

The San Marcos Writing Project Summer Institute 2011
Martha Stoddard Holmes - Monday, July 25 - University Hall 360 9-12 pm

**Propel Creative Writing and Wake Up Expository Prose:
Some Everyday Practices**

1. Introductions to each other
2. Introduction to my approach:
 - repairing the unproductive split between creative and expository pedagogy and process by using “creative” writing practices to stay in love with language, meaning, structure, and play
 - Schools of thought on daily warmups, morning pages etc: practice to stay limber vs. “getting to it.”
 - Finding a balance that embraces a range of approaches to continually nurture AND provoke our writing selves
3. Workshop activities for ourselves and our students: invention and revision (9:30-11)
4. Discussion (11-12): What do college teachers expect from first-year college writers? How can we help students across the bridge?

Closing

Some Good Books about the Writing Process (“cookbooks”):

Behn, Robin and Chase Twichell. *The Practice of Poetry: Writing Exercises From Poets Who Teach*. New York: Harper, 1992.

Bernays, Anne, and Pamela Painter. *What If? Writing Exercises for Fiction Writers*. 3rd edition. NY: Longman, 2009.

Goldstein, Natalie. *Writing Down the Bones*. Expanded Ed. Boston: Shambhala, 2005.

Johnson, Bret Anthony, ed. *Naming the World*. New York: Random, 2007.

Kiteley, Brian. *The 3 am Epiphany*. Iola, WI: New York: Writer’s Digest Books, 2005.

----- *The 4 am Breakthrough*. Iola, WI: Writer’s Digest Books, 2009.

NOTE: You can get a great selection of Kiteley’s exercises from both books, and read the intro to *The 4 am Breakthrough*, on his website: <http://mysite.du.edu/~bkiteley/>

Kowitt, Steve. *In the Palm of Your Hand*. Gardiner, ME: Tilbury House, 2005.

Lamott, Anne. *Bird by Bird*. New York: Anchor, 1995.

Smith, Hazel. *The Writing Experiment*. Sydney, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 2005.

Website: <http://www.allenandunwin.com/writingexp/multimedia.htm>

Tiberghien, Susan M. *One Year to a Writing Life: Twelve Lessons to Deepen Every Writer’s Art and Craft*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2007.

Ueland, Brenda. *If You Want to Write*. 1938. Minneapolis: Graywolf, 2007.

Thesis Statement Activities: A Few Little Process Things to Do with Students

Instructions to the Class:

Method 1: (need markers, paint, crayons, papers)

This can be done at any time in the writing process.

Make a visual image of your paper's ideas. Don't feel you need to do a representational image (pictures of recognizable items). Lines, shapes, patterns, blots etc. are fine. You can think of it as a mental map of your paper. As you create the visuals, try to imagine the paper inhabiting your mind—your body—your hand. **You may feel you need to use some words—try to avoid them as much as possible. Relax and have fun with this! When everyone is done, each student should have time to share his/her image, tell the class about the images and what they mean to him/her, and hear the class's impressions.**

Method 2: (hand out index cards and have students get out paper)

1. Write this sentence on the index card:

What's this paper about?

2. Place the card in front of you on your desk. Look at it. Now free-write an answer to this on paper for two minutes (longer if you can): just write, don't edit, and don't stop.
3. When you are done, raise your hand. Pair up with someone else who is done and go to another part of the room. Tell each other what your paper is about. Finally, return to your seats. Turn over the index card. Write what the paper is about in one rich sentence.

Method 3: (need pencil, paper, highlighter)

1. **If you have a thesis statement, forget about it. Throw it away (!) or put it in your desk.**
2. Make a list of statements you want to make in this paper. Remember that a statement is different than a topic:

Topic: student boredom in class

Vs.

Statement: The main reasons students are bored in class include lack of sleep, lack of preparation, confusion about the material, and unexciting teaching.

3. When you're done, take a break and then come back to your list. Read it out loud or have someone read it to you. Now consider:

- a. Are there any repetitions? Is the order logical, or do you want to tinker with it? Adjust as needed. Move the items around. Delete repetitions.
 - b. Highlight any statements that are smaller parts of other statements. If you're typing, just indent these.
4. When you're happy with your list, take a good look. **This is the outline of your paper.** Each statement is a topic sentence of a major paragraph. The indented statements help develop the paragraphs.
 5. Read through your list again, or have someone read it to you. (out loud) Now that you know your points, how might you summarize them to someone just starting to read the paper?
 6. Write that in one paragraph.
 7. Now reduce it to two sentences.
 8. Can you reduce it to one?
 9. When that summary of your points is as short as you can make it, make sure that it suggests all the big statements your paper makes. If not, add to it to build it up so that it introduces all the main points. You now have a draft of a thesis statement that actually matches the points your paper will make.

Method 4:

This one should be done *after you've written a draft*. **Read** (really read it! Don't just run your eyes over it...read it out loud under your breath if that helps) your draft and then *put it away*. Make notes for a 5-minute presentation of your thesis statement (summary of main points) to two partners. Your presentation should: 1) tell what your paper explores, argues, explains, narrates, deepens, investigates, ETC. 2) should not take more than 5 minutes. The partners will ask you questions about your thesis to help you refine your thesis. You can ask them questions about those questions☺ Take notes on what they say, and then when you are all done presenting and commenting, take 5-10 minutes to review your notes, revise your thesis statement, and turn it in. **This is a longer activity. With a small class, you can have each student present his/her thesis statement to the whole group.**

Method 5:

This one should also be done *after you've written a draft*. Read through your draft to the conclusion. What does the conclusion tell you the main point of the paper is? **Is this your real thesis?**

A Selection of Fiction Exercises, from *The 3 A.M. Epiphany*

Published by Writers Digest Books
Copyright Brian Kiteley
<http://mysite.du.edu/~bkiteley/>

*I'm always glad to answer any questions about the book or this selection of exercises (the exercises below are quite condensed versions of the ones in *The 3 A. M. Epiphany*). If you use this page for a class, there's no need to ask for permission, but I would love to hear how the exercises work—or don't work. My email address is bkiteley@du.edu.*

I use these exercises in classes to find stories. I assign eight or ten of them over the first few weeks of class (asking students to write about a consistent set of characters and a place, without trying to write a story). After the class has looked at these exercises, we try to find, from a handful of the exercises, or sometimes from just one, the most interesting possible story that is developing. The rest of the course is devoted to connecting the dots between these fragments of story.

1. **Synesthesia**, according to M.H. Abrams in *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, is a description of “one kind of sensation in terms of another; color is attributed to sounds, odor to colors, sound to odors, and so on.” Here is an example of synesthesia from Bruno Schulz's *Street of the Crocodiles*: “Adela would plunge the rooms into semidarkness by drawing down the linen blinds. All colors immediately fell an octave lower [my italics]; the room filled with shadows, as if it had sunk to the bottom of the sea and the light was reflected in mirrors of green water.” Schulz describes a change in color by means of a musical term. Writers consciously and unconsciously employ this peculiar method to convey the irreducible complexity of life onto the page. Diane Ackerman (in *A Natural History of the Senses*) feels we are born with this wonderful “intermingling” of senses: “A creamy blur of succulent blue sounds smells like week-old strawberries dropped into a tin sieve as mother approaches in a halo of color, chatter, and perfume like thick golden butterscotch. Newborns ride on intermingling waves of sight, sound, touch, taste, and, especially, smell.” Use synesthesia in a short scene—surreptitiously, without drawing too much attention to it—to convey to your reader an important understanding of some ineffable sensory experience. Use “sight, sound, touch, taste, and, especially, smell.” 600 words.

