Short and Sweet!

Grade 7

SHORT STORY

Reading & Writing Activities

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GRADE SEVEN SHORT STORY ACTIVITIES

CUMINATING TASK

- After having complete the various Short Story Activities each student will have the opportunity to create his/her own short story.

OVERALL EXPECTATIONS

Writing
- organize information to develop a central idea, using well-linked and well-developed paragraphs;
- produce pieces of writing using a variety of forms (e.g., descriptive, narrative, and expository compositions), techniques and resources appropriate to the form and purpose, and materials from other media (e.g., diagrams, illustrations);
- revise and edit their work, focusing on content and elements of style (e.g., diction), independently and in collaboration with others;
- proofread and correct their final drafts, focusing on grammar, punctuation, spelling, and conventions of style;
- use and spell correctly the vocabulary appropriate for this grade level;
- use correctly the conventions (spelling, grammar, punctuation, etc.) specified for this grade level.

Reading
- read a variety of fiction and non-fiction materials (e.g., novels, short stories, poetry, reports, articles) for different purposes;
- read aloud, showing understanding of the material and awareness of the audience;
- explain their interpretation of a written work, supporting it with evidence from the work and from their own knowledge and experience;
- understand the vocabulary and language structures appropriate for this grade level.

Oral and Visual Communication
- use instructions and explanations to plan and organize work;
- ask questions and discuss different aspects of ideas in order to clarify their thinking;
- listen to and communicate related ideas, and narrate real and fictional events in a sequence;
- contribute and work constructively in groups;
- demonstrate the ability to concentrate by identifying main points and staying on topic;
- use the conventions (e.g., sentence structure) of oral language, and of the various media, that are appropriate to the grade (see below).

SPECIFIC EXPECTATIONS

W - give evidence of an expanding vocabulary in their writing;
R - explain how various elements in a story function in relation to each other;
R - identify the main ideas in information materials, and explain how the details support the main ideas;
R - make judgments and draw conclusions about ideas in written materials on the basis of evidence;
R - clarify and develop their own points of view by examining the ideas of others;
R - select appropriate reading strategies
R - identify various forms of writing and describe their key features (e.g., novels, short stories, biographies, scripts, plays, essays)
R - listen and respond constructively to alternative ideas or viewpoints;
O - express ideas and opinions confidently but without trying to dominate discussion.
UNIT OVERVIEW:

- This unit contains a variety of activities for Grade Seven English Language Arts.
- The student will be provided with many opportunities to read, analyze and write.

The Short Story Unit is set up in the following way:

TEACHER LED INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITIES

- **Genre Introductory Activities** - 3 genre activities
- **Short Story Elements Activity** – Review short story components.
- **Conflict Search** – Find pictures or images from magazines that represent each of the four conflicts.

READING RESPONSE CENTRE

It is suggested that a centre approach be used for these activities. Students should be placed in groups and each student should be responsible for creating his/her own product for each story.

1. Each centre consists of three tasks for the students to complete:
   a) read the story
   b) complete an analysis sheet
   c) work on activity/product

2. By choosing five short stories available in the school, excessive photocopying or the need for a class set of textbooks should be eliminated.

3. Students could read the stories independently, with a partner, or as a group, depending on the needs within the classroom.

4. After reading the story students should then independently complete an analysis sheet (see Appendix) for each short story.

5. There is an activity at each centre that has been designed to highlight a particular aspect of the centre’s genre. The activities have been developed using multiple intelligences as a focus.

6. Upon completion of each centre there is a short story activity assessment rubric for evaluation.

7. At each centre, the time spent on reading the story, completing the analysis sheet and accomplishing the task for the activity should take approximately 160 – 200 minutes.

8. It is recommended that students rotate from one story/activity to the next until all five are completed. Teachers may choose to include fewer stories depending on the time available.
**READING/RESPONSE CENTRES OVERVIEW:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GENRE</th>
<th>ACTIVITY</th>
<th>STUDENT'S TASK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Historical Short Story</td>
<td>Celebrity Match Up Chart and Poster Design</td>
<td>• Turn the story into a Silver Screen Production and cast famous actors as the lead roles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realistic Short Story</td>
<td>Character Report Card</td>
<td>• Create a report card for each of the main characters using adjectives or adverbs as descriptors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science Fiction Short Story</td>
<td>News Report</td>
<td>• Write a news report of the events using the elements of a news story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mystery Short Story</td>
<td>Plot Graph Profile</td>
<td>• Examine the plot in detail graphing the rising action, climax and denouement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventure Short Story</td>
<td>Story Map</td>
<td>• Produce a detailed map depicting the relevant people, places and events in the story.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**CULMINATING ACTIVITIES**

- **Summative Evaluation of Genres**
  - Record thoughts on the various genre of short stories.
  - Paragraph writing on the various genre.
- **Writing Short Stories**
  - Use the Short Story Planning Guides to write an original short story. (see Appendix)
EXPLORE

GENRE INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY

The following three activities will help introduce the concept of genre to the students.

Activity 1: Genre Identification (35 minutes)

1. Students brainstorm movies they have seen.
2. Students decide which movies have similar characteristics.
3. Ask the students to classify the movies with the same characteristics into categories, e.g., horror: scary, dark, suspenseful; comedy: happy, funny.
4. Explain to the students that the names they have selected for the movie types can be considered genres. Discuss how books can have specific categories as well.
5. Repeat steps 1 and 2 using books that the students have read.

Activity 2: Characteristics of Genre (35 minutes)

1. Before this lesson the teacher writes the name of each genre as a heading on separate pieces of chart paper.
2. In cooperative groups students participate in a carousel activity where they record characteristics of each genre on the chart paper. Give each group one minute at each paper and then rotate the group to the next paper to add more characteristics to the previous group’s work.
3. Post charts around the room and discuss the various characteristics of each genre deciding which are the most accurate descriptors.

Activity 3: Genre Matching (15 minutes)

1. Photocopy genre matching activity sheet.
2. Students identify elements that fit each genre.
SHORT STORY ELEMENTS ACTIVITY

1. Choose a short story to read to the class, or, for the students to read individually. See suggested Short Story List in Appendix.

