Dear Readers,

Welcome to the inaugural issue of The Drabble, a quarterly e-zine brought to you by the editors at www.thedrabble.com, a site dedicated to the art of drabble, which is loosely defined as a work of prose or poetry of 100 words or less. For a more detailed description of drabble see our essay, “What Is Drabble?” on page 5. This issue features a collection of some of the most popular pieces we’ve published since our site’s inception in March 2015.

Submission Guidelines

The Drabble accepts original works of fiction, non-fiction, and poetry. We receive a lot of submissions, so if we accept your piece it may be a month or more before you hear back from us. Note: Your submission must contain no more than 100 words. Be advised that we reserve the right to edit any piece we receive to conform to our style guidelines (loosely based on The Chicago Manual of Style). Please include your name, WordPress link, and the title of your piece. (Also note: The title and by-line do not count against the 100-word submission limit.)

To submit, please use our online submission form.

We look forward to reading you shortly. (Bad pun intended.)

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Meet the Editors

**T. N. Haynes** is a writer and visual artist living in Central Virginia. He’s worked in publishing for over 25 years. He’s always been a fan of simple, yet evocative pieces that capture what it means to be human. His literary influences include Lydia Davis, Joan Didion, Russell Edson and David Sedaris. His advice to would-be drabblers: “Keep it simple. Avoid adverbs in favor of strong verbs. Stick to a single theme.” Haynes believes that the best literature (as is true with any good art) “exercises a part of the brain we don't always get to use in our day-to-day lives – the part that lets us see the world through the eyes of another.”

**Rebecca Lee**, a writer from Charlottesville, VA, is drawn to pieces that capture a feeling of quiet desperation. She also runs the popular short-fiction blog, **awordofsubstance.com**. Her work, which ranges from poetry to Op-Ed, has appeared in *Existere, Able Muse, Rain Taxi, Deadbop City, Noctua Review* and *The Virginian-Pilot*, among others. She’s also a frequent contributor to *The Skirt Collective* and regularly reviews books for *Cleaver Magazine*. She writes every day and believes that “sometimes less is more.” Lee cites Peter Hamill, Mario Puzo, Ann Landers, and Stephen King as influences.
Contents

What Is Drabble? 5
Writing Advice 8
Beach Day 9
Daydream 10
Snapshot 11
Coming Out 12
Walking the Writer’s Plank 13
Novelist’s Kingdom 14
A Fresh Angle 15
Maple Seed 16
The Color of Poppies 17
I Can’t Sleep 18
Adrift 19
News 20
Leaves #2 21
Contributors 22
What Is Drabble?

By The Drabble editors

Poem? Story? Brain vomit? A snapshot? A representation of a thought, idea, feeling or emotion? An entry point for thought or feeling? Drabble can be all those things. Drabble is a form, not a formula. Just as a haiku or sonnet has rules, so too does drabble.

Words. 100 or fewer. Drabble is a form that requires concision.

You may wonder if it’s even possible to write a good story in fewer than 100 words. We say yes, but it’s certainly not easy.

Most modern narrative art adheres in some way to Shakespeare’s three-act structure (i.e., conflict, rising action/crisis, resolution); whilst presenting a clear theme.
Must all these elements be present to tell a good story?

Grant Faulkner, co-founder of the on-line lit mag 100 Word Story, thinks so. In his Brevity essay, “Writing with Gaps,” Faulkner says,

“I think the best 100-word stories move with the escalation any story has. They have a beginning, middle, and end—a telling pivot, an emotional velocity.”

While the old writing workshop trope, “What’s at stake?” is still germane; with drabble, however, the stakes needn’t always be presented upfront, but the subtext should be clear. To illustrate this notion, we offer two examples of drabble done well by two great writers.

Example 1 – Lydia Davis

Look at what Davis manages to do in just 37 words in her story, “Contingency (vs. Necessity) 2: On Vacation.” (From her book, Can’t And Won’t: Stories)

He could be my husband. But he is not my husband.
He is her husband. And so he takes her picture (not mine) as she stands in her flowered beach outfit in front of the old fortress.

This is a story about the timeless themes of unrequited love and regret. In this case, it’s about a woman who regrets missing her chance to marry the man she now covets. Conflict: a woman covets another’s husband.

The rising action takes place in the narrator’s mind – the woman watches a scene that touches a nerve and stirs the inner conflict. Although Davis doesn’t offer an obvious resolution, she gives us just enough information to formulate one of our own.
Example 2 – Hemingway

Back to the iceberg, Ernest Hemingway wrote,

“If a writer knows enough about what he is writing, he may omit things that he knows, and the reader … will feel those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of an iceberg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water.”

