

Two Truths and a Lie

ENGL 123: Intro to Fiction

"I have tricks in my pocket—I have things up my sleeve—but I am the opposite of the stage magician. He gives you illusion that has the appearance of truth. I give you truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion."

—Tennessee Williams, *The Glass Menagerie*, Act I, Scene 1

"The primary duty of literature is to tell us the truth about ourselves by telling us lies about people who never existed."

—Stephen King

Fiction is traditionally defined as “not true,” but I believe this definition is reductive and problematic. Sometimes fiction is the best medium for expressing truth; some fictions are more “truthful” than the texts we traditionally classify as “nonfiction.”

In the game “Two Truths and a Lie,” one person makes three statements about themselves, two of which are true and one of which is a lie, a fiction, not true. Everyone else has to try to guess, either individually or collectively, which one is the “lie.” Sometimes, a statement will stand out as unlikely, thus indicating the two “truths”; at other times, two other statements may stand out as highly likely, thus seeming to reveal the “lie.” It’s a fun, simple ice-breaker game that can be used to get people more comfortable with each other and generate discussions.

The game works by generating stories, one of the best ways to truly get to know other people. And that’s the value this game has for our class. The stories we tell—and the way in which we tell them—reveal a great deal about ourselves. They are opportunities to share the events and experiences that comprise our lives, but even the “lies” or “fictions” we tell can reveal truths about ourselves. Meanwhile, your reaction to someone else’s stories, your decision regarding which statements you believe and disbelieve, can also reveal truths about yourself and your expectations, preconceptions, or assumptions regarding that other individual.

For each class session throughout this term, I will assign one student to lead a round of “Two Truths and a Lie.” For the day on which you’re assigned, you need to go to the forum for the game and post three statements about yourself, two of which are true and one of which is not true (Sakai>Forums>Two Truths and a Lie). This should be completed prior to the start of class that day. Your timely submission of these statements will be considered part of your grade for your daily posts for that day. At the beginning of that class session, we will take a moment to examine your three statements and try to discover the fiction you’ve presented. Again, fiction reveals truth. We may learn more about you and each other through the lies you tell than the true statements you make.

Also, this will be a fun way to start class each day and to get to know each other better as the semester progresses. (I expect this game will generate a desire for more questions, explanations, and stories, but please save that for after class time.)