


WHERE ARE YOU REALLY FROM?




STORYTELLING  
PACK



*“Healing begins where the wound was made.”*

Alice Walker  
(The Way Forward Is with a Broken Heart)





**The Inclusion Agency**

engage | empower | educate



# Introduction

## About the project

Where are you really from? is a project being run by The Inclusion Agency (TIA). We plan to digitalise the stories of black and brown people's rural lives, and share them via a podcast, website, and other channels.

Our aim is to increase understanding between people of different ethnic backgrounds living in rural communities, to build empathy, and celebrate diverse histories and resilience.

Due to the coronavirus outbreak, we have adapted the project so it can all be delivered remotely.

You can share your story by **working through this pack and /or watching the associated online tutorial**, then submitting a written piece to be considered for publication on the website.

A film including stories from the earlier WAYRF project is available on [Youtube](#)

For more information about the project,  
please visit: [www.whereareyoureallyfrom.co.uk](http://www.whereareyoureallyfrom.co.uk)

*‘The feeling I didn’t belong seeped into every corner of every day. It was rarely explicit, but an accumulation of questions undermining my existence and place in the world:  
“Where are you from? Why are you here?”’*

Previous WAYRF participant

## Project themes

### Natural environment

What does nature mean to you? What stories do you have that are set against a backdrop of the natural environment? How can we describe nature & what it means to us in way readers will enjoy?

### The Arts

Music, poetry, visual art, theatre...how has a countryside experience shaped PoC's careers in the arts? What kind of work is being produced by black and brown people from rural Britain?

### Resilience

How do we stay resilient in the face of challenges? How do we look after our emotional wellbeing? What might help us to become/remain resilient?

### Rural/urban

What are the differences for PoC in rural and urban areas? How does place impact our identity? Have you lived in both?

### Storytelling/legacy

Why is it important to tell our stories? Who are we telling them for?

## How to use this pack

This pack has been designed to support people of African, Asian, mixed, and other 'non-white' heritage who would like to tell their story of life in rural parts of the UK. No previous writing experience is necessary; the aim is to support new writers' confidence and abilities in telling their story by providing inspiration and simple tools.

The pack can be used individually, explored with friends or family, or, for young people, whilst supported by a parent or guardian. It includes simple writing, reading and reflecting activities, and a main writing activity.

You can choose to submit your final piece to be considered for publication on the *Where are you really from?* website, or simply enjoy writing for yourself. You could also write someone else's story – a relative or friend – on their behalf.

This pack has been designed with adults in mind, however young people are welcome to use it. We'd recommend they do so under parental guidance, and that parents/guardians check they are happy with the resources included, some of which contain upsetting themes.



## Questions to think about or discuss

Why is it important for us to tell our stories?

What do you hope might change by you telling your story?

What stories about real people have had an impact on you?

What was it about their story that appealed to you?

### Writing activity 1: Freewriting

Freewriting is a great way to get the creative juices flowing! There's no pressure, and you don't have to show anyone. Try to write non-stop without taking your hand off the page, and don't overthink – just see what words come out!

Write for 5 minutes, beginning with the words **'I was born...'**

Read what you have written. How does it sound? How did it feel to write it?

### Writing activity 2:

Watch the short project [lyric films](#).

**Choose one of the stories:**

Martha's, Tamzin's or Becca's

Then summarise it in one paragraph.

**Reflect on the following:**

Why did you choose to write about that person?

Was there anything in their story you could relate to?





# Poetry

People often think poetry is hard to write, and it needs to include complicated words. The poetry that is often considered 'the best' is in fact simple and accessible. Free-verse is often used by poets today, although there are many different forms you can write in.

## Questions to think about or discuss

What is the point of poetry?

How is a poem different to prose or a story?

