

# WRITEGIRL PLANET

Issue No. 9 - The Short Story Issue!



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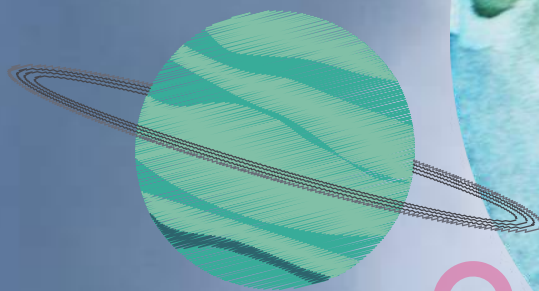
Keren Taylor

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# HOW TO USE THIS AT HOME

*breathe*

Take a deep breath counting to 4, then exhale slowly counting to 4. You're ready!



**Grab your journal** and a pen. (Or a stack of colorful Post-it notes!)



**Take a break** stand up and stretch your arms skyward.



“Flip” through this “WriteGirl Planet” and unearth a new adventure.



When you write the first words that come to mind, give yourself a big smile and then keep writing!

Check out all the WriteGirl smiling faces and get inspired!



# GLOSSARY

on writing

## SHORT STORIES

**Short stories** are pieces of fiction that clock in at about 1,000-7,500 words. Many short stories focus on communicating a theme or mood rather than an intricate plot.

**Flash fiction** is a short story compressed down to 1,000 words or less. Like a poem, making your word choices super specific helps illustrate something big in a small space.

**Microfictions** leave even more to the reader's imagination. These are shorter than flash, maxing out at 300 words (not including the title.)

**Short fiction tip:**  
Don't let your title be an afterthought.  
Something unique and descriptive can help you tell the story!

## LESLEY NNEKA ARIMAH



**Lesley Nneka Arimah** is a UK-born, Nigeria-raised, Las Vegas-living writer of fiction. Her debut short story collection, *What It Means When a Man Falls From the Sky*, was released in 2017 and garnered her esteemed literary awards including the Kirkus Prize and the New York Public Library Young Lions Fiction Award. She was also selected as a National Book Foundation 5 Under 35 honoree.

Arimah's stories combine realism, folktale, and speculative fiction. She closely examines different kinds of relationships between girls and women and the societal pressures put on them through school, work, family, motherhood, and technology. One of the ways she approaches short story writing is by imagining all of the (fictional) things that have happened to her characters before the time in their lives when the story starts. With her own backstory—that doesn't ever need to be revealed to the reader—she is able to make more "realistic" decisions about how each character responds to situations she puts them in and the problems she gives them.

Check out her story "Who Will Greet You At Home," about a woman and her baby, who is made out of hair.

A circular portrait of Laura van den Berg, a woman with long, wavy brown hair, wearing a black leather jacket over a black top and a gold necklace with long, thin, radiating elements. The portrait is set against a light blue background with a white, cloud-like or water-like texture at the bottom. The entire graphic is surrounded by decorative orange and blue circles of various sizes.

## LAURA VAN DEN BERG

**Laura van den Berg** is the author of the novels *Find Me* and *The Third Hotel* and the short story collections *What the World Will Look Like When All the Water Leaves Us*, *The Isle of Youth*, and, most recently, *I Hold a Wolf By the Ears*.

While she doesn't necessarily write ghost stories, a lot of her work is certainly haunted. Whether she's setting a scene late at night on abandoned train tracks or having a character sneakily follow a mime troupe around Paris, van den Berg's stories always have an air of strangeness and mystery without necessarily making them capital-M Mysteries.

Originally from Florida, Laura van den Berg now lives part-time in Boston where she is a creative writing lecturer at Harvard. She loves astrology and trains as a sparring boxer.

