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Come in...and be captivated...

[Writers' Craft Box](#)

What this section is intended to do:

Give writers suggested hints, resources, and advice.

How to use: Pick and choose what you feel is most helpful and derive inspiration from it- most importantly, **HAVE FUN!**

What a Writers' Craft Box is: Say you're doing an art project and you want to spice it up a bit. You reach into a seemingly bottomless box full of colorful art/craft supplies and choose only the things that speak to you. You take only what you need to feel that you've fully expressed yourself. Then, you go about doing your individual project adding just the right amount of everything you've chosen until you reach a product that suits you completely. So, this is on that concept. Reach in, find the things that inspire you, use the tools that get your writing going and see it as fulfilling your self-expression as



"Arts and Crafts" N.M.B Copyright 2008

opposed to following rules.

Writing is art and art is supposed to be fun, relaxing, healing and nurturing. It's all work and it's all play at the same time. A Writers' Craft Box is whatever your imagination needs it to be- a lifeboat, the spark of an idea, a strike of metaphorical lightning, a reminder, or simply the recommendation of a good book. Feel free to sit back and break out the crayons. Coloring outside the lines is heartily encouraged.

The Greatest Hits of the Writers' Craft Box Recommended Reading and then some...

On Beginnings

Recommended Reading:

The Hours by Michael Cunningham
Practical Magic by Alice Hoffman
Memoirs of a Geisha by Arthur Golden
The Blind Assassin by Margaret Atwood
Child of the Dawn by Gautama Chopra
Strange Fits of Passion by Anita Shreve

On Description

Recommended Reading:

The Garden of Good and Evil by John Berendt
The Da Vinci Code by Dan Brown
White Oleander by Janet Fitch
Joy Luck Club by Amy Tan
My House in Umbria by William Trevor
The Virgin Blue by Tracy Chevalier

On Whimsical Description and Artful Children's Storytelling

Recommended Reading:

The Children of Green Knowe, by L.M. Boston
Peter Pan by J.M. Barrie
The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe by C.S. Lewis

On Short Stories

Recommended Reading:

Mute by Stephen King
A Sudden Trip Home in the Spring by Alice Walker
The Story of an Hour by Kate Chopin

Writing Resources/Books

Recommended Reading:

On Writing by Stephen King
Wild Mind by Natalie Goldberg

Writing from the Heart by Nancy Slomin Aronie

Making A Literary Life by Carolyn See

The Opposite of Fate by Amy Tan

F. Scott Fitzgerald on Writing edited by Larry W. Phillips

Portable MFA in Creative Writing (New York Writers Workshop)

The Observation Deck- A Tool Kit for Writers by Naomi Epel

The Writer's Block: 786 Ideas to Jump-start your Imagination by
Jason Rekulak

Two Years of Inspiration~ Highlights and Quotations from Interviews

"The craft of writing to me is the art of writing— the music of the sentence, bringing the senses to bear, always steering clear of any pre-owned phrase, creating newly minted images, creating new minted language, every time. What I enjoy most— is when you've been working so hard in a very craftsman-like way and suddenly the angels sing. You find the literary equivalent of a great jazz solo pouring out of you, pouring through you really. That's what I live for."

"Characters come to me first through their voices, normally. I hear them before I see them, before I know them. Protagonists always take longer than anyone else because you see the world through them- it takes awhile to be able to turn the camera around. But most of my characters are parts of myself, "pieced out" -- so one character has these traits and another has a different set. Like a dream in which every figure is you, a part of you working itself out against another part, with bits and fragments of other people thrown in."

"I obviously would like my work not to be bound to the circumstances of here and now, I'd like people to read me in fifty years and respond to my work as strongly as people right now. I hope I'm speaking deeply enough to the human condition to be resonant in the future, because the human condition- love, loss, struggle, the search for meaning and identity— does not change over time- only the trappings change"~ Janet Fitch, author of White Oleander

"When people are safe, they can go anywhere. If you have a ski instructor who encourages you, you take a risk. If a painting teacher is telling you you are using the wrong brush, are you going to feel flowy and free? There is no wrong in creative art. Any negative remark is going to stop you. Model a human being who suffers and laughs in the same paragraph. Go deep. Think, this is what terrifies me. This is what I love"~ Nancy Slonim Aronie, author of Writing From the Heart

"For me the magic is always a way to connect with and write about psychological and emotional truth. In fairy tales we read a story about witches, wolves, whatever, but we know all the time we're reading there's a double meaning, one that applies to our everyday lives. That's what I'm aiming for"~ Alice Hoffman, author of Practical Magic

