

Calming the Ghost Workshop

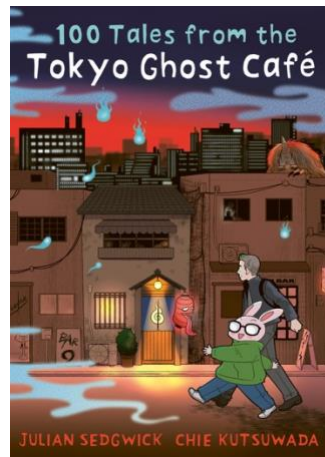
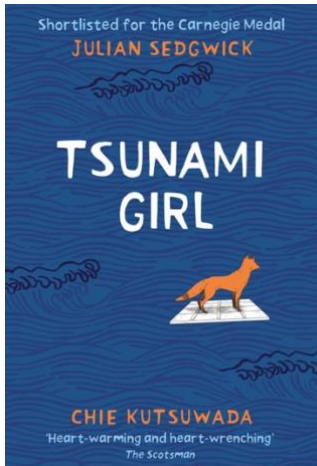
By Julian Sedgwick

Key
Stage
3 and 4



Creative Writing Workshop

*Inspired by Tsunami Girl and
100 Tales from the Tokyo Ghost Café*



*'A beguiling blend of
delicate manga and
haunting prose,'*
Chris Riddell

'Breathtakingly Powerful,'
Love Reading

Introduction:

- The workshop is designed as an activity inspired by Julian Sedgwick and Chie Kutsuwada's *Tsunami Girl* and *100 Tales from the Tokyo Ghost Café*.
- Themes from those books and Japanese Noh theatre will be used as inspiration for the workshop part of the class.
- In a short intro **video** Julian Sedgwick outlines the inspiration for the workshop, his two books co-created with Chie Kutsuwada, and the power of setting to create and drive story forwards.

Allow approximately 30 mins for **PowerPoint** inspiration and introduction (and interaction on particular slides), and then 25-30 mins for the creative workshop.

Groups of three work very well for this workshop, but two or solo work can also be fine.

<https://guppybooks.co.uk/guppy-school-resources/>

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Notes to accompany the PowerPoint

Slides 1-32: Introducing themes and ideas. [30 mins]

1	Title slide – picture is of Japanese Noh theatre play in action. More on this later...
2	Introductory video from Julian Sedgwick (2 mins). (Auto play disabled – press frame advance to play).
3	Julian never sets out to write ghost stories – in fact his books are principally about how young people overcome almost insurmountable problems – but ghosts keep showing up. Julian tends to start with a setting – if he explores that thoroughly, by research or imagination, a story will often start to happen almost by magic. Most of Julian's books began as real or imagined settings, all explored to the point where stories and characters started to emerge. We're going to do a mini version of that in today's workshop.
4	An example: <i>Ghosts of Shanghai</i> trilogy was set in 1920s Shanghai on the Chinese coast. A world of gangsters and civil war and spies and people from dozens of countries living cheek by jowl. Julian read more than 50 books to find key details to power the story. If he was standing on a particular place on this map, on a hot August day in 1926, he would know: what he could see, hear, smell; what the weather would be; what sounds the trams would make; what he could buy or eat; what the dangers would be. A key discovery was that – with Shanghai built on soft and silty soil – buildings often sank if you didn't get the foundations very solid. But more mysteriously and powerfully for an opening chapter, he discovered that if you buried a coffin in the wrong part of town, and you didn't weigh it down with heavy lead weights, then the coffin might start to drift and move in the soil beneath Shanghai. That became a key fact to deploy very early as it summarised many themes in the series.
5	<i>Tsunami Girl</i> involves a very specific setting. One that Julian explored for real, and where he interviewed many people who had gone through a difficult and traumatic experience, and yet found a way to keep living and finding new meaning in life.
6	On March 11th, 2011, Japan experienced a huge triple disaster: the most powerful earthquake ever recorded in Japan; a once in 1000 years tsunami wave and a third element that we will come to shortly.
7	The earthquake itself was 9.1 on the Richter scale, but didn't claim any lives. It was the tsunami wave that followed 40 minutes later that claimed almost 20,000 lives and destroyed many towns, fishing ports, schools and communities.
8	This is how it looked the next day. [NOTE – take a moment to remember the heavy truth behind what will be a more light-hearted workshop exercise.]

