



ART OF LIVING QUEST

Step 9: Writing Prompt

Something Borrowed, Something You

By now you're getting to be a fairly accomplished writer! In addition to the many notes, preliminary drafts, edits, and rewrites you've already written, you've taken some of the most important steps for any writer: mining your past for valuable material and using your creativity to imagine innovative possibilities for your story's future.

But no matter how creative and original a fiction writer may be, they almost certainly draw upon other people's lives for inspiration. And not just people they know, people they read about or hear about in the news, or even characters from books or movies!

In short, the entire world and everyone in it is a potential source of inspiration and material. (The phrase "material world" takes on a whole new layer of meaning when used by writers!)

You can take the same approach as you write your own story. As you continue to collect the elements of your story, remember that they don't all have to come directly from you.

Feel free to borrow elements from people you know, people you don't know, and even from the world of fiction. If someone else's story resonates with you, feel free to incorporate parts of it into your own.

If a movie hero or heroine inspires you, feel free to co-opt their best qualities for your own "character." Or if a person or situation real or fictitious repels you, use the clarity-through-contrast approach: put the exact opposite into your story!

Even if inspiration comes from others, the borrowed elements still become uniquely YOU as you work them into your specific story in your own original way.

So, think about people you know and stories you've heard, either over the past few weeks or any time at all (including fictional characters/stories). Which aspects of these people and stories would you like to use in your own story?

Other People's Stories

Person #1:

Story #1:

How you'd fit parts of this person's story into your own:

Person #2:

Story #2:

How you'd fit parts of this person's story into your own:

Reversing Other People's Unappealing Stories (Clarity Through Contrast)

What elements of other people's stories are completely at odds with your own tastes, desires, or values? Think of the opposite quality that appeals to you, you might like to incorporate into your own story.

Person:

Story:

Opposite of Story's Lesson/Take-away:

How you'd like to fit parts of their story's opposites or the lessons you learned from them into your story:

Fact from Fiction

The characters and/or stories that appeal to you, or repel you don't necessarily have to come from real life, they can come from novels, short stories, movies, or any other type of fiction.

Think of an inspiring fictitious story and/or character with elements you might like to use in your own real-life story. You can even draw from common themes from fiction, such as "The underdog triumphs," "Good prevails," "True love conquers all," or anything else that you might like to be a theme of your story.

Work of Fiction:

How you'd like to fit parts of this story into yours:

Fictitious Character:

How you'd like to fit elements of this character into your "character" (YOU):

Theme from Fiction:





How you'd like to incorporate this theme into your story:
Unappealing Fictitious Story, Theme, or Character:
Opposite of Story's Lesson/Take-away:
How you'd like to fit the opposite of or lesson from, this
fictitious story, theme, or character into your story in a
positive way:

Admiration, Envy, and Attention

Another way to figure out what characteristics or elements
you might like in your own life/story is by looking at who or
what you admire, envy, or find your attention drawn to.

For instance, if you have immense respect and admiration
for a philanthropist who supports many causes you value,
perhaps it's a sign that philanthropy is a part of your ideal
story. Or if you often find yourself reading stories of spiritual
mystics, maybe a similar path might be in your future.

Learning from others doesn't necessarily have to be so
noble! For instance, if a single person becomes envious at a
friend's wedding, maybe it's a sign that a happy relationship
and perhaps a wedding is an element of their story's happy
ending.

If you find yourself getting jealous when you hear about
someone's new publishing contract (or slim figure, new
child, professional success, art exhibit, or anything else),
there's a good chance that this jealousy is helping you learn
more about yourself and your happy ending. After all, if you
didn't desire it, you wouldn't envy it!

For instance, if a friend of mine joined an AFL team, I
wouldn't be jealous because I have absolutely no desire
to become a AFL player! On the other hand, I might feel
a tinge of envy if someone I know or even a fictitious
character in a book or movie lands a top publishing deal,
because I would like that for myself!

So, rather than being something negative, I can actually
learn from this envy. It helps me bring this desire to the
forefront of my consciousness, clarifies the vision of my
happy ending, and motivates me to reach it!

Finally, Notice What You Notice!

In other words, become more aware of where your attention
goes. Whether or not you feel any respect, envy, or anything
else, it's definitely noteworthy if you always find yourself
drawn to a particular area, person, or situation.

So start paying attention to what you pay attention to...and
see what you can learn about yourself and the kind of story
you'd like to write/live.

When you go to a bookstore or library, which section do
you naturally gravitate toward? What types of movies and
TV shows catch your attention? What topics come up most
often in your conversations? What might these tendencies
indicate about what your ideal story would look like?

Take some time now to contemplate and write about the
people you admire or envy, as well as the people and
situations that most often capture your attention and then
consider what this attention might teach you about your
ideal story!

Envy

Have you ever felt jealous of anyone (even just a tiny bit)?
Who? Why? What did they do or have that you might like to
include in your own story?

