

## **Writers Workshop #7**

### **Mom, Dad, I've got Something to Tell You...**

For this month's writing exercise, let's dream up some really awkward and tension-filled situations. You will depict three or more characters coping with something unexpected that makes one, two, or all three of them squirm. These scenes can be sad or tragic, or they can be humorous, or even both. Regardless of the tone you choose, this kind of scene is always intriguing.

If you're teaching this exercise, it can be tailored to any age level. For young kids, you can suggest, for example, that they write about a child bringing home a found animal.

--What is unique about this animal? Does it talk? Is it filthy? Does it play chess, or like to cook?

--Have the parents react differently to the news. (It doesn't have to be two parents: the child might live with one parent and a sibling, or two grandparents, or one grandparent and one parent, and so on.) Both people can react negatively, but one should have a stronger reaction than the other.

--How might this surprise turn from being bad news into being something good?

For older writers, the surprise might be a pregnancy (I know, it's not original, but it's in the ether these days), or a decision to drop out of school, or the revelation that the teenage child has destroyed something the parents value (the family car, a treasured piece of jewelry or artwork, something with sentimental value.)

--You can have one of the adults, not the child, present the surprising news.

--The news should directly contradict some previously stated rule or value or instructions. In other words, the person with the news has done something he/she was expressly or implicitly asked or told not to do, something that will have a negative consequence for the other two people.

Other suggestions:

To simplify this exercise, write it with only two people. Later try the same situation with three.

After writing your scene, see how you can deepen and complicate it. For example, if you write about a pregnant teen telling her parents she's pregnant, add that her mother is the high school health educator. Or maybe the teen who reveals that he wrecked his mom's car learns that she had agreed to sell it that day to pay for his little brother's much-needed eye operation. Or the giant raccoon that Jimmy brought home is a way better cook than either of Jimmy's parents and gets Jimmy and all his friends to eat all vegetables, even brussel sprouts, but soon he is incorporating all the vegetation in Jimmy's town into the family's meals, and kids are filling the house at every meal, and so on...