

# HIDDEN MEANINGS: CREATIVE FICTION, NON-FICTION, AND FACTS

## SESSION FOUR—ASSIGNMENT

Below are the assignment questions for this session

### PROMPT 1

Think about a time when you've been wrong and later realized it. Write a narrative account where you attempt to recreate this realization for the reader, so they first believe the same version of reality that you did, then—either slowly or quickly—become aware that things aren't how they seem.

One example of this would be thinking your parents have a happy marriage throughout your childhood, then realizing they're heading towards divorce when you're a teenager. A more lighthearted example would be believing some silly thing you're told as a joke as a child (perhaps for a little too long!). For instance, imagine your mother making some offhand comment about how her father was the strongest man in the world, and you taking this literally and bragging to your friends about how your grandfather held some strongman title.

Childhood is rich with experiences like this, because when we're young we're just starting to learn the “rules” of how the world works and are easily and unintentionally duped, but these shifts in understanding happen in adulthood as well.

These realizations don't need to involve being wrong about other people or external occurrences. Sometimes what we're wrong about is ourselves—for example, always considering yourself a courageous person, then encountering a situation that makes you reevaluate just how brave you after all.

Peer Response Questions:

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1. Did the writer successfully “trick” you (did you initially believe things were one way, then experience a turn or a shift in perspective)?

2. If so, was this shift a sudden “aha!” moment, or a more gradual realization?

3. In retrospect, can you see any earlier foreshadowing that things weren’t as they seemed? Try to pinpoint specific moments of foreshadowing in the text if possible.

## PROMPT 2

Write an account of something that happened in your life, but just stick to the facts. Who, what, when, where, how. No editorializing, no betraying the wider significance of events or your emotions surrounding them through word choice. Strive for complete neutrality. The less neutral the subject matter, the more fruitful this exercise will be. For example, a neutral account of eating a bowl of cereal on Sunday morning won’t force you to stretch your writing muscles as much as a neutral account of that time you got fired.

This can either be a new piece, or a rewrite of your first writing exercise (or an entirely different piece you’ve written, either in a different section or apart from this course). This exercise is intentionally stifling and will result in writing that isn’t especially good—but it will hopefully help you become more aware of the different rhetorical tools you use in your writing without even realizing you’re using them.

## Peer Response Questions:

1. Can you pinpoint any moments in the text where the writer fails to achieve neutrality?

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1. What do you think is missing from this piece as the result of this forced approach?
  
1. Which moments were you most desperate for any insight into what the author was thinking or feeling?