

420 Characters Tiny Story Contest Planning Guide: Draft 1

Written by
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2016

for IslandLink Library Federation

With thanks to:
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1.0 Introduction: Overview & Objectives (or What & Why)

WHAT

Variouly called flash fiction, postcard fiction, smoke long (in China), and (thanks to this contest) tiny stories, micro fiction is a form defined by its relatively short length. In the case of a 420 characters story, the parameters are clearly set. The story must be 420 characters or fewer—approximately one paragraph long—with every, letter, space and punctuation mark counted.

WHY

Offer an Accessible Literary Challenge (with rewards). Lou Beach, whose book “420 Characters” inspired this contest, spent much of his working life as a successful illustrator and describes his writing as “a most surprising and miraculous second act.” A huge appeal of the contest is the accessibility of the form. Just like Beach, you don’t have to think of yourself as “a writer” to give it a whirl, but it might get you excited about writing, raise questions about what makes a good story, and actually make you a better writer in the process.

Challenge the status quo of the status update. The stories in the book “420 Characters” were originally written as status updates, before Facebook increased the maximum character count for an update from 420 characters to over 60,000. Regardless of this new higher ceiling, the fact remains that many of the people we serve use social networking sites to share and exchange snippets of information, news, ideas, and emotional content on a daily basis. Through this contest, we’re encouraging people to inject some imagination and narrative ingenuity into a form that was created as a result of the restrictions imposed by various types of social media.

Microfiction is friendly for workshops, activities, publications and other kinds of sharing. Besides being an accessible concept in general, from a coordinator’s perspective micro fiction is also just the right length for turning it into a group exercise, a classroom or public presentation, a community event, or a publication. I encourage libraries to get creative with how the stories are created and shared – through workshops, readings, or yet to be determined activities. Some examples: PRPL’s Senior’s Memoir Writing Group wrote tiny stories as an exercise in 2013, we made a tiny stories projection for a local arts festival called Aurora in 2014, and we gave workshops in four high school classrooms in 2015.

2.0 Suggested Timeline

AUG 1-28: PRE-LAUNCH

AUG 29-SEPT 11: LAUNCH & PROMOTE CONTEST

SEPT 12-OCT 30: WORKSHOPS, UPDATES, RECEIVING ENTRIES

OCT 31: CONTEST CLOSES

NOV 1-13: LOCAL JUDGING AND DELIBERATION + ADVERTISE & PLAN READING/AWARDS CEREMONY AND/OR RECOGNITION OF WINNING STORIES

NOV 14-20: FEDERATION-WIDE SHARING OF STORIES

NOV 20-30 CONTEST WRAP UP – ANNOUNCE & HONOUR WINNERS

AUG 1-31: PRE-LAUNCH

- **Invite Judges** from local literati and confirm timeline for judging and location and time for deliberation (Judges must be confirmed in advance of the contest launch in order to put their names on promotional materials). PRPL offers judges a modest \$50 honorarium.
- **Select Prizes** (these will go on the poster & in promotional materials). See section **3.6 Contest Prizes** for more details.
- **Prepare “Contest Guidelines”** document to publish on your website along with contest announcement and optional entry form. See section **3.2 Contest Rules, Procedures, Forms**
- **Build a Lineup of Microfiction Examples** by trawling ILLs and library collection for books of flash fiction.
- **Schedule Status Updates** all at once so you don’t have to think about it again! These updates should include a contest announcement with a link to the guidelines and entry details on your website and regular reminders until the contest closes. PRPL also posts examples of tiny stories to generate interest and inspire potential writers, always with a link at the end to our contest information and guidelines.

