**Everyday Horror Story Writing Plan** Rev. 2019

**Your Story Idea**

Stephen King talks about standing at the edge of a small pond. He imagines “some dreadful, hulking thing rising out of the still waters to carry off sheep . . . and horses . . . and finally people.” He takes a very ordinary, everyday situation and lets it unravel into a story with suspense and horror.

In your writing notebook, describe a few everyday situations you experience and explain how each of them could unravel into a horror story. (The unravelling is the problem or conflict or complication of the story.) Circle the one you like best and use it as the foundation for your own everyday horror story.

**Writing Ideas**

Find a place to keep notes on ideas for your story whenever they occur to you. Maybe you will hear or think of a good bit of dialogue. Or maybe you’ll think of a good line or an amazing image to include in your story. When this happens, write it down or record it somewhere so you can use it later when you actually sit down to write your story.

**Your Plot**

Create a plot map for your story. Think of it as a road map that will get you to your final destination, (the climax and ending of your story) with a few interesting stops (the rising action of your story) along the way. Use the story map I printed and tape it into your writing notebook, or just create your own story map in your writing notebook.

**Your Setting**

Create and describe a setting that will support your plot and contribute to your story.

**Suspense**

How will you use story elements and language to create a sense of suspense/fear/anxiety?

**Your Main Character**

Quick Write: In your writing notebook, list three interesting people you know. Then describe what is interesting about each person and tell us about something each one has done.

- Your story needs a strong, interesting protagonist.

- Everything in your story, including character traits, should be there for a reason

Create a main character or protagonist for your everyday horror story. This is a very short story, so you only have time to develop one character. You may include other flat characters to move your story along, but focus on one round, well-developed character.

What are some traits that make your character interesting? How will these traits contribute to the overall effect of the story? For example, if your character likes to read and hangs out at the library, he or she will approach the problems in the story differently than a character who likes to get in fights and hang out in the alley behind Angela’s.

Hints: Short story writers must create characters quickly. Personality traits are more important than physical descriptions. Your goal is to create one clear, singular impression of the character. Be sure to consider how your character’s traits will be useful in telling your story.

In your writing notebook…

Describe your character’s most important traits and explain how these traits relate to and support the story. Consider your character’s age, appearance, family, education, profession, interests, thoughts, and motives. How does the character react to problems and failure? How does the character react to success? What is his or her view of life? What does he or she obsess about? What does he or she want? What is he or she afraid of?

What is your character’s name? Choose a meaningful name that matches your character’s background, personality or motivation.

**Character Sketch**

Write a character sketch to introduce your character. Write about the opening incident in your story in a way that will reveal your character’s personality and motivation. Use actions, dialogue, and description to show, not tell. Every detail (like the setting of the incident) should help to reveal character.

**If you want a pattern to follow, try this:**

**Introduce your character and the setting:**

My grandmother drove a nineteen seventy-something dark green Oldsmobile with a faded black vinyl top and about half of a floor. The missing part of the floor was on the passenger side where my feet would normally rest, but if I kept one foot on the hump and the other foot up on the solid part by the door frame, I could avoid pushing through the carpet and dragging my feet on the pavement below.

**Show us what is happening (the incident) in a way that that reveals the character:**

On the way to the grocery store one day, she rolled slowly to a stop at an intersection, tapping her fingers on the cracked steering wheel and waiting as the light cycled from green to yellow to red. Scrunching her eyes and leaning into the windshield, she sighed and frowned. “Steve, what color is that light?” she asked.

My grandma never really remembered how old I was, so I thought she was maybe quizzing me on my colors. I was in 6th grade. I told her it was red.

“That’s what I thought,” she said. “Let me know when it turns green, okay?”

“Uh…Okay,” I said, nervously.

**Continue telling us about the incident using actions, dialogue, and description to reveal the traits of your character:**

The light turned green, and she moved ahead to the next intersection. She stopped again, this time at a green light.

“Can you see the lights, Grandma?” I asked.

“Of course I can,” she said, gripping the wheel tightly, like maybe she was going to strangle it. “But I don’t why they moved them up so high where they’re harder to see. They used to be closer. I don’t know why they had to do that.”

“Yeah.” I hesitated. “I think they’re the same as they used to be, Grandma. It’s green now.”

“I know,” she said, looking both ways as she pulled into the intersection.

“Are your eyes okay, Grandma?”

“I just went to the doctor and he said they’re fine,” she snapped.

**Add a closing comment or detail:**

Later, I told my dad about what happened. He said my grandma hadn’t been to a doctor in at least five years. My grandma was always good at ignoring a problem.

**Another Example: A very short character sketch from Dave Barry:**

It was time to go have my last words with my father. He was dying, in the bedroom he built. He built our whole house, even dug the foundation himself, with a diaper tied around his head to keep the sweat out of his eyes. He was always working on the house, more than 35 years, and he never did finish it. He was first to admit that he really didn’t know how to build a house.

Get some advice: Ask another student to read and evaluate your character sketch and do the same for them. Is it interesting? Believable? Consistent? With a singular focus? Talk about these things and how you could improve your character sketch.

**First Draft**

Review your notes about writing ideas, then follow your plot map to write a first draft of your everyday horror story.

**Revising**

Add showing, dialogue, and figurative language. We’ll do this together in class.

Complete the group revising activity. We’ll do this together in class.

**Publishing**

Type a final draft, proofread it, and print it to turn in.

Record your story for a podcast. Write a brief introduction, including the title and author. Maybe have someone else read the introduction, then record yourself reading the story. Check your recording levels and the mic position to get the best sound. Consider adding sound effects.