

Unit 1

Fiction: Part I

Short Stories

Lesson 1

The Origins of Language

Materials Needed:

▣ Journal or notebook

✎ Pen or pencil

Free Writing



Most of the lessons in this course will begin with a brief *free writing* activity. If you are thinking you are not going to enjoy it, you may not know what free writing means and how it is done. Free writing, also called *fast writing*, simply means you write without worrying about correct spelling, sentence structure, or mistakes in grammar or punctuation. Sounds too good to be true, doesn't it? Well, there are very good reasons for writing in this manner—the best is that it's a proven way to get thoughts down on paper. The idea is, if you don't permit yourself to stop as you write to correct a less than perfect sentence or look up a word in the dictionary, your thoughts flow into written words more easily and what you get down often sounds fresh and appealing. In short, the technique of free writing makes the task of writing easier; this is especially true for creative and imaginative writing.

Professional writers have long known the value of free writing. When you permit yourself to just let go and write quickly, it is surprising how powerfully you can express yourself. Another plus: the more you write the better a writer you become and the easier it gets—like exercising regularly gets your body in shape.

Obviously, free writing usually produces *rough* writing. In other words, what you create still needs correcting if you plan to do something more with it, such as using it for the basis of a polished story. Otherwise, there is no need to “clean it up” and it can be left as is. Remember, the only “rule” for free writing is don't stop—write quickly.

Your turn —

Now that you know what a useful tool free writing is, try it for ten minutes. In your journal or a notebook where you will keep your free writing exercises, write a true story about something that happened to you, something that deeply moved you. It can be a story about something that



made you angry, frightened, or happy. It doesn't have to be about some world-shaking accomplishment. For example, you might write about the day you got your driver's license, or when you were recognized for some achievement in school, or when you did a good deed. Write using language that captures the feelings you had at that time. Provide as much detail as you can so your descriptions create pictures in the reader's mind.

Congratulations!

You have just finished your first piece of creative and imaginative writing for this course.

Ideas to use later

Since the purpose of this course is to learn how to write creative and imaginative stories, it isn't too early to begin thinking like a writer. And one of the things writers are always thinking about is ideas for their stories—what to write about. Although you won't be asked to write an original story for awhile, you should start thinking about stories you would like to tell.

Power Words



Words are the bricks and mortar with which you will *build* your stories. They provide the muscle to give power and strength to what you say. In many of the lessons in this course you will find words to help you understand the reading or that you should add to your vocabulary. Words

that you are told to add to your vocabulary may be included on the final test for each unit. Write these words in your journal or notebook as a help in learning them and so you can read over the list each time you add new words. There is also a **Glossary of Literary Terms** at the end of the unit.

Add these words to your vocabulary

The part of speech for each word will appear in parentheses () as noun (n), verb (v), adjective (adj) or adverb (adv). Sometimes there may be more than one part of speech given.

Word	Definition	Example
prehistoric (adj)	in the distant past before writing was invented; when people had no way of keeping a record of events except by remembering and telling others	The only way to learn about <i>prehistoric</i> peoples is by searching where they lived for evidence of their life – tools, bones and the like – and then studying these remains.
evolve (v)	to develop or work out gradually	Language <i>evolved</i> slowly over many hundreds of years.
oral(ly) (adj or adv)	spoken	Juan gave his book report <i>orally</i> in front of the class.

Background

Somewhere deep in time, before people knew how to write, they communicated through crude gestures, expressions, and sounds like yells and grunts. Gradually, (no one knows how long, but it probably took thousands of years) specific sounds took on meaning and these became the first words and the beginning of speech. As people strung words together to communicate more complex ideas and detailed information, language evolved. It was during this prehistoric period that people began telling stories. Since people didn't know how to write, these stories were passed down from generation to generation orally. It was only later, once ancient peoples invented writing, that these stories were kept in written form.

Activity

Here is a writing activity that will help you understand just how much language has evolved.

Imagine you are a cave dweller living in prehistoric times. You and the others in your little group share a simple spoken language. It only has words for people, places or things (nouns) and actions (verbs). You spend most



of your time looking for food. You search for wild plants you can eat and animals you can catch or bring down. And you do this hunting while trying to keep from being eaten yourself by larger animals. Now pretend you are sitting by the campfire at sunset, telling the others of your day's adventures using the limited language you have. It might help to think about how a young child just learning to speak gets a message across: "Me go." Or "No bed." (*Hint: Give yourself a name.*) In the space below under the heading "Cave Communication" write a sample of what you might say.

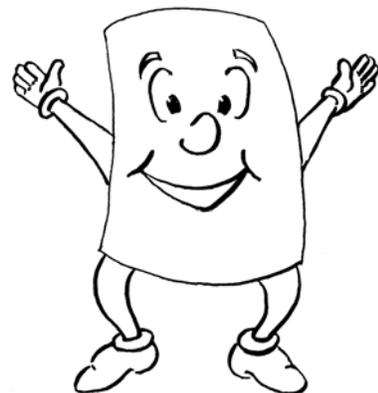
Cave Communication

Since you aren't a cave dweller and have a well-developed knowledge of language, you probably found it difficult to express yourself using only nouns and verbs. Now rewrite your prehistoric story in modern, everyday language using the space on the next page under the heading, *Modern Language*. Fill the space.

Because of the limitations of *cave communication*, what kinds of information couldn't you include in the first story that you were able to include in the second? Give at least three examples comparing the stories. (For instance, in the first version it is almost impossible to express details such as when and how you found and killed an animal, while in the modern language version it is easy.)

1.
2.
3.
4.

Terrific! In this lesson you learned the technique of free writing, learned about the development of language and writing, and wrote three stories! In the next lesson we will learn more about the development of literature. Then you will read a story from one of the best-known storytellers of ancient times—Aesop.



End of Lesson 1