

**Student Work Samples:** *First Year Seminar: The Short Story at Home and Abroad*

**SAMPLE 1**

As the editor of a literary magazine, I look for stories that are unique and make the reader think a little. Stories that express feelings that are unknown to the common man. Stories are windows to another world, a place where one can escape and be free. In a story, the reader can live a personality so different from their own and learn how deep the emotions of others can be, especially those who have undergone a traumatic experience. Out of all the stories that we received for our next edition, I have only selected three of them that stood out to me. “The Night in Question” by Tobias Wolff, “Doughnut Shops and Doormen” by Kimberly Kepa’a Tubania, and “Tomorrow’s Bird” by Ian Frazier are stories that are simple, yet they make the reader think outside the box. They pull on the audience’s feelings and emotions, and they are humorous as well.

“The Night in Question” by Tobias Wolff is about a brother and sister who have a close relationship. Ever since they were children, the older sister Frances would look after her younger brother Frank, and protect him from any sort of danger, including their abusive father. The story takes place when they are older, and we can tell this because it opens up by saying “Frances had come to her brother’s apartment...” (pg. 637). Frank had called his sister over to talk about a “disappointment in love” but instead, when she arrived, he told her about a story he had heard from a sermon. The story was about a railroad switchman named Mike Bolling and how he had to sacrifice his only son to save a trainload of random strangers who he did not know. This story is appalling to Frances and throughout

the time Frank was dictating the story, Frances repeatedly interrupted and said that she didn't want to hear anymore because she foresaw a tragic end. Frances doubts the validity of the story and thinks that it's made up because, "people don't act like that. I sure as hell wouldn't." (pg. 642). Then she asks Frank if he would sacrifice her for a trainload of strangers who very well could be murderers and bad people. She then remembers a very vivid memory from when they were younger; their father was coming up the stairs, and both Frank and Frances were trembling with fear, yet Frances was able to gather the strength to tell Frank, "It's okay, Franky. I'm here" (pg. 643).

I find this story unique because it captures so many emotions and feelings between the two siblings that would normally be overlooked. If Franky says he wouldn't pick Frances over a trainload of strangers, she would still be strong enough to say "it's okay, Franky. I'm here." Because she knows that she is all that he has, and she knows that she has to be there for him. It is a strong relationship that has been strengthened by every time their abusive father attacked Frank. Another reason, this story stands out is because of the contrasts in relationships. Frank never obeyed his father. We know this because "He [Frank] went after everything his father said no to" (pg. 639). On the other hand, the relationship between Mike Bolling from the sermon and his son Benny was the complete opposite. "Benny always behaved himself" (pg. 639). But the one time Benny disobeyed his father, by going down to the engine room while the bridge was being brought down, it cost him his life. This story uses these different relationships to mold Frances. She is who she is because of what happened when she was a child. She has a strong will and personality because she needed to be strong to protect her brother ever since they were children and it has made her who she is. She can't

accept a story about sacrifice and giving something up, because all her life, she has been fighting everything in her way.

“Doughnut Shops and Doormen” by Kimberly Kepa’a Tubania is a very interesting story. It follows the life of a woman named Amy who has a very strange personality. She purposely isolates herself from her friends, family, and even her coworkers. She justifies her separation from society by idolizing the “former lead singer of Soundgarden” and calls him the “god of my [her] life” (Page 288). She feels that the very thought of him is enough for her to feel satisfied, to feel loved. Fantasizing him fills the void left by the total absence of communication with the rest of society. After informing us of her deep strong feelings about this person, Chris Cornell, she then goes on to describe an experience she had when she went to buy a doughnut. She meets a beggar there who she doesn’t think much of at first but when she gets closer, she starts to see the face of Chris Cornell as this beggar. She decides to give this beggar some spare change and a doughnut and the beggar’s smile captivates her and makes her fall in love- or is it lust- with this beggar. She decides to take this beggar home and clean him up, and she calls him Chris, failing to recognize this poor man as he is and wanting to see him as something he is not. In her home, she watches him clean up and shave and they live together for about five days. She says that "Chris stayed for five days. He was a great lover, did everything I told him to" (Page 292). This symbiotic relationship between Amy and the beggar seemed to work out. She got her fantasy to come true and he got the money he wanted... and then some. After these five days, Amy says that she is “one of the few people [she knows] who have fulfilled a fantasy” and then she goes on to say that “it might have been a fantasy of a fantasy” and that she is grateful (Page 292). So we, the audience, are not sure if any of this happened at all. But this five day fantasy/experience caused a change

in Amy. She became more open and willing to communicate with others. She felt as if she accomplished something rare. I mean it's not every day that one gets the opportunity to live out a fantasy. And a story like this aims to give the reader a glimpse at what it feels like to have a fantasy fulfilled.

