chekhov's writing, which is the tendency towards open endings, or a lack of a neat resolution.

The main ideas

'Gooseberries', first published in the magazine *Russkaya Mysl* (Russian Mind), is considered one of a trilogy of stories, the first being 'The man in a case' and the third being 'About love' (all 1898). The trilogy features the same two men in each story – Ivan Ivanovitch the veterinary surgeon and Burkin the schoolmaster – and in the second two stories, set on subsequent days, they stay at the house of their friend the landowner Alehin. A sense of hopelessness and lost potential permeates each story as one of the men takes his turn to tell a tale of a particular character.

- Burkin's tale, in 'The man in a case', is of a teaching colleague whose life is so driven by self-imposed strictures and concern for appearances that he never marries and dies unhappily.
- Ivan's tale, in 'Gooseberries', is of his brother's determination to become a man of the country instead of the town, and of Ivan's own subsequent realisation of the pointlessness of life.
- Alehin's tale, in 'About love', is of the lost love between himself and the wife of a friend.

'Gooseberries' explores a range of ideas in relation to country: the physical landscape itself; how different classes interact with the countryside; and the differing values associated with urban and country lifestyles.

Physical and psychological landscapes

In the opening of this short story, Ivan Ivanovitch and Burkin are introduced but described only briefly, by their occupations, as they pass through the fields. The land itself, however, is described in great detail, with sensory descriptions and figurative language (e.g. the simile describing a distant train in the countryside as 'like a crawling caterpillar'). At the conclusion of the first paragraph, we are told that the men are both 'filled with love of that countryside, and both thought how great, how beautiful a land it was', emphasising the central role of the setting in the story.

'Gooseberries' has a strangely inconclusive ending. We are left with a sense of the characters' dissatisfaction: while all three retire to bed, Ivan seems to have been unsettled by his own story, and Burkin 'could not sleep for a long while', bothered by the elusive 'oppressive smell'. Even the final line, 'The rain was pattering on the window-panes all night', gives a sense that the issues of the story are not concluded but that the concerns are ongoing, like the rain. It should be remembered that Chekhov was notorious

for concluding his short stories without a satisfactory or expected resolution, sometimes leaving characters psychologically unchanged since the start of the story – in contrast with the common literary structure of taking characters on a journey of growth or change. Perhaps in ‘Gooseberries’ this partly reflects the fact that the landscape, unlike a neat narrative journey, rarely has a measurable beginning, middle or end. Rather, we see sections of it and form our own interpretations, much as we do with this small snapshot of Ivan Ivanovitch’s life.

Land and class

One of the ideas of country in this story, and explored in some other works of Chekhov’s also, is a concern with social class structures in nineteenth-century Russia. Such attitudes are linked with characters’ feelings about land and landscape. Class hierarchies were important in the Russia of the late 1800s and dictated opportunity, power and wellbeing. The feudal system had historically bound lower-class peasants, called serfs, to the rich nobility and land-owning upper classes. Though serfdom had been abolished in the early 1860s, by the time Chekhov was writing at the turn of the twentieth century, the lowest classes (particularly peasants and factory workers) still made up the vast majority of the population. In general, they suffered from extreme poverty, limited access to education, poor working conditions and various other forms of social disempowerment. All of this brewed the longstanding inequality and discontent that led towards the revolutionary atmosphere and rebellions early in the twentieth century. Class difference is illuminated in ‘Gooseberries’ principally in the different ways the characters relate to country.

Ivan Ivanovitch and Burkin – a teacher and a vet – are representative of the very limited middle class that existed during this period. As is seen from the beginning of the story, they are at liberty to use the country as a place of leisure. (Although Ivan Ivanovitch’s father rose to the rank of ‘nobility’ as an officer, his sons grew up ‘running wild in the country. Like peasant children’. Ivan does not seem to embody the slightly wealthier class his father had earned for his family.) Their connection to the country is characterised by their freedom to roam and enjoy its aesthetic qualities, though they are forced to take shelter when confronted with the elements, resorting to visiting the house of a local landowner they know.

As further evidence of the class status differences in relation to place, Ivan Ivanovitch takes an almost absurd delight in swimming in Alehin’s millpond in the rain. This serves as a stark contrast to the peasants working in the mill, who were previously described as ‘covered with sacks’ and their horses ‘wet ... with drooping heads’, forced to endure the conditions in a

scene that is 'damp, muddy, and desolate'. Though the protagonists had initially observed that the pond appeared to be 'cold and malignant', no doubt Ivan Ivanovitch's enjoyment of splashing about in it is strengthened by the fact that he, unlike the peasants, can fully expect that after his swim he will be pampered in the house with 'silk dressing-gowns and warm slippers'.

Land and values

From his position of comfort, Ivan Ivanovitch then holds forth on his own beliefs – via the story he tells of his brother Nikolay's longing for a farm – about rural versus urban life. Here, the story's philosophical argument about the country is less simplistically tied to class and more particularly to the protagonist's own values: he is disdainful of the dream his brother endorses (an idyllic vision of an honest life lived on the land). He is convinced it equates more to 'monasticism without good works' than to any kind of morally admirable goal. He deeply scorns his brother's ambitions, despite claiming to be 'fond of him' initially.

'Monasticism' refers to the choice to live without worldly goods in order to devote oneself to spiritual development.

With Nikolay's transition into being a landowner and a 'gentleman' (the word is not used in a complimentary sense), Ivan characterises his brother as being in every way unpleasant. He catalogues Nikolay's greed (having married and been unkind to a wife he allegedly chose purely on the grounds of her wealth), his 'insolent self-conceit' and his adoption of a new identity so at odds with his earlier life. Ivan has nothing nice to say about the way his brother treats his peasants or spends his days, perceiving only how country life corrupts his brother's character.

In Ivan's condemnation of Nikolay's dreams and resulting personality changes, Chekhov suggests that the desire for ownership of land is dangerous and can only lead to a man's downfall. Though it is primarily the human flaws of selfishness and greed that the story seems to critique, it still makes an argument that somehow these are connected with a mistaken belief that a life in the country will be full of happiness. 'Gooseberries' poses the notion that 'to retreat from town, from the struggle, from the bustle of life, to retreat and bury oneself in one's farm—it's not life, it's egoism, laziness'.

Purpose, context and audience

Russkaya Mysl was a monthly magazine and had been around for a few decades at the time of publication of 'Gooseberries'. It was published for an educated **audience**, despite the fact that its founder had started out with only a limited formal education. Under its second editor, the magazine had also dropped its price, becoming slightly more accessible to a wider market, rather than being too economically, socially or intellectually elite. It also changed character somewhat over time, shifting a little in its political association and outlook from moderate to slightly more liberal. This means its readers would likely have been open to a range of perspectives. In its early days, it had been associated with some of the ideological values that later underpinned the Constitutional Democratic Party. Although the publication wasn't purely political, Chekhov would have been able to make some assumptions about the expectations and the sociopolitical **context** of his readers.

The Constitutional Democratic Party was a political party in Russia that was founded in 1905. It held liberal views – considered radical at the time – and advocated for the government to become a constitutional monarchy similar to the model in the UK.

Chekhov also published hundreds of short stories in many different magazines, newspapers, journals and anthologies throughout his career (which, by the time he published 'Gooseberries', had already been well established for almost 20 years). So it is likely that he also already had a familiar audience who would find his works regardless of where they were published.

Chekhov's **purpose** in 'Gooseberries' is both to express and to reflect, exploring ideas such as disillusionment with life and the immorality of being content at the expense of others. Ivan is given a full and unchallenged soapbox from which to expand on his ideas: Chekhov gives Ivan's listeners (Burkin and Alehin) no opportunity to oppose Ivan's views or even question them. In fact, Ivan states, 'Once a man is absorbed by an idea there is no doing anything with him' and, in a similar sense, once Ivan has decided he must tell his story, there is no interrupting or challenging him. This device provides a platform for Chekhov to present a particular philosophical argument in which Ivan's criticism of his brother's obsession with landownership could be equated to Ivan's own preoccupation with judging his brother's choices. This reveals Chekhov's use of satire to reflect on and critique aspects of human nature, such as hypocrisy.

Key features

Some of the writing structures and textual features employed by Chekhov in 'Gooseberries' are explored below.

Structure

Stylistically 'Gooseberries' is a **third-person** story that uses a **frame narrative** or story-within-a-story to expand the reach of its central character's journey. Although the chronology of the present action is conventional and consistent, Ivan's story allows him to reach back into his previous experience and to describe a change in outlook that he himself has observed in his life (specifically on the night when he stayed with his brother). This provides the opportunity for a fairly short story, and one with few characters, to embrace a wider perspective. This is a useful strategy to experiment with in your own writing, although you need to be careful that the story does not feel fragmented.

In this case, Chekhov had the benefit of writing 'Gooseberries' as one of three stories, each of which uses a frame narrative. As a result, his carrying narrative (the story of Ivan and Burkin's trip into the country) is able to be seen across three stories, gaining strength with its repetition. Obviously, your scope when writing about country will be smaller, so your structural decisions should take this into account.

Dialogue

'Gooseberries' also makes use of **direct dialogue** – not just between characters, but in Ivan's extended speech when he tells the story of his brother. Direct dialogue presents the exact words spoken by a character, as opposed to indirect dialogue where these words are paraphrased or summarised. Direct dialogue can be an efficient technique in short-form writing, as it can convey ideas and issues in a more immediate way than narrative description.

Setting

The **setting** in 'Gooseberries' is an important aspect of how the story addresses the key idea. If you choose to write a short story, you might want to set it in a location that gives you the opportunity to literally write about country, as Chekhov does. One example here is the establishing paragraphs, where Ivan and Burkin observe the land around them, and there are concrete descriptions of the scenery, weather and surroundings. Another is in the story-within-a-story, where Ivan explores social and moral associations with the country.

These include both Nikolay's idealised views of the land – as epitomised by his dream of growing gooseberries – and also Ivan's discussion of the dangers of wanting to escape the realities of city life.

Remember that the setting needs to be relevant to your purpose, and should support the ideas that you want to convey. In this story, it is relevant that the protagonists are visiting a house in the country, as this links directly with Ivan's analysis of desiring a country life over an alternative reality.

Characterisation

The **characterisation** in 'Gooseberries' is deliberately sparse. We know almost nothing about Burkin – he functions merely as a companion and an audience for Ivan – and little about Alehin. Also, Nikolay's character is constructed only through Ivan's view, which is necessarily biased. Of Ivan himself, we are given little narrative description. Some of what we learn about him we glean from our interpretations of his limited actions, such as his childish enjoyment of his swim. The rest we must gather from the story he chooses to tell, such as:

- his relationship with his brother
- his own perspectives on ambition, greed, kindness, integrity and purpose
- his sense of disillusionment with the world.

Constructing characters in this way can be risky, as we are learning about them predominantly from a restricted source. This is less common in more extended fiction such as full-length novels, where we are likely to have multiple sources of information (narrative descriptions, characters' actions, internal monologues or description, and other characters' opinions or interactions). But in short fiction, like pieces you might create in your writing about country, there is less space to construct characters. You might choose to experiment with similar strategies, such as not providing the reader with an external character's opinion of the protagonist.

Useful quotes

The table below identifies some key quotes from 'Gooseberries' and ways in which they can prompt ideas for your own writing.

Quote	Interpretation / relevant associated ideas	Suggestion for incorporating into your writing
'Gardening books and the agricultural hints in calendars were his delight, his favourite spiritual sustenance ...'	Slightly sarcastic judgement on the ultimate frivolousness of an obsession with landownership	Use the quote as a humorous prompt for a snide letter to a friend about another friend.
'A change of life for the better, and being well-fed and idle develop in a Russian the most insolent self-conceit.'	Satirical proverb that cautions Russian people against certain life choices	Generate a similar made-up proverb to serve as the main contention in a blog post about the Australian real estate market.
'I want to tell you about the change that took place in me during the brief hours I spent at his country place.'	Time spent in the country and its impact on one's mental state	Write a diary entry about a time when you experienced a realisation or change of mind/mood when visiting a new place.
'... if there is a meaning and an object in life, that meaning and object is not our happiness, but something greater and more rational. Do good!'	Relationship with the wider environment and sense of purpose	Use the idea as a prompt for a motivational speech or TED Talk style speech about how to improve your own local community/place.

Work with useful quotes

Create your own useful quotes table like the one above by identifying some stimulating quotes from the text, as well as ways in which they prompt interesting ideas you could explore in your writing.

EXPLORING CHAPTER 2 OF *THE HATE RACE*

This section looks at the second of the mentor texts for Writing about country: Chapter 2 of Maxine Beneba Clarke's memoir *The Hate Race*.



Scan the code or click [here](#) to read the text.

