

# THE SUTHERLAND LONGHOUSE PROJECT

## CREATIVE WRITING WORKSHOPS

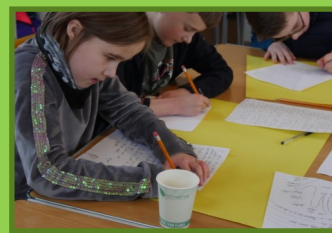
On Saturday the Longhouse project was fortunate enough to have author Janice MacKay come along to lead two creative writing workshops.

The morning session was for children, and through a series of exercises Janis inspired the children to use their imaginations and set free their creativity. Then, through targeted questions, she led them to think about how it would be to live in pre-clearance times. What would the everyday sights, smells and sounds be? And how would these things be different from modern times?

The children engaged immediately, and responded enthusiastically with both playful and very sensible



answers. After a refreshment break, Janis read a short excerpt from her novel, *The Reluctant Time Traveller* while the children sat in complete silence, engrossed in the story. Finally, building on their answers to the earlier exercises, Janis asked the children to go on an imaginary journey 250 years into the past and to write the first chapter of their own story about time travel and finding themselves in pre-clearance times.



After twenty minutes of eager writing, Janis called time and drew the children into a group to share their adventures - each different; all uniquely creative and wonderful.



The afternoon workshop provided the adults' turn to get creative. Following a series of warm-up exercises, the Historylinks Curator read a short excerpt from a late 18th-century diary written by John Matheson whose family lived at Brae, Dalnamain. His account is both empathic and observational, bringing pre-clearance times to life through the vivid recollection of everyday occurrences.



Now the participants explored their own childhood memories, listing the smells, sounds and tastes evoked, as well as other details to provide a strong sense of place. Janis likened this exercise to 'suitcases of memories', opening each one and exploring the past through intuition, imagination and empathy. Working

in pairs, group members shared their memories in turn. Then Janis read from her novel, *The Watchmaker's Wife*, a first-person memoir based on the life of her own grandmother. Inspired by this example, participants created their own 18th-century Sutherlander, and wrote a diary extract in their created character's voice. The final task was to mesh personal memory with fictional diary; to juxtapose the two to create a new and thought-provoking piece.



Shared results varied in style and content, yet each was unique and special. Again, Janis successfully inspired all to set off on their own creative writing journey.

