LIBROS DE TEXTO PARA ESTUDIANTES UNIVERSITARIOS

Express yourself:
Exploring creativity in English Language Teacher Education

Enrique Alejandro BASABE
Natalia Fabiola MUGUIRO
(Editores)

[2018] LIBROS DE TEXTO PARA ESTUDIANTES UNIVERSITARIOS

Express yourself: Exploring creativity in English Language Teacher Education

Editores:
Enrique Alejandro Basabe
Natalia Fabiola Muguiro

Autores:
Enrique Alejandro Basabe
Natalia Fabiola Muguiro
María Isabel Arriaga
Martín Carlos Marusich
Miriam Patricia Germani
John Ryan Brakke
Lyuba Basin

Muguiro, Natalia Fabiola

Express yourself - Exploring creativity in English Language Teacher Education / Natalia Fabiola Muguiro ; Enrique Alejandro Basabe ; editado por Enrique Alejandro Basabe; Natalia Fabiola Muguiro. - 1a edición para el alumno - Santa Rosa : Universidad Nacional de La Pampa, 2018.

134 p. ; 18 x 25 cm. - (Libros de texto para estudiantes universitarios)

ISBN 978-950-863-334-7

1. Inglés. I. Basabe, Enrique Alejandro II. Basabe, Enrique Alejandro, ed. III. Muguiro, Natalia Fabiola , ed. IV. Título.

CDD 372.65

LIBRO DE TEXTO PARA ESTUDIANTES UNIVERSITARIOS

Express yourself: Exploring creativity in English Language Teacher Education

Enrique Alejandro Basabe - Natalia Fabiola Muguiro (Editores)
Enrique Alejandro Basabe, Natalia Fabiola Muguiro, María Isabel Arriaga, Martín Carlos Marusich, John Ryan Brakke, Miriam Patricia Germani y Lyuba Basin (Autores)

Mayo 2018, Santa Rosa, La Pampa

Diseño y Diagramación: M. Florencia Mirassón - Diseño-UNLPam

Imagen de Tapa: Lyuba Basin

Impreso en Argentina
ISBN 978-950-863-334-7

© Cumplido con lo que marca la ley 11.723
La reproducción total o parcial de esta publicación, no autorizada por los editores, viola los derechos reservados. Cualquier utilización debe ser previamente autorizada.

EdUNLPam - Año 2018
Cnel. Gil 353 PB - CP L6300DUG
SANTA ROSA - La Pampa - Argentina

Universidad Nacional de La Pampa
Rector: Oscar Daniel Alpa
Vice-Rector: Verónica Moreno

EdUNLPam
Presidente: María Claudia Trotta
Director: Rodolfo D. Rodríguez

Consejo Editor de la EdUNLPam
María Marcela Domínguez
Victoria Aguirre
Daniel Eduardo Buschiazzo
María Estela Torroba/ Liliana Campagno
Celia Rabotnikof
Yamila Magiorano/ Edit Alvarellos
Paula Laguarda/ Marisa Elizalde
Graciela Visconti
Mónica Boeris/ Ricardo Tosso
Griselda Cistac/ Raúl Alvarez

In memory of Professor María del Carmen Trouvé (1944-2016).

Index

Introduction. *Exploring creativity in English Language Teacher Education.* Enrique Alejandro Basabe and Natalia Fabiola Muguiro 11
References 15

Chapter 1. *While on the pavements grey: Reading and writing Imagist poetry.* Enrique Alejandro Basabe and María Isabel Arriaga................. 17
1. The city and the poet, then and now 19
2. What is an Image? 20
3. Reading Imagist poetry 21
4. Writing Imagist poetry 24
5. Assessing your Imagist poems 30
References 32

Chapter 2. *Short story writing, or the art of planning your story.* Natalia Fabiola Muguiro 35
1. What is a short story? 37
2. Where is the story?... 38
3. What makes stories work? 40
4. On answering some more questions.. 43
5. On writing your first lines.. 46
6. On writing your opening scene... 48
References 54

Chapter 3. *Writing the whole story, or the craft of putting it together.* Natalia Fabiola Muguiro and Martín Carlos Marusich........................... 57
STATION 1. Your characters, their words and emotions 61
STATION 2. Point of view: Alternatives and distances.................... 66
STATION 3. Time and place: The description of the setting........... 71
STATION 4. The plot and structure of your story........................... 74
STATION 5. Some words on voice, style, tone, and theme 75
References 78

Chapter 4. *Turn your writing upside down: The reflective essay.* John Ryan Brakke 81
1. What? Why? How? 83
2. Descriptive vs. analytical reflective writing 86

3. What you say vs. how you say it 90
4. Writing a reflective essay 95
References 99

Chapter 5. *The narrative and the images: Turning a story into a photo-story*. Enrique Alejandro Basabe and Miriam Patricia Germani 101
1. Narrative and Photography 103
2. What is a photo-story? 104
3. How to read images 105
4. Description and narration in photo-stories 110
References 113

Chapter 6. *The building blocks of buildings books: The artist's book in practice*. Lyuba Basin 115
1. An introduction to the art of the book 117
2. A journey through the senses 120
3. Creative writing and the artist's book 124
4. Text becomes material: Time to EXPRESS YOURSELF! 129
References 135

Introduction

Exploring creativity in English Language Teacher Education

Education would not be possible without creativity. Creativity moved John Amos Comenius (1592-1670), the outstanding Czech philosopher and pedagogue, to publish *Orbis sensualium pictus* in 1658. *Orbis pictus* (Comenius, 1887), the visible world in pictures, was the first children's textbook widely used throughout Europe, and it was revolutionary because it contained a series of both short texts describing the world and pictures illustrating what the printed words depicted to children. Since then, text and image have been intricately tied with one another throughout the history of education. Creativity also inspired John Dewey (1859-1952), the American philosopher and educator, to summon us "to restore continuity between the refined and intensified forms of experience that are the works of art and the everyday events, doings, and sufferings that are universally recognized to constitute experience" (Dewey, 1994, p. 205). In sum, Dewey called us to relive art as experience. Yet, as teachers, we have always lived art as experience, designing posters for our classroom walls, combining stories and pictures for our students to narrate or to describe, or enticing them to notice and use the unfamiliar qualities of the world that literary discourse offers to their creativity.

Creativity constitutes the foundation of our entire educational endeavor. There is creativity in teaching because we teachers write and perform, draw and design, plan and practice. Moreover, there is creativity in learning because it is only when you learners put your geniality at work and at play that you can make sense of the materials we create for you and make them your own. We use the term *geniality* not only in its archaic form, the one that relates it to *genius*, but also in its more contemporary usage, the one that binds it to our friendliness and our pleasant disposition and manner. In that sense, we firmly believe that

working collaboratively is a form of art, and at the heart of collaborative work also lies creativity.

Thus, we have creatively come together and assembled this textbook for you. In it, we have collected a handful of successful experiences we have put into practice in our classrooms in the English Language Teacher Education program at the National University of La Pampa for the last 10 years. However, we have patiently turned those experiences into a series of guidelines for you to explore creativity as you progress through *English Language IV* and *English Literature II* because we also consider that creativity has to be taught. We have been guided in its teaching by two principles to which we have already indirectly referred above: *creativity, as well as art, needs to be experienced and therefore thoroughly incorporated to our education*. It is not only through reading a fantastic piece of literature that we become skilful writers, and it is not only through contemplating an awesome painting that we will draw and paint majestically. We need to write and paint. We need to learn by doing. Then, *creativity, as well as art, has to integrate the different artistic forms*. It cannot stand alone as a final ornament to an otherwise mechanical lesson or be revived only on special circumstances when we remember there is art in teaching and learning, literature and life. That is precisely where creativity flawlessly blends into the realm of language. We create as we learn a language, but we do not always create through linguistic means only. We use our hands and our sight, our minds and our hearts. In both principles, we follow the above-mentioned Dewey and Comenius.

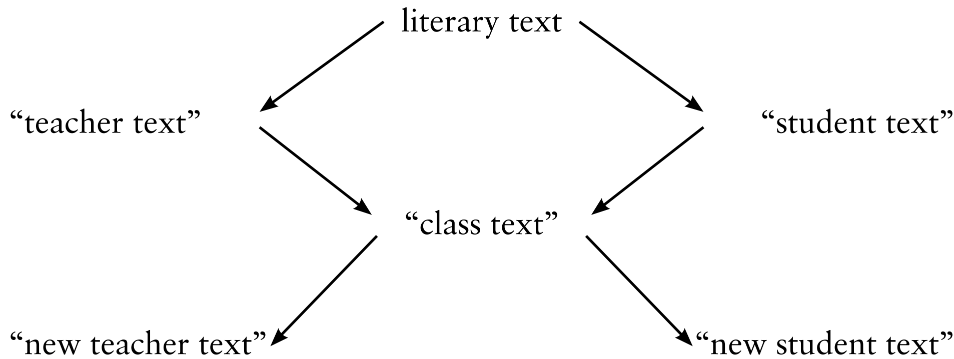
We also follow the teachings of an exceptional professor we both admired and with whom we had the amazing opportunity to work, María del Carmen Trouvé (1944-2016), a university teacher whose skill and temperament were truly genial, in both versions of the term.

Throughout this book, we invite you to explore creativity in English Language Teacher Education. In Chapter 1, Enrique Alejandro Basabe and María Isabel Arriaga explore the possibilities of re-experiencing the avant-garde mood and creativity of the Imagists at the beginning of the 20th century in present-day Santa Rosa, La Pampa. Thus, they propose a series of clearly structured guidelines for reading and writing Imagist poetry. In Chapter 2, Natalia Fabiola Muguiro craftily teaches you how to write a short story. Do you think you can't? Well, yes, you can! Just trust yourself, and believe in her and Stephen King's motto: the scariest moment is always just before you start. In that chapter then you will be guided on how to use your creative imagination productively and turn an idea into a story. In Chapter 3, Natalia Fabiola Muguiro and Martín

Carlos Marusich gather the key elements of narrative and demonstrate how to shape them into the final version of the story. In Chapter 4, John Ryan Brakke describes in detail how to turn your personal responses to literary texts into a powerful piece of reflective writing. Both Chapters 5 and 6 leave the world of the written word and try to take you to the realm of the visual. In Chapter 5, Enrique Alejandro Basabe and Miriam Patricia Germani explore the ways of turning short stories into photo-stories through a general analysis of images inspired by literary texts and detailed instructions on how to create your first photo-story. In Chapter 6, Lyuba Basin goes a step further and shows you how to craft your own artist's book. Can you believe it? By the time you reach that chapter, you will have gone a long way since your first little poem and you will be constructing your own book! That will be definitely awesome. And it will certainly put your creativity at work.

Chapters 1, 4, and 5 will be used in *English Literature II*, during the second term of the academic year; Chapters 2, 3, and 6 will be used throughout the year in *English Language IV*. We will schedule your readings in advance. So, once you get your book, be patient, and wait for our instructions. You might be wondering, "why only one book for two different courses?" Well, at the heart of all we do lies the fact that you are learning a language and all our efforts must be concentrated on how to improve our use of English, both literary and non-literary. Then, in all cases, there is creativity. In other words, this book is definitely dedicated to explore creativity. Notice that all the genres we invite you to discover are fictional, representational. There are no news, no essays, and no reports. See what we mean?

Finally, despite all the hard work, we see this textbook as a sheer framework. The real place where creativity is ultimately at play is the classroom. Individually, each teacher and each student meets the texts in his or her own way, and his or her understanding of them is based on personal experiences and knowledge about literature and life. However, it is in the classroom where a dialectical *class text* emerges. Here, we concur with Ibsen (1995), who considered that "class interpretation is a public performance, a shared experience in a public room" (p. 145). After class, both of us, teachers and students, will have transformed our initial texts and creatively turned our texts into new ones. Thus, we will have definitely appropriated them –till the moment we decide to re-create them again through storytelling or creative writing or any other strategy we choose. The process can be represented in this way:



Adapted from Ibsen (1995)

So that you don't get lost, all chapters in this textbook have a similar structure. Each one starts with a definition of the genre you will be dealing with: Imagist poem, short story, reflective paper, photo story, and artist's book. Then, we present a series of strategies that we suggest you to use when creating your own written or visual texts. Moreover, throughout each chapter, we instruct you on how to do that step by step so that, when you finish reading it, you craft your own Imagist poem, your own short story, your own reflective paper, your own photo story, and your own artist's book. All over the textbook, we also revise concepts at the core of Literary Studies, such as art, image, persona, defamiliarization, etc., as well as aspects of language use for creative writing. Last, you will notice that this book not only reads but also looks pretty "artistic." The artwork throughout the text (i.e., the cover and the drawings at the end of chapters 1 and 4) was intentionally but selflessly designed by Lyuba Basin, and it was intended to inspire you to find your ways of expressing yourself, either through language or through any other means that may let you put at work and at play your pent-up creativity. At the end of the day, we will have explored creativity in English Language Teacher Education, and we will have done it together. As we said somewhere above, working collaboratively is a form of art, and this book is dedicated to you, students, the ultimate goal of our creative endeavors.

Now it's time to express yourself. Enjoy it!

Quique and Nati

Santa Rosa, October 2017.

References

Comenius, J. A. (1887). *Orbis Pictus*. Syracuse, NY: C. W. Bardeen. Available at http://www.gutenberg.org (Original work published 1658).

Dewey. J. (1994). Art as experience. In S. D. Ross (Ed.), *Art and its significance: An anthology of aesthetic theory* (3rd. ed.) (pp. 204-220). New York: State University of New York Press. (Original work published 1934).

Ibsen, E. B. S. (1994). The double role of fiction in foreign-language learning: Towards a creative methodology. In T. Kral. (Ed.), *Creative classroom activities: Selected articles from English Teaching Forum 1989-1993* (pp. 143-153). Washington: U. S. Department of State.

Chapter

While on the pavements grey: Reading and writing Imagist poetry

Enrique Alejandro Basabe
and María Isabel Arriaga

1. The city and the poet, then and now

At the turn of the 20th century, New York, Paris, and London had become the hubs of an industrialized, capitalist world, and they bubbled with sound and enthusiasm, light and life. Literature had grown decidedly urban, and writers, so inclined to seek solace in nature under the romantic influence, had become true city dwellers. American poet T. S. Eliot (1888-1965), for example, had left his *half-savage country* and was working as a bank clerk in London. Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) was also London-based and joined a select cadre of artists named after the area of the city where they all lived, the Bloomsbury Group. James Joyce (1882-1941), the quintessential modernist writer, was truly cosmopolitan, as he spent most of his life between Dublin, Trieste, Paris, and Zurich. W. B. Yeats (1965-1939), also an Irishman, who thought of himself as the last Romantic, yearned for a simple island life but acknowledged he mostly stood "on the roadway, or on the pavements grey" (Yeats, 1890, l. 13).

City dwelling made these writers keen observers, and they noticed not only the bright prospects of urban life but also its demoralizing effects on an urban population increasingly dominated by the rigid routines of the office and the factory. They were then faced with the question of how to turn that contradictory experience into an act of literary creation. What did they do? In poetry, they chose to use a form that represented a hard, clear image and that reflected the subject matter and the language of plain, everyday reality. As in the case of most modernist artists, they clustered around a group that reached its creative apogee just before World War I, the Imagists, and Ezra Pound (1885-1972), a friend of Eliot and also an American, edited their first anthology, *Des Imagistes*, in 1914.

True. That reads as if everything happened ages ago. It was only 100 years ago, though, and, through this chapter, we will recreate the mood and perspective of Imagism in the context of our city, dry, sunny, and

windy Santa Rosa, La Pampa, at the turn of the 21st century. How will we do that? By patiently learning how to read and write Imagist poetry. Keep calm, and let's do it together!

Task #1:

We will go for a walk around the university block. Please, turn off your smartphones and during our walk say very little; just watch and see and listen and smell. Take your notebooks and feel free to jot down any impression, visual or otherwise, you get from the weather, buildings, people, or objects that you experience.

2. What is an Image?

What did you see as you strolled around the block? Did you notice that white and red little tablecloths have always covered the tables in the café at the corner? Could you feel the wind in your hair and the breeze on your face? Did you hear the sparrows and pigeons placidly gurgling on the gutters or chirping on the barren branches? Did you look up at the sky and see whether it was cloudy or cloudless? Did you have the chance to window-shop and look at the shoes and clothes, cell phones and handicrafts? Did you wonder why it feels so calm and small-town to walk along *25 de mayo* St. in comparison to striding along Gil St.? If you did, then you are on your way to becoming an Imagist reader –and writer.

So was Ezra Pound in Paris back in 1913. Once, he went out of the subway, *le métro* in French, and he saw a face, and then another, and another, and another. Swiftly, he started searching for words to express what he had seen. However, there came only expressions, in colors, in patterns. He was experiencing –and would later try to record– what Virginia Woolf (1972) would superbly describe as "the atoms as the fall upon the mind" (p. 89). That, he decided, was an Image. The Image itself was the speech, and what he craved to create was a one-image poem. It was a year later (yes, one year later!) that, after much writing and re-writing, he came up with the most anthologized of Imagist poems, "In a station of the Metro." The poem reads,

The apparition   of these faces   in the crowd:

Petals   on a wet, black   bough   .

Short, isn't it? And difficult. Or almost meaningless. Or all of them. Don't panic, and re-read the poem silently and wisely. Rationally examine phrase by phrase and think about the ways in which you would utter them if you were reading them aloud. Don't you find them beautiful and appealing to the senses? Consider their sounds, their arrangement, their meaning. Don't these words trigger memories about flowers and faces, spring and city life? Right. Most probably, the answer to all these questions lies on you and on your own interpretation.

What the poet tried to convey through these two simple lines, though, was an Image. Pound (1972) defined an Image as "that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time" (pp. 59), and he expected us readers not only to appreciate the simplicity of the words and the structure but to feel the complexity of the concept at the same time. That is the reason why "In a station of the Metro" is both brief and difficult simultaneously; yet, it is meaningful. Through it, the poet expects us to feel "that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of sudden growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art" (Pound, 1916, n. p.). To feel all those feelings is in fact quite complex, perhaps too challenging. What we have to do then is to tune in into Imagist poetry and, above all, to learn how to read it. Which we will do in the following section.

3. Reading Imagist poetry

Almost 100 years ago, a group of literary critics associated with Cambridge University developed a practical, analytical method of reading poetry, and they called it *close reading*. Close reading is a "detailed, balanced and critical examination of a text to discover its meanings and to assess its effects" (Cuddon & Preston, 1999, p. 144). Some years ago, Elena Laila Nicola, a renowned professor of English Literature at the National University of Córdoba, revisited a series of language-based theoretical works on reading poetry and she concluded that "understanding literal meaning is not enough for the fuller enjoyment of poetic discourse and that one should also possess the tools for interpretation" (Nicola, 1998, p. 127). Based on Roger Fowler's (1971) *verbal analysis*, she suggested that, whenever an experienced reader faces a poem, he or she analyzes, following a processing order, a series of segments in order to clarify for him or herself the stylistic qualities of the discourse. Close reading and verbal analysis then are very much alike in their linguistic approach to poetry. They are not enough, though, to live what Nicola (1998) called "the transforming experience of reading

poetic discourse" (p. 131). To achieve that, we will have to make final connections between the linguistic segments constituting the structure of a poem and all our knowledge of the world, of literature and the life around us.

The segments we usually notice when we read a poem are the graphological, the phonological, the syntactic, and the lexical-semantic. At this stage in the program of studies, you must be able to define them on your own, but please refer to the broad definitions below so that we all share a common basis of analysis:

The graphological segment refers to the ways in which the printed words are arranged on the page and to the visual sensations that they initially convey. For its study, you should contemplate the number of stanzas and lines and the indentation, punctuation, and capitalization.

The phonological segment are the sounds of the poem, and therefore you may want to read the poem aloud or read it, as it were, aloud on your mind. Think about whether the poem sounds like normal everyday speech or whether it retains its poetic diction. Also, consider its rhyme, assonance, and alliteration.

Once you have noticed these assets, you will have become aware of the structure of the poem and will proceed to analyze how and what the words actually mean.

The syntactic segment consists of the overall textual organization of the poem and the grammar of the sentences that make up the poetic text. Is the poem a narrative? Is it a speech? Is it a dialogue? Are the sentences short and strong, or are they long and redolent with dependent clauses and the like. Who are the participants in the poem? Are you as a reader directly addressed; is the poem dedicated to somebody else; or does it just state a fact about life, love, or literature?

The lexical-semantic segment entails the specific use of words and phrases to create meaning. In poetic discourse, language reality is usually *defamiliarized* through language. Basically, that means that words tend to miscollocate. For example, when Eliot (1911) wrote *the burnt-out ends of smoky days*, he is excepting us to make a connection between cigarette ends, which are usually *smoky* and *burnt-out*, and the evening, the specific period at the *end* of the *day* that he is describing in the context of an industrial and most probably *smoky* city. So, explore the

words and phrases in the poem and decide whether they are used literally or figuratively. Try and detect how metaphor, metonymy, or oxymoron, among other literary figures, make reality unfamiliar for you as a reader. At this stage, don't fret, though, as you will revisit defamiliarization in Chapter 6 of this book.

Task #2:

Take a piece of paper, fold it in two, and then fold it again in two. Label each quadrangle with the headings *graphological*, *phonological*, *syntactic*, and *lexical-semantic*. Re-read "In a station of the Metro," and, with a classmate, make notes under each of the headings suggested above. Get ready to share your ideas, thoughts, and emotions with your professors and the rest of the class.

Below are some of the issues you might have noticed:

The graphological segment

The poem is a couplet, i. e., a poem that has two lines. It is capitalized in a conventional way, and there is a clear punctuation mark, a colon (:), that separates the two phrases in it. There is also a final full stop. Without any apparent logics, the phrases within each line has been turned into separate units using blank spaces that are rather noticeable.

The phonological segment

The first line has a cadence that is long and simple, whereas the second line is constituted by short monosyllabic words. Vowels and consonants seem to have been precisely selected, and there is an almost accurate balance between both. There is assonance between the last word of each line, *crowd* and *bough*.

The syntactic segment

There is no verb in the poem at all, and, consequently, there is no sentence, either. The poem consists of just two noun phrases separated by the colon. Both structures, therefore, stand in paratactycal or equal arrangement: one noun phrase is superposed on the other. Agency can be understood to have been suppressed intentionally by the author, as the key structures in it are nominal.

The lexical-semantic segment

The word *petals* in the second line seems to accurately coincide with *faces* in the first one. If the title is considered, then the *wet, black bough*

stands for the train. Last, *apparition* seems to be the key word in the poem since it is the noun that generates the whole of it.