An anecdote: As legend has it, while imbibing with some writing buddies, Hemingway boasted that he could write an entire story in six words. He then wrote these infamous six words on a napkin:

*For sale: Baby shoes, never worn.*

Here, Hemingway seems also to be heeding his own advice, that is, showing only the top one-eighth of the story, while leaving the remaining seven-eighths “below water” to be conjured. In six short words he manages to paint a vivid picture of hope, loss, grief, and acceptance. In writing workshops we’re often told to avoid using clichés, which is good advice, but with drabble, clichés can sometimes be used to paint a fuller picture in fewer words. This would be an example of a writer exploiting a cliché (in this case, the ubiquitous vernacular of the classified ad).

Does Hemingway’s story have a beginning, middle, end, a telling pivot, and an emotional velocity? No, not explicitly. Here he gives us only a tiny glimpse — a snap shot — but it’s all the pretext we need to fill in the rest of the story. ✤
Write about what you know, they said. But when she wrote about the hollow pull of loneliness and the fear she felt when walking alone they said no, no that is self-indulgent, and unfair on the many men who do nothing to warrant fear, even late at night when the bulbs in the streetlights are broken and the shadows run across the pavement like foxes. So she wrote about dragons and magic instead, and they praised her humor, her lyricism, and her vivid imagination. ❖
Beach Day

By Susan D. Durham

Allie pokes her head out the car window. Wind whips her pig tails and drowns out Dad’s terrible singing. Everything smells like oranges. They’re off to the beach.

Mom hands out sticks of Juicy Fruit. The scent, mixed with oranges, makes Allie dizzy for things she doesn’t understand.

At the beach, she walks along with Dad. He smells like beer and talks about things he needs. Allie doesn’t understand. She picks up a perfectly formed dead seahorse; drops it gently into Dad’s empty bottle. He keeps walking.

At sunset, when he doesn’t return, Mom cries. And Allie still doesn’t understand. ❖
Daydream

By Karen Lenton

For the next hour I am just me.

I sip coffee and watch the people.

A young man hooks my gaze. He is writing. You don’t often see that these days.

He is young but … attractive. I wonder if he would glance at me and see past the shell of motherhood. We would talk of art and of writing and of how it could never work. Then have a delicious affair.

He looks up. I quickly look away and think of groceries.

As I leave I catch the eyes of an elderly man. He averts his gaze. He looks uncomfortable. ✿
Snapshot

By Rebecca C. Lee

Let me take a picture of you. Stand over there and look into the sun. Don’t cover your eyes. Don’t put on your hat. When you squint, I’ll be able to see your ambivalence.

Forever searching through the sky, I wait for your head to turn. Bright light is only meant for flashes. ✿
He stared up at the house. A light was on in the kitchen.

“They’ve read it by now,” Molly said.

He only nodded. The house was quiet.

“Do you want me to go in with you?” she asked.

He blinked and found a word. “No.”

She squeezed his hand. “Good luck.” A moment later, her footsteps faded to silence behind him.

The door opened before he put his hand on the doorknob. His mother’s eyes were red, but she smiled.

“I’m so glad you’re home,” she said, and hugged him.

It was then that he let himself begin to cry.
Walking the Writer’s Plank

By Noshin

She sat staring at the screen. She had it all planned out, down to the ending. But now the characters had lives of their own, and they wanted to be heard. Her storyline lay trampled.

“What’s wrong?” he asked from the door.

“My characters are rebelling.”

“Only you,” he sniggered, “would have a character mutiny in your hands. What happened?”

“She fell in love with someone else.”

“Ugh, not the love triangle again!”

“It’s not! I just hope listening to her isn’t a mistake.”

“It won’t. She’ll have her happy ending, you’ll make sure of it.” ✤
Novelist’s Kingdom

By Daniel Boshoff

There was a job once, monotony masquerading as stability, and a dissatisfied woman who never had enough things. One of us left for greener pastures. It must have been her because I look outside and see only red and grey and glass. But none of that matters. None of it’s real. Tangible, maybe, but real?

No. I’d know if it was. I would feel it, and I don’t. What I feel is fiction. Endless opportunity, limitless potential. I live here, in the world behind the words, and I am a king, a pauper, a hero, a villain and, finally; content. ✧
A Fresh Angle

By Nick Dunster

The elderly tenant called me up to make a formal complaint, insisting that I visit him in person that cold, December morning.

“It’s that immoral young woman over there,” he explained, gesturing toward a window in an adjacent block. “Every day she wanders around in her apartment with no clothes on. It’s really not acceptable.”

I peered across. “Well,” I said, “I can’t see anything.”

