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Double Triple Many Lives

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“~~Double Triple~~ Many Lives” by Faithe Smiley

Instructor’s Notes

Faithe Smiley tells her readers a story about story telling in her literacy narrative. Detail, dialogue, and description, or the 3Ds, are necessary to effectively draw readers into a story, set a scene, develop characters, and reveal universal significance. Point to examples in this essay where Faithe incorporated each of the 3Ds. Identify places where she might have included even more.

Writer’s Biography

Faithe Smiley is a returning junior English major from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Faithe mostly enjoys creative writing, but also appreciates the challenge of exploring many other styles and forms of writing. In her spare time, she likes writing and reading books. She spends her summers working at a summer day camp run by her church, but hopes to go on another missions trip during a summer in the near future.

~~Double Triple~~ Many Lives

I was in preschool when I heard my first stories. They came in the form of stories from the Bible read to us in Sunday School. They were short: only about a dozen sentences each. But because they were short it is now easy to identify each of the three elements of good writing within them. Each began with a main character who had a problem. After a little dialogue between characters, God would help them solve their problem, and the conflict was resolved. At the end of each story was a question meant to convey the significance of the story because preschoolers have to be prompted in order to consider such things. Questions like, “How does God help you in your life?”

I do not remember hearing these stories. I only know they were read to me because I work in Sunday School classes and hear them being read to the children I work with. What I do remember,

my earliest memories, in fact, are those of my mom reading aloud to me, my sister, and my brother. When we were very young, she read us picture books: *Chrysanthemum*, *Fritz and the Beautiful Ponies*, *The Day Jimmy's Boa Ate the Wash*, *Stellaluna*, *Ferdinand the Bull*, *Julius the Baby of the World*, *The Velveteen Rabbit*, *The Giving Tree*, her favorite, *Love You Forever*, and my favorite, *Andrew Henry's Meadow*. We loved to listen to her; not only for the sake of being together, but also for the sake of the story itself.

My sister and I quickly advanced in our reading skills. We leapt past *Dick and Jane*, and quickly moved on to more difficult and much more entertaining stories. My brother, on the other hand, got stuck. He was bored out of his mind by *Dick and Jane* because the books of *Dick and Jane* are not stories. Each is a conglomerate of repetitive sentences designed to be a tool to teach young children basic reading skills without truly entertaining or engaging them in any way. My mom quickly realized that she was getting nowhere, so she revised his reading list and filled it with *Calvin and Hobbes* collections. His reading immediately improved. However, even though he could now read well, my brother still enjoyed having me read to him. We would sit side by side with a *Calvin and Hobbes* book across our laps and I would read it to him panel by panel. I used funny voices, sound effects, dramatic pauses, and changes in volume to make the words come to life.

Even though I could read on my own, I too still enjoyed being read to. As we got older, my mom began to read chapter books to us. I remember sitting on our back porch in the summer listening to her read *The Chronicles of Narnia*. I do not know if it was the first set of chapter books she decided to read to us, but I distinctly remember a moment when I was contemplating where to look. Before, I had curled up next to her and looked at the pictures from under her elbow. But now there were no pictures. I remember that it was then that I first began to stare dreamily out into the distance and see the pictures the words painted in my mind's eye.

This became a reflex for me, even when I began to read on my own. My imagination became so vivid, that sometimes I could barely see the words before me. I became a fly on the wall in Cair Paravel, Erebor, The Capitol, Lothlórien, Maycomb, Cawdor Castle, Ithaka, a raft on the Mississippi, West Egg, Manor Farm, Ingolstadt, behind the barricade in Paris, and many other captivating places. I

saw what there was to be seen, I heard what was said, I smelled the flowers growing, I felt the wind on my face. When I was bored, I would daydream. My family would take long car trips and I would stare out the window: my eyes watched the world slide past but in my mind I was a world away.

In middle school I attended a small, private Christian school called Blackburn Study Center. We read many difficult books, including *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, *The Odyssey*, *The Canterbury Tales*, several writings of the Bard, and other classical works that are at times hard to understand. Although the people at Blackburn were all good students, not all of them were good at reading. Some would give up, others would fail to comprehend. My teacher had us discuss the assigned reading so that she could be certain that everyone was on the same page, both literally and figuratively. Eventually, it became inevitable that when these discussions began, everyone would look at me. It may be thanks to my habit of imagining each scene from every book I read, or some other reason, but I have great reading comprehension and retention. As it turned out, I would end up giving a quick summary of whatever it was we were supposed to have read the night before. I would insert my own commentary into the summary, making parallels to previous sections, giving a deeper explanation of the motives of certain characters, and all in all trying not only to explain, but also to entertain.

I kept in touch with the teacher of that class, mainly because she is my aunt. One day I was emailing her a paper I had written for one of my college classes so that she could give me some advice. She is an English teacher at Geneva College as well as Blackburn Study Center so she gives good advice about writing. After we had talked about the paper for a little while, I asked, “How are things going at Blackburn these days?”

“We have a bunch of new students this year,” she replied. “I still teach Ancient Literature, but the class isn’t the same without you. Not only would you discuss the readings, you would tell the story to the other students. With enthusiasm!”

I did not do so for the grade, I did it to bring those other students into the world I had imagined so that they too could see what there was to be seen and hear what was said and smell the flowers growing and feel the wind on their faces. I had begun to turn into a storyteller.

Finally, I began to write my own stories. These were the first writings I had ever done outside of school. As I wrote, of course, I tried to write well. Not just with good grammar or syntax, not simply ‘well’ in the sense of following the rules. I tried to write in a way that I thought people would want to read. Because I was a storyteller; I wanted to tell stories.

I knew the basic structure of a good story from the stories I had heard as a little preschooler in Sunday School class. I loved to read, and now to write, simply for the sake of a good story, because my mom had taught me to love stories all those years ago. I knew how to make my words come to life so that the reader would hear funny voices, sound effects, dramatic pauses, and changes in volume because of the time I had spent reading to my brother. Also through my mom reading to me, I had developed a rich imagination. As I wrote, I imagined every scene, every minute, and every move each character made. I played these scenes over and over again in my head, studying them, considering them, viewing them from every angle. I did not write a story until I had lived it.

That is what being a storyteller is all about. That is what being a reader is all about. When it comes to stories, reading and writing is about more than simply relaying information or even entertaining. It is about getting out of our own heads and living in a different world. Through stories, we can live the lives of a knight in shining armor, a princess in a tower, a slave on a cotton plantation, a misunderstood evil villain, a great explorer, and a skillful magician all in one day.

In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, by C.S. Lewis, the main characters, the Pevensie children, travel through a magical wardrobe to another world. Specifically, they travel to a country called Narnia, which they save from an evil witch, and are subsequently crowned kings and queens of Narnia. They proceed to grow up until one day, they rediscover the wardrobe and emerge back into our world at the exact moment at which they left it, children once again. The book is full of allegorical language and general life lessons; but overall, it teaches that books allow us to live entire lives in other worlds without ever leaving ours.

And this is what I find so enchanting about reading and writing stories. In this life, they are the closest we will ever come to immortality.