## Thoughts, Hints and tips

A poem often focuses on a snapshot of the poet's life, whereas in a story or prose piece there's more room to tell your story. Poets often focus on emotion, and aim to create something beautiful and heartfelt, even if the subject is sad. Line breaks are used in poems to suggest pauses. Poems use lots of imagery – similes and metaphors, and visual descriptions to help immerse the reader, as well as the other senses such as sound and touch. A poem doesn't have to rhyme, and in some ways there's less pressure if you aren't trying to find words that rhyme. I think of a poem as something that grows from a seed which plants itself inside your head. Meter (stressed and unstressed syllabic pattern) and rhythm are also important – try reading poems out loud to explore these.

If you want to write poetry, and get better at it, it's important to read LOTS of contemporary poetry. It's useful to know what others are writing, but as well as this, themes, ideas, styles, methods, and much more can be absorbed and learnt without us realising.

### Reading/listening Activity 1: BAME poets writing about the countryside:

[Kayo Chingonyi](#)

[Kim O'Loughlin](#)

[Maggie Harris](#)

[Vahni Capildeo](#)

[Jackie Kay](#)

Which did you like the most?  
Can you find any others?

*Yes, I am from here, really,  
but also from there.*

*My feet connect me  
to this piece of earth*

*which rolls away in green waves;  
this piece of earth inhabited  
by people who do not look like me.*

From 'Land, real and imagined,'  
by Louisa Adjoa Parker

## Velvet Dresses

*I want to climb under Dorset's skin  
curl up in her folds, wrap her around me  
like a patchwork quilt, stained  
yet stitched with years of love,  
taste the colours of green and gold,  
run my fingers over rough textures  
of ancient earth.*

*I want to crawl under her pavements,  
her roads, lift great slabs of tarmac,  
climb every craggy, awkward hill,  
every cliff like a tooth capped with gold;  
trek for miles through woods  
and green fields like velvet dresses  
with skirts fanned out wide.*

*I want to sink my fingers into the earth  
let the tiny stones and grit and bones  
run through my hands;  
search for the past along with  
fossils spiralling to dust  
in clay-rich soil.*

*I want to let Dorset's past soak  
like cocoa butter into my skin,  
let her history merge with mine:  
talk of Africa and her slaves.*

*I want to know it will be fine  
for anyone with not from here  
etched like tribal markings into their skin,  
to sink into Dorset like a warm rock-pool,  
with fingers stretched out towards the sun,  
to walk her beaches, green-velvet fields  
with pride, say*

*I live here, belong here, she's mine.*

Louisa Adjoa Parker

### Reading activity 2: Read the poem

Reflections on the poem

**What did you think of the poem?**

**Was there anything that resonated with you?**

**Was there any imagery you liked or didn't like?**

**Favourite line?**

### Writing activity 3: Simple poetry exercises

Write a list poem beginning with the words 'I come from' at the beginning of every line. Think of a memory. Write a six-line poem to describe this using all the senses. 1st line begins with 'I remember seeing', then continue with the other senses. Final line can begin 'I remember thinking...'

### Writing activity 4: Up for a challenge?

Write your own Velvet Dresses poem!

Think about where you live – county or town – as if it were a person.

What would you want to say to it? Think of actions you would do with this person, in order to feel you belong. Start each line with 'I want to...', with a final line that begins 'I want to know...'

Give your poem a title.

Read what you have written.

How was that? Is there anything you could change to make it better?





## Life writing

Life writing can take many forms – journalistic-style articles, features and blog posts; memoir; personal essays and more. Some fictional pieces can be considered life writing, too, if they are based on the author's experiences.

If you want to engage others with stories from your life, how might you do this? What other people's stories have you read that moved you? What was it about the writing that you liked?

### Writing activity 5: Freewriting

Go to a window that has a view you like. Write for 5 minutes beginning with the words: 'From my window I can see...'

