



CREATIVE TECHNIQUES FOR WRITING AND STORYTELLING

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Abstract

The theoretical background of the topic is based on a process-based writing strategy rooted in cognitive psychology, specifically focusing on creative writing triggered by an external impulse (in this case, a visual stimulus). During creative writing, the writer creates something new based on their subjectivity, highlighting free associations, emerging experiences, feelings, impressions, and personality, thus allowing for self-expression while developing self-confidence and self-esteem. A stress-free environment, an open task formulation tailored to the learning group, and a supportive teacher attitude that makes all this possible are prerequisites.

Taking the above into account, we organized a creative writing workshop where 15 high school students could try their hand at creating their own works based on visual impulses. The students could choose from various thought-provoking images and then collected associations related to their chosen image, which they represented in a word cloud. Following this, they created independent written works in various genres, forms, and text types based on the chosen image and their associations.

Keywords: *creativity, productive imagination, self-expression, creative writing, visual arts*

1. Introduction

Those born after 2010, the oldest members of the alpha generation, are now finishing primary school and will soon enter secondary school. They, and those younger than them, are the ones who have not lived in an era without social networking sites, mobile and smart devices, and they are the ones who have already experienced the challenge of learning in a digital extra-curricular work environment. They are no strangers to multitasking: they are constantly exposed to a myriad of stimuli in different channels, in parallel. Their natural mediums are communication channels that assume and enable immediacy, and this accelerated rhythm permeates every aspect of their lives.

Today's educational arenas and actors must respond to their needs. The needs of an age group that tires of monotony quickly enough, with a constant need for variety, excitement and experience, preferably through several channels. They are the ones who prefer to spend their time in adventure and theme parks, playing bubble football or paintballing instead of going to museums on a class trip.

There is a continuous effort for methodological innovation and change in pedagogical approach, there are many solutions and good practices that are forward-looking and approaching the alpha generation, to mention just a few: the use of cooperative methods (H. Molnár, 2013), operating a gamified assessment system (Magyar and Magyar, 2016), creative-productive text processing (Törteli, 2013), RWCT techniques (Magyar, 2022; 2023a), experiential pedagogy (Tóth, 2003; Csehiová - Tóth-Bakos, 2022). Many of these are working, but in general, the quantity of undifferentiated and inaccessible curricula, large class sizes and the role of teachers trying to comply with the curriculum still dominate. Some of the innovative good practices listed above have been tested in practice by the author of this study and the results are available in the form of publications. In this paper, I will describe the methodological potential of creative writing on visual stimuli, using the example of a writing seminar organised in September 2023 as part of the Researchers' Night.

2. Theoretical background

The broader theoretical background of my study is the process based writing concept, rooted in cognitive psychology. In a narrower sense, the conceptual background is provided by the theoretical underpinnings of methodological approaches such as creative writing, experiential pedagogy, and techniques for developing reflective and self-reflective critical thinking (e.g. RWCT - Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking) (Bárdossy et al, 2002).

2.1. *The process-based writing concept*

Research in cognitive psychology has contributed a lot to the description and understanding of how texting works. The concept of process-based writing has also developed from the views of cognitive psychology. Flowers and Hayes (1980), in their recursive model, divide writing into three stages: planning (determining rhetorical purpose, addressee and form), shaping and revising. Planning and revising are emphasised in their model; these stages are considered to be crucial to the writing process, and therefore require time, according to those who believe in process-based writing strategies. Their model is called recursive because they consider the first draft of the finished text to be a draft on which any number of local or even global changes can be made. De Beaugrande's (1984) interactive model distinguishes different levels, but this model also includes the possibility of going back and forth between levels. De Beaugrande's model describes the process by which the information stored in memory in multiple forms is eventually transformed into a linear, coherent text. Bereiter (1980), in his model of writing strategy, distinguishes between levels of development of the ability to write, from the associative writing of the novice writer, through the performative, communicative and unified writing levels, to the level of the epistemic writer who sees his writing as an external observer, a critical, reflective reader. In their joint model, Bereiter and Scardamalia (1987) distinguish between the knowledge-constructing and knowledge-shaping writing strategies characteristic of inexperienced (child) and experienced (adult) writers. For a detailed discussion of the three models, see previous studies (Molnár, 1996; Magyar, 2023a).

