

Writing Subtext

Introduction: The following exercises are designed to help writers to practice the art of subtext, aka, what is happening “between the lines.” This kind of writing allows us to access our character’s innermost thoughts about the scene they are experiencing. See what you can learn about the following characters through these three writing challenges.

Scenario #1: Write from the perspective of a student who has just opened their grade report to learn they have passed a math class they thought they were going to fail and would have had to retake during summer school. They received the news when they glanced down at their phone as they were walking through a local park (in a city/town of your choosing!) How do they see the world when they look up from their phone? Do NOT mention the news of grade or the class.

Scenario #2: Write from the perspective of a high school student who just learned that they did not get a spot on _____ team or _____ musical/play (you decide!) Describe their bus ride home (in a city/town of your choosing.) What do they see inside the bus and out the window? Do not mention the news they've just received.

Scenario #3: Write from the perspective of an elementary school student who has just been told at a family dinner at (insert your favorite restaurant here) that their parent got an exciting job promotion, but now their family now has to move to a completely different state, leaving everything and everyone they've ever known behind. What does the rest of the dinner experience look like? Once again, do NOT mention the news of the promotion or moving.

Reflection: What was the most interesting/strange part about this process of writing about something you can't actually mention? What was the most challenging part of this exercise? What was the most rewarding part?