



Teen Writer! What if...?

Every writer has faced a blank white page and grappled with writer's block. In this video, take a trek with award-winning writer Gina Catanzarite, who reveals the most powerful creative writing prompt there is: Asking *What if...?* Get those creative juices flowing and fill your pages with one-of-a-kind storylines and unique plot twists once you learn how to use this powerful prompt!

TRANSCRIPT

Gina Catanzarite;

Ever since the first storyteller put ink to paper, writers have battled occasional bouts of writer's *block*. Creativity stalls, and the story ideas just don't flow.

But there *is* one sure-fire way to get *over* writer's block. In fact, I think it's the most powerful tool in any writer's bag of tricks! The next time writer's block strikes *you*, ask the question. . . "what if. . .?"

Just take an *ordinary* situation... ask "what if..." and then brainstorm more *extraordinary* possibilities.

What if . . . that librarian had the power to transport people into the stories of the books they checked out?

What if . . . Your new teammate is really a *spy* from a rival school?

Popular fiction and films are full of *what-if* scenarios.

What if . . . A lonely little boy realized he was a wizard?

What if . . . A misfit teen met her soulmate. . .then discovered he was a vampire?

What if . . . You woke up tomorrow and realized you'd *switched bodies* with your parent?

Once you come up with your "what if..." scenario, *keep asking questions!*
Why did that happen?

Who does it affect?

What happens next?

Answer *those* questions, and you have yourself an *outline* for a story! This is one of my *favorite* places to ask “what if...”?

It’s Schenley Bridge in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and I bring my creative writing students here all the time to try this “what if...” exercise.

Teen Writer Camper reads inscription on lock:

“You were exactly what I needed. And suddenly we were in love. #6WordStory.”

Gina Catanzarite

The locks were inspired by the famous *love locks bridge* in Paris, France.

Some locks represent love. . . others mark special occasions... but they *all* symbolize *unbreakable promises* people made.

An *unbreakable promise* is also called a **vow**.

Just think of all of the epic moments in fiction when characters make *vows*: Vows of revenge, vows to overcome hardship, vows of love.

Every single lock here could be the starting point for a “what if...” storyline.

But *what if...* I asked *you* to make a vow. . . to yourself. An unbreakable promise – *to yourself* - of something *you will do* in your lifetime. What would that vow be . . . and how would your life change if you started taking actions *right now* to make *your vow to yourself* come true?

Try another one. *What if...* you found a message in a bottle? What does that message say? Who wrote it? *What if...* That message *asked you to do something*? What would that “something” be. . . and what would happen if you actually did do it?

Here’s one more: *What if* someone *you never expected to see again in your lifetime* showed up at your door? *Who* is that person? *What* do they want. . . and how do *you* respond?

And check out *this* art installation. A face emerges from the dirt. . . with a *tree* growing out of its mouth.

What if . . . you could understand the “language” of that tree? What is it saying to you? Try writing a scene filled with that dialogue.

I also ask my teen writers to try the “*what if*” exercise with *statues*.

This one sits on top of Mount Washington, overlooking Pittsburgh. The statue's title is "Point of View" and it depicts General George Washington and Goyasuta, leader of the Seneca tribe. The two men met in October of 1770, when Washington was here scouting land for a settlement.

But... *what if* these characters came to life *right now*? What would these two historical figures have to say *about our modern world*?

That's a good "what if..." question to ask about any statue! Think of some of the world's best-known statues and monuments.

If they came to life, what would these statues say about the world today?

(MUSIC UP FULL BRIEFLY)

Everyday people and places *could* be transformed into surprisingly *perfect* plots!

So the next time writer's block has *you* stumped, explore *your* world for inspiration. All it takes is a little imagination, and asking the question *what if* . . . ?

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