



Story Prompts: Emotional

Introduction

The following story prompts are designed as entry points to new stories. Some of them will spark an idea. Some of them won't. With the ones that do spark an idea, can you keep pushing that idea into something completely unique? Perhaps the story you come up with in the end only references the prompt in a very oblique fashion. Perhaps it sticks to it more closely.

ANGER

Half an argument

Write a scene where two characters are having an argument about something. However, only one of them is saying their thoughts out loud. How might the second character's silence inflame the first character's ire?

Rage room

A character is given a red-letter day experience at a rage room for their birthday. At first, they don't think they have anything to be angry about, but as they start to smash things up, their anger builds within them.

Touchy subject

Write a story where your narrator needs something important from a touchy subject (someone who explodes at the smallest irritation).

BOREDOM

Everything in the world

Imagine you had always had everything in the world, all the money you could ever want. Would it be a wonderful existence or would you be less enamoured by everything because it had been given to you so easily?

Stuck in a lift

A character is stuck in a broken-down lift with the most boring person in the world. What we find boring is of course highly subjective. What is the most boring thing from your character's point of view? How might your character find a way of amusing themselves and avoiding total boredom?

CALM

The international space station

Write a story where a character is able to observe the world from the widest lens possible, exploring the sense of tranquillity that might come over them on seeing how small we all are compared to the size of the earth.

The river of calm

Describe a river where a character is placing all their negative emotions, and how the character becomes ever calmer and more at peace as they watch their anxious thoughts and unpleasant memories float away from them.

Yoga at the end of the world

A character does their usual morning yoga while everyone else runs around screaming about the apocalypse.

CONFUSION

Contradictory signposts

You're going on a journey but every signpost you come to points you in a new direction so you end up walking around in circles.

Waking up in an X

Where might a character wake up that would be completely discombobulating? Use that as the inciting incident for a story.

DISCOMFORT

A fish out of water

Write a story where a character literally transforms into a fish out of water. What triggers this change? What happens next?

The relationship conundrum

Two characters have fallen in love. It's a classic tale of boy meets girl or boy meets boy or girl meets girl. Except that the two characters discover they have diametrically opposing views on something that is a core belief for both of them (for example, a climate-change denier and a climate-change activist).

Swallowed by the ground

When something embarrassing happens, we often experience that sensation of wanting the ground to swallow us whole. What happens if this comes true? Does it make the embarrassment any less or does the character's embarrassment grow even larger? How do they get out?

Uncomfortable clothes

We often talk about 'dressing to impress' but not everyone feels comfortable dressing up (or dressing down). Write a scene where a character feels uncomfortable in their clothes. How might the clothing become more uncomfortable as the scene progresses? This feels like a prompt where you might lean into exaggeration and absurdism.

DOUBT**The colour of doubt**

Cowardice is often described as yellow, anger is associated with the colour red, sadness is blue, jealousy is green. What colour is doubt? Create a character whose vision becomes tinted by whatever emotion they're feeling and think about how you might use that effect to create increasingly vivid imagery of how the world appears to them.

The unconfident acorn

Oak trees are mighty beings that have that ethereal quality about them, some of them living for a thousand years. But imagine where that oak tree starts off—as an acorn. What if that acorn was severely lacking in confidence or had impostor syndrome? Write a stream-of-consciousness paragraph that builds through its doubts.

Version of events

A crime has taken place. Have a group of characters discuss what they have seen with each of them experiencing doubt over their version of events.

EXCITEMENT**The embracer of life**

It's exam season and everyone's drowning in dread or boredom. Except the embracer of life who's as excited about the exams as they would be about travelling to the moon or meeting a superstar.

Sitting on their hands

Write a story where a character is struggling to keep a secret about a life-changing (and exciting) event.

FEAR**A matter of life or death**

Make a character confront their fear as a matter of life or death. Are they able to overcome their demons or does the fear overcome them?

The psychologist

Write a story about a psychologist who helps others with their fears. What is the psychologist's biggest fear? How might that build up while the fears of all their clients are slowly overcome?

The support group

Imagine a support group for individuals with different fears. How might each character act and how might they cause tension for each other? For example, imagine if one character had a fear of beards and another had a fear of buttons.

HOPE**The darkest hour is just before the dawn**

Take this proverb as a starting point for a story. Begin at that darkest hour and describe the slow creeping in of the dawn. Is the darkness / dawn literal or metaphorical? What object might represent hope and how

might it grow?

The museum of hope

Hope is a thing of the past. The world is now a place of purely negative emotions. However, the artifacts of hope have been preserved in this one museum. What are those objects? How might you build through a list of those objects to create a story?

