



Worksheet: Journalism

Reportage with an 'I' with Blake Morrison

How do you share an experience in writing?

The best journalistic writing has the power to take a reader into the smallest details of something that has happened, so that the reader feels like they're experiencing it too. Journalism isn't only about reporting the facts – it can also be about sharing the questions you had during the event or experience. Sometimes, a piece of journalism can feel like the writer is having a conversation with their reader, leading them into the situation they are describing.

Remember: As a journalist, you can sometimes find yourself exploring upsetting, difficult or hard to understand situations and topics. In your writing exercise you'll have heard of some of the challenges Blake Morrison faced writing about the very distressing case of James Bulger. When you're writing, remember to ask yourself how you're feeling about the situation you're delving into, and talk to friends and family about anything you're finding challenging. It's important for you as a person as well as giving you new ways into the details of the piece you're writing.

Get writing:

Write a series of sentence each beginning with 'I remember...'. (08.04)

Describe something you witnessed or that happened to you. (17:29)

This could be something that has stuck in your mind since it happened because it brought you great joy, or because it was very tragic. You may remember it for what was exhilarating about it, or because it was so unexpected.

Think about that episode in your life and **write down what you saw and experienced**. Don't worry about trying to find a memory that is 'major' enough – the fact that you remember it shows it can't be small or trivial. **Your job is to explore why it matters – why has it stuck in your memory?**

Remember: It's the detail that will take your reader into your experience. Give as much depth and detail to your descriptions as possible.

Think about the different techniques you can use to make your journalistic piece, or reportage, real to your reader:

- Use the five Ws: **Where** are you? **When** are you? **What** is going on? **Who** is there with you? **Why** is this happening, and why are you there?
- **Give small, telling details** - is there anything that has surprised you in the situation? Tell your reader - bring them into your experience of the situation.
- You're telling the story, so put yourself in it. **Be present in the narrative**, even if only as an observer. Don't moralise, don't analyse - just show us what happened.

- **Think about the tense you want to write in** - just because something happened in the past doesn't mean you have to write about it using the past tense. Sometimes writing about the past using the present tense can make your work feel more urgent and help a reader to be immersed in the moment.
- **Take some time away from your writing** - read it again - what can you improve? Remember it's only a first draft. Be honest with yourself about what doesn't work.

Bonus challenge:

Once you've finished writing your piece, try to write it in a different tense. What difference does it make to your writing? Does the episode or event you're writing about feel different written in the past tense to the present?

Make some notes about what differences you find – these differences show you the power of the choices you make in your writing, and the techniques you can use in your future work.

Your workshop today was led by **Blake Morrison**, who has also designed your takeaway writing challenge too.

About Blake:

Blake Morrison was born in Yorkshire, England and worked as a journalist at the *Times Literary Supplement*, *The Observer* and the *Independent on Sunday*, as well as writing full-length books. Blake has written in many different literary forms, from journalism to fiction, poetry to literary criticism. He has written two memoirs detailing experiences he has had in his life, and exploring the power that secrets can have within a family. His first memoir, *And When Did You Last See Your Father?* was adapted into a film starring Colin Firth as Blake, and Jim Broadbent as his dad.

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