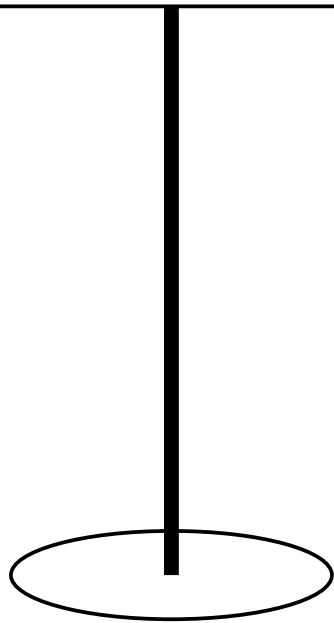
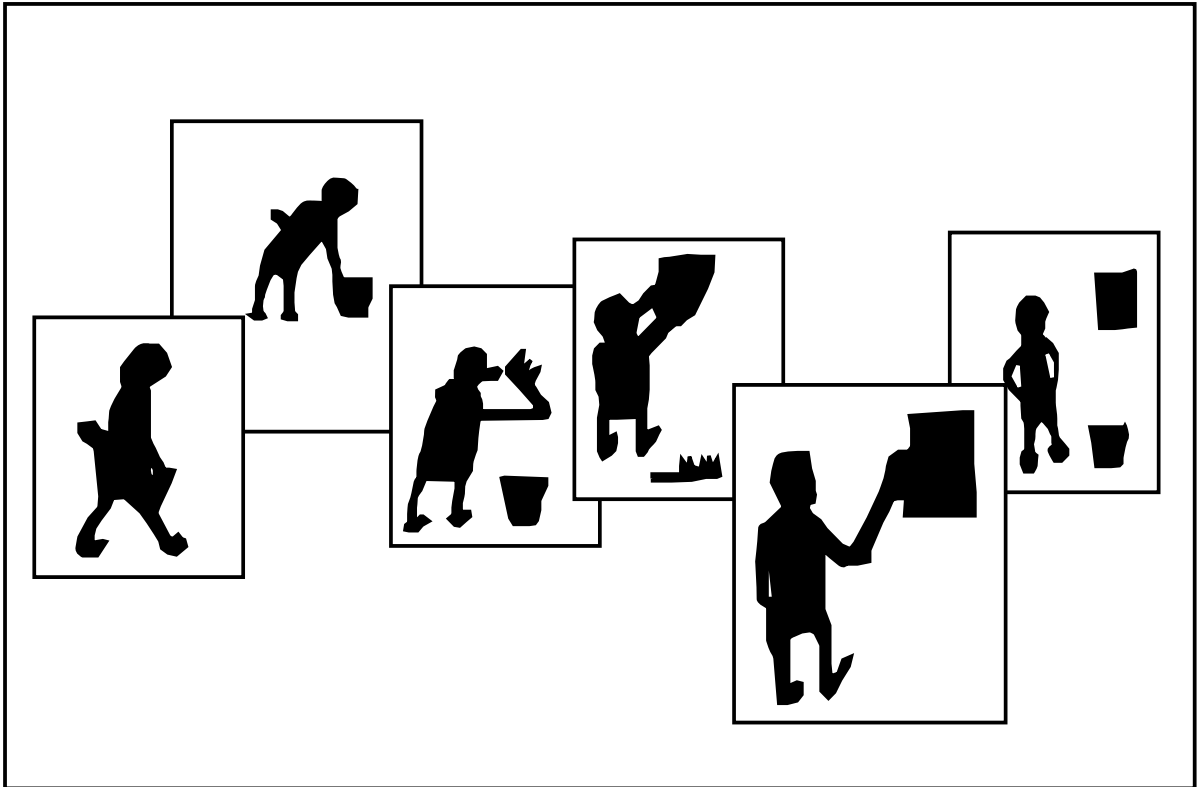


# Loesje

**a course in creative writing**





**A THOUSAND MILES  
FROM HERE**

**THERE IS  
ANOTHER PERSON  
SMILING**

*Loesje*

A THOUSAND MILES  
FROM HERE

THERE IS  
ANOTHER PERSON  
SMILING

*Loesje*

Hello there,

What you see in front of you is an adaptation of the workshop manual as we give to the people who give workshops for the organisation Loesje. We've been using this method for writing texts, Loesje slogans, within our own organization. From 1994 on, we decided to offer these workshops in a slightly adapted form to other organizations as well. Since then, we've been teaching our creative writing method at ministries, youth centres, schools, tax departments, environmental organizations, police departments and so on. Because the art of getting topics back to basics and summarised into one catchy sentence, is an art that can be used by everyone.

*Loesje*

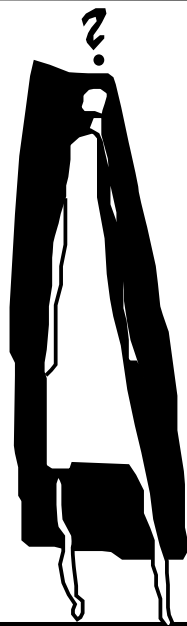
November 2006

Loesje is not a training centre for creative writing. It's the name of a Dutch girl who gave her name to a poster organisation, that, through making and spreading posters, tries to make people think about what is going on in the world. She stimulates people to form their own opinion, remain critical—also to themselves—and search for the news behind the news.

