

Short Story Writing Exercise #2

Inspired by Isak Dinesen's "The Blue Jar"

You may write in ANY genre. The focus is on craft and experimentation with story structure.

Step 1. Choose a symbol to work with - examples include a black cross necklace, a white lily, a willow tree branch, a lucky brown 1956 penny, a dying fish, etc. You see how specific it has to be, and original (ie not as cliché as a red rose).

Step 2. Cluster / web / mind map this symbol: Put your chosen symbol in the middle and web outward all the possible things it could mean and/or that you or others could associate with it.

Step 3. Create an outline using 4 columns: Setting, Character, Conflict, and Plot. Plan out your story around this symbol by asking yourself and answering questions such as: who owns this thing? How old is s/he? Do they have a family, what do they wear, do for a living? Where do they live? What's important to them? What's a defining memory? Why is this object significant to them? What the person's problem? Where do they live? Are they rich or poor? Can this thing represent a dynamic or a relationship between two people?

Step 4. Freewrite by hand as much as class time allows (15-20 minutes) to start the story. *Please read below for what you must include / do in this exercise, and what to avoid.*

Step 5. Type and extend the draft to a min. of 400 words. *Keep in mind the constraints listed below.*

Your exercise MUST have:

- Symbolism to structure the story (so it has to feature, its qualities etc as a motif throughout in different ways and perhaps with different meanings.)
- Passive voice and inverted syntax to give a more descriptive, poetic, myth-like feel
- 3rd person omniscient narrator

A few things to keep in mind as you do this exercise:

DO	DO NOT
Keep the focus on ONE main character.	Write too much. (Keep it tight).
Limit the context of your piece like Dinesen – you can choose a whole life, but there is ONE focus.	Describe every detail. (Tell the reader only what they need to know).
Use figurative language (simile, metaphor, personification, imagery)	Let plot or 'and then this happens' to drive the story
Experiment with characterization to show how this symbol is significant to her/him.	Wrap the story up in a neat little bow. (Resist the urge to have a happy ending. Trust the reader to do the work.)

These exercises count towards the process grade of your final short story. Missed checkpoints can be made up, but ultimately, you'll lose marks on the final product if these exercises are skipped.