### Reading activity 3: Sea life

Read [Louisa's essay](#) about living by the sea here (Trigger warning, contains themes including bereavement and domestic violence which may be upsetting)

**What was your favourite part?  
Was there anything you didn't understand?**

**Was there anything that resonated with you?**

### Writing activity 6:

- Think about an experience you've had by the sea. Jot down some notes before you start writing – what happened?
- What did you see, smell, feel, hear? Any vivid colours or textures? Who else was there? What time of day or season was it?
- Can you give the reader any other details that help set the scene?
- Start writing your piece.
- Write for 15 minutes
- Read what you have written
- What do you think of it?
- Did anything surprise you?
- (Keep hold of this as you may decide to develop it into your final piece!)

### Writing activity 7: Writing your main piece!

This is what you've been building up to! Now you can have a go at writing your main piece.

Choose one of the following:

- Use the **Telling your story template** on the next page
- Write your own **short article/essay** – this can be about your life in general, or one experience, or theme e.g. living by the sea (you can build on writing activity 6)
- Choose a poem as a model to be inspired by, (or have a go at writing your own)
- Examples here:

[No 115 Dreams](#) [Lament for Syria](#)  
[A Portable Paradise](#) [Inbetween Days](#)

### Who are you writing for?

**Are you writing for an audience, or for yourself or your family? Are you writing for therapeutic reasons, or do you want people to read your story?**

If writing for an audience there are a few things to think about:

- Keep it comfortable – only write about what you feel happy to share with the public
- Keep it safe – if you're talking about difficult experiences such as racism or abuse, you might prefer to be anonymous. If writing brings up difficult emotions for you, take a break, and seek support from a mental health charity or trusted friend/relative
- Make it engaging by including details that bring your story to life, use the senses, colours, food, seasons, descriptions of landscape
- Think about the project themes of resilience, storytelling, legacy, the countryside, the arts, and urban/rural – does your story include any of these?
- What themes will resonate with most people? We can all relate, for example, to feeling sad, or as though we are an outsider. Other themes include parenting, childhood, place, belonging
- Remember what might seem ordinary to you can be interesting for others!
- Keep it sweet and short – keep it focused, concise, be strict when you edit!

# Re-drafting your work

It's rare that a good piece of writing emerges fully formed – even the most successful writers have editors to help them shape their work. I like to think of the process of editing as though a piece of writing was a chunk of stone that's been loosely shaped into an object – you can see what it's meant to be but it's unformed, raw. Redrafting, or editing, for me feels like taking a chisel and chipping away at the extra bits, watching them fly off, chip by chip, until the finished piece has emerged, and it's as beautiful as it can be.

Of course, no writer is perfect, and many writers believe a piece of work is never truly finished! But you can get to a point where you feel happy with what you've written.

Try the following:

- Do some research online to find examples of 'Before' and 'After' redrafting. What are the main differences between first draft and final edit?
- Decide whether you prefer to write, then edit or write and edit as you go along. Many writers find the former easiest but do what works for you
- Have some space. Go away from your work. Come back to it later – hours or the next day or even a few days. Look at what you've written with fresh eyes
- Be strict – every word needs to deserve its place! Even more important with poetry and short non-fiction pieces
- Get feedback from a family member or friend on your first draft. Ask them to be constructive and say what they like and what could be improved. Decide whether you agree with them or not!

## Performing/reading your work

Listen to the earlier [WAYRF podcast](#).

## Whose story did you find most interesting?

Try reading your finished piece aloud. Practice reading to a family member or friend, and ask for feedback – what did they like about your performance, and what could be improved?

# Telling your story template

Answer the questions below on a separate page ... feel free to answer as many as you want, and add in other thoughts!

What is your name?

**(first name / full name) or pseudonym**

Title of your piece

**(some writers prefer to choose this when they've finished writing)**

Where do you live?

**(County or nearest city/large town is fine)**

How do you define your ethnicity?

Where were you born?

Where were your parents and grandparents born?

If you weren't born in the area you're writing about, where else have you lived?

Describe your experience as an ethnic minority in a rural landscape.

**(as child, adult/both)**

How did this experience impact your emotional wellbeing, and sense of belonging to the community where you live?

How did a rural background shape your career choices?

What has helped you to be resilient?

What do you think the main differences are for minorities in urban and rural locations? Have you experienced both?