Attention

What do you find yourself drawn to? Common Threads, Life
Lessons, and Story Elements. What do these objects of
admiration, envy, or attention have in common? What can
they teach you about yourself? Could any of these lessons,
qualities, or elements be worked into your new story?

Reverse Engineering Your Happy Ending

So, by now you're just about ready to write a first draft of
your new story. You've got plenty of raw materials, like a
chef with lots of ingredients to choose from!

You've drawn inspiration from your own life and also from
a variety of other people and stories. You know a lot about
your protagonist, their arc, and your story's theme.

The final main ingredient to consider is what your story is
moving toward, in other words, what's your happy ending?

I don't mean the end of your life, just the final "scene" of
this part of your personal story. It could be a few years from
now, a few months from now, or even less. Whenever you
reach your personal idea of success and happiness...at this
stage in your life!

In other words, what would it look like if you reached your
goal, achieved success, and were living your dream?

There's a common personal growth saying, "Begin with the
end in mind." This is an important reminder when you're
working toward any real life goal, but it's also good advice
for authors.

For instance, many mystery writers begin by coming up
with an ending to their story, then they figure out how to
arrive at that end.

Romance writers might know that the romantic leads will
end up in each other's arms, but they just have to figure out
the route they're going to take to get there.

And an adventure writer might know that their hero will
succeed in their quest, even if they don't know exactly how.

You can do the same thing while writing your own story.
Before you begin writing the first draft of your new story,

think of the happy ending that you'd like, for the distant
or not-so-distant future, then work your way back to the
present, figuring out how to arrive at that ending.





In other words, reverse engineer your happy ending.

For instance, if you'd like your story to end with a character winning an Olympic gold medal, think of how they might reach that goal, probably by training almost every day, practicing with a coach, and taking great care of their body.

Also, think of the kind of person who would behave this way: disciplined, passionate, dedicated, and driven.

But maybe you don't want to be an Olympic gold medalist. Your happy ending might involve a book contract, a dream wedding, a quietly content family life, or a spiritual awakening and deep sense of inner peace.

Whatever your happy ending looks like, begin with this end in mind, then work your way back to the present. What's YOUR Happy Ending?

The first step is to get clear about how your happy ending looks and feels. Maybe you're not even sure where you'd like your story to end up.

Or, even if you already have a good sense of what your happy ending looks like, you can still embellish, dream bigger (or smaller/simpler, according to your tastes and desires), or simply clarify and fine tune your vision. The following process can support you to do exactly that.

Elements of Your Happy Ending

What are some internal and external experiences you'd like your story to lead to? Internals (e.g., emotions, psychological/spiritual states): Externals (e.g., people in your life, goals you've achieved):

Your Happy Ending

Describe your "Scene of Success" in other words, the happy ending you'd like your story to have.

Reverse Engineer Your Happy Ending

Describe the steps that lead to your happy ending, working your way backwards from the ending to the present.

Your Second First Draft

Now that you've heartstormed, written notes for your new story, and revisited the benefits from your old one,

you're ready to write a first draft of your new story. If this process feels familiar, that's because...it is!

And I'm not just talking about past two months, when you wrote your old story. I'm talking about your entire life.

After all, we write our own autobiographies every single day of our lives!

The only difference between what we usually do and now is that today you're going to write yours consciously, deliberately choosing the character, story elements, and happy ending that appeal to you!

You can do this anyway you'd like, but if you want to start with a template, you can use a variation on the one I suggested for your old story:

A [character/characteristics or label]
in [their world]
wants to [desire]
because [motivation—including the benefits they'll receive].
They're inspired by [people/stories that attract their attention/desire],
and they really want to [desired end/goal].
So they [steps from "Reverse Engineering Your Happy Ending"] **...and they reach their goal!**
When they get there, this is what it looks and feels like for them: [inner/outer description of success].

The new story might look something like this:

A single mother
in middle-class suburbia
wants to express her artistic talents
because she feels an inner yearning (and because she saw her mother frustrated in this area, and vowed never to fall into that trap herself). She knows that this is her calling, because she's felt it for years, and when she put the dream on hold, it kept resurfacing! She knows that if she does express herself artistically, she'll feel great about herself, inspire her daughter, and ideally, be able to make a great living doing what she loves!

She's inspired by Monet and other French Impressionists, and by her friend who's a professional sculptor. She'd love to incorporate elements of these artists' work into her own art, but to do it in a modern style that's all her own.

She really wants to take the visions she sees in her mind and bring them to life on the canvas, and to make a great living from her art.

She commits herself to making this vision a reality, she takes art classes, paints at least five days a week, goes to museums and gallery exhibits for inspiration, and learns about the business end of the art world.

Sure enough, her painting flourishes, the sales start pouring in, she has more time to spend at home with her daughter (who is so proud of her mom!), and she feels great about herself, knowing that she's followed her dream and made it a reality!

Whatever structure or approach you choose, Feel free to dream big, and give your story a happy ending! This is your blank "canvas"/page!

Blessed Be

