

# CREATIVE WRITING:

## THE ART OF THE STORY

### COURSE MANUAL

ENG310\_23A



LESSON PLANS - TESTS - ANSWER KEYS - QUARTER REPORT FORMS

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# INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *Creative Writing: The Art of the Story!* This course is designed as a fast-paced and fun guide to storytelling, with an emphasis on the short story. At the same time, it takes seriously the God-given gift of language and expects students to use attention and care to grow in its use.

## Overview

The following surveys the concepts and content by week. Seton-graded assignments are in bold.

Week 1: Art and Story

Week 2: Setting and Mood (**Week 2 Test**)

**Week 3: Description paragraph of a room**

Week 4: Poetic prose

Week 5: Character

**Week 6: Character exploration, either checklist or backstory**

Week 7: Point of View

Week 8: Anecdote (**Week 8 Test**)

**Week 9: An anecdote**

Weeks 10-12: Dialogue (**Week 11 Test**) / **Week 12, Dialogue**

Weeks 13-15: Plot

**Weeks 16-18: Short story**

## Supplements

Annotated readings used with the course can be found in the "Supplements" section at the back of these lesson plans.

## Writing Skills

The majority of the course consists of ungraded exercises, called Writing Skills, that will have students practice aspects of fiction writing. We suggest students keep an organized collection of these completed exercises. This will help them to observe their progress and save the work as inspiration or even usable material for creative writing outside of class.

For those who use pen and paper, a large notebook should suffice. For those who prefer to type, we recommend creating a folder for the course. Subfolders can be created by week.

Where days lack a Writing Skills exercise, students are encouraged to do some form of non-academic writing to build writing experience. The first day of the course explains this in more detail. The course will occasionally remind students to "Do daily writing."

## Seton-Graded Tests and Compositions

As writing is an art to be respected and this is a class for credit, when it comes to the work to be submitted to Seton, the student should exercise the same level of discipline and care as in other classes.



There are several basic story terms and concepts students will learn in this course. They are reinforced by periodic home-graded quizzes called Reviewing the Selection. There are three closed-book, multiple-choice, Seton-graded tests (Weeks 2, 8, and 11) based on the terms and the quizzes. Students will be given time to review and prepare before each.

There are five total Seton-graded compositions: four in Weeks 3, 6, 9, 12 and a final short story assignment over Weeks 16-18. Most of the compositions call for fewer than 500 words to emphasize quality over quantity. **Any compositions with obscenities, sex, graphic violence, occult magic, or other clearly offensive material, as determined by a grader, will be returned for revision.**

## Manuscript Guidelines

1. All submissions to Seton must be typed.
2. Submissions are usually double-spaced so that graders have room to write comments. However, because fiction in books and magazines is single-spaced, students are free in this course to either single-space or double-space submissions.
3. Documents should have one-inch margins on all sides (the preset of most word processors).
4. We request that you use 12-point font. Use Times New Roman, or another clear, professional-looking font.
5. As a Catholic school, Seton welcomes students who choose to do so to put some religious symbol, motto, or acronym at the top of their submissions (e.g., a cross; A.M.D.G.; Jesus, Mary, and Joseph).
6. A student's full name, ID number, and the name of the assignment should appear in the upper left part of the first page of any submission.
7. In regards to grammar, it is very important to proofread your submissions. Observe all spelling, grammar, capitalization, and punctuation rules, as they will form part of your grade. There are allowable departures from typical grammar rules (slang, contractions, incomplete sentences, etc.) in some types of creative writing, especially in character dialogue, and such exceptions will be explained in the instructions or checklists for each assignment.

## Plagiarism

Copied or paraphrased work from the internet will result in plagiarism penalties, up to and including failing grades. If you are having difficulty with an assignment, please contact an English counselor at Seton by e-mail ([hseenglish@setonhome.org](mailto:hseenglish@setonhome.org)) or phone (540-622-5560), and we can help.

Plagiarism is using the ideas or words of another in a test or composition and presenting them as your own. The creative writing you submit should be original work generated by you. You must not submit writing by or altered passages from anyone else as your own work.

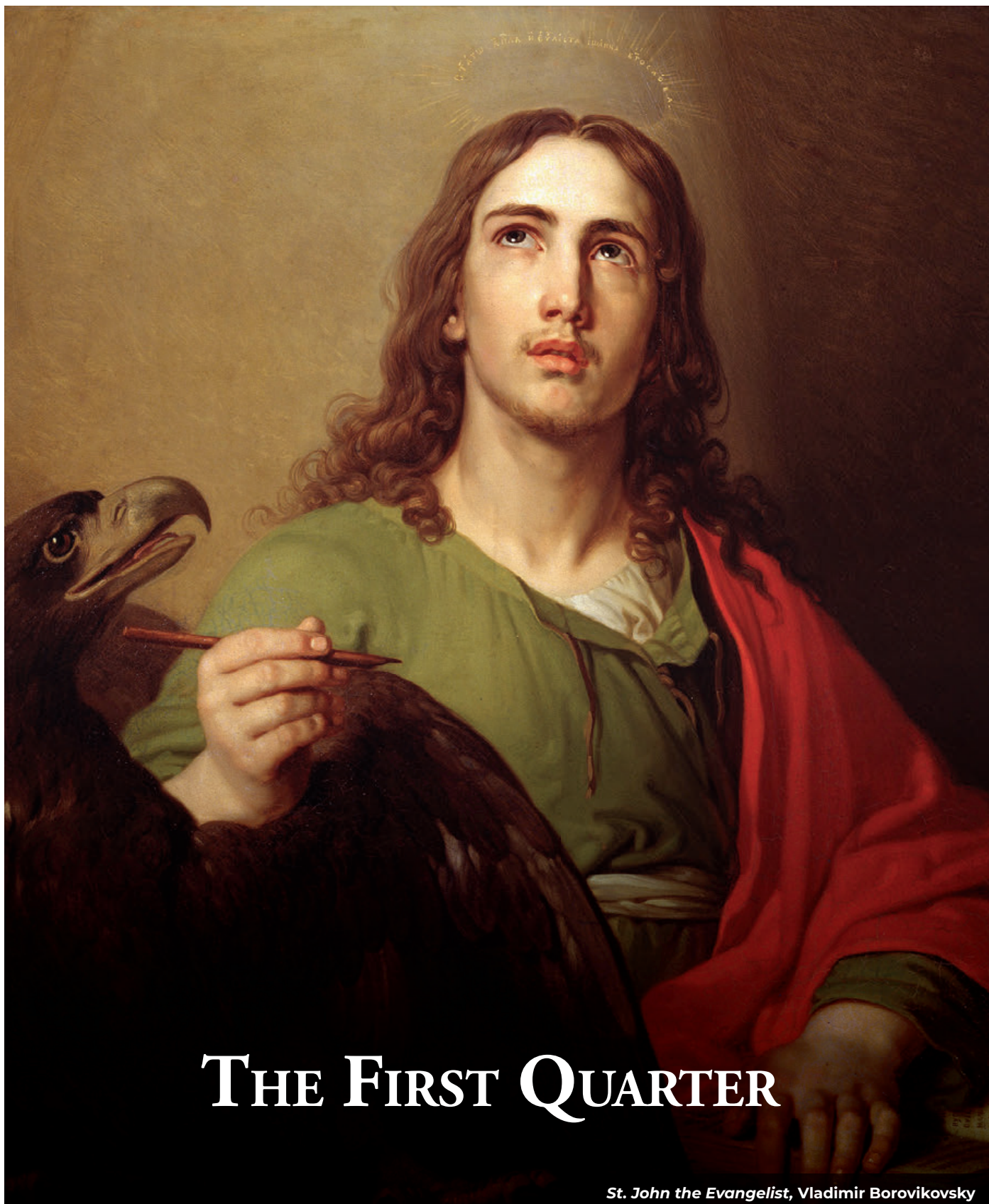
## TO THE PARENT-TEACHER

Each class day is designed to take approximately 50 minutes. Parents with backgrounds in writing will be able to expand on each day's lesson. The important help every parent-teacher can offer is to check that the student is doing the assigned work.

