

College Guild
PO Box 6448 Brunswick, Maine 04011

Short Story Club I

Unit 1 of 6

*"College Guild has provided me with
an outlet for creativity, a source for introspection and insight,
and a means to partake in something positive where such
opportunities are far and few between."
~ Robert D. ~*

Completing the Creative Language course makes you eligible for an advanced course where you can specialize in a specific area of writing: poetry, drama, journalism, or short story. All four courses have this underlying message in common:

Creativity is key. Keep in mind that you want to write something entirely new. Good writing also takes hard work (and lots of time) to make it the best it can be, and that means stepping back, rereading, and editing your work often over and over again! These are considered "advanced" courses and so you can expect us to be tough and tell you where your work can be better.

In this course, each Unit will consist of a short story by a successful, well-known author. You aren't responsible for answering specific questions the way you did for the Creative Language Course. You will have two jobs with each Short Story Club Unit:

1) Read the story and discuss it.

Discussing a piece of writing should not consist of just summing up the plot. Instead, consider these questions:

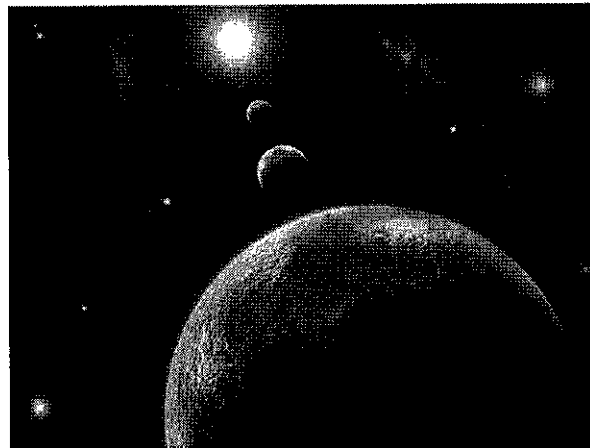
- * Are the characters believable? How has the author accomplished that - description, speech, interaction with other characters, ect?
- * What is the author's motivation in writing the story - is there a message or personal statement s/he wants to convey for entertainment, for commentary on life, or for another reason?
- * How well does the last sentence or paragraph wrap up the story?
- * What tense is the story written in and does this work best?

- * How well do the transitions in the story work? Are there any flashbacks, and are those useful?
- * How is the point of view working for the story? Do you think the story could be improved with a different narrator?

These are just a few suggestions; feel free to write about whatever peaks your interest in the story as well. The purpose of these suggestions is for you to learn techniques to use in your own writing.

2) Write a short story of your own. (See the enclosed Guidelines.)

In this Unit, you'll be reading "Dog Star" by Arthur C. Clarke. Born in England in 1917, Arthur C. Clarke is one of the masters of science fiction. His interest in science included all branches from the stars and the sea to electronics. He was able to reduce the complications of science into words and stories that anyone can understand. His knowledge also made the technical side of his stories believable. In addition to the creative story telling, Clarke usually had a message behind the scenes. He cautioned us to use our inventions wisely. Clarke wrote over a hundred short stories; "Dog Star" was written in the 1960s.



<http://www.sanhujinka.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/cool-solar-system-wallpaper.jpg>

**"DOG STAR"
by Arthur C. Clarke**

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When I heard Laika's¹ frantic barking, my first reaction was one of annoyance. I turned over in my bunk and murmured sleepily, "Shut up." That dreamy interlude lasted only a fraction of a second; then consciousness returned—and with it, fear. Fear of loneliness and fear of madness.

For a moment I dared not open my eyes; I was afraid of what I might see. Reason told me that no dog had ever set foot upon this world, that Laika was separated from me by a quarter of a million miles of space—and, far more irrevocably,² five years of time.

"You've been dreaming," I told myself angrily. "Stop being a fool—open your eyes! You won't see anything except the glow of the wall paint."

That was right, of course. The tiny cabin was empty, the door tightly closed. I was alone with my memories, overwhelmed by the transcendental³ sadness that often comes when some bright dream fades into drab reality. The sense of loss was so desolating that I longed to return to sleep. It was well that I failed to do so, for at that

* Dog Star: another name for the star Sirius (sir'ē-əs), the brightest star in the heavens, located in the constellation Canis Major (the Great Dog).

