Story Quest
Creative Writing Guide for Story-Writing Workshops

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A Note to Parents of Young Writers

Dear Parent of an Aspiring Writer,

This might seem self-evident, but I’ll say it anyway. One of the best ways to help your kids with their writing is to surround them with well-written stories. Read them good stories before they can read them on their own. Continue to read them stories that are above their reading level as they get older. In my opinion, there is no age at which a child is “too old” to be read to. My high school and college students still often come running when they hear me reading to their younger siblings! And my grown daughter gets together with friends regularly so they can read aloud to each other. I can’t possibly stress enough the importance of reading aloud. Let me say that again: I can’t possibly stress enough the importance of reading aloud to your child.*

Help them pick out great library books, and after they have read them, talk to them about what they liked and didn’t like about the story. This will help them recognize what makes a story interesting to read. If it was a short book, ask them to tell you the story in their own words. Telling back a story they already know is an excellent way to practice narration skills.

Another thing you can do is to help your child practice telling stories orally. By this I mean telling about something that happened in a sequential way. For instance, if your child went on an outing of some kind during the day, ask him to tell you about it at the supper table. Prompt him, if necessary, by saying, “What was the first thing you did?” “What happened next?” “What did you think about that?” And prepare to listen patiently to some meandering narratives that seem to go on forever! Bible stories and familiar stories from books or movies make great practice material also. Remember, your child is practicing narration skills, and the only way to become skilled is to practice repeatedly over a long period of time. Your ears will survive!

*For more encouragement on the topic of reading aloud to your children, go to excellenceinwriting.com/ncc-e, “Nurturing Competent Communicators,” by Andrew Pudewa.
## Scope and Sequence Chart

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<td>Three Things You Should Know... Narrative Writing handout Story Sequence Chart Three Kinds of Words handout Story Planning worksheets Setting the Scene handout Vocabulary/Assignment handout</td>
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<td>Finish Strong handout Title Time handout Vocabulary/Assignment handout</td>
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<td>Tinkering and Revising handout Vocabulary/Resource handout Vocabulary Word List (optional) Vocabulary Quiz (optional) Reading Record handout</td>
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Lesson Two: Retelling Old Tales

Goals for Lesson Two

1. to give students practice in “narrating,” or telling back a story they have read or heard
2. to take the next step and guide them through rewriting a story in their own words

Materials Needed for Lesson Two

- Vocabulary Words for Lesson Two: fable, moral.
- “Vocabulary/Assignment” sheets for students.
- “The Ass and the Lapdog”/“Androcles and the Lion” handout for homework (alternate: “The Tortoise and the Hare”)
- “Guidelines for Read-Aloud Time”, a copy for each student.

Teaching Procedure for Lesson Two

Review last week’s vocabulary words. Ask, “Who can tell me what a character is? What is an example of a character in a book?” and so forth. Go over the new vocabulary words, fable and moral. Then go into an explanation about fables. Aesop was supposedly a Greek slave who collected or devised these tales in ancient times. Over time, hundreds of these stories became attributed to Aesop. The two primary distinctions of these stories are that they use animals as the primary characters, and that they always teach a lesson, or “moral,” that is stated at the end of the story.

In-Class Assignment

Have the students take out a sheet of paper. Explain that you will read a short story out loud, and then they will write the story in their own words on the piece of paper after telling it to each other. (It might be a good idea to pair students up for the duration of the course, so they all have a telling/reading partner. If you have an odd number of students there can be one group of three.) Read aloud one of the following: “The Frogs and the Well,” “The Dove and the Ant,” or “The Ant and the Chrysalis.” (Save the others for alternate assignments.) Do not expect a perfect word-for-word retelling or transcription. This is not the point. The point is for them to pay close attention to the brief story and then write a similar story of their own, after telling it to someone else. It is fine if they want to embellish or embroider their versions of the story. After ten minutes or so, when they have finished, go around the room and have each student read his or her story out loud. If students are familiar with doing key word outlines, then you may want to have them write a key word outline before telling their story to their partner. If key word outlines are new to you, there is a brief explanation in the appendix on page 93. There should be time for them to do two stories in class—perhaps one with a key word outline and one just from memory.
Explain that they will be doing a similar assignment for homework. (The homework assignment is on the sheet with the vocabulary words.) You can assign “Belling the Cat,” “The Dog and the Wolf,” “The Ass and the Lapdog,” “Androcles and the Lion,” or “The Tortoise and the Hare.” (Whichever ones you don’t use are alternate assignments. “The Tortoise and the Hare” is really more for older students.) They may read it through twice before setting it aside and telling it to a family member. Then they can write down their own version. If it is helpful to them, they can use the seven sentence format on the Story Planning Sheet. It may also be helpful to look at the story planning sheet as they tell their story aloud, to make sure they include all the parts of the story.