2. **Deja Vu**. Write a 500-word sketch of a scene in which a character has an experience that causes her to recall a startlingly similar past experience. Juxtapose the two scenes, the present one and the past one, on top of each other, writing, for instance, two or three sentences of the present moment, then alternating back and forth between present and past that way. Show the reader the remembered scene by use of Italics. Why would a character be haunted like this? Think of a convincing reason for the *deja vu* experience. Or don't worry too much about convincing reasons—just let some strange set of events impinge on the present moment of your character. Be playful with the relationship. Simple advice to beginners: don't be heavy-handed. It's easier said than done, I know, but you can train yourself to relax and honor your readers with difficult and unusual human patterns of behavior. Always flatter your readers by proposing a complex and unexpected reality.

3. **The Reluctant “I.”** Write a 600-word first-person story in which you use the first person pronoun (“I” or “me” or “my”) only two times—but keep the “I” somehow important to the narrative you're constructing. The point of this exercise is to imagine a narrator who is less interested in himself or herself than in what he or she is observing. You can make your narrator someone who sees a very interesting event in which she is not necessarily a participant. Or you can make him self-effacing yet a major participant in the events related. The people we tend to like most are those who are

much more interested in other people than in themselves, selfless and caring, whose conversation is not a stream of self-involved remarks (like the guy who, after speaking about himself to a woman at a party for half an hour, says, "Enough about me, what do you think of me?"). Another lesson you might learn from this exercise is how important it is to let things and events speak for themselves, beyond the ego of the narration. It is very important in this exercise to make sure your reader is not surprised, forty or fifty words into the piece, to realize that this is a first person narration. Show us quickly who is observing the scene.

4. Body English. Write a "conversation" in which no words are said. This exercise is meant to challenge you to work with gesture, body language (or, as a baseball announcer I heard once misspeak it, body English), all the things we convey to each other without words. We often learn more about characters in stories from the things characters do with their hands than from what they say. It might be best to have some stranger observe this conversation, rather than showing us the thoughts of one of the people involved in the conversation, because the temptation to tell us what the conversation is about is so great from inside the conversation. "I was doing the opposite of Freud," Desmond Morris says, of his famous book *The Naked Ape* that first studied the ways humans speak with their bodies. "He listened to people and didn't watch; I watched people and didn't listen." Because of Morris, according to Cassandra Jardine, "when politicians scratch their noses they are now assumed to be lying—and the sight of the Queen [Elizabeth] crossing her legs at the ankles is known to be a signal that her status is too high for her to need to show sexual interest by crossing them further up." Autistic children cannot understand human conversation even when they understand individual words because they cannot read facial expressions, which is clear evidence of how important other forms of language are. 600 words.

5. The First Lie. Tape-record a conversation. It's a tried and true method of understanding how people talk, but still surprisingly effective. Obtain permission of the people you are taping. Instruct your group each to tell one small lie during the session, only one lie. Tell them, if they get curious, that some philosophers think that deception was a crucial learned behavior in the emergence of modern consciousness several thousand years ago. You can participate in the conversation yourself, but don't become an interviewer. Let the machine run for a good long while, allowing your friends to become comfortable and less aware of the tape recorder. Listen to the tape a day or two later. Play it several times. Choose some small part of the conversation to transcribe (the lies may be interesting, if you can spot them, but more interesting should be all the other stuff they say). Transcribe as faithfully as you can. Do not transcribe more than one page of talk. After that, fill out the conversation with information about the people who are speaking, giving us only details about them that we need to know. The final product should be no longer than two pages long, double-spaced.

6. Phone Tag. Write a fairly long, complicated phone conversation overheard by someone in the room. All three people—the listener in the room, the caller, and the person on the other end of the line—are involved with each other in some way (not necessarily romantically). Let us hear the other end of the conversation, without actually hearing it. This means you will be giving us only one side of a conversation, so you will have to work to make the side we're hearing intriguing and capable of carrying a story. The listener in the room can guess what the person on the other end of the line is saying, but try to keep this guessing to a minimum, and make sure this guesswork is done with integrity—well after the unheard speaker has spoken. 600 words.

7. Underground History. Reread your own older fiction—one story or as many as you want to. Find the ten most common words from this fiction (excluding small and uninteresting words). Use these words as hidden titles for ten paragraphs of prose. By hidden, I mean that you should operate as in the above exercise, but after several rough drafts, eliminate the titles. Choosing these ten words is obviously going to be somewhat subjective, unless you have a program that allows you to do some of the work for you (for instance, you could pick a word that seems to occur

commonly, then do a MS Word global search—the find icon under edit). This exercise may help you uncover the trends and unexpected subject matter of your fiction.

8. **Backwards.** Write a story backwards. Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* works this way, more or less. Murder mysteries are told backwards, in a sense. Most stories we tell orally we tell from the middle forward until someone tells us we've left out important details, then we double back. You might try taking one of your own short pieces—or someone else's—and simply reversing the sentences. What then? Unless you're very lucky, you'll have to do a good deal to make this reversed piece of prose make sense. Make sure this does not become simply a device. The structure should be inherently useful to the material, which is good advice for any fiction. 500 words.

9. **Jointly Held Story.** Speak the beginning of a story with someone else. Choose someone you know well, who also writes, but that's not a necessity. Choose a good storyteller. Do this in a relatively private place, where you won't be interrupted. One person starts the story and continues for a few sentences. The next person continues for another few sentences, and so on for a while. You don't need to start up right away after the other person has finished his or her bit. End when you feel things getting exciting. Both speakers should go away from the experience and write down what they remember of the story, but don't write the tale down right away. Let it sit in your memories for a day or so. Don't play games of one-upmanship with your partner. Be faithful to the growing story and the characters created on the spur of the moment. Listen to the other person's quirks of storytelling. Let someone else's manner of creating a story guide you and influence your own story-telling style. The two stories that result from this exercise ought to be quite different from one another. 1,000 words.

10. **Home.** "Some women marry houses," says the poet Anne Sexton, meaning presumably that these women marry not men but the ideal of house and home. The different etymologies of these two words are instructive. *Home* originally referred to village or hometown. *House* has in its earlier meanings the notion of hiding, of enclosing oneself. Now house indicates any house, and home is the place that is central to our notions of ourselves. Use a home in a story fragment (500 words). Think about the power of rooms (kitchens, basements, unfinished attics, walk-in closets) on psychology and conversation. In this fragment, make the house a unique participant (though a passive one) in the unfolding events. The room need not be in a typical house. Think about all the other rooms we become familiar with—classrooms, office cubicles, public toilets. What are their personalities? How do the more public spaces we inhabit affect our behaviors? You might consider keeping several characters permanently stuck in different rooms in a house, communicating by shouts, cell phones, intercoms, Dixie cups, or telepathy.

11. **In the Belly of the Beast.** Describe an unusual interior space, one with lots of interesting appurtenances and gadgets sticking out: a submarine, a small plane, a subway tunnel away from the platform, a boiler room in the sub-basement of a high rise building. Again, do not yield to the easy use of this scene. The boiler room, for instance, we all expect to hide a creepy axe murderer-type. Put two innocent children in it instead, romping and playing among the glow and roar of the fire and steam vents as if this were a sunny playground (their father is the superintendent of the building, and he prefers to keep the kids where he can see them). 500 words.

