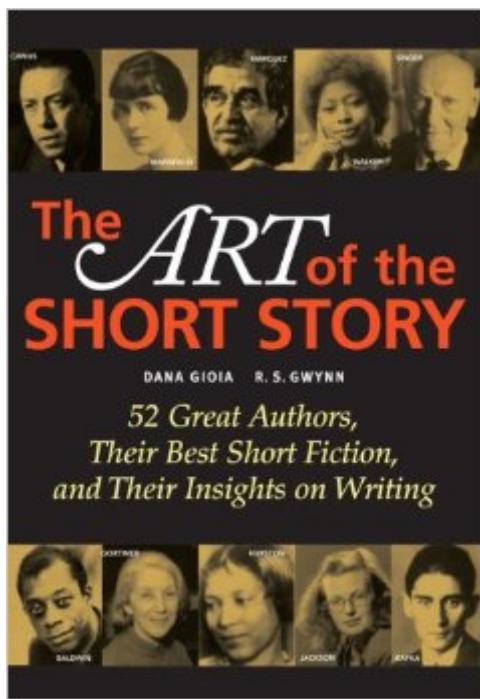


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# The Art Of The Short Story



## Synopsis

This affordably-priced collection presents masterpieces of short fiction from 52 of the greatest story writers of all time. From Sherwood Anderson to Virginia Woolf, this anthology encompasses a rich global and historical mix of the very best works of short fiction and presents them in a way students will find accessible, engaging, and relevant. The book's unique integration of biographical and critical background gives students a more intimate understanding of the works and their authors.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book's title and subtitle are a good summary for a book I feel belongs every creative writing class and on the desk of every aspiring writer. And for only \$18.95 USD for 926 pages, the book is a bargain. If you've recently purchased books for a college class, you will know what I mean, I've paid upwards of \$100 for a book. The Art of the Short Story is an anthology of the best stories from the best short story writers. See if you recognize a few of these names: Nathaniel Hawthorne, Stephen Crane, Edgar Allan Poe, Sherwood Anderson, Herman Melville, Jack London, Gustave Flaubert, James Joyce, Leo Tolstoy, Virginia Woolf, Henry James, Franz Kafka, Kate Chopin, D. H. Lawrence, Joseph Conrad, Anton Chekov, F. Scott Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Ernest Hemingway, Ursula K. Le Guin, John Updike, Raymond Carver, Ralph Ellison, Joyce Carol Oates, Shirley Jackson, Margaret Atwood, Alice Walker, Flannery O'Connor. What I like best about this book is that, in addition to the great short stories, the book also contains commentary from each author. The commentary varies. The author might discuss how or

why the story was written, or public reaction to the story, or their view of literature, or give specific advice on an area of the writer's craft. For example: Ernest Hemingway's essay is on Crafting one True Line. Jorge Luis Borges author perspective is Literature as Experience. Shirley Jackson's essay is The Public Reception of "The Lottery." There are too many to list here but the masters discuss the entire spectrum of short story writing from why to write to elements such as character, plot, style, and suspense to authorial explanation and defense of stories.

I bought this book to use in a course on short fiction at MIT. I expected the usual history of literature book, but what this contains is a treasure of not only excellent, popular fiction, but essays by each of the authors that are as interesting as the stories. I don't think you can find a better collection to study the art of the short story anywhere.

This collection has a nice variety of authors and stories. There are unmistakable classics like Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery," Ernest Hemingway's "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" and James Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues" but also stories by several authors I had never been introduced to before. The result is a fascinating range of styles and perspectives which make the book a compelling and inspiring read. In addition, many of the "Author's Perspective" pieces give great insights into the lives and views of the writers. For example, Baldwin writes about "Race and the African-American Writer," Faulkner writes about "The Human Heart in Conflict with Itself," and Kafka discusses "The Metamorphosis." These are writings that are not often seen, yet they go a very long way toward placing the story and author in context. I wholeheartedly recommend this book.

A few years ago, I decided to explore the genre of the short story, and bought several anthologies to that end. This book, despite its hefty bulk, rose, like cream, to the top of my stack. And there it has remained. Why? At its heart, this is a great collection of stories written by an eclectic array of authors spanning a wide-ranging literary, chronological, geographical, and cultural landscape, with the expansive view that implies. But equally important is that this is not merely a book of classic stories, but it is actually four books in one. Each story is preceded by a brief biography, image, and discussion of the contributions of the author to literature; the story is then followed by a brief essay or interview with the author on the subject of writing or their work in particular. At the end of the book there is a 70 page section titled "Writing" that includes discussions of elements of short fiction and different critical approaches to literature, which greatly enhanced my appreciation of the stories. The author biographies provide insight to their creations by revealing their life experiences, as well as

the Zeitgeist of their times. The Russian writer, Nikolai Gogol, for example was an oft-maligned misfit who once held a petty bureaucratic post, much like the anti-hero protagonist in his story "The Overcoat". Or consider the culture-spanning experiences of African author Chinua Achebe, who grew up speaking Igbo, but learned English and studied at London University. Living in both colonial and post-colonial Nigeria, his experiences give credence to the effects of colonialism on his homeland prevalent in his writings. Most important, however, is the opportunity to learn about authors the reader has discovered - or rediscovered - and be pointed to other short stories, essays, plays, and novels they have written. In that way this book serves as a compass to more good reading. The reflections on writing by the authors themselves provide further insight. For example, the delight of the young Gabriel GarcÃ-a Marquez upon reading the opening line of Kafka's "Metamorphosis" - who said to an interviewer "...I didn't know anyone was allowed to write things like that. If I had known, I would have started writing a long time ago." And so the imagination of a master of Magic Realism was unfettered. Or Jack London's letter of assurances to a revision editor's questions of certain facets in his story "To Build a Fire", as only a man who lived in the Klondike and had to build a fire with bare hands at -74 F degrees could fully explain. And perhaps most enthralling of all, Shirley Jackson's public response to the uproar caused by her shocking story "The Lottery", which cleverly follows the structure of the story itself, with an O. Henry ending even more chilling than that of the fiction, because it isn't fiction. But, as mentioned, the heart of this book is the stories, over fifty of them by fifty two authors, most represented by a single story, some by two. Rather than imposing a sequence on the stories, the editors chose the random approach, alphabetizing them by author, from Achebe to Wolf. So there are definitely incongruities, such as reading Hawthorne followed by Hemingway, which is actually adds to the eclectic appeal of this volume. To be sure, there are stories oft-repeated in other anthologies, such as Hemingway's "A Clean Well-Lighted Place" or Poe's "The House of Usher", which, for me at least, were worth re-reading decades later. But there are many hidden gems here as well, such as Ursula K. Le Guin's "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas" and Zora Neal Hurston's "Sweat" and John Cheever's "The Swimmer", to name but a few. The greatness of this book is due in no small part to the editors, Dana Gioia and R.S. Gwynn, who did a wonderful job selecting authors, stories, and author commentaries, as well as writing informative biographies and the "Writing" section that concludes the book. So if they happen to read this, I have a favor to ask: Could you please create another book like this with more great authors?

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