

Practicing with Point of View: An Activity

Created for Excelsior Classes
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Point of View is often overlooked, but it is absolutely crucial to the success of your story. When I say it is overlooked, what I mean is that it is not given proper thought. Many amateur writers tend to write always in the same point of view just because it is comfortable to them. While it is not necessarily a bad thing to write predominantly in one POV, it is important to make sure that you give thought to which POV you will use for each story and choose it intentionally in light of the purpose of your story and the connection you want readers to have to your characters. If you didn't read my blog, I suggest you do that before completing this activity. Then read on to see my example and, finally, my instructions for you.

First, let's look at an example:

Scenario: A man is found on the beach. (Notice the questions I ask in each category.)

- Plot: How did he get there? Is he lost? Has he been shipwrecked? Has he been dumped by someone who meant him harm? Who found him?
- Character: Should he be a "good" guy or a "bad" guy? Do I want him to be my main character? Who finds him?
- Setting: What setting could I create that would be believable? Florida, west-coast. Modern day. (I chose this scene because I lived here, and I know a lot about it without having to research).
- Point of View: How do I want my readers to feel about my character? I would like to keep him mysterious. I will use 3rd person to give my readers the insight they need, but to keep them distant enough from my character that he maintains his mystery.

Now that you've seen my thought process, take a look at the scenario I developed out of this:

The tide swayed quietly in and out, rhythmic, as if echoing the very breathing of Ellie. She had spent every morning since she was a girl out here on these beautiful beaches. There was something mesmerizing about the powdery, white sand and the way it slipped smoothly through her fingers. On calm days, the sea was as translucent as glass. She could stare at it for hours, lost in the mystery of what could be. Ellie had traveled many places, but had made up her mind that nothing was as magical as the salty Florida air beneath the blurred orange sunstreaks, the promise of morning.

By the dunes, a slight movement grabbed her attention. It was so subtle that she almost dismissed it. However, something in her subconscious made her think otherwise. She quickly unfolded her legs and stood as straight as the pelicans that lined the pier. Briskly, she walked towards the dunes

where she found a man, unconscious. He was young with dark hair and a goatee that clearly hadn't been trimmed in quite some time. On one eyebrow, there was a slight scar where the hair refused to trespass. He looked entirely innocent and she was compelled to learn his story.

She nudged him gently to no avail. For nearly 30 minutes she sat beside him imagining his person. Perhaps he was a merman turned human by some wicked seawitch. Perhaps he was an adventurer, shipwrecked on the Gulf Coast. Perhaps he was simply a man who preferred the canopy of stars to harsh man-made lights.

"Hmpff." Ellie was startled out of her wanderings by the man's murmuring.

"Are you ok?" she almost whispered. "I found you here and wanted to make sure you were ok before I left."

The man opened his eyes. They were grey and murky and turned her stomach instantly. "I think I am fine....a little groggy. Where exactly am I?"

"Florida. Indian Rocks, to be exact," she said looking at the ground. For some reason she could no longer look at him. She couldn't bear the weight in his eyes.

The man got to his feet, stumbled a little, and began to walk away.

Suddenly, about 50 yards away, he fell to his knees and began digging furiously. Ellie watched him from afar, both intrigued and a little wary. After a few minutes, the man stood holding a leather pull-string bag. The man shouted, "Have you seen anyone else here this morning?"

"No," Ellie said as she shook her head.

"It is very important that you think about that. If you have seen anyone, anyone at all, I need to know." The man ran his fingers through his wavy hair anxiously.

"I'm positive I've seen no one else." Ellie rose to her feet, unsure of whether she should stay perfectly still or run in the other direction.

The point of this exercise is not to develop an entire story, but to experiment with point of view to see if you are able to use it effectively. In my case, I need to keep my readers interested, but distant from my character. There definitely needs to be some mystery. I think this snippet does that.

Finally, it's your turn! You do not have to spend a lot of time on this, nor do you have to write a long piece (although if you'd like to keep going, do it!).

1. Choose a scenario from below (or create one of your own).
2. Write out the words: plot, character, setting, point of view.
3. Begin writing out questions for each category listed above.
4. Write your snippet after you've contemplated the best POV for it.
5. Have someone else read it and see if your POV accomplished what you wanted it to.

Possible scenarios:

- * a person walks into an abandoned warehouse
- * the first day of swim practice
- * a big recital
- * a family sits down for dinner
- * the cellphone rings