I love the personification used in "Tomorrow's Bird" by Ian Frazier. The narrator characterizes the crows as being business people who seem to want to have a monopoly on bird population. They want to have "control over the market." I find it funny that the narrator was hired by the crows because he or she did "well on the first interview". I also laughed a little when I read that the crows apparently speak English but only caw for their "everyday needs." And apparently the crows have nationwide control over everything that gets run over on the roads and they have control over a bunch of large companies. The author paints a new picture of crows, one where they aren't all that bad as people make them out to be. After reading the story I asked myself, "Why crows?" Why did the author choose to write about crows? They're ugly, annoying, and they eat dead things. So why would anyone choose to write about them. Crows tend to symbolize death because they're so dark and mysterious. But then I thought about it. The author picked something that nobody really likes or pays attention to, and brings it to light. Crows are finally mentioned and viewed in a "good" way. Now of course that means taking over the country, but apparently that's what the narrator considers to be good. This story made me think outside the box, and it was very humorous and entertaining. It makes the extraordinary sound somewhat reasonable, and it allows the reader to understand something new.

All of these stories were more appealing than the rest, because they made me step back and try extra hard to understand what I just read. They were

completely original ideas that were new and refreshing. They made me as a reader, feel like I was one of the characters, as if I was experiencing what they experienced, through the use of good narration and imagery as well as very descriptive writing. Some of the other stories we've read have used a higher tier of vocabulary, but these stories are relatively easy to read, though it may take time to interpret. These stories are complex enough to have multiple interpretations of the story and of what really happened, thus making them good topics of discussion. So publishing these stories can get our literary magazine's name out there and it could be good for the company as well. If there are any other suggestions for short stories or artwork or poetry, feel free to send it to me, but keep our deadlines in mind. We are also starting our online digital publication which will launch next issue, so don't find some material for that as well. Please take these three short stories into consideration as we continue to reach our deadline for next issue!

THE  
COMMON

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IN THE CLASSROOM

## SAMPLE 2

From the desk of GsC-2195

Date: 22<sup>nd</sup> of November, 2554

To: Incompetentponies@wemissthe toilet.com

Subject: Literature Magazine that you all destroyed before it had a chance to see light. And, yes, I did change ALL of your email addresses to that.

Okay. If we want to make this magazine work, we are going to need some really gripping stories. I have set some criteria earlier (actually, it was two years ago, when we all first had the idea to start a literary magazine) as you all may remember and, as I expected, none of you were actually competent enough to find anything worth taking the time to read. You. Guys. Suck. I want that to be as clear as possible. You all have horrible taste in literature. So stale and boring. By extension, that goes for all of your lives. Ponies, all of you. That's right, ponies. Did you that the word pony comes from the old French word for young and immature? I felt that to be an apt description for all of you. Except the difference between you and ponies is that children and orphans like ponies. They don't like you. So, as it is with world domination and finding a good place for ribs, if I want something done right, I have to do it myself.

As I was connecting and meeting with different authors, poets, and comedians (mainstream and not) from all around the galaxy and the Digital (and you were all doing what you do best, wasting away, waiting for the grave) I made some very good friends. We all agree. You're not very bright. I was so upset that even the DNA of Ricky Gervais reconstituted in a hyper-intelligent Japanese Macaque couldn't cheer me up. And Ricky Gervais has always been able to cheer