1. Laika's (l'kās): Laika is the name of the dog in this story. A Laika is also a breed of dog. In November 1957, a Laika was sent aloft in Russia's second earth satellite, Sputnik II.

2. irrevocably (i-rev'ə-kə-blē): unalterably; without possibility of change.

3. transcendental (tran'sen-den'tal): profound, intuitive, beyond human understanding.

"Moondog" (retitled: "Dog Star") by Arthur C. Clarke, copyright © 1962 by Galaxy Publishing Corporation. Reprinted by permission of the author and his agents, Scott Meredith Literary Agency, Inc., 530 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10168.

moment sleep would have been death. But I did not know this for another five seconds, and during that eternity I was back on Earth, seeking what comfort I could from the past.

No one ever discovered Laika's origin, though the Observatory staff made a few inquiries and I inserted several advertisements in the Pasadena⁴ newspapers. I found her, a lost and lonely ball of fluff, huddled by the roadside one summer evening when I was driving up to Palomar.⁵ Though I have never liked dogs, or indeed any animals, it was impossible to leave this helpless little creature to the mercy of the passing cars. With some qualms, wishing that I had a pair of gloves, I picked her up and dumped her in the baggage compartment. I was not going to hazard the upholstery of my new '92 Vik, and felt that she could do little damage there. In this, I was not altogether correct.

When I had parked the car at the Monastery—the astronomers' residential quarters, where I'd be living for the next week—I inspected my find without much enthusiasm. At that stage, I had intended to hand the puppy over to the janitor; but then it whimpered and opened its eyes. There was such an expression of helpless trust in them that—well, I changed my mind.

Sometimes I regretted that decision, though never for long. I had no idea how much trouble a growing dog could cause, deliberately and otherwise. My cleaning and repair bills soared; I could never be sure of finding an unravaged pair of socks or an unchewed copy of the *Astrophysical*⁶ *Journal*. But eventually Laika was both house-trained and Observatory-trained: she must have been the only dog ever to be allowed inside the two-hundred-inch dome. She would lie there quietly in the shadows for hours, while I was up in the cage making adjustments, quite content if she could hear my voice from time to time. The other astronomers became equally fond of her (it was old Dr. Anderson who suggested her name), but from the beginning she was my dog, and would obey no one else. Not that she would always obey me.

4. Pasadena (pas'ə-dē-nə): a city in southern California near Los Angeles.

5. Palomar (pal'ə-mār): Mount Palomar, an astronomical observatory near San Diego, California, having a 200-inch reflecting telescope, at present the largest in existence. Powerful telescopes are used in *astronomy*, the scientific study of the motions, distributions and arrangements, and make-up of the sun, the moon, the planets, the stars, and the earth. Astronomy comes from two Greek words, *astron* (star), and *nemein* (to distribute, arrange).

6. *Astrophysical* (as'trō-fiz'ī-kəl): pertaining to *astrophysics*, the branch of astronomy that treats of the physical make-up of the stars and the heavenly bodies, especially as revealed by spectrum analysis (see footnote 8 on p. 276).

She was a beautiful animal, about ninety-five per cent Alsatian.⁷ It was that missing five percent, I imagine, that led to her being abandoned. (I still feel a surge of anger when I think of it, but since I shall never know the facts, I may be jumping to false conclusions.) Apart from two dark patches over the eyes, most of her body was a smoky gray, and her coat was soft as silk. When her ears were pricked up, she looked incredibly intelligent and alert; sometimes I would be discussing spectral⁸ types or stellar evolution⁹ with my colleagues, and it would be hard to believe that she was not following the conversation.

Even now, I cannot understand why she became so attached to me, for I have made very few friends among human beings. Yet when I returned to the Observatory after an absence, she would go almost frantic with delight, bouncing around on her hind legs and putting her paws on my shoulders—which she could reach quite easily—all the while uttering small squeaks of joy which seemed highly inappropriate from so large a dog. I hated to leave her for more than a few days at a time, and though I could not take her with me on overseas trips, she accompanied me on most of my shorter journeys. She was with me when I drove north to attend that ill-fated seminar at Berkeley.¹⁰

We were staying with university acquaintances; they had been polite about it, but obviously did not look forward to having a monster in the house. However, I assured them that Laika never gave the slightest trouble, and rather reluctantly they let her sleep in the living room. "You needn't worry about burglars tonight," I said. "We don't have any in Berkeley," they answered, rather coldly.

