**A brief guide to short story writing**

1. Read as much as you can, paying attention to the broad and diverse ways writers have approached the short story form. Read writers that inspire you to write stories and challenge you in terms of style, genre and vocabulary. A brief short story reading list is below but it is difficult to find appropriate short stories for teens so this compilation is a work in progress. Read just for fifteen minutes a day and just as with physical exercise, the benefits will be immediate.
2. Short stories only require a brief and concentrated amount of attention to read. We only see a fragment of the character’s day or a single event in their life. It’s as if we open a window and look in to a moment in their day rather than walk through the front door to live with them for a few months or years (or a lifetime).
3. The event in the story could be a meeting with someone or something, something unusual that happens to them or a time when something changed and why.
4. Although short stories are less of a commitment to write than novels, writers will readily admit that short stories are hard to write well. Every word, element and detail must contribute to the whole. The event should be immediate and immersive – there is no room for waffle, backstory or a lot of descriptive writing. The focus must be on what is *happening* and how this affects the way the character behaves or feels.
5. Much of the writing process happens away from the desk or the notepad. Once you’ve started (or finished) a draft, ask yourself if what you’ve written so far will catch a reader’s attention and make them want to read on; if your characters are authentic and feel real; if there is an emotional reaction being worked towards or evoked in the reader, and if the place feels believable and adds to the atmosphere. To reflect, go for a walk or run, do something practical (draw, cook, swim) or stare out of a window and have some thinking time.
6. Then reread it and see if it engages *you.* Think about the characters, the setting, the time when the story happens, and what is happening. Think about what is unsaid but the reader can figure out. Make notes about where you could and should make changes. When you have a strong idea of what is happening, to whom, when and where, ask yourself what kind of story it is. Do you want your reader to be on the edge of their seat, holding their breath? Reduced to tears? Filled with wonder? Happy that someone’s life has improved? Laughing and entertained? It could be more than one of these. You may need to make more notes and some more changes.
7. There is a tendency to feel a twist should be given to the tale. In some cases this works well but some stories just don’t require one. Short stories often just end with no resolution (as if we close the window and their life and ours just carries on).

Here are some short story collections for teens: please note I have not read all in these collections and can’t verify their content:

* <https://www.weareteachers.com/short-stories-for-high-school/>
* <https://www.scottishbooktrust.com/book-lists/short-stories-for-teens>
* Nikolai Gogol, The Nose: a story, about a St Petersburg official whose nose decides it wants to lead a life independent from its face.
* Roald Dahl: The Wonderful Story of Henry Sugar
* Short stories for older readers: <https://www.penguin.co.uk/articles/2021/09/short-stories-everyone-should-read> (many of these collections are for over 16s only)