



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative  
2007 Volume III: Maps and Mapmaking

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## **Mapping + Episodic Short Short Stories = Classroom Writing Success**

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### **Introduction**

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"The cleverer I am at miniaturizing the world, the better I possess it."

*Gaston Bachelard*

French Philosopher

(1884-1962)

Possessing the world, literally and figuratively, has been a desire of Homo sapiens for thousands of years. What better way to achieve this goal than by charting it? Charting terrain turns the unknown into the known, vanquishes the fear, and allows one to confidently undertake a journey to even the most remote lands. This is the journey students will undertake in this unit through mapping and exploring the places that have shaped them. They will combine the creation of personal maps with a unique form of writing called "short short" stories. Their short short stories will be linked not only through the personal voice of the storyteller, but also by the use of writing strategies such as a recurring motif, rich language, assonance, and an economical choice of words.

The unit begins with an exploration into the history of cartography with a careful examination of maps with decorative elements common in medieval *mappe mundi* and *portolans*. These pilot charts and maps created to illustrate a principle are sprinkled with artwork like ornate borders, elaborate hand drawn frames encapsulating cultural philosophies, and fantasy creatures like sea monsters, gods and goddesses, angels, and muses. Examining these works will allow students to push their visual creative skills when drawing their personal maps.

As students begin creating their personal maps, they will explore the sub-genre of short short stories through the format's history and examples of classic and modern pieces. They will begin writing their own pieces of short short stories using their personal maps as a guidepost. In order to best facilitate this work, a series of writing exercises in teaching the features of a short short story have been included as well as the rules of short short stories, a detail of the necessary elements, a series of writing exercises to help students generate

pieces, and revising tips unique to short short stories.

Finally, I have created individual assignment sheets and rubrics for the students' personal maps and the episodic short short story assignments. These will aid in providing clear guidance for the students, and you, as their teacher.

## Unit Research

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This section includes the basic background information needed to teach this unit. The section is divided into three parts. The first part is a brief vocabulary guide on map terms followed by a condensed early history of cartography. The second part contains a history of short short stories, rules of the format for this unit, and a listing of examples to use in the classroom. The third section outlines a series of writing exercises useful in prompting short short stories and motifs, exercises in instruction of elements of the features in short short stories, as well as, special revision tips.

### Part One—Cartography

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I recommend ensuring that students are familiar with these terms.

Cardinal directions—there are four cardinal directions, which are the four main directions on Earth. They are north, south, east, and west.

Cartography—is the art and science of creating maps and charts

Charts—graphic representation of land usually with additional information such as depth, height, and other features

Compass rose—direction arrows which show the cardinal points and sometimes the intermediate directions. The pointers or arrows were often made to look like the petals of a rose, and thus the symbol began to be called a compass rose.

Distance scale—much like a bar graph, a distance scale is a horizontal line or bar that enables one to calculate the distance between two locations. This is done by measuring the distance between the two locations, and then using the distance scale to calculate the actual distance. A distance scale generally stands for kilometers or miles.

Distribution map—details how people or things are distributed throughout an area.

Equator—an imaginary line around the world that is the halfway point between the North Pole and the South Pole. It divides the earth into the Northern and Southern Hemispheres (halves).

Greenwich Meridian—(also known as the prime meridian) is the starting position for the prime (first) meridian

or zero degrees longitude. Also the dividing point in which the Earth is separated into the Eastern and Western Hemispheres. The prime meridian originates in Greenwich, England, a suburb of the city of London.

Grid—the crossing lines dividing a map into a pattern of squares in order to pinpoint a location on a map.

International Date Line—is an imaginary line for the 180th meridian. This is the starting point where a new calendar day begins. The line falls predominately over the Pacific Ocean.

Intermediate directions—or "in-between" directions, which help to more precisely pinpoint a location. They are: northeast, northwest, southeast, and southwest.

Latitude—also called parallels as they never meet. Latitude lines are imaginary lines that run east to west around the globe and are parallel to the equator as well as at an equal distance to each other. Their distance is measured in degrees. Since the Earth is a circle, it has 360 degrees. Every line of latitude is 30 degrees apart. The North Pole is at 90 degrees north. Going toward the equator, the next latitude line is 60 degrees north (also called the North mid-latitude region), and followed by 30 degrees north (tropical region). The equator is 0 degrees. Proceeding to the South Pole, there are 30 degrees south (tropical region), a 60 degrees south (south mid-latitude region), and the South Pole at 90 degrees south.

Longitude—also called meridians. Imaginary lines running north to south and from pole to pole. Each line of longitude crosses each line of latitude one time. The intersections allow for an exact location to be pinpointed. The lines begin at the prime meridian (in Greenwich, England, which is 0 degrees. They continue eastward with a distance of 30 degrees between each. The lines end at 180 degrees, which is the same line for east and west 180 degrees.

Magnetic north—due to the magnetic points of the Earth not aligning with the North Pole, all compass needles will point to an area in the Hudson Bay, Canada, which is approximately 1300 miles south of true north.

Map—in geography—a representation of a region or place. A map can be of something small like a backyard, or large such as the earth.

Map index—an alphabetical listing of names of places included on a map.

Map key or legend—is a special section of a map in which the map symbols are explained.

Map symbol—is a character, letter, or a graphic picture used on a map to indicate an object or characteristic.

Mappa mundi—(singular) Medieval Latin term meaning "cloth or chart of the world. Mappae mundi (plural) are highly decorative maps of the world commonly developed in Europe during the Middle Ages. The maps were more decorative than factual or functional. Their purpose was to illustrate principles. Good examples are: "Hereford Mappa Mundi" and "Saint-Sever Beatus Mappa Mundi." These maps are often called "T-O" maps because they were designed with the two letters as main features. This was because the "O" stood for the Atlantic Ocean surrounding the known and habitable world which was Asia, Africa, and Europe. The "T" stood for the Mediterranean Sea which divided the three landmasses.

