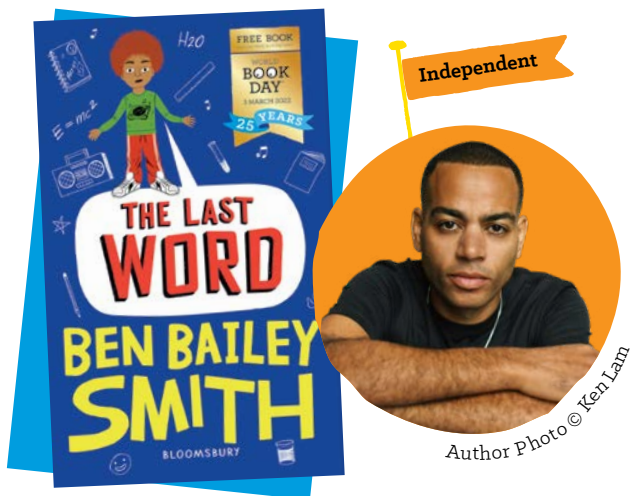


Author & Illustrator ACADEMY

BEN BAILEY SMITH REAL-LIFE COMEDY & INSPIRATION:

NOTES FOR TEACHERS AND LIBRARIANS



Author Photo © Ken Lam

STAND UP, COMEDIANS!

Before watching the video or reading the extract...

Ben Bailey Smith explains in his video that a lot of his inspiration came from several years of performing live on stage as a stand-up comedian. What skills or qualities do you think you need to possess to be good at this job? For example, do you think you need to be able to think on your feet, or something else? As you read *The Last Word*, consider which of these traits you see in Ben's protagonist, Carmichael Taylor.

DISCUSS THE EXTRACT!

TAKEN FROM CHAPTER 1, PAGES 1-3.

Before you get into the detail of the discussion, get the group's initial responses to the extract – how do they feel about it? Are they keen to read more? Do they have any questions?

1. What do you learn about the narrator, Car, in Chapter 1? What are his personality traits?
2. What does Car mean by always getting the 'last word'? What does this tell you about him?
3. How does actor, comedian and author Ben Bailey Smith create comedy in the extract?

FIND INSPIRATION

AFTER WATCHING THE VIDEO, DEVELOP BEN'S IDEAS

INSPIRATION 1: FINDING A STYLE

In the video, Ben talks about the style of his two stories about Carmichael Taylor: *Something I Said* and *The Last Word*.

- Discuss whether the group enjoy reading books that are set in the real world. Can they think of other examples and also examples of books that are set outside of the real world? Encourage listening to each other's ideas about why they enjoy reading realist or non-realist books.
- Discuss why it might be useful to use your own experiences in your writing.
- If you were to write a story in the REALIST COMEDY style that Ben Bailey Smith talks about, which key themes would you like to explore? Make a list of three that are important to you.

INSPIRATION 2: IMPORTANT INFLUENCES

Ben says that 'if you are a writer, you will also be a reader; there will be hundreds or thousands of writers that influence your stories'. What are the different ways that we can be inspired by the stories we read?

- Ben Bailey Smith explains that two of his big influences are Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events* and Mark Forsyth's *The Etymologicon*. Why? What is their influence on *The Last Word*?
- Consider your own influences. Which books have you read that have had a big impact on you? Write a list of all the ways you have been inspired by a particular book or writer.

CREATIVE CHALLENGE FROM BEN BAILEY SMITH

Write 100 words or more about something funny that has happened to you or that you've seen happen in real life! As an extra challenge, use a thesaurus to expand your vocabulary and use some words in your writing that you've never used before. Can you find the etymology or origin of your chosen new words?