Process-based writing can be compared with the results-oriented approach (Szilassy, 2012; Kisné, 2012), which emphasises the product, leaves little room for student freedom, the teacher determines the topic, timeframes, text type and genre, and then assesses according to specific criteria (typically: content, spelling, grammar, layout). In a process-based approach to writing, the writer's individual ideas are the main focus, with form and recording being secondary considerations. The learner may have choices and decisions about topic, addressee, genre or text type, and the assessment is also the result of a process. The emphasis is on sharing with peers and the teacher, and feedback and self-reflection by the writer on his or her own text, with the possibility of several revisions before the text reaches its final state. In process-based writing, the learner's reflections, personal feelings, associations, experiences and personality are given more space.

2.2. *How can writing become an experience?*

Writing is a creative process, and as with all creative processes, the creation of a stress-free environment is a prerequisite. Self-expression and the free flow of ideas can only work in a relaxed, trusting atmosphere. It is the teacher who can create the conditions for this. The teacher can do a lot to create a relaxed atmosphere by setting the tasks openly according to the characteristics of the group of pupils, by offering the possibility of revision and by not marking immediately after writing. An additional motivating factor can be the opportunity to give and receive constructive, non-discriminatory criticism (Haase, 2017).

Lessons in a creative atmosphere are more experiential and lasting, learning by creating makes students more confident (Takács, 2018; Kisné, 2011; Szaszko, 2019), develops their self-esteem, self-confidence, critical, "creative" thinking (Ohler, 2013). Csehiová and Tóth-Bakos (2022) summarise the essence of experiential education as follows. The activity is centred on experience, it takes place in a relaxed atmosphere, it provides opportunities for initiative, discussion of emotionally charged situations, opinion-forming, evaluation, self-expression, and it develops emotional intelligence, communication skills, mutual respect, acceptance, empathy, and, as a result, community and personal development, in which experience is rewarding and motivating. If the experience is positive, it is accompanied by a feeling of pleasure, which serves as an additional motivation, and therefore the main driving force of these activities is flow, the joyful and experiential immersion in the activity

(Csíkszentmihályi et al., 2010). Such an experiential creative process is described in the study of Magyar (2023b).

2.3. *Creative writing and its techniques*

The defining feature of creative writing is that the writer's free associations, emerging experiences, feelings, impressions, personality come to the fore in the process of creation (Benő, 2011; Kisé, 2011). The writer restructures his/her own existing knowledge to create something new, building on his/her subjectivity to create something new (Meisinger, 2002). Samu (2004) also sees creative writing exercises as an opportunity for self-expression. Writers can create uniquely in genres and themes (e.g. poems, short stories, songs, diaries, monologues, scenes), which allow them to develop their writing, develop their self-confidence and self-esteem, supporting their personal development.

According to Haase (2017), creative writing can be understood in two senses. He uses CW (Creative Writing) to denote creative writing in the sense of poetics, which is the competence of professional writers and poets. The skills can be learned in writing courses, writing circles and seminars organised by contemporary writers and poets. In these courses, the rules of creative writing in different genres can be learned through a variety of critical methods of evaluation and analysis (Raátz 2008). Another approach to the concept of creative writing has a methodological meaning. It is understood as creative writing in mother tongue, second language or foreign language methodologies (Haase, 2017), which aims at developing text composition competence.