# DROP RIGHT IN!

In a short story, you have limited time to set up the backstory and move the action from place to place. Think of a setting that's a great backdrop for all the action and that plunges your character right into a challenging situation. Keeping your characters in a confined space can add intensity, or comedy, to a situation. **Place your characters together in one of these settings** and see what's revealed about them and where your story goes:

- tent or treehouse in a storm
- empty classroom
- animal compound
- bubble
- dinner table at a family gathering
- escape room
- elevator stuck between floors
- spaceship
- food truck
- pod on a ferris wheel
- sealed room in a laboratory
- makeshift hideout or cave.

## Check this out:

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's short story, "A Private Experience," is set in the tiny confines of an abandoned building where two women from starkly different backgrounds are sheltering together during a political riot. We never see the riot, but the women's actions and conversation reveal everything we need to know about them, their situation, and their respective family ties.

## STUCK FOR A STARTING POINT? TRY THIS:

Dig into your memories: Is there a memory that particularly stands out? Imagine telling it as a story to your friend. Maybe you're sitting together (if only!), or you're messaging them, or chatting on the phone. What makes the story something you want to share? Who or what stands out as the main driver in your story? Focus on that one person or thing as your main character or event.

## SINGLE OUT A SCENE:

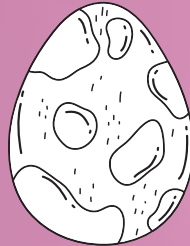
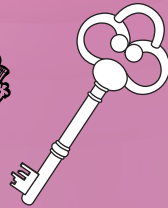
If you've already worked on a longer story, try creating a short story out of just one scene.

# CHARACTER CHAOS:

Rewrite the story of a character you know well. Imagine you're the game master in an alternate reality game! How would Winnie the Pooh get on as a code-busting mastermind? What if a Warrior Cat wound up at a rescue center and was forced into domesticated life? What if Charlotte was actually out to get Wilbur? And how might Gandalf cope with 21st century life?

## CRANK UP THE CONFLICT

Conflict plays a big part in fiction, and short stories are no exception. Dive your characters deep into conflict over **one of the objects below** and see where your story takes you.



As you write, think about what's driving your character in the conflict:

- Do they crave recognition or acceptance? Are they driven by loyalty or rivalry?
- Do they have a desire to succeed or be in control?
- Maybe their motivations shift as your story unfolds.
- Show us their motivations by how your character talks and reacts.





# EMOTIONAL ENDINGS...SIGH!



It can be tempting to rush your ending because, hey, this is a short story and you're running out of words. But, as a reader, you know how unsatisfying it feels when a story leaves you hanging! **So take your time with the ending.** You can cut it back later or edit out other parts of the story instead.

How do you want readers to feel when they finish your story? Do you want to surprise your readers with a twist? Do you want them to sit back with a satisfied sigh, have tears streaming down their cheeks, or be fist pumping the air?

Can't decide? Try out different endings and see which you think fits best.

## TRY THESE TIPS FOR KEEPING YOUR SHORT STORY, WELL, SHORT!

**Cut characters.** The fewer characters you have the more your readers can get to know them and care about what they do. Want to keep them all? Try combining characters so you get to keep all the bits you love!

**Simplify scenes.** Concentrate your action on one or two scenes that truly show what your story is about. Trim transitions. You can waste a lot of words getting your characters from place to place. Instead, use dialogue or a single sentence to let us know that the location's changed.

**Bump the backstory.** Instead of lots of backstory, use dialogue or descriptions to give readers essential information about your characters. For example, hint at a past accident by your character repeatedly placing her hand on a scar.

**Double up on dialogue.** Make sure dialogue does more than one thing. Use it to tell us something about your characters, or the setting, as well as to move the story along.

# MICROFICTION!

Check out this tiny, tiny microfiction from e9art

Once upon a tiny little time there was a tiny woman who found a tiny little shell.

She put it to her tiny little ear expecting to hear a tiny little ocean.

Instead she heard a tiny little voice cry, "Help me!" She laughed her tiny little laugh and inserted her tiny little business card.

'Call me,' she said, and tossed the tiny shell aside.