SEPT 1-14: LAUNCH CONTEST

- See Section **3.3 Promotion and Sample Media Release**

SEPT 14-OCT31: WORKSHOPS, STATUS UPDATES AND RECEIVING ENTRIES

- Workshops are optional, but are one way to guarantee that stories get written and entered into your contest. See section **3.7 Programming ideas and Awards Ceremony** for a workshop summary.
- If you scheduled status updates as part of your pre-launch prep, this step should take care of itself. Monitor the posts for any comments or conversations that arise.
- See section **3.4 Receiving Entries**

OCT 31: CONTEST CLOSES

NOV 1-13: LOCAL JUDGING AND DELIBERATION + ADVERTISE & PLAN READING/AWARDS CEREMONY AND/OR RECOGNITION OF WINNING STORIES

- See sections **3.5 Judging Process**

NOV 14-20: FEDERATION-WIDE STORY SHARING

- The top 3 stories selected by judges in all local contests will be forwarded to the Regional Contest Coordinator to be compiled in a web-based publication. A link to this publication will be sent to all participating libraries in order that it can be shared on library websites and on social media throughout the federation in conjunction with the announcement of local winners.

NOV 20-30 CONTEST WRAP UP – ANNOUNCE & HONOUR WINNERS

- See section **3.6 Programming Ideas and Awards Ceremonies**.

3.0 The Contest

The following sections address the various aspects of running the contest, mostly in the order that you will encounter them. I've included some anecdotal information based on my experiences running the contest at the Powell River Public Library for three years. I don't expect that what works in Powell River will work in every library but I do hope these basic blocks will form a solid foundation for building the contest in your own library and community.

3.1 Potential Target Groups

The challenge of writing a tiny story is arguably one that can be tackled by writers as young as elementary school. A paragraph, after all, is not very long. In 2014, PRPL received several entries from a grade 6 class and the judges were faced with the conundrum of how to judge kids in the same category as adults. They couldn't. The quality of the writing and the grasp of the concept of "story" were very different in the kids' stories. They were sweet and funny and dramatic and basically awesome, but ultimately they needed to be judged in their own category. When I created a Teen category in 2015, I had this experience in mind and I was also thinking about how I would judge the success of the contest. One of the measures I feel is important is how much participants learn from the process of writing microfiction. I want coordinators to be able to discuss the elements of prose and introduce editing concepts as part of potential workshops. I also want judges to be able to use the same criteria across contest categories. For these reasons, and also because it becomes logistically more complicated the more categories you add, I recommend targeting teens in high school, grades 10 and up. This results in two target groups:

- **Teens (grades 10 +)**
- **Adults**

These categories worked well for PRPL and also seemed fair. A grade 10 student won first prize in the Teen category 2015.

3.2 Contest Rules, Procedures, Forms

CONTEST RULES & PROCEDURES

[Appendix A: Contest Guidelines](#) contains the contest rules used by PRPL, including additional guidelines for a Youth category. Feel free to adjust them to reflect how many categories you will run, your preferred submission method and how the stories will be shared or honoured after the contest closes. If you plan to publish them in a local newspaper or magazine, for instance, make sure that this is stated in the rules so that you don't need to seek the author's permission a second time.

CONTEST FORMS

The contest guidelines ask entrants to submit specific information with their email entries including:

- Full name
- Title(s) of entry(ies)
- Character count for entry(ies)

If you're not sure that entrants will read the guidelines thoroughly and remember to include this information in their emails, you might also require that they fill out and attach [Appendix B: Entry Form](#) to their email.

3.3 Promotion & Sample Media Release

PROMOTION

- **Launch approximately 1.5 months before the submission deadline.** This lead time is important for a contest that requires participants to do/make something.
 - **Blitz!** Advertise on your website, on social media, in local media (print and radio), and your community's local events calendar. Ensure that ads contain a link to your website story about the contest where potential entrants will find more detailed information about contest guidelines, the previous year's entries, and an invitation to follow updates on Facebook.
 - **On the poster and in the Call for Entries on your website include:**
 1. Contest description
 2. The nutshell rules
 3. Names of Guest Judges
 4. Deadline
 5. Prizes
 6. URL for full guidelines
 7. Where to email entries
- [Appendix C: Call For Entries](#) contains a template for all of the above points. Feel free to copy and revise it as needed for the purposes of your contest.
- **Don't let them forget!** In keeping with the social media origins of the contest, I recommend that libraries continue to put out micro-fiction inspiration, teasers & updates on Facebook. This serves double duty. These updates are informational and inspirational but they also keep the contest on people's minds.