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9	This is Ukedo Elementary – close to the ocean in Fukushima Prefecture. It used to be part of a busy port side community, but we see here how only the school building is left standing. If you look on Google Maps now, the message reads “permanently abandoned “. That is because no child will ever return to the school, even though all students and teachers managed to run to safety. The reason for its permanent abandonment is the towers you can see at the top right of the picture in the distance.
10	Those towers belonged to the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power station. Unfortunately, the tsunami wave overpowered the cooling pumps at the power station, and three of the four reactors melted down sending radiation inland.
11	On this map you can see how the wind was blowing on the 11 th and 12 th of March and how radiation was blown north-west inland towards Fukushima city.
12	<p>Within an hour of the first radiation leak, residents had to flee their homes with only a handful of possessions, sometimes travelling long distances to emergency refuge centres.</p> <p>TASK – what would you grab if you had to flee your house with an hour’s notice? Pets? Phone? Money? Warm clothes? Food?</p> <p>Some people left their pets as they thought they might be home the next day or next week. But in reality, some families couldn’t return home for six, seven or even eight years. An area around the power station became a no-go zone, called the difficult to return zone.</p> <p>Abandoned houses, pets and businesses were left to nature and the wild...</p>
13	Ukedo Elementary was left to the wind and rain and snow.
14	<p>Inside a classroom at Ukedo. Imagine what you might see or hear on a cold day there now...</p> <p>TASK: ask for suggestions for sensory data, e.g. the ocean, wind and waves in the distance, broken pipes clanking in the wind, silence beyond that.</p> <p>(Hundreds of sparrows now live in the sports hall!)</p>
15	In March 2018 Julian first visited Fukushima evacuation zone. There was an incredible sense of emptiness, no cars or pedestrians. Just the occasional wild animal.
16	He was given special permission to enter the heart of the zone, for a short period and with guide and Geiger counter (to measure radiation).
17	<p>Video of abandoned Okuma town high street. A town abandoned for 7 years at this point. [Play video – listen and watch, see what you notice.]</p> <p>Just after Julian finished filming this video, he thought he heard footsteps right behind him. The guide and his travelling companion were ahead and they were the only three people in the zone. Turning round he could see nobody behind him – then he realised it was his own footsteps echoing back off the metal shutters. In the emptiness, imagination was playing games and creating things that weren’t there...!</p>

