



Hello!

Thank you for your interest in Boundaries and Bridges. We hope this packet is helpful and interesting and that it inspires you to create thought-provoking art!

Boundaries and Bridges will be a collection of short stories, poetry, nonfiction, and comic strips that will be published and disseminated in prisons and throughout Alaska. The theme of the collection, Boundaries and Bridges, is a call for writing that widely explores our connections and disconnections. We are looking for short work, less than 2000 words, because we plan to publish the collection through StoryCube story dispensers throughout the state. These are small boxes that allow readers to press a button and receive a story, poem, or comic from the collection.

The team behind this project is a group of individuals who are committed to building a story culture that crosses profound social barriers. We are a group of educators committed to increasing educational opportunities for incarcerated Alaskans, fostering connections to the outside world, and building opportunities for reentry. The collection will be edited by Jaclyn Bergamino, who teaches creative writing at UAF and taught at Hiland Mountain Correctional Center, and Naomi Hutchquist, an award-winning Fairbanks-based visual artist. Boundaries and Bridges is a project sponsored by the Learning Inside Out Network (LION), the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF), and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA).

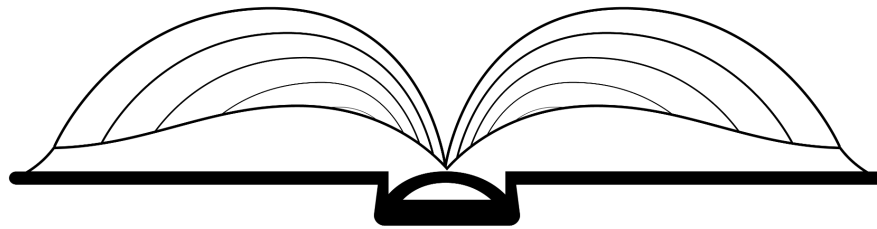
In this packet, you will find our call for submissions, which gives details about the kind of writing we are looking for, instructions for sending us your work, and information about how and where it will be published. You will also find articles on the craft of writing to help give some instruction and ideas about how to create short-form pieces of poetry, fiction, nonfiction, and comics. This packet also includes some examples that have come from StoryCubes. We hope you will also be able to form your own small writing group with this packet and provide feedback to your fellow writers and artists inside.

Finally, at the end, you will find several writing prompts to get your creative juices flowing. You can use these prompts to get started on new ideas, but you can also send us art and writing that you have already created or that does not respond to the prompts. These prompts are just meant as suggestions for getting started, but we are open to all kinds of writing and art that are loosely connected to our theme of Boundaries and Bridges.

If your work is chosen to be included in the Boundaries and Bridges collection, we will work with you to polish the work and get it ready for publication. If you would like to get feedback on your writing as you develop your ideas, please submit drafts to us by June 1, 2023. This will allow us time to read your work, send you personalized feedback, and give you time to revise as you see fit. The date for final submissions is **Jul 31, 2023**.

No personal defining information in your submission, please. If personal identifying information is a part of a submission, we reserve the right to edit to protect all parties.

Call for Submissions



Boundaries and Bridges

Boundaries and Bridges is a story collection from both incarcerated and unconfined writers to be distributed by portable story dispensers inside and outside of carceral settings in Alaska. Our inaugural collection theme, Boundaries and Bridges, invites writing and art that explores connection and disconnection. We are currently accepting submissions of stories, comics, creative nonfiction, and poems, written and image-based, that cross boundaries and build bridges between inside and outside of jails and prisons in Alaska.

Submissions must be previously unpublished, online or in print, including on personal websites. Work must be a maximum of 7500 characters, including spaces (approximately 1750 words). For formatting poetry, keep in mind that the story dispensers print on paper that can hold only 40 characters per line. Comics will be printed in grayscale. Final submissions are due Jul 31, 2023.

Boundaries and Bridges is supported by The Learning Inside Out Network (LION), an Alaska-based grassroots group that increases access to quality participation in artistic exchanges for people inside and out of the carceral system. Incarcerated writers will be offered trauma-informed writing curriculum and feedback to help develop their work for publication. Handwritten submissions are welcome.

This collection will be published through StoryCube dispensers, a portable printer from global publisher Short Édition, that offers stories at the push of a button.

Submissions can be submitted by email or to our mailing address.

Email address: uaf-lion@alaska.edu

Mailing address:
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More information can be found on our website: <https://lion.open.uaf.edu/bnb/>

On Craft

Writing Free Verse Poetry: Poetic Devices of Comparison

By: Dave Hood

Poets use various poetic devices or figures of speech to make comparisons. These figures of speech are intended to enhance understanding, to entertain, to add deeper meaning, and to enrich the quality of a poem. These figures of speech are also used by writers in other forms of creative writing, such as short fiction, novel writing, personal essay, and memoir writing.

In this post, I'll explain how to use the poetic devices of comparison. The following will be covered:

- Simile
- Metaphor
- Symbol
- Synecdoche
- Metonymy
- Personification
- Allusion

Simile

It is a poetic device or figure of speech in which the poet uses “like” or “as” to compare one thing to some other thing. The things compared must be unlike each other. The purpose of a simile is to add meaning and understanding. A good simile also makes a poem pleasurable to read. It can turn a dull poem into something memorable. For instance, Robert Frost wrote “the attic wasps went missing by like bullets.” Here are a few other examples:

- The neighborhood is like a ghost town.
- The sick man looks like a corpse.
- You are free as a gold-fish in an aquarium.
- He writes as if possessed by a demon.
- She strolls down the beach like a model on a runway in a fashion show.
- The truck is rusty as a wreck in the scrap yard.

Metaphor

It is a poetic device or figure of speech in which the poet suggests the one thing is another. The poet does not use “like” or “as” to make the comparison between two different things. Often the word “is” or “of” is used to make the comparison.

A poet can create an explicit metaphor by directly suggesting that one thing is another. Example: He is a shark. She is a black widow spider. (A is B) Or the poet can make an implied metaphor by comparing one thing to another using the attributes of the object, such as adjectives or verbs associated with it. Example: He **sailed** down the highway in his new corvette. (Comparison to a sailboat) She cut him with her claws. (comparison to an animal)

The purpose of an explicit or implied metaphor is to entertain the reader, to help the reader understand, to add deeper meaning to a poem.

Examples:

- The running back is a tank.
- The old man is a walking corpse
- The house is a mausoleum.
- Place of grief
- Sea of death
- Dinner of gratitude
- Gift of pleasure

- Lust is a drug
- Teeth of the wind
- Mouth of a river

Poets must avoid using **dead metaphors**. These are metaphors that have been used so often that they've lost their originality and effectiveness. The comparison has taken on a new meaning of expression—and is often viewed as a cliché. Examples of dead metaphors include:

- Seeds of doubt
- Fishing for compliments
- Grasp the idea

Poets must also avoid **creating mixed metaphors**. A poet creates a mixed metaphor when one thing is compared to two different things in the same metaphor. A few ludicrous examples include:

- I can see the light at the end of the rainbow.
- I make my goal to shake every hand that walks in the door.
- I am bone empty.

Symbol

It is a poetic device in which the poet uses an image to represent something other than its literal meaning or dictionary meaning. A symbol is usually a physical object used to represent some abstract idea. For instance, a rose can be a symbol of beauty. A dove can be a symbol of peace. The cross can be a symbol of Christianity, faith, Jesus. The lion is a symbol of courage. The gun is a symbol of violence.

Poets use well-established symbols in their poetry, such as darkness for ignorance or light for knowledge. Many poets also create their own symbols and then use them in a poem.

Not all images are intended to be symbolic. Sometimes a gun is just a gun, or a clock is just a clock. It is up to the reader to analyze and then identify the symbol in the poem. For instance, a poet might make reference to a ticking clock in his poem. The purpose of the clock might be to symbolize the passage of time.

Synecdoche

It is a poetic device or figure of speech in which the poet makes reference to the “part of something” instead of its whole, and this part is used to represent the whole.

Examples:

- Skates sail up the ice. (Instead of writing “The hockey player sails up the ice.”)
- The teenager purchased a “set of wheels.” (Instead of writing “The teenager purchased a car.”)
- All hands on deck (Instead of writing “All sailors on deck.”)

Metonymy

It is a poetic device or figure of speech in which one thing closely associated with another thing is used as a substitution. Frances Mayes, author of *The Discovery of Poetry*, states that a metonymy is “an identifying emblem” substituted for the whole name. In other words, an associated quality or name or emblem, which is not part of the whole, is substituted.