SAMPLE MEDIA RELEASE

[Appendix D: Press Release](#) was published in the Powell River Peak to announce PRPL's contest in 2013. Feel free to use or modify it for your own contest.

3.4 Receiving Entries

- **Before you receive entries, you will receive questions** from potential entrants, mostly about rules; 9 times out of 10 the question will have its answer in the contest guidelines. ie) "Does the character count have to include the title?" Be patient. Send a link to the guidelines.
- **Contest Guidelines (are made to be broken)** Be prepared to be forgiving about partially followed guidelines. Not everyone will include the character count on their entry. Some will put their names on the entry and you'll have to remove it to maintain anonymity. I recommend you do a "just checking" review of all stories to make sure they got it right. Stories that come in over the character count or come from someone outside PRPL's service district are disqualified. You can be as forgiving or strict about guidelines as you want to be, just be consistent.
- **Keep it orderly.** Sounds self-explanatory, but I can't over-emphasize how important organization is to running a smooth contest. If you are able to shuttle stories into the right files and folders as they arrive in your inbox, you'll have way less work in the end. I recommend keeping a "Tiny Stories" Subfolder in your inbox so that all the emails related to the contest are kept in one place. It's useful to be able to refer back.

- **Create an email contact list** as entries come in. If, after the contest closes, you want to invite all the entrants to a reading or direct their attention to the way in which winning stories will be recognized, this will make it a snap!
- **Let entrants know you got their entries with a form response** that also lets them know in advance about the date of the reading and that you'll be in touch with further details. [Appendix E: Email Templates](#) contains two form responses: one for receipt of an entry and one to invite participants to a reading.
- **Create one folder and three documents:**
 - 1) The Folder part is obvious. Call it "Tiny Stories". This is where you put all the entries you receive. Save related contest materials, guidelines, etc. to a subfolder. If an entry has a generic name like "420 Contest," re-name it to reflect its actual title or content.
 - 2) **Document 1: Entrant and Story List** is a master document of titles and the writers who submitted them, alphabetized by title. You'll have to type this yourself. Where an entrant failed to provide a title, I use the first 3-4 words of their story as the working title which is more useful than calling it "untitled" when it comes down to judging. Note that the judges don't get to see this document, but you'll need it when the contest ends and you want to connect a story to its author!
 - 3) **Document 2: All Entries** is a document in which to copy and paste incoming stories without author names. Each story should undergo a character count, regardless of whether or not the entrant supplies one, since they are often wrong. Do this so the judges don't have to!
 - 4) **Document 3: All Entries with Names** is a nicely formatted document with all stories and authors names. This document gets published to the library's website to provide recognition to the writers who submitted and an example for future contestants. You might also want to transfer the contents of this document to Powerpoint to make a slideshow of tiny stories to run during the Tiny Story Reading. This makes the evening a lot more interactive and gives everyone a chance to spend more time with the stories which can go by quickly in the context of a reading. However you decide to share your library's tiny stories, having this document will make it easier than if you have a hundred or more individual entry files.
- **Order = sanity.** Create a system that works for you and stick to it.
- **Expect a mid-contest lull and an end-of-contest rush.** You may need a day or so after the contest closes to finish up your documents.

