



*100-Word Stories* is a revelation. Culbertson and Faulkner's helpful book offers the perfect platform for students to learn and practice the essential skills of writing. It also helps them be more critical readers as it shows them how to explore the myriad decisions writers make to express and convey ideas. It offers teachers profound insights into writing instruction and provides deep understanding of the writing process. Filled with examples and thoughtful reflection questions, their practical and classroom-friendly guidance provides a clear pathway to helping students to unlock the stories hiding within them.

**–Peter Brunn, author of *The Lesson Planning Handbook***

Teachers of writing and literature—as well as practicing writers—love 100-word stories, and this book is exactly the resource teachers need to bring those little gems into their classrooms.

Culbertson and Faulkner, themselves masters of the craft, show us how 100-word stories are not only short but also impeccably crafted, revealing so much in such a concentrated form. In addition to practical advice, the book includes a wealth of 100-word stories suitable for classrooms from fifth grade through high school.

**–Elyse Eidman-Aadahl, Executive Director,  
National Writing Project**

# 100-WORD STORIES

## *A SHORT FORM FOR EXPANSIVE WRITING*



KIM CULBERTSON  
with Grant Faulkner

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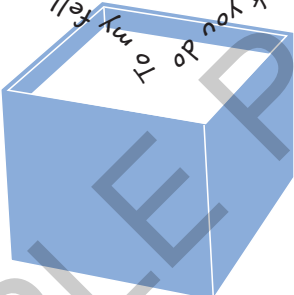
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# Online Resources

...I hope ...  
...attention to details,  
...production to look "I ...  
...try to ...  
...rather ...  
...because ...  
...I find ...  
...seems that allow us to experience ou ...  
...ve way they speak to each other for do ...  
...world beautiful and interesting and in ...  
...I allows us to create unique, vibrant ...  
...Before starting this section, have ...  
...ment I give my students a ...  
...I read it from the online re ...  
...of about how muc ...  
...writing is about. "Seeing ...  
...ago appear, smell, taste, ...  
...ch, sound. For this ...  
...I spend approximately th ...  
...minutes noticing e ...  
...sits, touch, hear ...  
...not drives ...  
...I time just ...  
...bright of ...  
...to know ...  
...not its ...  
...stop ...

Some of the discussion questions and writing exercises associated with the 100-word stories suggest that students have their own copies to annotate, so we've added each of the stories, chapter by chapter, to the online resources as downloadable files. For access to the stories and several other student resources:

1. Go to <http://hein.pub/100Words-login>.
2. Log in with your username and password. If you do not already have an account with Heinemann, you will need to create an account.
3. On the Welcome page, choose “**Click here to register an Online Resource.**”
4. Register your product by entering the code **\*\*\*\*\*** (be sure to read and check the acknowledgment box under the keycode).
5. Once you have registered your product, it will appear alphabetically in your account list under “**My Online Resources.**”



Note: When returning to Heinemann.com to access your previously registered products, simply log in to your Heinemann account and click on “**View my registered Online Resources.**”

## Part One: Foundational Elements

### Chapter 1

- OR1 "Silence" by Cole Gibson  
"Shirley Temple" by Grant Faulkner

### Chapter 2

- OR2 "Sight of Sound" by Bryce Kemble  
"Walls" by Luella Dang

### Chapter 3

- OR3 "Paris, Texas" by Haley Johnston  
"The Spot" by Jeff Zentner

### Chapter 4

- OR4 "We Regret to Inform You" by Emma Brink  
"The Greatest Show" by Tara Campbell  
OR5 List of Lists! Handout

### Chapter 5

- OR6 "Even When" by Shayden Eagleheart  
"Leaving It" by Julie Valin

### Chapter 6

- OR7 "Influenced" by Aubrey Cline  
"Desert, Spring" by Tabitha Lawrence  
OR8 Exploring Voice Handout

### Chapter 7

- OR9 "Teenage Playroom" by Max Tel  
"Daddy's Flask" by Stacey Lee

### Chapter 8

- OR10 "And I Love Her" by Maya Pedersen  
"Sea Witch" by Pearl Fisher

## Part Two: Elements of Language

- OR11 The Art of Noticing Handout

### Chapter 9

- OR12 "Victory" by Alex Belles  
"Sous" by Darien Hsu Gee

### Chapter 10

- OR13 "Power Outage" by Kirsten Casey  
"Tonight" by Kirsten Casey  
"Sunrises" by Julia Allgeyer