About the author

Maxine Beneba Clarke (born in 1979 in Sydney) is an award-winning Australian writer with an Afro-Caribbean heritage. Clarke's work covers a wide range of genres and styles, and she has published children's picture books, autobiographical works (including the memoir *The Hate Race*, 2016), poetry, essays, reviews, articles and short fiction. She has also edited several anthologies and is a spoken-word performer or 'slam' poet and champion. Clarke has won numerous Australian literary awards including an Indie Award, an Australian Book Industry Award, several Premiers' Literary Awards, a Children's Book Council of Australia Award and a Boston Globe–Horn Book Award. She has also twice been nominated for the prestigious Stella Prize. After studying for a Bachelor of Creative Arts and Law at the University of Wollongong, Clarke published her first book, *Foreign Soil*, in 2014 – a collection of short stories with wide-ranging subject matter and varied international settings but with a focus on the African diaspora.

The main ideas

Clarke's memoir *The Hate Race* explores her own childhood, with a particular emphasis on her traumatic experience of pervasive racism. The book reveals how this impacted on her identity growing up in New South Wales in the 1980s and 1990s. It examines ideas of diversity, difference and discrimination (sometimes explicit and intentional, sometimes incidental and inadvertent), painting a portrait of an Australian society towards the end of the last century that was multicultural but often ignorant and intolerant. The memoir also interrogates Clarke's own developing understanding of what it meant to be Australian, to be a woman of colour and to be of Afro-Caribbean descent.

The set mentor text, Chapter 2 of *The Hate Race*, forms a kind of establishing section for the main body of the book. It follows on from a brief prologue set

in the adult Maxine's present, and Chapter 1, which offers a background and context for Maxine's parents – Bordeaux 'Bordy' and Cleopatra 'Cleo' – in England before they migrate to Australia.

Migration

Chapter 2 documents Bordy and Cleo's arrival in Australia, swiftly sketching a portrait of a mid-1970s migrant experience for two young, educated West Indian–English people in Sydney. Their arrival is inauspicious, marked by events such as their horrific discovery of a cheese apparently branded with a racist slur and their accommodation in a hotel named after a black slave character from a Defoe novel. Bordy (born in Jamaica and raised in England) and Cleo (Guyanese-born and raised in England) begin a life in Kellyville, Sydney, where their three children, Cecelia, Maxine and Bronson, are born between 1978 and 1982.

In 2021, the cheese brand Clarke mentions renamed itself to 'Cheer' following the efforts of an anti-racism campaign. Though apparently named after cheesemaker William Coon, the original brand name has a long history of being used as a racist slur against people with dark skin.

Through the chapter, Maxine maps her childhood in Kellyville as an Australian with two degrees of migration in her background: her parents' migration from England and her grandparents' from the West Indies. The chapter sets the scene for her exploration, in the rest of the book, of this aspect of her identity. She is an individual for whom Australia has been home all her life, yet whose heritage tugs at her sense of self and contributes to a feeling of difference. This difference is abused, devalued and even weaponised by those around her when she is a young girl.

Landscape, place and belonging

The landscape of the Kellyville neighbourhood is mapped in fond and specific detail and, when contrasted with the race riots back in the UK, is portrayed with a certain sense of safe nostalgia. Yet at the same time there is an underlying awareness that Maxine's family, like the local Exclusive Brethren religious community, has been 'thrust unexpectedly into' the 'close-knit village' that is Kellyville, and is visibly different from others in the small community. While there is little reference yet in this chapter to the racial discrimination Maxine faces constantly throughout the rest of the book, there is a distinct impression of her inner tensions. She experiences a sense of belonging to the community and place she lives in, while also feeling that she is marked as different from those around her.

The chapter uses description of the physical and social landscape of Maxine's early years to establish a sense of place. Kellyville is mapped out for us in various ways, including:

- geographically (e.g. in the description of where Hectare Street is in relation to the creek and the rest of the town)
- demographically (e.g. 'The village was largely populated with young single-income families, or older empty nesters ...')
- historically, with the references to Hugh Kelly and the development of the estate divisions
- temporally (across time), with references to details such as hypercolour t-shirts, the 1980s British race riots, the local milk bar and the architectural styles of 'classic seventies suburbia'.

History

In Maxine's memories, Kellyville consists of tadpole-collecting excursions, Friday night fish-and-chip feasts, weekend vegetable missions to the local market gardens, and a home 'packed with love, laughter, playdough and pride'. Her early childhood memories are innocent and secure, even though they are contrasted with the 'fraught' race relations under the conservative political leadership in Britain at the time. The shadows of the deeper past also hang over her, not just in the colonial convict settlement of NSW but also in the American Confederate history of slavery in the Deep South, and Maxine's own connection to that ancestral trauma through the African convicts who had arrived along with the First Fleet.

The idea of country is approached in this text particularly through the notion of *home* in terms of nostalgic representation of a familiar childhood environment. The text also draws on ideas of migration, building a new life in an unfamiliar nation and navigating a duality of belonging and otherness. This is explored at a personal, subjective level, primarily for Maxine herself but also in her retelling of her parents' experiences in the first few pages, as well as from a wider perspective, with the acknowledgement of the African connections in the area's colonial settlement history.

Purpose, context and audience

This mentor text is an extract from a full-length memoir and can stand alone in the sense that you don't need further background about the characters or situation to understand the events. Although you are not expected to study

the complete book for this part of the English course, it is worth recognising the full text as a vital **context** for the chapter in exploring ideas and issues. Further contexts for the work include the sociopolitical dynamics, particularly in terms of race, in Australia around the time Clarke's book was published. The Black Lives Matter movement in America is recognised as having begun in 2013, three years before publication of *The Hate Race*, and is a relevant idea that may have helped precipitate Clarke's writing and publication. While her memoir is a very personal one, it takes place in a world where similar concerns are a wider issue for society.

Just as Chekhov was able to make certain assumptions about the likely demographics of his readers, Clarke can make assumptions about the **audience** of this chapter in her book. For example, her memoir is published within an Australian literary culture that broadly shares concerns about racism, equality and respect for individual identity. Whether or not her readers share her lived multicultural experience, they will likely recognise their realities in her representation of contemporary Australia and the issues that drive it, and she can thus expect their respect for her. Further, Clarke can reasonably assume that her primary audience (readers of her memoir) is invested in her story and will be taking details from this early chapter forward to the rest of the book to aid their understanding and interpretation. Therefore, in this chapter Clarke needs to begin to establish characters and offer backgrounds for later events and themes, as with Bordy and Cleo's experience of settling into their cautiously accepting community in Kellyville. However, as part of a longer work, the chapter also needs to find a balance, not exploring *too* much too early, as the narrative needs to be sustained for the whole book.

The **purpose** of this chapter, then, is somewhat divided. It broadly shares the purposes of the whole book (to express and reflect, as well as provoking thought and inquiry in the reader). But it also sets out to explain and to introduce the reader to characters, concepts and settings, in preparation for ideas to come later. It is also Clarke's purpose in this piece – in addition to sharing her own experience with readers – to prompt readers to consider their own upbringing and experiences of home and place in childhood, and to question their own relationship with where they grew up and how this influenced them later in life. In particular, the chapter (even outside the context of the full text) invites readers to think about the connections between place, belonging and identity.

Key features

The extract from *The Hate Race* employs a range of language and narrative features to achieve its purposes. You may like to consider utilising some of these features in your own writing about country.

Point of view

As is usual for a memoir, Clarke writes in a subjective, emotive and intimate **first-person voice**, in a semi-formal register. This establishes a reflective, friendly tone. These are all options you might choose in your own work, whether you are writing nonfiction (e.g. biography, speeches, articles and letters) or other genres such as fiction, poetry and hybrid texts.

A first-person narrative point of view in your writing will align your reader closely with the narrator (who may be you, a fictional character or a persona you have adopted), providing potentially unfiltered access to their views, feelings and experiences. This can help to engage your audience, making them feel very connected to the main character in your text, though it can also limit the number of characters you are able to portray in detail.

Note that, in this mentor text, Clarke does manage to convey some of the inner experience of her parents on their arrival into Australia in the first few pages. She does this by describing the way she imagines they were feeling: 'I can hear them now, those bogongs of doubt beginning their dusty-winged beat beneath my mother's rib cage'. Clarke chooses to use rich figurative imagery here to connect us emotionally with Cleo and Bordy as they begin their new life. In fact, she inserts herself into this moment in the first person, making sure her readers remain connected. This is a more direct technique than using third-person reporting to reflect how her mother might have felt.

Imagery

Paired with the honest, personal tone of the first-person narrative, Clarke employs **descriptive sensory imagery** to draw her readers in, creating vivid impressions of Kellyville and her childhood home. Again, this is a technique you could use in your own writing, whether fiction or nonfiction (although note that, in more formal genres such as opinion pieces and feature articles, this might be less appropriate). Examples in this chapter include the following.

- 'On winter mornings, white frost sheeted the buffalo grass'
- '... thick glasses fogged up with perspiration, black muscles shining from underneath his dark blue Bonds singlet, striped terry-towelling sweatband circling his afro'

- ‘... workers would be stooped low to the ground, triangular straw hats or water-soaked head wraps protecting them from the unforgiving sun’.

Time

The **chronological setting** of this text is another feature you could adopt in your own writing: either the same period in Australia or in your own life (early childhood years). This would encourage you to be very specific by not just writing about a particular place, but a particular place *at a particular time*. Whether you are writing a reflective biography or not, keep this specificity in mind. Physical setting is likely to be very important when writing about country, but remember to consider chronological setting, too.

Another related factor in this piece of writing is the collapsing of time: the eight-page chapter covers approximately seven years, yet somehow without feeling rushed. This is partly because routines and patterns are established in Maxine’s family’s life in Kellyville (‘In summer, lawn sprinklers were on constant rotation’; ‘On weekends, we would ... buy fruit and vegetables from the market gardeners’). This gives us a sense of the reassurance of regularity and predictability, allowing much ground to be covered in a short time. Note also the balance between detail and generalisation in the descriptions: elements such as the supermarket items, the tadpole collections or the Brethren women’s outfits are described intricately, while a century of history is summarised in a paragraph. If you choose to write a piece where chronology is relevant (e.g. biography or short fiction), think about appropriate ways to convey **the passage of time**.

Place

There are two distinct parts to this chapter – the first half, describing the new and unfamiliar world Bordy and Cleo are met with, and the second, describing the enduring comforts and habits of a place where ‘everybody knew everybody’. Either of these **social** and **emotional settings** could be used as inspiration for, background to or the setting of your own writing, as both newness and familiarity are rich scenarios for generating ideas. You might write about a place you have only recently discovered, or one you know extremely well. You might do as Clarke does in this text, contrasting experiences of unfamiliarity and familiarity, or you might choose to explore just one. Any of these options would make a good focus for writing about the key idea of country, as they encourage you to find ways of characterising and communicating *place*.

As Clarke does, you might contextualise the place you are describing both in terms of its broader social history and also its personal associations, or you might choose just one. This will relate to the purpose and audience you choose for your work. For example, if you decide to write about the town where you grew up, you might write an entry for a travel blog that focuses on the history of the area. On the other hand, you might write about the town in a very subjective personal way, concentrating on your own memories and emotional connections, for a podcast about locations that have shaped you.

Useful quotes

The table below identifies some key quotes from Chapter 2 of *The Hate Race* and ways in which they can prompt ideas for your own writing.

Quote	Interpretation / relevant associated ideas	Suggestion for incorporating into your writing
'Their first impression of their new country was the sheer brightness: a luminous southern hemisphere sunlight they had never seen before in an impossibly clear blue sky.'	Physical description of landscape features; comparison of one country with another; symbolic associations of migration and possibility	Write a similar description of a place brand new and unfamiliar to a character, for the opening of a short story.
<i>'What kind of country is this?'</i>	Fears and uncertainty associated with the migrant experience; interrogating the character of a place where you live; looking for meaning in signs and coincidences in the environment around you	Use the quote as an opening prompt for a poem.
'On the village outskirts lived an assortment of city dropouts ... backing directly onto bushland.'	Intersection between urban/suburban/bush; boundaries; rejecting a living environment/lifestyle	Script a podcast episode about people moving away from urban environments.

'Fitting, if amusing, geography.'	Symbolism of geography; layered meanings of landscape; interpretations of place	Write a funny short story using contrasting locations that have particular meaning for you.
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Plan an original text

Choose one of the ideas in the final column of the table on pages 32–3. Write a plan for an original text based on this idea.

EXPLORING ‘THE CONQUEST OF LAND AND DREAM’

This section looks at the third of the mentor texts for Writing about country: the essay ‘The conquest of land and dream’ by Yumna Kassab.



Scan the code or click [here](#) to read ‘The conquest of land and dream’.

About the author

Australian author Yumna Kassab grew up mainly in western Sydney and also lived and studied for two years in Lebanon with her family. She studied sciences at Macquarie University and the University of Sydney and has taught secondary students in regional New South Wales. Her first full-length publication was the collection of linked short stories *The House of Youssef* (2019), and her second was the novel *Australiana* (2022). Some of the themes she has considered in these works are community, inequality, family and family relationships, immigrant experiences, nostalgia, connectedness and place. Kassab’s work has been nominated for numerous prestigious Australian literary awards including the Stella Prize, a Victorian Premier’s Literary Award, a Queensland Literary Award and a NSW Premier’s Literary Award. Her most recent novel, *The Lovers* (2022), was shortlisted for the 2023 Miles Franklin Literary Award.

