

21W.755, Writing and Reading Short Stories (Fall 2006)
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Session 13: Description

Explain free writing - experience of writing fluidly

- description, details, kinesthetics
- *show* don't tell
- give reader the experience

Jack London

- What does the character want?
- Obstacle?

Experiencing what you haven't is a reader's motive in fiction.
What is it like to ____?

Many things we don't actually want to try, but are curious about

What makes this story effective? It is a VERY simply story – never get man's name.

Exposition (how to handle – wonderful if done well – London is not afraid of exposition)
How many ways does he discuss the cold?

Story is about – “Man without imagination”

Yukio Mishima

- sensuality
- pointed kinesthetics (details, 5 senses)
 - Why? – this reinforces this story
 - the contrast life and death
- how vitally alive these characters are with death so soon
- the writer uses the very vivid, visceral description of sex, dressing, food

Description goes from ABOUT a story to BEING a story.

Which details does the author include? Which are not mentioned?

Solidity and authority mean that you *know* things that are not included. The author knows a lot of information that does not come out directly in the story, but still gives the author authority and so the reader feels confident and trusting.

Description SHOWS us so that we as readers are drawn into the physical reality of the story.

Context

- using the reader's knowledge and experience (**employing**)
- **reinforcing** what the reader knows
- **teaching** the reader something new

Make it physical.

Make it real.

The more the reader can experience, the more that reader will **suspend disbelief**.

London writes what he knows. It is clear to the reader that he understands every detail and nuance of the situation and how to survive in such extreme conditions. Because we as readers are very likely unfamiliar with these conditions, he has to teach us so that we understand just how serious the situation is.

What details does he use to make the world real? What senses?

How do you experience this world?

SHOW, don't tell.

Mishima in the story "Patriotism" does something rather interesting—he is writing from a very different perspective than his own. He is a gay man writing from the point of view of a married woman. And he makes it work. This story has been called his "rehearsal" for his suicide (he did commit ritual suicide—he is quite an interesting character himself, a right wing political figure with his own private army as well as a brilliant writer.) The setting in Japan is probably somewhat alien to many students, and Mishima is not writing for us. He was writing for Japanese who would be familiar with the history and the culture.

And yet he teaches us the culture, teaches us what these people do and decide. Again, pay attention to how he builds up the world through his use of detail, of all five senses. Look at how he uses touch especially to create a visceral experience of this world.

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Spring 2012

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