



# Samantha M Clark

## Igniting a Story Spark: Idea Generating Exercises

One of the questions I get asked the most is how I get ideas. I love answering this question, because before I started writing my own stories, I wondered the same thing. I would read books and think I couldn't possibly come up with an idea that's so fun or interesting. But the amazing thing is, once I figured out how to find ideas, more and more started to pop into my brain. How did I go from no ideas to lots? I'll tell you.

But first, I want to share with you the biggest secret about getting story ideas: It's ok to start small. You don't have to know the entire story, just the smallest spark of an idea. Then when you explore it, you can slowly come up with characters, situations, plot turns, a whole story. All from the spark.

And, not all my ideas would turn into a story, and that's ok too. Sometimes, one idea might spark a better one.

### BE CURIOUS

What-if questions help us get used to asking questions and make us practice being curious, which leads to ideas.

#### EXERCISE: WHAT-IF RODEO

Show your students a picture (limitations are good when we're practicing). Have them write what-if questions about the picture. Make it a game: Time your students to see who can come up with the most what-if questions in, say, 5 minutes. You can expand the game by having your students choose one of their questions and do another round digging deeper. Or, have your students choose one and start asking more questions about it: Who are they? What are they doing? Where are they? When is it? Why are they doing it? How? Etc.

### RESEARCH YOUR PASSIONS

What fascinates us makes us curious and keeps us interested as we research. Find stories in what keeps you up at night. NOTE: It doesn't have to make sense. Stories can be silly and fun.

#### EXERCISE: DOWN THE PASSION RABBIT HOLE

Have your students make a list of 20 things that they love. Time them, if you'd like, but tell them not to think too hard about it. Just write quickly. Next they'll choose one and make a list of questions, things they'd like to know. Work with them on researching one of more of those questions, then have them choose what interests them the most and write what-if questions about it. These can be story sparks.

## GO FOR A WONDER

Inspiration often comes when we get out of the places we know into places we can explore, even if it's just a local park, trail or the school cafeteria. The challenge is to block out thoughts from other things and open our minds to what's around us. To do this, try this exercise:

### EXERCISE: THE WONDER WANDER

Take your students for a walk outside, in the hallway, or for a tour of your school cafeteria. Have them focus on what they're experiencing by guiding them with questions. Even better, have them bring a notebook and write and/or draw what they see, hear, smell and touch. Later, have them write a list of what-if questions or questions like, Who could live in a place like this? Why do they live here? What kinds of things could happen in a place like this? These questions can lead to story sparks.

## MINE YOUR PAST

Our backstory can help feed our characters' backstories, and the places we've been can inspire the places we write about. Pull them out with this exercise:

### EXERCISE: MEMORY GAME

Have your students write about a good memory. Maybe it was a birthday party they enjoyed, or a time with their friends, family or pet. Next, have them think of things they could change in the story. Perhaps the location (party on top of the Eiffel Tower), or people (a dinosaur could crash the party), or time (it's in the future with flying cars), or what happened (all the birthday presents were stolen).

## MIX AND MATCH AND TURN IT ALL AROUND

Lots of authors, including myself, are inspired by other stories and create brand new stories by twisting and re-mixing other tales, like fairy tale re-imaginings.

### EXERCISE: STORY BLENDER

Have your students draw a line down the center of a piece of paper, then list their favorite characters on one side and favorite places on the other, fictional and/or real. Next have them randomly draw lines to connect them. Finally, get them to choose a pair and write what-if questions. Make this the start of a story.

For more resources, go to [SamanthaMClark.com/Resources](https://SamanthaMClark.com/Resources)