CHAPTER FIFTEEN
INVENTED STORIES

This chapter comprises all imaginary narratives in either prose or poetry. Invented stories comprise many types of writing and most of the world's great literature—folk tales, fables, parables, myths, legends, epics, ballads, modern story poems, short stories, novels, science fiction, detective and mystery fiction, and so on. It is important both for experiencing the various kinds of literature others have created and for exercising one's own creative imagination. Since *oral* activities for invented stories are covered in Chapters 5 and 8, we'll deal here only with the writing and reading of them.

All good writing is imaginative, even when the point of departure is as factual as sensations and memories. In confining our discussion here to made-up stories, we don't mean that only fiction is imaginative or that fiction is not rooted in the real world. There's no such thing as "pure imagination"; even the most farfetched of fantasy inventions are indirect recombinings of experiences. If we call the source of inventions *imagination*, that is only to say that their derivation from reality is too indirect and unconscious to know. Nor must "lying like the truth," to use Daniel Defoe's phrase, be deemed frivolous because of this indirection. For understanding and emotion, fiction is functional!

We believe "creative writing" is a staple of learning, not Friday afternoon fun or the luxury of lucky "gifted" children who are mastering the "basics" on schedule. The testimony is ample from many hardworking teachers in the inner city that their students can learn basics only after they have become persuaded that the world of letters has something in it for them. The basics for children are feelings and motives. A ghetto child needs more so-called creative writing, not less of it. Once persuaded of the personal value for her of writing, she will attack its technical aspects.

MEDIA ALTERNATIVES

An increasing proportion of entertainment in our culture comes to us through nonprint media, and this fact has to be faced by any teacher of literature. Films and TV shows particularly have preempted the role of casual fiction in the lives of most Americans. In inviting students to invent stories, we should tie the process to at least as many options in media as they have experienced already so they can produce a story in sound and/or in pictures—drawn, filmed, acted live, printed, and so on.

Even before children can write, they can tell or draw a story. Their audiotaped story can be played while their drawings are shown or transcribed by an aide and attached to the drawings. Transparencies or slides can capture the visuals more durably and allow for projection as authors tell their stories (for more on this see page 182). Desktop publishing can put text and pictures together as booklets (see "Duplicating" on page 199).

■ FILMING

Although youngsters can go out and simply shoot a film if they have access to a camcorder, revising and reshooting as they go, they may sometimes get a better product if they write a film script first or at least a "treatment outline." In a film, they need to think of camera sequences: for example, four people playing cards; a *close-up* of a wink across the table; a *long shot* of all the players at the table; a *slow panning* of all their faces; a *zoom-in* to a close-up of a card passed under the table, and so on. Get some professional shooting scripts for students to look at to see how not only camera shots but sound effects and voice-over are indicated. See page 165 for filming animation; drawing story boards or writing some notes can serve as a script or treatment outline.

POINTS OF DEPARTURE

The kernels of stories are lying about everywhere, and once students are licensed, say, to convert a sensory description to a short story by imagining an action in that setting, or to start making up something from the random meanings of rhyme words, or to imagine a story behind a news report, or to transpose a "minimal situation" into a narrative, they will solve for themselves the problem of getting an idea. Many good ideas for stories will accumulate in the writer's notebook that we suggested on page 211—incidents, scraps of conversation, hearsay, dreams, memories, etc. Sometimes stories spin off from other activities like involved discussion or reading about a certain subject, or immersion in a particularly literary form, or workshop improvisations.

Often students won't need any external stimuli. The following possibilities are for the times when writers want a prompt. Also, children imitate a great deal the characters and stories they find on screen and in books. Although a certain amount of borrowing is natural and useful, so pervasive are ads, cartoons, sitcoms, and vogue movies that some less conventional, more creative prompts are needed to ensure some variety and originality.

■ PHOTOGRAPHS

Collections of photographs students cut from magazines and newspapers can spark invented stories in the same way they do invented dialogue. Especially handy are some sets of ten to twelve photos each, in which the same people, places, and objects recur. Students or aides may have to make these. A student arranges a sequence of events by physically ordering the set of photos a certain way. She might write captions for each photograph (see pages 293 and 296). A photograph or series of pictures can be studied by a small group, and then each person can go off and write a story telling exactly what is going on in the pic-

ture(s), what happened before, what could happen next, and what each of the characters is like. Then the group can come together to compare their stories.

More experienced students can take a single photograph and write a series of short accounts of what is happening, each from a different point of view. For example, if the photograph is of an emotion-charged human interaction, they could write it up from the viewpoint of a participant, a reactive spectator, or an objective professional reporter.[1]

■ STORY PROMPTERS

A popular way of priming the story pump is to borrow only a starting sentence or phrase from another person or an activity card and improvise the rest. The fragment might set a locale such as a doctor's office, a thick forest, an old bridge, a fishing shack, or an alley at night. Now, imagine somebody in that place. Is it a man, woman, child, animal? What is he, she, or it doing?

Beginning writers might respond well to such simple starters as:

- There were two little kittens who ...
- Over the hill came a big ...
- Mary heard a loud noise.

Some older students might want a bit more mood or action:

- The castle, which had stood solidly beside the sea for a thousand years, was the only mark on the horizon. I was paddling my small boat toward it when ...
- Mom announced firmly, "From now on things are going to be different around here."
- Until that Saturday no one would have ever said Jerry was particularly clever, or even very helpful, for that matter.
- She hadn't ever really wanted to go along with the idea; but here she was.
- I woke up to the sound of men shouting. At first I'd forgotten where I was.

Students can supply story starters like these for each other on demand, or keep some on hand. Comparing stories written from the same starter is fun and enlightening.

A fifth-grade boy started with "All of a sudden there it was, a big red ...".

All of a sudden there it was, a big red sign that said Ghost Realty. Just then a man walked in. He said that he was looking for a haunted house. The man in the chair said that there was one house on an island about a half mile from Long Island. The owner died about a week ago, and the man (buyer) said, "I will take it."

"Wait. In order that you may buy the house you will have to spend the night in the house."

"Ok, I will spend the night in the house."

"Ok, than it is settled."

"Fine, then you will take me out in a rowboat tonight."

