

Education

What the judges said...

IN AN era of 'alternative facts,' the responsibilities of journalists are always increasing. But it is also important to recognise that the real skill of the journalist does not reside just in the facts, but the narrative in which he or she embeds them.

It is not a coincidence that most journalists describe what they produce not as an 'article'

but as a 'story'. Journalists present their facts in narrative form because that is the way our brains have been conditioned, over millennia, to make sense of facts and to remember them.

In doing this, journalists take certain liberties with the facts — not by changing them, but by organising them. They are



allowed to decide, for instance, which are the most important facts in their narrative, where to put them and how to best engage the reader's interest.

Most of all, they recognise that no narrative can be long enough to contain all the facts, so their tools are, among others, juxtaposition, humour and — above all — the

identification and description of details which, although they are only a small part of any story, are significant enough to engage the reader's imagination and can illuminate the whole narrative, like a spotlight on a crowded stage.

Our overall winner, I feel, knows this in his bones. From a deceptively low-key

introduction, he engages us and our imaginations in a fascinating story, through short paragraphs which keep the reader racing ahead, to a conclusion which ties up the events of the narrative in a way many professional journalists would salute.

Prof John Horgan, chairman of the judging panel

Students imPress

In a Gaeltacht region with a rich history of storytelling, a school is keeping the tradition alive and well, writes Katherine Donnelly

THE 390-pupil Pobalscoil Chorca Dhuibhne on Kerry's Dingle Peninsula produced three winners at last week's Press Pass Awards, an annual Newspapers in Education initiative that rewards original journalism among transition year students.

The overall winner was Tomás Ó hUallacháin, who took on the challenge of writing a feature about a 'Sportsman I Most Admire'. He eschewed famous names for a local hero,

about Press Pass and their students have participated since its second year.

Daly explains that they see great value in it for students who have just come through junior cycle and its exams, "when most of the work they would have done in English was prescribed", setting them up for the more critical thinking required at senior cycle.

Kirwan says that one of the many benefits of the initiative is the way it can draw out ingenuity and talent in students



Easy writer: Tomás Ó hUallacháin, with Tomás Mac a t-Saoir, outside his father's pub, Tig An tSaorsaiigh, Ballyferriter, Co Kerry

PICTURE: DOMINICK WALSH/EYE FOCUS LTD



Critical thinking: Kate Ní Dhubháin, winner of the News category, Tomás Ó hUallacháin, overall winner, and Ciara Ní Bhruic, who was second in the 'News' category in the Press Pass Awards

cyclist Tomás Mac a t-Saoir, from Ballyferriter. Also flying the flag for the school was Kate Ní Dhubháin, whose story about conflicting local passions over an upgrade to a dangerous stretch of road took first place in 'News', followed by Ciara Ní Bhruic, who wrote about the anxiety felt by students affected by the disruption caused by the ASTI dispute over junior cycle reform.

Two teachers of English at the school, Fergal Daly and Fiona Kirwan, are passionate

who might not otherwise be known for academic brilliance.

The programme is run by Newsbrands Ireland — the public face of Ireland's newspaper industry — to improve literacy and critical thinking skills, while helping students to develop a deeper understanding of news media and how it communicates about the world around them.

It is supported by the Department of Education and Skills. Some 8,000 students participated this year.

WINNING ENTRY

Ard Fhear! A Neighbour's Inspiration

TWO elderly customers prop the counter, their eyes fixated on their settling pints. Applying the crème de résistance is Tomás Mac a t-Saoir. Saddle sore, Tomás hands the men their pint of plain. 'Anois a bhuachaillí,' exclaims Tomás in his native tongue. The young cyclist, after his 3,053 mile exertion, is at his ease manning the bar of his father's premises in the Chorca Dhuibhne Gaeltacht.

Inspired that a 22-year-old neighbour could accomplish such an achievement, I have Tomás join me in the snug once his only afternoon customers are, like their pints, settled.

I asked what made him cycle alone from San Diego to Florida's St Augustine.

"When 16-year-old Kerry teenager Donal Walsh tragically passed from cancer in 2013, a charity in his name was established. I felt the best way to turn a hobby into an awareness mission was to cycle across the US to help raise funds for Donal's Live Life Foundation."

For 42 days, Tomás battled headwinds and punishing terrain on his epic journey, punctuated by only seven days' recovery.

Departing on October 24, it wasn't until December 11 that he freewheeled to his finish line, having seen California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas.

Tired imagining it, I asked had he any downtime whatsoever.

"In Austin, I took three days off and had a badly needed night on the beer."

As someone who'd get lost in a shopping mall, my admiration for his effort soared. Curious, I asked how he managed those infinite, tumbleweed-accompanied US roads.

"Leaving Ireland, I was sceptical, scared about cycling in a different country. Yet I've met incredible people on the way."

His inventory was limited: A bike bought in San Diego, sunscreen, two panniers, two pairs of bib shorts and an Irish team gilet. Two Donal Walsh cycling jerseys, three pairs of socks, runners and a light jacket.

Cycling shoes, gloves, some casuals and a tub of chamois cream completed the list.

Headwinds were a low point. "Thinking I'd have a westerly wind at my back, I cycled from west to east. If anyone wants

to cycle across America, go east to west. The wind will be more generous!"

I asked Tomás about social interaction en-route.

"I experienced great warmth and generosity," he said. "Familiar with Americans from our family pub, I know they're great people. I was offered food, accommodation and was treated like a king. The American people have been absolutely incredible to me."

He called his experience "priceless," learning much of the diverse US cultures and landscapes, and significantly raising €3,907 for the foundation. For a young man who found cycling after his father banished him from the PlayStation, Tomás is an inspiration to us all.

As the old men beckoned our heroic peddler to pull another two pints, a line from their overheard conversation summed up my admiration.

"He's a better man than any of us."

Tomás Ó hUallacháin,
Pobalscoil Chorca Dhuibhne