

**Writing Stories for Change:
Workshops on the Fundamentals of Storytelling
Lubbock, Texas: October 2-4, 2024**

Humans make meaning of their lives through story—the arc of Beginning, Middle, Climax, and The End. We want to hear the story of our births because we instinctively know, even at a young age, that our first day sets us on a certain course, tells us who we are. We want to know the story of how our parents met because we believe this is the core of marriage, the key to love. When someone dies, we ask *where? how? what were his last words?* because this story prepares us for what death will bring.

Storytelling is a privilege. If you’ve never been allowed to read stories similar to your own—whether because of economic disadvantage, bigotry in our schools, or the control that the publishing industry has over who is and is not published—it can be difficult to make meaning of your own life. It may feel impossible to voice what has happened to you in a way that makes sense to others. This fact says something about the clients we defend and how they communicate with us. This fact tells us how important storytelling is. When you engage in telling the stories of others, narrative becomes a responsibility.

In this workshop, we will practice what it means to shape personal experience into narrative—whether the most tragic of events or the smallest of encounters. Using our own stories, we will learn to tell our truths in light of character development, environmental research, cause and effect, and facts and memory—which, in turn, will help us learn to hear and decipher our clients’ stories, to shape them into the kind of narratives that change the way judges and prosecutors and jurors think. You may write about your client’s life instead, if you prefer, though it might not teach you as much about storytelling and how your client feels to be “the subject” if you yourself don’t ever experience the spotlight turned in your own direction.

By the end of the three days, you will have written several brief stories (what writers call “flash” essays) about your own life or your client’s life. If you wish, all of your brief stories may revolve around a single experience or time that you want to make sense of. Or, they might revolve around the same theme.

Reading Assignments (essays to read before the seminar)

- Rochelle Spencer, “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Woman”
- D. Winston Brown, “Ghost Children”
- Michael Torres, “As If to Say”
- Aimee Baker, “Beasts of the Field”
- Kim Coleman Foote, “Mama’s Boy”

Required Materials

- Please bring at least one photograph that means something to you, that tells a story important to your life. You may choose to bring several photos of the same event.

Wednesday, October 2

Today's Learning Objective:

Participants will understand the connection between the records collection and interviews conducted by mitigation specialists as essential to successful narrative development. Members of the defense team will learn about the main components of effective story-telling and why narrative matters to client outcomes. Participants will use their own lived experiences to practice identifying the component parts of a successful narrative and engage in discussions regarding how to unearth those components.

8:00 PLENARY SESSION / HUMANITIES BUILDING 001

The Importance of Storytelling

8:45 PLENARY SESSION / HUMANITIES BUILDING 001

Taking Inventory. Participants will complete an inventory exercise that asks them to mine their life for experiences they can write about over the course of the seminar. These questions will mimic the kinds of questions we frequently ask our clients. Students will complete the inventory and then share the “surprises” they found in completing it—what stories they managed to recall that they’d forgotten, what stories they realize suddenly are important to them, and what stories they may have chosen to forget. This experience will help participants understand what stories our clients and other witnesses tell us and why—or what stories they don’t want to tell us and why. It will help us understand the way we shape our public and private identities through story and selective memory.

9:30 BREAK

9:45 PLENARY SESSION / EDUCATION BUILDING 001

Who Populates Our Stories: Intro to Character Development

10:45 BREAK

11:00 WRITING GROUPS (Group assignments and room numbers will be provided)

Beginnings. In this first breakout session, participants will introduce themselves, learn about their first writing prompt and complete it. The first writing prompt will practice the art of seeing how complicated humans are from the very beginning—no villain is all bad, no hero is all good. In writing about themselves in this way, participants will learn how hard it is to admit our own failures—and how hard it is to share those failures with other people. Additionally, this exercise will help participants recognize those moments in life when a person changes or chooses not to. The ultimate goal: to learn that every human has worth and positive value and that a story is still a “good” story even if stasis is the outcome. This exercise will help participants reconsider how to address the “future danger” question.

12:30 LUNCH

2:00 PLENARY SESSION / EDUCATION BUILDING 001

Character as Conflict: Intro to Narrative Movement

2:45 BREAK

3:00 WRITING GROUPS (Group assignments and room numbers will be provided)

What Did You Say? In this breakout, participants will practice detecting a key line of dialogue, understanding the language systems at play in a story, or recognizing when silence is the key to insight. The goal: to learn that every person's story has recognizable patterns at play. This exercise will also help participants learn to speak to their clients and their clients' family members.