---

[1] For other ideas, see Hart Day Leavitt and David A. Sohn, *Look, Think, and Write* (Lincolnwood, IL: National Textbook Co., 1985).

"Good."

Out in a rowboat that night he rowed him up to the island, and when the man let him off, he rowed back as fast as he could. He looked back and then went up the stairs and went inside. He looked all around, then he saw a staircase. He went up it then he heard a voice. It said, "If the log rolls over we will all be drowned," and then he ran in a room as fast as he could, and there sitting in a washbowl sat three ants on a match stick saying, "If the log rolls over we will all be drowned."[2]

Sometimes just a suggestive word will suffice, like *mysterious* or *lonely*. Avoid prompters that do more than set the imagination going.

■ OBJECTS AND SOUNDS

Just as an object can be a stimulus for show-and-tell or improvisation (see pages 77 and 95), so it can be a start for a story. Youngsters can put together into paper bags objects that might be used together in a story—a feather, a toy drum, and an old pulley—or that are supposed to belong to one person. Then they exchange bags with each other, and each person tells or writes a story using all of the objects in her bag. The story either can be about characters who have used those objects in some way or other, or can explain how all of the objects were used or came to be together.

Looking over notes of sounds and sights made on locale by others or oneself is another way to start an invented narrative. A tape recording of suggestive sounds—a door opening or closing, people running, dogs barking, a person laughing or groaning—may prompt a good story and might be used later as sound effects while reading it.

TYPES OF FICTION

Perhaps the best story prompts of all are the examples passed on in the culture. If youngsters are steeped long and fully in good literature of all sorts, their stories will take on the forms of adult stories just as their play-acting takes on the roles they see around them. Through this imitation, they identify with storytellers and do what they do. Thus each of the types of literature we shall distinguish below is not only a model but also a writing stimulus.

We do not mean to imply, however, that this categorization is to be taught directly. Instead, we advocate arraying all these kinds of literature in the classroom and letting students discover the differences as they circulate among the various types. To approach literature definitionally is to short-circuit youngsters' own thought. As they read examples of a form and share them with others, they come to their own understandings of the form, which are far more solid than any verbal overlay that describes something they have yet to experience and internalize. The types we're presenting here, then, are "for you to know and the students to find out," in their own way and in their own time.

One of the most fruitful discussions students can have about literature involves their efforts to distinguish for themselves between, for instance, legends

---

[2] Our thanks to Rose Arnone, Cochituate Elementary School, Wayland, Massachusetts.

and myths or fables and parables. Any authority that attempts to do this for them deprives students of an important part of their learning. Defining forms should be a long-range experience involving reading, writing, and discussing, without undue outside intervention to force premature closure of issues. If a student asks what a parable is, for example, refer her to examples of it.

Invented narratives can for practical purposes be broken down several ways. One is by major genre—poetry, prose, or drama—that is, narrative poems, short stories and novels, and plays. But folk literature cuts across these, since fables and parables, legends and myths, may be in either prose, poetry, or drama (which may itself be in either prose or poetry). Folk literature forces us to distinguish between these specific traditional forms and the broader genres that they intersect with. It also forces a distinction between the anonymous, collective authorship of the oral tradition in which these forms originated and the modern, personal authorship that developed after the advent of literacy.

Interplaying with these breakdowns are the topical categories such as mystery, sports, humor, adventure, fantasy, and science fiction.

■ FOLK NARRATIVE

Folk literature is old, oral, and international. It has been preserved and transformed by generations of storytellers from those times when voice and memory alone were what bound together one generation's experience to the next. Folk literature was not originally authored by individuals, but professional writers have usually relayed it to us from the oral tradition, and modern authors sometimes choose to write in these old forms. Folk and fairy tales, myths and legends, fables and parables, ballads and romances, epics—all are folk narrative. They are the expressions of the culture out of which they swelled, now long gone. Students can imitate the old forms and perhaps invent their own new ones.

FOLK TALES

Tales like "Rapunzel" and others from the Andrew Lang books were not created especially for children but speak, rather, to the child in everyone. They symbolize deep feeling and serious thought in fantastic figures and events, so children may find in them a fusion of the imagination and intellect that they can understand. Just as the form itself is found all over the world, many of the items and situations figuring in the stories, like rings or caves, journeys or physical transformations, seem to represent psychological archetypes.

The basic distinction between tales, which originated for telling, and stories, which originated for reading, blurs considerably when tales have been literally retold by skillful authors, as most folk literature has, often in fine-quality picture-book format, or imitated by such masters of form as Hans Christian Andersen—in both cases retaining the original oral quality. Tales are usually harder for silent reading than "children's literature" written for children to read themselves. Thus tales should be heard before they are read. As children hear, tell, vary, and re-create tales, they are perpetuating the grand tradition of folk literature. As they get to know and love a tale they've heard, they try reading it by themselves. Oral familiarity makes word recognition much easier, especially as the tales are characteristically full of refrains and other repetition.

Learning to tell tales, varying them according to individual emphasis, is a valuable experience. Tellings can be recorded to add to the cassette collection in the classroom. Many folklorists are quite interested in acquiring variants of oral tales and would welcome recordings and transcriptions of children's tales, jump-rope jingles, street rhymes, and other oral literature. (Folklorists like Harold Courlander and Maria Leach are also the best source for collections from different cultures of the following forms.) A good collection for the elementary classroom is David Lindsay's *The Wonderful Chirronera and Other Tales from Mexican Folklore.*

FABLE AND PARABLE

Both fables and parables are highly pointed narratives in prose or poetry. They're short and direct, stripped down to nothing but what brings out the implicit statement or moral, and they don't linger over description or narrative detail or characterization or any other aspect of stories often enjoyed for its own sake. They provide a model of lean concentration, of how to tell a story economically with a strong focus and subordinated detail in order to make a point, a model that contrasts with the longer rhythms of other forms of literature. Some folk tales have a parable aspect, but unlike parables and fables, they revel in exotic plots and detail for their own storytelling sake.

A fable always ends with an explicitly stated moral, whereas a parable characteristically stops just short of stating its point explicitly. In addition, a fable often has animal characters and inanimate objects that act like human beings, whereas a parable typically has human characters.

