



The Portico Sadie Massey Awards for Young Writers 2017 - 2018

A good short story...

Stories have always been at the heart of our culture and communication; a vehicle for sharing experiences, eliciting powerful emotion and encouraging reflection. Writing a complete story in 2000 words is an exciting challenge! Good short stories, whatever their genre, engage and inspire their readers, saying something about the human condition and encouraging us to see the world in a different way. Despite their brevity they feel complete, they pack an emotional punch and we remember them long after reading.

We're looking for stories with an engaging premise or concept (any idea that fascinates or intrigues you as a writer); which explore an event or events that propel the story to a conclusion; stories of interesting characters with compelling personalities; stories with vivid description. Most of all, we're excited to read stories set in, inspired by, or about our context – the North of England. The rest, however, is up to you!

Judging criteria

- Judges will be looking for stories which fulfil the entry criteria first and foremost, responding to the word counts and other requirements outlined above.
- We will be looking for stories that engage with our context and place; the North of England.
- They will reward stories that deal with a compelling concept, looking for original and interesting ideas behind the submissions.
- Judges will be looking for well written stories, memorable in style and tone; writing that makes places seem vivid, characters and dialogue that seem real, emotions brought to life for us.
- We will reward submissions that are executed well; structured as complete stories with a sense of pace and direction towards a conclusion, reading naturally rather than feeling like an extract from a larger piece.
- A secure grasp of English will be important in communicating effectively, so errors in spelling, punctuation and expression or inconsistencies in tense or point of view will be taken into account, though will not be a wholly limiting judgement.
- Most of all, the judges will appreciate stories that are dramatic, engaging, and memorable. There are no specific requirements or preferences when it comes to genre, style or narrative point of view; we will reward the work of writers who have enjoyed the creative process, thought about their story and its potential effect on their readers, and encouraged discussion amongst the panel!

How Can You Make Your Story Stand Out?

1. Begin by thinking about your context and the focus for the competition – the North of England. Are there settings, people or historical periods that interest you, or you think will make a good story? Here are some suggestions you might want to use or ignore:
 - Secret locations in your town or city; abandoned buildings, forgotten places
 - Your local setting – your streets, neighbourhood, park
 - The north by night; nightclubs, bars, street-corners

 - Current or historical periods; for example the rise of industry or the building of the ship canal
 - Famous events such as the Peterloo Massacre, the rise of the Suffragettes
 - Periods of conflict and violence – the Arndale centre bombing for example
 - Periods associated with culture and music; Joy Division, The Smiths, Factory records
 - Current or historical personalities; artists, writers, musicians or scientists. Famous or infamous names such as Elizabeth Gaskell, Tony Wilson, Emmeline Pankhurst, Alan Turing, Sir Robert Peel, Ian Curtis, Morrissey, Myra Hindley, Thomas De Quincey, Liam Gallagher...
2. With such a short word count, starting your story well will be important. Avoid lengthy prologues and begin at an 'inciting incident', a moment or event that marks the true start of your story.
3. Restrict yourself to a small number of characters and draw them well, rather than introducing large numbers.
4. Short stories can't travel far! One or two memorable or atmospheric locations will likely be enough.
5. Focus on one, two or three events that rise to a climax and natural conclusion rather than filling your stories with plot – if you've too much to tell, you'll only ever be able to outline it in 2000 words.
6. Read the work of great short story writers and ask yourself – how are these stories working? What can I learn from this writer? The following are considered by many to be outstanding short story writers, so explore their work:
 - Edgar Allan Poe
 - Ernest Hemmingway
 - Roald Dahl
 - Sarah Hall
 - Shirley Jackson
 - Stephen King
 - Raymond Carver
 - Kelly Link
 - Ali Smith