**Please note:** The course provides excerpts of writing advice from well-respected sources of creative writing, which are generally written for adults. For copyright reasons, these are cited with endnotes, but the inclusion of an excerpt from a book or source is not Seton's recommendation of that book or source.

We encourage students in this course to pray to their guardian angels, patron saints, and our Blessed Lady for attentiveness, perseverance, and a good attitude in approaching the challenges of the course. A few patron saints of writers include St. Francis de Sales, St. Hildegard von Bingen, St. John the Apostle, St. Paul the Apostle, and St. Lucy.

*Mother of the Incarnate Word, pray for us!*



# THE FIRST QUARTER

*St. John the Evangelist, Vladimir Borovikovsky*



# Week One

## Day 1

### ART, TRUTH, AND BEAUTY

You can check off work as you complete it!

For the first week of this quarter, we will be exploring art and story.



Read the following selection from the Catechism that covers what art is and how one makes it:

#### From Paragraph 2501 in *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*

Created “in the image of God,” man also expresses the truth of his relationship with God the Creator by the beauty of his artistic works. Indeed, *art* is a distinctively human form of expression; beyond the search for the necessities of life which is common to all living creatures, art is a freely given superabundance of the human being’s inner riches. Arising from talent given by the Creator and from man’s own effort, art is a form of practical wisdom, uniting knowledge and skill, to give form to the truth of reality in a language accessible to sight or hearing. To the extent that it is inspired by truth and love of beings, art bears a certain likeness to God’s activity in what he has created.<sup>1</sup>

### Reviewing the Selection



Answer the following questions based on the selection above. We expect that you will refer back to the selection several times as you answer the questions; the questions are to help you engage with the reading as well as to assess your understanding of it.

1. Imagine a beautiful spiderweb and a beautiful poem side by side. According to the passage, which statement is true?
  - a. The spider and the poet intended to make an object whose primary purpose was beauty.
  - b. The spider and the poet both made functional items to ensure the survival of their bodies.
  - c. The web and the poem are free expressions of their makers’ superabundant spiritual riches.
  - d. The poem, not the spiderweb, could be properly called “art.”
2. People sometimes debate whether artists are “born” or “made,” i.e., whether the most important aspect of an artist is talent or training. According to the passage, which statement is true?
  - a. The artist creates solely from effort.
  - b. The artist creates primarily from talent.
  - c. The artist creates from a combination of talent and effort.
  - d. The artist requires neither talent nor effort.

3. According to the passage, art comes from
  - a. Knowledge and skill
  - b. Knowledge only
  - c. Skill only
  - d. Neither knowledge nor skill
4. According to the passage, whatever form it takes, art attempts to turn the truth of reality into a
  - a. Language
  - b. Simplification
  - c. Fiction
  - d. Person
5. According to the passage, art is like God's act of creation
  - a. Always
  - b. When inspired by truth and love of beings
  - c. When the artist is a Christian
  - d. When the work is realistic and complex

## Writing Skills

### CREATE A PRAYER

The Catechism passage states that art resembles God's creativity when it is inspired by truth and love of beings. In another place, the Catechism states that God had "no other reason for creating than his love and goodness: 'Creatures came into existence when the key of love opened his hand.'"<sup>2</sup> It would be a good idea, then, whenever you are trying to create art, to say a prayer centered around love and truth.



**Create a short prayer you might use when writing creatively.** It might be as simple as "Father, help what I write to be inspired by truth and the love of beings."

Here is a writing prayer the Catholic short story author Flannery O'Connor (1925–1964) wrote at the age of twenty-one: "I ask You for a greater love for my holy Mother and I ask her for a greater love for You. Please help me to get down under things and find where You are."<sup>3</sup>

### DAILY WRITING PRACTICE

The Catechism passage refers to art as a combination of knowledge and skill. Standard advice for aspiring writers is to read a lot and write a lot. Reading artful writing and writing advice helps expand one's knowledge. Skill refers more to training of the body. An aspiring painter spends hours drawing simple shapes to train fingers, hands, arms, eyes, and brain—in short, the body—to become an instrument for creating art at a nearly automatic level.

One time-honored form of daily writing is journaling. A journal can be whatever you want it to be: a place to write about events in your day, or your private thoughts, even about not feeling like writing. Again, here is Flannery O'Connor in a "prayer journal" she kept shortly before a big breakthrough in her writing:

"If I ever do get to be a fine writer, it will not be because I am a fine writer but because God has given me credit for a few of the things He kindly wrote for me. Right at present this does not seem to be His policy. I can't write a thing. But I'll continue to try—that is the point. And at every dry point, I will be reminded Who is doing the work when it is done & Who is not doing it at that moment."<sup>4</sup>

With a parent's permission, you might start a blog. You might write letters (or e-mails) to family or friends.



Many great authors were frequent letter writers whose artful, entertaining letters are now collected in books. Catholic Harbor (catholicharbor.com) is Seton’s student message board. A message board post, with care paid to expression and style, would be good daily writing. One daily story-a-day exercise is to buy a pack of 4” x 6” index cards and commit to writing a brief tale or scene, enough to fill one side of a card.



**Decide** today about a kind of daily writing you could sustain. Then **do** a form of daily writing today.

Hereafter, we will refer to this as “daily writing” and on days where there are no “Writing Skills,” remind you periodically about it. Even if you are not perfect in managing to write daily, the important part is to try and to know that whatever minutes you devote to it are minutes that go to increasing your skill.

**Day 2**

**STORY**



The novelist and critic E.M. Forster (1879–1970) gave a series of lectures collected into a book called *Aspects of the Novel*. His influential reflections on storytelling can be found in many creative writing books and courses. **Read the following:**

**From the chapter “The Story” in *Aspects of the Novel***

And now the story can be defined. It is a narrative of events arranged in their time sequence—dinner coming after breakfast, Tuesday after Monday, decay after death, and so on. *Qua* story, it can only have one merit: that of making the audience want to know what happens next.

...