Here, we will stop our suggested analysis because we consider that it is in the literature class that the richest interpretations are reached due to the social nature of the discussions and the open spaces for inquiry we offer. The exploration of the meaning extending from the linguistic traits of the poem themselves will vary from reader to reader and from class to class. That is the reason why we prefer to let your imagination work freely. We assume, however, that your reading of "In a station of the Metro" will most likely make contrast the actual urban experience of walking out of a train at a subway station at rush hour and the calmness of flowers as they stand on their boughs. Alternatively, you may think of how we have become used to move and live underground or enclosed in square rooms when there is nature all around us, waiting to be experienced and enjoyed. Any interpretation you may reach, you should remember that your relatively free associations must always be tested against the text, especially in a poem like this, which is ultimately self-referential, i. e., it is a poem about its own technique.

As a literary theoretician once stated, "the modernist method is to produce a text that is at once an enigma, a key to the enigma and a specimen of the kind of decoding the enigma that an ideal reader might perform using the key" (Albright, 1998, p. 25). Reading "In a station of the Metro" is, in fact, an exercise skillfully designed to make us use the key to disclose its enigma, an enigma that is ultimately about itself. Finally, notice that we, as well as the scholars we have mentioned, refer all the time to ideal, experienced readers. That is precisely what we expect you to become, skillful, proficient readers capable of learning how to go from unawareness to artistic knowledge and, in the long run, to aesthetic enjoyment. And we are sure we are on the right track. So, move on.

4. Writing Imagist poetry

Czech philosopher and educator John Amos Comenius thought that the only way we could meaningfully appropriate what we learn was by actually doing it, and his revolutionary ideas on education became the basis of what today we know as *learning by doing.* Similarly, American philosopher and educator John Dewey believed that art had to be experienced. Poetry in particular and literature in general are forms of art, and, ideally, they have to be experienced in order to be completely

grasped and enjoyed. In this section, we propose that you write your own Imagist poems. That reads as slightly complex and perhaps a little bit demanding. It will, but it will also be rewarding and, if we do it carefully, we may live the transforming experience of *writing* poetic discourse. Let's go!

Have you read a poem called "The daffodils" by English poet William Wordsworth (1770-1850)? If you haven't, please, google it, and read it. In it, the persona, evidently associated with the poet himself, tells us about the joy, the glee, and the pleasure that he felt when he saw a crowd of golden daffodils. That is precisely *not* what the Imagist poets wanted to do. Through their poetry, they did not want to tell us what they have felt or how we should feel but to present us with an image capable of generating in us feelings akin to those they have felt when experiencing it. Have you noticed that so far we have always used a capital letter in the word *Image*? That Image with a capital letter corresponds to the awesome sensation the reader would experience when faced with the poem and when he or she finally grasps it and makes it his or hers or, in Pound's (1916) words, "the precise instant when a thing outward and objective transforms itself, or darts into a thing inward and subjective" (n. p.).

Please, read this poem again:

The apparition   of these faces   in the crowd:

Petals   on a wet, black   bough   .

Can you feel the beauty in it? Have you grasped and internalized its image? Has it become an Image? If you can, then Imagism works! The object and the image superposed on it have darted into your mind and become an Image, a new mental representation that is only and absolutely yours. Have you also noticed that the poem does not *tell* us how to feel or how the poet originally felt? "In a station of the Metro" goes in the opposite direction of "The daffodils": It just *shows* us what there is, and it is on us to construct its meaning.

A wonderful way of understanding Imagist poems it to try to write some. Consider these simple guidelines:

First, do not tell your reader what or how to feel. Just show him a strong, striking image.

Second, build your poem in two straight steps:

(1) object
(2) image.

As you might have noticed and Abbs and Richardson (1990) taught us, Imagist poems "are structured as follows: they present an *object* and then visualize it through an *image*" (p. 148). In the poem above, the first line in the couplet makes the object; the second one makes the image. The idea that you have gotten and that still lies alive in your mind makes the Image.

Third, keep it simple. Do not use extra adjectives or unnecessary verbs. Do not describe much. If possible, keep to a small number of precise, carefully selected nouns. Pound (1972) warned us: "Poetry will be hard. It will be as much as granite as it can be…. Austere, direct, free from emotional slither" (p. 66).

Last, do not disclose who you are. Create your own persona. For Eliot (1919), the poet's enterprise was not to display his or her emotions but to use ordinary emotions and work them up into poetry: "Emotion […] has its life in the poem and not in the history of the poet. The emotion of art is impersonal" (n. p.).

You don't feel you can do it? Yes, you can! Yet, if you still feel unsure, here are some Imagist poems written by students in our English Language Teacher Education program some years ago. Let's see what they did.

Mara Ciaffoni, for instance, was in the *English Literature II* class of 2017, and she wrote "Down the avenue:"

Down the avenue

Her figure in the evening light;
A stray dory drifting away in a sea of sadness.

For this poem, she chose an object, a woman, and a specific place and time, an avenue in the evening. However, she left the avenue outside of the poem and only included it in the title. In the poem, she just juxtaposed the object with an image of her own creation, *a stray dory drifting away in a sea of sadness*. Notice that she used no verb, exact punctuation, and a subtle touch of alliteration with /s/ sounds, which may make you recall the real sea, not the figurative one present in the poem.

Luciana Viglino, from the *English Literature II* class of 2014, conceived "At rest," a delicate one-image poem:

At rest

Just as we gradually fell into ruins,
trees silently shed their leaves.

Luciana decided to use verbs in her poem, which the Imagists disliked. The verbs, *fell* and *shed*, are accurately parallel in phonological and lexical-semantic terms, and so they add to the simplicity and the beauty of the image. She also included in her poem an ambiguous, general persona, *we*, and a straightforward metaphor, *falling into ruins*, which most probably refer to going to bed at night but which, depending on the Image you create on your mind, may also refer to growing old or being about to die. How can we know?

In 2015, Fátima Blanco took us aback with a quite enigmatic Imagist poem. It had no title, to begin with. It read:

Broken glasses all over the floor
A taint of madness I don't want to recall
But that's my burden, till the end of days.

Through her poem, Fátima created a very enigmatic persona and offered us a remarkable Image. She did make her readers feel an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time. At that time, we only objected, though, to the second line, which we thought somehow went in the direction of the Romantics in its expression of feelings and sensitivities. Otherwise, the whole class loved the poem because of the striking Image with which it left us and because of the connection that most of us immediately made with gender violence and its endless perpetuation in our society.

Task #3:

Go back to **Task #1**, and made a list of at least eight objects you noticed during your walk. Don't try to describe them. Just mention the objects. Once you have finished, find images for them. Ignore those for which you have no immediate response. Leave the third column blank.

Object	**Image**	**Development**

(Adapted from Abbs & Richardson, 1990, p. 149)

Some Imagist poets took the initial structure further. They comment on the image so that the structure becomes longer and more intense. It becomes then:

(1) object
(2) image
(3) development of the image.

In the *English Literature II* class of 2016, Alexandra Fuentes wrote "Happiness:"

Happiness

A distant and mild and then wild song.
To and fro,
a flashing note.
Someday it will come!

Though it'll never be loud enough
to my earless soul.

We can analyze her poem this way:

(1) object — Happiness
(2) image — A distant and mild and then wild song.
(3) development of the image — To and fro,
a flashing note.
Someday it will come!

Though it'll never be loud enough
to my earless soul.

Let's stop for a moment and consider one little word we have used throughout this Chapter: *persona*. A word in Latin, *persona* stands for the character or the figurative mask that an author wears in order to tell his or her poem, to sing, or to perform. The Imagists loved the idea because it gave them countless chances to become someone else and defamiliarize experience. If you use a persona to create a work of literature, you can see reality through a different lens and communicate that truth to your readers from a poetic voice other that your actual voice. In turn, that may result in your understanding parallels between your worldview and another person's or you can simply free yourself from the limitations of your own life experiences. Do you see what we mean? If you don't, please go to the Literary Devices website at http://www.literarydevices.com for a brief explanation.

We don't know, for instance, whether Fátima Blanco had experienced or was experiencing any relationship problem at the time she wrote her poem or whether Alexandra Fuentes actually had such a hopeless view as regards happiness. However, both were strikingly successful in creating a mask and providing their readers with a reality they would consider believable. Think about that when you write your Imagist poems. Go!

Task #4:

At home, alone, choose three objects and images from **Task #3**, and develop them into your own Imagist poems. Consider all the guidelines with which we have provided you and all the poems you have read so far. The Imagists thought that we had to use the methods of physicists and think about our poems as if we were working with particles. Last, we encourage you to use urban images since they are perhaps the ones that most describe our everyday experience. Feel free, though, to think about yourself as a Romantic –with an Imagist twist. Then, choose the best poem you wrote and be ready to share it with the rest of the class.

For inspiration, we invite you to read "Buodo Street" and "The corner," written by Rocío Rodríguez and Jesica Pérez, both students in the *English Literature II* class of 2011, respectively. Both developed urban images, the former in rather neutral tone and the later from a more socially minded point of view:

Buodo Street

Buildings in rows, dark bushes below
Damp, dull walls, dreary boulevards in between
Narrow pavements mingle with the roots
The cloud-covered heaven looms above
The moonlight barely illuminates the steep drenched street
No sound of engines or of voices

The corner

A leafless tree
A skinny dog
with a rubbish bag hanging from its teeth.
A poor man
staring at his treasure, a shinny cog
with a bottle of wine in his hands.
The animal, the man, the corner.

Feel free to analyze the strategies used by each author. Nevertheless, it is also good that you choose to read them just for the sake of pleasure.

Task #5:

Your teacher will have asked you to send him or her your poem electronically, and all of the poems written by the class will be read aloud. Please, enjoy the reading. We need to get used to reading poems for pleasure, not only for analysis.

5. Assessing your Imagist poems

That was it. Now you have read and written Imagist poetry. Which was not simple or easy. Some years after he had published his anthology, though, Pound decided he had to reconsider what he had done and where his ideas on poetry had led to. So he wrote a text called "A retrospect" (Pound, 1972), in which he offered a list of dos and don'ts for Imagist poem. We turned them into a checklist that you can use to go through your poems and assess up to what extent they follow the tenets of Imagist poetry. You will find that some of them seem to be redundant, and perhaps they are. The Imagists were so keen on thinking hard and working hard on the language itself, on hunting for *le mot juste* or the right word that oftentimes, full of enthusiasm, they went overboard.

Task #6:

As a class and with the help of your teacher, go through each point in the checklist below and make sure you understand what each one of them stand for in practical terms.

Then, re-read the poem you wrote at home and the one you like best, and tick (✓) the dos or don'ts you have successfully followed.

Discuss your results as a class.

Dos and Don'ts from "A retrospect" (Ezra Pound, 1918)	"In a station of the Metro"	Your poem	The poem you liked best
Direct treatment of the thing			
An Image is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time.			
Economy of words			
Use no superfluous word, no adjective that does not add something.			
Go in fear of abstractions.			
Be influenced by the great artists.			
Use either no ornament or good ornament.			
Don't be viewy. Don't be descriptive.			
Consider the way of scientists.			
Hunt for *le mot juste*.			
Don't mess up the perception of one sense by trying to define it in terms of another one.			
The sequence of the musical phrase			
Use cadences, assonance, alliteration, rhyme.			
Absolute rhythm, a rhythm which exactly corresponds to the emotion to be expressed.			

Once you have assessed your poems, you can vote for the best poem in your class or rank them in view of their Imagism. Alternatively, and only if everybody in the class feels safe and ok with that, you can try to guess who the author of each poem is in order to see how successful you have been in inventing a persona. This is usually so much fun! Unless you keep to a gloomy atmosphere for your poetry. Sometimes, we do since poetry is about us, and we feel love but we also feel sorrow.

As final gift, please, read the poem we voted as the best in the Literature class of 2017. It was written by Ximena Beiras, and it has no title.

The naked trees shaken by the wind:
Vulnerable souls after a devastating war.

C'est fini, mes amis! Au revoir!

Assignment #1:

Once you have finished reading Section 2, go to *Poetry Foundation* website at http://www.poetryfoundation.org, and read and analyze the prose poem "Spring Day" by Amy Lowell (1916). Notice that not all Imagist poems were dull. Many of them sang to the light, the sound, and the never-ending energy of modern cities.

Assignment #2:

Use the poems that you have ranked best in **Task #6**, and create an anthology of Imagist poems. You may also democratically decide to edit all the poems in your class and print them for free delivery at the university. You will have become a true poet, your poems will have been published, and you will have had so much fun! Promised!

References

Abbs, P., & Richardson, J. (1990). *The forms of poetry: A practical study guide for English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Albright, D. (1997). *Quantum poetics: Yeats, Pound, Eliot and the science of modernism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cuddon, J. A., & Preston, C. E. (1999). *The Penguin dictionary of literary terms and literary theory* (4th Ed.). London: Penguin.

Eliot, T. S. (1911). "Preludes." *Poetry Foundation*. Available at http://www.poetryfoundation.org

________. (1921). “Tradition and the Individual Talent.” *Bartleby: Great Books Online*. Available at http://www.bartleby.com

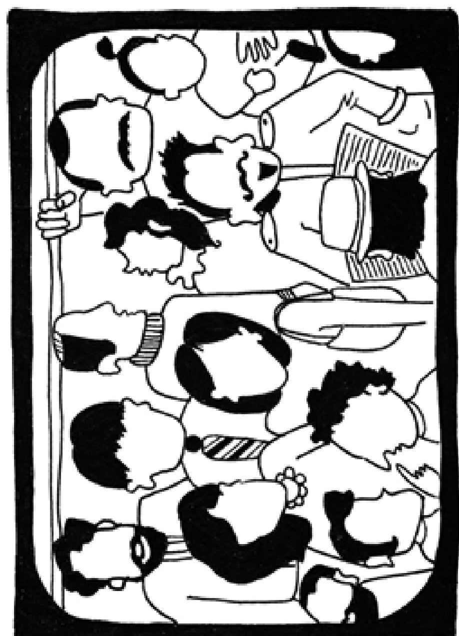
Nicola, E. L. (1998, spring). “The transforming experience of reading poetic discourse.” *Bitácora: Revista de la Escuela Superior de Lenguas, 1*(2), 126-135.

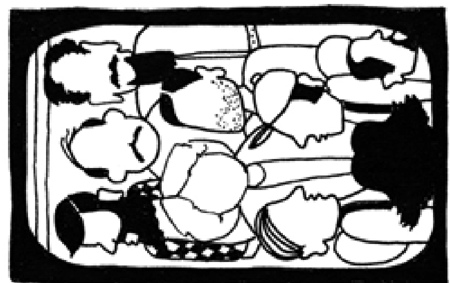
Pound, E. (1916). From *Gaudier-Brzeska*. *Modern American Poetry*. Available at http://www.english.illinois.edu

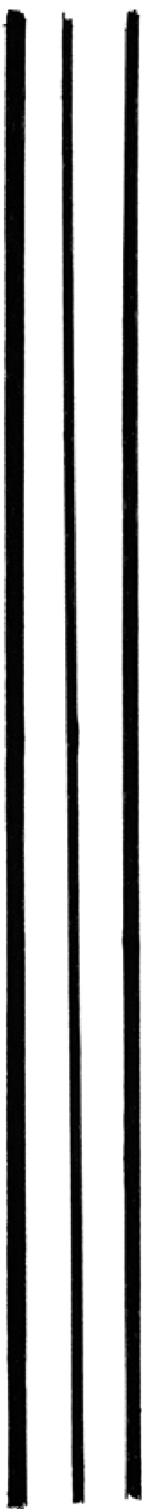
________. (1972). “A retrospect.” In Lodge, D. (Ed.), *20th century literary criticism: A reader* (pp. 58-68). London & New York: Longman. (Original work published in 1918).

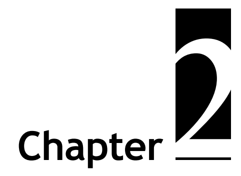
Woolf, V. (1972). “Modern fiction.” In Lodge, D. (Ed.), *20th century literary criticism: A reader* (pp. 86-91). London & New York: Longman. (Original work published in 1919).

Yeats, W. B. (1890). “The lake isle of Innisfree.” *Poetry Foundation*. Available at http://www.poetryfoundation.org









Short story writing, or the art of planning your story

Natalia Fabiola Muguiro

> "The scariest moment is always just before you start."
>
> Stephen King

Yes, it is. It is. It CERTAINLY is.

I can feel it myself, trying to find a way to start this chapter without falling into the temptation of telling you, in the most naïve of the possible ways, that writing a short story is an easy task.

That all you need is a little bit of inspiration, a lot of imagination and a good deal of creativity. That words will come out of your mind and will be forged in sublime ways into immaculate paragraphs, one after the other, effortlessly…

False.

No. Writing a short story is not an easy task, and King is right: "the scariest moment is always just before you start."

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

The aim of this chapter is, precisely, helping you to start.

Step one: don't be scared.

Step two: don't look before you leap. One, two, three…. JUMP!!!

Pfffiuuuuu!!…We are all here, safe and sound. Ready for work. It was not THAT scary after all. Did you pack everything you need? A little bit of inspiration? A lot of imagination? A good deal of creativity? Keep it safe, you are going to need all this later. Now, it is time to start from the scratch. Oh! Don't forget your camera.

1. What is a short story?

The search for a definition begins in 1842, when Edgar Allan Poe expressed some general precepts on the short story, by which he meant a
~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

prose narrative requiring anything from half an hour to one or two hours in its "perusal". According to Poe, the intensity of short, concentrated forms read in one sitting increased their emotional impact. Poe also associated the short story with poetry and painting, referring to a unity of effect or impression created by the close integration of language, imagery, and form. Poe's concept of unity and completion provided the basis for almost all theories on the short story, although many writers have added their own flavors.

The contemporary critic and writer Joyce Carol Oates (1998) defines it as a form that represents a "concentration of imagination, and not an expansion", one which "no matter its mysteries or experimental properties", always achieves closure (p. 47). For her, while novels "expand" on their themes, a short story "distils or condenses," since it captures the essence of an experience. Similarly, Carver (1994) refers to "the things that are left out, that are implied, the landscape just under the smooth (but sometimes broken and unsettled) surface of things" (p. 26).

The great Tobias Wolff (2011) adds that there is a certain tone typical of the short stories. It is a tone "close to that of shared confidence, even, occasionally, confession, as if the moments we recall from certain stories arise from own experience." The particular power of the story, he says, is "the way it imitates memory" (p. 7). That is why certain stories, once read, reappear to us with the texture and force of personal recollections. Finally, Prose (2011) contends that everything in the story "resonates at its own unique, coherent, and recognizable pitch" along with everything else in the story, creating, in Joyce's words, an effect of "wholeness, harmony, and radiance" (p. 11).

And that is a short story, with its unity of effect, length restrictions, emotional impact, radiance, concentration of imagination, essence of experiences, wholeness, implied meanings, shared confidence, and harmony. THAT is a short story.

2. Where is the story?

"The story is in the dark. That is why inspiration is thought of as coming in flashes. Going into a narrative – into the narrative process – is a dark road. You can't see your way ahead" (Atwood, 2002, p. 176).

True. The story is in the dark, but it IS. You just have to find the way to bring it to light. But how? As Colum McCann (2017) wisely asserts, "a story begins long before its first word, and it ends long after its last" (p. 5). This is the point. Finding the instant, the precise moment, the

exact situation, image, or recollection that can serve to give your story a beginning. Or an end.

So, go and search. Dig. Explore. Hunt. Inspect. Burrow. GO! Search for your story.

It is time to unpack your luggage. Did you say that you had brought a little bit of inspiration? Good. But you will need a lot, and sometimes finding it is not an easy task. Here are some possible sources, as suggested by Vandermeer (2013, p. 19):

- Childhood, family situations and personal anecdotes
- Travel
- Religious, historical and cultural issues
- Work experience
- Overhead conversations
- Friends and classmates
- Environment, nature, the wilderness
- Hobbies
- Other stories and novels
- Social and political issues
- Interest in a particular genre or topic
- Science
- Newspaper and magazine articles, movies and songs
- Images, sounds, smells
- Dreams

It is likely that almost anything that surrounds you might become itself an initial spark of inspiration, creating a series of secondary sparks that little by little will help you find the beginning or the end of your story, which should be, by now, not any longer in the dark. For example, you can process any of these inspirational influences by directly transferring them to your story, or you can act in reaction to them, or you can transform them into something different. As Ernest Hemingway told one of his interviewers: “I met a girl…I knew she’d had an abortion. I went over and we talked, not about that but on the way home I thought of the story, skipped lunch, and spent that afternoon writing.” Of course, he was talking about the origins of his masterpiece, “Hills like white elephants.” Needless to say, we are not Hemingway, but who knows? You might have witnessed an encounter between the characters of your story on your way to the second floor last time you took the lift to attend classes.

Learning how to identify these inspirational inputs -ideas, memories, real or imaginary events, unforgettable people or places, and many more- is a satisfying experience, but it is a challenging one too: turning ideas into a compelling story means figuring out what makes stories work. And this is our next question. Before answering it, let your first inspiration sparks flash before they fade. Try these exercises, and see what you find:

Task #1:

Choose five short stories, novels or movies that you really like. In a single sentence, try to state the major reason/s why you enjoyed each one of them.

Task #2:

After digging into the sources of inspiration presented above, write down ten *sparks* than can serve as story ideas. Then, review your list and pick the idea that looks the most promising for a story. Finally, list several ways in which this idea might be turned into a short story.

3. What makes stories work?

If we look up the meaning of the word *story* in a dictionary, we are likely to encounter definitions like this: "An account or recital of an event or a series of events, either true or fictitious", according to *The American heritage dictionary of the English language*. However, there we might also find an additional meaning which is more connected with the aim of storytelling: a story is "a usefully fictional prose or verse narrative intended to interest or amuse the reader or hearer." Although the first definition is accurate, and here we agree with Baechtel (2004), it does not really address what is most important about a story: commanding the reader's interest and holding it until the story is finished. The second definition, then, would come to add this essential feature.

In other words, what makes stories work is their ability to make the reader experience what Aristotle called a moment of *recognition*. This is a moment of *rethinking*, when the story acts on the reader to produce an insight or realization. In Baechtel's (2004) words, "as readers, our recognition of the emotional, spiritual, or experimental truth a story contains is a deep, even a visceral experience. It is when the story's heart declares itself to us" (p.12). And this is what ultimately makes a story work: its HEART! ♥

Now, the process of unfolding a story's heart in a way that excites the reader's sense of recognition may be neither direct nor easy. This is

the third time, by the way, that you are told that something is not easy in this chapter. Don't despair, and be ready to unpack a lot of imagination. According to most authors, a story can reach out to the reader's sense of recognition through its *structure*. The structure of a story is defined by Koch (2003) as "the large units that organize the movements of your story and supply them with their overall shape." The structure, he adds, "is likely to give you your first dim glimpse of your story's wholeness" (p. 69).