12. **Absent.** Construct a character who is not present. You have many options here: people may talk about this character before meeting him, or after meeting her; you might choose to examine what this character owns, how he or she lives, under what conditions; you might use indirect approaches, like letters or documents that attest to the existence but not presence of the person. How do we know of people? Examine the ways we build characters in our minds and in our social environments before and after we meet them.

13. **Ways of Seeing.** Imagine a person with an idiosyncratic way of seeing the world (for instance, an occasional drug dealer, who, because of his amateur status, is more than usually prone to

seeing danger where there is none; an entomologist who tends to categorize the world dryly, as if seen through a microscope; a world-class athlete whose clarity of vision is almost hallucinogenic). Have this character witness a traumatic event that does not directly involve him or her. Narrate the event from a first-person point of view, making sure that the perspective is carefully built around the idiosyncrasies of this personality. Also, as a hidden aspect of this character, imagine him or her as some kind of unusual animal. 600 words.

14. **Loveless.** Create a character around this sentence: Nobody has ever loved me as much I have loved them. Do not use this sentence in the fragment of fiction you write. The sentence comes from Guy Davenport's aunt, Mary Elizabeth Davenport Morrow, via his essay "On Reading" in *The Hunter Gracchus*. Resist the temptation this exercise offers for a completely self-indulgent character. Of course, some self-indulgence will be fun with this character. But don't write from inside your own wounded sense of the world. 500 words.

15. **Loving.** Write about a person you love. This apparently simple instruction may be more difficult than you think. What makes us love people? How do we avoid being sentimental when describing the attributes that make someone loveable? You will immediately be faced with the decision of writing about someone you love or loved romantically or as a friend. Or perhaps you'll choose a family member. Your greatest challenge will be to make your reader love this person, too. 600 words.

16. **Improvisation.** Put two characters in a situation that demands improvisation, on both parts, which also demands that the two characters interact and compromise with each other in the improvisation. We should be able to observe the surprise, pleasure, and frustration that result from this improvisation. Remember that most of life involves one form of improvisation or another. Beginning writers tend to control their characters too much, so in this exercise you should work hard to let the characters surprise themselves as well as you. 500 words.

17. **True Feeling.** Using language that is simple and straightforward, describe intensely and exhaustively a moment of true feeling between two characters. Meryl Streep says that when she's researching a character she's going to portray, she always gives the character some simple secret that no one on the set, none of the other actors, and none of the other characters knows about. Give the character you're showing us this moment of true feeling through a secret, but don't reveal the secret either to us or to the other character.

18. **Teacher.** In a 500-word scene, have one character teach another character something that changes the *teacher*. But this exercise asks you to go another step beyond the first layer of reality. It should teach you how to play with more than one level in your fiction. The teacher learning something from her student is surprising, though not so unusual as you may think. The audience is moved by Rose's tragic learning curve in the movie *Titanic*. Imagine how much more interesting the film might have been had Jack learned something from what he taught Rose, rather than simply dying handsomely.

19. **The Bunny Planet.** Rosemary Wells has written a trilogy of children's books collectively called *Voyage to the Bunny Planet*. The basic problem she sets for each book is that a child (in the form of a young bunny) has a bad day (in prose). Halfway through each little book, an unseen narrator intervenes and says that the child in question "needs a visit to the Bunny Planet." Everything alters in this other world, first of all by changing to rhyming poetry. The world is better after we hear the words, "Far beyond the moon and stars/Twenty light years south of Mars,/Spins the gentle Bunny Planet/And the Bunny Queen is Janet." Wells encourages children, in these wonderful books, to rethink their world, to take an emotional timeout and find a better world than the one children frequently find themselves stuck in—chaos, messes, tantrums, sickness, loneliness. What I want you to do in this exercise is only very tangentially linked to this trilogy. Use this hinge device that Wells employs so deftly. For the first part of your 500-word piece, tinge the world in darker hues, show us a narrative style that reflects frustration, sadness, alienation, whatever. Then, with a

phrase a little like this central phrase of Wells's, change everything—especially the narrative method. Wells goes from a very dense and quite beautiful prose (almost prose poetry, as the best children's literature is) to this light rhyming style (although she does not stick to one method of rhyme—she uses couplets, quatrains, etc.).

20. The Argument. Two people are arguing—a man and a woman. They don't have to be a couple. Each is convinced he or she is right. You, as the writer, do not know—and do not want to know—who is right, but you will have exquisite sympathy for both points of view, both sides of the argument. How do men and women argue differently? Couples tend to disagree over relatively minor issues, which often stand for larger issues. Give us enough background and history, but try to stay in the moment as much as possible. Narrative PoV is going to matter here a great deal: writing from one or the other's PoV is likely to make it very difficult to show both sides fairly. An omniscient narration may seem to be the answer, but I don't like omniscient narration—I don't think it's really possible in fiction about contemporary life. Choose an accidental arbitrator—a third party narrator, either first or third person narration. This narrator knows and likes both these people well, but doesn't and can't favor one over the other. ♦ 600 words.

21. Standup. The usual method of the standup comedian monologue is apparently casual connections. For instance, Elvira Kurt once started a monologue with the simple idea of bad hair. "As a five-year old, you never had bad hair days. You woke up with hair straight up, and you said, 'I look great! I slept in my swimsuit and I feel wonderful!' Mother made clothes for me—horrible outfits. She probably laughed herself to death. I got back at her. When I told her I was gay I said it was because of those clothes." Note the deliberate movement from plain detail to plain detail, with great leaps between the details—the mother making clothes to the coming-out declaration. We are not expecting this transition (nor for that matter the simpler transition from bad hair to mother making clothes). But the transitions are funny, and they affect us, shock us even in this day and age. Write a 600-word standup comedy monologue, fitting it into a story situation you've already begun working on. Don't make it obvious to your reader that you are doing a stand-up routine—just tell a story as if you were doing a monologue in front of a smoky, irritable audience, with a Late Show talent scout scribbling notes at the bar in the back.

22. The Joke. End a 600-word fragment of a story with a joke you like or loathe. Use the joke as a way of coloring the whole passage, but don't just lead up to the joke. The joke should be relatively short, and it might be better if the joke is somewhat odd. A guy walks into a bar. He says to the bartender, "I'll have one g-g-gin and t-tonic, p-p-please." The bartender says, "One g-gin and t-tonic c-c-coming up." The customer glares suspiciously at the bartender, who smiles innocently. Another patron walks into the bar and says, "Scotch on the rocks, barkeep." The bartender says, "One Scotch rocks, coming right up." A moment later he brings the gin and tonic to the first customer, who says, "You were m-m-mimick-k-king m-m-me." The bartender, with a truly pained look on his face, says, "N-n-no. I was m-m-mimicking that other g-guy."

23. Outrunning the Critic. Write 100 short sentences about a character you are working on in a piece of fiction. The sentences should not connect and should not follow one another in any logical way. The idea of this exercise is to force you to outrun your own thoughts and intelligence and critical mind. Be careful not to be monotonous, using the name of your character or a pronoun to start each sentence. A better exercise would be to write 200 or 500 sentences about this character, but 100 sentences is still enough of a stretch to make this useful. The idea for this exercise comes from a collaboration the poet John Yau did with a painter, which was to match 1,000 small watercolors with sentences by Yau. John Yau is the author of *Edificio Sayonara*, *Forbidden Entries*, and *Hawaiian Cowboys*, among other books.