Benő (2012) distinguishes six methods of creative writing based on Ingrid Böttcher (1999). She distinguishes between associative processes, language games, writing according to prescriptions, patterns and rules, writing related to literary texts, writing on the influence of an external stimulus and working with creative texts. Of these, I have used associative processes, writing according to prescriptions, patterns and rules and writing under external impulse in the writing seminar presented in the empirical part, and I will therefore write about these in more detail. Böttcher (1999) distinguishes two further subgroups of associative procedures, meditative procedures and playful-experimental procedures. In the former, the teacher takes the students on an imaginative journey, who, with their eyes closed, perform a guided internal imagery according to the teacher's instructions. After the meditation, students write down their impressions. Among the playful-experimental procedures, Benő (2012) includes two types of brainstorming, clustering and mindmapping, as well as automatic writing, call-word writing and acrostic writing. Writing according to prescriptions, patterns and rules is worth mentioning because the writing seminar included, for example, writing in the form of a knitted poem (dystichon or haiku) as an optional activity. During the workshop, each piece was created in response to an external stimulus, an image of choice. The participants created their own writing based on their feelings and fantasies, which, together with the chosen image, conveyed both verbal and visual messages.

3. Empirical research

In September 2023, as part of the Researchers' Night series of events, we organized a creative writing workshop for interested high school students. The program was held at the Eszterházy Károly Catholic University, Jászberény Campus, with the aim of sparking interest in creative writing among young people and strengthening the cooperation between the Campus and high schools in Jászberény.

Fifteen students attended the four-hour program, including six 9th graders, six 10th graders, and three 8th graders (they are in an eight-year high school program). All of them were from Lehel Vezér High School. The number of participants was optimal for a workshop, as more participants could have hindered the sharing of creativity and opinions.

The students were welcomed in a pre-arranged room. I arranged the tables in a U-shape to allow everyone to see each other and their creations. In the middle of the room, on a large, circular table, students found the necessary tools for the workshop: colored papers, glue, scissors, colored pencils, crayons, painting supplies, and various creative tools. Each participant received an A3-sized technical drawing paper to display their finished work. I placed 33 selectable images at the edge of the table, serving as visual stimuli for the creative writing exercises.

3.1. *Methods*

The sequence of the workshop was as follows. After a brief introduction, the students walked around the table, examining the pictures closely. Following this study, each student chose an image that caught

their interest. They then took their seats and started interacting with the chosen image by gathering associations related to it. They verbalized these associations, writing down everything that came to mind about the picture. Next, they received a task list containing the following 12 options:

- Writing a poem based on the image and associations, with no restrictions on the number of stanzas, lines, or rhyme types.
- Writing a poem in distich based on the image and associations, with a short description and samples of distich provided as an aid.
- Writing a haiku based on the image and associations, with a short description and samples of haiku provided as an aid.
- Writing a poem based on the image and associations and then transforming the poem into a concrete poem, with samples of concrete poems provided as aids.
- Writing a monologue in the name of one of the characters seen in the image and using the associations.
- Creating a diary entry for one of the characters seen in the image, using the associations.
- Writing a story that the chosen image illustrates, using the associations.
- Creating a comic scene for the chosen image, including writing and drawing the preceding and following scenes, using the associations.
- Writing a song to the tune of a known song (e.g., children's song, pop hit) based on the image and associations.
- Writing a prayer based on the image and associations.
- Writing a report based on the image and associations, with a short description of the content requirements of a report provided as an aid.
- Conducting an interview with one of the characters seen in the image, using the associations.

Participants could choose one of the 12 options, but they could also implement their unique ideas. After that, the organization of thoughts (still the planning stage) began, followed by writing and formulation phases. During the tasks' interpretation and execution, students could ask for help, guidelines, explanations, and feedback on their work so far. Those who finished writing were asked to display the chosen image and the related associations on an A3-sized technical drawing paper, along with the text they wrote, and optionally expand it with visual elements. The task had no time limit, only the program's time constraints. Those who couldn't finish but wanted to complete their creation could take it with them and submit it later. The program's closing element was sharing the current phase of the creations, concepts, experiences, emotions, and thoughts encountered during the creation process.