End by having students read their homework stories aloud after going over the “Guidelines for Read-Aloud Time” with them. Encourage them to make constructive comments about each story as it is read.
The Frogs and the Well

Two Frogs lived together in a marsh. But one hot summer the marsh dried up, and they left it to look for another place to live in, for frogs like damp places if they can get them. By and by, they came to a deep well, and one of them looked down into it and said to the other, “This looks a nice cool place. Let us jump in and settle here.” But the other, who had a wiser head on his shoulders, replied, “Not so fast, my friend. Supposing this well dried up like the marsh, how should we get out again?”

Moral: “Look before you leap.”

The Dove and the Ant

An Ant, going to a river to drink, fell in, and was carried along in the stream. A Dove pitied her condition, and threw into the river a small bough, by means of which the Ant gained the shore. The Ant afterward, seeing a man with a fowling-piece aiming at the Dove, stung him in the foot sharply, and made him miss his aim, and so saved the Dove’s life.

Moral: “Little friends may prove great friends.”

The Ant and the Chrysalis

An Ant nimbly running about in the sunshine in search of food came across a Chrysalis that was very near its time of change. The Chrysalis moved its tail, and thus attracted the attention of the Ant, who then saw for the first time that it was alive.

“Poor, pitiable animal!” cried the Ant disdainfully. “What a sad fate is yours! While I can run hither and thither at my pleasure, and if I wish, ascend the tallest tree, you lie imprisoned here in your shell, with power only to move a joint or two of your scaly tail.”

The Chrysalis heard all this, but did not try to make any reply. A few days after, when the Ant passed that way again, nothing but the shell remained. Wondering what had become of its contents, he felt himself suddenly shaded and fanned by the gorgeous wings of a beautiful Butterfly.

“Behold in me,” said the Butterfly, “your much-pitied friend! Boast now of your powers to run and climb as long as you can get me to listen.”

So saying, the Butterfly rose in the air, and, borne along and aloft on the summer breeze, was soon lost to the sight of the Ant forever.

Moral: “Appearances are deceptive.”
Appendix: About Key Word Outlines

The concept of a key word outline is very simple. It consists of taking three to four “key” words from every sentence of a brief piece of writing, and using those words to spark your memory, so you can retell or rewrite the information in your own words. For instance, here is a brief fable with sentences numbered to make it easier to follow the process:

The Boasting Traveler

1. There once was a man who had traveled all over the world and who loved to brag about his exploits to anyone who would listen.
2. He claimed, for instance, that when he had visited the isle of Rhodes, he had jumped so far that no one could compete with him, and there had been many witnesses there to see him perform this amazing feat.
3. One of the bystanders said, “Who needs witnesses in Rhodes?
4. Pretend we’re in Rhodes right now and show us your amazing jump.”

Key Word Outline

1. man, traveled, brag
2. Rhodes, jumped, witnesses
3. bystander, needs, witnesses?
4. pretend, show, jump

This key word outline can be used to tell back the story to a partner, followed by writing it down in your own words.
Story Quest—Lesson One Student Page

Story Planning Worksheet

1. Setting/Introduction: _____________________________________________________________
                                                                                     
                                                                                     
2. Add in some details; start the action: ____________________________________________
                                                                                     
                                                                                     
                                                                                     
3. Introduce the problem: _________________________________________________________
                                                                                     
                                                                                     
                                                                                     
4. More detail about the problem: _________________________________________________
                                                                                     
                                                                                     
                                                                                     
5. Solution to the problem: _______________________________________________________
                                                                                     
                                                                                     
                                                                                     
6. Conclusion/aftermath of the solution: ____________________________________________
                                                                                     
                                                                                     
                                                                                     
7. Resolution—what was learned? _________________________________________________
                                                                                     
                                                                                     
                                                                                     
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Guidelines for Read-Aloud Time

When it is your turn to read

• Speak up and read loudly enough for everyone to hear.

• Read slowly and distinctly enough to pronounce every word, but not too slowly!

• Hold your head up and speak out to your audience instead of into your paper.

• Read with expression. To help with this, read your story out loud to a family member before coming to class. This will also help you catch a lot of your errors.

• Give your character(s) an accent if appropriate.

When it is your turn to listen

• Show respect for the writer by paying attention and looking at him or her.

• Don’t whisper or make comments while someone is reading.

• Don’t ask questions or interrupt in any way while someone is reading.

• *Don’t laugh* unless the story is supposed to be funny!

• As you are listening, find at least two things you like that you can tell the writer about later. It can be as simple as a great word or turn of phrase, a surprising plot twist, a vivid description, or a great dialogue example. Go ahead and write down a note about what you want to say so you won’t forget.

• After the writer has finished, you may tell him or her what you liked about the story. You may also ask a question if you have one.

• Thank the writer for sharing his or her story with you.
Writing About People (Characterization)

When you write about people, you have to make them seem real so that your readers will care about what happens to them. How do you do this? Here are some ideas:

1. Give your characters familiar names that your readers will relate to, or have them come from a familiar place or be involved in a familiar situation. Or, you can choose an unusual and memorable name that will spark curiosity. Just don’t make it so unusual that readers can’t pronounce it!

