

Prompts for The Little Box of Inspiration

This is the first and last line of a short story. Fill in the middle.

A slender girl and her mother lived in our town, good people but poor.

There was something strange about that illegal soup factory on Sovetskaya Militsiya Street, everybody said so, but nobody knew for sure.

Little Pot – Ilya Kaminsky

This is the first and last line of a short story. Fill in the middle.

You are in her room, on her bed, as she paces angrily and tells you about Ridiculous Boyfriend #9 and their relationship, which (mercifully) has just ended.

You have no idea how much I love you.

Without Saying – David Levithan

At birth, everyone has the date they will die tattooed on their arm. Chris was supposed to die yesterday.

Literally everything about this is illegal. ...

Jamie finds a stack of 'missing persons' news clippings under his/her/their parents' bed. All with Jamie's photo.

A serial killer has been monitoring the movements of his next victim for months. The victim is a loner and the perfect target. One day the victim disappears and no one notices but the killer.

This is the first and last line of a short story. Fill in the middle.

People never change the place they hide their keys

The door closes and I walk away.

Breaking and Entering – David Levithan

If we were all forced to wear a warning label, what would yours say? And your best friend's?

Ominous shadows danced over the smouldering ruins of the Academy. ...

This is the first and last line of a short story. Fill in the middle.

My father lost me to the The Beast at cards.

My earrings turned back to water and trickled down my shoulders; I shrugged the drops off my beautiful fur.

The Tiger's Bride – Angela Carter

Two best friends each make a New Year's Resolution. But for either of them to succeed, the other must fail.

Take the main characters from your two favourite books/TV shows/Films and send them on a road trip together.

This is the first and last line of a short story. Fill in the middle.

Two Jehovah's Witnesses, suffering in hot clothes, found the bodies a little before the cloudburst.

He knew that much anyway.

A Country Killing – Annie Proulx

Cassie's grandmother has Alzheimer's, but she's the only one who ever knew the family secret that Cassie now needs to unravel. Cassie goes to see her. Write the scene where they talk.

The hypodermic slid smoothly under his skin and every doubt he'd had was replaced by chemical confidence. Suddenly, he couldn't wait to get started. ...

This is the first and last line of a short story. Fill in the middle.

You stand there, braced.

If you believe that you'll believe anything.

People in Hell Just Want a Drink of Water – Annie Proulx

1. Write down a list of things usually associated with a stereotypical princess (eg rich, pretty etc)
2. Write the opposite of all those things, being as specific as possible (eg don't say 'poor', say 'living rough under the Sydenham bypass').
3. Pick a few of your opposites and base a princess character on it. What does this princess want most in the world? Write the opening of the story.

Sarah is looking through a box of old photos of herself as a baby when she discovers a death certificate with her own name on saying she died aged 2. She also finds an adoption certificate of a 2-year-old girl dated the same year. She confronts her parents: write the conversation in the form of a script.

This is the first and last line of a short story. Fill in the middle.

There is a sudden silence and then everything is the same.

We watch the door and wait for somebody to come through it.

Notes from the House Spirits – Lucy Wood

Write the first chapter of your memoir – This doesn't have to be from the very beginning of your life, but it should be significant – i.e. an event/period of your life that stands out/sums you up/defines you/made you who you are etc.

Write a chapter from the point of view of one of your minor characters or your antagonist or a minor character in a book you've read. This should be about THEIR story, not their view of the main character's story. They are the main character of their own lives.

Write about something you're angry about but write it from the point of view of the person you're angry with or write it as a comedy.

Write a diary entry for today, either for yourself or for a character you're working on.

This is the first and last line of a short story. Fill in the middle.

She didn't hear him arrive.

She took his small brown hand and lifted it to her cheek and closed her eyes like someone who hadn't known till now how tired they were, and then she asked him, would he help her, please, to dig the hole.

The Quiet – Carys Davies

In *The Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon*, the 11th century Japanese poet and courtier created a series of lists based on her daily life. Her topics included 'hateful things' ('A carriage passes by with a nasty, creaking noise'), 'elegant things' ('A pretty child eating strawberries), 'things that have lost their power' ('A large tree that has been blown down in a gale and lies on its side with its roots in the air'), and 'things that should be large' ('Men's eyes), among others. The list form allowed her to celebrate, or denigrate, details that may have otherwise been passed by unnoticed. Try to invent a list of your own as a poem – the more specific, the better.

Write about what the body (your own, other people's, in the media?) means to you.

In his poem, 'Rain', poet Kevin Prufer creates a distinctive atmosphere through repetition: 'Rain made red leaves stick to car windows. / Rain made the houses vague. A car / slid through rain past rows of houses.' The poem begins innocently enough, but the accumulation of the word 'rain' soon brings it into a nightmarish territory. Try choosing one word and letting its repetition guide you through a poem or story.

Write a story in a style/genre you never usually use, but which someone else in the room really loves. Write it as a gift to them.

In a new program that debuted earlier this month, the majority of employees at a technology company in Wisconsin agreed to have microchips implanted into their hands, which allow them to swipe into the office building and purchase food at the cafeteria. Many of the employees see the program as an opportunity to participate in cutting-edge technology that they believe will be standard protocol in the near future. Given the choice, would you opt in or opt out? Write a personal essay, poem or story about your perspective on this issue, perhaps exploring how your opinion about the incorporation of technology into everyday life may have changed over the years, and your feelings about the prospect of integrating technology into your body.

Write a poem to say sorry for something

The Oseberg ship was found in a Viking burial mound. Among the grave-goods, two female human skeletons were discovered. One woman had high status; the other was probably a slave, sacrificed to accompany her in death.

Write a story or poem from the point of view of the slave woman. Was she ordered to die? Did she volunteer? How did she feel about her mistress? About dying? Who did she leave behind? Did she get to choose how she died? Who killed her? Did she go first or the mistress? What was her last request?

This is the first and last line of a short story. Fill in the middle.

On a windless day in November, shortly after sunrise, she saw a squirrel at the landing place.

On a windless day in November, shortly after sunrise, she saw a person at the landing place.

The Squirrel – Tove Jansson

Ernest Hemmingway once wrote a short story that was 6 words long, complete with beginning, middle and end. This is it –

For sale. Baby shoes. Never worn.

First, identify which bits are the beginning, middle and end of the story. Is it chronological?

Try writing a short story in fifteen words or fewer including a beginning, middle and end.

If you're stuck, stop trying to 'come up with something'. Instead, try to 'get something down'. Ie start trying to describe what's going on around you, the thoughts running through your head. You don't have to invent anything, you just have to transcribe what's there onto the page. When you've done that you can go back and look at it and if there's anything that jumps out at you that you'd like to develop, go for it.

Answer the following question ten different ways:

Teenagers are.....

Could any of your answers be the start of a story, a first line, an idea?

This is the first and last line of a short story. Fill in the middle.

I was under the bed when Emily died.

I closed my eyes, though this was entirely unnecessary on account of the darkness, and I wondered, in the morning, if my father would wake uneasy, if my mother would find the house emptier without me.

In Feet and Gradual Inches – Jan Carson