



Finding your voice: Writing from your own experience

This activity will support you in finding a voice and something to say as a writer.

Sometimes, the writing you have to do for school assignments doesn't allow you to write from your own perspective, or allow you to write about things that are important and relevant to you, in the way you want to say them.

The writing you'll do here is all about your direct experience – of being a young person in a secondary school environment.

You'll have choice in what you write about and how you want to do this and be able to learn from a practicing writer; spoken word artist, poet, novelist, playwright and screenwriter Steven Camden.



Before you start, you'll need some paper or a notebook and whatever writing tools are most comfortable for you to use to note down and draft your ideas for writing.

Part 1: Being a writer

- First, think about what 'being a writer' mean to you:
 - What do you think a writer does? Where do they get their inspiration?
 - What writers do you know? Who are your favourite writers? Why do you like their writing?
 - Is there style or genre of writing that you prefer?
- Now think about yourself as a writer:
 - Do you like writing? Why or why not?
 - Do you ever write outside of school? Does the way you feel about writing change when you think of writing in school and out of school?
 - What do you like to write most? What subjects, topics or themes interest you?
 - Would you call yourself a writer? Do you have any ambitions to write in the future?
- Watch published writer Steven Camden talk about why he writes and what inspires him in this video: <https://vimeo.com/336173046> Think about what he says about why he writes:
 - Are there lots of things that are happening in your life as a teenager in secondary school that are important to you or your friends? What are they?
- Make a note of these on your paper or in your notebook:
 - Do you think these things would be relevant to other teenagers in different secondary schools?

Part 2: Being inspired by the work of a published writer

- Watch Steven Camden read aloud *Prologue*: <https://clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poets/camden-steven>.
 - What kind of writing is this? What makes you think this?
 - How did it make you feel? What makes you feel like this?
 - What do you think this piece of writing is about?
 - How do you relate to it personally?

- Now look at this piece of writing as it was published and read it to yourself, you could read it aloud or to yourself in your head:

Prologue

What's it about then?

Well,

It's about the tapestry of moments, woven of a thousand threads.

Different versions of the world swirling inside a thousand heads.

We go from the biggest to the smallest, dropped off, left to fend,

in the secondary school jungle jumbled enemies, new friends.

It's a war zone. It's a haven. It's a stage full of bright lights.

It's a series of scary alleyways walked on a dark night.

Always moving. Unforgiving.

Full of music. Full of living.

Zoom in. One mind. Split screen. Another mind. Another mind.

Another mind. Another mind.

And another mind.

All together. Same place.

Same walls. Same space.

Every emotion under the sun. Faith lost. Victories won.

It doesn't stop.

Until the bell. Now it's heaven. Now it's hell.

Who knows? Not me.

I just wrote what I can see.

So what's it about?

Here's my response:

It's about Everything, All At Once.

- Does this change your mind about the kind of writing you think it is? Or does it confirm what you already thought?
- This is the first poem from Steven Camden's debut poetry collection 'Everything All at Once':
 - Do you think you'd like to read more of it? Why or why not?
 - Does this fit your perception of what poetry is? Why or why not?
 - What do you think of when the word poetry is mentioned? How do you feel about poetry?
 - Can you think of any poets or poems you know and like?
 - Do you like reading poetry? Performing poetry?
 - Do you ever write your own poetry?
- Think about the title of the poem - Prologue.
 - What does this word mean to you?
 - Why do think this might have been chosen as the title for this poem?
 - If this is the first poem in the collection, what might you expect from the rest of this collection? What do you think the themes or style of the poems might be?

Part 3: Writing from your own experience

- Watch a second video of Steven Camden, talking about what inspires his ideas as a writer: <https://vimeo.com/336017614>. Think about how he describes his poems as moments and opportunities to be able to put yourself in somebody else's shoes.
- Now read the blurb from the back of this poetry collection:

It's about fitting in, finding friends and falling out, loving lessons, losing it, worrying, wearing it well and worshipping from afar.
- Do you relate to these themes and subjects? Are they what you would expect to find in a poetry collection?
- Take some time to think about the amount of moments that might happen and characters that could be found in a secondary school that could inspire your own writing. These could be based on people you know or your own experiences.
- Make a note of the things you think about when you think about secondary school. You could do this in concept map or other visual organiser to help you explore people, places and themes that could inspire you to write in the context of being a teenager in a secondary school.
- Then come back to these ideas and think about which aspects would most interest you to read about, or which you think other teenagers might like to read about.
- Now pick one of these things and think about what you could write. Will you capture a moment, person or place in a poem? Will you reflect on a specific event through a diary entry, letter or email? Could you extend your writing into a short story? Could you write a news story, magazine article, leaflet or webpage about a specific event or topic? Could you write a speech or design a poster or leaflet about a topic that matters to you?
- Start to draft your initial ideas, in the form that you have chosen. When you get to an appropriate stopping point, take a break away from the writing.

- Now watch Steven talk about how he comes back to his writing after a first draft:
<https://vimeo.com/336012970>
- Consider what Steven said and come back and read your writing aloud to yourself, checking it makes sense and conveys what you want to say. Make any edits that you feel are necessary. This might be re-writing a line, section or paragraph that you feel could be improved or it might be changing your mind totally about it and starting over, just keeping anything specific you feel is still relevant. Think back to what Steven said in his video about 'listening to the voice' and think about whether your writing really conveys what you want it to say. **Remember**, writing in draft is a messy process, crossing out, changing words and rewriting sections is a good thing. Writing will rarely, if ever, be perfect on the first attempt!
- When you are happy with your draft, you could think about whether you want to publish it. This might just mean reading it aloud to someone else, or you might want to work it up in presentation handwriting or on the computer to share more publicly.

If you liked Steven's work:

- Watch him perform other poems from Everything All at Once:
<https://clpe.org.uk/poetryline/poets/camden-steven>
- Watch more videos of him talking about how he writes:
<https://clpe.org.uk/poetryline/interviews/steven-camden>
- Read the whole of Everything All at Once:



- Read his other novels for a teenage audience:

