



## Creative Writing Guide Lesson Plan

**Grade Levels:** 5th thru 8th

**Skills:** Students learn to use language in imaginative ways, analyze text, and improve their overall writing skills.

**Resources:** Stone Soup Magazine, *The Stone Soup Book of Friendship Stories*, *Animal Stories by Young Writers*, published by Tricycle Press, 1998, 2000.

**Worksheets:** *Metaphor and Simile Worksheet*, *Story Elements Worksheet*, *Letter to the Author*.

### Words with Special Meanings:

**Simile:** A comparison of two essentially unlike things, using the word “like” or “as”.

**Metaphor:** A comparison that says something IS something else.

**Plot:** The chain of events which create a story.

**Characterization:** Description of the distinctive traits and qualities of a character.

**Conflict:** When two forces or desires in a story come in opposition.

**Setting:** Where and when the story takes place.

**Point-of-View:** The narrator’s perspective of the story.

**Introduction:** Stone Soup Magazine and the Stone Soup Anthologies, *The Stone Soup Book of Friendship Stories* and *Animal Stories by Young Writers*, encourage young writers by giving them a forum for their work. Many children and young adults have the desire to write and stories to tell. We created this curriculum to teach them some of the building blocks of good writing and good story-telling. By reading and analyzing the writing of kids their age, students will feel closer to the process of writing and discover the unique stories they have to tell.

**About this Lesson Plan:** This lesson plan contains three worksheets to be used in conjunction with the Stone Soup anthologies. The lesson plan is geared towards grades 5th through 8th and can be used for skill development, comprehension development and/or exploration into the writing process.

### Procedure:

**Read selected stories from** *The Stone Soup Book of Friendship Stories* and *Animal Stories by Young Writers*.

**In class,** distribute and review the *Metaphor and Simile Worksheet* and the *Story Elements Worksheet*, discussing how the young writers in the Stone Soup books used various short story elements to bring their writing to life. Note that both the story elements and metaphor and simile worksheets ask questions that could be extended into writing assignments. Continue with the “Letter to the Author” activity. As a homework activity, ask students to create their own short stories using the short story elements they have learned.

**Further Possibilities:** Ask each student to bring in an image from a magazine. This image should be something that has sparked the student’s imagination in some way. Have each student write one metaphor and one simile that is inspired by the picture.

Created by Tricycle Press  
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# Stone Soup



## GUIDE TO METAPHORS AND SIMILES

### DEFINITIONS

**Simile:** A comparison of two essentially unlike things, using the word “like” or “as”.

**Metaphor:** A comparison that says something IS something else.

Can you find three animal metaphors in your favorite stories from *Animal Stories by Young Writers*? Write them down here!

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What do you think? Are they good matches?

☐ Yes, it was love at first sight.

☐ No, it's a blind date disaster!

*The authors of the stories in Stone Soup are kids just about your age. They use metaphors and similes in their writing to liven it up, make it more interesting, and to fill their readers' heads with images that will make the characters and their actions come alive for them. The better the metaphor or simile, the more the reader will be drawn into your story.*

### A BIT OF HISTORY:

Back in the days of togas and forums, the greeks had the word “metapherein” the ancestor of our word “metaphor.” The Greek root word “meta” means “to change or transform” (as in “metamorphosis”) and “pherein” means “to bear.”



In the metaphor “a cascade of thoughts” from the story “Fantasizing Emma,” the two nouns “cascade” and “thoughts” are brought together to transform one another's meaning and create a fresh picture. Each word “bears” on or influences the other: instead of gushing water, the cascade gushes thoughts. The thoughts, instead of staying still, are flowing one on top of the other like cascading water. A metaphor brings together two separate things and creates a relationship between them. Think of it as playing matchmaker and arranging a blind date. This leads us to...



### TWO WARNINGS!!

When you use a metaphor or a simile in your writing to create a relationship between two words, you're expanding and deepening the meaning of the words. But BEWARE of what you bring together, like a blind date gone wrong, the chemistry may be off and the results, disastrous—in other words, you may end up with what

all good writers dread: an unsuccessful metaphor or simile.