me up. It's been that way for over 500 years. That makes you all horrible people. My wife would be turning over in her grave if she hadn't had her neural map burned onto an AI core. Though maybe I'm just jumping to conclusions. It may not be your faults. As a man and woman of science, we agree: all of our measuring equipment is not yet sufficiently advanced enough to measure such high levels of lack of effort. Perhaps I have digressed. The point is that I am very close to firing all of you. Out of a mass driver canon. Into a black hole. Thomas, you suggested a story from a X'pl Krcgjhtn author. Perhaps later, we'll explore why you thought that would be a good idea. X'pl Krcgjhtn speak a beautiful but incomprehensible language. They lack an almost universal component of every language: vowels and things analogous to vowels. There currently exists no way to learn or even translate their language into any other language. Not any human languages, not any Turian languages, not SLoR, not even that filthy language you can't even name in polite company (notice how I haven't named it you, see how highly I can still think of you all, my little ponies, even though I hate you all so very much.) And Caroline. I met an author named Caroline. She was a lot like you. Except nowhere near as heavy. She had some good stories to contribute. Just not good enough. Just like you.

The rest of you. I don't even have the patience for the rest of you. I don't have the patience to tell you all how being surrounded by garbage would be preferable because just like all of you, it sits there, doing absolutely nothing, but at least it's quieter and I don't have to smell it if I don't want to. I don't even have the patience to tell you all about how if I knew you would all fall into a figurative pit of stupidity so easily I would have just literally dangled a turkey leg from a rope on the roof and lead you all into an open manhole so I could go about this myself anyway. In fact, if I wanted to go on and on about how a team of professionally

trained Silver-Back Gorillas that have been introduced to a Thresher environment and lobotomized could do a better job than you, believe me, I could go on for days. But I won't do any of that. Instead, I will competently and swiftly move on to business. Something, that as far as I'm concerned, none of you are sufficiently developed enough to do.

Now, as I was saying before thoughts of you people intruded into my head, I took it upon myself to find authors from all around the galaxy and speak with them. I found several excellent authors. They all submitted many excellent stories. I won't be using any of them. I will also be bypassing the rest of editorial board. That's okay though. I invited them to my autumn house on Eden Prime. I told them they had full access to everything, including the hot tubs. Which they all used. After I had the water replaced with fun and deadly hydrochloric acid. Instead I found some ancient literature from the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>th</sup> centuries. These three stories have actually never been published. In fact they've been digitized and secured with some of the most advance and complex encryption codes to date. Cracking those would have been impossible. For you. I just did. While I was typing this email. It wasn't difficult. In fact, I just drew some unwanted attention to myself when the head of Colum McCann preserved in a temporal stasis jar caught wind of this and made his way over here. He said he would have been hear sooner but the quantum highway he used to materialize over here from Earth was under heavy stress. Holidays, what can you do? He was quite upset, claiming a violation of his privacy and wishes. He took the bribe after the neurotoxin started to make its way in through his eyes. Don't worry, he's fine, right here on my lap. And legally, I own his unpublished story now. Well, not legally, but he's in no position to say anything. I will now begin telling you why these stories make great material for this little project of ours. I'll start with "Tomorrow's Bird" by Ian Frazier. A quick



rundown. A man is hired by crows to head their public relations department and creates the slogan, "We want to be your only bird." The slogan is very successful and the crows begin to buy out other companies and eventually other bird species until all birds are legally classified as crows.

Okay, so maybe peons like you need a slower explanation. A man is hired by crows to head their public relations department and creates the slogan, "We want to be your only bird." The slogan is very successful and the crows begin to buy out other companies and eventually other bird species until all birds are legally classified as crows. I believe that Frazier was trying to bring up the point of just how much control, influence, and power companies and organizations have over almost every aspect of our lives. Obviously, he lived in a time before the psychic worms of Arcturus-7 were found to control everything that organic life in the universe does, information which they later erased from the minds of all organic life in the universe after this realization caused the research teams that heard it to commit suicide outside of the worm's control. Oh, silly me, I just told you guys, the most disgusting, pitiful excuse for ponies that could have ever had the misfortune of coming into existence. There I go again, rambling. I really must break that habit. Back to the story, what I (and that means you) like about this story is that there is still a point that rings true today. Corporations do hold a lot of power. That's why I own so many corporations. Corporations do have the amount of influence that sways opinion and thought through advertising. Especially N-Uiel, which broadcasts their advertising directly in to peoples dreams. Have you ever woken up with the urge for a tasty Fronk's Sea Flavored Breakfast Mix? That's because Fronk's also broadcasts their advertising into your dreams. It also means that if you actually go out and buy some, you have a very weak will and no friends to serve as a support structure, Caroline. Indeed, this is probably what

Frazier feared advertising would reach. Even back in my early life in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, were we not safe from the never-ending bombardment of advertising. It was all over the place. Our television, our movies, our internet, our skies, our water, our soil, our music. Frazier knew this and equated it to crows. There he did something interesting. He used crows to represent the corporations. Back then we used crows to represent evil as well, much as I use snails and you to represent something slow, or those tags on mattresses and you to represent something useless. I (you) think this will be a wonderful story for the magazine. This underlying theme will wring true with many people and that little crows and evil aspect will teach alien races a little something about primitive human folklore, provided they know what a crow is.