"Perseverance is the only way for a writer... [it] is the only way to achieve what you set out to do as a poet or novelist or playwright. There is no easy way. As for three books - the range is simply vast, but I'd nominate three of my own favorites: W.B. Yeats Collected Poems, D.H. Lawrence's Sons and Lovers and the poetry of Elizabeth Bishop"~ Gerald Dawe, Director of the Oscar Wilde Centre, Trinity College, Dublin

"I think all kinds of writing are pretty much the same. I know others don't always feel that way and I've met many journalists, for instance, who lament that they can never write a novel because of all the journalism ringing in their ears. I just don't see it that way. I think EVERYTHING IS FICTION. Each of our lives is an on-going novel, we notice the same things over and over. I think there are very few verifiable "facts" in this world"~ Carolyn See, author of Making a Literary Life

"The presence and role of the internet will continue to affect children's entertainment and education. There are books online, and children can download many books for school and vacation reading. However, it's still a different and pleasurable experience to turn the pages of a book. I believe there will always be a place for books both in bookstores and in libraries."

"A book can happen at any place or time. The essential part is the character- one you can be with, believe in, and share in their triumph. It has to be hard for the reader to turn that last page"~ Michelle Poploff, Random House VP of Children's Books

"If the logic follows that you learn or experience something and take it with you in a positive way, going through without wasting time, things are not singular to you, but universal. Each time has its own ingredients and character. We are shaped by what shaped our ancestors. For a person not to know their history is like having amnesia. We have a lot to study in history and then based on those observations, we can make informed decisions. There is an inner conflict of primal instinct vs. intellect. At the end of the day, there are the same basic needs- people will always need to be loved. Without learning from the ages and acting on primal overdrive, it is as though we are trying to operate something without a manual"~ Grammy-nominated Celtic Musician, Loreena McKennitt

"On that first Sunday, some new acquaintances took us on a trip out into the countryside, to an outdoor trattoria complete with wooden tables under a wisteria-covered arbor and a view of the valley. At one point we were served a simple mixed salad and, engrossed in trying to follow a conversation awash in accents, I took a bite, unthinking. And stopped. It was just lettuce and tomatoes and olive oil, but it was mind-bendingly sensual. Something in me changed at that moment. I was living with all of my senses engaged.

Now, when I want to write descriptions, I try to recreate in myself that feeling of utterly slowing down, of paying attention with your body as much as your mind. My goal in *The School of Essential Ingredients* was to help people experience that through reading as well as food."

"I often get asked if various characters in the book are people I know, and the truthful answer is no – usually the characters begin with feelings and turn into living and breathing people who often surprise me in their complexity. Abuelita came from that feeling that happens when someone truly sees you. It can be (and often is) an unlikely person – a stranger on the bus, the mother of a friend, a teacher – a person who says the thing you need to hear even though you can't imagine how they know it"~ Erica Bauermeister, author of *The School of Essential Ingredients*

"The hardest thing to do when writing is what sounds easy: LET GO. Let the wise presence inside you guide you. Don't tell the book what to do; let the book tell you. So when I rewrite something, it's with an eye toward being willing to let anything and everything go, to move my own preconceptions out of the way. I like to be surprised by what comes up. The best writing for me comes when I

have no idea what I'm doing"~ Elizabeth Berg, author of Open House (from the discussion featured in the autumn 09' edition of Writers' Craft Box)

"In Greek, "alone", comes from all-one. You need time to stop and be alone. You need to hear what your heart has to say without distraction. In my weekend seminars, I take out an hour glass, and I tell women we can't see the time passing. We need to become intentional about our lives. We as women are the carriers of culture and we can't carry meaning until we really know who we are. I advocate becoming a scholar of self and soul. I don't want to get to the coffin not knowing who I really was. In our patriarchal society, we're always expected to do more rather than be more"~ Joan Anderson, author of A Year By The Sea

"I agree with the notion that the human mind is "structured for storytelling" -- and, likewise, for perceiving the world around us as a sequence of unfolding stories. We even live our lives as a kind of story, selecting and crafting our memories to give our past a plot structure, narrative cohesion, and some semblance of meaning – and as we do, we're influenced, naturally, by all of the stories around us: by our favorite tales from childhood, by the well-known stories of our sacred texts, by the clamor of the stories churned out each day by television, newspapers, the internet; by the stories that we – as a culture or country -- collectively agree to believe in. Advertising is based on selling us stories about who we are and what we need; history itself is a story told and re-told, constantly reassessed and revised. Stories not only reflect the way we see the world, they also help to shape the way we see the world – which was something understood by older societies in which the storyteller's role was a magical and sacred one.