The main ideas

‘The conquest of land and dream’ was published in the Spring 2021 issue of *Meanjin*. The headline essay in this publication was academic and Munanjahli and South Sea Islander woman Chelsea Watego’s ‘Always bet on Black (Power): The fight against race’. Watego’s essay is an examination of race, violence, discrimination, subjugation, power and unceded sovereignty (both literal and emotional). The content and title of Watego’s piece lends emphasis to these themes within Kassab’s essay, priming readers to keep these ideas in mind as they read through the publication.

Dispossession of land

Kassab's essay is a critique of the European invasion and colonisation of the land we know as Australia. She asserts that migration, as it has occurred in Australia, has involved theft and the subjugation of land and existing inhabitants, stating emphatically that 'possession is built on ... dispossession'. As well as shaming the colonisers for their past actions, Kassab sheds light on the ongoing denial and burial of this history. She holds the reader's attention in a firm grip through the confronting use of the second-person voice, characterising all readers as occupying the position of the colonising dispossessor. The reader is addressed directly, in a tone that doesn't allow them to relax and instead demands a deep emotional engagement with the content.

More subtly, though, the piece is written in such a way that it speaks broadly to the concept of dispossession and geographical theft. Kassab achieves this by sometimes using indirect language and sidestepping specifics, extending her emotional attack to include all those who seek to overwrite land, race, culture and history in any context.

Land use

'The conquest of land and dream' is an example of writing about country because it examines the habitation of a landscape, particularly in terms of the shifts and changes over time. Kassab considers human relationships with land, especially its agricultural potential and the use of resources – most pointedly in the section 'Homogenous'. But she also uses this connection to land as a lens through which to view tensions between groups of people, and to examine the decisions one group has made in relation to another. In this way, 'country' plays the part of a character in a conflict situation, shaping and providing a context for shifts in power and control. While the land itself is central to the writing, the discussion explores what the use of land says about the people using it, not just what the land represents in isolation.

Possibilities

Despite a persistent tone of resignation about the damage done to Australia, Kassab still somehow expresses a cautious hope that we can find, even in the lingering evils of colonial exploitation and homogenisation, new, peaceful and harmonious ways to inhabit the country we live in. For example, Kassab illustrates how migration *could* be a positive, respectful and productive process:

There is plurality, this is not one ... There isn't one idea, there is an endless store. The great levelling, this recognition, is not diminishment. You and them, together you are something more.

Purpose, context and audience

Published online in one of Australia's premier literary magazines, 'The conquest of land and dream' can expect a relatively informed, engaged and creatively literate **audience**. This allows the writer to take some risks with both form and content as she is not restricted by having to appeal to a mass-market commercial platform. Therefore, Kassab was able to make language choices and decisions about the emotional intensity of the piece knowing that her readers would likely be committed to the literary value of the work. Rather than capturing interest with hooks, dramatic tension or conventional characters, she uses rich and sometimes challenging language appropriate to the likely audience.

The author's cultural **context** is likely to have also shaped her decisions. Although she addresses her condemnations to the second-person 'you' that is the reader, she implicitly includes herself in this group. Kassab is not an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander woman, so she too is from the many generations of Australians who 'arrived by land ... arrived by sea'. As some of her other writing also interrogates the migrant experience, this is clearly a focus that interests her and helps dictate what she chooses to explore in her work.

The **purpose** of this essay is a mixed one. It strives equally to:

- reflect and express (sharing an emotional study on a sensitive cultural issue)
- explain (offering a historical analysis of what happened, for example, when European settlers began to rename parts of Australia with European language and references, overwriting existing culture and community) and
- argue (although there is no specific call to action, Kassab's criticisms of empire and colonisation prompt us to reconsider our attitudes and think carefully about how we approach the future as a nation).

Each of these communication purposes shapes the piece. In reflecting on and expressing a shameful colonial history, Kassab draws on emotive language and evocative imagery. Then, to strengthen her argument that what has been done to this country in the name of empire is deeply wrong, and to implicate the reader within this history, she uses the second-person voice.

Key features

Generically, Kassab's piece is a compelling example of **creative nonfiction** that takes the form of a persuasive essay. It draws on a range of language features to achieve its purposes, some of which may inspire your own writing about country.

Voice

Kassab constructs a voice that is not purely transactional or functional but rather uses mood, emotion and poetic rhythms to shape the ideas presented. While the tone is bitter and accusatory in many places, it always remains **poetic**. Kassab constructs this poetic and descriptive voice by paying particular attention to the rhythms and shapes of sentences and drawing on language that is not necessarily literal. Her language choices can therefore be described as rich and expressive, yet distilled.

In places the figurative descriptions are sparse and stark, and in others they are more sentimental and detailed. Beginning with an extended metaphor of dispossession in which she refers to the country as a 'burial site', Kassab establishes the emotive tone that continues throughout.

Structure

In terms of structure, Kassab uses **headings** to help guide the reader through her argument; a strategy common to both the 'creative' and the 'nonfiction' sides of the hybrid genre. Such headings are often seen in chapters of novels or sections of short stories, or equally in online articles, opinion pieces or scholarly writing. In this essay, the headings work poetically like much of the rest of the piece: they maintain some ambiguity and abstract qualities so that they remain open to interpretation while still helping shape and explain the sections that they label. This is different from, say, the headings that might be used in more literal scientific or journalistic writing, and more like the headings of separate poems within a suite of poetry.

Point of view

A particularly notable language feature in this essay is the use of the **second-person voice** ('you'). This point of view is an unusual choice given it can be difficult to sustain, and is rarely used in longer texts as it is sometimes confronting or alienating.

Many novelists have experimented with the second-person voice – some with commercial and critical success, such as Italo Calvino’s *If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler*, 1979; Jay McInerney’s *Bright Lights, Big City*, 1984; Erin Morgenstern’s *The Night Circus*, 2011; and the 2022 Booker Prize winner, *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida* by Shehan Karunatilaka.

In this piece, confrontation is one of Kassab’s primary aims – as a means of challenging her reader to reconsider the status quo – so it is an appropriate choice. It is also carefully paired with the piece’s length (around 2000 words), structure (e.g. being broken up into shorter sections) and style (lyrical and gently experimental) in order to maximise its impact and ensure that it doesn’t alienate the reader. This is worth remembering as you write your own pieces: while powerful writing usually challenges expectations and conventions in some way, it always has to treat its audience with respect.

Note that there are also several **shifts** of narrative perspective to the first person. Sometimes these are very brief, encapsulating a particular moment (such as ‘I am sorry’), but in the middle paragraph of the section ‘Homogenous’, the shift to first person significantly changes the tone of the piece. Here the primary voice becomes that of the fearful ‘migrant’ coloniser, clinging desperately to their sense of righteousness but glimpsing the true knowledge that ‘I am an alien and this is not my land’. This use of contrast and conscious shift has a powerful impact, emphasising the moment for the reader.

Shifts (whether in voice, tone, style, rhythm or other areas) are a compelling strategy you might use in your own writing in order to emphasise a particular character, moment, development or idea. Remember that there must be a reason, related to the argument or the structure of your writing, to make a decision like this. For example, it might emphasise a significant moment in a character’s life, create a memorable twist in a story, add emotional tension to a monologue or speech, or strengthen the impact of the introduction of new evidence in a persuasive essay.

Gaps and silences

Another element of the essay that lends it a sense of elevated emotional tone is the use of **allusion and omission** in phrasing. This type of phrasing involves risk, as there is the possibility of readers missing the point of what is being said. If you choose to use a technique like this in your writing, be sure that you can make confident assumptions about the knowledge your audience possesses.

At times Kassab uses allusion to particular real-life events, for example in 'I am sorry for history but gloss over the present day.' This alludes to, without specifying, events such as the National Apology speech made by Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd (2008) and the implementation of a national Sorry Day (from 1998). Both these events recognised historical atrocities like the Stolen Generations policies, while (Kassab asserts) not addressing 'present day' inequality and crimes.

Other examples of using gaps and silences in this essay include:

- generalised and yet emotionally loaded and meaningful terms such as 'elders' (used here without a capital E but likely to be recognised by readers as a specific term of respectful address for particular First Nations community members)
- the avoidance of naming specific places, instead referring to them elliptically, as in the mention of the European names for Australian states: 'a reference to Wales, two honours to the Queen and for the rest laziness creeps in. This part north, this part west and there is a piece in the south'
- metaphors and similes, which are a way of omitting specifics in language while still creating very particular and distinct images and meanings (e.g. 'the shard of metal lodged in a national wound').

Useful quotes

The table below identifies some key quotes from 'The conquest of land and dream' and ways in which they can prompt ideas for your own writing.

Quote	Interpretation / relevant associated ideas	Suggestion for incorporating into your writing
'To enact a dispossession, you need the comfort of a lie. There is no-one here, this land belongs to no-one else.' (Context note: quote is within the section 'Terra nullius')	Toxic colonial misconception of Australia as unoccupied land (a widely held belief used to justify British settlement and that has become enshrined in white records of Australian history since, perpetuating views that First Nations civilisations had no claim to land)	Use this quote as a prompt for an article about land rights and native title.





'... you held fast to an idea that does not belong on this land.'	The stubbornness of imposing human desires on land	Use this quote to inspire a piece of creative nonfiction about the difficulties of living on the land, perhaps in terms of the hardships of an agricultural lifestyle or industry.
'You believe in possession through measuring the thing.'	Ideas around cartography/mapping/naming and how these are linked with controlling and owning land	Write a monologue about how knowing the names of local streets and landmarks can take away fear of new places.
'Where a traveller may have seen the land, been curious ... already your mind was quartering, the stake hammered right in.'	Differentiating travel and exploration from colonisation and invasion	Brainstorm bullet points for a debate speech on the topic 'Travel enhances the mind while settlement is greedy'.

Write about country

- 1 Drawing on an idea in the table on pages 39–40, or on an idea of your own about country, write the opening two paragraphs of an original text.
- 2 Annotate your paragraphs to indicate how you have drawn on some of the features of this mentor text in your writing.

EXPLORING ‘SPLIT’

This section looks at the final mentor text for Writing about country: the short story ‘Split’ by Cassie Lynch.



Scan the code or click [here](#) to read ‘Split’.

About the author

Cassie Lynch is a Western Australian writer who is a descendant of the Noongar people. As co-founder of Woylie Fest and through her associated work in the Woylie Project, she has facilitated mentorship and publishing opportunities for Noongar storytellers. Lynch also does other work in language and culture revitalisation. Her PhD comprised a novel set in an alternative version of the Swan Coastal Plain (an area in Western Australia that contains the Swan River, referenced in ‘Split’), and research into Deep Time, geology, colonial history and First Nations storytelling. In addition to ‘Split’, she has published numerous essays, articles, poems and other short fiction, and has also created a number of audio stories.



Scan the code or click [here](#) to visit Lynch’s website, which includes links to some of her stories and podcast episodes.

Across various platforms and through differing modes, the works Lynch has created have often shared concerns and ideas, particularly Noongar climate memory (the focus of her PhD), specific connections to Country, local ecology, and intersections between self, space and time. Her story ‘Split’ sits within this context of her ongoing engagement with Noongar language, culture and geography.

Useful terms

An understanding of the following key terms will help you to better appreciate the ideas and themes in ‘Split’.

- **Anthropocene:** The theoretical era that includes the most recent period of the earth’s history; the era characterised by the impact of human actions on the earth’s climate, geology and ecosystems. →

-
- **Deep Time:** This term was coined late last century and refers to the billions of years of geologic history that predate our more human notion of history on earth. First Nations conceptions of Deep Time encompass a broad history, sometimes incorporating a non-linear understanding of time. Commentators have argued that embracing a perception of Deep Time is necessary to understand and tackle challenges such as current climate crises. Others suggest that the human mind struggles to comprehend such a vast scope and that artistic interpretation, metaphor and analogy are the best ways of understanding Deep Time. Some of Lynch's own research beyond this story has focused on Noongar notions of Deep Time (e.g. relating to memories and narratives of ice ages). In this story, 'Deep Time is a stone dropped in a pond and we read the ripples'. (Note that this guide capitalises Deep Time, in accordance with the presentation in Lynch's text and with First Nations understandings of the term.)
 - **Noongar, Noongar Country:** Noongar (note Lynch uses this spelling, which is one of a number of accepted spellings) is the broad general name for the Aboriginal peoples of south-western WA, or for the language or traditional lands of these peoples.

The main ideas

'Split' was first published in the anthology *Stories of Perth* (2018) and later in the anthology *Flock: First Nations Stories Then and Now* (2021). Both these anthologies share a particular focus on place, with the first collecting experiences of life in Perth, Western Australia, and the second concentrating on First Nations experiences more broadly.