The basic, universal, and invariable structural sequence of every story consists of a beginning, a middle, and an end. However, in order to be told, a story also needs to have a *plot*, and in order for a plot to be coherent, it must rely on a solid structure. In other words, the structure refers to the arrangement, pattern, or design of the story, it is about *how* and *when* things happen. The plot, in turn, refers to the sequence of events, often expressed through scenes; it is more about *what* happens. But events and situations are given significance and emphasis only through structure. As Cox (2016) argues, "structure shapes the raw material; it provides a pattern which gives meaning to the story." Furthermore, she adds, "stories that are cleverly plotted tend to be carefully structured" (p. 19). Thus, when it comes to achieving a sense of *wholeness* in a short story, structure and plot work together in tandem.

From this interrelation between story, plot, and structure, several approaches or models have been developed to the shaping of narrative fiction. One of the most famous is the "Freytag Pyramid," developed by Gustav Freytag in 1863. It consists of five moments: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution, where the climax is the apex of the pyramidal structure (Cuddon & Preston, 1999). Another very much adopted approach was developed by Thornley (1976), who defined a short story as a series of reported scenes in which "a causative situation arises which requires a deciding character to solve some kind of problem along lines of action which suffer interruptions and intensifications until he comes to the result of his final decisions" (p. 4). More recently, although equally influenced by previous models, Baechtel (2004) presented the "Arc of the Story." According to it, stories travel through a course of increasing tension and rising complication as they move towards a crisis point after which they pass through a period of decreasing tension and complication, imitating the movement of an arrow.

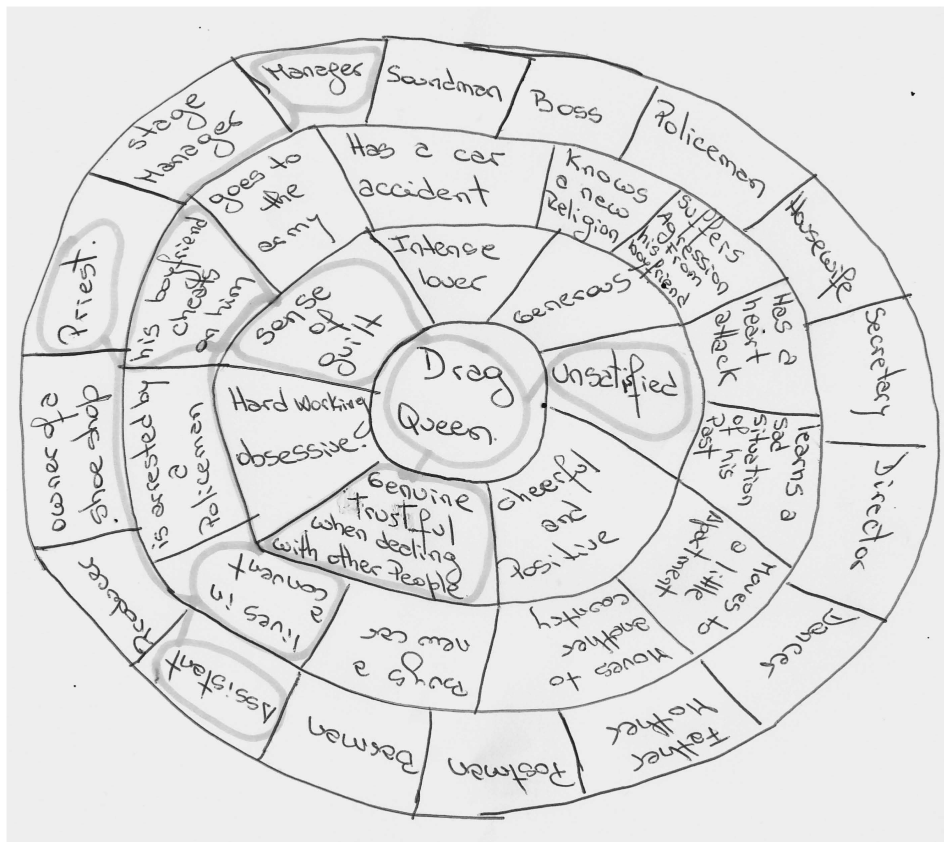
We will go back to plot and structure in the following chapter. By now, I guess, you must be already anxious to give some kind of initial shape to your story. So, go and gather all the inspirational sparks you found in **Task #1** and **Task #2**, add all the imagination that you have

just unpacked and don't worry about "making it work" right now. Your readers aren't ready yet to unfold your story's heart.

Task #3:

Create the "story cloud diagram" (Baechtel, 2004, p. 17). Take out a blank sheet of paper and write the name of your main character in the center. Now, as if in a cloud around it, write some emotional states you think the story will contain. After that, make a second cloud that surrounds the first, this one including possible situations which might provoke or contain these emotional states. Now make a third cloud that contains the other two, this one composed of possible second characters. Once you have the three clouds sketched in, think of relationships both within and among the levels of your diagram. When you do it, draw lines between the elements, as in the following example.

Below you will find an unedited cloud diagram designed by Juan Andrés Martin, a student in the *English Language IV* class of 2017.



4. On answering some more questions

As McCann (2016) claims, "the simplest questions are sometimes the hardest, but the *who-what-where-when-how-why* construction is the fuel of the writer's fire" (p. 47):

- Who is telling the story? Who is the story about?
- What happens? What is the story about?
- Where does the story take place? Where are the characters telling the story from?
- When does the story take place? When are the characters telling the story?
- How have things happened? How are the characters telling the story?
- Why have things happened? Why is your narrator telling a story? Why is this story being told?

Thinking your way through these questions can help you to establish the frame and basic outline of your story. Moreover, it can help you to identify and understand the main elements of narrative, such as character, dialogue, point of view, setting and time, together with plot and structure. Most importantly, understanding how these elements work together also helps to the process of unfolding your story's heart. Although next chapter will be entirely devoted to the development of each element in detail, here you have some basic descriptions:

Point of view: who tells your story and how close you get to their perspective depends in part on point of view. In some stories, readers may feel as if they are "perched on the character's shoulder, or inside that person's head. In others, the reader feels more remote" (Vandermeer, 2013, p. 47). That distance, or lack of distance, is key to other elements of the story.

Characterization: this is the method by which the primary and secondary people, or imaginary beings or animals in a story are made to seem real or interesting (Vandermeer, 2013). "Character is the key," says Kress (2005, p. 2). Without believable and interesting characters, you don't really have fiction at all. You may have names walking through the plot, but without "the essential animation of character, a historical story becomes mostly a history text, or a mystery becomes a police report" (Kress, 2005, p. 2).

Dialogue: "Dialogue is conversation -nothing more, nothing less," claims Kempton (2004, p. 1). Frank and Wall (1994) add that as you work with character, you let yourself become possessed by this person, so you abandon the automatic voice in your head, which shapes dialogue as you would speak it, and become the voice of this other person. Dialogue, then, are the conversations and "snipers of speech" that convey what the characters are saying to one another and also help "to dramatize scenes" (Vandermmer, 2013, p. 46).

Setting: it is the physical environment in which the story takes place, including the general time frame. Your story, Rozelle (2005) suggests, must have a setting "rich enough to match the story you intend to tell." It must be believable and sufficiently described to be as real for your readers "as the rooms they are sitting in when reading it" (p. 2). Furthermore, in some cases, the setting becomes a character itself.

Time: although place and time are usually put together as two aspects of setting, we are referring here to the specific meaning of *fictional time*. Fictional time is not real time. Fictional time, like character or setting, is "illusory" (Bailey, 2011, p. 61). Flashbacks, jump cuts, flash forwards, slow motions are all resources to represent the time's movements in stories, thus helping to create the fictional time.

Together with these elements, other components play an important role in the creation of the narrative. These cannot be considered elements because they exist at a different hierarchical level, as if permeating the whole thing. These components are: style, voice, tone and theme.

Style: this slippery term refers to the way the story is told; the patterns of words, phrases, and sentences through which the writer achieves certain effects. If the writer is said to have a distinctive style, it is because "the writer's voice has found expression in a unique way that resonates with the reader" (Vandermmer, 2013, p. 59).

Voice: another slippery term, "voice is akin to style, but it isn't style alone. It is the writer's particular and unmistakably signature on everything he writes" (Carver, 1985, p. 46). Voice is more than style, or it is beyond style; it is the writer's special way of looking at things, and the way he or she has found to give artistic expression to that way of looking. Style, then, "lends expression to voice" (Bailey, 2011, p. 71).

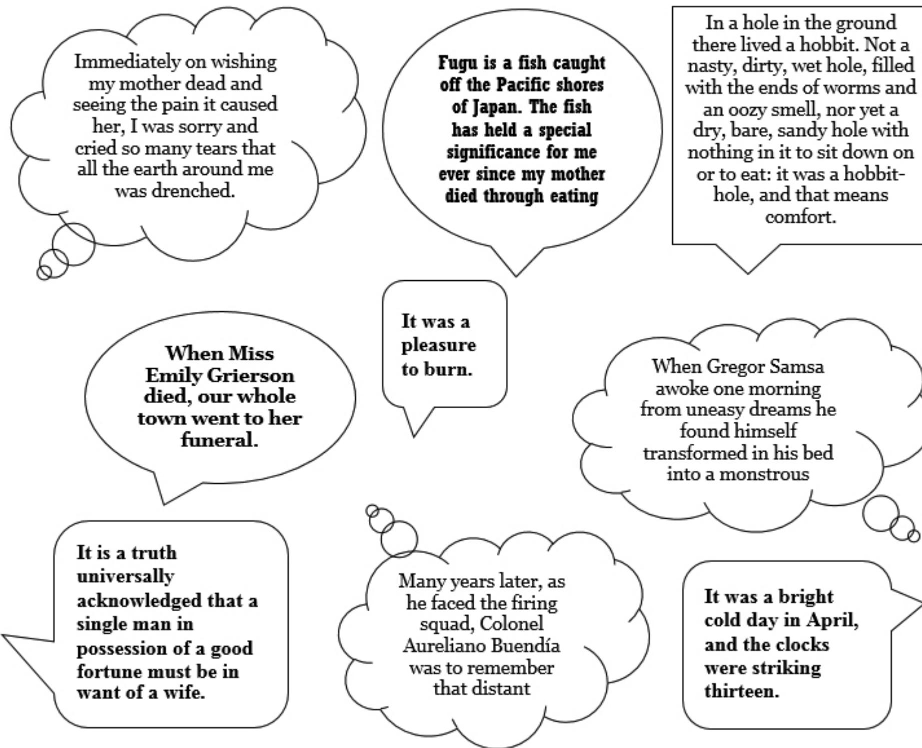
Tone: the tone of fiction refers to the atmosphere created and the mood evoked. The tone can fluctuate greatly within a story, depending on the effects required. For example, the tone can be serious, playful, terrifying, exciting, creepy, sad, etc. Tone is created not just by word choice, but also "through the rhythms and lengths of the sentences, which must be flexible enough to achieve a single effect" (Vandermeer, 2013, p. 65).

Theme: this term refers to the story's subtext, what the story means beyond the events described on the page. As argued by Vandermeer (2013), theme is a tricky subject, because even if a writer decides to write a story about social injustice, or love, or death, what accounts on the page "is usually more complex and not reducible to slogans or abstract ideas" (p. 65). Thus, figuring out what themes you've been exploring can be useful to decide what things to emphasize or not, as long as it is considered only in the context of many other concerns.

Having a good sense of the elements of the story and the ways in which the rest of the components contribute to their functioning as a complete system is the starting point to evoke *the world of the story*, which is, most of the times, perceived from the very first lines.

Task #4:

Read these memorable first lines from different stories or novels and match them with their titles. Then describe the *worlds* they evoke. For that, try to find answers for the questions posed before and imagine possible ones for the still unanswered questions. Also try to identify at least some elements and components of the narrative.



These are the first lines from:

1984 by George Orwell
A family supper by Kazuo Ishiguro
A rose for Emily by William Faulkner
Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury
Metamorphosis by Franz Kafka
My Mother by Jamaica Kincaid
One Hundred Years of Solitude by Gabriel García Márquez
Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen
The Hobbit by J.R.R. Tolkien

5. On writing your first lines

Writing the first line of your story is not an easy task (I know, this is the fourth time you are being told that something is not easy in this chapter). As McCann (2017) so skilfully tells, a first line "should open up your rib cage. It should reach in and twist your heart backward. It should suggest that the world will never be the same again" (p. 8). In an attempt to find this magic, you can include some special features

(Vandermeer, 2013) to your opening lines which might make the reader realize that everything is about to change:

- A sense of mystery or special atmosphere
- An interesting initial situation
- Immediate tension and excitement
- An intriguing statement
- An unusual or interesting description
- A unique point of view

Now, this is the question that follows: how can your first line achieve at least one of these effects? How can it plunge your reader into something urgent, interesting, moving? This is the point where you need to pick up all the imagination you still have unpacked and be ready to place it in two separate bags because this is how imagination works when writing a story, even when writing its very first lines.

You use your "creative imagination" (Vandermeer, 2013, p. 69) to write a rough draft. To your creative imagination, conscious self-editing and commentary on what is being written is "poison" and leads your writing "to becoming frozen or superficial". Your creative imagination needs to let flow whatever comes into your mind while writing, and let it fall out as it may. Your "technical imagination" (Vandermeer, 2013, p. 69) then comes along to find "the pattern or structure to establish balance to draw out aspects of characters or situations suggested by the rough draft," to make the elements of narrative work together in synergistic ways to generate numerous effects at different levels.

At you might expect, the creative and technical imaginations engage at different times and stages for different writers. For example, if you are the kind of writer who spends a great deal of time perfecting your beginning before moving on, then you are engaging your creative and technical imaginations at the same time during the process. No matter how you use your imagination, you need to be sure that you use both types. And don't worry if it takes time. It MUST.

> 'I have been working hard on *Ulysses* all day,' said Joyce.
> 'Does that mean you have written a great deal?' I said.
> 'Two sentences,' said Joyce.
> 'You've been seeking *le mot juste*?'
> 'No,' said Joyce, 'I have the words already. What I am seeking is the perfect order of the words in the sentence.'
>
> Dialogue between James Joyce and Frank Budgen

Task #5:

Write the first lines of your short story on a strip of paper at home. Put it folded in an envelope, and bring it to class.

In class, once the envelopes are mixed up together, pick one. Read the first lines in silence and then write down the sensations, emotions, and thoughts they provoked on you as a reader. Are you eager to keep on reading that story? Why? Why not?

6. On writing your opening scene

> "Storytelling is an escape from the jail of the self, leading to the ultimate adventure -seeing life through the eyes of another."
>
> Tobias Wolff

We are almost there. Right about to finish the first part of this long journey. You already have your first lines. Go now for the whole first scene. What will you need now? You have already found a little bit of inspiration and used a lot of imagination, but you still have a great deal of creativity to add. Come on, finish unpacking and set up for this, your last task (which is not an easy one). Fifth time.

The first scene serves as the opening for your story. A scene, according to Baechtel (2004), is "a portion of the story in which things are dramatized," that is, in which "setting, events, physical movements, conversations and other interactions between characters are used to portray action that explores the central themes so vividly that this exploration seems to the reader to be happening before his eyes" (p. 26). Thornley (1976) identifies eleven elements in a scene: time, place, plot, character, point of view, purpose and the five senses: sight, smell, touch, hearing, and taste. A scene, he adds, has many functions in the story: to report "sensory experience" of time, place and perception; to analyze and report "character and purpose and motive;" to fulfil "the discipline of story structure;" and to delight the reader "with its clarity and sensitivity to artistic truth" (Thornley, 1976, p. 10).

Baechtel (2004) suggests to use the original cloud diagram to try to get your story off the ground when attempting to write the opening scene. And this seems to be a good idea. So choose one of the elements from each level of the cloud diagram: your central character, a particular emotional state which dominates the scene, and a situation in which your primary character interacts with a secondary character. Then choose

one of the connections that you had established before, the one you think might make your story work. Another good idea is to answer the six questions: the *who-what-when-where-why-how* collection. As you answer these beginning questions, do it in as much detail as you can, making connections with the elements of your cloud diagram. Finally, make an appeal to your reader's senses. Add as many details as you can. Set them down as they come, in pieces, in tatters. Use incomplete sentences, single phrases, colors, sounds, smells, textures.

And you have your first draft. There are no rules for a first draft.
So go and DO it.
And do it QUICKLY.

Task #6:

Write the first draft of your opening scene. Don't show it to anyone.
And now take a break.
And then take another break.
REST. And let your STORY rest too.

Last push. Look at what you wrote some days ago. You have pieces of characters and situations before you. Now you need to order these scattered pieces and rescue the opening image that you had imagined. While you do it, as Baechtel (2004) reminds us, try to keep your reader in mind. And make sure "he is still ignorant, puzzled, curious, interested" (p. 28). Take the last remains of creativity you still have at hand and think in terms of possibility. Oh! And don't forget your camera.

The term "possibility thinking" was originally coined by Craft (2000, 2001, 2002) to represent a process which may be common across creativity in differing domains of inquiry and across life. It refers to the posing of the question *what if?* in different ways and contexts, together with *perspective taking*, or *as if* thinking. To this degree, it was argued that possibility thinking could be seen as involving the shift from what is this and what does it do? to what can I do with this? Thus, there is a shift from *what is* to *what might be* which involves questioning and problematizing as well as imagination triggering. And this is, after all, creativity.

How might you translate this thinking to the revision of your opening scene's first draft? Simply. Just ask yourself *what if?* questions. What if you reverse the order in which you unveil the elements of the story? What if you add detail to the description of an emotional state? What if you delete, or alter, one of the situations? What if you give your

character a different governing characteristic? What if your secondary character becomes the main one? Or the main character a secondary one? What if you set your scene at a different time, in a different season or place? What if you change the point of view?

TRY. Focus on what your scene might still be, not on what it is. And FAIL.

"Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better."
Samuel Beckett

I know, you haven't used your camera yet. Go and take it. Imagine the lens is your eyes, and then your pencil. Then imagine you are yourself the camera. "Language us into vision!" cries McCann (2017). Make us feel as if we are there. "Bring us to the pulse of the moment" (p. 37), he continues. Set your camera (and yourself) to panoramic mode and create the *panoramic view*. The panoramic view provides the necessary framework to a clear understanding and perception of your opening scene and, as Thornley (1976) explains, "performs the same function as does the camera, when it shows first an entire general panorama, then zooms in closer to the immediate object" (p. 47). So go and see the whole landscape at first, then focus in on a detail, and "bring that detail to life" (McCann, 2017, p. 37).

Task #7:

Revise the first draft of your opening scene. Think in terms of possibility and let your words be the lens of your camera.

Then write your second draft.

You did it. You started. The scariest moment is already part of the past.

Now RELAX and read these opening scenes written by students from previous courses for whom, guess what?, writing a short story was not an easy task.

But it was worth the effort.

"If a story is in you, it has to come out."
William Faulkner

Assignment #1:

Read this selection of unedited opening scenes and decide which three stories you would like to read. Why?

Assignment #2:

Evaluate the selected scenes according to the guidelines described through the chapter.

> As if nature would have known what was going to take place to his friend, the day began with a dense fog that did not allow to see more than ten meters ahead. At 7 o'clock of this freezing morning in 1750, all the slaves from a Maryland tobacco plantation were woken up by the shrill loud sound of the bell that presaged a dreadful event. In compact rows, they directed themselves towards the stable where they observed their furious master and, close to him, John, Christopher's best friend. Everyone foresaw it was the last time they were were going to set eyes on him.
>
> From "Turns of life" by Samanta González, 2012.

> The gentle yet unbelievably cold night breeze whips the skin of my face. It makes my eyes want to be shut for once and for all. I should have done it at midday. But oh, yes, those freaking noises. Anyway, I seriously can't believe it is this cold in this time of the year, I mean, it is just April and I am freaking teeth chattering. How will they cope with the cold in July? It is unbearable. Whatever. I guess you just sometimes can't do anything against the Gods' will. You just have to embrace it. And it's like mom has always said: 'The sooner, the better'.
>
> Mum, she's so wise. When I was born, with her eyes flooded in tears, she said to my father: 'Alfonso, this kid is going places. Look at him. He has just some minutes on earth and yet, he clings to life so fiercely. He will know what he wants and how to get it. He will rise above the rest.' And hell she was right.
>
> From "A step further" by Mariano Hartfiel, 2016.

> The tender autumn evening was drawing to its close. The gleams of the sunshine that once lit up the luminous afternoon faded away abruptly. The twittering of birds soon dwindled to nothing. Everything remained quiet and the only moving thing was the gentle breeze outside. The room was blissfully warmed; heavy pallid curtains hung either side of the huge windows. On the scrubbed table next to her, a glass of wine and a meager untouched meal could be seen from a discreet distance. Now and then, she took a brief glimpse at the clock. However, she did it without showing any apprehension or even despair, merely to please herself with the thought that each minute gone by made the

time when the phone would ring nearer. She didn't want to admit it, but she felt some nervousness at the prospect of receiving that call.

From "No higher love" by Vanesa Montero, 2012.

The midday sun of autumn dazzles in Laura's hazel eyes, fixed on the straight and flat route that passes through La Pampa. The brightness makes her squint, but she knows the way by heart from the countless times she travelled back home when she was studying at University. Although May is almost over, the weather is so sunny and warm that her pale cheeks soon turn rosy. She opens the window a bit to let a *pampean* gust cool her skin. She imagines herself at the top of the hill, observing everything from above, the strong wind hitting her face, getting into her skin. "I guess life is a bloody steep hill," she thinks. The monotony of the road makes her go over all those memories indelibly imprinted on her mind.

From "Head for the hills" by Sabrina Orden, 2017.

"Bang!"

A striking loud gunshot broke the silence. I gradually sank in the water and saw the tiny bubbles rise till they disappeared in the surface. Releasing the air slowly and holding my breath for some seconds at the bottom of the pool helped me to relax and get into the competing atmosphere. After all, Nationals have always been a biggie in my family. Willie and I have been swimming before we could ride a bike. We were used to the high-performance athletic life. "Blood, sweat and tears", used to say our coach. Hard daily training, loads of healthy food, a strong mind and a thirst for winning were the motto. Anyhow, after countless competitions, medals and trophies, every National felt like the first one, it was a war.

From "The Somers' twins" by Ana Luz Alonso, 2013.

A soft but cruel breeze had been born the very same moment that the sky started to light up on that autumn morning. The weak wind flew across the many streets of this tall monochromatic city, taking a turn at every empty corner and reaching every soul unguarded by brick walls. It brought a coldness within it that was sharp and unavoidable, and I crawled tighter into myself in a futile attempt to escape from it. To aggravate the situation, the dirty and ragged newspapers in which I laid provided me with little warmth. So I shook and trembled in cold and nameless grief.

From "A home in the heart of a friend" by Ayelén Schneider, 2015.

