Creative Writing II

with Johnny Worthen

Week 1 – Story Elements

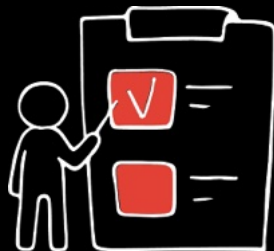IMAGINE U | THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH®

Creative Writing 2

Tuesday Nights (6 sessions)
February 27th – April 2nd, 2024

6:30 – 9:00 p.m. (we hope)

Lifelong Learning — *LLWRC 825*

Today's Plan

- Class Basics

- Conflicts

- Choices

- Show vs. Tell

- Details

- Dash of Poetry

Class Goals

Students should come away from this class possessing a greater knowledge of the theory and mechanics behind their art, have more confidence that their writing matches their intentions, and have more enthusiasm for writing by possessing better skills in its creation and editing.®

Warning?

This class may explore adult themes, language, and content.

–University of Utah

Class Structure

- Workshop / Critiques

- Lecture

- Discussion

- Writing Sprints

  - Reading Homework

  - Writing Homework

Online/Shared Resources

http://johnnyworthen.com/SharedResources/LLWRC825/SharedLLWRC825.html

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I write what I want to read, that guarantees me at least one fan

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Introductions

- Who are you?

- What's your writing experience?

- What are you working on?

- What are you looking for in this class?

Characters (Cast)

- Get to know the primary players of your story before you begin.

    ● *So you can hit the page writing!*

- "Character Worksheet" – an "interview" to get to know them

- Character Record sheet - rubber on the road details.

Character Desire

- What does the character think they want?

- What does the character really need?

    ● *Can be the same thing*

- This will help define your story conflict

- Your job as writer will be to make it as difficult as possible for them to get what they (think they) want.

Only Seven Stories?

- Man against Man

- Man against Nature

- Man against Himself

- Man against God

- Man against Society

- Man caught in the Middle

- Man and Woman

Conflict

- A <u>Defining Element</u> - more than genre
- An integral part of modern storytelling
  - Necessary to keep interest
- One force set against another — dissension
- Non-Fiction needs conflict too (Creative Non-Fiction)
- Even (Especially) Literary Fiction (man vs. self)
- The best fiction has multiple conflicts
  - *Man vs X... and Y and Z too!*

Freytag Story Pyramid

Climax

Falling Action

Rising Action

Denouement

Set-Up

Inciting Incident
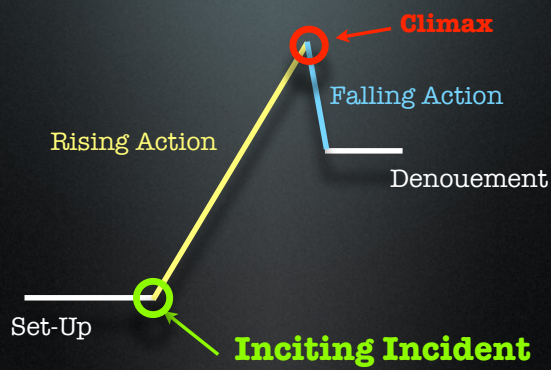
Setting
the room where it happens

- An excellent starting place
- Knowing **Where** and **When** the story happens can indicate *what happens* in the story
- All things are connected
- Creates Limits (a good thing)

HAMILTON
AN AMERICAN MUSICAL

Construction Choices

- **Point of View**
  - First / Third / Limited / Omniscient / Multiperspectivity
- **Tense**
  - Present / Past
- **Voice and Style**
  - Author presence
- **Genre**

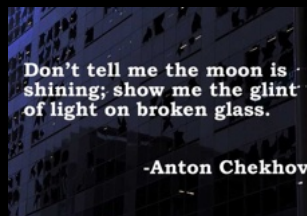## Do your good where it'll the do the most:
Show & Tell

- *She was depressed.*

- *The days dragged by, not in hours or minutes but in breaths, heartbeats and sighs. Each new unwanted moment was a weight on her chest, flat and crushing that squeezed the life out of her lungs and darkened the muddy light that found its way to her weeping eyes from under the dusty, drab, and lifeless curtains.*

Note lack of economy
sentences/words do multiple things
CUT: from under the dusty, drab, and lifeless curtains. ?