The title 'Split' alludes to a number of elements of the story, drawing together the ideas of landscape, Country, geology and Noongar creation history, as well as the narrator's experience of seeing the double landscape, and of being a descendant of two different heritages.

Split landscapes

'Split' follows the experience of an unnamed first-person protagonist who moves through a 'split' landscape in the Perth CBD. They see the 'recent' and particularly human-built physical city ('glass and concrete buildings' etc.) simultaneously inscribed with the natural historical landscape that has been overwritten by colonial settlement and development ('a cormorant shrieks from

its perch in a swamp banksia' etc.). As the story progresses, the narrator's 'real' physical landscape becomes the latter rather than the former, as they transition from one version of the country into another.

The story appears to begin naturalistically, although by the beginning of the second page the reader becomes aware that all is not what it seems. For example, the 'semi-solid statue' described in the first paragraph is actually evidence of a non-naturalistic reality rather than a physical structure with holes through which the swan is able to pass. As the story develops, the protagonist becomes explicitly more aware of the 'split' reality they are inhabiting. They consciously reflect on the enduring resonance of the original 'rich and storied Country' compared with the transience of the city built on reclaimed 'infilled' land by the 'new people' (European settler-invaders) – a city that 'wasn't there in the past and [that] won't be there in the future'.

Lynch also depicts a literal geological split in the land, millions of years ago, integrating an explanation of how it occurred (through the lens of the Noongar creator serpent, the Wagyl) with a description of the resulting geological features still visible – the Darling Scarp mountain range in Western Australia. This dual representation of the broader landscape (referencing the history as well as the present) echoes the dual descriptions of both the Bilya river and the Perth CBD.

Splits within time, place and the self

Yet another central 'split' examined in the story is one in the protagonist's own emotional experience, between being part of Country (as their grandmother was) and being divorced from it by the 'cushion of resistance' Lynch describes as 'Anthropocene Air' – a kind of 'second skin'. The story charts this 'skin' as progressively falling away from the narrator's body until they are able to not just see but feel the pre-settlement landscape.

The transition out of the Anthropocene Air is not a comfortable or an easy one: the protagonist becomes wet, cold, heavy, trapped and 'panicked'; they feel alone and out of control in the water, as well as 'slightly nauseated'. But as the story concludes, this landscape comes to feel safer and more enticing, and the narrator can see 'the light of [their] ancestors' and feel 'not so alone' after all, welcoming an 'invitation from the creator serpent' to rid themselves of the Anthropocene Air 'for good'. In the story's resolution, the narrator seems at peace with their new surroundings, embracing the 'Deep Time river landscape'. Interestingly, the city lights of the 'Settler Time' Perth are still visible in the final paragraphs. This suggests that – despite Lynch's argument throughout that the settler time frame and its physical geography are less substantial than Deep Time and the Noongar Country landscape – the multiple

realities both have validity and meaning in individuals' lives. They somehow speak to each other across the divides of time and culture through a shared space, even when their realities are incompatible.

Although the narrator reaches a kind of equilibrium, the story ends with a tangible tension reflecting the binaries throughout. Some of the divisions of the story have 'healed', but in the unending space that is Deep Time the geological split (also symbolising the other splits of the story) 'echoes, and echoes, and echoes'. This closing sentence gives the story a complicated sense of both closure and open-endedness that reflects the idea of Deep Time.

Country and 'Split'

'Split' is intensely invested in the notion of Country, most particularly in its close investigation of the connection between a First Nations person (the protagonist) and the landscape they inhabit. The landscape refers to both a physical human-made landscape and an underlying environmental, cultural and emotional version of place. The protagonist navigates their own presence in these simultaneously overlapping spaces, reflecting on their connection to both realities and linking this with their heritage: they are descended from a First Nations grandmother and a European settler grandfather.

Country in 'Split' is composed of geological history, cultural history, colonial settlement, contemporary human architectural space, literal landscape, natural environment and imaginative/imagined landscapes. Lynch explores connection to place and how past ties to land can dictate present experience. She also observes how land and Country can be more powerful than modern endeavour, since ultimately the humans and buildings of the Perth CBD fade to 'ghosts' and then to nothing: 'no buildings ... no luxury apartments ... no skyscrapers', in fact, 'the city isn't there' and the protagonist is 'alone.'

As well as focusing on varied human connections with place (or *disconnection from* place, as with the settlers whose 'Anthropocene Air' prevents them fully connecting to Country at all), the piece also illuminates the idea of country from other angles, such as:

- environmental resilience and changing land use (the land throws off human industrialisation, development and constraints; for instance, the shaping of the Bilya into the 'bound' Swan River, ultimately returning to its own sovereignty)
- the challenges of shared land use and settlement (animals like the swan and snake coexist in the same coordinates in space as the humans and structures in the city)

- long-term environmental evolution (as in the spiritual and geological history Lynch catalogues in the Perth area)
- tensions between the natural or wild environment and human habitation/settlement/development.

Purpose, context and audience

An important **context** for this piece is the author's own cultural heritage and particular areas of research and writing interest: specifically, aspects of Noongar language, history and Country. These passions shape the content of the story, leading Lynch to focus on the experience of inhabiting contemporary Perth with a First Nations perspective. The story examines what it can be like to navigate ways of connecting to the landscape and to the past, while also respecting and living that 'past' (in the sense of Deep Time) in the present. Lynch has examined these concerns in much of her other writing, research, and cultural and professional activity (e.g. by initiating an Aboriginal storytelling festival). As an authorial context, this shapes her writing as well as her purpose. For example, she chooses to include both a Noongar explanation of the formation of the Western Australian landscape (in the stories of the Wagyl) and a Western explanation (in identifying the geologists' perspective on the resulting land formations). This addresses her combined purpose of reflecting on her own heritage and providing explanations to those who may be unfamiliar with the Noongar knowledge of the land.

The republication of this story in *Flock* emphasises this **purpose**: as editor Ellen van Neerven has noted, the anthology seeks to strengthen and amplify First Nations voices by curating them together, just as a 'flock' can provide strength in numbers for its members. Therefore, by appearing in a collection with other First Nations writers, Lynch's 'Split' is likely to reach an **audience** who is engaged with and receptive to the imagining of country/Country and the teaching of ideas that the story sets out to do. The collection includes pieces that share a focus on identity and belonging; connection to place, home and Country; impacts of colonial settlement and dispossession; and other aspects of First Nations realities.

While connection to Country is a central element of the story, it is not written specifically for a First Nations audience, nor for an exclusively non-Indigenous readership whom Lynch wants to educate. Although she refers to settlers as 'they' in the story, distancing the narrator from that side of their heritage, she also uses inclusive language, describing those who walk through Perth (and, by extension, the whole country) as 'we'. This characterises the residents of Western Australia as being shrouded in Anthropocene Air regardless

of their cultural heritage. Lynch does not make an assumption about whether her readers identify as First Nations people, as she herself does. Indeed, while the ‘split’ between a First Nations identity and a settler identity is one important idea in the piece, Lynch’s narrator also acts as a kind of unifying member of both groups. They illustrate the problem of finding ways to connect to Country as a shared one for those who currently live on Country, not purely one for members of one or other cultural group.

Lynch’s story seeks to challenge readers to think carefully about the place in which we live, and about our disconnection from its true and enduring essence. Her language choices – including in the strong visual imagery she creates – are all in service to this purpose, inviting the reader to engage strongly with the narrator’s experience and to be able to see the reality of Deep Time and what it means for a sense of place.

Key features

‘Split’ is a lyrical, imaginative, visual and descriptive short story, which features emotive imagery capturing the shifting and transforming landscape around the protagonist. This section considers some of the distinctive features of ‘Split’, and how you might draw on these in your own writing.

Binaries

Lynch creates a number of **binaries** (divisions into two contrasting yet connected parts) in this short story, for instance between:

- water and air (or sometimes Water and Air, which are distinguished through the use of capitalisation as meaningful specific entities rather than generalised concepts)
- past and present
- Deep Time and Settler Time (these are different kinds of time that are related to, but not simply the equivalent of, past and present)
- First Nations (particularly Noongar) and settler cultures
- the Bilya and the Swan River (while these are essentially a single body of water in two different iterations, they are distinguished as being two quite different things: one ‘the sweet water body of the creator serpent’ and the other ‘a creation of the new people’).

At the same time as differentiating the two halves of each binary, Lynch shows the extent to which binaries often cannot be separated. This is most notable in the overlap of the two realities that the narrator experiences, as

they see the two landscapes and timescapes inscribed upon one another: animals from the Noongar / Deep Time reality traverse through human-built structures from the European / Settler Time reality. Another moment when the binaries transect powerfully is when the narrator and a man in the city 'pass through' each other as their eyes 'occupy the same space, impossibly, for a moment.' This is an analogy for the narrator's two worlds (their Noongar and settler heritages) intersecting.

Exploring binaries in writing is a productive and powerful way to make comparisons between ideas, exploring various perspectives and enlightening one reality by juxtaposing it with another. You could use this in various forms of writing, whether the purpose is to explore or reflect (as in a short story like this one), or to argue or explain (such as in a persuasive piece of writing like an opinion piece, a letter, a feature article, or a political speech or podcast). In a piece of writing that sets out to explore or reflect, you might not choose to present one half of a binary as more valuable than or preferable to the other, whereas in a persuasive piece of writing you are likely to be arguing for the benefits or qualities of one alternative over the other.

Magic realism

Another distinctive element of this story is the use of **magic realism** – a stylistic choice that opens up a wide range of options you could use in your own writing, particularly if you choose fiction as a genre.

Magic realism is a genre that blurs the distinctions between imagined and empirically measurable worlds and, in doing so, challenges readers to understand and accept ideas, emotions or concepts that might not be easily represented through other modes of writing.

In 'Split', Lynch harnesses magic realist techniques to illuminate a world that functions on multiple levels, not only the literal, concrete level. She does this to explore an emotional reality – specifically the challenge of connecting to a First Nations and Deep Time sense of place while physically existing in a contemporary, urban settler version of place. This enables Lynch to *show* rather than *tell* us (an important distinction in engaging and powerful writing) what Country means to her as a First Nations person.

Unlike fantasy or science-fiction genres, magic realism is generally set in the 'real' world where we live, and incorporates fantastical aspects in a matter-of-fact way. In 'Split' this is evidenced by the fact that the narrator lives in a recognisable setting (contemporary Western Australia) and, even when they begin to transition into the Deep Time layer of country, it is still an actual

place on earth (the ‘rocky shore of the Bilya’, where the narrator ends the story). None of the places represented are fantasy locations.

Setting

The physical **setting** of this story is also a key element and might inspire your own writing. The story is set in a real location very familiar to the author (and likely familiar to many of her readers too), and this enables her to make a detailed connection with the place represented, and therefore with ideas of Country. Using a setting that you know well is a good way to help you incorporate specificity and detail into your work, and these will help you to create a cohesive and compelling piece of writing.

There is an old saying that writers should ‘write what they know’, and while this is of course not a rule (otherwise we would never have incredible worlds such as Middle-earth or Hogwarts!), it is a good tip especially if you are feeling stuck with where to set your writing. Geographical setting is relevant no matter whether you are writing fiction or nonfiction, particularly when you are dealing with the key idea of ‘country’. Although some work may not explicitly discuss or mention the settings, it is always a part of the context of your response and, as the author, you should always know exactly where your writing is set, even if you do not refer to this within the piece itself.

Persona

One more feature of this mentor text that you might like to adopt in your own writing is the use of a first-person protagonist or narrator who shares elements of your own identity, but is not actually you. In other words, you might choose to write in the first person but take on **a persona**. This can be applied in many forms and in writing for various purposes, such as in a short story (whose purpose is to reflect), in an editorial or opinion piece (whose purpose is to explain or argue), or in a podcast script (which might be for a combination of any purposes).

In ‘Split’, Lynch’s narrator is a contemporary Western Australian person with a mixed Noongar/non-Indigenous heritage, who is interested in Deep Time and has a connection with Country. These all overlap with Lynch’s own experience, context and interests, but by creating a fictional character as the persona (or the narrative ‘I’) of the piece, she gains the freedom to incorporate and explore perspectives beyond her own.

Useful quotes

The table below identifies some key quotes from 'Split' and ways in which they can prompt ideas for your own writing.

Quote	Interpretation / relevant associated ideas	Suggestion for incorporating into your writing
'... a temporary possession though. A recent occupation.'	First Nations habitation of Australia predating European habitation by tens of thousands of years	Script a podcast featuring an interview about the history of land management by First Nations people.
'The land remembers the violence that begot it.'	Colonial and frontier violence; geological and creation origins; land as having a kind of emotional sentience	Write a quirky story about past events that a particular landscape 'remembers', or use 'memory' as a motif for a short piece about the history of a tourist area.
'They are sliding through the swamp undampened. They traverse like cross-cosmic travellers in spacesuits walking on a foreign planet, carrying with them the atmosphere of their place of origin.'	Human existence in a landscape without true connection to it; the negative or alienating implications of this situation	Write a diary entry in which the narrator makes new discoveries about a country or place where they have lived for a long time.
'The landscape is a pervasive memory of saturation.'	Land reclamation; dramatic changes in land usage; alterations to the essence of a place; waterscapes transitioning into landscapes; human impacts on land	Research and write an essay about the impact of human habitation or land use.

