

# Short Story Bootcamp: Crafting the Perfect Miniature World

## Materials Needed

- Notebooks or paper
- Pens/Pencils
- Timer (phone or clock)
- Optional: Access to a digital device for quick typing or light research (e.g., descriptive words)
- "Story Starter" Handout (Prompts listed below)

## Learning Objectives (What You Will Achieve)

By the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

1. Identify and utilize the four core elements required for a successful short story (Character, Setting, Conflict, Resolution).
2. Outline a short story using the three-act structure (Setup, Confrontation, Climax/Resolution).
3. Draft a complete, focused short story (approximately 400-600 words) based on a chosen prompt.

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## Part 1: Introduction (Tell Them What You'll Teach)

### The Hook: The Power of the Short Pause

Imagine you have a long, complicated road trip (that's a novel). Now imagine you just have to drive around the block, but that one lap is the most exciting, action-packed ride of your life. That's a short story!

Short stories require laser focus. Every word counts. How can we make sure our story is complete, satisfying, and doesn't wander off track? We use a map.

### Success Criteria

You will know you have successfully completed this lesson if your story draft:

- Includes a clear main character who wants something.
- Has a definite problem or conflict that needs solving.
- Follows a logical path from beginning to end (3 Acts).

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## Part 2: The Body (Teach It)

### Phase 1: I Do (Instructor Modeling and Direct Instruction)

## Concept 1: The Big Four Elements

Every good story needs these four essential parts:

1. **Character:** Who is the story about? (They must have a goal!)
2. **Setting:** Where and when does it take place? (The setting can create conflict!)
3. **Conflict:** What is the problem? (This is the engine of the story.)
4. **Resolution:** How is the problem solved (or not solved)? (This gives the story meaning.)

## Concept 2: The Three-Act Structure (Your Story Map)

Short stories use a simplified narrative arc:

- **Act 1: The Setup (The Beginning, ~25%):** Introduce the character, the setting, and the routine. Something changes—the **Inciting Incident**—which kicks off the problem.
- **Act 2: The Confrontation (The Middle, ~50%):** The character tries to fix the problem, but things get worse. There are obstacles and rising tension. This leads to the **Climax** (the highest point of action/decision).
- **Act 3: The Resolution (The End, ~25%):** The immediate fallout from the climax. The loose ends are tied up (or intentionally left open). The character has changed or learned something.

## Modeling a Story Outline

*(Educator/Parent models filling out this structure with a quick example, e.g., "A competitive baker runs out of flour 10 minutes before the competition deadline.")*

- **Character:** Leo, super stressed baker. Goal: Win the Golden Spoon trophy.
- **Act 1 Setup:** Leo is perfectly prepping his cake. Inciting Incident: He opens the pantry and the flour container is empty—his little brother used the last cup!
- **Act 2 Confrontation:** Leo frantically runs to the neighbor's house (they are mean), then tries the corner store (it's closed). Obstacles: Time pressure, judgmental onlookers. Climax: He sees the ingredient tent outside—does he risk stealing a cup? He chooses to trade his best apron for a cup of flour.
- **Act 3 Resolution:** He finishes the cake just in time. He doesn't win the prize, but he realizes saving his integrity was more important than the trophy.

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## Phase 2: We Do (Guided Practice - Collaborative Outline)

### Activity: The Impossible Object

**Prompt:** A character finds a common object (e.g., a rusty key, a faded photograph, a single red sneaker) that suddenly begins to do something impossible or magical.

**Step 1: Choose the Object.** (Let the learner choose the object and the character.)

*Example: Sofia chooses an old, chipped coffee mug found in the backyard.*

**Step 2: Map the Acts Together.** (Use guiding questions to fill out the structure.)

1. **Setup:** Who is the character? What does the mug do that is impossible? (e.g., it always perfectly replicates the last thing poured into it, but it's becoming unstable.)
2. **Confrontation:** What is the main problem caused by the mug? Who tries to take it? How does the

character escalate the use of the mug to fix something big? (e.g., they try to replicate a lost key, but it replicates a living thing instead.)

3. **Resolution:** What difficult choice does the character have to make about the mug? How does the story end?

**Formative Assessment Check:** Review the outline. Is the conflict strong enough? Does the character's choice in Act 3 match their goal in Act 1?

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## Phase 3: You Do (Independent Creation - Drafting Sprint)

### Step 1: Choose Your Story Seed (Autonomy)

Select one of the following prompts (or use the collaborative outline we just created):

1. **The Tiny Room:** A character discovers a brand-new room in their house/apartment that was never there before, and it's decorated for them, specifically.
2. **The Wrong Forecast:** The local weather app predicts sunshine, but the sky is pouring thick, purple rain. Only your character seems to notice the strange color.
3. **The Locked Box:** A character inherits an old wooden box that has no lock, no hinge, and no visible seams, but they know something important is inside.

### Step 2: Rapid Outline

Before writing, spend 5 minutes quickly listing the Big Four and mapping your chosen story onto the 3-Act Structure.

### Step 3: The Drafting Sprint

Set the timer for 20 minutes. Write your story draft, focusing on getting from Act 1 (the beginning) to Act 3 (the end). Don't worry about perfection; just focus on completion.

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## Part 3: Conclusion (Tell Them What You Taught)

### Closure and Reflection

#### The Power of Structure (Recap)

Discuss the experience of writing with a structure versus just "seeing where the story goes."

**Q&A Check:** What is the engine of the story? (Conflict.) What must the character have at the start? (A goal.)

#### Final Story Review (Summative Assessment)

Use the following checklist to review your own story draft. This helps confirm you met the lesson objectives.

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Criteria	Check Yes/No
I introduced a clear main character and setting (Act 1).	
I included an Inciting Incident that created conflict.	
The character faced at least one major obstacle (Act 2).	
The story reached a final turning point or decision (Climax).	
The story concluded and resolved the main conflict (Act 3).	

## Differentiation and Extensions

### Scaffolding (For Struggling Learners or When Time is Short)

- **Focus on Outline:** If the 20-minute drafting sprint feels overwhelming, focus solely on creating a detailed 3-Act outline for two different prompts.
- **Sentence Starters:** Provide specific opening lines to reduce the fear of the blank page (e.g., "The moment the door shut, I knew the apartment was wrong," or "She only had three minutes before the secret would be revealed").

### Extension (For Advanced Learners or Longer Sessions)

- **The Constraint Challenge:** Rewrite your story draft using only dialogue and setting descriptions (no inner thoughts or exposition). This forces the writer to "Show, Don't Tell."
- **Theme Deep Dive:** After the first draft, analyze the story and articulate the underlying theme (the moral or message). Then, go back and revise the story to make that theme clearer in the resolution.
- **Advanced Perspective:** Rewrite a short scene from the draft using a totally different point of view (e.g., switch from first person "I" to third person "She").