Plats—a type of map which is used to represent property-boundary or celestial information

Portolans—also called rhumb chart, compass chart, and harbour-finding chart. Named from the Italian word portolano or pilot book. Produced during the European Middle Ages, and are thought to be the earliest

navigational charts. Used by pilots to guide ships from port to port. Portolans were originally ornately hand drawn and expensive. Vellum or other hides were their medium. Prominent features included compass roses and lines showing the shortest route to ports. Not until the 16th century with the wide availability of paper, did portolans begin to transform into mass produced charts. Approximately only 130 portolans survive, and this is probably due to the fact they were working maps as well as the hazards of sea journeys.

Prime meridian—(also known as Greenwich Meridian) is the starting point for the lines of longitude, which is 0 degrees longitude. Located in Greenwich, England, the prime meridian.

True north—the true top/axis of the earth if it was not tilted.

## **Early History of Cartography**

Cartography is the art and science of map creation, whereas the term map refers to the end product, which is an actual physical representation on a flat surface of land, water, celestial space, and any combination of the three. Some of the features a map can graphically record are altitude, land, water, roads, railroads, natural resources, population, financial information, the number of single people living in the United States, and anything else one could possibly dream up. This can be proven by looking at the website/blog, "Strange Maps" (<http://strangemaps.wordpress.com/>), which is where the majority of the maps used in this unit can be found. Currently on the "Strange Maps" website can be found a graphic rendering of cyberspace, a map of New Jersey based on Bruce Springsteen's songs, and a 1570 map of Europe fitted into the figure of a queen. Each map has a narrative explaining a little bit about that particular representation such as where it came from and the features of it. The site has an option to access older posts, where there are at least a hundred more strange maps to view.

Please note that the following paragraphs on the history of cartography are based largely on information from *The New Britannica Encyclopedia* and *Funk and Wagnalls New World Encyclopedia*, as well as, material from my Yale seminar. Any information not common to all three sources will be cited.

It is important for students to realize that maps were one of the first means of written communication and used well before written language. These early maps would have been used to show travel routes for trade, the paths of animal herds, and fertile sites for nomadic tribes. The medium used reflected the materials available to the people. The Mexican and South American areas used bark and clothe; Inuit's medium were bone, tusks, and wood; Chinese used silk; North American Indian tribes relied on animal hides; and Pacific Islanders turned to cane fibers or stick frames.

The earliest map dates approximately to 2300 B.C., and was found in the present day area of Iraq. The map was created by the Babylonians, early inhabitants of the area. Its medium is clay. Examples of early clay tablet maps, including the earliest map, can be found on the Internet by searching "Babylonian clay tablet." Note that many of the examples on the Internet use round, and even a star frame. The use of a round frame, during this time period, has no correlation with any preconceived thought to the shape of the earth as undoubtedly, so too, the use of a star frame. The tablets are populated with mythical creatures, heroes, battles, and even figures drinking beer. A few of these maps have been graphically recreated, and are wonderful in allowing the designs to be better appreciated. The graphically recreated maps are also on the Internet and will appear under the above search term.

Note: There is some debate that a wall painting from approximately 6000 B.C. discovered in the Turkish excavation site of Catalhoyuk is actually a map and not a landscape. Unfortunately, at the time I was writing

this unit, the debate had not been resolved. Nor could I find any images of it on the Internet.

The Egyptians either followed closely or began using maps about the same time as the Babylonians. Their maps were carved predominantly into the stone used for tombs. Both cultures' earliest maps dealt with land distribution. Later maps are representations of infrastructure such as detailing roads, and interiors of temples. The earliest maps did not attempt to capture the world or even the known world to the mapmaker at the time. They were interested in more practical concerns such as who owned what tract of land or how much tax is due from a property.

The first attempts to capture the known world in a map sprang from the Ancient Greeks. The ancestors of the Greek people are thought to have come from the Balkans around the third millennium B.C. They brought with them the spirit of explorations that would remain first due to the close proximity of the seas, and then later as the Greek population exploded to over 10 million inhabitants around 400 B.C. Then the need for arable land became tremendous, and the Greeks turned to the seas. They needed functional seafaring maps, and this is what they produced. Their use of accurate sea maps was unlike other cultures of this time, who were generating maps for taxes or ownership. The Greeks used the city of Miletus near the Aegean Sea as the center for their cartographic and cosmographic studies (*The New Britannica Encyclopedia* 474). With few tools, other than mathematics and observation, the advances the Greeks made in the field of geography are amazing.

By the 4th century B.C. the Greeks had accepted the theory that the world was shaped like a sphere. This was first presented by either Pythagoras in the 6th century B.C. or Parmenides in the 5th century B.C., but it was not until the 4th century B.C. that Aristotle developed six rationales proving that the Earth was a sphere. This turned the hypothesis into an accepted idea (*The New Britannica Encyclopedia* 474). Dicaearchus, a student of Aristotle, began using lines of latitude. Others—Eratosthenes, Marinus, and Ptolemy would add lines of longitude. However, Ptolemy made even greater strides in the field of cartography than contributing to the use of lines of longitude.

Ptolemy, or Claudius Ptolemaeus, (90-168 A.D.) was a mathematician, astronomer, and astrologer whose ancestry is as ambiguous as is his life. He is thought to have worked in the epicenter of knowledge for his time, the library in Alexandria, Egypt. Ptolemy contributed many theories and much insight into the fields of cartography, optics, trigonometry, and astronomy. Three of his treatises still have a profound impact in the world of science, even though they are error laden. Some of his cartographic errors that were perpetuated long after his demise include the notion that the Earth is the center of the universe (thought until 17th century), and his mathematical plotting of the size of the world, which was a phenomenal feat especially since he was not too far off. One good spin-off of Ptolemy's error in the size of the earth was that it caused Columbus to miscalculate the route on his most famous voyage. However, Ptolemy's eight volume work, *The Guide to Geography*, captured the known world of cartography at the time. This would have significant repercussions centuries later in allowing the knowledge to be rediscovered as much was lost during the turbulent centuries after the fall of the Roman Empire.