Explore binaries and country

- 1 The key idea of 'country' is associated with a number of binaries, or contrasting ideas, for example: town/country; local/foreigner; land/sky. What others can you think of?
- 2 Compose a piece of writing around one of these binaries. Structure your text in a way that supports your exploration of contrasts. For example, you might like to divide your text into two halves, perhaps separated by subheadings, in order to present two sides of an argument. Or you might like to show two different perspectives on a situation by creating a dialogue in which two speakers present contrasting ideas or experiences.

CREATING YOUR OWN WRITING ABOUT COUNTRY

In this section, you will apply your learning from the mentor texts and begin creating your own pieces of writing about country. In doing so, you will need to consider the purpose of your writing, your intended audience, and which text form or forms are most suitable. Tips and strategies for planning, drafting, redrafting, editing and proofreading your writing are also included.

Purpose, context and audience

There isn't a 'right' way to start your writing, in terms of the order of decisions you make: sometimes you will begin with something you want to say (your underlying purpose), and at other times you might begin with an idea you are interested in exploring. Whichever way you approach it, you should be certain very early in your writing process about your purpose, context and audience, as these will affect the form, content and style of your writing.

- **Purpose:** This is the reason you are writing your piece – beyond the fact that it is an assessment task.
- **Context:** This includes your own context of production (that is, the circumstances in which the text is created) and also characteristics of the context of reception, such as the platform it will be available on.
- **Audience:** Who will read your piece is an essential consideration (e.g. your peers; a specific family member; the viewers of a particular television program; residents of a particular place; readers of a particular age, nationality, gender, political persuasion etc.).

In some cases, your teacher might set guidelines for your piece (such as who the target audience is), and in other cases you might choose these for yourself. Regardless, it's essential that the decisions you make about your structure, style, tone and content are always appropriate for your purpose, context and audience. Your written explanation accompanying your work is a good place to make your understanding of these links clear. For example, if you know you are writing for a serious context and audience (as in an essay), you will make language choices that reflect this (such as using a formal register and a clear

structure). On the other hand, if you know you are writing for an audience who knows you well (e.g. in a diary entry, blog or personal letter), you will make appropriate choices to engage them (such as including familiar references and terms, and using an open and vulnerable tone).

Types of purposes

Your purpose should fall into at least one of four broad categories: to express, to explain, to reflect or to argue. Although there are no firm rules, many forms and styles of writing naturally align with particular goals and aims. The text types listed here are not exhaustive, and many forms can be used for multiple purposes.

Purpose	Overview	Possible text types
To express	Writing to express is about conveying emotions, feelings or ideas. It can be a deeply personal process, often capturing an individual's unique voice, thoughts and experiences.	Short story, monologue, poem, song lyrics, blog, play script, diary entry
To explain	Writing to explain aims to provide information, clarify concepts or describe processes. This type of writing is typically informative and educational, helping readers gain a better understanding of a topic or issue.	Podcast, blog, news article, infographic, speech, opinion piece, formal essay
To reflect	Writing to reflect involves examining and exploring one's own experiences, thoughts or beliefs. This type of writing encourages self-awareness and personal growth, as well as providing insight into the human condition.	Personal essay, diary entry, memoir, reflective podcast, letter, blog, opinion piece, documentary writing
To argue	Writing to argue involves presenting a point of view, supporting it with evidence and persuading readers to agree or consider your perspective. This purpose often requires critical thinking, analysis and logical reasoning.	Speech, open letter, opinion piece, debate transcript, blog, podcast, article

The most important thing is to draw clear connections between your purpose, context and audience. You could write a perfectly valid short story whose purpose is to argue, such as in the emerging genre of climate change fiction; however, if you choose to ignore conventions and expectations of the form (narrative logic, character development and language that is heightened or rich in some way), you run the risk of disappointing or alienating your audience and therefore failing to fulfil your purpose. Similarly, you might write a feature article for a newspaper with the purpose to express (e.g. an emotive article about immigration), but if you use language that is too figurative or indirect, your writing may not be well received by the existing readers of the paper, who expect clarity and informativeness.

Hybrid writing

In some cases, you may find that your writing doesn't fit neatly into one specific purpose. This is where hybrid writing comes in. Hybrid writing blends two or more purposes, resulting in a text that is rich, complex and engaging. For example, you might craft a short story that both expresses personal emotions and argues a particular viewpoint. Or you could create a podcast that explains a topic while also reflecting on your own experiences related to that topic.

As you work on your own creations, don't be afraid to experiment with hybrid writing. It can be a powerful way to explore and express multiple layers of meaning, making your text more dynamic and compelling. Remember, the goal is to create texts that resonate with readers, and hybrid writing can be an excellent tool for achieving that aim.

Getting started

A blank page is often overwhelming. But there are lots of ways to start filling that daunting space. You may be inspired by elements from the mentor texts, immediately connect with a provided stimulus or be struck by a general idea about country that you want to explore. Alternatively, you may like to get in the habit of writing about country by undertaking short-form exercises.

Using writing exercises

It can be useful to do some warm-up activities and writing that will help you get started. You might think of these sorts of exercises as 'muscle stretches' to loosen your ideas and focus your creative energy – they should be just casual pieces that you write with no pressure to show them to anyone else or include them in your final work. (If you end up with a phrase or a sentence that is

so good you want to integrate it into your final piece, that's just a bonus!) This might seem time-consuming but doesn't need to be: exercises like this can take just a few minutes and can really help you build your writing skills.

Below are some short writing exercises to help you get started. Some are general, just to get you going, but many are designed with the key idea of 'country' in mind. Use a timer to keep you on track and, if you can, do a few exercises in one sitting. Remember, the point of these is not to generate perfect work, but to practice creating. So don't worry if what you write is rough, or if an activity doesn't inspire you – just move on and try a different one.

Three-minute activities

Each of the activities below can be completed in approximately three minutes.

- 1 Write two different dictionary-style definitions of as many of the following words as you can, without looking them up – just express your existing understanding of them.
 - belonging
 - environment
 - travel
 - boundary
 - origin
 - discovery
 - remote
- 2 Choose one of your definitions from the exercise above, and rewrite it so that it is extremely simple: you may only use short words (five letters maximum) and short sentences. See how much of your original meaning you can still convey.
- 3 Write down the first sentence of one of your mentor texts or a supplementary text. (If the sentence is long, you can choose part of it.) Use that as the first sentence in a paragraph of your own, writing in a different form from the original text. For example, if you choose Chekhov's short story 'Gooseberries', you might begin a paragraph of a journal entry with 'The whole sky had been overcast with rain-clouds from early morning.'
- 4 Imagine that you are the leader of a newly formed country. What would be the three main values you would want all your citizens to share? Why?
- 5 Brainstorm as many words as you can think of relating to the term 'land'. Write down every word that comes to mind, even if it seems ridiculous

or abstract. After two minutes, choose the three most interesting words. Now write a single sentence that uses all three.

- 6 Take one of the words from the activity above and search the internet for images related to that word. Choose an image that appeals to you, then spend three minutes writing a detailed description of the image – pretend you are explaining it to someone who can't see it, and aim to capture literal features as well as emotional or tonal.

Five-minute activities

Each of the activities below can be completed in approximately five minutes.

- 1 Open a dictionary to a random page and choose the first word entry on the left-hand page. (If you don't have a physical dictionary, you can use a random word generator online.) Write the word as a heading on a blank page. Now write a 100-word story with that word as either the first or last word of the story.
- 2 Choose a house or a place where you have lived and write a paragraph describing it for someone who has never been there, relying on sensory imagery. Include at least one sentence for each of the five senses (sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste). You might write literal descriptions ('the cellar in that house smelled of mould') or you might use the senses figuratively ('being in that garden was like sitting in a warm bath').
- 3 Imagine you can move to any city in the world. Choose one, and then explain why you would like to live there. Your reasons should be very specific, and might relate to climate, architecture, culture, career opportunities, landscape or history.
- 4 Use the ideas from the activity above to draft a short email to a friend or someone in your family, attempting to convince them to let you move to that location or to come with you.
- 5 Choose a secondary character from one of your mentor texts. Write a short scene in which they are the main character, and we learn something unexpected about them. (If your mentor texts don't have many characters, you can do this exercise with another text you have studied.)
- 6 Choose an object in the room that you are in. Now write a short description (a sentence or two) of the object in each of the following ways:
 - as though you are putting it up for sale online – why is it a great bargain?
 - as though you are describing it to an alien – what does it do? What are its most distinctive physical features?





- as though it was given to you by the person you love most in the world – how does it make you feel?
- as though it was the subject of a short poem – come up with a metaphor for the object or for its uses.

Ten-minute activities

Each of the activities below can be completed in approximately ten minutes.

- 1 Choose a character from one of your mentor texts. Write a short podcast interview script, imagining that you are interviewing the character: come up with three to five questions, and write down their responses. Alternatively, imagine you are interviewing the author of one of your mentor texts. Ask at least one question relating to the idea of country, and try to ask questions that relate to the mentor text but that allow you to imagine information beyond its scope. For example, you might ask Maxine (the *character* in *The Hate Race*) which place in the world most reminds her of her childhood, or you might ask Maxine Beneba Clarke (the *author* of *The Hate Race*) to describe the moment when she first decided to write her book.
- 2 (This task has three sections; take around three minutes for each part.) Write a short paragraph describing your neighbourhood or the area where you live. Consider any elements you wish: how it looks, what sort of people live there, what's nearby, what it's lacking, what the weather is usually like, how it's different from other places you've lived or visited, or what sort of vibe it has. Now imagine your neighbourhood at a specific time in the past (it could be the recent past, or it might be hundreds of years ago). Do the same activity, considering how different it might be. Now do the same activity again, but this time by imagining the same location in the future (either near or distant).
- 3 Think about the last time something disappointing happened to you. Take a moment to jot down the details of the event and how you felt about it. Now spend the rest of the ten minutes rewriting the scene, as a diary entry or letter to a friend, in one of these two ways:
 - imagine that the situation had been even more disappointing – what's the worst that could have happened, and how would you then have felt or responded?
 - imagine that the opposite occurred, and the outcome was even better than you could have hoped for – how would you have felt and reacted?

Writing with another person can also be a very productive way to practice generating material or to overcome writer's block. You could set up a writing activity session with a friend or several people from your class – even just for 15 minutes once a week, or for a one-off session of an hour or two. Here are a few activities you can do with a writing partner or group.

Partner and group activities

- 1 Write a short sentence that includes the word 'place'. (It could be in any style or form; for example, a description, an interview question, a line of a song, a cliffhanger for the end of a book chapter, an opening sentence for a memoir, or a sentence from a letter to the editor.) Swap sentences with a partner. Write the rest of the paragraph (or the answer to the interview question, the beginning of the next book chapter etc.), using your partner's starter sentence.
- 2 Use word association as a way to brainstorm further ideas about your key idea. With a partner, take turns to say the first word that comes to mind in response to the other person's word. You might start with the word 'country' itself, or start with a word chosen at random from one of your mentor texts. Try to take no more than one or two seconds to respond, and don't censor your responses. A third person can write down all the words, or you could use a phone to record them if there are only two of you. The list can then become a word bank for writing about country, as well as a resource for starting other writing activities. For example, you can choose one of these words at random to use as the first word in a sentence about country, or as the heading for a blog post, or even as a theme for a short story or poem.
- 3 Set a timer for 90 seconds. In pairs or as a small group, write down as many words relating to country, or relating to a chosen topic, as you can. Whoever has the most words after 90 seconds wins.
- 4 Imagine you are responsible for a tourism advertising campaign and must come up with a slogan for either a newspaper, social media or television advertisement. Write down a location in the world, and swap with your partner. You have three minutes to come up with your slogan. Think about what makes that place unique or appealing, and about writing a concise statement.

Using the mentor texts

You can draw directly from the mentor texts to help prompt your own work. For example, you could choose an element from one of the mentor texts that appealed to you, interested you or challenged you, and use this as a starting point to create your own text. Elements could include:

- concrete content such as a plot detail or event
- stylistic choices, such as the particular language register or the narrative tone
- thematic material
- voice (the narrative point of view or the style of narrative)
- specific techniques such as the use of subheadings
- particular vocabulary
- structural features such as chronology or argument
- minor characters
- setting (chronological or geographical).

You could use any one of these as an inspiration to generate your own writing, but be careful not to ‘copy’ the writing from the mentor texts in your final pieces, or to write something that does exactly the same thing that they do. Although this can be useful learning, muscle-stretching and brainstorming work (for example, you can practise your control of tone by trying to write an extra section for one of the mentor texts), you should not submit work that tries to imitate the mentor texts directly.