3.2. Images Used as External Impulse

As previously mentioned, creative writing during the workshop was inspired by external stimuli, specifically pictures chosen by students from provided options. When selecting images, I considered that they should be thought-provoking, evoke emotions in the viewer, potentially leading to taking a stance or expressing opinions, thus holding significant meaning for young people. The images were works of contemporary artists Pawel Kuczinsky, Yuval Robichek, Marco Melgrati, and Alireza Pakdel. Pawel Kuczinsky, a Polish artist and illustrator, addresses themes such as poverty, death, greed, and deceit through his satirical illustrations, providing a sharp critique of modern society. Yuval Robichek, an Israeli artist, focuses on human relationships and the problems of the modern world. Marco Melgrati, an Italian artist, creates humorous caricatures of contemporary society. Alireza Pakdel, an Iranian artist, is known for his thought-provoking, satirical depictions. All four contemporary artists share a common trait of promoting their art on social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram, thus reaching a wide audience, including young people.

3.3. Results of the Research

Each participant successfully chose an image that resonated with them; no two students picked the same image. Formulating associations went smoothly, indicating that the images sparked thoughts and resonated with the students.

The students also didn't hesitate when choosing from the available tasks. Each found a task that suited their personality and mindset, feeling competent to complete it. Most students (N=6) chose to write poems. It was remarkable to see the emotional and cognitive streams that the images triggered in

the students, and how they organized these streams into proper poetic forms. One student even transformed their own poem into a concrete poem. The haiku format also interested several students, with three attempting to convey their associations in this Japanese poetic form. Two students created comics incorporating the chosen image, two wrote diary entries, and one wrote a monologue from the perspective of a character in the picture.

Although I cannot present all the creations in this study, I highlighted four of them, which I will include here.

The first creation (see Figure 1) is by an 8th-grade girl (T1), who chose Pawel Kuczynski's depiction of a turtle represented as a selective waste collector, from which people look out like from a submarine. T1's associations, impressions, and thoughts, presented in the form of a turtle, address the destructive impact of humans on the environment, particularly the oceans, and water pollution. The student created a piece containing both verbal and visual elements, each detail carrying a message. She wrote about the pollution of waters and the destruction of wildlife as consequences of human activities, followed by a desperate diary entry from a turtle fighting for survival in the almost uninhabitable ocean due to human pollution. She then condensed her message into a haiku: "With white sand / Surrounding the vast deep blue / Lies life within." The verbal messages are made even more vivid and emphatic through visual elements.

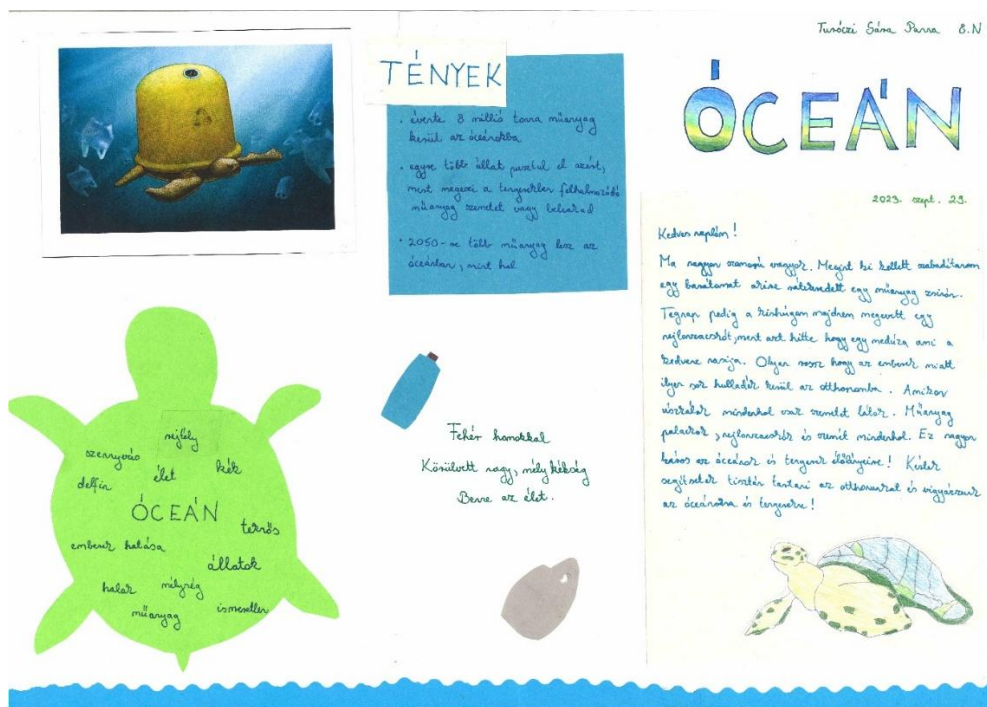


Fig.1: T1's work, inspired by Pawel Kuczynski's painting
Image source: artist's Facebook page

