

Yvonne Battle-Felton:

This is Write Your Novel, an innovative, write-along podcast series presented by me, Yvonne Battle-Felton. I'm a novelist and lecturer. And with this series, I'll be joined in conversation with other leading writers to explore the process of writing. This is all about the craft of writing a novel and decisions writers might make. In each episode, you'll hear one writer talking about one book to provide insight on one specific narrative device. So there may be the odd spoiler as we delve into their writing and their process. At the end of each conversation, there's a writing exercise to help you try out the technique in your own writing. Funded by Arts Council England, supported by New Writing North, this series is very much for you, the writer. Let's get started.

My conversation today is with Irenosen Okojie. Her work has been featured in the New York Times and the Huffington Post amongst other publications. Irenosen's debut novel, Butterfly Fish, won a Betty Trask award, whilst her short story collection, Speak Gigantular, was shortlisted for various awards, including The Edge Hill Short Story Prize and a Jhalak Prize. She was awarded an MBE for Services to Literature in 2021.

Today, we're focusing on her second short story collection, Nudibranch. Characterized as a dark and seductive foray into the surreal, Nudibranch is a collection of stories where characters find themselves in very extraordinary and unique situations, from a love-hungry goddess of the sea arriving on an island inhabited by eunuchs, to a girl from Martinique moonlighting as a Grace Jones impersonator. Every tale allows the reader to expand their imagination.

The focus of this conversation is on description. Description can play a vital role in transporting a reader, exploring a character and developing the spaces for a narrative to play out in all this variety. First, I asked Irenosen to read out a passage to set up our discussion.

Irenosen Okojie:

I think I'll read from Kookaburra Sweet. In this piece, Kara returns from Sydney back to London and she becomes something else. That's all I'll say. "On the Dartmouth Road where her flat was situated, she passed a mural of a giant white-haired woman in the clouds surrounded by a fleet of red birds. The strip of liquorice melted into her blood. She popped another in her mouth. They were so moreish, she finished the packet right there on the street. In her suitcase, the bar outfit spilled a small electric horizon from the black shirt collar into a zip, an insect dead from shock in the bright light.

At the flat, she fell asleep in the bedroom. When she woke up, her body felt supple, soft, bendy, unfamiliar. She spotted a dark stain on the blue bedsheet. She looked at it with suspicion, rubbed the spot. Her fingers were black, liquorice-colored, stretchy. Her heart rate tripled. She leapt off the bed somewhat unsteadily, rushed to the mauve bathroom. Skin care products lined the edges of the tub, crowded the sink. In her haste, she accidentally knocked over a bottle of Palmers Cocoa Butter. Her toothbrush went flying. She switched on the light. The 60-watt bulb stuttered in anticipation as she rushed to the mirror, light flickering sporadically as though arguing with itself.

Chest heaving, she stared at her reflection, her breath pale magician's smoke. Sure enough, she was not herself. Or, she was herself but something different. Something skewed and accidental, something tainted with the margin particles of an incense-smelling man who

could mimic the curves of a sidewinder. Her bathroom had become a circus balancing on two hinges, rocking unsteadily in the ether. She took tentative steps closer to the mirror. Sure enough, she had transformed into liquorice; a black, sweet liquorice woman, a liquorice sweet black woman; bendy, stretchy, adaptable in harsh conditions, resplendent and irrepressible."

Yvonne Battle-Felton:

Just such a joy to hear you read, to hear your insights. Thank you so much. And so one of my favorite lines in the collection is, "Sure enough, she had transformed into liquorice; a black, sweet liquorice woman, a liquorice sweet black woman; bendy, stretchy adaptable in harsh conditions, resplendent and irrepressible." And I wanted to ask you, because I know how reading that made me feel, and suddenly, it seemed like what was a tragedy seemed more an opportunity and, in some ways, empowering. What does description make possible?

Irenosen Okojie:

Yeah, no, absolutely. Description means that you can communicate with the reader on multiple levels, and that is dependent on the writer and what you want to say and how you want to say it. I'm really, as you know, keen and passionate about imagery, and imagery that really stays with the reader and that perhaps it will take them a while to figure out what's going on and they can sit with it for a long time and come back to it.

But that particular description, yeah, exactly. For me, it's about the beauty and power of black women, because I love black women. Obviously I am one, so maybe I'm a little bit biased, but it's just the tremendous level of beauty, of passion, of power, of intention that black women have, this vibrancy as well. The fact that our lives are often hidden and very unsung, yet there is this joy. You walk down the street, wherever, and you watch... I watch black women. I watch us because I find it such a joyful thing to see the differences, to see the individuality and the uniqueness, but also the power, the ability to be able to thrive when the world doesn't want you to is incredible to me.

