

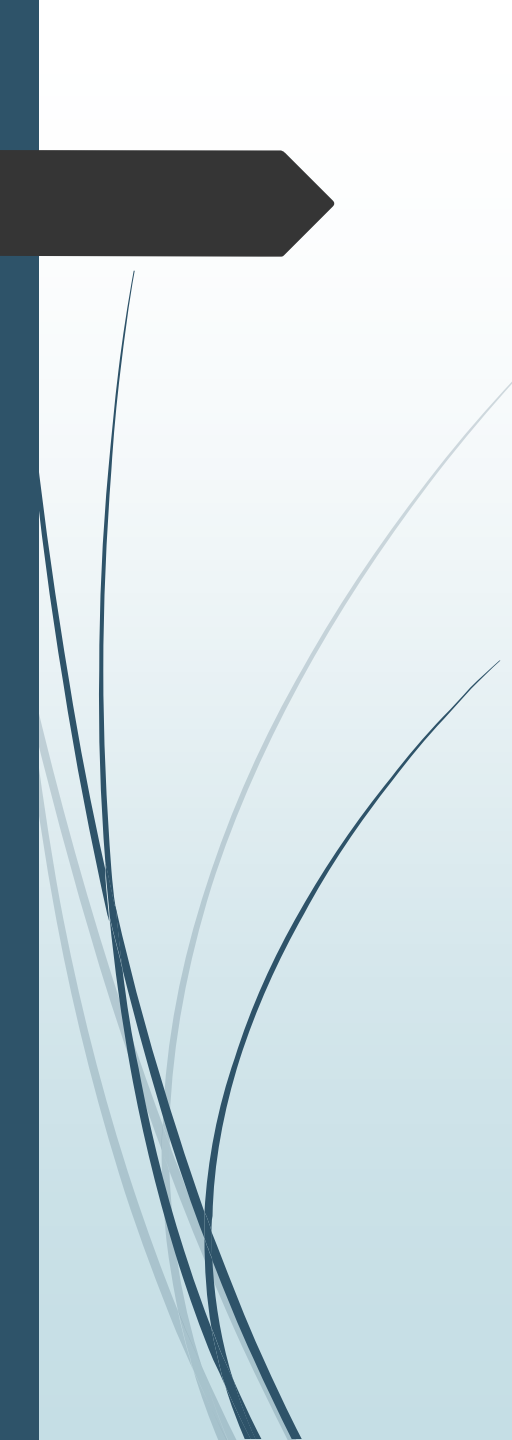


# You Can't Make a Long Story Short (But You Can Write a Short Story)

David Rodeback



Who is this guy?

- 
- ▶ CMTO of a West Valley City manufacturing firm, where I write stuff: C#.Net code, SQL queries, marketing copy, video scripts, policies, etc.
  - ▶ Before Fiction (before 2014)
    - ▶ Academic writing, speech writing, editing (but never fiction), a few scripts for stage or screen (history, biography, and documentary but never fiction)
    - ▶ Taught writing at two large universities and one small college, but never creative writing
    - ▶ Lots of blogging, mostly on topics forbidden at many dinner tables
  - ▶ Fiction
    - ▶ Two collections of short fiction in print; short stories in several anthologies
    - ▶ Novel forthcoming in 2024(ish)
    - ▶ Mostly contemporary realism (friends, family, love, loss, romance, memory)



# A confession

I resemble this remark:

“I love a good novel that’s approximately the size of the human head.”

-- [Tobias Carroll](#), “Why Doesn’t American Love the Novella”

Sez I:

“My first impression of any novel under 500 pages is that, if it’s any good, it’s too short. Twice that is not too long. War and Peace lumbers in at about 1400 pages, and that’s fine with me. I’ve read it in two languages.”

-- in “Writing What I Believe, Writing What I Love”



# The map

- A fuzzy definition
- Reasons to write short fiction (we'll focus on a few)
- How to write a short **story**
- How to write a **short** story
- What to do with it once it's written
- An exercise
- A bonus segment if there's time
- Contact info and book bragging



One guy's definition: up to 10k words



# Definitions (or just tendencies?)

## SHORT FICTION

- ▶ Microfiction: 100 words or less
- ▶ Flash Fiction: 1,000 words or less (or 1,500)
- ▶ Short Story: 1,000-10,000 words (or 7,500 or 8,000 or ...)
  - ▶ Publications vary
  - ▶ Contests vary (2k, 4k, 5k, rarely more than 6k)
- ▶ Novelette: 7,500 to 17,500 words

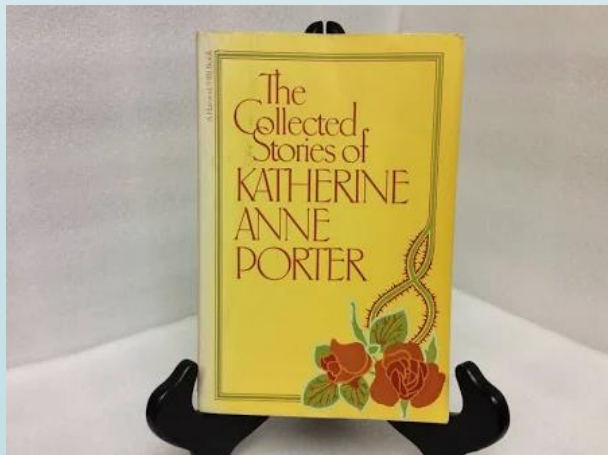
## LONG FICTION

- ▶ Novella: 17,500 to 40,000 words
- ▶ Novel: 40,000 words and up (but varies widely by genre/audience)

# Rebuttal by Katherine Ann Porter

“I beg of the reader one gentle favor for which he may be sure of my perpetual gratitude: please do not call my short novels Novelettes, or even worse, Novellas. Novelette is classical usage for a trivial, dime-store sort of thing; Novella is a slack, boneless, affected word that we do not need to describe anything. Please call all my works by their right names. We have four that cover every division: short stories, long stories, short novels, novels.”

-- Foreword to *The Collected Stories of Katherine Anne Porter* (1965 edition)





Why write short fiction?



