

Keep a diary by Julie Myerson

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To anyone who feels young, uncertain or adrift, I'd warmly recommend diary writing. Start your diary now and remember it's the small, ordinary details, the phrases overheard, the nuance of feelings, that are most worth recording. They, more than anything more epic, are what will pin down your present self and allow you to reclaim it sometime in the distant future.

When I was 13, my new stepfather presented me with a Halifax building society page-a-day diary. In the front, I listed my ambitions for 1973:

- finish novel & get it published
- write to some famous people
- sleep out in the open air
- stop biting nails!!

(this last underlined three times).

Then I turned the page and began writing. Every day for the next six years, I recorded in smudged ballpoint everything I thought and felt, ate for tea, what day my period was expected (discreet asterisk) and what day it actually came (larger asterisk with exclamation mark).

Hopeless constants emerge. My period was never on time. I was obsessed with a boy called Jeremy (a family friend several years older) who had no interest in me. I was always trying to stop biting my nails.

I was precocious, optimistic, passionate, priggish – and determined to be a Famous Writer. Big dramas sit sandwiched between banalities. On July 6 1975: 'Helped Libby rearrange the posters in her bedroom.

Today we all had a horrible shock. Daddy has accused Mummy of stealing money from the firm, of course he is lying but if he can "prove" it Mummy might go to jail. As long as I eat, sleep and breathe upon this earth, I will not see that happen. This has been the most frightening day of my life.'

Reading these pages now doesn't really bring back the events themselves so much as that madly impatiently optimistic girl living entirely in her head and waiting for her life to start. Writing a diary then was a way of anchoring myself, of gazing inwards and trying to find the bits that felt good and real. I know I write fiction for similar reasons now. I'm glad to say I ticked off almost all of those 1973 ambitions. Just please don't ask me about the nail biting.

Activity 3

Now you have read this extract, complete the example of a Question 1 task below.

Read again the whole of the source text.

Choose *four* statements* below which are TRUE.

Choose a maximum of four statements.

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| A Julie Myerson has always kept a diary. | F Julie Myerson thinks that everyone should keep a diary. |
| B Julie Myerson still bites her nails. | G Julie Myerson has found that reading her teenage diary helps her to remember the events exactly as they happened. |
| C As a girl, Julie Myerson rarely wrote in her diary. | H Julie Myerson's childhood wasn't always happy. |
| D Julie Myerson often wrote about the same things. | |
| E As a girl, Julie Myerson never wrote about important things that happened in her life. | |

* Note: in the exam you will be asked to shade in a box alongside a statement.