

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

## SESSION THREE—DISCUSSION

Below are the discussion questions for this session:

1. **Note:** Please feel free to answer one or more of the specific questions or to respond in a general way to the readings, if you choose. I encourage you to allow yourself to like or not like the story, but try to examine the craft choices made by the writer (the way it is written: voice, structure, POV) rather than the content (what it is about). It is fine to reflect on content, but the point is, how is the content revealed by the author, or hidden; how does the content achieve its power based on how the work is crafted?

*Likes*, by Sarah Shun-lien Bynum

This piece is written in a fragmented style (broken by paragraphs). Some claim that writing presented in fragments represents the reality of lived experience more accurately than traditional narrative structures can.

Focusing on craft over content, and especially the question of how and why a writer might choose fragmentation for the structure of their work: how does fragmentation work in this story to present reality and truth? What do you think of this technique?

You might choose one fragment or type of fragment (the Instagram descriptions, for example) and discuss how it is advancing the story, or you might consider the overall effect.

*ETA: if you would like to read an interesting article about Fragmented Writing, I would suggest: [http://fractionfiction.com/rise\\_of\\_the\\_fragmented\\_novel.html](http://fractionfiction.com/rise_of_the_fragmented_novel.html)*

2. *Likes* presents different glimpses into the daughter's character: the Instagram identity, the mostly silent car companion, the talkative girl in physical therapy, and the confident dancer. We see her through others, and others see her through these

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identities. Think about all the different voices here in the way this story is presented and the effect they have on your understanding.

Specifically: Whose story is this—the daughter’s or the father’s? Does this story take sides (is there an antagonist)? Who is the protagonist—the daughter or the father—and what in the writing supports this? (Do we get an honest glimpse of either?)

### 3. *The Rememberer*, by Johanna Skibsrud

I am now going to ask you to do the opposite of what I said previously. I’d like you to elevate content over craft, because this story raises some fascinating questions for writers and creators—it is interested in the art of writing and the drive to create, seek truth, and explore memory and its frailty.

Several times, the topic of metaphor emerges: “For some time now, it had been gallingly difficult for the girl to recall anything abstract—especially anything of a precognitive nature—without falling back on the bad habit of metaphor.”

What do you think of this idea? Does metaphor offer us a purer/truer way of presenting truth, or does it get in the way? What are some craft tools you use to represent the truth in your writing?

4. *The Rememberer* ends on a tale, told by a master, a story within a story: “the tale of the bridge, across which you were permitted to pass only if you told the guard in advance where you were going and why, and swore on oath that whatever you said was true....” (Is this a metaphor?)

Why do you think the author chose to end this way? What is the effect and are you satisfied by this ending?

### 5. *Astroturfing*, by Crofton Black and Abigail Fielding-Smith

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I know the content is fascinating (bots, politics, egg accounts!), but I am particularly interested in hearing what you think we can take as writers from this reporting? This is, after all, exceedingly well-written. Consider all the screen-captures, hashtags, @s, and other graphic additions—this is a visually rich article.

What do you think of these visual additions? Do they help keep you interested or are they distracting? How do they change/influence your perception of the “truthiness” of this reporting?