In the past 18 years, she has developed her own method of making these texts; even though all posters are signed “Loesje”, the texts are made by an international group of friends, who gather regularly on a local, national or international level to write about anything that's on their mind at that moment. Texts are mostly not made by one individual, but are created by the group, on paper, while writing.

The posters are translated and spread by the members, who, at the moment, are mainly living in Europe. Especially in Finland, Slovenia, Sweden and the Netherlands, large groups of members are active. The posters are spread by sticking them in the streets, the ultimate place to reach all people. There, people can be surprised by a posters, stand still for a while and smile, get angry, wonder or react in any other way.

This encouragement doesn't take place through long lectures or in big books, but by making posters with slogans. Everything she wants to say, she captures in one sentence. Keywords are positive, ideals, progress, humour, guts, initiative and action. She gives her opinion on all parts of life this way: both the items in the news, as things happening in daily life fill her posters. From refugees to summer love and going back to work to economic growth.

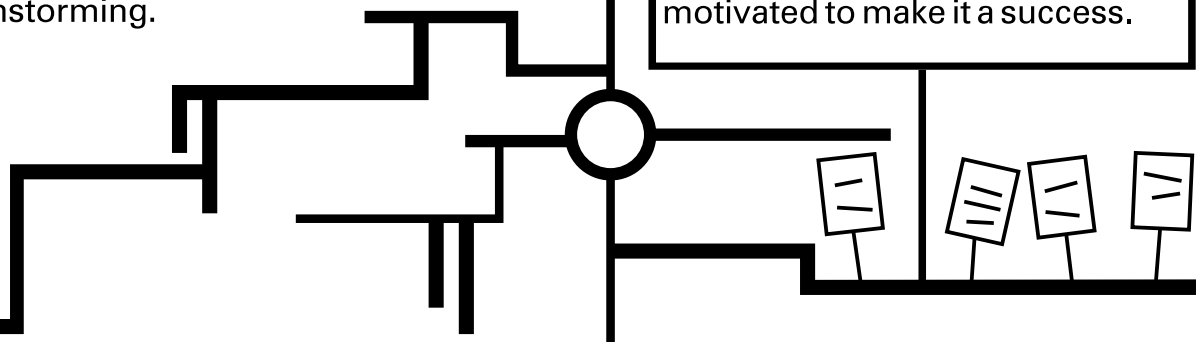


## Let's introduce Loesje

The power of texts has been proven in the past years. They won't cause world revolution directly, but their main power is to make people think and take action themselves, if they feel like that. Action, in this sense can appear in many shapes; it can be that someone finally opens his mouth to protest, or join that demonstration, but it can also mean finally leaving that job has been smothering you for years, thinking about all things that you've always considered “normal” or declaring your love to that one person that has been on your mind for years.

As was mentioned already, the making of posters is a group process. Several subjects to write about are selected, all participants receive one or two of these subjects, think about them and write down their thoughts, associations and opinions as short as possible, and pass them on to their neighbour, who reacts both on the subject and lets himself get inspired by the others opinions to write more, and passes those on again. The result is a huge list of texts on all the subjects, of which the most inspiring and sharp texts can be selected to be put on poster. Aims of the workshops creative writing are to let people speak for themselves, give people a way to express their opinion; look at subjects in a different way; make visible what's in people's mind; produce direct result; change frustration into initiative; creative brainstorming.

These posters can be put up in the streets, if they handle "general" subjects and feelings that live among all people. But they can also be focused on more specific subjects. For instance, a youth centre that wants to involve more young people in their activities can write texts and make posters with the young people who are already involved, and spread those in schools and sports centres and other places young people generally go. A company that wants to improve environmental behaviour with its employees, can organise a writing session to write about this on a way that is directly appealing to people without getting moralistic. Or an organisation that wants to start a new programme, can invite all people involved to write about it, look at the programme from a different point of view and brainstorm about new possibilities and ways to fill in this programme. This way, people will feel and be more involved with this new programme, and thus feel more motivated to make it a success.

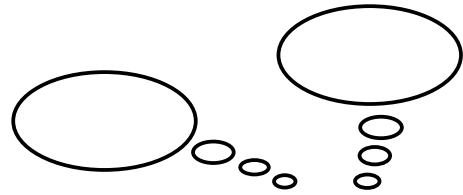


The last example mentioned, about the organisation brainstorming about the implementation of a new programme, is actually already a variation on the original shape of the creative writing method as Loesje first started it. In the original method, all attention is focused on writing one-liners about a subject. But of course, it is also possible to brainstorm about new idea on the papers. Both methods have been worked out in this booklet..