- written by e9Art

What's the MOOD?  
What was visual, or sensory?  
What might this little micro story be about?

"Main characters don't always have to be likable – they just have to be fascinating."

– Kim Purcell, Fiction Author and WriteGirl volunteer

# THE WORLD AT YOUR FINGERTIPS!

## "ONE TEEN STORY" FREE WRITING CONTEST!

Enter your original, unpublished short story about teen experience, any genre—literary, fantasy, sci-fi, love stories, horror, etc.! Follow the guidelines, check out excerpts of past stories, submit your story! One Teen Story is a sister publication to One Story, an award-winning not-for-profit literary publisher committed to supporting short stories and the authors who write them, providing education, community and mentorship. Find out more [here](https://bit.ly/3jouj0Y). (<https://bit.ly/3jouj0Y>)

## LUNCH TICKET

Lunch Ticket publishes underrepresented writers and artists focusing on work that engages with issues of social, economic and environmental justice. One of their projects, School Lunch, curates bi-weekly features, offering fiction, poetry, flash prose, personal essay, YA and creative nonfiction from writers ages 13-17. Check them out [here](https://bit.ly/3n6gSVw). (<https://bit.ly/3n6gSVw>)

You can also submit for free your own poetry or short story, personal essay, etc. to Lunch Ticket. Read the genre specific submission guidelines [here](https://bit.ly/3jrfudQ). (<https://bit.ly/3jrfudQ>)

## LOOKING FOR SCI-FI/FANTASY YA SHORT STORIES?

[Tor.com](https://www.tor.com) - Read short stories from YA authors, Kendare Blake, Kristen Simmons, Tina Connolly, and more. (<https://bit.ly/3iqGIW0>)



# MORE OF... THE WORLD AT YOUR FINGERTIPS!



## CALLING ALL PLAYWRITERS

Are you a playwright? Start planning for the 2021 YouthPlays' The New Voices One-Act Competition for Young Playwrights— due May 2021! Review this past year's submission guidelines to start writing your one-act play! Click [here](https://bit.ly/2HV7Tql) to learn more. (<https://bit.ly/2HV7Tql>)

## SHAKESPEARE GLOBE

Love Shakespeare? Watch London's Shakespeare Globe's modern 2019 Romeo and Juliet production for free starting Sept 28, 2020 - Feb 2021 on their Youtube channel [here](https://bit.ly/3l56lCT). (<https://bit.ly/3l56lCT>)

## LOVE SCI-FI?

Is science fiction your genre? Get visual ideas from real planetary and galaxy imagery on the Hubble Telescope site [here](https://bit.ly/3inySaw). (<https://bit.ly/3inySaw>)

## CIRQUE DE SOLEIL

Be entertained and inspired with free 60-minute [video specials](https://cirk.me/34iRHxf) (scroll down to see the list). (<https://cirk.me/34iRHxf>)

MORE EVENTS & ACTIVITIES  
on your very own  
WriteGirl Clubhouse page:

<https://www.writegirl.org/writegirl-club-house>

# SELF-CARE TOOLKIT

## 3 Ways to write yourself into a brighter day

1

### Instant Wisdom

You know how sometimes you can have negative thoughts or self-doubt running around in your head? Here's a way to tame them! On one side of the page, write them down, then, on the other side of the page, have a wise mysterious character offer opposite and completely positive thoughts to replace them!

2

### Ode To Me

We might have had times when we wrote letters, poems or songs about someone else, but what about ourselves?? Write a poem, song or letter to you, about you! You deserve it!

3

### Quarantine & Me

There's always a silver lining, so they say. So what is yours? Write a list of ALL the positive aspects of physical distancing these past months. You might have to really firmly plant your thinking cap on...see if you can list at least 5 things!

# SUBMIT YOUR WORK!

Share your work with us!

Visit the  
[WriteGirl Clubhouse Page](#)  
to submit your short stories!

# WRITEGIRL STAFF

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for you!

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