

Ms. McDowell's seventh graders, inspired by Walter Dean Myer's first chapter of Glory Field, created original stories about original characters in conflict-filled situations.

Read these three writers' stories. Be prepared to talk about these students use of voice and word choice.

The Vineyard Hotel
by Rosalie, eighth grade writer

Character:	Situation:	Conflict:
a firefighter	suddenly realizes (s)he has supernatural powers	a stranger is following

"I'm going down the street to grab some coffee, you guys. I'll be right back!" Tom bellowed to his friends. He was a firefighter at the town's only station, and everyone respected and appreciated him. Usually he was out fighting fires or rescuing citizens, but today was an awfully sluggish afternoon. There hadn't been any action all day. He and the crew were getting weary, so Tom stepped out to get them a snack.

It's gorgeous out! Tom thought to himself. And then he saw the smoke. Huge ashen clouds of it billowed on the horizon.

Hastily, he sprinted back to the station and alerted the men. Presently, they were on their way toward the source of the smoke. As they drew nearer, Tom could see a building.

"That's strange," he muttered. "I didn't know anyone lived all the way out here."

"That used to be a famous hotel," one of the men replied. "It was called 'The Vineyard.' Once, people from all over the world would come to stay there, but then the old widow who owned the place decided she had had enough, took her kids and moved away about twenty years ago. No one has been there since."

"Then I wonder what caused the fire." Tom pondered. "Fires don't just happen for no reason."

As they pulled up to the hotel, Tom thought he saw a shadowy figure shifting in the trees, but who would be up here?

The fire was effortlessly put out, and an investigation began for the cause of the fire. It was amazing inside the hotel. Even though it was charred and soggy, traces of the original beauty could still be found. There was a massive staircase leading up to the second and third floors. Even though they were burnt to a crisp, you could easily imagine what the furnishings must have looked like.

"Just make sure no one's in here, and then we'll leave. I'll check in the library," commanded Tom. He stepped inside and saw books strewn across the floor, as if thrown by the dancing flames. Tom knew that wasn't the cause though; a person had done this. He wondered how recent it was, and his question was answered when he found a silver lighter on the floor. It was lost there just a short time ago. He recalled the shadowy figure in the trees. Was he looking for something in the library? Could it be him who started the fire?

"Come on, Tom. No one's here. Let's go home!" pleaded the team.

"Okay, fine," sighed Tom.

As they silently made their way back to the truck, Tom noticed a plank of wood in the overgrown weeds. Wait a minute! It wasn't a board. It was a door! He opened it and felt his way down the stairs into the sinister gloom. Suddenly he remembered his flashlight, so he clicked it on and shone it around the damp and musty room.

At first, he didn't see anything. Then, as his eyes accustomed to the dim light, he saw a metal safe in the clay wall. It was open just a crack, and with some difficulty Tom was able to open the rusty door. Inside was a parcel wrapped in a handkerchief that once was white but was now yellowed with age.

"Tom, where are you?" The team was calling for him. Tom hurriedly stuffed the parcel into his oversized pocket and rushed out to join them.



Tom did not remember the bundle until that evening on his walk home from work. The air was cool and still. The only sound to break the silence was a lone cricket chirping. He carefully unwrapped the item with care and gaped in wonder as a stunning ruby dropped into his outstretched palm. It sparkled brightly in the light from the setting sun. Tom couldn't believe it. He hastily continued home, staring in disbelief at his newfound treasure. He anticipated the moment when he could show his family.

Suddenly he stopped. He could have sworn there were footsteps following him. Tom glanced over his shoulder and saw no one, so he continued on as a haunting chill crept up his spine.

Soon he was home though, and he breathed a sigh of relief as he stepped inside the threshold. He took one last peek outside and locked the door just in case.

"I'm home!" sounded Tom as the family dog came bounding down the stairs to pounce on him and slobber a hello. "Come here! I have something amazing to show you guys!" Tom gathered his family around the table to show them his prize and recount the story on how it came into his possession, conveniently leaving out the parts about the figure and the footsteps.

That night, Tom had fantastic dreams that he was flying over houses and fields, and of a mysterious stranger in the shadows.