# Reasons

- Lab work on craft (genre, theme, voice, character, POV, narrative style, etc.)
- Some key writing lessons on steroids (economy, humility)
- Have a fun idea, play with it.
- Get feedback faster
- Enter contests (more feedback, discipline, occasional glory, possible publication)
- Easier to tell people “I’m a writer” sooner (you finished something and sent it into the world)
- Outlet, Therapy, Task Avoidance
- Break from longer project (deep in a long project but you need to create)
- Life isn’t allowing the time or mental power for a large project, but you want to keep writing and improving

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# More reasons

- ▶ **Promote your novel(s) or just your name**
- ▶ **Bait/reward for subscribing to your newsletter**
- ▶ **Build your community of readers**
- ▶ **Connect with readers between novel releases**
- ▶ **Build your publishing credentials**



# How to write short **stories**

But first, an inoculation



# Inoculation against writer paralysis & death

## Death by Numbered Lists

- 3 Successful Strategies to Write a Short Story
- How to Write a Short Story in 5 Steps
- How to Write a Short Story in 6 Simple Steps
- Kurt Vonnegut's 8 Tips on How to Write a Good Short Story
- 9 Tips on How to Write a Short Story
- Top 10 Tips for Writing Great Short Stories
- How to Write a Short Story in 12 Concrete Steps
- How to Write a Story Story in 18 Steps (with Pictures)
- The Short Story Checklist (Spoiler: 20 items)

## Death by Rules, Mostly in Threes

- Be sure to use all five senses every 1,000 words.
- You can't have more than 3 characters with dialogue and development.
- You have about three lines to establish who, where, and the genre.
- You must establish the conflict within the first three paragraphs.

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# Read this about your inoculation

- ▶ Don't let rules and tips and how-to presentations paralyze you. Put your heart in charge of your brain for a while and just write!
- ▶ Read lists and tips them **after** you've written the story, to see what you might learn for revision or for next time.

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# Six near-absolutes

- ▶ A short story must be complete.
- ▶ The reader needs to start caring very soon.
- ▶ Something must be at stake.
- ▶ There must be change.
- ▶ The author must trust the reader.
- ▶ Read short fiction. At least twice.



# A short story must be a complete reading experience

- ▶ The story stands on its own and satisfies the reader.
- ▶ Target a single sitting.
- ▶ Beginning, middle, end.
- ▶ Aristotle:
  - ▶ A beginning is that which requires nothing to precede it.
  - ▶ An ending is that which requires nothing to follow it.
  - ▶ A middle needs something before and after it.
  - ▶ (This suggests a technique . . . )

“One begins a short story in the expectation of soon reaching its conclusion. . . . We tend to read a short story in a single sitting, drawn along by the magnetic power of its anticipated conclusion.”

-- David Lodge, *The Art of Fiction*, p. 225



# The Reader Needs to Start Caring Very Soon

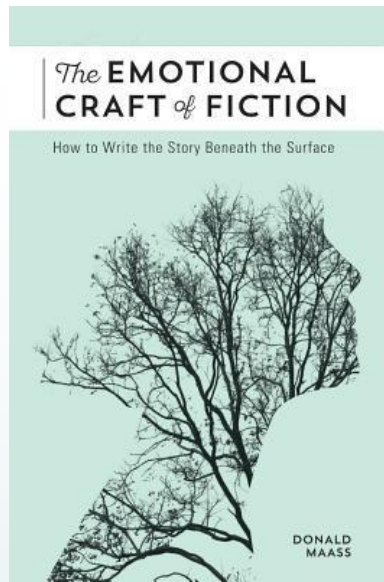
- ▶ The reader could care about ...
  - ▶ the main character.
  - ▶ whatever the main character cares about. (Helps to show this early.)
  - ▶ what the author is saying.
  - ▶ the reader herself, in a way or situation which somehow connects to the story.
  - ▶ language, humor, or suspense – or just the voice.
  - ▶ Tracy Kidder: “confidence that the writer is going someplace interesting.”
- ▶ Questions to ask when reading or writing a beginning:
  - ▶ What does the reader care about (to keep reading)?
  - ▶ What does the character care about, and how soon do we know?
  - ▶ On the first page, if not sooner – has the character earned what she purports to be? (Pious, awesome, despairing, etc.) It helps the reader care – and keep reading.

# Donald Maass

As your [story] opens, find something warm and human that your main character cares about. If your story is exotic, choose something we would care about in the here and now. If your story has an ordinary setting, find something about which your protagonist is passionate. Open with this feeling.

Now find in your opening situation something different, odd, curious, puzzling, weird, contradictory, a paradox, hard to explain. Highlight it. Don't pile on more or explain too much too soon. Let the mystery posed or question raised work on your reader for a bit. There's tension in the unknown.

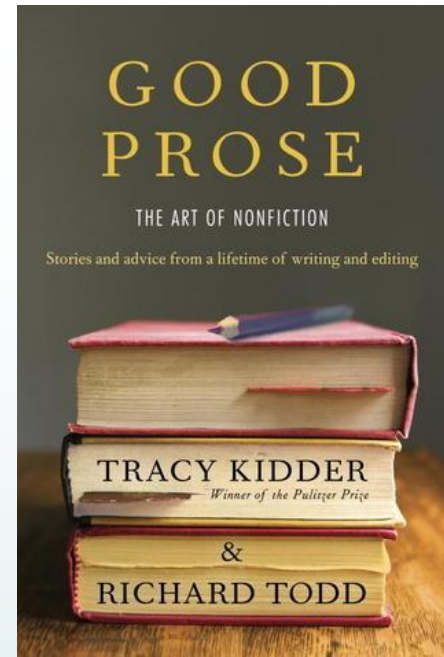
-- Donald Maass, *The Emotional Craft of Fiction*, p. 90



# Tracy Kidder

"A setting can be an actual place, but it is always more than that. Above all, a setting tells **what is at issue—what a character is trying to do, what a character fears or is trying to hide, hopes to gain or stands to lose, what a character is up against.** Depicting such circumstances and feelings is one way you can get the reader imaginatively involved; something matters to this person on the page, and we can imagine its mattering to us."

