

Junior Cycle English Assessment Task

Meet the Writers – Ann and Patrick, two young writers, talk about what they do.

Q. Tell us about how you got started as writers.

Ann: I've always had a very lively imagination. I've been writing since I was seven, although back then they were just little, maybe 200-word stories entitled *The Bad Sleepover* or something like that. I used to laugh at the stories I wrote when I was little but now I kind of like them. Not because they're any good, but because they are a source of inspiration to me. When you're seven years old, 200 words is a lot. When you're seventeen, 2000 words a day is a lot. Knowing that I could write ten years ago – even just a little – gives me more inspiration than almost anything else.

Patrick: I remember exactly when it was. I was in the scouts when I was ten and we went on a visit to a farm and kind of forest park where we camped. We had to build our own tents and source our own food. It rained practically the whole time and for some of it we were bored stupid. Being asked to write about the experience was a relief, because it simply gave you something to do and I wrote this kind of mad diary that the others seemed to really enjoy. And that's how I got started...simple as that!

Q What inspires you to write?

Ann: It helps to have past works to draw inspiration from, although I usually tend to turn to story generators or write a poem to get my imagination flowing. Sometimes I see a world with endless possibilities, and I write a lot of them down. The result? Many nonsense stories -- but at least they're stories. Oh, yeah...school, school, school. So much of what I write comes from things that happen in school, but I never write 'school stories', you know, things about teachers, and kids being bullied behind the bicycle shed!

Patrick: Reading, watching TV, the internet, things my friends or family say or do, music I'm listening to, conversations I overhear in the street or on a bus. Inspiration comes from anywhere really. It's not what you hear, it's what you do with it that counts. And that's where the hard work comes in.

Q You mean writing is hard work?

Ann: Oh God, yeah. Of course it is. Anyone can write a story off the top of their head. But will anyone else want to read it? In the early days you just want to get stuff down on paper, counting the number of words is the thing. But later you begin to learn the importance of tidying things up, putting a better shape on, say, a poem or story. That is called editing in publisher speak!! A writer (teenager or not) has to be willing to work and revise, as well as take criticism and advice, to give yourself a better chance of being successful.

Q Are some kinds of writing harder than others?

Patrick: Yes and no. It's not as though writing is a boring job or anything like that. At least, not for me it isn't. You are always writing something you want to write. But some people think writing a poem is really easy – all you have to do is make it rhyme and have a sing-song rhythm. But if that's what you think it's about you'd be as well off sticking to writing verses for birthday or Christmas cards. A poem has to challenge you in some way, has to be a bit hard to understand even, or else it's not worth much. And you have to work at it to make it come out that way. But it's great fun along the way and you get a great buzz out of it when it works.

Ed: Thanks to Ann and Patrick for this interview. See some of their writing in the New Writers section.