2. Students then brainstorm the common elements of short stories. (See teacher resource for examples of elements.) Teachers may choose to hand out resource sheet from Appendix.

3. Students describe each element as it relates to the short story that the class has read or heard. Using the Short Story Analysis Sheet, identify the elements of the story chosen. See Appendix for Short Story Analysis Sheet.

4. Explain to the students that they will be working together to create a short story.

5. Students may work in partners or small groups.

6. Assign an initial situation or narrative hook to each group. Because all the stories will probably have different endings, each group can work on the same initial situation.

7. This activity is meant to consolidate and reinforce the students’ concept of short story elements. This story is meant to be dramatized, not read to the class. Students may use a narrator, dialogue, or a combination of both.

8. Each group will dramatize its story for the class. (See below for an example of Story Creating Activity.) Teachers may use the initial situation examples or create their own to begin the dramatization activity with their class.

9. As the students view the dramas they should be instructed to look for the story elements.

Sample of STORY CREATING ACTIVITY

- narrative hook: It was a dark and stormy night...
- initial situation: Outside a derelict mansion, with a flat tire and no spare, ...
- narrator: The main character is telling the story.
- setting: Summer, night, in the country, on an abandoned road...
- characters: Billy and Teddy high school friends, old man Jenkins...
- protagonist: Billy
- antagonist: Old man Jenkins
- conflict: Billy and Teddy versus old man Jenkins (person versus person)
- climax: Billy and Teddy realize Mr. Jenkins is actually not a mean person.
- conclusion: Mr. Jenkins helps Billy and Teddy get back on their way.

Examples of INITIAL SITUATIONS

- The car screeched to a halt...
- The tree fell with a thunderous crash...
- The computer screen kept flashing the same message...
CONFLICT SEARCH

There are four main types of conflicts in short stories:

- person versus person
- person versus self
- person versus nature
- person versus technology

1. Using the example below as a guide, create a conflict chart on a large piece of art paper.
2. Find pictures or images from magazines that represent each of the four conflicts.
3. Describe what is happening in each picture to show that it is that type of conflict.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>person vs person</th>
<th>person vs self</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="example1.png" alt="Conflict Illustration" /></td>
<td><img src="example2.png" alt="Conflict Illustration" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In this picture, the people are fighting for a championship trophy. They are in physical conflict with one another.</td>
<td>This student is struggling with a difficult decision.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>person vs nature</th>
<th>person vs technology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="example3.png" alt="Conflict Illustration" /></td>
<td><img src="example4.png" alt="Conflict Illustration" /></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sailors in the boat are fighting the storm. Their lives appear to be at risk.</td>
<td>These students are having difficulties with the computer.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
HISTORICAL SHORT STORY RESPONSE

TASK:

• After reading the short story, your job is to turn the story into a Silver Screen Production and cast famous actors as the lead roles.

• Think of the physical and emotional characteristics of the story’s main characters.
• Brainstorm a list of TV and movie actors that could be cast in the roles of the main characters.
• Make your final cuts and decide who you think would best portray your main characters.
• Make a chart similar to the one below, listing your choices.
• Include common physical characteristics and emotional attributes between the characters and actors in the “Reasons for Casting” column.
• After you have decided on the cast of the movie, design and create a poster that will advertise the movie. Include an important scene from the movie and list the cast of characters.

Example of a CELEBRITY MATCH UP CHART FOR THE THREE LITTLE PIGS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STORY: THE THREE LITTLE PIGS</th>
<th>AUTHOR: BROTHERS GRIMM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STORY CHARACTER</td>
<td>ACTOR</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| PIG #1 (straw) | Freddie Prinze Jr. | • young, naive  
• would realistically portray a character thinking that straw is a good building material |
| PIG #2 (sticks) | Leonardo DiCaprio | • more experience in movies  
• could use his survival techniques that he learned on the set of “The Beach” to build a safe home |
| PIG #3 (bricks) | Sarah Michelle Gellar | • possesses super powers  
• she could use her street smarts to build the strongest home  
• she could utilize her vampire slaying experiences on “Buffy...” to eliminate B.B. Wolf |
| Big Bad Wolf | Jack Nicholson | • a renowned “bad guy”  
• he could use his famous “You can’t handle the truth”! voice to frighten the pigs |
MYSTERY SHORT STORY RESPONSE

TASK:

- A plot profile is an activity that combines two things – a time line and a rating scale. You will be examining plot in detail and then deciding how and when the excitement builds and then at what point the climax occurs.

Summarize the ten most important events that occur in the story. Record your plot points in the lines below in the order they occur in the story.

1. __________________________________________________________
2. __________________________________________________________
3. __________________________________________________________
4. __________________________________________________________
5. __________________________________________________________
6. __________________________________________________________
7. __________________________________________________________
8. __________________________________________________________
9. __________________________________________________________
10. __________________________________________________________

- In order to analyze the climax of the story, evaluate each plot point for its excitement level.
- Use the example of the plot profile below for the story, “the Three Little Pigs” as a guide.
- The events are written and numbered at the bottom of the page along the horizontal axis.
- The numbers along the vertical axis demonstrate the level of excitement or different suspense points in the story.
- The levels range from 0 – 10. The lower the number, the lower the excitement level. The climax should occur near level 10, usually near the end of the story.
- Illustrate the ten points from the story in the form of a comic strip.

Plot Profile for “THE THREE LITTLE PIGS”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PLOT POINTS</th>
<th>LEVEL OF SUSPENSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Pigs leave home;</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Pig meets man with straw, builds house;</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Wolf eats Pig #1;</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Pit meets man with sticks, builds house;</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Wolf eats Pig #2;</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Pig meets man with bricks, builds house;</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Wolf tries to eat Pig #3;</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Wolf climbs on roof of house;</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Wolf goes down chimney into pot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Pig #3 lives happily ever after.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Grade 7 SHORT STORY Reading & Writing Activities

Student Resource
REALISTIC FICTION SHORT STORY RESPONSE

TASK:

- Create a report card for each of the main characters using the report card below as an example.
- Think of **5 adjectives** or **adverbs** to describe the **protagonist** and **antagonist** in the short story.
- Examples of adjectives/descriptors: creative, honest, courageous, happy, sentimental, practical, loving, hard working...
- Give a grade for each quality and a brief explanation commenting on the mark you gave. Use **examples from the story** to explain and prove why the characters earned the mark they did.

