



COMING OF AGE AWARD

No matter how old we become, there is something inherently relatable about coming of age tales. From classroom assignments to broken hearts, and all the ups and downs between, these stories hold a timeless place in readers' hearts.

- Submissions must be **between 1,000 and 15,000 words**
- Intended audience is **teens and adults** (anyone 10 and older) who read below their age or grade level
- Stories should be **character-centric** and focus on a teenaged main character
- Use familiar **vocabulary** and straightforward sentences. Avoid long, unbroken paragraphs or chapters

TIPS AND INSPIRATION

Know your character.

Your audience does not necessarily need to know every aspect of your character, but knowing them yourself will help you add texture and dimension to your writing. It can also help to identify character wants and what obstacles stand in the way of those wants, thereby defining the conflict of your story. Consider the following.

Who is my character?

- **Traits:** This is your character's unique mixture of positive, negative, and neutral traits, habits, likes, dislikes, talents, hobbies, quirks, and mannerisms.
- **Values:** Your character's individual point of view, beliefs, attitudes, values, and passions.
- **Flaws:** Your character's negative traits, fears, resentments, emotional issues, etc. (These are important not only because they are distinctly human, but because they provide a basis for readers to sympathize/empathize with your character, which builds understanding and relatability.)

What does my character want and need?

- Your main character should have **at least one clearly defined goal** (or several goals with one being the dominant among them). This desire will lay the foundation of the story, while any obstacles that get in the way of the goal will lead to conflict (which keeps a story moving and keeps readers invested).
 - Why does your character want ___? The motivation behind a character's actions can be a great way for readers to relate. Also, if a character's wants are different from a character's needs, a story can be even more compelling and relatable because we have all been in a position where what we want to do is different from what we feel we *have* to do.
 - What are the stakes if my character doesn't get what he/she wants/needs? (Tension is important to keep a reader invested and knowing what is on the line is a perfect way to build it.)
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WRITING PROMPTS/THEMES

THEME: Firsts

- "Firsts" are a major aspect of teen life: first kiss, first date, first car, first job, first relationships. The high emotional quality of firsts also sets high stakes and high emotion, making for a deeper connection between the character and your reader.

THEME: Teenager/parent relationships

- Write a story in which a teen discovers something about his/her parent(s). This could be a secret from their past, a health issue, an upcoming change (divorce, relocation, major career change), etc. Don't be afraid to play with different genres, for example: the parents' major secret could be that they are paranormal creatures.

THEME: Life-changing moments

- Write about plans going awry: not getting into your character's college, losing a job, getting lost in an airport and missing a flight, etc. How does your character respond to these challenges?
- Write about moving to a new place and starting a new school/job. What are the challenges? How does your character face them?
- Write about a character who is researching another culture for his/her school project. What does he/she learn? What did he/she know previously? How did his/her view change and develop?

THEME: Discovering purpose

- Write about a lightbulb experience in which your teenaged main character realizes what he/she wants to do for the rest of their life.

THEME: Acceptance

- Write a story about a coming-of-age ritual gone wrong and a character having to learn to accept who they are/aren't meant to be.
- Write about a character's eyes being opened to flaws in something he/she believed to be flawless: a parent, teacher, a system (school, healthcare,) etc. Does he/she work to change that flaw, or accept it?

THEME: Choice

- A teenager who has to choose between two very different schools.
- It's difficult to choose between doing what is right and doing what is easy. Write about a teenager experiencing a tough choice. Ex.) Do they stand up to bullying on behalf of a classmate and risk becoming the victim themselves?

Questions? Send us a note: support@storyshares.org

