



Chapter Six – Pressure & Persecution - Transcript

By now you've learned a lot about writing from your own experiences and things that have happened to you - past tense. In this chapter we're going to be looking at certain pressures that might be surrounding you right now and having an effect on your present. Writing about the present can be really difficult because our life events are still playing out around us; it feels like stopping in the middle of a sentence or it feels like we can't finish a train of thought because it's still happening. Spoken word can be a wonderful tool to help you figure things out and also to help us contextualise the world around us and in this chapter we're going to be learning how to do so.

CHAPTER 6 – PERSECUTION & HINDSIGHT

This is one thing that I really wanted to talk about in the show but couldn't really find a way to properly fit it in. Have you ever heard the phrase that 'Hindsight is 2020'? It basically means that a situation can be seen for everything that is only when we look back on it with the reflection of time. For example, we can look at the witch burnings today and go: 'That was terrible. That shouldn't have happened.' Of course that shouldn't have happened. That shouldn't have happened at the time but it was the best thinking of the time. Well it wasn't really but it was just, it was just done at the time. It's a dark period in our history but do you think that, at the time, the people who were doing the burning were thinking: 'We're living out and, and we're acting out a dark period in someone else's history?' I don't think so. It was just the feeling of the time. Think about this - it's 2020 just now...think about 2050. Think about 30 years from now. Think about what people in 2050 are going to look back on this era and think: 'My God, that was atrocious!'

CHAPTER 6 – SOCIETAL ROLES

I wanted to take a moment just to talk about societal roles and expectation. What does society expect you to do? What role does society expect you to fill? If you're in high school or you've left school fairly recently this is going to sound very familiar to you. Pick your subjects, study hard, do well in your exams, pick your next subjects, study hard, do well in your exams, apply for university, get into university, go to university, get your degree, come out, get a good job, work your way up the ladder, buy a house. Then what? Where does the rest of that plan come from and also you're meant to know what job you want, where you want it...when you're 14? That is a lot of pressure on a 14-year-old to have everything planned out. So when I was in school I was really lucky that I always knew what I wanted to be. I wanted to make films. I wanted to be a film director. And I knew that from when I was about 15 and that was when I was told to pick something more realistic. We're told from a young age to know what we want to do. We're not given that much advice on what we can do and then if we do pick something...we're told to pick

something more realistic. Especially if you're looking for something in the arts. This is a contradiction and as much as I don't have the answers to that what I am saying is that I'm aware that it happens and you should be to. You should be aware that this is a small type of persecution and...ways to get round it, ways to counter it, is to be able to articulate yourself clearly, articulate your wants, articulate your feelings, articulate...what it is that's important to you, is going to help you. Also, know that you are going to figure things out along the way. I knew exactly what I wanted to do from when I was 15 and, that hasn't changed my whole life. But i'm doing poetry now. I'm filming a poetry programme. And that's because life takes a sharp left turn when you least expect it and you just gotta go with it. And you will figure it out on your way and you will do so because you are capable and you are confident and you are able to articulate your wants and feelings. It's important to keep checking in with yourself, figuring out what it is that you want, figuring out where you are at a certain place in time and you're allowed to grow and change your mind and change path and this is all great. This is all okay. Just know that you will figure it out along the way. That any expectations that people have of you (and you have of yourself) are subject to change and you can change them. Now we're going to do a really short mini exercise and it's not to teach any sort of writing craft, I just want you to be thinking a little bit more about pressure. So when I talk about it throughout the lesson you understand, um, what I'm talking about and also how it applies to you. So I want you to take a new page in your notebook and we're going to split it in two. I want you to do this with me. So you want to split it in two and then split it at the top as well, so you kind of have a head, so you have two headings at the top here as you can see. Now...in this top here, I want you to write along with me. I want you to write 'The Pressure to...' Is that how you even spell Pressure? Is there an a in that? I don't think there is, oh my gosh. This's the scary part of having to do any sort of writing in public, as I'm so dyslexic. This is why I stick with films and poetry because no one has to see my writing. I'm never writing prose or short stories. So, the pressure to dot dot dot dot. There's only three dots... Ugh, okay. And the next one over 'Makes me feel'. So I want you to think about all the kind of different pressures that you are under and they could be big pressures or they could be small pressures. But, um, think about where they come from as well. Are they coming from school? Are they coming from society? Are they coming from social media? Are they coming from your parents or your guardians? Just, think about all the different pressures and different examples of them and acknowledge them by writing them down on the page. So 'The Pressure to dot dot dot', so one example goes in here. And then 'Makes me feel' and that one goes in here. Using 'Arrival' as an example, I would put 'The pressure to become a mother at my age' 'makes me feel really uncomfortable.' I don't have to engage with the feeling any more than that. 'Really uncomfortable' is enough. So I want you to take five minutes and write down what it is that you think is, um, a pressure in your life and how it makes you feel.