The second creation (see Figure 2) is by a 9th-grade girl (T2). She chose Yuval Robichek's poignant depiction of parents seesawing on their child's back. Her associations, presented in the form of a broken heart, speak about a troubled marriage, the child's guilt and despair due to it, and even the thought of suicide. The completed work visually and verbally represents turmoil and hopelessness. T2 articulated the child's thoughts in the form of a diary entry. Identifying with the role, she speaks in the first person, from the perspective of a child who can only interpret individual details of the events around them, poignantly portraying the fate of a child caught in the crossfire of divorcing parents' arguments.

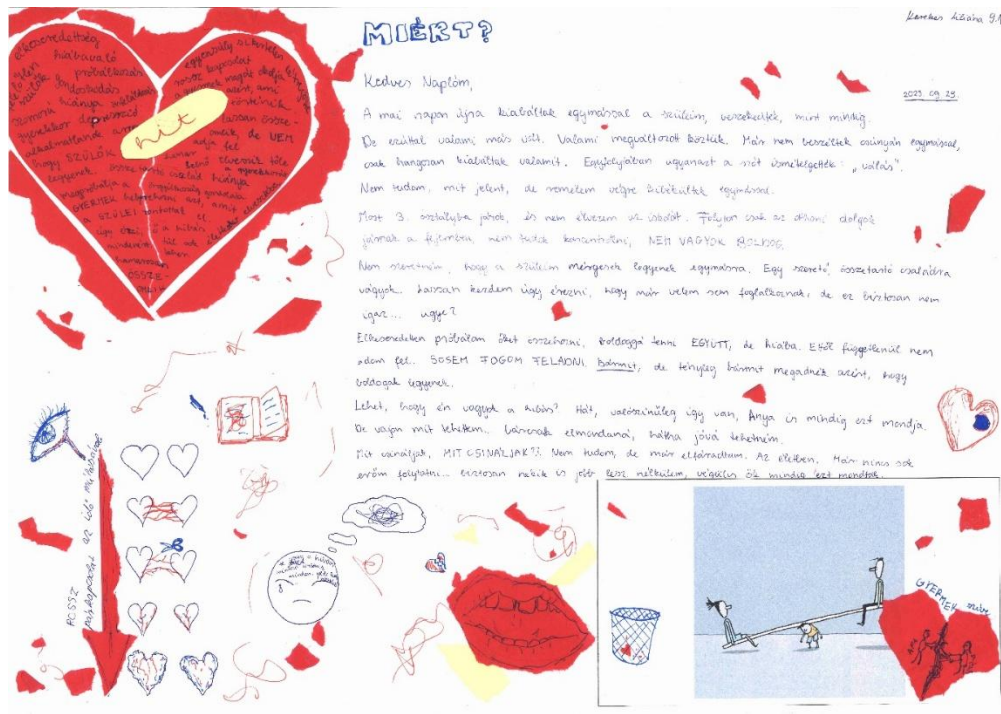


Fig.2: T2's creation, inspired by a picture by Yuval Robichek
Image source: the artist's Facebook page

The third creation (see Figure 3) is by another 9th-grade girl (T3). She chose Marco Melgrati's image depicting a goat finding a creative way to escape a maze: by chewing its way out of the hedge labyrinth. T3 interpreted the image as part of a comic scene, creating the preceding story panels and a concluding image. The story is followable and interpretable through the images and minimal text. For the goat, the path to freedom leads through a hedge maze, with only one way out within a set time. As time passes and the goat cannot find the exit, it employs a sudden creative solution: it chews its way out of the maze. The goat happily concludes that it was right to dare to change because it became free as a result.

