

Introduction

Hello everyone, I'm Jarred McGinnis, author and a co-founder of the Special Relationship. Today, I'm going to invite you to explore your own creativity by using some of the techniques that the visual artist Sam Winston developed to produce his exhibition, *A Delicate Sight*. *A Delicate Sight* uses darkness, closed books, unseen pictures and partially heard songs to explore the promise of imagination.

Sam spent a month in absolute darkness creating a series of drawings. He also invited a number of well-known authors such as Bernardine Evaristo, Don Paterson, Max Porter and Raymond Antrobus to complete their own darkness residencies. They generated drawings, texts and films inspired by their experience. *A Delicate Sight* is a showcase of their work but also an invitation for you to explore your own creativity.

Before we get started, let's get yourself prepared. Make sure your work space is free and clear. You don't want to be knocking things over as you work unsighted. You're going to need sheets of paper and something to write or draw with. Decide if you want to sit at a desk or lie on the floor. Draw the curtains. Turn down the lights. Light is sneaky and the eyes are very greedy. It will probably be difficult to achieve complete darkness. I would suggest sourcing an eye-mask or a blindfold. A scarf could work too. This exercise is about 20 minutes long – as you get more comfortable with the use of sensory reduction you'll be able to extend this time that you work unsighted, but as a start 20 minutes is good. You'll be surprised how time dilates and how you yourself slow down and pay attention.

The longer you are able to explore this world of the other senses, the more interesting the experience becomes. If at any point during the experience you become anxious, simply remove your blindfold. Remember, and it's important to remember, that you are in control of this experience at all times.

Most importantly, remove distractions. Turn off your phone or put it on airplane mode. Playing music is fine but for this exercise we're going to go without it. I want

you to give yourself a break. I want you to give yourself a chance to really explore your own thoughts and senses. Are you all set? Have everything you need? Great.

Now before we begin, let me explain. The time before you put on your blindfold and the time after when you take it off and return to the world and your every day are just as important your time in darkness. You'll be amazed at how quickly your senses and the experience of your senses change. Your thoughts too will seem to be freed once untethered to sight.

Let's start by taking a moment to think about all the different technologies that make demands of your attention. Do they make you feel anxious? Is there always a sense you are missing out on something because there's an article you want to read, an email to return, a book to finish? Now imagine if all that media social or otherwise suddenly stopped.

(Pause)

What might be gained in your daily life? How might removing yourself from the 'noise and chatter' of your life be a challenge? Could you cope? Now I want you to think about the darkness itself.

What do you associate it with? What does it mean to you? What do you hope to explore while 'in the dark'? Is there something specific you want to write about? Go ahead and write a word or a phrase at the top of the paper. If there isn't anything specific in mind, that's fine too.

Are you ready? Have everything you need at hand? Let's put on the eye mask, blindfold, scarf or whatever. Make sure light doesn't get in because it will. It's tenacious that way. And, our eyes will eagerly seek every little photon that comes its way. Let's give those eyes a break.

Preparation

Take some time to get used to being without sight. Give yourself a moment of quiet. Don't worry, I'll stop talking soon to give you that moment. Start by tracking the sounds inside and outside the room – noting what you can hear and what you can deduce from the soundscape. Go ahead.

(pause 00:00:10)

Now consider where your body is in space and what you can feel. The chair beneath you, the floor under your feet. Where your arms are resting.

(pause 00:00:15)

Listen to your own breath, feel the sensation of your own breathing as the air goes and goes out. Let's take a minute.

(pause 00:01:00)

The Exercise

Did that feel different, that minute? Now while still in darkness, carefully find your pen or your pencil. Make sure you are writing on paper and start. If you wrote a word or phrase a moment ago, write about that.

Or don't.

Feel free to doodle and draw.

Write about anything.

If you become distracted then great, write about that. If you daydream – also great. All of this is useful and welcome. You can write about a place, person, your feelings or describe your sensory experience right at this moment. I told you, the eyes are

never quiet. After some time and you're comfortable in the dark – simply allow your body and mind to be in the space while doing nothing. Do this for as long as you like. I'm going to be quiet now but I'll be back to let you know when about fifteen minutes has passed.

(pause 00:15:00)

Hello again.

Go ahead take off your blindfold.

How was that?

Give yourself plenty of time to let your vision adjust naturally. The transition back to looking is very much an intended part of the exercise.

Pay extra special attention to how you see things after your time without sight. If you have a view from a window feel free to have a look around. Be careful as your eyes might still be sensitive in direct sunlight.

How do you feel? Was it an enjoyable experience? Was your thinking different unsighted? Feel free to spend some time going over what you have made. Pull out any choice sentences or phrases or words to work with later. Write about what you experienced in the dark or what you are experiencing now.

Or, go have a nice cup of tea. Feel free to try this exercise again and again when you need a little break.

Maybe try to extend the time in you spend in the dark and see what happens.

Closing

Thank you very much. I'm Jarred McGinnis for A Delicate Sight by Sam Winston.

If you want to know more about Sam Winston's work and the exhibition visit adelicatesight.com. I want to thank the National Centre for Writing and thank you for participating. Of all the things you could be doing you spent that time creating, if that isn't nice, I don't know what is. See you soon.