

The Story Starter **Worksheet** Pack

Seven pages to get a story out of your head and onto the paper, from James Hannon, author of The Ballinacrack Chronicles.

WHAT IS INSIDE

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|------------------|---|
| 1. Character | Who is this story about, and what do they want? |
| 2. Setting | Where are we, and why does it matter? |
| 3. Worldbuilding | One big rule, and everything it changes. |
| 4. Plot | Want, problem, disaster, decision, ending. |
| 5. Dialogue | How to make people sound like people. |
| 6. Action | Making sure something actually happens. |
| 7. Now write it | All of it, on one page, no excuses. |

For teachers, parents and anybody in charge of the printer.

Each sheet works on its own, so you can use one as a ten minute warm up, or work through all seven as a short story unit. They print perfectly well in black and white. Every sheet ends with three story starters, so nobody is ever stuck staring at a blank page saying they have no ideas. They always have ideas. They just want you to suffer a little first.

Character

Name _____ Class _____ Date _____

A character is not a list of what somebody looks like. A character becomes real when we know **what they want** and **what is stopping them getting it**.

1 BUILD YOUR PERSON

Name and age

What they are secretly afraid of

What they want more than anything

What is in their way

2 THE ONE WEIRD DETAIL

One small, specific, slightly odd thing about them. Not "she is kind". Something a camera could see. She keeps every receipt. He names the crows.

James says: In my first book, Barry's whole problem is that everybody in his class wants to be a hero and Barry just wants to be normal. One want, one thing in the way, and suddenly there is a book. Your character does not need superpowers. They need a problem.

3 SHOW IT, DO NOT SAY IT

Boring: Sam was very nervous. Prove it instead, without using the word nervous.

THREE STORY STARTERS

- Somebody who is famous in their town for one very stupid reason.
- Somebody who is brilliant at something completely useless.
- Somebody who has been pretending to be brave since September.

Setting

Name _____ Class _____ Date _____

Setting is not a postcard. You need **a few sharp details** and **one thing that feels slightly wrong**, because that is what makes a reader lean in.

1 PICK YOUR PLACE

Be specific. Not "a town". A chipper at half nine on a wet Tuesday.

2 THREE SENSES, THREE DETAILS

I CAN SEE	I CAN HEAR	I CAN SMELL

3 THE THING THAT IS WRONG

One detail that should not be there. A door that was locked yesterday. A field that is humming.

James says: I set the Ballinacrack books in the Irish midlands because I know it inside out, and a monster in a car park you recognise is great fun. Use your own place, or invent one from nothing. Both work. The only rule is that the details have to feel real.

4 DESCRIBE THE PLACE IN YOUR OWN WORDS

THREE STORY STARTERS

- Your school at three in the morning.
- A place you know well, but one thing has changed and nobody else has noticed.
- The last shop on earth that still sells something nobody wants.

Worldbuilding

Name _____

Class _____

Date _____

Good worldbuilding is not a hundred pages of maps and made up names. It is **one big rule**, and then being honest about everything that rule would change.

1 YOUR ONE BIG RULE

In my world, ...

2 SO WHAT CHANGES?

If your rule is true, three other things must also be true. Follow it through.

So schools...	
So jobs...	
So trouble...	

James says: The test of a world is not "is it cool". It is "what would get you in trouble here". Rules and punishments tell a reader more about a world than any map ever will.

3 THE RULE NOBODY BREAKS

Write the one rule everybody obeys, and what happens to the person who does not.

THREE STORY STARTERS

- Every child gets one wish at age eleven, announced in front of the whole school.
- Lying is impossible here, and it has ruined absolutely everything.
- The internet went down in 2031 and never came back.

Plot

Name _____ Class _____ Date _____

Somebody **wants** something. Something gets **in the way**. It gets **worse**. They have to **choose**. Things are **different** at the end. That is the whole job.

1 THE PLAN

1. WANTS	2. IN THE WAY	3. IT GETS WORSE
4. THE CHOICE	5. WHAT IS DIFFERENT NOW	WHO ELSE CARES?

2 MAKE IT WORSE, THREE TIMES

Bad	
Worse	
Oh no	

3 WRITE THE MOMENT IT ALL GOES WRONG

James says: Here is the trap I fall into myself. Characters walking places, opening doors, getting into cars, none of it changing anything. That is not plot, it is just a list of sentences. If you can delete a bit and the story still makes sense, it should not be there.

THREE STORY STARTERS

- Somebody wins a competition they cheated in, and the prize is worse than getting caught.
- Twenty four hours to put something back before anybody notices it is gone.
- Two best friends want the exact same thing, and only one can have it.

Dialogue

Name _____ Class _____ Date _____

Real people do not swap information politely. They interrupt, dodge the question and say the wrong thing. Characters talk because they **want something from the other person**.

Wrong: "Where were you" Asked Dad angrily.

Right: "Where were you?" Dad asked. New speaker, new line. Punctuation inside the speech marks. Said is not boring, it is invisible, which is the point.

1 DO NOT ANSWER THE QUESTION

Somebody asks your character a question. Your character answers a completely different one.

2 SAME WORDS, DIFFERENT PERSON

Write "I am fine." said by somebody who is fine, somebody who is absolutely not, and somebody lying badly. Add what they are doing while they say it.

3 NOW WRITE THE ARGUMENT

Two characters, one thing they both want. No describing, just talking.

James says: Read your dialogue out loud. If you would never say it to an actual human being, your character will not say it either. If you feel a bit stupid doing this, good. That is the sound of it working.

THREE STORY STARTERS

- Two characters argue about something small because neither will mention the big thing.
- Explaining something impossible to somebody who does not believe a word of it.
- Somebody is trying to say sorry and keeps getting it wrong.

Action

Name _____ Class _____ Date _____

Action is not people moving around. Action is **something going wrong that matters**. A chase where nothing is lost is just running.

1 WHAT IS AT STAKE?

If they win, they get

If they lose, they lose

2 SHORT SENTENCES. FAST BEATS.

"Ellie, who was becoming increasingly worried about the situation, began to move quite quickly in the direction of the door."
Rewrite it so it moves.

3 WRITE THE SCENE

Chasing, or being chased. By line four something goes wrong. By the end they have lost something they needed.

THREE STORY STARTERS

- Something is chasing your character and it is not even slightly out of breath.
- Thirty seconds and two very bad options.
- The rescue goes perfectly until the very last step.

A character, a place, a rule, a plot, some talking and something going wrong. That is a story. Fill in the grid, then start. Do not plan it to death.

MY CHARACTER, AND WHAT THEY WANT	WHERE IT HAPPENS
WHAT GOES WRONG	WHAT THEY LOSE

Start in the middle of something. No weather reports. No waking up. Keep going on the back of the sheet.

[illegible]

- Read it out loud to somebody. Watch where they laugh, and where they go quiet.
- Ask your teacher about a school visit. I do workshops all over the midlands and beyond.
- More free printables, colouring pages and drawing guides at ballinacrack.com.
- Say hello at [@JayeHanzo](#) on TikTok, Instagram and YouTube.