

FROM READING TO RESPONSE: YOUR OWN WAY, IN YOUR OWN WORDS!

In the excerpt we read from The Loving Nowhere, to create a context or “stage” for fictional characters and a fictional event, James Baker Hall drew on something he obviously knew very, very well, Kentucky basketball. You are to begin work toward a short story about something you know very well.

- A. Getting started: What you know!!! Maybe what you know is the candy counter at a local store, or more specifically, one particular kind of candy. Maybe it is fishing, the lures, the tackle, the different ways to cast, and different fish you might pull up. Or cats. Or muscle cars, or tattoos, or cell phones or trucks. If you can’t think of a topic, think in terms of a setting, such as a river, a bowling alley, a baseball diamond, a soccer field, a school bathroom, your car, a barn, a certain road, etc. It could even be your own room! If you have a topic, settle on a specific setting for that topic—for instance, a certain pond for the fishing, or a tattoo parlor, or a parking lot (muscle cars). As a first step in writing your story, free write one page about your topic and setting. Yes, you can do additional research for your story as Hall probably did, but make sure that you pick a topic you know very well from personal experience.
- B. Write a one-sentence description of an event that could take place in your setting, regarding your topic. With the example of the truck, a wreck or theft comes to mind. But perhaps an act of vandalism or a set of lost keys would be more effective. Remember Hall’s story. What matters isn’t what happens, but how you tell it. Keeping the central event small will mean you can focus on telling the story. At this point if the central event is something you have actually experienced, that is o.k.
- C. Adding a “What IF. . .” A story does need conflict, as in the case of Barbarsweet Zee and Lights Out Lukens. What will the conflict in your story be? Who will the characters in conflict be? (It is possible for a story to have only one character, in which case the conflict will be internal.) Think broadly here, and jazz up your sentence from yesterday. Let your mind wander. What *COULD* happen? To continue the truck example—what if someone *STOLE* the keys. . .who? Why? Then what?
- D. Re-read the description of the dunk in Halls’ story: “so there they went to the hoop, the big mean hammer, the boy, and the ball: like they were all one glorious, uprising DNAish thing: swirling and thrashing body parts looking for a shape, until the boy’s left hand emerged at the top with the ball in its palm, voila, like a cherry on top of a sundae—frozen there momentarily, or so it surely seemed, an impression confirmed on replay, a moment out of time you were called to notice—before he threw el sweet cherry ball into the hole with a mighty thonk and rattle, leaving the very hammer on his athletic powder-blue backside sliding into the photographers.”
Write a description of the central event or moment of central conflict for your story. Try to show very precisely what happened. Practice by watching and writing a description of a person doing a similar action, if possible.
- E. Extend your story by writing backward and forward from this central event. In other words, write what happened just before and just after the central event. Remember that you can’t include everything, and don’t worry about giving all the background or completely narrating the event. You can skip things to just focus on the “good parts.”

When you have completed this step, you’ll have a first draft for peer and teacher review!