

# theory of **craft.**

A NEWSLETTER ON MASTERING SKILL

## LITERARY FESTIVALS AND THE WRITING CRAFT



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# About Theory of Craft

The *Theory of Craft* is a personal and knowledge development resource newsletter developed by Society for Book and Magazine Editors of Nigeria. The scope of the topics range from enhancing skills, cultivating talent, improving productivity, freelance business management and knowledge resources. The target audience is the editorial professional to assist them in mastering their skills. The newsletter is managed by members of the society who serve as guest editors. The ToC is a continuous professional development project.

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## Editor's Note

Literary Festivals are on the rise, creating better writing and writers. Lagos, Abuja and Port Harcourt take the lead with more well-known literary festivals, while Akwa Ibom held the inaugural edition of the Boldo Book and Arts Festival in Uyo.

As diverse as the festival locations are, they offer opportunities to improve one's writing craft through networking, engaging panel discussions and writing workshops. This edition focuses on festivals.

You will read an essay that explores the role children's book festivals have to play in the writing industry using the Akada Children's book festival as a study. We featured an interview with author Michael Afenia who revealed how he distilled an MFA-styled writing session into a one-hour master class at the Boldo Book and Arts Festival in Uyo. Lastly, the How-To section will explore how book festivals like Ake Book and Art festival and communities of book lovers can effectively aid young writers' talent and build literary networks.

This exploration of how literary festivals shapes writers and writing aims to inspire writers who have never attended a book festival, offering a taste into the transformative power such experiences can have on both authors and their craft.

We hope this edition of Theory of Craft will demonstrate to the readers to the significance of the book festivals to authors in the writing industry.

Thank you.

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## ESSAY: THE IMPORTANCE OF CHILDREN'S BOOK FESTIVALS IN THE WRITING INDUSTRY by SOFIYYAH OYESANYA-SANNI

*“There are many little ways to enlarge your world. Love of books is the best of all” – Jacqueline Kennedy*

Book festivals are celebrations designed to bring together book lovers, authors, publishers, illustrators and all stakeholders to celebrate books. There are various book festivals in Nigeria, and so far, the only one targeted at children is the Akada Children's book festival in Lagos. A children's book festival specifically showcases children's books and connects authors to readers. According to data, since its inception in 2019, over 8500 people have attended the Akada Children's book festival, and it keeps growing. The last edition featured thirty-two books by Nigerian authors, as against the nine books featured in the first edition.



Akada Children's Book Festival. Photo Credit: Global Association of Literary Festivals

Among its activities include book chats by children, book reading sessions, pop up libraries, workshops and training. There are also games, paintings and sensory activities sessions. Children's book festivals have numerous benefits to authors and readers, such as promoting the love of reading and books in children. When children experience so many books in one place, it can evoke a sense of wonder and excitement. They feel joy and curiosity, as they are immersed in a world of endless stories and adventures; therefore, sparking their imagination and a love for reading. It also helps when children see that books are written by people like them, that is, people that they can meet and speak to. Children's love for books provides a market for children's book authors, creating valuable avenues to market their work.

Children's festivals a powerful source of encouragement for authors. Meeting their readers and getting feedback about their books reassures authors that their stories are making an impact. This motivates them to write and publish more, knowing they are serving a need. In addition, children's festival elevates and showcases the brands of publishing houses, helping them to reach more audience and promoting their works.

One key component of children's festivals is the networking opportunities. At the festivals, people can connect with different key players in the book industry from authors to illustrators and publishers, thereby increasing connection and promoting collaboration. A book festival is an amazing place to promote diverse voices, get exposure and promote a variety of stories and products for children. Attending the Akada Children's book festival exposed me to a range of types and styles of children's books of different genres.

Another prominent thing at a children's book festival is the book sales. The festival provides authors and book companies to a new market for their books. Service providers such as illustrators, agents and publishing houses can also sell their services to a fresh set of audience and generate revenue in the long run.

In conclusion, the children's book industry is no longer underrepresented. Events like the Akada Children's Book Festival are exposing more people to the vast potential within this market. As a result, the future for children's literature is filled with new opportunities and growth.

## About the Guest Editors

**Nmadiuto James** is a writer, editor, and travel enthusiast with a passion for books, languages, and cultural exploration. She has written book reviews for literary blogs and covered major literary and arts events as a journalist. Her work often highlights off-the-beaten-path adventures, capturing the essence of places and the stories they hold. Fascinated by the nuances of language, she has studied Ibibio, Igbo, French, Mandarin Chinese, and Spanish, with native proficiency in English and Nigerian Pidgin. Currently, Nmadiuto is working on a travelogue exploring the unique sights, sounds, and experiences of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, where she resides.

**Sofiyyah Oyesanya-Sanni** is a writer with over 7 years of writing experience, Sofiyyah is a Human Resources professional by day and a writer by night. She is passionate about literacy and raising wholesome children, thus she specialises in Children's books. She has authored two children's books and has some others on the way. She is a book lover and she writes short stories and lifestyle articles too.

**Uzoegbu Chiamaka Maryjane** is a writer who is mainly interested in fiction, most of her works center on characters with complex lives, trauma and psychological battles. She is a lover of books and mind blowing movies. She has written a few short stories and is looking forward to publication soon. Aside from literature and anything related to it, she's a huge fan of football. She supports Real Madrid.

**INTERVIEW**

**MICHAEL AFENFIA**



# A CONVERSATION WITH MICHAEL AFENFIA

NMADIUTO JAMES

I first met Michael Afenia during the inaugural edition of the Boldoz Book and Arts Festival held in Uyo. On the second day of the festival, he led a masterclass workshop in writing fiction. This conversation will centre on that workshop, the importance of writing workshops for writers, and the impact of literary festivals on the writing craft.