24. Rehearsal. Imitate the method of actors rehearsing a scene, repeating lines and whole sections of a speech, going over mistakes, etc., with several familiar characters of yours. Use this social trial and error to find new, submerged material for your story. You should think of this

exercise as artificial and behind-the-scenes work, but it may also trigger strangely realistic conversation. Human beings constantly rehearse and re-rehearse their lines. The anarchic rhythm of conversation is more akin to a social science experiment than to the polish of theatrical dialogue.

25. Surprise. Write a short scene about a character you've become familiar with over time—either your own fictional creation or a character based on someone you know. Start the scene by letting the character do what you expect this character to do. But at some point in the sequence of events, allow the character to do something completely out of character. Let the character surprise you. This exercise demands that you consider what is expected and unexpected in a character. You may want to make a list, behind the writing of this scene, of the kinds of things this character usually does; and another list of the sorts of things this character would never do.

Sample exercises from *The 4 A.M. Breakthrough*

1. The Coma. Write from the point of view of a person in a coma. This is a permanent condition; the patient will not come out of the coma but still understands the outer world. The catch: voices of loved ones are familiar, even intimately familiar, but the comatose person cannot attach names to the voices. The coma patient has lost this capacity. 500 words.

2. Money. In one short scene show us a character who has relatively little money—say \$503 in his or her checking account and a \$3,006 credit card debt. In the next scene, show us this same character suddenly very wealthy. Don't worry too much about how the character got this money—inheritance, a lottery winning, an unexpected windfall. What is the difference between these two states of being? How has the character changed? 700 words.

3. Falling out of the sky. Write a very brief story about someone who has jumped from the burning top of one of the two towers of the World TradeCenter on September 11, 2001. It took the buildings each ten seconds to collapse, but I imagine it took less time for a person to fall to their deaths from these buildings. Watch Ric Burns' documentary about the building and destruction of these buildings to see a handful of video images of such falling men and women. Write about what the mind is experiencing while falling, although flashbacks are certainly possible (but try to avoid something like the Ambrose Bierce story "Incident at Owl Creek Bridge" in which a man is hanged during the Civil War and the rope breaks and he dives into a river below him and swims to safety and runs away from the soldiers and finally reaches a long, beautiful tree-lined drive to an elegant home and sees his wife at the end of the drive only to have the rope yank him back to reality and death by noose and hanging). Once you've written one of these stories, write another one and then a third one. Each story should be less than 200 words.

4. Dying Young. Write a fragment of a story about a character who is relatively young (under 40), who will die in a few years, but has no inkling of this. You, as author, do, though, and let that knowledge affect this brief 500-word story however it will affect the story.

5. Concordance. I'm not sure why, but Amazon has a feature for books called a Concordance. A concordance is the alphabetical index of the principal words in a book (or the works of an author). I noticed this on the page for my own book, *I Know Many Songs, But I Cannot Sing*. The concordance lists the 100 most common words in my book:

across again against American another Arabic arm asks away balcony building Cairo call chair
Charles city come daughter day does door down Egypt Egyptian English European even eyes face
feels few first friend Gamal girl go going good hand head himself home hour I know language last
laughs I Lena lights long look man men moment name next night now old own people prisoner
read right room Ruqayyah Safeyya say saying see sits small something speak stands still story

street table take talk tell thing think three time told turns two walks want wife without woman word
years Yehya

This is an interesting distillation of a book. Here is the concordance for James Joyce's *Ulysses*:

again always arms asked away behind bit black Bloom call came come course day Dedalus door
down ever eyes face father fellow first get girl give go god going good got hand hat head heart high
himself house Joe John know last left let life little long look lord love man men might mother Mr
Mulligan must name new night now old own place poor put right round saw say see sir something
Stephen still street take talk tell thing think though thought three time told took two voice want water
went white wife without woman words world years yes young

Pick a book you like and know well that has one of these concordances on the Amazon site. Write a 500-word exercise using only these words as your vocabulary. Let the words guide you toward the subject of this fragment of fiction—see if you can find, independent of the novel you know, the sort of content and mood or tone this piece of narrative should have.

6. **Happy.** Here are Gretchen Rubin's twelve commandments for her Happiness Project:

1. Be Gretchen.
2. Let it go.
3. Act as I would feel.
4. Do it now.
5. Be polite and be fair.
6. Enjoy the process.
7. Spend out.
8. Identify the problem.
9. Lighten up.
10. Do what ought to be done.
11. No calculation.
12. There is only love.

This is from Gretchen Rubin's website (http://www.happiness-project.com/happiness_project/).

Write a very short story (no more than 700 words long) in which the main character is happy, following some or all of these rules, but silently, without pronouncing any of them aloud (and without using the name Gretchen, though it is a lovely and archaic name).

7. **Blind.** Write a short scene from a third-person attached point of view of a character who has just lost his or her sight. Do not tell us how this person became blind. 400 words.

8. **Lost.** Write about a town that has disappeared. It could be a Palestinian village on a hillside in what is now Israel, forcibly evacuated in 1948 and then "erased" from maps and view (though there are vegetable remains of the town). It could be a ghost town in the American west—a silver or gold rush boom town which remains in substantial form but is empty of people. It could be an African town erased by the encroaching Sahara. Or it could be a village sunk under a reservoir formed in 1933 in Massachusetts. Write about it in the present and at the moment of its last human habitation and at its most vibrant, lively apex. 600 words.

9. **A Beautiful Woman.** Describe a couple of encounters a beautiful woman has with several strangers within a short space of time—an hour or two. Don't tell us that this is a beautiful woman, the sort of beautiful woman who turns heads, who receives slightly better treatment than the

average human being, who moves through the world constantly aware of people's observation of her. Don't tell us any of this—just let her move through your story untroubled by her beauty. It will be our little secret. 600 words.

10. **The Apocalypse.** Heinrich Heine said, "Holland is always fifty years behind the times, so if I hear the world is about to end, I'll go to Holland." Write a comedy about the end of the world. 666 words.

11. **Your Swann.** Write a letter from one of your fictional characters to another. In this letter, tell a brief history of another (third) character over many years who plays at least three significantly different roles over the letter-writer's lifetime. The person receiving this letter may know a little bit about your character's acquaintance, but she shouldn't know too much. Because you'll have so little space to expand upon this character, it's okay to use narrative shorthand, as all letters do. 500 words.

Doubtless the Swann who was a familiar figure in all the clubs of those days differed hugely from the Swann created by my great-aunt when, of an evening, in our little garden at Combray, after the two shy peals had sounded from the gate, she would inject and vitalize with everything she knew about the Swann family the obscure and shadowy figure who emerged, with my grandmother in his wake, from the dark background and who was identified by his voice. But then, even in the most insignificant details of our daily life, none of us can be said to constitute a material whole, which is identical for everyone and need only be turned up like a page in an account-book or the record of a will; our social personality is a creation of the thoughts of other people.

—Marcel Proust

Swann is the first "character" in Proust's book *The Search for Lost Time*. [*A La Recherche du Temps Perdu/The Remembrance of Things Past*]. He is the first character outside the narrator's immediate family who impinges on his childhood. He appears initially as someone who takes his mother away from her bedtime ritual with young Marcel. Then, years afterward, he is the father of Marcel's first crush. Later, when Marcel is an adult, Swann becomes his friend.

Introduction to *The 4 A.M. Breakthrough*

Writer's Digest Books, 2009

Copyright Brian Kiteley

Email me: bkiteley@du.edu



The Basics: What You Need to Know

This book is a companion to *The 3 A.M. Epiphany*. The two books work in tandem, but you can also read *The 4 A.M. Breakthrough* by itself. In this book I give much less basic fiction writing advice than I gave in *The 3 A.M. Epiphany* (which came mostly in the introductions to the chapters). Here I jump right into the problems and processes of these 200 exercises. The exercises should speak for themselves. The categories of exercises in *The 4 A.M. Breakthrough* are, with one or two exceptions, new. The Appendix has advice on how to teach this book.

