

Creative Responses to Crisis: Spoken Word & Creative Expression Workshops

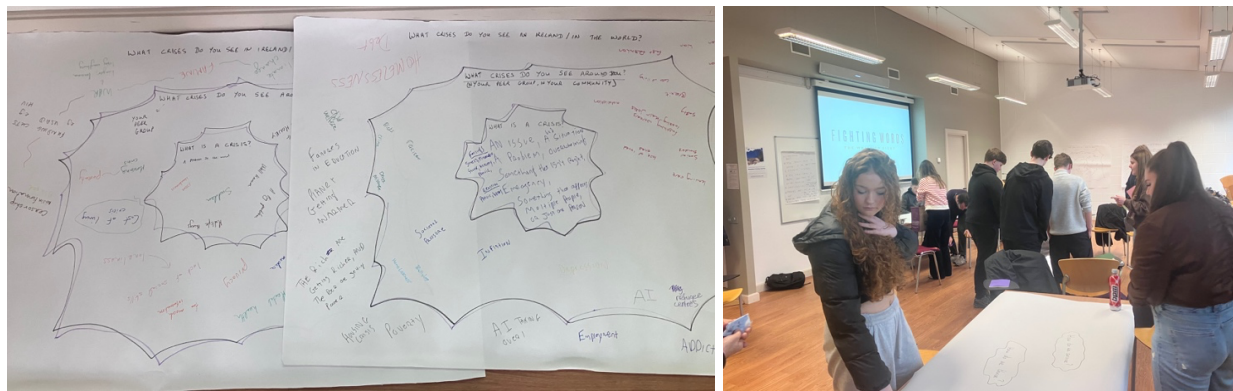
Instead of informing policy through crisis research, interdisciplinary humanities scholars of permacrisis might focus on interventions in arts and education, including expanding high-quality, informal educational opportunities for creative arts practice among young people. As part of wider interventions aimed at addressing inequality and building resilience in communities disproportionately impacted by connected crises, permacrisis research programmes might also direct resources towards groups which have traditionally perhaps had fewer opportunities to engage with public arts programmes. On 5 and 12 November 2025, the UCD Humanities Institute, in collaboration with the arts NGO [Fighting Words](#) and [UCD Access](#), hosted 15 Transition Year and 5th Year students from Rosary College, Collinstown Park Community College, and Coláiste Bríde for workshops on the topic of responding creatively to crises they see around them or in the world. Over two days, facilitators Nóra Nic Con Ultaigh (Education Director with Fighting Words), Adam Mohamed (spoken word poet), and Cormac Mac Gearailt (spoken word poet and current All-Ireland poetry slam champion and the UNESCO Cities of Literature Slamovision Champion for an Irish language poem) guided students in encounters with spoken word and poetry, including writing and performing individual and group pieces.



Day 1

To begin, students generated ideas through a guided brainstorm session and started to expand on each other's responses in reply to the following questions: What is a crisis? What crises do you see in your community? What crises do you see in Ireland and the wider world?

Students voiced their primary concerns about the crises they observed in their own communities, and spoke out about the challenge of finding places for young people to socialise off the streets, as well as issues of housing, addiction, and inequality. In relation to the wider world, they mentioned topics of wars, AI, cost of living, and global disparities. Students were quick to identify that global and national crises are often interconnected in ways that are experienced locally, and observed how trying to solve crises is contested and complex process.



For some of the students, this was their first time in UCD, so before lunch the group toured part of campus and had a chance to see inside one of the bigger lecture theatres in the Arts Block.

The creative writing dimensions of the workshop took off after lunch, as facilitators built on students' various levels of experience with spoken word as a vehicle for expression. After introducing some powerful online performances by well-known Dublin spoken word artists Natalya O'Flaherty and Emmet O'Brien, and discussing technical features like pacing, rhythm, sound, imagery, and authenticity, Adam Mohamed and Cormac Mac Gearailt performed some of their own pieces. This had a strong impact on the group, and raised the level of vulnerability and willingness to experiment in a trusted environment.

Then it was time for some independent writing. Students were encouraged to write about something that was on their minds in the present moment, and to get feedback from Adam and Cormac.

