

## STORY MODULE OVERVIEW -- HOW TO TELL A STORY

### Content:

How can students begin to tell their own stories and to understand why they should?

### Process:

- Lesson One: The Seeds of a Story
- Lesson Two: The Roots of a Story
- Lesson Three: The Budding of a Story
- Lesson Four: A Story in Full Bloom

### Objectives:

- To examine the techniques used by authors in developing short stories
- To develop ideas about character, setting, conflict, plot, mood, point of view, and theme
- To analyze and interpret how the short story techniques can be effectively utilized to create a work of fiction, including dialogue, description, and figurative language
- To identify the audience, purpose and goals in their own and others' short stories
- To plan, draft, revise, edit, proof and publish an original short story

### TEKS:

6.12 (A-K)

Eng. I (1) (A)

Eng. I (11)(A, B, C, D)

Eng. I (2) (B), (D)

Eng. I (8) (A)

## Short Story Lesson #1

Title: The Seeds of a Story

Question: How do writers tell stories?

Objectives:

- To examine the techniques used by authors in developing short stories
- To develop ideas about character, setting, conflict, plot, mood, point of view, and theme
- To analyze and interpret how the short story techniques can be effectively
- Utilized to create a work of fiction, including dialogue, description, and figurative language
- To identify the audience, purpose and goals in their own and others' short stories

Process/Activities:

1. Select three to five short stories for students to read. You might consider using a combination of professional and student work.
2. As students read each story, ask them to focus on one or two particular aspects or techniques. For example, how does the author create suspense? How does the setting description affect the mood? How does the point of view affect your understanding of the characters? You will probably need to provide and/or review the definitions of short story elements.
3. Also, have students write responses to the stories that focus on what they like or dislike about how the story is told. They should make specific references to the text and the elements to support their opinions.
4. Have students discuss each story in small groups and/or as a whole class. During the discussion, make sure that students recognize the elements that are reflected in the examples they have cited and how these elements "work" to create the story.
5. Throughout the study of these stories, have students consider (and possibly write about) where they think the authors' ideas originated and why the authors' might be telling these stories.

Product/Application: (Options)

- Response Journals for each of the stories
- Test (Objective and Essay) on elements and story lines
- Graded Discussion (either small group or whole class)
- In-Class Essay discussing what has been learned about the ways authors utilize various techniques in creating short stories.

Assessment/Evaluation: (Options)

- Individual or group grade assigned to activities and/or product.

Conclusion:

Use what students have learned about how authors use short story techniques to begin the process of creating their own ideas for stories.

Resources/Comments:

- Active Voices II and III by James Moffett
- (collections of writings by 7th - 12th grade students)
- Textbooks, Anthologies and Short Story Collections by various authors
- In the Middle by Nancie Atwell

Time Frame: approximately two weeks

Grade Level: adaptable for grades 6-12

TEKS:

Eng. II (11) (A-C)

Eng. II (1) (A-C)

Eng. II (8) (A)

Eng. II (1) (A-C)

Eng. II (10) (A-C)

Eng. II (14) (A, B)

Eng. II (15) (A-C)

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## Short Story Lesson #2

Title: The Roots of a Story

Question: How does a story originate?

Objectives:

to explore possible ideas for original stories  
to draft a story

Process/Activities:

1. Take students through a series of activities to help them develop possible story ideas. Each of these could revolve around the same idea or each could be a separate idea. After students have completed the activities, they should have at least one idea worth pursuing for their drafts.
  - a. Try developing a character. Have students consider how they can take aspects of various people they know to create a character. Have them imagine the person they would like to create by considering the person's physical and personality traits. Use "Get Inside the Skin" as a source. Students do not need to answer every question, but should use the questions as a guide for developing a character.
  - b. Try writing a setting description. As a starting point, use "The Street" or "The Cocoon" from *Inside Out* by Dan Kirby and Tom Liner. Have students close their eyes and imagine a place as you read the questions. When you complete the questions, have students open their eyes and write a description of the place they imagined.
  - c. Try creating a mood. Have students draw a piece of paper from a bucket. Each piece of paper should have a specific mood listed, for example, suspenseful, dramatic, funny, scary, romantic, etc. Then have students write a description that they feel conveys that mood, choosing details and specific words that reflect the mood.
  - d. Try writing about an issue or emotion about which you would like to make point. What point would you like to make? Can you think of a story that would illustrate your point? First write down the point. Then write for 10 minutes about the point. What are your thoughts? What are your questions? What conflicts exist as a part of this issue and the point?
  - e. Try writing a story outline. Give students a list of story starter ideas. (See attachment for suggestions.) Have them outline a possible plot for one of these ideas. Have them consider what the situation is, what conflicts will or could arise in this situation, what choices the character will face and will make within these conflicts, and how s/he and others will react to the choices that are made.
2. Students should now write a rough draft of the story idea they would like to pursue. They should remember that they may start their drafts with any part of the story -- the end, an incident that introduces the conflict, the setting description, background description, a character description, the first incident that happens, a conversation between two characters, etc. It is not important that the story is written in the order that it will eventually be told for this first draft. Sections may be rearranged later during the revision process.