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# The workshop

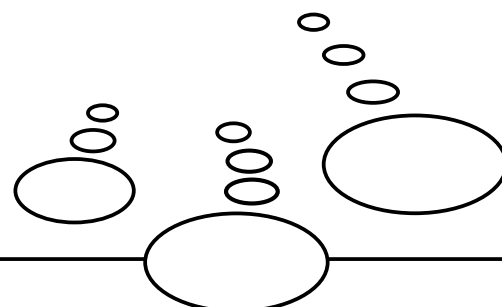
## IN PRATICE:



The most famous and used method to get new ideas, is the brainstorm. Brainstorm in its most primitive form simply means that everyone shouts out their ideas, associations and thoughts on a certain subject. Within Loesje, we choose most of the time for brainwriting; brainstorming on paper. Advantages are that it is less chaotic, and you can discuss more subjects or different aspects of one subject at the same time. Some basic rules for brainstorming, in any form:

1. Try to collect as many ideas as possible. The more ideas you've got, the higher the chance that there are some really useful ideas amongst them.
2. React on each other. The advantage of the collective brainstorm is that you can be inspired by the ideas of others. Of course you can put forward your own ideas, but by working out and elaborating on other people's ideas, the best plans can be created as well.
3. The weirder and wilder the ideas, the better. Lots of people are bothered by this inner voice telling them to quit when they've got another wild idea. Ask this voice to shut up. Because weird ideas most of the time turn out to be the most inspiring and definitely useful.

Four rules, that might seem quite logical, bur are ignored an awful lot of times. The dominant meeting-culture is one of getting to conclusions as fast as possible and in which wild ideas don't stand a chance. This also explains the success of this kind of creative writing workshop. At last, everyone gets the chance to say something, there is space for all ideas and it's much more fun than an average boring meeting. With the brainwriting method, you've already got the basic of getting great ideas. But there are more methods that you can use. One of them, we've called "ACCESS" and is an abbreviation for Associating, Comparing, Contradicting, Exaggerating, Stimulating and Suggesting?



ATTENTION  
REFUGEES  
THE PASSWORDS  
AT THE BORDER IS  
"CULTURAL  
DIVERSITY"  
*Loeje*

**Associate :**

Think of as many words as possible connected to the subject. What connotations the word might have, what do you associate it with, what feeling do you get with it, what does it mean to you.

ART  
NEVER  
UNDERSTAND  
ME  
*Loeje*

IS A CAR  
WITH CATALYSER  
SOMETHING LIKE  
A FILTER CIGARETTE  
*Loeje*

**Contradict :**

Turn your subject upside down, look for a contradiction in your subject, make aspects that are considered weak, strong and the other way around.

BECAUSE OF THE  
RISING SEA LEVEL  
SUNSET WILL BE  
TEN MINUTES  
EARLIER TODAY  
*Loeje*

**Compare :**

Compare the subject or idea, which might be quite unknown to you or to other people, with something that is well-known. Clarify the meaning of your subject, or the consequences it might have.

IT WAS A DAY  
LIKE THIS  
WHEN MARCO POLO  
DISCOVERED CHINA  
SO WHAT ARE  
YOUR PLANS  
FOR TODAY  
*Loeje*

**Exaggerate :**

Make your subject or the things it implies, ten times as big; a slight drizzle becomes a hurricane, a "kiss" an affair.

PEACE KEEPING  
FORCES  
SHALL THEY  
KEEP THE PEACE  
OR GIVE IT  
*Loeje*

**Stimulate :**

Motivate people into taking action. Tickle their thoughts, their sense of adventure by showing them how easy or rewarding doing something unusual might be.

**Suggest :**

Create an impression, use words with different meaning. Make people think about what they read, and think about what it implies and what its actual meaning might be.

Well, that's just to give you an impression of techniques that might be used for creative writing. But the most important of course is to think positive, keep an open mind and just get started. Once you've been taken by the stream, you just dive into it.

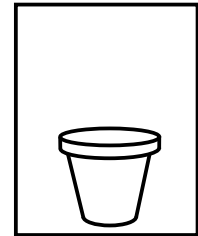
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# Step by step

## Eleven steps in giving a workshop\*

### 1. BEFORE THE START :

- check time, place, date where the workshop should take place;
- arrange a nice atmosphere in which both you and the participants feel at home;
- check what sort of organisation you're gonna give the workshop for; read some background material;
- take care that the workshop room is complete; table and chairs in the right position, working pens and felt tip pens, enough paper;
- take posters for decoration and support.



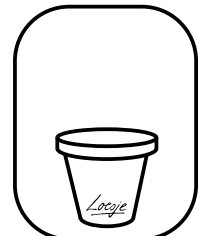
### 2. INTRODUCTION OF LOESJE :

- explain about Loesje and her aims;
- explain in short who you are and what you're gonna to do;
- adapt to the group but exceed the atmosphere directly;
- avoid discussion, questions can be asked afterwards;
- don't make it too difficult for yourself;
- keep it short.



### 3. THE HOW AND WHAT OF A WORKSHOP:

- making posters together about what concerns them;
- break through and exceed the daily routine;
- explain in short and clear terms; they don't know what's going to happen—which is a good thing—but some clarity is advisable;
- the workshop is a method and means of changing the reality;
- change disappointment to initiative;
- everything is allowed, but criticism;
- dancing in paper;
- atmosphere; creativity, tickling, standing still for a while, building, push in the right direction, active, stimulate, contemplate, enchant, surprise, enthusiasm.