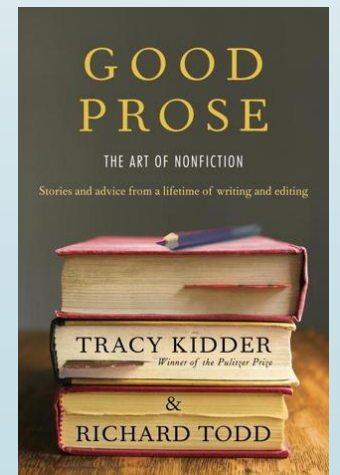
... which overlaps with ...



# Something Must Be at Stake

- ▶ for the main character
- ▶ Ideally, for the reader
- ▶ Tracy Kidder: "... A problem that confronts the characters or confronts the reader in trying to understand them. The unfolding of the problem and its resolution are the real payoff. A car chase is not required."

... which overlaps with ...





# There must be change, not just a slice of life

- Change in character's circumstances or attitude
- If you're a genius writing a masterpiece, it might work to have the only change be in the reader.
- Patterns are powerful – but there must be change, progress, or at least slight alteration when a pattern recurs.
- If things finally end where they began, there must be enough promise of change along the way that we're disappointed.

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# Trust the Reader

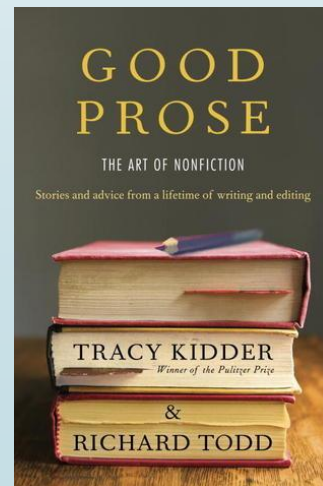
- ▶ not to read your mind, but **to have a mind and a heart and to use both.**
- ▶ **to connect some of the dots**, to read between the lines, to see what you're showing but not saying or implying but not explaining.
- ▶ Tracy Kidder: “[Imagine] for the reader an **intelligence** at least equal to the intelligence you imagine for yourself.”
- ▶ George Saunders: “A story is a frank, intimate conversation between equals. We keep reading because we continue to feel respected by the writer. ...The reader is out there, and she's real. She's interested in life and, by picking up our work, has given us the benefit of the doubt. All we have to do is engage her. To engage her, all we have to do is **value her.**”

... And trust the reader's imagination

Tracy Kidder:

“One sure way to lose the reader is trying to get down everything you know about a person. What the imaginative reader wants is telling details.”

“A character has a wart. You could describe it in detail, but the reader would probably see it more clearly if you described not the wart but how the character covers it when he's nervous.”



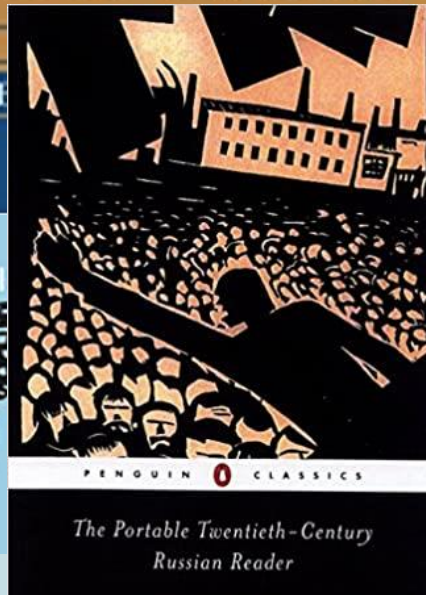
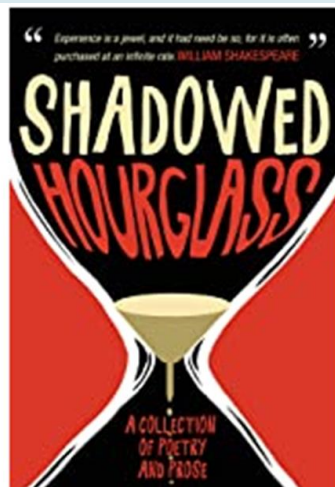
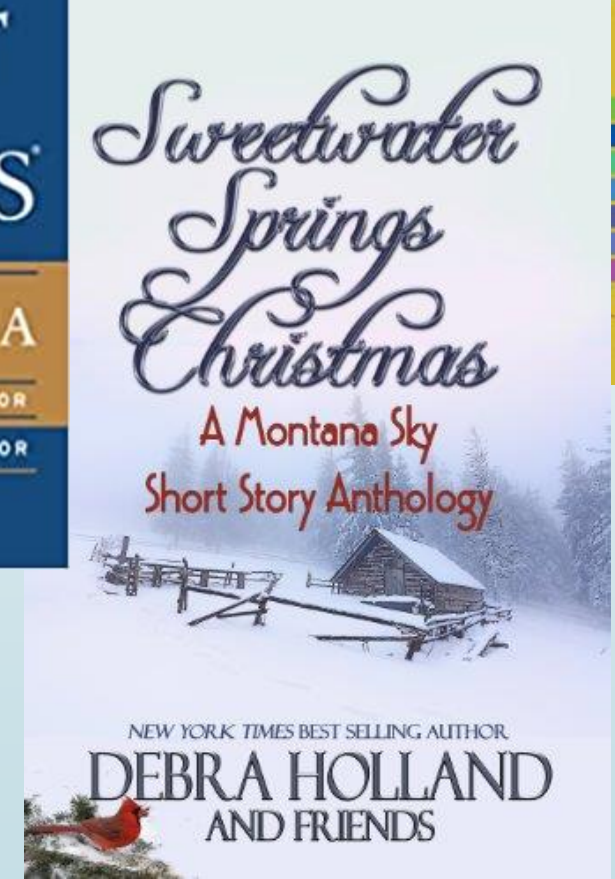
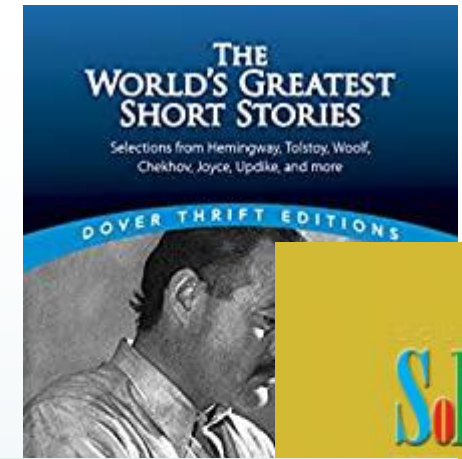
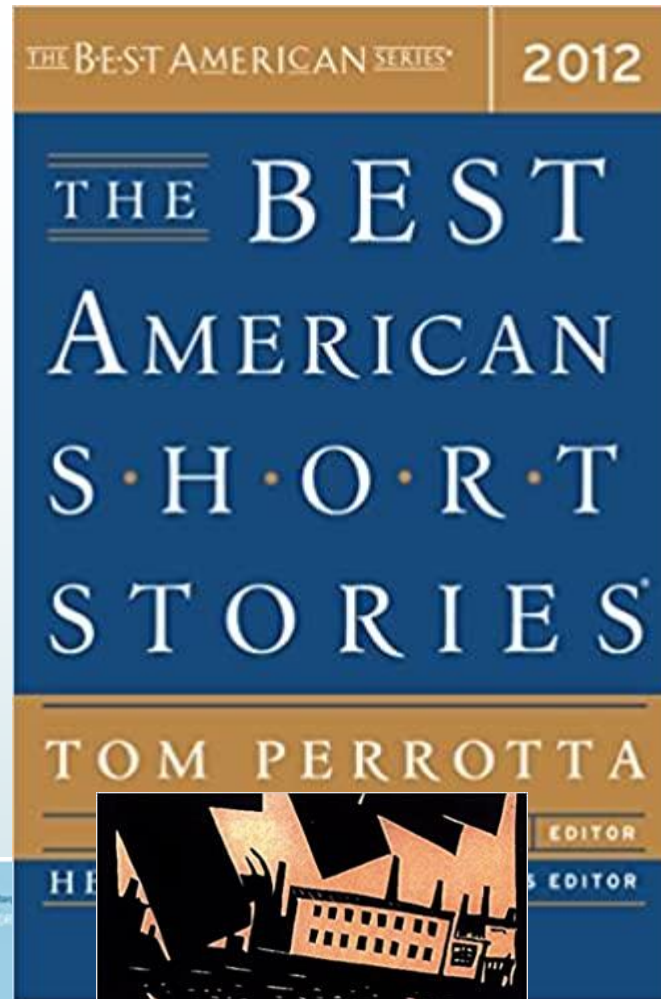
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# Read short stories at least twice.

