

# Step 1

Come up with a story



Did you hear the  
one about...?



## Step 1 – Did you hear the one about...?

**Objective:** To tap into the student's reserve of creativity

**Overview:** The scope of this step is to observe the works of other authors. How do authors get ideas? What makes a great book? Students then begin thinking about themselves as authors. How can I come up with an idea? Is it a worthy one?

### Hints:

1. During this first lesson, give an overview of the 13 steps by referring to the table of contents. Discuss schedule and course expectations. Let older students help plan their own schedules.
2. Have the student select at least one favorite book. Use it for reference throughout this lesson.
3. Give your student the time needed to come up with an idea and then reject it, come up with another idea and then reject it. For some students there will be several tries before the light bulb turns on.
4. Respect the privacy of the student during this time. He may need to daydream or go off alone somewhere just to think. This incubation period is extremely important in any creative endeavor.
5. Listen without much feedback during this period. At this point the student is not seeking advice as much as a sounding board for his ideas.

### Group Activities:

1. Have students share with one another their choices of favorite books. Why is this a favorite? What kind of book is it -- fantasy, historical fiction, comedy, mystery, intrigue, romance, science fiction?
2. Do **Learn #3** in groups of two or three. If you have enough students, give the same list of three items to several groups. It is intriguing to see the different stories that develop from the same set of items. This exercise reinforces this fact: *Since all people are created in God's image, everyone has creative potential.*
3. As a group, do **Learn #4**: *Think of a problem or a conflict that you have had. Could you develop a story around it?* Give each student enough time to consider an example before presenting it to the group.
4. Discuss **Learn #5**: *If you wrote a book about someone in your family, who would it be?* For further discussion: *Why is this person so interesting to you? What is (was) the person's problem, predicament, or dilemma? Would this person's story appeal to others? Why or why not?*
5. Discuss **Learn #5**: *If you returned to a time in history, when and where would it be?* For further discussion: *What about that period of history has the greatest appeal to you? Have you read other books based upon this time period?*
6. Take enough time to thoroughly discuss the first activity in **Learn #7**: *As a family (or group), read Philippians 4:8 and discuss its implications in both reading and writing literature.* For further discussion: *In what ways are my reading and writing choices consistent with this standard?*
7. Discuss the second activity in **Learn #7**: *Discuss the characteristics of a great book.* For further discussion: *You chose one particular book as a favorite. What makes this a "great" book? How is it consistent with Philippians 4:8?*



8. Have older teens read *Reading Between the Lines: A Christian Guide to Literature* by Gene Edward Veith, Jr. (Crossway Books). Also recommended is Veith's *State of the Arts: From Bezalel to Mapplethorpe* (which focuses upon the visual arts but refers to the same principles that apply to literature).
9. In groups of two or three, check off the items in activity #7. Defend your answers before the rest of the group.
10. Do Practice #4 as a group. To be most effective, the room must be totally dark. If necessary, put students in closets (but don't report me to the authorities!). Set the timer for 10 or 15 minutes. After free-writing, have each student read what he wrote. Another idea for releasing creative ideas is to write left-handed (the hand not normally used for writing).
11. Have each student present the story he has conceived so far. This activity is not so much for feedback as for helping the "author" to verbalize his story and providing ideas for other students. In later lessons, students will request feedback from one another.

**Planning:**





# Learn

## How to come up with a story

For some students Step 1 is easy. Are you like this? During a sermon you start to stare out the window, daydreaming. Or when trying to concentrate on washing the dishes, a story just pops into your head. If you are like this, chances are you have TOO MANY stories in your head. Your problem will be deciding which is the BEST one to pursue.

Maybe you are like most of us. Is creating a story hard for you? "I just can't think of anything to write." In this section you will learn how to come up with a plot. Michelangelo, the sculptor, looked at a block of marble and remarked, "In there is an angel!" He saw the potential. You too are a creator of ideas. Somewhere in your mind is a story to be discovered. Our job is to find it. "It's in there!" This sixth grader had the right idea when she said:

*Writing is when you go to class and move your pencil around on your paper and it makes marks so people can tell what you're thinking about.*

Let's try to "crack the nut" and see what kind of story we can find. Just start playing around with ideas. Try these:

1. Think about books that you've loved. Which have been most meaningful to you? You can tell the kind of person you are by the books you love. You can also predict the kind of author you will be by the authors you've admired. Discuss.

☐ These are some books I love:

2. Browse through the public library or your home library to refresh your memory about great books you've read. Choose three and answer the following questions:

☐ Book A

Title

Type: Fantasy? Biography? Historical fiction? Humor?

Why did you like it?



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**□ Book B**

Title

Type: Fantasy? Biography? Historical fiction? Humor?

Why did you like it?

**□ Book C**

Title

Type: Fantasy? Biography? Historical fiction? Humor?

Why did you like it?

**□ Do you see a trend? What kind of books appeal most to you?**

**□ Does this give you an idea about a book to write?**

3. Ideas often come by combining items that don't ordinarily go together. Don't be afraid to think out of the ordinary. With a partner (or in groups of three) combine each of the following sets of objects into a story. Add what you want to make an interesting story, but be sure to include each of the following. Share with the others.