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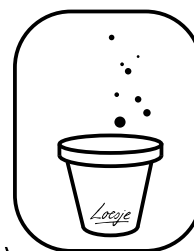
#### 4. WARMING UP:

- hand out paper and pens;
- choose a warm up game;
- don't tell in advance that you'll ask some of them to read out their stories;
- explain step by step;
- be fast, empty tables work best.

THE WARM UP GAMES. The most warm up game consists of a number of randomly chosen words with which a small story has to be written. What do stage diving, umbrella and Eminem have in common? Then someone from the group constructs a story about Eminem, who wanted to try stage diving as well for just once, but took an umbrella with him as a parachute in case the landing might be harder than calculated. Of course, great idea.

The most famous warm up game (plus variations):

- let everyone write down a word in the left upper corner of their paper;
- make everyone pass on the paper;
- read the word, and write down the first word that comes to your mind under that word;
- pass the paper on again (P.O.);
- read the last word written down and associate on that;
- keep on association, writing down and passing on for a round;
- circle two or three words you like best from the list (P.O.);
- write the name of a famous person next to it (P.O.);
- write down the name of something you use in the kitchen (P.O.);
- write down the name of a place (P.O.);
- write a story of what that person does on that place, with the kitchen thingy, and use the circled words in the story;
- read out (some of) the stories.



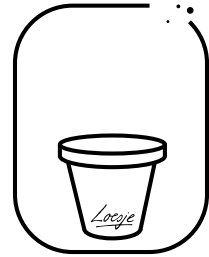
#### VARIATIONS:

- people write down two famous persons: let people write down a dialogue between those persons on the appointed place about the use of the object;
  - after step J.; write a newspaper heading with the famous person, the place and the kitchen utensil, and pass the paper on. Your neighbour writes the article belonging to the heading, using the circled words;
  - let the famous person write a love poem to the object, using the circled words and the object;
  - you can replace the famous person, the thing you use in the kitchen and/or the place by other things, for instance: a weather condition, a piece of food, some thing you take with you on holiday, a mood, a historical person, a number or a fantasy name. Use your imagination;
  - instead of a story, you can also make people write a letter, a dialogue, a newspaper article, a poem or a fairytale...
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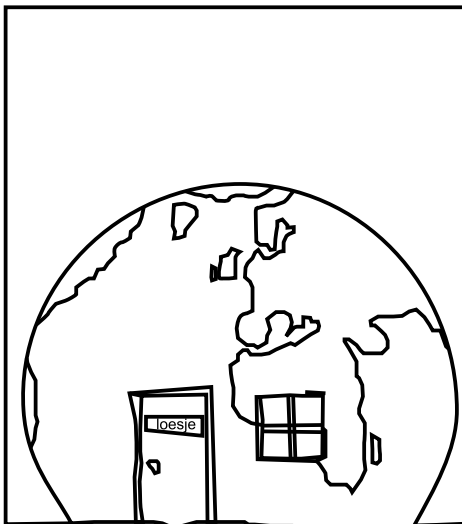
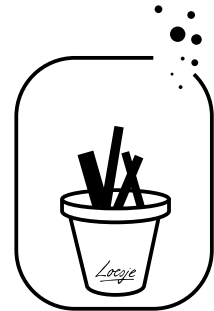
## 5. READ OUT:

- fun is more important than literary quality;
- start yourself if you can't find any volunteers;
- don't read out too long;
- no criticism or mocking.



## 6. COLLECTING SUBJECTS:

- get a varied number of subjects; atmosphere, the news, the central theme, what's on people's mind;
- ask people what's bothering them and turn that into inspiring subjects;
- don't make the subjects too big; "measuring the economic growth" works better than just "economy";
- collect all subjects on a big sheet on a big sheet or write them down on the papers directly.



## 7. EXPLAIN THE WRITING ROUND:

- subject on top the paper or in the middle;
- explain that people can write down whatever comes to their mind, and can then pass it on again;
- it is not obligatory to write something down;
- don't share at a paper too long;
- give them all freedom but just as a support;
- use the ACCESS method;
- react to what the others wrote;
- no yes/no/agree reactions, but questions, quotes, anecdotes;
- everything is allowed.





## 8. WRITING ROUND:

At the Loesje workshop we “write around”, which means that all papers are passed on through the group during the brainstorm. Just for fun, so you can read what others write and laugh collectively about the weird ideas from others. But also since thinking about different subjects sometimes cause surprising associations. For instance, Franck has just written a beautiful text about refugees, passes this paper on and then gets himself the subject of “cultural diversity”. The text “Attention refugees // the password at the border is ‘cultural diversity’” is born in no time then:

- take care that the sequence of the papers stays the same;
- whispering to your neighbours is okay, but no shouting to the guy opposite of you;
- stop before people get tired;
- keep some subjects in stock for fast writers.

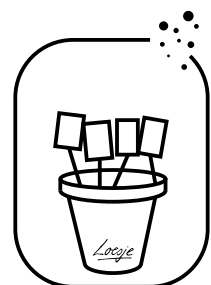
## 9. CIRCLING:

- by circling, people can “vote” for the best texts; the text with the most colours is the most popular;
- give a felt tip colour to everyone and ask them to circle all texts they like;
- you may circle your own texts;
- you may circle more than one text;
- be (self)critical;
- don’t cross out texts.



