



G.A.T.E.WAYS is an independent organisation offering challenging and enriching activities and experiences to develop and extend highly able children. Established in 1994, G.A.T.E.WAYS runs a range of stimulating school programs as well as the Saturday Brainwaves Club.

This challenging and fun two-day program will introduce young writers to a genre that is rarely explored at school in any depth. *Life writing* involves turning different events in our lives into plot arcs and the people (and maybe the animals!) in our lives into characters. It is a broad category that includes autobiographical writing, memoir, personal essays, and auto-fiction (fictionalised autobiographical writing). It encourages individuals to reflect on how experiences precipitate change and personal growth, and to show this using a range of creative techniques. Over the course of the program we'll engage in a range of writing exercises to unleash your creativity and assist you to tell your own life stories. And no, you're never too young to write about your life!

Bring along:

A notebook, pens and pencils, snacks, lunch, a bottle of water, and two photographs of you and/or your family. Please also bring along a sturdy shoebox (or other box around that size) and an object that is special to you.

Prior to the program:

Compulsory text: *It's Trevor Noah: Born a Crime (YA Edition)*.

If you have already read this book, or would like to read additional books from the life writing genre, read *Mao's Last Dancer (Young Readers Edition)* by Li Cunxin and/or *I Am Malala (Young Readers Edition)* by Malala Yousafzai.

Day 1: Session 1

We'll begin by unpacking what life writing means as we explore the themes and ideas from *It's Trevor Noah: Born a Crime (YA Edition)*. Noah grew up in South Africa with a black South African mother and a white European father, at a time when it was illegal for mixed-race couples to marry or have children. Noah, now a comedian, writer, producer, political commentator and actor, used his humour and wits (and some mischief) to surmount the many obstacles he faced. We'll discuss Noah's depictions of race, gender, poverty and family issues in his book through characterisation, non-linear narrative structure, tone, foreshadowing and allusions. As a creative and unique way to process our thoughts and responses, and as an alternative to journaling, we'll start work on our own literature boxes. We'll build up images and words on the outside of our boxes to represent the themes, settings, characters and ideas in the text and our overall feelings and responses to the book.

Day 1: Session 2

It's time to get creative with characters and settings! To encourage ourselves to go beyond our comfort zones, you'll create a profile on a person, place or object that will appear in your story in a style that is not your usual choice – for example, if you are very visual, focus on the auditory and represent a person or place through song, or if you normally love to write descriptions, use a visual medium like collage or drawing. Once you've created a few profiles, we'll get our characters talking, and we'll describe a character's reaction to one of the settings or objects (such as Noah's description of the Sunday he was "hurled from a moving car"). Using your literature box, photographs and the object you brought with you, you will start to create your own life writing pieces in response to a prompt (for example, write a story about a time when you were talked into doing something you later regretted.) We'll finish the day by coming up with a 10-word memoir – a very short version of what your autobiographical writing might be about (for example, Noah's might be 'Growing up in South Africa when my existence was illegal'. This will help you get to the very heart of your story.

Homework: Take your literature box home and continue work on it. You can fill the box with writing you have done (today or anytime), objects you associate with your writing, stories that you love, photographs, images and memes that illustrate your writing and objects from your own life. You might also use song lyrics, quotes, designs and symbols that are meaningful to you. Don't forget to bring back your literature box next week for Day 2! My box contains pieces of writing I have written at different times in my life (some published, some just for myself), quotes from my favourite writers (Maria Tumarkin and Audre Lorde), photos from a writing workshop I attended in Chamonix, France, letters from some of my former students, and items that inspire me to keep working on the memoir I am writing (I will show you some of these at the workshop).

Day 2: Session 1

We will start off by looking at shorter examples of life writing (e.g. personal essays) and tease out what we like about their format, tone and style. Then it's time to bring out our literature boxes. What have you put in your literature box? Why was this important to you? What ideas can this give you about writing about your life? Is there anything missing that you think should be there? You'll choose two things from your literature box and use them as a prompt for a piece of life writing.

Day 2: Session 2

This afternoon it's back to our text *It's Trevor Noah: Born a Crime*. We'll identify what we consider the most powerful creative non-fiction techniques used by the author and compare these with the earlier personal essays (for example, the way that Noah uses comedy to show how difficult some of his experiences were.) We will discuss the advantages and disadvantages of memoirs and personal essays and whether you prefer book-length memoirs or short personal essays, and why. We'll explore story arcs and narratives styles, and spend some time writing and incorporating the techniques into our own writing. At the end of the day, you will have the opportunity to read a short excerpt of your writing at a literary reading for parents.

About the presenter:

Roz Bellamy is a writer, editor and researcher whose work has appeared in *The Big Issue*, *Going Down Swinging*, *the Guardian*, *Kill Your Darlings*, *Meanjin*, *SBS*, *Seizure*, *Ten Daily*, *The Huffington Post* and the *Sydney Morning Herald* as well as other publications. Roz's nonfiction writing was shortlisted for the Scribe Nonfiction Prize in 2014, and Roz won the Stonnington Prize for Poetry in 2016. Roz is a PhD candidate at La Trobe University, researching life writing and identity formation. Roz is also the online editor at Archer Magazine.