My History with Fiction Exercises

Accidental Exercises. The first decent story I wrote began as a combination of two different exercises. I'd been writing the same kind of mediocre story for six years. In 1982, I wrote in my journal an imitation of Thomas Pynchon, because I was reading and thoroughly enjoying his first novel *V*. In the same journal, I wrote another imitation (of Evelyn Waugh, who several months later

fascinated me). I wrote it on a blank page in the journal, as it happened right next to the Pynchon imitation, because by accident I'd left two pages in the journal blank and then moved on. This was obviously not a conscious act. I opened to those blank pages and started writing the imitation of Waugh, thinking I was writing it in the proper place in the journal. In fact I wrote it several months behind the current entries. I noticed the mistake only when I turned the page to continue the exercise, and discovered I was writing in the "past" of the journal. Then I looked at the exercise on the previous page and I realized both pieces of fiction were about the town in southern Spain where my family lived for three months in 1969 when I was 13. I liked the way the two stories fit together, even though they had very different sets of characters. I had not intended for the two stories to go together, but it was easy enough to link them, because of the shared town, Nerja. One was about a young British woman who'd just killed her Spanish boyfriend (maybe in self-defense) and the other story was about my brother and our family. For a long time afterward I was very conscious of the fact that an accident triggered the first really good fiction I wrote. In effect, I used a fiction exercise to create my first good story. I knew I was writing an exercise, by imitating Pynchon and Waugh, but the second part of the exercise was the accident and the real revelation—to combine such apparently unrelated parts to make a different whole.

Language is Alive. I wrote this sentence years ago: "I believe language is infinitely malleable, a live being in our hands, which deserves our great respect and curiosity." One exercise I designed for *The 3 A.M. Epiphany* (and have used myself several times) is to take the full name of someone you love and use the letters from that name as the only alphabet available for a set of words and sentences which serve as the raw material for a very short piece of narrative. I did this using my brother's name. My brother died of AIDS in 1993, and I'd been trying for years to compose my thoughts about him. The page of fiction that grew out of this exercise was a construction of the last moments—and thoughts—of his life. The story took several years to write (even though it was never much more than a page long), which seemed like a natural amount of work for a project about my brother's last thoughts. The way these sentences—and this language—came to me, in laborious and methodical pieces, is an example of how one can reflect on language—words and letters even—in a microscopic way, not seeing narrative of any sort but seeing the most basic elements of fiction. The vignette arranges and rearranges the words I could come up with from a set of Scrabble letters (literally) scattered around my desk. I had to seek out the only words available to me in this arbitrary fashion and yet I also saw how much my mind was still manipulating the material, without the more conscious part of my mind knowing it. This is a good example of what I mean when I say language is a live being in our hands.

Equivalent Processes

Adapt, Improvise, and Overcome. Former baseball player and manager Yogi Berra said, "You can't think and hit at the same time." But can you think and write at the same time? Writers should practice hard, work on repetitions, and think through the process as much as they can, whatever the process is. But when it comes to actual competition—writing the fiction itself, like playing tennis or golf—writers should trust that they have trained their instincts well and not think at all. Practice makes for better instincts. Fiction exercises are one part of a very particular sort of practice to build better instincts. There has always been a practical, instructional attitude in American fiction—it often dismisses opinion and interpretation. There has also been an ideal of the naive innocent, the rube who came to the city from the farm and wrote down great stories about driving an ambulance in a war. American fiction writers, much more than European or Latin American fiction writers, like this notion of conversational, easy, unpracticed, apparently guileless novel or story. The Marines have a saying, "Adapt, improvise, and overcome." Writing fiction is not like going into battle, but you do test yourself the way a soldier does test herself. The first two commands—*adapt* and *improvise*—are crucial. Writing fiction is somewhat like living reality—it is unpredictable,

but you can train yourself to react gracefully to life's surprises. Prepare for fiction the way soldiers train for battle.

Staying One Step Ahead of Disaster. The filmmaker Orson Welles said, "The director's job is to preside over accidents." In *The 3 A.M. Epiphany* I quoted Daniel Dennett, in *Consciousness Explained*, who theorized that the task of the human brain "is to guide the body it controls through a world of shifting conditions and sudden surprises, [to] ... gather information from that world and use it swiftly to 'produce future'—to extract anticipations in order to stay one step ahead of disaster." We read fiction to see how characters improvise their lives moment by moment to survive. In order to write fiction, we need to train to build up and stretch certain muscles and practice a variety of plans for retreat or attack. We practice our skills at improvisation, which sounds like a contradiction in terms, but it isn't. Actors who specialize in improvisation do not do typical rehearsal, by reading lines. They practice by responding to phrases, props, or new costumes thrown at them. They have to react without any preparation or even thinking. One of my models as a teacher is Harry Mathews, author of *My Life in CIA*. Harry's approach to fiction workshops is closer to an acting class than to a typical writing class. Over the course of a couple of hours he would inspire students to take on different parts of a fictional persona, actually adopting layers of a self, as an improv actor would. This persona might or might not become a narrator or a character in the student's fiction. I once took a one-day workshop with Harry when he visited the University of Denver, which he insisted should be eight hours long. He staggered the parts of the exercises, interleaving them, so that we were not always sure which exercises we were doing. He made us act out our possible characters, speaking aloud their quirks and endearing insanities. Harry Mathews also showed me, more than any other writer, how one can play with form and restraint to make beautiful music out of the essential structures of fiction.

Learn by Doing. In the early 1980s, Sid Caesar was a guest host of *Saturday Night Live*, during the down years when Lorne Michaels was not producing the show. Caesar was host of his own similar show in the 1950s, *Your Show of Shows*, and he was amazed by the way the *SNL* writers proposed their sketches each week before the Saturday show. They gathered 20 or 30 sketches, partly written and even rehearsed a little bit. Sid Caesar said they were wasting a great deal of time on each of these sketches. In his show the writers proposed a sketch with a line of description, not much more. If the sketch was accepted for the show, the line was turned slowly into a whole playlet (or sketch), and the thing was worked on until it was funny, right, and perfect. *SNL* operated with the notion of looking at these 30 or so rounded-out sketches, even though it seemed to waste a lot of the writers' time. What intrigues me about this story is that these writers were operating on something like the system of fiction exercises I advocate in this book and in *The 3 A.M. Epiphany*. They wrote whole small pieces instead of a brief outline form of the idea. I propose an alternative to the idea of outlining a story or novel. I have never written outlines for my fiction. My novels have had very simple structures—an entomologist's field notes or an aimless walk through Cairo two men take during Ramadan. I believe in learning by doing, like building an airplane in the air. Because of my novels' uncomplicated outlines, I feel free to include whatever catches my eye during a day's composition. These exercises are a formal way of filtering the day's residues.

Never Throw Out Sketches. The apparent excess of Lorne Michaels' system for *Saturday Night Live* allows writers to work out stories and sketches over long periods of time. Perhaps in *Your Show of Shows* the writers did keep track of ideas for future sketches as they were working on the week's sketches. But what *Saturday Night Live* seems to have perfected was the notion of an on-going endlessly revisable file of stories. The writers honed their stories, working on them week after week until perhaps one week the sketch caught the producers' fancies. One year, Larry David was a writer on *Saturday Night Live* (several years before he began co-producing his own sitcom, *Seinfeld*). He wrote dozens of sketches, only three of which made it to the show itself.

