



Lincoln Book Festival's 50-Word Flash Fiction Competition Teachers' Resource Pack 2025



Introduction

Thank you for encouraging your students to take part in Lincoln Book Festival's 2025 Flash Fiction Competition!

The competition invites budding authors to craft a compelling short story in precisely 50 words. Wannabe wordsmiths can submit their own super short stories on the theme of 'heroes and villains' for the chance to win an individual £30 book token prize, and a £50 book token for their school.

Shortlisted authors will be invited to Lincoln Book Festival 2025 (which takes place from 2nd to 5th October) for an award ceremony at the Lincoln Arts Centre on the University of Lincoln campus. Winners and highly commended runners-up will also have their stories published on the book festival website with the opportunity to read them aloud to audiences during the festival.

The competition challenges authors of any ability to produce an original short story of exactly 50 words – no more and no less! – on the chosen theme, which entrants are encouraged to interpret as broadly as they wish. The shortlisting and judging panels will assess entries for

creativity, style, structure, plot, characters, dialogue and locations that are reflective of the competition theme of 'heroes and villains'.

Below are some tips for how to use the flash fiction competition in the classroom, and instructions for entering your students' stories into the competition. Categories are Primary (Reception to Year 6); Secondary (Year 7 to Year 11); and Adult (Year 12 upwards – no upper age limit). There will be five shortlisted authors in each category, with one final winner chosen from each of the three age groups. Attached with this resource pack are the full terms and conditions and the entry form.

Learning How to Write a Story in Just 50 Words

The following lesson plan has been created to suit students at both Primary and Secondary schools, so there are writing tips for students who are new to writing and those working at a more advanced level. The tips have been developed with input from Creative Writing and English Literature academics from Lincoln's two universities.

Writing an extremely short story is challenging and fun. It will test your skills as a writer, requiring you to think carefully about the ingredients of a good story and the craft of writing prose which stirs ideas or emotions in the reader. To tell a story in exactly 50 words, every word matters. You start to see the power in choosing certain words over others and making choices over what to include and what to miss out!

Normally the main features of a story are:

- A beginning, a middle and an end.
- The story is set in a particular place, or a series of places.
- There are different characters that feature in the story.
- Who is telling the story? Is it a narrator, or is it one or more of the characters in the story? A narrator may use words like "he/she/they" to describe other characters. This is known as speaking in the Third Person. A character may use "I" or "we", which is known as speaking in the First Person.
- Inverted commas are used to signify characters speaking (known as dialogue).

However, when writing a very short story of 50 words, some things to think about are:

- Instead of having a beginning, middle and end, do you start in the middle, or leave the story open ended?
- To keep the story short, does it take place in one location, rather than lots of different places?
- Is there a surprise twist to the story? Short stories want to grab the reader's attention, which a twist at the end can help with.
- Keep the story simple. The simplest ideas are often the best, and easiest to fit into a few words.
- When writing to a small word count, words become precious so choose them wisely. Think about powerful words such as verbs and adjectives that can pack in lots of meaning or emotion.

The Theme of Heroes and Villains:

- We love goodies and baddies for a reason. Stories help us make sense of the world so tales of bad people getting brought to justice are a powerful way to share ideas about right and wrong. Tales of heroic deeds help us convey values we think are important as a

society, like being brave, selfless or determined. Is there a moral to your story?

- Character and plot are the magic ingredients in storytelling - it's the connections between the people in our stories and the events that affect them that makes us want to read on. Heroes and villains make some of the most memorable characters in fiction for this reason. What events would bring out somebody's best or worst traits?
- People are complicated. No human is truly perfect or pure evil. The most compelling characters in fiction often have flaws to overcome or which take them down the wrong path. What drives a hero to do good deeds? What compels a villain to do wrong?
- Show, don't tell. Sometimes great stories keep us guessing about whether a character is good or bad. We might even change our mind at a dramatic plot twist! Do we judge people on their actions, their words, or their intentions? As a writer, how do you help your readers decide?

You can apply the theme of 'heroes and villains' to your story in any way you want. Your story could be inspired by somebody you admire, or perhaps you'll prefer to focus on bad behaviour which makes us think of someone as a villain. Maybe it's a showdown between goodies and baddies. Your story doesn't have to be about people either. It could be about animals, aliens or made-up creatures!

Ideas for Creative Cues:

- If you're not sure where to start, what people, animals or stories come to your mind when you think about 'heroes and villains'?
- You could come up with the story first, or a character's name, or start with a funny, scary, sad or happy thing you want to happen in the story.
- Think about capturing a mood, atmosphere, and emotion in 50 words.
- Remember to make use of the title to create your story - its words do not count towards the word limit.
- What other theme/s do you want your story to have? Examples of themes are death, love, families, school, holidays, weather, animals etc. You can bear it in mind even if it's not mentioned in the story outright!

Further Competition Rules

- Submitted short stories must be original works by the named author, and they must be written by one author. Co-authored works will not be accepted, so children must write on their own and not in a team.
- Only one entry is permitted per author.
- Story titles are not included in the word count. Footnotes and other annotations will be included in the word count. Hyphenated and compound words will be classed as a single word but should be common dictionary uses.
- The Competition closing date for submissions is midnight on 31st August 2025 (BST). No entries will be accepted after this time. Full Terms and Conditions are attached with this document, which we recommend reading before entering the competition.

How To Submit Your Entries

Each story must be submitted on the Lincoln Book Festival Flash Fiction Competition 2025 Entry Form, which is attached with this document.

For schools, when students have a finished 50-word story they are happy to submit for the competition, they should handwrite or type the final story onto the Entry Form provided. At the top of the form, please include the entrant's name, age (at time of submission) and school year (eg. Year 7). We can take the school and designated teacher's contact details as their address and contact information. Teachers may use pupils' initials or other identifiers in place of the author's name (for data minimisation purposes) provided winning entrants can later be identified by the school.

Multiple entries from different authors may be collated in a single attachment (e.g. a PDF of all the entries from a school class group) provided a separate Entry Form is contained in the file for each author. Entry forms may be printed and completed by hand then scanned for electronic submission. Incomplete or illegible entry forms cannot be accepted.

Please submit your completed entry forms in Word or PDF files to: competitions@lincolnbookfestival.org with the email subject line "Lincoln Book Festival Flash Fiction Competition 2025". Unfortunately, postal submissions cannot be accepted.

If you have any further questions or queries regarding the competition or how to submit entries, please contact us via email competitions@lincolnbookfestival.org.

We look forward to reading your stories and maybe meeting some of your talented authors at the festival in October!