By treating both fable and parable as specialized kinds of stories, you can make clear that not *all* stories are to be read for their moral or to interpret some symbol, an incorrect idea that many students now have. One reads different kinds of tales differently, according to whether they invite one to savor events for their own sake or to distill conclusions from them. Fables and parables encourage readers to infer a generality—either a truth or an imperative—and to interpret symbolically, but this way of reading is an appropriate response to the purpose of the writing as signaled by its form, not as an indiscriminate reaction to *all* stories. Being pushed to find "hidden meanings" in every piece of literature, or to state the underlying idea, turns students off from reading and subverts the main point of most stories, which is to entertain the senses and the imagination so that the mind is more inclined to entertain the ideas *embodied* in the story.

FABLE. Fables are short enough to make simple reading and writing. These popular and readily available tales, part of a rich literature stemming from Aesop through La Fontaine and including the Bidpai fables and Jataka tales, are especially suitable for discussion, acting out, or imitation. See also *Black Folktales* by Julius Lester, *Fables in Slang* by George Ade, and *Fables for Our Time* by James Thurber. The fable is a form we especially recommend.

Whereas many elementary school children may be incapable of, or uninterested in, sustaining generalizations throughout a whole discourse, as in essay, all are able and motivated to make single generalities and to insert these into their stories and descriptions. A fable encapsulates what much other writing consists of, two kinds of idea presentation—examples and generalities. Thus a fable acts

as a natural bridge between narrative statement and idea statement. The moral itself is an explicit assertion in the present tense, like any other generalization. (see "Aphorisms and Maxims" on page 404). It states what the narrative embodies.

The fable leads into other kinds of narrative, both fictional and true, that continue this gradual transformation of *what happened* into *what happens*, of *when* into *whenever*. What differentiates fable and parable from other narrative is just this cognitive shift from pure story (once-upon-a-time) toward the illustrative story (typical of many times)—the subject of much of the next chapter.

Here are some of the activities that might be spurred by fables:

- Write a new fable.
- Write a new version or modernization, perhaps in a very different style, of a traditional fable.
- Read a fable without the moral, then write a moral for it and compare it with the original moral. (For use in discussion see page 80.)
- Take a moral from a fable and write a new fable to precede it.
- Take a proverb or other generalization and write a fable to illustrate it. Test each fable by having a classmate read it and write a moral for it. If it's close to the author's generalization, the fable makes its point.
- Turn a parable into a fable by thinking of a moral that seems to fit it.
- Convert a fable into a poem.
- Rewrite an item from a newspaper or magazine as a fable and write a moral for it.
- Collect fables into a class book, using both student-written and published fables.
- With a few other students, write several different fables for the same moral and post or print these together.
- Test a fable by taking off the moral and asking other people what moral they would give it.
- Discuss the truth of a moral.

Fables may be woven into many other activities where children choose to focus on animals.

One of the successful ways Herbert Kohl helped Harlem children start writing was through reading and making fables. Here's what one eleven-year-old girl wrote for him:

> *Once upon a time there was a pig and a cat. The cat kept saying, "Old dirty pig, who want to eat you?" And the pig replied, "When I die I'll be made use of, but when you die you'll just rot." The cat always thought he was better than the pig. When the pig died he was used as food for the people to eat. When the cat died he was buried in old dirt.*
>
> *Moral: Live dirty die clean.*[3]

---

[3] From *Thirty-six Children* by Herbert Kohl. Copyright 1967, 1988, by Herbert Kohl. Reprinted by arrangement with The New American Library, Inc., New York, N.Y.

Both the tale and the moral show real native wit. "Live dirty die clean" illustrates how writing morals can help children practice the pithiness of epigrammatic statement.

PARABLE. The parable provides a good transition from fable to more complex and symbolic literature. Imagery, action, and imagination are there in all their allure, while at the same time the parable is clearly a vehicle for thinking and making statements about people's experience. Some science fiction also shows this exuberant combination of rich, pleasurable fantasy and serious intellectual work.

A parable is like an example used to support a statement, but the statement itself is not quite made. The point has to be inferred. Stating the main idea or moral for themselves is a good activity for students who have read a parable together. They can compare morals they write for it individually, or they might write other short stories that show the same thing they think the parable shows. Some of the activities listed above for fables apply to parables as well.

Reading parables may help students to recognize themes in fiction. Jesus' parables in the Gospels are the best known in Christian culture, but modern authors such as Leo Tolstoy and Robert Louis Stevenson have also written parables. Paul Reps has included Zen parables in *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*. Sufi parables can be found in the books of Idries Shah. Folklore collections include them for other cultures.

MYTH AND LEGEND

Because the experience distilled in myth and legend is communal, the anonymous narrator is merely speaking for all. This fits well the child's unself-consciousness and undeveloped sense of separation.

MYTH. Myth is the literature that declares a culture's core beliefs and values. This literature is an important key to understanding how a people explains itself and the world. It is because of this particular explanatory power that myth has a fascination for youngsters who are also in the process of explaining many forces, phenomena, and relationships in their experience. In this regard, myth shares some of the viewpoint and subject of much science fiction.

The creative intelligence that flowered forth in myth resembles remarkably well what goes on in children's heads during their years of relatively concrete thinking. Like earlier people, they too put together from their experience with the natural world, their observations, and their imagination—without science or abstract thinking—a vision of the world that makes sense. Myths are full of wonder in a double sense—full of imagined marvels and full of questions about why the world is as it is.

Beginners might follow the model of Kipling's *Just So Stories* by explaining whimsically how some animal got its spots, stripes, hump, etc. Then students might try making up a myth to account for why people are all different from one another and behave in unique ways, or to make sense of such puzzling phenomena as electricity, radio signals, cancer cells—or love. Creation myths explaining how the world began are popular. A group project could be to make up a whole mythology—a series of related myths, in which the same characters, setting, and objects recur, as in Greek, Norse, Native American, African, or Hindu mythology. These can be pulled together as a booklet or performance.