Examples:

- Crown instead of monarchy
- White House instead of President and Staff
- Habs instead of Montreal Canadians
- Leafs instead of Toronto Maple Leafs
- Broncos instead of Denver Broncos

Personification

It is a poetic device or figure of speech in which the poet assigns human characteristics or human attributes to nonhuman things, such as ideas, concepts, places, objects, animals. The purpose of personification is to add deeper meaning, to entertain, to describe.

Examples:

- Death comes knocking
- Love arrives unexpectedly
- Old Man Winter
- Lady Luck
- Jack Frost
- April turns on the shower
- The maple trees stood in silence
- The walls stare back and talk nonsense
- The wind whispers through a crack

Allusion

It is a poetic device or figure of speech in which the poet makes reference to another person, event, art, history, religion, literature, mythology, or some aspect of popular culture. An allusion can also be a statement or quotation made by a famous or public person. An allusion can also be a line from a poem. Popular types of allusions in poetry are biblical allusions, literary allusions, and mythical allusions. The purpose of allusion is to provide additional meaning. For the allusion to be effective, the reader must have knowledge of what the poet is alluding to.

Example: The painting reminds/ of Picasso's Cubism..f

T.S. Eliot often used allusion in many of his poems. For instance, in *The Wasteland*, he includes "I remember/those are the pearls that were his eyes..." a reference to Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

To master the art and craft of writing poetry, you must learn the poetic devices of comparison, such as simile, metaphor, and symbol. Once you've learned these poetic devices, you can use them to write powerful, entertaining, memorable poems.

HOW TO WRITE FLASH FICTION STORIES

By **Sean Glatch**

Like a lightning strike, flash fiction stories can be over in an instant—radically altering the terrain of the reader’s imagination. These bite-sized stories take a lot of style, skill, and effective word choice to pull off. Many writers try to conquer the flash fiction form in their writing careers, but the **short-short story** requires lots of planning and editing, so if you’re not sure how to write flash fiction stories, you’re in the right place.

What is flash fiction, and how do you write it? In short, it’s a story that delivers a complete narrative, with **plot**, characters, and setting, in fewer than 1,500 words. As such, the form relies on an efficient use of language and **storytelling**, without inhibiting the story’s flow and impact.

Writing flash takes practice, but the form has produced some of the most interesting stories in literary canon.

A FLASH POETICS OF FLASH FICTION STORIES

Flash fiction must accomplish the same as fiction does: namely, a complete story with well-developed **characters**, a finished plot, and complex **themes**. The story must feel *finished* in under 1,500 words.

Despite its brevity, flash still needs complexity. If the reader finishes the story without giving it further thought, then the story has not engaged the reader enough. The length should not inhibit the story’s value.

So, how does flash manage to be brief yet complex? Let’s explore the ways that flash minces words, with flash fiction examples to follow.

FLASH FICTION EXAMPLES AND TECHNIQUES

All great flash fiction stories use the following techniques. Before we look at how to write flash fiction, familiarize yourself with these techniques, as it will make your drafts much easier to write and edit.

SHOW, DON’T TELL

Show, don’t tell is a rule that tells writers to transmit an experience through imagery and description, rather than to state an experience plainly to the reader. It can be summarized best by this Anton Chekhov quote: “Don’t tell me the moon is shining; show me the glint of light on broken glass.”

Flash fiction example: **Things I’m Holding For You** by Kayleigh Shoen. Rather than state “my date was abusive,” the narrator builds a character profile through his many blunders. This results in a damning portrait of a man burdened by his own toxic masculinity, while also saying something about the narrator as well: why does she hold onto these things, despite all-but-admitting he’s a terrible person?

WRITING SCENE VS. SUMMARY

In fiction writing, we classify a passage of text as being either **scene or summary**. A scene is a close look at an important event in the story, whereas a summary glosses over the details while presenting the most important information. In flash writing, there is generally very little summary, and there should be only one or two scenes.

Flash fiction example: **As the North Wind Howled** by Yu Hua. There are only two scenes: when the narrator’s door is kicked down, and when they arrive at their friend’s house. Each scene forces the narrator to make certain decisions and observations, which builds the story’s mood and characterization.

TRUNCATION

The language of flash fiction is sharp, economic, and to-the-point. Flash writers are often ruthless editors, truncating their sentences and scrapping whole paragraphs.

Flash fiction example: [A Telephone Conversation](#) by Mark Twain. Though the first few paragraphs are wordy, this story cuts down on words by formatting its telephone conversations like a play. This allows Twain to juxtapose incongruous ideas next to each other, making this a finished, humorous story.

SYMBOLISM

Symbolism refers to the use of concrete objects to represent abstract concepts. Most flash fiction stories have a lot of symbolism, allowing the writer to boil a wordy idea into a symbolic object.

Flash fiction example: [A Haunted House](#) by Virginia Woolf. This prose poem advances its narrative through its corporeal symbolism. From empty hands to the heartbeat of a home, the heavy symbolism of the story helps contain its concise, hyperbolic emotion.

IN MEDIA RES

Many flash pieces start *in media res*, which means that it starts in the middle of the story, rather than the beginning. This roundabout way of writing the plot could help crunch down on the amount of details the story needs to be effectively told.

Flash fiction example: [Everyone Cried](#) by Lydia Davis. The story begins in the middle of its moral: all adults want to be kids, sometimes. Though there isn't a clear plot to the story, it succinctly points out the irony and duality of adulthood.

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

Flash borrows a lot from the methods of poetry, especially in terms of figurative language and [literary devices](#).

Flash fiction example: [Sticks](#) by George Saunders. This story abounds with metaphors, symbolism, and image-lead narrative. The reader experiences the story through a father's psychosis as he communicates through the way he decorates a pole. Each image represents the father's slow decline, communicating its ironies in short bursts of intense feeling.

TRUSTING THE READER

Because flash stories are so short, writers don't have much time to set up the world of the story. As a result, writers might feel inclined to keep unnecessary description and worldbuilding in the story, cutting out important moments of characterization or dialogue instead. In truth, the best flash fiction stories trust the reader to understand what's going on and to lean into the mystery of what they don't know.

Flash fiction example: [My Dead](#) by Peter Orner. The narrator is a little hard to trust at first. Why would you drive with a stranger to visit a seance, especially if you have no one you want to contact? But the narrator's passiveness becomes a lens to explore spirituality and self-destructive habits, finding something haunting in the gray, liminal spaces of existence.

HOW TO WRITE FLASH FICTION STORIES: WHAT TO LEAVE OUT

In longer works of fiction—novels, novellas, and even short stories—the writer must include a considerable amount of detail to make the story and its characters immersive. The short word count of flash greatly hampers the amount of details the writer can include. So, whether you're starting from scratch or trying to pare down your word, here are some things you can leave out of your story.

DEEP INTERIORITY

Interiority refers to the inner life of your [protagonist](#). What do they think, feel, and dream about? How do they view and react to the world? Who are they when no one is looking?

Most main characters require some level of interiority, unless they're [flat characters](#). Nonetheless, you don't need too much interiority in flash. Certainly, tell us when your main character has important thoughts, reactions, or traumas: the reader wants to connect with your character, after all. But the reader doesn't need to know every thought in the protagonist's brain: their actions and dialogue will often suffice for this.

EXCESS BACKSTORY

Related to interiority is backstory. Both interiority and backstory help explain certain aspects of your story: how certain characters think or feel, and *why* they think and feel those things. Where interiority shows us the inner workings of a character's mind, backstory provides the events *prior to the current story* that influence a character's decisions or current situation.

It makes sense to provide backstory in novels and memoirs. In flash fiction stories, less so. The focus should be on the main scenes of the story and the actions that the character takes: these items should either explain themselves, or provoke the reader with a certain level of intrigue. Otherwise, excess backstory will simply waste words. Don't try to explain everything: leave some things to the reader's imagination, and only explain when it's essential.

MOMENTS OF INACTION

Action drives the story forward. Your characters make decisions, and those decisions yield results and further actions. When your word limit is short, stick to the nouns and verbs.

In other words, we don't need to see your character thinking too much. We don't need to see their morning routine, either, or what they ate for breakfast. These details help build the worlds of novels and memoirs, but in flash, stick to the action, and only embellish with detail when you have the reason (and the words) to do so.

PASSIVE VOICE

These next three tips have to do with [writing style](#). The passive voice occurs when the subject of a sentence *receives* the action of the verb, rather than *does* the verb. The passive voice is wordier than the active voice, and often less compelling.

Here's an example:

Active: He scaled the mountain.

Passive: The mountain was scaled by him.

