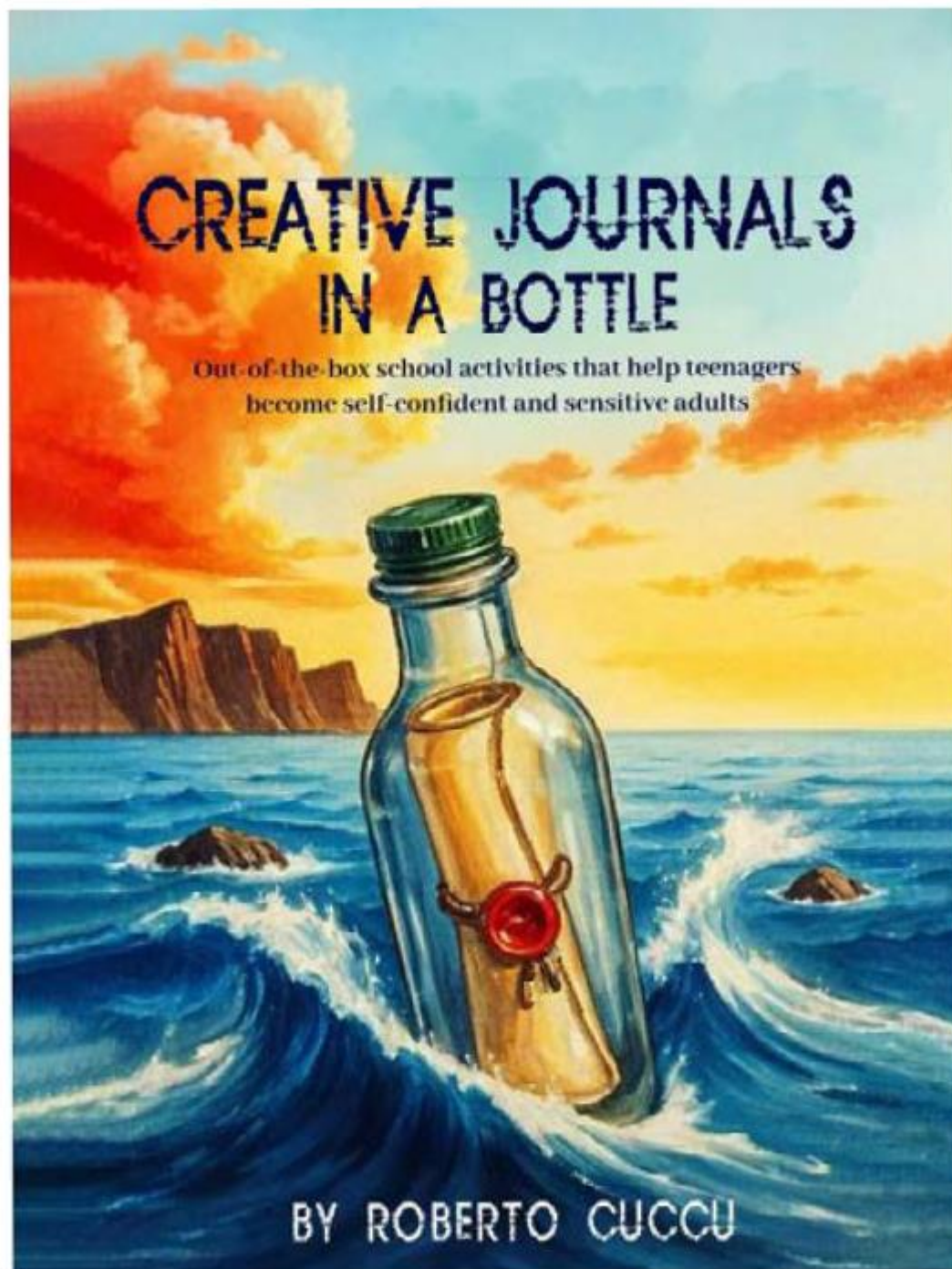




Reading Guide to Creative Journals in a Bottle

Introduction to the Book

What takes place in the minds and hearts of teenagers when at the age of 16/18 they are getting ready to become adults?

What are the challenges that they have to face in order to become an adult, that is being autonomous, self-confident, responsible, able to think outside the box and to learn by experience, to be optimist and with no fear to admit when they are wrong?

How can educators, both parents and teachers, support them in their journey to adulthood?

