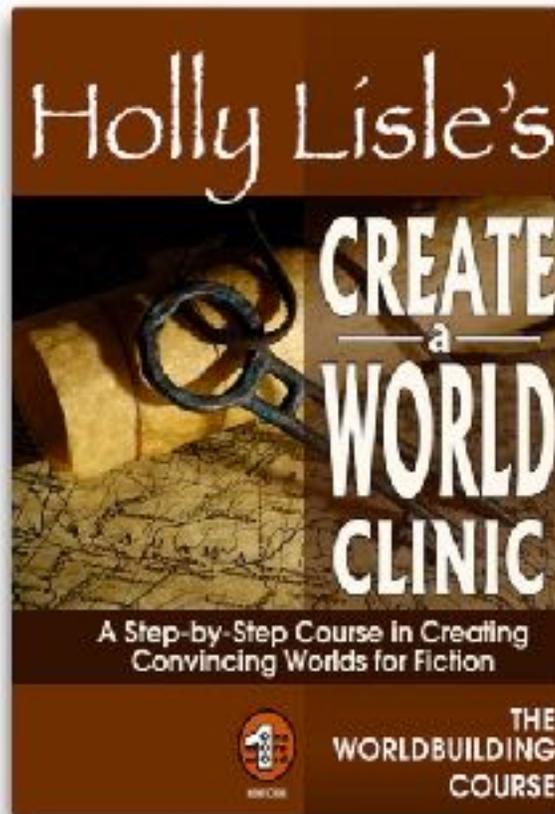


Your First Story World in 5 Minutes



HOLLY LISLE

Holly Lisle's Create A World Clinic

HOLLY LISLE

WORLDBUILDING III

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Holly Lisle's Create A World Clinic

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BUILDING WORLDS

CHAPTER 1

World #1: The Dot World

Build Your First Complete World In Five Minutes

I'm going to hold off on the introduction for a few minutes, in favor of trying something different.

I'm going to walk you through building your first world right now. So grab a pen and a piece of paper. A napkin will do just fine if it's all that's available, or lined paper from a notebook, or the back of a page of the stack of email printouts sitting on your desk. Or that memo from your boss...

Whatever. If it'll hold ink and you'll be able to read what you've written once you're done, it'll do.

You're going to build a small world, but big enough to give you what you need for a story. And by the time we're done with this first exercise, you'll already have a start for your story, too.

Here's how this works. All the ways through this course, I'll take the course right along with you as I write it. When I build an exercise, I'll actually *do* the exercise so you can see some of the possibilities—**but this will work *much* better for you if you don't see my answers first.**

So to make sure you get work that is purely your own, you complete each exercise before you read what I wrote.

Only when you've finished the exercise, move on to the next page, and take a look at what I got.

Ready?

Let's build a world.

The Exercise

With your pen and paper at the ready, I want you to imagine that you are standing in a dark room. It's small, and it has a ceiling, a floor, and four walls, but you can't see them yet, because it's absolutely dark. Don't worry. The light will go on in a second.

But before it does, the room has one other thing in it, not including you. When the light goes on you're going to see it...but odds are pretty good that a word or an image just popped into your head suggesting what the thing in the room with you is—so if it did, USE that.

It doesn't matter how silly you think it is. It doesn't matter if you can't imagine how that word or image could matter. Or how you could get a story from it.

All that matters is that this time, you use the very first answer you get.

Okay. Now the light goes on, and you see the thing in the room with you.

Your Turn

Write down what it is.

What I Got

My answer is: *The paint on the wall.*

What this means is that my Muse, also known as my *subconscious mind*, or *right brain*, has decided to be a smartass. Don't know if you have a good working relationship with your Muse yet or not, but my relationship with mine is...*interesting*.

And because sooner or later, most folks who rely on creativity to put food on the table develop equally interesting relationships with their Muses, I'm going to detour for just a second here. This matters, and I guess this is as good a place as any to discuss the bare bones of it.

Your left brain is your editor, the driver of your body when everything is calm and no tigers have just started growling behind you, your internal grown-up. Your right brain is a perpetual kid, one who believes everything it sees and hears, one who loves to play, one who balks when commanded to work. (It's also the part of you that will get your feet running and have you up in the top of a tree before you can think about it if those tigers do start growling—so it has many uses.) But if you want to build a career as a writer, you have to learn how to deal with both halves of your mind. And telling your right brain—your Muse—that the idea it just gave you is stupid is a **real fine way** to make sure that part of your mind goes off in a corner and doesn't give you any more ideas for a good long time. (This is how writer's block is born, incidentally.)

Your ***You/left brain/conscious mind*** is smart and articulate and organized, but it is **not** creative. So if you tick off your Muse and give it an excuse to shut down and quit playing your game, you are going to have a bad writing day. Or week. Or year.

Having been dealing with my particularly cantankerous ***Muse/right brain/subconscious mind*** while having to be creative on deadline for the last twenty-five years, I have learned the importance of using the ideas it gives me, no matter how weird or unworkable they seem initially, and then working to make sense of them.

EVEN, and this is important, when I suspect the idea was *intended* to make things difficult for me.

The paint on the wall.

