One Painting is worth one thousand short stories



Introduction to the Book

Have you ever been to a museum and been captured by a particular painting? Felt like touching it, establishing a contact in order to discover what you might learn from it? What ideas, insights, or questions sprang to your mind?

A single two-surfaced composition can be a source of inspiration and it has been so for many writers who expanded their initial attraction into a well-developed story that captured the attention of a multitude of readers.

Why only them? Couldn't also you be able to do like them and write a story after a painting that stimulated in you a particular reaction?

The purpose of this book is twofold: first of all, it's a reflection on what is at the heart of a creative writing process, facing a number of simultaneous constraints that characterize from the inset the dynamics of composing. There will be an analysis of the archetypal plots and characters that are found in a short story and an investigation in the working of the creative mind of a young adult.

Secondly, it will be a practical guide on how to write a short story based on a painting from the past. You will be taken by the hand and guided into a journey that will allow you to write a short story about a painting that you consider special, particularly inspiring, that captured your curiosity and heart.

About the Author

Roberto Cuccu has been a teacher of English Language and Literature in an Italian Secondary School.
He collaborated with the University of Cagliari, Sardinia, as contract professor for ESP (English for Specific Purposes) and for Use of Multimedia in Teaching English. In addition, he has worked as teachers' trainers, educational multimedia consultant and designer for online museums, using the M.U.S.E. (Museums United with Schools in Education) approach, based on multiple intelligences.

Realizing the central role of human development in a digital world, he has been experimenting ways to ride these two horses at the same time: a holistic approach to learning along with enhancing learning and teaching through the use of Digital. He has published, among others, a book bases on Case Studies on how to help overcoming blocks in learning.

Purpose of the Reading Guide

This Reading Guide should help to have a general idea about the facts described in this book. It should also inspire to interact with a painting when you see one that you like.
The philosopher and novelist Umberto Eco wrote in ***Lector in Fabula*** about the interpretative cooperation between writer and reader and he stated that once a writer publishes a novel a reader is allowed to complete and interpret it according to his/her own personal experience. So, it becomes a collaborative creation. The same could be said about a painting; if you see something in it that the artist did not imagine at the time, it could be added to its value as a work of art that inspires reflection and change.

This book should also demonstrate that all of us, if supported in the right way, can create a short story, even one with a message to make readers reflect.

Overview of the Book

In the first part there will be an **introduction to the literary genre Short Story**, followed by how to **motivate would-be writers to be active participants** in a learning process and how to interact creatively with a painting.

There will be the results of an analysis on the use of creative imagination in young writers, their preferred **fictional archetypes**, the way they **connect their imaginary world to their real life** and feelings, and their use of the elemental masculine and feminine principles in the construction of their stories.

Then you'll **be guided step by step through the creative process** of writing a short story. If you think about it as a single act, you might be discouraged, as it is not in itself a simple and immediate process. But as are introduced gradually through the stages of the creative process, you will find it achievable and you should be able to complete each of its stages.

There will be practical examples from students who underwent the same experience, at first doubtful of their own abilities to create something original and inspiring, but with the appropriate support, they managed to **overcome the obstacles, learn something more about the writing process, and not only that,** and eventually acquire some expertise in this field. This was made it possible also thanks to a straightforward pragmatic approach, based on a logical analysis and an inner trigger that an outside element, such as a painting, could stimulate as a starting point in an internal journey.

In the fourth part of this book, you'll find **a collection of short stories written by teenagers about paintings** that are considered works of art representative of our age. What is interesting is that one single painting has inspired many tales, fiction and facts have been intermingled in such a way that after reading these stories you will not be any longer sure of which is real and which is just over imposed fiction.

Key Themes and Main Ideas

- Teenagers can develop their self-esteem by making mistakes, learning from their mistakes, holding themselves accountable for their actions.
- We should not judge their ideas and opinions. Instead, we should listen and then offer our own views as plainly and honestly as possible. Love and mutual respect can coexist with differing points of view.
- When teenagers recognize their strengths, accept their weaknesses, then they can apply that knowledge to help them find the best path to life success.
- Curiosity will help teenagers be open to possibilities, acquire new information, make discoveries, and stir creativity so they are inspired to follow their dreams.