FIVE MINUTE TIMER

EXERCISE CONTINUES

Well done on writing those exercises. Even though these things are happening now you can still check in with yourself and you can still have an opinion of them. Especially if those pressures are coming from external forces: from school or society or peers. Look at your list and ask yourself 'What would life be like without those pressures or if you were free of those pressures, what would that look like?' We're going to tie that to our writing exercise today.

TRANSCRIPT FOR 'ARRIVAL'

I was one week early which never happens to me. My Mum never had you know the chat with me only handed me a book with a confident-looking preteen on the cover and said read this and if you have any questions come and talk to me. I smuggled it into school and I showed it to everybody and we howled at the cartoon scrotums and then the word scrotum and then we fell quiet when we saw what would happen to our bodies I never asked my Mother any questions except from one. what if I get pregnant you know by accident what I meant was should I tell you if I do she never gave me a real answer but I should have asked her more questions I was one week early because there must have been a chapter missing from that book because it never told me to look for the day that boys become quiet and learn to speak in a code never it told me that if your body grows beyond a certain size it becomes public property a monument to development it never told me growing up was going to be so damn hard that your mind would grow with your body and experience pains of their own it should have mentioned mental health and peer pressure and managing stress and you know would it have been so hard in this section about periods to say that when using tampons for the first time don't use the same ones your mother does the woman's had two children for christ's sake have a little common [fucking] sense I really should have asked my Mother more questions.

In high school she was two weeks late the right boy the wrong time too young to play mother too old to ask her Mother to hold her hand and it should have been him he who pitched a tent inside her self-worth and built them both a home but in instead it was me and I was 30 seconds too late and breaking down the bathroom door as all that could have been spilled down her hands it wasn't wrong she wasn't wrong an impossible decision between that and the life she envisioned for herself I asked my Mother if that ever happens to me should I tell you she said I'm the first person you tell and stroked my hair as I cried for all the right choices that come at the wrong times and all the arms that never get to carry it never told me growing up was going to be so damn hard

At a party my Dad's 60th my Cousin brought her newborn baby her name is Isla and she floated through a sea of arms and aunties no rocking disturbed her slumber and she drifted into the port of my chest and all the seas quieted and all eyes looked to me as someone said 'that suits you' they were many years in too late in learning that I am not port not harbour not resting place or laughing shore I compass point courage and adventurer mind I'm the road I'm the captain and I live my life with my arms outstretched these arms were not meant to carry ready to catch everything that comes my way and they're whistful stares wrestling my arms from sail into cradle tie me to this love this is what it is to love when you're a woman isn't this what you wanted? isn't this what we wanted for you? doesn't mother just suit you so damn well?

I was one week early which never happens to me I was one week early and it even felt different looked different was different maybe my normal sign telling me that I wasn't pregnant was this time telling me that I was. past tense I'll never know for sure but it wasn't the right time I was born one day late because my Mum was due when she had 'T in the Park' tickets and she I was born into a world of music and I have never stopped dancing my Mother taught me how to look after myself my Father taught me that I would never be alone my Sister taught me how to be sister be friend be storyteller and those are things that I think I could pass on and I see her she has all the music of her Father and she has my way with words she is him and she is me and she

will grow to be free to pick the labels that she wears for herself and damn it she will know that we all change and she is free to do the same so if she is ever called by the wind and sea and leaves me once again empty harbour I'll keep my love burning in the lighthouse point her North wish her fair weather tell her never look back she will be free as I am now to weather her storms and seas we are connected by the oceans that boil under our skin and I've been making waves my whole life

I don't think that's going to change anytime soon I was one week early one day late one life inside that's mine to give and maybe she will only ever be beautiful possibility my best story maybe the best is yet to come but if she does she will be right on time

CHAPTER 6 – BRAIDING A STORY

'Arrival' for me is the perfect example of not writing what you know but writing what you are desperately trying to figure out. When I decided that I wanted to write a show about...myself and my inspirations and womanhood and the people around me, I knew that I would have to write about motherhood. Now I don't want kids myself but that's not to say that I won't change my mind one day and decide that I do want them and that's okay. What I found strange was...is that I was told many times that I would change my mind. People say: 'Do you want kids?' and I say: 'No.' And that's not an acceptable answer for them...which is weird. Because you asked me and I told you. And you're like 'No'. 'Sarah, would you like a roll and egg for breakfast?' 'Thank you for that but I don't actually like eggs.' 'Yes you do.' And that (along with everything else I was feeling about not wanting but maybe wanting) this is all things that I was like: 'I need to write a poem about motherhood', I have no idea what that means. Motherhood is a huge subject and I didn't even know where to start. So I sat down and told myself: 'Don't think about it too much. Just...start writing.' And I did. And I wrote a poem... 'Arrival' is unlike any poem that I've ever written because it doesn't feel like a, one poem. It felt like a collection of short stories. I sat down and thought: 'I'm going to write about motherhood. I don't know where to start. Just, bleugh, just write something.' And the first thing that came to mind, the first thing that came out was the story of when my Mum gave me this, like, book called 'Growing Up' when...I was about to hit puberty - and that was it. I was like: 'What is this?' I was such a sheltered kid I was like...'Is that a willy?' So I wrote that but then that story came to an end and I was like: 'I haven't...covered everything there is to know about motherhood. Let's write another one.' So then, the next story that came to mind was a story about a girl I knew in high school who had an abortion...and just not being ready to deal with that? But then I wrote about that. And then I wrote about, um, being at a party and then, when, ah, all my aunts saw me holding a baby - like my cousin had just had a baby and I was like 'Gies a cuddle' - and everyone was like: 'That suits you.' And I was like: 'Oh my, I'm so uncomfortable and I just want to cuddle off a baby, I don't...want, thi-thi-this doesn't mean anything.This doesn't mean that, like, I'm gonna change my entire life just because I like to cuddle this little baby.' And then I wrote about...what I imagined it would be like if I did have a daughter. But when I (these stories aren't linked at all) but when I put them together and read them back I think: 'Oh... Well I still haven't figured this out... But if you ask me what I think about motherhood...this is it.' 'Arrival' was everything that I had to say on a subject that I didn't know what to say about and...that felt good.

