

THE LIFEWRITING 10-WEEK WORKSHOP

by Steven Barnes and Tananarive Due

WEEK #1 Intro

Welcome! This workshop will teach the fundamentals that will serve as your bedrock for every screenplay or piece of fiction you write. It is designed to give you a lens by which to realistically measure the quality of your story, characters and visual narrative. You will have a sense of what a writer's life is like, what obstacles to expect, and strategies to not only create your best writing.

By the end of these ten weeks, you will understand everything you need to create what we call a "machine", or a "garden"--the process that will take you to producing the best writing of your life.

Our recommendation is that you write a short story every week, applying the ideas contained in these videos. Short stories are recommended NOT novels, until you have sold (and been paid for!) about five stories. Many reasons for this, but the core idea is that you don't run a marathon until you have run around the block.

Here's a very fine piece of advice, created by combining the thoughts of Science Fiction greats Ray Bradbury and Robert Heinlein:

1. Write a story a week, or a story every other week.
2. Put them in the mail.
3. Keep them in the mail until they sell.
4. Don't rewrite except to editorial request.
5. Don't graduate to novels until you have sold five short stories.

Now, you're adults, and are going to do as you wish, but this is our advice.

We're going to discuss film a LOT, and there are multiple reasons for this. All you need to do to translate most of this discussion to prose is read poetry and short stories. You'll pick it up.

But the reason we use film is, again, multi-level. But one is that screenwriting is in many ways the highest level of the storyteller's art. The competition is higher and more intense, and the product reaches the widest audience. The lessons you'll learn by studying screenwriting will apply to any other writing you need to learn.

Most importantly, you will learn plot, characterization, theme, image systems, pacing, genre and much more. By watching a movie a week and reading the screenplay as you do, you can absorb a fantastic amount of information while having fun. And having fun is the very best way to learn.

You are about to learn writing from the inside out .

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The study of any writing craft is a process that takes years to master. Anyone who tells you otherwise is not helping you succeed, they're trying to sell you something. And no matter how good a writer you are now or will be in the future, you can always become better through study and practice. Never stop growing as a writer.

The notion of "getting rich" is a terrible reason to take a writing class. I secretly might hope to get rich from my writing one day, but the only way you can produce the writing that would make me rich is to write what is closest to your heart. So write fiction and screenplays for one reason only: you love it.

There is value in learning how screenplays are written even if ultimately decide you don't want to be a screenwriter. How is that? Why is that?

How to proceed:

1. Watch the first video.
2. Download the courses: “Tananarive Due’s Secrets To A Writer’s Life” and enjoy.
3. Download the “Ancient Child” program and use it. Understanding the tools and tropes of writing will not help you at all if you cannot control your emotions and daily behaviors. The Ancient Child will give you focus, emotional healing and control, access to creativity, clarity, and countless other tools no MFA program in the world can teach you.
4. The first week’s movie is THE PURSUIT OF HAPPYNESS. It is of course available through Netflix (DVD, not streaming, unfortunately) but also through other video services (Amazon Prime, etc.) We will discuss the basic universal structure of story as we go through the course, but this is where you start. We discussed the film during the original LIFEWRITING 10 WEEK TELECONFERENCE, and if you weren’t on that call, HERE’S the [link](#). Enjoy!
5. Join the Facebook Lifewriting Group. There, you will find writers at many different levels, and at different stages of their journey through this course. Ask anything you wish concerning this course, and your path ahead. This is a place to share, learn, grow, and help others.

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The text we will reference most often is the Robert McKee screenwriting craft classic Story. Even those in Hollywood who disagree with McKee have all read Story; it is the screenwriting standard, period. This book will start your library. Keep it. Return to it again and again. If you’re stuck on character or scene, go back to McKee’s chapters and remind yourself of what you already know. You might discover your own language for

writing in agreement or opposition to McKee's method. Or, you'll agree strongly with some parts, disagree with others. It's a valuable text for any writer to learn.

This is week #1, so we'll talk about the first step in the Hero's Journey, our core story structure approach, but also the way we will organize our emotional resources for the journey.

The first step is: THE HERO IS CONFRONTED WITH THE CHALLENGE.

We will talk a LOT more about this, from many different directions. But right now, we challenge you with becoming the writer you were born to be. With finishing this course, step by step. With watching the videos, doing the work, and learning the lessons.

You've taken the first step--actually joining the class. Congratulations! You are our kind of people!

Talk to you again soon...

Steve and Tananarive