4:00 WRITING GROUPS (Group assignments and room numbers will be provided)

Workshop. participants will learn how to workshop, then choose which of the day's exercises (Beginnings or What Did You Say?) they wish to share with their writing group members. The group will offer constructive feedback for improving the participants' narratives.

5:00 BREAK

5:15 PLENARY DEBRIEF / EDUCATION 001

What We've Learned from Character Development. We'll discuss how mitigation/ investigation tasks and processes inform successful, rich, and deep character development in ways that engender empathy and connection.

6:00 SESSIONS DISMISSED

8:00 INFORMAL GATHERING / COTTON COURT COURTYARD

All participants can meet in the Cotton Court Courtyard for some light snacks and networking. If you are not staying at the Cotton Court, public entry to the courtyard is located to the west of the Midnight Shift Restaurant & Bar (the restaurant run by Cotton Court). Drinks can be purchased in Midnight Shift and brought into the courtyard, or you may bring your own drinks into the courtyard.

Thursday, October 3

Today's Learning Objection:

So often in mitigation work, teams resist investing time into the contextual investigation, focusing instead on the client's specific character development in the story. This has the potential to make the client one-dimensional. Participants will understand the critical importance of context in narrative development. Discussions throughout the day will include addressing the types of materials and information a defense team needs to provide depth to their narratives.

8:00 PLENARY SESSION / EDUCATION BUILDING 001

We Adapt to Circumstances: Intro to Setting as Influence

9:15 BREAK

9:30 WRITING GROUPS (Group assignments and room numbers will be provided)

Trapped. In this breakout, participants will write about an experience that took place in a confined location. The exercise will encourage them to consider the factors, objects, mood, and aggressors in any scene that might influence the outcome of a singular event.

10:30 BREAK

10:45 WRITING GROUPS (Group assignments and room numbers will be provided)

Object Lesson. In this breakout session, participants will write about an object that represents who they are but also plays a pivotal moment in an event in their life—an object that affected the outcome of a particular situation. This exercise is intended to help participants read crime scenes in an effective manner—what objects either on our person or in a room play a role in moments of change.

12:00 LUNCH / ENGLISH BUILDING 201

Lunch will be provided by Advancing Real Change.

1:30 WRITING GROUPS (Group assignments and room numbers will be provided)

Workshop. In this workshop, participants will choose which of the environment exercises (Tight Spot or Object Lessons) they wish to share with their writing group members. The group will offer constructive feedback for improving the participants' narratives.

2:30 BREAK

2:45 PLENARY SESSION / EDUCATION BUILDING 001

Photos, Memory, History, Interviews: An Introduction to Research

4:00 BREAK

4:15 WRITING GROUPS (Group assignments and room numbers will be provided)

Photo Op. In this breakout, participants will write the story of one of the photographs they brought. First, they will quickly brainstorm the details of the photo that speak to the event represented in the picture. Then, the group will break up into pairs, and each participant will explain the photo to their partner, and the partner will ask questions about the photo. The group will discuss what details of the photo they didn't want to share, what details of the photo their partners saw that they never noticed, and how their partner reacted to the photo. Finally, participants will write the story of their photo—which may or may not include the experience of sharing the photo with another person.

5:45 BREAK

6:00 PLENARY DEBRIEF/ EDUCATION BUILDING 001

What We've Learned from Exploring Place and Facts. We'll discuss the importance of

childhood spaces and crime scene photographs—how visiting key places and “reading a room” engenders understanding and empathy.

6:30 SESSIONS DISMISSED

Friday, October 4

Today’s Learning Objective

Collaboration is essential for defense teams to develop successful client narratives. Participants will understand how different people on a team will view the same information through their own lens of experience and how that enables a richer narrative. Participants will also learn about how to budget/ manage time for drafting successful narratives and the benefits of feedback and reflect on the overall emotional heft of the piece.

8:00 PLENARY SESSION / EDUCATION BUILDING 001

Revise, Revise, Revise: Intro to the Process of Re-Visioning a Story

9:00 BREAK

9:15 WRITING GROUPS (Group assignments and room numbers will be provided)

Revision. Students will gather in their groups but work individually to polish one of their essays completely. Though this is not at all a realistic amount of time to completely revise an essay, even a short one, this is the allotted time we have, and we are simulating the writing process. Faculty will be available during this time to look at changes and offer additional feedback.

11:00 LUNCH

12:30 PLENARY READING / EDUCATION BUILDING 001

In this final celebratory session, all groups will gather together one last time, and three representatives from each writing group will read one of the flash essays they’ve polished this week. The representatives may be volunteers or elected by their group.

2:00 ALL SESSIONS DISMISSED