Bullfinch's *Mythology* and Edith Hamilton's *Mythology* are traditional synoptic source books, but many cultures aren't represented there, and many stories in them have been elaborated and embellished in more artful versions, as in ancient and modern plays. So look for myths relating to students' ethnic backgrounds and for modernizations and transpositions of myth into various literary forms. For student dramatization of myths see page 108.

Another tack is to explore the myths of our own contemporary culture—the stories we keep telling ourselves and live by that express our conventions and values. What unquestioned assumptions do we operate on? How are these reflected in our advertising? In teleplays? In what department stores sell? What do Americans do to impress each other, and what does this tell us about our beliefs? Is there a worldview that encompasses all of this? Is it the same for all Americans, or do we splinter off into different cultures with different myths? What books or other works embody our myths?

LEGEND. Legends are tales of power. Whereas myth is primal religion and science, legend is idealized biography and history. Both are literature. Legend speaks to the need for heroes and heroines—superhuman people who can do things we wish we could do, who show us our potentialities. The first legends that were called such recounted the exemplary lives of saints. Other historical personages like the Old Testament prophets and King Arthur, Joan of Arc, and William Tell became enshrined in story to inspire listeners. The stories of other figures representing their culture shade off from legend into the even grander form, the epic—*Beowulf, Gilgamesh, Odysseus, The Song of Roland,* and so on—which distill into one figure's story the experience and aspirations of a whole race or nation.

These stories embody a wish to overcome the limitations of smallness and inexperience and to feel omnipotent. Seeking heroes is part of a search for positive models to imitate and prompts readers to choose true stories of sports and adventure, biography, and realistic fiction featuring such models. However, the fantastic elements of many legends make them kin also to fantasy and to folk tales. Legend is balanced between possible role models on the one hand and wish fulfillment on the other, corresponding exactly to its mixed origins in historical truth and popular romance. Younger children may read legends more for the folk heroes and teenagers more for plausible models to identify with. Students of minority cultures need ample folk literature in their own tradition. Jamake Highwater's *Anpao: An American Indian Odyssey* is an excellent example of American Indian legend.

As in updating fables, creating legends in modern dress is a way to internalize legend-making. Students can take a traditional story and set the whole thing in the present, retelling it in modern language and style. Another way to start is to brainstorm first about what kind of hero or heroine our culture needs. Then students can create such a personage, deciding whether to give him or her outstanding human qualities, perhaps extending those of some actual personage, or to bestow superhuman powers. They can set their superperson to work on one of the seemingly insolvable problems people face today.

BALLAD

Much of folk narrative was originally sung as ballad. Traditional folk ballads have the same appeal to the ear as tales and have in fact survived mainly by memory

through oral traditions. A great many of the best ballads in the folk tradition have a special dramatic quality because they're told mostly through dialogue and have a sense of taking place now rather than being recounted from the past. Thus there's a strong link between this type of invented narrative and invented dialogue. Because so many folk collectors and singing groups have steeped themselves in and have imitated this traditional narrative song form, you may find a ready audience for it among teenagers. And of course ballads should be performed and heard rather than read. Comparing different renditions can stimulate student interpretation of ballads.

Encourage students to renew old ballads by writing additional verses to the story or by putting a new story to a ballad tune they know. Here's part of one done by a group of fourth and fifth graders who were inspired by an East Coast blackout. Fitted to the tune and meter of " Sweet Betsy from Pike," this ballad shows the stimulus of both a subject and a form.

BALLAD OF THE BLACKOUT

At half past five Tuesday, November the ninth,
The lights went out and it gave me a fright.
We lit all our candles.
'Twas a spoo-ooky sight,
When the lights went out o-on that Tuesday night!
(Chorus)
The people were all right when candles were light.
But electricity is a much better light.

"What happened?" said Sally.
I said, "I don't know."
"What happened?" said Willy
While tying a bow.
They pushed the wrong button and turned to reverse.
The main truck line shorted with one great big burst.

(Chorus)
The li-ghts went ou-out.
The hou-ouse got dark.
The moo-oon came ou-out.
The do-ogs did bark.
The babies cri-ied.
The pe-eople sighed.
And tha-at's what happened on Tu-uesday night.[4]

Ballads may be easily related to history and social studies, since many important events were cast into ballad form at the time they occurred in order to broadcast them or commemorate them. Students can write a ballad in this tradition about some personage or event they have learned about and been inspired by.

---

[4] From the Franklin Elementary School, Lexington, Massachusetts.

■ NARRATIVE POETRY

In addition to ballads there is a large body of story poems by authors of all periods. Like Robert Frost for one, most poets have written a lot of narrative. These poems, unlike ballads, are often cast in first- as well as third-person. ("The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" by Samuel Taylor Coleridge is told as memoir by a survivor of a collective experience.) So they can demonstrate how students might tell their biographical or autobiography stories as poetry. Suggest also that students retell favorite folk tales, fables, legends, and so on as poems. Groups or individuals can collaborate on a long poem, each contributing perhaps a stanza.

Collections of narrative poems to read should exhibit all sorts of options in stanzaic form, rhyme schemes, metric patterns. Like ballads, narrative poems lend themselves well to performance.

■ FANTASY

Modern fantasy, like folk and fairy tales, presents a world where magic abounds, where the logic of the everyday is turned on its head and things are not what they seem. In many children's libraries this fanciful literature is often given a label such as "Wonder Tales" and shelved near the Dewey decimal "398" section where folk tales sit. In other libraries fantasy is shelved in with realistic fiction, and there is no way for a child hungry for make-believe to find it easily.

Many of the classics in children's literature—*Alice in Wonderland, Winnie-The-Pooh, Pinocchio, Mary Poppins, The Black Cauldron, The Children of Green Knowe, The Borrowers, The Hobbit, The Sword of Shannara*—are fantasy. Their counterparts in adult literature are novels such as *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy or *Watership Down*, and classic allegorical works like John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress.*

Works of fantasy do exactly what creative thinkers do: They take apart the familiar world and reassemble it in startling ways that show relations and implications one does not usually think of. To follow fantasy is rather like floating up in an observation balloon . . . o r going down a rabbit hole. The novelty of such a perspective lets us see things we were never aware of before.

