

CLASSROOM WRITING TIPS FROM ALLY CARTER

NOTES AND ACTIVITIES FOR TEACHERS



Photo Credit: Liz Lipner

Go beyond the books with Ally Carter and the Embassy Row series!

Master of intrigue Ally Carter talks about her writing process in these great videos that are perfect for sharing with young writers—watch the videos, engage in these activities, and share Ally’s writing tips to inspire.

Embassy Row is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling series that brings together international intrigue, psychological thrills, and swoon-worthy cross-cultural crushes. Grace, the rebellious granddaughter of a powerful ambassador has spent years trying to unravel the mysterious circumstances of her mother’s death, and in doing so has uncovered a terrifying worldwide conspiracy. Will Grace fall into the traps set for her or will she reveal the truth, when both choices threaten to destroy her entire world?

Ally Carter is the *New York Times* bestselling author of *Heist Society*, *Uncommon Criminals*, and the popular Gallagher Girls series, which have sold over two million copies and are published in more than twenty countries.

VIDEO 1: ABOUT THE BOOK

<http://bcove.me/9kfc33dz>

Booktalk It!

Students often read books that classmates recommend. Have each student choose a favorite book from their independent reading and prepare a booktalk on it. They can start by listing what they liked about the book. They should combine a few of those points with a short summary of the characters and plot—but without giving away the ending. Have them write out the booktalk, revise it, practice giving it aloud, and either record it or share it orally with classmates.

(Resource: scholastic.com/teachers/classroom-solutions/2010/11/kids-talk-shows-book-talk-101)

VIDEO 2: ELEMENTS OF STORY

<http://bcove.me/16y5ogbe>

A New Point of View

This activity can be done with *All Fall Down*, another novel that the whole class reads, or novels for independent reading. Students should choose a scene from the novel and write it from a different point of view. This could mean trying a third-person narrative, or a first-person narrative from the perspective of a different character. Have your students choose the point of view they think works best and explain why.

Character and Setting, Hand in Hand

As Ally points out, characters and setting are always intertwined and one can help inform the other. Have students explore this concept by taking a character, either from their own writing or a novel they’ve read, and placing that character in different settings. They should write a scene about the character in three or four settings, changing the historic period, the place, or both. Another possibility is to set the scene in a fantasy world. Have students share their character-setting pairings in small groups, talking about which settings work best and why, and how the character changes depending on the setting.

The Worst Possible Thing

Have students take the character from the last assignment or another character from their writing or reading, and brainstorm three answers to the question: "What is the very worst possible thing that can happen to this character?" They should write a scene with each of the scenarios they have brainstormed, including the character's reaction to the problem and subsequent actions. Have students meet in pairs to share their work.

VIDEO 3: WRITING PROCESS

<http://bcove.me/14rov81v>

Shifting Scenes

Choose a book your students don't know, write down plot points on big sticky notes, and arrange them randomly on a board. Have students as a group try to put the plot points in the order they predict will occur in the book. Then show them the actual order and lead a discussion about different approaches to structuring a story.

As a follow-up, have students choose a favorite book that they've read on their own and that other students are unlikely to know (it can be a book from their childhood or something more recent). Have them write down plot points on index cards. Then have students gather in small groups to try to put the cards for each other's books in order. Each student should then share the correct order of their book and talk about why they liked it.

The Power of Questions: Creative Writing

Within a creative writing class or as part of a creative writing session, gather as a class and brainstorm questions that students can ask themselves or each other about any piece of fiction they are writing. For example, what does the protagonist want most? What is the biggest conflict in the story? Who is the audience for the story? Have students meet in small groups and apply the questions to their own and each other's writing.

For another creative writing activity to highlight the importance of questions, have students write a dialogue between themselves and a character in their writing. They can use questions from the previous exercise and other questions to explore the character's background (e.g., "What has been the hardest thing in your life?") or to address the character's reaction in specific scenes (e.g., "How did you feel during the storm?").

Exquisite Corpse

Have students play the game of Exquisite Corpse, sometimes called Consequences, which follows the pattern below. Post the pattern where everyone can see it and discuss how the game works. Each student starts with a piece of paper and writes the first line (of adjectives), then folds the paper over the line to conceal it. They pass the paper to another student, who writes the next line, not being able to see the line(s) before, and so on, until the paper is all folded up. Everyone will end up contributing to ten stories. Have students gather as a class or in small groups and read the stories aloud.

1) Adjectives for a person, such as "The menacing..." or "The friendly yet alarming..."

2) A person's name

met

3) Adjectives for a person

4) Another person's name

at

5) Where they met

6) What the first person gave the second

7) What the first person said

8) What the second person said

9) What the consequence was (**The consequence was...**)

10) What the world said about it (**The world said...**)



WRITING TIPS FROM ALLY CARTER



1. Don't get it right; get it written.

I get credited with this quote a lot online, but I didn't coin it. I have no idea who did, but it's brilliant, and it has been a mantra I have returned to off and on for years.

2. Don't ever compare your first draft against someone else's finished draft.

You don't know what the first draft of your favorite book looked like. You don't know what the finished draft of your book will look like. So give yourself a break and keep writing.

3. Respect your own process.

Every writer is different, and every story is different. Some require three drafts; some require thirty. Learn to appreciate and respect whatever writing process works for you.

4. Enjoy the time in your life when writing is a hobby and not a job.

New writers seem to always be in a hurry to get published and start becoming famous. Instead, I'd recommend savoring the time when all you have to do is enjoy and learn the craft because once the deadlines and promotional responsibilities start piling up you won't have that kind of time again.

5. Character is king.

Ultimately, every story is about a _____ who _____s. It's how we fill in those blanks that makes our stories unique and hopefully interesting. If you don't have a great character you cannot possibly have a great book.

6. Don't compare your work/life/career against someone else's.

There will always be someone who can write faster or better or make more money. Always. You can't control what they do. You can only control what you do.

7. Show, don't tell.

It's an old cliché, but it's true. Don't tell me how awesome your character is, show me. Don't tell me how scary the villain is, show me. When in doubt, think of your story as a movie. If it's something someone wouldn't see on screen, it is likely something the reader is being told, not shown. And that can keep the reader from feeling immersed in your story.

8. Make 'em earn it.

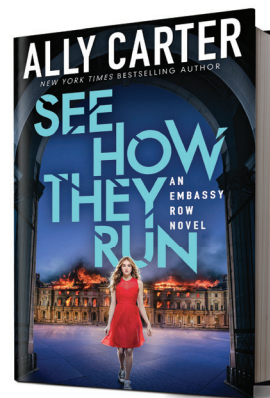
Nothing should come easy for your characters. Nothing. The more your characters have to see, do, and learn for themselves, the more conflict you'll have throughout your story.

9. Conflict is gas in the tank.

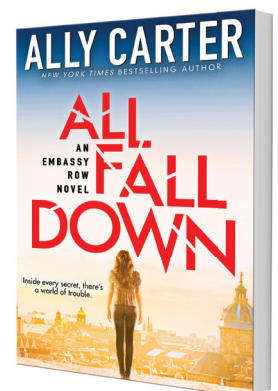
Stories are only interesting if the characters have stuff to do. It sounds obvious, but it's a step many new writers overlook. Give your characters obstacles—lots of obstacles—and the pages will fly by.

10. Read.

Amazingly, a lot of people like to talk about "being a writer" but they never actually read. You learn to write first by reading. So read everything. All the time. Just read.



Book 2: *See How They Run*



Book 1: *All Fall Down*



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