And that particular story, I am in those lines that you mentioned, celebrating the power and the beauty of black women because I think it's very, very special. And I'm so glad you felt that way about it because that's the feeling that I wanted to convey, that even though there is this difficulty happening in the story where she's come back from what she feels is a failed excursion to Australia and she tried to have a thriving career, tried to fall in love and that didn't work out, and she's come back with her tail between her legs in that way that we do, but you rebuild yourself.

And this idea of her becoming what she eats, it's such a powerful image and it just really stayed with me when I had the idea, and I really wanted to go there because I thought, "If I do this, am I going to go there with this story?" You know, the fantastical element. I won't spoil for people who haven't read the story, but it was important to strike that balance of, "Yes, we do face difficulties," but I'm communicating with my sisters, man, in that story as well. And I'm really glad that you picked that up.

Yvonne Battle-Felton:

You know what, there's so much to, I think, pick up on and it just... I'm telling you, it feels like a treasure trove. So you go in there and quite honestly, it starts right there from the beginning in Logarithm. So you drop us right into the story and it's vivid description. And of

course, I'm going to read some of them. And it says, "Here is a skillet. Here is a dawn carrying December. Here is the umbilical cord slung over a rose-colored lampshade." And then, "here's the shape of the departed."

And I feel like right there, right in that description, there's these silences and these spaces. And I feel like you invite the reader to build this story to consider, to experience. And for me, it was a sense of loss and absence. And I'm curious if you can... How do we do that? How do we use that description to enhance and drive that narrative and create that tone?

Irenosen Okojie:

Yeah. Great question. That piece, as you said, it's really an introduction into the world of Nudibranch. And by the time you get to the end of the collection, the last piece, I think hopefully the reader feels that all the stories are connected. You feel that running theme throughout it. But I think what you say, or what you don't say in a story is just as important. Leaving gaps for the reader to fill in, to have their own ideas, to let things percolate, to let things simmer.

And with that particular piece, Logarithm is really a life's philosophy, actually. It's about everything: birth, death, motherhood, all kinds of things. But what you have are these really poetic lines. And then in between that, hopefully there are little spaces and silences for you to just go, "Okay, let me just digest that line. Let me fill in the gaps. Okay, I think I have some sense of what that means. This particular sentence, let me take that in, let me fill in the gaps."

So I'm not trying to create a traditional narrative with that story, if you could call it a story. And that's deliberate. It's creating a context for what is to come in the collection. And that's fun for me. I'm trying to show my range, I'm trying to show the variety of writing. I think the short form allows you to do these things, to be playful. And for me, that's really fun as a writer. I love both forms; both the novel and the short form, but it was really important to me to do that with the first piece; to really be brave with the first piece, because I've had people say, "Oh, do you think that was the right thing, to start off with that piece? [laughter] Don't you think you should have started off with a different story?"

It depends on your perspective, but I think that that's what's so interesting about what we do as writers, is that we don't want to spoonfeed the reader or give them everything. For me, I like that some people will get that piece and that some people will go, "I don't know. I'm still confused about it. I need to read it again." And that's okay. That happens to me with some stories, but I like that you can come back to things, even really short pieces. That's like a prose poem, essentially, Logarithm. It has so much in it that I'm really glad that you were able to see, not just what's there, but also the silences, because I think that balance is really important.

Yvonne Battle-Felton:

How did you come up with the ideas, the characters, the places that you take us to emotionally, psychologically, descriptively?

Irenosen Okojie:

Great question. Yeah. Like you, I guess I'm just really curious about the human experience and I'm really interested in how we get through things and what it's like when you're at a

crossroads. And also, I think the process of writing about the hidden lives of characters of colour, their rich internal landscapes, I think that's so important to see on the page - you do it, lots of other great writers do it, and it's something that I'm equally passionate about. So in terms of how the process works for me, I'm always interested in offbeat ideas because I'm a slightly alternative chick. So I'm always looking to come from something, a context, from a side angle, because for me, that's exciting and it's a way to mine that human experience and hopefully surprise the reader.

But I think even within these fantastical worlds, I anchor it in everyday experiences. I think it is anchored in things that we can connect to as human beings, but the world feels both familiar and new. It's that sense of being taken on a journey and hopefully you're experiencing all sorts of things with these characters, you're going on a journey with them and the process is to really show the experiences that we have as people of colour, as black people, that these stories are just as valuable and just as exciting and just as complicated.