Daily life is also full of the time-sense. We think one event occurs after or before another, the thought is often in our minds, and much of our talk and action proceeds on the assumption. Much of our talk and action, but not all; there seems something else in life besides time, something which may conveniently be called “value,” something which is measured not by minutes and hours, but by intensity, so that when we look at our past it does not stretch back evenly but piles up into a few notable pinnacles, and when we look at the future it seems sometimes a wall, sometimes a cloud, sometimes a sun, but never a chronological chart.

...

So daily life, whatever it may be really, is practically composed of two lives—the life in time and the life by values—and our conduct reveals a double allegiance. “I only saw her for five minutes, but it was worth it.” There you have both allegiances in a single sentence. And what the story does is to narrate the life in time. And what the entire novel does—if it is a good novel—is to include the life by values as well...<sup>5</sup>

**Vocabulary Help:**

*Qua*: “as” or “insofar as it is a”



## Reviewing the Selection



**Answer the following questions based on the selection above.** We expect that you will refer back to the selection several times as you answer the questions; the questions are to help you think about the reading as well as to assess your understanding of it.

1. “A narrative of events arranged in their time sequence” is Forster’s definition of
  - a. Life
  - b. A novel
  - c. Story
  - d. Memory
2. A story is most properly a story when it elicits what kind of question from the reader?
  - a. What is going on?
  - b. Where is this going?
  - c. What happens next?
  - d. Why does this matter?
3. Forster’s definition of “time-sense” is closest to which of the following ideas?
  - a. Our ability to tell time from a clock
  - b. Our understanding that time moves from past to present to future
  - c. The use of our five senses every day
  - d. Our frequent habit of wanting to know the time
4. Forster says a good novel contains both “the life in time and the life by” what?
  - a. Allegiance
  - b. Love
  - c. Values
  - d. Hours

## Writing Skills

### EXAMINE STORY

In everyday speech, we use story, plot, and medium (movie, novel, play) interchangeably. If someone spoils the end of a movie we haven’t seen, we might say, “You spoiled the story (or plot or movie) for me.”

Forster has a famous definition of plot we’ll examine later. For now, we’ll examine his definition of “story” as a narrative of events arranged in an orderly sequence. Furthermore, a story of “merit” will maintain suspense (the audience’s desire to know what happens next).

If all that drew us to a story was suspense, we wouldn’t want to revisit a story we had already read. However, we often like to revisit favorite stories even though we know what happens in them. As Forster notes, life has moments that stand out for their intensity, and there must be emotional, intellectual, and spiritual qualities that stand out in a story as well that is, values.



**Fill out the chart below for three narratives you like and have returned to more than once.** The narratives can be books, movies, songs, or any other medium (try to include at least one book or written story). Sketch the main sequence of events in the story under “Story in time” and then the values in the story that attract you personally.

For values, try to use phrases (or even sentences) wherever possible instead of single words. The idea is to be specific about the values that attract you and to notice if there is any overlap in values between stories. These may signal values you want to write about in your own stories.



The example below can be used as a rough guide but adapt as necessary to make the exercise more useful to you.

**NARRATIVE ONE**

**NARRATIVE TWO**

**NARRATIVE THREE**

<b>Name:</b>	<b>Name:</b>	<b>Name:</b>
<b>Type:</b>	<b>Type:</b>	<b>Type:</b>
<b>Story in Time (Sequence of Events):</b>	<b>Story in Time (Sequence of Events):</b>	<b>Story in Time (Sequence of Events):</b>
<b>Value (Concepts or Principles that Draw You to the Story):</b>	<b>Value (Concepts or Principles that Draw You to the Story):</b>	<b>Value (Concepts or Principles that Draw You to the Story):</b>

## EXAMPLE

<i>Name: The Sound of Music</i>
<b>Type:</b> Movie
<p><b>Story in Time (Sequence of Events):</b></p> <p>In World War II era Austria, a postulant, having difficulty with her order's discipline, is sent by her convent to accept a governess position for a widower's seven children. The children grow to love her, as does their father, though he is engaged to another woman. The postulant loves them in return and, afraid she is jeopardizing her vocation, flees back to her convent. Her mother superior makes her return to the family. The father, who has broken off his engagement, proposes to her and they wed. The family later escapes the country, fleeing from the Nazis.</p>
<p><b>Value (Concepts or Principles that Draw You to the Story):</b></p> <p>beauty and majesty of nature, restlessness, search for belonging, playfulness, welcome from children, music and bonding, vocation of married life versus religious life, love between man and woman, marriage and lasting commitment, courage, love of country</p>

## Day 3

## DEFINING THE SHORT STORY

This course aims to cover the principles of storytelling, a transferable skill across the widest variety of forms, whether your interest is in screenplays, play scripts, novels, poetry, songs, or other arts. For practical reasons of space and time, many of our examples will be taken from the short story, and your final project will be a short story. A short story provides an excellent place to study and test various aspects of storytelling.

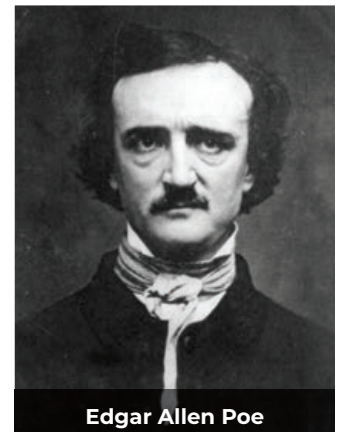


## Read below about short stories:



Brief prose tales have an ancient history in forms like the fable, parable, fairy tale, and folk tale. Still, the unique form we call the short story arose in the nineteenth century, simultaneously in various parts of the world, coinciding with the rise of magazine publication. Magazines collected bits of news, history, and commentary and also offered a convenient space for publishing short tales.

The novel was the great artistic standard for prose narration, and shorter narratives were considered lesser by comparison and sometimes called “sketches.” The common current definition of a short story—a fictional prose narrative shorter than a novel—continues to define it by its ancestor. This is mostly because the form is so young, it is unclear what constitutes its essential qualities. This makes the short story an exciting form to work in, as this leaves much room for you, the artist, to experiment with and develop it.



Edgar Allen Poe



Although dictionaries date the coining of the term “short story” to 1877, Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849) was one of the earliest authors to attempt to define and to create works now universally accepted as short stories. He championed the creation of short narratives for their own sake, in which artistic effects could be achieved that could surpass those of longer works.

Besides being a poet and fiction writer, Poe was a critic. His ideas on the short story (or “tale,” as it was called at the time) mostly come from his reviews of other works. Some of his most important ideas come from a book review in praise of the short story collection *Twice-Told Tales* by Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804-1864).

**From book review of *Twice-Told Tales***

We need only here say, upon this topic, that, in almost all classes of composition, the unity of effect or impression is a point of the greatest importance. It is clear, moreover, that this unity cannot be thoroughly preserved in productions whose perusal cannot be completed at one sitting.

...

We allude to the short prose narrative, requiring from a half-hour to one or two hours in its perusal. The ordinary novel is objectionable, from its length, for reasons already stated in substance. As it cannot be read at one sitting, it deprives itself, of course, of the immense force derivable from *totality*. Worldly interests intervening during the pauses of perusal, modify, annul, or counteract, in a greater or less degree, the impressions of the book. But simple cessation in reading, would, of itself, be sufficient to destroy the true unity. In the brief tale, however, the author is enabled to carry out the fulness of his intention, be it what it may.

