



Worksheet: Short story writing

Happiness with Irenosen Okojie

How do we write towards happiness?

When you write fiction – whether short (with a short story), in a novella (a short novel) or a novel – you can create whatever world you want. You can use fiction to explore feelings and experiences you remember in unusual or different situations, or to imagine things that you've never seen before. Using details from your memories can help shape your new worlds, or transport you to better situations.

Get writing: (02:14)

Write a short list of five things you're excited about.

These can be things you would like to focus on doing in your life now, things you want to experience in the future, or things you'd like to reconnect with after the experience you've had over the pandemic.

Create a 'memory capsule'. (05:37)

1. Think about an experience you've had in your life that gave you a lot of joy. Focus on it as hard as you can and write about it.

Remember: The most powerful writing focuses on the details of an experience. Think about the experience you're remembering and use your sense to think about the detail.

- What does it smell like?
- What does it feel like? Can you feel anything on your skin?
- What can you see? Are there strong colours?
- Are there any strong tastes in your memory?
- What can you hear?

2. Now think up a character you're excited about. (08:23) Write a 'Desert Island Discs' for that character – this will help you to find who your character is from what things they like.

Imagine for your character:

- Six happy, joyful songs.
- A luxury item – this has to be something that brings them joy but not something useful (you can't choose a boat to escape a desert island!).
- A book

Remember: If your character was stranded on a desert island, these are the only things they'd have with them, so everything you choose has to be important to your character.

3. **Build a scene for your character. Picture your character on the island: (10.02)**

- Where is it?
- Where would you like to see them?

Imagine your character on the island, rummaging around, looking for something to eat. **They hear a rustling sound. What happens next?** How do they respond to the sound?

Bonus challenge:

Now you've tried using writing to do several things.

- You've used real memories you have to write about joyful experiences, finding how to use details to transport your reader to where you are.
- You've also created a character using details about their likes and created a new environment for a story.

Take what you've written to **write a full short story. Start with the scene on the island. (12:14)**

Your story should have a beginning, middle and end, with different things happening to your character throughout. Ask yourself:

- Does your character go on a journey?
- What happens to your character to change their experiences?

Remember: For a story to work there has to be some tension – what does your character want and what gets in their way? Be joyful and have fun on the page!

About Irenosen:

Irenosen Okojie is an award-winning Nigerian-British short story and novel writer. Irenosen's first novel, *Butterfly Fish*, won a Betty Trask Award in 2016, and her story 'Grace Jones' won the 2020 Caine Prize for African Writing. In her stories, Irenosen often uses magic realism and reflects on her West African heritage.

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