

KOESTLER ARTS + ART AID

Hello from Koestler Arts!

Koestler Arts + Art Aid sheets suggest creative tasks that can be done in-cell. For most all you need is paper and a pencil - though if you have further materials please use them.

You can enter the 2022 Koestler Awards now!

Please complete a Koestler entry form for every entry and see our guidance notes for full terms and conditions. Entry forms should be attached to this sheet. If not, or if you need more, please ask education, the library, or contact us at FREEPOST KOESTLER ARTS (no stamp or address needed). The deadline for submissions is Thursday 7 April 2022.

For each Art Aid sheet Koestler Arts are commissioning an artist/writer who has directly engaged with Koestler to set a creative task.

New Art Aid sheets will be available from the first Monday of every month.

March 2022

This task was set by Koester Award-winning writer and mentee, Tim.

My Story

I started writing in prison. It's a useful skill. You write to governors, you apply to jobs. You can access more of life with a good letter.

Then writing became a way of communicating how I felt. Making thoughts and ideas real by committing them to paper.

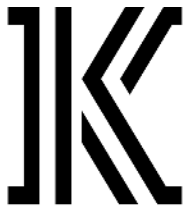
There are great novels in my head, but I can't yet seem to get them on paper. What I write is never quite what I had in mind. There's a myth that writing just happens. A stream of consciousness that flows from brain to paper. But that's not how people write.

What you see, is the result of dozens, if not hundreds of edits. Like a sculptor carving a block of marble into a statue, it's a slow process, of many small steps. It takes time, resilience, and a motivation to tell your story. These are things that prisoners have.

The way I improved, is the same way you can improve. Write as much as you can and assess your writing. Listen to that annoying internal voice critiquing it. Be brave, and edit it, again and again, to make it better. I hate looking back over old pieces of my writing, but it shows me that I'm improving, and that nagging voice inside means that I still can improve further.



Image: *Another Chapter*, HM Prison Peterborough, Gold Award for Themed Category: Interlude



My Task: It Starts with a Sentence

Let's think about that process of editing. One thing I'm terrible for, is telling the reader what to think, rather than letting them come to their own conclusions.

Every story starts with a sentence. I wrote this sentence:

"The rain lashes down on me, and I feel annoyed that I didn't bring an umbrella."

It conjures up a simple image in my mind. The character is annoyed, and you already know why, they're getting wet. It's boring, it doesn't make me care about the character.

As the reader, I don't want to read the next sentence, it's resolved. As the writer, I'm not really inspired to write more.

So I edited the sentence, with the above assessment in mind:

"The rain lashes down on me, as I gaze upon those around, safe under their umbrellas."

In the same number of words the character has become richer. You feel their annoyance is more complicated than simply getting wet. It conjures up multiple images in my mind of where the story could go.

Crucially, as the reader, I've had to make up my own mind about the character. I want to read on.

This is what I find cool about writing. Simply rearranging letters on a page can completely transform meaning. It's strange, and magical, like a mystery to be solved.

This is a great exercise if you're stuck, or can't think what to write. Every story starts with a sentence. So, write a simple sentence as I did earlier. Action and feeling. "I dropped the plate, and I felt sad". Then, edit it, and write a better sentence, where you show the feeling, rather than telling it. "The plate breaking on the concrete floor causes tears to finally break through".

Then, think about that sentence, what it makes you think of, and use it as the start of your story.

Productivity Tips:

1. Use the routine of prison to your advantage. Set a time each day to write, and stick to it.
2. Have a separate notepad *just* for writing. You'll be in the zone as soon as you open it.
3. Learn from the experts - the library is full of great literature.