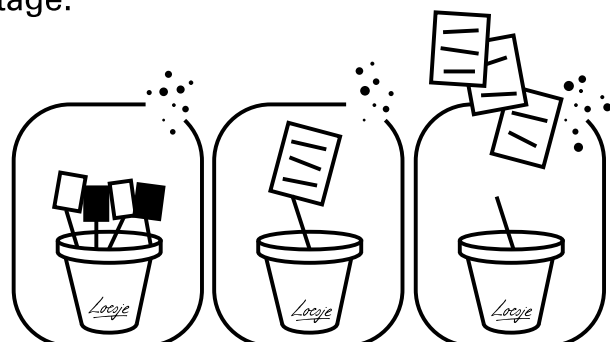
## 10. READ OUT:

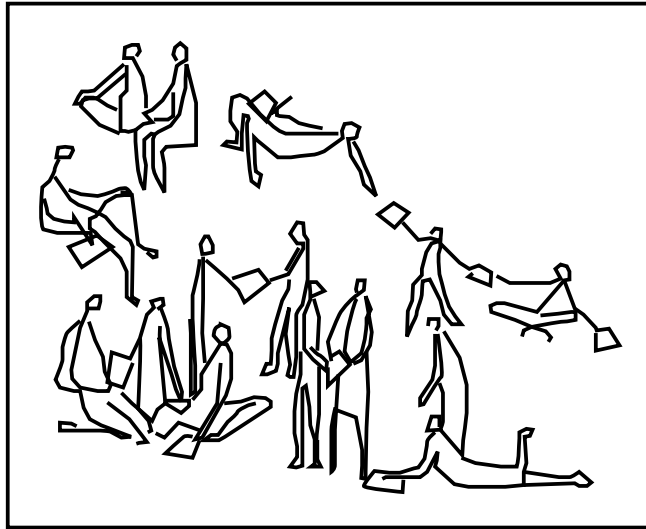
- if there is time, read out the best texts;
- if possible, let the texts be read out in some speakers corner;
- make one text alive and act it out on stage.



## 11. THE SEQUEL:

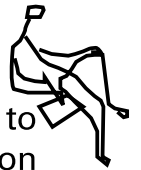
- this is not the end but the beginning;
- thank people for participating;
- ask them what they liked / didn’t like;
- best texts will be selected by Loesje;
- the layouted series will be sent to the organisation or the participants;
- if possible; make an appointment to go and stick the series.





## Variations on the Loesje workshop

Of course, there can be many varieties to this way of writing. You don't have to focus on the production of one-liners. You can use the write-and-pass-on method for obtaining other results. Two examples:



Collecting ideas. Brainstorming is a good way to collect creative ideas. People get inspired by each other, think further on other people's ideas, add to them and adapt them, so that in the end, you'll have a great number of plans. Make sure to formulate your subjects very clearly; if you want people to think about the subject, they need to know what they should be thinking about. For instance, if you want to have ideas for a good atmosphere, you can formulate as "the ten best ways to create a perfect place", instead of just writing "atmosphere" on top of the paper. Or you can write a question on top of the paper: "What would you change if you were the boss?".



Getting opinions. You can brainstorm about what people think about certain matters that are important in your organisation; write, instead of the subject, a certain statement on top of the paper, and let people write about that. For instance: “in our organisation, we shouldn’t become dependent on grants” or “we should lower the minimum age for the disco-night in our youth centre to twelve”. This way, everyone will have the possibility to say his or her opinion on the matter in a relatively anonymous way, so also the people who normally don’t contribute much to the discussion will have the opportunity to have say, and people will be able to react on each other without the discussion becoming a big mess. Another advantage is that all opinions are gathered on paper already.



Further on, the same rules count for this variation as for the “normal” writing; keep an eye on the energy level in the group, when people get tired, take a break or end the brainstorming session. Whispering between neighbours can be allowed to a certain extent, but shouldn’t become a distraction for the whole group, constructive criticism (on paper) is good, but “this is a stupid idea” or “I hate this” doesn’t contribute anything. Also crossing out other people’s ideas is not done; even if you don’t like an idea, other people might be inspired by it to change it into something better.

