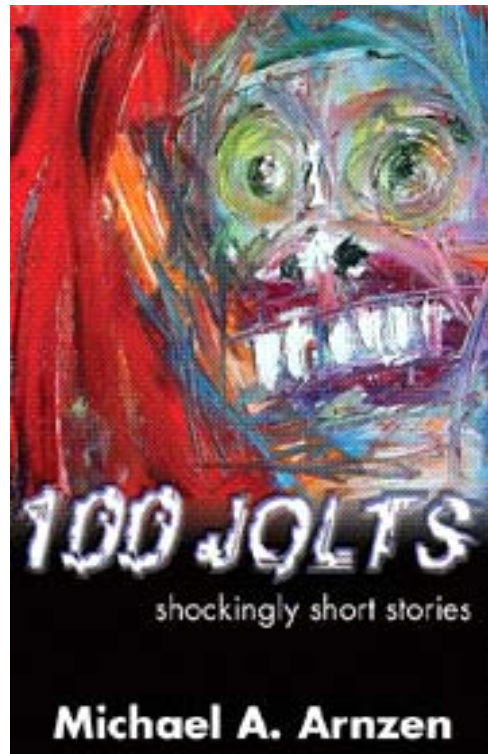


A Reader's Guide
and Instructor's Manual for
100 Jolts: Shockingly Short Stories
by Michael A. Arnzen



Compiled by
Michael Arnzen

A supplement to 100 Jolts: Shockingly Short Stories
Raw Dog Screaming Press
ISBN 0-9745031-2-6, \$12.95



Raw Dog Screaming Press
5103 72nd Place
Hyattsville, MD 20784
www.rawdogscreeaming.com

INTRODUCTION

About this Guide

This guide offers an assemblage of questions to help facilitate any discussion of the text, whether for a classroom or a reading group. It also includes a number of creative writing prompts which can springboard the writer into a creative process in response to the text. These two sections -- discussion questions and writing prompts -- allow English teachers, especially, to bring *100 Jolts* into their writing and literature classrooms. The prompts invite writers or students to respond to the stories imaginatively, often by emulating the structure and approach of each tale. Students could be encouraged to exchange, share, or critique their answers to the questions provided in both sections.

Why Teach 100 Jolts?

100 Jolts is an ideal "reader" for college-level English courses (or even senior level High School courses) where instructors want to:

- teach the fictional genre of the "short-short" (in all its guises, from "flash fiction" to the prose poem),
- stress the values of brevity, concision, and word choice in student writing,
- lead discussions of unique writing strategies in creative writing workshops,
- present models for "short" fiction and journal writing assignments,
- explore the literary issues associated with popular fiction,
- encourage students to cultivate a habit of reading by tapping into the natural popularity of the horror genre and the draw of the brief narrative

Unlike many collections, *100 Jolts* is authored by an English professor who teaches both writing and genre fiction full-time. Arnzen holds a Ph.D. in English from the University of Oregon, and is currently an Associate Professor at Seton Hill University, where he mentors and leads workshops in a unique Master of the Arts program in Writing Popular Fiction. He is also an award-winning novelist and poet. Arnzen has regularly used excerpts from this book in his own writing and literature classes to much success -- and several related exercises which he's used in the classroom appear in this very guide.

Teaching Flash Fiction

100 Jolts makes some unique contributions to the relatively small library of textbooks available to teachers of flash fiction. While a handful of canonical examples of the short-short story can be culled from stock literary anthologies (W. Somerset Maugham's "Appointment in Samarra"; Jamaica Kincaid's "Girl"), and a few standard anthologies dedicated to flash fiction are popular with literature teachers (Thomas' Flash Fiction, Shapard and Thomas' Sudden Fiction International, Jerome Stern's Microfiction, etc.), there are very few single authored collections of the form, let alone a book that privileges a popular genre. Most flash is literary -- eschewing entertainment for poetics. To some degree, Arnzen calls such distinctions into question...which can make for profitable class dialogues, particularly among students who are resistant to "literature."