What does the natural environment mean to you?

## How to submit your story

If you would like to submit your final written piece please read the [submission](#) guidelines on the website.

# Keep on writing!

## Hints & tips

- If you want to write for yourself, **keep writing**
- If you want to write for publication and performance, **keep writing!** There's a lot of rejection in this game so try not to take it personally (easier said than done when you've poured your heart onto the page)
- **Keep your work** so you can (a) look back later and see how far you've come and (b) go back to a piece and develop it
- Get books such as the Writers and Artist's Yearbook, or Mslexia's guide to Indie Presses for lists of magazines and publishers
- **Network** – find out what's going on locally/online such as open mic nights
- **Get feedback** on your work from other writers if possible or friends and family, readers can offer great constructive criticism – choose what you want to take on board
- Join a writing group or start one!
- Sign up to local **e-newsletters** that have submissions opportunities and competitions e.g. Literature Works. Subscribe to a **writing magazine** (Mslexia for women is brilliant)
- When submitting work **be professional** (do what the guidelines tell you, don't hassle the editors!)
- **Read as much as you can** in a wide variety of genres
- Check out what **free online creative writing courses** are available
- Learn to **be strict with self-editing**, less is usually more
- Take **inspiration from wherever** you may find it!!
- **Write what you know**, based on your experiences, but also think about writing from others' perspectives
- If you want to write, **keep going**. It may take years for your writing to develop and when we start out as writers our work may not be brilliant. But if you keep at it, you will get there!
- **Believe in yourself**. You have a story to tell. Our voices are important.



# Resources

## Books, podcasts & media publications

There are plenty of platforms out there telling black and brown people's stories in a variety of forms.

For example, media publications gal-dem; Black Ballad; and Skin Deep focus on these voices.

Podcasts exploring 'race' include Growing up with gal-dem; Say your mind; and Dope Black Dads.

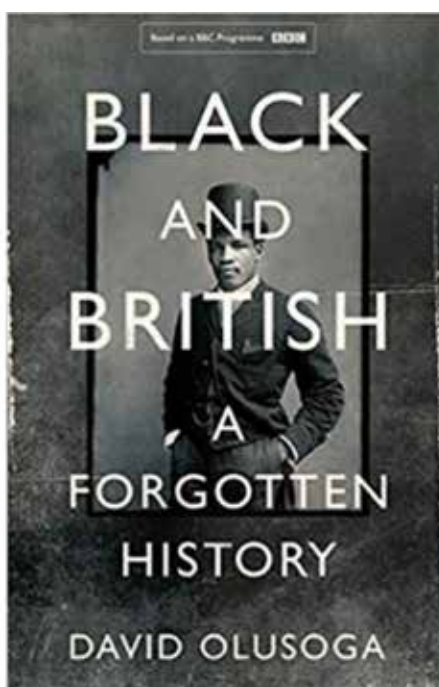
Here are a few books – you may have read these! Can you find any others?

'Essential' Marlon James, Winner of the Man Booker Prize 2015

Reni Eddo-Lodge  
**WHY I'M  
NO LONGER  
TALKING  
TO WHITE  
PEOPLE  
ABOUT  
RACE**

REMARKABLE CIRCUS

Based on a BBC Programme **BBC**



'THE BOOK FOR OUR DIVIDED AND DANGEROUS TIMES' DAVID OLUSOGA

Afua Hirsch  
**BRIT (ish)**

*On Race, Identity  
and Belonging*

THE SUNDAY TIMES BESTSELLER

POPPIANA



Louisa Adjoa Parker is a British writer and poet of English and Ghanaian heritage who lives in south west England. Her first poetry collection, Salt-sweat and Tears and pamphlet were published by Cinnamon Press. Her third collection, How to wear a skin, which is an exploration of identity set in the south west, was published by Indigo Dreams in 2019. She began writing to talk about the racism and domestic violence she experienced as a child, and she is passionate about telling the stories of marginalised voices and making literature accessible to everyone.

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