Truth: A Collection of Short Stories about Coming Out

Introduction

A. What will the artistic endeavor explore?

Writing short stories is a literary art form. It takes imagination, skill, patience, and the ability to create a complete, developed story in less than twenty-five pages. For this project, I will be creating eight short stories and revising them to the level of being ready for publication. Writing short stories starts with creating a concept, developing characters and their motivations, and crafting a believable plot arc.

As a member of the LGBTQIA community, I know the importance and impact of “coming out”, that is to say revealing one’s sexuality to other people (for example: family members, friends, coworkers, and other people that are important in one’s life).

I will be writing eight short stories that represent different situations that can arise before, during, and after coming out. I feel that this is an important project because it may positively impact young readers who are the target audience.

B. What is the overall concept/treatment and significance of the project?

The concept for this collection of short stories is living one’s truth. After hearing dozens of coming out stories, I have come to the conclusion that the most important factor in coming out is embracing one’s truth. Coming out may not be feasible for some people, they may be found out or they may live in a situation that inhibits them from expressing themselves. Coming out in one’s own time and on their terms is important for the process of healing and continuing towards a mentally and physically healthy life. Living one’s truth is critical to improving one’s mental health. Coming out may not be a choice for some people, but once a person is out, they might as well live their truth.

The significance of this project is trying to positively impact young readers that may have begun questioning their sexual orientation. By reading stories that have real life elements, situations, and consequences, young readers may feel empowered and less like there is something abnormal about them or wrong with them. It is not a choice to be LGBTQIA, but by sharing these stories, I hope to make a difference in the lives of young people. Short stories are an appropriate format for this endeavor because short stories will allow me to develop life inspired stories that can motivate, comfort, and compel readers to understand the difficulties of owning one’s identity in an unfriendly society and/or circumstances. It is important for young people to read fiction because of the many benefits including the development of empathy (Seiter).
Young people that read this collection that are not LGBTQIA can still benefit because the stories will help them to understand what their friends and peers may be going through. I want to give young readers a glimpse into the process of coming out, so that they may be better prepared for coming out themselves someday. Coming out allows individuals the freedom of living their own truth and not having to hide, lie, or feel like they are living a double life (Skidmore College).

**Background:**

**A. Brief review of the work that has already been done in the project area.**

Dozens of novels exist for young adults that tackle the subject of coming out including *What They Always Tell Us*, *Two Boys Kissing*, and *Proxy*. However, we do not yet have a collection of short stories about coming out. The benefit of a short story collection is that the stories are much faster reads than novels. If the collection was used in an educational setting, it would be very possible to have students read one of the stories and then discuss it. It is important that the stories are fiction and not mimicking other individual’s coming out story because it protects people’s privacy. I will be using elements I have gathered from other people’s coming out stories as well as my own, but in a way that is completely anonymous. These elements might include a specific place where someone came out, a specific reaction from someone who witnessed the coming out, or a feeling that someone had before or after they came out.

In preparation for this project, I have begun the preliminary writing of the eight short stories. First drafts have been completed for four of the short stories. The rest of this semester, I will complete the first drafts for the other four stories. In the spring semester, I will revise and edit the stories to prep them for publication.

**A. Responsibilities/Duties of the student.**

As the writer, my responsibilities will include continued drafting and revisions of eight short stories. I will continue to explore and develop the characters to make the stories as believable as possible. I have to create strong conflict and plot development that will move the action of the stories along and keep the readers engaged. One of the important tasks I must complete is examining the fluidity of the plot and the development of the characters as well as the characters’ underlying motivations. I must examine what is at stake for the individual characters, and the subtext of each story, thus helping me to build a stronger collection. What is at
stake for the characters is one of the most important elements of a writing because if there is no risk of losing something, there is no story. I will work diligently to represent a variety of situations in each of the short stories.

After the drafting process has been completed, I will move on to the editing and revising stage of the project. This is when I will fully exam each story, with the help of my mentor. After examining each story, I will work diligently to strengthen and enhance the stories. Before the stories are ready for publication they must be edited not only for grammatical reasons, but also for fluidity. Each story must have a complete arc (beginning, middle, and end). During the editing process, I will break each story down and fully access the Five C’s of Fiction Writing (character, conflict, climax, choice, and change) to make sure each piece has all of the elements it needs to be a successful story.