A Note to Reading Groups

Michael Arnzen may also be available for visiting your reading group or classroom, depending on funding and travel arrangements. Inquire at arnzen@gorelets.com.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

General

- How does Arnzen seem to define "flash" fiction? What's a "jolt" in his view?*
- What patterns do you see recurring throughout the text? Are these the result of the writer's habits and blindspots? The conventions of the horror genre?*
- What makes this book a work of "horror" fiction? Are there any stories in the book that you would say are not horror stories? Why not?*
- What role does humor play in Arnzen's flash fiction?*
- Is there any particular story or group of stories that feels out of place in the collection as a whole? Why?*
- Is Arnzen's work literary? Is this proper literature? Is it a work of popular culture? Are some stories more literary than others? What's the difference?*
- Discuss the importance of the book's title. Does the use of "100" short-stories feel like a gimmick or does it serve some important function? Does the book live up to its title and subtitle?*
- What distinguishes Arnzen's style? How would you recognize an Arnzen story elsewhere if you read one?*
- What books does 100 Jolts remind you of? What other books, stories, or writers would you recommend to a fan of 100 Jolts?*

On the Introduction

- What parallels does Arnzen draw between flash fiction and the horror genre?*
- What does Arnzen mean when he writes, "Less is more. And less is less."?*
- What ideas does Arnzen imply about time and narrative?*
- Is Arnzen's metaphor of the "thrill ride" appropriate for horror fiction?*
- Arnzen writes that "Horror is the most subversively experimental popular genre of them all." Do you agree? What's so subversive about horror? What's so experimental? What exactly does Arnzen's book subvert? Cite examples.*

On the Interview

- What did you learn about flash fiction from Arnzen's interview?*
- Do any of Arnzen's comments help you to better understand particular stories in the book?*
- Do you disagree with any of Arnzen's claims?*
- Arnzen suggests that poetry helps him write flash fiction. How is reading flash like reading haiku? How might a background in poetry hinder writing flash?*
- Arnzen talks about the internet in his discussion of why he writes flash. Discuss the role of the medium in shaping the message.*
- How do you respond to Arnzen's writing advice?*
- Does 100 Jolts inspire you to write your own flash fiction?*

On the Stories

Skull Fragments

How effective is the frame narrative of "Skull Fragments"?

Which of the "Skull Fragments" is the most effective? Which is the least? Why?

"Skull Fragments" incorporates a number of "microfictions" under fifty words. What is the impact of these extra-short stories? Do they stand on their own (Would they work without this frame narrative to support them?)

Pay attention to the way "Skull Fragments" comments on family relations. What themes are suggested here?

The pieces in "Skull Fragments" first appeared in a Macromedia Flash animation online at Arnzen's website. Does this change your interpretation of the stories? How does flash fiction interrelate with new media? Compare and contrast the printed version to the animated version.

Limber

Is "Limber" an example of gross for gross-out's sake? What is the moral of the story?

At what moment did this story take you by surprise?

Obictionary

Discuss Arnzen's word play in this story. Is it effective? What tricks is he employing?

Why is this piece dedicated to the late Edward Gorey?

Degrees of Separation

What does the title mean?

How does gender play a role in this story?

Punishment

"Punishment" is one of the "softer" horror stories in the book. How well does it work?

How does Arnzen suggest what he does not say?

Nightmare Jobs (#1-5)

How does Arnzen represent the idea of "alienated labor" -- the way that people are estranged by their own work?

Compare and contrast the five "Nightmare Jobs."

Which "Nightmare Job" is the most revolting?

What is the relationship between horror fiction and issues of the working class?

Have you ever had an "anxiety dream" about your own job?

Turn of the Season

"Turn" is an example of microfiction: a story under fifty words. How effective is this approach and what are its limitations? Is "Turn" really a "story"? What's missing?

Pop-Up Killer

If horror is the genre of fear, what fear(s) is "Pop-Up Killer" concerned with?

Brain Candy

"Brain Candy" is an example of a short-short horror story that dramatizes a scene that implies a much larger scenario. What is that scenario? How does Arnzen construct it?