Sometimes you need the passive voice, especially if you want to highlight when certain things are done to your characters. But, when your protagonist is taking action, let your sentences also take action.

EXCESS PREPOSITIONS

A preposition is a word that directs the action of a sentence. They're essential components of speech, and you shouldn't avoid them entirely. But you should avoid sentence constructions that rely on prepositions when you don't need them.

Here's an example:

Wordy: This is the chair of my mother.

Succinct: This is my mother's chair.

"Of" is the preposition in this sentence, but you would do much better to add an apostrophe+s to "mother."

ADVERBS

An adverb is a descriptive word that modifies a verb. Often, but not always, adverbs end with the suffix -ly. Sometimes, an adverb does add necessary description and detail; however,

there are plenty of verbs in the English lexicon, and you will often do better to use one strong verb than a weak verb with an adverb.

For example:

Wordy: The lion roared deeply and loudly.

Succinct: The lion bellowed.

Wordy: The road ran haphazardly around the hills.

Succinct: The road zigzagged around the hills.

Verbs provide the actions of sentences, so using strong, descriptive verbs will better illustrate your story in fewer words.

HOW TO WRITE FLASH FICTION STORIES: 4 APPROACHES

In short, flash fiction has all the elements of longer stories, but with less “fluff.” So, the challenge of writing flash lies in crafting a complete story in under 1,500 words. How should you approach writing flash? Consider the following four approaches.

1. HOW TO WRITE FLASH FICTION: RUTHLESS EDITING

Some writers might try starting their flash piece as a normal story, then cutting the words down. This is a common approach to writing flash, especially if your story isn’t far away from the 1,500 word mark. If you think you can cut a story down after writing it, then kill your darlings—and have fun with it!

2. HOW TO WRITE FLASH FICTION: PLOT FIRST

Flash stories require bones before you can put meat on them, so start with the story’s plot. With a plot-first approach, you start by writing *only* the details of the story, without any description or figurative language. Then, once the plot is written, you fill it with details until you hit the 1,500 word mark. This “fill in the blanks” approach allows you to keep the story to its most important details while still being complete.

3. HOW TO WRITE FLASH FICTION: START WITH POETRY

Writing fiction from poetry? It’s more likely than you think. Many literary critics consider flash fiction stories to border the lines between prose and poetry, since it uses many poetic devices to convey plot. If you’re a poet as well as a fiction writer, consider writing your story’s plot in verse, then expanding that verse into a prose-poem or prose.

4. HOW TO WRITE FLASH FICTION: END WITH A BANG

For a flash story to feel “complete,” it needs to “end with a bang.” The final line(s) of the story must leave the reader thinking long after the story ends.

The end of a flash fiction story must surprise the reader in some way. Flash often offers a resolution to the story that inverts themes, uncovers ironies, or offers unexpected dualities. Take the aforementioned story [Sticks](#) by George Saunders, one of the strongest flash fiction examples out there. The final line of the story presents the irony in the father’s pole ritual, since it is an unanswered cry for help.

Thinking about the ending, first, isn’t a conventional way to approach storytelling, but may work for this genre. Try it, and see what you write!

“Turn Your Anecdotes Into Flash Fiction”

By **Pamelyn Casto / Geoffrey Fuller**

Stories, stories everywhere! You hear anecdotes and gossip at the office water cooler, over the backyard fence, at parties. You watch conflict on Judge Judy and hear personal problems on the Dr. Phil show. Often you'll think, there's a story in that! Unfortunately, it's not that simple. Good flash fiction never is.

Such snippets can be used as raw material for flash fiction, but few are complete stories: most are more like anecdotes. Even after you've written them down, no matter how realistic they are, they will remain more like journal entries than full-fledged flash fictions and, therefore, of limited interest to readers. Good flash fiction is both compressed and expansive—interesting to readers who are strangers to our lives.

To become effective flash fictions, such pieces must be transmuted, must undergo the alchemy that turns basic narratives into the golden weave of fiction. You must find "what is best and richest, if it's for a short space only."

Expand the Boundaries

To turn journal entries and personal anecdotes into flash fiction, you must expand their boundaries. You must also write them in a way that compels readers to extend their boundaries. The more the reader is involved in the story, the more the reader thinks on the story, the larger the story becomes. Giving a piece the room to expand beyond its few words is one of the central tricks of writing flash fiction.

Good flash fiction gives us stories that are set apart from the everyday fare we're used to. Readers want something extra that takes them out of ordinariness and into the realm of meaningful fiction. Using four standard techniques, you can expand the boundaries of a basic anecdote:

1. Conjure the universal from the particular (Put Your I Out);
2. Imbue the anecdote with mystery (Don't Tell All);
3. Create epiphanies in the story or in the reader (Find the Aha! Moment);
4. Tie the narrative to a larger story (Take Up Literary Shorthand).

Put Your I Out

Although experience provides the richest material, you need to beware the trap of using first-person narrative. While the personal "I" does add immediacy, an I-did-this-I-did-that narrative can lock you into personal anecdote, blinding you to a larger, more expansive story.

Start by changing "I" to the third-person "she" or "he." When something actually happens to you, it's easy to feel an obligation to tell it as it happened. Forget that! Fiction doesn't require you to report "facts."

However, changing to third-person is not the mere substitution of "she" for "I." The switch should free you to see the situation with new eyes. You can always go back and re-establish the "I" if the story is stronger in first person. However, to free yourself from personal facts is to open your anecdote to a larger, more interesting story.

Changing the anecdote from first person to third can also free you in other ways. You can turn it from a narrative about four people to a story involving only one or two—thus sharpening the story's conflict and focus. Ask yourself what the essential issue is, what's at stake. Chances are, you'll see what can make your personal anecdote applicable to most people, and then you can tailor the story to that larger audience. Your story will move from the particular to something more universal—a story that reveals as much about human nature as about unique individuals. In what seems like a contradiction, by removing the personal, you can make the anecdote more personal to readers.

Don't Tell All

Once you've stepped away from your own experience, work to draw your readers in. An effective way to do this is to create mystery, not in the whodunit sense, necessarily, but by leaving something ambiguous or unanswered: leave the main character's motivations unstated until the final action, allow the setting to remain unclear for a time, or find that moment when the conflict could go either way.

Mystery always hooks readers, but only if they are sure that it is intentional. Be careful that the mystery is not due to a lack of clarity. What's depicted must be written clearly enough to resonate with readers—given enough thought. It should be a pleasure for the readers—not a job—to put the elements together and realize the revelation.

For example, Peter Meinke's "The Cranes" depicts an impending mercy killing (and possible suicide), but at no time does Meinke state what's going to happen or what finally does happen; he merely depicts a couple talking in a car and allows readers to pull all the clues together to realize—and fully feel—the poignancy of what's at stake. He allows the symbol of the whooping cranes to be a backdrop to the couple's story without ever explicitly stating the symbol's meaning. He leaves mystery intact through the power of suggestion.

Find the Aha! Moment

Mystery implies an aha! moment. You can further transform an anecdote by creating a dramatic epiphany in your story. An epiphany, a sudden understanding of what's at stake or of a larger issue, can be produced in a story's character, in the character and the reader, or in the reader alone.

In its simplest form, an epiphany can be the moment (often toward the end of a flash fiction) when the reader discovers that "things are not as they seem." For example, in Luisa Valenzuela's "Vision Out of the Corner of One Eye," the narrator, who is being groped on a crowded bus, retaliates by wiggling her bottom into the groper's hand. . . and picking his pocket. The end provides a surprising and satisfying "Aha!" The narrator knows what's taking place but the reader does not. Until the end.

In Alice Walker's "The Flowers," the character and the reader come to a terrifying epiphany at the same time. When the child discovers a dead body and the remnants of a noose, both the character and the reader realize a lynching has occurred, though it is never directly stated.

In John Updike's "Pygmalion," only the reader comes to an understanding of what's at stake. The Pygmalion character never understands the consequences or the meaning of his actions and how they affect his relationship with his new wife. Pygmalion's eternal repetitions do not make him any wiser, but the reader understands.

An epiphany on the part of the reader also occurs in Heinrich Boll's "The Laughter." The narrator knows all along, while the reader experiences the epiphany at the end of the story. In the monologue, the narrator is ostensibly telling about his life as a professional laughter. By the end, though, close readers will question the nature of laughter, to what degree it's socially programmed and when, or if, one's *own* genuine laughter is ever heard. The story expands to become an interrogation of both the nature of laughter and of the reader's laughter.