Apart from the Boldoz Book and Arts Festival, have you led writing workshops at other literary festivals?

At this point, it's impossible to mention just how many, but I've been part of a good number around Nigeria. I've also participated in events in Canada, Kenya and Uganda as well.

What lasting impact did you hope attendees would carry from your fiction masterclass at the Boldoz Book and Arts Festival into their writing journey?

First, let me say that the Boldoz Book and Arts Festival was a huge success, and it was an honour to be a part of it. Personally, I don't look at impact in terms of numbers. I would be happy if one person out of many participants reaches out to me after a workshop, conference or festival to tell me that they have started writing or have completed a project they've been working on for some time. The idea or plan is to get people interested in books. To get them interested in writing, so if one person can do that, then my deed is done and that is impact for me.

What role(s) do you see literary festivals playing in the development of writers and the advancement of the writing craft?

Writers need a place and opportunity to converge, dialogue and meet with the people that read their books. They want to be able to talk about their books and the things that inspire them, thereby becoming an inspiration for younger, newer and intending writers. We want to be able to have conversations about the things that bother us and how to bring about advancement in the literary community. We want to be able to freely discuss social issues and the part we play in shaping narratives. Our publishers also want to be able to sell our books and seek opportunities for writers with individuals, corporate bodies and the government. That's my notion of what literary festivals do for all those involved.

Do you maintain contact with writers seeking mentorship after your festival sessions? What benefits or transformations have you seen from these connections?

I try to. I've made lifelong friendships from them actually. Like I always say, there's nothing quite as exhilarating as reading a book or manuscript of someone you've mentored and invested in their talent and growth.

You have written in diverse forms, including blogging, fiction novels, short stories and speech writing. How have literary festivals impacted your own writing craft and expanded your network with other creatives?

It's the awareness it brings to me, that there's so much out there. After each event, I feel challenged to do more. Sometimes, it ignites an interest in me in an area I'd never thought about

before, or I see a gap somewhere that needs to be filled, or I get the motivation to write a story I feel needs to be told. These festivals have done a lot for me.

*Sometimes, it ignites an interest in me in an area I'd never thought about before, or I see a gap somewhere that needs to be filled, or I get the motivation to write a story I feel needs to be told*

What are your thoughts on the effectiveness of literary festival workshops for writers' growth and networking? Do festivals offer unique learning experiences that complement or substitute formal MFA programmes?

I don't have an MFA or formal training in writing (at least for now), so I guess you can figure out what my thoughts are on the subject of being trained to write versus being born to write. I've mostly self-taught and some of that learning came from just listening to other successful writers whenever I had a chance to. Overall, I would say that two things can exist at the same time, if you know what I mean.

Can you share the most memorable piece of advice you've received as a writer on the craft of writing?

Never stop writing.

If you were to host a writing masterclass session for emerging writers, which three facilitators would you invite and why?

I think it would be hard to limit my answer to just three facilitators because of the enormous talents and resources out there, so I'll be diplomatic and not mention names. There's a large pool to choose from.

# HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR TALENT AT A FESTIVAL

UZUEGBU CHIAMAKA MARYJANE

You are a young writer in your craft. You have written a couple of pieces, but your readers and critics do not belong in the industry or field. You rely on a few relations and friends. You feel your works lack something, but you do not know what it is, and it has proven difficult to figure this out all on your own. You want the opinion of people who would point out your flaws and share their experience to help your inexperience. How can you possibly meet these people?

How can you possibly connect with these kinds of people to help you figure this out?

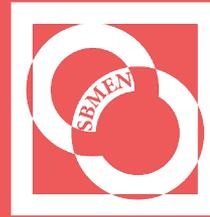
Here are several ways to solve that problem:

**1. Attend book festivals:** Following literary magazines and literary spaces on social media can provide information on upcoming book festivals that you can attend in your country. For instance, the Ake Book and Art Festival, which is commonly held in Lagos, Nigeria, admission to attend is simply by buying a ticket which is quite affordable. By attending book festivals, you could meet experienced writers who you can ask to critique your works, edit them or to mentor you. And even if this does not happen, you can learn a lot from the discussions between writers, editors and publishers.

**2. Attend book festivals writing workshops:** Most literary festivals like the Boldo Book and Art Festival, which was mentioned in the interview section, offer creative writing workshops during the course of the festival. Book festivals offer creative writing workshops to inspire and educate writers, providing a platform for skill development, networking and feedback. These workshops enhance creativity, offer valuable insights from experienced authors, and create a supportive community, fostering growth and collaboration among writers. By attending these book festivals' workshop, you will be able to meet young writers like you. In as much as meeting experienced writers is important, most times we learn effectively from our peers.

**3. Join Communities:** Community is of utmost importance in every sphere of life; hence, joining book clubs on different social media platforms provide writers with constructive feedback, support and a sense of community. They offer networking opportunities, motivation through regular meetings, inspiration from diverse perspectives and access to shared resources. These benefits foster growth, creativity and professional development for writers. At festivals, discussing the books you have read with other writers and book lovers at the festival will discover new authors and books, which can aid your growth as a writer.

The Society for Book and Magazine Editors is a non-profit organisation that represents editorial professionals with headquarters in Lagos, Nigeria. It was founded in 2017 and registered in 2018 by Anwuli Ojogwu and Enajite Efemuaye. SBMEN offers training, resources and events to editors to enhance their professional development.



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