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18	<p>As another warm up for our workshop, let's visit an abandoned convenience store on a cold March day, seven years after the disaster. Normally this would be bustling with life, but what do you notice about the convenience store? (Zoom in)</p> <p>TASK – Take suggestions for sight, sound, touch, smell etc. Possible answers – weird how doors are open but lights are off; weeds trying to reclaim the tarmac; uncollected parcel in post-box, possibly 7 years lodged there; bins not emptied.</p>
19	<p>Let's go inside the shop. The first thing we see is an abandoned newspaper from the day of the disaster itself. In the abandoned settings you are going to create you might want to place some artefacts or significant objects.</p>
20	<p>Stepping inside the shop you can see the chaos of the earthquake. But something else has messed around in here.</p> <p>TASK – what do you think you could hear as you step inside? ANSWER – dripping pipes; the crunch of your feet on the wreckage on the floor.</p> <p>TASK: and what do you think it would smell like? ANSWER: very musty – lots of rotting food as fridges and freezers all switched off.</p> <p>TASK: Which can only attract what? ANSWER: animals! Mice, insects, foxes, wild boar, stray dogs ... and bears!</p>
21	<p>Feeling brave, Julian walked deeper into the shop, his feet crunching the metal and plastic beneath. Pausing to take this photo he heard a sound in the far aisle of the store. Thinking it would be a huge wild boar, he ran from the shop at full speed! It was probably just a mouse – but emptiness and imagination again created something bigger and scarier.</p>
22	<p>One of the saddest moments of the zone tour – a care home for retired and old people very near the power station. Again, we see the natural world trying to reclaim the man-made world, but we also see something very strange: there is a word written on one of the vans and cars in the car park.</p> <p>Task: what is strange about that word? Answer: it is written in English even though we are in north-east Japan. (Maybe it was written by a Western YouTuber keen to get more followers who sneaked into the Zone!)</p>
23	<p>Imagination loves to work with emptiness. There are countless ghost stories that have sprung up after the 2011 disaster. The north-east of Japan has always been a superstitious area, and in the months and years following the tsunami and radiation disaster many people had experiences of ghosts. Normally, if someone dies of old-age or natural causes, a family says prayers and the dead person's spirit can travel to the other world safely. But if you have died in an accident, or suddenly, traditionally your spirit is thought to roam the countryside nearby.</p>
24	<p>Such spirits are called yūrei. This is an actor in a sheet, by the way – but shows the typical form of Japanese ghost.</p> <p>Julian and Chie are often asked 'how real are ghosts in Japan?!'</p>
25	<p>They are so real that if someone dies suddenly or on their own in a house or flat, that dwelling immediately becomes cheaper – just in case it is haunted. These so-called 'stigmatized properties' are sought after by students and people without much money. You even get special 'stigmatized house' estate agents...</p>

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26	Which brings us to the workshop and ghosts. Japan loves ghost stories – and has retold and created hundreds of ghost stories over many centuries. Tokyo Ghost Café is a retelling of many of those tales, with some personal stories and inventions from Julian and Chie themselves. Many ghost stories found their way into a traditional form of Japanese theatre called Noh. In these plays a ghost appears in a lonely or abandoned setting and then tells a witness what has happened to them.
27	A key feature is that the protagonist always wears a mask, somehow distancing the story that they tell. But change of expression is possible from way the mask is angled by the (almost always) male actor. This makes us feel something otherworldly maybe...
28	But the incredible thing is that these masks are carved from one piece of wood, yet can change their expression. [Short video showing change of mask expression – advance to play] Lady starts friendly, then looks cross/ scary, then smiles again.
29	We could meet anyone on a Noh stage: from a beautiful young woman who died far from the man she loved, to a warrior who lost his last fight and just wants to win one more battle. Historical figures, ghosts, distressed mothers, gods...
30	What unites all these ghosts is that they have unfinished business. Something that they didn't complete or never managed to achieve in their life, or just something they always wanted to do.
31	Here we see a typical Noh stage – always designed the same and very formalised. Plays are long, intense, powerful and very stylised. A building within a building that looks a bit like a ritual space – and Noh is a kind of ritual for looking at powerful stories, often of restless spirits. The Noh stage is often a PORTAL – the walkway to the left leads to a curtain that divides this world from the other world. To the left (upper stage right) the <i>hashigakari</i> , a narrow bridge used by actors to enter the stage. <i>Hashigakari</i> means "suspension bridge", signifying something that connects two separate worlds.
32	We're going to create ideas for a mini version of Noh theatre, based on abandoned spaces that you will create and imagine. Here we see all the elements together on a Noh stage: setting, witness, protagonist, musicians and chorus (who help set the scene). The backdrop or 'Mirror board' at the back is always the same - a lone pine tree.
33	You're going to by focusing on the SETTING . In Japanese culture, the evergreen pine has come to be an important symbol of longevity and unchanging steadfastness. It is perfect for all seasons and settings as it is evergreen.