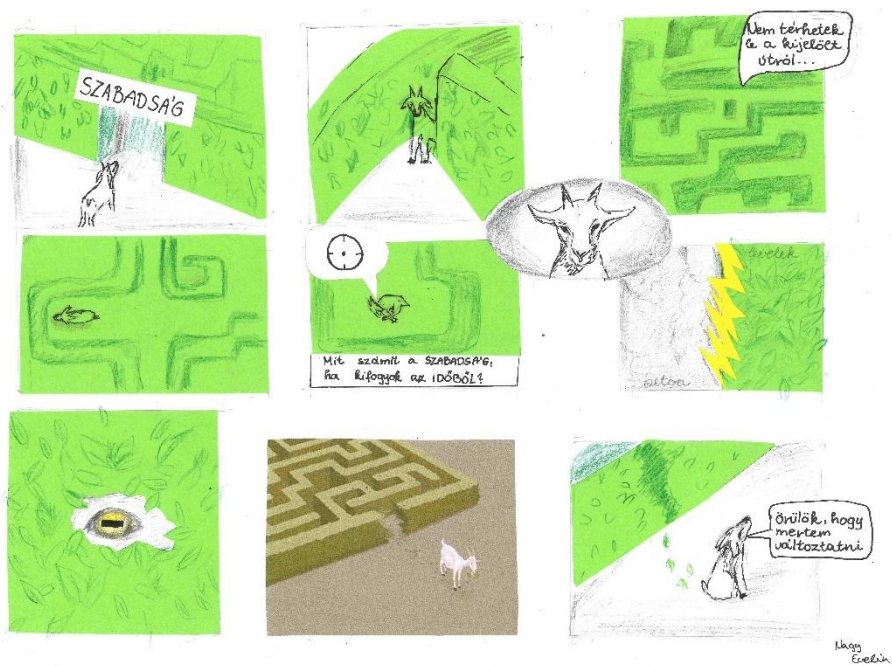


Fig.3: T3's work, inspired by the image of Marco Melgrati
Image source: the artist's Facebook page

The fourth creation (see Figure 4) is by a 10th-grade girl (T4), inspired by Alireza Pakdel's depiction. The image shows a soldier returning home from war to his family. T4's associations relate to the war, the trauma experienced during it, and the supportive family in the background. She also presented the image as part of a comic scene, specifically as the concluding illustration, and created a series of panels depicting the preceding events.

These panels illustrate the internal struggle of the soldier returning from war, showcasing the relief felt at the end of the war, the trauma endured, and the guilt associated with it. The returning father is no longer the same person who left, but in the moment of his homecoming, only one thing matters: seeing his loved ones again. The teenage creator visually presents touching and profound thoughts with a few words and fragmented sentences, highlighting the horrors of war.