What is the most horrifying issue raised in "Brain Candy"?

White Out

The use of colored skin raises the question: is "White Out" a comment on race relations? Compare and contrast Arnzen's treatment of vampirism in this story with any of the other tales in 100 Jolts dealing with vampires ("Beyond Undead", "Canines", "Crusty Old Age", "Anniversary Meal", "The Blood Ran Out").

Stabbing for Dummies

"Stabbing" is one example of Arnzen's parody of the self-help genre (his tale, "How to Grow a Man-Eating Plant," is another obvious parody). What point does the humor seem to suggest?

Like many of the tales in 100 Jolts, "Stabbing for Dummies" relies on 2nd person point-of-view. Is there anything different about the use of this viewpoint for a how-to narrative?

Discuss the final lines of the story. Why, for example, would the instructor advise a "suicide note"?

The Cow Café

How reliable is the narrator in "The Cow Café"?

Which images in this piece stand out as most striking?

What is the theme of this piece? Is it simply a vegetarian's nightmare, or is there more to it than that?

Handicapped Spot

How does Arnzen foreshadow the trick ending of this story? How does he misdirect the reader?

Is this story politically incorrect, when it comes to the handicapped? Should fiction be politically correct? If not, when must horror fiction be politically incorrect?

Take Out

What does this story say about romantic relationships?

How well does the metaphor in this piece work? What are its weaknesses?

A Change in Policy/Little Stocking Stuffers

At what point did you realize that you were reading a Christmas story?

Compare and contrast the approaches of these two stories to Christmas.

Mustachio Moon

An early reader of this story saw it as a metaphor for the war on terror. Does this interpretation hold water?

Who Wants to be a Killionaire?

How do you explain the scenario behind this piece in your own words?

Does "Killionaire" have a theme? What is it?

How effective is the script approach to this story?

Other horror stories have parodied game shows -- like, Richard Bachman's "The Running Man." What accounts for this affinity between horror and gaming?

Beyond Undead

What does it mean to be "undead"?

Stretch

Is a one-sentence story really a story? What are the strengths and weaknesses of "Stretch"?

Stress Toy

What is the theme of "Stress Toy"?

Who do you identify with most in "Stress Toy"?

What does "Stress Toy" tell us about the nuclear family?

Tassels/Jack the Teacher

What is the moral or theme of "Tassels" and "Jack the Teacher"?

How would a parent and their child react differently to these stories?

Does knowing that Arnzen is a college teacher change your perspective on this story?

Returns

"Returns" is clearly a tale of surrealism. What makes this genre different than the straight horror stories in the book?

The Dead Head

What does "Dead Head" have to say about the Hippie movement?

Surgical Complications

What is the primary "complication" in this story?

What explains the surgeon's actions?

In the Balance

What is the implied conclusion of this story?

What explains the judges actions?

Diagara

What makes "Diagara" a horror story?

How does the letter format function to support this story?

Strange Trout

Did the ending of this story surprise you? How did Arnzen divert you from the ending?

Revenge of the Mummy

This microfiction, like many of the pieces in 100 Jolts, approaches the form of a joke rather than a story, per se. How is this story structured like a joke? Are there other "jokes" in 100 Jolts? What's the difference between a joke and a short story? How does flash fiction lend itself to joke-telling (or vice versa)?

Canines

How does the length of this story influence your interpretation? Is this tale too short? If so, what's missing? What would you like to see here?

The Seven-Headed Beast

*This piece generally reads more like a prose-poem than a story. Does the structure work? Does the ending pay off?
Discuss your interpretation of the various heads in the story -- what do they represent?*

Psycho Hunter

*"The hunter becomes the hunted" is a stock plotline from suspense fiction. Discuss what is original about this piece, if anything.
Are there other "hunter" stories that you know? What are the common conventions among them?*

A Worse Mousetrap

*What exactly is going on in this piece? Retell it in your own words.
How does the central character undergo a change in this story?
In his review of 100 Jolts, Gary Braunbeck cited this story as an example of how good horror fiction can leave the horror unspoken. Does Arnzen succeed at this? What horror is unspoken in "A Worse Mousetrap"?*

Little Devils

*What does the last line suggest about the scenario that the neighbor has been watching?
Discuss the role of viewpoint in this story.*

Latex

*What fears does "Latex" revolve around?
This ultra-short story was inspired by a found object -- a glove in a bathroom stall. What mysterious objects have you seen in your own experience that made you speculate about its origin or purpose?*

Mother's Haunted Housecoat

What would Sigmund Freud say about this story?

