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Research challenge

I do different sorts of research for my books. I go to the library, I look up things online, I interview people. But the research I like best is finding out what something feels like.

Say I'm writing a story in which one character is spying on another. Maybe they're lying in the long grass, trying not to be seen. Or peeping around the corner of a building. Or hiding behind a car. Or creeping through a darkened factory.

The best way to research a scene like this is to do it myself.

I lie in the long grass, or peep around a corner, or hide behind a car. I take a notebook and pencil with me and pretend I'm the person doing the spying. And I take notes.

What does it feel like, lying in the grass? What can I smell? What can I hear? Does the grass tickle my nose? Does an ant walk over my wrist? How closely do I hug the ground? How do I crawl forward, so as not to be seen? Am I nervous? Does my heart beat faster? Does my breath come quicker?

I write it all down, and then I use these notes when I'm writing my story.

So that's today's challenge. Think of a story, or a scene in a story, that you can research by doing it yourself. Your character might be trying to get from one place to another without being seen. Or running as fast as they can while being chased by a wild bull (please don't go and find a wild bull – you can imagine that bit). Or trying to find their way through a strange house in the dark (use your own house and pretend you've never been there before).

Take notes. Use those notes when you write your story.

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Illustration: Sebastian Ciaffaglione