“Ah no,” the tenant explained. “You can’t see anything from there. You’ll have to stand on this table and then lean your shoulder against this wall. Then you’ll have the right angle.”
Maple Seed

By T.N. Haynes

Here, beneath this poolside lounger, I spot a brittle comma caught in a flagstone crevice. I pick it up, hold it to the sun, and count its veins.

I recall that my mother called these whirlybirds, and that as a child I’d gather them in handfuls, toss them to a gust, and watch them flutter away like moths. Then, I’d give chase, hoping to catch the one that traveled furthest and put it in brown paper bag with the others. (Call it my contribution to natural selection.)
The Color of Poppies

By S.S. Hicks

How long did it take
turning battlefields into blooms?
Nourished from fallen soldiers,
clutching hearts not their own.

Nameless warriors, yesterday's schoolboys
with combed hair and brushed teeth.
Given bayonets, helmets and cigarettes,
whispering to their mamas as they
colored fields with their death.
I Can’t Sleep

By Azul Serena

It’s 3am but I can’t sleep.
I’ve begged and pleaded my eyes to close,
To ignore my emotions
And forget the image of him in her arms.

But they won’t listen.
They demand an explanation
As they replay yesterday’s events
One excruciating detail at a time:
Her lips, his hands, their breath, my heartbreak,
As though pain is the very essence of their existence.

This pain should accompany tears,
The respite my chest desperately seeks.

But my eyes refuse to cry.
They cannot see beyond the past.
Adrift

By T.N. Haynes

It began as a pinhole.

The longer I stared,
    the darker everything around it grew.

Over time the pinhole expanded
    \( \text{(Not because I wanted it to,}
        \quad \text{but because the current pulled me toward it.)} \)
Soon, I saw nothing else.

Then, one day, as quickly as it came, it was gone.
    Again one with the darkness, I was relieved.
So old-fashioned,
a letter arriving with actual handwriting,
something to be treasured
    were it not for the bulletin
    bleeding inside the envelope.
Your grandmother’s scratchy penmanship,
a news clipping attached—
    a black and white photo of you
    back when you were still lovely, mine,
and alive.
Leaves #2

By Moshe Kessler

Are we not all leaves on the tree of life?

So wanting to be different, but really so much like our myriad brothers and sisters

Until the fall of our life comes

And we finally burst with variegated color

Only to float to the ground

Leaving a faint impression on the damp earth.
Contributors

Daniel Boshoff is a writer from Cape Town, South Africa. More of his work can be found at his author site, www.danielboshoff.com.

Nick Dunster lives in Worcester, England. By day, he runs a small, independent fostering service. By night, he writes very short fiction pieces. You can find more of his work at fiftywordsdaily.wordpress.com.

Susan Durham lives and works in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. She enjoys writing short stories, grand-mothering, and being outdoors.

T. N. Haynes is a writer, painter, and videographer living in Central Virginia. He is a fan of simple human stories of conflicting wants and needs. He is co-editor of The Drabble.

S. S. Hicks writes poetry and prose on her blog sshicks.wordpress.com. When she’s not writing, reading, or traveling, she’s spending time with her family in the Southwestern United States.

Moshe Kessler is a husband, father, and grandfather, who blogs about 12-step topics at wisdomfromtherooms.com. He is currently working on a book of daily reflections.

Len Kuntz is a writer from Washington State, an editor at the online magazine Literary Orphans, and the author of I’m Not Supposed to Be Here and Neither Are You out now from Unknown Press. You can also find him at lenkuntz.blogspot.com.
Rebecca Lee is a writer living in Charlottesville, VA. Her work has appeared in Able Muse, Existere, Cleaver, Deadbop City, Psych Central, Noctua Review, and The Virginian Pilot, among others. She runs a popular blog at awordofsubstance.com and serves as co-editor of The Drabble.

Karen Lenton is a thirty-something Executive Assistant living in Devon, UK, with her partner and daughter. When time allows, she loves archery, origami, gaming and, of course, writing. When the writing bug hits, she churns out all sorts of life-fueled thoughts, poems and stories. Her work can be found at theonethatwrites.wordpress.com.

Emma McCandless is a wife, mom, former English teacher, and school librarian living in Connecticut. She’s a self-described life-long learner, education reformer, and equality advocate for eternity.

Noshin uses writing to make sense of the thoughts and concepts that seem to always swarm through her head. She blogs regularly at fortheloveofnotion.wordpress.com.

Azul Serena is an educator in California. Writing has been an important part of her life for many years, but she has only recently decided to share her writing publicly. Her literary heroes include Gabriel García Márquez, Isabel Allende, Sandra Cisneros, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Jane Austen.

Jamie Thunder blogs at asintheweather.wordpress.com. His worked has also appeared on the web at Thepygmygiant.com and in print in the Across the Ages Anthology.