

# SITUATED SPECULATIONS

*an exercise in fictioning futures...*

# WHAT'S SPECULATIVE FICTION?

Speculative fiction probes writers/readers to ask 'what if' questions, and reconsider the quotidian certainties of the past, present, and future. Such texts may defamiliarize readers' thinking about what is, or cause readers to reconsider what could be through describing different worlds, or describing this world, differently. While speculative fictions generally do not attempt to realistically represent our current world, through the exploration of alternative, or extrapolated, or fantastical stories, speculative fiction is a medium that allegorically or metaphorically can draw attention to elements of our current world that may need to be reconsidered.

## **Why 'situated'?**

An enabling constraint of this project is geographic specificity and a situated perspective. We all live somewhere, and we all speculate from somewhere. Geographic and situated specificity will both constrain and enable the kinds of stories that are created.

**The purpose of this exercise is to use speculative fiction to prompt thinking and discussion. You'll be speculative fictioning.**

This pamphlet takes you through the stages of writing a short fiction (250-500 words), set in the future of your town/city using one of the following themes:

- *Sustainability*
- *Technology*
- *Social Justice*

Your story could be utopic, dystopic, or realistic. It could be set in the distant future or tomorrow. If you don't want to write a story you don't have to. You can still complete the first parts of this project as talking-thinking-prompts.

# PART 1:

## Geographic Specificity (Pre-writing)

**Think about your current city/town.**

**Note:**

- What are some elements of its history?
- What is its geography and climate?
- What are its main industries?
- What is its cultural makeup?
- What are some aspects you enjoy about the city?
- What are some pressing social/cultural/technological concerns for you?



**IF TIME PERMITS:  
Go for a stroll around your neighbourhood/city. What do you notice?**

***Discuss the above with a partner or in a group.***

# PART 2:

## Themes (Pre-writing)

**In groups or with a partner discuss what the following three themes mean to you.**

- *Sustainability*
- *Technology*
- *Social Justice*

***Make notes, discuss with larger group.***

# PART 3:

## Your city's future (Pre-writing)

**Consider what kind of future(s) you imagine for your city/town and the people, plants, animals there?**

**Note:**

- Is it sustainable? Why/why not? Sustainable for whom?
- What technologies would (or would not) be present?  
Why/why not?
- Would it be an equitable place?  
Why/why not?

***Make notes. Discuss with a partner.***



**IF  
TIME  
PERMITS:  
Go for a  
stroll around your  
neighbourhood/city. How  
do you imagine this  
place in the  
future?**

# PART 4:

## Writing (and prompts)

**Draft a story or scene about some aspect of the future set in your city/town, on one of the following themes:**

- *Sustainability*
- *Technology*
- *Social Justice*

*If you're ready to write – go ahead! If you need more inspiration or want to workshop more before writing, you could chat with a partner and think through some of the following prompts.*

## These angles of approach may help you draft a story:

- **Focus on an object or technology** or form of social equity that doesn't yet exist but should/could. Describe it and how it would matter in your city/town's future-world.
- **Explore a social relationship** that could/should exist in the life of a character in your town's future-world. Describe it and why it would matter to the life of a character (human or non-human) in your city/town's future-world.
- **Explore a way of working or living** that doesn't yet exist but should/could in your city/town. Describe it and how it would matter in the future-world of your city/town.
- **Think about an aspect of life**, or object, or social relationship that already exists. What would happen if it continued to exist or grow far into the future? What would the world of the future be like for the people/plants/animals there?



# Elements of writing you may want to use:

- **World building:** showing the reader the future version of the world by describing setting, characters, language, technology, geography, and climate etc.
- **Hook:** A hook is often used in a story to catch the reader's attention and pull them into the story quickly.
- **Novum:** an element in your story that is 'new' so that the reader understands they are not in their usual reality or present day.

*Spend some time crafting your story.*

*\* For more ideas, head to page 11.*



**YOU  
MIGHT LIKE  
TO THINK OF OTHER  
FORMATS FOR YOUR  
STORY! Could it be a  
film? Or a photo-essay?  
Or a drawing? Or  
a play?**

# PART 5:

## Share your story, Edit and Redraft

**Share your story with a partner. Have your partner read and comment on your story. Have you used world building? A hook? A novum? Is there anything that needs clarification, could be expanded on?**

Edit and redraft anything you'd like to clarify in your story if you want to make it into a more polished piece. Submit for others to read.

### ***And/Or:***

If in a class or workshop and you don't want to polish your draft but would rather discuss the themes, you can use it for further discussion at this point.



**GOT TIME?**  
**Try illustrating**  
**your**  
**story!**

***Discussion ideas now or later:***

- What themes did authors focus on?
- In addition to thinking about the future, what do the stories tell you about the present or part of your town/city life?
- What might you do to either create/avoid the futures described in the stories?

***If interested in improving the writing, give advice on each other's writing and re-draft.***

# DEEP FUTURE DISCUSSION

## PROMPT: WHAT KINDS OF TRACES WILL FUTURE EARTH DWELLERS FIND FROM OUR TIME?

**Speculate on a ‘cene.’ ‘Cene’ is used in geology to refer to a specific era. For example, ‘Anthropocene’ refers to the ‘era of humans,’ when Anthropos (humans) became geological agents.**

Think about our current era: what kinds of fossils are we generating that future generations may discover? Chicken bones? We eat a lot of chicken! Plastic? We use a lot of plastic!

Note down what you think future earth dwellers may find from our era. You can try to be ‘realistic’ or be entirely ‘speculative:’ it might not be the hardest metals/bones that last. Discuss with your group.

***Speculative Artefact:*** Speculate on an artefact from the future. Something you imagine. What is the artefact used for?

***Speculative Botany:*** Describe a plant from the future or past. What are its properties? What would it be used for? Write a brief narrative about something or someone encountering the plant and using it (or a part of it). The plant could be used for food, medicine, clothing or something completely different.

***Speculative disease:*** Write about a disease from the future. What causes the disease? How does the disease manifest?

***Speculative geography:*** Describe a feature of your region. How may it have changed in the future. Why has it changed? Build a narrative around the geographic feature.

# NOTES:



**Use  
this  
space for  
jotting down  
ideas, sketches or  
diagrams!**

# SITUATED SPECULATIONS

This resource was developed by Sarah E. Truman as part of an Australian Research Council funded DECRA (DE220100110), in partnership with University of Melbourne.

<http://www.LiteraryEducationLab.org/Speculative-Futures>

Designed by: Therese Keogh



If you use  
this resource  
and find it  
helpful, we'd  
love to hear  
about it!