Take Up Literary Shorthand

Another powerful way to create flash fiction from anecdotes is to use literary shorthand: Draw upon what's already been written by making use of stories that have enlightened, amused, or disturbed readers for generations, giving your story more power, more "universality." Expand beyond the personal by tying your personal anecdotes to established stories. Look to myth, legend, fairy tales, or other literature for elements to include in your story. Using established tales, you can compress your story, and good flash fiction must be richly condensed in order to expand in a reader's mind.

Because flash fictions are short, you don't have a lot of time to develop unique characters. Characters from established literature can provide necessary background without having to state it directly. For instance, when Updike wrote "Pygmalion," he didn't have to overtly say much about his central character because readers already know that Pygmalion can only love women he creates himself. You can use the naming technique to take off on what has already been written and thus present your readers a story that expands in their minds.

Another way to use literary shorthand is to look for patterns that already exist in your anecdotes and tie them to patterns that have been laid down in literary tradition. Walker's short-short, "The Flowers," is an innocence-to-awareness story that uses a pattern similar to that set forth in Genesis. Walker's story alludes to a garden, suggests snakes, and depicts a child cast out of her Edenic existence when she becomes aware of a terrifying reality. The innocence-to-awareness pattern is an old one, and you can use patterns like it to transmute your anecdotes.

It's All in the Mix

Use one or more of these techniques to turn your anecdotes into full-fledged flash fictions. The best, the ones with the most resonance, often draw on several techniques at once. The trick is to use the techniques without seeming to do so. The best flash fiction flows effortlessly from the page to the reader's brain.

In Synge's, *_Deidre_*, Deidre says, "It should be a sweet thing to have what is best and richest, if it's for a short space only."

Her companion replies, "And we've a short space only to be triumphant and brave."

Apply these words to writing flash fiction. When you work to transform basic anecdotes into memorable flash fiction, choose what's best and richest in order to compress and expand at the same time. Your result will be both brave and triumphant. These basic tips can give you the courage to take risks and turn out powerful flash fiction.

Writing Comics

By Naomi Hutchquist

Welcome fellow comic lovers!

Comics are a unique method of storytelling that combine visual art and text to create fascinating fiction. Otherwise known as sequential art, image panels are arranged in a specific way to convey the story. Comics include a wide variety of genres and styles, from fictional superheroes to non-fiction accounts, dating back all the way to Egyptian hieroglyphics.

Comics build a rich and rewarding world to explore and share with your readers. With their unique blend of art and writing, comics have the power to inspire and entertain in a way that combines the potency of visual art with the power of written words. If you feel that your ideas and stories are better accomplished in this unique form, then read on to find some tips and techniques to help you along the way!

Comic book terminology

1. Panel - a single frame or image within a comic. Panels are arranged in sequence to create the comic's narrative.
2. Gutters - the blank space between panels that separate and define each image. These can be used, or not, intentionally to adjust the pacing of the story.
3. Balloons - speech or thought bubbles that contain dialogue, sound effects, or narration. The shape and line quality of the balloon conveys as much information to the reader as the text within the balloon.
4. Caption - text that describes or narrates action, sometimes contained within a box.
5. Sound effects - words or symbols used to visually represent sounds within a comic.
6. Lettering - the quality of the text within a comic, including dialogue, captions, and sound effects.
7. Pencils - the first draft sketches or drawing outlines before they are finished.
8. Inks - the process of refining, adding finishing details and textures to the initial sketches

Elements of a comic script

1. Theme: The underlying message, feeling, or meaning of the story. This will inform the other elements of the story, as well as how the visuals themselves will look.
2. Characters: The entities or visual objects that move the story forward. These are often people or animals, but could be more abstract objects such as buildings or planets
3. Setting: The location and environment where the story takes place. Think of this as the stage and props that will be in the background of your panels
4. Plot: The series of events that create the story, including the conflict, rising action, climax, and resolution.
5. Pacing: The speed and rhythm at which the audience will read your comic. This includes how the multiple panels of artwork and text work together to control that speed and rhythm.

6. Line quality: used to outline characters, objects, and environments, as well as to create shading and depth. The type of lines used will convey various effects, textures, and meaning

Developing a concept

Begin by brainstorming potential ideas. Write down several ideas for stories you may want to tell, including characters that might fit well into those stories. What kind of message might you want your reader to receive? Ideas can come from a wide range of sources, such as your own personal experiences or dreams, current events, or even other stories. Consider who your audience will be and what kind of story will resonate with them. Once you have an idea, start brainstorming potential scenarios and characters that could be part of your plot.

Once you have some ideas floating around, decide on a concept for your comic. This should include the genre, tone, setting, and story arc. It may be useful to write a single sentence premise, or brief description of your story, to help clarify your main idea. It should be clear and concise while describing what's at stake for your characters. Consider what the main conflict may be, where the climax of the story may be, and how the action will rise and fall. How will these elements be shown visually through the line quality, shapes, and shading?

Create a character sheet for each character that defines who they are, what they look like, describes their backgrounds, and their personalities. Your characters are the heart of your story, as they are the elements moving the readers through the action. What motivates them, and what are their challenges? What strengths and weaknesses will they contribute to the story? Not all of this information needs to be included in your comic, but it will help you determine what belongs in the story, and how your characters would react to a given situation.

Next, create an outline for your story, while continuing to refine your concept. This will help organize your ideas before you get too deep in the weeds. Include the major plot points, such as the inciting incident or conflict, the climax, and the resolution. Look for ways to add depth and interest to your characters, and consider how they will build tension and suspense throughout the story. Your characters should face challenges that make it difficult for them to achieve their goals. These can include external conflicts, such as a hostile environment, an adversary or villain, or internal conflicts caused by conflicting emotions or desires.

Story Structure and Plot

The beginning panels of your comic are important because they will establish the environment and introduce your main characters. This is your opportunity to set the tone for the story and establish the kind of world your characters live in. This is also where this “inciting incident” comes in. The inciting incident is the event that sets a story moving in a new direction from how it began; it could be a problem that the characters need to overcome, a profound discovery that changes everything, or an unexpected turn of events. From here, the story starts to build and gain momentum, often called “rising action.”

The rising action is where the story develops and the tension begins to build. This is where you introduce obstacles or challenges for your characters, and begin to release key details of

information. Use this section to help your readers understand and relate to your characters. This action should continue to build and develop until it eventually comes to the climax, the pinnacle of the story.

The climax is the point where tension and conflict reach their maximum. This is where characters face their biggest challenge and conflict is resolved. Your character either succeeds or fails, or makes the big decision that changes the course of the story. This is the peak of your story, where the message should be revealed and action will shift to wrapping up any final details.

The falling action of the story is where the tension and conflict wind down. This is where the characters resolve the issues that have been raised and prepare for the conclusion.

The resolution is where the story comes to a close. This could involve the characters achieving their goals, or learning a lesson. This is where you tie up any loose ends and give the story a satisfying conclusion.

When plotting a comic, it's important to consider how each panel contributes to the overall story. You may need to experiment with pacing, timing, and structure to find the best way to tell your story visually. By using a combination of text and images, you can create a unique and engaging story that resonates with your audience.

Understanding pacing

Pacing in comics is about controlling the reader's interpretation of time and information. The speed with which a reader consumes your story is determined by several factors, including how the panels are arranged, how much text they will need to read, and how detailed the images are. Good pacing can make a comic feel exciting or suspenseful, while poor pacing can make it feel confusing, or rushed.

The size and arrangement of panels controls much of the pace of a comic. Larger panels can slow down the pace, while smaller panels will speed it up. Irregularly shaped panels can create a sense of movement, speed or urgency.

The amount of text throughout a comic will also affect the pacing. Short, back-and-forth dialogue can create a fast pace, while longer, more descriptive narration can slow it down. The placement of speech bubbles and captions guide the reader's eye through the page and control the order in which information is revealed.

Line quality, shading, shapes and detail will also affect the pacing and speed that a viewer interprets as they read through your comic. Large simple shapes and bold lines often create a faster pace, while additional detail and thinner lines can hold the viewers attention longer. The action and movement shown in a comic can also affect pacing. Showing a character running or jumping can create a sense of speed and energy to move the eye to the next panel, while a static shot of a character standing still can slow things down

The pace of your comic can be a powerful tool for building suspense. By slowing down or speeding up the action at key moments, you can create a sense of anticipation and drama.

Building tension

Developing tension or suspense in a comic is essential in keeping your reader engaged in your story and invested in your characters. Use foreshadowing to hint at future events in the story. This can create a sense of anticipation for what might happen next.