Ptolemy's *The Guide to Geography* is divided as follows. The first volume presents the basics of map and globe production. The next six books contain a listing of over 8,000 places and their locations given by latitude and longitude. The belief is that Ptolemy would have compiled this listing from a few of his own voyage experiences, but the majority came from either other written sources or sailor's accounts. The final book in the series is the most important for modern humanity. This book provides information on how to create a map, all the then-known principles of cartography, and a guide to the Earth's features. Unfortunately, all the original

maps Ptolemy created for *The Guide to Geography* are missing. Also, his listing or atlas of places was updated as it was recopied making it difficult to know what is Ptolemy's work in this section, and what is not.

Fortunately, beginning in the 15th century reproductions of Ptolemy's maps, particularly of his world map, began to appear in copies of *The Guide to Geography*. These were made according to Ptolemy's specifications in his books. By searching under the term, "Ptolemy's map," either in "Images" or as a general search term on the Internet, many will come up as a result. The best reproduction of Ptolemy's maps to use in the classroom is the one of the Earth printed at Ulm in 1482. Many sites use this map, and it is easy to pick out as surrounding the Earth is the heads of the winds. This example has the added decorative elements that are optimal for inspiration in students' personal mapmaking.

A final consideration with Ptolemy's cartography work is that he worked in a time when the Romans were in power. They were practical military-minded men and preferred to use older maps in which the world was disk-shaped simply because they were easier to read and could include larger areas (*New Encyclopaedia Britannica* 475). So, while Ptolemy's maps were considerably more accurate, they were not widely used.

After the fall of the Roman Empire, early Christian ideology almost completely annihilated the knowledge and advances that had been made in the field of cartography. During this time the production of maps in Europe fall to monks or others heavily influenced in the Christian doctrines. Their maps, while religiously correct, were highly erroneous as they no longer relied on mathematics, like Ptolemy did. This is the time of the **mappae mundi**.

Mappae mundi were highly decorative maps that were sometimes functional itinerary maps, but often not. Their main purpose was to illuminate points in the illustration of manuscripts. While other people would produce similar maps, like the Chinese, they do not qualify as mappae mundi. To be a true mappa mundi, the map had to have been made in Europe. Mappae mundi also strived to show harmony and order. This is why many mappae mundi use the T-O framing of the known world at the time of Europe, Asia, Africa, the Mediterranean Sea, and the Atlantic Ocean. (See vocabulary list for a full explanation of a T-O mappae mundi.)

However, Arabian seafarers, often pirates, correctly charted the seas. By the 13th century, Mediterranean navigators were also producing fairly accurate sea charts, called **portolans** (*Funk and Wagnalls New World Encyclopedia On-line*). Portolans also have the decorative elements prized as teaching tools for this unit. By searching under the term "portolan" and choosing "Images," many examples will result. The examples, which work the best for classroom, are those with sea monsters, ships, and buildings, or with unusual frames like eyes and circles. The works of Dutch cartographer Lucas Janszoon Waghenauer are also wonderful.

Not until the fall of the Byzantium Empire in 1453, which sent refugees fleeing to Italy with copies of Ptolemy's *The Guide to Geography*, was his work rediscovered in Europe. The rediscovery of Ptolemy's work coincided with the Renaissance's revival of the work of the Ancient Greek and Roman classics. Coupled with this change in mindset was the ability to reproduce written materials much more expediently and cheaper through the printing press. These forces combined to extinguish the desire for mappae mundi

Mappae mundi and portolan maps should be the maps used to introduce the student mapmaking component of this unit. These maps are highly decorative and creative. While they may not be accurate by today's standards, they also prove how maps are someone's perspective. This also highlights that any map can never truly graphically recreate any area due to individual judgment calls and mechanical considerations such as scale. To further expound on these points, look at the "Teacher Resource" listing included with this unit. Also listed with the unit's lesson plans are the mappae mundi and portolans used as examples.

After exploring the early world of cartography with students, the modern and not so modern, examples can be featured. This can be accomplished by either allowing students to explore on their own, or as the unit specifies, as part of a class warm-up.

## Part Two—What are Short Short Stories?

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Short short stories have also been called "sudden," "flash," "micro," "postcard," "skinny," and "minute" stories. I choose to use the title short short stories for this unit as that moniker has been around for hundreds of years—think Aesop's Fables (Shapard and Thomas xii). Authors such as Kafka, Chekhov, Borges, and Hemingway have written short short stories. One of Hemingway's forays into the sub-genre uses only six words. It reads, "For sale: baby shoes, never worn" (Earle). This has since spawned an off-shoot of short shorts that rigidly adheres to word counts such as "nanofiction" in which no more or less than 55 words must be used and 69ers using 69 words.

Word count is the ultimate test of whether a piece is a short story or a short short story. Short short stories have been tagged to have a maximum of up to 1,999 words. Short stories generally have 2,000 words and up (Answers.com). The minimum is widely agreed upon as no fewer than two words (Earle). For this unit, the word count range will be 500 to 1,000 words. This will allow students to write a substantial amount for those who are wordier, while keeping true to the form.

Still what is a short short story? Irving Howe writes in *Short Shorts* that the stories can be distinguished, not just due to number of words, but because they are, "fiercely condensed, almost like a lyric poem" (ix). Short short stories pack two-tons of explosives in their brief span. They show a slice of a pie, but in that slice, the best is jammed in. The story does not have time for full character development, elaborate plots or description, and extraneous words. Every word, phrase, and sentence must be absolutely important to the flow of the story. Howe also notes that a writer of short shorts must "be especially bold. . .[and] There's often a brilliant overfocussing" (xiii-xiv). The writer must place the reader in the story within the first line. Nothing else will suffice. Still not sure? I will elaborate further.