...

A skillful literary artist has constructed a tale. If wise, he has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents; but having conceived, with deliberate care, a certain unique or single *effect* to be wrought out, he then invents such incidents—he then combines such events as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his very initial sentence tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design. And by such means, with such care and skill, a picture is at length painted which leaves in the mind of him who contemplates it with a kindred art, a sense of the fullest satisfaction. The idea of the tale has been presented unblemished, because undisturbed; and this is an end unattainable by the novel. Undue brevity is just as exceptionable here as in the poem; but undue length is yet more to be avoided.<sup>6</sup>

**Reviewing the Selection**



Answer the following questions.



1. What does Poe call “a point of the greatest importance”?
  - a. “undue length”
  - b. “fullest satisfaction”
  - c. “undue brevity”
  - d. “unity of effect or impression”
2. Poe states that a prose tale should require what amount of reading time?
  - a. Between a half-hour and two hours
  - b. Less than a half-hour
  - c. Between one to two hours
  - d. At least two hours

3. Poe states that the first thing to be decided before writing a prose tale is
  - a. The first sentence
  - b. The events of the story
  - c. The effect one wishes to produce in the reader
  - d. The title
4. Poe states that epics and novels are imperfect because they are too long. The length
  - a. Tires a reader
  - b. Takes a reader away from other worldly duties
  - c. Deprives the reader of the intense exhilaration obtainable from a short work
  - d. Disorients a reader with too many characters and events

One of Poe's major contributions to thought about the short story is his idea that it should aim at **unity of effect** (also known as his "single effect" theory): that all details of a story should contribute to one powerful, single impression on the reader. It makes sense that a story that creates an intense experience will be memorable, and Poe recognizes that the impression should not be surface-level but something with depth.

## Writing Skills

### CREATING EFFECTS

If you are not clear what an "effect" is, Poe is also somewhat vague. In some places, he says it can be named, simple things like "terror, or passion, or horror."<sup>7</sup> However, he also speaks of something ranging between a thought and feeling: "impressions, of which the heart, the intellect, or (more generally) the soul is susceptible."<sup>8</sup> This could mean something more like Forster's values: an impression of the power of nature, the importance of family, and so on.

If you could write a story that made a single powerful impression on a reader, what would you want the impression to be? Recall stories from the Bible: some leave impressions of tenderness, some of fear, some of inspiration.



**List as many different impressions** as you would like to experiment with giving a reader and **keep the list** as a reminder of what you might try some time in the future.

## Day 4

### "THE RAVEN" AND ITS MAKING

For the next two days, we will have a rare experience in literature: to read a work of art and then to read the author's description of the step-by-step process of creating it.

Most students have read "The Raven" before (some have even memorized it). You may use an audio version to listen to the poem, but you're asked to follow along with our provided text and notes, which will be needed for the "Reviewing the Selection" questions.



You may use an **AUDIO** version to listen to the poem.



**Read "The Raven" by Edgar Allan Poe** in Supplements at the back of this lesson plan.



Then **complete the "Reviewing the Selection" questions**.



## Reviewing the Selection

1. Although the narrator's reaction to the tapping sound in stanza 1 seems mild, stanzas 3 and 4 clarify that he reacts to the sound with
  - a. Humor
  - b. Terror
  - c. Sorrow
  - d. Anger
2. In stanza 5, the narrator's first guess as to the specific identity of the visitor is
  - a. A raven
  - b. An angel
  - c. Lenore
  - d. A beggar
3. The narrator's reaction to the appearance of the Raven in stanzas 7-8 is
  - a. Fear
  - b. Humor
  - c. Anxiety
  - d. Anger
4. The first two lines each of stanzas 2, 3 and 14, among other clues, lead us to regard the narrator as someone troubled by
  - a. A nervous imagination
  - b. A persistent sense of self-confidence
  - c. A propensity to headaches
  - d. An analytical intellect that attempts to apply scholarship to simple situations
5. In yesterday's selection, Poe wrote, "If his very initial sentence tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step." Which of the following words from the first sentence of "The Raven" most contributes to the effect?
  - a. Dreary
  - b. Quaint
  - c. Gently
  - d. While

## Writing Skills

### WORDING ANALYSIS

Perhaps you like "The Raven" and perhaps you don't. It's not necessary to like a work of art to find things to admire and aspects to imitate. This is one of the most popular pieces of writing of all time, so despite flaws (of which critics can enumerate many), there is something to be learned here and from most of what you read.

On the level of style, it's a good idea to write down phrases or uses of language you admire. If you can discover why certain passages create certain feelings in you, you can then learn to reproduce those feelings in others. Some writers keep collections of quotes in what's called a commonplace book. Even taking an extra moment to write out a striking phrase can be worthwhile. Many famous books—*The Sound and the Fury*, *Remembrance of Things Past*, *Brave New World*—were titled after short but well-worded phrases from Shakespeare.

**Write out two or three phrases** (or longer) from "The Raven" you wish to understand better. Substitute other words into the phrase to see what effect it would have on the passage and poem as a whole.

For example, "each separate dying ember" is one of many memorable phrases from "The Raven." Would "each *shrieking* dying ember" or "each separate *smoldering* ember" have substantially altered the mood or meaning of the opening?

## Day 5

## POE'S "THE PHILOSOPHY OF COMPOSITION"



Edgar Allan Poe's "The Philosophy of Composition" describes how he composed "The Raven." The essay is worth reading in its entirety, but we have excerpted a few passages to emphasize some key takeaways from Poe's approach to writing. **Read the following:**

## READER-ORIENTATION &amp; BEAUTY

Poe's "unity of effect" principle means seeing from a reader's point of view. It means focusing on two questions throughout the writing process: *What experience do I want the reader to have?* and *How best can I create that experience for the reader?*

Poe's essay states that, in his poetry at least, his intention was always to have readers experience beauty.

My next thought concerned the choice of an impression, or effect, to be conveyed: and here I may as well observe that throughout the construction, I kept steadily in view the design of rendering the work universally appreciable. I should be carried too far out of my immediate topic were I to demonstrate a point upon which I have repeatedly insisted, and which, with the poetical, stands not in the slightest need of demonstration—the point, I mean, that Beauty is the sole legitimate province of the poem... That pleasure which is at once the most intense, the most elevating, and the most pure is, I believe, found in the contemplation of the beautiful... Beauty which is the atmosphere and the essence of the poem.

Regarding, then, Beauty as my province, my next question referred to the tone of its highest manifestation—and all experience has shown that this tone is one of sadness. Beauty of whatever kind in its supreme development invariably excites the sensitive soul to tears. Melancholy is thus the most legitimate of all the poetical tones....