One way to help you avoid simply imitating mentor texts is to take points of inspiration from multiple texts. For example, you might adopt the idea of migration, which is explored both in ‘The conquest of land and dream’ and in the chapter from *The Hate Race* (and to a lesser extent in ‘Split’), and use that as your central theme for a feature article, a podcast script or a short story. Or you might challenge yourself by choosing some strategies and ideas that at first seem to conflict with each other, and combining them to generate new material. For example, you could try choosing a content element from the Chekhov story (e.g. the notion of disappointing ideals) and examine it in a poetic style or a more experimental tone reminiscent of Kassab’s writing, using metaphor and allusion more than direct concrete language.

Since your mentor texts for this unit of study are short, you can really focus on small details. Keep a pen and notebook, or an open computer document, beside you as you read and reread your mentor texts, and jot down any words, phrases or images that stand out to you. You can combine these

into a list or a table like the one below (which provides just a small sample of possible ideas; you should have many more in your own list or table). This will become a helpful resource for you as you create your own writing. You might like to swap lists with another student in your class to get some ideas you might not have thought of.

	'Gooseberries'	Chapter 2 of <i>The Hate Race</i>	'The conquest of land and dream'	'Split'
Features	frame narrative third person dialogue	past tense first person real setting	emotive language second person sections	fantastical plot elements narrative persona descriptive language
Words/ phrases	property country life countryside fields water freedom nobility	first impressions urban fringe gossip family outer margin local worlds apart	migrant burial site terra nullius Southern Land I am sorry possession empire	Deep Time settler ancestors strange landscape memory river
Ideas	class structure family relationships idealism	nostalgia/ home identity childhood	theft language history	duality belonging habitation

Combine writing elements

As simple writing exercises, or as ways to generate a piece for assessment, try combining two or more of the features, words/phrases and ideas listed above. (Also see the earlier sections of this guide that explore each specific mentor text; under the headings 'Key features', you could combine any of the features highlighted in bold.)





- 1 For simple writing exercises, just choose several items from the list and use them to generate a short piece of writing. For example, write a first-person paragraph including the words 'ancestors' and 'property', or write a pitch summarising a new podcast about 'history' using a 'frame narrative'.
- 2 For writing that is more directly related to creating your assessment pieces, also concentrate on your audience and context, and choose items carefully to support your purpose. For example, if you want to write about a nostalgic sense of home (as in *The Hate Race*) and your purpose is to express, it would be appropriate to harness emotive language (as in 'The conquest of land and dream').

Ideas for pieces

The table below offers examples of the kinds of pieces you might write about country, along with some ideas about how to develop them, and some potential starting points.

Purpose	Audience	Piece	Exercise / tips for generating content
To express	Readers of a sci-fi anthology	Short story about an extraterrestrial visit	Use sensory imagery as the basis for your story: convey an unfamiliar landscape through descriptions of how it sounds, smells, tastes, looks or feels. You could also use comparative language to illustrate contrasts between earth and the other reality.
To explain	Broader school community	Feature article for school newspaper about a local endangered flora or fauna species	Start with some basic research about the species (don't go into too much depth to begin with) and list five main points of interest (e.g. what's most unusual about the species, the biggest threat to its survival and whether there are local organisations advocating for it). Turn each into a topic sentence for a paragraph or a question to use as a subheading, then research as much as necessary to write a paragraph on each.

To reflect	Your family	An open letter about your year studying abroad	<p>Use the following prompt as your opening line: <i>'Dear family, let me tell you what I learned about my home by spending a year away from it.'</i></p> <p>Use the following prompt somewhere in the middle of your letter: <i>'The thing that surprised me most about living in a new country was ...'</i></p> <p>Use the following prompt to begin your closing sentence: <i>'And if I were to do it all again, I would only change one thing: ...'</i></p>
To argue	A local developer	A letter objecting to plans to demolish a local landmark in order to build a new hotel	<p>Adopt the persona of someone with a specific connection to the place threatened with demolition (e.g. write as if you are someone whose grandmother was born in the old hospital building that will be torn down for the new hotel). Explain the personal significance of the landmark, appealing to its emotional value, and then move on to discuss its cultural/community/historical significance. Conclude with an alternative proposal for consideration.</p>

Responding to a prompt or stimulus

Sometimes for your assessment in this unit you may be asked to craft a text in response to a prompt or stimulus material, as well as incorporating the key idea (and, to some extent, taking inspiration from one or more of your mentor texts). It may seem like a challenge to incorporate so many forms of input, but consider the fact that all writing is a form of response to many stimuli from the environment around you. When you write any piece, you are responding to some or all of the following: your own experience and emotions; events, conflicts and issues around you; the media and literature you are consuming and have consumed in the past; the types of writing that you enjoy or are challenged by; the topics that excite you. So, being asked to synthesise and integrate many elements in a task is simply a way of focusing these many inputs.

Work with stimulus material

Below are some prompts, and (for the first one) some possible ways you might incorporate them into your writing. Complete the table by coming up with suggestions for how to use each prompt in a piece of writing. You can then use these to generate your own practice pieces.

Stimulus	Notes	Ideas for responses incorporating the stimulus
<p>'Now that it is possible to travel right round the globe, the real challenge lies in staying at home and discovering the world from there.' (Judith Schalamansky, <i>Pocket Atlas of Remote Islands</i>)</p>	<p>Physical travel; analogies for travel and landscapes; global idea of countries; ways of understanding the world from a subjective perspective</p>	<p>Write a blog entry about how the internet is getting better and better at allowing 'armchair travel', but ask the question: Can we really experience another country without physically being there?</p> <p>Write a short sci-fi story about a form of virtual travel that has not yet been invented.</p> <p>Write an opinion article about how personal travel is or is not (choose which side to argue) worth the carbon footprint.</p>
<p>'... it is a universal law of indigenous cultures that if you look after country, country will look after you.' (Dr Terri Janke, 'Mabo lecture')</p>		
<p>'The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.' (LP Hartley, <i>The Go-Between</i>)</p>		
<p>'Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.' (United Nations, <i>Universal Declaration of Human Rights</i>)</p>		

Planning your writing

The writing process involves several stages, including prewriting, planning, outlining, drafting, redrafting, editing and proofreading. Each stage is important, and skipping any of them can result in a less effective response.

Before you start writing, it's important to plan your response carefully. This will help you to organise your ideas, structure your writing effectively and avoid writer's block. Prewriting is especially important, as it helps you to generate and organise your ideas. It's also recommended that you create a clear outline from your ideas as this will provide you with a roadmap to follow, making it easier to stay organised and maintain a logical flow in your writing.

Prewriting checklist

- Define the purpose and audience of your response.
- Brainstorm and generate a range of ideas.
- Organise your ideas into categories or themes.
- Use graphic organisers or other tools to visualise your ideas.
- Identify any research or additional information that may be needed.

Planning checklist

- Review your prewriting notes and select the most important ideas.
- Choose an appropriate form.
- Follow up on any additional research or sources that may be needed.
- Determine the structure and order of your response.
- Consider the language, style and tone appropriate for your purpose and audience.

Outlining checklist

- Use your planning notes to organise your ideas and make a final selection of what you will include.
- Identify a clear introduction, body and conclusion for your response, or a narrative structure. If your response is in a form such as poetry, consider how you will structure a poem or collection.
- Create headings and subheadings to organise your content.
- Ensure your outline follows a clear and logical order.
- Review your outline to ensure that it reflects your purpose and audience.

Drafting, editing and finishing your work

Once you have a planned outline, it's time to begin writing your piece. Drafting is an essential step in the writing process that allows you to explore your ideas, refine your message and create a coherent structure. It's important that you redraft your writing as you go, to enhance your voice and style for the specific purposes of the piece. Pay attention to your language choices, tone, use of transitions, overarching structure and other important features of your chosen text form. Once you're happy with your written piece, you'll then need to edit and proofread the content to put it in the best shape possible.

Drafting and redrafting

The process of drafting and redrafting is very personal and there are no right or wrong ways to do it, but you should try various methods to make sure you find what suits you best.

Some people draft and edit carefully as they write, working very slowly to construct sentences and paragraphs that are complete and need only proofreading for minor details at the final stage. Others work more quickly initially, jotting down ideas and thoughts as they come, but then spend longer at the editing stage to shape the notes or drafts into cohesive sentences and complete pieces of writing.

Whichever way you work, you should always try to give yourself time and space during the process so that you can step away and come back to it with fresh eyes.

General tips for the writing and drafting process include the following.

- **Break the process into manageable chunks:** Drafting can feel overwhelming, especially for longer pieces. To make the process more manageable, break your writing into smaller parts or tasks, such as completing a specific section, writing a certain number of words or addressing a particular argument. This will help you stay focused and maintain momentum.
- **Write notes:** Keep a notebook beside you or a separate notes document open on your computer as you work, and use it to jot down anything that comes to mind that might interrupt the flow of your writing. These may include ideas you want to follow up on later in your piece, quotes you want to refer back to, or even items for your grocery shopping list!
- **Save your work:** If you work digitally (writing straight onto a computer rather than writing the first drafts by hand), it is worth saving

multiple versions of your document as you go. Use a logical file naming system that makes sense for you, and don't simply continue saving changes to a single document. Sometimes you may want to return to ideas or content that you wrote earlier in your drafting and if you don't save new versions, you may lose valuable work that you previously deleted.

- **Work on tricky sections separately:** If you want to make significant changes or rewrite a sentence or paragraph, copy and paste it into an empty document. This will allow you to work on it without the distraction of the surrounding paragraphs, and without any concerns about getting tangled or accidentally deleting something important. Then, when you are happy with the changes, you can copy and paste it back into your main document.
- **Keep focused:** If you need to, turn off your phone and even disconnect your computer from the internet for short periods while writing. (You can use your notes page to list relevant things that you want to google later, so you don't get distracted by doing it in the middle of your writing period.)
- **Take breaks:** If you get stuck with what you are writing, try to move to a different section of your piece then come back later, rather than getting bogged down on something that isn't working. Alternatively, you can give yourself a quick break by trying one of the writing exercises in the previous sections.
- **Seek feedback and revise as needed:** As you work through your draft, don't be afraid to share it with others for feedback. This can help you identify areas that need improvement, and it can also provide valuable insights and perspectives that you might not have considered. Be open to constructive criticism and be prepared to revise your draft based on the feedback you receive. Remember that drafting is an ongoing process, and it's essential to be flexible and adaptable as you refine your work.

Editing and proofreading

Once you have finished your piece, it's time to edit and proofread it. At this point it can be very useful to take a break, because when you are too close to your work (for example, if you have now read and re-read it a million times and have been working on it for hours or days in a row), it is almost impossible to spot errors. This is because when you read, your brain will see what you expect to see or what you intended to write, not necessarily what is actually

on the page. Ideally you would have days or even weeks between writing and editing, but obviously this is not always practical. If you are pushed for time, even a few hours in between is better than nothing, and will increase how effectively you are able to edit.

If possible, get a classmate or friend to give your work an edit, as they will be far more likely to spot errors, inconsistencies or issues. (You may want to do this with someone not working on the same assignment as you.) Make a clear arrangement regarding what they will be doing for you and what they are not expected to do. You may not always agree with feedback, and you may or may not make changes in response (remember that feedback can always be subjective). But it is important to take on board any issues raised – your editor is your reader, and they are giving you information about how well your writing is working from an external perspective.

Below are some questions you may want to ask, in order to get feedback that is useful. Let your partner know how you would like them to provide the feedback. For example, you might give them a printed copy and ask them to make notes and highlight or underline parts; you might prefer digital mark-ups; you might like them to read the work and then have a face-to-face conversation so that you can discuss questions.

Potential questions for peer editors include the following.

- Is there any way the opening of my piece could be more engaging?
- Is there anything about my piece that is unclear (such as a confusing turn in the argument, events that don't make sense, characters who don't fit the context etc.)?
- Are there any inconsistencies you noted? (This might apply to the argument, narrative point of view, use of certain terms, fonts and headings, features of characters such as age etc.)
- Are there any points in the piece that felt jarring? (This could be a change in the line of argument, a change in perspective, a particular piece of dialogue or imagery, an awkward sentence etc.)
- Can you identify the purpose of my piece?
- Can you summarise my main argument?
- How would you describe the tone of my piece?
- Is it clear how my piece addresses the key topic/idea?
- Is there anything you felt could be left out?
- Is there any part you would have liked to see more of?
- Is my ending satisfying?

You might also have specific questions about anything you are uncertain of in your piece, such as whether a particular character is believable, whether a change in setting is effective, whether your argument is convincing or whether a piece of subtext came across. In some cases, you may not want to ask these questions until *after* your peer has read your piece – for example, if there is a twist or an element you want to check the effectiveness of, but do not want to artificially direct the reader’s attention towards while they are reading.