One of the actors he frequently used in these proposed sketches was Julia Louis-Dreyfus. The sketches he wrote for her were revived when it came time to write the plots of *Seinfeld*. The reason they were rejected by Lorne Michaels, apparently, was that they were generally about nothing, acutely observed descriptions of ordinary life (which sounds a lot like what *Seinfeld* became). The moral of this story is that you should not throw anything out. Think of your writing as a collection of rough drafts. Do fiction exercises for whatever you're working on, but also just as play, practice, to keep writing when nothing feels inspiring. Organize your exercises, put them in groups with other similar pieces, rewrite their titles often, reread them, reorganize them.

Schmucks with Laptops. The Hollywood mogul from the first half of the 20th century, Jack Warner, dismissively called his screenwriters "schmucks with Underwoods," which were the most common typewriters of the day. The full quote is "Actors? Schmucks. Screenwriters? Schmucks with Underwoods." We are all schmucks with Underwoods or laptop computers—we're all in this game for the love of the game, not the money. No one else cares if we write or don't write. This book aims at demystifying the process of writing. These exercises should make you realize it is possible—and even fun—to write fiction. Lao Tze's maxim that each long journey begins with one step is something like what I'm trying to teach with this book and with *The 3 A.M. Epiphany*. Each exercise is a step. Make enough of them and let them interlock and interact, and you have a short story, a novel, or a long hike into the wilderness of your imagination. Your stories don't have to be made up entirely of exercises, but if you become stuck, try one or two out. Give yourself many options. If you're stalled and you have several choices to make about a possible scene or section of writing, it will be easier to proceed. It is much harder to resolve your dilemmas when you have no alternative.

Deep Play. In *Interpretation of Cultures*, the anthropologist Clifford Geertz defines this odd term (*deep play* sounds like a contradiction in terms, serious play):

Jeremy Bentham's concept of "deep play" is found in his *The Theory of Legislation*. By it he means play in which the stakes are so high that it is, from his utilitarian standpoint, irrational for men to engage in it at all. If a man whose fortune is a thousand pounds wagers five hundred of it on an even bet, the marginal utility of the pound he stands to win is clearly less than the marginal disutility of the one he stands to lose... Having come together in search of pleasure [both participants] have entered into a relationship which will bring the participants, considered collectively, net pain rather than net pleasures.

I've always taken deep play to mean a complete engagement in the process, as if there were no outside, nothing beyond the game. Diane Ackerman, in her book *Deep Play*, says, "D. W. Winnicott wrote about play as a creative state of withdrawal from everyday life." Here are some more of Ackerman's insights on the subject, from her book *Deep Play*:

Animals play, in part, to stay active and fit. The exploring play of primates helps them gather information about their environment and food sources. The escape play of horses keeps them in shape for flight. Social play establishes rank, mate-finding, and cooperation when needed. Play probably helps to keep an animal's senses well informed and alert. The central nervous system needs a certain amount of stimulation. To a dynamic organism, monotony is unbearable. Young animals don't know what is important, what can be safely ignored; they have had fewer novel experiences, and their senses are fresh and highly sensitive. Everything matters.

Old-Fashioned Innovations. Any fiction that does not observe the fairly strict rules laid down for popular fiction tends to be ignored by major American reviews of books. But innovations that creep into the mainstream become traditions. Multiple perspectives, streams of consciousness, cutting back and forth in time, or even telling stories backwards—these were all radical innovations even 50 years ago. Only the press (*The New York Times* Sunday Book Review, for example) and mainstream publishers worry about annoying readers with too much innovation or difficulty. Look at television commercials, television shows, and big-budget Hollywood movies, and you will see a dizzying array of “experiments” in narrative structure and efficiency. Christopher Nolan’s movie *Memento* (2000) works backwards. Its protagonist has suffered severe short-term memory loss, and he tattoos himself with the information he learns to solve the mystery at the center of the film. This sort of story would have upset audiences and critics alike in 1980, but something has changed in audience expectations. Gradually these innovations in form become familiar and necessary because they describe the chaotic nature of contemporary reality. Our minds have changed in the last few decades, too. This is obvious to me, as a teacher of 20-year-olds. The young now especially see the world visually, in a much different way than my generation of baby boomers does. Icons, layers of images on computer screens and television, multiple uses of attention—these are some of the triggers of the great change in consciousness. This is neither a good nor a bad thing. I have thought, often fruitlessly, about how to engage young readers and writers in my classes. This book and *The 3 A.M. Epiphany* are my meager attempts to get at these new ways of assembling and comprehending the world.

How to Use this Book (excerpt)

Word Limits. In this book, I suggest four word-length-restrictions for the exercises—250, 500, 750, or 1,000 words (which translates to roughly one, two, three, or four pages). I suggest these lengths to match each exercise’s inherent properties. The most difficult exercises often have 250-word limits. The rare 1,000-word exercises indicate a relative open-endedness of scope (although they are not license to blather). The majority of these exercises have a 500-word limit. George Bernard Shaw occasionally apologized to his correspondents for not having had time to write a *shorter* letter. The implication is that Shaw spent time revising some letters and presumably reducing them. My older bother Geoffrey often rewrote his letters to our grandparents, when he was in his early teens. I was intimidated by this activity and a bit scornful of the idea that one could rewrite a loving letter to such wonderful people. I thought it robbed the letter of spontaneity, a crucial part of the process of expressing love to someone. I was wrong. Restricting the length of fiction pushes you to come up with small gems rather than an unreadable mass of material to sift through. The ability to compress what you need to write into very small molds is one of the most important things you can learn as a writer. I urge you to do whatever you can to obey these limits. At the same time, you can and should think of these exercises as something much larger, rangier, or baggier. But if an exercise grows into something larger—a story, a novel idea—keep in mind the basic notion of restraints as you move along. I object to flabby, meandering fiction. Stick to the story or the concept. Make each sentence you write do one or two distinct and interesting things. Let each paragraph be an island of thought and similar activity.

Catalogue and Cross-Reference. So you write 10 of these exercises, and one turns out to be a very good idea. That’s great. What about the other nine exercises? Put them away, but don’t forget them. You may find very good ideas for other fiction among these fragments one month or one year later. You should train yourself to think of all your writing as useful, attachable, and interlocking, like Lego pieces. I tell my graduate students to consider their teaching and their writing (when they’ve gone on to become a professor somewhere else) as being interchangeable.

Each is a form of writing. All the notes I take for my classes, all the variations on syllabi, all the paper assignments I dream up become useful—or are potentially useful—some time in the future, as parts of a book, an essay, a talk, or fiction. Writers should think of their lives as being made up of a lot of little writings. The key is to label every small thing you write, so you can recover it later. Catalogue, cross-reference, keep hand-written journals, save your emails in a separate file on your computer, type up intriguing pieces from your journals. Cannibalize all of your own writing. Most important of all, reread all your writing. It won't be useful if you've forgotten it and left it to languish in a basement file cabinet.