Now, never losing sight of the object—supremeness or perfection at all points, I asked myself—"Of all melancholy topics what, according to the universal understanding of mankind, is the most melancholy?" Death, was the obvious reply. "And when," I said, "is this most melancholy of topics most poetical?" From what I have already explained at some length the answer here also is obvious—"When it most closely allies itself to Beauty: the death then of a beautiful woman is unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world, and equally is it beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such topic are those of a bereaved lover."<sup>9</sup>

Beauty is sometimes seen as a liability in writing, as though it forces one to create idealized, unrealistic portraits of life. That "The Raven," a rather dark poem, was written with Beauty in mind is therefore surprising. Interestingly, Poe was trying to take heavy topics like sadness and death and find ways they "allied" to Beauty.

This corresponds to a point in St. John Paul II's "Letter to Artists," where he writes, "In so far as it seeks the beautiful, fruit of an imagination which rises above the everyday, art is by its nature a kind of appeal to the mystery. Even when they explore the darkest depths of the soul or the most unsettling aspects of evil, artists give voice in a way to the universal desire for redemption."<sup>10</sup>

The narrator of "The Raven" experiences unsettling despair, yet clearly voices a desire for beauty and the heavenly. More broadly, Poe's desire for the reader to experience Beauty—an intense, pure, elevation of soul, shows an "imagination which rises above the everyday," in the Pope's words, and which sought to raise others as well.



## UNIVERSALITY VERSUS ORIGINALITY

Poe's reader-oriented approach inverts the usual focus of writing for self-expression. At the same time, he stresses originality throughout his essay. Poe looked to literary tradition to see what had worked in the past and, in his usual manner, tried to intensify it.

I betook myself to...obtaining some artistic piquancy which might serve me as a key-note in the construction of the poem—some pivot upon which the whole structure might turn. In carefully thinking over all the usual artistic effects...I did not fail to perceive immediately that no one had been so universally employed as that of the refrain....As commonly used, the refrain, or burden\*, not only is limited to lyric verse, but depends for its impression upon the force of monotone—both in sound and thought. The pleasure is deduced solely from the sense of identity—of repetition. I resolved to diversify, and so heighten the effect, by adhering in general to the monotone of sound, while I continually varied that of thought: that is to say, I determined to produce continuously novel effects, by the variation of the application of the refrain—the refrain itself remaining for the most part, unvaried.<sup>11</sup>

**Vocabulary Help:** *burden*: refrain in a poem or song

You're probably most familiar with "refrain" from popular music, in which a refrain is a repeating set of lyrics after the main verses. In poetry, a refrain is usually a single line that repeats at the end of each stanza. Poe chose the common poetic technique of a refrain to build his poem on, but with two alterations: shortening it to one word and having its meaning vary in each stanza. Poe's essay explains that selecting the melancholy tone helped him choose a grim raven as the most fitting mouthpiece for the repetition of the refrain "Nevermore."

## WORKING BACKWARDS

Early in the essay, Poe writes:

Nothing is more clear than that every plot, worth the name, must be elaborated to its denouement\* before anything be attempted with the pen. It is only with the denouement constantly in view that we can give a plot its indispensable air of consequence, or causation, by making the incidents, and especially the tone at all points, tend to the development of the intention.

**Vocabulary Help:** *denouement*: pronounced (day-new-MAW), the final part of a story, the ending





Poe is saying that the entire ending of a story should be decided before the first parts are written. In other words, he works backwards. After selecting effect, and settling initial aspects of structure, Poe writes that he turned next to plot, and found it and the ending almost simultaneously.

I had now to combine the two ideas of a lover lamenting his deceased mistress and a Raven continuously repeating the word "Nevermore." I had to combine these, bearing in mind my design of varying at every turn the application of the word repeated, but the only intelligible mode of such combination is that of imagining the Raven employing the word in answer to the queries of the lover. And here it was that I saw at once the opportunity afforded for the effect on which I had been depending, that is to say, the effect of the variation of application. I saw that I could make the first query propounded by the lover—the first query to which the Raven should reply "Nevermore"—that I could make this first query a commonplace one, the second less so, the third still less, and so on, until at length the lover, startled from his original nonchalance by the melancholy character of the word itself, by its frequent repetition, and by a consideration of the ominous reputation of the fowl that uttered it, is at length excited to superstition, and wildly propounds queries of a far different character—queries whose solution he has passionately at heart—propounds them half in superstition and half in that species of despair which delights in self-torture—propounds them not altogether because he believes in the prophetic or demoniac character of the bird (which reason assures him is merely repeating a lesson learned by rote), but because he experiences a frenzied pleasure in so modelling his questions as to receive from the expected "Nevermore" the most delicious because the most intolerable of sorrows. Perceiving the opportunity thus afforded me, or, more strictly, thus forced upon me in the progress of the construction, I first established in my mind the climax or concluding query—that query to which "Nevermore" should be in the last place an answer—that query in reply to which this word "Nevermore" should involve the utmost conceivable amount of sorrow and despair.

Here then the poem may be said to have had its beginning—at the end where all works of art should begin—for it was here at this point of my preconsiderations that I first put pen to paper in the composition of the stanza:

**"Prophet!" said I, "thing of evil! prophet still if bird or devil!  
By that Heaven that bends above us—by that God we both adore,  
Tell this soul with sorrow laden, if, within the distant Aidenn,  
It shall clasp a sainted maiden whom the angels name Lenore—  
Clasp a rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore."  
Quoth the Raven—"Nevermore."**

I composed this stanza, at this point, first that, by establishing the climax, I might the better vary and graduate, as regards seriousness and importance, the preceding queries of the lover, and secondly, that I might definitely settle the rhythm, the metre, and the length and general arrangement of the stanza, as well as graduate the stanzas which were to precede, so that none of them might surpass this in rhythmical effect.

There's a commonsense appeal in Poe's statement that works of art should be written from the ending backwards. His suggestion is that when you know the destination first, writing the path there becomes much easier.

## UNITY AND CONTRAST

One might think Poe's "unity of effect" means every detail of a story should directly cause the desired effect, i.e., that in a horror story, all details should have some noticeable aspect of horror. However, Poe's essay mentions the effective use of contrast.



About the middle of the poem, also, I have availed myself of the force of contrast, with a view of deepening the ultimate impression. For example, an air of the fantastic—approaching as nearly to the ludicrous as was admissible—is given to the Raven’s entrance....

**Then this ebony bird, beguiling my sad fancy into smiling  
By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore,  
“Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou,” I said, “art sure no craven,  
Ghastly grim and ancient Raven wandering from the Nightly shore—  
Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night’s Plutonian shore?”  
Quoth the Raven—“Nevermore.”**

**Much I marvelled this ungainly fowl to hear discourse so plainly,  
Though its answer little meaning—little relevancy bore;  
For we cannot help agreeing that no living human being  
Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his chamber door—  
Bird or beast upon the sculptured bust above his chamber door,  
With such name as “Nevermore.”**

The effect of the denouement being thus provided for, I immediately drop the fantastic for a tone of the most profound seriousness—this tone commencing in the stanza directly following the one last quoted, with the line,

**But the Raven, sitting lonely on that placid bust, spoke only, etc.**

From this epoch the lover no longer jests—no longer sees anything even of the fantastic in the Raven’s demeanour. He speaks of him as a “grim, ungainly, ghastly, gaunt, and ominous bird of yore,” and feels the “fiery eyes” burning into his “bosom’s core.” This revolution of thought, or fancy, on the lover’s part, is intended to induce a similar one on the part of the reader—to bring the mind into a proper frame for the denouement—which is now brought about as rapidly and as directly as possible.