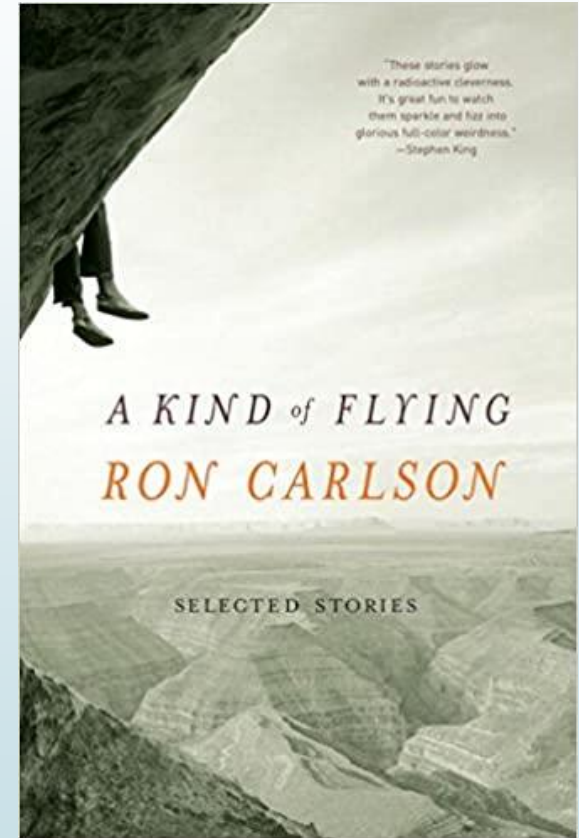
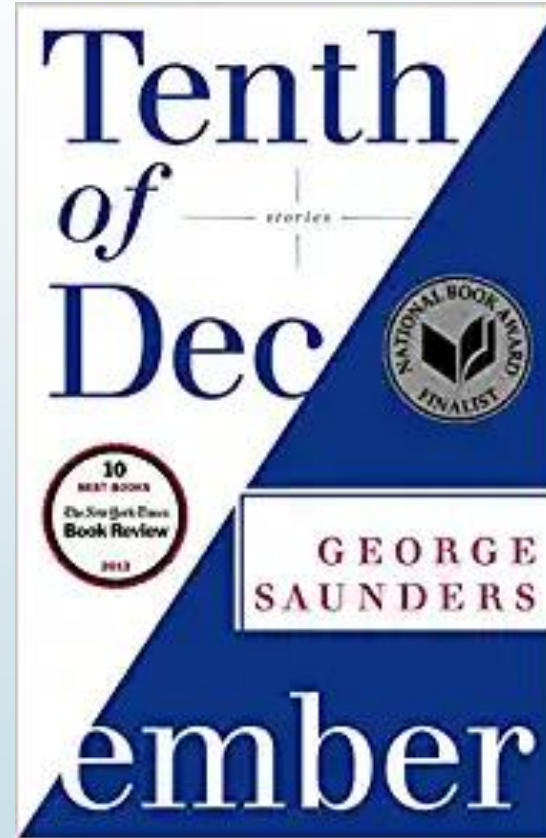
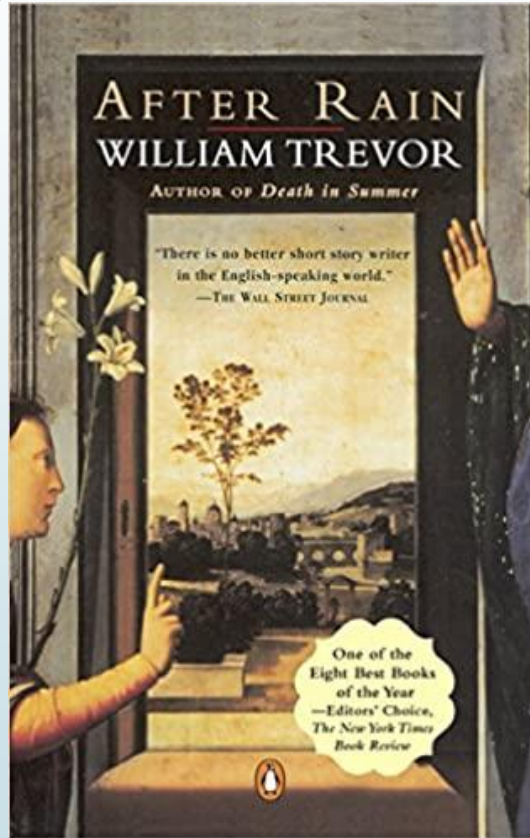
- At least once to enjoy the story. (Reading as a reader.)
- At least once more to study the story.
  - How does it do what it does to you?
  - Where, if anywhere, does it fail?
  - Why does it begin where it begins and end where it ends?
  - Why does it happen in a train car? Why *that* car? Why *that* train?  
Why a train on *that* route on *that* day?