In the chapters of this book, you will be able to see a number of creative experiences proposed to teenage students in order to let them reflect on themselves and express some feelings they have inside and that they generally keep for themselves.

At home, not many teenagers open up to their parents, telling them about their fears, their deep desires and some of their problems. When they are at school, it is even more unusual for them to have the right situation that allows them to share their inner feelings with others.

The title of this book, *Creative Writings in a Bottle*, refers to the idea that a message in a bottle can symbolize hope and the human desire for connection. Many of us, when we feel lonely, look for ways to reach out, to connect with someone, anyone. That is where the message in a bottle comes into play. Sending a message in a bottle is a romantic act, is like surrendering a part of yourself to something larger, or even is like a prayer. In literature and art, the image of a message in a bottle has been used as a metaphor for creative expression. It can represent the idea that art, like a message, can be sent out into the world and impact people who encounter it. In some of the following creative situations, teenagers experience the feeling of not being alone at being alone, as others are just like them.

About the Author

Roberto Cuccu has been a teacher of English Language and Literature in an Italian Secondary School. He collaborated with the University of Cagliari, Sardinia, as contract professor for ESP (English for Specific Purposes) and for Use of Multimedia in Teaching English. In addition, he has worked as teachers' trainers, educational multimedia consultant and designer for online museums, using the M.U.S.E. (Museums United with Schools in Education) approach, based on multiple intelligences.

Realizing the central role of human development in a digital world, he has been experimenting ways to ride these two horses at the same time: a holistic approach to learning along with enhancing learning and teaching through the use of Digital. He has published, among others, a book bases on Case Studies on how to help overcoming blocks in learning.

Purpose of the Reading Guide

This Reading Guide should help to have a general idea about the facts described in this book.

Without a real motivation inside themselves, students do things without putting their souls in them. One of the strategies used in some of the following experiences is one based on multisensorial visualization. From their creations at the end of each one of them we can see how they had found something inside that they had no idea to have: a sensitive, original and productive creativity involving the whole of themselves.

Overview of the Book

In the chapters of this book, you will be able to see a number of creative experiences proposed to teenage students in order to let them reflect on themselves and express some feelings they have inside and that they generally keep for themselves. At home, not many teenagers open up to their parents, telling them about their fears, their deep desires and some of their problems. When they are at school, it is even more unusual for them to have the right situation that allows them to share their inner feelings with others.

The title of this book, ***Creative Journals in a Bottle***, refers to the idea that a message in a bottle can symbolize hope and the human desire for connection. Many of us, when we feel lonely, look for ways to reach out, to connect with someone, anyone. That is where the message in a bottle comes into play. Many complain that students are not involved in the school subjects, they make an effort to spend time at school and to study what their teachers told them to. It is given for granted that young people should be motivated to study and perform well at school. But it is not so. Without a real motivation inside them, they do things without putting their souls in them. One of the strategies used in some of the following experiences is one based on multisensorial visualization. From their creations at the end of each one of them we can see how they had found something inside them that they had no idea to have: a sensitive, original and productive creativity involving the whole of themselves.

In the extracts of the creative Journals teenagers created when stimulated by the right situation and support, they show their potentialities as human beings. Their kindness, their sense of beauty, their responsibility towards themselves, their friends and family, and the world around them.

Key Themes and Main Ideas

- Teenagers can develop their self-esteem by making mistakes, learning from their mistakes, holding themselves accountable for their actions.
- We should not judge their ideas and opinions. Instead, we should listen and then offer our own views as plainly and honestly as possible. Love and mutual respect can coexist with differing points of view.
- There are several essential characters strengths that are necessary in order to grow up with a strong and independent character:
 - a. Self-Confidence, so they recognize their strengths, accept their weaknesses, and can apply that knowledge to help them find the best path to life success.
 - b. Empathy, so they can recognize and understand the feelings and needs of themselves and others and develop healthy relationships.
 - c. Self-Control will help them learn to think straight, manage strong, unhealthy emotions, and reduce personal distress so they can cope with whatever comes their way.
 - d. Integrity, so they will adopt ethical values that help them develop a solid moral code and guide their life and relations with others.
 - e. Curiosity will help teenagers be open to possibilities, acquire new information, make discoveries, and stir creativity so they are inspired to follow their dreams.