Inside the Man with No Eyelids

*What is effective in this tale? What is melodramatic?
Does knowing that this piece was published in a poetry journal change your interpretation?*

Burning Bridges

*Discuss the use of viewpoint in this tale. How does it steer the reader's identification?
Smoking appears in other stories by Arnzen not included in 100 Jolts, particularly "The Lust of Lungs" and "Fluid Mosaic." If you've read either of them -- or perhaps alternate tobacco tales by other authors, like Stephen King -- how does it compare?*

Taking Care of Baby

*Discuss the parallelisms drawn in this piece, both obvious and subtle.
"Taking Care of Baby" is a revenge fantasy. Discuss the role of revenge in horror fiction. Is it overdone?*

Five Mean Machines:

What do these tales suggest about the horror of machines? Are there other stories in the horror genre involving mechanical objects? How do these tales differ?

Discuss the role of gender in each of these stories. What do they tell us about male fears and fantasies?

"Mortichinery" is perhaps the most conventional "short story" in 100 Jolts. How does it differ from longer stories? Does it remind you specifically of other horror titles?

Tugging the Heartstrings

How do you interpret the various symbols in this piece?

Discuss the emotional impact of this story. How did it literally "tug" your heartstrings? The title is ironic, obviously. Is there anything tongue-in-cheek about this tale?

Face of Clay

Are children naturally murderous? Discuss how horror fiction represents the children.

Crusty Old Age

Discuss how age functions in vampire fiction. Are victims usually young, preyed upon by the old? Or is age irrelevant, given the promise of immortal life?

How does this story use food as a device?

Next-Door

This story -- while impossible -- plays on the reader's assumptions and hides the trick ending "in plain sight." What other stories does this approach remind you of?

Choppers

Discuss the neologisms (invented language) in this story.

What is really happening in this absurdist piece?

Why does Arnzen call most attention to the verbs in this story?

Amputating the Phantom

What fears are addressed in this story?

Sometimes short-shorts are "idea" pieces -- virtually plot sketches which don't satisfy the readers' needs for character depth or drama. Is this story an "idea" piece? Are others in the book?

How to Put a Cat to Sleep

Discuss the disquieting use of point of view in this tale. Why does Arnzen choose second person?

Analyze the final line of the story. What does it suggest?

What makes this a horror story?

While Knitting Your Hat

Discuss Arnzen's use of alternative punctuation for dialogue in this story.

Disgruntled

How much of this story is simply in the main character's mind?

Anniversary Meal

Discuss the use of romantic couples in vampire (or other horror) fiction.

Second Helping

What act of justice is performed here?

This story features several torture scenes leading up to the grand finale. Do these earlier scenes also tell us something about the main character?

In the Middle

How much of this story is "all in the narrator's mind"?

What does Arnzen mean when he writes, "Murder's in the middle"?

The Curse of Fat Face

How does "Fat Face" treat the issue of anorexia?

Why does Arnzen personify the face?

Discuss the conclusion of the story. Is the shift in viewpoint fair?

Skullduggery

What does this piece seem to say about childhood?

Chanting Richard

Is microfiction like this story better or worse than standard flash fiction? Why?

Here Arnzen plays with language in a way that the very words generate a tale. Does this approach work for you?

The Eight Ball in Big Mouth's Pocket

This story is more comedy than horror, more tall tale than flash fiction. Why does Arnzen include it in this collection?

What does this tale thematically suggest about competition? Is it in favor of one-upsmanship or not?

Discuss the viewpoint character's use of the collective "we."

A Donation

Why does the narrator want to make this special donation?

Does this story make you consider (or reconsider) donating your organs to science?

