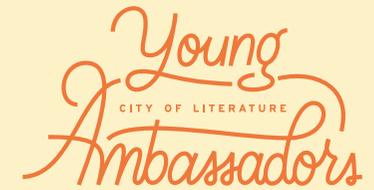

YOUNG AMBASSADOR CASE STUDY:

Finding your Voice in a City of Literature



Ava became an ambassador in Year 11 at a school specialising in science and technology. She was 'flattered' when she was chosen to be a YCLA, and in her opportunities to meet fellow Young Ambassadors, enjoyed the feeling that they were 'connected by a passion for reading and writing', helping them to communicate.

Ava participated across a range of activities during the programme, developing her existing interest in 'classical' literature by engaging in a broader range of opportunities across the City of Literature. As one of four Young Ambassadors on the Big City Reads judging panel, the shortlist of Big City Reads titles helped her to 'reconsider assumptions' about literature, introducing her to books with 'young protagonists, portrayed in a way I can relate to'. She was disappointed her choice wasn't selected, because she felt the theme of homelessness was relevant to Nottingham, 'hiding a truth we might find hard to bear'.

Ava took the opportunity to attend the workshops on becoming a critic and interviewing, subsequently writing around twenty reviews, challenging herself to develop a voice for non-fiction rather than fiction,

which became steadily 'easier and more pleasurable'. She also interviewed a poet, a 'safe practice' experience she thinks will be useful in helping her handle interviews in the future. She described her mentoring sessions with sensitivity and an awareness of her own development needs.

I already wrote quite a lot, but I can't keep one idea in my mind. I've learned that it's key to stay focused on one idea. You have to keep in mind who you're writing for.

Young Ambassador mentoring helped Ava develop her ideas into stories, steering her writing into form and pointing out improvements, such as avoiding repetition, and trying to show not tell. She rated her confidence in writing as 8/10 against a starting point of 6/10, describing the way she has worked on tone of voice and character in prose and also in poetry, a new genre. 'Mentoring made being a writer feel official', she said in the evaluation

interview: 'I was doing it anyway, but now I feel like a professional writer doing it.' The mentoring sessions also raised and addressed complex issues of well-being. Ava described the transformation of a negative mood into a powerful mood to channel in writing a journal or diary.

It is clear that she has learned confidence in self-expression through her experience of the Young Ambassador programme, resulting in taking part in broader public opportunities such as the NUCoL National Poetry Day Poetry Funfair, poetry festival and book launches which she 'wouldn't have known were on' otherwise. Her response to the need for a Young Ambassador programme encapsulates its aims:

It means the population will be able to express itself better to feed into the next generation of writers, helping them effectively communicate their ideas in fiction and non-fiction.