

Brainstorming for a Short Story

You've been asked to write a short story. Short stories allow a lot of room for creativity, but most contain common elements: characters, setting, conflicts, and plot line. Stories are also told from a certain point of view. Before beginning your story, brainstorm ideas for all these aspects.



If you've been asked to write a story based on a certain historical event, first choose that event. For example, you might write a story set during the Civil Rights March on Washington, or The Battle of Little Big Horn, or the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. Choose an event that you already know something about and that is meaningful to you.

Your turn! Brainstorm at least five events, then choose the one you want to write about

My event: _____

Next, Think of a plot line that makes sense with this event and that would be short enough for a short story. Remember that in a plot, one event should lead to the next, then to the next, and so on until you have a climax and some resolution after the climax. In some way your character(s) or world (or both) should be different at the end of your story than at the beginning.

Your turn! Brainstorm some ideas that would go well with your chosen event. Once you've done that, choose those you think best for a coherent plot line. You can of course make changes to your plot once you actually begin your story:

My plot: _____

Characters

Who will people your story? You will need a main character, and often there will also be an antagonist (someone who is opposed to your main character in some way), though that is not required. You may also have other supporting characters. Will one or more of your characters be historical or will they all be invented? That is for you to decide. Brainstorm a few characters for your story:

Conflict

Conflict is crucial to a story. What does your main character want and what keeps them from getting it? Do they finally achieve their goal, and if so, how? Brainstorm ideas for conflict for at least your main character and possibly others. Remember characters can experience conflicts with other characters, with society, with nature, and within themselves.

Setting

This may already be determined by the event you chose, but just in case, brainstorm some ideas about where and when your story is set:

Point of View

Finally, who is telling this story? It could be first person point of view (I did this) or third person point of view (he did that). The focus character is usually the main character, but it doesn't have to be. Brainstorm at least two or three ideas for who could tell this story and in what voice (first or third person). As you write the story, you may find that you want to change the point-of-view character, so it's good to have more than one idea here.

Now you're ready to begin your outline!