The next morning Tom felt ecstatic. He had no idea why, but he felt as though he really could fly as he joyfully floated down the stairs. His wife, Lucy, was making their usual Saturday breakfast: homemade blueberry pancakes.

"Good morning!" he sang just as Lucy shrieked.

"Tom, you're flying!" she gasped. "Am I still dreaming?"

Tom looked down and saw it was true, and he exploded with laughter. He didn't know why she thought it was so horrible; he rather enjoyed it. Floating was quite a sensational feeling. Tom ate quickly and left for the station, ensuring the ruby was secured safely in his pocket.

At work, Tom and the team was shocked, too. They soon accepted Tom's new ability however, and Tom set all of them in a good mood as well. They put out the fires in less than half the time with Tom's help. When the crew stopped for lunch at Val's diner, they were all in a jovial mood. All of a sudden, Tom got a horrid feeling that he was being watched. He slowly turned around just in time to see a man dash out of the diner.

After work, Tom heard the footsteps again, so he soared higher and higher to see if he could catch a glimpse of his pursuer. The man dashed up a side street and vanished. Tom wondered why he was being stalked, and then he remembered the ruby. The man must be after it! It enabled Tom to fly, but what else might it do? Although he regretted it, Tom knew him or his family might get hurt if this man was desperate enough, so he decided that the only thing to do was to somehow put the gem where no one could find it.

That night, Tom couldn't get to sleep. *Where could he put the ruby?* He couldn't put it back in the safe; the man could open that, and he didn't want to just toss it. *Who knows who could end up with it?* Then, Tom sat up in bed. He had the perfect idea. He would find out the name of the old lady who owned The Vineyard, and return it to her family! Hopefully, the man would not think to look there.

The next day was Sunday, which meant no work for him. But he strode on down to the fire station anyway to see if anyone knew the old woman's name.

"Hey Tom, what are you doing up here on your day off?" asked one of the guys.

"I'm here to find out if anyone knows what the name of the lady who owned The Vineyard," explained Tom, "and where I could find her."

"Sure Tom, her name was May Venhiesor, and if I remember correctly she moved to Richmond."

"Thanks!" was all that Tom had time to say as he sailed away, ruby in hand. He had to find the Venhiesors.

Tom flew joyfully through the air, his arms outstretched as the wind playfully whipped through his hair. He made it to Richmond in just a few hours time. He sighed deeply. He would miss flying, but he knew it was the right thing to do. He landed and after a few minutes located a phone booth and looked up the Venhiesor's number.

"Hello?" A harsh voice crackled over the receiver.

"Are you by any chance related to May Venhiesor, owner of The Vineyard Hotel?" Tom questioned.

"Who wants to know?" the lady demanded.

"My name is Tom. I am a firefighter, and I live near The Vineyard. Someone was looking for something in your hotel, and set it on fire." Tom paused as the lady gasped, and then continued, "As I was leaving, I stumbled upon a safe in the cellar, and I think I have something that belongs to you. Someone was trying to get it."

"Oh dear! You better get over here right away." She hurriedly gave him her address and hung up.

When Tom reached the lady's lovely home, he rang the bell and waited. Sheepishly, he realized that he had no way to get home; he had flown here. He didn't have time to think about it though, because the old woman opened the door. She was the oldest person Tom had ever seen. She was short and hunched over with silver hair. She walked with a cane and wore huge glasses.

"Tom? Come in now. Hurry!" The lady hurried Tom in and quickly closed and locked the door.

"So you have it? The ruby?" She gasped in delight as Tom handed his precious cargo over to her.

"Thank you so much! Ever since I left there... well... I can't stop thinking about who had my jewel. I am so glad that a good feller like you had it instead of that scoundrel! Here, sit down and I'll tell you the story:

"Twenty three years ago, my husband Richard and I owned The Vineyard together. We were so happy, but then he died and I had a stroke. My children decided the place was too much for me to handle, so while I was in the hospital they took all of my personal belongings and bought me this house.

They never even bothered to ask about the ruby, even though they knew it was there. It was a wedding present from Richard. Never did tell me where he got it from. Oh yes, I suppose you want to know who that man following you was. I'm pretty sure that is my daughter's ex-husband. She told him and he was always the greedy type anyway. He won't come after it now thought, because he's plum scared to death of me!"

