

How to Write a Flash Fiction Story Inspired by a Group of Seven Painting



In approaching the Flash piece, what is important is that you feel something, that a painting touches, moves, and awes you. I think that this can only happen if you are awed by the majesty of the Canadian wilderness itself. The Group of Seven explored the vast regions of the Canadian landscape and were in awe, and documented the unique character and beauty of what they saw through their paintings. Their artistic interpretation is what you should find inspired and inspiring. It should resonate with you in the space where a story (a flash fiction piece) is crafted, 'from the place where you dream, your unconscious - your white-hot center' (Robert Olen Butler).

**Keep in Mind That Your Flash Fiction Piece
is to be Inspired by the Painting, it is not to Interpret the Painting**

The first step is to Google the 'Group of Seven' paintings / images and select which ones appeal to you visually. – and, perhaps to google photographs of the Canadian wilderness, its mountain ranges, forests, rivers, lakes, oceans, and wildlife - the actual landscape, so that you know what the artists were trying to capture. There are ten painters plus Tom Thomson and Emily Carr (the only woman) who comprise the Group of Seven. - Take your time and have fun exploring these artists and their works of art.

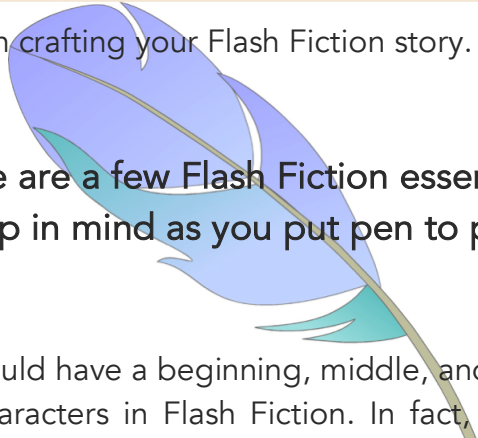
There are lots of paintings/images to choose from, hundreds in fact. Hopefully one if not several will speak to you – it is wide open.

The easiest way to make a selection is to visit/google an online digital gallery housing many of the Group of Seven artists and their works, where you can scroll through painting after painting at your leisure. [The McMichael Canadian Art Collection - http://mcmichael.com/collection/group-of-seven/](http://mcmichael.com/collection/group-of-seven/) in Kleinburg, Ontario houses the premier collection. Also visit [Art Country Canada - http://www.artcountrycanada.com/group_of_7.htm](http://www.artcountrycanada.com/group_of_7.htm) (an online gallery and store) to view their collection, or [Group of Seven.org - http://www.group-of-seven.org](http://www.group-of-seven.org), another online gallery and store. There are more sites, but these three should give you a good start to your search and a good sense of the scope of the work of each artist, and prepare you to select a painting for your story.

Take your time and have fun exploring. Do not rush this stage. This is something that should incubate then percolate.

When you find a painting that resonates/speaks to you, copy/save the url, take a screenshot and label the file with the name of the artist and name of the painting.

Now you are ready to begin crafting your Flash Fiction story.



**There are a few Flash Fiction essentials
to keep in mind as you put pen to paper.**

Your Flash Fiction story should have a beginning, middle, and end. There is no need for a backstory or multiple characters in Flash Fiction. In fact, start in the middle of the action. Something needs to happen or change, either internally or externally to or with a character, or setting. There should be an inciting event and an implied, imagined or referred experience or 'truth' at the center of your story. Build tension right from the get-go. That irrevocable moment when the main character realizes something about themselves, or their life, subconsciously, is the sweet spot in Flash Fiction. Use the five senses to show, not tell the story. Surprise throughout and drop a twist at the end. Open with a clear sentence and feel free to close with ambiguity; ambiguity is one of the things that makes flash fiction compelling.

You do not need to wrap up Flash Fiction in a neat little bow.

Trust the reader to use her/his imagination to fill in the gaps. Flash Fiction gives the reader the barest glance. Often the gem of Flash Fiction isn't what is told outright – but

what is discovered lying in the white spaces between lines. Anchor your piece with a clever title (but do not give away the twist). The title can go along way to set the tone, genre, archetypal theme, era, and point of the story. Above all, keep the writing concise, word choice intentional, and ideas original. - It will shine!

What the story is about is completely up to you. The content, theme, and subject matter of the Flash Fiction piece is at the discretion of the Contributor/writer, - as long as the piece conforms to the 'structure' of a Flash Fiction piece, falls within the 250-500 word count, and is in spirit, a celebration of the paintings of the Group of Seven.

To begin crafting your piece, begin by reflecting on how the painting inspires/speaks to you. What does it conjure up in your mind/heart/soul? Use your imagination, passion, depth, and sensual and literary interpretation to draw a story out. In the beginning as you are developing your story idea, keep going back and forth between your draft and the image/painting to ensure that the story idea resonates closely with how you feel/think/are inspired by, the painting. Remember, the story is not to be an interpretation or review of the painting. It is the spark in your imagination, and the exultation in your heart that animates your story. **(No fan fiction, horror, porn, politics, or stream of consciousness)**. Your story must be fully developed and complete, albeit in miniature; a vignette or poem just won't do it. Trust your instinct and talent, and enjoy the creative process.

When you have completed your draft, the next step is to refine your Flash Fiction piece. Edit, Revise, and Polish. Writers of Flash Fiction may take a few moments, to several hours, to a couple of days to jot down the story, but the real craft takes place in refining your piece. Have your Flash critiqued by a fellow writer with the painting/image alongside, then **Edit, Revise and Polish** it again.

The best Flash Fiction pieces include lots of layers, nuance, and insight hidden along the edges and in the spaces between words. Be intentional, authentic, and fully present when refining. Do not rush this stage. It can make the difference between a good Flash Fiction and a memorable if not masterful one. In your revision pay close attention to word choice, imagery, flow, and completeness. This includes cutting out or replacing words that end with ly, any phrasing that serves to explain what you are describing rather than 'show', any introduction, (start in the middle), and any words that don't zing. - You are transporting the reader to another world, an alternate experience, provoking an unexpected reaction, desire, or viewpoint, albeit or a brief moment.

Your task is to delight, provoke, illuminate, dramatize, and deepen the connection between the painting and the reader. Take them somewhere special, daring, and memorable.



The Group of Seven Flash Fiction is to be written within a **word count range of 250 min – 500 max** (to fit on one page, opposite the selected painting/image on the other page)

Trust Your Instinct and Talent and Go for it!



- Karen Schaubert