Here's an example: If you're writing a love poem, for goodness sake don't write, "her cheeks were as rosy as a brick wall." That's not saying much for the girl's complexion. How about, "her cheeks were a wash of rosy watercolor." "Cheeks" and "rosy watercolor" are a much better pair than "cheeks" and "brick wall."

A lot of clichés—such as "tired as a dog"—are similes and metaphors. These expressions have been so overused that the comparisons have lost their power. You can be sure that the first time anyone ever used the phrase "tired as a dog" it sounded fresh and conveyed to the reader its image of an old dog on a rug sleeping the day away. Nowadays people are so used to hearing this expression that the image barely registers.

Conclusion? If you want your metaphors and similes to have real punch, find good matches and discover comparisons that have never been used before.



### QUICK BREAKDOWN:

A **SIMILE** compares one thing to another, usually using the words "like" or "as". For example you could say, "the raindrops were as big as pancakes" or "the raindrops were like pancakes, they were so big." Both of these examples are similes.

Similes also compare actions: "Anna walks like a clown on stilts" uses simile to compare two separate actions. One action is Anna walking, the other is a clown walking on stilts.

A **METAPHOR** is a lot like a simile. It compares one thing or action to another. The difference is that a metaphor doesn't just say that one thing is like another. It says that one thing **IS** another thing. For example: "I gave Bertrand crystal clear directions." This is a metaphor. The reader is being told that the directions ARE crystal clear which, if this were literally true, would surely make them unusual. (What are they, carved on a piece of glass?!) But we intuitively know that this is a metaphor and an example of figurative language. It explains that the directions given to Bertrand were perfectly comprehensible and it was no doubt his fault that he got lost!



# Stone Soup

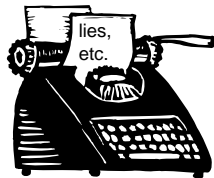


## Guide to Story Elements

Here's a secret: ALL GOOD WRITERS LIE.

*“The great thing about writing short stories is that it's one of the few instances in life when it's okay to lie. Unlike excuses for not doing your homework, the more believable the lies, the better. And you won't get in trouble—at least not unless the reader catches you at it.”*

*—Earnest Lemmingplay*



Every time you open a book to read fiction, you're agreeing to believe lies. It's the writer's job to make you forget you're reading about people who never existed (like Earnest Lemmingplay) doing things they never did and saying things they never said. Here's how they do it.

### CHARACTERIZATION

or A VOLCANO ISN'T MUCH OF A HERO:

A story can do without a lot of things depending on your style—writers for centuries have tried all sorts of zany experiments. Stories have gone without setting, without plot, conflict, or dialogue but you'd have to be pretty crazy to write a story without characters. Try and do it; we bet you 50 barrels of brussels sprouts you can't.

Sure, maybe you could write a story about a volcano that explodes on a deserted Caribbean island however, though the story has a setting, plot, and some kind of point-of-view, (see the entries below) it's not going to make much of a story because unless you give the volcano human-like qualities (personification), the volcano is not

an interesting hero. It sits there; occasionally, it blows its top. No crying, no screaming, no giggling—nada. If you wanted to write a science book that would be a different matter—but it's a story and all stories have one thing in common: characters the reader cares about. Readers want to know what's going to happen to the characters, whether they'll overcome their problems or be defeated by them (which, by the way, is the definition of a **TRAGEDY**). Readers can even care about a character who's a bad guy or gal, desperately wanting them to get what's coming to them.

Think of some of the characters in the *Stone Soup* stories that you really liked. Were they narrating the story or not? What made you like them? Can you spot the little tricks the writer used to paint a vivid character? Here's an example: In "A Christmas Secret", author Laura Chaddock gives this characterization of Drew:

*Every year, he asked Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, even the Tooth Fairy, to bring his parents back together, but it never happened. Last year, he stopped believing in them.*

Laura's trying to make you, the reader, understand Drew, what he feels and what made him who he is, so you can care about him and want to know what will happen to him.