The use of visual cues, such as exaggerated poses and facial expressions, close-ups, or leading lines, can also create tension and suspense. These cues can signal to the reader that something important is about to happen.

Conflict is the basis of every good story, and it can be a powerful tool for building tension and suspense. As you create a goal for your characters, with obstacles that stand in their way, you create a sense of tension as your characters work to overcome these obstacles. Keep in mind the pacing in which you reveal crucial information about your characters and their obstacles. Consider withholding details, revealing them slowly over time, to create a sense of mystery.

Creating tension and suspense is about using a variety of techniques to keep your audience engaged and invested in the story. Experiment with techniques to find what works best for your story to hold your viewers' interest.

Writing effective dialogue and captions

As you are writing the dialogue and narration for your comic, you need to have a thorough understanding of your characters; this is where those character sheets come in handy. Dialogue should sound natural, things that real people would actually say in such a situation. Read your dialogue aloud to hear how it sounds when spoken. Does it seem overly formal, or forced? The tone and language used in your dialogue should match the genre and style of your comic. Lighthearted and silly for a comedic story, or more ominous and uneasy for a dramatic tragedy.

The underlying meanings and implications behind what characters say is called subtext, and can be used to add depth and complexity to your characters and conflict. Instead of having characters explain everything that's happening in the story, use dialogue that shows how characters are feeling and reacting to events, and let the reader fill in the blanks for themselves. This can help to create a more immersive and engaging story.

Captions can be used to provide additional information or insights into a character's thoughts and feelings. Use captions sparingly to help move the story forward, as using too many can break the immersion and leave a story feeling boring.

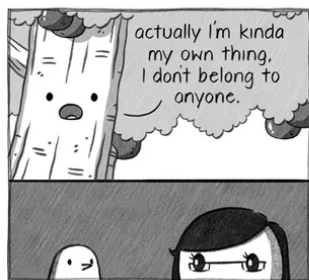
Putting it all together: short comics

The comics we accept as part of this Boundaries and Bridges call will need to be relatively short, sorry no 80 page graphic novels for this one. Use this template for a 4-panel comic to help you tell your short story or joke in just a few panels.

1. The setup: The first panel of your comic should be an establishing snapshot for the rest of the story. This is the place to build the scene, introduce your characters, and set the tone or mood of your comic.
2. Add the conflict: The first or second panel of your comic should also introduce a problem or conflict. This could be serious or lighthearted, such as a misunderstanding, or a comedic situation.
3. Plot twist: The next panels often provide a surprise that catches the reader off guard, adding either humor or tension to the story.
4. A resolution: The final panels should resolve the conflict or deliver the punchline that brings the story to a satisfying conclusion. This might be a clever solution to the problem, or some surprising revelation for the character.

In such a short comic, it's important to make each panel count. Experiment with these basic storytelling techniques to create your own short comic that will engage and surprise your audience.

Examples



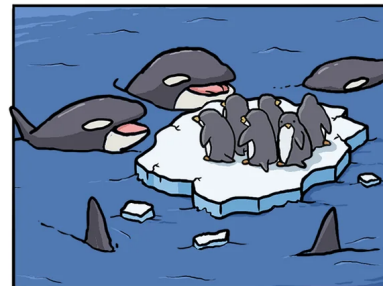
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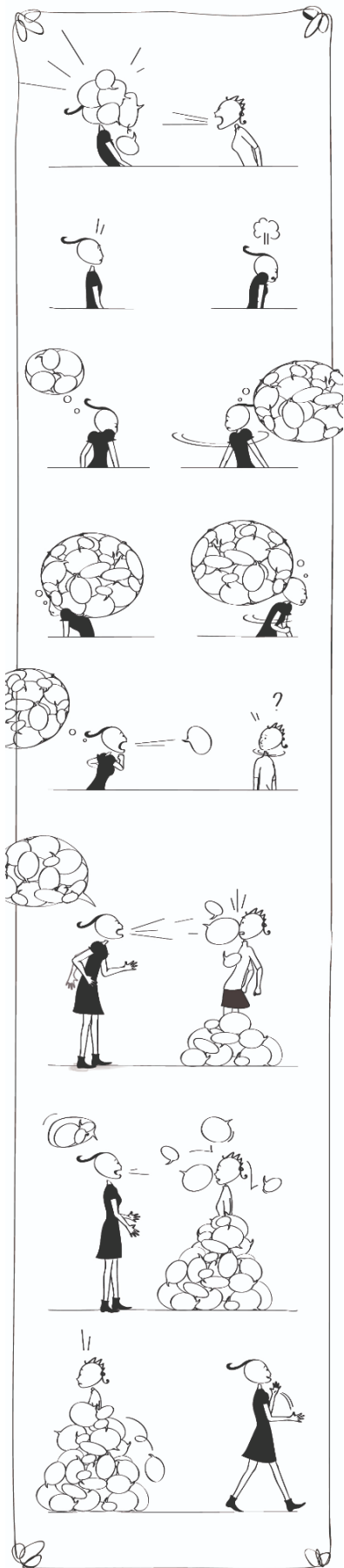


EXOCOMICS.COM

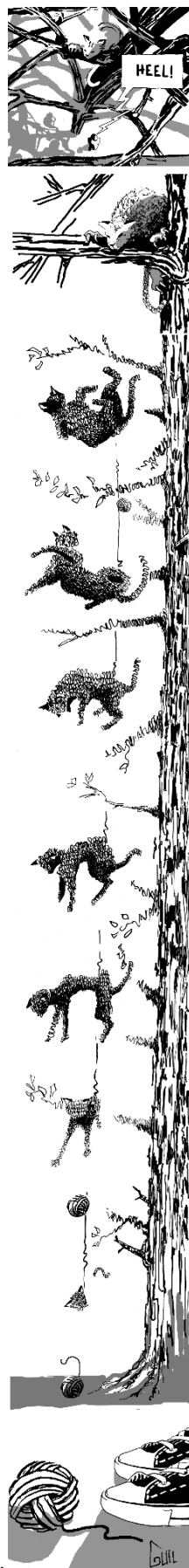


MART VIRKUS @ARCADERAGE





Resentment - Carine Guichard



Soft Landing - Guil GDéon

Eddie's faces from Jack Hamms' "CARTOONING THE HEAD & FIGURE"



AGGRESSIVE



ALOOF



AMAZED



AMUSED



ANGRY



ANTICIPATION



ANXIETY



APATHY



ASTONISHMENT



AWE



BAD



BITING?



BITTERNESS



BLINKING



BLUBBERING



BLOWING



BOISTEROUS



BRAVE



BRAZEN



BULLISH



CHOKING



CHUCKLING



CONCEIT



CONFIDENCE



CONSTERNATION



CONTEMPT



COY



CRAZY



CRYING



CURIOUS

Examples

Getting Her Daughter Ready **Sarah Barr**

She ties on her daughter's wings made not
of wax, leather, eagle feathers, but of
paper, ribbon, glue and glitter. Her
daughter flaps her arms and
pretends to be bird, fairy,
angel. She keeps
dancing. Her
mother says,
"Stand still," as she
combs out plaits, strokes
hair into shape, clips on stars,
a halo, thinks of magic. She looks
at her daughter's sprung feet, says, "Fly,
sweetheart. Then walk, strong on the earth."

There's a body in the blueberries **Stephen Hundley**

There's a body in the blueberries.
Inside the hedge
from where the bees emerge
and emerge.

So many bees. So many
I can feel them buzzing
beneath my skin.

They tunnel the tubes
of my earways. They walk
the globes of my eyes.

In through the nose, out
through the mouth, leaving traces,
other bodies they have known,

hair washed with motel shampoo,
the wishes that come before sleep,
snatches of names, leafy muffles.

Each bee plants its message
soon to ripen, swell summer velvet:
it goes white to green to blue.

Field Guide for Park Rangers
Chelsea Stockham

How Yosemite can fit
within these four fragile walls,
stretched across the bedspread
with hip bone peaks pointing
heavenward. You wake to
dawn's open-window woodnote,
ribcage canyon yawning under
conifer air, ridges kissed by misted
breath and lips of florid morning.
How you can trace each trail,
each thick white-water and thin
snow creek scar, by fingernail
and still lose yourself like a boy
scout between the ponderosas.

How Yosemite can fit
in the bathtub and the two-seater
that sheds its leather like pine needles
but never in your arms, never
long enough to hear the chasmic
echo of your heartbeat returned or
to learn the smoke-signal language
or call her yours.

Overpass
Abigail Swoboda

In our dreams, we've started
seeing the phantoms planted
beneath our floorboards—

and we fear that there is no door that is always open for us.

