



Conversations with the World

Taught by Scott Lambridis and Eric Myers
Limited to 12 students, ages 11–14
September 4, 11, 18, & 25, 2008
Tuesdays, 6:00–8:00 PM
TA: Aaron McManus
Intern: Joanna

What do you think about what's important in the world? Writing is not only a dialogue between yourself and the reader; it is a dialogue between yourself and the world. Taking regular headlines as our starting point, we will draw inspiration from the comic, tragic, complex world we inhabit. Working collaboratively, we will use everything from Web 2.0 software to scrapbooks to capture the building blocks of stories that are both entertaining and socially relevant. We will then use this mixed media collage to create stories that communicate our thoughts and concerns about life in the twenty-first century. The creative process will be archived in a digital journal for future use. Completed stories will be submitted for inclusion in 826's Quarterly, published online in OLOGY magazine.

Outline - Day 1

1. Introductions
2. Review of student expectations. What do you think this workshop is really about? What are you expecting it to be? What are you hoping to get out of it? If you don't know, what do you think of when you hear the title and description? What might it be?
3. Class goals.
 1. No one likes to be told how to think. If you ever tried telling someone what's wrong with them (maybe a friend, maybe a parent), then you know that people don't learn if they don't want to. But people can be surprisingly receptive to being provoked to think about something when given from a point of view that isn't overbearing. We want to inspire people to think about things in a new way, and stories are a great way (if not the best) way to do that.
 2. Why are stories so good at doing this? Metaphor, allegory, letting them draw upon their own life's experiences. Imagination. Emotional attachment to characters.
 3. Examples of socially relevant stories (movies, books, etc)
 1. Successful ones
 1. Clockwork Orange
 2. Wall-E
 3. Uncle Tom's Cabin
 4. To Kill a Mockingbird
 5. Harrison Bergeron
 6. 1984
 7. Animal Farm
 8. Monsters Inc
 9. Slaughterhouse 5
 10. Fables and Nursery rhymes (Jack and Jill, Ugly Duckling)
 11. The Jungle
 12. Unsuccessful ones?
 2. We're going to try to do this ourselves, and we're going to take a close look at the process of doing it so you can continue doing this on your own.
4. The Plan for all the days
 1. Teams???

2. Look at the world and think about things that bother you.
3. Hone these thoughts into a narrative goal.
4. Brainstorm the elements of a story that could help bring about this goal. Brainstorming is great for non-linear thinking. Practice at embedding your ideas into characters who have a real past and real emotions and real concerns.
5. Catalog these brainstorms for later reference. (Scrapbook & digital at <http://826valenciaconversationswiththeworld.blogspot.com/>)
6. Create a framework for your story.
7. Write a draft of a story.
8. Critique each other's work.
9. Write a second draft.
10. Read them aloud.
11. At the end of each day, we'll collect all the papers.

Day One activities:

1. Theme creation
 1. Find headlines, articles, news snippets from the pile that you find interesting, cut them out, and throw 'em in a folder.
 2. Write one sentence about why that clipping is interesting to you.
 3. Using these as a basis, list three things you'd like to change about the world. (We'll only actually use one).
4. Character/scenario creation
 1. Dig through the pile of artistic/random scraps and clip out pieces you find interesting.
 2. Write one sentence for each clipping about why you find it interesting.
 3. Using these as a basis (and with the help of some more brainstorming exercises if necessary), make a list of characters, traits, settings, and such that appeal to you.
 4. Create a character and situation that will be used to address your theme. (Your "What if...")

By the end of the first class, each student will have a pile of scraps, with a caption of why, plus a theme, a character, and a situation to write a story about. They'll also be introduced to blogging software for archiving the pieces that comprise the creative process.

Outline - Day 2

Answer any questions.
 Review/add more blog entries.
 Create rough first draft.

By the end of the second class, each student will have a first draft of a story and a set of blog posts corresponding to their ideas.

Outline - Day 3

Peer review and revisions
 Final draft
 Archiving

By the end of the third class, all stories will be complete and everything will be archived online.

Outline - Day 4

Student readings

By the end of the fourth class, everyone will have read their story out loud, and will have a functioning blog of the story and process to show off. We'll even record the readings (if they permit us) and post them to the blog as well.

Materials

1. Examples of successful socially relevant stories
2. Examples of unsuccessful socially relevant stories
3. Box of headlines (Sources of news stories for them to flip through and cut up. Newspapers, magazines, anything you can think of where someone might find something about the world that they want to change.)
4. Box of extraneous artistic goodies
5. Brainstorming outline
6. Peer review forms
7. Archive examples

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## **Brainstorming Activities**

These activities are aimed to show how many ways you can come up with ideas related to your story and character. Use them as you need them.

