

These tasks will help you prepare a piece of writing to enter the Orwell Youth Prize 2025, on the theme of ‘Freedom is...’



LESSON 4: RESEARCH

George Orwell did his own research. But he couldn't rely on YouTube videos. Orwell stayed in the homes of the industrial working class in Depression-era Wigan; he worked among the poorest in London and Paris; he fought in the Spanish Civil War.

Don't worry, though. No one expects secondary school students to travel so far, in space or time. Orwell was also very well-read, with a keen eye for what could be trusted and what was propaganda.

When looking for stories, facts, and ideas to inspire your own writing, make sure to ask yourself questions about what you read and how you respond to it. Here are some examples of places to start:

Freedom is...

... the right to roam.

Octavia Hill: “We all want quiet. We all want beauty... we all need **space**.”

Octavia Hill was one of the founders of the National Trust. She believed strongly in the public's freedom to access green spaces and connect with nature.



In Scotland, Scandinavia, and other parts of Europe, the public have something called the ‘right (or freedom) to roam’ which allows anyone to enter public or private land to exercise or relax. Activists are now campaigning for the same freedom in England. Read [this interview](#) with one such activist, Nick Hayes, and check up on how the movement is progressing in [this article](#).

Is there a green space in your local community you don't feel free to access? Would the right to roam be “a repossession of an ancient freedom?”

... an animal right.

Artist Banksy has recently unveiled a series of animal murals across London, including a [wolf on a TV satellite](#) and trio of [playful monkeys](#) on a bridge over Brick Lane.

Banksy has explored the theme of freedom before, and this time his message has been complicated by the fact that several of these murals have been removed or even stolen. His final piece in the series, depicting a [gorilla freeing other animals](#) outside London Zoo, was quickly taken down.

Should Banksy's artworks have been left up for the public to enjoy? What metaphor was he trying to express through his liberated animals?

Writer Margaret Atwood has a poem called '[The animals in that country](#)' in which, like Banksy, she imagines a world where animals live alongside humans. In that world, animals are treated with a dignity equal to people, unlike in our world where "Their eyes / flash once in car headlights / and are gone."



Would you prefer to live in a country like the one Atwood describes? Today there are 33 animal and 39 plant species that only exist in captivity. What could we do to ensure the freedoms of animals are better protected?

... a friendly city.

In your local community, have you ever wondered why certain surfaces are covered in spikes, or why benches have so many armrests? These features are called 'hostile architecture' or 'anti-homelessness architecture' and are designed to prevent unhoused people from sleeping or resting in that space. [Here](#) are some more examples.

Some people, such as Eva Wiseman in [this opinion piece](#), say that hostile architecture is cruel because it doesn't allow unhoused people the freedom to exist comfortably in public spaces, and makes parks, highstreets, and stations less accessible for everyone. Others argue hostile architecture does not just target unhoused people, but prevents loitering and crime, ultimately making public spaces safer.



The conversation about hostile architecture has been raised again following the Paris Olympics where new measures were taken to drive out unhoused people; read about it in [this article](#). How do you feel about hostile architecture in your local community? Is it a necessary measure, or a restriction of freedom? Orwell experienced homelessness for a time, as he records in 'Down and Out in Paris and London' – what do you think he would think of the hostile architecture we have today?

... “sweet, it’s amazing, but it’s not easy.”

These are the words of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, who was arbitrarily detained in 2016 in Iran under accusations of espionage. She was incarcerated for six years before finally being freed in 2022, and has struggled to adjust to life back in the UK. Read about her return home [here](#).



Why do you think Nazanin describes her freedom both negatively and positively? She talks about how other unlawful arrests of activists remind her of her ordeal and that she is going to keep campaigning to free her friends who are still detained. Is freedom something we experience as an individual, or a collective?

You have access to information with an ease and immediacy that Orwell could only have dreamt of. You are also exposed to misinformation in a way that Orwell did dream of ... in his nightmares. Check out 2023 Youth Prize judge Marianna Spring's Royal Television Society video on disinformation and online conspiracies here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_yzGgDO8cE and who starts viral misinformation here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UAY6PI5UtSU> .



Before you research your topic for the Prize, carry out these exercises to help you prepare to get sound, useful information – and fight off the misinformation-makers who are everywhere out there, trying to mislead you.

ACTIVITY

Use Michael Caulfield's 'Four Moves' to assess information on the web.

- Choose two stories from his blog. <https://fourmoves.blog/>
- Then apply the SIFT technique to each story – and record your results in the table attached. <https://www.notion.so/Introducing-SIFT-04db7879dd7a4efaa76bfb2397d11ffd>

“Every record has been destroyed or falsified, every book rewritten, every picture has been repainted, every statue and street building has been renamed, every date has been altered. And the process is continuing day by day and minute by minute. History has stopped. Nothing exists except an endless present in which the Party is always right.”
George Orwell, 1984

Research Activity: SIFT

Stop

Investigate the Source

Find trusted coverage

Trace claims, quotes, and media back to the original context

Stop! How do you feel about this story?	Investigate: what did you find out about the Source?
What better trusted coverage did you find ? In what ways was it a better source?	Were you able to trace claims, quotes, and media back to the original context? What did you find? Did your views change?

What have you learned about research from this exercise?
 Share your thoughts with others. What did they think?

Now you are ready – hopefully! – to research your topic for your own piece!