The rebel alliance

Write a story where the 'government' have made dreams illegal. How might a 'rebel alliance' provide dreams and give the population hope?

JEALOUSY

Green with envy

What if it went further than green? Craft a story around the premise of someone becoming physically sick because of their jealousy towards someone else. How far does this progress? At what point do they realise their envy isn't helpful?

Jealousy or attraction

Write a story where a character's jealousy is hiding a deeper emotion, one of attraction. What is the thing that makes them accept their true feelings?

The ugly duckling

The story of the ugly duckling ends with the duckling turning into a beautiful swan. Imagine how one of the ducklings who previously teased the swan might become jealous. Or shift the story into something more 'real world', a character who was an 'ugly duckling' as a child and the bully who teased them, now jealous.

JOY

Happy sad

Imagine if sadness wasn't just an "emotion" but a living being, a bit like the Greek muses. What would bring sadness joy? How would this contradict their purpose for being? What might this build towards?

Tension free

Write a story entirely without tension. What is it that drives the narrative momentum of the piece?

Topsy-turvy land

Set a story in a world where it's a crime to laugh or smile; and have your protagonist visit a "speakeasy" establishment for the first time.

PROUD

Celebration of weirdness

Being 'weird' (or diverging from the norm) is often frowned upon or ridiculed. Have a character reclaim their 'weirdness' and create a story around that. What unique thing might make them 'weird'? How might they celebrate this part of their identity?

Pride before a fall

Pride often ends up creating a downwards trajectory. Write a story where a proud character has a literal fall, perhaps down a flight of stairs in front of a crowd of people, perhaps down a shopping-centre escalator, perhaps down a hill at a cheese rolling contest...

SADNESS

The depression cake

Cakes are usually joyful things, pleasant tasting and full of colour, but imagine how a cake might turn out if a character working through sadness or depression pressed their emotions into the sponge mixture and the fondant icing? What would be the look, taste and feel of the cake? Could it have layers where each layer was more emotionally infused than the one before?

Searching for happy

Write a story in reverse chronology where a character has the motivation of trying to identify the point when they were last happy, revisiting all their memories from front to back.

Six-word story

Write a six-word story that captures the same sense of sadness as Hemingway's "For sale: baby shoes, never worn." What item might you pick to represent sadness? How might you expand that into a longer story?

SHAME

The confession

Write a story in the form of a letter where a character confesses to something shameful they've done in the past. What has triggered the character to write this letter? What justifications might they give for what they did? What will the character learn through the process of writing the letter?

SURPRISE

The surprise party

A character walks into their living room only to be met by all their friends and family jumping out and yelling surprise. But this isn't their birthday or an anniversary or a retirement. Find a completely bizarre reason for throwing a surprise party and build a story from there.

Unexpected visitor

An unexpected visitor turns up on your doorstep...

SUSPICION

The pirate detective

Private detectives tend to be portrayed as mysterious men in a trench coat and a fedora. But what if they were a pirate detective instead? And what if, instead of solving traditional crimes, they solved things like 'who stole the boss's lunch from the workroom fridge' or 'who killed the vibe at the roller disco'?

Small town suspicions

A new character moves to town. Everyone is suspicious of this newcomer. Write a story in 1st person plural (we) where either the town's suspicions are well-founded or where their suspicions go too far and there is nothing to be suspicious about.



ENDNOTE

Bio:

This resource has been created by Matt Kendrick. Matt is a writer, editor and teacher based in the East Midlands, UK. His short fiction has been widely published both online and in print. His work has been included on the Biffy 50 list for 2019-20, in Best Microfiction 2021, Best Small Fictions 2022 and the Wigleaf Top 50 list for 2022. He has also been nominated for Best of the Net and the Pushcart Prize.

Other Resources:

For links to other free resources, please visit my website: <https://www.mattkendrick.co.uk/resources>

Services and Courses:

Information about my [courses](#), [workshops](#) and [editorial services](#) can also be found on my website.



Support me on Ko-fi

As a workshop facilitator, I am committed to opening up writing opportunities to people from all backgrounds based on ability to write rather than ability to pay. However, it is becoming increasingly difficult to finance pay-what-you-can and free spots exclusively from my own pocket. So, if you've downloaded this resource and are in a position to support narrowing the access gap to creative writing opportunities, I would be very grateful if you would consider buying me a virtual coffee*.

**Any money donated to my [Ko-fi page](#) will be used to fund free and reduced-price places for my Write Beyond The Lightbulb courses, as well as to provide free editing and mentoring opportunities for low-income writers, and to support other opportunities that seek to level the playing field.*