LESSONS FROM THE GREATS
This workbook is best used in conjunction with The Narrative ARC website (www.thenarrativearc.org)

The website goes into detail about why these novels were chosen and the techniques used by each author.

This workbook utilizes the techniques of deliberate practice

Deliberate practice is the science-backed way to get better at any task. Deliberate practice has three steps:

1. Breaking down skills into manageable "chunks"
2. Repeatedly practicing these chunks at the edge of your ability
3. Receiving feedback on your work

Stretching ability

This book is designed to expose you to different narrative styles. Use the following prompts to experiment. The only way to improve as a writer is to practice outside of your comfort zone.

Receiving feedback

The best way to receive feedback is through a teacher or a coach. Show your completed writing assignments to a trusted friend or writing group.

Barring that, pretend that you’re reading a stranger's work (write the name of your least-favorite person at the top, if it helps) and decide what you think you’re doing great and what needs work. Make note of the things that need work.

Repeat, Repeat, Repeat

After you decide what you need to work on, go back and do the same prompt over again, armed with your new knowledge. I've provided plenty of pages so you can keep working.

Improve your writing process. Learn techniques from the best writers of all time. Get better at what you love to do!

-Andie
The Narrative ARC
Create your own Proustian Memory

Make your favorite childhood treat. Go ahead and make that grilled cheese or indulge in a gooey brownie. Write a paragraph about how it tastes now and a paragraph about the way you remember it tasting as a child.
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Take the Proust Questionnaire

Originally a parlor game, the Proust Questionnaire has about 30 questions. This one is my favorite:

What do you consider the most overrated virtue?
What's in your backyard?

Ulysses is famously set in Joyce's hometown of Dublin.

Get a map of your own city and find a neighborhood you've never explored. Take a drive or go on a virtual Google Maps tour. Write about what you see.
Take a dip in the stream.

Set aside ten minutes to write. Don’t think about what you’re writing, don’t worry about punctuation. Follow the stream of consciousness and let the whatever is on your mind come out on the page.
Take a break

Use this page to doodle, jot down ideas, or write about why you want to be a writer.
There was a what in the where?

Melville’s protagonist is saved from the drowning in a coffin.

Where is the strangest place you can imagine a coffin?
Notes
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To diacope, or to not diacope

Words, friends, words. Shakespeare's got 'em and we need 'em. He rather liked diacope.

If you haven’t guessed, diacope is one of the figures of rhetoric. It involves sandwiching a word or phrase between another word or phrase. Try wedging ten of them onto this page.
I didn't forget...
I bet some of you thought I'd forgotten about The Great Gatsby... nope... it's just delayed...
In the meantime, enjoy this lovely... word search?

| N | O | T | S | E | L | R | A | H | C | N | O | U | C | W |
| G | V | A | L | L | E | Y | P | P | C | O | W | L | E | L |
| J | E | G | P | T | B | X | A | N | A | I | E | S | D | O |
| H | P | L | H | L | Q | G | R | E | R | S | T | A | P | O |
| W | O | G | T | N | I | M | T | J | B | N | T | P | S | P |
| I | I | T | R | O | P | S | Y | N | P | A | F | R | D | T |
| L | Y | B | A | B | O | K | D | E | J | M | W | A | Y | P |
| G | A | T | S | C | B | S | E | O | X | I | Z | H | W |
| F | P | N | J | I | T | R | H | K | S | T | P | L | D |
| C | W | E | N | Y | E | Q | V | G | Y | P | T | S | K | C |
| E | G | G | L | W | G | O | C | E | B | L | V | E | U | V |
| Q | H | U | O | U | A | G | H | S | T | V | F | Y | Y | D |
| G | X | L | N | R | J | H | E | X | J | Q | E | C | K |
| E | F | Y | W | C | N | C | F | V | V | Y | A | B | S | R | T |
| X | T | W | L | H | K | X | V | V | U | S | L | B | G | D |

- BOOTLEG
- CAR
- CHARLESTON
- DAISY
- DUST
- EAST
- EGG
- EYES
- FLOWERS
- GATZ
- GREEN
- JULEP
- LIGHT
- MANSION
- MINT
- NICK
- OLD
- PARTY
- PASTRY
- POOL
- SPORT
- VALLEY
- WEST
He deserved it...

In the Divine Comedy, Dante depicted some of his political rivals suffering in hell. Start a story with this phrase, "He deserved exactly what he got."
Dinner Two Ways

In Madame Bovary, everyday objects betray the inner emotions of the characters. The door squeaks, the knife drags, and the walls sweat.

Think about your least favorite meal and try to convey your disgust implicitly, the way Flaubert does in Madam Bovary.