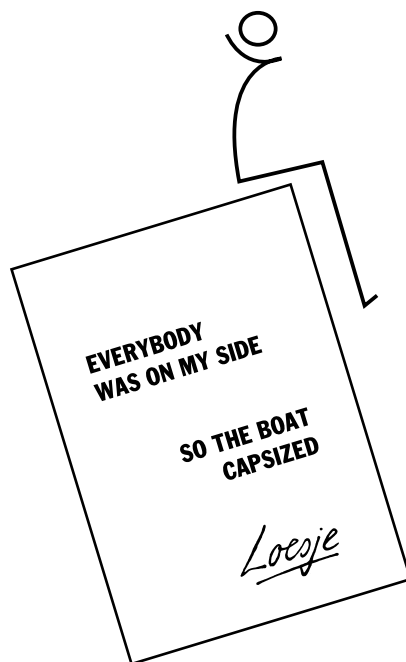


# The secret behind creative writing

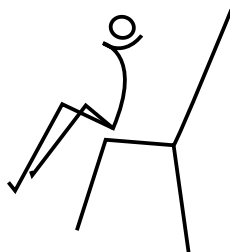
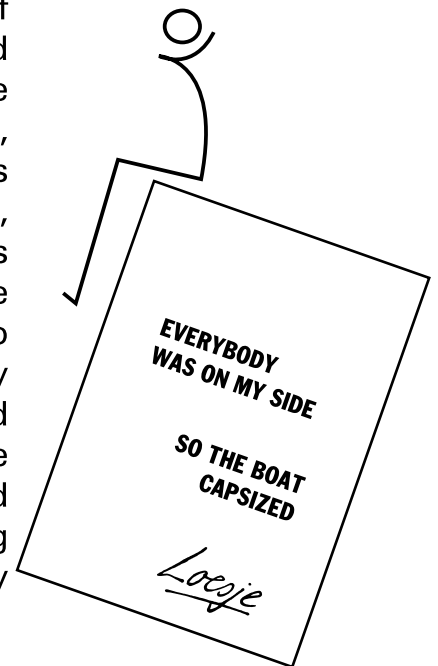
Anyone with a bit of experience in the Loesje way of writing has concluded two things:

1. It works.
2. It works with practically everyone.

HOW IS THAT POSSIBLE? How come that this way of writing almost always gives great results and beautiful, inspired texts? And that it leaves people feeling enthusiastic and full of good ideas? Especially, when you consider that quite a lot of people start of a writing session stating that they are not creative at all, or no good in writing. What is this “creativity” thing anyway?



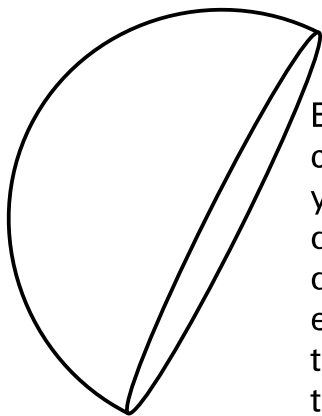
One story about creativity is by Betty Edwards. She wrote a book about creativity in relation to drawing. In this book, she describes a discovery that can be tested easily by everyone. After trying for years to teach her pupils to draw, she ordered them one day, as a sort of joke, to copy a drawing she had stuck upside down to the blackboard. To her surprise, everyone made beautiful drawings now. The drawing was one of a man, sitting on a chair with one hand in his pocket. Normally speaking, the students had immense difficulties to get the proportions right; especially that one hand in the pocket proved to be a nightmare. But now that the drawing was upside down, it turned out that all students, when turning their drawing, had made a very good reproduction of the original.



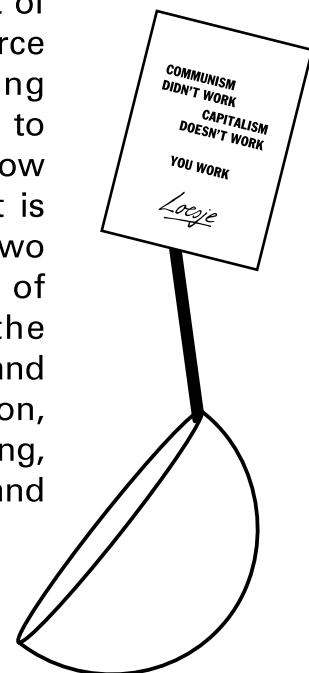
The explanation Edwards gave for this, also after speaking to her students about it, was that, because of the drawing being upside down, it became unrecognisable. They didn't see it anymore as a drawing of man on a chair, but as a bunch of lines forming some weird figure. And because they didn't know what they were drawing, they were studying the drawing much more intensively. They were checking exactly where the lines were and what the proportions were.

Of course, that was the intention with the normal drawing lessons as well, but then it didn't work out most of the time, because the students then knew what to draw and stopped studying it so intensively. When you know you are supposed to draw a man on a chair, you have an idea in your head already on what that should look like. And then you sketch more according to the image in your head, instead of reproducing the drawing. And when you come to drawing the hand in the pocket, you think "this is going to be difficult" which makes it fail. Your studying is obstructed by the expectation that it probably won't work. When you work or think too long on something, you can become too focused. You see ever less around it. And part of creativity is that you don't exactly know what you're doing, treading on unknown paths, that you leave the world as you know it.

This mechanism is exemplary for the mystery of creativity; usually, something is described as "creative" when it is new in one way or the other, different than usual, different than expected, breaking through habits.



Betty Edwards links this to a theory concerning the left and right part of your brain. There are still fierce discussions about there being differences that can be retraced to either part of the brains, but for now that's not so relevant. The point is that there seem to be (at least) two fundamental different ways of thinking and looking. It's the difference between conscious and unconscious, logic and intuition, knowledge and feeling, Yin and Yang, taught behaviour, controlled and impulsive, systematic and chaotic.



When you are drawing a face, you have to think about how that face looked exactly, or you have to try to truly observe and experience what a face is like really. When someone asks you to say a word, you can think about an appropriate word or what word might be meant, or just spontaneously say the first word that pops up in your mind. You can close your eyes and say "nothing" when someone asks you what you see, or look and maybe see a purple mermaid float by.

