

# *Dream your way to creativity*

Being aware that you're dreaming when you're dreaming is a portal to enhanced creativity, says author **Clare Jay**



My doctoral research investigated the role of lucid dreaming in the creative process. One of my case studies was an artist who solved the perennial problem of inspiration by walking into art galleries in his lucid dreams and memorising paintings in order to reproduce them in the waking state. The realisation of this technique demonstrates that the deliberate retrieval of artistically valuable imagery from the unconscious, while lucid in a dream, is a feasible step along the road to completed artwork.

Lucid dreaming can provide us with the possibility of experiencing something that we have never experienced before, or cannot experience due to circumstance: The highly emotional experience of talking to and hugging a beloved relative who died some time ago, for example. Or flying without the aid of machines. Or running and jumping even if we are wheelchair-bound in waking life. The beauty of lucid dreaming is that these events all seem utterly real, and our conscious awareness enables us to appreciate them fully while they are happening in the dream.

As part of my PhD thesis, I wrote *Breathing in Colour*, a novel about lucid dreaming and a girl with synaesthesia who disappears while backpacking in India. Synaesthesia is a sensory condition in which musical notes might be experienced as colours, or textures tasted on the tongue. I had never heard of the condition until I had a lucid dream in which I was lying on a beach and experienced a fistful of sand as having an orange texture and taste: on a strong sensory level, the sand was orange before I'd even looked at it. As I wrote the novel, I had further lucid dreams in which I decided to research synaesthesia. I would stroke different textures in the dream to see if they would stimulate a particular taste or sensation for me. These dreams, which went beyond my daily waking perception, were highly beneficial to the novel-writing process. I used to laugh with my PhD supervisors that I was carrying out my doctoral research while asleep – a preposterous statement, but in my case it was actually true.

## Dream out fear

Creative blocks that take the form of fear can be particularly potent and troubling. A participant in one of my 'Dreaming into Writing' workshops reported a breakthrough at the end of the session. We had been working with yoga relaxation techniques and dream images to get us into a light trance state that resembles a kind of waking lucid dream, with conscious awareness mingled with deeply unconscious imagery. We had then written as fast as we could, to see

Imagine you are running through the greenest field you have ever seen. Your feet pound on the ground, the air is fresh in your lungs. It's as real as reality, yet suddenly you realise that you are dreaming this. Impossible as it seems, you know it's true, and a sensation of purest joy sweeps over you. Since this is a dream, you decide to try and fly, and the moment the thought is formed, your feet lift from the ground and you are soaring 30, 40 feet high, with the wind skimming your skin. Your vision is incredibly clear – even from this height, you can see the tiniest blade of grass. The colours are so intense that you can almost taste them.

This is a lucid dream: a dream in which the dreamer is aware that he or she is dreaming. Lucid dreams are characteristically vivid, memorable, and they tend to have a magical quality because of the thrill of conscious awareness. Quite apart from the pleasurable aspects of lucid dreaming, there is also a strong indication that they are conducive to a broad spectrum of creativity. Experiments have indicated that practising a golf swing or a swimming stroke in a lucid dream has positive effects on the waking performance of the same actions. Then there's the computer scientist who, whenever he was stuck on a computer programming problem, would meet Einstein in a lucid dream and get him to explain the solution in the form of flowcharts on a blackboard. Upon waking, he'd write the code down, and usually found it to be 99% accurate when it was checked.

## Getting into the zone

Dream lucidity challenges the notion that the presence of the conscious ego only serves to disturb and hamper the creative process. The trance-like 'in the zone' state, in which many artists and musicians create, can be hard both to attain and to remain in – with dream-like creative processes easily damaged by the censorious rigidity of waking consciousness. However, in lucid dreams there is no need to 'disappear' in order for art to appear, since the dreamer has awakened *within* the dream world; present in terms of ego and conscious awareness and yet simultaneously encompassed by the moving art form of the dreaming imagination. The lucid dreamer is surrounded by the equivalent of a film of the unconscious mind at play: an unquestionably stimulating artistic resource, and one that can help to dissolve creative blocks.

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what emerged. It transpired that this man had chosen to work with a terrible recurring nightmare he had, of standing on the edge of a cliff on a stormy night and watching, helpless, as a fleet of ships was swept onto the rocks below and smashed to pieces. He felt that this nightmare was somehow at the root of his blocked creativity.

At the point in the workshop where I said: 'The dream image might move and transform into something else, and you can let this happen', to the man's relief and amazement, in his mind's eye, the ships rose up over the rocks and flew to safety. Six months later, the man reported that the nightmare had never returned and that his creative energy had since been at an all-time high. Similarly, becoming lucid in recurring nightmares can be an astonishingly easy way of eliminating them for good: negative images or dream characters can be challenged and reasoned with until understanding is reached, or the atmosphere of the nightmare gently changed so that it no longer feels emotionally damaging.

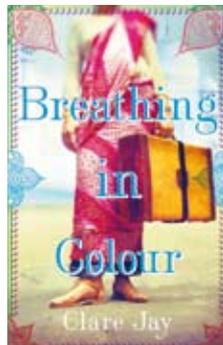
*" The practice of creative artistry in lucid dreams could benefit the dreamer through providing an opportunity to explore his or her creativity "*

Whether the dreamer opts to watch, motionless, as the dream imagery unfolds, or decides to experiment with the art of glass-blowing, lucid dreaming provides a space for creative development. The practice of creative artistry in lucid dreams could benefit the dreamer through providing an opportunity to explore his or her creativity, as well as informing ongoing creative projects and inspiring new artistic directions. Overall sleep quality could also be expected to improve, as the more time dreamers spend indulging in positive creative experiences, the happier their dream life becomes. Since an emotional residue from dreams often seeps through into waking life, exploring creativity in lucid dreams could also add a glow to waking life mood.

For our own, original artwork to appear before our eyes in the form of symbols and emotional landscapes, and for us to interact consciously and creatively with that art, we don't need to be geniuses. All we need to do is wake up inside a dream. **KS**

#### more information

● Reader Offer: Kindred Spirit readers can purchase Clare Jay's debut novel, *Breathing in Colour* (Piatkus, normally £6.99) for the special price of £5.99 including free P&P. To order, please call 01832 737525 quoting PIA 061.



● You can find out more about Clare's work at [www.clarejay.com](http://www.clarejay.com).

## How to do it

Lucid dreaming is a learnable skill, although some people have a greater propensity for it than others. There are several techniques that help induce lucidity, the main ones among these being:

- Improving dream recall. The more familiar we are with our dreams, the more interesting our dreams tend to become, and recognising our personal dream imagery can help to trigger lucidity.
- The recognition of incongruent elements: as you are drinking tea with a friend, a giraffe strolls across the room towards you. Aha, you think, I must be dreaming this!
- The clear intention to become lucid in your dreams. This can be formulated easily by repeating to oneself throughout the day and directly before sleep: 'Tonight, I am lucid in my dreams'.