Get Lost. K.C. Cole, a science writer and columnist for the *Los Angeles Times*, writing about science journalism in the *Columbia Journalism Review*, says, "In science, feeling confused is essential to progress. An unwillingness to feel lost, in fact, can stop creativity dead in its tracks... [Science] editors, however, seem to absorb difficulty differently. If they don't understand something, they often think it can't be right—or that it's not worth writing about." I contend that confusion—or not-knowing—is good for writing. The way most writing teachers use exercises is to stimulate and help find material. Writers rarely see the need for this process once they've started writing. But fiction exercises can be used at any time in the process—when you're stuck, confused, desperate, or even when you're working very happily and fluently. Stacy Schiff, in *The New York Times* said, "Tea is said to have fueled the Industrial Revolution; caffeine has been credited with modern physics and chemistry. 'A mathematician,' the prolific, non-sleeping Paul Erdos liked to say, 'is a machine for turning coffee into theorems.'" Fiction exercises can be your coffee—energizers, clarifiers, simplifiers.

Using Procrastination to Your Benefit. If you're facing a deadline you absolutely have to meet—for example, to write a paper for a class that meets in two hours, or a letter of recommendation, or a memo describing how the Y-screws cannot possibly fit into the X-holes your subsidiary in Indonesia has just manufactured ten thousand lots of—spend the first ten minutes of this precious time writing a piece of fiction, quickly, no editor of the shoulder, no stopping the fingers from their dance on the computer. Use your own natural skills as a procrastinator for the good of your fiction (in this case at least). Find moments to write fiction when it is least convenient and most desirable to do so. You'll find, during these frantic little interludes of writing, that you often write beautifully, much better than when you give yourself an hour or four hours to do nothing but write beautifully. Why is this? We need constraints. We need to be ordered not to do something to want to do exactly that thing. The tension that creates good writing is often torqued by the constraints we feel while we're writing. The exercises in this book are tools for avoiding postponing writing (or overcoming writer's block), but there are times when procrastination is a good thing.

Stop Thinking. In the *Boston Globe* Gareth Cook talks about methods of decision-making that could easily be applied to the creative process:

Scientists have some remarkable new advice for anyone who is struggling to make a difficult decision: Stop thinking about it. In a series of studies with shoppers and students, researchers found that people who face a decision with many considerations, such as what house to buy, often do not choose wisely if they spend a lot of time consciously weighing the pros and cons. Instead, the scientists conclude, the best strategy is to gather all of the relevant information—such as the price, the number of bathrooms, the age of the roof—and then put the decision out of mind for a while.

Then, when the time comes to decide, go with what feels right. "It is much better to follow your gut," said Ap Dijksterhuis, a professor of psychology at the University of Amsterdam, who led the research. For relatively simple decisions, he said, it is better to use the rational approach. But the

conscious mind can consider only a few facts at a time. And so with complex decisions, he said, the unconscious appears to do a better job of weighing the factors and arriving at a sound conclusion.

Read the instructions for whichever exercise you decide to do—read carefully. Apply the problems of the exercise to whatever you're planning to write about. If you are in the middle of a story or a novel, consider where the exercise would fit best and read around that area. But when you begin to write the actual exercise, stop thinking. Operate within the restraints of the exercise but don't think. Train your instincts. Let yourself swoon completely into the process.

The Big Picture. At the end of *The 3 A.M. Epiphany*, there is a little section called "Limbing Up" in which I said that writers "need to teach themselves to write useful and necessary fiction, as well as good and competent fiction. Seek the higher ground, search for the material that challenges and changes you as a writer. These exercises should allow you to play with language on a small scale and build units of subject that help engineer the larger projects you want to do. Be ambitious, take on complex intellectual, political, and philosophical problems." This is very important. The exercises in this book and in *The 3 A.M. Epiphany* might seem designed to make you concentrate only on small details. But keep the big picture in mind. Don't let the work you do on these exercises distract you from tackling moral problems, philosophical issues, and important subjects in your fiction. Exercises are not the goal. They should be the means of writing larger projects on significant questions. Behind the theory of these exercises is the simple idea that you should ask questions of the world. Ask your grandparents, parents, aunts and uncles, friends, and strangers why they do the things they do, what their essential philosophies are, and why they like what they like. Constantly ask yourself why you like what you like, too. Writers ask questions. The best stories and novels are full of more questions than answers.

Once You Do The Research it is Easy as....

ABC

Thinking about Multiple Uses for Student Research and
Giving Students Choice

Presented by Robin Orner

San Marcos Writing Project



What went wrong with writing process?

www.discover-writing.com

Research First

I use the color paper organizer for my colonial person report, but it has many uses.

If you help students to organize while they are researching it saves time and agony. I say AGONY because my students want to write down line for line what they are reading. I have found that giving students different colored papers and then having them brainstorm together what should go on each color works well.

Remember to remind them that this is an organizer and they are jotting down notes. (* you may want to have them use the last page as a bibliography) I have found that this type of organizer helps them to realize they need to use more than one resource. I give them computer time but, also, I help them find books, at least one, for their colonial person.

There are multiple ways to pull together a five paragraph essay. I use a combination of Fetzer, Bing Bang Bongo, and now, since my district is training with Step-up, I will probably play with that too.

But what I want to explore is what to do with all that RESEARCH! I give my students lots of time to read and research. They write their report and maybe a poem, or a diary entry, but I wanted to give them even more choice.

How About?

- *Poems: I am, Bio-poems, or ???
- *Diaries or Journal entries
- *ABC books
- *Biography Bubbles with Punch and Set-up. (humor/drawing)
- *write a video game
- *write a movie trailer skit
- *How about a blog, wiki, or set up a facebook for your character.
- *New Ideas:

List of Colonial Characters

- George Washington
- Martha Washington
- John Adams
- Abigail Adams
- Thomas Jefferson
- Dolly Madison
- John Paul Jones
- Crispus Attucks
- Paul Revere
- Molly Pitcher
- Deborah Franklin
- Thomas Paine
- Benedict Arnold
- Phillis Wheatley
- Sacagawea
- Lewis and/or Clark
- Pocahontas
- John Smith
- John Rolfe
- Virginnia Dare

Biography Bubbles with Setup and Punch

Divide a piece of paper down into two columns. One side is for the setup-all the serious stuff you have gathered. The second side is for punch-all the silly and weird stuff you have learned.

Example: George Washington

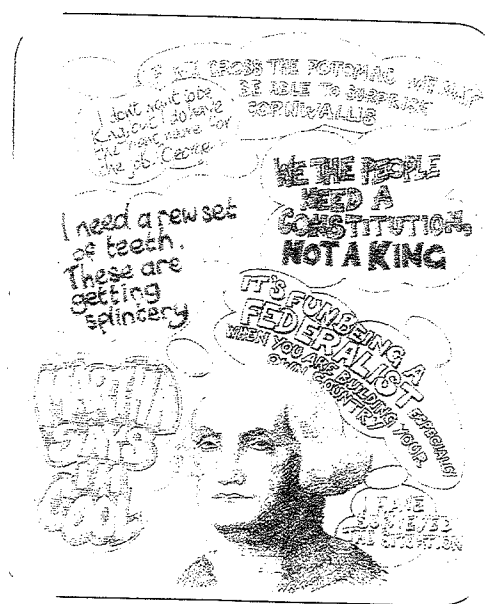
SETUP

He refused to be king
 He was a Federalist and
 a surveyor

PUNCH

He had false teeth
 Married to Martha
 He was tall

Now draw a picture of your person in the middle of a piece of paper. Add thought bubbles over his or her head. Next, fill in the thought bubbles with both serious and funny facts. (Barry Lane But How do You Teach Writing)



Three Ways of Looking at an Egg

1

A little white chest
without a key,
holding gold
for you and me.

2

White and gray
and polka dot.
Some have more than
just one spot.

3

White as a cloud,
smooth as a stone,
round as a ball,
treasure bound.

