How to Develop a Short Story

Brainstorming Phase

What are your *loose* ideas? These aren't concrete concepts; rather, they are snippets of an idea that could grow into a plot.

- A boy gets lost on a family trip
- A girl learns something bad about her family or someone she trusts
- A guy learns he has a power
- A foreign exchange student gets left behind in a foreign country

Ask yourself: Do I want to write a mystery? A coming-of-age? A romance? Something fantastical or science fiction? Pair your *genre* of choice with your *loose ideas* and see what goes together.

- Maybe the boy gets lost on a family trip and sees a crime committed. (mystery?)
- Maybe a girl learns something bad about someone she trusts and she has to learn how to cope with it (coming of age journey?)
- Maybe the guy's superpower is too strong and he struggles to control it (fantasy/adventure)
- Maybe the foreign exchange students get stuck on Mars (science fiction)

As a story pieces together, move on to **characters** and **setting**. Who is your main character? What does he or she look like? What's her personality? What's his family/friends situation? What are his quirks and mannerisms? Also, where does everything happen - in a town? Across several cities or countries? In an aquarium?

- Just because you decide your character is five feet tall with brown eyes and freckles <u>doesn't mean you have to add those details in the story.</u> If they aren't pertinent, don't include them. BUT, take the time to consider these details because you have to know your characters well before you write about them.
- If your character's physicality matters, then include it. For example, it mattered that we knew Rose and Ben were deaf. It was central to the story. Their other physical features were less important.
- Resist writing sequential actions that aren't necessary to the plot.
  - For example: *He went into the kitchen and opened the refrigerator. Then he picked up the milk jug and got a glass from the cupboard. He drank a glass of milk and got dressed for the day. Then he went to work.*
  - If these sequential actions have zero to do with the main plot, you can eliminate unnecessary words by being more concise: *He downed a glass of milk before getting dressed. Then, he was out the door.*

Once you feel like you have a general understanding of your story, map it out using Freytag's Pyramid. **Make sure you have:**

- Exposition, but not too much
- An inciting incident - the point of no return that sends your character on his/her journey

- A primary conflict, whether internal or external or both (you can have secondary conflicts too!)
- Complications or Reversals
- Designated rising action (plot points necessary to push the story forward)
- A clear and obvious climax
- Falling action, even if it's brief
- A resolution, even if it's implied

Then, start writing.

Know that you can always edit, rearrange, or start over. If you don't like the way you're headed, turn around.

There is no perfect order in writing. If you want to start with the climax because it's fresh in your mind, write the climax and set it aside. Work backward. Move in and around the plot as you need to. **Just make sure the end result is coherent and engaging.**

THINGS TO REMEMBER:
- If the stakes aren't high enough, the climax won't matter.
- SHOW, don't tell. (R.U.E. - Resist the Urge to Explain, especially in dialogue)
- Play with a literary device. Consider a limerick, foreshadowing, symbolism, and irony.
- Make sure your story has a theme. Write the theme down on a notecard and keep it by your desk to help keep you focused.
- Use archetypes to help you with characters, plots, and settings. (They are posted on the class page.)
- If you are totally lost, refer to the list of prompts I gave you! Sometimes we just need a boost and there's nothing wrong with that.

Word Count: minimum 2,500

Deadlines to remember:
Tuesday, February 19: Plot diagram due no later than 5 p.m. via email
Tuesday, March 12: Turn in the first draft no later than 5 p.m. via email
Tuesday, April 9: Turn in the second draft no later than 5 p.m. via email
Tuesday, April 30: Turn in the final draft no later than 5 p.m. via email

"Deadline" means this is the *latest possible day* to turn anything in. You are MORE THAN WELCOME to show me your work as you go along. **If you have a plot diagram ready in mid-February, bring it in. If you have a first draft by late-February, bring it in.** I would rather you work ahead than wait, but there's nothing wrong with keeping to the deadlines.