The insertion of some momentary humor and its sudden vanishing helps to set up and intensify the final effect of melancholy.

## CONCLUSION

Poe’s thesis in the essay is the following: “It is my design to render it manifest that no one point in [“The Raven”] is referable either to accident or intuition—that the work proceeded step by step, to its completion, with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem.”

There is scholarly debate as to whether the essay accurately reflects Poe’s composition of “The Raven,” some finding it hard to believe the process was so “mathematical.” The moderate position is that Poe simplified the process for the purpose of illustration. The short story writer and Poe fan Jorge Luis Borges (1899-1986) wrote, “I suspect that the real elaboration had to have been even more complex, and much more chaotic and vacillating. In my opinion, Poe limited himself to supplying a logical, ideal outline of the many and perplexing paths of creation.”<sup>12</sup>

There is little doubt the essay expresses many cherished ideas of Poe, such as “unity of effect,” which as we have

seen, he argued for elsewhere. The essay is an intriguing change of perspective from usual writing advice in placing a priority on the reader's experience and in unique ideas like working backwards. We will return to it later in the course.

## Reviewing the Week's Selections and Lessons



The following questions are based on readings and lessons throughout this week.

- According to the Catechism passage this week, art is a union of
  - Love and desire
  - Knowledge and skill
  - Patience and perseverance
  - Creativity and imagination
- According to the Catechism passage this week, art is like God's act of creation
  - When it creates something from nothing
  - When it is lifelike
  - When grounded in realism
  - When inspired by truth and love of beings
- Forster's definition of story is
  - A plot with substance
  - A narrative of events arranged in their time sequence
  - A set of scenes that create a mood
  - A narrative with meaning
- Which of the following is part of Poe's "unity of effect" theory?
  - A story should be short enough to be read at one sitting.
  - A story's elements should unite to produce a powerful effect.
  - The purpose of a story should be to produce a powerful effect on the reader.
  - All of the above
- Merriam-Webster's dictionary online defines short story as "an invented prose narrative shorter than a novel usually dealing with a few characters and aiming at unity of effect and often concentrating on the creation of mood rather than plot." This definition shows that
  - Poe had a substantial influence on how the short story is defined
  - E.M. Forster made an important contribution to the definition of the short story
  - Poe invented the term "short story"



Illustration of Poe's Story, *The Raven*, by Édouard Manet

## WEEK 7

## Day 1

## POINT OF VIEW



Read the following about point of view:



You have probably encountered the concept of “point of view” as a literature student. The choice of point of view is a meaningful one for a writer.

First, it is necessary to distinguish between author and narrator. The **author** is the real-life human being who composed the fictional work. The **narrator** is the named or unnamed teller of events within the fictional work.

In **first person** point of view, the narrator is a character and participant in the story. “The Raven” and “Araby” both had first person narrators.

The other common point of view is **third person**, either **limited** or **omniscient**. The third person narrator is an observer and non-participant retelling events from the perspective of one character (limited) or freely shifting through the minds and perspectives of multiple characters (“omniscient” is Greek for “all-knowing”).

The first person point of view is easily identifiable by its use of first person pronouns like “I,” “my,” “we,” and “our.” When not first person, the type of third person (limited or omniscient) may take a few pages to determine. Third person limited means the events stay filtered through the perspective of a single character, what is observed and known by him or her. Omniscient (or what might just as simply be called “non-limited”) is not limited to this perspective but can freely enter and portray the thoughts and points of view of different characters.

### Reviewing Literary Terms



The following questions are based on today's lesson.



1. When the narrator is an observer and non-participant retelling events from the perspective of one character, what is the point of view?
  - a. First person
  - b. Third person limited
  - c. Third person omniscient
2. From the Greek for “all knowing,” which point of view means the narrator can freely shift through the minds and perspectives of multiple characters?
  - a. First person
  - b. Third person limited
  - c. Third person omniscient
3. “Call me Ishmael. Some years ago—never mind how long precisely—having little or no money in my purse, and nothing particular to interest me on shore, I thought I would sail about a little and see the watery part of the world.” This opening sentence from the novel *Moby Dick* indicates what point of view?
  - a. First person
  - b. Third person limited
  - c. Third person omniscient




### Writing Skills

#### POINT OF VIEW DIFFERENCES

It's useful to see what difference turning a passage into another point of view would change. One might experiment with turning "The Raven" into third person point of view:


“Once upon a midnight dreary, while a scholar, weak and weary,  
Mulled o’er many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore—  
While he nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping...”

One difference the change might make is to increase suspense. The first person point of view in the original means we know from the start the narrator survives the encounter he is about to narrate (after all, he’s the one telling it to us), while third person would give us no such assurance. Continuing the experiment through the next several stanzas would reveal even more.

 **Take a passage from a favorite book and change the point of view.** Note what the differences are.

### Day 2

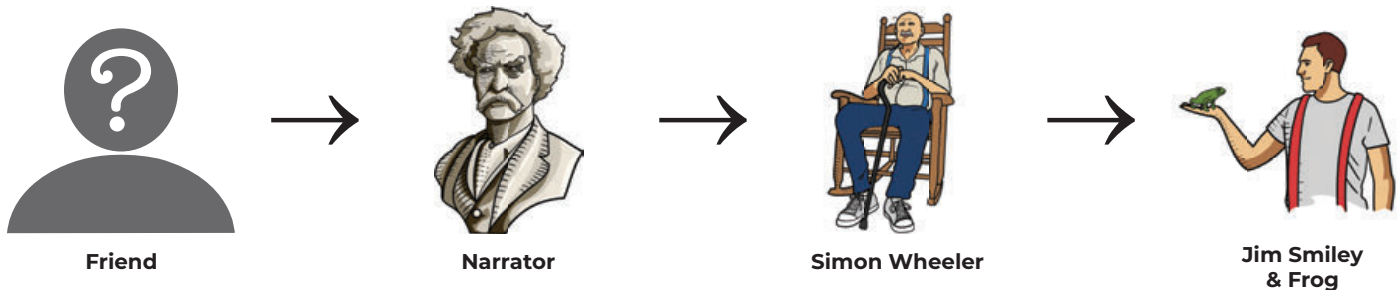
## FRAME STORY

 **Read about frame story below:**

A **frame story** is an outer layer of narrative that encloses the main story or stories. In Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*, for example, the frame story is that Chaucer, himself a character in the book, is travelling on a pilgrimage to Canterbury, England, with other pilgrims when a story contest is proposed. The main narratives are the various stories the individuals tell.

In *Frankenstein*, the frame story is comprised of letters that Captain Robert Walton is writing to his sister as he sails to the North Pole. The letters relate taking a stranger aboard, Victor Frankenstein, who tells his life story to Captain Walton, who writes it down afterward. The novel then switches from letter form to Victor Frankenstein narrating in first person, which as the frame story has informed us, is Captain Walton’s written recollection of how Victor told the tale.

