

Exercise Five - Flash Fiction

I hope you managed to write some terrible, terrible openings for the last task. I always find doing a fun writing task with no pressure helps generate story and character ideas.

This week we're going to take the plunge and write out first story. Over the last few weeks we have focussed on character, memories, objects and openings. It is important to draw on all the work you have produced and start to imagine how you would craft it into a short story.

Flash fiction is short fiction that is usually under 1000 words, which is perfect for us, as we want something that is short enough to not be off putting, and long enough so you can flex your writing muscles and show off you ideas.

There are a million websites with advice on how to write a short story, and there are great tips and hints in all of them, but sometimes you can be so overwhelmed with advice that it puts you off ever picking a pen up. This is (probably) going to be our first attempt at writing flash fiction, so why scare ourselves before we've even started? Instead, I'll note three simple points of advice:

1. Keep it simple. There's no need for over-elaborate plots or dozens of characters. Note down a rough plan of what happens in your story- identify a beginning, middle, and end, and make sure your ending impacts the readers' emotions. You don't want to write an ending the reader can see coming a mile off, surprise us.
2. Conflict. Put your character in an uncomfortable situation and see what happens- this could be a divorce, a hospital waiting room before an operation, realising they're at the wrong funeral etc.
3. Momentum. Keep the story moving and build on the conflict that you have inserted into the story. Always be moving the story forward with momentum and intent. This will help keep the readers interest and attention.

Other than these pointers, I'd say be free with writing the story and write whatever you want. What works for one person isn't necessarily what works for another, so find your own style and approach and run with it. Your first draft won't be brilliant, no-ones is! But it will be your own and your next draft will be better.

Before I start writing I find it extremely helpful to read other writer's work and get a sense of the form I'm going to be writing in. It helps generate ideas and map how you're going to tell your story. As we are writing flash fiction, here are some links to short stories:

- 'The Weight' by Anne Enright
<https://www.newyorker.com/books/flash-fiction/the-weight>
- 'Sticks' by George Saunders (This also has notes attached and an exercise, feel free to read them and complete the exercise)

<https://www.writerstudio.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Saunders-Exercise.pdf>

- 'Miracles' by Lucy Corin
<https://tinhouse.com/miracles-by-lucy-corin/>

If you are struggling to think of an idea, use one of the previous tasks as a starting point for a story. It could be one of the characters you created or one of the scenarios you made up.

Your story can 10 words, 100 words or 500 words, but set yourself a limit of 1000 words and see what you can come up with.

Please feel free to share your stories with us at yourlibrary@knowsley.gov.uk

Enjoy 😊