Understanding the strategies put into practice

Sometimes in my career as teacher of English literature I have used some unusual strategies to help students express their inner self. The day-to-day school routine does not allow individuals to express themselves, but just to conform to what is required to learn. This project allowed them to learn how to work in a team, respecting others' opinions and points of view while at the same time finding ways to forward their own ones. It gave teenagers a moment with themselves, to reflect about their lives and see inside themselves who they really are. It also helped to create a rapport with other classmates and with their teacher. The potentialities of young human beings are expressed by all the participants in this proposed experience.

Chapter-by-Chapter Summary

1. THE LITERARY GENRE CALLED SHORT STORY:
   What is a short story?
   Archetypes in Narrative plots
   The creative imagination of a teenager.
   Analysis of the archetypes in the collection of short stories.
   The Work of a Writer. The Historical research behind Novels.
   Differences between a novel and its film version.
   The Girl with a pearl earring: novel and film script.
   First example: The beginning of the story.
   Second example: Griet's chores.
   Third example: the subjective point of view.

2. A PEDAGOGY FOR CREATIVE WRITING
   Active learner – Active writer.
   Cognitive approach to the painting .
   Introduction to the creative writing project.
   Preliminary skills - How to describe and interact with an image.
   Describing a static scene.
   Describing a person.
   Describing a moment.
   How to write and format a dialogue in fiction.
   Samples of students' assignments.
   Initial objective observation.
   Personal interpretation of the image.
   Interaction with the situation portrayed.
   Interaction with the person in the painting with dialogue.

3. HOW TO WRITE A SHORT STORY BASED ON A PAINTING.
   Introduction.
   The Narrative text.
   Plot and Conflict.
   The opening line.
   Narrators.
   Setting.
   Characters.
   Details.
   Dialogue.
   Figurative language.
   Edit your short story.
   Narrative Story Planning.
   Plan, before you start writing.
   An example of Climax in a short story.

4. STEPS IN THE CREATION OF THE SHORT STORY.
   First part of the narrative.
   Introduction.
   Inciting Action.
   The Middle sections of the short story.
   Climax and Falling action and End of the story.
   Personal Feedback and Peer Review.
   Ideas to trigger your inspiration.
   The Workshop's participants and their feedback.
   Learning from teenagers.
   Feedback from students at the end of their writing experience.
   Storytelling and Real life.

5. COLLECTION OF SHORT STORIES.
   Lady Lilith, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1868
   The Spirit, George Roux, 1885
   The lovers, René Magritte, 1928
   Diogenes, John W. Waterhouse, 1882
   The traveller on the sea of fog, Caspar David Friedrich, 1818
   A Song of Springtime, John W. Waterhouse, 1913
   Ophelia, John Everett Millais,1852
   Guernica, Pablo Picasso, 1937
   The Kiss, Francesco Hayez, 1859
   The Last Supper, Leonardo Da Vinci, 1498
   Madame Charpentier with her children, P. A. Renoir, 1878
   The raft of the Medusa, Theodore Géricault, 1818
   La liberté guidant le people, Eugéne Delacroix, 1830
   Lamia and the soldier, John W. Waterhouse, 1905
   The Son of Man, René Magritte, 1964
   The kiss, Francesco Hayez, 1859
   Siesta, Paul Gauguin, 1894
   The kiss, Francesco Hayez, 1859
   Primavera, Sandro Botticelli,1480
   The Soul of the Rose, John W. Waterhouse, 1908
   The Scream, Edvard Munch, 1893

Important Concepts and Learning Strategies

Sometimes, teenagers were helped to abstract themselves for a short time from the daily routines and habits of mind, and visualize themselves in a new multisensorial situation that allowed them to express inner and unexpected feelings they had in themselves and for others.

They were supported to develop their argumentative skills, that would help them in their near future, in a job interview, in defending someone else, and so on. They were also led to write something in a creative way, finding in themselves new ideas, alternative ways to tell a story, and communicate something important to others.