Roberta Allen in her book, *Fast Fiction: Creating Fiction in Five Minutes* attempts to define short short stories with, "Almost every author of short shorts seems to have a particular way of defining them. Even the qualities of brevity, unexpectedness, and intensity, which I present here as the unique qualities of the very short story, may not be agreed upon by all those who write them (11-12)." Allen is correct in that one of the difficulties of defining short short stories is that there is no canonical description.

However, Charles Baxter in his introduction to *Sudden Fiction International* feels that not being able to define short short stories is what makes them unique. He states, "I have the liberating feeling that the form of the very short story is far more mysterious, more multi-faceted, than I have made it out to be. . .they are between poetry and fiction, the story and the sketch, prophecy and reminiscence, the personal and the crowd. As Stuart Dybek has said, no one is sure what they are or even what to call them. Which means that, as a form, they are open, and exist in a state of potential" (25). The rawness, the creativity, and the uniqueness that short short stories can enflame is what sets them apart and will interest students in trying to craft such stories.

Ultimately, the best way to understand what is a short short story is to begin reading them. There are many e-zines on the Internet that specialize in publishing only short short stories. I have included their websites in the additional teacher resources section of this unit. I also recommend reading the following short short stories, many of which can be read on the Internet through Google or Yahoo. They are excellent for use in the classroom. My favorites include: "The Nincompoop" by Anton Chekhov, "The Colonel" by Carolyn Forché, "Blindsided" by Don Shea, "Space" by Mark Strand, "August 25, 1983" by Jorge Luis Borges, "A Sick Collier," by D.H. Lawrence, "Happy Endings" by Margaret Atwood, and "Girl" by Jamaica Kincaid.

Finally, I would like to clarify a few general writing guidelines for short short stories that all the definitions include. They are: the piece must use an economy of words (in this case 500-1,000), there must be a beginning, middle, and end arc, and something dynamic must happen. I want to also include Allen's insistence that poetic elements such as: compression—realizing that less is more, significant details/images—use of metaphors and similes, sculpturing—pruning words, phrases, and sentences, and careful word choice needs to be included. I feel the addition of poetic elements will be more challenging for students as well as create the opportunity to either teach new writing skills or reinforce them.

### **Marriage of Short Short Stories with the Episodic Format**

While I was familiar with short short stories, I discovered the idea to use them in the classroom through the National Writing Project's book, *Breakthroughs: Classroom Discoveries About Teaching Writing*. In the book, Pen Campbell and Dan Holt write that they successfully use episodic short short stories in their high school and college classes. The format especially intrigued me as Campbell and Holt note that short short stories, especially when used in an episodic fashion, show, "similarities. . .[with] the nonlinear communication that is becoming more and more prevalent in our digital age. Internet sites, magazines, and even textbooks present a mosaic of information on each page, encouraging a randomness of order through which students move with increasing adeptness" (83). While the format of a short short story may seem challenging to students, the economy of words due to text messaging, IMs, and e-mail is something they are already willingly and unconsciously undertaking. However, they are winging it—writing without any guide or rules, stringing along a story.

Campbell and Holt have developed a set of more rigid guidelines, from which I will borrow a few to add to the previous list (economy of words, beginning-middle-end arc, something dynamic happens, and use of poetic elements) in order to provide a more comprehensive set of guidelines for students. The additional guidelines are: pieces should vary in length, the works need to be chronological, a unifying element such as a motif must be present in all the pieces, and the stories are bound together through the use of a central theme (Ibid). I would also like to add my favorite writing rule, which is: once all the rules are mastered, then it is time to break them. I have created a sample assignment sheet that includes all of the rules for this portion of the unit, and labeled it Appendix B.

The Campbell and Holt article can be accessed through the National Writing Project's on-line archives of the journal, "The Quarterly." Go to National Writing Project's main website, choose "Publications—The Quarterly," select 2001—Volume 3, and the entire article is available. I recommend reading the examples of episodic short short stories included in the article. They are excellent for use in the classroom.



## Part Three—Writing Cues & Craft Guide

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The following are writing exercises that will help students write short short stories, select a motif, assist in revisions, and help in their overall writing success. Each exercise is explained and my examples are included to aid in understanding.

### Adjective Expansion

This is one of my favorite exercises. Open with a discussion on what is an adjective, and have students create a list of them. Then have students think of an adjective they believe describes their personality or a characteristic of them. After they have their adjective, they are to think of a story that shows why this adjective is accurate for them. I would emphasize that they must have a story. For example if I say I am funny, I can not say, "I am funny, because silly things happen to me" or "I always say funny things without meaning it." No, that is telling!

The students must tell the story. For example using the adjective—foolish:

Yesterday, I was winding through the lunch line at my high school cafeteria, when I noticed the principal, Mr. James standing by the courtyard doors. He was with two other gentlemen, whom I did not know. Mr. James saw me and called out, "Mrs. Price, can I speak to you for a moment?" As I approached, he strode several steps toward me and said, "Mrs. Price, tomorrow during Vice President Smith's visit were you planning on taking photos for the yearbook?"

"Oh, yes. I was hoping to take some informal and formal shots." I responded with my voice rising to be heard above the normal voluminous level caused by mixing students' conversations with cavernous cafeterias. "It's something I think needs recorded even though the man has a Do-Do brain.

My principal's face paled. I realized the gentlemen, who had been standing with him by courtyard doors, had quietly walked to his side, and undoubtedly heard everything I had said. "Aww, Mrs. Price," Mr. James stumbled out like his tongue had become stuck in mud. "I would like you to meet the advance team for tomorrow's visit. This is Agent Campbell and Mr. Wally of the National Republican Party. Gentlemen, this is, Mrs. Price, an English teacher and the yearbook advisor here at Oliver."

This is showing and not telling. I have found it an excellent way to explain the difference with minimal effort after years of frustration in instructing students.

I generally allot ten minutes for students to write their stories. Afterward, I ask several to share their pieces. An expansion for this exercise is to have them look at images they have used in their story. In my example, I could use teaching, birds, and camera/photography. These are items that could be used in other pieces? How about the adjective the student used to describe herself? It could be the connecting element—mood or motif. Also the piece generated through this exercise can be the rough draft of a short short story.