It was dark. Very dark. The trees passed him as he ran. He couldn't stop. No. That would be fatal. It was dark. The moon was somewhere in the sky, but the trees didn't let its light reach him. The hard sharp leaves harmed his cheeks and his bare chest. His feet started to hurt. Damn it! If he could have taken his shoes! But he couldn't stop now. That would be fatal. They shouldn't find him. Gosh!! Why had he to believe? Why now? It was dark and his lungs were about to burst. He couldn't run anymore, but he couldn't stop either. Why had he to believe? That morning things were different. He woke as skeptical as any other day. But eventually the day became weird. And dark.

tap!

Tap!

TAP!

THEY WERE CLOSE. Tap! TAP! His head was dizzy. His legs were heavy. His heart was about to burst.

tap!

Tap!

TAP!

He could hear their steps nearer (were they running?).

And nearer (they don't run).

And nearer.

From "Daffodils" by Ivana Gómez, 2014.

The crops are dying. Nine months without rain, not even a small tear from the sky. Heat and dust are everywhere, oppressing and suffocating. Summer is days away and it promises more heat and drought. The sky is bright and blue, as if ironically smiling to the suffering people that look up to it in search of a saving rain cloud. This afternoon is particularly hot and the fan only blows hot air into Rose's face. Her swollen legs and ankles are resting on a chair while she lies on the sofa. She feels sticky and sick; this is not a good day for a pregnant woman. The 35-week belly is oppressing her and even the baby shows her that he is uncomfortable, kicking her from time to time. "It's all his fault", she thought and her muscles tense when she remembers him. "HE wanted a baby, he couldn't wait!". Her ironic tone when she speaks of him. But she speaks to no one, to the darkened room, to the

exhausted ventilator. Of course, nobody answers. Then, all her body relaxes again and she starts to cry…

From “Waiting for the rain” by Carolina Weigum, 2013.

13 years before.

Natalie woke up with a start. She didn’t want to open her eyes. She refused to move. She didn’t utter a word. She was too afraid to do any of that. She had dreamt again of her father. Her kind father, who cared so deeply for her and had always a smile on his face. But that was before. That was when things were good. Now things were bad.

“It’s okay. You’re safe.” Natalie heard the words and felt strong but gentle arms holding her, rubbing soothing circles on her back. She slowly opened her eyes and found a blue eye and a brown eye staring right back at her. Natalie felt safer under that gaze, her uneasiness steadily dissolving.

“How long was I out? And how did I end up on top of you like this? It’s like I’m crushing you.” Layne only chuckled and didn’t ask about Natalie’s nightmare since she already knew what it was about. Natalie and her best friend Layne had been sitting on a wooden park bench which was kind of hidden in front of some strange bushes shaped like a heart. The bench was also facing a lake, the place were Natalie and Layne usually spent the days when they wanted to forget about the rest of the world; or better said, the days when Natalie wanted to forget about the rest of the world and just be with her best friend. Layne was happy to oblige every time.

From “Promises made whilst sitting on different kinds of benches” by Victor Camargo, 2015.

References

Atwood, M. (2002). *Negotiating with the dead: A writer on writing.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Baechtel, M. (2004). *Shaping the story: A step-by-step guide to writing short fiction*. USA: Pearson Education.

Bailey, T. (2011). *On writing short stories* (2nd ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.

Carver, R. (1985). On writing. *Mississippi Review*, *14* (1/2), 46-51.

Carver, R. (1994). *Fires*. London: Harvill.

Cox, A. (2016). *Writing short stories: A Routledge writer's guide* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.

Craft, A. (2000). *Creativity across the primary curriculum: Framing and developing practice*. London: Routledge.

________. (2001). Little "c" creativity. In A. Craft, B. Jeffrey, and M. Leibling (Eds.), *Creativity in education* (pp. 45-61). London: Continuum.

Cuddon, J. A., & Preston, C. E. (1999). *The Penguin dictionary of literary terms and literary theory* (4th Ed.). London: Penguin.

Frank, T., & Wall, D. (1994). *Finding your writer's voice: A guide to creative fiction*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin.

Kempton, G. (2004). *Dialogue: Techniques and exercises for crafting effective dialogue*. USA: Writer's Digest Group.

Koch, S. (2003). *The Modern Library writer's workshop.* New York: Modern Library.

Kress, N. (2005). *Characters, emotion & viewpoint: Techniques and exercises for crafting dynamic characters and effective viewpoints*. USA: Writer's Digest Group.

McCann, C. (2017). *Letters to a young writer.* UK: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Perkins B., & Perkins, G. (1985). *The American tradition in literature*. New York: Random House.

Prose, F. (2011). What makes a short story? In T. Bailey (Ed.), *On writing short stories* (pp. 3-11). New York: Oxford University Press.

Rozelle, R. (2005). *Description and setting: Techniques and exercises for crafting a believable world of people, places and events*. USA: Writer's Digest Group.

Thornley, W. (1976). *Short story writing.* New York: Bantam Books.

Vandermeer, J. (2013). *Wonderbook: The illustrated guide to creating imaginative fiction*. China: Abrams Books.

Wolff. T. (2011). Foreword. In T. Bailey (Ed.), *On writing short stories* (pp. xi-xiii). New York: Oxford University Press.

Chapter 3

Writing the whole story, or the craft of putting it together

Natalia Fabiola Muguiro
and Martín Carlos Marusich

"Finish everything you start."

Colm Tóibín

The previous chapter was an invitation to unpack your inspiration, imagination, and creativity to let your story come out. And so you did. You already have your opening scene there, ready to be taken somewhere else, to a place or a state in which it will become something different. It is time to lead that scene towards a new direction. It is time to transform that scene into a whole story.

How? Think of this chapter as another invitation. This time, the adventure will be even more exciting. Besides inspiration, imagination, and creativity, you will also need a large amount of courage. And this is not because you are to face a scary moment again. You know, the scariest moment is always just before you start and you have already started. So, what will you need courage for? To face a new challenge. Sometimes challenges come in the form of obstacles, problems, or threats. Some other times, however, challenges can be hidden behind mysteries to solve, questions to answer, or paths to find. We invite you to think of this, your new challenge, as a kind of labyrinth. Really exciting, isn't it?

A labyrinth can be defined as an intricate combination of paths or passages in which it is difficult to find one's way or to reach the exit. Your opening scene lies at the entrance of the labyrinth. And guess what will you find when you reach the exit? YES. Your golden pot. Your magic treasure. Your whole story. We know, you came to a halt when you read *difficult* above, right? You should know by this time that writing your whole short story is not an easy task. Throughout this chapter, however, we will not remind you of this again. Because now you have courage to do it, and this is everything you need.

Before facing this thrilling challenge, pay attention to these notices. Unfortunately, no GPS devices are allowed, but you can set up your mind

as one. This is easy. Just type. *Destiny*: “My own short story”. *Preferred route*: “Any permitted one. Please also show blocked or forbidden roads.” If these instructions work, these is the answer you will get for the *estimated time*: “Plenty of time ahead. No need to hurry. The exit gate will remain open until you reach it.”

There is something else, which is really important, that you need to take into account. You cannot go through the labyrinth alone. So go and take your reader with you. He will know how to help you. Finally, and this is pretty reassuring, there is not only one possible way out. Fortunately, now, although you might find high walls impeding you to proceed at some points, many other successful passages out are available. Go and try. Get into the maze. You are not alone. And you are COURAGEOUS.

You learnt from the previous chapter that a short story is usually made of several elements, known as the elements of the narrative, such as plot, structure, character, dialogue, setting, time, and point of view. We also told you that some other components, like voice, style, tone and theme are equally important to the shaping of your story because they permeate it through all. Now, although numerous books, handbooks and sets of instructions have been published under the motto: “how to write the perfect short story,” we don’t expect this chapter to become a magic recipe to achieve this goal. And we don’t expect this for two reasons. First, because there are no magic recipes; second, because those elements act as living systems that work together in complex ways to create a series of effects, depending on every writer’s decisions. Then, there are hundreds of different recipes for hundreds of different writers.

That is why we will offer you only tentative guidelines to help you shape the elements of your story. And we will present them in a certain order, but this does not mean that you need to follow it straight. You can choose the order in which you will work through each element, thus making your own decisions as a writer. Remember that this is a labyrinth but that several ways out are possible. So use these clues to find your way through. Think of them as different stations across the map of the labyrinth, or across the exciting world of your story. Stop at them as many times as you need. Or take a rest at any of them. Advance some meters and go back to the same station again. Skip stations. As if playing a new, intriguing board game.

Task #1:

Look at your story cloud diagram and read your opening scene again. Think of the elements present in them, and decide which is/are the first one/s you would like to start working on. Think also of those

you haven't made present yet; perhaps you prefer to explore them first. Choose one of the following stations and start your way through the labyrinth of your story.

STATION 1. Your characters, their words and emotions

> "It begins with a character, usually, and once he stands up on his feet and begins to move, all I can do is trot along behind him with a paper and pencil trying to keep up long enough to put down what he says and does."
>
> William Faulkner

For many writers, all else comes out of characterization: plot, situation, structure, even the reader's perception of setting. However, the way writers view characters and characterization varies greatly. So, what does characterization mean? According to Baechtel (2004), it is one of those terms of art that "gets tossed about pretty liberally in fiction-writing classes, but that is too often insufficiently defined and thus poorly understood" (p. 91). And this might be so because, in Bailey's (2011) words, "character in literature is the always shifting and changing element that makes each story different no matter how similar the plot." As he continues, "character pumps as the heart of fiction" (Bailey, 2011, p. 27).

Another aspect to consider is the number of characters that you will present, as suggested by Kress (2005). In some stories, this cast is huge. In some others, you may find an intimate cast of two characters. For instance, in "To build a fire," Jack London managed with only one person and a dog. No matter how many characters you have, you need to assemble them from somewhere. Kress (2005) suggests four sources to get your characters from: "yourself, real people you know, real people you hear about, and pure imagination" (p. 5).

Once you find your characters, you need to think about how to make them the right characters for your story. In fiction writing, most authors agree that characters emerge through the author's skilful presentation of the emotional meaning present in what the character does, says, and sees or in how they respond to the situations, events, and other characters in the story. So this is how characterization works: characters unfold best "in a setting of action," i.e., in a scene. Taking Aristotle's ideas, we also learn that what the character expresses:

1. must be "appropriate" (the right kind of character to carry off the action portrayed),
2. "possessed of recognizable human nature" (i.e., behaving in ways that don't strain our belief), and
3. "consistent" (that is, not brave in one scene and cowardly in another, at least not without sufficient explanation) (Baechtel, 2011, p. 92).

Having described how characterization works, we will now show you different methods of characterization as well as different types of characters.

1.1. Methods of characterization: Indirect vs. direct

As we have seen, the best possible characterizations simply show who characters are through the scenes, by having them act as themselves. Think of Anders in "Bullet in the brain," by Tobias Wolff. Remember his sarcastic reply to the woman standing before him in the bank or his loud laugh in the face of the robber that gets him shot in the head. What Anders has said or the way in which he has behaved has drawn a perfect portrait of who he is for us: "*how* he is forms part of *who* he is" (Bailey, 2011, p. 40). This is indirect characterization. In this way, characterization is one area where *showing* is usually preferable to *telling,* because character emerges more immediately and vividly for the reader when presented in the frame of the action that a scene provides, as we have already explained.

There are times, however, when the writer needs to employ direct characterization, which is usually achieved through exposition, as in the following example from "The blue heart," written by Alexandra Fuentes, a student in the *English Language IV* class of 2016.

> The man that was about to approach Amy looked so serious, unfriendly and impatient that she would have hardly expected to receive such great help from a person like him. He was well-dressed in a grey suit, a white shirt, and a bluish tie that seemed to add a little life to the seriousness he irradiated. And those clothes truly made justice to the profession he practiced: he was a young and committed lawyer on the way for a meeting with some colleagues from the firm he was part of, so it was obvious that he should return to work quickly. His hasty steps abruptly ceased, nevertheless, when he saw the awkward woman on her knees. He was truly bewildered, not by her evident charm, but by the determination she showed to her committed quest. That was a quality he felt identified with and that attracted him so

> badly he would not think twice to treasure no matter the difficulties. He only asked her about the characteristics of the object she had lost and, without knowing if she wanted the help, he started looking for it.

Whether you prefer to *tell* that your character is serious, unfriendly and impatient, as Alexandra directly did, or to *show* that your character is cynical and sarcastic, as indirectly learnt from Anders' words and reactions, is a decision you need to make depending on many other aspects. The important thing is that you notice the difference between both methods and that you choose the one that is more appropriate for the effect you want to create. Now it's time to work. Try this activity adapted from Baechtel (2011, p. 102).

Task #2:

Think of three or four separate characters who are all feeling different emotions. Write a brief characterization paragraph for each one, featuring traits such as mad, sad, lonely, tired, etc. Imagine him or her as he/she walks down a sidewalk and encounter someone who asks them the time. Represent the walk and the encounter so that your reader (remember he is with you all the time) knows your character's emotional state without you ever naming it explicitly. This will help you focus on the difference between *showing* and *telling*.

1.2. Types of characters, and avoiding types

As you may all know, most stories have at least one *main* or major character, which is the person around whom the story resolves. Most stories also have at least one *minor* or secondary character, a character who is not the focus of the story but who still plays an important role. However, another, perhaps more interesting distinction has been made between *flat* and *round* characters. According to Forster (1956), who introduced both concepts, "flat characters are constructed around a single idea or quality: when there is more than one factor in them, we get the beginning of the curve towards the round." Flat characters, he adds, "can be expressed in a single sentence." In order to know if a character is a round or a flat one, we can scrutinize them through a test: "the character is round if it is capable of surprising in a convincing way. If it never surprises, it is flat" (Forster, 1956, p. 23).

Kress (2005) states that a still further consideration in choosing your characters is whether you want to write about a character who is altered by the story events, known as a *changer*, or one who remains

essentially the same, a *stayer*. Unlike stayers, “changers progress through an emotional arc, a logical sequence of character alternations caused by the story’s action” (p. 17).

Finally, when referring to types of characters, it is important to know how to avoid types. Baechtel (2004) advices us that if a writer relies on type, he is breaking a contract with the reader. The writer does this when he uses “stock characters: the whore with a heart of gold, the mad scientist, the absent-minded professor, the bubble-headed blonde, the drunken Irishman,” to name a few (p. 93). Endless examples might appear from different contexts and cultures, so be sure not to include them, or any other cliché-ridden characterization, in your story. As they “do not take any energy in the writing, they do not give any energy in the reading,” Baechtel (2004, p. 94) concludes.

Now, it is time to work again. Make your characters start pumping at the heart of your story.

Task #3:

Find examples of round and flat characters in the short stories you have read throughout the course. Explain your choices and exchange opinions with your classmates. Then think of the characters you started developing for your own story. Do you have both, main and secondary characters, flat and round ones, changers and stayers? Why? Why not?

Task #4:

Think of the man in “To build a fire” by Jack London, and Henry in “The red convertible” by Louise Erdrich. Write a few sentences describing the protagonists at the beginning of the story: their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. Now write a few sentences describing those characters at the end. Do you see any significant differences? Are the characters changers or stayers? How would you describe their emotional arcs?

Task #5:

Choose one of the character clichés above, or any other you are familiar with or interested in. Now write a passage of characterization that explodes that type, trying to show that not all is as it first appears. Then, watch the TED Talk “The dangers of a single story,” by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and reflect on this statement: “The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete.”

1.3. Your characters' words: The importance of dialogue

One of the best ways to make characters describe themselves or others, whether directly or indirectly, is through their own words. In Hemingway's "Hills like white elephants," if you listen to the American and Jig as they sit at the little table at the train station, you will notice that what they say and how they say it shows us more about them than what full paragraphs of exposition would. Dialogue, which in fiction is simply the written version of the way characters speak, "lets the characters show themselves for who they are" (Bailey, 2011, p. 41). Some other times, what the characters *don't* say plays an equally important role in the story, as in a "A family supper," written by the recent Literature Nobel Prize Kazuo Ishiguro. This particular story shows a perfect interplay of text and subtext through dialogue. As McCann (2017) claims, "everything unsaid leads eventually to what is said" (p. 43). Finally, Kempton (2004) explains that dialogue "not only creates space on the page, which is visually appealing, but it's also what brings characters to life in a story, which is emotionally appealing" (p. 4).

Effective dialogue, which is the kind of dialogue that makes characters connect with readers and makes readers know about characters' motives, struggles, and emotions, can also accomplish many other purposes simultaneously, as acknowledged by Kempton (2004) and Vandermeer (2013). For example, dialogue in a scene can convey a mood, provide information, move the plot forward, create or reflect conflict or understanding between characters, create tension and suspense, foreshadow what is to come, or remind readers of things they may have forgotten. Through dialogue we can also give readers a very real sense of a story's setting or background, and we can even communicate the story's theme.

Enough from this station. You need to get ready to move to another one. Before doing that, solve the following exercises, and gain confidence to give your characters plenty of words.

Task #6:

Choose a pair of characters from the following set, and write a conversation between them. Decide where in the story you would place the dialogue, and justify your decision.

- Emily and Homer in "A rose for Emily" by William Faulkner.
- The boy and his mother in "A family supper" by Kazuo Ishiguro.
- John, the son of the priest, and a survivor from the Dead Places in "By the waters of Babylon" by Stephen Vincent Benét.

Task #7:

Gather the cast of characters you imagined for your story. Think about the possibilities to create conversations between them. Reflect: which characters might have such conversation? Which would be the purpose of it in the context of your story? In which part of the story would you place this dialogue? Now choose two characters, and write a complete paragraph that contains dialogue.

STATION 2. Point of view: Alternatives and distances

> "A definite purpose, like blinders on a horse, inevitably narrows its possessor's point of view."
>
> Robert Frost

Who's telling the story? The answer to this question refers to what we understand by point of view. As its most basic, point of view can simply be thought of as the character who holds, or is held, in the eye of the camera; our narrator or the focus of the narration. "Through the eyes, perceptions, or directions of a narrator or narration, we *view* (i.e., *experience*) the story" (Bailey, 2011, p. 29). There are different types of point of view and, as you must already know, any story can be told in three possible points of view: *first person* (I, we), *second person* (you), or *third person* (he, she, it). Each choice of point of view has its advantages and disadvantages, its freedoms and limitations. When choosing point of view, we not only consider the person in which the story is told, but also whether it is *subjective* or *objective*. Let's see them now in a little bit of detail.

2.1. First person narration

You may notice that first person is by its very nature *subjective*. The speaker is the subject, even if the story seems to be about someone or something else, as in "I stand here ironing" by Tillie Olsen, for example. In this case, although the story is about Emily (the narrator's daughter) and her problems, the narrator's own guilt, shame, and finally understanding lie at the core of the story while she moves back and forth ironing. Another common denominator of stories told in first person is

the unique *voice* of the narrator. In fact, Kress (2005) affirms, voice is the heart of first person. As first person is told directly in the narrator's own words, it allows us, more than any other choice, to "hear" the natural voice of the character (p. 179). Finally, there is a great sense of intimacy in the relationship that a first person frame enables to establish between the story and the reader (Baechtel, 2004). Most often, a first person narrator brings the reader close to his view of the story's action, as in this example written by a former student:

> It's horrible in here. A strange feeling presses my chest, not letting me breathe, making me gasp. The smell of death fills the place; the shouting and the weeping echo in my mind day and night; the gnashing of teeth guiding my heart beats… I cannot rest. Not even a minute. Everything seems so confusing. Wherever I look, I find sorrow and grief, physical and emotional agony. Darkness, literally and metaphorically, is everywhere. Not a single ray of hope, not a single moment of peace.
>
> From "Eternal adieu" by Joana Herrán, 2013.

Sometimes, the inevitable result of using a first person point of view is a narrow focus of one person's experience, which can also limit the amount of information the story can present. At other times, as stated by Baechtel (2004), there can be variations in the use of first person narrator. For instance, Faulkner framed "A rose for Emily" as a narrative in first person plural, with the story's narrative "we" as the collective consciousness of a town: "We didn't see she was crazy then. We believed she had to do that […], and we knew that with nothing left, she would have to cling to that which had robbed her, as people will." Furthermore, although first person stories often feel very intimate, it's also possible to think of a first person story in which the narrator sounds reserved, cool, and reluctant to reveal himself, like the protagonist in Ishiguro's "A family supper." Finally, there can be shifts in point of view, changes that the writer makes as the story unfolds to create different effects or to intensify the impact of events. Here is a fragment from a student's story in which there is a shift in point of view from first to third person narrator:

> So I had to be brutally honest and tell him I didn't feel the same. Poor guy, he was heartbroken. I almost wished I could feel something for him… but I didn't. The heart wants what it wants and it didn't want him, not anymore.

> Bruno stopped walking as he passed by a drugstore and interrupted his internal monologue. He paid a look at his phone. No calls, zero messages. He then decided he wanted some booze and some cigarettes.
>
> From "A step further" by Mariano Hartfiel, 2015.

Finally, it is important to highlight that description and exposition in first person must be presented "as the character sees the information, not the author" (Kress, 2005, p. 183). This requirement is actually positive in that it aids characterization. As we have already said, the strength of first person is the voice of the narrator. You need to make him reflect his personality not only in what he says but also in how he says it.

2.2. Second person narration

As a narrative strategy, second person has the strange effect of both distancing the narrator and going so far as to include us in a more general, objective universal narrative (Bailey, 2011). Although not used very often, by speaking through the story's narration to "you", as Baechtel (2004) explains, the author is either "asking the reader to imagine himself experiencing events as a character in the story", or talking or writing (in the case of the epistolary story, which is told through letters) "to another character to whom the story is addressed" (p. 39). This last case is illustrated in this passage from a student's epistolary story:

> Be happy. You're young and free. You don't know what pain is yet. Love comes and goes, and so do your friends and your work. You are overreacting. They treated you as though you were not real, as if your life hadn't started yet, and that was not so. The true fact is that you were already alive, and the pain you felt was as real as it could be. It's just that they could not see that, none of us could. The reasons that you had for taking your decisions are far beyond anyone's comprehension, and there are countless things that cannot be explained or justified, but I am not writing to you to ask any questions. I am writing today because there are some things that I want you to know, and some things that I want to give you. And I am writing to say good-bye, too.
>
> From "Read me" by María Sol López, 2016.

2.3. Third person narration

Third person is the point of view with which we started our life as readers, as in "Once upon a time there was a beautiful princess" (Kress,

2005, p. 185). In stories using third person narration, the narrator is what authors have called "an informing intelligence" (Baechtel, 2004, p. 40). This is the teller of the tale, who is not a character in the story, but manages the story's unfolding. Furthermore, third person also allows the writer "more freedom in the use of language," since the words used are not determined solely by the character's voice (Bailey, 2011, p. 34). However, we might also have stories in which characters do not speak. In those cases, third person narration also offers tools to create vivid characterizations, as in the following example. This is a fragment from a story whose main character is a toddler who, needless to say, is unable to utter a single word:

> The gentle warm breeze ruffled his hair. He closed his eyes enjoying the tickling sensation of some strands of hair slightly touching his nose. Lying on the grass while looking at the vast and azure sky was his favourite activity. Dogged to catch a fluffy cloud so as to play with it, he raised his little arms trying unsuccessfully to reduce the distance between his fingers and the bright sky. After all, if there was something soft and squishy, it had to be his toy. However, the clouds were very high, and no matter how fast and excitingly he waved his arms, the clouds did not come any closer. Defeated, he folded his arms and looked reproachfully at the sky.
>
> From "Step by step" by Fátima Blanco, 2015.