In such societies, the line between "fact" and "fiction" was less rigidly defined than it is today, and less relevant to the point of

telling stories. Joseph Campbell once wrote that we no longer know how to hear a myth or folk tale properly; we no longer understand these stories as our ancestors did -- for we've all but lost the knack for understanding the metaphoric language of myth. In modern culture, our thinking tends toward the reductive and literal, not the metaphoric and poetic. But when we approach such stories metaphorically, poetically, we get to the very heart of truth, finding subtle teachings and sophisticated wisdom encoded in seemingly simple tales.

I think some of the problems we face today come from people reading stories – especially those in sacred texts – just too darn literally, missing the metaphors within. You can't "prove" the truth of a myth or a sacred tale with reductive thinking or the scientific method. We need to learn to listen to stories properly again, and stop asking: "But is it literally true?" Literally? No, probably not. But metaphorically, symbolically, spiritually, such stories contain profound truths that speak directly to the soul. As metaphorical tales, they enlarge our capacity to wonder, to question, to think, to experience – whereas reading myths, folk tales, or sacred texts in a literal, reductive fashion tends to close our thinking down."

"I'm particularly fascinated by the ways we're shaped by our environments—not only our families and our communities, but by the very land under our feet—and how, in turn, this shapes our art, our stories, and our myths."

"Although genre designations can be useful things, pointing readers and viewers to the specific types of work they seek, these designations can also create artistic ghettos with boundary walls so high that artists in different fields can't lean over them for a good conversation. It's been my goal, over the last thirty years, to dismantle some of these walls, brick by brick -- if not to tear them down entirely, then at least to make them lower and more easily crossed."

"I believe that those of us who write stories for children or young adults should remember how powerful stories can be -- and take responsibility for the moral tenor of whatever dreams or nightmares we're letting loose into the world. This is particularly true in Fantasy, where the tools of our trade include the language, symbolism and archetypal energies of myth. These are ancient, subtle, potent things, and they work in mysterious ways."

"Oh, I'd love to have a crystal ball that could tell us what the future of Fantasy and mythic arts will be -- and I'm sure every publisher in New York City and London would like one too! It's hard to even make an educated guess, for technology is changing so rapidly and the state of book publishing itself is in great upheaval. Art forms that play an important role today -- web-based magazines and blogs -- didn't even exist when I was starting out. Heck, the whole Internet didn't yet exist. Things are changing too fast these days for an old-school book editor like me to make an accurate prediction."

But I think it's safe to say that art rooted in myth and folklore will continue to be with us, in some form, because it's always been with us. Each generation re-fashions the old tales anew, and creates the new ones that it most needs"~ World Fantasy Award winner and editor, Terri Windling

"There is day-to-day living upon spiritual paths. When writers become "God intoxicated", they have to write their books, being filled with inspiration, truth and divine essence. Socrates said, "The more I know, the more I know nothing." Ego is separated from the process so that the creativity flows smoothly. We co-create, using our skills and gifts to communicate to each other. We say what we have to say and we say it in our voice. I love writers willing to do this and fully put themselves into their

work. In order to be a true messenger (vibration to vibration) there are seven lessons to protect writers from negative self-talk that might impede their work. They are courage, tolerance, self-protection, self-love, ego (do you want to be the message or the messenger), love of humanity and God love- an enigmatic phrase addressing faith... and sacred trust. Writers have to 'chillax' ! Relax and chill. Let go and let the process come naturally"~ Deborah Levine Herman of The Jeff Herman Literary Agency

"I love when everything is flowing: the idea-the concept-hardcopy- pitch-publishing contract- published book/fulfillment of practical tasks which I apply myself to. It is frustrating when you believe in a project and it isn't getting published due to one obstacle or another. Yet all published authors were once rejected"~ Jeff Herman of The Jeff Herman Literary Agency

"Before starting my book, the longest story that I'd ever written was around 3,000 words long. It takes a lot of butt-in-the-seat time to write a book, and a lot more to polish it off. (You've got a lot of terrible first drafts to write remember?) My biggest advice to people is that if you're serious about finishing a book, schedule your writing time and stick to it. No one has "free time" anymore. If you write when you've got "spare time," you'll never do it. It took seven, long months of writing and rewriting my proposal for Sharper before I sold it. I found a cheap office and got up every morning and went to work just as if it was a job. I went to writing conferences and met people. I asked everyone one I knew if they knew of a literary agent. I tried to meet the universe halfway again.

