

#### 4. The inspiration file

Every creative writing tutor in the world will tell you this, but it's still worth repeating: keep a notebook and pen to hand at all times (and that really does mean at *all* times). You never know when inspiration is going to strike and, like dreams, good ideas quickly fade if not written down immediately. But what, exactly, are you going to jot down? Ideas for new fiction, poetry or plays, obviously, but here are a few other suggestions:

- Dreams and daydreams – when your mind isn't focussed on anything in particular, it often throws up connections that wouldn't normally be made.
- Snippets of conversation that you hear around you – at home, in the pub, on the bus, in the supermarket check-out queue. Don't just concentrate on what people say but on how they say it. The varieties and nuances of speech are essential to the fiction writer and playwright alike.
- Descriptions of people (including gestures and mannerisms) or locations, either from real life or from TV. Next time you're on holiday, try writing down what you see instead of taking photographs.
- From books, quotations and references that excite your interest – either for their content or for their style.
- Newspaper/magazine articles that catch your eye. [Thomas Hardy used to copy out news items from his local paper. Some of the scenes in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, for example, have their real-life counterparts in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Dorset.]
- Photographs, whether your own, or from newspapers and magazines (you will have realised by now that you're going to need more than just a notebook).

The very fact that you've noticed these things makes them important, even if the reason for their importance is not immediately apparent. Your unconscious mind has flagged them as things worth noting, and you would be well advised to leave it to work on the connections. It can take days, weeks, months or even years, but one day you will know why that particular item caught your eye.

So, what are you going to do with all this material? Different writers have different storage and retrieval methods – such as indexed card files or even shoeboxes – but why not invest in a few loose-leaf folders and a pack of A4 plastic pockets? You can keep separate folders for different projects – plus a general folder, for things that don't yet fit anywhere else – and can file, sort and resort the material to your heart's content.