Example of report card comment:

Intelligence: A+ The third pig outsmarted the wolf by building his house out of bricks. The wolf could not get in to eat the pig as the house was too strong.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBJECT</th>
<th>GRADE</th>
<th>COMMENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fitness Level</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>Big Bad has great lung capacity. He is able to run, blow down houses and catch pigs. Big Bad must learn to pace himself so that he can blow down brick houses before he gets tired.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>Big Bad is not very creative. He did not try to problem solve different ways to get into the pigs’ houses. He could have tried to trick the pigs as he did in <em>Little Red Riding Hood</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Big Bad must learn to get along better with other forest creatures. He is not very collaborative because he views everyone as a possible lunch item.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligence</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Big Bad, although strong, has satisfactory ability to reason. He didn’t get a meal, but managed to survive. He should get some advice from his cousin, Wile E. Coyote.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persistence</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Big Bad proves that he is persistent because he just keeps trying and trying to get those darn pigs. He even destroys two of their homes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SCIENCE FICTION SHORT STORY RESPONSE

TASK:

- After reading the short story, create a news report of the events.
- What important parts of this story should be included in a news report?

Include the elements of a news story:

| HEADLINE: | The headline catches your attention. It’s the hook that explains what happened. |
| DATE LINE: | This tells you where the story came from and when it was written. |
| LEAD LINE: | The first sentence does the same job as a headline. It tells you what happened. It may provide some detail. |
| BODY: | This provides the reader with more details. It usually answers the questions: Who? What? Where? When? How? Why? The body often has quotations from the people who heard or saw what happened. |

PIGS' HOMES TERRORIZED

FOREST VIEW (CP) – Two houses were destroyed Friday when a wolf on a hunger rampage began yelling and attempting to blow down homes. The damaged houses, belonging to two local swine, were constructed from straw and sticks.

A witness from the scene reported that the alleged wolf is known in the community as “Big Bad”. The witness overheard Big Bad say, “Little Pig, Little Pig, let me come in or I’ll huff and I’ll puff and I’ll blow your house in!”

So far the Little Pigs have been unavailable for comment. Their whereabouts at press time are still unknown.

Clean-up crews have been called in to deal with the mess.

Proofread your work for spelling, grammar and completeness. Have at least two other people proofread your work. Make a final copy that contains no errors. If possible, use the computer to word process your news article.
ADVENTURE SHORT STORY RESPONSE

TASK:

• Create a detailed map depicting the relevant people, places and events of the story.

Include the elements of a news story:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PEOPLE</th>
<th>PLACES</th>
<th>EVENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>•</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

• Put all the events from the story in chronological order.
• Make a rough draft of your map. On your map be sure to include all the important places, events and people that were in the story.
• When designing your map consider the amount of space on your paper and where you will place your graphics and text.
• To find details you will definitely need to READ parts of the story again.
• Make a final (good) copy of your map. Use colour to make it visually appealing.

Below is an example of a very rough (yours will be much more detailed) story map from THE THREE LITTLE PIGS.

THE BIG BAD WOLF. HE’S HUNGRY AND FULL OF HOT AIR!

The house of sticks

The house of straw

The house of bricks

THE FOREST
The forest is the home of The Big Bad Wolf. It is dark and creepy!

HOG TOWN

This pig, having skipped his D & T classes, built his house out of straw. The hair on his chinny chin chin did not keep the Big Bad Wolf out! This pig was eaten by Big Bad in one gulp.

This pig built his house out of sticks. Sturdy but, yet it was no match for Big Bad Wolf’s breath, as he blew it down. This pig was also eaten by Big Bad Wolf.

This brightest pig saved his bacon by constructing his house out of bricks. The Big Bad Wolf was no match for this brick house. Big Bad Wolf retreated to the forest.

huff & puff

VERY STRONG
## GENRE MATCHING

Match each genre to the characteristics that best fits it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GENRE</th>
<th>CHARACTERISTICS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Science Fiction</td>
<td>shadows, “the unknown”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mystery</td>
<td>skydiving, action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survival</td>
<td>aliens, future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adventure</td>
<td>past events, horse and carriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical</td>
<td>monsters, vampires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real Life</td>
<td>jokes, comedy, situations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biography</td>
<td>family conflict, making friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fantasy</td>
<td>shipwreck, resourcefulness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horror</td>
<td>famous or infamous people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humour</td>
<td>fairies, dragons</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**APPENDIX**

**GENRE MATCHING**

Match each genre to the characteristics that best fits it.

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<td>Humour</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SUMMATIVE EVALUATION OF GENRES

TASK:

Use the chart below to record your thoughts on the various genres of short stories. Include positive, negative and interesting points or opinions about each short story.

Example: Adventure

Positive – a lot of action, fast paced, interesting
Negative – unrealistic because of too many risks taken by the hero
Interesting – the use of description for the setting

GENRE COMPARISON CHART

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story/Genre</th>
<th>😊 POSITIVE</th>
<th>😞 NEGATIVE</th>
<th>😊 INTERESTING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</table>

PARAGRAPH SUMMARY

Use the information from the chart to write a paragraph(s) detailing your exploration of the various genre. Include statements such as:

- This story was exciting and full of adventure because...
- The readers were made to feel that they were really there because...
- The author developed the feeling of suspense by...
- This story would have been more enjoyable had the author included...
## SHORT STORY ANALYSIS

**Genre:**

**Title:**

**Author:**

### Initial Situation:
(circumstances the main character is in at the beginning of the story)

### Narrative Hook:
(author uses it to gain reader’s attention)

### Narrator:
(first or third person)

### Setting:
(where: e.g., country, city, street, house, room; when: e.g., year, month, day, time, mood)

### Character P.B.E.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characters</th>
<th>Physical (looks like)</th>
<th>Behavioural (acts like)</th>
<th>Environmental (surroundings)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Protagonist:</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(main character/hero)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Antagonist:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(provides conflict, villain)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Minor Characters:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Conflict(s):
(i) person vs. person, (ii) person vs. nature, (iii) person vs. self, (iv) person vs. technology
SHORT STORY ANALYSIS

Plot: (List the important events in the order in which they happen.)

