



Generating Ideas for Creative Writing (Transcript)

Whether you're taking your very first creative writing class, or you're an aspiring or established poet, playwright, memoirist, or novelist, it's likely that you'll encounter writer's block sometime during your writer's journey. Writer's block is that terrible feeling of being unable to write that's often associated with a lack of creative impetus. This video is going to give you some great strategies for generating ideas that are going to help you to get right over that writer's block.

My very favorite method of generating ideas for creative writing is simply to respond to a piece of writing that already exists. Some of our nation's best-selling novelists have relied on this very trick in order to inspire their works that we have celebrated over the years. For instance, Madeline Miller's really popular novel, *Circe*, was inspired by the Greek Enchantress from the *Odyssey*. She simply told the story from Circe's point of view and gave us Circe's backstory. One of my favorite writers is Shannon Hale. Shannon Hale uses this method of generating ideas all the time. Her first novel, *The Goose Girl*, is a response to the Brothers Grimm fairy tale. She simply takes the plot line and she expands it, giving us more information about the world that the Brothers Grimm created. My favorite Shannon Hale novel is a novel called *Austenland*. As you can tell from the title, it borrows from Jane Austen's settings, plot lines, and characters, as it brings us a totally exciting story about a young girl who's looking for love. And Shannon Hale isn't the only author who's found great success in responding to Jane Austen's works. There are literally hundreds of novels that are inspired by the world of Jane Austen. And just because we've concentrated on novels as examples of texts that have been responses to other texts, don't think that this doesn't work in other genres, because it absolutely does, from script writing to poetry. There's plenty of room to find wonderful inspiration in texts that already exist. As you'll want to avoid violating any copyright laws, I would encourage you to choose a text to respond to that's at least 100 years old. It's very likely that a text that you're choosing that's more than 100 years old will be in the public domain, which means that you can use it without any fear of violating any copyright. It's easy to do a little research, though, just to make sure that the title that you want to respond to is in the public domain. I have found that classic fairy tales and Greek mythology are two of the places in the public domain that I love to go to for ideas.

Another great method of generating ideas for creative writing is to engage in some ekphrastic writing. That is, writing from art, or allowing a piece of art to inspire your writing. Do you have a favorite piece of art? If so, try responding to that piece of art. There's something about it that makes you love it in the first place. See if you can tap into that for your own creative writing. Or visit an online website that houses a lot of art. For instance, Art.com. They have tons of paintings and other types of art that you can browse through to find something that inspires you. Or go to your local museum and look around. It's amazing the things that you'll find there. One of my favorite paintings is Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *The Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*. The painting depicts the moment when the mythological character Icarus, who has gotten wings from his father, flies too close to the sun, melting the wax on the wings and falling to the earth. If you look into the painting, you can see on the right-hand side, by the ship, there's two little legs sticking up out of the water. That is Icarus falling. Many poets have used this painting as inspiration for poems. One of my favorites is William Carlos Williams' *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*. It's a response to Pieter Bruegel the Elder's painting. I'm going to read William Carlos

Williams's poem to you now so that you can see firsthand, how a piece of writing is inspired by a piece of art.

Landscape with the Fall of Icarus.

According to Brueghel
when Icarus fell
it was spring

a farmer was ploughing
his field
the whole pageantry

of the year was
awake tingling
near

the edge of the sea
concerned
with itself

sweating in the sun
that melted
the wings' wax

unsignificantly
off the coast
there was

a splash quite unnoticed
this was
Icarus drowning

The final method for generating ideas for creative writing that I'll share in this video is one that has been particularly inspiring to me as a professional playwright. One night my brother and I were out to dinner and we were talking about new ideas for plays. We came up with this game right there on the spot during the dinner that was one of us would present a setting and the other one would tell what happened there. One of the settings that I introduced was a backyard and my brother came up with the idea that what happened there was snowmen realized that they were melting and had to face their own mortality. My brother also gave me an interesting setting during the game, one that I found to be very inspirational. It was the board game for the Game of Life. I subsequently imagined that a young couple, both pegs in the Game of Life, were driving along in their car when they figured out that they could see the end of the road. Both of them became worried that the end of the road meant the end of them. Both of the plays that I've just mentioned as examples of generating ideas for creative writing using this method went on to win contests, and they were inspired simply by a single setting

Let's recap here. The techniques that we learned about for generating ideas for creative writing in this video were: 1. Respond to a piece of writing that already exists. 2. Engage in ekphrastic writing, writing from art. 3. Be inspired by a setting. I hope you find something in this video that's going to lead you to a masterpiece