

How Writers Write Fiction 2016: Storied Women

CLASS TWO • Assignment

In our last assignment, you created a character, and her identity shaped the structure of your first writing assignment. In this assignment, we're focusing on a central aspect of character development: desire. And we're using desire to make a central structural decision: point of view. Consider this quote from Amy's contribution to our Class 2 Video:

Your protagonist begins at Point A with a desire - striving to get X. By the end of the novel, the protagonist does or does not get X. And you can even write that as a sort of basic Yes or No question: Will my protagonist get X by the end of the novel? The answer is Yes or No. [...] And there are many, many choices we have to make as novelists in determining this "how," but one of the most important is the choice of point of view: who is doing the desiring, and who is telling about the desiring, and how conscious is that desire?

Consider how Ogechi's desire is established in the Class 2 Reading, what her desire motivates her to do, and what rewards her actions bring her. Lesley Nneka Arimah wrote this story in close third person. Consider what we learn about Ogechi from the direct access to her thoughts and feelings that close third person provides. Consider what we learn about her actions from the way she describes other characters, from how she says they look at and speak to her. Consider also how Ogechi's point of view limits our experience: we can see only through her eyes. Is her vision accurate? What can we not see?

Write a scene or a short story as follows:

- Establish a female character who experiences a strong desire (what Amy Hassinger would call her "big D desire" and Cate DiCharry would call her "core yearning")
- In this story or scene, your character must act on that desire.
- The way that you think she should experience and act on her desire must determine what point of view you pick for your story or scene

About establishing her desire:

Your character does not have to know what her core yearning is, but you need to know.

About how she acts on her desire:

Your character can pursue the object of her desire openly, such as by declaring her goal and pursuing it where others can see her, perhaps even enlisting their help. She can pursue it secretly, such as by trying to hide what she is doing or by trying to manipulate people or events so that they bring the object of her desire closer to her. She can pursue it actively, taking steps to attain it, or passively, such as by hoping it will come to her but not directly trying to make it happen. Or she could even reject her desire: she could take steps, openly or secretly, actively or passively, to prevent herself from having what she wants.

About determining the story's point of view:



If you have a character who feels a desire and acts upon it in some way, then you have opportunities to write about both her internal life, such as how she's feeling and what she's thinking and why; and her external life, such as what she does and says. A summary of your point of view choices and what they might mean for this assignment is below under the subheader Choosing a point of view. Feel free to skip this summary and continue to Important assignment details if you already feel comfortable making decisions about your story's point of view.

Choosing a Point of View:

Choices that fall under Amy's "_reader/_protagonist":

- You could choose to tell the story from her point of view, in first person or close third person, in which case you will tell the story through her eyes only and can give the reader a sense of having complete access to her internal world. If you choose first or close third, the reader can see only what the character sees, only the way she sees it. Some writers believe that first and close third are equally able to offer this interiority, and other writers believe that creating this interiority is easier and/or more successful in first than in close third.
- You could choose to tell the story from her point of view, but in second person. Again, the reader can see only what the character sees, only the way she sees it. Some writers believe that second person offers a chance to create character interiority that will feel very immediate and very thorough to the reader; other writers think that second person is of limited use.

Choices that fall under Amy's "_narrator/_protagonist" :

- You could choose to tell the story from a second character's point of view, in first, close third, or second person. If you choose to tell the story this way, your second character will show the reader what your main character's desire is; how she thinks about it and what she does about it. Your second character's perception of your main character - their current relationship, plus any history or conflict that this desire may bring up between them - will affect what the reader is shown.

Choices that fall under Amy's "_omniscient/_rotating":

- You could choose to tell the story in omniscient third person. In this case you will tell the story partly through your character's eyes and partly through the eyes of an omniscient narrator. Through the omniscient narrator, you can show the reader things that the character could not know or see, and you can show the reader how your character looks from the outside.
- You could choose to use more than one point of view. In this case, you could use a combination of first, second, and multiple close thirds.