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# Joan's Junk Shop

For Developing Writers

48 PLAYFULLY PRACTICAL  
CREATIVE WRITING PROMPTS

Aligns to NCTE and Common  
Core State Standards

Robert S. Boone and  
Mark H. Larson

 GOOD YEAR BOOKS

## Dedication

Dedicated to Jerry Grunski—  
great teacher, great leader, great friend.

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### **NCTE & Common Core State Standards**

*Joan's Junk Shop: 48 Playfully Practical Creative Writing Prompts* contains lessons and activities that reinforce and develop skills as defined by the National Council of Teachers of English and the Common Core State Standards as appropriate for students in grades 6 to 12. These activities meet the NCTE standards regarding literary range, periods/genres, textual analysis, voice, audience, form/technique, research, technology, diversity, and purpose. The Common Core State Standards are met in the categories of Writing (Text Types and Purposes, Production and Distribution of Writing, and Range of Writing) and Language (Knowledge of Language and Conventions of Standard English). See [www.goodyearbooks.com](http://www.goodyearbooks.com) for information on how specific lessons correlate to specific standards.

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# Introduction

## To the Teacher

*Joan's Junk Shop: 48 Playfully Practical Creative Writing Prompts* is our follow-up book to *Moe's Café: 48 Decidedly Different Creative Writing Prompts*. Like *Moe's Café*, *Joan's Junk Shop* has 48 prompts, each beginning with a situation. The situation could be a memorable place, an intriguing person, or a dramatic moment. Each of these is then followed by ten questions to help your students imagine the situation more completely. Next come instructions and suggestions for shaping the answers into stories, essays, or other forms. As in *Moe's Café*, after completing the prompt, students will find lists of books and movies that provide opportunities for further pursuit of the subject they have just explored. Along with these 48 prompts, students will also find 50 story starters and six samples of student writing. These samples include comments, which identify strong writing and places where the writing could be even stronger.

There are many reasons you might stop by *Joan's Junk Shop*. Perhaps you teach a creative writing class at your school. Or perhaps you don't teach creative writing as a separate course but still like to sneak it into your regular classes whenever you have a chance. Maybe you are the sponsor of the creative writing club or the literary magazine. In short, you believe that creative writing is not a mere diversion, but essential to a complete education. You want your students to do more than just study literature; you want them to create it, as well.

Perhaps you bought this book to help your own writing. You would like to write, but the more you try the more frustrated you get. You have the talent, energy and motivation, but the harder you try to lose yourself in the creative adventure, the more you cannot settle on a place to start. You need some serious nudging! We guarantee that these prompts will get you started. We know that because we have used them with our own students, both old and young. We have used them in large workshops, small seminars, conventional classrooms, and one-on-one settings. We've even used them in ESL classes and on-line courses—and they work!

Finally, even if you have no interest in creative writing, you will find that this book helps students develop skills that will be useful in all of their writing. Consider what some people refer to as the “Seven C’s of good writing”: writing should be clear, composed, correct, concise, convincing, compelling, and clever. Someone writing a sonnet or a short story needs to be just as aware of the Seven C’s as someone writing an analysis *about* a sonnet or a short story. *Joan's Junk Shop* aligns to NCTE Standards and can serve as a natural complement to any preparation for the writing required on standardized tests such as the ACT and SAT.

So, welcome to *Joan's Junk Shop*. There's a lot going on in here—watch your step!



Part One

# Fiction Prompts

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# Joan's Junk Shop

Finding a Real Treasure

## Start

*You're on the road and looking for a place to kill time. You spot a sign that says "Joan's Junk Shop—Old Treasures." "Why not?" you say to yourself, so you pull into the gravel parking lot. Once inside the store, you find more junk than you ever imagined could exist in one place.*

## Questions

After reading the prompt above, answer the following questions on another sheet of paper. Use your answers to help you think about your subject.

1. The front of the place looks strangely familiar. What does it remind you of?
2. You immediately find yourself in a large room packed with furniture. What do you notice first?
3. Next you wander into a smaller room that says "Hobbies." What do you find there? How is it arranged?
4. In the backyard you find a collection marked "Outdoor Stuff." What do you find there?
5. There's a heated argument going on in the backyard. Who is involved? Why are they fighting?
6. Toward the back you find a room marked "For Readers." What does this room look like? What are some of the books? What other reading material is there?
7. Your last stop is the basement. What do you find there?
8. In the basement you notice someone crying. What do you learn about this person?
9. At the cash register you meet Joan, who does not look at all like you expected her to be. What does she look like? What do you talk about?
10. What do you decide to buy? Why that particular item?