### Chapter 11

- OR14 "The Firefly Jar" by Isabel Yang  
"Fences" by Kasie West

### Chapter 12

- OR15 "Dump Jason" by Rose  
"Places that Know You" by Jessica Taylor

### Chapter 13

- OR16 "Grief's Choice" by Penelope Johnson  
"Under the Rainbow" by Amy Rutten



#### **Chapter 14**

**OR17** "Baby Bat" by Rain Skyler

#### **Chapter 15**

**OR18** "The Human Algorithm" by Ana Sagebiel  
"Rainbow" by Ran Walker

#### **Chapter 16**

**OR19** "Murmurations" by Dylan Gibson  
"More Than a Waitress" by Darcy Woods  
"She finds me in the art room . . ." by Kim Culbertson

### **Part Three: Structural Elements**

#### **Chapter 17**

**OR20** "Breaking Free" by Jay Godwin  
"Falling Apart" by Asma Almasry

#### **Chapter 18**

**OR21** "Netflix Party Is Now Teleparty" by Luca LaMarca

#### **Chapter 19**

**OR22** "The Gatekeeper" by Iris Vandevorst  
"Mirror, Mirror" by Gretchen McNeil

### **Part Four: Revision**

#### **Chapter 20**

**OR23** Charley Meyer's first draft of his story "City of Crime"  
Charley Meyer's second draft of his story "City of Crime"  
Charley Meyer's third draft of his story "City of Crime"  
Charley Meyer's final draft of his story "City of Crime"  
**OR24** Rachel Teferet's first draft of her story "Bantam Chicken"  
Rachel Teferet's second draft of her story "Bantam Chicken"  
Rachel Teferet's third draft of her story "Bantam Chicken"  
**OR25** 100-Word Story Revision Checklist

#### **Chapter 21**

**OR26** "Band Shed" by Kim Culbertson  
Kim Culbertson's draft story "Spoon Trouble"  
Kim Culbertson's draft story "Ready"  
Kim Culbertson's final draft "Dead Tired"

#### **Chapter 22**

**OR27** "Waiting" by Estlin Miller  
"The Ticket" by Kristin Dwyer  
"Quitter" by Misa Sugiura

#### **Chapter 23**

**OR28** "Ten Times" by Brinda Ambal  
"Multiples of Ten" by Brinda Ambal

#### **Chapter 24**

**OR29** Terms for Annotating a Story Handout, with Lachlan Ryan's story  
"Green Land"

#### **Chapter 25**

**OR30** "Jack-O'-Lantern" by Kim Culbertson  
"Setting the Table" by Sands Hall  
"The Believer" by Gary Wright



# Introduction

## From Grant

I had an epiphany one day while I was volunteering in my daughter's second-grade class during a writing lesson. I observed as the teacher guided the students to flesh out their stories beyond the short, blunt sentences most of them had written and to capture the world more vividly with more detail, more feeling, more words. She was doing her job, and doing it well—making the world come alive through language—but I began to think of the role that “more” plays in most writers' development.

I remembered how when I was assigned a paper when I was in high school, our first question was always, “How long does it have to be?” And then we wrote in order to reach that page count, padding the paper with extra research or extra words, especially those of us who knew that a good way to get an A was to write longer papers with big words we found in the thesaurus.

This is all good in those early stages of writing. We need to try on those big words. We need to be ambitious with language to explore the bigness of our thoughts and learn how to fill pages and push boundaries. But that bigness also needs a counterpoint, a question. We need to recognize the different ways that smallness can work to open up an idea, how less is often the best way to reveal a dramatic moment.

We live in a culture that celebrates bigness—big houses, big vehicles, big meals—so bigness is generally valued more than smallness in

most matters. In fact, even though length was not mentioned in the SAT essay grading rubric back when the essay was part of the SAT, a study revealed that the longer an essay was, the higher the score tended to be.

The length of papers increases with each grade level, and students' writing lives essentially become apprenticeships with "more" as they bulk up their texts, using bigger and more jargonistic language as they proceed through college and graduate school. It's as if writers are taught to prove their smarts by flexing their writerly muscles, pumping up their prose with multisyllabic curlicues and complex structures.

Good writing, however, is so often about less. It's about succinctness and clarity. It's about evocation and mood. It's about suspense and omission. It's about finding the right word, not more words.