# Anthologies and Literary Journals

- By year
- By genre
- By theme
- By setting or author location
- By ...



# Collections (by author)



# On the web

- Author websites
  - And newsletters
- Social platforms like Simily, Medium
  - Haven't seen a lot of short fiction on WattPad.
- Publisher websites
  - Tor.com Original Fiction
- Classic print magazine websites, e.g. *The New Yorker* and *The Atlantic*, free if you read sparingly, or you can subscribe
- Online collections
  - ClassicShorts.com (Classic Short Stories)
  - Project Gutenberg
- Podcasts, e.g. LevarBurtonPodcast.com (Levar Burton reads)





# How to write **short** stories

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# One actual absolute

- ▶ Economy is essential.



# Economy

- Fewer major characters
- Fewer minor characters
- Fewer settings
- Fewer themes
- Fewer plot threads, few if any subplots
- Often: a short time span
- Every word counts. May use the title to establish theme or setting.

TRUE OR FALSE?: A novel immerses us in a world. A short story immerses us in a moment.

**ANALYSIS OF 35 SHORT STORIES BY DAVID RODEBACK – 21 June 2024 –**  
 author@davidrodeback.com – 60eastpress.com

Bold title = published (by someone else) and/or award-winning. Speaking roles: directly quoted speech only, incl. 1<sup>st</sup>-person narrator. Named speaking roles: character name mentioned, incl. Mom/ Dad. Time span: primary time span of the narrative, not including memories. Counting settings, scenes, and major themes is subjective.

|    | Title                          | Word Count | # POV | # Sp. Roles | # Named S R | Time Span | # Settings | # Scenes | # Maj. Thms |
|----|--------------------------------|------------|-------|-------------|-------------|-----------|------------|----------|-------------|
| 1  | Clipped                        | 1000       | 1     | 4           | 4           | 1 hour    | 1          | 1        | 1           |
| 2  | <b>Falling Off My Shoes</b>    | 1000       | 1     | 4           | 4           | 2 hours   | 3          | 3        | 1           |
| 3  | I Dreamed You Died             | 1000       | 1     | 1*          | 0           | < 1 hour  | 1          | 1        | 1? 2?       |
| 4  | <b>Unmanned</b>                | 1000       | 1     | 4           | 4           | 6 hours   | 1          | 3        | 1           |
| 5  | <b>Marie</b>                   | 1100       | 1     | 3           | 3           | 3 days    | 3          | 5        | 1? 2?       |
| 6  | New Student Orientatn.         | 1500       | 1     | 7           | 3           | 2 hours   | 1          | 2        | 1? 2?       |
| 7  | Jesus Loves You                | 1700       | 1     | 2           | 2           | 1-2 hours | 1          | 2        | 1? 2?       |
| 8  | Nine Roses & Three             | 1700       | 1     | 2           | 1           | 15 hours  | 2          | 3        | 2           |
| 9  | <b>Her Voice</b>               | 1900       | 1     | 3           | 3           | 17 hours  | 3          | 5        | 2           |
| 10 | <b>I Made Muffins</b>          | 2000       | 1     | 5           | 2           | 10 hours  | 4          | 4        | 2           |
| 11 | <b>Hate Puppy Stomper</b>      | 2000       | 1     | 2           | 2           | 1 hour?   | 1          | 1        | 1           |
| 12 | <b>Failure of Imagination</b>  | 2800       | 1     | 7           | 1           | Lifetime  | 4          | 8        | 1           |
| 13 | My Life, Work, Home            | 3000       | 1     | 2           | 1           | 3 days    | 1          | 4        | 2? 3?       |
| 14 | The Experiment                 | 3000       | 1     | 4           | 4           | 6 hours   | 2          | 3        | 3           |
| 15 | Christmasing with Preet        | 4800       | 1     | 4           | 3           | 3 hours   | 4-6        | 8?       | 1           |
| 16 | Kissing Santa                  | 4900       | 1     | 16          | 10          | 5 hours   | 6          | 10?      | 1           |
| 17 | Ex-Brother, Antichrist         | 5000       | 1     | 3           | 3           | Months    | 3          | 4        | 1? 2?       |
| 18 | <b>I Helped the Police</b>     | 5000       | 1     | 4           | 4           | 2 months  | 4          | 5        | 2           |
| 19 | Keep My Secrets                | 5000       | 1     | 4           | 3           | 6 days    | 9          | 14       | 2?          |
| 20 | Missed You                     | 5000       | 2     | 6           | 4           | 24 hours  | 7          | 19       | 2? 3?       |
| 21 | <b>Missing Hair</b>            | 5000       | 1     | 10          | 9           | 2-3 wks   | 3          | 8        | 1?          |
| 22 | Not That Jason                 | 5000       | 1     | 5           | 5           | 3 hours   | 3          | 4? 8?    | 3?          |
| 23 | Old Man & Chicken              | 5000       | 1     | 1           | 1           | 2 day     | 1          | 3        | 2           |
| 24 | Orange Juice                   | 5000       | 1     | 5           | 5           | 9 mos     | 1          | 6-10     | 2?          |
| 25 | <b>Tossing an Eight</b>        | 5000       | 1     | 5           | 5           | 4-6 days  | 5          | 7        | 2           |
| 26 | <b>We'll Never Be Like ...</b> | 5000       | 1     | 5           | 5           | 1 week    | 5          | 5        | 4?          |
| 27 | Wildfire                       | 5100       | 1     | 8*          | Approx. 20  | 5 days    | 4          | 6        | 3           |
| 28 | <b>Might Be Another Way</b>    | 5200       | 1     | 3           | 3           | 5 hours   | 5          | 4        | 2           |
| 29 | If Only I                      | 5800       | 1     | 6           | 5           | 4 weeks   | 9          | 16?      | 2           |
| 30 | Invisible                      | 6500       | 1     | 6           | 6           | 3 mos     | 4          | 9?       | 2?          |
| 31 | Unseen                         | 7000       | 1     | 1           | 2           | 5 months  | 2          | 5        | 3           |
| 32 | Abolishing Christmas           | 7500       | 1     | 8           | 7           | 3 days    | 7          | 10       | 3? 4?       |
| 33 | Beyond Ugly                    | 7500       | 1     | 6           | 6           | 4 hours   | 3          | 5? 10?   | 3?          |
| 34 | I Am Chuck Steak               | 8900       | 1     | 8           | 5           | 8 days    | 4          | 12?      | 3           |
| 35 | Rhonda VII                     | 9800       | 1     | 4           | 4           | 9 days    | 7          | 7        | 3           |

