

# Prompts From Published Authors



Think of something memorable that happened to you or think of someone memorable you've met.

Write about it, but change an important detail to its opposite e.g. a great birthday party becomes a disastrous one (How? Why?). Or turn a kind friend into a mean one (What else changes about them?).

**Caroline Greene, author of *Lessons At The Water's Edge* (a novella-in-flash)**



Write a short story and include the following words somewhere in the text: hula hoop, smartphone, thunderstorm, clown car, and lightbulb.

**Dan Crawley, author of *Blur***



Write this opening scene:

You sit on a bench in a park. What time of day is it? Why are you there?

You notice there's a purse or wallet next to you. What does it look like?

You decide to open it. What's inside? Money? Credit cards? A photograph? A shopping list? A letter? Or something else?

What happens after that?

Write the rest of the story.

**Alison Woodhouse, author of *The House on the Corner* (Ad Hoc Fiction) and *Family Frames* (V Press)**



Quickly write twenty sentences containing the word "storm." Now choose the sentence you like best. Maybe the one that has the most "feeling" to it. Write that sentence at the top of the page, then free write for 5-10 minutes without stopping. Bring in all the senses as you write: sight, sound, smell, touch, taste. Just riff and allow whatever comes. You may surprise yourself!

**Kathy Fish, author of *Wild Life: Collected Works from 2003-2018***



There's a boy in school whose mother brings him lunch every day, sits beside him peeling an apple or an orange while he eats, hugs and kisses him before leaving...

**Sara Siddiqui Chansarkar, author of *Morsels of Purple and Skin Over Milk***



Dinner at my house is...

**Diane Gottlieb, editor of *Awakenings (ELJ Editions)***



Write a story where one of the laws of physics is completely different from how we know it, e.g. there is no gravity / time runs backwards / there is very low air pressure so we all float around like inflated human balloons / water flows uphill / wind is opaque / emotions are visible as colours - anything you like! Imagine how that would make life different and try and think of a scene where you can show that to the reader without having to explain what is different.

**Lucy Hooft, author of the *Sarah Black Spy Series***



Write a story about two people who dislike each other and accidentally meet again after a few years. Include the words 'iron', 'thread' and 'darkness'.

**Tim Craig, author of the short-short fiction collection *Now You See Him (Ad Hoc Fiction)***



Think of a place. Maybe it's a place that feels familiar, or a place you'd like to visit. Maybe it's someplace you saw in a video or found on a web search. Maybe it's a place you can only dream of.

Now, take a few minutes to imagine the specific details of the place: How does it smell? Is it hot? Cold? Are there noises? What are the colors and textures and tastes of the place? Make a list of these details—be as specific as possible.

Next, imagine the characters that inhabit this space. Who are they? What do they want? How do they interact with the space you've created? Allow your detail list to guide your characters' goals and actions.

**Myna Chang, author of *The Potential of Radio and Rain***



Start writing with the words, 'It wasn't much of an excuse...' and keep going for at least 5 minutes.

**Ruth Brandt, author of *No One Has Any Intention of Building A Wall***



For a layered and unexpected story, create three columns on your page. In the first, write down a really normal, every day event—brushing teeth, taking the bus to school, putting dishes in the sink. In the second, write down a bigger or rarer life event—moving away, a new class teacher, a holiday. In the third and final column write down a 'wildcard'—it could be a word that comes to mind, an animal (animals are often in my own stories!) or something from your imagination, or just something you can see around you—a unicorn, a broken doll, a snake, Santa Claus, pride. Try and put around 10 things in each column, then sit back and look at what you have. What calls out to you? What do you think would either work well together or contrast nicely against each other in a piece of fiction writing? Can you create an idea that could link one word from each column together? I guarantee you'll get a unique and layered story using this method. Have fun.

**Gaynor Jones, author of *Among These Animals***



What happens when your family takes a road trip to Disneyland using the car's sulky / mean / unreliable navigation system?

**Sudha Balagopal, author of *Things I Can't Tell Amma***



Think of a number between 1 and 20.

Now find your favourite book and turn to the page that is the same as the number you chose.

Close your eyes, run your finger down the page and stop.

Whatever sentence your finger finds should be the first sentence of a new story that is completely your own.

**KM Elkes, author of *All That Is Between Us***



Think about a place you know really well, one that's a big part of your everyday life. Maybe it's your bedroom or your classroom. It could be outside, like a sports field or a store you go to a lot. Perhaps the bus to school. Someone - or something - totally unexpected suddenly steps into that place. Who or what is it? What happens next? How different is that place afterwards?

**Sharon Telfer, author of *The Map Waits***



Write a story loosely based on an argument or fight you've had with someone - a family member, friend, classmate, stranger. But write it from the other person's point of view.

**Damhnait Monaghan, author of the novel *New Girl in Little Cove***



What will your life be like in 10 years' time?

**Anita Goveas, author of *Families and other natural disasters***



Your character is at the fairground and has become separated from their friend. How might they experience the sights, sounds and smells as they search? They take a ride on the Ferris wheel alone, hoping to catch a glimpse of their friend, and from the top they witness something extraordinary, maybe something terrifying. What is it? What happens next?