Product/Application: (Options)

- Completed rough draft of original short story

Assessment/Evaluation: (Options)

- You may want to give credit for each of the prewriting strategies as well as the completed rough draft.

Conclusion:

- Now that students have rough drafts, they may begin to work on more fully developing their stories and the elements that will help them best tell them.

Resources/Comments:

- Attachments: (see below)
- "Get Inside the Skin"
- "Story Starters"
- Inside Out by Dan Kirby and Tom Liner

Time Frame: 5-10 days

Grade levels: 6-12

TEKS:

6.12 (F)

6.15 (D), (G), (H)

Eng. II (2) (A-E)

**Get Inside the Skin**

(attachment to lesson 2, short story writing)

Since experienced writers take so much trouble before they write a narrative, perhaps you may need to try knowing your characters before you begin to write.

- What is the person's face really like?
- What is individual about his eyes, mouth, and nose?
- Does His expression change easily?
- What is his hair like, in color, in texture, in arrangements?
- How does he manage his hands and feet?
- What gestures does he use?
- How does he walk--does he stride, wobble, saunter, sneak, lurch, and march?
- Are his muscular movements free and spontaneous?
- Do they reveal his urges and aversions?
- What mannerisms does he have?
- Does he narrow his eyes when he thinks?
- Does he snap his fingers when he is perplexed?
- Does he shake hands?
- Does his bodily position or his expression change when he is with inferiors, superiors, when he is asked to use his mind or his hands, when he is caught off guard?
- Can you realize his inner feeling when his face take on a certain expression?
- How does your character speak?
- Does he drawl?
- Is he precise or slovenly in his enunciation?
- Is his voice high or low, thin or rich and resonant, easy or strained?
- What are his pet expressions, bywords, expletives?
- Is his language informal or bookish?
- Is it idiomatic and picturesque, or flat, conventional?
- When you close your eyes and listen to his talk, do you hear an individual speech rhythm?
- When he is absent, after you have observed him carefully, can you hear his voice in your imagination?
- Can you make other people hear his voice?
- How does he laugh?
- Does he express honest amusement, or is he covering up other feelings?
- If you heard this type of laugh from an unseen stranger, what would you think of him?
- What do you know about his inclination, tastes, interests, favorite sports, reading habits, ambitions?
- If his ambitions are strong, are they controlled by scruples?
- Is his vanity strong?
- What are his fixed ideas?
- His prejudices?
- His dominant motives?
- What does he desire most or value most?
- What does he think about when he is most himself?
- What thoughts does he have which he would be unwilling to tell his best friend?
- Would he tell any of these thoughts to a stranger?
- How does he treat equals, superiors, children, servants?
- What is his basic trait?
- Do you reverence, or admire him?
- Do you envy or pity him?

Do you feel dislike, aversion, disgust?

Does he make you angry?

Are your feelings so complex that you have trouble analyzing it?

How do your own muscles behave when your character approaches?

## Story Starters

(attachment to lesson 2, short story writing)

1. She had a little tinkling laugh like those bells made of glass and painted with exotic flowers you hear chiming on porches when a breeze blows.
2. His impatience was like a teasing toothache.
3. His eyes bulged like marbles and his suit of rough green skin with big bumpy spots was so thick that a stone wouldn't have scratched it.
4. She was as cool and graceful as a very elegant cat.
5. He looked like a crafty intelligent old goat.
6. She was small and mouselike.
7. The entrance to the cave was hidden by leaves and branches.
8. The blazing sun drifted low in the sky, shooting purple and gold sunset into the room.
9. Like rivulets of tears, the rain ran off the windows of the crooked old house and dripped from the crooked old roof hanging like a shapeless hat.
10. Velazquez Street is in the heart of the city.
11. The island sits off the coast of Georgia.
12. The fire roared like a hurricane all night.
13. Under the full moon shining through a gauzy cloud, the wind-rippled cove glittered like a sheet of hammered silver.
14. The strong spring sun lifted a mist-like chiffon veiling from the weathered red roof.
15. Thunder cracked like a giant whip, and lightning sizzled through the air.
16. Tallfeather crouched low in the canoe as it rushed downstream.
17. The clubhouse was a cozy shack in an unused parking lot.