Third person point of view allows for different degrees of distance between the writer and his subject, depending on the perspective adopted: *subjective*, *objective*, or *omniscient*. Below we briefly summarize the characteristics of each perspective:

- The third person *objective* approach puts the reader in the place of a "fly on the wall," able to observe the details of physical action and conversation (Baechtel, 2004, p. 40), but without access to the characters' inner lives, like in "Hills like white elephants" by Ernest Hemingway. Such stories leave the reader to draw his own conclusions about what the characters think and feel.
- When the author gives us access to the world of the story only through the consciousness of the protagonist or other characters, we are in the presence of third person *subjective* point of view.
- Finally, third person *omniscient* point of view means an "all-seeing, all-knowing" narrator, one having a kind of "God-like scope". The omniscient narrator seems to know all and is an intimate part of the goings-on, he is "a storyteller to be reckoned

> with," even when the reader momentarily forgets his or her presence (Bailey, 2011, p. 38).

These three different perspectives do not necessarily have to exist separately, but they might co-exist. This particular strategy is known as "third person narration with shifting points of view" (Baechtel, 2004, p. 40), as skilfully achieved, for example, in "Bullet in the brain" by Tobias Wolff.

2.4. The non-human point of view

Non-human points of view, whether through first or third person narration, turn up mostly in children's literature and science fiction, usually through animals, strange creatures, aliens, or robots. When used in mainstream adult literature, non-human perspectives are usually used to satirize or comment on human behaviors (Kress, 2005). If you go back to the opening scenes presented at the end of the previous chapter, you will find a story written by Ayelén whose narrator is not a person. Can you guess who or what is telling the story? Here is another example from a story told by a butterfly:

> During my first week of life, I spent whole mornings in a remaining flower in the front of the building. Every time people passed walking by, I could hear them gossiping about Mr Benson, blaming him for something wrong he had done. I couldn't resist any more, so I decided to enter the house and discover the truth by myself.
>
> I flied all around the dwelling until I reached a small loophole in a window where the shutters were not completely shut up. Then I squeezed and went into the place. I had a mixture of feelings. I felt nervous, anxious, curious and scared. Everything was dark inside, and the silence chilled my wings.
>
> From "Butterfly" by Yanina Cepeda, 2013.

Now that you have a complete panorama of the types of points of view available for your story, you might ask yourself whether you have taken the best approach when you wrote your opening scene. So, why not experimenting with different possibilities? Go through this activity adapted from Baechtel (2004, p. 44).

Task #8:

Go back to the cloud diagram again and to your opening scene. Use them to imagine the scene that comes right after that. Now write

this second scene you're imagining three times: once as a first-person narration, once as a second-person narration (addressed either to another character in the story or to the reader), and once as a third-person narration (subjective, omniscient, objective, as you like it). And remember that different points of view argue for different types of contact with the details and characters in your story.

STATION 3. Time and place: The description of the setting

> "An hour is not merely an hour, it is a vase filled with perfumes, with sounds, with projects, with climates."
>
> Marcel Proust

As stated in the previous chapter, the term *setting* refers to the story's place, time, social environment, and physical environment. As Spack (1998) explains, the setting is often connected to character development and/or to the values of the society in which the story is set. Setting can even have a direct effect on characters and actions. The characters' attitude and behaviour may be influenced by the time and place in which they live. Finally, the characters' emotional states can be affected by the physical environment.

Setting is depicted primarily through images, as for example in "To build a fire" by Jack London. As part of these images, often an aspect of the setting is actually a symbol representing something else, as skilfully achieved by Benét in "By the waters of Babylon." Thus, we might agree that setting is mostly created by imagery and symbolism. Finally, while in some short stories the setting is central, other stories have few or no references to it. But what is certain is that when details of the setting are provided they can give clues to the story's meanings and significances.

3.1. The importance of details and description

According to Spack (1998), details related to *place* may provide information about: the "geographical location" (the countryside, the city, etc.), the "size and type of location" (a large city or a small village, etc.) or "the site of the action" (indoors or outdoors, a room or a street, etc.). Details related to *time* may provide information about "the length of time during which the action occurs" (several years or only one hour,

for example), "the time of day" (the actual clock time, or the description of light, darkness, shadows, or activities such as eating supper), "the time of the year" (through references to seasons, for example), "the particular year, and the period of history" (the French Revolution, World War I, etc.). Then, details related to *the social environment* may provide information about "social and economic class or level, manners, customs, rules, religion, moral codes", etc. And, finally, a story's *physical environment* may be revealed through references to or description of "nature, objects, clothing, physical appearance, buildings and rooms, climate and weather, sounds and smells" (pp. 284-285). Through the combination of all these details, writers create imaginary worlds, or settings, which can reflect a character's inner thoughts as well as a whole society's set of values.

Focus now on the short stories we have studied in this course, and be ready to reflect upon their particular settings.

Task #9:

Explore the imagery and details that help create the setting in all the studied short stories and find answers for this set of questions. After that, share your answers with a classmate. Do you both agree? Did you miss anything?

In which story/stories….

…does setting play a special part on the character's actions? Why?

…is a character's emotional state affected by the physical environment? How?

…is a character's attitude or behaviour influenced by the time and place in which he or she lives? How? Why?

…is setting so central or important that it can be considered another character? How do you know?

…do elements or aspects of setting represent something else or reveal a particular symbolism? How are those symbolic meanings important for that particular story?

…does setting reflect a whole society's set of values? How does this influence the characters' actions and emotions?

3.2. Fictional time: Representing time's movement in your story

Fligelman and Grae (2003) claim that "the most prevalent way to manipulate time is by compressing and expanding it to fit the needs of your story" (p. 166). As a writer, you must remember that time passes for

your characters, but you need to control how quickly, or slowly, it flows. Generally, writers do not show every moment of a plot, every instance in a character's life from birth until death, but instead speed through or skip over sections of time that are irrelevant to the story, while they slow down and expand the sections that are most important. Now, in order to represent the passing of the fictional time or its movement thought the story you can make use of several strategies that create different effects, such as "prolepsis, analepsis, jump cuts, and metalepsis" (Baechtel, 2004, p. 154).

- "Prolepsis," better known as *flashback*, represents a way in which we can visit the past in our story. Most often, this means "a fully dramatized scene" represented in the story as a character's memory of a situation or event that affects or influences something that is happening in the story's here and now (Baechtek, 2004, p. 154).
- Contrarily, "analepsis," also called *flash forward*, allows us the possibility to visit the future in our story. Thus, it is possible to accelerate time by "taking the characters to an altered reality for which the preceding story has amply prepared the reader" (Baechtel, 2004, p. 154).
- "Jump cut" is a term adapted from films. In fiction, it identifies a place in the story where the action stops at the end of a scene, then picks up again at another point, in another place and/or time. Where a jump cut occurs, "the action that takes place between one scene and the next is implied rather than summarised" (Baechtel, 2004, p. 72).
- Finally, "metalepsis" is still another way of "altering the time sense within a story" and it comes to play when "there is an intrusion of one narrative level into another". This serves strategically to make the reader conscious of the story's various narrative levels and its fictionality (Baechtel, 2004, p. 154).

Let's see now how well you understood the differences among those strategies by exploring these fragments from two students' stories.

Task #10:

Read the following paragraphs and decide which type of strategy to represent time's movements has been used in each:

> Margaret spent her days locked in her room, next to that unique window that brought her back to the days in which she was a cheerful, extremely vivacious nature lover. Through the window an enormous

garden was seen, full of elms, vivid-colored perennials, beautiful flowing paths and beds for the daisies. That garden looked fanciful although it was real. The days looked all the same and went by motionless. Margaret Jones has never received a visit, till today.

Margaret Jones was born the 20th of August 1923. She had become a famous actress in the Golden Age, before the Second World War. She was a spoiled rich girl that defied her parents when she decided to leave her home so as to find her way in the acting business.

From "What I lived for" by Laureane Byrne, 2012.

Strategy: …………………….

As he advanced across the forest, an increasing shriek of agony echoed in the woods. They were closer and Mike could feel it, their steps resounding in his guts. He was exhausted. His lungs were about to burst. TUNG! TUNG! But he couldn't stop now. It was dark. The hard leaves hurt his cheeks and his bare chest. TUNG! TUNG! The pointed stones and dry twigs stuck into his bare feet. They started to bleed. Suddenly, he tripped over a damned root and fell down.

It was darker now, everything he could feel were their fingers (or were they claws?) tearing his flesh. He shouted, screamed, begged. The pain was intolerable, but their teeth wouldn't cease crushing. Finally, he stopped fighting. It was the end. The spectres were dragging him, or what was left of him, to the cracking fire ahead. He could only hope it would end soon.

From "Daffodils" by Ivana Gómez, 2013.

Strategy: …………………

STATION 4. The plot and structure of your story

"Remember, plot is no more than footprints left in the snow after your characters have run by on their way to incredible destinations."

Rad Bradbury

You have already learnt from the previous chapter, and from previous courses, what plot and structure mean. You already know about the

pyramid and the arc, the conflict and the climax, the complications and the resolutions, the sequences of events. Thus, you must certainly be aware that your story's heart can be unfolded through the crafting of an interesting plot. As Fligelman and Grae (2003) put it, "at the heart of greatest fiction is the excitement created when we really feel that the work is after something specific, when it has plot" (p. 54). Thus, plot makes stories coherent by drawing together all the characters, settings, voices, and everything else around a single organizing force.

As for structure, McCann (2017) says it is essentially "a container for content" (p. 52). The shape into which your story gets placed is "a house slowly built from the foundation up. Or maybe it's a tunnel, or a skyscraper, or a place, or even a moving caravan, driven forward by your characters." In fact, McCann (2017) majestically adds, structure can be any number of things: "you just have to make sure that it doesn't become an elaborate hole in the ground into which we bury ourselves, unable to claw out" (p. 53).

We are sure that by this time you already have the outline of your story in mind, or some idea of where your story is heading; in other words, you already have your story's plot and structure crafted. Perhaps, however, you haven't decided yet how the unfolding of your stories' scenes might contribute to create a sense of rising tension, a crisis point, and a falling tension. Or perhaps you haven't considered yet the necessity of a conflict, internal or external, and its possible resolution. Well, then, it's time to make all those decisions.

Come on, you are about to find the way out from the labyrinth.

We promise.

Task #11:

Write the outline of your story. Think of the sequences of events, the order of the scenes and the transitions between them. And then move from the scenes to the story. Base your outline on any of the studied models (the pyramid, the arc, etc.), but feel free to add variants and changes.

It is YOUR story.

STATION 5. Some words on voice, style, tone, and theme

In the previous chapter we presented these four as components, rather than elements, of the story. And this is so because, as we said before, they

are not as "quantifiable," or they exist at a different hierarchical level (Vandermeer, 2013). However, they are equally, or even more important than any of the elements, since they are what would make your story distinguishable and unique.

Simply put, *voice* is what readers "hear" in their heads when they're reading; it is the "sound" of the story. In every strong work of fiction, Fligelman and Grae (2003) state, "one voice rises above the din to unify the piece and lead the reader through the thicket of characters' voices" (p. 172). This voice is the most important for the simple reason that, after finishing a good story or novel, it's this overarching voice which continues to ring in the reader's mind. And yes, you might have guessed it: the voice of a story is the voice of the narrator. That's why voice and point of view work together. There are different types of voices: conversational, informal, formal, ceremonial, etc. In fact, the voice of a story can take on any conceivable "sound" as long as you have a reason for it, since literature is filled with unusual, unique voices, that "don't fit anywhere on the clothesline of types" (Fligelman & Grae, 2003, p. 72). The terms voice and style are often used interchangeably, but there's an enormous difference from the writer's perspective.

Style consists of "various technical choices made by a writer", and the voice is the sum result of those choices. "If voice is the velvet dress, style is the fabrics, threads, buttons, and such that create the garment", Fligelman and Grae (2003, p. 182) assert. But how is style created? By using the most elemental tools in writing, namely: what words you pick, how you string them together in a sentence, and how you mix and match your sentences to form paragraphs. For example, while Hemingway uses short sentences and repetition, Jack London employs a wealth of whole descriptive paragraphs and Kazuo Ishiguro is recognized by his stylistic minimalism and austerity. The important thing is that you can find, by carving through the caveats of language and its possibilities, your own style. You can and should admire and study the works of other writers, but these writers aren't you and their narrators aren't your narrators. As Fligelman and Grae (2003) wisely advise, "bad style often comes when a writer is trying too hard to imitate the style of other writers" (p. 183).

Tone, on its part, is at the service of style. As stated before, the tone of a story refers to the atmosphere created and the mood evoked. The tone of a story can fluctuate from tragic, comical, humorous or biblical to solemn, gloomy, intimate or ironic, to name a few within endless possibilities. Then, style might be flexible enough to allow for the necessary changes on tone throughout the narrative, so as to avoid "evolving into monotones"

(Vandermeer, 2013, p. 65) which do not create any particular or interesting effects.

Finally, *theme*, or what the story is about, adds the last flavor to your story. A confusing term, you shouldn't think of theme as a synonym of "message or moral," as stated by Fligelman and Grae (2003, p. 197), but as the general subject of the story. In order to convey a particular theme, the writer does not have to solve a problem, he has to state the problem correctly. This means that you don't have to create themes that will solve the problems of the world. You just have to "shine your flashlight on some aspect of life and let the reader see what's there. But not *every* aspect. Just *some* aspect" (Fligelman & Grae, 2003, p. 197). And that's the key point, because the purpose of theme is to give a story some kind of focus.

5.1. Finding the way out: A successful exit through the labyrinth

End of the game. There are no more stations. You have gone through all of them.

We don't know the order in which you did it, though. But who cares? You did it your way. We are curious: Did you stay too long at any of them? Did you skip a station and go back to it later on? Did you speed up between stations? Did you find one more comfortable than another? Did you enjoy it? Tell us, and reflect upon your answers. They tell a lot about the kind of writer you are, and about the kind of story you'll come up with.

Now the important thing is to go through the exit gate. "Approaching destination," tells your GPS device. Tóibín told you that at the beginning of this chapter: "Finish everything you start. Often, you don't know where you are going for a while; then halfway through something comes and you know. If you abandon things, you never find that out." We can see it, and you too. Your golden pot. Your magic treasure. Your whole SHORT STORY.

> So much for endings. Beginnings are always more fun. True connoisseurs, however, are known to favor the stretch in between, since it's the hardest thing to do anything with.
>
> That's about all that can be said for plots, which anyway are just one thing after another, a *what* and a *what* and a *what*.
>
> Now try *how* and *why*.

This is the way in which Margaret Atwood ends his wonderful metafictional short story, “Happy Endings.” Now go and enjoy the complete story before going on.

It’s time for your final assignment now.
You have everything you need. And you are COURAGEOUS.

Assignment:
Write the first draft of your whole short story. Then show it. And share it. Let it be enjoyed by the reader that helped you through the maze. You never know, perhaps your last line is the first line for everybody else.

References

Atwood, C. (2011). Happy Endings. In T. Bailey (Ed.), *On writing short stories* (pp. 229-232). New York: Oxford University Press.
Baechtel, M. (2004). *Shaping the story: A step-by-step guide to writing short fiction*. USA: Pearson Education.
Bailey, T. (2011). *On writing short stories* (2nd. ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.
Benét, V. (2014). By the waters of Babylon. In J. London, *By the waters of Babylon and other fantasies and prophecies* (pp. 1-16). UK: Hythloday Press.
Erdrich, L. (2004). The red convertible. In Baechtel, M., *Shaping the story: A step-by-step guide to writing short fiction.* (pp. 293-299). USA: Pearson Education.
Faulkner, W. (2011). A rose for Emily. In T. Bailey (Ed.), *On writing short stories* (pp. 191-197). New York: Oxford University Press.
Fligelman, J., & Grae, D. (2003). *Writing fiction*. New York: Bloomsbury.
Forster, E. (1956). *Aspects of the novel*. New York: Mariner Books. (Original work published 1927)
Hemingway, E. (2011). Hills like white elephants. In T. Bailey (Ed.), *On writing short stories* (pp. 180-184). New York: Oxford University Press.
Ishiguro, K. (2004). A family supper. In Baechtel, M., *Shaping the story: A step-by-step guide to writing short fiction.* (pp. 284-290). USA: Pearson Education.
Kempton, G. (2004). *Dialogue: Techniques and exercises for crafting effective dialogue*. USA: Writer’s Digest Group.

Kress, N. (2005). *Characters, emotion, and viewpoint: Techniques and exercises for crafting dynamic characters and effective viewpoints*. USA: Writer's Digest Group.

London, J. (1986). To build a fire. In J. London, *To build a fire and other stories* (pp. 176-190). USA: Bantam Books.

McCann, C. (2017). *Letters to a young writer.* UK: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Olsen, T. (2011). I stand here ironing. In T. Bailey (Ed.), *On writing short stories* (pp. 185-190). New York: Oxford University Press.

Spack, R. (1998). *The international short story: An anthology with guidelines for reading and writing about fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Vandermeer, J. (2013). *Wonderbook: The illustrated guide to creating imaginative fiction*. China: Abrams Books.

Wolff, T. (2011). Bullet in the brain. In T. Bailey (Ed.), *On writing short stories* (pp. 442-426). New York: Oxford University Press.

CHAPTER 4

Turn your writing upside down: The reflective essay

John Ryan Brakke

1. What? Why? How?

We start with a lot of questions. Essay writing can be tricky enough, but when you are asked to distinguish between narrative, persuasive, descriptive, expository, and reflective writing, it's easy to see why students lose their minds. These distinctions can be especially challenging for students who are doing work in a second language and may not even have been provided with a solid understanding of literary analysis in their native language. In response to these challenges, this chapter aims to give you a clear definition of reflective writing, as well as set a framework for constructing future reflective essays.

So, what is reflective writing?

Think about the word *reflection*. For me, reflection conjures up images of looking at myself in a mirror or noting the image of mountains on the glassy surface of a lake below. Powerful writing should make you feel like you are looking in a figurative mirror, like you are examining your own beliefs, feelings, and dreams as a result of the literature. It is an introspective journey. Notes from and "oldie but goodie" can give us a definition of reflective writing more specific to our literature classes: "A reflective essay is an exercise in contemplation on any given subject. It tests your ability to think and describe, to order your ideas and to draw on your experience, imagination, and general knowledge" (Alexander, 1965, p. 81). Reflective writing is inherently personal: as we read, we react to the literature and take note of those reactions. We then use our own reflections to analyze or comment on general themes. More than any other style of writing, reflective writing pushes you to *give your own opinion* on the text, rather than approach it from an impersonal, colder, analytical viewpoint.

Okay, then why do we engage in reflective writing?

We gain more from reflective writing than just a chance to offer up our thoughts and opinions. I think that Professor Graham Gibbs (1988) said it best when he explained,

> It is not sufficient simply to have an experience in order to learn. Without reflecting upon this experience it may quickly be forgotten, or its learning potential lost. It is from the feelings and thoughts emerging from this reflection that generalisations or concepts can be generated. And it is generalisations that allow new situations to be tackled effectively (p. 14).

Notice: he comments on reflection in general. This could be applied to a variety of fields in education. So how does this testament to the reflective process connect with literature? We don't learn just by reading the poems, narratives, and plays that are assigned to us. Learning starts when we take note of how we are affected by the literature. From there we are able to organize our thoughts into themes, and draw conclusions based on the text. It is from this synthesis that literature gains meaning. Literary themes are the *generalizations* described by Gibbs that allow us to look at new stories with a more critical eye.

How do we reflect on literature?

According to the definition of reflective writing used in the beginning of this chapter, we reflect on literature by thinking and describing the reading, ordering our ideas, and then drawing on our own personal experience to produce meaning. This definition, however accurate it may be, does not set a clear structure for how to approach reflective writing. It can, however, be combined with Gibbs' reflective cycle (as cited in Dye, 2011) to create a clear, structured approach to reflective writing in literature. These are the four steps:

- **Description**: What are you reflecting on? This could include background information, the story, or specific excerpts from larger pieces. This ties in closely with the "think and describe" portion of the definition above.
- **Evaluation**: What was your own personal reaction to what you read? During this step, you draw comparisons to the literature from your experience.
- **Analysis**: What sense can you make from this reflection? This is where you start to see themes emerge. Make connections between the big ideas of the literature and your own personal reflections.

- **Synthesis**: What message do you draw from the literature? Take a stand and explain what you think the point the author is trying to make through the writing, using the description and your evaluation as evidence.

Task #1

Consider the following poem by John Berryman (1989). Read through it once, just taking in the words. Afterwards, read the reflection questions so you can keep in mind what you will be asked to do. Then read the poem again. As you read through it, highlight parts that leave an impression, and use the margins to annotate your thoughts and feelings. After you read it a second time, work through the four steps in the reflective writing process: description, evaluation, analysis, and synthesis.

What is the boy now, who has lost his ball.
What, what is he to do? I saw it go
Merrily bouncing, down the street, and then
Merrily over—there it is in the water!
No use to say 'O there are other balls':
An ultimate shaking grief fixes the boy
As he stands rigid, trembling, staring down
All his young days into the harbour where
His ball went. I would not intrude on him,
A dime, another ball, is worthless. Now
He senses first responsibility
In a world of possessions. People will take balls,
Balls will be lost always, little boy,
And no one buys a ball back. Money is external.
He is learning, well behind his desperate eyes,
The epistemology of loss, how to stand up
Knowing what every man must one day know
And most know many days, how to stand up
And gradually light returns to the street,
A whistle blows, the ball is out of sight.
Soon part of me will explore the deep and dark
Floor of the harbour … I am everywhere,
I suffer and move, my mind and my heart move
With all that move me, under the water
Or whistling, I am not a little boy.

1. Description: What is the poem about? What images are used?

____
____
____
____
____
____

2. Evaluation: What is your own personal reflection?

____
____
____
____
____
____

3. Analysis: What themes do you see emerging?

____
____
____
____
____
____

4. Synthesis: What conclusions can you make?

____
____
____
____
____
____

2. Descriptive vs. analytical reflective writing

By completing the exercise above, you successfully move through the four important phases of reflective writing, albeit in a condensed format. Still, like other "umbrella" writing styles, reflective writing can be broken down further into smaller categories: descriptive-reflective and analytical-reflective. It is important to make a distinction between the two, and to understand how each operates.

Descriptive-reflective writing is literal. If you were writing an essay about a garden, you would describe the dirt, the way the sun catches the colors of the petals, and any other image that the writing draws your attention to. Then you would note your reactions to the scene set by the author: How did you feel when reading it? What did it make you think? What did it remind you of? What deeper meaning can you infer from the work? As you can see, descriptive writing asks you to move through the first two stages: description and evaluation.