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Creative Workshop – [25 mins]

- Divide into groups and provide blank paper – ideally A3 as this generates more ideas than A4!
- Each group will work together to create a collaborative SETTING, a WITNESS, a TIME, and a PROTAGONIST. Number of minutes for each mini task outlined below.
- No prose writing needed – just NOTES, LISTS, SPIDERGRAMS, DOODLES...

Notes to accompany the PowerPoint

Slides 33-40: Workshop

33 10 mins	<p>Create the setting: Choose an <u>everyday</u> or <u>modern</u> building or space – ideally one you know well, then – in your imagination – turn off the power and heating, empty it of people, leave it for TEN years and IMAGINE what it will be like after all that time. Focus on SIGHT, SOUND, TOUCH, SMELL. Don't try to create the story yet, just focus on the setting.</p> <p>[Things to suggest if a group is stuck: cinemas, amusement parks, schools, hospitals, supermarkets, arcades. Julian has had wonderful haunted fish and chip shops, McDonalds and hairdressers in his time doing versions of this workshop! Sometimes the more banal the better, but some students always go macabre here. Generally, you get a nice spread across the groups.]</p>
34	<p>Show spidergram example – place your setting to be abandoned in middle of paper and radiate out as many sensory ideas as possible</p>
35 2 mins ONLY	<p>Now we bring in our lone traveller -the WITNESS. In a Noh play, the <i>waki</i> or witness would often be a travelling monk or poet. In a modern-day setting, who might be travelling alone, possibly even a bit lost? What jobs or roles create lone travellers looking for places/addresses?!</p> <p>Focus on three basic things: <u>occupation, age, gender</u> – that gives us all we need for the role of witness. It's not their story after all!</p> <p>[Things to suggest if groups stuck: pizza delivery guy, delivery driver, researcher/writer researching a book/film, door-to-door salesperson, YouTuber, urban explorer – children's writer lost on way to school visit!...]</p>
36 2 mins ONLY	<p>Make a quick decision about time of day and season. Sometimes broad daylight and summer can work even better than wintry midnight for spooky setting. Sometimes better to go with the obvious. Just choose a time of day and time of year, one minute for each task!</p> <p>Most popular time for ghost stories in Japan is the hottest summer days – a chilling tale is good aircon!</p> <p>ADJUST your setting, particularly depending on season.</p>

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37 5 mins	Now, remembering all the detail of setting, let your imaginations run as a group, and see who you find here in your setting. See if a protagonist (and their story) emerges from the setting. Try and shape a backstory for the ghost or spirit your group encounters, and see what he/she/ it has to say.
38 5 mins	IMPORTANTLY for the story: What might the PROTAGONIST/GHOST want or need to find peace? What would help them rest? Can the WITNESS provide that?
39	For example: remember the convenience store? – maybe it's just something as simple as a woman who is trying to finish her shopping. Maybe the witness can take her to a place that is recovered, replenished and find peace that way.
40	Task summary/recap

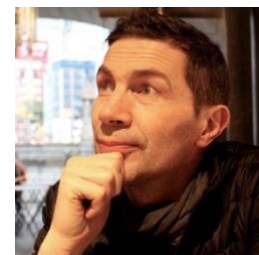
Wrap up

- If time allows, invite groups to share their ideas.
Maybe the ghost of the footballer in the abandoned stadium who just wants to take one more penalty (witness can go in goal and let it in!).
Or the dentist who wants to do one more extraction...
Or.... Julian has had many wonderful and strange outcomes with this workshop!

Extension Activity

- Write a short story or story introduction based on the structure.

Julian lives near Ely, Cambridgeshire, is married and has two grown-up sons. He combines writing with his work as a therapist. In his spare time, he draws as much as possible, juggles torches and knives, tries his best to learn Japanese – and waits for the weather to get cold enough to go fen skating.



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