### Motifs and Generating Prompts

In literature, a motif is a recurring element in a work or body of work that holds significance to the story. The element can be an image—real or symbolic, an action repeatedly done, word/phrase/sentence uttered again and again, or whatever the imagination can conjure.

Ready examples of motifs in literature include the carpe diem idea in early 17th century poetry such as Robert Herrick's "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time," the use of blood in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, and Dr. Seuss's use of green eggs and ham in his story of the same name. The use of a recurring motif in the pieces will allow for "a slide show or even a music video" (Campbell and Holt 75) feel to the work.

Many students will think of the motif they want to use during the production of their personal maps. However students develop their motif, it should be used in their maps. To aid in developing a motif, I have provided the following writing prompts.

My favorite writing prompts are: Tell the story of how you received a scar, and Write a story about a door or window. In her book, Allen lists ten pages of writing prompts to generate short short stories. The ones that I feel will aid students in creating a short short story and a motif are:

- "Write a story about a lie. . .
- Write a story about an animal. . .
- Write a story about a child. . .
- Write a story about food. . .
- Write a story about friendship. . .
- Write a story about crime. . .
- Write a story about dancing. . .
- Write a story about a book. . .
- Write a story about a toy. . .
- Write a story about a home. . .
- Write a story about stairs. . .
- Write a story about school. . .
- Write a story about a gift. . .
- Write a story about a habit. . .
- Write a story about a grave. . ." (95-105).

Finally, when introducing a writing prompt in my classes, I do not like to have students brainstorm on a topic before beginning to write. I have noticed that when I do this, inadvertently there will be too many copycat pieces. I will go over the prompt, but not provide story examples. Since the majority of my classes are not writing classes, I will allot five to ten minutes for the students to write. However, I will walk quietly around to insure students are working and provide extra time if I see it is needed.

## **Dialogue**

Using dialogue in a story, any story, should be a prerequisite. Dialogue in a story should be concise and pick-up the pace of the story. In short short stories, dialogue must do even more. It must add tension and mood, and often, explode like an egg in a microwave. I suggest the following two exercises to aid in teaching the power of dialogue.

The first is to have students recreate a dialogue they had with someone that day. The conversation can be with their parent, friend, teacher, stranger, or anyone else who they spoke to for at least three to four minutes. They must write the exchange in dialogue. No sustained prose should be in the piece. Remind them that once a pattern of back and forth exchange is set, they can drop the "She said, He said." Also if someone joins their conversation, they can include them as well, but they will have to make it clear who is speaking again.

The second exercise is from Art Peterson's book, *The Writer's Workout Book*. He calls it "Examine Your Confusions" (28). While Peterson does not term it a dialogue exercise, I find it works well, and students can work on it in teams of two, which is different than Peterson's original exercise. He has students compose independently. The basic premise, though, is the same. Students compose a dialogue with an inquisitive space alien. My spin is to have one student play the space alien and the other themselves. The space alien is given a question in which they must persistently push for a clearer answer. The students must write responses back and forth for at least 20 lines, and absolutely no prose or exposition. I also add the following two restrictions: 1. The lines can contain no more than 20 words per line, and 2. There can only be two lines of less than two words.

Questions the space alien can ask—Why do only women have babies? Why do you make fun of your politicians after you vote them into office? Why do American men wear only pants, but women can wear pants and skirts? Why do you eat? Why do people like to get drunk and then sick? Why do you date?

### **Challenge Your Words**

The following exercises are meant for students to challenge their word choices and push them to use words to create vivid pictures. Words in short short stories must be able to invoke more than the surface layer as words are at a premium. Every word must be weighed and found necessary.

The following two exercises tap into Peterson's treasure chest of exercises. The first he calls, "Visualize Words." Students are to choose several words, make sure they understand the denotative meaning of them, and then decide upon the images and feelings the words convey (*The Writer's Workout Book* 191). I suggest having a list of words; especially ones culled from students' writings. A starter list can be: recycle, prince, outcast, crib, school, stop, driving, adult, IM, i-pod, no, grades, DJ or disc jockey, prom, parent, and society. I think this exercise would work best in a group—three to four students, and assigning only two to three words in order to keep the exercise down to ten to fifteen minutes maximum. Each group can report a summary of their work to the class.

The second is one I have had great success with in my writing and non-writing classes. I call it "Culling Words." The original idea for this exercise is from Kathleen O'Shaughnessy's article, "Everything I Know About Teaching Language Arts, I Learned at the Office Supply Store" which is reprinted in *Breakthroughs: Classroom Discoveries About Teaching Writing*. O'Shaughnessy has students find, "powerlines" in their reading. Powerlines can be, "similes, metaphors, or just good writing that is chock-full of vivid images" (189). When students discover the phrases or lines, they record them on post-it notes, and later transfer them to index cards along with the source information. The cards are then posted on a bulletin board allowing everyone to borrow or be inspired. I extend the exercise by having students collect words they feel are loaded or powerful such as: twinkling and muddled. This allows for a bigger yield, and allows for an extension in which I have students select five posted words or phrases. They must create a poem in which all five of their choices are used in five minutes.

If you do not already have a "Culling Words" bulletin board or space, you can create a mini-one by collecting words and phrases from the short short stories read in this unit. This will allow students to witness how the best short short stories rely on them.

### **Tension**

Tension is caused by conflict, difficulty, and opposition whether due to internal or external forces or

individuals. Tension elements can be stretched and constantly added to in novels and plays, but in a short short story there is no time for tension to build. It must happen over the short life of the story, and resolve just as quickly. The tension in a short short story often will allow for the twist that is a prerequisite of the sub-genre. This, in turn, will make the story, or character(s) dynamic—another prerequisite of the genre. The following exercise titled "Juxtapose Oppositions" by Peterson in *The Writer's Workout Book* will help twofold in short short story writing. It will help students realize the basics of tension creation even though the exercise entails writing just one sentence. I also find it an excellent way to create story ideas.