I learned all those elements later in my writing life, after years of trying to write novels with an ever-expansive aesthetic of what I call "maximalist comprehensiveness," full of crisscrossing tentacles of storylines and sentences stuffed with syntactic flourishes. But then I discovered 100-word stories one day by chance, and I became addicted to writing these mysterious little stories because of the way I had to move a story not by including more, but by telling less. I had to find the essence of a story, not its sprawl. I had to learn how to tell a story through a simple detail, a hint, instead of the layers of a backstory. I had to work with the gaps of text rather than stuffing things in to fill the gaps.

It was a different kind of writing and reading. Most of my writing life had been a training ground of "more," so I'd never been taught to write less, to focus on what could be removed from a story or an essay rather than what could be added. I'd never thought about how "bigness" can reside in tiny things, how stories can reside on the borders of a poem, opening up to include the reader as if the reader is a co-writer of the story.

I'm often asked if one can tell a story in just 100 words. As *100-Word Stories* shows, the answer is yes. Kim Culbertson has written a brilliant guide based on her classroom experiences of teaching 100-word stories. She explores all the traditional elements of writing a story—setting, plot, character, conflict, imagery, theme—and, in fact, because

these stories are so short, those elements become more noticeable—brighter, even—so students can focus on them more precisely.

“It might seem almost impossible to enclose the great movement of the universe in such a narrow space. But through a kind of magic, the poet manages to make the infinite enter into that small cell. There, every surprise may fit,” wrote Jorge Carrera Andrade (2011).

These stories might be small cells, but they teem with life when looked at under a microscope. May *100-Word Stories* be that microscope for you and your students. I know you’ll see things about stories and writing that might previously have been invisible. I know your writing and reading will never quite be the same when you experience the infinite that swirls about in these small cells.

*From Kim*

## **Small, Bright Things**

It’s likely that most ELA teachers have been in the situation I found myself in one day: asking a question about a longer piece of writing our class was reading, and getting . . . crickets. I cleared my throat and tried to rephrase, hoping to get someone to say *something* about the piece. Nothing. Zip. Nada.

Next class, I changed gears. I loaded a 100-word story onto Google Classroom, read it to them, and had them read it again. Right then. On the spot. Then I asked the same questions I’d asked before: “What’s important about where this is set? Who are these characters? What do they want? What are the themes?”

Hands went up. More than several. What was happening? I kept bringing in stories. They kept responding. So I had them write some, centering on a list of themes we’d generated from the stories we’d been reading. They wrote for me. And wrote. And wrote.

I started referring to these stories as “Small, Bright Things” because they brought with them a sort of magic to my classroom. They glimmered, breathing new life into our study of literature and our original writing.

When I first started assigning 100-word stories, one of my students said in surprise, “It’s like all the parts of a real story, but short!” I love this—even as I explained to her that a 100-word story is a *real* story, she was spot on about its parts. This is the beauty of using these stories to teach exploration and analysis of individual literary elements. In another class, we were unpacking a student’s original 100-word story when one of his classmates pointed out to him, “You devote sixty-two words to setting—that leaves almost nothing for all the other stuff!”

All that other stuff is what this teaching guide breaks down. All the parts—not just of a short story, but of any longer piece of fiction too: character, setting, point of view, conflict/tension, sensory description, arc, theme. Each 100-word story allows students to explore a structure that holds all these essential literary elements in an easily digestible package. I have found that working with this form before we dig into larger pieces, or during the study of longer pieces, enables my students to more readily recognize these elements in any piece of literature, because the study of these 100-word stories teaches them to identify a story’s intrinsic architecture.

When studying stories with my students, I generally group fiction elements into three categories: **foundational**, **language-based**, and **structural**.

**Foundational** elements are any element a story simply can’t exist without: POV, setting, plot, character, conflict/tension, etc.

Elements of **language** are sentence-specific: sensory language, imagery, active language, symbolism, etc.

**Structural** elements, for me, are things like form/structure, theme, genre, dialogue, arc (the way an author tracks plot across a story), subtext/backstory, etc.

As a fiction writer, I understand that any of these elements could be grouped differently, but this is one way to look at the architecture of a story, the specific choices/tools a writer uses to build a story, and their purposes within the storytelling. For the sake of this book, I grouped them this way, but you should feel free to move them wherever makes sense for your classroom.