What fears are evident in "A Donation?"

Her Daily Bread

What do the birds signify in this tale?

Discuss the nanny's motives in this story.

Does the title have significance?

My Wound Still Weeps

Discuss the family dynamics portrayed in this story. What ideologies are depicted? Who

possess power? Who is powerless? Is the narrator male or female? What does the absence of "mother" signify?

Why does the author choose an eye as an image for describing the wound? Does this relate to any archetypal eye imagery?

How do you see the socioeconomic position of the narrator and his father? How is this important to the story?

The author does not give an explicit physical description of either the narrator or the father. What physical traits do you imagine for each of them based on the text? Are these images based on stereotypes?

An Evil Eye

Compare and contrast "An Evil Eye" with Poe's "Tell-Tale Heart."

The Blood Ran Out

This story stretches the concept of the vampire to its logical conclusion. And yet most people have never considered this end. Did the concept surprise you? Why do you suppose you never thought of this before?

Hand in Marriage/Contused

What makes the dismembered hand (or in this case, finger) such a popular icon of the horror genre?

Phrenological Love

What does this story teach us about love? About science?

The Cut of My Jib

This work of surrealism has the loose structure of a prose poem. And yet it also seems to tell a story about the narrator. What is that story?

The Leaf Pile

How does this story blur the lines between fantasy and reality?

Receiver

This story requires a lot of "reading between the lines." What is happening between messages...and why does the author leave it unspoken?

What does this story suggest about communication?

What do you imagine these characters look like?

Discuss the ending of the tale. Does it satisfy? Play fair?

Surge

How do you account for the surgeon's behavior?

Convictions

Why does the narrator feel so haunted by his job?

What does the use of the Psalm as a recurring motif add to this piece?

Valentine

What is most horrifying in this short story?

Sinking Sandy

Compare and contrast this tale with T.C. Boyle's short story, "Drowning" (which inspired it).

Is Sandy suicidal or not?

What role does the mother play in this tale of child abuse?

Strung

This short-short -- like many in the collection -- explores language and turns of phrases as much as it tells a story. Discuss Arnzen's use of language in 100 Jolts, particularly in the book's shortest stories.

How to Grow a Man-Eating Plant

Discuss the function of viewpoint in this story. What role does the narrator play?

Why does Arnzen choose to write this as a "how-to" guide? Does it give the story a comic tone? Would a story about a man-eating plant work better if it were straightforward?

The Killer Descends

What is most frightening about this tale?

What is "existential" about this short-short?

Gasp

Arnzen considered opening 100 Jolts with this story, rather than "Skull Fragments." How might that have changed the way you read the book?

Domestic Fowl

Account for the relationship between the man and his friend, the chicken. Is there a subtext of some kind here?

How does the absurdism in this piece challenge the laws of reason?

This piece is entertainment, but what is the theme of this story?

CREATIVE WRITING PROMPTS

Skull Fragments

"Skull Fragments" uses a frame narrative to hold together twelve microfictions involving skulls in one way or another. Borrow this technique to write a cluster of different microfictions all involving the same specific word or object.

Set a horror story on a children's ride, like the ball pit in this story.

Come up with your own "skull fragment" to continue the series.

Limber

"Limber" follows the structure of the body from head to toe as the narrator crumbles to the ground. Is there another way that you can use body shape to organize a tale?

Obictionary

Write your own "abecedary" -- a poetic piece structured off the alphabet.

Come up with some other pun on the word "dictionary" as a title to guide your own story that invokes wordplay.

Degrees of Separation

Rewrite this story in first person from the viewpoint of the woman in the tub.

Punishment

Start writing a straightforward memoir about how your parents punished you -- whether for your own good or not -- and when it feels right, take it into fictional territory.

Nightmare Jobs

There are five "Nightmare Jobs" scattered throughout 100 Jolts. Come up with three more of your own.

Write a twisted want ad, ala "Nightmare Job #3."

Craft a story about a killer's thoughts and actions during their mundane day job.

Imagine the craziest profession you can.