## PLOTS

### NOT JUST FOR DEAD PEOPLE

Something happens: a volcano explodes, a girl and her dog become trapped on a ledge in the headlands, a boy attends an after-school writing group, two kids meet on a bus. Some plots are action-packed, others are more subtle. A plot describes the action in the story—this can be physical action (the girl on the headlands) or emotions that lead to action (a girl questions her friends' teasing of a fellow classmate and extends her friendship to the tormented girl.)

## Some Quick Definitions

**Characterization:** Description of the distinctive traits and qualities of a character.

**Setting:** Where and when the story takes place.

**Plot:** The chain of events which make a story.

**Conflict:** What stands in the way of a character and her/his goal.

**Setting:** The where and the when of a story.

**Research:** Finding out about a subject in your story to make sure the details are accurate.

**Point-of-View:** The narrator's perspective of the story.

Each example of plot in the above paragraph (aside from the volcano, which, we promise, won't make any more appearances) comes from *The Stone Soup Book of Friendship Stories*. Can you find which ones?

## CONFLICT

### or STORMY SEAS AHEAD

*Something went wrong. We were sailing and it was a clear, sunny day when a strong wind blew out of the north and tore our sail. We managed to gain control of the boat but the question remained, how were we going to get home?*

Conflict is a difficulty the characters must address and, possibly, attempt to overcome. It doesn't always have to be a physical danger (like the tear in the sail). It can be an emotion that creates problems between characters: a sister's jealousy, a shy young boy anxiety in front of his classmates. Conflict is what makes your stomach tighten up when you're reading a story. That feeling is also known as **TENSION** and when you're writing a story, you want the reader to feel lots of it.

## SETTING

or HAVE I INTRODUCED YOU TO  
HAVANA, MR. HEMINGWAY?

The great writer Ernest Hemingway used to say, "think of setting as another character in the story." Think of the places you love. What makes your favorite beach different from, say, a similar beach down the coast? Is it the winding inlet that flows into a warm, salty, swimming hole? Is there a horse ranch nearby so that riders trot by in the afternoons? There are many beaches with beautiful sunsets and nearly every beach in the world has salty air and a pounding surf—why is your beach different? Often a story benefits from a concrete setting: "Sessy lived in Bluffdale, Utah" gives your imagination a lot more than "Sessy lived in a small suburban town." Carolyn Nash in her story, "Sunbeams," sets her story on the shores of Lake Superior and you believe she's been there when she says, "most people think Lake Superior water is too cold for swimming in mid-July." How else would she know this unless she'd actually been there?

Setting doesn't always have to be given a lot of attention. It's up to you to decide how important the setting is to the story. There are stories that don't even have settings.

Can you make a list of five Stone Soup story settings? Can you find a story that doesn't have a setting? Why do you think the writer decided a setting wasn't necessary for this story?

A Lying Writer



Yeah, Lemmingplay was a buddy of mine. Taught him everything he knows.

## RESEARCH

or I MADE THEM BELIEVE I WAS BORN IN  
TUSCALOOSA

Actually, this is a way of cheating. Carolyn Nash didn't need to go to Lake Superior to find out the water is cold in July. She could have made that up, in which case if the reader had been to Lake Superior in July and knew the water to be quite warm then, he or she could have said, "I don't believe this story." You never want your reader to say that. So if Carolyn wanted to make sure, she would have done research. This is a lot like being a detective or a journalist. Carolyn could have looked up Lake Superior in the encyclopedia and found a chart that listed the water temperature for every month of the year. Or she could have interviewed people who had spent the summer on Lake Superior. Research helps you dig up details that make the story more believable.

## POINT-OF-VIEW

or YOU CAME AT ME WITH THE GARDEN  
HOSE

Are you, the writer, telling the story? Is your character telling it? Who is she telling it to? Take a look at your favorite *Stone Soup* stories and try to answer the question: who is telling this story?

Close your eyes. No, really do it. Imagine a sunny hillside and a cottage at the foot of it. Laura and Bob live in the cottage and they're arguing about what to eat for lunch. Now, if you described the scene looking down at the cottage from the top of the hill, you would tell it something like this, "Laura walked out into the garden. She picked up the garden hose. Bob waved his hands saying, 'No!' but Laura sprayed water in his face anyway." This is called a "third-person point-of-view." The narrator is an observer and isn't involved in the story at all. A first-person narration might be told by Laura and so would sound like this: "I walked out into the garden. I picked up the garden hose. Bob waved his hands

saying, 'No!', but I sprayed the water in his face anyway." Can you write the story from Bob's first-person point-of-view?

