

STORY GENIUS

Workbook
LESSON 1

Presented by:



Lesson #1: What Is a Story?

A story is how the **things that happen** affect **someone** in pursuit of a **difficult goal**, and how they **change internally** as a result.

1. Write about the instant that the idea you're working with first grabbed you.

- Was it sparked by an image?
- By the point you want to make?
- An actual *What if?* question?

Start typing your response here:

I was sitting in my dispatch chair at the local police department thinking about NaNoWriMo when the idea hit. I thought... what would happen if a girl was involved in a drunk driving accident that resulted in the death of her father and two innocent people. And what if that girl fell in love with a guy whose wife and child were in the other car – the other two people that died. Would love be strong enough to overcome this tragedy?

Comment [aa1]: This is great! And one thing to think about: was there anything that happened, or thing that you noticed in this moment that triggered this thought? There doesn't have to be, but sometimes by really diving into what spurred such a meaty question reveals things that might not seem as clear on the surface. This is where we sometimes find gems. Just a thought!

Comment [aa2]: This is fabulous – meaty, rich and full of specifics that you can instantly begin to dig into. It's far more accomplished than what I'm used to hearing. Just as an example, here are some of the specific questions that this instantly brings to mind: Who was drunk in the car, the girl or her dad? Assuming that the drunk person was driving, why? And why didn't the other person (girl or dad) try to stop him/her? Which brings up: what was the relationship between the girl and her father? And, on the other side, what was the state of the relationship between the husband and wife at that moment? Where were they going? Why? And, was the driver of their car (I'm assuming it was the dad) complicit in the accident in any, even minor, way? As you can see, specifics beget specifics, and the more specific you are, the easier it is to begin to ask relevant questions. Excellent!

Comment [aa3]: THIS brings up the biggest question – because it sounds as if there are two people in this story – the woman and the husband – and they would each have a VERY different test for “love being strong enough” to trump the tragedy. And the biggest of questions is: IS it possible to fall in love with the person who is responsible for the death of the people you love most? That's a very different question than the drunk driver would face. Which brings us to the question that we'll be dealing with next week: Whose story is it?

2. Dive deeper into why you care about the story you want to tell.

Ask yourself:

- Why do I care about this?
- Why is it sticking with me?
- What about it matters to me?

Start typing your response here:

I'm intrigued by forgiveness. How we as people decide who to forgive and who not to, how some people that love and hope and the future are enough to let the past and hurt go, while others are unable to get past the pain. It's sticking with me because I honestly don't know if I were in this position, what I would do. I've never experienced the level of pain of losing a spouse or child or parent. I have and continue to experience intense love... and the thought of losing that love devastates me, but if I also fell in love with someone new and felt the same way I feel now, could I give that up because of the pain? I'm also interested in the topic of addiction – how someone can be so addicted to something to numb pain/escape reality.

Comment [aa4]: This is great – it's a perfect example of a universal that we all struggle with. Because you're going to answer the question: why we forgive some and not others. And, in the process I'm betting you'll confront whether forgiveness is a choice. And – this is what's so fabulous about the situation you're going to use to make this point – what it costs us to do it. So much possibility here!

Comment [aa5]: Of course, the question is also: is it possible? In other words, might not be a conscious choice – might be something that can't be "overcome" – not the anger, but the pain in the face of the person who caused it. But important to also be specific – is all the love the same? Is it possible to love two people but in different ways?

Comment [aa6]: Also an interesting question – and what's so good about this here is that it's NOT a separate question, but one that's part of the bigger question: How do we cope with pain? (And, of course, some believe that addiction isn't a choice, either. That is another question you could consider here).

3. Nail down the point of your story.

- What do you want your readers to go away thinking about?
- What are you trying to say about human nature?
- What inside intel are you going to give us to help us navigate the future?

Start typing your response here:

I think the most general, basic point of this story is: **Love is bigger than anger and hatred. That true love will conquer pain.** I want my readers to go away thinking: that character went through one of the most painful things to ever happen in life (losing a wife and child) and yet, love was strong enough to heal him.

Comment [aa7]: Wow, that's quite a point! Of course, the question is: *is it?* And that's a very general approximation of your overarching force of opposition. And, one question (because it occurred to me, does love really conquer pain, or does it allow you to withstand the pain? Because chances are the husband will always feel the pain of his child's death. The love is what will allow him to live with it. BUT, keep in mind, that you've got a very potent test for him. It's one thing to then fall in love again, it's another to fall in love with the person who might be responsible for your child's death.

4. Write a *What if?* that is both concise and fully fleshed out.

- Your *What if?* straddles the middle of your story: looking forward from page one it captures a hint of where it's going; looking backward it captures why what happens will matter to your protagonist.
- Your *What if?* begins to capture *both* your story's internal and external relationship.
- Your *What if?* can be longer than one line, but keep it to no more than 250 words.

Start typing your response here:

What if a man who is grieving the loss of his wife and daughter unknowingly falls in love with the woman who was involved in the accident that killed them?

Comment [aa8]: This is a GREAT what if – you've nailed it here.