

Why do I write?

Jeffrey Boakye

[Insert nuanced essay on the complex relationship between insecurity, bravado, intellectualism and creative expression in the context of an unexpected physical lockdown amidst an international viral pandemic. Aborted introductions below.]

Attempt 1: I can break down why I write into ten reasons: five good, five not so good. I'll start with the not so good.

Attempt 2: I'm in awe of stand-up comedians. I watch them wide-eyed in wonder. I study what they do and make notes on the craft that I strive to understand.

Attempt 3: There's something called Aggression Theory that comedians use all the time to generate laughs and get the audience on their side.

Attempt 4: Question: Why do I write? Answer: Entitlement. I sort of feel like I have a right. To write. It feels right, right?

Attempt 5: As a writer, I'm acutely aware of the expectation to perform.

Attempt 6: As a writer, I see myself as someone who peddles tension, anxiety and release.

Attempt 7: (After almost a week of lockdown, when the reality of life in

quarantine started to hit home.) It's just dawned on me, as the sun shines and the wind blows, and the death toll rises and the queues grow, that the Coronavirus Isolation Lockdown of 2020 marks a definite line in the sand.

Attempt 8: I don't know when you happen to be hearing or reading this, and I don't know what version of 'normality' has finally descended upon you, but I do know that right now, with empty streets and everyone at home, society reduced to a million smartphone thumbscrolls, that we're living inside that line between Before and After.

Attempt 9: Why do I write? Forget that. Why can't I write?

Attempt 10: (Trying to be cute with a little second-person wordplay.) You are Jeffrey Boakye. You are a black writer. Four days ago, you decided to write an essay about why you write. You thought it would be easy.

Attempt 11: (Written in complete desperation using predictive text on my phone.) You are not filtered out. The act of vulnerability and the other idea of the day before yesterday. I'm not sure what to think of you. The only thing that could be used for complex or important topics such as the previous one.

Well, that didn't work. Anyway, in conclusion:

There's something profound in the answer to this question that I thought laid in wait, ready to spill from my thoughts once I put pen to paper. But it doesn't work that way. The act of writing itself is all five of those good reasons that I didn't write after Attempt 1 back there. It's an act of (1) curiosity; an embarking upon a journey without any answer necessarily in sight. It

requires (2) agility and experimentation; calling for another roll of the dice, another rummage in the box, acts of hope maybe, that something might stick. It's (3) resilience; forging ahead in the face of an empty page or a heartless, blinking cursor. It's also an exercise in (4) resourcefulness; drawing on whatever you have to make the best steps you can towards what you need. I mean, just look at what I've created here. It's a mess. I tried everything to make this work and it didn't.

But I've reached something like an ending, and I feel whole. The process of reaching wherever it is I've reached makes me feel somewhat satisfied, if not whole, in tune with my innate (5) wellbeing.

And that's the big reveal. That writing is painful, but it heals along the way and is ultimately cathartic. Not a journey that leaves you unscathed by any means, but a process that, in the attempt(s), can leave your being feeling well.

Jeffrey Boakye

Jeffrey Boakye is a writer, teacher and music enthusiast originally from Brixton, London. He has a particular interest in issues surrounding education, race and popular culture. Jeffrey has taught English in London secondary schools and sixth-form colleges since 2007, previously working in journalism and copywriting, after graduating with a degree in English Literature.

His first book, *Hold Tight: Black Masculinity, Millennials and the Meaning of Grime*, is recognised as one of the first seminal books about grime music, published by Influx Press in 2017. *Black, Listed: Black British Culture Explored* is his second major book, published under Dialogue Books in 2018. He is also the co-author of *What is Masculinity? Why Does it Matter? And Other Big Questions*. He has contributed articles and comment pieces

to publications including the *Guardian*, the *Financial Times* and the Royal Society of Arts Journal. After moving from London in 2018, Jeffrey now lives in East Yorkshire with his wife and two sons.

A recording of this talk can be found on the WritersMosaic website at

writersmosaic.org.uk

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