



Mark Binder's Transmit Joy Writing Workshop



Detailed Teacher's Handout

If you have any questions, comments or suggestions
email: mark@transmitjoy.com
<http://www.transmitjoy.com/>

Workshop Goal:

To clearly communicate a method for creating and shaping stories.

Teacher Participation

Teachers may participate as facilitators or as participants. In other words, you may "take" the workshop beside your students, or assist with the workshop by helping to model following the "coaching" process (see below).

What is a story?

Stories are spoken or written narratives. They are collections of events shaped by the author/teller and experienced by the reader/listener*. Stories may be fiction or nonfiction, they may be true or "false." The best stories always ring true, and by using this method, almost any narrative can be shaped into a powerful (or at least enjoyable) story.

Story Components

There is a huge laundry-list of items that can go into a story. They include: characters, setting, plot, beginnings, middles and ends, descriptions, narrative arcs, themes, morals and so on.

What makes a story work?

For a story to be effective it needs only a very few elements.

- 1) Clear communication – whether spoken or written
 - a. Clearly written/legible
 - b. Loud enough to be heard (or quiet enough room)
 - c. Consistent grammatical presentation.
 - d. Few or no inconsistencies. In other words, no mentions of rocket ships in a 1776 historical narrative.
- 2) Reincorporation of most, if not all elements. (See below)

Unlocking Creativity – Creating a story

Stories are created from many different angles. Some stories start with titles. Some start with themes. Some start with settings. (Some start with assignments...)

Since this method is based on improvisation, it is important to work on avoiding censoring creativity – especially in fictional narrative. In other words, if someone introduces a rocket ship in a 1776 narrative, let it go and see if it can be edited out later. Otherwise let go of the idea that the narrative is meant to be set exclusively in 1776 as we expect it to be.



Mark Binder's Transmit Joy Writing Workshop



Some Common Examples

- *Goldilocks and the three bears*
When the porridge, chairs, beds and bears have all been reintroduced, the story is complete
- *The Brave Little Tailor*
When the tailor retells his victories while the guards are about to attack, the tale is almost done. When the king sees him alive, the story is done.
- *George Washington and the Cherry Tree*
By telling his father the truth, George reintroduces the tree.
- *The Story of Rosa Parks*
Although there are many events that make up this story, following the Supreme Court's decision, when the busses in Montgomery, Alabama are finally desegregated, the story is most powerful complete only when the narrator describes Rosa Parks riding the bus and sitting wherever she likes.
- *The Lord of the Rings*
When the rings are unmade, the story is nearly done. When everyone's final tales are told the story is nearly done. When Frodo returns to the Shire, the story is nearly done. When all meet to sail away, and Bilbo is included, the story is done.

Completing a Story

A story is complete when every major element has been reintroduced. This is a visceral feeling. It just works.

Editing and Revision (Part Two)

Allow the editing and revision to take place long after the first-draft occurs. If edits and self-censoring happen too early it often shuts down new ideas.

Editing methods include:

- Read-aloud (and make notes for changes)
- Omit needless words (and elements)
- Find dangling elements and reincorporate them
- Shift around the plot points to make the story more interesting or powerful
- Ask for help. Useful questions include:
 - o What was missing?
 - o Was there anything you didn't understand?
 - o Were you bored? When/where?

I highly recommend the use of paper and pencil beyond the printer. Printed text looks far too "finished." Students need to see the scribbles to understand that the text is imperfect and malleable.

Applying Reincorporation to non-fiction

The basic/traditional essay form is all about reincorporation

- 1) Topic Paragraph – states what's coming
- 2) Topic Sentence in Each paragraph – states what's coming
- 3) Concluding sentences in each paragraph – state what's been
- 4) Concluding paragraph – restates what's been said/written



Mark Binder's Transmit Joy Writing Workshop



FAQ: More Detailed Description

How do you produce an "instant" story?

You can start with an idea, an opening sentence, or nothing at all.

As you go, don't censor yourself. Just get it all down. In the old days, they called this part "automatic writing."

Your story will putter along, and you'll begin introducing elements — bears, chairs, girls with golden hair and so on. Or they may be more complex — lovers, mysterious strangers, odd habits with cigarettes....

The Instant Short Story works on the basis of reincorporation -- every element you include in your story is reincorporated, reweven, into the fabric of the story. Your story develops with new elements, it grows as these are reincorporated, and it finishes when everything has been accounted for.

Can you give an example?

Take a quick look at Goldilocks and the three bears. The story is a perfect example of adding elements and then reincorporating them. You have the title, then the bears making porridge and leaving. Reincorporate Goldilocks (from the title) and the porridge. Then we introduce the chairs and the beds. Reincorporate the bears, the porridge, the chairs, the beds and Goldilocks! Done.

It sounds too simple

Yes, it does.