The final activity of the day involved creating a group poem. Each student received two big slips of coloured paper and everyone was invited to write down two sentences starting with the phrase 'Right now ...'. Each student wrote one 'right now' phrase that was related to the day's earlier conversations about crises, and the other phrase was about anything students observed or understood to be going on 'right now.' Working in two groups, students shared their 'right now' sentences and discussed how to order them to make a collective poem. They considered choices like the flow of images, grouping together or spacing out recurring themes, and

The following week the students reconvened in the HI, and facilitators re-focused the group through a few rounds of the 'beat detective' icebreaker before opening the space up to anyone who wanted to share a piece they had written. Four students shared their writing, covering topics such as being proud of their community, the feelings of freedom and group happiness created by a good DJ set, as well as a highly sensitive portrayal of the loss of a family pet, and a powerfully delivered polemic against the lifting of the eviction ban. Facilitators gave authentic, supportive feedback to every shared piece, drawing out the power of strong observations, the effect of matching different types of content with various qualities of delivery, and highlighting writing as a tool for figuring out how we feel about personal experiences and working through challenging situations.



Nóra then shifted the focus from the recognition of various interconnected crises that surround us, to thinking about how we survive—and even thrive—in a time of permacrisis. Guided through a discursive brainstorming session, students mentioned struggling with feeling disempowered but they also seized on discussions of the positive meaning they received from being engaged in their communities, and found a space for personal agency in thinking about the value of small actions and giving back to key youth groups that provide young people with essential, vibrant outlets. Arising out of this brainstorm, the students' conversations conveyed a wide enthusiasm for seizing opportunities for having their voices heard and welcoming new, positive experiences where their observations and perspectives are valued.

Before lunch, students had an open period for individual writing and another opportunity to get one-on-one feedback on their pieces from Adam and Cormac. After lunch, more students shared poems about feeling pride of place, confronting fears, and the power of music to bring people together. The feedback from facilitators underscored that the voices of young people matter and that there are audiences who are interested in what young people have to say about what they see happening around them, as well as pointing to the need to diversify the range of perspectives in our cultural spaces.

As a whole group, they students wrote another collective poem on the themes of survival and thriving. This time participants were invited to write least two sentences in response to the prompts 'how do I survive' and 'how do I thrive.' Students had a chance to read aloud all the group poems and consider the elements that make an engaging performance.

Across the two workshops, the group was focused and involved. Students embraced opportunities to try new approaches, develop their writing skills, share their individual creative work, and to support and encourage their peers similarly.

To formally conclude the two workshops, students receiving individual Certificates of Participation and left their mark on UCD by writing a line from their personal writing on a wall in the HI Seminar Room.



Overall, the students voiced positive feedback about the workshops. Some said the workshops encouraged them to want to write more, while others mentioned they enjoyed meeting new people who were also interested in what's happening in the world, creative writing, and performance. Some students said that they appreciated the opportunity to try something different in a fun way, and others mentioned they felt like they had the freedom and courage to engage and share in the workshops.

The HI was delighted to invite all the students and their families to the HI-led 'Festival of Ideas' on 10 March 2026. At the Festival, all students are invited to participate in a performance of the group poems if they wish. Before the Festival, students will return to the HI for a third workshop focused on stage delivery and dramatic performance. The HI is thrilled to be working with these amazing, engaged students and to offer the Festival as a space for their voices to be heard.

The HI was also pleased to collaborate with Fighting Words and UCD Access on these workshops. **Fighting Words** is a non-profit creative writing organization whose programmes are designed to help participants harness the power of their imaginations and develop their creative voice. The organisation explicitly seeks to empower and strengthen children and teenagers from all backgrounds to be resilient, creative and successful shapers of their own lives. **UCD Access** works with students, teachers, families, and communities to foster access and participation in third-level education.

These workshops for teenagers on creative writing as a response to crisis are part of the wider transnational research project 'From Modern Crisis to Permacrisis,' (PI Prof Anne Fuchs), led by the HI in collaboration with Prof. Marek Tamm of Tallinn University (Estonia); Prof. Ingvild Folkvord of the University of Trondheim (Norway)/Humboldt University Berlin; and Prof. Monika Bakke of Adam Mickiewicz University (Poland), and funded by UCD Strategic & Major Initiative Scheme. The larger research project debates the shift from the modern understanding of crisis as a series of manageable events to perma- and polycrisis as entangled phenomena, and adopts a transdisciplinary frame to explore alternative epistemologies and responses to a world at risk. For further details see: <https://www.ucd.ie/humanities/research/frommoderncrisistopermacrisisandpolycrisis/>.