

Ideas for Student Consideration

Thomas Wolfe was a master of taking real experiences from his life and turning them into exciting works of fiction. He often invented characters based upon himself. Do the same in your “tale.” Use descriptive words to help the audience envision your character and the setting for your story. Base your story on your own experience or that of a friend, but enhance it by adding elements of exaggeration, excitement and humor.

On his first trip by ship to Europe in 1924 Thomas Wolfe began to record his “thoughts, observations, and memories.” His experience living for a week onboard a ship in cramped conditions led him to begin to write about being “a giant in a world of tiny creatures.” Wolfe was over six foot five inches tall.

Thomas Wolfe never totally discarded any of his early writing, and many would later become parts of his novels or a short story for a magazine. In June 1935, Scribner’s Magazine published the story “Gulliver: The Story of a Tall Man.” Wolfe then planned to use themes from “Gulliver’s Travels” by Jonathan Swift in his third book, “a book about man’s discovery of life” or “the adventures of an innocent man.”

Read about the Gulliver, the character that inspired Wolfe’s story.

As you read “Gulliver, The Story of a Tall Man,” by Thomas Wolfe think about the writing prompts below. These themes that might help you to begin telling your tale.

Writing Prompt:

“Gulliver’s Travels” by Jonathan Swift is a satire about someone’s adventure around the world. Think of a place you have traveled and how to make it a more interesting story? What are some comparisons between Johnathan Swift’s character Gulliver and the tall man in Thomas Wolfe’s story? How did the Lilliputians first react to Gulliver and how did that change over time? How do their reactions compare to the reaction of Thomas Wolfe’s character?

Imagine you are a giant in a world of tiny creatures. What experiences might you have in this imaginary world? In writing your own story, what would you want people in the future to learn from your experience? Have you ever been in a situation where you expected one thing and found another to be true? Have you ever gone from a situation where everything seemed normal to a situation where everything was different? What was different, and how did this affect your experience? Was it your own foolish behavior that led you to a new discovery?

Create a character based upon something unique or different about yourself. How does it affect everyday life and interactions with others? It might be something physical (ex: Thomas Wolfe was taller than most people he met), or emotional (ex: something you are scared of that others are not). Is this difference something your character doesn’t realize until others bring it to their

attention? Is it something that used to exist but no longer does? Is it something they are afraid of others discovering? Does this difference make your character feel alone like Thomas Wolfe, or is the character proud of the difference? Does the character see him or herself the same way as others do?

Think of someone different from you in every way, and imagine a day of life in their place. Is this difference something that others view as an advantage but is really a disadvantage? Or the other way around?

Is there something in your life you cannot change but keeps you from getting something you want? Was there a time you were singled out to be tricked because of being different? Did someone say anything to make you change how you viewed your difference? Did you eventually come to realize others shared your difference? Or that you weren't as different as you originally believed? Do your differences give you an insight into society that others might not have? (Ex: being deaf might make you more observant of other people's actions/mannerisms etc.)