WRITING EXERCISE – STORY POEM

The technique I just talked about - taking lots of stories and putting them together to tell a bigger story - is called braiding. You're braiding these mini stories to create a bigger story. The title of today's exercise is called 'Am I brave?' This is a question that's hard for you to answer yourself so it's a good excuse to try and use this exercise to figure some things out through writing poetry. We're going to put ten minutes on the clock for you to mind map this exercise and what I want you to do is to write down times that, um, you think that you were brave. So maybe if you want to put up the top here 'Times I was brave', then you can add little individual stories around here or memories. Um - memories from way back when you were a little kid and just figuring out what brave was or not even when you were brave, when you first looked at someone else and thought 'Oh aye, they're brave!' Feel free to consult your story grids if you think it'll help. Remember we're going to try and braid these stories together so try and pick ones that are quite different but ones that stick out very strongly in your mind. Remember to use your sensory memories and your sensory details when you're mind mapping and... Happy writing.

TEN MINUTE TIMER

EXERCISE CONTINUES

Well done on having your mind map, I hope you have lots of different examples from when you think that you were brave or when you were learning about bravery and they all stick out in your mind and there's lots of details for you to work with, when we go forward to actually do our writing exercise now. So I'm going to give you another ten minutes and what I want you to do is to try and look at your examples and then start braiding them together. Maybe take little bits from one and then a little bit from the other and then just layer them up one on top of the other and then, at the end, then you can kind of like finish it off with... what you think that means. What, what does all this story mean to you? Does it answer the question 'Am I brave?'

TEN MINUTE TIMER

CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSION

Pressure can come from anywhere. It can come from...your school, it can come from your community, it can come from general society, it can even come from your home. Admitting that there's something that you don't know and you want to figure out...is vulnerable, and commendable. And, by the way, that vulnerability...that is what is going to write you incredible poems that connect with audiences. Audiences, as much as they want to be...taken on a journey by you, they don't want someone to stand up there who claims to know a hundred percent about everything. Because that's hard to relate to. But if someone goes up, on stage, and says: 'Here's something I want to talk about but I haven't quite figured it out yet.' That is so relatable. And if you have that vulnerability you can be rewarded by a room full of people saying to you, 'I- I really felt that because I haven't figured that out either but I figured it out a little bit more because of what you've said.' And that is one of the things that makes spoken word so addictive - being able to connect through being brave and being vulnerable. I hope you get to experience that one day.

TOP TIP – AN INTRO TO EDITING

Occasionally when, um, I am submitting a written version of a poem to a magazine or having to dig out a written version of my poem. I'll open the word document that I save it on on my computer and I look at it and I go: 'What is this? Like, I don't remember writing this at all.' Because it's so different from the poem that I remember performing. What kind of happens is that I'll write something and then I'll start rehearsing it, I'll start performing it, I'll start trying to get it into my memory and then it will naturally kind of evolve. I'll change words. I'll mix little bits and pieces up. There'll be some lines I've written that I've either just forgotten and then, just, it's been erased from my memory, um, so it's completely different. So what I'll do is I will adapt the-the written piece to reflect what it is that I perform. This is editing and it is your friend. Some of your work that you write down, even in this programme or elsewhere, will adapt and will grow and will change. Maybe it changes just naturally as you perform it. Or maybe you come back to it after a couple of months and decide it isn't really the point you wanted to make. Or you didn't want to put the focus elsewhere or there are some bits you're like: 'This needs a little bit more.' Or there are some bits you're like: 'This-this stanza doesn't actually add anything to the piece at all, I'm just gonna take it out entirely.' That can happen. Whatever you write when you sit down to write doesn't ever have to be the finished piece. The point is to get something down because the blank piece of paper is way scarier than having something that's not quite finished or little notes here and there being like: 'This little paragraph has to be about this' and you come back to it later. That is...absolutely much better than a blank, um, sheet of paper so, um, feel free to at any point come back and edit your pieces.

UP NEXT – CHAPTER SEVEN – RAGE