# Economy

## George Saunders:

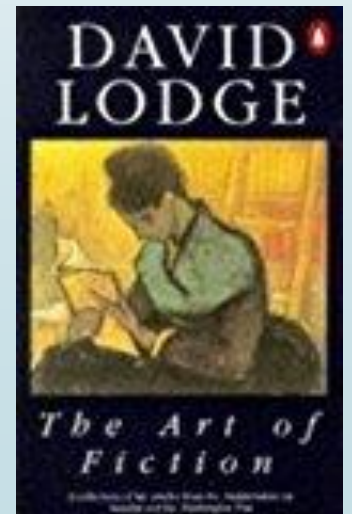
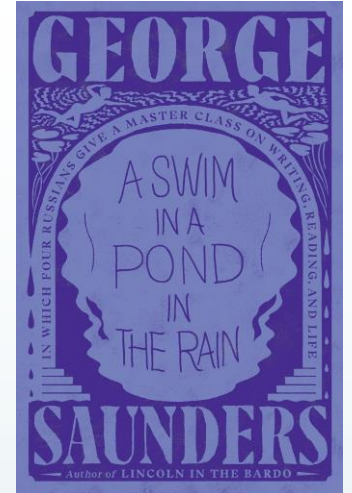
"Everything in it is there for a reason (for the story to make use of) – even a brief description of a road."

"Ruthless Efficiency Principle ... What is the purpose of this town? Why this town, and not another?"

## David Lodge:

"In a [story] names are never neutral. They always signify, if it is only ordinariness."

"Description in a good [story] is never just description."





# Does all that sound too analytical?

## **Dan Brotzel:**

“You could just start writing — and see what shape starts to emerge. Often voice or idea is far more important than structure in a short story, and you can often retro-fix the shape once you’ve nailed those essential components first.”

## **George Saunders:**

“[The short story] is not a documentary or rigorous accounting of the passage of time or a fair-minded attempt to show life as it is really lived; it’s a radically shaped ... little machine that thrills us with the extremity of its decisiveness.”



# How to start: decisions

(If this every comes easily to you, you won't need the next few slides. They're for when it doesn't.)

- ▶ Same genre as novel(s)?
- ▶ Same world? Same time? Same setting?
- ▶ Any of the same characters?

Your choices:

- ▶ May depend on your purpose for writing the short story.
- ▶ May depend on your plans for more novels in the same world.



# How to start: choose your starting point

*not the same as the story's beginning; could be from your novel(s) but need not be*

- A character or relationship
- A theme
- An event (or just a moment)
- A setting
- An object
- A road (or ship or aircraft or carriage or horse)
- A bit of dialogue
- Something readers have mentioned or asked about

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# How to start: don't try to do too much

- ▶ You can say something about something, maybe two things . . . You can't say a lot about anything, let alone a lot of things.
- ▶ Be careful with deleted scenes/chapters. They're useful too, but a short story must be a complete reading experience.
- ▶ **George Saunders:** "One feature of a beautifully ended story is that we can imagine the lives of the characters continuing on beyond it."
- ▶ **George Saunders quoting Anton Chekhov:** "Chekhov once said, 'Art doesn't have to solve problems, it only has to formulate them correctly.' 'Formulate them correctly' might be taken to mean: 'make us feel the problem fully, without denying any part of it.'"



# How to start: don't sweat it

- Keep in mind: you'll likely move your beginning and your ending anyway.
- If you throw it away the whole story, it was just a short story, not a novel.

“Short stories can take one tool from the fictional toolkit — voice, character, dialogue, structure, point of view, idea — and major on that, almost to the exclusion of all others. **[David's translation: You don't need the checklists.]** They can talk of boring or obvious topics in fresh ways, or they can deliver great weirdnesses and wild thought experiments. In short, they can do whatever they like. They just have to be true to themselves, and make us believe in them, and not go on too long.”

