

## Creative Writing Week One

Goal: By the end of the course, you will complete one 5,000–7,500 word (10-15 page) short story.

This class will be run like a writer's workshop. Come prepared to every class with pen and paper, a readiness to share ideas, to support the ideas of others, and to give constructive feedback.

Reading:

<http://wisdomhomeschooling.com/images/courses/creativewriting/whatmakesagreatstory.pdf>

### **Week One: Inspiration, or How to come up with an idea**

#### Brainstorming

Get a blank sheet of paper and make a list: all the stuff that you love. Make another list: all the stuff that you fear. Another list: examine your greatest desire. Find something that evokes an emotional response in you. Find a common anxiety, folklore, legend, or goal and make it real. Look through history books and classic literature and come up with a new angle on an old story. Stir up your emotions and play the imagination game: *What if?* What if you could go back in time and undo a terrible wrong in your life? What if you could be God for a day? Now try combining a few ideas—like the fear of drowning + the fear of being eaten (*JAWS*). The *idea* has to be powerful.

#### Signs you have a good idea

Your idea lights a creative brushfire. You can't stop thinking about this cool idea for a story. You are dying to write it. Every idea you have about it sparks two more ideas. On a new piece of paper, write down as quickly as you can everything cool you can think of that this idea brings to mind: a cool moment, a line, an entire sequence. You know it is a good idea when you keep coming up with more ideas based on the premise—not all of them will fit together but don't worry about that.

#### Questions to test the strength of your idea

Does the idea suggest a central question that compels you? Is it worth devoting a couple months of your life writing? What is your story about? What is it *really* about? Does that excite you?

Stories are about extremes. This means that they are about that one day something unusual happens, the moment where life breaks the pattern. Raise the stakes of your story. *Fred gets the mail. Wait—Fred gets the mail and discovers*

*he won the lottery! WAIT—Fred gets the mail, discovers he won the lottery, but really he's being tricked by a nefarious neighbour who wants Fred to move!*

Does the premise suggest a compelling relationship? Does the obstacle in your story matter? If it is something that seems easy to get over, it can be hard to write a story about. The obstacle has to be real. Does the obstacle *seem* insurmountable? Does it require great skill or heroism to overcome it? Whatever that obstacle is, embrace it. Or make it even worse.

In-class exercise: Idea in a nutshell

What if a (flawed) (protagonist—profession? who is he/she?) had this terrible thing happen to them? (ironic—the opposition of their flaw) And then he/she sought to overcome it by (external goal) but a (antagonist) tries to stop him/her because of (antagonist's motivation)?

Brainstorm adjectives, people, challenges, goals, and antagonists.

Homework

Come up with three ideas (for three different stories). If there is an idea you already have you may use it as long as you haven't written the story yet. Use the idea-in-a-nutshell as a basic formula. Choose the most vibrant, descriptive words possible that will create the most powerful image of your characters and the challenges they will face. Email these to your tutor and come prepared to discuss them in the next class with your fellow writers.