May graciously bought Tom a train ticket for his troubles, and by early the next morning, Tom was home. He got a scolding from Lucy for not telling her where he had been going, and then went straight to bed.

At work, Tom told the story over and over so many times that he began to get sick of it. The crew wanted to celebrate Tom's good deed by treating him to lunch, and once again Tom saw the man who had been tailing him for the past few days.

"Hey buddy! I know what you're after! And you're never going to get it because I gave it to the one person you will never get it back from!" Tom hollered across the diner. The man got up and scowled at Tom before slinking out the door.

Tom shared a good laugh with his buddies, and gave no more thought to the subject. He kept in touch with the Venhiesors and never laid eyes on the mysterious pursuer again.

More Money, More Problems

by Veronica, eighth grade writer

Character:	Situation:	Conflict:
a paparazzi photographer	wins the lottery	laughs uncontrollably

"Lindsey! Over here! Give us a smile!" I was becoming hoarse trying to get Lindsey Lohan to look my way at the MTV Movie Awards. She finally turned around and flashed me a winning smile. *FLASH.* Perfect. My work here was done. After I left the red carpet, I decided to take a spin on the wild side. I went down to Winner's Corner and bought a lottery ticket.

"Why not?" I said to myself. As I paid the cashier, I saw Jack Black getting an icee. I brought my camera to my face, and got a perfect "stars are just like us" picture.

When I got home, I greeted my Labradoodle, Pooh, and fed my kids' bird, Moosie.

"Mommy! Tell Bailey to stop throwing paper at my head!" my youngest, Kenny, wailed.

I sighed heavily and said, "Bailey, don't throw paper at your brother's head." I set my feet on the ottoman and turned on the TV, but immediately fell asleep.

Ring, ring. Ring, ring. I woke to the phone ringing loud and clear.

"Hello?" I answered groggily into the receiver.

"Ms. Otis, I am calling to tell you you've won the lottery! Approximately eight million dollars will be placed into your bank account. If you would please give us your social security number, we can place the money into your account immediately!" the man said.

I wondered if this was all a scam, but I was too tired to care. "542-8888-7895-85," I said, as I tried to focus on the end table. It read 5:35 am.

"Thank you, Ms. Otis. Have a great day!" the man said as he hung up. I sat on the edge of my bed, wondering why I'd just given some strange man my social security number.

Later that day, after I got a snapshot of Uma Thurman, I went down to the National bank of California. "Hi. I was just wondering if I could check the balance of my account," I asked the lady at the window.

"Sure! If you could give me your name, social security number and identification, I'd be happy to." The lady's nametag read Adriana, and I'd wondered if Adriana had too much caffeine this morning.

"Okay. Monica Otis, 542-8888-7895-85, and here's my driver's license," I said as I handed over my ID.

"So, you're the one who has 8.2 million dollars in her account?" Adriana asked.

"Yeah, that's all I needed to know. Thanks!" I said over my shoulder as I turned and nearly sprinted out of the bank.



So it wasn't a scam! I thought to myself and then something very peculiar happened. I started laughing. I mean, laughing so hard I was crying. People looked at me like I was absolutely psycho. I wanted to stop laughing, but I couldn't. I slammed the door to my Camry shut and laughed for about ten minutes.

"What had just happened?" I asked myself. I was making a list of things I would do with my new money, including buy a brand new BMW, when my cell phone rang.

"Hello" I managed before I broke out in a new wave of laughter.

"Monica, this is Monique Otis," the woman sounded very upset with me.

"Who?" I asked.

"Monique Otis! This may sound very strange, but this is your conscience. Please consider the following: you are laughing non-stop, and one of the things you want to buy with your money is a BMW. How correct am I?" As she talked, I couldn't help to think to myself how much Monique sounded like my mother.

"Yeah, so?" I was only able to manage these few words.

"I know how to stop this. You must... never mind. Just think about WHY you're doing what you're doing." Monique said, and hung up.

I went back to my plans for my newfound wealth...giggles and all.

It took me about three bouts of giggles and an aching side to realize what Monique meant. Since I'd gotten this money, I was becoming more and more greedy. I realized that being greedy is what was making me laugh. To test this theory, I thought about giving all of the money to charity, and, immediately, my laughing stopped. I gasped and tried to think selfless thoughts all the way home. I did just that, until I started thinking about saving most of the money to buy a new, bigger house. I started laughing again. *This is it. I'm going to turn around and just shove it in some charity guy's face!* I flipped a u-turn as I came to this conclusion.

