

NAME: _____

STORY STARTER QUOTE:

DESCRIPTION OF KEY:

STEP 1: Use the graphic organizers to brainstorm and plan out your short story. (15 points)
(Your planning packet will be turned in with your final short story on 4/8.)

STEP 2: Put together your ideas into a rough first draft of your story.

STEP 3: Revise and rewrite.

STEP 4: Write a final version of your story and turn in on **Friday, April 8th**. (25 points)

Guidelines —

- > You can hand write or type your story.
- > In terms of length, make it at least 5 paragraphs but no more than 3 pages
(remember it's a short story)
- > Don't count sentences just make sure you have a well developed
beginning, middle and end.
- > HAVE FUN!!

HOW TO WRITE A SHORT STORY

For any writer, the short story is the perfect medium. While writing a novel can be a Herculean task, just about anybody can craft and, most importantly, finish, a short story. That does not mean that short stories are easy to write, or that they aren't as artistic and valuable as novels. With practice, patience, and a passion for writing, they can be every bit as moving and memorable as their much longer cousins. We'll give you some ideas on how to make it happen, or help you get through creative doldrums. Read on!

1. **Collect ideas for your story.** Inspiration can strike at any time, so carry a notepad with you wherever you go so that you can write down story ideas as they come to you.

- Most of the time, you'll just think of small snippets of information (a catastrophic event around which you can build a plot, a character's name or appearance, etc.), but sometimes you'll get lucky and a whole story will reveal itself to you in a couple of minutes.
- If you have trouble finding inspiration, or if you need to write a story in a hurry (for a class, for example), learn how to brainstorm or if you can't come up with any ideas you might have to look to family and friends for inspiration.
- Experience usually helps to build good plots. Many of Isaac Asimov's mysteries came from experience of certain incidents.

2. **Begin with basics of a short story.** After you've chosen an idea, you need to remember the basics of a short story before writing one. Steps to a good short story are:

- Introduction: introduces characters, setting, time, weather, etc.
- Initiating action: the point of a story that starts the rising action.
- Rising action: events leading up to the climax or turning point.
- Climax: the most intense point or turning point of the story.
- Falling action: your story begins to conclude.
- Resolution: a satisfying ending to the story in which the central conflict is resolved—or not! You don't have to write your short story in order. If you have an idea for a great conclusion, write it down. Move backward or forward from your starting idea (it may or may not be the beginning of the story), and ask "What happens next?" or "What happened before this?"

3. **Find inspiration from real people.** If you have trouble understanding or finding attributes of a character, turn to your life. You can easily borrow attributes of people you know or even strangers you notice.

- For example, you might notice someone is always drinking coffee, they talk in a loud, booming voice, they are always typing away at the computer, etc. All of these observations would together make a very interesting character. Your character can even blend attributes of a number of people.

4. **Know your characters.** For a story to be believable, the characters have to be believable and realistic. It can be a difficult task to create real characters that are interesting and realistic. But here are a few strategies to create "real people" to populate your story:

- Write a list, titled with the character's name, and write all the attributes you can think of, from their position in the orchestra to their favorite color. Know as much as possible about your characters, from what their central motivations are to what their favorite foods are. Do they talk with an accent? Do they have any quirky mannerisms? You won't include all this information in your story, but the more you know, the more your characters will come to life, both for you and for the reader.

- Make sure your characters' personalities are not perfect. Every character needs to have some flaws, some problems, some imperfections, some insecurities. You might assume that people wouldn't like to read about a character with a lot of flaws, but that couldn't be farther from the truth. Batman wouldn't be The Dark Knight if he weren't a borderline sociopath!
- People can relate to characters with problems, as that's realistic. When trying to come up with flaws, you don't need to give your character some huge, bizarre issue (although you definitely can). For most characters, try to stick with things you know about. For example, the character could have anger issues, be afraid of water, be lonely, dislike being around other people, smoke too much, etc. All of these could be taken further in development.