Analytical-reflective writing tests your ability to *reason* rather than to *describe*. You still move through the first two stages of descriptive writing, however you do not emphasize the descriptions and your evaluation of the literature. Moreover, this category of reflective writing pushes you as the writer into the analysis and synthesis of your reflection.

Example: Consider this excerpt from Charlotte Perkin Gilman's (2009) "The yellow wallpaper:"

> It is a big, airy room, the whole floor nearly, with windows that look all ways, and air and sunshine galore. It was nursery first and then playground and gymnasium, I should judge' for the windows are barred for little children, and there are rings and things in the walls. The paint and paper look as if a boys' school had used it. It is stripped off—the paper—in great patches all around the head of my bed, about as far as I can reach, and in a great place on the other side of the room low down. I never saw a worse paper in my life (p. 133).

In descriptive-reflective writing, you would connect this excerpt to your own experience. When I read through this, I was drawn to the idea that the paint and paper had a "look as if a boys' school had used it." When I read this section, I thought back to my experience when I taught in a school in Baltimore that had a small middle school in the basement. I could tell that the basement filled with young boys and girls every day because of the condition of the walls. There were dents and old cracked paint where students had gotten too rowdy on their walk to class. In some cases, entire sheets of drywall had holes in them. This is what the excerpt reminds me of. When I evaluate my thoughts, I think about the differences between the ideas of *worn* and *loved*. Walls can be in poor condition but can still be endearing if they remind you of a specific moment in the past. When I was growing up, my parents would always mark my siblings and my height on a doorframe. After a while, the paint cracked and got worn. Still, I love looking at that doorframe because it reminds me of younger years. I don't think this kind of nostalgia is what

the author is describing in the quote above. To me, it is more like the middle school basement.

In analytic-reflective writing, you would use the context that the quotation provides to construct your own observations about a theme you may have observed in the piece of literature. For this example from "The yellow wallpaper," I would comment on the theme of insanity and use the excerpt to do my own personal reflection on the theme. In my opinion, the author uses the descriptions from the narrator to convey a different perspective on insanity. To the main character, the room that she took in the house used to be a nursery and a gymnasium. She describes the marks on the walls as a result of children playing. When I look at the story outside of her point-of-view, I face the real situation: the narrator is in an insane asylum. The bars on the windows are not in place to protect children; they are there to keep her locked in. The marks on the walls are not from boys playing. She describes the paper as stripped off "as far as I can reach." When I read this quote, I imagine that she had been strapped to the bed and has clawed off the paint around her head as far as she can reach. Without ever explicitly saying it, the author provides this powerful image of insanity. When we are first introduced to the setting, the narrator describes her life in a "country house." When I began to catch the clues that there was a darker reality of her imprisonment, her true insanity started creeping in. I believe Perkins Gilman uses this style of writing to give an authentic perspective into a character that does not realize her own insanity.

As you can see, there is a clear difference between descriptive-reflective and analytical-reflective writing. Both involve making personal observations based in text. While descriptive writing does not require that you reach conclusions about the literature, analytical writing pushes you to complete all four steps in the process of reflective writing. Now, you get to practice!

Task #2:

Consider this quote from John Steinbeck's (1994) *Of mice and men*,

> "Well, we ain't got any," George exploded. "Whatever we ain't got, that's what you want. God a'mighty, if I was alone I could live so easy. I could go get a job an' work, an' no trouble. No mess at all, and when the end of the month come I could take my fifty bucks and go into town and get whatever I want. Why, I could stay in a cathouse all night. I could eat any place I want, hotel or any place, and order any damn thing I could think of. An' I could do all that every damn month. Get a gallon of whisky, or set in a pool room and play cards

> or shoot pool." Lennie knelt and looked over the fire at the angry George. And Lennie's face was drawn in with terror. "An' whatta I got," George went on furiously. "I got you! You can't keep a job and you lose me ever' job I get. Jus' keep me shovin' all over the country all the time." (p. 89).

For the first part of the task, use the space below to reflect on the quotation above. Limit your reflection to strictly descriptive. You should analyze what this quote is about, describe the images used by the author, and include your own personal reflection on the passage.

____
____
____
____
____
____
____
____
____
____
____
____

For the second part of the task, take this reflection one step further, and do an analytical-based reflection. For this part, focus on the theme of friendship. Where do you see this theme evident in the quotation above? What does the passage make you think about friendship in your own life? What point do you think Steinbeck is trying to make about friendship? Use the space below for your analytical-reflection.

____
____
____
____
____
____
____
____
____
____
____
____

3. What you say vs. how you say it

Differences in *what students say* and *how they say it* pose big problems to professors when teaching reflective writing. On a basic level, *what students say* has to do with the content of the reflection while *how they say it* focuses on proper use of English. This distinction is best explained in the "subject-matter" section from Alexander (1965): "What you have to say is quite as important as how you say it. An essay may be well written and well organized but still lack *substance*" (p. 82). Too often, students place an emphasis on effective writing, and the content of their essays suffer as a result.

Task #3:

For this task, you will get the chance to read excerpts from the perspective of professors. After reading each excerpt, you need to assign it a grade in each category. After you assign them a grade, comment on why you gave them the mark that you did.

Excerpt #1

Supportive and caring home environments are really important; children with these types of homes tended to do better in life as they are more likely to get along with people, avoiding the *development of mental disorders*. This is not the case of Lenny Small, one of the main characters of the novel *Of mice and men*. Lennie, a giant man with a shapeless face, has a mental disability, and because of this, he is completely dependent upon George, his only friend. George is always helping and instructing him as he is not capable of realizing the consequences of his actions. Throughout the narrative, readers can sense that he had not an ordinary childhood, as it can be assumed that he was abandoned by his parents, and consequently, raised by his Aunt, "… I knowed his Aunt Clara. She took him when he was a baby and raised him up. When his Aunt Clara died, Lennie just come along with me out working" (p. 40). In view of this, Lennie's love for petting soft things can be considered a side effect of his mistreatment during childhood. Moreover, the big man is also a victim of bullying, despite the fact that he is not aware of; "One day a bunch of guys was standin' around up on the Sacramento River… I ain't done nothing like that no more" (p. 41). Bullying is a traumatic experience, and it helps to increase psychiatric problems which affect social and emotional development. In this way, it can be inferred that the abandonment of his parents, the death of his aunt, and being a target of bullying lead to Lennie's final outcome: the killing of Curley's wife.

Criteria	Grade (out of 25)
Personal response (Does the student include his or her opinion?)	/25
Internal consistency (Are the ideas developed in a clear progression?)	/25
Quality reference to texts (Does the student select appropriate quotes?)	/25
Use of English (Is it well written, with few grammatical errors?)	/25
Comments (Why did you assign the grades that you did?):	

Excerpt #2

I now proceed in analyzing this concept of loneliness through the work of John Steinbeck's *Of mice and men*. What I find interesting about this narrative is that, in my perspective, two points are confirmed. Number one is the one already stated in which characters, despite being surrounded by others, they still feel alone; and point number two is that, despite the fact that characters really long for having someone in their lives, in the end it seems that they do their best to destroy whatever relationship they form. For example, in the case of tormented Lenny, he seems to do away with loneliness by petting rabbits since he is a child. However, as it happens to Curley's wife, when someone seems to show affection towards him, the rabbits, the woman in the red dress and Curley's wife are eventually killed by him. In the case of George, he many times argues that "guys like us, which work in ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world! (p. 15) in a reproachable way. But, Georges' apparent need of company comes with a price, and if it is not any beneficial for him, he will proceed, as he did with Lenny's life, to terminate it. Last but not least, we have the case of Curley's wife; she is married and around many people in the ranch, however, she sadly remarks: "Why I can't talk to you? I never get to talk to nobody. I get awfully lonely" (p. 85). And "I get lonely she said", "You can talk to people, but I can´t talk to nobody but Curley" (p.85). It may be the case that Slim's words: "Maybe everybody in the damn world is scared of each other" (p. 35), are certainly right.

Criteria	Grade (out of 25)
Personal response (Does the student include his or her opinion?)	/25
Internal consistency (Are the ideas developed in a clear progression?)	/25
Quality reference to texts (Does the student select appropriate quotes?)	/25
Use of English (Is it well written, with few grammatical errors?)	/25
Comments (Why did you assign the grades that you did?):	

Now, let's discuss the difference between what you say and how you say it. The latter focuses on your use of English. Is your essay written well? This includes your grammar, punctuation, clear organization of thought, and word choice. This is important, and for many English students, the emphasis is put on this side of writing. You have likely been told that to write well means you need to have a grasp on many of the technical skills we outlined above. This is true, however equally important is…

…*what you say* in your writing. This is the content. What point are you trying to make, and do you make it? This includes theme, meaningful quotes that demonstrate your understanding of the material, and connection between different parts of the piece of writing or between different pieces of literature. In reflective writing, your content should also be personal. You should include your own opinions on the literature, the major themes, and the quotes you select.

Task #4:

Return to the excerpts from essays above, and assign each one a category: either "well-written" or "personal reflection on content"

depending on where you think the student placed their focus. If they focused on the use of English, and writing in a more theoretical style, comment on where you saw this occur in their writing. If they focused on the content and including their own personal opinion comment on where you saw it.

Excerpt #1

- *Circle* one: “well-written” OR “personal reflection on content”
- *Comment* on where you saw this evidenced in the excerpt:

____
____
____
____
____
____

Excerpt #2

- *Circle* one: “well-written” OR “personal reflection on content”
- *Comment* on where you saw this evidenced in the excerpt:

____
____
____
____
____
____

To conclude this section, we include our own analysis of each excerpt above, as a summary of how your professors will view your writing. Following, find the grades and comments professors made on each of the excerpts we looked at during this section.

Excerpt #1

Criteria	**Grade (out of 25)**
Personal response (Does the student include his or her opinion?)	12/25
Internal consistency (Are the ideas developed in a clear progression?)	18/25

Quality reference to texts (Does the student select appropriate quotes?)	18/25
Use of English (Is it well written, with few grammatical errors?)	23/25
Comments (Why did you assign the grades that you did?): Very interesting, thought-provoking writing. Remember to connect the content to your personal life! Well-written analysis, missing your personal reflection on many of the ideas. Strong use of English.	

Excerpt #2

Criteria	Grade (out of 25)
Personal response (Does the student include his or her opinion?)	20/25
Internal consistency (Are the ideas developed in a clear progression?)	15/25
Quality reference to texts (Does the student select appropriate quotes?)	20/25
Use of English (Is it well written, with few grammatical errors?)	18/25
Comments (Why did you assign the grades that you did?): Strong personal response. You express your own opinions well. Make sure you add in this reflection at the end of your paragraphs, not just the beginning. Quotes develop your personal reflection well. Nice use of quotes from the literature as summaries of your opinion, but don't just drop them in without explaining them. There was some unusual preposition work, and some confusion with sentence structure. Overall, well done!	

It is important to note that we chose the excerpts for this section specifically because they offered a good contrast between content and technical writing skills. Remember, effective reflective essays are both well written and offer insightful personal reflection.

4. Writing a reflective essay

As a conclusion to this chapter, the last part will give you a chance to work through each of the four steps in the reflective writing process in more detail, and with opportunities to engage with each step through tasks. As a reminder, here are the four steps:

1. **Description**
2. **Evaluation**
3. **Analysis**
4. **Synthesis**

The first step, *describing*, should start when you pick up the book. People annotate in a variety of ways: journaling, writing notes in the margins, underlining or highlighting important excerpts. One key to reflective writing is that you have material to work with. If you mark meaningful passages while you read, it will set you up for success when reflecting later.

Step two is *reflection*. This should be done in conjuncture with the first step. When you are highlighting meaningful parts of the literature, you should reflect on them. Why did that part stand out to you? What did it make you feel or think of? How does it connect with other important parts of the work? While you answer these questions, remember to record your opinions so you can refer back to them later.

Task #5:

The following quotations are chosen specifically from Hemingway's (1954) *The sun also rises*. They represent the first step —description— in that they were chosen as parts of the story that the reader found meaningful and was able to connect them to a theme. Read the quotes below. While you read, comment—in the margins—on the parts of the passage that are underlined. **Describe** what these important phrases or words make you think of.

> She was sitting up now. My arm around her and she was leaning back against me, and we were quite calm. She was looking into my eyes

> with that way she had of looking that made you wonder whether she really saw out of her own eyes. **They would look on and on after every one else's eyes in the world would have stopped looking.** She looked as though there were nothing on earth she would not look at like that, and really she was afraid of so many things. 'And there's not a damn thing we could do,' I said. 'I don't know,' she said. 'I don't want to go through hell again.' (p. 22-23).

> You know Robert is going to get material for a new book. Aren't you Robert? That's why he's leaving me. He's decided I don't film well. You see he was so busy all the time that we were living together, writing his book, that he doesn't remember anything about us. So now **he's going out and getting some new material**. Well, I hope he gets something frightfully interesting." (p. 44).

> He seemed to handle it. That was it. Send a girl off with one man. Introduce her to another to go off with him. Now go and bring her back. **And sign the wire with love**. That was it alright. I went to lunch (p. 212).

Now, use the following lines to **evaluate** what you just read. What is your own personal reaction to the passage? ___________________
____
____
____
____
____
____
____

Step three, analysis, really focuses on the emergence of big themes. These are the big ideas that the author tackles explicitly or implicitly through his or her writing. Steps one and two, if done correctly, should make picking a theme easier. Once you reach this step, you are ready to begin the essay writing process.

Task #6:

Look at the following analysis of the Hemingway excerpts. The writer tries to make a point about the general theme of love. It is your job to determine why the point that the writer makes does not match up with the quotation that he has chosen. Once you determine where the writer made a poor or weak connection to the text, explain what you would change to improve their writing.

> Robert and Frances are a couple that fights all the time. The only thing Robert wants to do is have some peace and quiet so he can write his next book. Frances doesn't want him to write, she wants him to stay at home and focus on their relationship. Hemingway shows this dynamic when Frances says "So now he's going out and getting some new material. Well, I hope he gets something frightfully interesting," (Hemingway, 1954, p. 44). I believe that Hemingway is showing that love in a marriage means that sometimes you have sacrifices. Even though she doesn't want Robert to leave the house, Frances loves her boyfriend so she is excited for him to go take time for himself and find more material for his next book.

Why is this an example of the writer making a weak connection to the text? ____
____
____
____
____
____
____

How would you improve this analysis? ____________________
____
____
____
____
____
____

The last step in the process is the synthesis. As we previously defined, this step involves drawing a message from the literature. You have already identified a theme; now tell your audience what point you believe the author is making about that theme. Remember, while this involves using text-based evidence, the reader should still be able to clearly see your personal reflection.

Task #7:

For this final task, you will focus on the synthesis made below. The theme of *love* unifies the quotes chosen from *The sun also rises*, but Hemingway is trying to convey something specific about love through the selected excerpts. Using the following pieces of the three larger

quotes above, connect the reflection given to the point that the author is trying to make about love:

> Although she looked at him with eyes that "would look on and on after every one else's eyes in the world would have stopped looking" she still never chooses to be with him. These characters truly love each other, but are not able to be together. To me, Hemmingway is showing that sometimes there are clear and defined qualities that you look for in a spouse that are not negotiable. As much love as these characters share, his injury puts a strain on their relationship and makes their love unattainable.
>
> When she says "now he's going out and getting some new material" she is expressing her frustration that no matter how much she may have cared for him, his career and subsequent lifestyle lead him to lose interest in her. In my opinion, this shows that the idea of true love does not exist between these two characters. He chooses to be with her because she is interesting, but when he loses interest, he will go off to find somebody else.
>
> I believe he choses to "sign the wire with love" because he recognizes that the love he has for her is the closest she will get to real love. Because he loves her, however, he also recognizes that he will continue to take care of her as she runs off with new men who will only hurt her. He may never be able to be with her, but that does not mean that he will stop loving her.

When looking at the analysis of the quotes above, what point is the writer trying to make about love using these quotes? ________
____
____
____
____
____
____
____

What makes you say that? ________________________
____
____
____
____
____
____
____

Assignment:

Choose two or three literary works you have read and analyzed during the course, and, using the guidelines suggested in this chapter, write a reflective paper of your own.

References

Alexander, L. G. (1965). *Essay and letter writing.* London: Longman.

Berryman, J. (1989). The ball poem. *Collected Poems, 1937-1971.* New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux. (Original work published in 1937).

Dye, V. (2011). Reflection, reflection, reflection: I'm thinking all the time, why do I need a theory or model of reflection? In D. McGregor, & L. Cartwright (Eds.), Developing reflective practice: A guide for beginning teachers (pp. 217-234). Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill.

Gibbs, G. (1988). *Learning by doing*: A guide to teaching and learning methods. Oxford: Oxford Polytechnic Further Education Unit.

Perkins Gilman, C. (2009). The yellow wallpaper. *The American fantastic tales: Terror and the uncanny from Poe to the Pulps* (The Library of America) (pp. 131-147). New York: Literary Classics of the U.S. (Original work published in 1892).

Hemingway, E. (1954). *The sun also rises*. New York: Scribner.

Steinbeck, J. (1994). *Of mice and men*. New York: Penguin Books. (Original work published 1937).

CHAPTER 5

The narrative and the images: Turning a story into a photo-story

Enrique Alejandro Basabe
and Miriam Patricia Germani

1. Narrative and Photography

Do you remember when you were little kids and your parents kept a photo album? They probably glued in it pictures of you as a very small baby, of the very funny things you did when you were growing, of your first day at school. They started telling your story. Have you ever wondered why we label *stories* the quite uneventful events we post on Instagram? Most probably because, actually, we are trying to tell a story –or many. "In the end, we'll all become stories," claimed Canadian author Margaret Atwood (1939-). Or photo stories, we might add. Don't feel bad, though. Before we become stories, we still have a long way to go and become storytellers. Which, in fact, we are always in the process of becoming. Through the fantastic anecdotes that we tell to our families, the episodes of your favorite TV series we retell our friends, or the photo-stories of our life at university as we post it on the social media.

Both cognitive research and research of a more sociological nature suggest that storytelling is popular across cultures because it provides a framework in which we can more easily interpret human experience. Storytelling provides our experience with an order which may or may not be chronological but which in our minds works, as it were, orderly. Then, facts themselves, real or imaginary, become more memorable when they take the form of a narrative. Moreover, the effects of storytelling on us are so powerful that they even work even when the narrative transport us to "another world," through film or literature, for example. In those cases, we inevitably turn to our own life experiences to bear on the interpretation of the events and human actions carried out by other people. Well, not people, actually, but *characters*. Thus, we inflict on the characters we meet some traces of our experience, and, conversely, we may understand some paragraphs of our lives through the circumstances lived by the characters in the stories we read or watch on TV. The beauty contained in "Life had its way of adding day to day," an

apparently simple reflection by Mrs. Dalloway, for example, may help us fare through difficult days, though a person that only exists in fiction uttered the dictum. Likewise, we may choose to act a character and even utter the same words or she has used in film or in literature. One of us, for example, sometimes chose to act the serious, bad-tempered teacher and still uses some of the expressions of his favorite teacher as a kid, combined with those of Mag, a fierce mother in a play, or *la tana Ferro*, a popular character from an Argentine film.

Yet, it is not only through written or spoken discourse that we tell stories. As we stated at the very beginning, we also tell stories through pics. In this chapter we invite you to tell stories in a rather artistic way. We propose you to read short stories, which are in themselves the product of the imagination, and, using your creativity, turn them into photo stories. So, you will be required to enter the realm of a different artistic form: photography, and for that we will provide you with some basic tools on how to read images so that then you can create your own images based upon the stories. Thus, you will go from the written text to the visual text. So let's go, and let's do it!

2. What is a photo-story?

In the last decades, we have experienced two simultaneous processes in the context of photography. First, photographs have become widely available and extensively open for circulation. Second, cameras and cell phones have become accessible, and, consequently, most of us can use simple electronic devices to produce photographic fictions or on-the-spot documentaries. Actually, photography and the gadgets with which we take photographs are so overwhelmingly present in our everyday lives that we seldom stop to consider that the *photographic act* constitutes an act of creation (Dubois, 1986). Photographs are not just images, but they entail a way of thinking through which we establish particular relationships with time and space, action and being. Photographs turn into metaphors of our understanding of the world, and they are in fact a continuation of our psychic life. This, together with its high degree of accessibility in current times, has led many teachers and teacher educators to think about the chances of using photography in educational contexts.

In both South and North America, for example, Barndt (2001) has carried out workshops for adult immigrants on how to document their experiences in the hard settings of a foreign country through the production of their own photo-stories. Also in the context of English

language teaching, Dummett (2017) suggested practical examples to exploit the link between images and stories in the classroom because he claimed that "the five W's and the H," already tackled in Chapter 2 of this book, help students organize and give a clear structure to events and understand human character and emotion. Furthermore, Augustowsky (2012) reported that groups of primary school students in our country successfully recreated their daily experiences in artistic ways while learning how to use photographic techniques such as position, frame, perspective, and distance. All these experiences made us think about the probable ways in which we could integrate narrative and images in our literature classes, and we came up with the idea of exploring the ways in which we can turn the stories we read into photo-stories.

Our definition, then, goes: *photo-stories constitute the creative recreation of a short story through a series of photographs designed collaboratively by students and having themselves as characters in the visual version of the fictional narrative*. Now, in order to be able to do that, you should learn first how to read images, i. e., how to observe them closely and interpret their meaning, so that you can later creatively produce the images that will display your own interpretation of the stories. For that sake, we invite you to read a short story that became the source of inspiration for two students in the *English Literature II* class of 2015 to devise their photo-story. We ask you to do this because we will show you photographs belonging in that photo-story throughout this chapter for your close reading and interpretation. Therefore, it is good that you are acquainted with the original written narrative on which the images are grounded.

Task #1:

At home, read the story "Dying to see the sea" by South African contemporary author Shereen Pandit, available at http://bookslive.co.za/, and discuss it as a class. The photographs to be studied in this chapter refer to the characters and events in that story, and they were taken by Fátima Blanco and Ayelén Schneider Morales.

3. How to read images

In order to work with images, we need to develop *visual literacy*. Visual literacy is a systematic means of looking at images and developing an understanding and interpretation about the messages they convey (Corbett, 1996). Here we speak about "reading" images because we follow Kress and van Leewen's (1996) seminal work on the issue, in which they established parallels between textual analysis and the analysis of visual

images, and Corbett's (1996) adaptation of their grammar of visual design to the context of English language teaching. Visual images then have a *vocabulary* and a *grammar.* The people and objects represented in a photograph, including their *denotational* and *connotational* meanings, constitute the vocabulary of the image. This content is arranged in a particular way to convey a particular message. The relationship between the elements represented in the photograph becomes the grammar of the image. For example, the traditional thematic structure of a clause, i. e., the disposition of Theme and Rheme from left to right, is mirrored in the display of elements in an image.