—Vincent Russo (4th)

Three Ways to Look at a Cloud

1

A white pillow
for a giant
to sleep on.

2

White cotton candy
in the sky
for a carnival
nearby.

3

A white piece
of loose-leaf
crumpled up,
leaving blue stripes
in the sky.

—Robby Russo (5th)

Five Ways of Seeing Stars

1

Little lightning bugs
trapped in the sky.

2

A dark field growing
small pieces of gold
which die when the sun
spills its light.

3

Stars, why do you
never dance
with the sun?

4

Your firing lights
guide us
through dark nights
when the moon
is sleeping.

5

You're stuck in a prison,
little pieces of the sun
that join together in the day.

—Christa Nussbaum (5th)

Model Poems

Winter

I am winter.
You know me
for the white blanket
I lay upon you,
for the cold hard stare
I lock on you,
for the harsh breath
I blow on you.
I have one enemy.
She dances in her dress
of colorful flowers
across your lawn
after the sun melts
my blanket of snow.

—Dawn Eisenbraun (4th)

(This poem won first prize for poetry in the Eastern Suffolk County Reading Council Contest.)

Paper

I am paper.
I feel the words you put on me.
I see the pencil after you are done.
It looks like a needle
Coming to poke me.
It feels good to be written on,
To be used.
I fear being shredded.
I dream I'm folded
And I soar.

—Kenneth Harris (5th)

Candle

I am a candle
My wick sings through the center of my soul
The glow I emit melts my existence
Slowly
Painlessly
I am eternal for an unknown tomb
I am forbidden in the eyes of the blind
I am light at birth
I am smoke at death
I am a candle

—Erica Lussos (teacher, 4th)

Bees

We are bees.
You know us for
our stinging rays
which pierce your skin,
for our busy buzzing bodies
and our sticky hairy legs
which carry food.
We are bees.
You know us for our sweet-smelling honey
which busies bears.
We share one hive,
We share one dream:
To be the queen.

—Xenia Protopopescu (2nd)
Angela Lu (3rd)
Adrienne Lu (4th)

DISCUSSION: Poets often make up words. Did you know that the playwright and poet Shakespeare added thousands of words to the English language? When you use a word or words that suggest the sound of whatever the words are talking about, that is called onomatopoeia. Onomatopoeia is used throughout "Bees."



Voice or "I Am" Poems

I am _____

You know me for _____

My mother is _____

My father is _____

I was born in _____

I live _____

My best friend is _____

Because _____ (We like to) _____

My enemy is _____

Because _____

I fear _____

Because _____

I love _____

Because _____

I dream (or wish) _____

GENRE LIST

Here is a list of some possible writing genres.

- | | | | |
|--------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------|
| Acceptance speech | Elegy | Love letter | Radio spot |
| Ad copy | E-mail | Lullaby | Rap |
| Address to jury | Encyclopedia article | Magazine article | Recipe |
| Advice column | Epilogue | Manifesto | Recipe poem |
| Allegory | Epitaph | Manual | Recommendatio |
| Apology | Essay | Map | Restaurant review |
| Autobiography | Eulogy | Memorandum | Resume |
| Billboard | Experiment | Memorial plaque | Riddle |
| Biography | Expose | Menu | Rock opera |
| Birth announcement | Fable | Minutes | Sales letter |
| Blueprint | Family history | Monologue | Schedule |
| Book review | Fashion show monologue | Movie review | Screenplay |
| Brochure | Flyer | Myth | Sermon |
| Bumper sticker | Foreword | Nature guide | Sign |
| Business letter | Fortune cookie insert | News story | Slogan |
| Bylaws | Found poem | Newsletter | Song lyric |
| Campaign ad | Graduation speech | Nomination speech | Spell |
| Campaign speech | Graffiti | Nonsense rhyme | Sports story |
| Cartoon | Greeting card | Nursery rhyme | Storyboard |
| Chant poem | Haiku | Obituary | Survey |
| Chat room log | Headline | Oracle | Tall tale |
| Cheer | Horoscope | Packaging copy | Test |
| Children's story | Infomercial | Parable | Thank-you note |
| Classified ad | Instructions | Petition | Theater review |
| Comic strip | Insult poem | Play | Toast |
| Consumer report | Interview | Poem | To-do list |
| Daydream | Invitation | Police report | Tour guide speech |
| Death certificate | Jingle | Post card | Translation |
| Debate | Joke | PowerPoint presentation | Treaty |
| Dialogue | Journal entry | Prayer | T-shirt design |
| Diary | Keynote address | Precis | TV spot |
| Diatribes | Law | Prediction | Want ad |
| Dictionary entry | Letter of complaint | Preface | Warrant |
| Directions | Letter to the editor | Profile | Wedding vows |
| Dream analysis | Letter of request | Prologue | |
| Editorial | Limerick | Public service
announcement | |

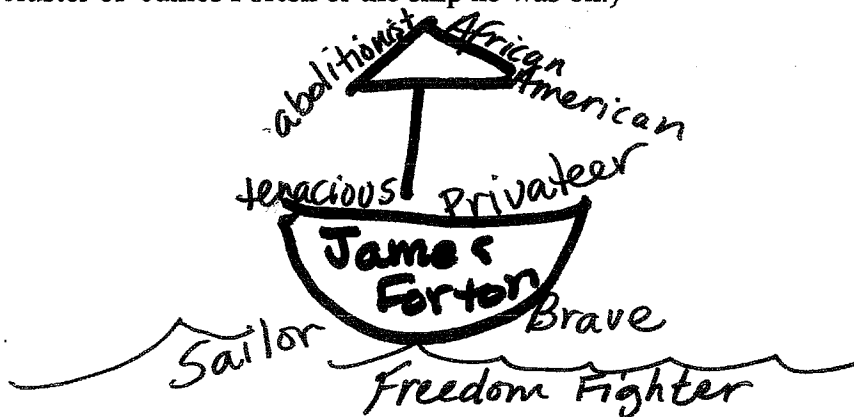
Adapted from a similar list in Why We Must Run With Scissors, Discover Writing Press 2002. Used with permission, www.discoverwriting.com

Name _____

One Pager Book Report Colonial Book

Complete the following on construction paper:

- Write the title and author of your book as well as your name.
- Choose a character trait that you think the main character has and write it down. Use the Fetzter organizer to back up your opinion of the character's trait. (opinion with a sentence starter, prove it—use a passage from the book, what does that mean?, and connection.)
- Choose a theme for your book. Once again use the Fetzter organizer to write down this information. (opinion with a sentence starter, prove it ----use a passage from the book, what does that mean?, and connection.)
- Use visual images. E.g. draw, computer process, cut from magazines.
- Draw a cluster around and important thought, feeling, character or image you had while reading. Artistically symbolize whatever you choose to cluster. (example cluster of James Forten or the ship he was on.)



- Make a personal statement about what you have read. Begin it with I believe.....(example from the James Forten story)

I believe that even though the black soldiers were very brave and fought for their freedom they were still denied that freedom. In the book, James Forten fought because he wanted to be like his father who was a free man. The story showed how unfair things could be for black people. They were denied their freedom because of the color of their skin. The author showed how James Forten was indefatigable and brave. He never gave up in hard times after his father died, he was valiant during the war aboard the ship though he feared death and enslavement, and he went on to become wealthy and famous because he believed the color of his skin should not stop him from what he needed to accomplish. We should be more like James Forten and not judge people by their outside looks, but by their character.

- Ask two meaningful questions or predictions and answer them.