

# WRITING STORIES: EVEN THE SKY IS NOT THE LIMIT

by Betty G. Birney



Who hasn't been nervous when sitting down to write a story? The key to success is to relax and let your imagination do the work. To me, the most exciting part of writing is the fact that you, the author, are totally in charge. You get to create the universe and everything that's in it. You get to make the rules and decide what happens to everyone in your world. In the end, you get to rule the universe – and that's powerful!

But getting started isn't always easy, as Humphrey finds in *Imagination According to Humphrey*. It would be nice to get a "brain blizzard" that gives you all the answers, but here are four simple but powerful tips to remember. They may seem obvious, but I forget them, too, sometimes.

- 1) Give your hero a problem to solve. Only he or she can solve it. If anybody else does, it weakens the story.
- 2) A story needs a clear beginning, middle and end. For me, the end is often the biggest hurdle, but in many books and movies, it's the middle that's the boring part, so make sure that doesn't happen.
- 3) Adding a ticking clock always helps. Whatever the hero must accomplish needs a deadline.
- 4) REVISE-REVISE-REVISE and then revise some more. That's what professional writers do.

## Here are some suggestions for getting started.

In *Imagination According to Humphrey*, Mrs. Brisbane gives the students in Room 26 an assignment to finish this sentence,

"If I could fly, I would fly like a(n) \_\_\_\_\_."

When they complete the sentence, they write another sentence about where they would go.

Once the students finish the assignment, they continue to build a story, adding details and descriptive words. And while Humphrey finds writing his own story challenging, his hamster-iffic imagination finally comes through!

*Try the assignment yourself:*

If I could fly like a(n) \_\_\_\_\_, I would fly to \_\_\_\_\_.

Complete the story by saying what you would do there:

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In the books, Humphrey goes home with Felipe, whose brother has an imaginary friend named Bear. Have you ever had an imaginary friend? Even if you didn't, describe the perfect imaginary friend for you:

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In *Imagination According to Humphrey*, Mrs. Brisbane is reading a book about a young knight and flying dragons.

Write a short description imagining that YOU are coming face to face with a dragon. It can be scary or silly, serious or happy. You get to choose. That's what makes writing fun!

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Part of the fun of the Humphrey books comes from seeing a character (in this case, a small hamster), suddenly living in a world he doesn't really understand. There are many "fish out of water" stories like this, from Mark Twain's classic, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* to the movie, *E.T.* "Fish out of water" ideas provide a good way to get a story going. Try writing a paragraph or short story, looking at the world through someone else's eyes.

- A story about something in your life, seen through the eyes of your pet.
- A story about a kid in an adult's body and world OR a story about an adult in a kid's body and world.
- A story about switching places with your pet or even a wild animal.
- A story looking at the world through the eyes of a bully .... your teacher .... or an alien from another planet! How about a story looking at kids through the eyes of the owner of the local toy store or a new kid who just moved next door where he can see in your window and tries to imagine what you're doing.

