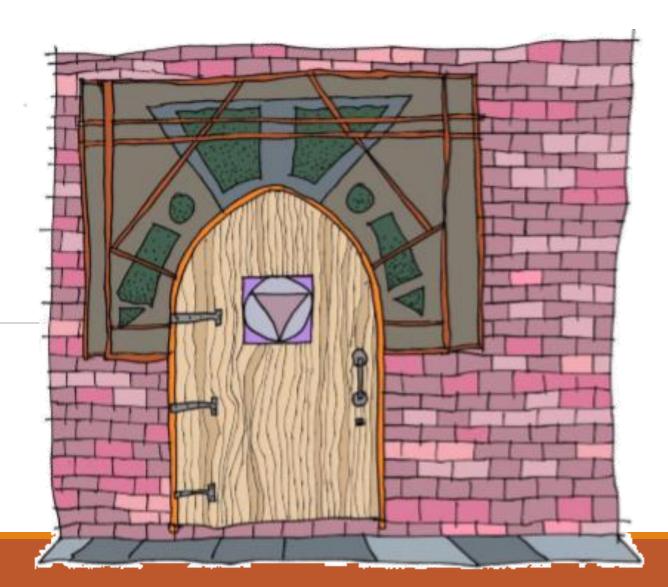# A Portal Story

By the end of **this** week, you will have written a portal story: your main character will go through a magical door to a new world.

The following activities **this week** will prepare you for your writing by the end of this week.

Activity 6: Comprehension

Activity 7: Grammar & Sentence Work

Activity 8: Through the eyes of a character

Activity 9: Planning a portal story

Activity 10: Writing your own story

Doors - the world of possibility

Introduction

Have you ever looked at a door and wondered what might be on the other side? Where may it lead? What may be hiding within? At first glance, a door is just a piece of wood, glass or metal that is opened and closed so that people can get in and out of a room, a vehicle or a space. But in the hands of a writer, a door represents a world of possibility, a world where things are not only hidden but often closed off and restricted. Together, through poetry, text games and narrative, we shall explore the potential that a door offers to you, the writer.

Activity Six: Comprehension

★ Read this extract from 'The Snow-Walker's Son' by Catherine Fisher.

★ Then, answer the questions on the next slide about the text.

The door was the last one in the corridor.

As the flames flickered over it, they showed it was barred; a hefty iron chain hung across it, and the mud floor beneath was red with rust that had flaked off in the long years of locking and unlocking.

The keeper hung his lantern on a nail, took the key from a dirty string around his neck, and fitted it into the keyhole. Then he looked behind him.

'Get on with it!' the big man growled. 'Let me see what she keeps in there!'

The keeper grinned; he knew fear when he heard it. With both hands he turned the key, then tugged out the red chain in a shower of rust and pushed the door. It opened, just a fraction. Darkness and a damp smell oozed through the black slit.

He stepped well back, handed the stranger the lantern, and jerked his head. He had no tongue to speak with; she'd made sure he kept her secrets.

The stranger hesitated; a draught moved his hair and he gazed back up the stone passageway as if he longed suddenly for warmth and light. And from what I've heard, the keeper thought, you won't be seeing much of those ever again.

Then the man held up the lantern and pushed the door. The keeper watched his face intently in the red glow, and his great hand, as it clutched a luck-stone that swung at his neck. The man went in, slowly. The door closed.

1. **The door was the last one in the corridor.**

What is the significance of the word *last*? Can you think of another context

where the word *last* has a significant meaning? e.g. *the last chance*.

2. How do the opening lines (highlighted above) set the mood of the story?

What are your immediate impressions?

3. Having spent a great deal of time reflecting on the significance of doors

and their appearance, what does this description suggest to you?

4. Why has Fisher described the iron chain as being 'hefty'? What could the

significance of this word be in the context of the story?

5. **Darkness and a damp smell oozed through the black slit.**

How does this make you feel as a reader? What is the relevance of both

darkness and a damp smell? Do either of these surprise you; if so, why?