In the middle of the night, it seemed that they were wrong. I was awakened by a hysterical, high-pitched barking from Laika which I had heard only once before—when she had first seen a cow and did not know what on earth to make of it. Cursing, I threw off the sheets and stumbled out into the darkness of the unfamiliar house. My main thought was to silence Laika before she roused my hosts—

7. *Alsatian* (al-sā'shən): a German shepherd dog, also called a police dog. This breed has a large, strong body, a thick, smooth coat, and great intelligence.

8. *spectral*: pertaining to or made by a spectrum. A *spectrum* is the band of color or pattern of lines observed when light from a source is separated into wavelengths. Astronomers study the colors contained in a star's light to determine its composition and to measure its motion toward or away from the earth. (*Spectral* can also refer to a specter or ghost.)

9. *stellar evolution*: the complex movements or formations of the stars. Stellar comes from the Latin word *stella* (star).

10. *Berkeley*: a city near San Francisco, California, and the site of the University of California at Berkeley.

assuming that this was not already far too late. If there had been an intruder, he would certainly have taken flight by now. Indeed, I rather hoped that he had.

For a moment I stood beside the switch at the top of the stairs, wondering whether to throw it. Then I growled, "Shut up, Laika!" and flooded the place with light.

She was scratching frantically at the door, pausing from time to time to give that hysterical yelp. "If you want out," I said angrily, "there's no need for all that fuss." I went down, shot the bolt, and she took off into the night like a rocket.

It was very calm and still, with a waning moon struggling to pierce the San Francisco fog. I stood in the luminous haze, looking out across the water to the lights of the city, waiting for Laika to come back so that I could chastise her suitably. I was still waiting when, for the second time in the twentieth century, the San Andreas Fault¹¹ woke from its sleep.

Oddly enough, I was not frightened—at first. I can remember that two thoughts passed through my mind, in the moment before I realized the danger. Surely, I told myself, the geophysicists¹² could have given us some warning. And then I found myself thinking, with great surprise, "I'd no idea that earthquakes make so much noise!"

It was about then that I knew that this was no ordinary quake; what happened afterward, I would prefer to forget. The Red Cross did not take me away until quite late the next morning, because I refused to leave without Laika. As I looked at the shattered house containing the bodies of my friends, I knew that I owed my life to her; but the helicopter pilots could not be expected to understand that, and I cannot blame them for thinking that I was crazy, like so many of the others they had found wandering among the fires and the debris.

After that, I do not suppose we were ever apart for more than a few hours. I have been told—and I can well believe it—that I became less and less interested in human company, without being actively

11. **San Andreas Fault:** San Andreas is a village in central California. A *fault* is a break in the rock layers beneath the earth's crust, caused by the shifting of the crust, a movement usually associated with earthquakes. A zone of faults, called the San Andreas Fault, extends along the coast of northern California. The fault line is traceable over a distance of more than 270 miles. A movement along a part of this zone caused the highly destructive San Francisco earthquake of 1906.

12. **geophysicists** (jē'ō-fiz'i-sists): experts in geophysics. *Physics* is the scientific study of matter, energy, motion, and their interrelations, including mechanics, heat, sound, light, electricity, and magnetism. *Geophysics* is the study of the physics of the earth including its magnetism, volcanoes, and air and water movements.

unsocial or misanthropic.¹³ Between them, the stars and Laika filled all my needs. We used to go for long walks together over the mountains; it was the happiest time I have ever known. There was only one flaw; I knew, though Laika could not, how soon it must end.

We had been planning the move for more than a decade. As far back as the nineteen-sixties it was realized that Earth was no place for an astronomical observatory. Even the small pilot instruments on the moon had far outperformed all the telescopes peering through the murk and haze of the terrestrial¹⁴ atmosphere. The story of Mount Wilson,¹⁵ Palomar, Greenwich, and the other great names was coming to an end; they would still be used for training purposes, but the research frontier must move out into space.

I had to move with it; indeed, I had already been offered the post of Deputy Director, Farside Observatory. In a few months, I could hope to solve problems I had been working on for years. Beyond the atmosphere, I would be like a blind man who has suddenly been given sight.