I have divided this book into four sections and twenty-five chapters. You can use it comprehensively or jump around based on your needs. I've included in each chapter discussion questions that you can assign for written response or use for class discussion. I've designed the writing exercises to be done in class, but these can obviously also be homework assignments. The exercises are less formal—they are meant to be generative and to get those creative ideas flowing. I've centered the writing practice around the development of a 100-word story portfolio for your students to develop throughout the year. But again—mix it up, use one thing or all the things. I just hope you find something that lights up your classroom the way these small, bright things have lit up mine.



### Content Disclaimer

*It is no easy task to design a book meant for fifth- through twelfth-grade classroom use, and as a result not every story in the book will be appropriate for every grade level (not to mention, different people have different levels of comfort when it comes to content). We tried to include at least one story in each section that could work for each concept at any grade level, five through twelve.*

SAMPLE PAGES

...cause e...  
...are noticing the specific se...  
...the way people interact with each other, th...  
...oticing all the small, bright specific things that make...  
...breaking. This noticing (and the specific choices we...  
...brant worlds in small spaces, and these worlds begin...  
...have your students practice noticing their worlds. I...  
...students. I share it with them as an online docu...  
...much of writing is about "seeing"—about noticing...  
...smell, taste, touch, sound. For this assignm...  
...approximately thirty minutes noticing e...  
...how what you see, smell, taste, touch...  
...vignette; they can be just words...  
...you discover in that place, but al...  
...reason I refer to these 100-v...  
...is its attention to detail...  
...the introduction to this...  
...tell a story through a...  
...gaps of text rather...  
...rticular way beca...  
...hat in all writin...  
...noticing the sp...  
...interact with...  
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...and the...  
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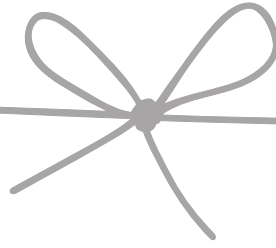


## PART ONE

# FOUNDATIONAL ELEMENTS

### What the Story Can't Live Without

I define foundational elements for my students as the pieces a story can't live without. I tell them that these foundational elements are fairly straightforward: a story is told through a specific lens (point of view, referred to throughout as POV) about a character who lives in an environment, who is experiencing a moment of change, and for whom something is “at stake.” Every story has these elements. There are many other elements I will get to later, but I always have my students start here: POV, character, setting, conflict.



# POINT OF VIEW (POV)

**Featured Authors:** Cole Gibson, age 12, and Grant Faulkner

Many students are likely tired of hearing me say, “Point of view is everything,” but the more I write and study story, the more I think it must be. I could write an entire book exploring the role of POV in a piece of fiction. It’s a complex concept. But this is not that book, so we’ll keep to the basics.

Simply put, POV is the lens through which the story is being told.

For me as a writer and reader, the essential thing to know is this lens is the cornerstone of the way an author tells the story. It is the place where the narrator stands. Sometimes that is first person, sometimes it is third-person close or distant, and sometimes it is omniscient. Therefore, because of this *purposeful* lens, the point of view of a story determines the information we receive as readers.

An author chooses a point of view by deciding whether the story is set from a first-person or third-person perspective or from an omniscient point of view. Authors also choose to set the story in the past tense or the present tense. Each of these decisions shapes the lens of the story. Therefore, what we as readers know about the point of view allows us to understand our relationship to the storytelling. Will we be getting one person's perspective the entire time (first person and third-person limited) or will we be getting more of a bird's-eye view with an all-knowing narrator (omniscient)? Will the story be told through only one lens? Or will there be multiple lenses? Is the story more reflective (past tense) or immediate (present tense)?

Like I said, it's complex.

POV has its own attitude, voice, and position. POV determines the way everything in the story gets shaped (the verbs and adjectives, the character attributes, the specific images all exist as ways of revealing this lens). If a narrator is a dancer, the story must be told through the eyes of this particular dancer's experiences. If the narrator is a tiger, the story can only describe things a tiger would know or see. Once, when I was workshopping my first novel, *Songs for a Teenage Nomad*, someone asked me about a specific line, "Is this Calle here or *you*, as the author?" It was an essential question for me to think about as the author. It had to be Calle, my first-person POV; it couldn't be *me*, Kim. I wasn't telling the story—Calle was.

