



AISHA BUSHBY





## Resource 1—Writing with your senses

Whenever you're trying to introduce a new place or setting, it's helpful to refer to your main characters' senses to get an understanding of how they're feeling in that moment. All of the five senses—touch, sight, smell, hearing, and taste—send signals to the brain to help us understand and navigate the world around us. Keep in mind that not everyone has all five senses, and some people might have a stronger sense than others.

*A Pocketful of Stars* relies on smell, which is scientifically proven to invoke memories, as a portal into a new setting and world. It uses a combination of wood, rose, and orange, which are ingredients that make up Arabic perfume, which is called Oudh.

To start off your own writing exercise, think of (or seek out) a smell that you feel strongly about. You might like it or really dislike it—either way can work for a great story. Then, think about how you might describe the smell. Words used to describe Oudh, include: musky, warm, pungent, floral, and smoky. But peppermint, for example, gives the opposite effect of being cool and sharp.

It can be tricky to find concrete words to describe abstract smells, so similes and metaphors can help. A **simile** directly compares two things to make a description more vivid and uses comparison words such as “like,” “so,” or “than.” A **metaphor** compares two things that are otherwise unrelated, making the qualities of the first thing figuratively apply to the other.

A good way to begin is by thinking about how the smell makes you feel. Something warm and musky might feel like a hug (simile), or wrap you in an embrace (metaphor). Once you've described smell, think about how you can work some of the other senses into your setting.

Here are a couple of examples from *A Pocketful of Stars*:

**Hearing:** *I swear I can hear them whisper my name. “Safiya,” they hiss. “Safiya, welcome.”* (p. 26)

The key words to consider here are whisper and hiss.

**Touch:** *It's hot, hotter than any weather I've known. Like opening the oven door just after you've baked something delicious.* (p. 25)

The key focus of this line is the simile in the second sentence.

The absence of our senses can be intriguing too, such as a creeping silence, or dark path ahead. The sentences below lack sensory descriptions. Rewrite the sentences and add sensory details to make them more interesting. Practice using similes and metaphors to add an extra twist!

1. The cow slept in the barn.
2. She ate the cake quickly.
3. The flowers were pink.
4. The car drove down the hill.
5. Jake pet the dog.



## Resource 2—Writing the Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How

Once you've figured out what senses you can use, it can be helpful to think of **who, what, when, where, why** and **how**? Here's an example from *A Pocketful of Stars*:

It features Safiya (who), whose mother has fallen into a coma (what). She visits her mother's old house in Kuwait through memories from her childhood (when/where), in order to try and save her (why). She starts unlocking memories and following a scavenger hunt (how) until she eventually speaks to her mother's past self.

The hardest part of writing a story often comes from staring at a blank page, and knowing where to begin. So, if you're struggling, you can use this paragraph from *A Pocketful of Stars* as a prompt:

*When I next open my eyes I'm lying on my back staring up at the sky. The stars wink at me, brighter than I've seen them before. There are thousands of them, millions, coating the land like a great big blanket. The moon greets me shyly in a crescent wave. I sit up. It takes a while for my eyes to adjust, for me to get my bearings. I'm in... (p. 25)*

## Resource 3—Video Games and Writing

There are lots of different ways you can use your writing skills outside of writing books. You can write for TV and film, adverts, blogs, websites, and even video games. I find it helpful to think of my main character like they're in a video game, and my job as a writer is to play the game in my head as I walk them through their hurdles and achievements.

But sometimes it can be difficult to know where to begin. A good way to start is by thinking about the three key things that make up any story: character, setting, and motivation. And a fun way to do this is by picking prompts out of a hat.

**Step 1—Get into small groups of 3-4.**

**Step 2—Write out all of the eight different characters and pick one out of a hat.**

**Step 3—Write out all of the seven different settings and pick one out of a hat.**

**Step 4—Write out all of the six different motivations and pick one out of a hat. Feel free to add your own!**

**Step 5—Spend some time brainstorming what sort of stories you might come up with using the character, setting, and motivation that you've chosen as a group.**

**Step 6—Spend some time presenting your ideas to the rest of your peers to see which combinations you all made and the sorts of stories you've all created.**

**Step 7—If you're feeling particularly inspired, you could always write some of the story, or even illustrate it, too.**



## Character

While *A Pocketful of Stars* features a human main character who is a school student, there are lots of other options to consider:

- **Astronaut**
- **Spy**
- **Explorer**
- **Anthropomorphised animal (that means an animal with human-like qualities).**
- **Witch**
- **Mermaid**
- **Fairy**
- **Vampire**

## Setting

*A Pocketful of Stars* has a few different settings, like Safiya's home and school, but the key setting is her mother's childhood home in Kuwait, which she accesses through her memories. There are lots of unique and exciting settings to consider when coming up with your story:

- **Outerspace (this can be on a spaceship, or a planet)**
- **The ocean (you might be on the ocean on a ship, or living in it)**
- **A type of house (tree house, haunted house, palace etc.)**
- **The desert**
- **The forest/jungle**
- **A snowy mountain**
- **A type of school (this could be a vampire school, or set in a different time etc.)**

## Motivation

It is said that most (if not all) stories, fall into seven categories, but for this exercise we are going to focus on the following five:

- **Overcoming a monster—your main character has to fight an evil force to save their people.**
- **Rags to riches—your main character gains riches throughout their story.**
- **The quest—your main character must go on an adventure to a new place.**
- **Voyage and return—your main character has to go off on a journey to obtain something (whether that is an object or knowledge) and return to their people.**
- **Comedy—a funny main character will usually go through humorous hurdles before having a happy ending.**



*A Pocketful of Stars* is written as a quest story, where the main character must go on an adventure to a new place. Many video games use the quest format to tell their stories. But some stories can be a mixture of two or more of the above (for example, you might have a comedy quest story, or a rags to riches voyage and return). But the key thing to consider with all of the above, is that your character will need to have changed in some way, and/or learned new things during the course of their story.

You might find, when you do this exercise, that you end up with a combination of prompts that don't seem to make sense upon first glance. For example, what if you get a vampire that lives in outer space and has to defeat a monster? The exciting thing about that is that it allows you to come up with a story that might never have been done before. Maybe the vampire lives on Neptune in a futuristic world? And though we might consider vampires to be monsters, maybe this one is misunderstood, and the real monsters are the humans who have banished them to a lonely planet...?

A tip to help you develop your idea with your group is to think about these three questions and see if you can write a sentence or two that answers each. Once you do, you'll end up with a pitch that's similar to the blurbs you get on the backs of books:

- **What does your main character want?**
- **What (or who) is standing in their way?**
- **What are they going to do to achieve what they want?**





**A Pocketful of Stars**

Ages 10-14 HC: 9781728450698 \$19.99 (List) \$14.99 (S&L)



**AISHA BUSHBY** was born in Bahrain and has lived in Kuwait, England and Canada. She is the author of several children's books including *A Flash of Fireflies* and *A Pocketful of Stars* which was longlisted for the Carnegie medal and shortlisted for the Branford Boase award.

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