It was utterly impossible, of course, to take Laika with me. The only animals on the Moon were those needed for experimental purposes; it might be another generation before pets were allowed, and even then it would cost a fortune to carry them there—and to keep them alive. Providing Laika with her usual two pounds of meat a day would, I calculated, take several times my quite comfortable salary.

The choice was simple and straightforward. I could stay on Earth and abandon my career. Or I could go to the Moon—and abandon Laika.

After all, she was only a dog. In a dozen years, she would be dead, while I should be reaching the peak of my profession. No sane man would have hesitated over the matter; yet I did hesitate, and if by now you do not understand why, no further words of mine can help.

In the end, I let matters go by default. Up to the very week I was due to leave, I had still made no plans for Laika. When Dr. Anderson volunteered to look after her, I accepted numbly, with scarcely a word of thanks. The old physicist and his wife had always been fond

13. **misanthropic** (mis'ən-thrōp'ik): marked by hatred or contempt for one's fellow man.

14. **terrestrial** (tə-res'trē-əl): of, belonging to, or representing the earth. This word comes from the Latin word *terra* (land).

15. **Mount Wilson:** an astronomical observatory near Pasadena, California. It has a 100-inch telescope. **Greenwich** was formerly the site of the Royal Observatory at Greenwich, near London, established by King Charles II in 1675.

of her, and I am afraid that they considered me indifferent and heartless—when the truth was just the opposite. We went for one more walk together over the hills; then I delivered her silently to the Andersons, and did not see her again.

Takeoff was delayed almost twenty-four hours, until a major flare storm had cleared the Earth's orbit; even so, the Van Allen belts¹⁶ were still so active that we had to make our exit through the North Polar Gap.¹⁷ It was a miserable flight; apart from the usual trouble with weightlessness, we were all groggy with antiradiation drugs. The ship was already over Farside before I took much interest in the proceedings, so I missed the sight of Earth dropping below the horizon. Nor was I really sorry; I wanted no reminders, and intended to think only of the future. Yet I could not shake off that feeling of guilt; I had deserted someone who loved and trusted me, and was no better than those who had abandoned Laika when she was a puppy, beside the dusty road to Palomar.

The news that she was dead reached me a month later. There was no reason that anyone knew; the Andersons had done their best, and were very upset. She had just lost interest in living, it seemed. For a while, I think I did the same; but work is a wonderful anodyne,¹⁸ and my program was just getting under way. Though I never forgot Laika, in a little while the memory ceased to hurt.

Then why had it come back to haunt me, five years later, on the far side of the Moon? I was searching my mind for the reason when the metal building around me quivered as if under the impact of a heavy blow. I reacted without thinking, and was already closing the helmet of my emergency suit when the foundations slipped and the wall tore open with a short-lived scream of escaping air. Because I had automatically pressed the General Alarm button, we lost only two men, despite the fact that the tremor—the worst ever recorded on Farside—cracked all three of the Observatory's pressure domes.

It is hardly necessary for me to say that I do not believe in the supernatural; everything that happened has a perfectly rational explanation, obvious to any man with the slightest knowledge of psy-

16. Van Allen belts: belts of radiation surrounding the earth. Charged atomic particles are believed to circle the earth in an inner and outer belt conforming to the earth's magnetic field. They are named after their discoverer, James A. Van Allen, a United States physicist born in 1914.

17. North Polar Gap: probably an opening or gap in the Van Allen belts at the North Pole, the northernmost point of the earth's axis, where the radiation would be less intense.

18. anodyne (an'ə-dīn): pain-reliever.

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chology. In the second San Francisco earthquake, Laika was not the only dog to sense approaching disaster; many such cases were reported. And on Farside, my own memories must have given me that heightened awareness, when my never-sleeping subconscious detected the first faint vibrations from within the Moon.

The human mind has strange and labyrinthine¹⁹ ways of going about its business; it knew the signal that would most swiftly rouse me to the knowledge of danger. There is nothing more to it than that; though in a sense one could say that Laika woke me on both occasions, there is no mystery about it, no miraculous warning across the gulf that neither man nor dog can ever bridge.

Of that I am sure, if I am sure of anything. Yet sometimes I wake now, in the silence of the Moon, and wish that the dream could have lasted a few seconds longer—so that I could have looked just once more into those luminous brown eyes, brimming with an unselfish, undemanding love I have found nowhere else on this or any other world.