In this book there are some ideas you might find useful when you find yourself stuck and don't know how to continue with the story you are writing. They are just possibilities, if in need you just can try the ones you like the best.

Reading Comprehension Questions

- How to make ancient history appealing, involving for the new generations?
- How to transform a classroom that is not particularly motivated to learn new things in different subjects into one that becomes active in their learning process?
- What is the role of visualization in some of the activities described in the book?
- What happened at the end of many of these experiences described in this book?

Book Club Discussion Questions

- Is there a difference between books written only on a theoretical background or books that are based also on real experiences and show how valid those theories are?
- Have you noticed the different approaches to involve students?
- Would you like to contact the writer of this book and share experiences and ask questions?

Personal Reflection Questions

- Have you ever found a teacher that did not judge you, but helped you empathically to find in yourself alternatives to ways of learning that were not effective for you?
- As we are all different, do you use a different approach when dealing with a person who is your son, daughter, husband, wife or friend?
- Which of these short stories has interested you the most, and why?

Practical Exercises and Activities

- In our present age, we are always surrounded by outside stimuli, but do you find ways to relax and find your inner self sometimes, in order to reflect or feel something from inside you, instead of reacting to what is outside of you?
- When dealing with another person try to deal in an empathic way, without judging the ideas different from yours, but try to put yourself in their shoes and see how you would react to some circumstances.
- When you see a painting that you find interesting, or a novel you like, complete these works of art with some of your personal ideas or emotions, like when you have in your hand a message in a bottle and you read it and react to that message.

Applying the Lessons to Everyday Life

- If you have children or students, try to see how to involve them as active learners, so that they feel not passive subjects but leading their own life.
- Sometimes young people don't really know where to find in themselves a source of happiness, they depend often on what is offered through a cellular phone, a video game or the Internet. So, after you have found a way to discover in yourself your source of love, try to help others in doing so.

Key Takeaways

- If you help someone who has a problem in learning, behaving, or in another field, you are not only giving something precious to another person, the connection you create in order to understand and help the other one is also something that you receive yourself, from the new relationship you have created. It's a two-way channel, give and receive.

Final Reflections and Conclusion

What about learning from teenagers who have just started writing stories? They are supremely underestimated in terms of drive, passion, and intelligence, all three of which the participants to the Creative Writing project had in spades.

Being a creative teen can be difficult. Sometimes teens feel that if they set expectations low, they can't disappoint their already judgmental audience.

These teenagers who completed successfully the whole writing process can be taken as an example for many others. They took risks and pursued their dreams with their full heart and soul. **They found their own voice in the narrative process**, and as the collection of short stories will surely prove, they gave free rein to their imagination and inner soul to achieve what they had never **thought be possible for them. Their experience as first-time writers could be called, in a way, pristine, innocent**, as they were not concerned with publish contracts, keeping up with previous works, being different for its own sake, but just with expressing their dreams and letting themselves go, wherever their inspiration took them.

Some of the insights they had during their writing experience could help us have a better understanding of the creative process.

In conclusion, why do we tell stories?

From the collection of short stories based on paintings, and from the reflections of the writers on their personal experience, we could ultimately draw a few insights on the creative process that is behind the writing of a fictional narrative.

- First of all, **stories can heal;** they can mend what is torn, and patch what is missing.
- We read them and we write them **to see beneath the surface of things.** Sometimes we need to add an imaginative effort to a list of mere facts, so that ultimately our creative stories become '**true lies'**.
- It's an opportunity to **care for others** beyond ourselves, to show a possible future where some of the discriminations we suffer at the present are no longer there.
- A short story follows a plan, has a final message to the readers, and often it shows **how to translate suffering into meaning**.
- Imaginative fiction based on historical facts may be able to take up broken threads and tie them off, helping us to **understand the past and so also our present condition**.
- Writers have to try to perceive beyond their ego's too-often miniscule understanding, **achieving a wider and more inclusive set of perspectives to observe life**. Stories become compelling when our perceptions of reality are challenged or changed in some way..