

STORY STARTER

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I find houses or places a powerful starting point for stories. The inspiration for my latest book came from one of the most beautiful Elizabethan estates in the country, Montacute House. My grandparents lived in the village of Montacute and I spent hours as a child in the house or climbing the strange, pointed hill behind it. Walking around it more recently I wanted to know about the people who lived and worked there when it was built, more than four hundred years ago. They had a Queen called Elizabeth too, but how different would their lives seem to us and what has stayed the same? What were the dangers and struggles they encountered? Out of those questions came Cess, my main character, and the central plot of the book.

A good way to start a story is to think of a house or a particular place that you find intriguing. It does not have to be an old house like Montacute, it could be a very modern house, a new swimming pool, a Victorian park, a tunnel. In reality, or in your imagination, they could have been built on the ruins of an ancient fort, a cunning woman's cottage or the graves of Viking raiders. Sound far-fetched? I worked for a while as an archaeologist in the centre of Paris. During the dig a large stash of gold coins were found, hidden in a hurry by someone at the time of the French Revolution. What a great starting point for a story. There are layers of history just beneath our feet.

Once you have decided on your place you can use it to find a story – maybe there is drama in the real history of the place or maybe you imagine the people who lived, died, were heartbroken or plotted to kill a King there. Was someone forced to live there against their will – in an orphanage, an old prison, a wartime camp? You will soon have stories yelling at you to tell them!

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