- ___________________________________________________________
- ___________________________________________________________
- ___________________________________________________________
- ___________________________________________________________
- ___________________________________________________________
- ___________________________________________________________
- ___________________________________________________________
- ___________________________________________________________
- ___________________________________________________________
- ___________________________________________________________

Suspense: (Explain a time when you felt anxious or curious about what would happen next.)

- ___________________________________________________________
- ___________________________________________________________
- ___________________________________________________________
- ___________________________________________________________

Climax: (Explain how the main character made a decision that created the most interest and resolved the conflict. It is usually near the end of the story.)

The climax occurred when ___________________________________________
- ___________________________________________________________
- ___________________________________________________________
- ___________________________________________________________

Denouement: (Describe the events which occurred after the climax and tied up any loose ends.)

- ___________________________________________________________
- ___________________________________________________________
- ___________________________________________________________
SHORT STORY PLANNING GUIDE

Use this guide to help plan your short story.

When writing a short story consider:

- your audience
- characters
- a central problem
- possible solutions
- resolution
- suspense
- possible appropriate ideas
- setting/mood
- an interesting plot
- a climax/the most exciting part
- editing

1. Choose a genre for your story. e.g., fantasy, comedy, romance, sci-fi, mystery, drama, action/adventure

2. Brainstorm possible original ideas for your short story.

Original Ideas for a Short Story

3. Decide on a **problem** or **conflict**.

Choose 3 possible solutions for your conflict and explain a little about each.

Choose the best solution for the conflict in your story.

(continued)
4. Create some **characters**.

   For each character include descriptive characteristics and details that you will use in your story.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sketch</th>
<th>Descriptors</th>
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<tbody>
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</table>

5. Decide on a **setting**. Where, when and under what circumstances does the story take place?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where:</th>
<th>When:</th>
<th>Other details:</th>
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<tbody>
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**MAKE A DETAILED ILLUSTRATION OF YOUR SETTING**

Use your illustration to make a list of descriptive words to use in your story.
**Plot Outline**

Briefly outline what will happen in your story. Be sure your points flow in order. Build suspense into your story.

1. ________________________________  
2. ________________________________  
3. ________________________________  
4. ________________________________  
5. ________________________________  
6. ________________________________  
7. ________________________________  
8. ________________________________  
9. ________________________________  
10. ________________________________  
11. ________________________________  
12. ________________________________  

Plot your story points in order on the plot line below.

**Conflict Resolution**

Have an obvious **climax** where the main character has made some kind of decision that affects his or her situation.

It is at this point in your story that the main character has to deal with the **problem** or **conflict** and tries to solve it.

The problem or conflict in my story is solved when:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Be sure to tie up the loose ends at the end of your story. The proper term for this is the **resolution** or **denouement**.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Give your story a title. ____________________________________________
SHORT STORY GLOSSARY

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SHORT STORY:

- purpose is to entertain, engage reader in imaginative experience
- usually read in under thirty minutes
- characters are few in number
- little development of character
- setting fairly static; little movement of time or location
- little introduction
- single plot develops very quickly and usually sequentially
- types of conflict limited
- conclusion is very short
- tense is usually the past

TYPES OF SHORT STORY GENRES

Contemporary Realistic: These stories contain characters very similar to the people we know in our everyday lives and they deal with the problems of everyday real life. In French they are called *tranche de vie* or “slice of life” stories.

Mystery or Detective: This story often revolves around a crime that has been committed. Often the protagonist is the person who acts as a detective to solve the crime. Clues or evidence are built into the plot in order to lead the detective to the criminal/s. The mood of a mystery or detective is one of suspense.

Survival or Adventure: These stories are about exciting accomplishments or the struggle to survive. There is lots of physical action and open conflict. Often the setting is important because it provides difficulties that the character/s must overcome. In these stories, nature is often the antagonist.

Historical Fiction: This type of story is set in the past. Often, real people from history are mixed with fictional characters and take part in the plot. The reader may learn a lot about the culture, politics, economics, etc. of the time period of the story.

Fantasy: This genre is most often about a character who is on a quest. During the journey to fulfill the quest, many strange and bizarre characters are met and the protagonist must overcome the forces of evil. Often, magical events occur which assist the protagonist in meeting his/her goal.

Science Fiction: These stories take place in a future world filled with highly advanced technology. Often the writer tries to teach the reader a lesson about his/her own world by projecting important issues and problems into the future in order to illustrate what may happen if society does not change its ways.

Horror: These stories produce fear in the reader through the use of inexplicable events, strange characters and gloomy settings.
TERMS and DEFINITIONS for SHORT STORIES

Narrative Hook: A trick used by an author to gain the reader’s attention within the first few lines of the story, e.g., “By the time she arrived, the paramedics had already loaded up the ambulance.”

Setting: The setting consists of the time, the place and the circumstances of an incident.

Orientation: The time, setting, main characters in the story.

Narration: The method chosen to tell the story; there are two types:
- **First person narration**: the narrator tells the story as it happened to him/her, or, based on his/her perception or interpretation of the events and characters. The point of view is limited because the narrator cannot “get inside” the minds of other characters; also, this narrator may misinterpret events and characters. First person narration contains much use of first person pronouns: I, me, mine, myself, etc. The gender of the first person narrator is often clearly established, e.g., I was one of three teenage girls who absolutely hated going to gym class.
- **Third person narration**: the narrator tells the story as it happened to others. This narrator does not take part in the story but is all-knowing: characters’ pasts, their thoughts, their emotions, their motivations, etc. This narrator is “anonymous”; the reader does not learn anything about his/her gender, thoughts, etc., e.g., Cheryl was one of three girls who absolutely hated going to gym class.

Characters: These are the people in the story.
- **Protagonist**: this is a major character around whom the plot revolves; the protagonist is usually fully-developed by the end of the story.
- **Antagonist**: this is the character who provides the major conflict for the protagonist; the antagonist may be Nature, e.g., a storm, a predatory animal, an illness, an injury, etc.
- **Minor characters**: these characters play a secondary role in the plot; they are seldom fully developed.
- **Stock characters**: these characters represent certain types/stereotypes in society.

