

## Growing the Seed of Your Story – Tips for Young Writers

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So you have an idea for a story and want to start writing? Brilliant! Whether you're a writer who likes to dive right in and write as you go, or someone who prefers to think and plan ahead, here are some of my tips for growing the seed of your story.

### **Read, read, read**

Reading is the most important thing you can do as a writer. It's a great way to learn so much about writing and, most importantly, reading as many books as you can will help you to develop your own voice.

If I get stuck while writing, I will take a break and read. The effect reading has is instant. Just like when you're playing a video game and need to wait to heal or regain your strength, dipping into a book reminds me that yes, writing is hard, but it's something that I can do!

### **Keep notes of your favourite types of writing**

I also keep a note on my phone called 'Power Words.' When I'm reading a book and come across something amazing – whether it's description, dialogue, metaphor – I type it into my note and squirrel it away. I take inspiration from the poetic prose of Kiran Millwood Hargrave and the cracking dialogue of Jenny Pearson. My favourite authors all have different writing styles and the note on my phone is a way of reconnecting with them. It reminds me that every writer, including myself, has something unique to offer and that we all do this because we really love words. Create your own treasure trove of brilliant wordplay and come back to it every time you're in need of inspiration.

### **Ask yourself questions**

Why is my main character doing this? What structure will the plot take? Why? What? How? When? Where? I annoy myself with these types of question from the very first rough draft all the way to the final version. Motivation is an important word here; you want the readers of your story to understand why your characters are doing the things they do. Understandably, answers might change as you revise and edit, but as long as you can answer each question, justifying your choices, then you're on your way to creating a tight and well-thought out story.

### **All writing counts**

I wrote the first draft of *The Unexpected Tale of Bastien Bonlivre* anywhere I could. I wrote on my phone during my morning commute to work. I took the Central Line on the London underground and losing myself in my story was a good way to forget about the armpit that my head was currently stuck in. You don't need your own office, a decluttered desk, or even a proper laptop to write a story. You can write in the cracks of the day as long as you have your imagination and something to type on or scribble in.

### **Observe and eavesdrop**

Yes, you have my permission to be as nosy as possible. Watching and listening to the world around you is a great way to write dialogue that feels authentic. We've all read a book before where the dialogue just doesn't sound like anything anyone would say in real life. So listen to other people when you're on the bus; listen to how your friends and family speak. Real life is messy. People interrupt each other all the time, so don't be afraid to reflect that in the dialogue of your characters.

Observing people is also a great way to give your characters authentic personality traits. My mum has a terrible habit of picking her nails when her mind wanders. As soon as my dad wakes up, he's belting out Elvis Presley songs at the top of his lungs. My neighbour has a habit of playing loud punk music in the afternoon after they get home from work. Someone I saw on the train from London to Leeds the other week was having an intense heart-to-heart on the phone at the top of their lungs. Such observations give you an insight into other people, so why not use them for your own characters? Make a note of any interesting observations and come back to them when you're creating characters.