3.5 Judging Process

JUDGING AND DELIBERATION

- **Heads up to judges.** Be in contact slightly before the contest ends and re-confirm that the judging date and time still works for all.
- **Provide but (don't push) judging criteria.** [See Appendix F: Optional Judging Criteria](#). Ultimately, judges should be able to use or ignore the provided criteria as they see fit. Criteria mostly come into play when the judges have narrowed down their choices to a top 15 or 20 and need to differentiate the solid from the good but flawed stories in their piles. Criteria also help on the day of judging because their pre-existence means that the judges don't have to start by creating and agreeing upon criteria. [Appendix G: Sample Judging Sheet](#) may also come in handy.
- **Once the contest is closed, send the judges what they need:**
 1. **Document 2: All Entries** – The all entries, no names document.
 2. **Optional Judging Criteria** document – with the use as you please caveat.

- 3. **Sample Judging Sheet** – To be used on judging day (print extra copies).
- **Allow 2 weeks** for the judges to read, deliberate, and choose their winners.
- **On deliberation day, allow up to 3 hours** for judging and provide refreshments and snacks.
- **No arm wrestling necessary.** The contest coordinator can serve as a “shadow” or “tiebreaker” judge during deliberation. Select a top 10 of your own to be taken out in the event that the guest judges reach stalemate. However, be clear that the judges have ultimate say and veto power. That’s what they signed up for!

3.6 Contest Prizes

Prizes will depend on your Library’s budget and, potentially, how many categories you run. In 2015, PRPL ran both an Adult and a Teen category with first, second and third place prizes in each category totalling \$100. The value of each prize was scaled according to placement, with first place receiving a \$50 value prize, second place \$30, and third place \$20. All prizes came in the form of gift certificates from local businesses.

3.7 Programming ideas and Awards Ceremony

WORKSHOPS

One way you can guarantee that stories get written and entered into your contest is to offer workshops. A workshop can be a platform for introducing microfiction and where it fits in the short story spectrum, a place to offer examples and dissect what makes them work, or a way to tweak imaginations by sharing creative content such as vintage photographs that can be used as story starters. [See Appendix H: Tiny Stories PowerPoint Workshop](#) for a sample. Note that slides 9 through 34 in the presentation are all images taken from “The Commons” on Flickr and are intended to provide some grist for participants who might not have an idea to begin with. When I offer this workshop, I present the first 8 slides at my own pace. Once we move into the writing segment, I let the slideshow cycle through and repeat while everyone writes.

READING AND AWARDS CEREMONY

If you have the resources and the time to host a reading and awards ceremony at the end of the contest, the checklist below should help. In my experience, the reading is as important if not more important than the actual contest. It’s where stories get shared, bringing together a community of readers as well as writers of microfiction. It helps build performance confidence in participants, and often turns audience members into future writers of tiny stories.

- **Leave at least a week** between the end of judging and the reading to prepare for the event.
- **Invite everyone to read!** It doesn’t matter if they’re a winner, a runner up or on the long list. The stories are short, so be inclusive and fill the evening with as many as you can!
- **Send that reminder email** you promised entrants when you received their submissions. [Appendix E: Email Templates](#) contains a sample. This email:
 1. Reminds potential readers of the date, the time and the location of the reading.
 2. Requests they RSVP if they are going to read (so you can create a lineup).
 3. Tells them to show up at least 15 minutes before the reading starts and check in at the door.
 4. Says what to expect - the structure of the evening (this helps nervous readers!).

5. Invites participants to read any number of the stories they entered (1-3), as well as comment on the process of writing a tiny story.
 6. Asks for permission to display stories.
 7. Friends, family and fans of tiny stories all welcome!
- Any winners not present at the reading are notified after the event.
 - **Schedule an announcement** of winners and shortlisted stories to go up on your website and out on social media right after the reading.
 - **Print & Display stories around the room or turn them into a PowerPoint projection** so that people can mingle and read stories to themselves before the reading and during the intermission (if you have one).
 - **Door prizes!** for people who incorporate a “tiny” element into their outfit. This adds another layer of fun and entertainment to the evening.