Conflict: A conflict is a problem which needs to be resolved. There are four types of conflict:
- **Person vs. Person**: two people arguing
- **Person vs. Nature**: a people are lost in a snowstorm; a man is battling cancer
- **Person vs. Self**: teenagers deciding whether or not to smoke
- **Person vs. Technology**: this usually occurs in Science Fiction stories

Plot: The plot of a short story is the series of related incidents. In a well-composed story this series moves forward with increasing interest and tension to a climax.

Initial Situation: This is made up of the circumstances in which the protagonist finds him/herself at the beginning of the story. The situation at the story’s end is never quite the same as it was at the beginning.

Rising Action: This is made up of the actions the main character takes to resolve the conflict(s).

Climax: This is the point in the story where the conflict is resolved. The main character may make a decision or take an action which represents either victory or defeat.

Denouement: These are the events in which occur after the climax.

Open-Ended: This is a story in which the conflict is not resolved by the end of the story.

Suspense: This occurs when the reader experiences an anxious or curious interest regarding the outcome of events in a story.
RESOURCES

PRINT

Non-Fiction
Issues Collection – McGraw Hill
Families in Transition
Futures
Gender Issues
Global Issues
Justice
Multiculturalism
Music
Native Voices
Popular Culture
Values
Wellness

VIDEOs
The Gold Bug
Bill’s New Frock
Grandpa Chatterji

CANADIAN SHORT STORIES ON VIDEO
Boys and Girls
An Ounce of Cure
A Good Tree
The Cap
One’s a Heifer
Cornet at Night
Bambinger
Going to War
Hotwalker
Rebellion of Young David
Old Man and the Child
The Bell Ringers
* Katie-Girl
* Home
Baby Pinksy
The Comic Book Chase
In Limbo
Then / Now
Cement Soul
Voodoo Taxi
Looking For Nothing
Dance to Remember
The Haircut
The Day Glo Warrior
Jack of Hearts
Mortimer Griffin and Shalinsky
To Put Our House in Order
The Dream and the Triumph
* 702 series focuses on identity issues such as being part of a minority, etc.

OTHERS
Bill’s New Frock
Grandpa Chatterji
Grandma’s Chair
Granny Lives in Galway
Griff Gets a Hand
Haunting at Harrington House
Hey Kelly
Dance Lexie Dance
Death of a Gandy Dancer

Diana Knight . 91 page 23 6/6/02
## Rubric for SHORT STORY ANALYSIS
### READING – INTERMEDIATE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRITERIA</th>
<th>Performance Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>STRATEGIES</strong> (Oral Reading)</td>
<td><strong>LEVEL 1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• reads with limited fluency (words, phrases, sentences)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>STRATEGIES</strong> (Making Meaning)</td>
<td><strong>LEVEL 1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• uses a limited number of strategies to derive meaning from texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>STRATEGIES</strong> (Purpose/Variety)</td>
<td><strong>LEVEL 1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• finds information in pre-selected materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COMPREHENSION</strong> (Elements of Text)</td>
<td><strong>LEVEL 1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• requires assistance to recognize and respond to the elements of fictional and informational texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COMPREHENSION</strong> (Literal/Inferential)</td>
<td><strong>LEVEL 1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• requires assistance to derive inferred meaning from texts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTERPRETATION</strong> (Personal)</td>
<td><strong>LEVEL 1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• requires assistance to make connections between personal experiences and texts, with some assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INTERPRETATION</strong> (Critical Response)</td>
<td><strong>LEVEL 1</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• begins to respond critically, when assisted</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

http://www.haltonbe.on.ca/Halton/hCows/AandE/RubricMenuSystem/Language/Reading1.html

page 1 of 2
### Rubric for GRADE 7 SHORT STORY

#### THE WRITING PROCESS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRITERIA</th>
<th>Performance Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PRE-WRITING</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brainstorm to Generate Ideas for Writing</td>
<td>• requires prompting to generate options</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Select a Topic, Form, Purpose and Audience</td>
<td>• requires prompting to identify a topic, audience, purpose and form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Plans</td>
<td>• requires assistance to generate a simple plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conferencing</td>
<td>• with direction, chooses partners and applies suggestions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DRAFTING</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creation of First Draft</td>
<td>• requires prompting to begin writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the Plan</td>
<td>• uses the plan in a limited way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>REVISION</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• with assistance, makes changes to the content and/or organization of a draft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EDITING</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• requires assistance to edit own work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PUBLISHING</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual Presentation</td>
<td>• with assistance, uses some grade-appropriate visual techniques</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# Rubric for SHORT STORY ACTIVITY PRODUCTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CRITERIA</th>
<th>LEVEL 1</th>
<th>LEVEL 2</th>
<th>LEVEL 3</th>
<th>LEVEL 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>REASONING</td>
<td>• uses simple explanations to demonstrate understanding of concepts, e.g., plot characters, rising action</td>
<td>• uses partial explanations to demonstrate understanding of concepts, e.g., plot characters, rising action</td>
<td>• uses detailed explanations to demonstrate understanding of concepts, e.g., plot characters, rising action</td>
<td>• uses complex explanations to demonstrate understanding of concepts, e.g., plot characters, rising action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• reaches conclusions that are not supported by the text</td>
<td>• reaches conclusions that are supported by the text in a limited way</td>
<td>• reaches conclusions that are supported by the text</td>
<td>• reaches well supported conclusions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMMUNICATION</td>
<td>• uses examples from the text inconsistently or ineffectively to support answers</td>
<td>• selects and uses some appropriate examples from the text to support answers</td>
<td>• selects and uses many appropriate examples from the text to support answers</td>
<td>• consistently uses the most appropriate examples from the text to support answers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• communicates with limited clarity and precision</td>
<td>• communicates with some clarity and precision</td>
<td>• communicates clearly and precisely (e.g., written or visual)</td>
<td>• communicates clearly and insightfully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORGANIZATION</td>
<td>• creates an unorganized product</td>
<td>• creates a partially organized product</td>
<td>• creates an organized product</td>
<td>• creates a highly organized product</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONVENTIONS</td>
<td>• uses a few of the spelling, grammar, punctuation and style conventions</td>
<td>• uses some of the spelling, grammar, punctuation and style conventions</td>
<td>• uses most of the spelling, grammar, punctuation and style conventions</td>
<td>• uses all of the spelling, grammar, punctuation and style conventions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