Fantasy-writing can be stimulated in many ways. Creating make-believe stories, especially those featuring animals, is popular even with preschoolers. Such a simple project as drawing a monster picture can be a beginning for a fantasy story. Kenneth Koch found that asking children to tell as fantastic and preposterous a lie as they could think of produced some fine fantasies and poems.[5] Tall tales and exaggerated yarns can be swapped, taped, or written. Students might enjoy a tall-tale contest to see who can tell the most fantastic, the funniest, or the most ingenious tall tale. These tales can begin with story starters such as, "I dreamed I was a .... and I ...." or "One morning I woke up and I was ...." Students can write these tales as after-the-fact autobiographical fantasy or as a series of diary entries.

Keeping records of dreams and daydreams is a good way to get material for fantasy. The vivid and bizarre images of dreams—most of which we forget—can be recalled if they're rehearsed immediately on waking and recorded in some

---

[5] See other good story and poetry stimuli in Kenneth Koch et al., *Wishes, Lies, and Dreams* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980).

way. Dreams are accompanied by feelings, often strong ones, which can be tapped for stories or insights about oneself. Nightmares are an effective resource for horror stories. Finishing incomplete dreams or changing endings may afford psychological resolution as well as good story material.

FICTIONAL ANIMAL STORIES

An ever-popular type of fantasy for children is animal stories told from the animal's point of view so that people are only dim figures at the edge of the action. Classic animal fantasies for children include such books as *Tale of Peter Rabbit, Charlotte's Web, Rabbit Hill,* and *The Wind in the Willows.* This interest lasts into adolescence, though with a shift toward more realism. Witness *White Fang* and some other novels of Jack London or Marguerite Henry's ever-popular horse novels. Youngsters identify with fictionalized animals, who usually have very human characteristics but may be less confusing or threatening and more understandable than adults in their real world. In the Kipling tradition of closely observed detail, good animal fantasy builds stories on factual realism. Thus readers can use animal lives as symbols for their own emotions and at the same time acquire factual knowledge about animals.

GHOST STORIES

These are part of the oral literature of children at camps and slumber parties. Collections of scary tales play into another reading motive that most children have—the desire to feel awe, the pleasurable chill of mixed fear and marvel, and to feel wonder, that strange mixture of intellectual curiosity and amazement. Reading ghost stories can start youngsters telling, retelling, and writing down the oral literature that is always floating about among schoolchildren. Encourage them to retell from memory or write down any ghost stories they know. By including ghost stories under fantasy, we don't mean to rule out the possibility that there may be real ghosts but simply to note that most literature treats them as fantasy.

SCIENCE FICTION

This type of fantasy, although appealing to the students' love of wonder and imagined worlds, is comparatively intellectual and thus potentially difficult. Despite its emphasis on plot and action, most science fiction sets up certain premises—physical laws or dimensions or perspectives—from which the action "follows," so that the plot is a kind of working out of the ramifications of the premises. In addition, science fiction is usually loaded with true or possibly true information that is woven into, or causes, the events of the story.

Science fiction should be a regular option for elementary as well as teenage students. It's becoming an increasingly popular kind of reading matter in our technological culture, one a great many students respond to. Some devotees might want to subscribe to a science fiction magazine or book club.

Like myths and legends, science fiction is charged with a sense of awe and mystery and calls for an imagination that embraces the far-out. It incorporates humanity's knowledge of nature, reassembles this so as to explore the frontier between possibility and impossibility, and ultimately contemplates the universe both as an object of actual curiosity and as a humbling and fearsome unknown. It has been called predictive myth.

Students may generate ideas for writing science fiction by imagining a change in some natural law or condition such as a shift in human eyesight from visible light to another part of the electromagnetic spectrum, or simply a sharp decline in insect population. What would result? They need to decide whether to follow results through a group, as a kind of chronicle, or see them through the eyes of one or two main characters.

■ REALISTIC FICTION

In this category are stories and novels set in a world governed by the same laws of time and space and the same logic of cause and effect that we find in the customary world. Although they're fiction, for the happenings they present never took place in just this way, they *could* have happened. This is a popular category for both children and adults. Good realistic fiction evokes the world as we know it, features at least one fully rounded, believable character with whom we can identify, and unfolds through an inventive plot. Be they kings or antiheroes, the characters are people we recognize. Indeed, this identification is probably the strongest motive for reading realistic fiction. Some recent serious adult fiction like *Gravity's Rainbow* by Thomas Pynchon, *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez, *Beloved* by Toni Morrison, and *Midnight's Children* by Salman Rushdie keeps enlarging the boundaries of what's regarded as real by including phenomena conventionally classed as supernatural or fantastic. Students have to understand that such categories as we describe here are mere conveniences that can break down easily because the mind shouldn't be bound by what it creates itself.

Writing realistic fiction can begin with either an interesting character or an idea for a situation or relationship. Given this, what happens? In workshop discussion, partners can help each other talk out the idea further. How much will thoughts and feelings manifest in dialogue and action, and how much will the narrator need to take the reader into the minds of the characters? Who should the narrator be—a main character, a peripheral character, the author in her own voice? *How* a story is told relates directly to *what* it's about. Asking point-of-view questions, as discussed below, often helps the author realize what's essential in her story.

Also, which parts of a story should be fully "staged" with dialogue and other detailed action, and which simply be narrated more synoptically. Work with drama should help writers particularize scenes in narratives and develop a good sense of onstage and offstage.

Memories are another good beginning point. Let students search their past (and their notebooks!) for a moment of perception, in the model of James Joyce's epiphany experiences, when they suddenly discovered something about themselves or the world that they didn't understand before. Encourage them to look for and make use of such moments. They jot down all the things that led up to this awareness, then go over the list and select those events, details, and characters that seem most important.

Sometimes a setting or mood or atmosphere can be the beginning point of a story. Maybe a sensory recording or memory of a place starts the process. What's there? Who's there? What could happen there? For more mature writers introduce the idea of orchestrating characters and of playing variations on a theme. Inventing stories resembles, after all, composing music or making patterns in any other artistic medium.

POINTS OF VIEW IN STORYTELLING

Another kind of breakdown that cuts across all of these types will help to integrate them with each other and with true stories as well. Since it applies to both fictional and nonfictional narrative, it points out parallels between invented stories and the true stories they imitate, as the designations below indicate.

