



WHAT WE'RE UP AGAINST A RESOURCE BY FIRST STORY

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NATIONAL
Writing Day

24 JUNE 2020

FIRST STORY

CHANGING LIVES THROUGH WRITING



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WHAT WE'RE UP AGAINST

Aim: Engage with contemporary issues on a personal level and within your writing.

Exercise One: What I Am/We Are Up Against

1. On a sheet of paper write on one side: 'What I'm up against'. And on the other side, 'What we're up against'. You can define 'we' as you wish.

2. Fill out each side with as many items as you possibly can. Side one might include personal challenges you face: tiredness, dyslexia, racism, PTSD, anxiety, boredom, sexism, a broken heart, for example. Side two might include more general challenges for society as you see it: homelessness, corruption, death, the perils of social media, the weather, climate change.

3. Think about the differences between what you as an individual are up against and what 'we' are up against. Who did you mean by 'we?' (e.g. young people, others society, other the whole world.) Are there some things we are all up against?

Notice what comes up on both sides that reveals something of yourself and what you most care about.





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Exercise Two: This Word Is

1. Choose one of the words/phrases from either of the lists that is most interesting to you. Choose one that is less obvious, and more personal to you, as part of your quest for originality. Now, write ten or more things this word is, for instance:

- If it were a musical instrument...
- If it were a colour...
- If it was a type of weather...
- If it was an item of clothing...
- What is it saying?
- What does its voice sound like?
- What is the volume like?
- How does it make you feel?
- If it were an emotion...
- An image...
- A place that makes you feel safe...

2. And ten things it isn't, using the same (and your own) prompts, varying these where necessary, for instance:

- A place that you would be afraid to go...
- A type of injury...

3. Now, insert 'It is' or 'It's' and 'It is not' or 'It's not' where this feels right. Think about the effect of repetition. Here is an example of a young writer's poem crafted from this writing exercise:

'INJUSTICE' BY SHAKUR GRANT, FIRST STORY YOUNG WRITER

It is the colour red

It is having to go to the toilet in a separate bathroom because of your skin

It's an electric guitar, always playing the solo, always trying to stand out

It is pain

It doesn't have a voice, it's speechless

It's racial, religious and sexual segregation

It is someone who got the job on the phone but then didn't get it in person

It's being treated differently because I am perceived as different.

It is not the colour blue.

It's not piano because that makes everyone feel better

It's not when I see my great gran and know she doesn't feel lonely

It's not raising money for charity, knowing that I'm helping somebody's future.



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Exercise Three

Write a letter to your future child, taking the issue from exercise two as the theme.

Tell them how it has affected you, and what you have done to try and overcome it. Tell them how you hope that it will have changed by the time they arrive. What will the world be like then? Imagine, and have fun. Offer your tips for survival, relating to this issue that has affected you, and might affect them.

Here is an example of a young writer's poem crafted from this writing exercise:

'DEAR FUTURE DAUGHTER' BY MARIA BYCZYNSKA, FIRST STORY YOUNG WRITER

No matter what anyone tells you, boy or girl, man or woman, remember you are strong. Your opinions shouldn't waver, this way or that, depending on what society says. You shouldn't feel the need to hide your face or cower your body when a group of men pass by. You shouldn't feel the need to stop doing something that you love. You shouldn't listen to what people label you; only you know who you really are. You shouldn't feel lesser because of your physical appearance, nor should you alter it to please others. You do you.