Proofreading checklist

- Underline any sentences in which you felt the meaning was unclear the first time you read them.
- Highlight any paragraphs that do not flow on smoothly from the paragraph before.
- Circle any spelling errors or typos, or punctuation that is incorrect or awkward.
- Circle any words or phrases that have been overused.
- Circle any phrasing or vocabulary that seems inappropriate for the context, text type or audience (for example, in terms of complexity, formality or style).
- Note any points where the tone is inconsistent.
- Note any content that feels irrelevant or out of place.
- Note any content that feels repetitive.

If you do not have a peer who you can ask to edit your work, you can use all of the questions and tasks above to help you in your own editing and proofreading of your work. Try to imagine you are reading someone else’s work, and make any notes or corrections that you would make for them.

A trick to help you separate yourself from what you have written while you are editing and proofreading it is to read it aloud. This will slow your reading down and force you to pay more attention so that you don’t skip over anything.

Written reflections

For this unit and outcome, you will need to write a short reflection to accompany your writing about country. The specific details of this task will be set by your teacher; make sure you are clear about what they expect from you. But generally, your written reflection will be short (probably less than half the length of one of your written pieces) and will need to demonstrate your own understanding of the various elements of your work, from process and decisions

through to intentions and connection to the key idea. Your reflection is likely to be written in the first person. Note that EAL students will produce a set of annotations of one or both of their original texts outlining their writing choices, rather than an extended commentary.

The reflection should do some or all of the following.

- Identify the **purpose** of your piece (to express, to explain, to reflect, to argue, or a combination of more than one of these) as well as the specific **audience**.
- Draw **connections** between the purpose and elements of your writing (for example, 'Since my purpose in this piece was to educate parents about the school's values, I chose to write in a friendly tone').
- Show an awareness of the relevance of **context** (for example, 'My readers – my classmates – share my social context, as we all live in the same city, so I did not need to spend significant time providing a background to the area').
- Reflect on the aspect of the **key idea** that your piece explores (for example, 'My feature article looks at the notion of cross-continental migration from an evolutionary perspective' or 'My short story plays with the idea of landscape as a reflection of emotional states').
- Discuss any **challenges** you faced, and how you overcame them (for example, 'I struggled to come up with a theme for my poem, so I read a wide range of poetry by authors from different backgrounds to help me brainstorm ideas').
- Acknowledge any particular **inspirations** you found in the mentor texts or elsewhere (for example, 'I was really taken with the reflective tone of *The Hate Race*, and tried to create a similar tone in my piece').
- Highlight any key **stylistic or language decisions** you made, indicating their specific relevance to your piece (for example, 'I have used very informal and sometimes inaccurate vocabulary, since my narrator grew up with limited access to education').

Remember that your written reflection relates to the process of creating your text. This is your opportunity to demonstrate your understanding of the writing process and of any challenges you faced, as well as any decisions you feel are particularly interesting or successful. Your purpose is to communicate your experience of writing your piece, rather than simply writing an analysis of the text you have created.

SAMPLE RESPONSES

Note that, in this section, the first two sample pieces are written as responses to a task with few constraints – simply the instruction to create a piece of writing that addresses the key idea of country and is written for a specific purpose and audience. The other two sample pieces also include a prompt to which they respond. Both pieces respond to the same prompt, using different text types, purposes, techniques and styles, to demonstrate how diverse the possible responses to any stimuli can be (even in the context of the same key idea and the same set of mentor texts).

Sample response 1: Fictional letter

Craft a text that incorporates the idea of country and is written for a specific audience and purpose. Your text should be accompanied by a reflection on the writing process.

Dear M,

I've never told you this. I've never told anyone this.

First, though, I should do something important. I should tell you I love you. I know that's what this kind of letter is supposed to be for. It's supposed to be a last chance. A last effort. Making amends. It's supposed to be so that I can tell you the things I've never been able to tell you, before it's too late, and that's one of them. That I love you. Despite everything. And perhaps I should be sorry that I've never said it. But do you know what? I'm not sorry. I think you know why I've never said it and I think you should take some responsibility. I acknowledge that you *have* taken some responsibility now, and that's partly why I feel like I can say it.

I love you. Despite everything.

But here's the thing I've never told you. Or anyone.

I blame you.

What you took me away from was everything. You thought when we were kids we would be happy to hop from place to place, from home to home, school to school, life to life. And maybe when we were tiny that was true. Moving was wonderful. We were adventurers. We got to see everything, taste everything, feel everything new again. Each time. We had different air on our skin, different soil under our feet, different skies over our heads. We got to try out worlds. I loved it. We all did: me and Kit and Jo thought the whole world was our home when we were little. Every new place was our favourite. Every new country, every new village, we loved it the best. While you settled into your work in a new camp we would map our new territory. We ran through the back fields in summers, we built tree houses, we bonded with other kids, we flattened trails through the grasses from tents and shacks to creeks and forests. There were places to hide and places to shelter. To hunt, to watch, to challenge. And then we would wave goodbye when it was time.

But being taken away from the Valley hurt me. Maybe you didn't know, when you moved us that time. But I think you did. The Valley was the last time I had a home. Since then, I've been adrift. Even when I've lived in one spot for a long, long time. Nothing has ever felt solid like that place did. That was where we started growing up. Growing *down*: where I started growing into the soil like a transplanted seedling, finally finding ground I didn't know I'd been seeking, finally knowing how to belong somewhere. Maybe it's just the age I was then, but I think it was also the place. That valley where the sun rose early on one side of our small house, hot on my face, telling me it was time to meet a fresh day, and eased itself down on the other side, long orange shadows calling us in from play. That valley, where us kids could knock on any door for streets and streets, and they would know who we were and how many steps from home we were. I was never afraid there.

In the Valley, I knew which direction the rains would come from and how long they would last. I knew how late in the season it was by which trees still had leaves. I knew how far from here to there, how steep from home to school, how cold the evenings would get, and how long the days were. I knew the birds by song and by nest, and I knew myself.

You took all that from me.

From all of us, when we left the Valley.

I forgive you. That's what these letters are for, isn't it? I forgive you. I know you had your own life to live and your own choices to make, and having to take three children with you when you needed to move must have been hard. I know that now. I know that from my own life. But I know also that it is possible to forgive but still blame.

If only you could have stayed there, let us grow our roots towards the riverbed near the back road and shelter in the curves of the hills to the east and west of us, then maybe my own children would be running those same paths today where Kit and Jo and I flattened the grasses and chased the wild dogs. Maybe they would know what it meant to have a history somewhere. Instead, like me, they float. They don't know it yet, but they will.

If only. I think everything would be different now.

I suppose that's all I needed to say to you.

From D

Written reflection

In my early drafting process, I chose some key features from several of the mentor texts we have been reading, using combinations of various elements to inspire and prompt my writing. Initially this helped me to brainstorm and generate ideas, and later it also supported my process of editing and refining. As I drafted my work, I retained several of these inspirations

to help me shape my piece of writing about country. One element was focusing on concrete memories of a specific place where the narrator lived in the past, as Maxine Beneba Clarke does in Chapter 2 of *The Hate Race*. Another was navigating a confrontational tone towards the reader, as Yumna Kassab does in her piece ‘The conquest of land and dream’.

In my letter, my purpose was to express and reflect (and also, to an extent, to explain feelings to the particular target audience), while exploring a familiar notion related to the key idea of country: a nostalgic connection to home. This notion is examined or alluded to in several of the mentor texts. However, I wanted to experiment with a fictional voice – that of a character who had a complicated emotional connection to a childhood home. The character has a strong, positive memory of a place she lived as a child, but this can be a fairly simplistic idea. So I aimed to give it depth by connecting it to some less positive feelings, to give me scope to express and reflect a richer inner experience. I have delved into the character’s happy memories of one of her childhood homes but linked this with her conflicted relationship with her mother, to whom she is writing the letter.

I chose to create a persona who had an expanded life experience compared to mine (older than me and with children of her own) rather than a character living in the same context as me (a teenager still at school). This allowed me to create more of a chronological and psychological distance from the physical landscape she is reflecting on. In line with this, although the language register is fairly informal, suitable for a personal letter, it is still a more formal tone than I might use if I was writing a letter to someone in my own family – for example, using vocabulary such as ‘perhaps’ and ‘adrift’. I set myself this challenge of creating a distinct tone in order to make sure I created something a bit different from what I would write if I was simply writing a real letter. It was also important to me to reflect on the landscape in a slightly more poetic tone, so the techniques I used included similes

(‘I started growing into the soil like a transplanted seedling’) and rhythmic strategies such as repetition (‘I knew ...’).

Because the narrator’s intended audience (the character’s mother) is someone well known to the letter-writer, I have avoided using much explanatory language. Instead sometimes I left references incomplete or partial (e.g. the name ‘the Valley’; the initials for the writer and recipient; ‘the age I was then’). This indicates the degree of history and familiarity between the narrator and the reader. I also intended it to reflect some of the omissions Kassab uses in her essay, where she alludes to, rather than specifically explaining or naming, events and places – a technique I found particularly compelling as a reader.

Sample response 2: Podcast script

Craft a text that incorporates the idea of country and is written for a specific audience and purpose. Your text should be accompanied by a reflection on the writing process.

Podcast: *Beyond the Bubble*

[short opening theme song]

V/O: Bubble; noun. 1. a globule of air or gas. 2. anything that lacks firmness, substance, or permanence; a delusion. 3. an environment within which people are connected by common interests, seemingly unconcerned about and unaffected by events taking place outside.

[short musical sting]

Host: Hi, I’m Min. Welcome to series two of my podcast *Beyond the Bubble*, a weekly experiment where I attempt to get outside my comfort zone. My ‘bubble’. My own little echo chamber. We all have social spaces where our beliefs and values are amplified and reinforced by the friends we spend time with, the social media we engage with, the mainstream media we consume. It’s a natural

coping mechanism: we have to somehow filter out the endless stimuli the world throws at us every day. But it means we miss out on things. We end up living in a much smaller universe than the one available to us. And we alienate others.

Each week last series, I challenged a different one of my views to try to make the most of the world around me, and be the best social citizen I could be. This series, I'll be exploring spaces beyond my *physical* bubble. Like last series, I'm taking suggestions from you, my *Lovely Listeners*. So be sure to email me if you have somewhere you think I should visit, or something you think I should consider.

This week, *Lovely Listener* Sahir sent me a quote from their favourite writer, Anton Chekhov: 'We do not see and we do not hear those who suffer, and what is terrible in life goes on somewhere behind the scenes.' Thanks Sahir. This one really got me thinking.

Sometimes *Beyond the Bubble* has been about having fun – who can forget the episode where I tried zorbing ...

[short snippet of Min laughing hysterically from the zorbing episode]

(And if you haven't heard it, please go back and check it out. Wherever you get your podcasts. I guarantee you'll wet your pants laughing at me. And I'm fine with that!)

But it's also a serious project.

So this week, I'm letting Chekhov guide me.

I'm lucky. I live in a privileged community. I'm not rich, but I can afford to rent in a great share house in a safe suburb. Our streets are dotted with well-maintained green spaces. We've got reliable public transport. I'm within easy walking distance of two great fruit 'n' veg shops, and a good family doctor.

But only a suburb or two over, things are pretty tough. I know this suburb by reputation, but have never been. I've had no reason

to, and to be honest I'm scared. Scared of how sad and hopeless it might make me feel, to see people struggling without the resources I have access to. So, I always stay in my own neighbourhood. Until now. This week, I caught the bus three suburbs north, to somewhere new. I won't say where – that's not what this is about. Come with me now, and see what's outside my bubble.

[sound changes: background noise of traffic, distant voices, occasional dog barking, footsteps on concrete]

Here I am, about 25 minutes from home. It's Thursday afternoon. I took the afternoon off work so I could walk through these streets before dark. I'm going to describe what I'm looking at. Not because I'm here to judge the neighbourhood on its appearance. But because what I'm seeing prompts what I'm thinking about. Things I normally avoid thinking about.

The first thing I am noticing, as the bus stops get further apart, is that there are hardly any shops. So I'm imagining being a busy parent on the way home from work, using public transport because a car is outside my budget. I've somehow got to spend time dragging kids from school to shops that are nowhere near my house. Then I have to walk home with heavy shopping – time-consuming. Or catch more public transport home – also time-consuming. And what about for older residents? Not easy to grab a weekly loaf of bread or other basics. Sure, this is a relatively small thing. But a thing with a big impact on daily capacity.

The next thing I am noticing is that there is a lot of rubbish in the gutters, including loads of broken glass. A few blocks back, there were plenty of discarded needles. Again I'm imagining being a parent of young children, or an elderly person walking a dog. I'd be worried about my kids' or pets' safety. So, do I just not go out for walks?

I am also seeing more broken windows than I was expecting. That either means people struggle to afford to repair damage to their houses, or that vandalism is really common. Or maybe both.

I mean there's crime in every suburb, obviously. But break-ins are rare where I am. Here, it's just a constant reality.

And the thing is, Chekhov is right: what I'm seeing right now is only the surface. I'm seeing a glimpse of challenges I don't have to face on a daily basis. But I will probably never know what anyone in this suburb is actually experiencing. I probably won't meet 'those who suffer' here. And you know what? I rarely even meet 'those who suffer' in my own neighbourhood. We might live in the same place, physically, but our internal realities are so different.