Two ways of approaching reality. Two ways of being. And it's quite clear that one way is dominant in this age, and the other is being quite oppressed. Maslov once did research on creativity and studied the behaviour of so-called "creative people". He came with this description:

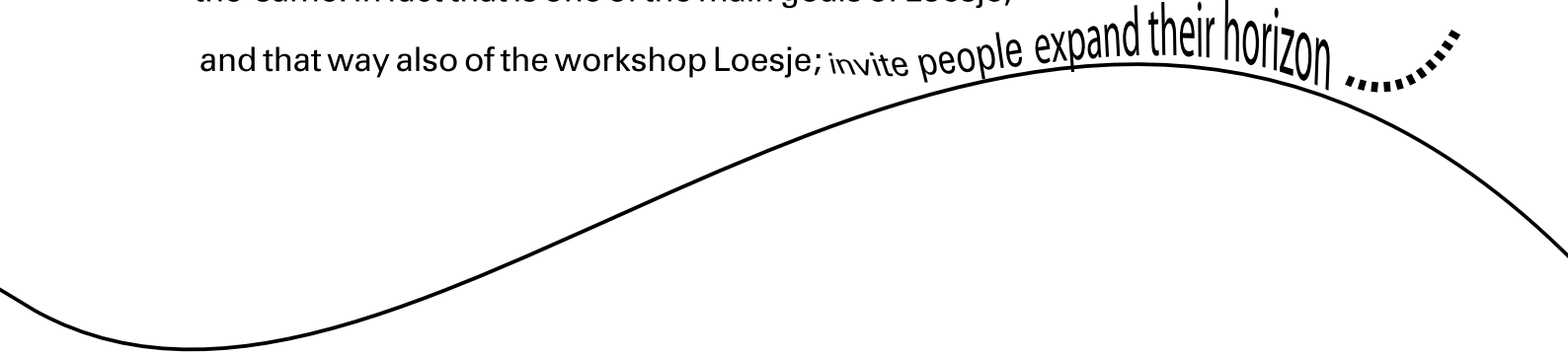
"An eccentric, unrealistic thinker, rather undisciplined, imprecise, unscientific, childish, irresponsible, wild, insane, uncritical and very emotional".

This is someone with whom the primitive, intuitive, associative thinking has been strongly developed and the logical, systematical and analytical thinking has remained underdeveloped. Quite a difficult colleague you might think. But still it's a pity there are so few of them.

Loesje sometimes seems to be like Maslov's "eccentric". But then again, she isn't. Often unreasonable, unpredictable and emotional. But on the same time, constructive, eager to learn and consciously working with the world. Both thinker and dreamer. Architect and Poet. But it is clear that Loesje tends to be closer to the dreamer and the poet than to the other two roles. A free hand for fantasy and imagination. Because mankind and society nowadays already are lacking ideals, humour and emotion.

So you might think that Loesje, in Edward's view, strives for emancipation of the right part of the brain. "Will you join me brainstorming in the sea of imagination". Brainstorming. That's what Loesje invites people to in her workshops. Let those brains out in the storm for some time, refresh, catch new ideas, cool down. Let go of the dominant, structural, rational, aimed-at-result thinking, and to give way to fantasy, imagination, humour, crazy things, fun and nonsense. Because that gives you space for real growth and progress. Progress that leaves the marked track, and breaks through the growth of more-of-the-same. In fact that is one of the main goals of Loesje,

and that way also of the workshop Loesje; invite people expand their horizon



# The Brugge workshop schedule

**Workshop Bridges for Trainers, Brugge, 17 September, 2001**


**TARGET:** Trainers in youthwork

**WORKING LANGUAGE:** English

**AIM:** Show and explain the Loesje way of brainstorm for making text

**DURATION:** 1 hour

## Steps and time schedule:

Part  (29')

- A.** Introduction of method and organisation. (5')
- B.** Introduction of people; the personal question. Participant tells his name and asks his neighbour a (not too) personal question: "what's your favourite movie", "do you have any pets", "what's the weirdest you ever ate", "how did you arrive here". (5') (B. alternative, when everyone seems to know everyone already; let everyone pronounce "Loesje").
- C.** Make a round of association; everyone writes down one word, passes the paper on, associates on that word and passes it on again. When they have their own paper back, the participants circle the two word, they like best. (5')
- D.** Add:
  - an object that fits into a box (pass the paper on);
  - a profession (pass the paper on);
  - a problem you might encounter when organising a youth event. (4')
- E.** Write a story about how a person in that profession would solve the problem you encounter, using the object. If possible, use the two words one way or the other in the story. (5')
- F.** Read out some of the stories. (5')

**2**

PART 1 (21')

**G.** Explain about looking at things from a different point of view, associating and using unusual methods/things for your purpose. Explain about some methods of creative writing: Associate, Contradict, Compare, Exaggerate, Stimulate, Suggest. (5')

**H.** Hand out subjects to write about. Subjects to write texts about:

- crossing borders;
- crisis management;
- language problems;
- engagement;
- culture mix;
- time pressure;
- trainers training;
- co-operation;
- partner finding;
- grant hunting;
- bridges for training;
- youth initiative;
- evaluating;
- contact making;
- alternatives for the cultural evening;
- salto;
- 10 guarantees for failure of your youth event;
- disadvantaged youth. (1')

