



*“Giraffe Receives Her Spots”*

**APRIL 2013**

*“Once Upon a Giraffe”*

This month we’re going to play with **STORY**.

I say “play,” because I’m imagining this month to be more of a note taking or brainstorming\* month (with of course some illustrations thrown in!).

*\* Note: In November I’m planning to hitchhike upon the “National Novel Writing Month” project (NaNoWriMo, <http://www.nanowrimo.org/>) with our own NaGiraffeWriMo. I only mention it here so that you will know that you will have time later in the year to flesh out any story ideas you brainstorm this month.*

We'll start with a simple definition:

sto·ry

/ˈstôre̅/

Noun

1. An account of imaginary or real people and events told for entertainment: "an adventure story".

In her article, "What is Story?" Elizabeth Moon writes:

Story, by its nature (and our nature) is not boring.... It is a way of experiencing the other (place, time, person) and making sense of it; it is a way of asking questions and suggesting answers but leaving the reader/listener free to keep asking, keep thinking, keep feeling.

<http://www.elizabethmoon.com/writing-story.html>

So this month we'll explore the idea of giving the reader/viewer more than just a pretty giraffe face! We'll do this with a combination of writing and illustration.

### **Illustration**

During this month "illustration" can mean anything: pencil or pen drawings, watercolors or paintings, even photographs and collage. I would suggest either starting with:

1. A media that you are comfortable working in, or
2. Something that you have been wanting to develop further (for example, I've been wanting to explore illustrations that use a very limited color palette, so that's what I'm going to start with, anyway!).

## Writing

Writing is out of my comfort zone. Especially fictional or imaginative writing... it's pretty terrifying for me to put it out there for you (or anyone) to judge — er, I mean, *read*.

But I'm counting on the fact that I can apply some of the same lessons of teaching drawing to learning to write more creatively:

1. Keep it fun.
2. Think of every poem, story, or essay as “practice.”
3. Go to the source of things as often as possible (with drawing, draw from “life”; with writing, draw from “intuition”).
4. Look to writers I admire for inspiration.
5. Remember that the mistakes (mixed-metaphors, etc.) make me more “human.”  
It's okay!
6. Start with small exercises and assignments.

To that end I decided to break down the month into bite-sized, weekly, and specific assignments (instead of one general assignment). They are:

WEEK 1 • Giraffe Invention

WEEK 2 • Comic Giraffe

WEEK 3 • Giraffe Poetry

WEEK 4 • Once Upon a Giraffe

The details for each assignment will come as the month progresses, but with all of the exercises I hope you'll try to keep brainstorming “rules” in mind as you tackle each assignment. (Remember, this is an idea-generating month more than anything.)

## Rules for Brainstorming

A quick internet search brought up a slew of “rules” (wait, isn’t that kind of an oxymoron?). I liked these from an article at about.com by Mary Bellis (“Lesson Plans on Inventive Thinking and Creativity”):

- **No Criticism**  
Allowed, people tend to automatically evaluate each suggested idea — their own as well as others. Both internal and external criticism are to be avoided while brainstorming. Neither positive nor negative comments are allowed. Either type inhibits the free flow of thought and requires time which interferes with the next rule. Write each spoken idea down as it is given and move on.
- **Work for Quantity**  
Alex Osborn stated that "Quantity breeds quality." People must experience a "brain drain" (get all the common responses out of the way) before the innovative, creative ideas can surface; therefore, the more ideas, the more likely they are to be quality ideas.
- **Hitchhiking Welcome**  
Hitchhiking occurs when one member's idea produces a similar idea or an enhanced idea in another member. All ideas should be recorded.
- **Freewheeling Encouraged**  
Outrageous, humorous, and seemingly unimportant ideas should be recorded. It is not uncommon for the most off-the-wall.

[http://inventors.about.com/od/lessonplans/a/creativity\\_2.htm](http://inventors.about.com/od/lessonplans/a/creativity_2.htm)

So let’s get storytelling!

