FLASHES OF INSIGHT:

Flash Nonfiction as Composition and Performance

Kathy A. Fitch, English Instructor, NIU
Shifting Terms and Definitions

- 2000 Words
- 1000 Words
- Under 750 Words
- 500 Words
- Two Pages
- One Page
- One Long Paragraph
- Micro-Essays
- Nano-Essays
- Lack of agreement?
- How shocking!
- Plus . . .
Elastic Approaches: Forms and Purposes

- Lyrical
- Braided
- Collage
- Hermit Crab
- Meditative/Contemplative
- Argumentative/Persuasive
- Analytical/Critical
The Names Reveal the Qualities

- **Flash**: A brief, powerful, attention-getting, purposeful burst.

- **Non-Fiction**: Based on personal knowledge, observation, and experience.

- **Essay**: Prose. Driven by ideas. Tentative, exploratory, but whole.
THE ENERGY OF THE PIECE HINGES ON THE RAPID-FIRE SHARING OF INFORMATION . . .
THE URGENCY OF HAVING TO FIT THE CONTENT INTO AN ABBREVIATED FRAME IS WHAT MAKES IT SO POWERFUL.

Dinty Moore
Editor of Brevity Magazine
Definitive Qualities Mainly Stylistic

- Energetic, urgent, passionate, fast-moving, often rhythmic.
- Surprising, bold, daring, even shocking.
- Spare, concentrated, honed.
- Constraint, compression, but wholeness--stands alone.
- Voice-y (a little known technical term).
- Diction driven. Every word counts.
- Image driven. Tell by showing.
Convergences

Make your home among strangers

“Smart, scathing, and hilarious… both urgently of-the-moment and destined to be a classic.” — Curtis Sittenfeld, Vanity Fair

JENNINE CAPÓ CRUCET

SKILLS

OPEN MIC NIGHT
What I Did

- Wrote with/for students (and myself).

- Wrote with the quintessential student tool: iPhone essays posted to Facebook and Blackboard hot off the keyboard.

- Shared and performed my flashes in class.

- Invited, pondered, and examined the responses across settings.

- Called upon students to write and to perform in class.

- Tied topics broadly to the novel.

The real writer is one who really writes. Talent is an invention like phlogiston after the fact of fire. Work is its own cure. You have to like it better than being loved.

Marge Piercy
How Students Reacted and Processed

- Read?
- Perform?
- MY WRITING?
- IN FRONT OF PEOPLE?!?
- But then--the rumbling of approaching thunder.
- Can I write about?
- Can I say?
- Can I be?
What Students Did
(Social Responsibility and Accountability)

- Found their **authentic intellectual voices**.

- **Explored** stances and ideas in fiery, vivid, arresting ways

- **Revealed** secrets, **tested** identities, **expressed** and **countered** traumas, limitations, micro-aggressions. **Spoke** their truths.

- Wielded their **authority** in voices at once authentic and experimental. **Expertise** is a journey.

- Entered the academic **conversation**.

- **Connected strongly** to the novel for the first time by talking back to it and its themes.

- Embraced revision and editing. **Performance fuels rewriting**.
I had been right: freedom smelled like ozone and thunderstorms and gunpowder all at once, like snow and bonfires and cut grass, it tasted like seawater and oranges.

Tana French

PICTUREQUOTES.com
Explorations

• *Brevity: A Journal of Concise Literary Nonfiction*

• "Flash Essays: Complete Syllabus," in *Creative Nonfiction*

• "What's a Flash Essay?" by Martha Nichols in *Talking Writing*

• Search Terms: Flash Essays, Flash Nonfiction, Micro Essays, Nano Essays.
Examples

- "Blackboard Announcement"
- "Home is Glass"
- "Reclaiming Red"
- "Flashes of Something"
- "We Regret to Inform You"
Exercises

• Hermit Crab: Pain Scale, Storm Warning, Rejection Letter, Detention Slip, DSM-V Entry, Birth Announcement.

• Explorations of or Riffs on a Single Color, Letter of the Alphabet, Word (Ravel, Recursive, Break, Carry, Mark).

• Intense Examination of a Small Moment or Object Observed or Experienced.

• The Barbaric Yawp of a Letter Unsent--a Necessary but (Perhaps) Dangerous or Unwelcome Vent, Rant, or Revelation.
Contact

Kathy A. Fitch
English Instructor
Northern Illinois University
kfitch@niu.edu
kfitch2017@gmail.com