19. labyrinthine (lab'ə-rin'thin): like a labyrinth or maze; intricate; involved.

Remember: First names only & please let us know if your address changes

SHORT STORY GUIDELINES

~ Keep this with you for help with future Units! ~

Perspective:

You'll want to spend some time thinking about the 'lens' through which you want the audience to read the story. For instance, you could create a narrator who has a great sense of wit, and the events in the story may come off as funny to the reader. Or, you could have a narrator who is compulsory and detail-oriented, and the reader will then be able to see the world through this narrator's eyes. Choosing the right narrator helps establish the way the reader sees the action, characters, and scenes within the story, and also helps create a narrator the reader will be interested in. Make sure your narrator is original and has his/her own unique personality.

When thinking about how the story will be told, consider these points as well:

Point of View:

We touched on point of view in the Creative Language Course, but below is a quick recap.

First person: This is the closest the reader can get to the narrator, and the narrator's internal thoughts are often heard. Such as, "I turned my head and, to my surprise, Susan had been standing at the door watching me the entire time."

Second person: This is rarely used in fiction writing, and is quite hard. It's as if the narrator is speaking to a general or specific "you" the entire time, such as "Go to work in the morning and pretend that Callie doesn't know. You'll find she forgets things easily anyway."

Third person limited: The "limited" here means that the third person narrator is focused on one main character, and often the reader can still hear the internal thoughts of the character despite it not being in first person. An example is, "John glanced outside, and to his dismay, saw rain sprinkling over top his freshly paved driveway."

Third person omniscient: The "omniscient" refers to an all-knowing narrator. This narrator has knowledge of all characters in the story, and is the most removed from the characters. For example, "Riley hopped over the fence and turned confidently towards Jonathon, urging him to join her despite his increasing anxiety with the situation."

Tense:

Give some thought to the tense you want to use with your short story, whether that be present or past, or a mixture of both. The events in some stories will be better recounted in past tense, such as a narrator who is reflecting on some time in his/her life. Flashbacks are also a great way to incorporate depth and information in the story.

Plot:

Because this is a *short* story, you'll need to try to move the plot quite quickly. However, though the story may be short, we still want conflict, drama, intrigue! Try to make sure the reader is a bit prepared for any major conflicts or events; we don't want to feel like something has 'come out of the blue'. This being said, try to build towards an exciting climax or something that gives the story substance. A conflict within the story, whether it be between two characters, between the narrator and society, between the narrator and himself, etc, will keep the reader interested and give the story purpose. One helpful hint from a student is to show "how did this happen?", as well as "why is this happening?"

SHOW don't TELL:

Something to remember that can make a world of difference in a story is this point: always, always, always try to SHOW not TELL what is happening in the story and what the characters are feeling. By showing, you will allow the reader to absorb the depth of the characters and events through your descriptions of them. This is much more entertaining for the reader than if you just went ahead and told them point blank what every character was thinking or feeling. Describe what the characters see, hear, smell, feel, touch, do -- and through the reader will be able to get the bigger events that are going on. For example:

TELLING: "She was sad after her mother died"

SHOWING: "After her mother died, she spent the next two weeks alone her apartment, staring blankly at the TV as the dark days of November passed." ~

taken from a Lesson packet by Cornell University

In the "showing" example, we are able to see that the girl is sad through the description of her/what she is doing.

Believability

Lastly, try to keep in mind these two suggestions. The first is to try to create a world for your reader. Place the characters in a time and place. Make the characters come to life, explore their relationships, attitudes, jobs, and emotions through small details that the reader can pick up on. And be sure to stay consistent with your characters' personalities and setting (unless the story purposefully involves a change in either). Secondly, try to see if you can include a meaning in the story. We want your scenes to mean something, your characters to be there for a reason, and the story to have been written with a purpose. This purpose can be specific, such as a commentary on how relationships with a stepmother can be difficult but rewarding. Or, the commentary can be about something much larger, such as noticing that people often don't take a chance to appreciate the smaller things in life, etc.. Sometimes writers like to use their characters' situations as metaphors for something deeper in life. Another purpose of your story could simply be to make people laugh! These are just examples. At the end of the day, you created your story for a reason, whether you know it or not!

* We know this is your first Unit! We do not expect you to include all these suggestions. Just try your best, and you'll slowly come to incorporate these techniques in your writing. Best of luck! *
