

Flash fiction

For sale: baby shoes, never worn.

You may have seen this story before, but whether you have or not, these six words that make up the title is said to have started the practice of writing very short stories which is referred to as flash fiction. Whether these six words were written by Ernest Hemingway, Arthur C. Clarke, or *The Spokane Press* does not really matter. It is a first-class example of everything fiction's shortest form can do.

TRAGEDY OF BABY'S DEATH IS REVEALED IN SALE OF CLOTHES

The world is indeed a complication of joys and sorrows, a continuous play made up of tragedy and comedy, and even in every day life, items and experience, small and unusual to us, perhaps, is woven a little story of the heart.

Last Saturday an ad. appeared in a local paper which read: "Baby's hand made trousseau and baby's bed for sale. Never been used." The address was on East Mission street.

This perhaps meant little to the casual reader, yet to the mother who had spent hours and days planning the beautiful things for her tiny baby, it meant a keen sorrow and disappointment.

She had, perhaps, dreamed of the time when her little one should be grown up and could, with a source of pride, look back upon its babyhood days and display the handiwork of its mother in the first baby clothes worn and the first trundle bed it had slept in when it first opened its eyes upon the beauties of the world.

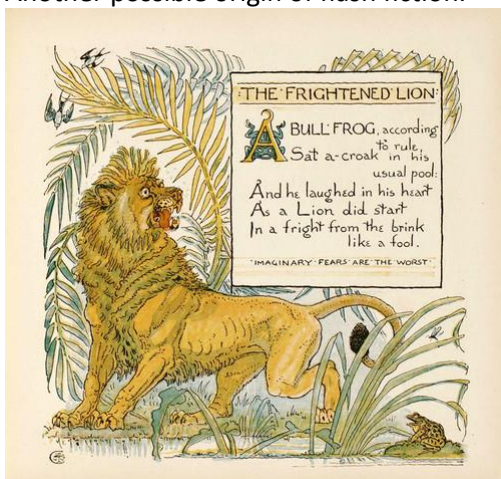
But the hand of fate had been unkind and took from the devoted parents the little one which was destined to be the sunshine and light of their life, and the mother, in a desire to forget her sorrow by parting with anything which reminded her of the little one, advertised the garments at a sacrifice.

What is flash fiction?

Flash fiction is the writing of brief and enclosed stories. Its average word count ranges anywhere from five to 1,500 words, but the consensus is that the maximum tops out at 2,000.

Also called short shorts, nano tales, micro-stories, postcard fiction, or napkin fiction. Flash fiction isn't just a pared-down short story. Its focus isn't necessarily on plot or characters, though it should still have both. Instead, the emphasis is placed on movement: each sentence must peel back a new layer that wasn't visible at first. If a line (or even a word) doesn't progress the story or reveal more about a character, it probably won't belong in this medium.

Another possible origin of flash fiction.



(source: Encore Editions)

With roots in folklore and collections like Grimm's Fairy Tales and Aesop's Fables, very short stories have been around for centuries. They fell out of fashion for a while, but recently came back again and are used frequently as competitions and practice exercises for honing your writing skills.

1. **Flash fiction:** Max 1500 words.
2. **Sudden fiction:** Max 750 words.
3. **Drabble**, or microfiction: Max 100 words.
4. **Dribble**, or minisaga: Max 50 words.
5. **Twitterature:** Max 280 characters.
6. **Six-word story:** Any story with a single-digit word count is a category unto itself.

Project 7 is to have a go at a 'Drabble' (100 words exactly including title) or a 'Dribble' (50 words exactly including title)