2. The most important question to ask about your character is: What does your character want or need most? If you don’t know this, then you don’t really have a story. Does he want to be a doctor? Does she want a new kitten? Does he want to prove he’s not as dumb as everyone else thinks he is? Knowing what your character wants or needs is critical to writing a coherent story.

3. Decide ahead of time what your character’s personality is like. Is he brave or fearful? Shy or outgoing? Funny or serious? Clumsy or graceful? Smart or not-so-smart? A leader or a follower? Happy or sad? Bad-tempered or peaceful? You get the point. Once you have decided what kind of person you are writing about, stick to it. For instance, if you have made a point of saying that your character is afraid of heights, don’t later have him fearlessly walking on a bridge that is swaying over a deep chasm!

4. Include some dialog in your story. Characters always seem more real if you can hear them “speak” in their own words. And when they do speak, they need to speak like normal people. Don’t have a modern guy saying something like, “Gadzooks, milord! Unhand that damsel!” Instead he should say something like, “Watch it, buster! Take your hands off my girl.”

5. Don’t be afraid to let your hero make mistakes—even big mistakes—or to have some character flaws. Nobody likes Mr. or Miss “Perfect.” We are much more likely to root for someone who wins in the end in spite of making some really stupid mistakes along the way.

6. For a story to be truly satisfying, it requires the main character to “grow” in some way. Maybe he learns a valuable lesson or overcomes a personal obstacle. For instance, using the example of the hero afraid of heights, perhaps he learns to control his fear in order to achieve his goals. Perhaps a selfish person will learn the value of placing someone else’s welfare before his own. The point is that fictional characters, just like real people, need to learn from their mistakes and become more mature in the process. If your character is exactly the same at the end of the story, then he hasn’t learned anything, and the story was, essentially, pointless.
My character’s name ________________________________

My character’s age ____________________________

My character’s nationality/race ______________________

What does he/she look like? Hair ___________________ Eyes ___________________
Height __________________ Size/Build __________________

Other facial features or physical characteristics __________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________________________

How does he/she dress? ____________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________

What does he/she want or need most? ____________________________
Favorite color? __________________________________

What are his/her spiritual beliefs? ____________________________
What’s the first thing people notice about him/her? __________________________________
What trait(s) does he/she have that people are drawn to? ____________________________
What trait(s) does he/she have that turn people off? _________________________________
Where does he/she live? ____________________________

Married or single? _________________________________
Any kids? _______________________________________

Strengths: _______________________________________
Weaknesses? _______________________________________

What is he/she good at? ___________________________
What skills is he/she bad at? _______________________
What are his/her hobbies? _________________________
Does he/she have a pet? __________________________

Why or why not? __________________________________
What does he/she do to relax? _______________________
What kind of music does he/she listen to? _______________________
What sport if any, does he/she play? ________________
What kind of vacation does he/she like? _______________
What kind of friends does he/she seek out? ____________
What kind of food does he/she like? ___________________

What is his/her secret dream? ________________________

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You’ll Never See Your Little Girl Again!

Every story that is a real story has a conflict and an antagonist. The antagonist is the “bad guy.” Remember Darth Vader in *Star Wars*? He was a great antagonist. Now right away we need to explain that the antagonist is not always a “guy” at all. It might be a woman, like Maleficent in Disney’s *Sleeping Beauty*. It might be an animal, like the giant squid that attacks the Nautilus in *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*. Or it might be the weather or a natural barrier, like the winter storm and the mountain Caradhras in *The Lord of the Rings*. But there has to be something that is keeping the main character from getting what he/she wants or needs!

As a writer, you get to choose who or what your antagonist will be. First you start with your protagonist. What does he or she need or want? Now your job as the writer is to figure out how you’re going to block that. Let’s say your character needs to get a message to a general, letting him know that relief troops have been delayed. Your character decides to jump on a horse and take the message in person. What can stop him from getting to the general, at least temporarily? It could be anything from a thunderstorm, to a lost child, to an enemy soldier who is determined to kill him before he can deliver his vital message. You decide!

Now let’s suppose that your story requires a human antagonist, or villain. If the antagonist is playing a major role in your story, it would be very helpful for you to fill out a character sheet on him or her. Why is he opposed to your protagonist? Why does he want to stop the protagonist from doing what he or she wants or needs? Remember, no one is completely evil, just as no one is perfect. Your antagonist needs to be more than just a “bad guy” who is mean to your main character. He needs to have a motive!

Once you’ve created your antagonist, you get to decide how to use him or her. Will there be an open confrontation or a behind-the-scenes sabotage? Will there be an ongoing conflict that escalates or a trigger incident that sets everything off? Usually, if your antagonist is another person, it makes a more powerful story if there is a face-to-face confrontation at some point. This can be a lot of fun to write! This confrontation is generally the central conflict of the story.

Finally, once you know how and why your antagonist is going to try to “block” your main character, you need to figure out how the confrontation is going to end. Who wins? And how? Is it the protagonist or the antagonist? Does it end in a stalemate? Does one of them die? If not, what happens to the loser? What happens to the winner? Do they resolve their conflict and become friends? Are any other characters affected by the conflict?