Understanding the strategies put into practice

Sometimes in my career as teacher of English literature I have used some unusual strategies to help students express their inner self. The day-to-day school routine does not allow individuals to express themselves, but just to conform to what is required to learn. These experiences allowed them to learn how to work in a team, respecting others' opinions and points of view while at the same time finding ways to forward their own ones. Some of them gave teenagers a moment with themselves, to reflect about their lives and see inside themselves who they really are. They also helped to create a rapport with other classmates and with their teacher. The potentialities of young human beings are expressed by all the participants to the proposed experiences.

Chapter-by-Chapter Summary

Chapter 1 - Dance and Hyperlink History - Computer Technology unplugged.

When we use a computer, we feel augmented and empowered. But everything has got a price. A gain in power is at a price of our direct involvement in things. First of all, computer technology can cast a spell of passivity on our lives. We talk to the system, telling it what to do, but the system's language and processes come to govern our psychology. We begin as voyeurs and end by abandoning our identity to the fascinating system we are using. Another limit is that computer communication cuts the physical face out of the communicational process. This project has been designed so as to allow students to create original pieces of work, weave a net of connections among each individual creation and the ones of their classmates, and use their own bodies, voices and emotions in retelling their stories in a hyperlinked context, paying attention to their fellow students' works.

Chapter 2 - Public debate on Child Labour during the Industrial Revolution

At the end of XVIII century the UK was divided between those who were favourable to allow minors to work in mines and factories and those instead who were contrary.

Sometimes a topic is not just right or wrong, but there can be positive and negative aspects that coexist. For this reason, students were asked to choose a historical character who really existed in Great Britain between the end of XVIII and XIX. After students presented their work in their class, three different classes had to choose two representatives each, one pro and one against, for a public debate.

3) WebQuests and Working in a Team

A real WebQuest is a scaffolded learning structure that uses links to essential resources on the World Wide Web and an authentic task to motivate students' investigation of an open-ended question. First of all, students were introduced to some preliminary skills, such as how to express a balanced opinion, how to read a diagram with a prediction of future developments. After that, it was explained to them that they would be looking at different energy sources; their advantages and disadvantages; finding out other people's opinions; and evaluating this information. The class was divided into groups; each member of the group had to become an expert on two energy sources. In the end the group had to meet and write a collective report of renewable energies.

4) Transgression in the XVII century and Today

The module is entitled *Vermeer and Caravaggio: The Art of Transgression in the XVII Cent*, and it has been designed for students attending the secondary school with a language level of at least B1 or B2.

Each learning stage begins with (1) a concrete experience based on direct physical input from the world around. During (2) reflection, learners are led to remember relevant information, develop insights and associations. In the (3) generative stage, learners are required to manipulate images and language to create new mental arrangements, create symbolic representations in their own words and images. They have to transform an outside input into an internal source of knowledge.

5) Visualization in a classroom on last hour of our life

Another effective strategy I used in order to create a rapport between each one of them and myself was the use of visualization and creative writing connected to learning English Literature, in particular Elizabethan drama and the rise of a novel in the early XVIII century.

After having presented the tragedy Doctor Faustus of Christopher Marlow, I reduced the lights inside the room, and using visualization techniques I had students relax, close their eyes and shut the world outside them from their attention. With a soft and inspiring voice, I led them to feel that for some reason, they knew they had only one last hour of life. In one hour they were going to die. Their life on this earth would be over. They were gently led to picture the scene as if they were there. What colour are the walls? What are they wearing? Then they were stimulated to use all of their senses in the visualization exercise: sight, sound, taste, smell, touch. After they were in the right state, some suggestions were presented to them. How were they going to spend this last important hour of their life?

6) A Blog from the Middle Ages

This project shows a way to have students actively involved in what they are studying. Instead of just reading and discussing about a historical period, or watching films about that age, after a preliminary study of the Middle Ages, this time they had to become medieval citizens, be in that apparently faraway place and time, and tell captivating stories about their fictional life in that period.

6) Short fantastic stories based on Archaeology

Students had to create a plot for their story with the following elements:

- A mystery to be solved;
- Protagonists and antagonists;
- Detailed settings;
- References to the culture and history of the ancient civilization.

Reading the stories written by these 16-year-old teenagers, we can see how with the right supporting scaffolding environment and guidelines, even young people can find in themselves the creativity and the skills to be writers and produce original and captivating stories.

