

Writers' Workshop

Telling a Big Story Through Small Stories

In this Writers' Workshop you will:

- Tell a story from the point of view of a character in the story.

Telling a Big Story Through Small Stories

Mini-Lesson: Snapshots, Not Movies

Tracy Wilkinson's story "Seeking justice for Mexico state's female victims" (see Chapter 6 in your textbook) tackles a very large story that includes corruption in high levels of Mexican politics, violence against women and hundreds of unsolved murders of women over a five-year period in one state. She tells it memorably by focusing on one victim, 14-year-old Jessica Lucero, and one crime fighter, David Mancera. The reader learns about the danger, the sorrow and the fight for justice through a series of snapshots.

At 14, Jessica Lucero had already lived a hard life. A stint in rehab, dropping out of school, making her way, day in, day out, in a terribly violent, desperately poor neighborhood.

But things were looking up. She had stayed clean and was planning to resume studies. She dreamed of becoming a forensic pathologist.

Then, in June, Jessica was raped by a man she later identified as a notorious neighbor, a known drug pusher. Jessica's reaction was to do something that few people twice her age have ever dared. She went to the authorities and denounced the crime.

Not 30 days later, she was killed, beaten to death with a small boulder. The force of the blow was so strong that

her skull left a dint in the ground that would remain for days.

Wilkinson introduces the women's "voice and champion"

... a fireplug of a man named David Mancera.

Part political activist, part social worker, and a bit of a gadfly, Mancera carries a spiral notebook filled with the scrawled names and circumstances of recent slayings of women.

"Just last week," he starts:

Yuridia Valente, 22. Raped, strangled, single shot to the head.

Fernanda Esparza, 19. Killed, allegedly by a boyfriend who killed his previous girlfriend three years earlier.

In the same manner, Jimmy Breslin told the story of President John F. Kennedy's assassination and funeral—a mind-numbingly broad panorama—with a little over a thousand words about the gravedigger and how Mrs. Kennedy walked to the burial. His snapshots are still read and remembered today. (You can find a link to "Digging JFK Grave Was His Honor" under the Web links tab on the *Journalism* home page.)

Great stories are told through little ones. A strong journalist finds the little stories and tells them well.

When you are given a panoramic story to report, do not bore your audience with a superficial recounting of the high points. Give them snapshots they will remember.

Apply It!

1. Choose one of the following panoramic stories. Working with a partner or small group, describe at least four potential snapshots, that is, interviews or small stories that could tell the larger story.
 - A. Recapping a sports season
 - B. Recounting a field trip
 - C. The first day of school
 - D. A service trip out of the country
 - E. A trip to a journalism convention
 - F. Academic decathlon
 - G. Another panoramic story of your choosing
2. With your responding group, choose the two strongest and write them using fictionalized information (something you would never do as a journalist writing for publication). Make the readers feel like they are there, sharing the group's experiences and emotions. Engage your readers. Try writing one story in first person.
3. Seek response from other writers, then revise and publish your best snapshot with an opening that connects the snapshot with the larger story.