

Derek Owusu resource

Thanks for watching the interview with Derek Owusu on [Game Changers: True Stories](#). Here's a resource with some activities and reading linked to the video.

Pre-reading activity

These five difficult words and phrases appear in the text you are about to read.

<p>Literature-averse Someone who doesn't like books</p>	<p>Enraptured Extremely pleased and engaged by something</p>	<p>To embolden To give someone the confidence to do something</p>
<p>Literature = books and texts Averse = against, disliking</p>	<p>Vignettes Short descriptions in text</p>	<p>Recalcitrant Stubborn, unwilling to do what they are asked to</p>

Fill in the gaps using the words above (once each).

- If you tell someone they are a good writer, this helps to embolden them to keep writing. They are emboldened by the praise.
- Derek decided to write his book as a series of brief descriptions. In other words, it was a collection of _____.
- When Derek started reading properly for the first time he loved it. He felt _____ by books.
- Derek's younger brother really hated reading. He could be called _____.
- When Derek tried to convince his brother to read, it was difficult. His brother was quite _____ and didn't want to listen to the advice.

Read the article (over the page)

TW: This article references mental health, abuse and self-harm.

To read the article online, visit [inews.co.uk](https://www.inews.co.uk)

Derek Owusu on *That Reminds Me*: ‘Writers of colour aren’t really given the space to be experimental’

The podcaster tells Jimi Famurewa how Stormzy enabled him to explore his mental health in print — and helped him win over his brother



By [Jimi Famurewa](#)

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Five years ago, poet, podcaster and author Derek Owusu enthusiastically pressed a copy of *To Kill a Mockingbird* into the hands of his literature-averse 15-year-old brother.

“My obsession with reading had started and I wanted to get him into it,” says the 31-year-old. Moments later, he heard sobbing. Was his sibling so enraptured by Harper Lee’s words that he was instantly moved to tears?

“He told me that he wasn’t crying because of the content but because I was making him read,” says Owusu, chuckling. “He was like, ‘Why are you making me do this, man?’ As if it was a punishment.”

Whether through the [hit publishing podcast *Mostly Lit*](#) (which he co-hosted from 2017 until earlier this year) or the March release of the essay anthology *Safe: On Black British Men Reclaiming Space* (which he edited and contributed to), Owusu has since made it his business to make the world of books less painfully boring to people such as his brother.

That Reminds Me – a slender, piercing novel-in-verse, the first release of a two-book deal with grime lord [Stormzy](#)’s [#Merky Books](#) imprint – is Owusu’s latest attempt to offer something enriching and entertaining to under-represented readers. Started when he was in a mental health facility earlier this year (“I’d had a mental breakdown; I thought I could do it all but I couldn’t”), it uses poetic vignettes – some only 100 words long – to tell the harrowing, tender story of K, a British-Ghanaian raised in foster care (just like Owusu) who drifts through flickering experiences of abuse, sexual awakening, depression, alcoholism and self-harm.

Though it is brief and shot through with flashes of dark humour, it is anything but an easy read. But, for Owusu, it was crucial that he didn’t gloss over the darker elements of K’s story. “I’ve read a lot of books that deal with mental illness but sugar-coat it because they feel like the reader might cringe,” he says. “But I think that’s a problem. So with the alcohol and the self-harm, I wanted to be really detailed.”

He was also emboldened by the backing of Stormzy, who read early passages of the book, personally met the author, and has enthusiastically tweeted news of its publication to his 1.3 million followers. “I don’t think I’d have been able to publish this kind of book anywhere else,” says Owusu. “Writers of colour aren’t really given the space to be experimental.”

[...] “I do worry, because black writers are being published, but then their books are coming out with no marketing or publicity, so they just fall by the wayside,” he says. “We have to try to get them to create a long-lasting career and a body of work.”

Owusu is out to do just that himself. He has already begun work on a short-story collection that fuses the tradition of griots – ancient African oral historians – with “the storytellers on estates”. And there is also *Teaching My Brother to Read*, a second [#Merky Books](#) release for 2021 that will involve him paying his recalcitrant brother to read novels and discuss them with him.

“I’m still structuring it but my brother is happy.” Owusu flashes a smile. “Especially when he heard that Stormzy signed it.”

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Questions

1. Highlight the words **literature-averse** in the article.



Looking

2. Why did Derek’s brother start crying when he was handed a book to read?

3. The article says that Derek felt **emboldened** by Stormzy’s support. Why do you think the backing of Stormzy made him feel more confident?



Inferring

4. Based on the article, which of Derek’s books would you be most interested in reading?

- That Reminds Me* – a series of vignettes about life and mental health.
- Teaching My Brother to Read* – a true story about his younger brother.
- His series of short stories mixing African and British cultures.



Thinking

Explain your choice.

Challenge

Derek's new book *Teaching My Brother to Read* is about encouraging his younger sibling to enjoy reading.

Design a poster that encourages people who don't like books to give reading a try.

You could include:

- How reading is good for your mental health and mind.
- How reading helps you to be successful in life.
- Examples of books that you find interesting.
- The work of writers like Derek Owusu.