COMMENTS
**SHORT STORY STUDENT TRACKER**

**INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITIES**

- Genre Matching
- Short Story Elements
- Conflict Search

**INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITIES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Read Story</th>
<th>Analysis Sheet</th>
<th>Product</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Historical</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mystery</td>
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<tr>
<td>Realistic Fiction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Science Fiction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adventure</td>
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</table>

**SUMMATIVE EVALUATION OF GENRE**

- Comparison Chart
- Paragraph Summary

**SHORT STORY WRITING PROCESS**

- Short Story Planning guide
- First Draft
- Self Edit
- Peer Edit / Conference
- Published Copy
SCIENCE FICTION

MEN ARE DIFFERENT

by Alan Bloch

I’m an archaeologist, and Men are my business. Just the same, I wonder if we’ll ever find out about Men – I mean really find out what made Men different from us Robots – by digging around on the dead planets. You see, I lived with a Man once, and I know it isn’t as simple as they told us back in school.

We have a few records, of course, and Robots like me are filling in some of the gaps, but I think now that we aren’t really getting anywhere. We know, or at least the historians say we know, that Men came from a planet called Earth. We know, or at least the historians say we know, that Men came from a planet called Earth. We know, too, that they rode out bravely from star to star; and wherever they stopped, they left colonies – Men, Robots, and sometimes both – against their return. But they never came back.

Those were the shining days of the world. But are we so old now? Men had a bright flame – the old word is “divine,” I think – that flung them far across the night skies, and we have lost the strands of the web they wove.

Our scientists tell us that Men were very much like us – and the skeleton of a Man is, to be sure, almost the same as the skeleton of a Robot, except that it’s made of some calcium compound instead of titanium. Just the same, there are other differences.

It was on my last field trip, to one of the inner planets, that I met the Man. He must have been the last Man in this system, and he’d forgotten how to talk – he’d been alone so long. Once he learned our language we got along fine together, and I planned to bring him back with me. Something happened to him, though.

One day, for no reason at all, he complained of the heat. I checked his temperature and decided that his thermostat circuits were shot. I had a kit of field spares with me, and he was obviously out of order, so I went to work. I turned him off without any trouble. I pushed the needle into his neck to operate the cut-off switch, and he stopped moving, just like a Robot. But when I opened him up he wasn’t the same inside. And when I put him back together I couldn’t get him running again. Then he sort of weathered away – and by the time I was ready to come home, about a year later, there was nothing left of him but bones. Yes, Men are indeed different.
THE ANIMAL THAT DRANK UP SOUND

by William Stafford

One day across the lake where echoes come now an animal that needed sound came down. He gazed enormously, and instead of making any, he took away from, sound: the lake and all the land went dumb. A fish that jumped went back like a knife, and the water died. In all the wilderness around he drained the rustle from the leaves into the mountainside and folded a quilt over the rocks, getting ready to store everything the place had known; he buried – thousands of autumns deep – the noise that used to come there.

Then that animal wandered on and began to drink the sound out of all the valleys – the croak of toads, and all the little shiny noise grass blades make. He drank till winter, and then looked out one night at the stilled places guaranteed around by frozen peaks and held in the shallow pools of starlight. It was finally tall and still, and he stopped on the highest ridge, just where the cold sky fell away like a perpetual curve, and from there he walked on silently, and began to starve.

When the moon drifted over that night the whole world lay just like the moon, shining back that still silver, and the moon saw its own animal dead on the snow, its dark absorbent paws and quiet muzzle, and thick, velvet, deep fur.

After the animal that drank sound died, the world lay still and cold for months, and the moon yearned and explored, letting its dead light float down the west walls of canyons and then climb its delighted soundless way up the east side. The moon owned the earth its animal had faithfully explored.

The sun disregarded the life it used to warm.

But on the north side of a mountain, deep in some rocks a cricket slept. It had been hiding when that animal passed, and as spring came again this cricket waited, afraid to crawl out into the heavy stillness. Think how deep the cricket felt, lost there in such a silence – the grass, the leaves, the water, the stilled animals all depending on such a little thing. But softly it tried – “Cricket!” – and back like a river from that one act flowed the kind of world we know, first whisperings, then moves in the grass and leaves; the water splashed, and a big night bird screamed.

It all returned, our precious world with its life and sound, where sometimes loud over the hill the moon, wild again, looks for its animal to roam, still, down out of the hills, any time. But listens now, and practices at night.
HISTORICAL FICTION

by Leon Garfield

MIRROR, MIRROR

Between Glass House Yard and Shoemaker’s Row lies Friers Street, where Mr. Paris’s premises occupy a commanding position on a corner. In the gloom of the November evening his shop window flares out extravagantly, as platoons of candles execute various dancing manoeuvres in flawless unison. On closer inspection, however, they turn out to be a single candle reflected in a cunning display of looking-glasses. Mr. Paris is a master carver of mirror-frames; golden boys and golden grapes cluster round the silver mirrors and seem to invite, with dimpled arms outstretched, the passer-by to pause and contemplate himself.

Inside, in the dining parlour, the family are sitting down to supper: Mr. and Mrs. Paris – a handsome couple who will be middle-aged when it suits them – Miss Lucinda, their young daughter, and Nightingale, the new apprentice.

Nightingale has not long arrived. He has scarcely had time to wash himself before sitting down to table. All day he has been tramping the streets with his father, a Hertfordshire joiner, and gaping at the multitudinous sights of the town. All in all, it has been a solemn day, what with the many unspoken leave-takings between father and son, the looks over the tops of toasting tankards of ale, the deep pressings of hands, the sentences begun and left half finished as the same melancholy thought strikes them both ...

They have never before been parted; or at least, not for more than a day. But now the inevitable time has come. Ten pounds has been paid for the apprenticeship and Daniel Nightingale is to embark alone on the great voyage of life ... as the village parson had been pleased to put it. Like all such voyages, it is to be seven years long, and the only provisions that the father might properly give his son to take with him have been the wise precepts he himself has treasured up and written down from his own seven years of apprenticeship.

Never come between your master and mistress ...