It took too long to realize
the tenderness of ice cubes
in our tomato soup

and that each sound is a sentence.

And when we wake up, the house is full of smoke
from fires burning somewhere else, but
all we can do is close the windows
and take out the trash.

An Algonquin Woman Saves Herself
Mary Finnegan

Sometimes, a fishhook
and a bit of flesh
are all you need
to save your baby
and yourself.

Take the knife,
slice off a piece of thigh,
and with that meaty part
of your own body:
Bait the hook.

Savor
the sweet taste of the fish,
the cool,
arctic flavor of this lake trout
that saves you.

Everything may be frozen,
encased in the ice
that killed your tribesmen.
Your son may grow cruel.
But for now:

You survive.
You need only
a knife, a hook,
madness enough
to sliver your own flesh.

A Love Letter to Potato Soup

[Emily Netherland](#)

A large, green pot rested on the stove, with heat rising off and warming my nose as I took in a deep breath of steam and starch. Potatoes – a five-pound bag of plain white potatoes turned into the meal that could cure all ailments and broken hearts. Each one caressed by Mom's soft hands while the peeler shaved off the bruises. Slowly the potatoes became thick and creamy, salt and peppered, and showered with toppings. A pan of bacon sizzled behind the soup as it bubbled, each strip soon to be lovingly crumbled into a savory garnish. Chives then rapidly chopped after a quick rinse in the sink. Cheddar cheese toppled into a Ramekin, awaiting the tiny fingers that would sprinkle a little too much into the bowl. The cure to a skinned knee, with each swallow pushing tears back inside. After my tonsils left my body, the soup soothed my healing throat, each warm spoonful calming my raw wounds. A toasted loaf of sourdough bread to accompany the lumpy, beautifully yellowed mixture. Potatoes from California, Ecuador, Barbados – it didn't matter. Potato soup is potato soup, and it is the fix to everything.

Freedom to Forgive

KaylaMarie

The sun leaks through the cracked window, making it nearly impossible for me to peer outside this small car.

I close my eyes, desperately trying to forget the horror of the past year. Images of my mom flash through my mind like a photo reel, her last words floating about me. “They can’t take you away! I’ll get you back. You can be sure of that.”

The brick building comes into view and I’m not sure what to feel. Anticipation rises up inside, along with the voice I’ve tried so hard to forget. “I’ll get you back.”

The caseworker glances at me from the rearview mirror. “Alissa, do you have any questions before we go inside?”

The questioning words jerk me back to the beginning; the night I was taken from my home.

Suddenly, panicked emotions encompass me. Memories of the horrific verbal abuse and terrifying screams take over. It’s taken years to numb myself to the pain, yet, somehow, it all comes flooding back.

I struggle to hold back the tears, begging myself not to let the hurt show, but it’s too late. I can’t hide forever.

“Honey, it’s okay. Is there anything you want to talk about?” The caseworker brings the car to a stop, as we pull into the nearest parking space. The tall office building stares me down, beckoning me to come inside.

Being in foster care is difficult enough, but the hardest part is what lies before me. “I’m fine. This is the only opportunity I have to make things right.”

We make our way up the sidewalk to the large, double doors. After checking in, I prepare myself for the very last visitation with my biological mom.

The hallway guides me closer to the visiting room and I clutch tightly to my foster parents’ comforting words. “Alissa, you are a very brave girl. Remember, no matter what anyone says or does to you, you’re never alone. Keep your faith strong.”

A newfound peace washes over me. I’m ready.

I enter the small room and see my mom standing there, a look of emotion I can’t quite recognize over her face.

After a moment of quiet thoughts, my mouth begins to let out all that I’ve wanted to say.

“Mom, you hurt me in more ways than I can say. It’s taking me a long time to heal from the terrible lies you put into my head. But I want you to know that I...” A small tear rolls down my cheek and onto the hardwood floor. “I...forgive you. And I hope, one day, you’ll realize just how much I care about you.”

They say courage gives us the power to do the unimaginable. And, they’re right. I say courage gives us the freedom to forgive.

Cracks in the Wall

[Die Booth](#)

"It's an old building," Becky said, when Peter asked her.

"Do you get them in your apartment, too?"

She'd given him a look, then, as if she thought he was trying to score an invite into her place, as if this was anything more than doormat chatter. As if he was interested in women, anyway. When she reached the stairs, she looked back at him, just a glance, unreadable and strange and he'd dropped his keys. When he looked up again, vaguely embarrassed at his fumbling, she'd gone.

As soon as the dawn sun pawed between the blinds, Peter was awake and studying them again: the cracks.

They were hard to miss, when his bed was butted flush up against the wall, his nose inches away from the yellowing plaster. Perhaps Becky was right. It was an old building. The rooms were suffused with a delicate sniff of damp. At first he'd noticed just a few, but soon he could see that the whole wall was a web of hairlines, like craquelure on an Old Master. There was probably mildew. He was likely breathing in mold spores day and night. He wouldn't be surprised if the entire thing came down on him; a mud bank in rain.

But it didn't.

When he was out and about, Peter mostly forgot about the cracks. But at night, they became more preoccupying than ever. Of course, it was impossible for them to be visible there, in the mute dark. But he was aware of them. Lying there, quietly pulling humid breath on the edge of unconsciousness, they troubled him. Emblazoned upon the inside of his eyelids, a migraine of flickering capillaries.

He started to think about the cracks a lot.

"Huh?"

"I said," Becky drew the words out, patiently, "Penny for your thoughts? You're miles away."

Miles away. Lost. Peter felt it, dragged from contemplation by her voice. He felt a sudden irrational lurch of guilt, to be caught thinking about the cracks by an actual person. He concocted a weak smile. "I might need glasses."

He looked at her, paused at the entrance to next-door, bag of groceries at her feet. Her frown was perfectly in focus as she said, "Oh. It comes to us all. Age. Right?"

"Right. Yeah."

The opticians set him straight. He didn't need glasses. They tested for glaucoma and retinal detachment, injury and cataracts, but confirmed only 20/20 vision.

Lying beneath his sheets, he watched the walls. The cracks seemed to pulse, as if the building was breathing gently. Bringing up one hand, Peter trailed a nail across the plaster. It felt smooth. Unbroken. He slid the edge of his thumbnail along the path of one crack, trying to wedge it in, but to no avail. The fissure was too fine. Even when he started to pick, he couldn't get purchase. He must be imagining it. And yet... He inched closer, lulled by the invisible hum of the air, until his nose touched the wall, his forehead, until he was near enough that his eyelashes brushed the paintwork, but still the cracks were there, in sharp focus, running deep into the walls, deeper than the walls—he jerked back, heart galloping and palms slick. Around him, the cracks telescoped, back into the fabric of the building and further, out into the air beyond... Peter crushed his eyelids shut, and keened. The night stretched. Eventually he was exhausted enough to sleep.

Morning shook him like a bleak dream. For a moment, he thought he was dreaming. Then he knew. That feeling of witness, of being seen. Not eyes beyond the cracks: the cracks were eyes, sucking at his existence with their vacuum gaze, running deeper than four meek dimensions. Peter covered his face with his hands.

The cracks were everywhere.
They were in the air.
Outside was no escape. They drifted like gossamer, beckoning him in. They bisected time. The world, the planet was fracturing.
"You look like death." Becky picked up the free newspaper from her doormat and folded her arms, regarding him warily. "Are you sick or something?"
Death. Suddenly it seemed like a remote concept. Peter gaped. The air bulged. "Can't you see them?" His voice sounded breathless, not his own.
"See what?"
"The cracks." He grasped at space, at the filaments of nothing webbing the something.
"It's all falling apart."
"There's nothing there," Becky said, a thin thread of emptiness peeling slowly across her forehead.

Love Letter to my Immigrant Family

[Annmarie Charles](#)

In 2010, the street artist Stephen Powers completed a series of murals as a love letter to the city of Philadelphia, his home. I had never heard of him before, but I'd seen these murals on my trips into the city with my friends and family. It was something to look forward to when riding the El, and my favorite one had graphic print that read:

Knocked on your door,
Knees weak, back sore
Migraine for sure
No more I snore
You smile, I'm cured

I could always see it on my way home to Upper Darby, the last stop of the El subway line going Westbound out of Philadelphia. It served as a comforting welcome home as I ended long days coming from internships and from college. Even on the days after we had fought and I escaped to the city for some space, that mural was my consolation that no matter what, I was going home to people that loved me.

