FINDING POWER: FINDING YOUR VOICE

A Digital Workshop with Patrice Lawrence
Presented by The Literary Consultancy
How It Works

This workshop is delivered through a series of videos from your tutor Patrice Lawrence, which are available here to watch alongside this written series of creative tasks. The workshop is yours to do in your own time. All copyright is Patrice's except where other authors are credited.

We'd love to hear what you think, and perhaps read what you come up with! Please do tag us @TLCUK (Twitter) @theliteraryconsultancy (Instagram) and let us know how you get on.
What You Need

1. A laptop, PC or phone with internet connection
2. A pen and paper or writing equipment
3. Your imagination!

No previous writing experience is necessary, but more advanced writers are very welcome to join in - you might surprise yourself.
What is a writer's voice?

“A poet’s voice is the written expression of their personality and their way with language.”

Patrice Vecchione, My Shouting, Shattered, Whispering Voice
Why is voice important?

It gives your work emotion, humanity, authenticity and makes it unique and memorable.

It is the ‘you’ that informs the way a story is told.
The intercom in the hallway buzzes. It’s the grocery shop delivery. I don’t know why Mum thought she had to stock up even more. If I add one more tin of beans to the cupboard, the whole thing’s gonna sink through the floor and squash Mr Bottler on his sofa below. It’s a short, white woman who’s hoisting our bags out the crates today. It’s never been a woman before. Her jacket looks a bit too big, like they only got sizes to fit men. Even so, I got a feeling she don’t take crap from no one. She smiles at me and says, ‘Good afternoon.’ Her accent sounds Polish. She offers to bring the shopping kitchen, but as our kitchen’s a) about three centimetres away from the front door and b) too small to fit me, the delivery woman and the groceries, I let her leave the bags in the hallway. It’s tempting to stack them all up against Silva’s door just in case she needs to get out. Yeah, Silva, both of us can block up doorways.
In the extract above, Becks is a 16-year-old black, working class Londoner who later finds out that her older sister, Silva, has gone missing. Becks is also out as a lesbian. It was important for me that she is resilient, funny but also true to her identity as a young Londoner. However –

- What reflects my own feminist beliefs?
- What reflects my experience as the daughter of immigrants?
- What reflects my experience of being an annoyed sister?
- What reflects my experience of living in a council flat in London?
Writing Exercise 1

“When we drop fear, we can draw nearer to people, we can draw nearer to the earth, we can draw nearer to all the heavenly creatures that surround us.”

bell hooks
This exercise is to help us lose the fear about writing, courtesy of the poet Caroline Bird.

First, select a number between 1 and 17.
Create an analogy around the word corresponding with your selected number. Begin with 'Writing is like a...'

1 Hologram
2 Shark
3 Broken mirror
4 Dying dragon
5 Telescope
6 Old boot
7 Robot
8 Clothes hanger
9 Carving knife
10 Intestine
11 Honeysuckle
12 Cruise ship
13 Cough medicine
14 The moon
15 Contact lens
16 Wind turbine
17 Butter
“That’s where my finger went down at.” “Well, your brain ain’t got to follow it. You don’t want to give this motherless child the name of the man that killed Jesus, do you?””

Toni Morrison, Song of Solomon,
Writing Exercise 2

“The banned names were: Nigel, Jason, Jasper, Lance, Percival, Wilbur, Wilfred, Peregrine, Norman, Alf, Reginald, Cedric, Ernest, George, Harvey, Arnold, Wilberine, Tristram, Clive, Eustace, Auberon, Felix, Peverill, Winston, Godfrey, Hector, with Hubert, a cousin of Hector, also not allowed…”

Anna Burns, Milkman
I am...

- Write your full name on a piece of paper. Write any other names you’ve been called – nicknames, shortened versions, different family names etc.
- Does anyone deliberately mispronounce your name and why?
- Who calls you what and when? Are you an aunty? A mummy, cuz, uncle, big bruv? Do you have an honorific – Ms, Mr, Miss etc.?
- Think about your relationship with your names at different times of your life. What do they mean to you?
- Do any versions of your name prompt particular emotion and why?

Now set an alarm for ten minutes. Using your responses to the above, write a piece starting:

These are the people I am. I am...
"I always start developing characters through their names. It gives me an insight into their social background, their relationship with their past and often into a plot line! It was my starting point for Indigo in Indigo Donut; she has siblings – Scarlett, Coral, Primrose, Teal, Bluebell and Violet. She and all her siblings were taken into care at different times. She knows she’s part of a rainbow but nothing more. How does that feel?