Task #2:

Look at the image at the beginning of this chapter, and think about it in terms of its grammar and vocabulary. What can you see in the picture? Are there many elements in it or just a few? Are they people or objects? What do they represent? How are they placed in relationship to one another? What may that relationship imply?

Let's think about the positions of elements within the framework of a picture. We can relate the specific areas in which the elements are placed with a particular meaning. Broadly speaking, those relationships can be summarized as follows:

- A person or object placed in the **center** of a photograph is probably the most crucial element within that frame and the one on which we have to focus our attention.
- The element/s at the **margins** will be read as of less significance than the one/s set at the center.
- An element at the **top** is often associated with an ideal state, whereas one at the **bottom** tends to be interpreted as more realistic.

Another set of relationships can be established in terms of direction. As we have already suggested in **Task #2**, there is a correspondence between the grammar of the clause and that of visual representation:

- An element placed on the **left**, the Theme, usually provides the context or stands for elements with which the viewer is already familiar.
- An element on the **right**, the Rheme, is regularly the new information and the most relevant constituent in terms of meaning.

Task #3:

The photograph below corresponds to Wendy's arrival at Freddie's house in "Dying to see the sea." Observe its elements closely. In pairs, reflect on the questions below:

Can you identify a setting? Are you invited to focus on an object or person in the image? How? Where are they? What is their significance? How are they related to those at the margins?
Is the top/bottom opposition relevant in this picture? Why?
Does the image have a left-right structure? Explain.

Further considerations have to be made as regards the size of the elements, i. e., the people and the objects, in the photograph and the distance between them and the viewer:

- **Bigger** elements are interpreted as of a greater significance than **smaller** ones.
- Elements that stand together and have **similar sizes** are usually associated with group identity and a sense of community.
- Elements in the **foreground** show a greater proximity to the viewers than those in the **background** and, therefore, they suggest closeness with us.
- The **separation** of objects by devices such as railings or walls tend to be read as displaying disconnection or detachment from one another.

Task #4:

Look at the photograph below, and relate it to the events in "Dying to see the sea." Observe its elements closely. In pairs, reflect on the questions below:

Who is the main element in the photograph? Where is she placed in relation to the objects and setting? And in relation to the viewers? How does that make you feel?

What objects are shown in the photograph? What is their function? What symbolic value do they have? How are the person and the object related to one another?

Now, go back to the photograph in **Task #3**, and re-examine it considering the questions suggested above.

You may have noticed that people are central to photo-stories. The reason is that human action is key to all instances of storytelling. As in short stories, the point of view determines the perspective from which events are narrated, in photo-stories the gaze and facial expressions show the relationships that people establish with one another and with the viewer:

- **Eye-contact** with prospective viewers demands their attention.
- **Lack of eye-contact** places viewers in the position of observers.
- Eye-contact between the people in the photograph, as well as the **facial expressions** they display, signify the kind of relationship they have.

Task #5:

Go back to **Task #3** and **Task #4**, and analyze them in terms of the relationships established between the people in the photographs and with the viewers.

Now, look at the photograph below. It was used to illustrate an event in "Dying to see the sea." It was not taken by the students but downloaded from the Internet.

Analyze the photograph taking into account all the features we have discussed so far: center/margin, top/bottom, right/left, foreground/background, size and distance, eye-contact, and facial expressions. How does this analysis help you interpret the meanings in the photo? And in the photo-story so far?

What if we stop reading images a little bit and start creating our own photo-story? In order to do that, we suggest that you read a short story and take your first pictures. Aren't you excited? It's your turn. Let's do it!

Task #6:

Read "Eveline" from James Joyce's (1882-1941) short story collection *Dubliners*, published in 1914, available at http://www.online-literature.com, and discuss it as a class.

Re-read the opening scene from "Eveline:"

> She sat at the window watching the evening enter the avenue. Her head was leaned against the window curtains and in her nostrils was the odour of dusty cotton cloth. She was tired.

Then, in pairs, turn it into the first photograph in your photo-story.

Last, decide which are the key scenes in Eveline's interior monologue, and turn three of them into photographs.

In both cases, make careful considerations as regards the elements of visual design studied so far: center/margin, top/bottom, right/left, foreground/background, size and distance, eye-contact, and facial expressions.

Now, leave the technicalities aside for a little while, and pay a look at your classmates' pics. Do they reveal Eveline's pensive mood? Does she look tired? Can you see the concrete pavement and the path before the new red houses? If your answer to these questions is *yes*, then we are on our way to understanding human character and emotion as depicted for us in the written text and we are becoming able to translate it into images. Isn't that fascinating! It is. Just as it is the fact that one of you had to take the role of Eveline and recreate the way she feels so as to perform it for the picture. As we promised you at the beginning of this chapter, it is through standing in the shoes of the characters we meet that we may actually comprehend their responses to the realities that surround them, and perhaps later, when we face similar realities, choose to act the way they do in their stories –or not.

4. Description and narration in photo-stories

If we look at the photographs you have created for "Eveline," we will notice that the one that sets the scene is most probably a descriptive image. On the other hand, the ones that retell her story tend to be narrative. Now, do you know how we make the distinction between description and narration in images? In this section, we will briefly explore the differences between these two modes as we move from the written text to its visual representation.

Broadly speaking, when we distinguish between descriptive and narrative images, we consider whether one element in them is acting upon the other/s or not:

- In **descriptive** images, elements tend to be isolated from one another, as if they were displayed for our observation and reflection.
- In **narrative** images, the elements usually act upon one another in some way.

In order to "narrate" visually, an image needs vectors. Vectors are "line[s], often diagonal, which lead[s] the viewer's eye from one part of an image to another, often from represented character to character" (Corbett, 2003, p. 156). They fulfil a similar function to that of verbs in clauses in that they establish relationships between the elements in the photograph and they stand for *action*. For example, if a character points, gazes, or gesticulates at another one or at an object, he or she is acting, or displaying his or her intention to act, upon them, thus establishing a narrative.

The lack of vectors implies description. Descriptive images are particularly significant when they convey particular *symbolic* values. Objects, for example, can stand as metaphors or metonyms for their owners. A symbolic mood can be achieved through the manipulation of focus, tone, shade, and color. We often associate, for example, black-and white images with documentaries and sepia photographs with flashbacks and events that happened in the past.

Task #7:

Compare and contrast the photographs below. Decide whether they are narrative or descriptive, and provide reasons for your choice.

In the photographs, what kind of elements are displayed? What relationships are established between them? Can you distinguish any vectors? If so, what kind of action do they suggest? If there are no

vectors, what are you, as a viewer, expected to observe? What kind of feelings does the image arouse?

Have you noticed that all the pictures in the photo-story based on “Dying to see the sea” were in a monochromatic black-and-white? What may that symbolize in view of the events in the story? Did you know that from time to time the photo-story included blackouts? Could you re-live the events in the short story through the photo-story? Through images, we can re-create the stories we have read and we have lived. As with written text, images also allow us to tell stories and provide both real and fictional action with meaning. Here, we have tried to show you ways in which text and image can interact in a creative manner in order to express ourselves.

Task #8:

Now, let’s close Eveline’s story.

First, read the excerpt below, and create a photo to represent the scene:

> She stood up in a sudden impulse of terror. Escape! She must escape! Frank would save her. He would give her life, perhaps love, too. But she wanted to live. Why should she be unhappy? She had a right to happiness. Frank would take her in his arms, fold her in his arms. He would save her.

Then, finish reading the story, and recreate the end through a series of photographs. This will prove to be your own interpretation of the critical end of Eveline’s lifestory.

Share your photo story with the rest of the class.

Expressing ourselves means, in fact, becoming storytellers. Or photo-storytellers, we might add. We hope you have enjoyed the process, and you have noticed that, as we create and collect stories and photo-stories, life finds its ways of adding day to day.

Assignment:

Which of the short stories we’ve read in the course did you like best? In pairs, create a photo-story based on that story, and present it to the class. You may want to retell the story orally as you show the pictures to your classmates.

References

Augustowsky, G. (2012). *El arte en la enseñanza* [Art in teaching]. Buenos Aires: Paidós.

Barndt, D. (2001). Naming, making and connecting –Reclaiming lost arts: The pedagogical possibilities of photo-story production. In P. Campbell, & B. Burnaby (Eds.), *Participatory practices in adult education* (pp. 31-54). Mahwah, NJ, & London: Lawrence Earlbaum.

Corbett, J. (2003). *An intercultural approach to English language teaching.* Clevendon, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Dubois, P. (1986). *El acto fotográfico: De la representación a la recepción* [The photographic act: From representation to reception]. Barcelona: Paidós.

Dummet, P. (2017). The picture and the story. In K. Donaghy & D. Xerri (2017). *The image in English language teaching* (pp. 145.143). Floriana, Malta: ELT Council.

Joyce, J. (1914). Eveline. *The literature network*. Available at http://www.online-literature.com

Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (2006). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design* (2nd. ed). London & New York: Routledge.

Pandit, S. (2006). Dying to see the sea [Web log post]. Retrieved from: http://shereenpandit.bookslive.co.za/blog/2008/01/09/dying-to-see-the-sea-a-short-story/

CHAPTER 6

The building blocks of building books: The artist's book in practice

Lyuba Basin

1. An introduction to the art of the book

As we have seen, creative writing comes in many shapes and sizes. We have found creativity within both poetry and narrative, within both long stories and short. But, did you know that it is possible for our creative texts to go beyond the page and present themselves as works of art? For hundreds of years, bookmakers and writers have been exploring their creativity not just in *language* but also in the style and the form of the book itself. This chapter will encourage you to see the multiple ways in which short stories and poems can be transformed into creative and unique books and book objects.

First, let's start with a little brainstorming activity. When you think of the word *book*, what kind of images come to mind? Perhaps you are thinking about a textbook from school, or your copy of *Harry Potter.* It is likely that you can find such books in a library or a bookstore, and, if you like to read, you probably have many books of your own at home. Even if you do not like to read, you might enjoy flipping through a magazine or a picture book. For most of us, books are a familiar *thing*, and we have encountered at least one or two of them at some point in time.

Now, let's switch perspectives a little. What do you think of when you hear the word *art*? This might be a little trickier as art comes in a variety of forms. Usually we think of a painting or a sculpture, or perhaps we are more interested in performative arts such as music or dance. In most cases, even literature can be considered a type of art. Generally speaking, art is usually depicted in museums or galleries, while also associated as an important part of a country's culture. That being said, do you think that *books* and *art* have anything in common? What do you think of when you hear the term *artist's book?*

If ancient Japanese and Chinese scroll books, hieroglyphics, or illuminated manuscripts come to mind, you are already on the right track. According to British artist Sarah Bodman (2005),

> The artist's book format has evolved from a combination of many forms of historical and traditional book making [...] all of which employed a decorative element of text or image as a means to emphasize the contents of the message (p. 5).

This brings us closer to understanding the origins of artist's books, but in order to develop our own, clear definition, we must review the term from a number of different perspectives, starting by examining other related terms. Because there is such a variety of examples of artist's books and ambiguity as to what makes a book an artist's book, there has been a wide range of debate which results in many experts coming up with differing opinions. One specialist on the subject, Clive Phillpot (as cited by Klima, 1998, p. 27), has created a short list of subcategories that help organize the genre:

- **Book:** a collection of blank and/or image-bearing sheets usually fastened together along one edge and trimmed at the other edges to form a single series of uniform leaves.
- **Art book:** a book of which art or an artist is the subject.
- **Artist's book:** a book of which an artist is the author.
- **Book art:** artwork dependent upon the structure of a book.
- **Book object:** art object which alludes to the form of a book.

For the remainder of this chapter we will mainly focus on the last three terms: *artist's book, book art,* and *book object*. You might be saying to yourself now: "But I'm not an artist!" Rest assured, as these skills of creativity are accessible to all of us, and it will soon become clear just how important they are within the academic setting. We will take what we have learned from previous chapters and apply them to the practice of making physical representations of our immaterial thoughts. As discovered by librarian and artist's books curator Louise Kulp (2015), "[t]he introduction of artist's books into a liberal arts curriculum can effectively teach critical thinking, encourage discovery of interdisciplinary connections, and prompt consideration of relationships between text and image and form" (p. 101). As we begin to think more about creating our own artist's book, let's start with reflecting on this relationship of text, image, and form as the combination of special characteristics which represent the design of any artist's book. These characteristics include *structure, sequence, form, intimacy*, and *ineffability*.

A book artist will first decide on a *structure*, the three-dimensional shape of the book. Typically, when we think of a book we envision a four-sided object whose inner pages are held by a front and a back cover.

However, with artist's books, this is not always the case, which is why artist's books are often referred to as *book objects*. The structure of the book can be manipulated in a variety of creative ways that might involve binding, folding, cutting, and sculpting, just to name a few. Some book objects do not resemble books at all and might be compiled of smaller parts that come together to progress the narrative.

If we choose a structure that involves pages, we must decide on how the pages will be represented in the book. The book artist refers to *sequence* when deciding whether or not the work will contain a beginning and an end, whether the pages will follow each other in a consecutive order, or if some other kind of direction is needed to guide the reader. While usually reading requires us to start at the beginning, flipping through the pages until we reach the other end, there are, of course, alternative ways to tell a story. It is important to note that sequence is a crucial characteristic which contributes to the movement and pace of reading, adding to the experience of the text as a whole.

As we look on each individual page, what do we see? The *form*, or the way the text is situated on the page, is a way in which the book artist creates a place to combine language with visual experience. The text itself might be positioned in a way that reveals a unique design. It is also possible to include images that accompany and add to the understanding of the text. This might seem familiar if you have ever looked at illustrated books such as comics. However, the form is not limited to pictures. Exploring different *genres* might present new ideas on how to experiment with form. Have you ever seen a book formatted as a letter or an email? What about a crossword puzzle or a movie review?

So far, all of these characteristics have dealt with an *ineffable* component, or something that cannot be expressed with just words. This includes how a book is handled and held, whether there are pages to turn and the ways in which they might be, and how the language and the image interact on those pages to enhance the visual stimulation. Each of these characteristics applies to the *intimacy* between the reader and the book object, the "key ingredient" being active participation that engages both the eyes and the hands, or what Phillpot describes as retinal and tactile reading (as cited by Klima, 1998). For example, let's imagine a book made up of thin, fragile paper that requires us to handle each page very gently. As we turn the page, we hear a slight wrinkle that tickles our ear. The delicacy of the paper asks that we move slowly and therefore are encouraged to linger on the text, engaging with its *materiality*. What kind of narrative do you think could be presented here?

While there is no right answer to the question above, it is important for us to begin to think about the ways in which a book artist reveals layers of meaning in literature through *structure*, *sequence,* and *form*. While these characteristics certainly contribute to the design of the book, they should act not as a formula but rather a guide for our own artist's book creations. As we move forward, we will focus on examples that detail the different ways we can manipulate and develop our own stories into unique artist's books. If you are still uncertain about your level of creativity, don't fret. At this point we are still trying to figure out whether *books* and *art* have anything in common. Has your opinion changed? With your classmates, reflect on the questions below and compare your answers.

1. What is the relationship between reading and writing?
2. Define *culture*.
3. In your opinion, what is the most important aspect of culture?
4. What is the relationship between literacy and culture?
5. Define *art*.
6. Is art something that you can read?
7. What is the relationship between literacy and art?
8. On a separate sheet of paper, draw a book.

Task #1:

Find one book (any book), and describe it in a paragraph using the characteristics we have previously discussed. In a second paragraph, present ideas as to how you might transform the book into an *artist's book*.

2. A journey through the senses

While defining what an artist's book *is* presents quite a challenge, perhaps it is even more difficult to decide what kind of artist's book one wants to create. The remainder of this chapter will be dedicated to helping you find the inspiration needed to engage creativity head-on, while also using the language skills you have already acquired. Each activity builds upon the one before, so it is important that you do not rush ahead. The first step is to brainstorm and outline ideas for our writing projects. Then, we will work to develop those narratives by applying certain literary devices to emphasize meaning and thematic structure. This will allow you to address the special characteristics of

the artist's book and make them unique to your story. Finally, we will provide information to guide you in the creation of your very own book object!

Combined with the creation of an artist's book, activating the senses should also be considered a key component in any academic environment. According to a study on art in English language learning classrooms, Masoumeh Farokhi and Masoud Hashemi (2011) found that "opportunities to practice the arts benefit students' cognitive development and enhance literacy and language development" (p. 925). Furthermore, their studies show language programs which incorporate the arts "encourage critical and conceptual thinking along with technical and creative problem-solving skills," allowing students to "develop their voices; enhance multicultural awareness; take pride in heritage; and recognize their role in, respond to, and participate in the world at large" (p. 925). The creation of the artist's book is not simply a measure of a student's artistic ability. It is an activity that will further assist all students in their academic careers by combining the engagement of multiple intelligences with language learning practices.

Some of you may already have ideas for your artist's book, but for many of us this is still a new concept that requires extra time and attention. Paying attention is easier said than done, especially in a world like ours filled with distractions. With smartphones and TVs we often forget to pay attention to some of the most important things, like our five senses. In the context of artist's books, focusing on the senses can help derive inspiration for your working narrative. How often do you pay attention to your *senses*? When was the last time you noticed a savory smell or tasted something exceptionally sweet? Have you ever touched something rough and scratchy? What did that *feel* like? What did it *sound* like? What sense or senses are most stimulated when you read books?

These may seem like simple questions with simple answers, but let's look more closely. If you think *sight* is the sense most stimulated when reading, you are not incorrect. Mainly, the act of reading does require us to use our eyes, following the text along the page. But other senses might also be activated (with a little bit of imagination) if we think about how authors use descriptive language, or *imagery*, in creative writing. To go further, we can *defamiliarize* our everyday experiences and bring out extraordinary details. *Defamiliarization* is a literary concept coined by Russian Formalist, Viktor Shklovsky. It is a way to "make fresh, new, strange, different what is familiar and known" (Cuddon & Preston, 1999, p. 214).

According to Shklovsky, “the purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived, and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects ‘unfamiliar’, to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty of length and perception” (as cited in Cuddon & Preston, 1999, p. 214). Applying this concept as an exercise for both brainstorming and writing will help you pay attention to details that might otherwise go unnoticed. These details can be crucial in determining the special characteristics of your own artist’s book because, unlike regular books, artist’s books are able to engage with the senses both *figuratively*, by means of language, and *literally*, through the manipulation of structure and form. Depending on the theme of the narrative, an artist’s book might want to actively engage with specific senses or even attempt to activate all five.

Of the five senses, *sight* is likely the easiest to engage with while creating an artist’s book, as there are a number of ways we can activate this sense without spending too much time, money, or resources. While we can quickly manipulate our book with a splash of color or a complementary illustration on the page, it is important to note that sight is not solely limited to color and image. In a similar way the style and appearance of the text, known as *typography*, can engage sight by creating designs with the words themselves. Text can be arranged in new and unique layouts or altered in size and shape, each variation quite possibly guiding a change in the volume, pitch, pace, and tone of reading. In all circumstances, the visual aspects of the artist’s book should accompany the content of the narrative, by emphasizing main ideas, keywords, or motifs.

Following sight, the next sense that plays a major role in our reading would be *touch.* Even a typical book requires a lot of holding and handling and, depending on the size and shape of the book, our reading experience might be totally different. For example, a heavy textbook, compared to an information brochure, is much more difficult to read while standing up. On the other hand, the thin pages of a magazine do not provide the same kind of support for taking notes as that of a textbook. And, if you are reading from a phone or a laptop, you don’t have to ‘flip’ any pages, but rather you ‘scroll’ with your finger or mouse. Without realizing, every time we read and interact with objects such as books, brochures, magazines, and phones, our sense of touch is being stimulated with information about texture, weight, and shape. Much like the visual aspects just mentioned, the tactile features can also enhance a reader’s experience in an immense way.

Unlike sight and touch, our sense of *hearing* is not typically discussed when we refer to reading. In most contexts, what we hear is totally unrelated to what we read. However, it is difficult to imagine complete silence while reading, as there is often background noise: other students chatting nearby, maybe the television is on, or perhaps the radio. You might even be one of those readers who puts on a set of headphones and settle in to a good book. Hearing is, of course, one of the most important senses we have because it is what first allowed us to communicate with each other. It is the origin sense of language itself. Surprisingly, hearing can also be associated with reading. Have you ever listened to the sound the page makes when you turn it over? How might this affect your reading experience? How might it influence the way you read and interpret a narrative? Later on, we will discuss in more detail how the *materiality* of the page impacts the reading and enhances the artist's book.

The final two senses, *taste* and *smell*, are without a doubt the most unlikely perceptions we would engage with while reading, but they should not be disregarded completely. There are still a number of ways these senses can be activated (without the reader making a snack of the book). Taste and smell are predominantly linked, as taste is often triggered by activating smell. There are certain 'smells' that can incite memories or thoughts, and it is possible to incorporate these smells into the reading experience. Some of the most common smells we recognize are sweet and fruity, or floral and herbal. These fragrances are often associated with women's perfume. Some aromas are reminiscent of different types of foods and drinks, like lemon, mint, chocolate, and coffee. There are also scents that are not as pleasant, such as milk, moldy wood, sweat, garlic, and gasoline. Incorporating smell and taste into your artist's book may or may not be a direction you want to go, but it is important to note it as another option to consider.

As we mentioned previously, focusing on the senses can be helpful for finding inspiration and brainstorming ideas for our stories and books. Now that we have learned how senses are activated while reading, it is time that we get out there, use our senses, and gather "inspirational material" for the next step in creating your artist's book. According to Bodman (2005),

> inspirational material can be used to develop a narrative, something that relates to a particular time or place; a set of photographs or post-cards may suggest a history of places, people dates and events, whether real or imagined that will naturally work in a book format (p. 8).

With her advice, we encourage you to go on a journey, whether it is a short walk or a longer travel, and document your experience in a notebook. Gather and collect small objects as you go -these can include receipts, bus tickets, leaves and flowers, candy wrappers, brochures, and flyers- nothing is out of the question. With your classmates, reflect on where you might take your journey, then answer and discuss the questions below:

1. What is your learning style? Describe the ways in which you learn.
2. Of the five senses, which one is the most important to you? Which is the least important to you? Describe why.
3. Which senses are engaged when reading a book?
4. Which senses do you want to engage in your artist's book?
5. Where will you take your 'inspiration gathering' trip?

Task #2:

Go on a journey to a place that you really enjoy (walk if you can!). During your journey, gather 'souvenirs' that might document your experience. In one paragraph, describe the trip using all five senses. In a second paragraph, use Shklovsky's concept of *defamiliarization* and rewrite your experience, turning the ordinary into something new and strange.