There is a second-person point-of-view but it's kind of strange. In second-person, the narrator is telling the story to one of the characters from **INSIDE THAT CHARACTER'S HEAD**. I told you it was strange. If you recounted Laura and Bob's story from a 2nd person point of view it would sound like this: "You walked out into the garden. You picked up the garden hose. Bob waved his hands saying, 'No!' but you sprayed water in his face anyway." There's another way you can tell the story from a second-person point-of-view. Can you find out how? (There's a hint in the heading.) Kelly Brdicka chose the second person point of view for her story "Voice of the Gray Wolf," in *Animal Stories for Young Writers*. How does the second person add to the story? What are the weaknesses and limitations of the point-of-view in this story?

## OTHER ELEMENTS

Once you're a pro at the basics, you'll be ready to tame:

**Dialogue:** a conversation between two or more characters. It's often useful to balance descriptive passage with dialogue, to better hold the reader's attention. Good dialogue captures the distinct voice of each character.

**Parody:** imitating a text or situation through wit and humor. If somebody wrote a story called, "I was Cinderella's Podiatrist" that would be a parody of the well-known fairy tale. For a parody to be successful, readers have to be familiar with the subject of the parody.

**Personification:** giving human traits to inanimate objects. (This is the one time a volcano makes a good hero.)

**Suspense:** when the reader knows something the characters don't know. If you want to spot some

good examples of suspense, watch any movie by Alfred Hitchcock. He was so good at it, he was called "The Master of Suspense."

## YOUR TURN: DARE YOU TO TACKLE THESE GUYS

Feeling adventurous? Inspired? Ready to lie and coerce? Ready to mold a character, contrive dialogue, dig up some dirt? Here are two writing ideas to get you started.

### •THE RAIN IN SPAIN FALLS MOSTLY ON THE...WAIT A MINUTE, LET ME LOOK THAT UP

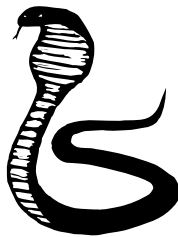
Think of a place you've always wanted to go. This can be anywhere in the world. Go to the library or go online and **RESEARCH** this place. What's the weather like there? What's the landscape like? Are there mountains or plains? What are the names of the towns there? Who or what were they named after? What kind of trees and flower grow there? What kind of names to people have there? What's the history of this place? Set a story there using the information you've found.

### •IF THEY ASK YOU WHAT YOU'RE DOING, TELL THEM YOU'RE PRACTICING YOUR CRAFT

Become a spy: carry a notebook and sneak around jotting down other people's conversations. Notice how people don't talk the way they write—real dialogue is full of "umm"s and "so"s and talk about incomplete sentences! Notice, too, that each person has his or her own way of talking: certain favorite words or expressions, different rhythms and speeds, loud or soft, high or low. Write a dialogue between two characters that speak in very different way, ie., someone from New York and someone from the Southern states. How do these elements change the wording and rhythm of the sentence?

**Now off to the land of Pushcarts and Pulitzers!**  
(FYI, those are the prizes you'll win one day.)

**Bon Voyage!**



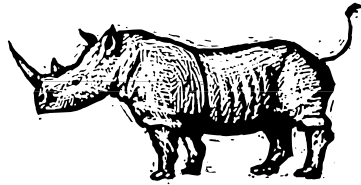
# Letter to the Author



Pick your favorite story from the two Stone Soup anthologies. Who wrote it? How old were they when they wrote it? Now turn to the back of the book to the “About the Contributors” section and read up on the author’s biography. You’re going to write them a letter about their story!

- What was it about the short story that you liked? Does anything in the author’s biography give you a clue about what inspired the story?
- Did the writer make good use of characterization? Plot? Conflict? Setting? How did they do this?

Now, using your observations, write a letter on the stationary below...



From the desk of

Dear

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Yours truly,