Hey MC! Muse a bit, then let the readers shine! The reading will look after itself. For the sake of building excitement and ambition in participants who almost place in the winning three, I recommend announcing the top ten in reverse order, ending with the prize winners.

RECOGNITION BY PUBLICATION

If hosting a reading and awards ceremony is too time-intensive, another way to honour winning stories is to publish them on your website or, even better, in a local publication such as a newspaper, journal or magazine. This second option requires that you approach local media/publishers in advance and seek a partnership. See t

3.8 Local/Regional Partners

- If you run a Teen category in your contest, consider partnering with an English department or teachers in your local high school(s). A keen teacher can make all the difference to how many entries you receive. Tip: have the teacher compile a list of student names with titles of entries to make sorting easier.
- Let your local writers groups know about the contest and encourage them to use it as an exercise or writing challenge.
- Partner with a local newspaper or magazine to have the winning stories published after the contest closes. *Powell River Living* published PRPL’s Tiny Story Contest winners in 2015.
- Invite your local radio station to attend or even capture audio at the reading and awards ceremony. A programmer at CJMP Community Radio aired several tiny stories on his show after hearing them at the Tiny Stories Reading.

3.9 Evaluation Options

Think about how you will evaluate both the quantifiable and the ephemeral aspects of the contest. Quantifiable aspects include:

- Number of entrants/entries.
- Number of people in attendance at related programs such as workshops or events such as the reading/awards ceremony.

- Number of spin-off activities that happen in the community or library as a result of the contest. Examples include the Memoir Writing for Seniors group that took on PRPL's contest as a writing challenge two years in a row, or the four high school classrooms that I presented to in 2015.

Ephemeral aspects include:

- How did people hear about the event? Who did you reach or engage through this contest?
- Success stories (for example, how did you share your stories? What did individuals tell you about their experience?)
- Did this contest encourage someone to start writing or keep writing?
- If you ran a Teen category what did the students and teachers say about the experience of writing microfiction? Did they learn anything from the process?

Keep track of your numbers and write down what people say and please send some of the highlights back to myself szagwyn@prpl.ca and Ene Haabniit: ene@islandlink.ca. We'll use them for our own evaluation and applications to fund the contest in the future.

4.0 Resources

Below are a handful of Internet resources that may come in handy in the process of running your contest:

The website of Lou Beach – The best place to find out more about the book that inspired the 420 Characters Tiny Story Contest and the man who wrote it.

<http://www.loubeach.com>

Stories in your pocket: how to write flash fiction – A succinct article on the form by David Gaffney.

<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/may/14/how-to-write-flash-fiction?INTCMP=SRCH>

The Art of Microfiction – a column on Lit Reactor that contains a nice summary of what microfiction is and why it's of interest to both readers and writers.

<https://litreactor.com/columns/the-art-of-microfiction>

Plus, The Commons on flickr is a great place to find imagery for story starters or ads. The key goal of The Commons is to share hidden treasures from the world's public photography archives. You'll need to sign up for a flickr account to access it.

Appendix A: Contest Guidelines

Deadline

The deadline for the 420 Characters tiny story contest is **(DATE HERE)**.

Guidelines

- Entrants may submit up to three tiny stories.
- Each story must be 420 characters or fewer—**including spaces and punctuation**. Hint: Use the “Word Count” function in Microsoft Word to find out your character count.
- **Do not count your title** in your character count.
- Please indicate character count for each story you submit.
- If entering more than once, submit all entries as separate attachments to a **single** email.
- Entrants’ anonymity is preserved throughout the judging. Contact information (including an email address) must not appear on the attached entry(ies), but should appear in the body of the email along with a title (or titles in the case of multiple entries) and character count.
- This is a community contest: only residents of **(YOUR LIBRARY REGION)** may enter.
- Youth entrants must be students grades 10-12 under the age of 19. If entering in the Youth category, please state your grade or age on your submission.
- Entries already published, accepted, or submitted elsewhere are ineligible.
- No entries will be returned.
- Winners and runners up will be announced and prizes will be awarded at a reading on **(DATE AND TIME)** at **(LOCATION)**. Entrants unable to attend the reading will not be notified of the results unless they have placed in the top 3.
- Winning stories and winning authors’ names will appear on the Library’s website and Facebook page following the reading.