I always write about ‘non-traditional’ families because that’s my own background. It has shaped my worldview and feeds into my stories."
Writing Exercise 3

This exercise is called 'Character Hot Seat' and is courtesy of Jenny Downham and Teller Theatre.

Complete the sentences about yourself on the next page. If you can't answer a question, skip over it. Answer quickly, and honestly.

Are you ready?
Character Hot Seat

I was born in
 Apparently my birth was
 My mother insisted
 My skin is
 My hair is
 My eyes are
 My physical peculiarity is
 The best thing about me is
 The worst is
 .... I’d describe my fashion as

My hobbies are
 I love
 I couldn’t give a crap about
 Colours I like are
 I don’t like
 I laugh at
 I see the world in these colours
 How I would change my appearance
 If there’s a confrontation, I
 The part of me I hide is
Now think of a time in your life when you wanted to be someone else. Go back to the questions above, and answer them now as that alter ego.

Some answers may be the same, some not.

Go!
“Two of those (months) were spent wrestling with standard English to give expression to the West Indian experience: I made little headway until I experimented with the language as it is used by Caribbean people. I found a chord, it was like music, and I sat like a passenger in a bus and let the language do the writing.”

Trinidadian author, Sam Selvon, about his book, The Lonely Londoners
Writing Exercise 4

Go back and have a look at your responses to Exercise 2. Think about the way we communicate when we’re in different roles. Do we hide our accent or are we more pronounced? Speak slower or quicker, louder or quieter? What different words do we use? Colloquialisms can come from shared history but also exclude outsiders, likewise references to shared experiences.
Our Many Voices

This exercise is called 'Our Many Voices'. I want you to **think of a part of your body that has a story to tell**. It might have had an operation or been close to one. It might have seen, overheard or touched something memorable. Think about your own memory of that experience.

Set your alarm for **seven minutes** and write down that experience as you remember it. If you want, you can begin with the words:

'I remember when I...'
Our Many Voices

Now that body part wants to tell you its version of events.

Think – is that body part angry with you, embarrassed, self-righteous? Is it well aware of its importance or timid and apologetic? What sort of voice does it have? If it’s reaching for a simile what would it use? Is it poetic or thoughtful? If you are multilingual, what language or languages does it express itself in?

Set your alarm for **seven minutes** and start with the words:

You remember that time when...
Our Many Voices

Compare the two pieces of writing you have just produced; the one from 'your' point of view, and your body part's.

How different are they? What do they have in common?

They BOTH represent your voice.
Writing Exercise 5

“A man's character always takes its hue, more or less, from the form and color of things about him.”

Frederick Douglas
Create a Character

Your character has an age, a name, a voice. Ask your character –
Who are you?

Set your alarm for twelve minutes. Write down what your character says to you. Don’t edit. Don’t filter. Start with the words:

I am...
Create a Character

Now read back through your writing.

How much of ‘you’ is in there?...
Writing Exercise 6

“I tend to foster drama via bleakness. If I want the reader to feel sympathy for a character, I cleave the character in half, on his birthday. And then it starts raining. And he's made of sugar.”

George Saunders
Thin Line

What does joy mean to you?

What makes you feel joy? How do you show it? If joy was a colour or colours, what would they be? What if it was a physical movement?

Now think about fear.

What are you afraid of? Why do you have those fears? How do you react to them – physically, emotionally, intellectually? What is fear’s colour/s?
"When writing fiction, it’s important to know what your character wants and what they fear, even if they don’t know yet. You use it to manipulate readers’ emotions and expectations and to build conflict."
Think of a moment where joy intersects with fear, a filling similar to the archetypal rollercoaster ride, where exhilaration tangles with terror! Sometimes the fear and joy may be mixed together – for instance, during childbirth – or one may follow the other.

Think about where you were and who you were with. Were your emotions on display or did you have to hide them?

Set your alarm for **fifteen minutes** and tell your story.
Writing Exercise 6

“Fiction is the truth inside the lie.”

Stephen King
Think about everything you have written so far.

There is a yew tree in the graveyard of St Andrew’s churchyard in north London. The earliest mention in records is 1622, but it may be up to 2000 years old. Here is the tree:
Your Powerful Story

It is twilight. Someone is sitting beneath the yew tree. In the last few hours, they have experienced fear and joy and it has led them to where they are now. Who are they and what are they doing there? Will they ever leave?

You have forty minutes. Write that story!
We hope you enjoyed this workshop!

Keep in touch:
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