Then, rewrite the passage using the same technique, but this time from the perspective of someone who loves the dish.
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I woke up like this...

In Don Quixote, the title character believes himself to be a heroic knight.

Superheroes could be considered the modern-day equivalent of knights.

What would happen if you woke up tomorrow convinced that you had a superpower? Write about it.
Let's talk politics

Tolstoy’s War & Peace uses real historical figures in it’s fictional narrative.

Whether you’re writing about contemporary events, history, or the future, the politics of your setting add to the world-building of your novel.

Look over your work-in-progress. Identify the political figures that factor into your protagonist’s life.

If the novel is set in the future, make a few figures up!
The Narrative ARC
The Narrative ARC
Real Magic

Magical realism allows a story to be grounded in a realistic setting while still having elements of magic.
Write a story about doing the laundry, but with a magical twist.
Character-driven plot

In *Their Eyes were Watching God*, the plot is secondary to the exploration of Janie Crawford’s character. We follow her through adolescence, three marriages, and a return home.

Plot should always follow character, not the other way around. This takes understanding human nature.

For this exercise, go to a public place, like a mall or coffeehouse and observe the people around you. Eavesdrop on conversations and write down some of your insights here.
Exploring the past with Jesmyn Ward

Sympathy for the Unsympathic

In Sing, Unburied, Sing, Ward gives us the character of Leonie. She is addicted to drugs and a neglectful mother and daughter, but as a point-of-view character, we come to understand her struggles if not agree with her behavior.

Think about your least favorite person in the world. Now write a short story from their point-of-view that starts, "I may not be perfect, but..."
Let me make you a mixtape

The Hate U Give is an allusion to Tupac Shakur’s THUG LIFE tattoo. The meaning of the tattoo is discussed by several characters in the novel.

Write a short scene where two characters explore the deeper meaning of some form of pop culture: music, celebrities, television, or movies.
Unraveling prejudice with Toni Morrison

Bleeding on the keyboard

The Bluest Eye explores some of the most painful experiences a human can endure. It contains stark scenes of racism, poverty, child neglect, rape, and incest. Write a paragraph about your worst memory, try to evoke the emotions you felt at the time, then give the experience to one of your characters. Let it be part of their backstory.
Notes

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Magicae Verbum!

Harry Potter has become such an iconic character. He is instantly recognizable with his wizard robes, wand, glasses, and lightning bolt scar.

Write a description of your protagonist and make it as vivid and concrete as possible. Draw a sketch next to the description.
Letters to God

Alice Walker uses a series of letters to God as the structure of the novel. It can add a sense of veracity to a fictional story. Start keeping a character journal. Write a daily entry in the character’s voice, paying special attention to word choice and spelling.
Mixing Fact and Fiction

Dan Brown made his protagonist a professor of Religious Symbology at Harvard. No such degree existed.
Create a fictional profession and complete the following story:

"In my line of work, you never, ever...."
Heart Connection

Romance is one of the most popular genres in the world. One of the primary tenants of the genre is that it ends with a 'happily ever after.'

Write a story that starts with the phrase, "She slammed the door..."
Lookin' for Love

Stephenie Meyer is just the latest in a long line of authors to cast vampires as heartthrobs, not horrors. Since the next vampire/werewolf renaissance isn’t scheduled until 2025, write a story about one of these horror movie staples finding love.

- mummies
- Frankenstein’s monster
- zombies
- aliens
- swamp monster
- clowns
The Narrative ARC
Hunger is never a game

From Katniss’ hunting to Peeta’s bread, food plays an important role in Suzanne Collin’s The Hunger Games.

Write a short story using these six foods:
- apple
- olives
- chocolate
- fish sticks
- coconut cream pie
- lemonade
What's your major?

Many of Grisham's characters are lawyers because Grisham is a lawyer. In this exercise, create a character with these three traits:

- Has a job in the subject you majored in (or loved in school)
- Drives the same car your next door neighbor does
- Has a name with the initials D and W

Write a short story that begins, "I was eight years old when I..."
Crafting a page-turner

The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo starts off with a compelling mystery. Write a short story that starts with the following phrase, "I am being framed..."
Remembering 9th grade

John Green is a master of creating realistic teenage voices for his characters in The Fault in Our Stars. But, not every teenager is the same.

In this exercise create two teenage characters writing about the first day of 9th grade.

• A teenager who writes in a paper journal or diary.
• A teenager creating an Instagram story complete with photos.
Despite spending the majority of the story on cutthroat revenge, The Count of Monte Cristo ends on a message of hope. Edmond walks away from his vengeful task, ready to start a new life.

Not every story can or should end happily, but write a short story that ends with the idiom, “they lived happily ever after. The End”