

Some comments on the kind of stories we publish.

Nov 11, 2016

Our submission rate for issue 7 has fallen a bit, and we have not yet received a story that both resonates with us and that we feel would be a good story to tie into a classroom investigation in earth science. Although we don't want to pre-reject any particular kind of story (since a good writer can sway us to choose something that doesn't fit our preconceived notions), some additional thoughts on the kind of stories we are looking for might be helpful.

We are looking for stories that include a key idea of earth science at their heart—that is, an idea that can be worked into a classroom-sized lesson in earth science. For example, the story [The Thieving Rain](#) by Anne E Johnson turns on the idea of how slope affects erosion and deposition of sediment. This core geological concept becomes key to solving a mystery. [Jigsaw](#) by Douglas Smith turns on the idea of change through time. Thinking in terms of how tectonic forces change a planet through time is a key idea of geology and this idea is the key to solving a mystery in that story. Each of our published stories has some fundamental idea of earth science at its heart that can be worked into a classroom-sized earth science lesson.

"Classroom-sized lesson" is important for us. Vague, large-scale, and evidence-free references to earth science don't usually work for that. Some possible story lines of more interest to us that haven't been used yet include the following. 1) A story that is based on using stratigraphy or cross-cutting relationships to solve a mystery that depends on knowing a particular sequence of events or 2) a story about weather than hinges on truly understanding some aspect of what causes it (or allows the protagonist to predict some critical event), or 3) a story that depends on using geochemical fingerprinting to identify where something came from or how it formed. In particular, we are looking for real observation, real reasoning, and real use of earth science to solve mysteries or problems. Some 'magical thinking' is ok in the story itself (see [In the Rough](#) by T. S. Brothers) but 'magical thinking' is not ok when applied to understanding the earth science world at the heart of the story.

To avoid 'magical thinking' stories, build in specifics of science, like evidence and reasoning. What is the earth science evidence for something and how can noticing and interpreting that evidence become a turning point in a story?

We receive a lot of dystopic, environmental catastrophe stories. There is usually little observational or experimental evidence brought to bear in these stories, and little reasoning for what caused the catastrophe. Instead there is an implicit bemoaning of the foolishness of the people who allowed the catastrophe to happen. This type of story is a hard sell with us for a couple of reasons. First, the material is too broad and large scale to easily translate into a classroom. You can't do a classroom experiment on global catastrophe. Second, these stories often contain broad philosophical beliefs but little consideration of scientific evidence supporting those beliefs. This type of story may spur a class

discussion on political activism but is more difficult to apply to a classroom investigation of real science processes. Political activism is not necessarily a bad thing, but it is not our primary goal with this publication.

Please do send us your stories, even if you're not sure they meet the 'goals' above. But striving to put an element of real science (observation and reasoning) into the story can put you ahead of other submissions.

Sincerely,

Russ Colson, editor IES

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