Going for a short walk beyond my bubble today has made me unbelievably aware of how hidden the lives of the people around me really are. We carry our own bubbles with us, even when we try to step outside them. I am reminded of the question that got me started in making this podcast in the very beginning: how do we find ways to see and experience those worlds beyond our bubble? Join me in the next episode as I continue to search for the answer.

[theme music]

Written reflection

My initial inspiration for this piece was the Chekhov quote from 'Gooseberries', and I challenged myself to incorporate this into a text type and context completely different from the original story. I had been keen to experiment with writing a podcast script, so I incorporated the quote as though the podcast host had stumbled across it in a similar way to me. Originally I was thinking about two interpretations of the idea of 'country': the idea of our own inner world as a kind of space or 'country' (and other people's worlds as places we often cannot visit), and the idea of the environment we build around ourselves as the 'echo chamber' the podcast discusses. I did find it a challenge to tie together all these concepts in a short work and tried to address this by alluding to episodes of the podcast beyond this particular episode and

series, acknowledging the ideas are much bigger than this short discussion.

In terms of the context of reception for this piece, I was very aware that my audience might be accustomed to listening to podcasts while doing other things, so I was careful to break complex sentences into shorter sentences (or even fragments, such as ‘my bubble’), so that listeners would be able to maintain concentration on the content. The intimate nature of podcasting – people often listen alone and often use headphones – also dictated the style of my writing, and I attempted to maintain a relatively informal, friendly tone, using inclusive language, direct second-person addresses and casual phrasing and rhythms designed to be spoken aloud. These choices also connect with my piece’s purpose, which is to engage listeners through personal reflection, even motivating them to send in suggestions as a way of sharing the journey. (To a lesser extent, the piece has the purpose to argue, in terms of prompting people to look beyond their own ‘bubbles’, but as this is a secondary purpose, I did not want to use forceful language choices.)

Given this is an episode from the second series of a podcast, the presenter already knows that her audience shares her interests. As a result, she can speak to them in a familiar way and can expect them to understand the topic and her perspective – this is another reason that there wasn’t a need for any forceful argument, rather an open sharing of experience.

Sample response 3: Short story

Craft a text that incorporates the idea of country. You must respond directly to the following stimulus in your response, and your text must consider the concerns of your chosen audience and purpose (express, explain, reflect, argue). Your text should be accompanied by a reflection on the writing process.

Stimulus: *‘Maps are not exact depictions of landscapes, they are representations of our connection to the world.’*

The Map of Us

He unfolds the map and smooths it out across the old wooden kitchen table. Twice, three times, four times, presses flat the creases with the heel of his hand. The many creases. This map has been carried so far, for so many years. Been folded and unfolded, stuffed in pockets in a hurry, carefully packed into suitcases; been spread out on picnic tables in the sun and in candlelight beside open fires in cabins; been consulted, marked, debated, disputed, consulted again, questioned, sworn at, revered. Loved. Some of the creases have become ruptures, and one corner is missing. But it has never been left behind, never thrown away, never replaced. It has been their guide, their agreement, their topography.

*

She holds the map loosely in her hands, hands limp on her lap. She doesn't open it.

It is the same map he has, and she wonders where he is right now, and where his copy of the map is. Does he still have it? Is he holding it? Is he looking at the roads they chose, the turns they took, the landmarks they revisited, the destinations they circled, the x-marks-the-spots where things mattered? It is the same map, but there were always two copies. One for each of them. And until not so long ago, all the folds, all the damage, all the markings were identical. But then something changed.

She holds the map loosely in her hands. She doesn't open it. She doesn't need to. She knows every road, every river, every coastline.

*

He smooths it one more time and looks closely. Was it a left turn at that intersection? Is that where they had gone? Is that what they had agreed? There is a highway there, and then a vast section of blank plains – country unmapped, full of surprise and discovery, hills and sparkling rivers and lush rainforests they

delighted in at every turn. Neither of them knew what they might find there but they went in together, open eyes and hearts ready for each new moment. Some were dangerous, of course: that's how unmapped terrain can be. Impassable scrublands, flooded wetlands, inhospitable desert. But it was usually easy to avoid those areas. They were visible on approach, and together he and she would take hands and find a different road, a different pathway, fertile fields or scalable cliffs. A new challenge. A new reward. New latitudes. Together, always together.

But at that intersection, did they both turn left? Or was that where everything changed and they didn't notice that they were no longer following the same route?

*

She remembers when the map was new. At first they pored over it constantly. Daily. Each evening before sleep. Which detour to take, which shortcut, which new road to veer off at, and always always always which little township or city or sight they were headed for. Should they change direction, should they stay an extra night here, should they cancel a visit there? And then, for months at a time they would forget to look at it, just turning left or right on instinct, following each other or synchronously picking the same course. But the map was always there if they needed it. They could always see where they'd been, talk about where they might go. And now. Now. Any lines she marks on her map will never appear on his. Any decisions she makes she will make alone. Left, right, back road, bypass, offroad ... entirely up to her. Just as his journey is up to him.

*

The maps are not real maps. The man and the woman are not touching real paper or ink or feeling folds and creases and rips. They are sitting, quietly, each alone in their space, reading the maps that are their memories, their records, their histories of the emotional journeys they took together.

This is the map of us, she thinks, as she holds it in her mind's eye, as she pictures every line and contour. This is the map of us, he thinks, as he smooths it over and over in his head, trying to find the place where they made the wrong choice, where they misjudged a junction. The coordinates where they left each other behind. This is the map of us.

Written reflection

The purpose of this piece is to reflect and to express. Given that a common strategy in such writing is figurative language, I decided to construct a whole short story that is an extended metaphor: the idea of maps as measuring and recording non-literal landscapes and terrains. Specifically, in this case, the map is an analogy for a relationship. This notion is also drawn from the stimulus, focusing on its characterisation of maps as ‘representations’. I have chosen to interpret ‘representations’ as relating to ‘symbolism’. In doing so, my story links emotions and emotional journeys with land features and routes, conceptualising ‘country’ as meaning the changing terrain of an emotional rather than a literal environment.

I’ve also taken inspiration from the mentor text ‘Split’, as I was particularly moved by the way it represents landscape in a very emotive way. I wanted to experiment with doing that in my story without making the story sentimental, so I concentrated on very concrete descriptions of physical landscapes, linking this with the sad story of the couple’s separation. My goal was to engage the audience imaginatively, so I didn’t want to overpower readers with emotional clichés and rather used quite literal language and sometimes even blunt sentences (such as the short fragments in the first paragraph), challenging familiar expectations of a sad break-up story.

A challenge I found in writing this story was that, in sustaining the analogy, I risked repeating terms. So I did some research and reading to widen my knowledge of cartography, discovering some terms that were new to me (for example, topography).

Sample response 4: Opinion article

Craft a text that incorporates the idea of country. You must respond directly to the following stimulus in your response, and your text must consider the concerns of your chosen audience and purpose (express, explain, reflect, argue). Your text should be accompanied by a reflection on the writing process.

Stimulus: *'Maps are not exact depictions of landscapes, they are representations of our connection to the world.'*

Distorting the world

Have you ever heard of the Eckert IV projection? The Hobo–Dyer (or even more fun, the Hobo–Dyer upside down!)? The Boggs eumorphic? The rectangular polyconic? What about the words retroazimuthal or pseudoconical? Chances are, unless you're a professional cartographer or a geospatial analyst, you probably haven't come across these names (or maybe even the words cartographer or geospatial!). But what they refer to is important, no matter what you do for a living. They're all terms for characteristics of world maps: for example, which of the basic metric properties (such as area and distance) a particular map preserves when it translates physical landscapes into two-dimensional representations.

We live on the surface of a sphere (unless you subscribe to particular conspiracies), but the way many of us usually picture it is on a flat map. And to turn a sphere into a rectangle on a page, all world map projections, without exception, perform some sort of distortion and compromise to fidelity. The commonly used Mercator projection, for example (which is what many Australians have grown up seeing in our school textbooks, on the news and online) preserves angles at the expense of distances. While this was useful for the navigational purposes for which it was originally devised in the 1500s, it completely misrepresents the relative sizes of many countries. For example, we're accustomed to seeing Alaska much larger than Mexico (in reality, it's much smaller).

In reality, South America is almost double the size of Europe. In reality, Australia is more than three times the size of Greenland.

Why does it matter, you ask?

Well, first let's go back a step. What on earth (if you'll excuse the pun) do we mean when we say 'map projection'? Well, broadly, it refers to the representation of complex physical realities of space as something we can draw on a piece of paper. The process uses mathematical functions to translate coordinates from the globe into visual information on a page.

There you go, now you're a professional cartographer.

Of course, no offence to cartographers. It's quite a bit more complex than that. But that's enough for the purpose of this article, which is to explain why it's so vital that, as a society, we don't automatically accept the default maps we are given. It's important that we question whether they are the most appropriate in any given situation, or at the very least that we take responsibility for educating and informing ourselves so we understand some of the variables and their potential impacts. How do such distortions impact the way we relate to not just the continents and landscapes around us, but other people? How does the way we mentally envision the place where we live change the way we live in that place?

'Map bias' is not just a philosophical concept. It influences our sociopolitical perceptions of global value and significance. Aidan Sun for The Borgen Project (a non-profit advocacy organisation in America that fights extreme poverty) explains, for example, that 'The Mercator Projection puts emphasis on Europe and North America' because of where they are positioned on the map and how large they appear. 'Developing countries in Southeast Asia, South America and Africa appear minuscule in comparison, literally below the industrialised Western nations', which Sun argues 'reinforces the perceived inferiority of developing nations'.

In 2017, Boston public schools began to phase out the Mercator projection map (until then, standard across the education department in the USA) and phase in the Gall–Peters projection (which restores the real relative sizes of continents). This was initiated to better reflect the cultural make-up of the schools district and try to decentralise the dominant white colonial history. It’s just that important.

And size isn’t the only thing. Another issue is where we’ve come to expect countries to *be* in a map, and which part of the world is on ‘top’ – have you ever thought about the fact that there is no scientific reason for north to be ‘up’? It’s just convention (after all, floating in space, the planet we call home has no top or bottom). And only relatively recent convention, in the history of human mapmaking. Studies show that humans often think of ‘up’ as positive or desirable and ‘down’ as negative or undesirable. When we regularly look at maps of the world with Europe and America on top, we might begin to believe that these countries are superior in some way. (‘Superior’ literally comes from ‘superus’, Latin for above). It’s a powerful influence on our thinking. Try to picture a world map ‘upside down’, with Antarctica and Australia near the top. You probably can’t, can you?

This is why we need to do better. Our thinking needs to be flexible, not rigid. We need to be open to other people’s experiences of the world in order to live in a respectful global society. We need to understand that our own view of ‘reality’ isn’t always the only one. Or even the ‘real’ one! There’s no such thing as a perfect or unbiased map of the world. So let’s make sure we don’t behave as though there is.

Written reflection

The stimulus for this task inspired me to consider the idea that maps – as representations of the physical world we inhabit – aren’t objective truths. I had heard of the different types of map projections, and so I began to research what this really means,

and what some of the implications are of representing the globe in one way at the expense of another. This connects with the idea of ‘country’ both in terms of the way we view and understand Australia in comparison to other countries, and also in terms of how motivated we are as humans to document the lands we inhabit, and therefore record ways of moving from one location to another. It also links with how visual representations of the world shape our sociological understanding of our surroundings.

The purpose of this opinion article is to argue for a less complacent relationship with the way we visualise the world. The article introduces numerous ideas about the difficulty of representing three dimensions in two dimensions. It explores various perspectives – such as the idea that the Gall–Peters projection’s more faithful representation of countries’ relative sizes has strong merit in terms of shaping international relations. Underlying the argument is the fact that *no* representation is unbiased, so I structured my article around presenting a range of different perspectives, not a proposal for one projection over another. I also explicitly state the article’s purpose (in the sixth paragraph): an appropriate strategy for the text type.

As the article is written for an (imaginary) Australian online public interest website, it assumes a shared context, such as the fact that readers are likely to be most familiar with the Mercator representation of the world, and that they are not members of a special-interest mapping group. This dictated my choice of vocabulary and phrasing, and a tone which is semi-formal but also conversational, despite the complexity of the subject matter. I tried to achieve this by, for example, the occasional use of humour (e.g. ‘no offence to cartographers’). I also aimed to engage the readers by interspersing hypothetical questions and thought experiments throughout. This is a technique Yumna Kassab uses (though primarily with a confrontational rather than a collegial tone) in her piece ‘The conquest of land and dream’.

To strengthen the potential power of the argument, I chose a first-person plural voice, which is likely to convey a sense of authority (the opinions are not just one author's) while still maintaining a personal connection with the reader, therefore encouraging them to trust the writing. I've also incorporated evidence (for instance, quotations), as is appropriate for this style of text.

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