EXERCISE: More is More

- **SHOW**
  - *It was cold.*
  - *The ship was in danger.*
  - *The woman was poor.*
  - *Someone drugged him.*

Don't tell me the moon is shining; show me the glint of light on broken glass.

-Anton Chekhov

Central "Key" Details

- Not a description per se - But some **Defining Detail** that nails it

  - *It was the kind of place that sold rooms by the hour and lockers by the month.*

  - *The room smelled of clove cigarettes, bad choices, and vomit.*

  - *He spent the day shooting people and eating chocolate.*

  - *She'd weep at phone commercials.*

  - *He put fifty grand under the hood but kept the rust on top.*

  - *She spoke with a lisp whenever she was excited*

EXERCISE: Less is More

- **IDENTIFY WITH KEY DETAILS**

  - *The beach was crowded*

  - *The plane was old*

  - *The club was trendy*

  - *It was quiet, too quiet*

Key Character Details

- A short hand to remember a character

  - A simple handle to grasp a complicated thing

    - For reader AND author

  - Name (HUGE)

  - Also: attitude / voice / scar / limp / nationality / smell

Examples

- Name: *Delores Umbridge, Willy Loman, Eleanor Anders*

- Attitude: *She was born rich and never forgot it.*

- Action: *He wouldn't pick up dropped change because he didn't like how his pants creased when he bent over.*

- How the world sees her: *She was seven foot three and single, of course.*

EXERCISE: Less is More

- **IDENTIFY WITH KEY DETAIL
  - Come at this from an unexpected angle**

  - *They liked sex*

  - *He was untrustworthy*

  - *She was afraid of change*

  - *He was very stupid.*

A Note on Poetry

- LINEATION: often considered the only absolute differentia between prose and poetry, although some theorists argue even this point. In most poetry, however, the poet retains absolute control over the line length and division.

- SOUND/MUSIC: the effects of rhyme, repetitions of various sorts, and the effects produced by specific word combinations

- RHYTHM: recurrent patterns of sound, pitch, stress, accent, etc., including both formal metrics and less formal repetitive syntactical, grammatical, and thematic patterns.

- COMPRESSION: the art of folding into the poem more meaning than a literal reading produces; this might include not only removing linguistic deadwood but also strengthening image and symbol

From: THE ART AND CRAFT OF POETRY, by Michael R. Collings

Cinquain

Line 1 (2 syllables): x x
Line 2 (4 syllables): x x x x
Line 3 (6 syllables): x x x x x x
Line 4 (8 syllables): x x x x x x x x
Line 5 (2 syllables): x x

Requires neither rhyme or meter, but the last line should emphasize, under-cut or underscore the previous 4 lines

Five lines;
Smooth left margin;
Words well-controlled, well-spelled
Fourth line long, taut, and ready to
Snap back!

Ocean
Blue, powerful
Waves crashing ashore
Teeming with sea creatures
Life

Homework for Week 2

- **READ:**

  - The Waking,
    by Theodore Roethke

- **STUDY:**

  - Standard Manuscript Format
    (SMF) *(learn it, love it)*

  - Character Worksheets
    ("Record" & "Background")

  - *Character Sheet & Form*

- **WRITE FOR CLASS:**

  - **A Cinquain (or two)**

  - **A Character introduction —**
    scene where character first
    enters the story
    - make a first impression

    - *<= 300 words*

    - *Use "Key Details"*

    - *Show setting*

By Sunday Night—Send in SMF, doc or pdf to:
johnny@johnnyworthen.com
Or, if you must, bring enough copies for everyone in the class