

Narrative Shifts

# To Build a World

*Session 4 Resource Packet*

SEVENTH WAVE

## Session 4: To Build a World

### Overview:

This session places residents inside the soft architecture of imagination, looking at the ways that creators across genres build, rebuild, and unbuild worlds. What is the relationship between world-building and wound-building? Are new worlds built around old wounds? Or just because of them? When and how do we build anew? This session will look at built worlds, real and imagined, to examine the limits and the possibilities of our imagination.

### Before Session:

No matter what genre or form you write in, every story you tell creates a world for others to experience. However fleeting or full, old or new, alternate or realistic, world-building is at the heart of every story. In this session, we're particularly focused on the groundwork of world-building: how quickly does a world take shape on the page? How do we build a better world, even if the one we're writing is broken?

**Recommended prompt:** Before our session together, go to your bookshelf and find one or some books that you feel do world-building particularly well. A book that built an entire world within the first few pages. A poem that changed the way you see the world. A story that you devoured or one that devoured you. Share a few sentences about that book, poem, or story in your Collective Journal. How did the writer create it so quickly? What tools, language, or imagery did they use? How much of the world did they build, and how much of it did your imagination have to fill in?

**Recommended exploration:** We'll be referencing "[hint fiction](#)" in this session, which are stories written in less than 25 words. This sub-genre started like six-word memoirs did — as an internet craze — and Robert Smartwood, who created this form-spell, turned the responses he received into an anthology. Like all good flash writing, these very short stories build worlds quickly and incompletely. How and why do they hook us? During this session, we'll talk about four key aspects to crafting a compelling story.

## During Session:

Below are the activities we have planned for our fourth session:

- **First Pages.** The best, and most complex, worlds are built around simple ideas. Referencing our first pages activity above and select mentor texts, we'll analyze the different tools that different forms use and wield to build their worlds.
- **Six-Word Memoirs.** To think about the craft of world-building, we'll be breaking stories down into their smallest essences to understand the power of what's left unsaid, what's left emotionally ajar, and what hooks us in.
- **Language Maps.** We love a good list, especially when it frees us up from the confines of narrative. In this freewriting prompt, we'll be creating alphabetical worlds — a language map of sorts — about your work.

## After Session:

These are continuing resources created in collaboration with Emilie Menzel, a poet and librarian who builds creative libraries for individuals, nonprofits, and organizations (pictures are not in order, but just a sample of the authors listed).



## 1. How to Build a World:

- [Tone, Sofia Samatar and Kate Zambreno \(Book\)](#). This study treats a variety of questions: How is tone filtered through translation? Can a text hold the feelings that pass between humans and animals? What can attention to literary tone reveal about shared spaces such as factories, universities, and streets and the clashes and connections that happen there? Searching and conversational, *Tone* seeks immersion in literary affect to convey the experience of reading — and living — together.
- [Poets on Place: Interviews and Tales From the Road, W. T. Pfefferle \(Book\)](#). "Out to see America and satisfy his travel bug, W. T. Pfefferle resigned from his position as director of the writing program at Johns Hopkins University and hit the road to interview sixty-two poets about the significance of place in their work. The lively conversations that resulted may surprise with the potential meanings of a seemingly simple concept. This gathering of voices and ideas is illustrated with photo and word portraits from the road and represented with suitable poems."

## 2. Resources to Return To:

- [Imaginary Worlds, Eric Molinsky \(Podcast\)](#). Interviews "with comic book artists, game designers, novelists, screenwriters, filmmakers, and fans about how they craft their worlds, why we suspend our disbelief, and what happens if the spell is broken."
- [Ecotone, University of North Carolina Wilmington \(Literary Journal\)](#). "An ecotone is a transition zone between two adjacent ecological communities, containing the characteristic species of each. It is therefore a place of danger or opportunity, a testing ground. The magazine explores the ecotones between landscapes, literary genres, scientific and artistic disciplines, identities, and modes of thought."

### 3. Examples of Effectively Building a World:

- [Dear Memphis, Rachel Edelman](#) (Book). Offering a direct address to the city where the poet grew up, this collection explores the displacement and belonging of a Jewish family in Memphis, Tennessee, alongside their histories of community and environment. Through letters, visual art, city documents, and dialogue, *Dear Memphis* excavates ancestry, inheritance, and the ecological possibility of imagining a future.
- [The Marrow Thieves, Cherie Dimaline](#) (Book). "Just when you think you have nothing left to lose, they come for your dreams. Humanity has nearly destroyed its world through global warming, but now an even greater evil lurks. The Indigenous people of North America are being hunted and harvested for their bone marrow, which carries the key to recovering something the rest of the population has lost: the ability to dream."

### 4. Resources by The Seventh Wave:

- ["The Jungle Book: Epilogue," Farah Ghafoor](#). Farah Ghafoor's stunning poem, "The Jungle Book: Epilogue," explores the idea of rewilding, or the reintroduction of a species back into its habitat after it's been obliterated by humans. She asks: What does it mean to try to return a thing, a creature, a condition to its natural state and is such a process even possible?
- ["Rock Jenny," Callum Angus](#). In his short story, "Rock Jenny," Callum Angus imagines a fantastical world in which humans can change into rocks, various bodies of waters, or even the moon. Through extended metaphor, Callum asks of the reader: What would happen if we removed the artificial constraints that we've imposed upon ourselves in terms of who or what we could become?
- ["Suit.co," Naomi Day](#). Naomi Day's chilling "Suit.co" puts the reader in a *Black Mirror*-esque world in which folks are able to don human suits to trial out what it might be like to quite literally walk around in someone else's skin.

- **[“In Less Than 365 Days,” Jennifer Tan.](#)** Though her fiction is set in the real world, Jennifer Tan’s “In Less Than 365 Days” draws deeply from the imagination in a story that follows an elderly cleaning lady who gets a glimpse into the lives of some of the very tenants who are gentrifying her neighborhood.
- **[“See Through and Shaking with Holes of Silver,” Julia Tolo.](#)** In sparse poetic verse, Julia Tolo paints the outline of a society in which isolation and loneliness have overrun the everyday, and time no longer exists, in a coupling of poems titled “See Through and Shaking with Holes of Silver.”
- **[“Those People,” Kristin Marie.](#)** Kristin Marie’s essay, “Those People,” offers an intimate look at one family’s struggles with addiction, and the myriad ways that society continues to perpetuate a myth of morality while ignoring the reality of the situation: that money-hungry pharmaceutical companies not only knew the risks of their addictive products, that they counted on them — at the expense of tens of thousands of lives.
- **[“The Long Slow Suck, the Muck and Ooze,” Lauren Mallett.](#)** Everything about Lauren Mallett’s poem, “The Long Slow Suck, the Murk and Ooze” is drenched in slime, goo, and deliciously defiant fluid. In investigating the unbothered nature of the common slug (and the not-so-common nudibranch), Lauren highlights the joys of loving one’s own body — mucus, sores, and all.

*If you have any questions about the resources provided, just let us know.*

*If the world doesn't change the way  
you write, you can't expect what you  
write to change the world.*