**“Go with the idea that tingles.”**

*Dan Brotzel, “How to Write a Short Story” – on [Medium](#)*



# When it's too long

- ▶ Trim. Then trim some more.
- ▶ Combine two characters (or delete one)
- ▶ Combine two settings (or delete one)
- ▶ Simplify your themes (say less, but say something)
- ▶ Tie up fewer loose ends
- ▶ Give less back story
- ▶ Lop off a piece at the beginning (or the end); see if you can make it work without that piece. (Also good for analyzing what a short story is about.)
- ▶ Learn to love it as a longer story and start a new short story.



Short stories for promotion



# Your places (always link to your novels)

- Post at your website (blog or otherwise) – with links to your books
- Put it in your newsletter – with links to your books
- Send it as a reward for subscribing to your newsletter
  - So they immediately get something – and they know what – for giving you their e-mail address
  - Promote it on all your online channels; have your publisher promote it too.
- Bonus content for your readers
  - Direct them to it at the end of your novel.
  - Add it to your book (after you novel)
  - On your website and/or your publisher's website
- Publish a collection, mention your novel(s) in front and back matter
- Print as a booklet for giveaway or sale (Christmas card/neighbor gift or sell for \$1)



# Others' places (always link to your books)

- ▶ Give a reading
  - ▶ In person (bar, library, bookstore, etc.)
  - ▶ Online (social media, podcast guest, National Read Aloud Day)
  - ▶ Radio/TV
- ▶ Social media – post story or a link (I did a short story a month for a year)
- ▶ Another author's newsletter
- ▶ Online reading sites (Simsly, Medium, Wattpad, many more – some specific to genre)
- ▶ Submit to anthology, mention in bio (sometimes: contest)
- ▶ More?



# Exercise: fiddling with *Fiddler*

*Small partly-Jewish village in Russia. Matchmaking and marriages. Tevye the milkman, his wife and five daughters. Lazar Wolf, the rabbi, the rabbi's son, Motel the tailor (gets a sewing machine), Perchik (revolutionary), Fyedka (Russian soldier). Order from the tsar: must leave. Family leaves for America.*

Possibilities for short stories:

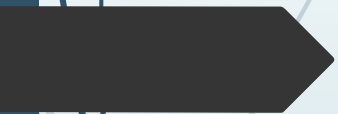
- ▶ A major character's back story
- ▶ A minor character's back story
- ▶ Earlier or later event
- ▶ Event or situation mentioned but not developed in the script
- ▶ Different POV of event in the script
- ▶ Alternate ending (perhaps of just a scene; how make it fit the existing whole)

**Exercise: Brainstorm at least three short story ideas based on *Fiddler on the Roof*.**




# Ten of my ideas (fiddling with *Fiddler*)

- ▶ Perchik begins his sentence in Siberia, yearning for Hodel to arrive.
- ▶ Perchik and Hodel break up briefly after she arrives, but they reunite.
- ▶ Motel goes to the city to barter for a new sewing machine. Obstacles arise.
- ▶ The rabbi's son wants one of Tevye's daughters, but he's too shy to tell even his father, the rabbi.
- ▶ Teyva's family arrives in England but struggles to afford passage to America without selling the heirloom candlesticks.
- ▶ Lazar Wolf plots vengeance against Tevye for breaking his agreement to let Lazar marry Tzeitel, but bigger things intervene. (From Lazar's POV)
- ▶ Before the larger story begins, Motel and Tzeitel gave each other their pledge to marry. (There must be a short story in that!)
- ▶ Fyedka's CO or comrades are bitterly opposed to his romance with Chava. (The play only shows Tevye's opposition to Chava seeing a gentile.)
- ▶ Tevye tries to persuade Golde to take dancing lessons with him. (In America?)
- ▶ A glimpse at the battle at the tsar's court over issuing an edict banning Jews.



Q&A



# Economy in its natural habitat

We'll keep asking, "What have we accomplished so far?"

THE BEST AMERICAN SERIES

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STORIES

TOM PERROTTA

EDITOR

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SERIES EDITOR



## “Axis”

Alice Munro, 2011

Fifty years ago, Grace and Avie were waiting at the university gates, in the freezing cold. A bus would come eventually, and take them north, through the dark, thinly populated countryside, to their homes. Forty miles to go for Avie, maybe twice that for Grace. They were carrying large books with solemn titles: *The Medieval World*, *Montcalm and Wolfe*, *The Jesuit Relations*.

This was mostly to establish themselves as serious students, which they were. But once they got home, they would probably not have time for such things. They were both farm girls who knew how to scrub floors and milk cows. Their labor as soon as they entered the house – or the barn – belonged to their families.



# “*Diem Perdidi*”\*

Julie Otsuka, 2011

She remembers her name. She remembers the name of the president. She remembers the name of the president’s dog. She remembers what city she lives in. And on which street. And in which house. *The one with the big olive tree where the road takes a turn.* She remembers what year it is. She remembers the season. She remembers the day on which you were born. She remembers the daughter who was born before you – *She had your father’s nose, that was the first thing I noticed about her --* but she does not remember that daughter’s name.

\*I have lost a day



# “Anything Helps”

Jess Walter, 2011

Bit hates going to cardboard.

But he got tossed from the Jesus beds for drunk and sacrilege and has no other way to get money. So he’s up behind Frankie Doodle’s, flipping through broken-down produce boxes like an art buyer over a rack of prints, and when he finds a piece without stains or writing he rips it down until it’s two feet square. Then he walks to the Quik Stop, where the fat checker likes him. He flirts her out of a Magic Marker and a beef stick.

The beef stick he eats right away, and cramps his gut, so he sets it on the counter while he writes on the cardboard, carefully, in block letters: *Anything Helps*. The checker says, You got good handwriting, Bit.



# “I Made Muffins”

(David Rodeback, 2017, 2,000 words)

What would you say if you were standing at the front door of a nice guy you just met, and it was 6 a.m. and still dark, and you were delivering fresh baked goods he wasn't expecting, but you hadn't rung his doorbell yet because you hadn't figured out what to say, and he opened the door and found you there?



# “Rhonda VII”

David Rodeback, 2021, 9,800 words

What I wanted to say was, “I’m a football player, not a popsicle.” What I said was, “This is what you want us to wear to the Homecoming dance?”

