INTRODUCTION TO FLASH FICTION LITERATURE (FF):

Welcome to Flash Fiction: A minimalistic approach to writing stories in a fast-driven society.

A. Study this story by Dr. Monifa A. Love (241 words):

Mount Olive Primitive Baptist Church is two miles from my home. She is a calla lily growing in deep woods. On the third Sunday of each month, I sit in the middle of the fourth pew beneath the jade shower of the skylight. I join other ample women and our rail-thin sisters in testimony and tears. The hymns are cradles and bayonets—nesting our laments and pressing us on. We sing like we have known each other all of our lives; our voices thickly woven ropes, making ladders. Vaselined children with swinging feet draw on their legs and rock to the rhythm. Thin brown men in thinning brown suits punctuate the preacher’s cadence with shouts and the percussion of their canes and polished shoes. The faithful rise and fall in the spirit like dolphin. Guardians in starched white uniforms resuscitate the overwhelmed with gentle, gloved pats to powdered faces. The elder women whisper underground words to call the faint back from their peaceful homes. They wield their fans with the skill of a signal corps. Elation evaporates from our bodies. Mercy rains down. Our tongues capture the tonic and we are saved. The service ends with hummingbirds calling “A-men” and the reverberation of small, powerful wings. We drift out to our cars. Well-worn leather bibles cross our hearts and touch the sky. The children pile into the backseats to watch the church disappear through dusty windshields; their minds on early supper. ~ Monifa A. Love, From Micro Fiction, An anthology of Really Short Stories

B. What do you see?

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II. Distinguishable Aspects of Flash Fiction (FF):

A. Here is what you need to know:

1. Other words used to describe Flash Fiction include microfiction, postcard fiction, short short story, and sudden fiction.
2. FF is between poetry and fiction
3. FF is between a sketch and a short story.
4. FF is a complete story—generally a 1000 words or less. Many pieces are typically around 300 words or less. It is a minimalistic approach to writing.
5. FF typically illuminates and enlightens universal aspects of living life; they possess depth, intensity, and penetration into our lives.
6. FF emphasizes minimalism because it strips a story down to its essence will remaining a complete story. A complete story will possess character(s), conflict, narrative, plot, and resolution.
7. Always remember: “Less is more.”
8. FF is typically simple in appearance yet complex... always precise in detail. Every word counts. Each word works with the whole story to produce the author’s desired effect. There will be a unifying effect.
9. The story will possess a smooth surface but resonate with deep undercurrents about life, our human condition, and existential issues.
10. Accuracy of word choice is critical to the success of FF.

1 Some material adapted from Mark Mills, Crafting the Very Short Story: An Anthology of 100 Masterpieces (Upper Saddle River, NJ.: Prentice Hall, 2003), xiv-xvi.
III. FF possesses a number of typical devices:

A. Here’s what your story needs to include:
   1. Structure: specific placement of events and details.
   2. Dialogue: propels a story forward and reveals character
   3. Symbolism: Offers details that underscore a story’s theme.
   4. Imagery: Figurative language that bring about a picture related to the reader’s five senses
   5. Conflict (internal and external)
   6. Suspense: Anxiousness to know what is going to occur.

IV: FF possesses a number of stylistic features: Here’s what you need to have in your story:

A. Voice: sentence construction, word choice, and emotional tone: these are your “musical notes.” Seduce us with rhythm and tone...function like a ballad’s harmony and mood.
B. Point of view (the perspective of the narrator):
   1. First person ("I looked down on my baby): First person conveys a sense of urgency and lacks comprehensive knowledge of the characters and events in the story
   or
   2. Third person: ("The professor did not realize that the students placed poison in his coffee"): Third person is typically objective and omniscient.
C. Setting (perhaps only a glanced symbol) which influences the story just as our environment impacts our lives.
D. Sequence of events.
E. Wordplays, ironic situations or word choice that deeply touch our lives, our frailties, our longings, etc.
F. Unconventional language may even be used.
G. A good pace to your story is critical.

V. Consider the following approaches:

A. You can hook us into the story with a familiar yet controversial subject, proceed to reveal universal truths regarding our frailties and desires using simply syntax and poetic diction while juxtaposing a certain chilling setting with romantically charged events. Throughout your piece, you could offer carefully paced surprises that reach an unexpected climax while delicately emphasizing some aspect of our humanity.
B. You can start with a narrator dialogue about a certain scene. Move into a generalized and impersonal portion. Then the narrator moves into a person’s mind. A minimalist will do a point of view of shift some time in the story.
C. You can start in first person about specific scene using a particular symbol that might be unique but will be obvious to the reader. Move from first person to third person. Have plot, intrigue, and universal lesson.

VI. To get you started this is what I want you to do:

A. Cut out or use a picture from a magazine, newspaper, or personal collection. Use that picture to frame a story. Attach that picture to your FF project. Share your picture in class.
B. Remember each word you use is critical to the success of your story.
C. Write, read, reflect, and ask questions concurrently.

VII. Ask yourself what you want the reader to walk away with when he or she finishes your story?

A. Perhaps a major truth and a minor truth?
B. Touch upon an existential issue?
C. Reminder about something?
D. Bottom: Focus on what matters most! Give me something to believe in!