Enter by Email

- Send entries as an attachment to tinystories@powellriverlibrary.ca
- The subject line must contain your full name and 420 Characters. e.g., "John Smith, 420 Characters."
- Please also submit the following information in your email or fill out and attach the provided “Entry Form”:
 - Your full name
 - Title(s) of entry(ies)
 - Character count for entry(ies)
- **Acceptable file formats: Word (.doc and .docx) or pdf**

THE FINE PRINT: Powell River Public Library takes non-exclusive electronic rights to post the text at powellriverlibrary.ca and in Library-related presentations and publications. All other rights remain with the author. This contest is open to all entrants except Library staff, contract employees, board members and executives. People in these categories may participate but will not qualify to win. Questions? Call contest coordinator Sonia Zagwyn at 604-485-8663

Appendix B: Entry Form

Please fill in this form and email it as an attachment along with your entries to: tinystories@prpl.ca

Full Name:

Title(s) and Character Count:

(ie. "The Boat" 370 characters)

1.

2.

3.

Appendix C: Call For Entries

Can you pack vivid descriptions, original characters and surprising plot twists into a narrative small enough to fit in a status update? We want to read your tiny stories!

Here's the deal:

RULES

- 1) The story must be 420 characters or fewer - including spaces and punctuation
- 2) Up to three entries per author
- 3) Before entering, read our Contest Guidelines at powellriverlibrary.ca

WITH GUEST JUDGES

(Judge 1) & (Judge 2)

DEADLINE: OCTOBER 31, 2016

ADULT PRIZES

- 1st: \$50 gift card for
- 2nd: \$30 gift card for
- 3rd: \$20 gift card

YOUTH PRIZES

- 1st: \$50 gift card for
- 2nd: \$30 gift card for
- 3rd: Three teen passes for

Send entries & queries by email to: tinystories@prpl.ca

Appendix D: Press Release

Contact: *S. Zagwyn, Teen Services Coordinator*

Tel: *604-485-8663*

Email: *szagwyn@powellriverlibrary.ca*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 13, 2013

Library Launches 420 Characters Tiny Story Contest

If you've seen the posters around town announcing the Library's *420 Characters Tiny Story Contest*, you might have wondered: what's a tiny story? Why 420 characters? In a nutshell, literally, 420 character stories are tiny narratives, approximately one paragraph long, in which every letter, space and punctuation mark gets counted. The first 420 character stories were written by author Lou Beach as status updates on a big social networking site. These stories were collected and published in a book called *420 Characters*, the namesake and inspiration for the Library's contest. So now you know what 420 character stories are and where they originated. Still wondering why the Library wants you to write one?

Given its traditional role as the go-to place for longer, more contemplative literary forms, the social media connection might seem a little odd, admits contest coordinator Sonia Zagwyn. What inspired the Library to create a writing contest that encourages its participants to count their characters and mind their spaces? "It's a bit subversive," says Zagwyn. "It's a way to challenge the status quo of the status update, to inject some imagination and narrative ingenuity into a form that was created as a result of the restrictions imposed by various types of social media. We're appropriating that form and daring participants to dream big in a small space."

Although you'd be hard-pressed to find a 1-page book in the Library, Zagwyn points out that there are numerous books in the Library composed of literary short forms—from collections of poetry and short stories to picture books and magazine blurbs. "It sounds counter-intuitive, but formal restrictions can actually be quite freeing," says Zagwyn. "Instead of looking at a blank page and being overwhelmed by infinite choices, the writer who starts with some boundaries is free to direct a greater amount of energy into specific things like word choice, inventing the perfect metaphor, or finding a detail that really sings. I'm excited to see what people come up with."