My parents moved to the outskirts of West Philadelphia in 1999, less than a year before I was born. My father had just made his own way to America that year and my mother had only been in the country since 1997. After many hardships, including brief homelessness in 2000, my father wanted to pursue the American dream and open up his own business. Using my mother's far more developed credit score, they bought a storefront on 69th Street (where the last stop of the El is located) and fought relentlessly to make ends meet. My father sometimes came home as late as 2am, and left as early as 6 in the morning.

Knocked on your door,
Knees weak, back sore

My dad started off working as a carpet installer and continued to until injury prevented him from doing so. His right knee, the one he used to kick carpet, was always painfully swollen. My mom and I got into a habit of taking turns rubbing it every night gently with medication, namely Iodex, one of the cure-all essentials of a Caribbean household.

While I was still in elementary school (or maybe early into middle school) my dad got into a bad car accident. Back in Guyana, their home country, he started logging in the Amazon as a teenager in order to support himself and his siblings. This had already put an unhealthy strain on his lower back, and the car accident made matters much worse. My father was a man that always

worked, no matter what the circumstance or how sick he was. He worked on our birthdays, he worked most holidays, he worked even when he was running high fevers. He didn't work for a week after the crash. That's how we knew things were bad. His spine was twisted in a painful manner, and there was little he could do other than take painkillers and do physical therapy. As most immigrant parents, he didn't take keenly to painkillers, and instead focused all his energy into physical therapy. His back hardly gives him issues anymore, but we're all careful to ensure he's comfortable during car rides and give him back rubs whenever he asks. Back rubs are our love language.

Migraine for sure

My mother endured a significant amount of trauma growing up. When she was young, Guyana was in the midst of violent political turmoil to the point where her life was constantly in danger. While this unrest had its effect on my father's life, he lived in the countryside. My mom was from the city, where the violence was particularly horrific. Having largely grown up in fear, she carried these anxieties with her to the States. Overwhelmed by trying to keep myself and my brother safe in a dangerous world, as well as trying to keep a business afloat, she suffered often from debilitating migraines. I was her head doctor. She was often scared and lonely when these headaches hit her, and she would call me in for comfort. I tried to make myself useful: I would make her the go-to sick foods and rub oils on her head in hopes of relieving the pain, but all she really ever wanted from me was to hold her while she cried.

No more I snore,
Your smile, I'm cured.

Largely due to my mom's anxiety, when my brother and I were little enough to fit, all four of us slept on my parents' king-sized bed. They wanted to make sure we were safe through the night. If burglary were to happen they wanted to prevent us from being kidnapped. These fears were largely unfounded, but nonetheless every night we all piled into bed together. I think they found it comforting, as all of their hard work was to provide a future for us. I liked it because we were all a team working together at the end of the day. As my brother and I grew older, we both had a part to play in developing and working for the family business. It was something we had all sacrificed a lot for.

We are far from a perfect family, and as I have progressed through college we have become more distant. It may be tied to the fact that we have equated our love for one another based on how hard we work for one another, which has left us all worn out and feeling unworthy. To be honest, while I am grateful for the monetary support my parents have been able to provide me to pursue my professional development, the moments I am most grateful for are the ones of us piled on their bed at the end of a long day.

Tree Love [Kirti Bhadresa](#)

Maria had never been in love. But when she first saw a tiny sprout push its way through the tile floor, she felt something tighten inside her belly. She sat in her father's wooden rocking chair, his unlit pipe held between her teeth, watching. Days later, there were three leaves on the little plant instead of one.

Maria lived in the same pink house on the narrow street near the river her whole life, even after her parents passed away. Every evening, she sat in the wooden chair, knitting or reading. The rest of her spare time, she would bake, which was why the children of the neighborhood loved her. Humming to herself, Maria would swing her front door wide open,

holding out plates of sweet cinnamon pastries, elaborately adorned pies, and soft white bread to the impatient youngsters.

The parents in the neighborhood didn't mind her excessive interest in cookery; it was her habit of thinking so much that concerned them. They thought she was a dreamer, and that was a shame because her parents were practical, hardworking people. And while Maria worked the same job her mother did, dying fabrics at the textile factory, they felt she did it with a certain absentmindedness. She rarely spoke, and when she did, she said things like looking into the vat of red dye made her feel alive.

It was the little ones who first reported that Maria had a tree. The busy mothers and fathers said, "Well, it's a houseplant."

"No, it's a tree," they responded (though later the parents would say they didn't remember that conversation at all). In fact, when the children spotted the sapling in Maria's house, it was already nearly two meters tall.

"Oh, that?" she said. "It's nothing."

But sometimes, late at night, Maria would put her palm on the widening stem, and she would stay like that, perfectly still for ten minutes or more.

As the sapling became a real tree, she would wrap her strong arms around it, and press her face against the rough bark. Sometimes she dreamed she was a bird, and she lived in the tree's lush open arms.

By the time the neighbors realized that there was in fact a tree growing in Maria's living room, the branches had already burst through the ceiling. The roots were discovered pushing up through the floors of homes as far as five down the lane.

People gathered together, banging on Maria's door, and shouting, "Open Up!" But when they broke down the door, it was clear that Maria had been gone for some time. The wood stove was cold, and the broad trunk took up much of the living room.

The young ones still played near the base of the tree where Maria's house used to be, skipping over the roots that pushed up through cobblestone street. Now and then they would smell the sweet scent of cinnamon and, high above, they would see a speckled bird watching them. The children would call to it, "Maria!" "Maria!" and listen for the answer in song. Hearing them, the adults sometimes looked up to the tree's twisting branches. Though they never saw the bird, they would sometimes notice, just for a moment, dapples of light shimmering through the canopy, in the slender gaps between leaves.

Connected

[Ace](#)

There is a species of jellyfish that exists just in one lake on this entire planet. Every morning, before the sun rises, these jellyfish travel to the surface of the lake so that algae that live within them can photosynthesize and produce glucose for the jellyfish to survive. Every day, they travel from east to west, chasing the rays of the sun, chasing their hope for survival.

Every night, these same jellyfish sink to the bottom of the lake, where oxygen is so limited that they risk dying. At the bottom of the lake, the oxygen-poor water is rich in nitrogen, which in turns, feeds the algae that worked all day to feed them.

Connected.

Spring time in Africa is known for its dust storms. Every year, hundreds of millions of tons of this dust gets picked up by the trade winds, make their way across the Atlantic Ocean, and land on the Amazon basin. This dust is the remnant of dried river beds; beds made up of diatoms and dinoflagellates and other microscopic creatures that create the oxygen for all life on Earth.

When these tiny creatures die, they sink to the bottom and create a layer about a half-mile thick on the river floor. Over millions of years, as the water recedes, the river beds dry and

become a desert. This desert dust is what gets lifted by winds, and make their way to the Amazon. It is the skeletons of these tiny creatures that once created the oxygen for us to breathe that then give life to new plants and trees by serving as fertilizer. It is this dust from the Sahara in Africa that is part of the reason that the Amazon is so fertile.

Connected.

You see, all life on Earth is in a delicate balance. And whether we realize it or not, our daily commute to and from home is not very different from the simple stingless jellyfish in the lake. We live in a world so connected that dust storms in Africa affect soil quality in the Amazon, and an entire species of jellyfish would die if the nitrogen content in the water shifts every so slightly. We are all connected.

One night, I received a call from the intern covering cardiothoracic surgery. He was worried because a patient had been having consistent runs of ventricular tachycardia, a heart rhythm that would not allow the heart to pump with enough coordination to get blood to vital organs. I was covering the intensive care unit, and told the intern to check the patient's electrolytes, obtain an EKG, and place pads in case he needed to be defibrillated. Shortly after the call, I heard a "code blue" called over the hospital intercom, in the same location as the patient.

And I knew.

When I arrived, the medicine team had been beautifully running a code, like perfect synchronized divers. I found out that the patient had undergone coronary bypass surgery a few days prior, and was scheduled to be discharged home the next day. He was still in a non-perfusable rhythm. I called the attending, who told me to prepare the patient for ECMO.

"Do not stop until I get there," he said.

While the medicine team ran the code, I placed two central lines, one in his femoral artery and one in his femoral vein, and waited. The attending arrived, and we placed ECMO cannulas and connected him to the circuit.

82 minutes later, blood left his body, traveled through this machine which provided oxygen, and re-entered his body, like the delicate cycles of nature.

We brought him to the intensive care unit, where the nurse called out that the patient required sedation.

"Sedation?" I thought. He may have suffered anoxic brain injury so severe that he might not have any brain function. I go into the room, and call out his name.

No response.

