

*Creative Writing 1*  
*with Johnny Worthen*

*Week 4 – The Muddled Middle  
Tension and Scenes*



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## Johnny's Upcoming Classes

- **Zen Lessons for Writers (LLWRC 873)**
- **Creative Writing 2 (LLWRC 825)**
- **Literary Querying (LLWRC 844)**



Sign up now to ensure your place,  
and that the class will run at all.

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## Today's Plan

- Suspense
- Tension
- Exposition
- Dialog
- Action
- Scenes
- But FIRST...



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# Discussion of Reading



**TO BUILD A FIRE**  
**JACK LONDON**

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# Suspense

- Do you want to know how to create suspense?

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# Tension like Crescendo

- In music, increasing volume or tension is called "crescendo"
- As with music, a story is more interesting when its tempo and quality change
- Changing, or shifting circumstances are necessary
- Changes need to happen believably
- Remember to allow room to breath
- Try to use **The Rule of Three**
  - *Try once, twice, succeed on third try*



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# Tension is More

• **THE STAKES** – Tension comes from increasing jeopardy and complications

- Solve one problem
  - Get two more
- Growing stakes, more problems
- Subplots



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# Considerations

- Your character needs to respond in **realistic ways** to the elevating tension
- The events creating the tension need to be **logical**
- As you near the end, try not to leave too many loose ends – try to end with the tonic
- Keep your promises, so don't make too many

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## Fractal



## Scene: Mini form of Pyramid



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# Exposition

A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away...

- Exposition is telling the reader things they need to know
  - Setting, facts, details...
  - Tell only what needs to be said, when it must be known
- Don't describe anything until someone interacts with it or the reader NEEDS to know.

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# Action



- Play with time
- Slow things happen fast
  - *"He flew from San Francisco to Madagascar and arrived at 5:00, just as the rain began."*
- Fast things happen slowly
  - *"The hit was a lifetime in coming. The mugger rounded on him from behind his back. Tim saw it happening, and knew it would hurt, felt it even before it struck..."*

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# Suspense continued

- Create suspense by asking a question and delaying the answer
  - (yes, it's as simple as that)



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# Dialog

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- Use minimum dialog tags
  - to make them count
  - “Said” is always good
- Avoid adverbs to modify tags
- Avoid patois as much as possible
- Read your dialog **out loud** to see if it sounds right.



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# Five Easy Pieces

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1. Think of someone you know well, or invent a person
2. Imagine the place you find this person
3. Write 5 Sentences

## A Kind of Poem

1. Describe the person's hands
2. Describe something he or she is doing with the hands
3. Use a metaphor to say something about some exotic place
4. Mention what you would want to ask this person in the context of 2 and 3
5. The person looks up or toward you, notices you there, gives an answer that suggests he or she only gets part of what you asked.

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# Homework for Week 5

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- Write 2 pieces:
  1. Five Easy Pieces
  2. Dialog Scene (<300 words)
    - Tell a story through dialog alone
- Read:
  - “The Yellow Wallpaper” by Charlotte Perkins Stetson

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