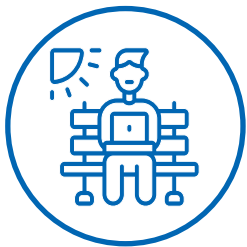


SPOTTING AND HARNESSING IDEAS FROM THE INSPIRATION AROUND YOU

If you've ever run into writer's block—gazing at your computer screen, your mind just as blank as the page staring back at you—or worse, wanting to write but in your mind, there is a dearth of ideas, fear not. Inspiration actually lurks around every corner. You just need to be able to spot it and then harness it.

Not sure how to do that—both the spotting and the harnessing? We have good news for you. Here are ten strategies to help you find the inspiration you need to move forward with your writing. Let's dig in.



1. THE PERKS OF PEOPLE WATCHING

Have you ever found yourself observing strangers in a café, at a mall, or on a park bench? If you have, congratulations! You've just tapped into a goldmine of character inspiration because real-life humans are wonderfully complex. They have quirks, habits (good and bad), mannerisms, speech patterns, ways of walking, talking, and acting, all of which you can mine for your own characters. If you are having trouble creating people, or rounding them out, taking them from flat or static characters to full-fledged three-dimensional folks, sit back, watch others, and take notes.

Remember *Garanimals*, the clothing brand where you mix and match pieces? Do that, only with the behaviors, appearances, and other peculiarities that catch your eye. Combining different traits from various people you observe might just lead you to create a completely original and compelling character for your story.



2. DREAMS: YOUR SUBCONSCIOUS AT WORK

Did you know that Mary Shelley was inspired by a dream to write *Frankenstein*? It's true, and she's not the only one. Franz Kafka, Stephen King, and Charlotte Brontë famously had dreams that ultimately shaped some of their fiction. You see, the subconscious is a powerful thing. It can solve problems, fill in blanks, and take your creativity in new directions, all while you sleep.

Your dreams can be a portal to inspiration. Keep a dream journal on your nightstand, and scribble down the bizarre, surreal, or emotionally charged dreams your subconscious throws at you. The results can serve as the foundation for fantastical settings, unusual plot twists, or unexplored psychological explorations in your characters and writing. Let your subconscious do its job and harness the results.



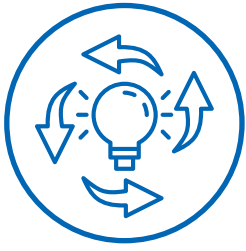
3. THE TRUTH IS STRANGER THAN FICTION

Have you ever encountered a real-life situation that left you thinking, "If that happened in fiction, no one would ever believe it!" Well, truth *can* be stranger, sadder, or more uplifting than fiction. Diving into real-life events, biographies, and news stories can spark inspiration.

One bestselling cozy mystery author was inspired by a news story about a funeral home manager who was under investigation for selling body parts. Her first thought was, *Wow, that's crazy!* Her second was, *Wow, that would be a great mystery plot.* Which is just what happened. That stranger-than-fiction news story inspired the plot for one of her mysteries.

Sometimes, a mere spark from reality can ignite the flames of a remarkable story. Real life can lead to captivating fiction.





4. PROMPT GENERATORS FOR THE KICKSTART

The internet is brimming with writing prompts and idea generators. Websites and apps like Pinterest, Reedsy, Writer's Digest, or even just a simple Google search can provide you with an array of intriguing prompts to kickstart your creativity. Pick one or more that resonate with you, and let your imagination run wild. These prompts can lead you in unexpected directions and can be the catalyst for developing your next story idea.



5. TRAVEL AND EXPLORATION

Travel can be a feast for the senses, and even a short trip to a new place can be a wellspring of creativity. Who knows what brilliance it might inspire? During a period of time when mystery writer Michael Falco was unemployed, for example, he traveled to Positano, Italy. That trip inspired his *Bria Bartolucci Mystery series*. J.K. Rowling has said that the 'birthplace of Harry Potter' was on a train journey she took through the Scottish Highlands.

The takeaway? Immersing yourself in unfamiliar cultures, landscapes, and cuisines can lead you to some wonderfully creative ideas.



6. THE HIDDEN GEMS IN HISTORY

History is an unending source of inspiration and ideas. Dive into a particular era, war, or moment in time that intrigues you. Historical events can be woven into your fictional world to give your story depth and authenticity. Take, for example, the breadth of historical references and details in Ken Follett's *The Pillars of the Earth*, Dan Brown's *The DaVinci Code*, Tatiana De Rosnay's tragic story, *Sarah's Key, Horse*, by Geraldine Brooks, and every historical novel by Kate Quinn.



Christina Baker Kline shares the story of the inspiration behind her award-winning novel, *The Orphan Train*, on her website. A chance reading of an article she discovered while visiting her in-laws in Fargo, North Dakota was the catalyst for the historical novel.

The bottom line is that history is powerful and full of opportunities to take something from the past and mold it into a powerful fictional narrative.



7. THE BEAUTY AND MYSTERY OF THE NATURAL WORLD

Many authors say that when inspiration or creativity is taking a nap, they take a walk. A stroll through the woods, a little star gazing, or listening to the waves crashing on the beach can give you what you need to start an elusive project or continue what you're already working on. Henry David Thoreau's *Walden Pond* is the perfect example of the power of nature and how it can inspire an entire body of work.

Nature has a way of inspiring awe and wonder. Descriptions of landscapes, weather, and the natural world can set the tone and mood for your story. Think of the vivid natural imagery of Middle Earth in *The Lord of the Rings*, by J.R.R. Tolkien (not to mention his wartime experiences and how they impacted his storytelling (see #6, The Hidden Gems in History). Taking time to experience nature can impact your state of mind *and* your writing.



8. BRAINSTORMING WITH OTHERS: COLLABORATION AND CREATIVITY

Sometimes, the best ideas come from bouncing thoughts off others. You are not an island. The process of writing is inherently solitary, but joining a writing group, discussing your projects with friends, or participating in writing workshops, for example, can lead you in new directions or spark entirely new ideas. Engaging with others can provide fresh perspectives, feedback, and collaborative concepts you might not have discovered on your own.



9. ARTISTIC INSPIRATION BEYOND WORDS

Words may be your primary form of creativity, but that doesn't mean other artistic avenues can't be influential. Visual arts, music, and other forms of creative expression can definitely ignite your imagination. Visit a museum, listen to music, or explore other art forms that resonate with you—both as an observer and as a participant. The emotions and stories conveyed in these mediums might just inspire your own creative work. Think about Dan Brown again. The works of Leonardo da Vinci are the basis for *The Da Vinci Code*.



10. YOUR OWN LIFE AS INSPIRATION

It might be surprising to think about but your personal experiences, challenges, and triumphs can also be a wellspring of inspiration. Drawing from your memories, relationships, and personal growth can give you the foundation for new situations, deep conflicts, or realistic depths of emotion in your writing. Brainstorm a list of important moments in your life and see what comes up. Hone in on the significant lessons you've learned. Mine your own life for story ideas and use your own experiences to infuse your characters and stories with real, relatable emotions.

CONCLUSION



In conclusion, inspiration for your next fictional masterpiece is everywhere. It's all about being open to the world around you, observing, reflecting, and allowing your imagination to roam freely. Be ready to spot and harness those

ideas and remember, inspiration can strike when you least expect it, so keep a notebook handy or use the Notes app on your phone to jot down your thoughts and nurture your creativity. ***Your next great story is closer than you think.***