# WEEK 1

April 1-7, 2013

## Giraffe Invention

*Think the Flintstones, Inspector Gadget, or Rube Goldberg.  
Invent something for or around the giraffe.*

Your assignment is to come up with an idea for a giraffe invention — useful or not — and illustrate it with instructions, diagrams, etc.

### Ideas: Getting Started

1. Ask yourself questions to try to identify some needs or situations that would benefit from an invention. Write them down. For example:

How could I ride the giraffe?

How could I climb up a giraffe?

What could a giraffe help me reach, and where should it put the item?

What kind of shelter would a giraffe need?

How would I put a hat on a giraffe's head?

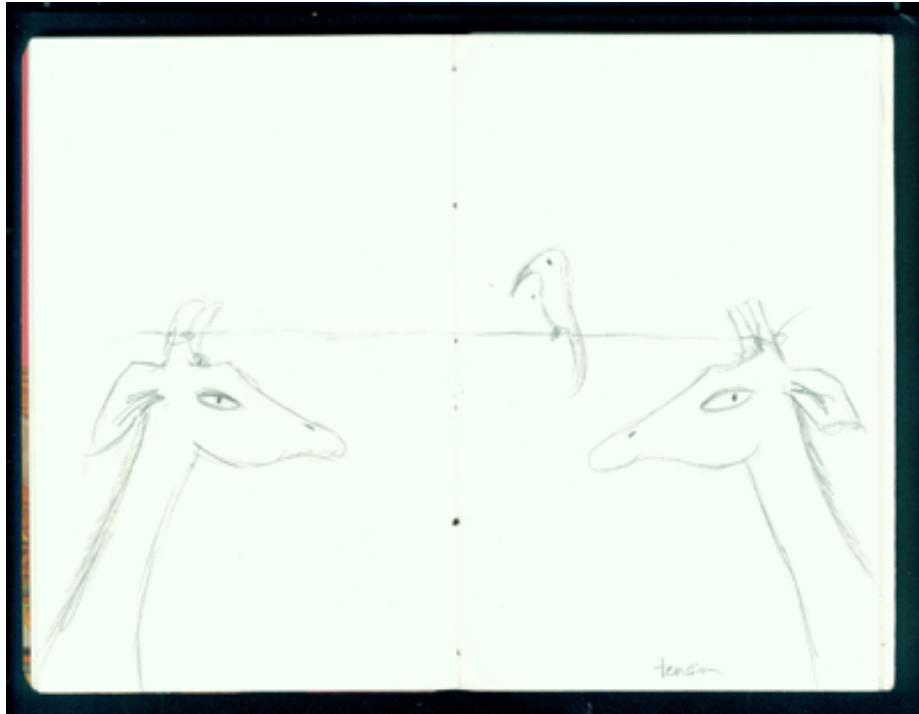
etc.

Spend a few minutes writing down both questions and any answers that pop into your head. Then, pick one to take further. (Remember that these inventions don't need to serve a "practical" purpose!)

2. It might also be fun to write down a bunch of random words like "toaster," "fan," "idea," "green," etc., and then write down all the ideas you can think of when each word is paired with "giraffe."

3. Another idea-generator is to simply start drawing before you have the whole thing thought out; ideas will most likely come to you during the process. Draw some giraffes on a page (one or two, in different positions), and then the image itself might suggest an idea for an invention.

For example, in the following illustration I drew the two giraffe's looking at each other. Immediately their ossicones just needed to be connected... with string. After that, the bird flew down:



Or this one... I drew the giraffe, then the tree... and by the time the tree was half done the idea of a bird feeder came to me (when the giraffe chews, the pole on it's forehead jiggles, causing the bird food to sift through the sieve at the end of the pole).



In this case, I drew a giraffe and knew I wanted to make a “saddle,” but the idea of making a face-saddle came when I realized it would be helpful as a securement while fixing telephone poles (somehow the full giraffe body on the page accentuated it's height).