Ha. Ha. Very funny. My muse could have told me, *window with bars on it*, or *ancient door*, or even *dead body*, and I would have had an easy time of this. But it didn't, so now you get to see what to do when your Muse decides to get cute. And because it's good practice, no matter what answer your Muse gave you, you're going follow the same steps I do this time.

I have to dig deeper. I need to ask a follow up question, and I need to ask it in a certain way. It cannot be a question that can be answered with a yes, no, or maybe, as with the question, "Is there anything unusual about the paint on the wall?"

My subconscious mind just rolls its metaphorical eyes at that one and says, "Maybe."

This is not helpful, but *your subconscious mind won't do things just to be helpful*. It likes to play, and the only person it has to play with is you.

So you have to learn to ask questions that can only be answered in a *useful* fashion.

This is my follow-up question:

"What is unusual about the paint on the wall?"

Your Turn

Before I write down the answer to that (though my Muse just told me the answer, and it is, in fact, pretty interesting), you need to ask a follow-up question.

Here are some variants that will work:

- **Why** does this _____ in the room matter?
- **How** did this _____ get here?
- **What** is unusual about this _____?
- **Who** (or what) is this, and how did he/she/or it get here?
- **When** did this _____ appear, and under what circumstances?
- **Where** did this _____ come from? (Or where does this _____ go?)
- **Why** is this _____ here?

Just answer one of the questions above (or one of your own devising related to your specific situation). However, answer it at whatever length you need. Your objective is to give yourself the information that will allow you to understand what you're dealing with. So when you have answered the question you've chosen, write out—then answer—any follow-up questions you need to ask. Don't turn to the next page until you're sure you got the full answer.

What I Got

So here's my question again: "What is unusual about the paint on the wall?"

And because of the way I work with my right brain, I'm going to write out the answers I just got in the form of a conversation. Yes, I do know this is bizarre, and you are not the first person to raise an eyebrow and suggest that I might want to seek care, counseling, or perhaps a nice padded room.

I do this because it works, because it lets me develop good story ideas quickly, and because I actually hold these conversations inside my head, though my right brain answers in images (and other sensory data) more often than it answers in words.

I just don't usually do this in public.

Onward.

Holly: What is so unusual about the paint on the wall?

Muse: It's black, and it's high gloss.

Holly: Okay...why does that matter?

Muse: Because it hides the blood.

H: (thinking carefully to avoid potential booby traps) What about Luminol, which makes blood on surfaces show up?

M: Not an issue here.

H: *Why* is it not an issue?

M: Because Luminol doesn't exist yet.

H: So I'm in the past?

M: (No answer. My Muse does not answer stupid questions, and that was one.)

H: (trying again) Well, the black paint suggests *intent* to me—that the room is going to be seen by people, that the person who painted it needs to have them not know about the blood, and that the room serves two purposes—people go into it voluntarily, but maybe people die there, too. So who owns the room?

M: An artist. (I get a flurry of images here, so what follows is the flow what runs through my mind.) *Blood on the walls, part of the process, passion and imbuing each painting with a different soul, love and murder at the same time, blood in the paint, a lot of dead women, a lot of live men who buy the paintings in this room, the room where they're hung, and the artist working on painting after painting in quick succession, and then not working at all until all but the most perfect paintings, which he keeps for himself, are sold.*

And at that point, I have the jump-off point for a story.

If I need to, I can build more details into the room before I start writing, or I can ask more questions about the artist, or the women, or the buyers.

But I can write the whole story in one room, in a handful of scenes, and I already have the critical key to this world.

Glossy black paint.

This is what worldbuilding is, and this is why you do it.

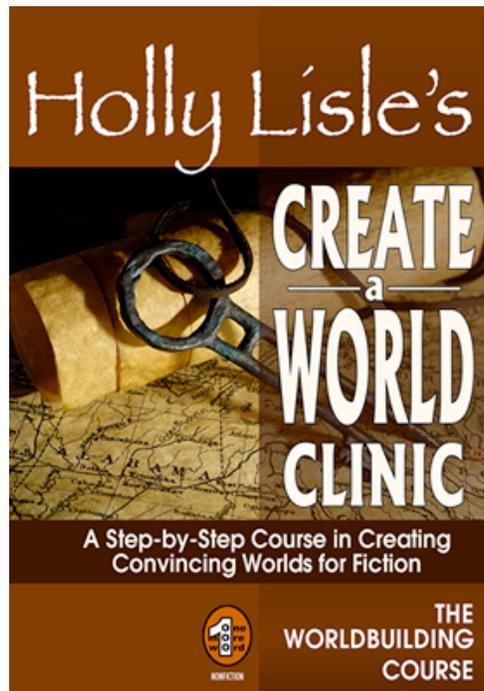
Worldbuilding has nothing to do with putting a map in the front of your novel.

It has everything to do with:

- Getting good questions that help you come up with story ideas.
- Getting good answers that help you tell your story.
- Finding the fixes for broken projects—you know, all those 30-page novel starts you did that never went anywhere, and you don't know why...
- But mostly, **worldbuilding is what brings your story to life for your readers.**

And...

To find out how to get the most out of the world you've just created, and to discover how to bring your readers into your worlds and stories with active description, conflict-creating settings, and much more...



Pick up your copy of

***Holly Lisle's
Create A World Clinic***

here:

<https://hollyswritingclasses.com/go/worldclinic.html>