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### Short Story Lesson #3

Title: The Budding of a Story

Question:

Objectives:  
to revise a story

Process/Activities:

1. Take students through a series of "separate step" revision activities, such as those suggested below. Although each step will not necessarily improve each story, the steps could provide a new insight about the story and how to tell it.
  - a. Write a dialogue between two characters in the story. Concentrate not only on the words that are said, but also on the thoughts of the characters while they are speaking with each other and on what the characters are doing while they are talking. See "Snapshots and Thoughtshots" in *After the End* for examples.
  - b. Have students pick one of the story's settings. Write for 5-10 minutes focusing on minute details, and sensory images of that setting. For example, what do you feel against your skin there -- cold air, textures; what do you smell -- in the air, from people or animals; what do you hear -- from nature, from people, from machines; what do you taste -- smells that are so strong you can taste them, actual foods; what do you see -- color, movement?
  - c. Choose one character. Write a specific description of that character. (Refer to the "Get Inside the Skin" questions from the previous lesson.)
  - d. Retell the story from a different point of view. If there is a first person narrator, try another character as the narrator or a third person narrator. If there is a third person narrator, try experimenting with objective vs. omniscient viewpoints or using one of the characters to tell the story.
  - e. Find the sentence in the story that best states or implies the point (theme). Write that sentence on a separate sheet of paper. Then write for 5-10 minutes from that point to see if any new ideas emerge.
  - f. Read the opening of the story. Write for 5-10 minutes about what happened just prior to this opening.
  - g. Have students identify the perceived audiences of their stories (children, peers, young adults, girls, boys, etc.). Then have them write letters to their audiences -- telling them what they want them to know from reading the stories. Have them reread their stories to determine if what they want the audiences to know is in the story or if they need to make changes.
2. At this point, students should look through their separate steps and decide what they would like to change about the structure and/or the way they

have told the stories. Then they should rewrite -- a second draft.

3. With their second draft, students should complete a variety of additional revision activities, such as those described below. Students will need several different colors of highlighters if you choose to do multiple activities.
  - a. Have students box the first four words of every sentence. This will make them aware of their sentence opening variety as well as weak sentence openings, such as "There is/are/was/were," and "It is/was."
  - b. Have students highlight strong, active, or vivid verbs. This will let them know if they are using expressive verbs. Then have them circle weak or passive verbs, specifically forms of "to be," "to get," and "to go." At this point you may need to model how to change these weak verbs to stronger ones.
  - c. Have students X-out intensifiers, such as very, really, so, and extremely. They may then choose to replace the adjective that follows with a stronger adjective.
  - d. Give students a chart labeled with the five senses. Have students list specific sensory images from their stories. If they find they are lacking in some (or all) sensory images, they should find places in their stories where the imagery would improve the telling.
  - e. Have students count the number of words in each of their sentences. This will show them if they are varying sentence structure and how their sentences are or are not reflecting the tone they wish to create.
  
4. Have students rewrite. With this third draft, they will be able to edit for grammar, mechanics and usage errors. You might specifically want to focus on punctuation of dialogue.

Product/Application: (Options)

Three drafts

Revision Strategies

Assessment/Evaluation: (Options)

You will need to decide the value of each draft and step as individual daily grades or as part of a portfolio of work on this project.

Conclusion:

You are now ready to show students ways they can publish their work.

Resources/Comments:

Attachments: "Word List"

After the End: Teaching and Learning Creative Revision by Barry Lane

Deep Revision by Meredith Sue Willis

Fan the Deck: An Advanced Composition Book

by Robert B. Cahill and Herbert J. Hrebic

Time Frame: 7-10 days (or more if you allow time in between stages or do more of the activities)

Grade Level: 6-12

TEKS:

6.12 (F), (H)

6.15 (E)

6.17 (B), (D), (G)

6.18 (C-G)

8.11 (D)

Eng. II (1) (B)

Eng. II (2) (D)

Eng. II (3) (A-D)

Eng. II (5) (A)

Eng. II (11)(B)

## Short Story Lesson #4

Title: A Story in Full Bloom

Question: How can I share my story?

Objectives:  
to publish an original short story

Process/Activities:

Below you will find a variety of ways students can publish their stories:

Have students share their stories in a formal reading session within their class. You might make this something like an "Author's Day or Celebration."

Have students submit their work to be included in a class collection (anthology) of short stories.

Have students submit their stories to publications or contests.

Product/Application: (Options)

Final version of story

Assessment/Evaluation: (Options)

Conclusion:

Resources/Comments:

Go Public: Encouraging Students Writers to Publish by Susanne Rubenstein

Publication sources:           The Highschool Writer  
  P.O. Box 718  
  Grand Rapids, MN 55744-0718

  Merlyn's Pen  
  P.O. Box 910  
  East Greenwich, RI 02818-0910

  Teen Ink: Voices of the 21st Century  
  Box 30  
  Newton, MA 02461

TEKS:  
6.18 (G)  
6.19 (B, C)  
6.21 (A, B)  
Eng. II (2) (D)