

Michael Tougias
Writing Fiction & The Story of Claws
Educational Guide, Grades 3-12



About the Performance

Life on Shipwreck Island is a bore for Easterly Wind and her friends Brian and Kristin until something strange happens just before the island's annual Summer Celebration Dinner. Michael Tougias mixes an environmental story with danger and adventure that will have readers on the edge of their seats. In his slide program, Tougias discusses the story using slides and explains the keys to writing fiction, as well as his process writing for young adults.



About the Artist

Michael Tougias, a *New York Times* Bestselling Author, is a lecturer and award-winning author/co-author of 24 books. His book *Fatal Forecast: An Incredible Tale of Disaster and Survival at Sea* was praised by the *Los Angeles Times* as “a breathtaking book – Tougias spins a marvelous and terrifying yarn.” He also co-authored the bestseller, *The Finest Hours: The True Story of the Coast Guard's Most Daring Rescue*, now a major motion picture from Walt Disney Pictures. On a lighter note, Tougias chronicled his misadventures at his remote cabin in Vermont in his award-winning book, *There's A Porcupine In My Outhouse: Misadventures of a Mountain Man Wanna-be*. This book won the Independent Publishers Association Award for the “The Best Nature Book of the Year.” Tougias uses humor, candor and edge-of-your-seat storytelling to inspire students to make sound decisions and to excel in their writing projects.

Program Learning Goals

1. To explore the characters, mystery, and plot of Michael Tougias's book *Claws*.
2. To experience the art of storytelling.
3. To empower students to create and tell their stories.

Essential Questions

1. What elements make up a story?
2. What makes storytelling engaging and exciting?
3. How can we use our distinct voices to tell stories?

Vocabulary

- **Storytelling:** the art of telling a story about real or imagined events using gestures and words to bring the events and characters of the story to life in the minds of those listening
- **Storyteller:** a person who tells or writes stories
- **Author:** a person who writes a story, novel, poem, or other written work
- **Fiction:** a story that is created from the imagination
- **Non-fiction:** a piece of writing that consists of facts and information about actual events or topics

Key Facts and Context for Students

About *Claws*

A lobsterman goes missing while fishing off the island, and there are signs of foul play. Then, just a day later, a local sailor's boat is found adrift, minus the missing sailor. Three children become obsessed with the mystery, and begin an investigation that leads them down a path of adventure. While none of the islanders know what happened to the missing fisherman, the reader does. He was snatched out of his boat by the claws of a giant seven-foot-long lobster!



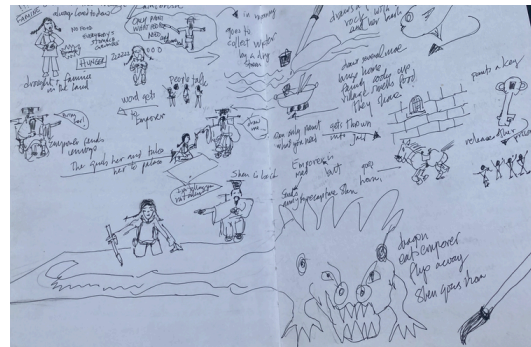
Questions for the Writing Process

Every author's writing process is unique, yet all storytellers seek to answer the same questions in their stories:

- Who are the characters?
- Where and when do they live?
- What do they do?
- Why?

Story Maps

Many authors use story maps to brainstorm their stories. Story maps can be a combination of pictures and text to layout the characters and plot before writing a first draft of the story. Students can make story maps as a learning tool, by breaking down a story into the most important events and putting them in order.



Pre-Performance Discussion Questions

- What do you know about creating and telling stories? What would you like to know? How could you find out more?
- What are some of your favorite stories? What happens in these stories? What do these stories teach you?
- Who tells stories in your family? What are those stories about? Do you use gestures or different voices to make a story funny or scary or sad?

Pre-Performance Activity: Mapping Stories

Learning Goal:

To understand the elements (characters, setting, problem, conclusion, and moral) of stories.

Materials:

A picture book (for younger grades) or short story (for older grades), “Story Map” worksheet (see page 4), coloring supplies

Directions:

1. Read a picture book or short story with the class.
2. Discuss the story. Who were the main characters? Where did the story take place? What was the conflict? How did the story end?
3. Have students complete the “Story Map” worksheet for this story. Include the characters, the setting, the activities that occur, etc. This can be done in words and/or pictures.
4. Share the story maps with the class. Discuss the similarities and differences between how students represented the story.

Extension:

Use the “Story Map” worksheet to outline the plot of an original story.