Also brainstorm directions, labels, etc. Anything that might be helpful to the viewer of your final illustration as to how it works, etc.

Finally, title your invention. Remember, work for “quantity” for the best chance of coming up with that winning title.

“face saddle”

“nose seat”

“The Incredible Nose Seat”

etc.

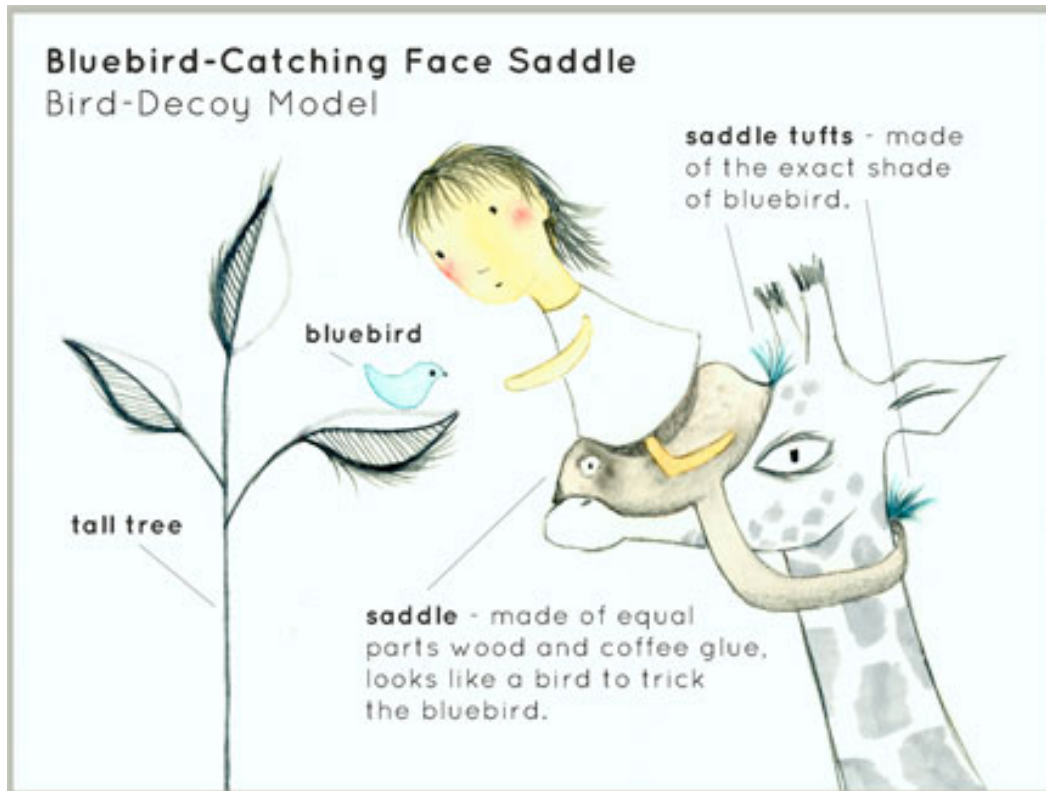
## The Final: Illustrating your Invention

Once you have some ideas in your sketchbook, show us your invention using the media of your choice. Be open to things changing even more once you get going (my story/ invention changed in the drawing of it... I suddenly thought a tree would be much more fun to draw than a telephone pole! So I needed to re-think the saddle's purpose, which was that it needed to be a bluebird catcher, which then gave me the idea of making the saddle look like a bird decoy).



Then, add words/diagrams to explain things, either by hand or in the computer:





I had loads of fun with this assignment and hope you do, too!

\* \* \*

**Deadline:** Post an illustration of your giraffe-related invention by April 7th! (Note, even uploading the pencil sketch counts.)

**Note for weeks 2, 3 and 4:** [Details forthcoming each Monday at the class blog!](#)