I am in the process of reaching out to variety of organizations including MT Lambda, the Southeastern Young Adult Book Festival, and Boro Pride about ways that I can share my work. I will be reading an excerpt from my stories at the In Process Open-Mic Night and Café events that take place during the fall semester. I will also be participating in the Scholars Week Poster Exhibition, College of Liberal Arts Day, and the Celebration of Student Writing events in the spring semester. During the fall semester I will be reaching out to local high school English departments and libraries as well as the Tennessee Women’s Theatre Project, and the LGBTQ friendly Split Britches theatre company about distribution opportunities as well as possible readings.

B. Information about the student, which would indicate to the reviewers the student’s qualifications to successfully complete the project.

I discovered my love for writing short stories while taking a few writing courses at MTSU. I’ve taken classes in Fiction Writing, Multi-Genre Writing, and Advanced Fiction Writing. Writing is one of those fields where the more you do it, the stronger you become. I successfully completed a URECA Silver Level project last spring in which I wrote a complete one-act play and had a table reading for it via Zoom. As a member of the LGBTQIA community, I have firsthand experience in coming out. I want to share these stories so that the young people that read them might be able to draw strength or courage from them. I want them to know it’s going to be okay. I have worked on large-scale research projects in the past including presenting at the Scholars Week Poster Exposition in 2013, 2014, 2019, and 2020.

Purpose:

A. Tell what the project will entail and describe the expected outcome.
I will continue to revise the stories I have written and expand them to completion. When I feel that I have stories with solid foundations, I will explore my work with my faculty mentor and receive feedback. I will use the feedback to revise and continue developing the collection. I will continue to edit and revise each story and resubmit them to my faculty mentor. When my mentor and I feel that each piece is as strong as it can be, I will work with 48 Hour Books to get the collection printed. I will create a poster for presentation at the Scholars Week Poster Exposition at MTSU in April 2021. I will also present one or two stories at the College of Liberal Arts Day during Scholars Week and the Celebration of Student Writing. I will schedule a reading at one or more schools so that I can test my work with the target audience.

B. Project objective(s)

The first objective of this project is to create a publishable collection of short stories. I want to become a professional writer and this project would be a tremendous opportunity to make a big step towards that goal.

A survey completed by the Trevor Project concluded that 40% of LGBTQ youth had seriously considered attempting suicide in the last twelve months. In the same survey it stated that 1 in 3 LGBTQ youth has been physically threatened or harmed due to their identity (Trevor).

The second objective of this project is outreach and sharing the work created. I really want to inspire young people. I want them to know that it’s okay to have questions about themselves. I want them to know that there are things about them that they cannot change. I know firsthand how exhausting and debilitating it can be to try to hide who you are, so I want young people to know there is hope.

C. Significance of the project to your academic development in this field.

This project will help me to continue to develop as a writer. Drafting each story is an opportunity to explore within myself. The experience I will gain during the revising/editing phase of the project will be significantly valuable towards my growth as a writer. I will begin applying for graduate school programs in creative writing this fall, so having a project like this on my CV would let writing programs know that I am serious about my work. The challenge with this project will be creating eight stories that can stand on their own but also work together in a collection.
Methods:

I plan to spend the first semester of this project continuing to draft the short stories. I already have drafts of four stories, and I am confident that I can draft four more stories before the end of the semester. In the spring semester, I will be revisiting each story for the revising/editing process. This process will include a variety of exercises I have learned from previous fiction writing courses and exercises from the *What If, Writing Exercises for Fiction Writers* textbook.

Collaboration with Faculty Mentor(s):

As my faculty mentor, Dr. Jennifer Kates will be an invaluable asset to this project. As a professional writer and Master Instructor of creative writing, Dr. Kates knows what it takes to create a compelling work of fiction. After drafting each story, I will submit them to Dr. Kates for feedback before I begin the revising/editing process. Then after I have completed exercises, explored each story, and made them stronger, I will resubmit them to Dr. Kates for another round of feedback. After receiving the second round of feedback, I will complete another round of revisions before the stories are completed and ready for printing. Dr. Kates publishes a literary journal on campus called *Shift*, therefore she is aware of the process and cost of producing hardcopy editions of a finished product. This is another way Dr. Kates’s knowledge will be extremely valuable to this project. I will be meeting with Dr. Kates every two weeks to discuss progress I have made and any questions I have about the work I have completed to that point. Dr. Kates will also mentor me in the creation of my Scholars Week presentation.


“LGBTQ Youth Crisis.” *Ali Forney*, www.aliforneycenter.org/about-us/lgbtq-youth-crisis/?gclid=Cj0KCQjwhIP6BRCMARIeALu9LfmSBFqqgwr1j_4ke9gKVf7t9d8tGHwrC6XtcLaco4qNjJSwtESAtulaAq13EALw_wcB.