The three most difficult aspects to creating stories with this method are

1. Allowing the mind to create the initial and ongoing elements without censorship.
As people write, most people's brains are short-circuited by a number of thoughts including, "That's dumb... I can't make a story about a giant peach... That's weird... I can't write a story about a wizard father and daughter trapped on an island... I already did that... I can't write another story about a kid growing up..." and so on. Self-censorship often stops stories from having the interesting and intriguing elements that keep the piece alive. The best practice is to write everything down -- silly, stupid, great or awful, and sort it out later.
2. Reincorporating the events
The same conversations come up as you reincorporate -- I can't do that, no, that's too obvious, I don't want to. Do it anyway.
3. Reincorporate everything and then stop. Some stories go beyond this point and get boring. Obviously, developing stories using this method does take practice. Not every story is a gem, but over time (and with 20 years experience, I can say that you do get better) you'll be able to hit your mark. (Heh.)

Some other tips:

1. If the story is boring, throw it out and start over
2. If you're having trouble reincorporating elements -- then add new ones. The story may be too short.



Mark Binder's Transmit Joy Writing Workshop



Story Writing and Creating

Once a story is begun, the author must begin to add elements. When she gets stuck, she can

- 1) Ask for help
- 2) Do research
- 3) Change tactics/paths
- 4) Take a break (if there's time)
- 5) Get random – if it's appropriate to the story

Boredom

Boredom is important. It means something either needs to be added, cut or reincorporated. In other words, if something is boring then it's either too long, not interesting enough, or hasn't reincorporated something.

Editing and Revision (Part One)

We'll get to editing and revision later.

Keep Going

One of the crucial elements to using this method is to keep going. Keep adding. Keep reincorporating. Don't get stuck. Don't let students get stuck.

How does "Coaching" work?

Coaching in this process is about keeping the writing moving. It's not about "getting it right" but about continuing to write! In other words, give answers, tell students how to spell things, if they ask for help, give it to them. Come up with the first thing that pops into your head. (If they don't like what you suggested, tell them to come up with their own ideas.) Feel free to repeat suggestions for other students.

What is "reincorporation"?

"If you bring a loaded gun onstage in the first act, it had better be fired by the end of the play."
—*common theatrical truism*

Starting from the Latin word *corpus*, we begin with the word incorporation and the process of incorporating elements into the body of a story.

In other words, we start at the beginning and keep adding details, characters, events, information and so on.

As long as the author is good, this process can go on for quite some time.

At some point, however, the author will begin "reincorporating" elements. By bringing these back into the story, the story will begin to have shape, form and resonance.

The distinction that transforms any random sequence of events into a narrative is reincorporation of earlier events, characters, actions, settings, etc.

Note: This is a fairly traditional/old-fashioned notion of narrative. It may not apply to modern and post-modern (and post-post-modern) texts.



Mark Binder's Transmit Joy Writing Workshop



3. Don't hurry.
4. Resist the impulse to rewrite during the first draft. That's why it's the first draft. Other drafts will improve the story. The goal is to get a first draft done. Then you can evaluate and correct.
5. If you do come up with a brilliant idea write it down and allow the story to go that way even if it's not in alignment with what's come before. These are your stories. Don't let the rules get in the way.
6. Reading stories aloud is a good way to learn what works and what doesn't -- what's interesting and what's boring.

What about editing and revision?

Editing and revision are a different part of the brain. They are 100% necessary, but one of the problems many students have is they want to get it RIGHT the first time. This process is about getting it down and done, and then returning for revision and rewriting. This will be addressed briefly in the workshop.

Pre-and Post-Workshop Questions and exercises for Students

These can be asked either before or after the workshop -- use them to help develop the enthusiasm the workshop creates. Invent more and invent your own!

- What would you like to write about? What kinds of books do you enjoy?
- Who are your favorite authors? Why?
- Find 10 words you enjoy the sound of and look them up in the dictionary?
- Make up 12 silly names for characters. Describe these characters.
- What is the worst place (setting) you can imagine? What does it look like? Smell like? Sound like?
- Describe the way an ugly sound feels in your stomach...
- List 10 things that can make an unhappy girl (or boy) smile.
- Write and then read aloud one paragraph (at least) a day.
- Tip on writing a long story or novel: write one page a day. At the end of 365 days -- a year -- you'll have 365 pages!

About Mark Binder

Mark Binder is an author, a storyteller, and a nice guy. He's written dozens of books and half dozen audio recordings. More than 200 of his stories for young and old have been published in magazines, anthologized in books, and used on standardized tests. His "Bedtime Story Book" collection is a multigenerational masterpiece with more than 60,000 copies in print. He is an award-winning recording artist, the founder of the American Story Theater, and teaches a college course in "Telling Lies." For the latest, please visit TransmitJoy.com

Additional Reading

Mark Binder's excellent books and audio on Amazon.com and at transmitjoy.com/store/
Johnstone, Keith. Impro - Improvisation and the Theater, Methuen, 1989.