

# Advanced Writing Workshop Notes

Thursday, January 14<sup>th</sup> at 21<sup>st</sup> from 6:00-7:45

**All participants must bring along one or two works in progress. It can be as little as a page, or as long as 500 pages. As long as you have something to work with, the length doesn't matter. If anyone is bringing poetry, please bring a small sampling of your work. Usually 3-5 poems is sufficient.**

*This workshop is going to be run a little differently than the previous workshops. The goal is troubleshooting. Participants will work closely with the other workshop members in order to troubleshoot problems you're facing during the writing process.*

## Week One

**Writing Warm Up:** Choose from one of the three word groups below. Write a descriptive paragraph(s) using all of the words in that word group. You'll have **15 minutes** to complete the exercise.

- *Word Group One:* barefoot; firefly; snow; shadows; mirror; evening; garden; queen; jewels; face
- *Word Group Two:* green; sunrise; wings; wall; dragonfly; fingers; birds; fly; shadow; white
- *Word Group Three:* buds; angels; dragon; artist; water; broken; warrior; moon; sun; sky

**Exercise One:** Pair up with someone in the group. For about 15 minutes, I want one person to summarize her story to the other person. Talk about main characters, plot, if and a potential ending. After, the person describes her story, she should answer any questions that the other person may have.

Now switch and start the process over again.

Helpful tip: If you can't answer certain questions, write them down and go back later and answer them. Incorporate these answers into your story if possible.

**Exercise Two:** Remain with the same partner. Discuss for about 15 minutes what you are struggling with as a writer. Make a list of things that are bothering or stumping you from a creative standpoint. For example, are you stuck developing your main character? Do you have strong beginning and end, but a middle that lacks? Are you having a hard time finding an appropriate setting?

When we come back together as a group, we will discuss what problems people are facing and base the next class on what people feel they need to work on.

**Writing Cool Down:** Begin your paragraph(s) with one of the statements below. You'll have **15 minutes** to complete the exercise.

- "You know nothing of the holiness of the hearts desires..."
- "There is a place where the sidewalk ends..."
- "Ink runs from the corners of my mouth..."

## Week II

**Prompt I:** Begin your paragraph(s) with one of the statements below. You'll have **15 minutes** to complete the exercise.

- "You know nothing of the holiness of the hearts desires..."
- "There is a place where the sidewalk ends..."
- "Ink runs from the corners of my mouth..."
- "Love set you going like a fat gold watch..."
- "Because I could not stop death..."
- "What lips my lips have kissed, and where, and why, I have forgotten..."

**Prompt II:** Pick from one of the following exercises that best suits the needs of improving your story. You'll have **20 minutes** to complete the exercise.

- **Characterization:** Work with a character you've been struggling with. Write a scene in which the character does not speak, but is engaged in some sort of task. Describe that task. Keep in mind how your character would handle the task, given what you know about him or her. The point is to glimpse into the personality of your character, without him or her speaking. Let his or her actions speak louder.
- **Characterization, II:** So, you've showed what your character is like, you've described him/her to no end and people are still having a hard time grasping onto the character; what the heck do you do now? Sometimes you've just got to tell the reader about your character. Here's your task. Pick a place in the story where you can insert a short, page or so, chapter. Take that space to simply tell the reader about your character; where he went to school; how old he is; what are his pet peeves; is he in love? Just because you're telling doesn't mean that you can't be descriptive. Don't have it read like a resume; give it some flare that is still true to the spirit of your style.
- **Transitions:** Review a story you've been writing. Circle a tricky transition spot. Now rewrite the scene using white space as a transition. Don't forget that after the space, you need to indicate what it was you were referring to before the white space; but do it gracefully. Sometimes it will only take a word, such as 'today' or a phrase such as 'an hour later', etc. Now, rewrite the same scene without white space, but be careful to show that a transition has occurred. Like in the previous statement, show that there had been a jump in time or location through language.
- **Mid Novel Blues:** Take a character from your novel and put him/her in a situation you're sure does not belong in your novel, either because it has no relevance to the novel or because it introduces a character you have no intention of using. Who knows, you may surprise yourself and eventually add the scene into the story; either way, it will help you regain so sense of character and what you originally loved about your story.
- **Pros vs. Poetry:** Write a paragraph (around 10 sentences) describing your favorite time of day. After you write the paragraph, transform it into a poem. This will require you to do more than just insert a line break. It will require that you delete words or phrases or add words and phrases. It will also alter your punctuation. After you're done, which do you prefer and why?
- **Show and Tell:** Choose a fantasy character (Dracula, Frankenstein's monster, Narcissus, anybody that comes to mind) and describe him/her in everyday terms and mundane details. Make sure you mention the daily stuff that this character deals with, such as brushing his or her teeth, eating, smoking, pimples, etc. The point is to show that the fantasy character is real, not just an overblown, caricature.
- **Beginning Your Story:** Pick a scene from your unwritten novel that you've been wanting to write. Think about it for a moment. Your task is to write the opening paragraphs of this scene in three different ways. First, open with dialogue. Second, open with a reminiscent narrator. Third, open with a description of your character.

- **Language Variation:** Read through a paragraph or poem you written and circle all of the adjectives (descriptive words) and adverbs (primarily adjectives ending in 'ly'). Can you choose another word that better describes the action? Can you delete the word entirely. If you have too many qualifiers (very, really, etc.)? If so, delete them and replace with a stronger adjective.

## Questions to Ask During and After the Writing Process

- ▣ What is my story about?
- ▣ Where is my writing taking me?
- ▣ What do I care about?
- ▣ What has been set in motion that I want to complete?
- ▣ What is the point of the story?
- ▣ Why did I begin writing this particular story in the first place?
- ▣ Where do I hope to end up in the end?
- ▣ How many scenes does your story have? Cut your story into its components and spread it out somewhere to peruse (use index cards to organize).
- ▣ Does your story start in the right place—in the middle? What is the story's "history"? Giving your story a history makes it more than just the retelling of a situation.
- ▣ Does the situation in your story grow more complicated, more grave, and finally reach a point of crisis? Thereafter follows the resolution of the crisis? Does something happen? Is there growth in your story?
- ▣ Whose story is it? How does the story reflect this? Is the point of view right for the story?
- ▣ What does the main character want? Where do you indicate this in the story? How does this drive the story?
- ▣ Where in the story is this made clear?
- ▣ How do we learn what the central character wants? Dialogue? Actions? Interior thinking?
- ▣ What does that desire set in motion?
- ▣ What or who stand in the way of achieving it?
- ▣ Creating the Dominate Base: List two to five traits that your character has from beginning to end. This introduced your character to the audience and will build the base of who your character is.
- ▣ Creating the Complimentary Traits: Add traits that support the dominate traits but add depth to your character.
- ▣ Creating Contrast: Show the human side to your character by showing opposite traits to the dominate. This shows the character's complexity.
- ▣ Do you know how your story ends?
- ▣ What final meaning are you working towards in your story?
- ▣ What about your title? Was it thrown at the top of the page or chosen with care? Make a list of about 20 possible titles and then make your choice.

- ▣ Ask yourself what is at stake in the story? What is at risk? What can be won or lost?
- ▣ What is at jeopardy for you characters
- ▣ Does your story have conflict Does something happen in your story? Something that is significant, that carries everything? Is there change? Do you maintain the tension in your story?
- ▣ Do you maintain the risk? Or do you shy away from the risk because it is becoming too dangerous?
- ▣ What are you willing to take a risk in your story that may ultimately mean taking a risk as a writer?