## Short and Sweet

A number of reality television shows revolve around people discovering, buying, and reselling antiques. Imagine you have been hired to seek out possible locations for one of these programs. Write a short, concise summary of what you found in Joan's Junk Shop. Make it clear and organized.



## Starting Up

Write three 90-word mini-stories that begin and end in Joan's Junk Shop. In each mini-story, you—the narrator—discover a solution to a problem that has been haunting you:

You are a/an...

1. location scout for a reality TV show
2. unemployed writer
3. lonely widow
4. unappreciated teacher
5. frustrated artist
6. discharged army veteran
7. unsuccessful stand-up comedian

**OR:** Come up with your own idea for a mini-story.

## Hidden Treasure

Want to see how another student used this prompt to begin a full story? Check out "The Hairdresser" on page 106.



## Write Away

1. Pick the story you like the best and write a much longer version. Although the story should take place within the confines of Joan's Junk Shop, you may choose to incorporate flashbacks to add context to your story.
2. Study what you have written. Have you made the right choice of narrator? Are the characters well motivated? Have you created and achieved suspense? If you've chosen to use flashbacks, do they add or distract from your storyline?
3. Revisit your draft. This time begin in the middle and use a flashback.



## Read to Write

Consider reading chapter 16 from William Least Heat Moon's *Blue Highways*, the true story of a man who faces a life crisis by driving his van on a 13,000 mile road trip on the back roads of rural America. In this chapter, Moon enters J.T. Watts' General Store in Nameless, Tennessee, and discovers a place where they "could fix up a horse or a man or a baby." Notice how entering the store is like stepping back into a forgotten era.



## On the Screen

Enjoy the made-for-TV movie *The Librarian: Quest for the Spear* (NR), which stars Noah Wyle in the title role as the geeky but impressive keeper of the greatest collection of priceless treasures ever assembled. Notice the comic irony of various "bookish" types successfully taking on the job of saving the world.



# Headlines

Keeping Up with the Times

## Start

*A lot is happening in the little town of Moesville. Just take a look at the headlines in the local newspaper.*

## Questions

What events could prompt each of these headlines?

1. Mayor quits!
2. Titans upset defending champs!
3. Eccentric art work finally recognized.
4. Former principal delivers a scandalous speech.
5. Police chief calls emergency meeting.
6. Controversial play sets attendance records.
7. Deceased woman leaves \$1,000,000 to her dog!
8. Man bites dog!
9. Class reunion ends in fistfight!
10. Weatherman sued.





### Short and Sweet

Characterize this town in a few sentences.



### Starting Up

Select three of your answers and expand each into a 90-word mini-story, which illustrates a certain point about life. Choose from these seven generalizations:

1. Conflict is inevitable.
2. People have different tastes.
3. People can have conflicting loyalties.
4. Things are not always as they seem.
5. Timing is important.
6. Emotions can take over.
7. We don't always know what's good for us.

OR: Come up with another truism.



### Write Away

1. Pick the story that makes the point most convincingly. Is the message clear to the reader? Does the story capture the feel of Moesville?
2. Study this extended version. Does it start well? Is the right person telling the story?
3. Revisit your draft. Maybe add some new characters.



### Read to Write

Read the science fiction story “The Sound of Thunder” by Ray Bradbury. Based on the concept of time travel, this story points out the dangers of altering history—even to the slightest degree. Notice how tremendous changes in society are depicted by just a few changes in wording on an advertisement.



### On the Screen

Check out the Disney film *Newsies* (PG), a musical based on the 1899 strike of newspaper boys against publisher Joseph Pulitzer. See how, in this case, the boys not only delivered the news, they made it themselves.

# Life is Fair—Or is It?

Dealing with Disappointment

## Start

*Most people seem to believe that life should be fair. Good deeds should be rewarded and bad ones punished. People should get what they deserve. But we also realize that is not always the case.*

## Questions

What little story might each of these people tell to remind us that life is *not* always fair? Be brief.

1. police officer?
2. soldier?
3. high school counselor?
4. professional athlete?
5. chef?
6. magician?
7. artist?
8. talk show host?
9. actor?
10. plumber?