I told Sue, the patient's nurse, to hold off on the sedation until we can assess his brain function. And before I could finish the sentence, he rose his hand off the bed, and gave me a thumbs up, as if he was still present, as if he was still connected.

What we do every day is not good luck. It is not a miracle. It is not God's work. It is neither magical, majestic, nor marvelous. What we do is restore function if we can, and keep those afflicted connected.

It is time to realize that this work goes beyond the trauma bay, the operating room, and the hospital ward. The connections that we have with each other are vital for this planet to continue functioning, and for our species to even remain present here on this Earth.

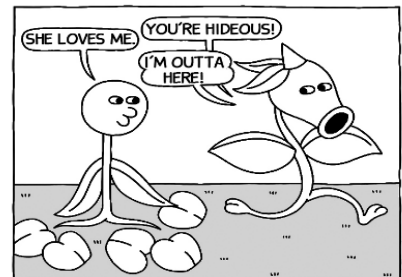
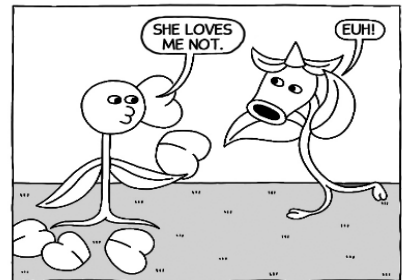
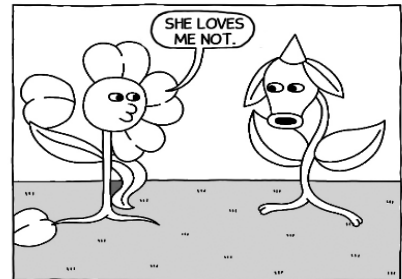
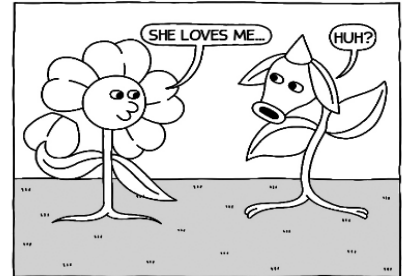
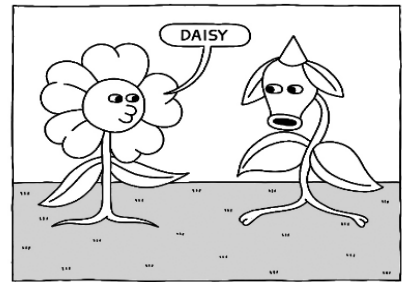
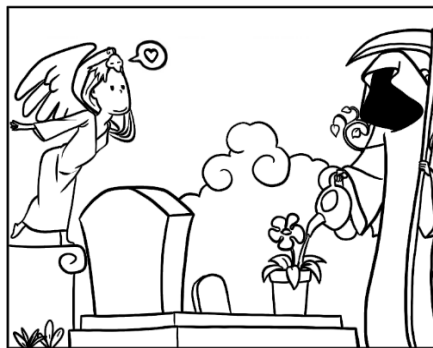
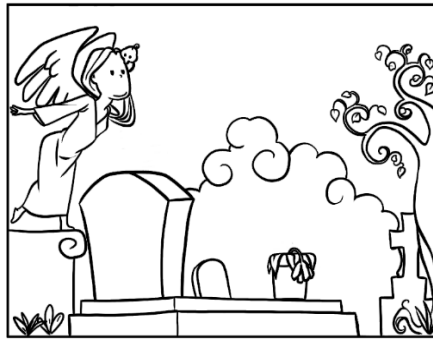
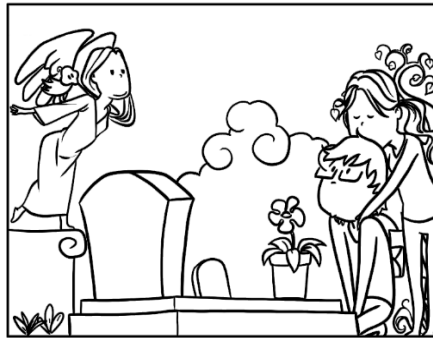
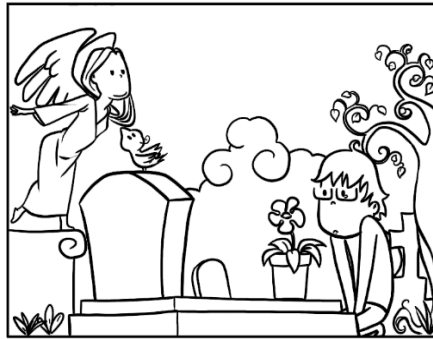
We are all brothers and sisters and husbands and wives and fathers and mothers and daughters and sons. And just like the dust in the Amazon, our remains will eventually create fertile ground for the next generations.

Our only job here on Earth is to stay connected to one another, and stop letting our differences set us apart. Because in the end, like the jellyfish and the algae, what we do for others is what will keep us alive.

Connected.



AS FOR DADS,
THEY GIVE BIRTH
FROM THE HEART.



@DIRTYPOTE

Writing Prompts

All of these writing prompts are designed to get your words flowing and help you write about boundaries and bridges, both metaphorically and literally. They can be used to create short stories, nonfiction, poetry, or even comics or drawings. Feel free to try just one or all of these prompts – whatever speaks to you. You do not need to follow the prompts exactly. Use them to see where your own imagination and creativity take you. Once you’ve got an idea that you like started, you can begin to hone it in whatever way you like. You do not need to stick to the parameters of the prompts.

1. **Find the connections and divergences between two sides of the same story.** Think of a story you want to tell that includes at least two people. This could be fiction or a true story. Tell the story completely, in as much detail as possible from one person’s perspective. (This prompt works best if you let yourself take a break, even a few days, between writing the two parts.) Then write the story in as much detail as possible from another perspective. Where do these two stories meet? Where do they diverge? How can you put these two stories together so that the differences in perspective are at the heart of the story?
2. **Show us the unexpected bridges.** Think of two things that are connected in your mind that might not seem connected to other people. For example, your grandmother and potato soup, blueberries and motel shampoo, or jellyfish and heart attacks. Freewrite for 10 minutes about each thing. You might include memories, dreams, opinions, or even descriptions of things you see in the room right now. Everything is fair game. Let your words flow and don’t censor yourself. Don’t worry about spelling or grammar, just make sure that your pen keeps moving on the page. What are the connections that came up in your two pieces? Where are they similar? Highlight the best parts of each piece of free writing and begin to weave the ideas together. Help us see the unexpected connections. Help us see what you see.
3. **Create a bridge by turning something into something else.** Use one of the poetic devices in the craft article in this packet (Writing Free Verse Poetry: Poetic Devices of Comparison by Dave Hood) to create an extended metaphor and write about something difficult or complex. You might use personification, symbolism, allusion, or any of the devices described. For example, if you were going to personify freedom, what kind of person would “freedom” be? What kinds of actions would they take? Who would they talk to and what would they say? What would their story be?
4. **Write about an image that comes up again and again for you.** For example, if salmon comes up again and again in your life in meaningful ways (dinners with grandma, fishing with your favorite cousin, the color of your first house, etc.), you might use salmon. Write in detail about each of the ways that this image is important to you. Give us the scenes and show us the memories by using all of your senses. Let us feel the depth of the meaning behind salmon in your life. Then, weave the scenes together to give your reader that sense of meaning. You could use one paragraph of each scene and rotate through them, or you could give us each scene one at a time.

5. **Write about pushing boundaries.** Write about a time you (or a fictional character!) were pushed outside of your comfort zone. Start by showing us the boundaries and why they were there. Then show us what made you (or your character) go outside the comfort zone, and what happened when you were there. Then show us how you (or the character!) reacted to being pushed outside of their comfort zone. Finally, show us the outcome. How did this change you (or your character)?
6. **Use boundaries to enhance your creativity.** Set a boundary for your writing. Perhaps you will only use five-letter words. Maybe you will not use the letter E. Maybe all your sentences will contain a rhyming word. Come up with a challenge that will force you to write differently than you normally would. How does this boundary change the way you express yourself? You might also consider using this as the basis for a story. Maybe your character only speaks in riddles, or doesn't speak at all. How do other characters respond to these boundaries?
7. **Write about a space that exists between two worlds.** Both boundaries and bridges can be liminal spaces, spaces that are transitional and do not exactly fit on one side or another. Write about a place (real, metaphorical, or imagined) that is "in-between." Who exists in this place? How are they different when they are in the "in-between" space? How does this space change people, time, and actions? What important changes take place in the transitional space?