■ THIRD-PERSON NARRATION

When a narrator refers to all the characters as *he*'s or *she*'s, she is writing in the third person, that is, about other people and as an outsider. The narrator does not choose to identify herself in the text; when she does that, she is writing in the first person. The real difference for fiction, then, is whether the author is telling the story as an outsider or is ventriloquizing through one of her characters.

FICTIONAL CHRONICLE

Some third-person invented stories, like Shirley Jackson's classic, "The Lottery," have no central character but focus on a group. These stories and novels, which we're calling fictional chronicles, tend to have purposes and themes rather different from those of stories told from other points of view. Fictional chronicles are relatively impersonal in manner and transpersonal in subject. They emphasize *communal* experience. Readers enter the minds of either no characters at all or of many.

Folk literature is almost universally told from this most impersonal point of view, usually without going into anyone's mind, because the motives and feelings are presumed obvious and universal. Modern writers employ this technique too for collective experience, as in science fiction novels such as Ray Bradbury's *Martian Chronicles*, realistic novels such as Margot Benary-Isbert's *The Ark* or Jean Merrill's *The Pushcart War*, and fantasy like Sheila Burnford's *The Incredible Journey*. Though today's storytellers are likely to go into many minds rather than none, the effect is similar, since personal viewpoints become absorbed into the transpersonal perspective.

Short stories told as chronicles are Bret Harte's "The Outcasts of Poker Flat," Edgar Allan Poe's "The Masque of the Red Death," and Stephen Crane's "The Open Boat." Other novels of this sort are the J. R. R. Tolkien trilogy, Albert Camus' *The Plague*, John Hersey's *The Wall*, and William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*.

Students make up chronicles when they think of some group whose members all undergo some event more or less together, though perhaps each in her own way, like the characters in "disaster" stories of shipwrecks, earthquakes, fires, and so on, or in stories of expeditions and team sports. Many enjoy making up modern myths, legends, fairytales, and stories in other folk forms.

FICTIONAL BIOGRAPHY

Many stories lie between those featuring a group and those featuring an individual. *How many* minds an author takes us into relates quite directly to the purpose of the story, which may be, precisely, to show misunderstandings or tangled motives among several characters. Some stories alternate between the point of view of one character and that of another with whom it's somehow paired, as in Sherwood

Anderson's story "Unlighted Lamps," about a father and daughter who can't communicate to each other how they feel. Only an anonymous narrator outside the story can host us into two or more minds.

Third-person narratives told from the point of view of one individual are probably the most numerous and frame all types of stories, though much more rarely in folk literature except as re-told in modern times. This popularity is understandable inasmuch as a third-person narration affording a single character's point of view allows the author to inform and comment all she wants but also allows the reader to identify with the main character or at least to experience events, as we all experience real life, from a personal and privileged perspective. Sports, adventure, mystery, humor, and science fiction stories may focus more on the action the individual is involved in than on her thoughts. Presumably at the center of events, she gives us the best view of what happens. Serious, nontopical fiction zeroes in on character, on changes in the inner life, and on the qualities of experience, so that the reader is engaged more with the *sources* of action in the inner life and, conversely, the character's *responses* to external events.

Alternating between reading fictional and actual biographies will probably help many students sustain interest in both and appreciate some of the important relationships between making up a person and a story and researching the true story of someone who lived or lives—two very differently derived stories that might textually look too much alike to tell apart, especially in an era when real lives are so often fictionalized in their details.

■ FIRST-PERSON NARRATION

The first-person narrator identifies herself as *I*, the source of what we are to learn. If her main subject is another or others she has known, she is writing memoir; if the focus is on herself, it is autobiography.

FICTIONAL MEMOIR

Memoir often tends to be a privileged, firsthand view of a person or group but not as the principals experience it. Memoir is the hinge between first- and third-person narration—a kind of biography or chronicle but filtered through a character narrator close enough to the people and events to be an onlooker, confidant, or perhaps occasional participant. This I-telling-about-her framework is used for various purposes by professional writers.

Fictional memoir lends itself to colorful and humorous personal styles, because the storyteller is herself a fictional creation, a character voice, as in dramatic monologue, that is in itself interesting or funny. Students may appreciate this particularly when listening to a recording of such a story or when writing one themselves. Read Damon Runyon's " Earthquake" or James Thurber's "You Could Look It Up," for example.

Students can discuss why a writer will choose to tell a story through the eyes of a character who is herself more observer than principal. Consider Edgar Allan Poe's "The Gold Bug," "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," and "The Fall of the House of Usher," precursors of the Sherlock Holmes stories told by Watson. Often the title indicates the focus on "other" rather than author: Sondra Spratt's "Hoods I Have Known," Guy de Maupassant's "Mademoiselle Pearl," John Stein-

beck's "Johnny Bear," Herman Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener," 0. Henry's "A Municipal Report." If you want to endow a character with mystery, romance, or grandeur, you don't let her tell her own story; you let someone impressed by her tell it, as indicated, again, in the following titles: F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim*, Willa Cather's *My Ántonia*, and Alain-Fournier's *The Wanderer* (*Le Grand Meaulnes*)—all fine reading matter for high school and excellent instances of artfully exploiting the relationship between the first and the third persons. *Zeely* by Virginia Hamilton and *A Child in Prison Camp* by Takashima illustrate this point of view for elementary children.

Students should be encouraged to consider fictional memoir whenever their subject would seem to benefit from such mediation between the main character and the reader. The best time to discuss point of view is in writing workshop deliberations about students' own efforts to tell a story. One advantage of reading real and fictional memoir side by side is that students can see how the vantage point that is *necessary* to use in writing one's own memories may be *adopted* as a deliberate strategy in making up a story.

Especially interesting, by the way, are alter-ego stories, like Joseph Conrad's "The Secret Sharer" and Jean Stafford's "Bad Characters," that have a dual focus on both narrator and protagonist and thus hover between autobiography and memoir. And as for dual focus, are John Knowles's *A Separate Peace* and Robert Penn Warren's *All The King's Men* autobiography or memoir? Such a question will increase students' understanding considerably.