5. **Limit the breadth of your story.** A novel can occur over millions of years and include a multitude of subplots, a variety of locations, and an army of supporting characters. The main events of a short story should occur in a relatively short period of time (days or even minutes), and you typically won't be able to develop effectively more than one plot, two or three main characters, and one setting. If your story has much more breadth, it probably needs to be a novella or novel.

6. **Decide who will tell the story.** There are three main points of view from which to tell a story: first-person ("I"), second-person ("you"), and third-person ("he" or "she"). In a first-person story, a character in the story tells the story; in the second-person the reader is made a character in the story; and in the third-person, an outside narrator tells the story. (Second-person narration is rarely used.)

- Keep in mind that first-person narrators can only tell what they know (which will be limited to what they see firsthand or are told by others), while third-person narrators can either know everything and explore every character's thoughts, or be limited to only that which can be observed.

7. **Organize your thoughts.** After you have prepared the basic elements of your story, it can be helpful to do out a time-line in some way to help you decide what should happen when.

- Your story should consist at least of an introduction, initiating incident, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. You can draw or write a visual with very simple descriptions of what should happen in each of these stages. Having this done will help you keep focused when writing the story, and you can easily make changes to it, so that you are able to keep a steady flow as you write the full story.

8. **Start writing.** Depending on how thoroughly you've sketched out your plot and characters, the actual writing process may simply be one of choosing the right words.

9. **Come out swinging.** The first page—some would say the first sentence—of any writing should grab the reader's attention and leave him/her wanting more.

- A quick start is especially important in short stories because you don't have much room to tell your story. Don't dillydally with long introductions of the characters or uninteresting descriptions of the setting: get right into the plot, and reveal details about the characters and setting piece-by-piece as you go along.

10. **Let the story "write itself".** As you develop your story, you may want to turn your plot in a different direction than you had planned, or you may want to substantially change or remove a character. Listen to your characters if they tell you to do something different, and don't worry about scrapping your plans altogether if you can make a better story as you go.

11. **Revise and edit.** When you've finished the story, go back through it and correct mechanical mistakes, as well as logical and semantic errors. In general, make sure the story flows and the characters and their problems are introduced and resolved appropriately.

12. **Get some second opinions.** Send your revised and edited story off to a trusted friend or relative for revisions, edits, and suggestions. Let your reviewers know that you want to hear their real opinions of the story.

- Make sure you consider everything that your reviewers tell you—not just the parts you would like to hear. Thank your reviewers for reading your story, and don't argue with them.
- Incorporate whatever edits, revisions, and suggestions you feel are valid. Your writing will be better if you can carefully consider constructive criticism, but you don't have to follow all the advice you get. Some of the suggestions may not be very good. It's your story, and you need to make the final call!

TIPS:

- ★ Stories have at least two timelines. There is the order in which the events occurred, and then there is the order in which you reveal them to your readers. These timelines don't have to be the same.
- ★ You may not need or want to go through the brainstorming and pre-writing work; many writers skip these steps, and you may find going through all the steps of the writing process superfluous. That said, everybody should try pre-writing at some point, even if it's just once. Also, without planning beforehand, it is very unlikely you will have a good story.
- ★ Short stories are sometimes best ended with a cliffhanger. What really happened to Douglas Quail (aka Quaid) at the end of "We Can Remember It for You Wholesale" (aka *Total Recall*)?
- ★ Make sure you couldn't have ended your story earlier. Every reader hates a book that is right about to end, but drags on for another paragraph or two.

WARNINGS:

Don't get lazy about writing. Don't end the story with the reader still confused. Cliff hangers are okay, but only if you are planning to write a second book, or as in the case of "We Can Remember It for You Wholesale", if the cliffhanger is integral to the story.

Short stories are the hardest kind of fiction to write. You have to do everything that happens in a novel (introduce characters, create conflict, develop characters, resolve conflict) in a condensed narrative. Respect the genre. It isn't easy.