

## Literacy Tips



Tips for middle school educators on various topics such as grammar, writing, reading, spelling, vocabulary, cooperative learning and more.

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### Tip #29: The World's Shortest Stories

Before I begin with this week's writing tip, I need to thank Staci Hurff at Goldenview for sharing this with me. She recognizes that good ideas and lessons need to be shared and is quite a team player. She got this idea from another colleague and doesn't want you to think it is her own. Thanks, Staci, for allowing me to send this idea to all of the middle school sites.

Staci reads some selections to her students from a book called The World's Shortest Stories (1998) edited by Steve Moss. There is also a sequel available, too... The World's Shortest Stories of Love and Death (2000). When I checked WebCat, I found one copy of the 1998 version in the stacks at Chugiak High School.

These are collections of authors who have submitted short stories that are 55 words in length (or shorter). Because these are not necessarily young adult books, be sure to preview each story carefully before reading it aloud to make sure you are comfortable with the content for your group of students. If you look the book up on amazon.com, they have two or three of the stories you can read as excerpts.

Challenge your students to identify the elements of literature in these extremely short stories. This is an excellent time to review: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. Analyze the stories for their

conflicts: person vs. person, person vs. self, person vs. society, person vs. nature, and person vs. fate. If you haven't used p. 343 - 344 of the Write Source 2000 student handbook yet, pull that as a resource. It lists 18 literature terms. Some of these will be review, but I bet others will expand your students' thinking. (I especially like the cartoons which illustrate the difference between omniscient, limited omniscient, and camera points of view.)

Then take time to look at the writer's craft with these extremely short stories. Review the six analytical writing traits and have students score the writing using the rubrics and a six point scale. Take a hard look at each author's brevity and word choice. Discuss the challenges of writing concisely and when that might be an issue for a writer.

Finally challenge your students to write some of their own extremely short stories. For some students, it might be better to put writing teams together. Other students might prefer the challenge of writing one on their own. If 55 words or less is too frustrating for your students, begin with an easier assignment of 100 words and work toward this goal.

Here are a few samples from Staci's former 8th graders that you might want to use as student models.



*Plane Crash*  
by Rachel F.

He heard shrieking people around him as they hurled to the ground. Seats around him seemed to detach, and he felt like he was suspended in midair. Thoughts of death ran through his head. Fear overtook him, and he screamed in panic. At the last minute the roller coaster came to a stop.

*1945*  
By Kelsey W.

I'm not sure why I'm here. I only remember being gently rolled on the plane. I feel vibrations beneath me as the floor opens. A couple of loud clicks, and I am suddenly free-falling. As I'm spinning earthward, I glance back at the plane and read the words Enola Gay. I will end this war.

*On the Edge*  
by Brad L.

I reach up and put my next clip into the sheer rock face and breathe a sigh of relief. I start climbing higher, and as I reach my hand up for the next handhold, I lose my footing. I smack my face against the rock and fall holding the clip holds.

*The Letter*  
by Colby C.

The woman opened the letter and read its words. A tear ran down her cheek as her eyes moved across the page. "No gestures, writing, or object could ever accurately let you know how much you mean to me. Remember I love you. Your son." As she read the last words, a gunshot sounded from upstairs.

*Terror Behind the Wheel*  
by Kate S.

I sat alone in my car. As a strange man got in and sat beside me, my blood ran cold.

"Start the engine. Do as I say," he demanded. He directed me onto the highway and then to a deserted parking lot. When I had parked the car, he turned toward me. I froze.

"You passed!"

...This last story has a dark plot to it. You may want to think about whether you are comfortable with the content. In a time with so much teenage suicide, this is certainly a sensitive and controversial topic.

## ***Extensions***

Consider these additional books which also have very short stories in them. These are not classified as young adult literature, so please preview each story before reading it aloud or using it with students. I have these for checkout purposes if you ever need them.

Micro Fiction edited by Jerome Stern

Sudden Fiction edited by Robert Shapard and James Thomas

Sudden Fiction (continued) edited by Robert Shapard and James Thomas

Flash Fiction edited by James Thomas, Denise Thomas, and Tom Hazuka