Turn of the Season

Set a scene with a woman working in a garden where a body is composting (whether she knows it or not is up to you).

Pop-Up Killer

Write a story that depicts a common fear or anxiety people have about the internet.

Brain Candy

Imagine a post-apocalyptic scenario. Now choose a moment where the loneliness of that setting (or a nostalgia for the past) is really driven home.

White Out

Write about a day in which the whole world changes.

Stabbing for Dummies

Choose a staple action from any genre (detective work, space travel, etc.) and write a short "for dummies" guide, whether humorous or not.

The Cow Cafe

This story was inspired by pictures on a restaurant wall in the hotel for World Horror Convention in Kansas City. Choose a banal location and make it surreal.

Take Out

*Write an extended metaphor for a broken relationship.
Craft a prose-poem involving food and fear.*

A Change in Policy

In this story, the characters' roles are withheld until the surprise ending. Write a piece using a similar tactic.

Mustachio Moon

Design a tale where the antagonist is outrageously large.

Who Wants to be a Killionaire?

*Take a television program you're familiar with and rewrite it with a horrific slant.
Pun on a title or slogan from the media and use it as the title for a work of fiction.*

Beyond Undead

Take a conventional horror concept and report how it would really feel to be involved in it, like the vampire in "Beyond Undead."

Stretch

Write a breathless one sentence paragraph.

Stress Toy

Write a piece about child abuse that withholds the status of the victim until the end of the story.

Tassels

Take a common social ritual, like graduation day, and twist it into something dark and frightening.

Returns

*Dramatize the encounter of a killer or creature with a department store return clerk.
Write about a killer who is returning a used murder weapon to the place where they acquired it.*

The Dead Head

Write a horror story involving a cultural icon from the 60's.

Surgical Complications

Set a horror story in a hospital room, using an immobilized or medicated patient as your protagonist.

Jack the Teacher

Put Jack the Ripper into an unexpected context.

Describe a horrifying event that plays out in a classroom without reifying the Columbine tragedy (or, alternatively, use horror to dramatize an theme on behalf of the victims).

Little Stocking Stuffers

Write a Christmas story involving cannibals.

In the Balance

"In the Balance" takes an icon like the scales of justice very literally. Choose another icon or emblem from society or the government and give it a dark slant.

Diagara

Write a scary letter, penned by a madman. Addressing it to the President is optional.

Strange Trout

Use this title as a prompt.

Revenge of the Mummy

Invent a story that uses a mummy's wrap in an original way.

Canines

Craft a short story featuring a vampire dentist.

The Seven-Headed Beast

What does your seven-headed beast look like? describe all seven heads

Psycho Hunter

Write a twisted hunting tale.

A Worse Mousetrap

Take a cliché (like "build a better mousetrap") and turn it into its opposite...then write a story to support it.

Little Devils

Without naming names, write about your next-door neighbor. Imagine the worst.

Set a horror story in a day care center.

Set out writing about an innocent game of child's play that -- through a slow revelation of details -- turns progressively deadly or scary.

Latex

"Latex" was inspired by a random encounter with a glove on a restroom floor. Take stock of the random objects that surround you right now and make them harbor deadly intent.

Mother's Haunted Housecoat

What's in your closet? Take an inventory of the mundane and explore these objects by describing them with increasingly twisted imagery.

Inside the Man with No Eyelids

This tale is a prose-poem; write a more realistic narrative about a character without eyelids (or, perhaps, with only one eyelid).

Burning Bridges

Write a cautionary tale about smoking that avoids or expands the clichés.

Write a story where a natural weakness in the body is exploited in a suicide or by a murderer.

Taking Care of Baby

Construct a mystery that involves a baby monitor or intercom.

Five Mean Machines:

For your own title or series of them, choose a compound word (like "machine") and concatenate words to it as Arnzen does with the titles to his "Five Mean Machines".

Tugging the Heartstrings

Write a tale about a fixation on a loved one dying.

Write the story of a scar you have or have recently seen.

Face of Clay

Invent a tale that turns on a child's artwork or sculpture.

