

The Magical Writer

Session 4 — Integrating Our Inner Critic

“That character is all wrong. No one would ever talk like that. What a stupid plot twist. That sentence is completely clumsy, not to mention pretentious. In fact, this entire book sucks big time!”

Sound familiar? Let’s welcome our Inner Critic. That part of ourselves that knows us so well, and exploits every insecurity to make sure we don’t start believing that we can actually write (or sing or paint...).

Most of us don’t need to invoke our Inner Critics. They tend to hang around all the time — especially when we’re trying to create.

Maybe we’ve tried different strategies for avoiding or outwitting them — forced typing sessions, caffeine and other mind-altering substances, refusing to acknowledge our own feelings — and when all else fails, berating ourselves for paying attention to the Inner Critic in the first place.

Engaging the Shadow

When we do magical shadow work, our aim is not to avoid or suppress the shadow energy, which usually carries great gifts as well as daunting challenges, but to engage and integrate the shadow energy.

Shadow energy is not necessarily negative. One of my great shadows is flamboyance, being loud, and taking up space. I find it excruciating. For someone else, it might be unacknowledged anger or frustration trying to burst out.

As writers, we are blessed with a special kind of shadow — the Inner Critic — that nagging voice that monitors every word we write.

Like much shadow energy, the Inner Critic is actually trying to help us. It desperately wants us to make a good impression in the world and often has an acutely developed fear of being embarrassed by anything less than perfection.

Integrating Our Inner Critic

As with any shadow energy, our goal as artists is not to avoid or banish our Inner Critic, which after all is a part of us. Our task is to integrate the shadow in a way that allows us to learn, change, and be strengthened by the experience.

As we integrate this critical energy, we can learn to tap its insights without being debilitated by the nattering. Ironically, the more effectively we listen to its feedback, the less the Inner Critic will need to spew at us.

We may even find that the Inner Critic can learn to support our writing — if only in order to have more material to criticize later.

See page 2 for exercises

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A Writing Intensive
in the Reclaiming Tradition

With George Franklin and Guest Teachers

Want to write a novel, memoir, or other narrative? Want to jump-start your writing, regardless of the style? Let Reclaiming magic help.

We'll look at the craft of writing and the emotional blocks that keep us from reaching our full artistic potential.

We'll meet in sacred space, share writing and support over the web, and gain understanding and skill from working with others. Writing can be an isolating practice - we'll use magic to weave a web of support and encouragement.

With magical tools such as circle-casting, ancestor invocations, trances, and spellwork, we'll free our expressive gifts and strengthen our belief in ourselves as artists.

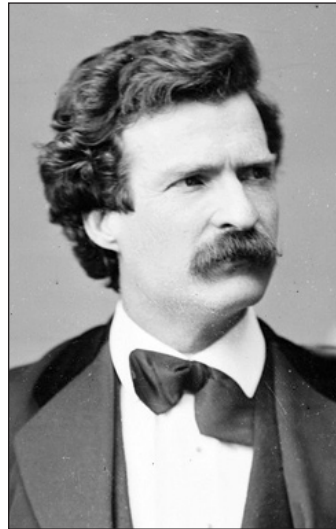
We will also work on writing that expresses our unique voice, creating plot-structures, developing characters, and other aspects of the writers' craft. Each class includes directed writing time.

Class is suitable for those working on writing projects who want a supportive circle and new inspiration, and those looking to begin the process. Although you'll determine your own work-pace, be prepared to dedicate time to your writing, and to write for at least ten minutes each day.

For more information, contact George, <george@directaction.org>

George Franklin is a Reclaiming teacher and co-editor of Reclaiming Quarterly. He has written several novels and published one (visit directaction.org), and helped edit work by writers such as Cynthia Lamb, T. Thorn Coyle, and Starhawk. Magic is a key part of his creative process.

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Magical Writing Ancestor — Mark Twain, later 1800s

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Exercises — Session 4

Listening Exercises

Listening to Our Inner Critic

Ideally, I want to encounter my Inner Critic on its own turf, where the voice is strong and insistent.

I could try trancing and listening, but I probably wouldn't find it in peak form.

To listen to my shadow, I may need to venture into unfriendly territory.

What if I sit down with pen in hand and really try to write something great — all the while taking note of the voices that crop up?

It's amazing how easily they arise!

Maybe I can speak them into a recorder as I write, or jot them in the margin: "That word choice is wrong. My paragraphs are too short. There's no flow. This isn't going anywhere."

Gather a half-dozen criticisms. Now make yourself trance-comfortable, with no distractions. Turn off your phone. Put on music you like. Make some tea.

Take some breaths to ground yourself. Maybe do a few mirror-affirmations. Then settle back.

Read a criticism, then close your eyes and ask: "Critic, what is it you are worried about? What is your fear for me? What would you like to see different?"

And listen.

What does your Critic want? What are the key fears? What patterns emerge?

At the end, thank your Inner Critic — and listen for possible return thanks. Our Inner Critic wants us to hear and learn, and truly wants to help our writing.

Engaging Our Critic

Talking Back to Our Critic

After you've done some listening, ask your Inner Critic to listen to you for a while. I would invite my Critic to sit at the edge of my circle.

Take a few statements that your Inner Critic likes to repeat. Print them out, so they are not in your handwriting.

Set a timer for two minutes. Read a criticism, then start spewing back — in a journal, on a keyboard, or into a recorder. Spew until the timer goes off.

When it rings, stop and shift your energy for a moment — stand up, go get a drink of water, feed the cat, etc.

Return, read the original criticism and your response. If you recorded your back-talk, jot down a few key words.

Breathe into the words a few times and acknowledge them. Now burn both pieces of paper and scatter the ashes.

Journal for a few minutes about whatever comes up.

Repeat for other criticisms.

Integrating Our Inner Critic

Consider whether you can make any commitments to your Inner Critic. If so, voice them and write them down.

Then make requests of your Critic — when and how input is welcomed. Frame this as positive statements of what you want, not what you don't want — but make the boundaries clear.

Find a way to consecrate your commitments — a ritual, a candle spell, etc.

Writing Exercises

Turn Your Critic Loose

Get a popular magazine or a paperback novel you don't care about. You'll also need a thick red marker.

Cast a circle away from your usual workspace and do this exercise within it. Invite your Inner Critic to join you.

With your Critic by your side and your red marker in hand, critique every aspect of the magazine or book. Be picky. Don't cut them any slack. Your Inner Critic will appreciate your dedication.

By the time you finish, the page(s) should be illegible. If they look funny, stick them on your wall. If they're oppressive, burn or compost them.

Then journal. Ask your Critic what they think as well, and scribe the answers.

Finally, thank your Inner Critic, devoke them, and open your circle. Avoid that space for the rest of the day.

Writing In Spite of It All

Looking in a mirror, repeat this a few times, gazing into your eyes and breathing in between: "It sometimes happens that a writer writes something really awful, and they're still completely okay."

Any laughter? Yawning? Exasperation?

Sit down and write whatever you feel like. If you're stumped, try writing one of these, and see what follows:

"If I set out to write the worst book in all history, it would be about _____."

"If I didn't care what anyone — even myself — thought, I would write _____."