3. Creative writing and the artist's book

Now that we have an understanding of how the five senses can be applied to the development of an artist's book, we move forward to the writing process and the use of literary devices. While there are a number of literary devices that writers can employ to make their stories unique and powerful, this chapter will focus on the four which are most beneficial to the challenges of book-making. Following the brief introduction of *defamiliarization* and *imagery* from the previous section, we will also discuss *setting* and *characterization*. With examples from a wide range of authors, these four techniques will be expanded upon to make them particularly applicable to artist's books. Of course, your creativity is not limited to these techniques alone, and we highly recommend looking to other literary devices for more inspiration, if needed.

From Cuddon & Preston's (1999) *Dictionary of literary terms and literary theory* we define *defamiliarization* as a literary concept that allows

a writer "to make fresh, new, strange, different what is familiar and known" (p. 214), as already defined above. You were also given the task to rewrite and *defamiliarize* your own sensory observations. If this activity was challenging, then you were doing it right. There is no formula to memorize when it comes to *defamiliarization*, you only need to understand that even the most familiar things can be described in such a way that they seem unusual. Cuddon and Preston (1999) remark that "through defamiliarization the writer modifies the reader's habitual perceptions by drawing attention to the artifice of the text [...] What the reader notices is not the picture of reality that is being presented but the peculiarities of the writing itself" (p. 214). Let's take a closer look at how this works by analyzing a short passage from Zora Neale Hurston's (2006) novel, *Their eyes were watching God.* Read the passage below and write down key words or phrases that are of interest, words that might be transformed into a physical expression (when text becomes material):

> She was stretched on her back beneath the pear tree soaking in the alto chant of the visiting bees, the gold of the sun and the panting breath of the breeze when the inaudible voice of it all came to her. She saw a dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of a bloom; the thousand sister calyxes arch to meet the love embrace and the ecstatic shiver of the tree from root to tiniest branch creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight. So this was a marriage! She had been summoned to behold a revelation. Then Janie felt a pain remorseless sweet that left her limp and languid. (p. 11)

This passage uses nature to defamiliarize the feeling of 'coming of age,' which the protagonist, Janie, has while lying under a pear tree. She describes the bees as chanting, the wind as a panting breath, the flowers and the bees in a love embrace, all of which "left her limp and languid." From this scene alone, there are a number of different ways one could transform the text into an artist's book: with a simple accompanying image, flowing text, or with paper as fragile as petals of a flower. The book itself could also be sculpted to resemble a flower, with the text carefully placed among the petals. Perhaps, instead, there is a focus on the ceremony of marriage, and the artist's book takes on a completely different variation of the scene. There is no right or wrong answer, we only ask that you look closely, pay attention, and derive from what is in the text.

Imagery was earlier defined as "descriptive writing," but there is a lot more to uncover if we are to understand how to recognize it and, furthermore, how to write it. According to Cuddon & Preston (1999),

"imagery as a general term covers the use of language to represent objects, actions, feelings, thoughts, ideas, states of mind and any sensory or extrasensory experience" (p. 413). It is the kind of descriptive writing that presents 'mental images' that are associated with sensation in the reader's mind. Imagery can include the five senses, as we mentioned before, but it can also describe movement and action. In her novel, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek,* Annie Dillard (1998) uses imagery to detail a winter evening. As you read the passage below, make note of the images that catch your attention and describe what sensations they might involve:

> At dusk every evening an extended flock of starlings appears out of the northern sky and winds toward the setting sun. It is the winter day's major event. Late yesterday, I climbed across the creek, through the steer's pasture, beyond the grassy island where I had seen the giant water bug sip a frog, and up a high hill. Curiously, the best vantage point on the hill was occupied by a pile of burnt books. I opened some of them carefully: they were good cloth- and leather-bound novels, a complete, charred set of encyclopedias decades old, and old, watercolor-illustrated children's books. They flaked in my hands like pieces of pie. Today I learned that the owners of the house behind the books had suffered a fire. But I didn't know that then; I thought they'd suffered a terrible fit of pique. I crouched beside the books and looked over the valley. (p. 39)

While not a lot happens in this short passage, it is still filled with a lot of detail that we can use in terms of thinking about artist's books. Some of the most prevalent imagery describes the pile of burnt books, "they were good cloth- and leather-bound novels [...] They flaked in my hands like pieces of pie." In this scene, it is clear that Dillard strives to activate our senses of touch and smell: the fragileness of the burnt pages, the smell of the leather. How wonderfully these fragments of books become juxtaposed with the beautiful overlook of the valley, the winding creek and pasture, the setting sun! The approach to applying this imagery to an artist's book can certainly go two ways. On the one hand, there is a lovely winter scene with birds flying overhead, but the book can also be manipulated to resemble the charred books found on the hill. This passage, developed mainly through imagery, asks us to pay close attention to sensory experience.

Like defamiliarization and imagery, *setting* also uses descriptive language, although it is specific to details that help position the reader in a particular time, place, and context. For each story, the author must build a world for the characters to live in. In most cases, what is written

within the text is only a small portion of the entirety of the setting. Time could be described as the duration in which an action takes place, referring to seconds, minutes, hours, days, weeks, months, years, and so on and so forth. While place details the surrounding environment, a particular space in which an action takes place, possible environments could be buildings, landscapes, cities, or countries, even planets and galaxies. The context of the setting describes the circumstances of narrative, whether they are historical, political, or cultural. In *Walden*, Henry David Thoreau's (1981) describes the setting of his cabin in the woods. Think about how time, place, and context work together in the passage below:

> When I first took up my abode in the woods, that is, began to spend my nights as well as my days there, which, by accident, was on Independence day, or the fourth of July, 1845, my house was not finished for winter, but was merely a defence against the rain, without plastering or chimney, the walls being of rough weather-stained boards, with wide chinks which made it cool at night. (p. 57)

Even without the context of the entire novel, this short passage from *Walden* presents a setting with enough information to describe when and where the scene takes place. We are told that the narrator first moved into his house *in the woods* on July 4, 1845, or *Independence Day*. The holiday is especially relevant as it foreshadows the growth of narrator's independence throughout the novel, and by doing a little extra research about the mid-nineteenth century in United States we can gather the historical, cultural, and political context of this narrative. What is determined from the setting can be directly applied to the appearance of the artist's book. Let's imagine Thoreau's protagonist writing a novel in the woods, nearly two centuries ago -something handwritten in a small, leather-bound notebook, with flower petals and leaves gathered from the woods inserted between pages.

Actively or passively, characters always interact with the setting, and each one will do so very differently depending on his or her personality. This personality is revealed through *characterization* either directly (by telling) or indirectly (by showing). Indirect characterization defines the character by different aspects such as *speech* - what the character says; *thoughts* - what the character thinks; *actions* - what the character does, how the character behaves; *looks* - how the character dresses and carries his or herself; and *affect* - the character's effect on other people, how secondary characters feel and behave in reaction to the character. The way an author approaches characterization is often dependent on

the *point of view* of the narrative. In her novel, *Jazz*, Toni Morrison (1993) uses a third-person limited narrator to describe the protagonist of the story, Violet. After reading the passage below, discuss what type of characterization, direct or indirect, is being used. What do we know about Violet?

> Sth, I know that woman. She used to live with a flock of birds on Lenox Avenue. Know her husband, too. He fell for an eighteen- year-old girl with one of those deepdown, spooky loves that made him so sad and happy he shot her just to keep the feeling going. When the woman, her name is Violet, went to the funeral to see the girl and to cut her dead face they threw her to the floor and out of the church. She ran, then, through all that snow, and when she got back to her apartment she took the birds from their cages and set them out the windows to freeze or fly, including the parrot that said, "I love you." (p. 3)

The most striking aspect of this passage is the narrator's distinct *voice*. In this novel, the third-person narrator seems to have a close relationship with the characters, telling the story from a close perspective and a casual tone. While this passage leaves a lot to the reader's imagination, there are many details about its characters that can be read between the lines. The information presented here introduces the protagonist, Violet, and the conflict that occurs between her, her husband, and her husband's lover. Beyond this, there is a description of winter, the *symbolism* of birds, and the color violet, all of which are connected to the characterization of Violet. Since there is little said in regards to what Violet *looks* like, we can use these elements of narrative collectively, or separately, to create a metaphorical depiction of Violet in the artist's book.

The application of literary devices to the development of artist's books may seem, at first, like an extra and unnecessary step, but before one can become a book artist, one must learn the intricacies of language and writing. Like the five senses, literary devices can act as a catalyst for creative thinking. They are used to reinvent familiar ideas so that we may manipulate them into our own unique, personal narratives. While it can be argued that some artist's books lack text and, therefore, lack literary devices, it is impossible for any story to exist without them. Even when language is lacking, we use materiality to develop meaning, and, under close examination, even our most basic conversations with friends and family incorporate these four literary devices, and perhaps others. Think about a conversation you had with a friend recently. With your classmates, talk about what devices you use in conversation and discuss the questions below:

Are there ways to read artist's books without text? How?

How does the materiality of the book enhance meaning?

Of the four literary devices we mentioned, which is the easiest to apply in creating artist's books? Which literary device is the hardest? Why?

Of the four short passages we read, which passage was your favorite? Describe it.

Are there other literary devices that were not mentioned, one could use and apply in artist's books?

Task #3:

Choose two literary devices to brainstorm ideas for your artist's book. On one page, describe how these devices apply to *structure*, *sequence*, *form*, *intimacy*, and *ineffability*.

4. Text becomes material: Time to *EXPRESS YOURSELF!*

Are you ready to start making your very own artist's book? We are almost there, but there is just one final step we have to cover before we can put your creativity into practice. In this last section, we will review a variety of methods that can be used in the production of your artist's book, detailing typography, materials, sculptural forms, zines, and digital outputs. Regardless of the method you choose, each of your book objects will reflect both unique narratives and specific skill sets of each book artist. If you are concerned about costs and equipment, we hope this section will assure you that making an artist's book does not have to be an expensive endeavor. With our newfound knowledge of literary devices and sensory reading experience, we will explore a number of different techniques used by contemporary book artists to help you decide how you might best tell your story. If you have any 'aha' moments along the way, make sure you write them down to remember and document your progress.

We have already briefly mentioned how the style and appearance of text on a page can influence a reader's experience. The text can be manipulated structurally through size, shape, color and orientation. Bodman (2005) states,

> using subtle variations of text shapes, styles and color can allow your book to be read on more than one level. If certain words within a passage of text are printed in italic or another typeface or color, the

viewer is then able to read the message through the emphasis that you have given (p. 22).

While the practice of typography is not new, its resurgence in bookmaking became popular in early 20th century Futurist publications. Russian Futurist, Vasily Kamensky explored "the visual and structural attributes of a given word or line, [suspending] the acoustic component of the verse," (as cited in Harte, 2004, p. 546). In addition to being read, his poems performed in accordance to their layout on the page. Navigating the typography like a map, the reader is forced to engage the text with a duality of language and image.

Below, you will find two excerpts of the same English translation of Kamensky's poem, "Tango with cows". In it, you can see how the size, shape, and layout of the text contribute to the reading experience. While the poem is very abstract and likely leaves us with more questions than answers you can still think about the ways in which certain textual variations work to change your perceptions in reading. Without any additional context, what underlying meaning can you decipher and develop? What does the typography reveal about the subject matter or theme of the poem? Finally, as you read the poem as it appears in a 'normal' typeface, in which ways does it change your reading experience?

TANGO with COWS

life's shorter than the sparrow's squeal

that hound seems to float there on

the spring river floe

with ***tin'd*** *revelry we gaze*

on destiny

Stitched as a sea snag

loneliness

WE — *the discoverers of countries*

legislative ***maggots***

KINGS OF ORANGE GROVES AND

C O W P O K E S

Maybe we'll drink a glass of wine for

Health plans expiring

Or better yet wind up the gramophone

Tango with cows

Life's shorter than a sparrow's squeal

That hound seems to float there on

The spring river floe

With tin'd revelry we gaze

On destiny

Stitched as a sea snag

Loneliness

We - the discoverers of countries

Manipulating typography is one of the easiest techniques of book arts, especially if you have access to a computer and printer, usually available in your university library. In addition, you can also apply your drawing skills and imitate typefaces by hand with just pen and paper. The true beauty of art is that it is accessible to just about anyone, and oftentimes it can be found right before our eyes. "With the vast amount of advertising flyers and cards littering streets and telephone boxes, it is good to know that there is always a chance that you might happen upon some art," (Bodman 2005, p. 48). In fact, recycling paper is considered both a cost-effective and creative way to making artist's books. Scraps from flyers, magazines, photographs, notebooks and even old books can be repurposed in a variety of ways to help you develop a structure and design unique to you. In addition, you can also check out your local stationary store to find paper of different sizes, textures and colors. Bodman (2005) suggests to "look around[...]; if you have paper, glue and maybe a stapler, you already have the materials to get going" (p. 50). Depending on the materials and equipment that are available, you can explore the structural aspect of the book and decide whether it will take the standard form that can be held or read, or something more abstract and physically challenging, this can include cutting, folding, binding, pasting, flipping and erasing. We can think back to certain children's books, "which make considerable use of pop-ups, cut outs and accordion folds [that] fulfill an esthetically expressive purpose in the artist book and, in addition, force adults to question their own approach to reading" (Hubert, 1999, p. 8). Structural methods can originate in your imagination, but there are also a many online resources that can guide you in developing your book's structure. A simple search online can direct you to manuals, handouts, and step-by-step videos that only take some extra commitment and patience. You can even try searching for book artists in your local area. Laura Beckman, from Santa Rosa, La Pampa, is just one of the many you might find.

Because of its focus on materiality and visual form, artist's books can often transcend language barriers while still remaining faithful to their individual cultures. Artist's books present a new alternative in sharing personal narratives cross-culturally. Sharing your artist's book might require you to make multiple editions, or copies, possibly in the form of a *zine*. Zines (short for magazines) were first created in the United States as a cheap way to share new ideas and art. The creator or collaborators of a zine would simply photocopy pages to produce hundreds or thousands of small pamphlets to be passed around among their friends. While different from the artist's books we have been discussing, zines can still be seen as a highly creative and unique transition from traditional books,

specifically because of their reception among subcultural groups outside of mainstream popularity. Prior to blogging and the internet, zines were used to establish communities based on particular interests such as punk music and feminism.

Despite the emphasis of the material nature of artist's books, consideration can still be paid to digital and computer based projects. After thousands of years handling physical books, rapidly growing technological advancements have allowed us to experience reading in a whole new way. For those of us who are savvier to technology, artist's books created in a digital format can be yet another alternative to think about. According to Bodman (2005), "using the internet in this way allows artists to publish work and make it accessible worldwide, without the physical expense of print and paper costs" (p. 47). Canadian artist David Clark developed one such virtual reading experience in a project called *88 constellations for Wittgenstein*. This 'book' can be accessed online through the website http://88constellations.net/88.html. By 'clicking on different constellations, the biographical narrative of Austrian-British philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein is revealed to the reader in a series of recorded audio and moving parts. Many other modern-day book artists have begun using the digital format in order to widen the demographic of readers across a much larger scope. On a more basic scale, digital formats can also be created through a combination of music, blogs, and home-made videos.

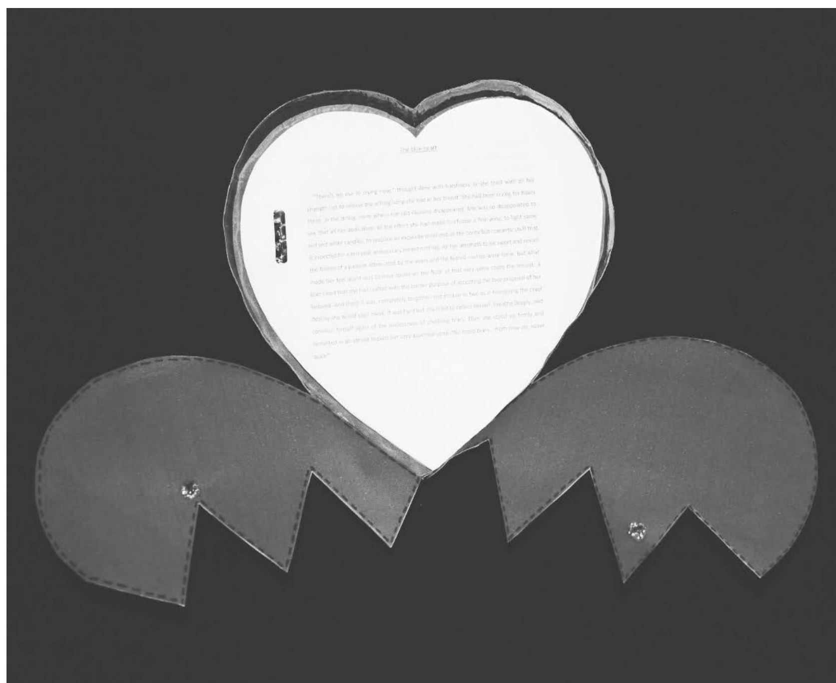
As we have uncovered, there is really no limit to how you choose to present your artist's books. This is only a guide to help you come up with inspiration and ideas along the way. Furthermore, it is important to understand that it only takes a little bit of creativity and not a lot of money to take advantage of the resources, materials, and equipment available to you. We have described

- how simple changes in typography can influence the meaning of a text in an immense way,
- how recycled paper can be used to develop unique visual style and form,
- how altering your book by cutting, folding, and binding can enhance the reading experience for adults and children alike, and
- how zines and digital books can help a book artist reach larger audiences.

In whole, we have redefined what it means to read a book by applying certain literary techniques to these methods and developing a new relationship between language, literature, art, and culture.

Now it is time for each of you to take the stories you have written and reinvent them into your own artist's book creations! We encourage the continuation of discussion, especially within the collaboration of the tasks previously mentioned. Brainstorm your ideas with at least two or three classmates, and keep notes of any comments or suggestions. Creativity is not an endeavor we should take on alone; it is through the participation of many people, many languages, and many cultures that we gain inspiration to create art. With each of you moving forward as new book artists, the last step is to finalize your project with a one-page *artist statement*, a written description of your work that explains your production, methods, and ongoing development from start to finish. We hope that you share your stories among your friends, family and peers, and continue to *EXPRESS YOURSELF*!

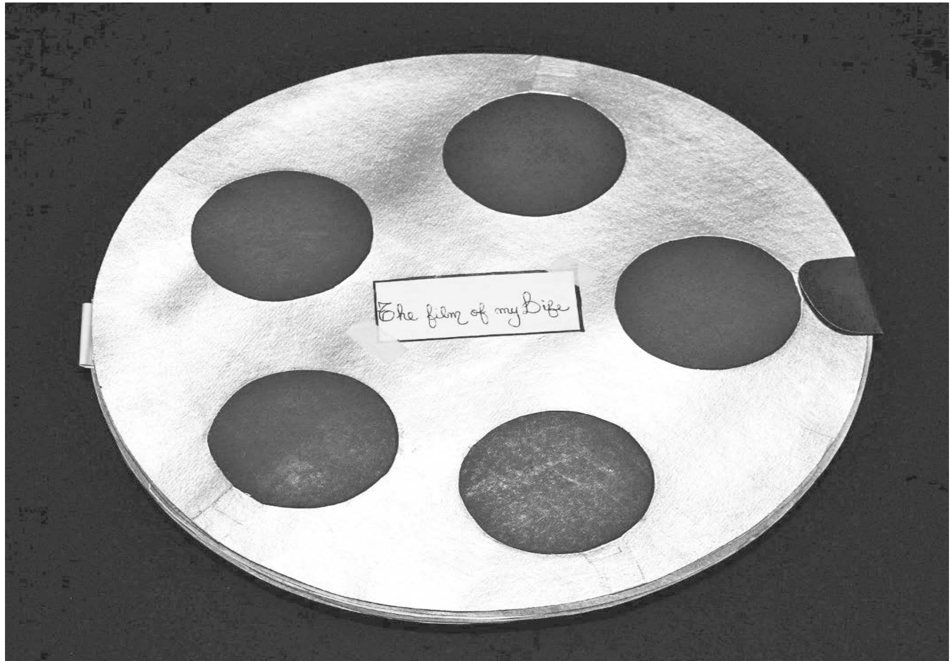
Just to get inspired, look through the artist's books below, and think about the stories they may hide, waiting to be shared and enjoyed.



Alexandra Fuentes, 2016.

Mercedes Berastegui, 2016.

Sol López, 2016.



Belén Olivares, 2016.

References

Bodman, S. (2009). *Creating artist's books*. London: A & C Black.

Cuddon, J. A., & Preston, C. E. (1999). *The Penguin dictionary of literary terms and literary theory* (4th ed.). London: Penguin.

Dillard, A. (1988). *Pilgrim at tinker creek*. New York: Harper Perennial.

Farokhi, M., & Hashemi, M. (2012). The impact/s of using art in English language learning classes. *Procedia. Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *31*, 923–926. doi:10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.12.170.

Harte, T. (2004, winter). Vasily Kamensky's "Tango with Cows:" A modernist map of Moscow. *The Slavic and East European Journal*, *48*(4), 545-66.

Hubert, R. R., & Hubert, J. D. (1999). *The cutting edge of reading: Artist's books*. New York: Granary Books.

Hurston, Z. N. (2006). *Their eyes were watching* God. New York: Harper Perennial. (Original work published 1937).

Klima, S. (1998). *Artist's books: A critical survey of the literatur*e. New York: Granary Books.

Kulp, L. A. (2015). Teaching with artist's books: An interdisciplinary approach for the liberal arts. *Art Documentation: Journal of the Art Libraries Society of North America*, *34*(1), 101- 123.

Morrison, T. (1993). *Jazz*. New York: Plume Fiction.

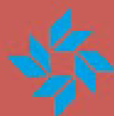
Thoreau, H. D. (1981). *Walden and duty of civil disobedience*. London: Norton. (Original work published 1854).

Imprimen 1000 ejemplares en la Imprenta de la Universidad Nacional
de La Pampa, dependiente de la Secretaría de Cultura y Extensión Universitaria:
Danilo Hernandez y Diego Mospruker.

Santa Rosa, La Pampa, junio de 2018

This is a practical guide for students to explore creativity as they progress through *English Language IV* and *English Literature II* of the English Language Teacher Education program at the National University of La Pampa. It provides them with a rationale and a variety of structured though imaginative techniques for integrating creativity and language learning at an advanced level. In a cline extending from the more traditional, written genres to the more visual, even multimodal ones, this textbook invites students to explore the possibilities of the Imagist poem, the short story, the reflective paper, the photo story, and the artist's book as channels for both artistic creation and reflective language practice. Each chapter offers a definition of the genre under consideration and a set of strategies and tasks suggested for the study and creation of written and visual texts, as well as samples of students' production as a token for what can be done with English if purposely tackled creatively. In sum, this is an invitation for students to express themselves.

UNLPam
Universidad Nacional de La Pampa



REUN
RED DE EDITORIALES DE UNIVERSIDADES NACIONALES

ISBN 978-950-863-334-7
9 789508 633347