Nightingale looks up the table at Mr. Paris and then down the table at Mrs. Paris; the husband and wife gaze at one another with identical smiles, as if each is the reflection of the other’s heart.

Carry no tales or gossip between master and mistress, nor chatter with the servants of their private affairs ...

A greasy girl comes in with a dish of mutton and a carving knife. She puts them both on the table with a glance at Nightingale that makes his blood run cold.

Look upon your master as another parent to you ...

Nightingale catches Mr. Paris’s eye, but finds it altogether too slippery to hold. Mournfully he remembers his own parent; only a few hours ago he was ‘Daniel, boy ... Dan, dear ...’ Now that fond distinction has been shorn away and he is plain ‘Nightingale’.

Perhaps now that I’m just a Nightingale, he thinks as a plate is set before him, I ought to sing for my supper? He smiles to himself, not having thought of many jokes before, wit in Hertfordshire being as thin on the ground as turnips are thick. Mr. and Mrs. Paris continue with their own smiles and the table presents an amiable aspect ... with the exception of Miss Lucinda, the master’s pretty daughter. She dislikes the new apprentice for no better reason than that he has failed to recognize her as the queen of the household. She knows it is every apprentice’s ambition to wed his master’s daughter and she cannot endure the notion of being a rung in someone else’s ladder to the sky. She is not much beyond fourteen, with fair hair, fair skin and a general brilliancy about her that suggests she has caught some shining complaint from her father’s wares.

‘I hope and trust, Master Nightingale,’ says Mr. Paris, never taking his eyes off his wife, ‘that at the end of your seven years we will all be as contented and smiling as we are now?’

The apprentice, caught with his mouth full, nods politely. At the same time, mournful thoughts of the day return. Seven years; seven long years ...

After the meal, Mr. Paris rises and shows Nightingale where he is to sleep. According to usage, the apprentice’s bed is made up under the counter in the front room that serves as showroom and shop; thus if dreams come, they are more likely than not to be dreams arising from the day’s work, so no time will be wasted. Mr. Paris bids Nightingale goodnight and leaves him with a wax candle which he must be sparing with, as it is to last him for a week.

The apprentice mumbles his tanks and, when he is alone, prepares to say his nightly prayers. He is scarcely on his knees before the door opens abruptly and startles him. His master’s daughter stands in the doorway. He has not time to observe her before she calls out:

‘Nightingale! Catch!’

She tosses something towards him that glitters in the candlelight like a speeding star. The apprentice is too surprised to do more than put out a hand that just touches the object before it falls with a crash to the ground. It is, or, rather, was, a looking-glass. Now it lies on the floor, shattered into silver knives and slices. Miss Lucinda smiles.

‘You’ve broken a mirror, Nightingale. That means seven years’ bad luck.’
ADVENTURE

THE LAST CANOE

by John Craig

For the first few days, it didn’t seem like anything special or very different to Arthur. He knew that each paddle-stroke was taking him farther away from Sarah and the rest of what had been his life, but in the beginning the country looked familiar, much like his own.

A lot of it was still forest, with, here and there, patchwork farms, seldom prosperous looking, for the soil was thin and grudging, little more than a dusting of sand between the quartz and granite outcroppings of the Great Shield. Piles of stones in the fields. Split-cedar rail fences. A few black-and-white pasturing cows.

Now and then someone waved to him – a young woman poised on a diving board, a man still fishing from an old, white skiff or a party of tourists looking down from a steel bridge. But although there were plenty of people around, Arthur felt no desire for company or talk, not when he would, so soon, be truly alone.

The numerous locks slowed him down, as he had known they would. He portaged around some, waited at others to lock through with other, larger craft. But in spite of the obstacles, he was putting ten or twelve kilometres a day behind his paddle. When night fell, he made camp wherever he could find an unoccupied point or small island, sleeping under the tarpaulin or under the overturned canoe when it rained.

At the end of the third day he reached the weedy bay from which the Trent River begins its journey south to Lake Ontario. That evening, in the lingering July twilight, he made the first entry in his diary.

July 3:
Well, Pretty good so far. Had a few aches, but mostly better now. Caught a ‘lunge this afternoon (pretty little!) and had it for supper. This is the easy part, I guess, along here. Wonder how things are back home? Don’t suppose I’ll get much rest.

After another three days, he had finished with the Trent and made a good beginning on his long journey to the east.

July 6:
Started out into the big lake this afternoon. Not as bad as I expected. They call this the Bay of Quinte. The shore comes pretty close on both sides, and there isn’t much wind. A man on a big boat told me that it will be like this most of the way to Kingston. Only a couple of open stretches to worry about. That’s good!

But Lake Ontario was not prepared to let him slip by so unmarked.

July 8:
Luck bad. Real strong east wind yesterday and today. Hard paddling in big swells. Just about swamped four or five times. Had to get down on bottom and let her drift. Got washed up on shore just before dark. Canoe and me all right but plenty wet. Think I’m on Amherst Island.

July 9:
Been here all day. Have never seen waves like it – some a lot taller than me. Not the ocean yet, though. There’s a glow over east that must be Kingston. Don’t know when I’ll be able to get over there. Had some pemmican tonight. Just have to wait – that’s all I can do.
HISTORICAL FICTION/FANTASY

MILK BOTTLES

by Maria Leach

This happened many years ago in a small country village in Alabama.

One day the storekeeper looked up and saw a pale young woman in a gray dress standing at the counter.

“What can I do for you, ma’am?” he said.

She did not answer, but pointed to a bottle of milk. The storekeeper handed it to her, and without a word she walked quickly out of the store and down the main street of the town.

The next day she came back.

“What will you have today, ma’am?” the storekeeper asked.

The young woman in gray pointed to a bottle of milk.

Again the storekeeper handed it to her. And once again the woman took the milk and hurried away without saying a word.

That night the storekeeper told his neighbors about the strange young woman in gray with the sad, pale face who came every day for milk and walked away without thanks or payment, in silence.

So the next day when the woman in gray appeared and again walked away with the milk without speaking, two or three of the villagers followed her.

She walked swiftly down the main street of the town. The men were amazed that they almost had to run to keep sight of her.

She passed the school; she passed the church; she kept right on through the little town up the hill to the graveyard.