**I.** Start writing, using the ACCESS-ways of writing. (15')

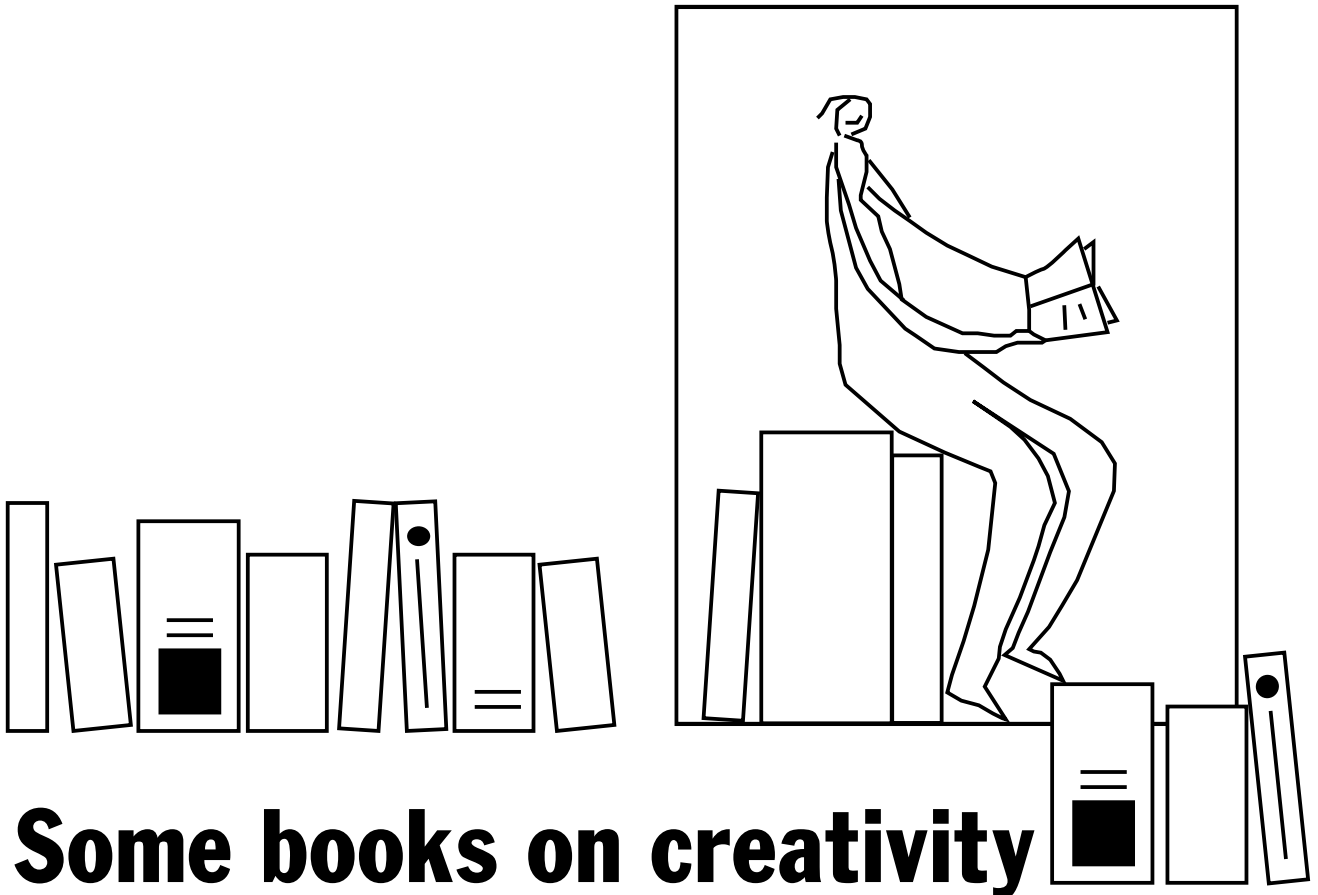
(Preferably, after 15 minutes, all papers have been seen and reacted on by everyone).

**3**

PART 2 (10')

**J.** Circling the texts you like best on the paper in front of you. (7')

**K.** Explain about follow up, goodbye. (3')



## Some books on creativity

**De Bono, Edwards** – Six Thinking Hats and Thinking Course.

**Edwards, Betty** – Drawing on the Artist Within: An Inspiration and Practical Guide to Increasing Your Creative Powers.

**Loesje** – Hey Peter, Let's Do Something About It.

**Neil, Alexander Sutherland** – Summerhill.

*Loesje*

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**WHAT DOES  
EAST AND WEST  
MEAN**

**WHEN  
THE WORLD  
IS ROUND ANYWAY**

*Loesje*

**IS  
YOUR WEATHER  
FINE**

*Loesje*

**YOU DON'T NEED  
TO SLEEP  
FOR PROGRAMMING**

*Loesje*

**BE  
CREATIVE**

*Loesje*



**TAKE A PEN  
EXPRESS YOURSELF**

*Loesje*

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