The Library's contest runs until September 30 with guest judges selected from local literati and "prizes worth writing your guts out for." First place entry wins a Kobo touch eReader, second a \$50 certificate to Breakwater books, and third \$25 worth of baked goodness from Manna from Heaven. For more details or to read examples of 420 character stories, go to the Library's website: powellriverlibrary.ca.

If you would like more information about this topic, or to schedule an interview, please call 604-485-8663 or email to szagwyn@powellriverlibrary.ca.

Appendix E: Email Templates

1st EMAIL – ENTRY RECEIVED

Hi, (NAME OF ENTRANT),

This email is to confirm that we received your entry for the 420 Characters Tiny Story Contest. Thanks for participating! Winners and runners up will be announced and prizes awarded at a reading on (DATE AND TIME) at (LOCATION). All participants are invited to read, so mark your calendar! We'll send a reminder email with more details a week before the reading.

Write on!

2nd EMAIL – READING REMINDER

Greetings Tiny Story Entrants:

The 2016 Tiny Story Reading will take place on **(DATE AND TIME)** at **(LOCATION)** and you're invited! If you'd like to read your tiny story or stories, **please RSVP to this address by (DATE)**.

Here are the details:

Friends, family and fans of tiny stories are all welcome! There is no door charge. Contest winners and runners up will be announced, prizes will be awarded, and stories will be on display for all to read. **If you don't want your story on display please inform me by the abovementioned date.** Plus, if you add a tiny element to your outfit (miniature bow tie, petite hat, teensy trousers) you'll be entered to win a door prize.

A few notes for those of you who will be reading:

1. All readers should **show up at least 15 minutes prior to the reading and check in at the door.**
2. Stories will be read before and after a brief intermission, with prizes awarded at the end. Reading order will be determined randomly, unless you give advance notice that you need to arrive late or leave early. I'll tell you your place in the reading line-up when you arrive. During the reading, I'll call you up to the stage by name.
3. You may read any or all of your entries to the tiny story contest (that means 1-3 tiny stories). **Please bring printed copies of your own stories to read from.** If you feel spontaneously inspired to say something about the joys or challenges of writing a tiny story...do it!

For more details, see the attached poster.

See you there!

Appendix F: Optional Judging Criteria

Dear Judges,

I imagine each of you will instinctively use many of these criteria, or variations thereof, when choosing your shortlist. Your top ten picks will probably consist of stories that stick with you in some way—gouge at your soul or tickle your funny bone—without jarring transitions or flat-footed language. The list below is meant to help you once you're down to that final list and need to distinguish the pretty good from the truly awesome pieces. Every one of these criteria do not have to exist in the stories that you choose for your shortlist and you're welcome to advocate for a story that doesn't check these boxes but succeeds in your opinion in other ways. You might want to score your shortlisted stories from 1-5 in each of these categories in the final discussion and then tally and average the numbers. I'm open to any system that works for you. So, in any order...

Does the story:

- **Make artful use of language and word choice?**
- **Actually tell a story? (Are there hints of conflict/character/setting/plot that lead you to a conclusion/revelation?)**
- **Have a surprising twist or evoke/suggest a greater story beyond the actual text?**
- **Contain memorable characters (or, by extension, voices)?**
- **Contain evocative description that avoids cliché?**
- **Show consideration for structure and sentence variation (Rhythm)?**

Happy reading!

Appendix G: Sample Judging Sheet

Score your top 10 stories from 1-5 in each category.

Title or Story #	Artful Language & Word Choice?	Tells a Story?	Twist or Story Beyond Story?	Memorable Character & Voice?	Description Avoids Cliché?	Considered Structure & Sentences?	Tally

Appendix H: Tiny Stories PowerPoint Workshop

See accompanying file: [“Appendix H - Tiny Stories Workshop.pptx”](#)