Activity Seven: Grammar & Sentence Work

SEMICOLON FOR INDEPENDENT CLAUSES

A semicolon can be used between independent clauses that are closely related in theme. In the following sentences, Catherine Fisher chooses to use semicolons in both of these sentences rather than using a joining word (conjunction) like because.

• The keeper grinned; he knew fear when he heard it.

• He had no tongue to speak with; she'd made sure he kept her secrets.

★ In your opinion, why has she made this choice and what impact does it have on you as the reader?

★ Can you write two or three sentences of your own that illustrate the power of the semicolon over the use of a conjunction?

ADVERBS

In the sentences below, the adverb 'slowly' is used to describe how the man enters the room.

The man went in, slowly.   Slowly, the man went in.

The man went slowly in.   The man slowly went in.

By changing the position of the adverb, we can often either alter the meaning or add emphasis to a sentence.

★ Try playing around with the adverb position in the sentence below. Consider how it alters the meaning and where the emphasis is best placed.

Cautiously, Samantha crept towards the door that stood before her.

★ Now try this out with a sentence of your own.

Activity Eight: Through the eyes of a character

First, think of your character – it's easier if you base this on someone you know.
- What are they called?
- What do they look like?
- What sort of a person are they (miserable/friendly/kind/aggressive)?
- What do they say?
- What do they do?
- How do they treat other people?
- How do other people treat them?

Start of your piece with a simple opener to drop the reader straight into the action:
- Samantha stared…
- Ali hesitated…

★ Compose a short piece of descriptive writing based on seeing a mysterious door through the eyes of your character.

★ Now, imagine your main character is walking along the road when they come across a mysterious doorway. Describe this through their eyes. Use the model to help you.

• Show the setting through the eyes of the main character (MC)	Samantha stared.
• Describe the door/portal. (You may like to use two sentences that are closely linked in meaning and connect them with a semicolon.)	There, rising out of the cliff, was an unfamiliar door; its metallic panels were tarnished in rust.
• Add some more detail.	Paint flaked off the brittle walls that made up its frame and the door handle rattled in the bitter breeze.
• Include an adverb to hint at how the MC feels. Remember, you can move the position within the sentence.	Slowly,
• Use the pattern of three to advance the action and inject a sense of pace into your writing.	Samantha gazed all around her, took a deep breath and stepped forward.

Activity Nine: Planning a Portal Story

- Main character (MC) finds magical portal & enters new world
- Describe new world

- MC explores this new world & encounters a problem
- MC has to escape & return through the portal
- MC cannot find portal again (sometimes brings back a memento of new world)

★ Using this underlying pattern, plan a few portal stories of your own.

You may like to draw upon your own personal experience as well as your wider reading and imagination. Here are two pictures that may help you.

On the next slide there are two example plans that may also help you.

Some examples to help:

Underlying Pattern	Story Idea 1	Story Idea 2
Main character (MC) finds magical portal and enters new world	Elif is playing in her Grandmother's garden and notices a small fairy door. Touches door and shrinks/enters.	Josh and Archie playing hide and seek in their house. Archie opens hatch in the roof and discovers new world.
Describe new world	Arrives in an underground world full of caves, giant toadstools and magical creatures.	Transported to life on-board an enormous sailing ship in Tudor England.
MC explores new world and encounters a problem	Elif explores new world and enters an area strictly forbidden. Picks magical flower	Ship is thrown into battle.
MC has to escape and return through the portal	Alarms sound and Elif runs. She is chased through the magical world by unknown threat and escapes.	Archie desperately searches for portal and way back to own world.
MC cannot find portal again (sometimes has brought back a memento of new world)	Elif cannot find fairy door again, but the cut flower lives on forever reminding her of her Journey	Archie escapes with small pouch of gunpowder in his pocket.

Activity Ten: Writing your own story

You now have all of the tools required to write your own portal story.

★ Now write your portal story, drawing on all that you have learned – use your plan! Don't forget to share or publish your work – great writing deserves an audience!