Blind Spot

Write a tale involving a seeing-eye dog.

Crusty Old Age

Write about vampires of different ages.

Next-Door

Write a surreal tale of one-upsmanship.

Hide a horror in plain site by making it larger or smaller than the reader realizes.

Choppers

Write a short-short where every verb is a newly invented word (neologism).

Take any of the strange verbs in "Choppers" and write a prose-poem about that action.

Amputating the Phantom

Write about a killer who has a phantom limb.

How to Put a Cat to Sleep

Use second person to put the reader in a very uncomfortable position.

While Knitting Your Hat

Write from the point-of-view of a decapitated head.

Disgruntled

Like an office worker "going postal," this story borrows its concept from the headlines. Watch the news or read today's paper and find your inspiration in the story behind the story.

Anniversary Meal

Write about a romantic couple -- of monsters.

Second Helping

Take a stroll through hell.

In the Middle

Write about an incident involving a nude model.

The Curse of Fat Face

Personify a character's low self-esteem.

Skullduggery

Utilize a character with a metal plate in his skull.

Chanting Richard

Put a dead character's name at the center of a mystery.

The Eight Ball in Big Mouth's Pocket

Set a story in a billiard hall.

Write a tale about competition among old veterans of some kind.

A Donation

Invent a narrative involving a human cadaver, donated to scientific research.

Write from the viewpoint of the dead.

Her Daily Bread

Set a horror story in a city square.

Hitchcock, too, told a story where "birds" did something creepy. Invent your own original take on this concept.

My Wound Still Weeps

Stream the consciousness of a self-destructive madman (or madwoman, naturally).

Write about a creature with an eating disorder.

An Evil Eye

Craft a tale about a paranoid and a body part in the vein of "An Evil Eye."

The Blood Ran Out

Borrowing the premise of this story -- that the vampires have drained their supply of human blood -- rewrite this piece (or a different scene altogether) in your own voice.

Hand in Marriage

Design a murder mystery revolving around a wedding band.

Phrenological Love

Design a plot involving a modern or young character who continues to work in an arcane field of psychology or primitive biology. (If Frankenstein did it, so can you.)

The Cut of My Jib

Research a common expression or figure or speech and write a piece that exploits what most people don't know about it.

Write a story about a character who misuses or misunderstands a cliché.

The Leaf Pile

Write about a person's mourning for their lost spouse.

Receiver

Create a crime plot composed entirely of answering machine or email messages.

Surge

Narrate the stream of consciousness of a surgeon as he operates on a body.

Convictions

Set a ghost story on death row.

Use a bible passage to structure a story.

Write the stream-of-consciousness of a man being executed.

Valentine

Write a horror tale involving a holiday other than Halloween.

Create a disturbing love story.

Contused

Write a story about a character who keeps a very strange object in his possession that no one else will ever know about.

Sinking Sandy

Write a tale from the viewpoint of a suicide at the oceanside.

Research Subjects

Invent a story about a very special research project or scientific experiment while avoiding the trappings of the "mad scientist" b-movie sci-fi genre.

How to Grow a Man-Eating Plant

Write a "how to" guide for another icon of the horror genre.

Revise a juvenile horror (or YA Halloween) story as if it were an adult narrative.

The Killer Descends

Set an entire horror story in an elevator.

Write a piece about making eye contact.

Gasp

Write the shortest story you can.

Domestic Fowl

"Domestic Fowl" was a story that began with the first sentence, which Arnzen just ran with. Take the first sentence as if it were your own and keep going.

In the tradition of Kafka, write an absurdist story about a man turning into an animal, bug, or even vegetable.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A few of the creative writing prompts in this guide have also appeared in either Arnzen's newsletter, [The Goreletter](#) or his "Instigation" column for [Hellnotes Newsletter](#). For hundreds of creative writing prompts visit "The Sickolodeon" via Michael Arnzen's home page: <http://www.gorelets.com>

Thanks to John Edward Lawson for making careful edits to the manual.

The discussion questions for "My Wound Still Weeps" were kindly contributed by Robert Derek, from a graduate seminar he led on the story.

--