2 September 2020
Dear URECA Scholars Grant Committee:

I am writing in support of my student (Student's Name) application for a Gold Level URECA Scholars Grant to complete her project “Truth.” I think you will find this project is precisely the sort of creative activity URECA seeks to fund, and (Student's Name) is an excellent candidate for this support.

I have known (Student's Name) since she took my Fiction Writing workshop. She came in as a “theatre kid” with little experience writing fiction, and she has grown exponentially. (Student's Name) travelled with me and a group of undergraduates to the Southern Literary Festival in Spring of 2019, where she presented her prize-winning play. She has also volunteered at a number of MTSU Write events and readings. In short, I have know this student well and have witnessed her skill, curiosity, and drive in a number of settings.

(Student's Name) is ambitious, energetic, and passionate about this project. I am confident in her ability to draft and revise the stories she has in mind as she has time and again proven herself not only talented but imminently teachable. (Student's Name) has reached a point in her development where she is knowledgeable enough of the craft and her own process to dive in confidently and trust the process. She is bold in her revision and increasingly sophisticated in her skill.

In addition to Steph’s capability to execute this project, I write in support of the importance of the project to her growth as a writer, as well as to the community as a whole. (Student's Name) has come to understand her power as a YA writer and seeks to use her talent to reach that audience in a significant way. YA fiction is a growing segment of literary creative writing, and it plays an essential part in the lives of its passionate following. (Student's Name) is astute to have noted that this collection would be a first in the genre, as well as to recognize the impact her stories could have on vulnerable readers. Young people desperately want and need to see themselves in the media they consume; it is an essential step in self-discovery. The possibilities for a collection like this to make a difference in young lives are limitless.

I know (Student's Name) plans to pursue graduate study in creative writing, an ambition I support. This project is an outstanding way to prepare for that next step. The support of the URECA grant would make it possible for her to make the most of the project’s potential as well as her own. I therefore support this application wholeheartedly.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Wachtel Kates

Jennifer Wachtel Kates, Ph.D.
Master Instructor, Dept. of English
Director, MTSU Write
Editor, SHIFT
Executive Director, Southern Literary Festival
URECA Grant Timeline

Week of
Sep 14- Draft story 5 (Characters and conflict)
Sep 21- Meet with Dr. Kates about story 1
Sep 28- Draft story 5 (Plot and arc)
Oct 5- Meet with Dr. Kates about story 2
Oct 8- Open Mic and Café
Oct 12- Draft story 6 (Character and conflict)
Oct 19- Meet with Dr. Kates about story 3
Oct 26- Draft story 6 (Plot and arc)
Nov 2- Meet with Dr. Kates about story 4
Nov 9- Draft story 7 (Character and conflict)
Nov 16- Meet with Dr. Kates about story 5
Nov 19- Open Mic & Café
Nov 23- Draft story 7 (Plot and arc)
Nov 30- Meet with Dr. Kates about story 6
Dec 7- Draft story 8 (Character, conflict, plot, and arc)
Dec 14- Meet with Dr. Kates about stories 7 & 8
Jan 11- Edit and revise stories 1 & 2 based on feedback
Jan 18- Meet with Dr. Kates about revisions of stories 1 &2
Jan 25- Edit and revise stories 3 & 4 based on feedback
Feb 1- Meet with Dr. Kates about revisions of stories 3 & 4
Feb 8- Edit and revise stories 5 & 6 based on feedback
Feb 15- Meet with Dr. Kates about revisions of stories 5 &6
Feb 22- Edit and revise stories 7 & 8 based on feedback
Mar 1- Meet with Dr. Kates about revisions of stories 7 & 8
Mar 8- Work on final revisions
Mar 11-13- Southeastern Young Adults Book Festival
Scholars Week TBA
Mar 15- Work on final revisions
Celebration of Student Writing TBA
Mar 22- Upload collection to 48 Hour Books for printing
Apr 12- Distribute collection to area schools and libraries
## URECA Budget Request and Justification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Cost</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Justification</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Printed Book of Collected Short Stories</td>
<td>$3.46/book</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>Printed books to distribute final completed work</td>
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</tbody>
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| Total                            | $433.00       |          |                                            |

Quote from 48hourbooks.com

Higher estimates were obtained from Office Depot and Staples. Blue Print Solutions website was down and a quote was not obtainable over the phone.