FICTIONAL AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Just as made-up stories in the third person are designated fictional biography, so their counterparts in the first person may be termed fictional autobiography. Again these terms call attention to the many similarities between actual first-person documents and the type of fiction modeled on them. This parallel may also suggest to students some alternative ways to write about their personal experience, including the possibility of distancing and clarifying it by fictionalizing true events.

Students who read fictional autobiography are often confused by and curious about the parallels they find between the fiction and the actual life of the author. Writing their own fictional autobiographies helps students understand from the inside how the pretense of writing fiction often serves to free a writer from inhibitions she might feel if she were offering the experience to others as the truth about herself. Through this process they gain insight as to why writers choose the fictional mode.

A happy circumstance of fictional and actual autobiography is that it usually features an older person telling about her experience as a younger person, often about problems of growing up. This makes it very easy for adolescents to identify with it. It also naturally provides a double perspective on this youthful experience—that of the narrator as a participant at the time of the events and as an author recalling those events after much intervening experience. In a sense, this dual perspective affords young people what they do not yet have and therefore enhances the appeal inherent already in material centered on growing up.

Fictional autobiography can be written as a story of an incident like John Updike's "A & P" or as a retrospective about a phase in the narrator's youth like Frank O'Connor's "My Oedipus Complex," Joseph Conrad's "Youth," or Ivan Turgenev's "First Love." This point of view has been a standard technique for the novel of growing up, of education-by-life, exemplified by Joseph Krumgold's

And Now Miguel, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*, and Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. Edgar Lee Masters' *Spoon River Anthology* is a series of capsule autobiographies uttered from beyond the grave and written as poems, and Amy Tan's *The Joy Luck Club* interweaves eight women's own stories.

Professional writers of fiction sometimes use a first-person point of view to create an imperceptive narrator, a person telling the story who says more than she thinks she says, because she doesn't understand the experience she's telling about, at least not in the same way the reader does. This is an especially useful fictional device, since it does deliberately what students, and indeed adults, often do unintentionally when telling about their personal experiences. Students, for example, who read Muriel Spark's "You Should Have Seen the Mess" will have to come to grips with the distortion in that story, that is, the fact that the values of the girl telling it are very different from those of many readers and hence make them feel that the story is biased.

Encountering fiction told by an imperceptive or biased narrator raises the possibility for students both to write such stories deliberately themselves and to perceive how their own and each other's personal accounts, true or fictional, may indeed seem biased in exactly the same way as "You Should Have Seen the Mess." Such deliberately biased stories are much like many dramatic monologues, which rely on the same technique of self-exposure (see page 321). Also, in reading letters to the editor and letters to advice columns, students may detect exactly the same sort of bias as in some fiction. In fact, writing deliberately biased material can become a very popular class sport among teenagers, along with detecting unintended bias and distortion in each other's writing. All of this helps overcome egocentricity. Interpreting of both real life and literature is involved.

The art by which a narrator betrays herself is the sophisticated art of Alan Sillitoe's "The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner," Henry James's "The Turn of the Screw," Ernest Hemingway's "My Old Man," Fyodor Dostoyevsky's "Notes from the Underground," and similar stories. Some students will try out subjective narration and fail in the first draft, thereby provoking one of the more interesting discussions of technique that students can engage in.

Personal values and private understanding of experience determine how one interprets what one reads, whether in fiction or nonfiction. No amount of literary knowledge can prevent someone from reading a subjective narration as an objective memoir or autobiography. Literature always breaks back ultimately into life. Seldom do more involved or fruitful discussions take place than those about amateur and professional stories narrated by teenagers whose perspective is transitional between stages of maturity. Try, for example, "My Sister's Marriage" by Cynthia Rich or "My Side of the Matter" by Truman Capote, both of which, like other examples, are narrated by adolescents. Some students will be taken in; others will not.

FICTIONAL DIARIES

Diaries and correspondences unfold a story bit by bit as it's happening instead of recounting it long after the events. This dwelling on the moment is an advantage for inexperienced storytellers, who tend to over-synopsize and over-explain instead of letting the reader experience what the characters are undergoing.

As a literary technique, diary writing may not occur to young people until they read a number of examples of it. Many nineteenth- and twentieth-century

novels, not to mention *Robinson Crusoe* in the eighteenth century, either are or include diaries. To focus on examples of this form is to make accessible a mode of fiction that features the natural language of the speaker and hence may become a vehicle to display the style and language behavior of the diarist. In this way diaries may be thought of as monologues and, like them, may serve as an occasion for creating or performing language of a strongly stamped style.

Because of the narrow perspective, diaries lend themselves to subjective or biased narration. Both Guy de Maupassant and Nikolai Gogol wrote a story entitled "The Diary of a Madman," and Daniel Keyes's "Flowers for Algernon," enormously popular with youngsters, is the diary of a mentally retarded man. There's an organic connection between the diary form and the subject matter. In all three stories, changes in the mental state of the diarist are reflected in changes in his style and language. Other good short stories for youngsters include Ring Lardner's "Diary of a Caddy" and "I Can't Breathe," William Harvey's "August Heat," Donald Barthelme's "Me and Miss Mandible," and Mark Twain's "Extracts from Adam's Diary."

Daniel Defoe's *Diary of The Plague Years* recreates history. André Gide's *Pastoral Symphony* may be the masterpiece of the genre, and the French have especially cultivated it: Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea*, George Bernanos's *Diary Of a Country Priest*, and François Mauriac's *Nest of Vipers*. Elementary children enjoy Hila Colman's *Diary of a Frantic Kid Sister*, and older students, Joan W. Blos's *A Gathering of Days*.

Students might consider how each such story would be different if told from the vantage point of the last entry. Of years later. How different would it be if another character had told it through *her* diary?

Diarists in real life do not know what is going to happen when they start making entries, and it's just this spontaneity that makes diaries interesting. But a fictional diarist chooses the form in order to tell a preconceived story. Help students think about which types of stories they might want to tell that would most benefit from being told by a character *as* the events occur. Some students may enjoy imagining a diary as some historical personage might have written it during a certain phase of her life, if they choose someone significant for them. Diaries do require some length, because it is the unforeseen development across a number of entries that makes them most effective.

