Section 3, The Writer's Advantage: A Toolkit for Mastering Your Genre

Write-by-the-Lake Writer’s Workshop & Retreat

June 15-19, 2015
9:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m. each day
Pyle Center, 702 Langdon St., Madison

Instructor: Laurie Scheer

WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

Are you certain you have the right genre for your material? Often writers think they are creating new content within their genre when in fact they are just writing what has been written previously. Writers need to research their genre to fully understand the genre’s evolution. Armed with knowing the history of their genre, writers can improve their content immensely and provide a new spin on their material so they stand out from others writing within their genre. By doing this work, writers conquer writer’s block, often sort out their storylines and create authentic pieces of writing. Some writers even find success by creating new sub-genres (think steampunk).

This workshop assists you as you run the history of your genre to discover the traits that are working (and not working) for your authentic content. The result of this workshop will lead to writers writing less prequels, sequels, remakes and reboots within your genre. By doing this research and learning this method of writing you’ll write an authentic and genuine new text with your next project and all of your future projects.

Genre topics:
- Understanding the new transmedia world within publishing
- Fragmentation of audiences adds to why you need to know your genre
- How to find the traits, the quintessential text, and history of your genre
- Looking at how your genre has been consumed by readers-and why you need to know this as a current writer in today’s marketplace
- How to assure you are creating authentic material
- How to look to creating hybrid genres and new genres for the future

Writers who would benefit from this workshop include:
- Writers of all genres
- Writers interested in elevating their work to a higher level
- Writers who want to write authentic and genuine material
- Writers who may have received one-to-many rejection notices – you’ll learn about hints on how to improve your writing
- Writers who are tired of writing the same thing over and over

Here’s an excerpt from The Writer’s Journey author Christopher Vogler’s foreword to Scheer’s book The Writer’s Advantage: A Toolkit for Mastering Your Genre and writing method: “She points to a high road for genre-loving writers, in which they can not only participate in the forms they admire, but also make fresh contributions that no one has ever imagined, and even spin out completely new genres and styles that others will have the fun of exploring and expanding one day.”

Syllabus

DAY 1
Introductions

Assignment: Clarify your genre. Why did you choose this genre? Why should you be the author of this book? How is your writing different from the writing of other writers who are writing within this genre? Who will care about your book? Why publish your book and why publish your book now? Respond to these questions in a brief essay (under 2,000 words).

DAY 2
The Quintessential Text.
Every genre has established texts within said genre. We’ll define the quintessential text trope. How does one research and identify their quintessential text?

In Class research and writing assignment: Find 5 texts that best represent the type of book you are writing – be ready to defend why you choose these titles.

Assignment: Study your subject matter—how has it been addressed previously in other books. Submit your completed list of quintessential texts and write an essay (250-500 words) explaining why your main choice is your best choice as a writing goal for your project.

DAY 3
Traits
Your genre has specific traits that are inherent to that genre. A full discussion will take place regarding genre traits and why you need some of them, why you could delete some of them, and how you could possibly introduce some new ones to your genre.

In Class writing assignment: List your genre’s traits. A discussion will follow regarding why certain traits belong to certain genres.
Assignment: List 10 to 15 traits for your genre. Now list those traits you will maintain and those you will delete. Add traits that you will introduce to your genre. Write a short essay (250-500 words) explaining why you have chosen these traits.

DAY 4
Looking at the mass production of your genre and studying the trends and patterns that have been successful throughout the years lead to your version of said genre and how your work will perpetuate and/or take the genre to another level.

In Class writing assignment: List popular books within your genre and their production dates (approximate) – begin to connect the dots between decades. A discussion will take place in class regarding some of your genres.

Assignment: Has your genre found an audience decade after decade, generation after generation – and why- or why not? Will your work bring something to the table that moves the genre beyond its current boundaries? Write a short essay in response (under 2,000 words).

DAY 5
Understanding the Writer’s Advantage.
You now know about the Writer’s Advantage, there are just a few more questions to answer and those are;

Is your story worth telling?
What does your story offer to readers that they cannot find in their real/normal life?
Does your work propel your readers to experience wonderment?

We’ll discuss the research we have gathered throughout the week. Each writer will present their findings – their quintessential text, list of 5 main traits, a short history of said genre and how their work will bring something new and authentic to the life of the genre.

You will be asked the same questions from Day 1 as follows;
Why did you choose this genre? Why should you be the author of this book? How is your writing different from the writing of other writers who are writing within this genre? Who will care about your book? Why publish your book and why publish your book now? Your answers will reflect the work you’ve completed throughout the week.

These presentations will also serve as beginning pitches for their query letters and marketing for their writing/book ideas.

Laurie Scheer, Media Goddess, is a former vice president of programming for WE: Women's Entertainment. She has worked as an assistant, d-girl, and producer for ABC, Viacom, Showtime, and AMC-Cablevision. Laurie has been an instructor at numerous universities across the US including Northwestern, UCLA, American University, and Yale. As a professional speaker, she has appeared at annual conventions for NAB, NATPE, The Great American Pitch Fest, Screenwriters’ World, Reel Screen, WIFV, FTX West, the Willamette Writers Conference.
She is currently an Associate Faculty Associate/Writing Mentor with UW-Madison’s Continuing Studies Writing Department where she is critiquing writers’ works, conducting numerous online and in-person courses, and the Director of the annual Writers’ Institute. She is also the Managing Editor of the annual regional journal, The Midwest Prairie Review. Her new book The Writer's Advantage: A Toolkit for Mastering Your Genre (Michael Wiese Productions, 2014) explores storytelling in the transmedia universe. Most recently, Laurie received the Marquette University Alumni Association “James T. Tiedge Memorial Award” for her outstanding work as a graduate of the J. William and Mary Diederich College of Communication.

Credit Option: Participants earn 1 credit by attending class and completing the assigned work for the week: daily reading, writing at least five pages of original work, and critiquing of own and others’ work. To earn 2 credits, participants submit an additional five pages of their work. Participants earning 3 credits complete all of the above requirements supplemented by another five to 10 pages of creative work or a short paper synthesizing how the material covered during the week applies to their own creative projects and/or teaching. The work must be handed in within two weeks of final class date.