POV gives us clues about the story. It can often be the starting point for discussing everything else: setting, character, conflict, etc. An author chooses words on purpose. These words build the sentences that build the paragraphs that ultimately build the entire story—all funneled through a specific POV.

In Cole Gibson's story that follows, the POV is first person, a young person taking a family trip. Notice right away that this narrator opens with "after an eternity" while the parents give directions. The use of "eternity" shows us instantly that this narrator, this POV, feels like this trip is taking forever. It positions us in this specific point of view, with its mood, attitude, and lens.

Let's read Cole's story "Silence" and investigate his choices.

## Silence

We're here. After an eternity of Mom and Dad saying, "Turn left here, James!" and "I know, Sharon!" Finally. Muir Woods National Monument. We park, and I immediately sprint toward the entrance, leaving the bickering behind. There they are, standing tall and proud. Redwoods. After twenty minutes of Mom and Dad yelling about which trail is shortest, we choose one. I smell the fresh air and look up at the sun peering through the trees onto the ground. I could stay in this moment forever. For a minute, Mom and Dad stop fighting, look up at the trees, and smile.

—COLE GIBSON

### DISCUSSION

After your students read "Silence," have them underline two places in the story that demonstrate the point of view, and then discuss:

1. Who is telling this story?
2. How does the first-person perspective shape our understanding of the story?
3. In what tense is this story told?
4. How does this tense make it more immediate?

### Writing Exercise

Ask your students to choose three lines from the story and write them in third person, past tense instead of first person, present. How does this shift to a different POV change the story? How does it stay the same?

Tense is essential to knowing where a narrator is seated, but sometimes an author can surprise us with a tense change. See if you can spot the tense change in Grant Faulkner’s story, “Shirley Temple.”

## Shirley Temple

I sat at the bar, my feet swinging from a stool. Jacksonville, 1972. The adults crowded into a circular booth in the corner. Men pinched women. Women squirmed in squirmy dresses. I smelled the chlorine on my hands as I listened to the cackles of laughter. My father told me I could have as many Shirley Temples as I wanted, but I drank slowly, counting to fifty before taking a single bird-like sip. The cherry bobbed slowly lower in the glass, almost dissolving like candy. I wouldn’t eat it until it rested on the bottom. It’s good to have rules.

—GRANT FAULKNER

### DISCUSSION

1. Where does this story change tense?
2. How does this tense change shift the story for us or give us greater insight?
3. What might be a reason Grant did this?

Once you’ve discussed these questions with your students, have them read about (or read to them) Grant’s choices in his own words.

*I once heard the creator of the TV show Mad Men®, Matt Weiner, speak, and he said he envisioned the show as if he was looking through a keyhole into his parents’ lives. That’s how I thought of the boy in my story, “Shirley Temple.” He’s an unwanted companion in this scene of adult decadence, so his father sticks him at the bar and essentially has the bartender be his babysitter.*

*Because he is abandoned, not a part of things, yet still present, the boy becomes a witness. This is the place I like to reside most in a story (and in life). While we don't get many details into what happens between the men and the women he watches, we get enough to know that people are doing things they shouldn't, and, like the boy, we can imagine the things that might happen offscreen.*

*I could have written this in the point of view of third-person omniscience, but I would have lost that touch of poignancy and vulnerability that's created by seeing the scene through the boy's eyes. The story is about what he feels about being in the presence of his father's misbehavior, and the reader needs to feel the character change that happens, the moral stance of restraint he takes by not allowing himself to drink as many Shirley Temples as he wants. Third-person omniscience would have provided more distance, another layer of witnessing, and taken the reader a step further away from the drama.*

*It's amazing what you can see just by looking through a tiny keyhole. Or from a barstool.*

### **Writing Practice**

Have students write a 100-word story with a purposeful POV choice (present, past, or a switch!). Encourage them to set this story somewhere interesting that allows the character to feel or learn something during the journey.

## **Story Portfolio**

If you'll be using this book either as a complete unit or throughout the year with your students in a deep way (or even just once in a while), it helps to have the students keep a portfolio of their stories (either virtually or in a paper format) so they can see all their stories in one place and have them in one place for the revision portion of this book.

## TIE-IN TO CLASSROOM READING



Look at a passage (the opening always works well) of the novel or story that you're reading as a class and explore the POV choice. Have students write about any specifics they notice that demonstrate the POV.

SAMPLE PAGES