Next on the list is “The School”, by Donald Barthelme. Again, as a rundown, because I must hold your hands with these things, a school faces deaths all the time. First its small things: plants and a few small animals. Then its people. The children in this school begin to ask why and raise several philosophical points formed by their over exposure to death. This one is a personal favorite because, looking back on it, death was pointless. Who was nature to tell me when I wanted to die? Still, this story does have a theme that will appeal to many laggards, and there are still quite a few. The uncertainty and mystery of death raises questions that many mortals still find themselves asking today. I don’t know why, when a simple conscious transferal is all that needs to be done to alleviate oneself of these weights, but to each their own. Even if they are wrong. It’s not just humans either. Many alien species have the same morbid fascination with death. This is why I (you) think that “The School”, will make an interesting addition to the line up in our first issue. Within the magazine, we should advertise this a bit and be sure to included something like this in every issue. No doubt, stories which raise these

philosophical questions (I honestly can't believe that's still a thing anymore, seriously, science has and will answer all questions philosophy can literally only ask "Why?" about) will continue to attract more readers with each issue. Oh, and that whole thing at the end about death giving meaning to life? Preposterous hogwash, all of it. If anything, death hinders the enjoyment of life just like you are all currently hindering the enjoyment of my life. I prefer life as a machine. I get to take everything at my own pace and really adsorb each and every little moment. As a bonus, I get to delete my memories of you when you die. I can barely wait.

Finally, we have "Everything in This Country Must", by Colum McCann. As a very quick run down. A father and his daughter walk their horse to a river in what was once Ireland on Earth. The horse falls in and is about to drown. Father and daughter try desperately to save it and along come British soldiers from what was once England. They help and save the horse. We discover that British soldiers accidentally ran over Father's wife years ago and he still carries scars. Horse will now be a reminder of that sorrow and so the Father shoots the horse. Look, I don't have a very good reason to put this is other than I love McCann's work. That's why I couldn't bring myself to keep administering the neurotoxin. I suppose I could say that the way McCann writes his characters in this story really shows how humans, and others, can really hold on to pain and then associate it with something. The father knew that these soldiers were not responsible for his wife death but all he sees is the uniform. I have to be doing something right here, McCann is shaking his head yes quite strenuously. Actually, that's something that seems to be universal. There doesn't seem to be a single species that doesn't share this behavioral trait. Even robots are vulnerable. For instance. I know not all of you messed up horrifically and left all the work to me but enough of you did and now all I see is the stupidity. And ponies.

Oh no, that wasn't shaking of agreement. Colum McCann just rolled off my lap and out of my house. I'll have to cut this short for now.

From the cell of GsC-2195

Date: 25<sup>th</sup> of November, 2554

To: [gloriouswhitestallions@blindingglory.com](mailto:gloriouswhitestallions@blindingglory.com)

Subject: Please help. Look, I even changed your email addresses to something amazing. Okay. I only get one of these so pay attention. McCann has made some very powerful connections across the galaxy over these 500 years. I'm locked up right now facing an eternity behind an EMP field. Since they can't kill me they decided to do something worse in here. I don't even want to mention it. Now, I was told I would be free as long as I pay McCann his royalties for using that story in the magazine. Apparently he went right to a publisher. Now, I'll disclose the amount in the phone call I get later, just know it is a lot. Even I don't have that kind of money. But you all do! So I'm asking – no, begging you all to pool together and pay him. Please. I love you all so much. Like my siblings. This is what best friends do, they help each other. Get me out and we could be best friends. Good friends. Friends of friends. Remember all of the good times we had! Remember when I said you were all majestic horses because you were such great editors? I remember that. Everybody remembers that.