

## Finding ideas

Archie Maddox

The incredible thing about writing is that ideas can come from *anywhere* – the scope in which to explore subjects and characters is limitless. Sure, we limit ourselves by trying to second-guess what might work and what people may want to see. But, in actuality, the more scope we allow ourselves to explore, the more accessible an idea can become.

Let me tell you, the amount of times I've gone into a meeting and pitched a niche idea that people have gotten excited about, because the specificity of it allowed them to insert themselves into it more than a generic idea, is pretty big.

But the ideas themselves, where do they come from? In my case, they always, always come from anger.

When I say anger, I don't mean that they are angry ideas - but the drive I've got to develop that idea is based in anger. Anger is what motivates me to explore. Whether that be racism, social inequality, gentrification, identity, Arsenal Football Club – whatever the subject is that I decide to explore, it always comes from rage.

Thinking about that, I guess it comes down to something that gives me a visceral reaction. If I feel that strongly about something, then I figure it's worth exploring. For me, anger towards something, and subsequent exploration of that subject, gives me a way of potentially solving the problem – which of course I never do, but at least it stops me from feeling passive about whatever it is.

Before I even think about the idea, though, I think about the characters. To my mind, every great bit of writing is character-driven. Nothing incredible has ever come from subject first and characters later. My favourite characters are supremely flawed, real and to an extent self-destructive. I think those are traits that we all have, yet sometimes we're able to suppress them – so for a character to give in to instinct and impulse is delicious.

I like to explore voices that we don't normally hear, people we make assumptions about, assumptions that are then turned on their head. I'm very keen to give voice to the misunderstood. (I'm basically a literary Robin Hood, giving out voices – you are very welcome.) I feel the most compelling stories are simple and go as follows: Who is the person? What is the worst thing that could happen to them? Make that happen. Then, how can they solve it? It's really that simple, most of the time. The idea comes from that. For example, if we have someone in total control of their life, the worst thing to happen to them would be for them to lose control – so how far are they willing to go to try and get that control back?

These characters come from people I know, or people I've met, or even sometimes people that I haven't met; people who have incredible fight, determination, motivation; people who inspire me in some way. The key thing is that all these people happen to be invisible, or underappreciated in some capacity. I suppose that creating characters in my world is some kind of way of giving them a voice, making sure that they're heard. I'm a thief really – I pilfer the lives of people I find interesting for my own personal gain. What a prick.

For me, ideas are reactions to the state of the world that we live in, which is in constant flux. However, more often than not, the problems of the world remain the same – the same ingredients in different packages with slightly different seasoning. My nature is as follows: even if I agree with what you're saying, I will disagree with you. It's my instinct to be contrarian and argumentative and, to that end, my ideas can often reflect the opposite of what appears to be the status quo. Toxic masculinity? Nah, everyone is writing about that, so let's explore the other side – which in this instance could be anything from toxic femininity to a character's unwillingness to confront the constraints of their toxic masculinity, resulting in them doubling down on their bad behaviour.

Ideas are everywhere and can come from anything. I mean, shit, you could probably make a pretty interesting political allegory using animated potatoes (Jersey Royals are pissed off that sweet potatoes are stealing all their thunder, for example). Ideas are in the fabric of *everything*, you just need to soften your eyes enough to see them through the whirling traffic.

## **Archie Maddox**

Archie is an emerging screenwriter and playwright. His work has been produced at the Bush Theatre, Lyric Hammersmith, Orange Tree Theatre, Royal Court, and in New York at the New Light Theatre.

Archie's play *A Place for We* was shortlisted for the Bruntwood Prize from a submission pile of 1900 and was also shortlisted for the Alfred Fagon Award. It was staged at the Park Theatre in autumn 2021 and has just been nominated for an Olivier Award 2022.

In 2017 Archie was a part of the BBC Writers Room 'London Voices' and in 2018 he was selected as part of the prestigious 4Screenwriting course. He was also named as the writer in Residence at BBC Radio Drama London Production.

As well as a writer Archie is also a stand-up comedian and was runner up in Amused Moose Laugh Off 2014, Winner of the Bath Festival New Comedian 2014, and NATYs 2014 finalist. His debut show, *Shirts Vs Skins* got several 4-star reviews at the Edinburgh Fringe 2016 and was long listed for the Amused Moose Comedy Award.

A recording of this talk can be found at **[writersmosaic.org.uk](http://writersmosaic.org.uk)**

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