I arrived at the Yolanda Roberts Orphan House and presented a 7 million dollar check to the man in charge of the YROH. He looked so shocked, yet so grateful, yet so confused all at the same time. I kept the rest to pay off bills and to get my kids into a better school.

It's three years later, and I am totally selfless, if I do say so myself. Every cent I've earned (except the ones I REALLY needed) went to the YROH. To this day, I haven't uttered a single giggle, unless something even slightly greedy crosses my thoughts. Maybe I have a special selfless disorder or something; I never bothered to check with a health professional.

I'm glad I won the lottery, but I'm not so glad that I got a really disgusting picture of me plastered on the front page of the Beverly Hills Chronicle. Now that I knew how celebrities feel, I decided to become a legitimate, professional photographer. It's so I can take pictures of celebrities looking their best, instead of waiting to take pictures of them at their worst. Monique never called me again, but sometimes I hear her whisper wisdom to me.

Character:	Situation:	Conflict:
a hippie	with magical powers	being watched by a stranger

The Black Smoke
by Danielle, eighth grade writer

One day when I was on my way to work, I saw this hippie girl playing her guitar and singing. She had the guitar case open. It had about twenty dollars worth of small bills and change in it. She was wearing a tie-died shirt with a purple skirt that you could tell she'd made herself. Her song was about peace and love. She seemed to be exactly what most people would think of when they thought about hippies.

I bent down to her case to give her five dollars because I thought her song was amazing. When I bent down, I accidentally hit the top of the case and made it close. On the top of the case was written "Darcie Ferguson, San Francisco, CA." I went to open the case again, but it automatically opened on its own! I got scared because I thought this lady might have some freaky powers to make it the lid open, but when I hastily looked up at her, she seemed surprised. (This seemed rather odd.) She treated me as if she were afraid of me. She grabbed my five dollar bill from her case and threw it back at me as she ran away.



I was curious, so I decided to follow her to see where she was going. She didn't look back the whole time until she reached her destination. She stopped at this rather odd-looking building. It was dome shaped and was purple with pink, and had very light blue peace signs and flowers all over it. I didn't want to go in because I had no idea if I'd be barging into her home or into a shop of some kind. So I secretly watched through the window and saw her move around the room like she'd just seen a ghost. She looked around the room and just as she looked at the window I was looking through, I ducked so she wouldn't see me watching her.

The whole time, I saw Darcie moving things around, but this action was very odd. She never actually picked up anything. All of the contents of the room seemed to just levitate by themselves. As Darcie controlled all of these items, she seemed like she was actually enjoying it. A few minutes later, she decided to meditate. After a while, she started to levitate as she meditated.

I was just about to leave when her eyes opened quickly and her body dropped from the air like a rock. A terrified expression came upon her face as she started to move things around again. A black smoke that looked like gun powder appeared to engulf her. A dark sorcerer appeared in the smoke. He said in a loud, booming voice, "Ah... I see you have realized your powers!"

"Wait! I only know how to move things without touching them! That isn't really a power; it's just moving things around," she said, sounding worried.

"Well, it's not my problem that you don't take your powers seriously. I still need to battle you!" he said.

"No! I will never fight! I promote peace and love, not war and hate!" Darcie cried. As she said this, she suddenly moved all of the furniture in front of the sorcerer to block him and she ran away.

Of course, I followed her. Her life seemed much more interesting than mine, at the moment. As she ran, the black cloud hovered above, so I knew that the sorcerer was following her too. As she ran, she discovered some of her other powers. She realized that she could make things she needed just appear. She stopped and thought for a moment. Then, she summoned a big, gray rain cloud to appear over the entire town. As a result, it started to rain and the wind blew forcefully. The smoke cloud was slowly disintegrating above her into different directions. The storm she made appear actually worked. As the storm cleared up, the black smoke disappeared.

A few minutes later, there was an angry, loud voice coming from out of nowhere. It said, "You may have won this battle, but I will be back. And when I come, you'd better be ready to fight."

From my hiding place, I could see Darcie shiver a little, with fear.