For me, I'm really passionate about writing complicated women, especially black women, because I think that we're just held to a different standard that is crazy, and we're expected to carry the burdens of the world and be these magical people who don't have feelings or needs or wants. And that, to me, is just ridiculous. So I really want to push back against that in my fiction. So it's a multitude of things, but really at the heart of it is the multiplicity of the black experience. That is really, really important to me that we do that.

Like I said, I'm not the only one - you're doing it, there are other writers doing it. And it's just great to see because it does show that variety. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie talks about the danger of one narrative. And I think that's really true. And I think that that's what we're all trying to push back against. We're all showing that these stories are really, really important. And everybody has something different to offer. Every voice is different and unique, and it's just really a pleasure to be a part of that.

Yvonne Battle-Felton:

One thing I always expect when I'm reading your work is something like empathy for a character that I would never have imagined empathizing with. And I feel like it's a special gift that you bring these characters to life. They may be completely different from what I would expect or understand for a character to want, and here they are wanting it and trying to get it and failing or experiencing being hurt, having pain, having these painful memories, being treated sometimes quite horribly, and you put their pain on the page. And even though it's descriptive and it's beautifully told, it's still pain and it allows us to feel and empathize and reflect.

And I guess what I'd like to know is how you... I love knowing that it comes from your imagination and sometimes from your life and that it's that form of play, but then how do you know when you've gotten it right? What is your practice or your process like?

Irenosen Okojie:

I think it's just trial and error, Yvonne. With most things, you have an idea and a character that you want to bring to life and then a particular experience that they've gone through that you want to capture, and you have to attempt to do that on the page in some way, as well as giving them things to... There's got to be tension in the story as well, I think, to really grip the reader. Like you said, what are their wants? What are their desires? What's stopping them from getting it? What's stopping them from getting it externally, but also

internally, because that's often a really big battle, because a lot of the time I'm writing about maybe traumatized people, or people that have been broken in some way and they're trying to get some sense of redemption, but what does that look like?

What does redemption look like for you if, say, for example, your mother abandoned you and you have that sense of loss for... you carry that with you, that sense of perhaps not being good enough, perhaps having that nagging pain all the time. Does it make you overly ambitious? Does it make you struggle to connect with people in relationship? Does it make you struggle to allow people to get close to you? The process of excavation and what makes somebody tick? How can you capture them on the page that feels fully formed, but also complicated? Because you don't want to do this thing of like, "Oh, someone's either good or bad." You know what I mean? Because that's too straightforward for me.

People are really complex. Somebody can be very loving and then the flip side of that, they might be traumatized. So it means they act out in really bad ways as well, or they have really difficult or problematic coping mechanisms. So for me, it's really important to convey that, even if a reader doesn't particularly like a character. I remember a woman saying to me, "Oh, I don't really know if I like Sidra in Grace Jones. I'm not sure I really like that character, but she's really fascinating. Her journey and what she goes through is really interesting." And for me, it's really interesting that that reader had that response because, A: what do you expect from black women? Do you expect them to be perfect? Is that how you like a character? Or maybe you see elements of yourself in that character that you might not be willing to articulate or express, but somehow touches a nerve?

This stuff is really interesting, how people respond to characters and what makes a character striking, what makes them stay with you? I'm thinking of Zora Neale Hurston's, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. I love that book. Great book, isn't it?

Yvonne Battle-Felton:

Yeah, yeah.

Irenosen Okojie:

And she's such a complicated character and she has to come through these different marriages, but she still keeps this zest for life, this joy, this desire to live her own truth, which is amazing, especially for such a liberated character for a woman at that time and for a black woman at that time to not be held by society's boundaries and just deliver, I found the fact that Zora Neale Hurston was able to do that just amazing. So it's complicated. And I think as writers, we bring so much to the page of our own experiences of not just of ourselves, but of other people that we've encountered or found really intriguing and fascinating, and there's some element of them that you think, "God, I really want to mine that for this particular story that's really interesting that they look at something in a particular way."

And if through that process people are able to have empathy for that character, that means I've done my job, I feel, as a writer because it's not just discussed or it's not just a straightforward feeling. It's, I have empathy, I don't think I would do what they're doing in this situation, but how do you know? That's the thing, how do you know, if you are pushed to the edge, how do you know...? You think you know how you might react, but you never know. That sense of uncertainty is what I'm also trying to capture as well.

