

21W.755, Writing and Reading Short Stories (Fall 2006)
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Session 3: The Seeds of Story

Where does **STORY** come from?

Stories are **not ONE idea**, they are constructed from **layers** of ideas compressed together. It is a mistake to think a story comes from a single place (tell about "A Real Girl"). This notion that one gets a **single** idea for a story is a central fallacy about how stories are written and is misleading. One idea is the starting point, the central energy for the story, and perhaps the "now" moment.

One way to make a story is keep a file of ideas. ONE idea is never enough for a story, but if you keep a general file of ideas that strike you—an interesting character, a snippet of conversation, an evocative place, a piece of plot—then you can take them out, look at them and rearrange them. Some will remain in the folder, but maybe one or two will strike you to work with what new ideas struck for a new story.

Look at the "now" moment and ask about it. What brought the person to this change? What happened? Why? Who was involved? Where? Why did it matter? How did that happen?

What did the person/character WANT? What was in the way of them getting what they wanted? What were they willing to do to overcome that obstacle?

Keep asking questions that lead up to the "now" moment.

Usually ideas come from all over. WATCH the world. Observe. Read the newspaper and clip articles that strike your interest. Or turn them into something for your idea folder.

* As we discuss (and read more stories) continue to be aware of the **layers** of ideas – list out the ideas (like following a single connection/wire in a system.) (Read the essay by Porter about how she wrote her story and think about the various experiences that she combined—some reading, someone else's experience, her own experience—to create the story.)

Exercise

Think about an event early in your life that is still powerful for you – that made you cry, or afraid, or angry, or triumphant with revenge. Sketch it out – focus on the emotional power. Now – make it fiction. Change something. Change character, change ages, change place, gender – see how this changes the center of the story.

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