

Writing in Lockdown by Tom Bromley

Writing at a time like this isn't easy. So if you're feeling that way, it's important to cut yourself some slack, give yourself some space, and look around for stories in what is available. Sometimes it is easier to write something small and new. As such here are three short exercises to start you on a story ...

Exercise One: Begin With A Character

One of the features of the last few weeks has been the way that shopping has changed. Those queues outside the shops at two metre intervals have been a strange but quietly powerful image. Either from memory, or imagination, or via the next time you go shopping, I'd like you to write a short character piece, describing the person in front of you in the queue. Two metres is a good distance to be able to observe someone. What I'd like you to try and do is write a physical description of the person, purely from behind. So no description of their face or anything like that, but in how they stand, how they wait, what they are wearing, see if you can capture the sort of person they are, through showing these details. Remember, the smaller, and more specific observations the better. You can write this as a short background piece (200 words?) or as notes, whichever you prefer. This exercise is designed to help you get to know the person you are writing about.

Exercise Two: Flesh Out Your Character

If, like me, you're spending time on Zoom and Skype, you've probably started getting interested in seeing the homes of people you normally work with. As a book worm, I'm always particularly interested in people's book cases, trying to work out what they got on their shelves. A person's home is another great way of showing the reader a bit more of what a character is like. So taking the person in the supermarket queue from exercise one, I'd now like to write a similarly short second piece, describing what they have on their book case. Think about the books on there, how they are ordered, what other ornaments and trinkets they have on there. Keep the piece just to the bookcase without the character present – let this do the work in showing what your character is like.

Exercise Three: Bringing Your Character To Life

I've been fascinated in the way that nature has slowly reasserted itself in the last few weeks. With no traffic, I can now hear much more birdsong in the morning. On our

one hour family walk the other day, we saw a kingfisher for the first time in ten years. You may have seen pieces in the news like the goats in Llandudno and the wild boars in France strolling through the streets.

What I'd like you to do now is to imagine that in your character's garden, they spot something natural, something unusual. Imagine them watching this through the window and try to describe in detail what they see. And as you do so, think about how your character reacts. Are they excited, are they sad, are they cross, are they angry? Use this as the starting point of your story proper and see where it takes you.

Good luck!