Even a fictional work as brief as a short story can utilize a frame story, as seen in “The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County” by Mark Twain (1835–1910). The frame story involves the first person narrator, assumed by the reader to be Twain but a fictionalized version more typically referred to in modern studies simply as the Narrator. The Narrator has been requested by a friend to ask an old man named Simon Wheeler for information about Reverend Leonidas W. Smiley. The friend is pulling a prank. There is no Reverend Smiley but the name “Smiley” will remind Simon Wheeler, a rambling storyteller, of Jim Smiley, a favorite subject, and make the Narrator a victim of a long-winded story session.





Turn to the Supplements and read "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County."

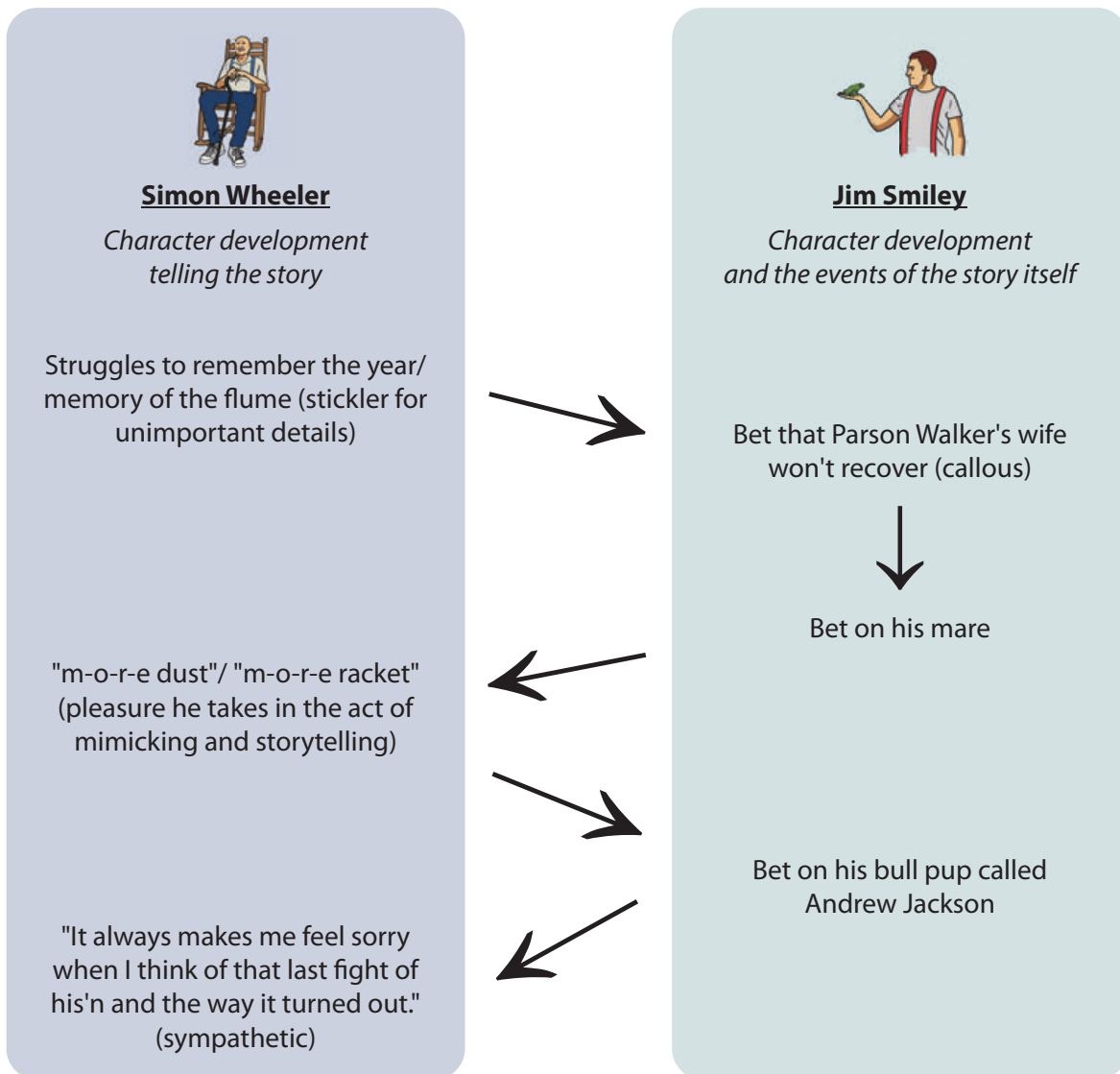


Then return and read today's lesson.

**Frame Story**

The story about Jim Smiley is funny in itself and might have begun, "There was a man once named Jim Smiley who was always betting on things." In fact, the basic anecdote of a betting man and his jumping frog was a piece of local folklore in the area where Twain first heard it and had been written up in newspapers before.

Twain increased the complexity of the story by adding a simultaneous point of interest in the narrator, Wheeler, and his personality and delivery. (In technical literary terms, as the frame story has set up, the narrator remains the fictional "Twain" who is imagined as transcribing the conversation, but practically the reader experiences the Jim Smiley story as narrated by Wheeler.) While Wheeler and the story—how he tells it and what he is telling—are intertwined, one might say there is a zig-zag in what is most strongly brought before the eyes of the reader at a given moment, the first half of which might be (by no means exhaustively) illustrated in the following chart:






The bull dog’s end and Wheeler’s pausing to comment on it add a sad note to a comedic story, certainly expanding the complexity. It emphasizes the immoral dimension of Smiley’s gambling obsession and perhaps makes his comeuppance more satisfying. It also may ennoble Wheeler and could cause the reader to take his side when “Twain” re-enters with what could be considered rudeness at the end. (The frame story with “Twain,” of course, is a third story layer.)


In sum, even in writing short stories, a frame story and developing the simultaneous interest of your narrator’s character via his or her act of narrating are options you might add to your creative toolkit.

## Writing Skills

 **Do some daily writing.**

### Day 3

## FREE INDIRECT DISCOURSE

 **Read the following:**

The choice of third person omniscient also has techniques that can be used to increase interest, one of which is free indirect discourse. First, it’s necessary to clarify types of discourse available in all points of view.

**Direct discourse** is character speech in quotation marks; it’s exactly what the character said.

*“It’s well for you,” she said.*

*“If I go,” I said, “I will bring you something.”*

In this passage from “Araby,” the quotation marks state that the girl’s and boy’s exact words are being given. This is direct discourse. It is the only discourse with quotation marks.

**Indirect discourse**, which has no quotation marks, occurs when the narrator states that he or she is giving a summary or equivalent of a character’s speech.

*She could not go, she said, because there would be a retreat that week in her convent.*

Without quotation marks, these are not being presented as her exact words, and even if we were to render this into the correct tense and person, we rather doubt she expressed herself as stiffly as, “I cannot go because there will be a retreat that week in my convent.” The “she said” states that the basic idea is being given in place of the character’s exact words.