Yvonne Battle-Felton:

I think you do such a wonderful job of that. And I think you're right because you give us glimpses of what led to this point. If we aren't able to empathize with it, knowing what we know about them, it does, I think, allow us to question either who we are, or how we read or how we see the world or our place in the world.

I'm curious now, or even more curious, about your choice of place. You bring people and characters to life in this way that allows us to have a different perspective. And so in the collection, Kara flies from Sydney, she goes back to London. She lives in Forest Hill. And when she comes out of the underground station, the streets, and some of these are quoted or misquoted, but the streets hum with festivities of Open House week. There's a market with edible plants, children pressing their hands against the screens as if gathering evidence of the day's journey so far. And then in... Deshuku?

Irenosen Okojie:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Yvonne Battle-Felton:

There's a fleeting image appeared, the grotesque shopping mall's pink elephant drinking oil from the subway steps.

So you use London, you play with London, you play with places that readers may or may not be familiar with, and it creates this image that captures energy, liveliness, this chaos of busy life of a London, maybe in our imagination, and for some people, the London that they know. And I'm curious about how closely the London in some of the stories represents the London you experience, and also if it was important for it to represent or not represent a London that you know.

Irenosen Okojie:

Yeah. I think both, actually, but almost subconsciously. I think because I write fantastically, in terms of creating fantastical worlds, that there will always be that element where it might feel like it's suddenly, the London that you're seeing, you recognize it, but it feels like slightly elastic. You might go, "Oh God, yeah, there is a pink elephant in that part of London at that shopping mall. But hold on, the oil on the steps, does that..." So there's always some kind of skewing, I think, of the presentation, but certainly, I want to capture the London that I know because it's thriving and eclectic and so different depending on who you are, your experience of it.

I wrote about Forest Hill in Kookaburra Sweet because my ex-boyfriend lives in Forest Hill, so I was always there a lot. I was in them streets, man, I was there. I was going to cafes to write and the Horniman Museum, which is amazing. It's just down the road from there. And I was a writer and residence at the local library for a bit as well. So I really like that area of London. And I tried to... And Open House is a thing in that area of London. Yeah.

So it's really interesting. While I was a writer in residence there, part of my brief was to write about Forest Hill. So Kookaburra Sweet felt like the perfect story to set in Forest Hill, but with this transatlantic connection in that she's had this experience in Australia, she comes back home to Forest Hill and this transformation takes place. But I also wanted to reference actual things that happen in Forest Hill. Like some of the murals I mentioned, they

are actual murals in Forest Hill. The Horniman I mentioned is actually a place in Forest Hill. And they're just tiny, little... The sweet shop that I mentioned is actually in Forest Hill, so I think it's nice to... You anchor it with the elements of the real, because people who've read that story, who live in Forest Hill, recognize those things and they go, "Oh my God, yes. I know what you're talking about." And that's really nice.

Again, it's that combination of you want people to feel like they recognize this London because that's what creates that sense of connection. But at the same time, you want them to see that the London that you've reflected, it can shift subtly, it can mutate a little. I definitely think that place is important. I definitely think that... I've grown up in London and it's a city I love, but I've also had some really tough times in London as well. And I think that's reflected in some of the stories, certainly in *Speak Gigantular*, a lot of the stories are about London, but also the joys and the difficulties, the loneliness of living in a city and what that can feel like.

Yvonne Battle-Felton:

I think one thing that you do, or one of the many things that you do when you're bringing these places to life is it seems that all of our senses are involved. So even in *Kookaburra Sweet*, Kara, she jumps onto 'the parched Sydney streets', then there's the concrete enemies, the blazing heat. Her silver case, the wheels are squeaking like a distorted instrument for the unlucky. There's bloodshot vision like a split thirteenth apostle sewn back together. So there's all these things that you're doing with imagery. So we can see it, we can feel it, we can hear it. You're evoking memory, that sense of familiarity, those feelings. How do you use the senses to create or recreate description?

Irenosen Okojie:

I think the senses are really important because you want it to feel really vivid. You want it to feel alive. I think that books I really enjoy just transport me. When you feel like you're actually in the story and you can feel like, I don't know, the dew on the grass... You know what I mean? You can see the flies on the flowers, you can feel the breeze. It's that sense of being just immersed. And I think when I'm... I'm sure it's the same thing for you, there's a point where you're writing the work, where it's almost like you just become a vessel creating it, and that's just a really nice feeling, where it feels like it's almost just happening instinctively, that that process of what you have in your head is being reflected on the page.