*Tip: if you get stuck, ask yourself a few 'what if...?' questions.*

**Ali McGrane, author of *The Listening Project***



What is your favorite sport or hobby? What is your favorite animal? Write a story that has that animal playing that sport or creating through the hobby. There's no limit to how you can creatively combine the two. A giraffe that plays basketball. A rabbit that knits. A lion quarterback. A turtle that wants to run track. A crow that is an avid reader. A piano-playing cat.

Write a story that brings this sporty or hobby-loving animal into real life. You don't have to give everyone else in the story animal qualities OR you can give them all their own unique personalities. Have your character interact with others. Don't explain how or why they're in the same space with more traditional characters, but do show any conflicts or interactions that might take place. For the space of your story, you're suspending any disbelief that these characters might coexist with humans.

Think about how others might react to a basketball-playing giraffe. What would you think if you saw a crow reading or a knitting rabbit? How would these characters speak? Would others accept them? What are their challenges and successes? Make these unique characters 3-dimensional - think about what they might wear, and eat, where they live, and who is in their family. Are they superstars at their sport / do they have an Etsy store? Or do they do these things out of personal enjoyment?

Try writing the story from the viewpoint of these imaginary characters and also from the other perspective. Do the characters feel isolated or more unique because they're different?

**Amy Barnes, author of three short fiction collections and mom to two kids who love science and writing**



You find a box on the ground with a note that says, "Don't open this." What happens when you do?

**Finnian Burnett, author of *The Clothes Make the Man***



Choose one letter from your name and write down 5-10 words that start with the same letter. See if you can use all of those words in your next story.

**Laura Besley, author of *100neHundred***



Take the first line of a book you've never read, and use it as the last line of your story. What happens to lead to that last line as an ending?

**Lindz McLeod, writing coach and author of *Turducken* and *Beast***



Since cause-and-effect is often so important in our storytelling, write a story where cause-and-effect can clearly be interpreted.

**Mandira Pattnaik, author of *Where We Set Our Easel***



Find a piece of writing in a language you barely understand. Take the first few paras and 'translate' them freely with your imagination, using the words as you see them to create the start of a new story. Make it up as you go along!

**Dan Brotzel, author of *Hotel du Jack*, *The Wolf in the Woods*, and *Work in Progress***



It's the year 7444. In time-traveling class, your teacher announces that you're visiting the year 2023. You're allowed to bring one of the following:

- 1) a letter for the people of 2023, describing the pitfalls of time travel—and also the possibilities
- 2) a letter to reassure the people of 2023, describing a problem they currently have that will be fully solved by the year 7444, and how
- 3) a letter of warning for the people of 2023, describing a catastrophic event in their future that they have no idea will occur
- 4) a letter for your own ancestors, describing who you are

Write the letter of your choice.

**Kristen Loesch, author of *The Last Russian Doll***



Write a story in which something sad and something joyful happen at the same time.

**Rick White, author of the short-story collection *Talking to Ghosts at Parties***



Write about your day, but use your own language, whatever that may be, mixed with more standard English. Use slang. Use your native tongue. Use your second, third or fourth language. Remember to include smells, tastes, touch, sound. Don't be afraid to share your reality. Don't be afraid to show your truth.

**Melissa Llanes Brownlee, author of *Hard Skin* and *Kahi and Lua***



Write a poem or story about an aspect (or aspects) of life on our planet as if witnessed by an alien species that's visiting. See Craig Raine's "A Martian Sends a Postcard Home" for an example:

<https://www.poetrybyheart.org.uk/poems/a-martian-sends-a-postcard-home>

**Michael Loveday, author of *Unlocking the Novella-in-Flash: from Blank Page to Finished Manuscript* (Ad Hoc Fiction, 2022)**



And they all lived happily ever after ... until ...

**Jupiter Jones author of *Gull Shit Alley and Other Roads to Hell***



What might the ingredients of unicorn ice-cream be?

**Jan Kaneen, author of *The Naming of Bones, A Learning Curve* and *Hostile Environments***



Draw an outline of your shoe

Now fill the inside of the shoe with:

- Places you have been to, it could be different countries, cities or even the different places in your town, like the activity centre, the sweet shop, the post office, the woods, the river, the beach
- Things you have seen
- Things you have done
- A special memory
- Something you ate there



Who did you go with?

Choose a word from the inside of your shoe that you would like to make into an acrostic poem like the one that follows:

**H**ow on Earth could anyone sleep here?

**O**nly madmen, who can fit in a bed

**U**sually 1 meter long

**S**ometimes even less!

**E**veryone must bend their legs

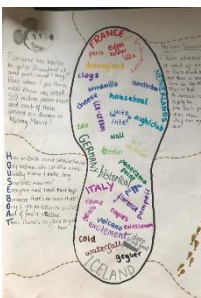
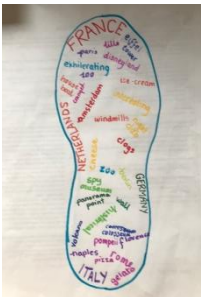
**B**ecause there's no room at all.

**O**nly if you are 60 cm small can you fit

**A**nd if you're taller,

**T**hen there's no place for you here!

- Rohini, 13



Extension: You could add some emotions to the shoe as well. How did you feel when you went for a walk in the woods with your dog? How did you feel when you got sand in your shoes on the beach? You could write a poem about those feelings and those actions you experienced when wearing this pair of shoes.

**Susmita Bhattacharya, author of *Table Manners* and *The Normal State of Mind***