**Free indirect discourse** occurs in a passage when the narrator’s speech has characteristics of the speech or perspective of another character, so the two perspectives are difficult to disentangle.

Jane Austen (1775–1817) was an early practitioner and innovator of free indirect discourse. This passage from *Northanger Abbey* is one of innumerable such examples:



Jane Austen

“When they arrived at Mrs. Allen’s door, the astonishment of Isabella was hardly to be expressed on finding that it was too late in the day for them to attend her friend into the house:—‘Past three o’clock!’ it was inconceivable, incredible, impossible, and she would neither believe her own watch, nor her brother’s, nor the servants, she would believe no assurance of it founded on reason and reality, till Morland produced his watch and ascertained the fact..”

Isabella’s direct discourse is signaled in “Past three o’clock!” but then the quotation marks are dropped and one is left without clear signals. The words “inconceivable, incredible, impossible” strike one as either the exact way Isabella expressed herself or an example of the flighty, melodramatic rhythm of her speech. It seems that Isabella has partly overtaken the third person narration.

Here is another example from Jane Austen’s novel *Persuasion*:

“The absolute necessity of seeming like herself produced then an immediate struggle; but after a while she could do no more. [Anne] began not to understand a word they said, and was obliged to plead indisposition and excuse herself. They could then see that she looked very ill—were shocked and concerned—and would not stir without her for the world. This was dreadful! Would they only have gone away, and left her in the quiet possession of that room, it would have been her cure; but to have them all standing or waiting around her was distracting.”

Although lacking “they said,” the “would not stir without her for the world” seems like what the onlookers must have said, and the “This was dreadful!” is Anne’s expression, or the narrator’s very sympathetic summary of it, or a mixture of both.

In excerpt form, perhaps it seems as though this is merely a confusion of who says what. If you reread the above passages, and particularly tomorrow where the short story will give us a larger context, the effectiveness of the technique is that the “distance” between narrator and characters collapses momentarily and the scene takes on immediacy, placing us into the midst of the drama.

## Reviewing the Lesson




Answer the following questions based on today's lesson.

- This type of discourse has no quotation marks and the narrator states that he or she is giving a summary or equivalent of a character’s speech.
  - Direct discourse
  - Indirect discourse
  - Free indirect discourse
- This type of discourse, with quotation marks, provides exactly what a character said.
  - Direct discourse
  - Indirect discourse
  - Free indirect discourse
- In this type of discourse, the narrator’s speech partly or completely takes on the characteristics of the speech or perspective of another character, so the two perspectives are difficult to disentangle.
  - Direct discourse
  - Indirect discourse
  - Free indirect discourse






**Day 4**

 **Read “The Doll’s House” by Katherine Mansfield (1888–1923)** in Supplements. You can just enjoy the story on this first read and tomorrow we will study some details of it.

**Day 5**

 **Read the following:**

Katherine Mansfield was born in New Zealand, where she lived till the age of 19. Years after she left, in memory of her brother who died in World War I, she focused her writing on stories of her native New Zealand. The character Kezia is her fictionalized self, and the other characters are based on real people from her childhood, most characters preserving even their real names. Pat was the family’s handyman, the Kelveys were a real family (though named “MacKelvie”), and so on.

The narrator is third person omniscient, cycling through the various thoughts and perspectives of Kezia, the Kelveys, Aunt Beryl, and others.

The story begins with free indirect discourse.

When dear old Mrs Hay went back to town after staying with the Burnells she sent the children a doll’s house. It was so big that the carter and Pat carried it into the courtyard, and there it stayed, propped up on two wooden boxes beside the feed-room door. No harm could come to it; it was summer. And perhaps the smell of paint would have gone off by the time it had to be taken in. For, really, the smell of paint coming from that doll’s house (‘Sweet of old Mrs Hay, of course; most sweet and generous!’)—but the smell of paint was quite enough to make anyone seriously ill, in Aunt Beryl’s opinion.

The “dear old Mrs Hay” doesn’t sound like a neutral narrative voice and, as we soon learn, reflects the “Sweet... old Mrs Hay” of direct discourse from Aunt Beryl. The “No harm could come to it” sounds like Aunt Beryl’s reassurance to the children, defending her preference to have it outside and certainly the “*had* to be taken in” expresses strong reluctance to take the dollhouse in.

This perspective is then dropped for a somewhat neutral narrative voice which in turn gives way to free indirect discourse from the children’s perspective.

There stood the doll’s house, a dark, oily, spinach green, picked out with bright yellow. Its two solid little chimneys, glued on to the roof, were painted red and white, and the door, gleaming with yellow varnish, was like a little slab of toffee. Four windows, real windows, were divided into panes by a broad streak of green. There was actually a tiny porch, too, painted yellow, with big lumps of congealed paint hanging along the edge.

But perfect, perfect little house! Who could possibly mind the smell? It was part of the joy, part of the newness.

‘Open it quickly, some one!’



Katherine Mansfield

The voice of narration and the children’s collective voice are so aligned, if one heard the story aloud, it might be difficult to tell that “Open it quickly, some one!” is direct speech. The next paragraph contains a different form of narration called the **intrusive narrator**, which commentates on the action of the story, sometimes identifying itself in first person or addressing the reader. This was a more common form of narration in the nineteenth century and before. Charles Dickens’ *A Christmas Carol* (1843), for example, has an intrusive narrator of which this section is an example.

The mention of Marley’s funeral brings me back to the point I started from. There is no doubt that Marley was dead. This must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come of the story I am going to relate.

This doesn’t make the perspective first person, as the narrator is not a participant in the events of the story and is still only an observer. In “The Doll’s House,” an example of an intrusive narrator occurs in the third paragraph:

That is the way for a house to open! Why don’t all houses open like that? How much more exciting than peering through the slit of a door into a mean little hall with a hatstand and two umbrellas! That is—isn’t it?—what you long to know about a house when you put your hand on the knocker. Perhaps it is the way God opens houses at the dead of night when He is taking a quiet turn with an angel. . .

In this case, this is the last blatant use of first person from the narrator (except for the phrase “our Else,” explained in the notes).

What is more frequent throughout the story is the use of free indirect discourse to represent multiple perspectives, enthusiastically presenting even opposing viewpoints. The following is what one might call the collective perspective of the townspeople towards the Kelveys:

So they were the daughters of a washerwoman and a jailbird. Very nice company for other people’s children!

while free indirect discourse also occurs with the Kelveys themselves:

Lil looked up from her dinner. She wrapped the rest quickly away. Our Else stopped chewing. *What was coming now?* [italics added]

Today, the technique of the intrusive narrator is generally frowned upon as more fun for the writer than useful or interesting to the reader. Also, used however sparingly, once an omniscient narrator has been introduced as a separate “I,” the reader can be distracted by who this narrator is and on guard for when or how often it will return with commentary. It’s a feature of older literature that doesn’t seem to work as well in modern narratives.

At any rate, free indirect discourse is a subtle, infinitely variable technique and Mansfield’s use here is worth study. The novels of Jane Austen are also great teachers in it, and it is something to be on the lookout for in any omniscient narration.

## Writing Skills



Do some daily writing.