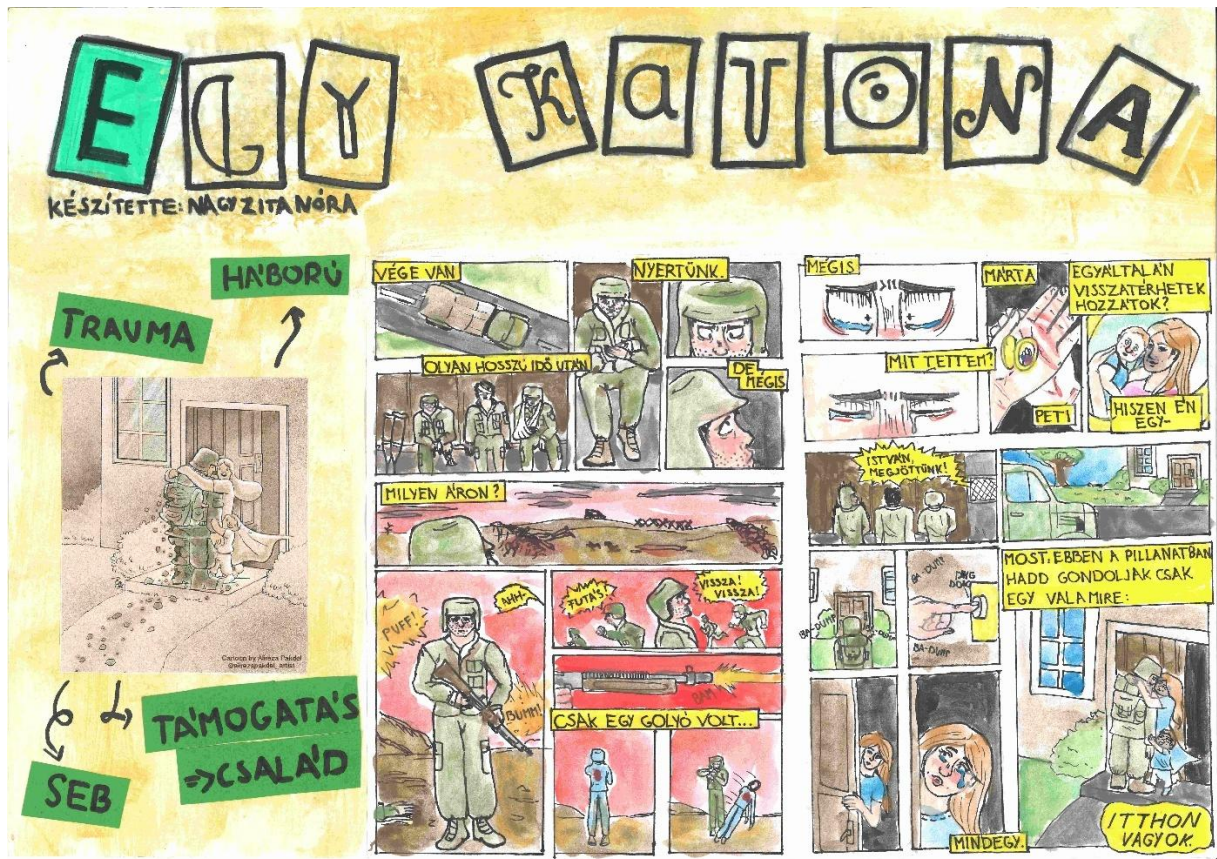


Fig.4: T4's work, inspired visually by Alireza Pakdel's painting
Image source: the artist's Facebook page

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The workshop confirmed that students have a demand for creative-productive activities that allow self-expression. The techniques of creative writing could be well integrated into teaching practice as interdisciplinary tasks from elementary school to higher education, yet they are not generally known and applied practices. The workshop also indicated that more such occasions are needed, which could strengthen the relationship and cooperation between secondary and higher education institutions.

5. Summary

In my study, I aimed to present creative writing as a methodological approach that supports text creation. I sought to answer whether a few-hour program advertised as a creative writing workshop, based solely on the participants' interest and curiosity, could serve as sufficient motivation to ignite and sustain their desire to create. I intended to examine whether a text creation process could be executed based solely on visual stimuli, following the principles of process-based writing, resulting in every

participant of the workshop being able to proudly showcase their own creation incorporating both visual and verbal elements.

During the workshop, we applied the techniques of creative writing supported by process-based writing, which is grounded in cognitive psychology, with the participation of 15 students from Lehel Vezér High School in grades 8, 9, and 10 who volunteered for the program. Among the creative writing techniques, the students tried text creation based on external stimuli (using an image).

By the end of the program, the participating students had completed their creative works, containing both visual and textual elements. The completed works were first presented to each other, reflecting on the creation process. Their feedback confirmed that we managed to create an enjoyable, creative-productive atmosphere in which they participated joyfully in every aspect, and they proudly presented their works resulting from the workshop. All students unanimously expressed a strong willingness to participate in similar programs in the future. Subsequently, their creations were exhibited first at the Eszterházy Károly Catholic University, Jászberény Campus, and later at Lehel Vezér High School.

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