She passed swiftly in among the graves and stones and trees, seemed to stop for a minute – and then was gone.

The followers stood quietly beside the grave where the slender gray figure had seemed to pause. It was the new-made grave of a young mother and her baby daughter who had died three days ago of a fever. In fact, she had died just one day before she first came into the store for milk.

It all seemed so strange and mysterious that the villagers thought they ought to investigate. So they went back with shovels and soon unearthed the young mother’s coffin.

Then, while they were moving the coffin, they heard – or thought they heard – a tiny muffled wail.

They listened.

They heard it again – the feeble little cry of a baby.

Quickly they opened the coffin.

Yes. Here was the frail young mother in gray who had come for the milk. And in her arms lay a baby girl – ill and weak, but alive.

Beside her lay the empty milk bottles.

One of the men took the baby home to his wife, and the little life was saved.

No one ever saw the young mother in gray again. She had accomplished her task. She had saved her baby girl.

Now she could rest.
REALISTIC FICTION

DON’T LOOK IN THE MIRROR

by Carol Major

Laura is my mirror. I am brushing her thick brown hair and watching my reflection. It has been twisted by some broken promise, withering her body to leave my dark eyes and Laura, someone so much better than me. I am helping her get ready to go shopping. It has taken two hours. Laura helps as much as she can. She crawls to the bathroom and I lift her on to the toilet and then into the bath, out of the bath, into the brace, up to the breakfast table, out to the car. Her world is a crusade over stairs and platforms. It would drive me mad. I look for flickers of irritation but Laura’s eyes betray nothing. And I am relieved.

The waitress in the coffee shop doesn’t look at Laura. She hands the menu to me. I hand it to Laura and we both laugh. Laura is used to being invisible. She is also used to people staring – “the conspicuous invisible woman, that’s me,” she laughs. She laughs a lot, even though her mouth can’t smile, even though her back hurts a lot, even though the waitress thinks she’s too stupid to read a menu.

Laura has just turned sixteen. We are looking for a new outfit to celebrate. Twenty-four years have passed since I was sixteen. I can remember spending hours with giggling girlfriends, looking for clothes and looking in mirrors. Is my bottom too wide, do my teeth stick out, am I pretty?

Laura and I look at racks of clothes but we don’t look in mirrors – because I am not sixteen anymore and because she has always been much older than me and doesn’t need to check to see who she is. I check to see who she is, looking for my fear, but see nothing. Even at six, when her father and I divorced, before this crippling disease twisted her growing body, she was composed, sardonic, never a baby – never like me.

Today she surrounds us both in a bubble of wit. She is fun to be with. We choose some white tights with big black daisies, a mini tent dress and big loopy earrings. Laura is going to try them on. It will be a challenge but she is determined.

“I want to try these on,” she announces to the woman guarding the change cubicles.

The woman looks embarrassed. Laura’s paralysis affects her speech. She sounds different talking from the back of her throat. The woman looks at me.

“She wants to try those on.” I am her stalwart.

“I don’t know if we can fit the wheelchair in there.” The lady hopes we will go away.

Laura stands ground. “I want to try these on.” Calm repetition is very effective. The attendant finds us a space in the storage room. The lady grunts and groans, moving boxes to give us a space. We have taken her out of her way. It is inconvenient. She’s wasted a whole ten minutes with us.

Ten minutes to us is nothing. It takes ten minutes just to lift Laura’s electric wheelchair out of the car, hook the chair to the motor, connect the batteries, lift Laura into the chair, find a slope in the curb. It takes hundreds of ten-minute units to find lifts from car parks, find doors that don’t have a step, find restaurants with space between the tables.

Laura is laughing as I rant and rave. “It doesn’t matter, Mum.” She is stripped down to her brace. She needs a new one. She has grown so much in the last six months and her young breasts are squeezed by the hard plastic.

“Doesn’t that feel uncomfortable?” I am angry with the brace.

Laura giggles and wiggles that plastic torso. “Look Mum, Madonna,” and then I have to laugh as well.

There is no mirror in the storage area. Laura guides her chair back to the sales floor. She looks at the outfit in the mirror. She doesn’t look at her wasted arms or her drooping lip, she just looks at the outfit. “I like it.” The deal is made. We pay the cashier.

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Laura keeps the new outfit on and we put her other clothes in a bag. In her new clothes she feels bright, “with it,” part of the “in crowd.” We decide to go to a movie and cut through the big open square in the centre of the mall. Laura thinks about where we are going and she appears happy.

I think about how she isn’t part of the “in” crowd and I can’t help but notice the people noticing. But she is stronger than me and buoys us up, two alien beings, exchanging jokes about earthlings from the safety of our space ship.

A small amusement site has been set up in the middle of the square. There is a kiddie ride, a huge water tank painted with the words, Mysteries from the Deep, and a tent with three curved mirrors. A midget dressed up like a clown presides over his mini circus. Laura slows down to have a look. She pulls up in front of the tent of mirrors.

“Hey Mum,” she shrieks, “look at your legs.” My legs have shrunk into two short little stumps in the bend of the mirror.

“Watch my flowers grow,” Laura calls to me as she steers her wheelchair back and forward in front of the mirrors. Her daisies and dots stretch and disappear. We laugh and laugh at her dress and my legs as they contort in the mirrors.

I am still laughing when I see them. They are giggling, smoking, kissing, swaggering toward the tent. Tall, brown teenage boys and girls, jeans and mini skirts, not contorted – young and healthy. One of them whispers at the others and they stop to look at Laura. I feel so frightened. Don’t look, don’t look, don’t look now.

Laura doesn’t seem to see them. She is talking to the clown. The teenagers reflect behind her in the mirror. Does she look?

The clown is talking to her. “Come and see my wonderful sea creatures, be careful the sharks don’t eat ya.” He has made a friend.

“Yeah, meals on wheels,” Laura quips, still looking at the moving patterns she is making with her dress. I feel foolish. She didn’t even notice them. She’s not a baby, not like me.

“Come on, we’ll miss the movie.” I check my wrist watch and turn to where Laura is sitting in front of the mirrors. And then I catch her, just within the mirror’s edge. She isn’t looking at the dress, she is looking at herself, reflecting me – with my horror screaming out of her big dark eyes.