

ARTICLE FOR ORWELL YOUTH PRIZE 2024 ENTRANTS – “HOME”

by Elizabeth Ryan, Volunteer Reader

Hi there!

My name's Elizabeth Ryan and I will be one of the readers and feedbackers for the 2024 Orwell Youth Prize. This will be my third competition and I can't wait to get stuck in.

This Orwell Youth Prize sees some exciting changes, most notably that the Prize is being opened to Year 7's for the first time. So anyone in years 7 to 13 in any UK school or FE college can take part.

And here's another twist – in past years the Prize's theme has centred on something abstract – last year's was the interesting concept of “Who's In Control?” This year the theme centres on something largely definitive – HOME.

Now the first thing people think of there is the home they live in. Being within the youth category means that you automatically have – or should have - a home to live in – which is where you sleep, where you eat your meals, where you play, where you do your homework and where, like me, you slump in front of the telly at the end of a busy day.

Now if you want to write a piece about exactly that then by all means do it – I would remember though to add the small unique things about what or who's in there or what goes on to make your piece memorable – Grandad's earthquake scale snoring in his favourite armchair or the cat scratching the settee in his own unique way – but keep in mind that the word HOME goes much further than that. What name is given to the screen on your Smartphone where all the apps are?

It's been more than thirty years since I was at secondary school but I remember my form room from Years 7 to 9 which was the same room (Room 21). As that was the first classroom I went into at senior school – an enormous change from junior school – it felt like home in that was where my class register was taken every day and where my desk was where I kept all the books and equipment I didn't need for the day.

I once went to New York on holiday. We got around the city by the Subway. The station closest to our hotel was 28th Street on Line 6. So this became our home station and almost all our trips began and ended there.

Yet also remember that there are those unfortunate enough not to have a home right now. The cost of living crisis means the UK has a higher than ever number of homeless people and it's no different in other countries. There are those in Gaza and Ukraine who have had to, quite literally, leave their homes and everything they know because of conflict. What must life be like for them?

Also remember that home can take on all manner of things – it could be your home town, a favourite friend or family member, even food or a certain aroma (that means a pleasant smell).

It's a lot to think about isn't it? Take some time to consider how “Home” will be the centre of your piece and compose your work accordingly. Remember this is a competition, so take care with spelling, punctuation and how you present your work. And above all have fun!