

Book Reviews

Alan Maley & Sharoon Sunny, *Exploring Creativity Through Writing: A Handbook for Teachers*, Routledge, 2025, 236 pp., \$43.99, ISBN: 978-1-032-70246-9

Reviewed by Jayashree Mohanraj

A classroom is a vibrant place where several brains are at work constantly imparting, receiving, absorbing and creating. What is important in this environment is to stimulate and challenge the pulsating brains to perform well. This is true of both the teachers as well as the learners. A lot of collaboration, cooperation and interaction is required to stimulate creativity.

Creativity involves two features, (i) sensitivity, and (ii) sensibility. Creativity is inherent in all human beings. Many a time this dormant faculty needs a nudge to blossom. In the classroom the onus is largely on the teacher to kindle this faculty in young learners. Learners certainly show more interest in learning when they are challenged, and get involved in learning when they are encouraged to think differently. For teachers who have to be on their 'creative toes' all the time in the class it is a refreshingly energising factor.

This handbook for teachers aims to offer help to teachers towards fulfilling this task. In the words of the authors, "for the teachers, creative writing has had beneficial effects both on their own command of English and on their development of self-knowledge and self-esteem. For their students, the way creative writing encourages genuine self-expression in a non-threatening atmosphere has resulted in a more motivated attitude towards the language and a willingness to take the risks without which little real learning can take place" (p.viii). The handbook deals with writing poetry and short stories from among the various genres of creative writing.

The book has three parts. Part I is the introduction; Part II deals with creative writing, mainly poetry; and Part III has discussion and activities for writing short stories. In Part I, the introduction gives a research base to the project with review of books that address the use of creative

materials in the classroom. The authors discuss what is creativity and attempt a fairly well-structured explanation while conceding the fact that to define creativity is not very easy. They discuss various forms of creative works like drama, theatre, visual arts and so on. Such materials can spur imagination in learners to use language creatively. They discuss creativity by answering the 'wh' questions. They assert that the importance of using creative writing in language learning environment helps in developing a well-rounded personality of learners while the nuances and use of language are learnt. The discussion of how to implement creativity in language classrooms and the methodology adopted by some teachers give a context to the activities presented in the subsequent sections. The section also gives tips to teachers to create a positive environment and kindle creativity in the learners. Creative writings of well-known writers are discussed. The discussion of what obstructs creativity is helpful to every teacher, as they should be aware of these to help learners overcome the hurdles. Time-tested techniques like pair work and group work are suggested while engaging the learners with activities.

Part II of the book deals with creative writing with specific references to poetry. It starts with a discussion of what is poetry, the different aspects of poetry and types of poems. The authors' reassuring statement that poetry "is not necessarily a special kind of language. Rather it is a special way of using ordinary language" (p.74) gives a lot of confidence to the teachers as well as the learners to attempt the activities. The activities that follow cater to form-based as well as language-based tasks. The activities in this section follow a specific structure: aims of the activity, what should transpire before the activity, during the activity, and after the activity. Then comes the possible variations, followed by comments. The authors explain different forms of poetry with examples, to give a thorough understanding to the teachers who may not be well-versed in this aspect.

They also discuss what writing a particular type of poem does to the learners, like writing 'haikus' teaches discipline. The activities do not seem to be graded but the 'Variations possible' and 'Comments' sections allow the teacher to use the activities with different levels with suitable variations. This is in the true spirit of freedom that creativity gives to individuals. Time frame for each activity is not given, perhaps, again, it is left to the discretion of the teachers based on the level of the learners.

There are guided activities for language practice with scope for fun and stimulating interest in language use. Some of the activities under the 'Free Expression Activities' are challenging and could be used with learners at tertiary level. This section ends with some reflections of language teachers who are also creative writers.

Part III of the book discusses short stories. This section is denser with a discussion of the seven key elements of a short story with adequate examples for comprehension of the concept. The activities follow a specific structure: aims, preparation, procedure, follow-up, and variation. The process of writing a short story is complex. It demands not just creativity but also craft, and skill of language use. The activities given in this section are more challenging than in the poetry section and largely suitable for tertiary level, though scope for variations is given. This section ends with reflections of some learners who had worked out the activities.

To write a handbook on Creative Writing and incorporate a number of activities for practice involves considerable thinking and effort because it involves not just the language competence of the learners and teachers but also sense and sensibilities of both. The learners' reflections at the end of the book tell us the activities have been largely successful. It remains to be seen how fruitfully the book is used once it is in the hands of teachers.

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Mohammad Asim Siddiqui, *Muslim Identity in Hindi Cinema: Poetics and Politics of Genre and Representation*, Routledge, 2025, 186 pp., £155.00, ISBN 978-1-032-26847-7

Reviewed by Adiba Faiyaz

Hindi films have been a major part of Indian culture, and have been enjoyed for their themes, songs and visual spectacle. From the era to

Doordarshan to that of OTTs, the enthusiasm for Hindi films has not diminished. Mohammad Asim Siddiqui in this book has undertaken the huge task of mapping and analysing the representation of Muslims in Hindi cinema, and the study covers a period of almost 100 years from *Sinhagarh* (1923) to *Maidaan* (2024).

The history of Hindi cinema started with *Raja Harishchandra* (1913) directed by Dadasaheb Phalke. The pre-independence era films focused on social reforms as in *Achhut Kanya* (1936). The post-independence era saw movies like *Mother India* (1957) imbibing national pride whereas the emergency and post emergency period saw the figure of the angry young man in movies like *Zanjeer* (1973) and *Deewar* (1975). Over the last few decades, the society has witnessed large scale changes like liberalisation and globalisation, and films as cultural texts have reflected socio-political situations and have influenced public discourse.

Siddiqui's book examines the representation of Muslim identity in different Hindi film genres by focusing on varied aspects of Muslim identity—historical, cultural, and linguistic—and their realisation in cinematic form. Chapter one, "From History to Circus" discusses Muslim representation in biopics like *Azhar* (2016) and *Shahid* (2010); in older period films such as *Mughal-e-Azam* (1960), *Taj Mahal* (1953); and in new historical movies like *Bajirao Mastani* (2015), *Tanhaji* (2020); and in war films such as *Border* (1997), *LoC Kargil* (2003) and *Uri* (2019). Siddiqui highlights the differences between earlier and the more recent historical movies. While certain movies like *Jodha Akbar* (2008) and *Razia Sultan* (1983) depict more humane Muslim historical personages, movies in recent times like *Panipat* (2019) or *Padmaavat* (2018) make closer linkages between religion and violence. The chapter ends with an elaborate discussion of the 'circus' genre through YRF's production *Dhoom 3* (2013) which portrays conflicts like that of the East and West, and underplays the religious angle.

Chapter two critically analyses the diversity of Muslim representations in Hindi films compared to other religious and ethnic groups. It must be noted that of the four Indian states with significant Muslim population, namely, West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Assam, the regional cinema from these regions largely represents Muslims as marginal or stereotypical characters, with the exception of Malayalam cinema. The author questions this lack of representation and selective erasure, and