7) Messages in a bottle to Connect

A message in a bottle is a form of communication in which a message is sealed in a bottle and released typically in a body of water. In literature and art, the image of a message in a bottle has been used as a metaphor for creative expression. It can represent the idea that art, like a message, can be sent out into the world and impact people who encounter it. Some of the other activities illustrated in this book can be considered in a similar way, as a message sent out into the world, an invitation to change our lives and the world around us.

8) One painting is worth one thousand short-stories

Another creative project that gave amazing results was the one based on the creation of a short story inspired by a painting. Basically, it consisted in an introduction to the literary genre Short Story, followed by how to motivate would-be writers to be active participants in a learning process and how to interact creatively with a painting.

9) Hacking the Humanities. The creation of a collective self

To become good story-tellers, the participants were continually offered sensorial strategies to involve the audience in their stories and were ready to adjust their narratives according to the feedback from the instructor. The whole process evolved gradually from basic hands-on and personal experiences, to more complex situations where students were involved more deeply, worked collaboratively and engaged their emotions, thinking and creativity.

11) Being like Robinson Crusoe on a Desert Island

When presenting to students the origin of the Novel and the works of Daniel Defoe, I generally focus on Robinson Crusoe for its appeal to younger generations. After the analysis of chosen passages, for two non-consecutive years as a follow up I asked them to imagine they were stranded on a desert island, and that they decided to write down on a journal what happened to them, day by day. They had to use old paper in order to simulate the conditions in which they had to imagine to be.

Important Concepts and Learning Strategies

Sometimes, teenagers were helped to abstract themselves for a short time from the daily routines and habits of mind, and visualize themselves in a new multisensorial situation that allowed them to express inner and unexpected feelings they had in themselves and for others.

Other times, they were trained to debate in public, discussing the pros and cons of a choice, without making it personal. This helped them to develop their argumentative skills, that would help them in their near future, in a job interview, in defending someone else, and so on. In other strategies, they were led to write something in a creative way, finding in themselves new ideas, alternative ways to tell a story, and communicate something important to others.

Reading Comprehension Questions

- How to make ancient history appealing, involving for the new generations?
- How to transform a classroom that is not particularly motivated to learn new things in different subjects into one that becomes active in their learning process?
- What is the role of visualization in some of the activities described in the book?
- What happened at the end of many of these experiences described in this book?

Book Club Discussion Questions

- Is there a difference between books written only on a theoretical background or books that are based also on real experiences and show how valid those theories are?
- Have you noticed the different approaches to involve students?
- Would you like to contact the writer of this book and share experiences and ask questions?

Personal Reflection Questions

- Have you ever found a teacher that did not judge you, but helped you empathically to find in yourself alternatives to ways of learning that were not effective for you?
- As we are all different, do you use a different approach when dealing with a person who is your son, daughter, husband, wife or friend?
- Which of the experiences has interested you the most, and why?

Practical Exercises and Activities

- In our present age, we are always surrounded by outside stimuli, but do you find ways to relax and find your inner self sometimes, in order to reflect or feel something from inside you, instead of reacting to what is outside of you?
- When dealing with another person try to deal in an empathic way, without judging the ideas different from yours, but try to put yourself in their shoes and see how you would react to some circumstances.
- When you see a painting that you find interesting, or a novel you like, complete these works of art with some of your personal ideas or emotions, like when you have in your hand a message in a bottle and you read it and react to that message.

Applying the Lessons to Everyday Life

- If you have children or students, try to see how to involve them as active learners, so that they feel not passive subjects but leading their own life.
- Sometimes young people don't really know where to find in themselves a source of happiness, they depend often on what is offered through a cellular phone, a video game or the Internet. So, after you have found a way to discover in yourself your source of love, try to help others in doing so.

Key Takeaways

- If you help someone who has a problem in learning, behaving, or in another field, you are not only giving something precious to another person, the connection you create in order to understand and help the other one is also something that you receive yourself, from the new relationship you have created. It's a two-way channel, give and receive.

Final Reflections and Conclusion

The cover of this book represents a bottle with a message inside floating in the sea. The message is that we are not alone at being alone. The activities described in this book show how during and after them teenagers felt a sense of being part of a friendly and supporting environment.

The slogan I have chosen for this book is a line from a song of David Bowie:

"We can be heroes, just for one day".

I hope that the out-of-the-ordinary experiences described in this book could inspire you to look for alternatives to attitudes, habits that you find in students or kids: you can help change them and help them to be free to experiment new ways.