School had been out for half an hour, when Haylee pulled me into a short, dead-end hallway to talk about formal wear. I stared at her phone in my hand. The disaster she was planning filled the screen.



# “Falling off My Shoes”

(David Rodeback, 2017, 1,000 words)

When Mr. Bingham asked, “Why did Nixon go to China?” I kept a straight face and raised my hand.

He nodded to me. “Ms. Morgenstern?”

“To make American Chinese food great again?”

Others laughed, but he didn’t. “After class, please. Now, serious answer, anyone?”

I raised my hand. When no one else did, he nodded to me again.

“Why am I in trouble, but Mark isn’t? His jokes haven’t even been funny lately.” I knew the reason. Mark Williams was the teacher’s pet.

Morons hooted behind me. Bingham pursed his lips. “Everyone, Monday will now feature a quiz. Fifty words on the significance of Nixon in China.”

The class groaned. A nearby jock said, “Thanks a lot, S&M.” That was their nasty nickname for me, Sandra Morgenstern – because, obviously, initials.



# “Miracle Polish”

Steven Millhauser (2011)

I should have said no to the stranger at the door, with his skinny throat and his black sample case that pulled him a little to the side, so that one of his jacket cuffs was higher than the other, a polite no would have done the trick, no thanks, I’m afraid not, not today, then the closing of the door and the heavy click of the latch, but I’d seen the lines of dirt in the black shoe creases, the worn-down heels, the shine on the jacket sleeves, the glint of desperation in his eyes. All the more reason, I said to myself, to send him on his way, as I stepped aside and watched him move into my living room.

# Ann Patchett

Imagine running over a butterfly with an SUV. Everything that was beautiful about this living thing — all the color, the light and movement — is gone. What I'm left with is the dry husk of my friend, the broken body chipped, dismantled, and poorly reassembled. Dead. That's my book.

“The Getaway Car: A Practical Memoir About Writing and Life”



THIS IS  
THE  
STORY  
OF A  
HAPPY  
MARRIAGE

ann patchett

# George Saunders

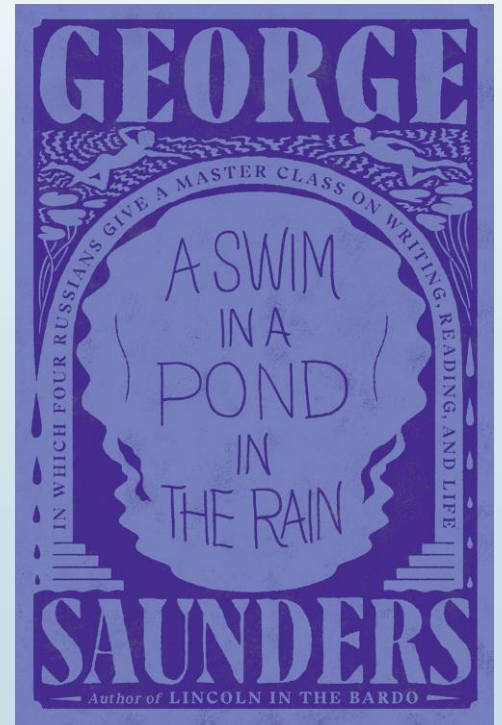
To write a story that works, that moves the reader, is difficult, and most of us can't do it. Even among those who have done it, it mostly can't be done. ...

It's hard to get any beauty at all into a story. If and when we do, it might not be the type of beauty we've always dreamed of making. But we have to take whatever beauty we can get, however we can get it.

\*\*\*\*\*

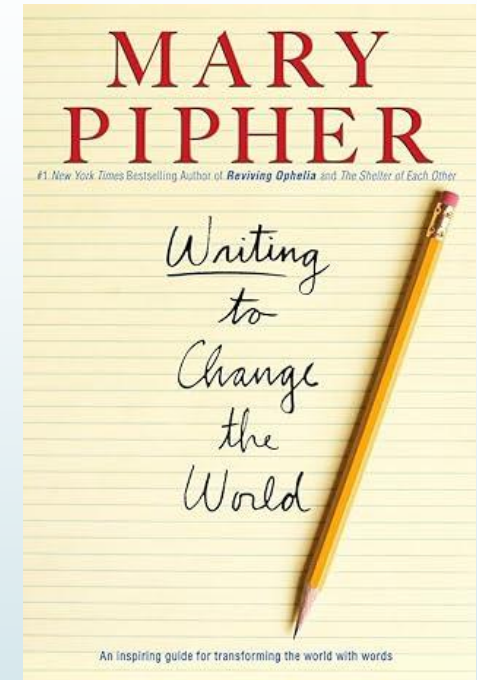
... That's the kind of story I want to write, the kind that stops being writing and starts being life.

But, Lord, it's harder than it looks.



# Mary Pipher

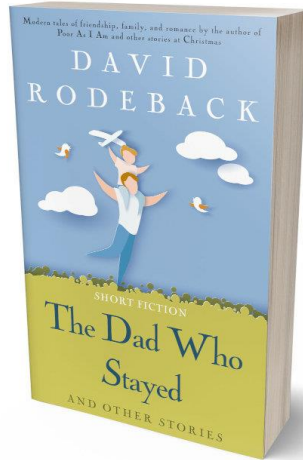
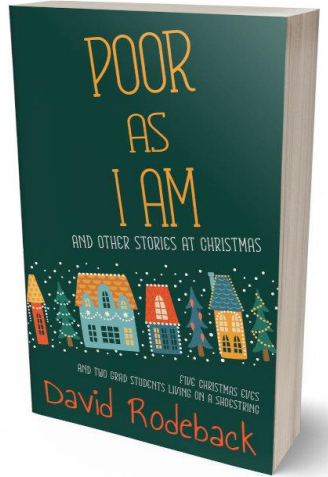
Any form of writing can change the world. Your goal is to find the form that allows you to use every one of your talents in the service of what you consider to be your most important goals. You want to search for what you alone can say and then how you can say it most effectively. (p. 27)





Thank you!

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