"Saving" your writing is similar to those people who have fabulous china and silver that they're saving "for good" and thus never use. What are they waiting for, the Queen of England to drop by for tea? Use your silver. Write every day. Meet other

writers. Get feedback on your work. Writing is like a muscle. It gets stronger the more you flex it, the harder you push it"~ Kathleen Flinn, author of *The Sharper Your Knife, The Less You Cry*



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Writer, editor, and writing coach and consultant, Noelle Sterne publishes widely in writers' and mainstream magazines. Articles have appeared in Children's Book Insider, Long Ridge Writers eNews, Pure Inspiration, 11.11, Sasee, The Write Place At the Write Time, Writer's Digest special issues, the 2008 Novel and Short Story Writer's Market, Writers' Journal, Writing World, and The Writer, with additional pieces scheduled. Based on Ms. Sterne's academic consulting practice, she is completing a psychological-spiritual handbook to help doctoral candidates finish their dissertations (finally). Other book-length projects include a collection of essays for writers, *First You Find Your Desk: Start Writing and Keep Writing with Less Agony and More Joy*, and a practical-spiritual handbook for reaching lifelong yearnings, *Trust Your Life: Forgive Yourself and Go After Your Dreams*.

BY WRITERS FOR WRITERS ABOUT WRITERS: The BYLINES 2010 WRITER'S DESK CALENDAR

By Noelle Sterne

Handfuls of Help for Writers

The Bylines 2010 Writer's Desk Calendar is indeed, as the subtitle proclaims, "By, For, and About Writers." In addition to the essays, the useful features seem endless, especially in a book of this size. Bylines is a calendar, a planner, record-keeper, address book, and compendium of helpful information for writers. For example, it includes a long list of recommended writing-related books and another of Web sources for ezines, jobs, and sites for most genres.

The calendar is replete with other perks that play obvious practical roles—and prompt ideas for articles. A partial list: a section on setting and achieving monthly writing goals, with lists of systemized tasks and actual goals; literary holidays by month (did you know that June is "National Bathroom Reading Month"?); a submission tracker, with excellent ideas on its multiple uses; purchase and mileage trackers for writing-related expenses and travel; lists of contests and literary festivals by month and with websites; and pages for notes from conferences attended.

Lookin' Good

The book is handy, compact, and feels good in the hand. With substantial sturdy covers and strong spiral binding, it's tuckable into a purse or laptop case.

The individual calendar pages are attractive and ample. Each full right-hand page has neatly divided days of the week for writing-related notations. Each left-hand page displays a contributor's photo, bio, and essay on one or more aspects of writing. These range from the serious to hilarious to instructional to motivational and inspirational.

On the glossy cover, a well-known writer is highlighted each year, with biographical tidbits and fascinating photographs interspersed throughout. In the 2010 edition, Will Rogers' desk eases my aloneness by reminding me of the community of writers, even though I'm sure he didn't blog. A wonderful photo of his typewriter increases my gratitude for all the electronic wonders at our literal fingertips.

A Calendar Book Is Born

How did the Bylines Writer's Desk Calendar originate? Sylvia Forbes, a prolific and accomplished writer herself, acquired it from another writer, Linda Hagen Miller, who started and published it for the first two years. The coming 2011 edition will be the eighth year of publication. Since taking on Bylines, Forbes has added many elements and pages and plans to provide ever more helpful features for writers.

Where does editor Forbes see the book going? She'll continue to spotlight the writing workspace of famous authors on the covers, with accompanying information. As a writer herself, she empathizes with others: "For me, it's inspiring to see the actual spot where well-known and admired authors sat down and created their books." Forbes will also soon offer a companion Bylines Journal for random thoughts, impressions, and those perfect phrases that shoot in out of nowhere we must get down.

A Market: Writing for Writers

The 2012 edition is now open for submissions. Forbes feels strongly about the essays and considers each entry carefully. "The most important part is the weekly essays, which tell about writers' experiences at different stages in their careers. I think it is extremely helpful for writers to read these essays and see how others have struggled, how they have succeeded, and how writers find so many different ways to write and places to publish and flourish."

The word count of the story should be about 200 words and a bio 100 words. "I'm looking for stories," says Forbes, "about lessons learned as a writer, funny moments, helpful things for writers to know, inspiring moments, times when other writers have given a hand, or just a slice of the writing life."

Although the fee paid on acceptance is small, space is reserved for promotion, with writers' bios, photos, web addresses, and contact information. Submission guidelines are on the website: www.bylinescalendar.com.

End Note

For both aspiring and practiced writers, the Bylines 2010 Writer's Desk Calendar is an excellent book. Its wealth of organizational and constructive ideas and resources complements the wide-ranging array of writers' experiences. So, every day when I open my Calendar, I dutifully log in my plans,

goals, and schedule. Then I turn to one of the essays and draw sustenance for my own work from fellow writers' words that confess, share, advise, motivate, encourage, and uplift.

Recommended Writers' Tool~ *Bylines 2010 Writer's Desk Calendar*, edited by Sylvia Forbes, (Snowflake Press)

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