

How Writers Write Fiction 2014

CLASS SIX • Assignment

This week's assignment asks you to take the familiar and remake it into something new.

Think of a family story, one you know well. Don't worry too much about the word "family" -- this story could be from any area of your life. Think back through the old stories you always remember about a friend, an old roommate, a partner, an ex, a family member; and select one. Re-experience the small details of the moments: voices, colors, smells, movements, actions and reactions -- especially actions and reactions. It could be a story of a small event (the time we had dinner with my boss) or a large one (the time our roommate set the house on fire).

Now, introduce two alterations to this story:

- 1) Change the setting. Write your remembered story/scene so that it takes place a new setting, not the original location.
- 2) Change the trajectory: introduce an event that did not happen. This can be a new exterior event (suddenly, as Aunt Peggy lifts her fork, a comet comes through the window and) or an internally-motivated change (suddenly, Aunt Peggy puts down her fork and says "I have to tell you something. I'm the one who stole your shotgun back in 2002. I stole your shotgun and I sold it on E-bay and I used the money to buy a passport").

As you write, and afterward, notice what happens to the feel of the events when they take place in a new setting. Notice what happens to the tone and meaning of the entire scene when you change one event within it. Consider: do the new juxtapositions you've created justify themselves?