So for me, I'm thinking about specificity, forensic details - that I talked about - because it really does... it brings you into the character's world and you feel in the moment. And you want to be able to feel that heat, you want to be able to feel that sense of anticipation. If they're about to experience something that's going to change them or be subtly transformative, what does that taste like? What are they seeing? What are they feeling? What's the smell in the air? As a writer, you know these things that they're all important to create a world. So I try to do that.

Obviously, you don't want to overload it too much. And sometimes you have to strike that balance between what you show and what you don't show, what you tell them, what you don't. It's a tricky thing, but I think language is really important to me. I'm a writer that cares about language and that's part of the experience. So using language to create something atmospheric, you know what I mean? Where you're just in it and you're just like, "Oh my

God, I feel part of this world even though I'm an observer," I think that's a great thing, you know?

Yvonne Battle-Felton:

I do. I wanted to talk a little bit about... One thing I was struck with, the stories... There's these lines, there's images, the themes, these feelings, and they orient us no matter how fantastical the setting is, and there's that realism. And in Cornutopia, and it's just, one, is it because I really want to quote your lines back to you because I feel like if they touched me and it took me to these places, then what a treat it is to be able to read some of them back to you?

So the narrator tells us, "The picture on the orange wall of four naked black women standing on a riverbank, holding scarves shaped like birds, trembled. The women turned around, made a space for me. I joined them, followed by our leap into the water." And I just thought, one, it's so expressive or so imaginative. And it's one of those things when you look at a picture and sometimes you imagine yourself in that, or imagine that picture having a life outside of you, and that image, it's followed by the books and the table. And it is where Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Amos Tutuola's *the Palm-Wine Drinkard*, and Jacqueline Woodson's *Brown Girl Dreaming*. How do you create that balance between how much of the world around you goes into the story?

Irenosen Okojie:

Yeah, really interesting. I think you just... it's practice, really. You feel your way through and you think about what might work in a scene, what might make it come alive. But also, I think what's not said is really important. And this thing of giving it an extra dimension... I love that you reference the picture because exactly the way you articulated it is perfect. I honestly couldn't say any better when you have something like that. And you imagine it being its own world and it's almost elastic in a way, like it moves and it breathes. And I really wanted to capture that. You know that feeling of when you go to an exhibition and you're just... You're completely absorbed by what you see and you feel yourself being drawn into that world and it takes on its own imagination? That's exactly what I wanted to create in that scene.

But then at the same time, you have that, and then you have the anchoring of those very real books that also have their own worlds and also have their own dimensions. And also is like this cartography of blackness and the black experience. Again, each writer very different. So it's an amalgamation of all those things. And it's wonderful, actually, to hear you talk about it and reflect that back to me, because I'm remembering the experience of writing that story. I love that story.

It's not a story people talk about often in the collection actually, but for me, it's a really important story because it's looking at how we quantify pain and trauma and what we do to get rid of that in the body, especially in the black body, because we carry so much. And here you have a young woman who is trying to recover from something really devastating. But it's also a beautiful love story as well, because she has this man in her life, who is an ex partner, but they have this amazing friendship that has transcended through this terrible experience.

So the fact that she's going for this drug trial to try to... When I was in my twenties and at uni, I would do crazy things like sign up for drug trials to earn money. You know those crazy things you do? Like, "Oh God, how am I going to pay the rent this month? Let me sign up for

a drug trial and see if I get accepted for it." I did that. [laughter] You are laughing. But I'm also drawing from my own personal experience as well and incorporating it, but really giving the character her own story within that too.

Yvonne Battle-Felton:

I love the drawing of your own life into the story and looking at the risks that we've taken and mining those for stories later. I don't know that I'll be taking more risks in order to write about them, but I love knowing that part of the risks that you've taken or the things that you've tried have informed part of your story.

Irenosen Okojie:

It's got to go somewhere, Yvonne. [laughter] These wild experiences, they've got to go somewhere, haven't they? That's the brilliant thing about being a writer. And I'm sure you do the same, where there are things that have happened to you and they find their way onto the page. And then you see it with a whole different perspective. It's so interesting. Like, "Would I sign up for a drug trial now?" Hell no, I probably wouldn't. But in my twenties where I was like, "I'm happy to try anything," I did.