**□ Light bulb, chewing gum, kitten**

**□ Spaghetti, wrench, typewriter**



☐ Paper clip, oak tree, jump rope

☐ Did any of these give you an idea about a book to write?

4. In every great story there is a dilemma, a predicament, or a problem. A boy going to the store to buy bubble gum isn't a great story, but a boy going to the store to buy bubble gum who sees a store robbery could be a great story. A kitten purchased by an old lady isn't a great story, but a kitten purchased by an old lady who had saved pennies for 80 years to buy a kitten could be a great story. Do you see the difference? In the books that you discussed above, what was the dilemma, the predicament, or the problem?

☐ Choose one book and tell the problem, predicament, or dilemma.

☐ Think of a problem or a conflict that you have had. Could you develop a story around it?

5. Some teens have written a fictionalized account of their own family's history. Write about your mother as a young girl or your grandfather as a young boy. Interview them for actual facts and stories. Create a story around their real-life experiences.

☐ If you wrote a book about someone in your family, who would it be?



6. Historical fiction is created around a period of history. You can use the context of a period of history and fictionalize it. Stories like *Johnny Tremain*, *Red Badge of Courage*, or *Little House on the Prairie* are historical fiction. What period of history intrigues you? Would you like to go back to the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, or life on the prairie? Your book can help take you there.

□ If you returned to a time in history, when and where would it be?

7. Before committing yourself to a theme, consider if the content is worthy. Just because a work is stylistically accomplished and grammatically correct, does not make it "good" literature. What is good literature? Why are Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov* considered great literature? Why is Shakespeare a great author? These are not easy questions, but they are profoundly essential to answer if you want to produce a great work.

□ As a family, read Philippians 4:8 and discuss its implications in both reading and writing literature. Write a summary here.

□ Discuss the characteristics of a great book:  
Which of the following would you include? Why?

- ◇ It has no cursing.
- ◇ The good guys win.
- ◇ There are no sex scenes.
- ◇ It inspires toward goodness.
- ◇ The author is a Christian.
- ◇ It is true to nature.
- ◇ The moral of the story is consistent with Scriptural principles.
- ◇ There is no violence.
- ◇ The protagonist is morally pure.
- ◇ People like it.
- ◇ It's exciting.

*Life is too short for reading inferior books.*  
James Bryce





## Practice

On your own try these:

1. It's time to practice coming up with a story on your own.

☐ Check off three of the following that you think could make a good novel:

- ◇ an admirable person
- ◇ an intriguing place
- ◇ the happiest moment
- ◇ the most embarrassing experience
- ◇ infinity
- ◇ a lesson learned
- ◇ tuna fish
- ◇ escaping from danger
- ◇ a peanut butter sandwich
- ◇ wishes come true
- ◇ an arson
- ◇ a rare animal
- ◇ a stolen treasure
- ◇ the history of a Hungarian family
- ◇ a bizarre tale
- ◇ a curious child
- ◇ worst enemy
- ◇ professional athlete
- ◇ handicapped child
- ◇ inventor
- ◇ best friend
- ◇ circus
- ◇ bank robbery
- ◇ hospital
- ◇ airport
- ◇ another idea

☐ Do any of these give you an idea for your novel?





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2. Does just the word "writing" make you tense? Perhaps you associate it with hard work or failure. Before you can get an idea you need to get relaxed. Nothing inhibits progress like wrong beliefs. We were created to be free (Gal. 5:1).

☐ **Admit any of the false notions you may have:**

- ◇ I can't succeed, because I'm not smart.
- ◇ Everything I do is too hard for me.
- ◇ No matter what I create it won't be good enough.
- ◇ If other people see it, they won't like it.

Ask your parents to help you with right thinking. Your mind can be renewed to think correctly. Right thoughts will transform you. For example, if you believe you can't succeed in something, read Joshua 1. If you believe you're not good enough, read Psalm 139.

3. Try some relaxing activity to get rid of the tension. How about trying a bike ride, a hot bath, a walk, some calming music? It's no coincidence that great ideas happen in the shower.

☐ **Try it!**

4. When all else fails, just do it. Here's an idea for getting started. **JUST START.** Write at least three "starts." Just start writing whatever comes into your head. Maybe you've already had a story idea. If so, start writing that. If not, try something else. **THIS IS NOT TO BE GRADED.** Don't worry about how good it is. Another idea is to sit in a darkened room to write. That way you won't get distracted. Try it.

☐ **Free-write #1**

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□ **Free-write #2**

□ **Free-write #3**

**If you like any of these ideas, save them for your story.**



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# Apply

- Write below the **BEST** idea that you have so far for a story. **Don't worry. You'll have lots of time later to make changes in the story. Just jot down notes. Write quickly without concentrating on spelling or grammar. The most important thing is for you to come up with something that really interests YOU. Have fun.**

- Present your work to your writing coach for approval before proceeding.

- All boxes for this step have been completed and checked.

**So far you have:**

- Come up with a story

Now you can *develop* your story in Step 2: A noisy musician on a dolphin in Indonesia...