The exercise calls for creating a pair of antonyms and using them in a sentence. For example, using the antonyms "full" and "empty," I quickly could create two different scenarios. The first—"Her world was empty in the long stretches of night, but full during the day when she was near him." Perhaps a story of unrequited love can be generated. My second story image is: "Coming upon the cauldron, Elizabeth found it full of boxes and cartons with strange symbols and pictures that upon examination proved eerily empty of their contents." A totally different picture, and thus story, has emerged with the tension apparent immediately.

### **Effective Description**

In this writing exercise, students must quietly observe someone or something, and write a detailed description. The detailed description should cover at least half of a sheet of regular lined paper. They are then to compact the description into one line. This means a lot will be left out, and students must choose one or two items about the person that will encapsulate them. This is a good exercise to have students write the first part for homework without letting them know the second part. The second part can be done in the classroom.

### **Writing Creative Similes**

Original similes can pack a wallop. Overused similes miss the mark, and even worse, can make your reader groan. An example of an overused simile, "My love is like a red, red rose." Enough! The following exercise from Peterson's *The Writer's Workout Book: 113 Stretches toward Better Prose*, which I call "Original Simile," will help students create their own similes that will allow readers to stop and think. The image/point will be well made. A powerful tool to use in poetry and short short stories where imagery is key.

Remember, a simile is a comparison of two dissimilar things using the words "like" or "as." Peterson says to "experiment with similes by making lists of objects which share the same quality" (207). Start by adding to the lists using additional adjectives.

Example: big as

- \*a skyscraper
- \*a pregnant 757
- \*King Kong on a good day
- \*George Bush's foot in his mouth
- \*the hole in the ozone layer

The obvious cliché is "as big as an elephant," but not using an established, or I should say trite, cliché is the point of the exercise. Clichés are traps. They often do not make sense or connect to where the writer is trying to take the reader. More often, clichés will confuse readers, especially young ones. Try to have your students explain "like a cooked goose" and "hoi polloi." They will quickly understand why clichés should be avoided, because many will have no idea what most mean.

## Revision Tips For Short Short Stories

The following are questions Allen suggests to use to query yourself to prompt revision.

"Does every sentence carry the story a little farther toward its conclusion?" (76). This falls back to economy of words or no wasted words. Allen believes that beautiful sentences, not words, do not belong in short short stories. My test is if I love a sentence, it needs to go. Often I will find myself trying to work my piece around this sentence that I think is just wonderful. That is the sentence that must go. Each sentence must propel the story a little bit more. Remember this is good for pacing as well (Ibid).

Does each piece follow a logical order? (77). Does the story follow from beginning to middle to end? To test, chart the story. It should fit the Freytag Pyramid pattern as far as having a short, sharp exposition—quickly climb to a climax, and then end. The story should not have a conclusion or summary. It should just end. Leaving the reader to infer is ideal.

Also check for what a character does in a story. You cannot have a person know what is inside a room if she has not opened the door (Ibid).

Is your opening slow? The best way to check this is to see if the first paragraph is needed or not. Challenge it. Try removing it and see if it is important. Maybe only a sentence or a phrase is important. Remember the first paragraph must grab the reader. If it does not, be tough, delete it, and go back to the keyboard (81-82).

Is your ending weak? Endings in short short stories are often not neat. They will not have characters come together and toast success, unless that is where the story twists. Endings are also not the place to introduce anything new. The end needs to have been hinted at before in the story (Allen 89). You cannot mention a character admiring the now-cut flowers in a vase on a table, unless you mentioned the flowers earlier in the garden.

Allen recommends an exercise I have participated in and found effective. In the exercise a great ending line becomes the starting point. However, you obviously do not write forward, but backwards (Ibid). Posing what has happened to enable this line to be said, will push creativity. Logic also becomes key as reactions must trigger a sensible action.

For example: Using the line, "Don't wait for me."

I can add: "He heard her say, "Don't wait for me."

Then I added: "Alex's hand was on the door knob. He heard her say, "Don't wait for me."

Now I will add: "Alex stood by the door. His hand on the doorknob. He heard her say, "Don't wait for me."

Finally, I added: "The baby was in her arms. Alex stood by the door. His hand was on the doorknob. He heard her say, "Don't wait for me."

The story is built backwards until it reaches the opening. A good exercise as it makes one think logically in

reverse. Most will respond to the exercise by thinking more about each line than normal.

Finally, all the normal writing revisions and editing must be done. This includes spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

### **Challenge Word Choices**

Students can challenge their word choices. This exercise can be part of the revision process. Especially if students will not revise well on their own. In this exercise, students choose five words from one or more of their pieces, and challenge their understanding and use of each. This exercise will also help students realize if they have used a word too many times.

An extension of this exercise is to allow students to exchange one or more of their pieces with another student. Each picks five words from the other student's paper, and writes them down. The author of the piece must complete the challenge, and discuss her answers with the student who challenged the words.

## **Lesson Plans**

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Day One—Warm-up exercise—Have students map an area of the school, such as the first floor, using only their memory. Students can use either paper from their notebooks or you can distribute unlined paper. Allow 5-10 minutes. Have students compare their maps and discuss any problems, how they solved the problems—if they did, and benefits of their maps. Important question to lead into: What other types of maps are there? Purpose of question is to introduce idea of unit for students to create their personal map of places, and the places can be where something important occurred in their life, the location or someone important to them works or lives, where something important to them is located, etc. Show examples of maps, such as "Imperialist Federation Map of 1882," and discuss the art and science of it. Homework—Students begin planning their maps. If time, read an example of a short short story. Suggested piece—Chekhov's "The Nincompoop."

Note: By searching "antique maps" images, there are wonderful examples of maps with decorative elements that should ignite students' creativity.

Day Two—Warm-up—ask students about what ideas they have for their maps. Go over map terms. Begin history of cartography. Ideally through the use of a Powerpoint—can highlight definitions and terms you would like students to know for testing and show examples. Students can begin their maps. Materials on hand are your call, but minimum I feel is construction paper, pencils, colored pencils, markers, and crayons. Toward the end of class, read another short short story. Homework—assign two short short stories to read. Have students think about what is different about the stories. Suggested pieces—"Blindsided" by Don Shea and Raymond Carver's "Little Things." Carver's piece can be accessed through the Internet on "Literary Kicks: Action Poetry" page or through the direct web address of: <http://www.jamelah.net/littlethings.html>.

Day Three—Warm-up—Use the "Original Simile" exercise. Have students work on own for five to ten minutes. Then as a class discuss their answers. Re-read the two short short stories assigned for homework. Brainstorm a list of what the students feel is different about the pieces versus regular short stories. Provide students with the basics of short short stories. Then assign one of the story writing prompts. My choice: Tell the story about

a scar they have. Work can be finished for homework. Also you might like to assign another short short story to read, such as Lydia Davis's "My Sister and The Queen of England" reprinted in Allen's book, or from the "Vestal Review" e-zine "Faustian Butterfly" by Masha Rumer from Issue 29 or "5" x 6" In a Sturdy Frame" by Caleb Ross. Day Four—Warm-up—Dialogue with a Space Alien exercise. Have several students read their work. Discuss what they learned from the exercise. Impress how dialogue can create tension and provide pacing. Talk about students' work & needs. Check homework stories on scars—can any students continue prompt to another piece? Read several pieces. Good pieces to use: "Aunt Germaine" by Yannick Murphy from Issue 30 of "Vestal Review" or "The Colonel" by Carolyn Forché in either Allen's book or Howe's. Discuss how dialogue propels the stories. Homework—Students write a description of a person exercise—part one only.

Day Five—Warm-up—Have students pare their homework description down to one or two lines as the Space Alien exercise dictates. Revisit maps—look at maps on "Strange Maps.com." Remember site is a blog and new maps are added every day or so. Use "Juxtaposition Opposites" exercise. Go over exercise either in groups or as a class. *Alternative classwork*—have students work on creating a second short short story for this unit using their maps as a guide. Homework—students work on their short short stories and maps.

Day Six—Warm-up—If you were unable to finish "Juxtaposition Opposites" exercise, do so now. *Alternative classwork*—use one or more of the writing prompts to help students generate another piece for the unit. Can allow students to choose from two or three of the prompts, or return to their maps for ideas. Look at one or two short short stories as a class. Suggestions—John Cheever's "Reunion" or "Pygmalion" by John Updike in *Sudden Fiction* (Shapard and Thomas 14-16, 33-34). Homework—students work on their stories.

Day Seven—Warm-up—Challenge word exercise. Students should either continue writing or revision work. Outline revision cues particular to short short stories. Homework—have students work on their stories and maps.

Day Eight—Warm-up—Read a short short story such as Langston Hughes' "Thank You, M'am" in *Sudden Fiction* (Shapard and Thomas 64-66). Good idea to allow students to exchange pieces and workshop them in groups of two, three, or four. Homework—students work on stories and maps.

Day Nine—Warm-up—Read a short short story such as "Rosary" by Robert Kelly in *Sudden Fiction* (Shapard and Thomas 176). Final revision day.

Day Ten—Show Time! Allow students to show their map work and read at least one of their short short stories. I recommend an informal atmosphere, where students volunteer to present. They should stand, briefly discuss their map, and then read one of their pieces.

Extension—Help students create a book of the classes' work using Microsoft Publisher.

## **Objectives**

This unit was written to meet the state of Pennsylvania's Department of Academic Standards for Reading, Writing, Speaking, and Listening for eleventh grade. These standards are posted online, and the web address is listed in my "Works Cited" section. The standards that apply to this unit are: 1.4.11 A—Types of Writing, 1.5.11 A-D, Quality of Writing, 1.6.11 B—Speaking and Listening, and 1.3.11 A-D Reading, Analyzing, and Interpretation. The following is a brief description of each of the above standards in order to aid in matching them to other state standards.

Standard 1.4.11 specifies students' creative pieces such as short stories, poems, or plays in which different organizational methods are employed. The standard itemizes the incorporation of other writing techniques such as: dialogue, literary conflict, poetic devices, and standard writing elements like point of view, plot, and characterization.

Quality of Writing Standard—1.5.11 A-D targets the quality of students' pieces. The standard calls for students' work to show a sharp, clear focus, that the content be developed, the pieces show organization, and the works display stylistic features. I used these characteristics as an aid in the creation of the short short story rubric (Appendix D).

The Speaking and Listening Standard—1.6.11 B applies to the listening, interpretation, and summarizing of literary pieces, which applies for any models read and discussed with the class. Standard 1.3.11 A-D & F Reading, Analyzing, and Interpretation covers the reading, interpretation, summarizing, and the reading and responding to literary works. Since students will be reading and discussing pieces either as part of class work or homework, this standard applies as well.

## Works Cited

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Allen, Roberta. *Fast Fiction: Creating Fiction in Five Minutes*. Cincinnati: Story Press, 1997.

The bible for teaching short, short story writing as it defines the form and provides guidance for teaching it. This book will provide mini-lessons and teaching strategies for the unit.

Answers.com. "Flash Fiction." 3 July 2007 <http://www.answers.com/>

flash%20fiction>.

A reliable site for quick answers, especially in regard to vocabulary.

Bauman, Amy, and Peterson, Art. *Breakthroughs: Classroom Discoveries About Teaching Writing*.

This is where I was first introduced to episodic writing. In general, the book offers experienced classroom voices in creative writing that will generate interest and solid learning opportunities.

Earle, Jamelah. *Literary Kicks: Where Literature Lives On*. November 2004 7 July

2007 <http://www.litkicks.com/BeatPages/msg.jsp?what=FlashFiction>>.

Very knowledgeable blog reporting on anything literary. Welcomes submissions.

English, Van H. *Funk and Wagnalls New World Encyclopedia*. 2002. 25 July 2007.

<http://ezproxy.chatham.edu:2102/ehost/>

detail?vid=5&hid=105&sid=ed278ba7-787f-468b-95b2-d79f2456d691%40sessionmgr109>.



Good source for information on the history of maps.

Pennsylvania Department of Education. "Academic Standards." State Board of Education 11 March 2006 20 July 2007  
<http://www.pde.state.pa.us/>

stateboard\_ed/cwp/view.asp?Q=76716>.

Direct URL to index of all Pennsylvania Education Standards.

*New Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc.* 15th Ed., Vol. 7, Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 2007.

Good resource to turn to for overall background.

Peterson, Art. *The Writer's Workout Book: 113 Stretches Toward Better Prose*. Berkeley: National Writing Project, 1996.

A writing teacher's must have handbook for insight into craft and the teaching of writing in the classroom. This book will provide mini-lessons and teaching strategies for the unit.

Strange Maps.com. 2006 November. 6 July 2007. <http://strangemaps.wordpress.com/>>.

A great site to find strange maps which are perfect for this unit. Make sure to check out the archives.

Thomas, James; Thomas, Denise; and Hazuka, Tom. *Flash Fiction: Very Short Stories*. New York: Norton, 1992.

The book contains excellent examples of flash fiction with the majority of the stories not over 1½ pages.

## Other Teacher Resources

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Brown, Dan, ed. "Smokelong Quarterly." 15 June 2007. 25 July 2007.

<http://www.smokelong.com/>>.

An e-zine that publishes only flash fiction. In its 17th issue. I advise selecting stories, and not just letting students on the site.

Ehrenberg, Ralph E. *Mapping the World: An Illustrated History of Cartography*. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic, 2006.

Beautifully illustrated large-sized book packed with reproductions of maps, portolans, and mappa mundis each with excellent commentary. This book provides good classroom examples and background.

Graham, Alma, ed. *Discovering Maps: A Children's World Atlas and Guide to Map Reading*. Canada: Hammond, 2006.

An elementary guide in the use of maps, and a good resource for teachers and students.

Monmonier, Mark. *How To Lie With Maps*. 2nd ed. University of Chicago Press:

Chicago, 1991.

While I have only read two chapters from this book in my seminar (chapters two and four), they were excellent on how maps can be "cartographic seduction" (7).

Short, John Rennie. *The World Through Maps*. Richmond Hill: Firefly, 2002.

A must read is chapter 19, particularly "Maps as Propaganda." Excellent as a resource in discussing how maps have been used to manipulate information.

Orton, Debi, ed. "flashquake." 2007. 8 July 2007. <http://www.flashquake.org/editorial/masthead.html>>.

An e-zine publishing short short stories. Good idea to preview before letting students on site.

"Vestal Review." July 2007. 25 July 2007. <http://www.vestalreview.net/issue30/issue30.html>>.

An e-zine that publishes under the Amazon.com label. Quality work, but again, you should preview site first.

## Student Enrichment Resources

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Howe, Irving, and Howe, Ilana Weiner. *Short Shorts: An Anthology of the Shortest Stories*. Godine: Boston, 1982.

Shapard, Robert, and Thomas, James. *Sudden Fiction*. Gibbs M. Smith: Layton, 1986.

Shapard, Robert, and Thomas, James. *Sudden Fiction International: Sixth Short-Short Stories*. Norton: New York, 1989.

Sobel, Dava. *Longitude: The True Story of a Lone Genius Who Solved the Greatest Scientific Problem of His Time*. New York: Penguin, 1995.

Tale of how "the longitude problem," which made sea travel precarious, was answered by John Harrison, a carpenter who built clocks.

## Appendix A

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Name \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### PERSONAL MAP ASSIGNMENT

#### GUIDELINES

A personal life map is one in which you chart one of the following: the highs and lows of your life, a series of significant things, important places/things/people to you, or steps along in your life. In creating your personal life map the following elements must be considered:

1. Your map does not need to be of only one (1) area or location. It can encompass whatever you need it to include and can switch from land, sea, building, thing, or person. Use your imagination.
2. Medium—a mixture is usually better than just one, but not always. Classroom materials are available, but you are not limited to using only them.
3. Destinations—your map should have a minimum of seven (7) places/things, etc. Remember that using only a minimum does not generally equate to a high grade.
4. Execution of assignment entails the quality of your final work. Think of simple things—sloppy, misspellings, no labels, no key, no title, no name, and poor quality equals points off.
5. Your motif should be included on your map.
6. Due date for this assignment is \_\_\_\_\_.

## Appendix B

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Name \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### EPISODIC SHORT SHORT WRITING ASSIGNMENT

#### GUIDELINES

As you create your personal map with at least seven (7) destinations, begin thinking of the stories you would like to use to make your map become an illustrative story guide. You must write at least three (3) episodic short short stories. The stories need to follow these guidelines:

1. Each story must have a length of 500 to 1,000 words.
2. Each story must have a beginning-middle-end arc.
3. Poetic elements, such as assonance, rhythm, onomatopoeia, and rich words, need to be part of the writing.
4. Something dynamic—shows a change—must occur in each story.
5. A unifying device must be used throughout the stories, i.e. motif, mood, format, etc.
6. Is there a central theme to the pieces, such as: Andy witnesses the aging effect on his grandfather—universal theme of young vs. old. (See Andy's example in Campbell and Holt's article.)
7. 7. Presentation of work—must be double spaced, font size—12, choice of font either Arial, Tahoma, or

Times New Roman.

8. 8. Assignment is due \_\_\_\_\_. Late submissions will receive a reduction in grade.

Writing conference with my teacher is: \_\_\_\_\_

Additional notes: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

#### Appendix C—Personal Map Rubric

(table 07.03.05.01 available in print form)

Additional comments \_\_\_\_\_

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Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

#### Appendix D—Short Short Story Portfolio Rubric

(table 07.03.05.02 available in print form)

Additional comments: \_\_\_\_\_

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