FICTIONAL LETTERS

A one-way correspondence resembles a diary except in that it is addressed to a particular audience. The author of a two-way correspondence has to create two or more "letter voices," one for each character, and carry on a story by implication. The reader may need to read a considerable amount between the lines—and between the letters. As a kind of dialogue at a distance, letters not only report events but constitute events themselves, because writing to someone is acting on someone. This double action makes fictional correspondence both a drama and a narrative at once.

It might be good for some students to work up to the full possibilities of multiple exchanges by first making up a single fictional letter, such as a letter of apology, complaint, thank-you, advice, report, request, and so on, to practice creating a character voice—a written rather than oral monologue. This might fit just right for certain story ideas centered on, say, response to an incident. A series of letters

all by one person actually may *suggest* a story idea. Is the character writing to only one person or several? If to one person, why doesn't that person answer? If to several, what connects the letters?

One point of departure for two-way correspondence is a relationship of two characters such as mother and daughter, lawyer and client, two lovers. Exchanges of letters can create multiple, interacting monologues among any number of people and a complicated skein of relationships as some write *to* each other and some *about* each other. Another kind of story consists of a collection of letters from various people concerning a single problem or person, who need not necessarily be one of the correspondents. One student, for example, told the story of a man's hidden mental disturbance through letters from recommenders, employers, case worker, and relatives, all about him. Indeed, wonderful stories can be told by combining letters with all sorts of other made-up documents like notices, memos, transcripts, files, etc.

Writing fictional letters can best be done in conjunction with reading epistolary fiction. Discussion of both professional and student stories can help readers become aware of what is going on between the correspondents and the motive for writing each letter. Discussion of the style of the letters may focus on such questions as: Do the two correspondents sound alike or could you tell them apart if you were read scattered excerpts? Are there differences in their vocabulary, the kinds of sentences they use, or the way they move from topic to topic? Can you say what each is like as a person?

The fact that correspondence may call for colloquial writing may justify mistakes in spelling, punctuation, and other mechanics. Classmates should consider the possibility that mistakes are intentional in characterizing certain kinds of correspondents, but, on the other hand, students will often have occasion to remark that a well-to-do or well-educated person, as characterized in X's letters, would know better than to commit such and such a mistake, or would not use the kind of kiddish expression or slang that X has attributed to him. Elementary children will find some good models ranging from informal to formal in *The Jolly Postman, or Other People's Letters* by Janet and Allen Ahlberg. Children enjoy writing in the role of fairy tale characters as these authors did.

It is not accidental that one of the first forms of the novel was epistolary. As the novel developed during the eighteenth century it shyly simulated familiar documents like diaries and letters. But modern authors find their own very interesting reasons for wanting to tell a story through exchanges of letters. Films have been made of one of the first, Choderlos de la Clos' *Dangerous Liaisons*, as well as of Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*. Mark Harris's *Wake Up, Stupid* is another modern epistolary novel. Bel Kaufman's *Up the Down Staircase* mixes letters with memos and other documents.

Elementary children enjoy the travel adventure written on post cards in *Stringbean's Trip to the Shining Sea* by Jennifer Williams and also a novel as a set of letters, *Dear Mr. Henshaw*, by Beverly Cleary.

Short stories that would interest adolescents are "Jupiter Doke, Brigadier General " by Ambrose Bierce, "Life at Happy Knoll" by J. P. Marquand, and "Marjorie Daw" by Thomas Bailey Aldrich. Once interested in the form, some students may well want to read some eighteenth-century epistolary novels like Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*, Tobias Smollett's *Roderick Random* and *Humphrey Clinker*, and Fanny Burney's *Evelina*. Poems in letter form include Kenneth Rexroth's "A

Bread and Butter Letter," Louise Bogan's "A Letter," Karl Shapiro's "V Letter," and Robert Bly's "A Missouri Traveller Writes Home, 1846."

To complete this tour of point-of-view techniques look now at "Dramatic Monologue" and "Interior Monologue"on pages 321–325 and 329–332 inasmuch as these are ways of telling a story that carry first-person narration to its furthest point within the narrator, a point also where drama and narrative fuse.[6]

WORKING THE REPERTORY

As a student expands her experience across this repertory, she becomes more sophisticated as both a reader and writer. Many amateur stories are bad because the authors simply do not know what the possibilities are. As you counsel and coach students, encourage them to draw on all the various narrative and dramatic forms in the repertory when telling stories by combining *point-of-view techniques* with the *major genres* of short story, narrative poetry, and plays, and all these perhaps in turn with the *topical types* like mystery, humor, adventure, fantasy, and so on. They can experiment with points of view as these may work out in the genres and topics (see "Changing Medium, Mode, or Point of View" on page 213). They can see what happens when the narrator does not identify herself and reveal channels of information, and they can compare that with what happens when she includes herself in the story and openly reveals her relationship to her subject matter; when she speaks from within the events with when she speaks long after the events.

Expect students' choices among these techniques to relate to degrees of self-awareness, including their decisions about your suggestions. On their own, younger children virtually never think to write stories as interior or dramatic monologues, diaries and letters. But this may be because authors of children's literature rarely employ these techniques. Indeed, one finds them less frequently in adult literature too because they give the author less scope. Open the repertory to students of all ages and see what happens as they read stories told from viewpoints they haven't thought of and as they naturally draw on models for their own storytelling. It is probably safe to generalize that as people grow they *differentiate* kinds of discourse more finely, so that, for example, students will be aware of a difference between first person and third person before they become aware of differences within each. The whole curriculum should sensitize students to discriminations among narrative relationships so that choice, whether intuitive or deliberate, becomes possible.

---

[6] *Points of View: An Anthology of Short Stories,* James Moffett and Kenneth R. McElheny comps. (New York Penguin USA, 1968) illustrates the whole spectrum of point-of-view fictional technique as described here and in the last chapter, ranging from interior monologue to chronicle. It contains many of the stories mentioned herein as examples. For samples of stories written in these techniques by junior high, senior high, and college students, see *Active Voices II, III,* and *IV* respectively (Boynton/Cook, 1987).