1. **Death as an insight into life** –What would be the most pleasant death you can think of? Most ironic? (i.e. riding a missile, burning alive, getting shot by a stray bullet while jumping to death off a building, being buried alive, cat swallowing a Christmas ribbon)
2. **Who's telling this story anyway?** – Who could be telling the story and how is the story being delivered? Is the main character telling the story as it's happening or is a witness talking about the past? Is the story in the form of a letter or email or voicemail message? Is the voice omniscient? Did the voice simply hear this story as gossip? If the narrator isn't the character, what relation could the narrator have to the character? Is the grave keeper telling the story? Did someone find an object and is telling the story of the object? Is it a myth or fable? (i.e. God's Acre, The Dude, CLAV)
3. **A place can tell a story** – What is the strangest place you've ever been to? What is the most pleasant place you've ever been to? What is the scariest place you've ever been to? Can you think of a way to make them stranger, more pleasant, or scarier? Where is the coolest vacation or trip you've ever taken or heard of? If you could go anywhere in the universe right now where would you go? What place would you like to see firsthand? (i.e. Badlands, Clockwork Orange home, the Louisiana swamp, a Thai temple, the moon, the inside of a pulsar, a Chicago speakeasy in the 1920's)

4. **Interesting names can spark stories** – What’s the funniest name or nickname of a person you’ve ever heard or can think of? What’s the most daunting name you’ve ever heard or can think of? If you can’t think of any, try jumbling the letters in someone’s name. If you still can’t think of any, try looking in a natural field guide for an animal or plant name. (i.e. Big Walker T, Mister Cleanjeans, Barron Storey).
5. **Tabloid time** – What’s the juiciest piece of gossip you’ve ever heard? If you could make up a lie about a family member, friend, or celebrity what would it be? What historical or local event do you think is really interesting? (i.e. Japanese city holding a Yakuza retirement day, a man found with 50 ravens in his apartment, a young couple running off to elope)
6. **Where’d that come from?** – Pick an object in the room that stands out to you as being out of place. Where might that object have come from? What’s the most innocuous object in the room? What might be its secret history? Do you see an object you never realized was there before? (i.e. a clock with fish for hands, a bottle of shampoo, a kazoo)
7. **Every picture tells a story** – How images can spark story ideas and story pieces can inspire imagery. We will provide some pieces of artwork for you to look at, as well as encourage them to think of images they’ve found to be particularly inspiring. (i.e. What’s behind Mona Lisa’s smile? The image of the dragon is the main character’s tattoo...where and when did he get it?)
8. **Using music to inspire writing** – How music can spark story ideas and tones and vice versa. We will provide a few small snippets of music for you to listen to, as well as encourage you to think of pieces they’ve found particularly inspiring. (i.e. The character’s childhood alarm clock always played “Here comes the sun” and now he shudders every time he hears it. The keyboards in a different piece might sound like a bunch of crickets in the grass, playing in unison.)
9. **Dictionary** – Great words or phrases alone can spark a story. Science textbooks are great for this. (i.e. pulsar, “throw out a window”, phobias, proboscis, pineal gland’s connection to circadian rhythms)
10. **What if?** – What idea has always struck you as amazing? What if something you’ve always assumed was true wasn’t? (i.e. a wind powered car, the universe may eventually collapse, taste buds are the only nerve cells that regenerate)
11. **Nothing’s stranger than nature** – What creature (animal, plant, or otherwise) can you recall having the most memorable feature, such as defense mechanism or courtship dance? (i.e. a snake can unhinge it’s jaw, you can find

harpoons from the 1800s inside whale stomachs, bees navigate by ultraviolet light, a spider's silk is the strongest fiber known to man, moths get caught in bug zappers because they use the moon to navigate)

12. **The title before the story** – Sometimes story ideas can come from a simple word or phrase that would serve as your perfect title. Maybe you keep it, maybe not, but it can certainly help spark ideas. What are some of the best titles of movies, books, or song's you can think of? Do you have any of your own? You can either get an idea from someone else's title, or get your story idea from your own title. (i.e. "The left was rotten and the right not quite ripe", "He played London tricks with pants macabre", "Franco's dead, Spain rejoices", "Stories within stories, human lives", "The man who wasn't there", "Jitterbug perfume", "Still life with woodpecker", "Life of the Gallows")

13. **Collaboration** – Requesting the impressions and thoughts of a friend or classmate on your work-in-progress can spark new ideas and lead you into new directions. Pair up with a classmate and have him/her give their initial impressions on the pieces you've put together.

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Peer Review Worksheet

Title of Story:

Reviewer:

What do you like most and why?

What's your favorite sentence and why?

What are your feelings of the first sentence/beginning? Does it grab you?

What are your feelings about the last sentence (ending)? Does it conclude everything?

What do you want to know more about?

What could be cut?

What advice would you give the author?

General or Additional Comments:
