

CREATIVE WRITING

**A CREATIVE WRITING GUIDE
FOR USE IN THE CLASSROOM,
WRITING CLUBS, AND
FUTURE AUTHORS!**

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YOUNG ADULT NOVELS FOR CREATIVE WRITING LESSONS

English teacher Kim Herzog on why young adult literature works well for creative writing units and lessons:

“Everyone has a story to tell. Sometimes the hardest part of writing, especially for students, is figuring out how to get stories on the page. Through my years of teaching, I have found that nothing is more powerful for young writers than a strong model—one that showcases structure, craft, and style in various ways to enable and empower students’ creativity. Often writers struggle with where to begin; for that reason, writing prompts can be invaluable. Selections of passages from these model texts can be used to create writing exercises in small and large groups alike, whether in the classroom or a writing group or club. Young adult novels provide great introductions to creative writing, with accessible text, engaging storylines, and many examples of the different techniques and crafts used in creative writing.”

In *A Good Girl's Guide to Murder* by Holly Jackson, teachers and student writers will find myriad opportunities for exploring creative writing. This guide can be used independently or by an instructor to help both long and short forms of writing.

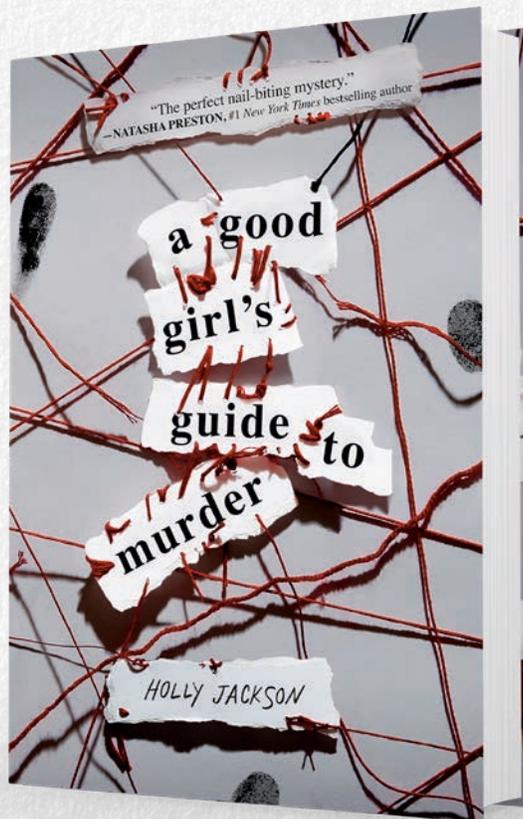
A FEW WAYS TO USE YOUNG ADULT NOVELS FOR CREATIVE WRITING!

In this guide, we’ve given a variety of writing lessons—mini-lessons, mirror lessons, and full-piece prompts—using Holly Jackson’s *A Good Girl's Guide to Murder*. We’ve highlighted structurally interesting young adult novels and provided suggested discussion questions to help writers think about the effects of each technique or device, and we’ve suggested, organized by genre, incredible young adult novels for writers to read and learn from for their own stories and writing.

 **MINI-LESSONS**  **MIRROR LESSONS**  **FULL-PIECE PROMPTS**

ABOUT THE BOOK

Everyone in Fairview knows the story. Pretty and popular high school senior Andie Bell was murdered by her boyfriend, Sal Singh, who then killed himself. It was all anyone could talk about. And five years later, Pip sees how the tragedy still haunts her town. But she can’t shake the feeling that there was more to what happened that day. She knew Sal when she was a child, and he was always so kind to her. How could he possibly have been a killer? Now a senior herself, Pip decides to reexamine the closed case for her final project, at first just to cast doubt on the original investigation. But soon she discovers a trail of dark secrets that might actually prove Sal innocent . . . and the line between past and present begins to blur. Someone in Fairview doesn’t want Pip digging around for answers, and now her own life might be in danger. This is the story of an investigation turned obsession, full of twists and turns and with an ending you’ll never expect.



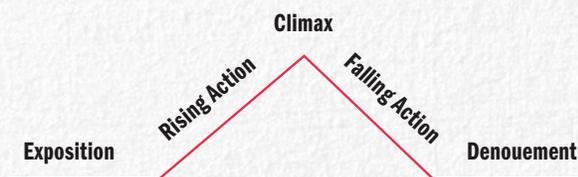
MINI-LESSONS: These warm-ups are to help get your creativity going. They are short, craft-based activities (five to ten minutes long) that can potentially lead to longer pieces! Think of them as small writing exercises.

1. Chapter one begins with the following two sentences: "Pip knew where they lived. Everyone in Fairview knew where they lived." (p. 3) In this example, Holly Jackson has intentionally chosen to avoid revealing who "they" are. Omitting vital information piques readers' curiosity, and there is more than one way to omit information. For your writing warm-up, write the next three to five sentences. Don't divulge who "they" are; instead, hint at it by describing where Pip can find "them."
2. In creative writing, titles are important. The title of *A Good Girl's Guide to Murder* has a few craft elements: there is alliteration (the repetition of a sound) as well as allusion (to other works with similar titles, in this case). To prepare for titling your own works, take a chapter from *A Good Girl's Guide to Murder* and create a title for it, using alliteration and alluding to something in pop culture while also referencing the content of the chapter.
3. Rhetorical questions can be a great way to reveal a character's thoughts without explicitly saying "she thought." For this warm-up, imagine a character who just got in a fight with their best friend. Use rhetorical questions, as Jackson does on page 104, to reveal one of the characters' reactions to the fight, their thoughts about why it happened, and what their next steps might be.
4. Try using thought-provoking redactions to hide information from your readers. This is a great way to pace the release of information; by giving readers some clues but not the full picture, we whet their appetites without overwhelming them. How do you think Jackson decides which information to redact? See pages 130 to 136 for an example. Outside the mystery and thriller genres, how would this technique be useful?
5. In Pip's Capstone Log on page 127, she begins to use the pronoun "our": "If Daniel is our killer, he might have disturbed the investigation somehow in his capacity as a police officer." By doing this, she has included others in her search, making it seem accessible to the reader. Explore the ways shifting pronouns can be used to reframe stories.
6. Often in dialogue, we resort to saying "he said" or "she said" to attribute speech. But using more specific verbs can give the reader important information about the speaker and what is being said. Here is an example: "And there are still too many youths loitering in the park in the evenings,' an old woman croaked, her arm raised beside her head." (p. 281) Write the same piece of dialogue three times, using different tags. Focus on changing the mood of the dialogue with the chosen verb. For example, "'I still love you,' she whispered" is different from "'I still love you,' she howled."
7. Pip tries to decipher notes left by Andie in her assignment pad to reconstruct what happened before her death. There are notes like: "TS @ 7:30" or "IV @ 8" on pages 206 and 207. Try to create a similar mystery in your writing, using codes or puzzles, and have your character think through what the solution might be, providing multiple options for both your character and your reader.
8. *Anaphora* is the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of clauses that follow each other, and can be used to emphasize a point. In this example, the repetition of *where* highlights Andie's absence and how her loss will be an everyday reality for her mother: "[Dawn Bell] didn't have her daughter, but she still had the place where she'd slept, where she'd woken, where she'd dressed, where she'd screamed and shouted and slammed the door, where her mom had whispered good night and turned off the light." (p. 199) Try using anaphora in your writing for a powerful way to draw attention to something.
9. A cliff-hanger compels a reader to keep reading, and is a powerful tool in creative writing, no matter the length of the story. For instance, look at this cliff-hanger: "When you ask people in town what happened to Andie Bell, they'll tell you without hesitation: She was murdered by Salil Singh. No 'allegedly,' no 'might have,' no 'probably,' no 'most likely.' He did it, they say. Sal Singh killed Andie. But I'm just not so sure." (p. 19) The final line makes readers want to know why Pip isn't sure, and compels them to continue reading. Try writing a story that ends with the line "But I'm just not so sure" to achieve the same effect.

MIRROR LESSONS: These lessons are based on the major parts of a story: plot, character, description, setting, dialogue, and theme, and will help writers to establish their own voices. These can be used together to build a framework for a larger story.

PLOT

Freytag's Pyramid is a useful device for planning a story. Begin by mapping out the major plot points of a chapter of your choice, using the elements of the pyramid. For this activity, the "resolution" will be the concluding action or event of the chapter rather than the end of the book (as that would take a much bigger pyramid!).



Once you have had some practice, use the pyramid to map out your next story before you begin writing. This will help you avoid getting stuck or spending too much time on a plot point.

SETTING

The book begins with a description of the Singh house as perceived by the Fairview residents, and more specifically, the adolescents of the town. There is a sense of time and place created by details, as well as a simile comparing the house to a haunted house.

Choose a setting in a story you're working on—a playground, a school, a house, or even a parking lot. Using descriptions associated with all five senses as well as a creative simile, depict this setting in a paragraph, doing your best to avoid explicitly describing something; for instance, instead of saying "the swings sounded rusty," you can say "the rusted swings creaked in the breeze."

CHARACTER DESCRIPTION

First impressions are crucial when it comes to understanding a character. For example, review the first impression Jackson provides of Howie, the drug dealer: "They heard shuffling and coughing from inside. A few seconds later the door was roughly pulled open. Howie stood there, blinking at them. He'd taken off his coat now and was wearing a stained blue T-shirt, his feet bare. He smelled of stale smoke and damp, moldy clothes."

(p. 180) In this passage, we don't just see this character—we hear him, smell him, and get a glimpse at his behaviors, too, all in a few sentences. With this introduction as inspiration, use specific details in your writing as you introduce your readers to a character in your piece, allowing the character to become three-dimensional by providing robust descriptions.

DIALOGUE

Rather than writing conventional dialogue, try something new in your writing by having characters converse in one of the following ways, as Holly Jackson does in her text.

- Interviews
- Emails
- Texts

THEME

A theme is a central topic or idea. These recurring ideas can be seen throughout a text. Although they are never explicitly stated, when reading a book, we understand the book's theme or message.

First, determine a major theme in *A Good Girl's Guide to Murder*. Then use this theme to guide your writing. How can you reveal this theme without explicitly naming it? Determine the major recurring idea or theme of your piece, and use that as a frame to get started (rather than starting with setting or character). How does this change the way your piece comes together?

PERSPECTIVE

Shift the perspective of *A Good Girl's Guide to Murder* by retelling a chapter from a different character's point of view. For instance, tell a chapter from the perspective of one of the characters in Pip's Persons of Interest web on page 261.

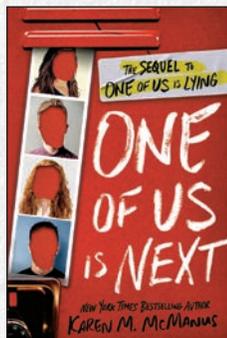
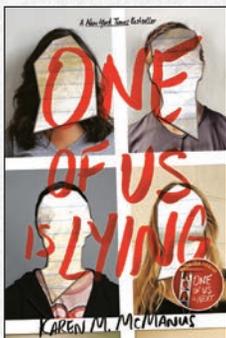
FULL PIECE

A Good Girl's Guide to Murder is epistolary, which means it uses letters to tell its story. It also uses clips from interviews, transcripts, emails, and logs within the narrative. For a full short story, integrate at least two alternative styles of writing into your narrative. Here are some examples:

- Text chains
- Emails
- Interviews
- Letters
- Webbing
- Newspaper clippings

Twists, games, and MORE twists: Structurally interesting YA, perfect for writing inspiration

These shifty young adult novels will help writers analyze the many effects that techniques can have on the reader.



STRUCTURALLY INTERESTING: *One of Us Is Lying* and *One of Us Is Next* use multiple perspectives, and the reader follows each character as they uncover plots and secrets, eventually weaving it all into one cohesive narrative.

1. *One of Us Is Lying* has been described as *Pretty Little Liars* meets *The Breakfast Club*. Fiction writers are always borrowing from their predecessors. What is it that makes this kind of conflict universal? Why does it continue to be relatable and entertaining?

2. What effect do the multiple perspectives have on each story? Is it always the same? What is the added value of using different voices to tell one story?

3. *One of Us Is Lying* and *One of Us Is Next* both include psychological manipulation and mind games. What other books that you've read employ this? How does universality affect the reader?

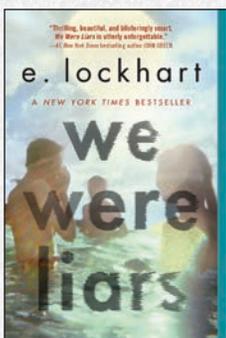


STRUCTURALLY INTERESTING: told in two voices, one prose and one poetry.

1. There's a twist beneath a mystery in this book. Looking back, how are the pieces of the twist layered into the narrative? Did you see the final twist coming?

2. Isobel Catching's narrative shifts in tone and form. Why do you think her chapters were written in verse? How does this affect your understanding of her story?

3. There are a lot of discussions about life after death in this story. How does it differ from other books that address this topic? How do Beth's and Isobel's experiences and opinions evolve throughout? How is this reflected in the novel's structure?



STRUCTURALLY INTERESTING: John Green describes *We Were Liars* as “blisteringly smart . . . utterly unforgettable” because of the TWIST!

1. Discuss the significance of the title, *We Were Liars*. In what ways does it accurately describe the events and relationships portrayed in the novel?

2. About that ending: Was it a surprise, or did you see it coming? Return to earlier passages in the book and locate instances of foreshadowing. How did Lockhart accomplish this without giving anything away? Do you think she was successful? Why or why not?

3. *We Were Liars* is a first-person narrative, but that narrative includes fairy-tale interstitials, hallucinatory episodes, and scenes that are repeated with new interpretations at different points in the story. Are there other books you've read that have a similar structure or that utilize similar devices and methods?

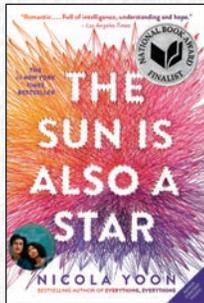
YOUNG ADULT TITLES THAT ARE EXCEPTIONAL CRAFT EXAMPLES

The following young adult titles exemplify particular crafts or devices and are excellent models for aspiring writers to read and learn from.

CONTEMPORARY FICTION



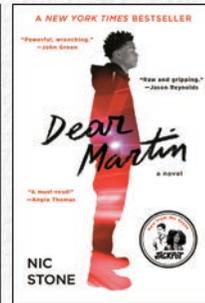
Alternating Point of View



Limited Timeline



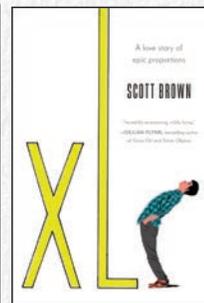
Vignettes and Diary Entries



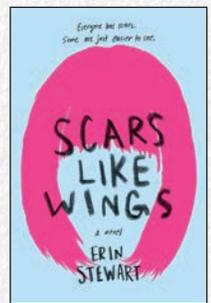
Epistolary



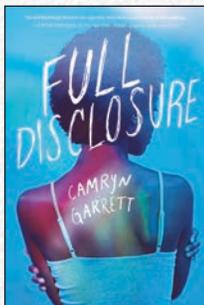
Personification



Magical Realism



Elements of Theater



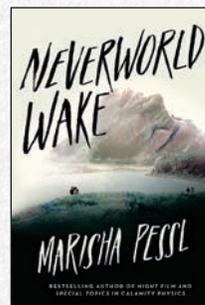
Elements of Theater



Alternating Timeline



Reverse Timeline



Time Warp

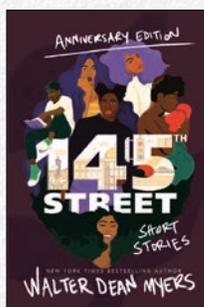


Inspired by Actual Events

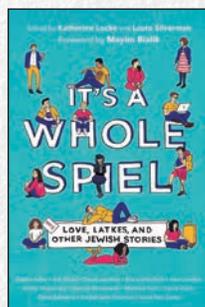


Superhero

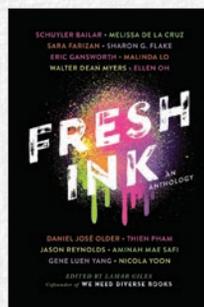
ANTHOLOGIES AND SHORT STORIES



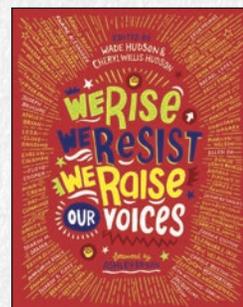
Collection of Stories about a Place



Jewish Centered Stories



Thematic Connection of Stories

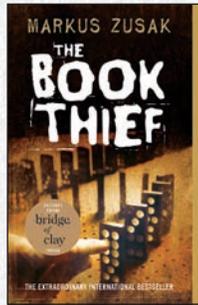


Anthology of Multiple Forms

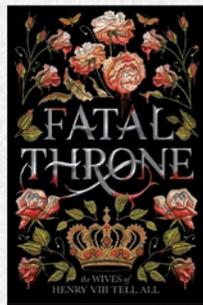


Thematic Connection of Stories

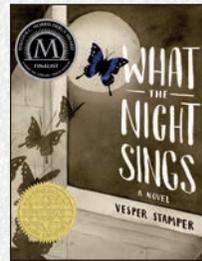
HISTORICAL FICTION



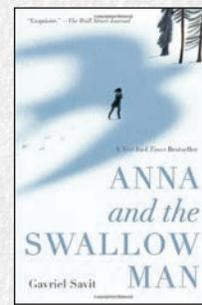
Abstract
Narrator



Multiple
Perspectives



Intertwine music, text,
and illustration

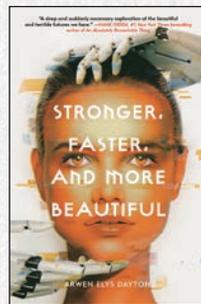


Allegory

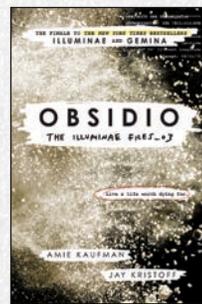
SCIENCE FICTION & FANTASY



Allegory



Thematic Connection
of Stories



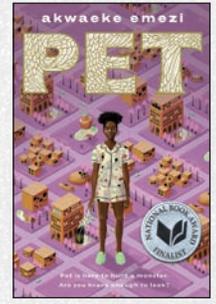
Epistolary



Updated Classic



Graphic Novel Hero's Journey

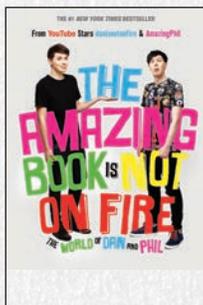


Literary Magical
Realism

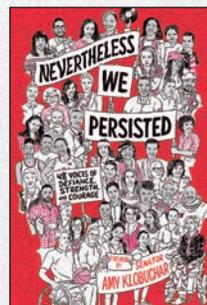
NONFICTION



Memoir



Interactive
Biography

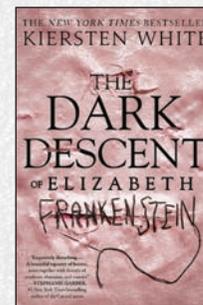


Biography and
Autobiography

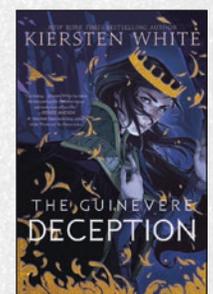
ALTERNATIVE HISTORY/RETELLINGS



Alternative American
History

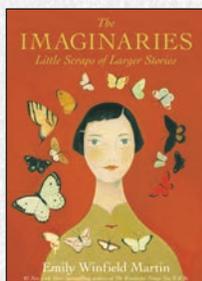


Alternative Character
Perspective

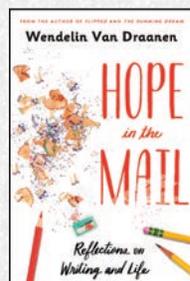


Revised Arthurian
Legend!

STORY STARTERS



Imaginative
Sentence Starters



Part Writing Guide,
Part Memoir



Updated Shakespeare!



Fairy Tale Retelling

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WRITING COMMUNITY!



WHAT IS IT?

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(over 5,000 published stories!)

Read and discuss writing with fellow members
(over 30,000 members!)

Comment and react to articles and stories, including
behind the scenes author videos

Get curated content delivered to a personal dashboard
based on your interests



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