

A Story Recipe (version 2: outline + example)

This recipe will make one simple short story and is useful when you have to write a story at short notice and within a time limit – you have to do this at school sometimes.

1) In your opening paragraph describe the weather, the place and your main character:

It had been a long hot day but now a dark cloud covered the sun and Bill shivered. Behind him the empty beach stretched back to a distant sea. A few feet away, the top of her head just showing above the hole they had dug together, Bill's sister Gina chattered to herself as she continued to dig. Everyone else had packed up and gone home. They were alone...

2) Now, start the next paragraph with speech. Your character wants to do something – what is it? Introduce your other character and describe them. Include a simile in your description:

"Mum! Where are you?" Bill's shout disappeared on the wind. The beach was stark and gloomy and the clouds were like purple bruises on the grey sky. Gina climbed hurriedly out of the hole.

"Where is everyone? Where's Mum gone?" Her eyes were wide as she glanced anxiously up and down the beach. Gina's hair was the colour of straw and the salt air and sand had stiffened it so that it stood in spikes around her thin face...

3) Open this paragraph with another detail of description about the place or a change in the weather. Something is going wrong and your character has a problem – describe it:

It began to rain. Huge raindrops splashed against Bill's skin and left dark craters in the soft sand.

"Mum must have gone back to the hotel, come on let's go."

Bill turned away and started to walk towards the sand dunes. The wind flung stinging sand at his shins and he lowered his face against the rain.

"Wait! Billy don't go!" Gina shouted, "I'm coming with you." She started to run and screamed as a loud crash of thunder boomed overhead...

4) Start this paragraph with an adverb – e.g. Suddenly, Cautiously, Hurriedly, Slowly etc. Shut your eyes and imagine what your characters might hear, see, smell, etc. Make it exciting:

Reluctantly, Bill turned to wait for his sister. As he reached for her hand an explosion of forked lightning ripped through the blackening sky. He grabbed Gina by the wrist and they ran... 5) Solve the problem, refer back to the weather and/or a detail of the place as described in your opening paragraph: Just half an hour before it had been sunny and calm and several happy families had been playing on the sand. Now a storm was raging around them and everyone else had gone. Bill glanced up at the steep sand dune that stood between them and the hotel and he started to climb, pulling Gina with him.

It's up to you to decide how this story ends...or maybe it's the opening chapter of something bigger.