So it's really interesting to see what people do in situations when things are really tough for them and difficult, and like you said, the risk that you'll take. And I feel like with this character, she's at a point where she's really struggling to cope with the pain that she's in. Trauma leaves its own imprint within us on a cellular level. And this character certainly experiences that. So she does this to try to find a way out or some hope that there'll be some kind of salvation at the end of it. Yeah.

Yvonne Battle-Felton:

I think that's one thing I've found in most of the stories, there was that transformation, that trauma, that hope. I know I have read some works where it's either there's so much going on and there's so much description, which no matter how lovely it is, it takes me from the story, and I end up getting lost in the description. And then I've also read some things where there's so little description that I can't orient myself, that I just don't know what's going on and where and who and anything. And sometimes it's been from the same writer, which is always like, "Wow, I wonder what that depends on." But what advice might you give writers grappling with getting that balance right, if there is such a thing as just right?

Irenosen Okojie:

Yeah. Yeah. No, that's such an interesting question. I think really read writers who get that right, because you and I are avid readers. And first and foremost, we're readers. And when you have that ability to appreciate other works and other worlds, you learn how to do it. You see, actually, this person gets this right in this way, or it doesn't quite work in that way. This is why I always advise writers, and it was an advice given to me by one of my early mentors, to read the first novels of authors you like, because in the first novels of authors you like, it's like a first album; basically, they give it everything, but they're also never perfect. So you can see how they strike that balance between the narrative arc and the sense of description, and you can learn how to do that. So that's my big tip in that regard. But I also think being able to have a bit of distance from your work helps as well. So when you've written something, take a break from it and then come back to it with that intention

in mind, "Have I managed a balance of giving good, evocative description that's rich but not too much, but also there's movement in the story?" If there's no movement in the story, you're going to lose the reader. And that's so important. Something has to happen or things have to happen. The character has to try stuff, they have to fail at it, they have to get back up, they have to grow, there has to be some kind of growth. You have to keep practicing to get that right. It doesn't come straight away. It certainly didn't for me.

I'm sure it's a similar thing for most writers. We try, we might get the character really right, but oh my God, maybe nothing's happened in the story. And then you got to go back and look at that story and think, "Oh gosh, how do I change that? How do I create action and how do I create momentum in the piece so that the reader is really..." Especially with short stories, I think that there's so much interesting work out there and short stories are competing against so much. You want to be able to bring that reader into your world and just hold their attention for however long that piece is, where they feel like, "Oh my God, I've got to stick around for this ride. I've got to find out what happens to this person." And for me also, to wrong-foot the reader. I think that's really important as well, just to disconcert them a little bit, because then you're challenging them.

Yvonne Battle-Felton:

Thank you so much. It's such a joy to hear you read, to hear your insights. Thank you so much.

Irenosen Okojie:

Thank you so much.

Yvonne Battle-Felton:

Now, let's write. Inspired by the discussion with Irenosen Okojie on description, this exercise draws on your own life experience to bring an object to life for the reader. Allow about 20 minutes for this exercise. First, you'll need an object. Look through your purse, trunk, in a kitchen drawer, dresser, under your bed, in a bag, briefcase or anywhere really, but look for an object you haven't used or potentially seen for a while. Choose an object that interests you. Now, using all of the senses, describe this object. First, start with the basics. What does it look, feel, smell, taste, and/or sound like? Be descriptive and describe it first as you might to yourself, and then for someone who can't see it, or doesn't see it as you do.

Now, what's its story? What does the object do? Describe it in terms of its functions. Where did you get it. Be as descriptive as possible. When did you get it? Also, how long has it been since you used it? Why did you get it? Again, be descriptive. This might include what you needed it for, what you thought was possible with it, why you don't use it anymore. Who did you get it from, and/or for? If possible, write a few paragraphs or description that show both the surface details and the deeper ones.

Finally, in about a paragraph, what does this object say and/or show about you? You can easily adapt this exercise to a character in your own writing to explore how they might describe an object and what the object says and/or shows about them.

As our description episode comes to a close, thanks again to my guest, Irenosen Okojie. Her book, *Nudibranch*, is available wherever you buy your books. *Write Your Novel* was presented by me, Yvonne Battle-Felton. And it was produced by Candace Wilson. The music

was by Joe Gardner. It was a Sonderbug production funded by Arts Council England and supported by New Writing North.

Next time, Alex Wheatle joins me in conversation to talk about tension. And if you want to know more, you can follow me on Twitter at @YBattleFelton. And don't forget, the conversation continues on Discord. Head over to the New Writing North website to sign up.