Name: _____

Book Title: _____

STORY MAP

Directions: Draw and/or describe the elements of the story in each box.

Setting:

Main Characters:

Plot:

1

2

3

4

5

6

Post-Performance Discussion Questions

- What was your favorite part of *Claws*? Why?
- What did you learn about Michael Tougias and his approach to creative writing?
- How did Michael Tougias change the way you think about creative writing?

Post-Performance Activity: Exploring Creative Writing

Learning Goal:

- To explore the plot and characters in *Claws*.
- To expand creative writing skills.

Materials:

Art/coloring supplies



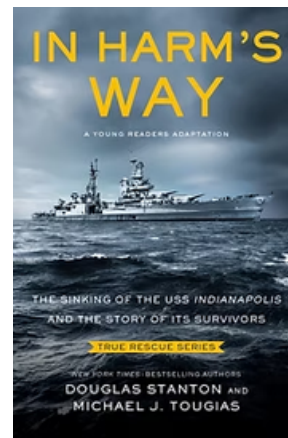
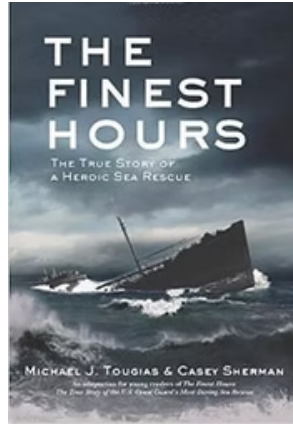
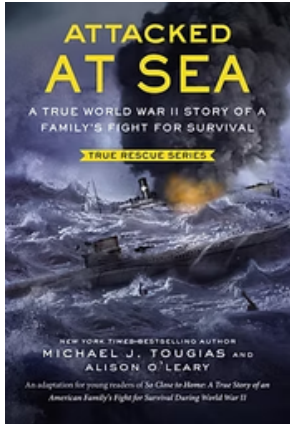
Directions:

1. Discuss *Claws*. Who were the main characters? What was the mystery? What were the challenges in solving it? How was it resolved?
2. Discuss Michael Tougias's approach to creative writing. How did he make the story come to life? What were his suggestions for writing compelling stories?
3. Breakdown the characters in *Claws*. Identify the personalities and roles of each character. Write down all of the important information discussed about the characters.
4. Brainstorm other possible outcomes of *Claws*. How would the story change if the characters and/or plot events were different?
5. Divide the class into small groups. Assign each group one of the alternative outcomes that were brainstormed as a class. Ask the groups to work together to determine how the possible outcomes would change the story.
6. Have each group create a presentation in the style of Michael Tougias's performance to enhance the storytelling of their alternative outcome. Incorporate photos, art, and/or music to bring the story to life.
7. Share and discuss the presentations with the class. How does changing small details in a story lead to an entirely new storyline?

Extension:

Outline the plot of a original short story with atleast three different endings. What changes in characters or events are needed to create these different outcomes? How do the different outcomes compare? Is one stronger than the others? Why?

More Michael Tougas Books for Students



Further Resources

- [Michael Tougias Website](#)
- [Scholastic Publishing: "Websites Where Kids Can Create Books"](#)
- Bauer, Caroline Feller: *Read for the Fun of It: Active Programming with Books for Children*, H.H. Wilson Company (1992)
- Gregory, Cynde: *Childmade: Awakening Children to Creative Writing*, Station Hill Press (2010)
- Sanders, Joshunda: *I Can Write the World*, Six Foot Press (2019)
- Trelease, Jim: *Read-Aloud Handbook: Eighth Edition*, Penguin Books (2019)



Curricular Connections

Arts Standards: Theatre

Creating

- Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work. (T.Cr.01)
- Organize and develop artistic ideas and work. (T.Cr.02)

Responding

- Perceive and analyze artistic work. (T.R.07)
- Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work. (T.R.08)
- Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work. (T.R.09)

Connecting

- Synthesize and relate knowledge and personal experiences to make art. (T.Co.10)
- Relate artistic ideas and works to societal, cultural and historical contexts to deepen understanding. (T.Co.11)

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Curricular Connections, continued

English Language Arts and Literacy Anchor Standards

Reading

- Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas. (R.PK-12.2)
- Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone. (R.PK-12.4)

Writing

- Write narratives to develop experiences or events using effective literary techniques, well-chosen details, and well-structured sequences. (W.PK-12.3)

Speaking and Listening

- Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally. (SL.PK-12.2)
- Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric. (SL.PK-12.3)

Language

- Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening. (L.PK-12.3)
- Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships and nuances in word meanings. (L.PK-12.5)

