

## **Writing Short Stories**

Designed for Students in Grade 11-12  
LSSU High School Short Story Prize  
[bcrossing.org/lssu-short-story-prize/](http://bcrossing.org/lssu-short-story-prize/)  
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### **Introduction**

The LSSU High School Short Story Prize, a North American writing competition that features a \$500 prize and publication for high school students, opens each year on January 1 and ends on April 30. The theme varies each year; in past years, entries have been expected to fit into genres like realistic, post-apocalyptic, and historical fiction. In this, the fifth year of our contest, the contest theme is **open**. This means **any** short story written by a North American high school student will be considered for this year's contest!

The mission of our contest is to help get North American high school students excited about reading and writing, as well as to raise awareness about LSSU English programs. Each year, the winning story is published in *Border Crossing* and the \$500 cash prize can be increased to a \$1000 cash scholarship if the winner chooses to attend LSSU. Students can also request feedback on their stories. What follows is a sample unit plan teachers can adapt to engage their students in writing short stories.

### **Contentions**

1. Students should be encouraged to read texts for enjoyment first and discuss the pleasure of reading before analyzing author craft and literary devices, because an aesthetic approach to literature in the classroom helps foster a lifelong love of reading and writing.
2. Students should be encouraged to think of themselves as writers and read like writers.
3. X-ray reading for creative writing craft makes students better readers, as well as writers.
4. Students should be encouraged to analyze and discover writers' decisions on their own through inquiry and the study of unfamiliar genres.
5. Student writing self-efficacy beliefs improve when they analyze student-written models.
6. Descriptive analysis of diverse mentor texts within a genre encourages student invention better than a formulaic or prescriptive approach to that genre.
7. A combination of whole-class discussion, small-group conversation, and individual reflection is the most effective mode for inquiry and craft analysis.
8. Providing opportunities for student choice is an integral part of creating student enthusiasm about writing.
9. Students benefit from being offered real-world venues for publishing their writing.

### **Step-by-Step Lesson Development**

#### ***Day One***

1. **At the end of a class period, introduce the contest. (5 minutes)** Introduce the LSSU High School Short Story Prize and website. Ask the students to read and enjoy one of the classic stories on our reading list for homework (or select a story you love!).
  - ["And There Will Come Soft Rains"](#) by Ray Bradbury
  - ["The Curse"](#) by Arthur C. Clarke
  - ["The Long Haul"](#) by Ken Liu
  - ["The Yellow Wallpaper"](#) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman
  - ["The Story of an Hour"](#) by Kate Chopin
  - ["A Rose for Emily"](#) by William Faulkner

- “[Where Are You Going, Where Have you Been?](#)” by Joyce Carole Oates
- “[Dead Men's Path](#)” by Chinua Achebe

### *Day Two*

- 2. Discuss the pleasure of the story as readers. (5 minutes)** Ask students: what did you think? What were your favorite parts? What were you reading to find out? What moved you, scared you, bothered you, or entertained you? Did anything confuse you? What made you stop and think?
- 3. Read like writers. (14:44)** Now ask students to reread the story like writers, paying attention to the decisions the author made. If available, play a recording of the story (if you choose the Ray Bradbury story, there is a recording of Leonard Nimoy reading the story available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LzhlU8rXgHc>). Ask students to pay attention to how the author uses **imagery** as they read.<sup>1</sup>
- 3. Discuss imagery. (5 minutes)** Where do students see the author describing *imagery*? Which passages use sensory description and concrete details to draw us into the story? Which sensory descriptions – smells, sounds, or visuals, for example – are most difficult to forget after the story is over? As students discuss, annotate the story using a document camera to model how students should take notes in a moment during groupwork.
- 4. Analyze author craft in small groups. (7 minutes)** Divide students into groups to analyze the following other tools the author uses to create his or her story. Give the following questions on separate slips of paper to individual students and let them find others who have the same task.
  - Character** – Where do you see the author focusing on character? Which passages work to make the story’s characters feel real? What details or moments from the story tell us who these people are and help put us in their shoes?
  - Setting** – Which passages give important details about the world in which the story takes place? Which details about the setting seem most important and why? Where are we given information about the apocalypse after which this story takes place?
  - Plot/Movement** – Which passages in the beginning of the story include hooks or mysterious details that draw the reader in? How does the author sustain the reader’s interest throughout the story by building on those mysteries or hooks? What are you reading to find out?

As students discuss, the teacher should circulate and give the groups guidance, helping them to select and analyze passages. Students should be encouraged to talk about how the author uses the assigned craft element in each passage.
- 5. Discuss the author’s craft as a class. (10 minutes)** Once each group has traced the use of each element throughout the story, discuss each group's findings with the class as a whole. Ask each group to read the passages students found aloud, and encourage students to make notes about techniques they could borrow in writing their own stories.
- 6. Analyze theme as a whole class. (5 minutes)** Distribute the final slips to each group, which ask them:

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<sup>1</sup> Students will benefit from studying multiple texts, in order to better appreciate the possibilities of the short story genre. Other stories from the list may be used to expand this into a longer unit on writing short story narratives.

**Theme** – What themes, or ideas, come to mind as we are reading this story? How does the story cause us to think about some social issue or element of human nature? How does the author use patterns in the details of the story to accomplish this?

7. **Ask students to read and enjoy one of the following past LSSU HSSSP winners for homework:**

- “Survival of the Fittest” by Zoie Cole (post-apocalyptic short story): <http://bcrossing.org/survival-of-the-fittest-by-zoie-cole/>
- “Shadows of Auschwitz” by Anna Shier (alt-history short story): <http://bcrossing.org/shadows-of-auschwitz/>
- “The Catch” by Grace Coberly (realistic fiction): <http://bcrossing.org/the-catch/>

### *Day Three*

8. **Discuss the pleasure of student-written story as readers. (5 minutes)** Ask students: what did you think? What were your favorite parts? What were you reading to find out? What moved you, scared you, bothered you, or entertained you? Did anything confuse you? What made you stop and think?
9. **Analyze author craft with shoulder partners. (10 minutes)** Have students discuss the student author’s craft with shoulder partners. How does she use image, character, story, and setting to draw the reader in? What moves does she make that you could borrow in your own stories? Compare/contrast the techniques and structures in the two fictions. What techniques could students borrow?
10. **Set aside time for brainstorming. (10 minutes)** Give students time to brainstorm ideas for their own short story. Have students answer the following questions about their story ideas (encourage reflection and talking with shoulder partners, as needed):
  - Who are the main character(s)?
  - What is the conflict or struggle for those characters? What major decision(s) will they make along the way?
  - How will the plot “move”? How might the story end?
  - What ideas or issues am I interested in exploring?
12. **Set aside time for writing. (15 minutes)** Encourage students to start writing as soon as they are ready. Students who are stumped may be offered a choice of first-line story starters, so they can think about ideas for a short story that uses that sentence as its first line:
  - *There had been only darkness since the child last heard the sound.*
  - *For one hundred years, the snow had drifted over the city, glowing unearthly hues of yellow and green.*
13. **Set aside time for sharing. (5 minutes)** Students should be encouraged to share the openings of their stories or their story ideas.

### *Day Four and Beyond*

14. **Encourage workshopping, revising, and editing. (as time allows)** Students should be encouraged to continue working on their stories in and out of class, and to workshop, revise, and edit their stories.

### Student Learning Outcomes

RL.3 - Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

W.3 - Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

W.4 - Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

### **Bibliography**

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