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How to Write a Holiday Tale that Isn't a Turkey

By Caterina Christakos

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by: **Caterina Christakos**

When we write stories, with the purpose of sharing them with others, we enter into an agreement where we allow our reader to see a glimpse of our heart, our souls and our memories. If we truly want them to be immersed in the tale, we actively immerse ourselves in those memories so that a glimmer of what we saw, heard and felt comes through.

This is especially true with holiday tales. The best way to convey a holiday scene is to take a trip back in time through the wonderful world of our unconscious. Here are some great ways to delve back into our childhood memories and incorporate them into our holiday tales.

1) Sit in a darkened room and close your eyes. Allow yourself to go back in time to the very first Christmas that you can remember. Take a deep breath and relax. What are the scents, sounds and feelings that come up? What is the first picture that pops into your mind?

Is it the sound of children racing down the stairs that comes to you first? The feel of your heart pounding when you awoke and found that Christmas was really here? The warmth of your parents' blankets as you bounced on them, anxious to wake them up?

The autumn and winter holidays will always be associated, for me, with my grandmother's cooking and pumpkin pies. I remember running into her little house, and the sound of the front door's slam behind me. I was immediately engulfed in warmth. The scent of nutmeg and cinnamon and pumpkin seeds physically drew me forward, until I was wrapped in my grandmother's embrace.

2) Recreate the scene. Since a prime trigger for me is the scent of pumpkin pies, I often order pumpkin scented candles from Yankee Candles. I sit on the couch, wrapped up in a blanket, light the candles and wait. Within moments, the scent has pulled me back to my grandmother's kitchen. And I hear the sound of my cousins pounding down the hall after me, each of us anxious to win the first warm treat.

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You can do the same. If a scent triggers your memories, you can either bake the cake or cookie or brew the eggnog. Or you can get one of those scented candles and simply light it.

If the feel of sweaters immediately transports you back to your snow throwing days, slip one on. If you are like me and live in Florida, turn the air way up first. Close your eyes and hear the sound of children shouting as they try to nail each other with snowballs. Picture their fresh flushed faces.

3) If there is a particular holiday character that sparks your memories, rent holiday movies. Some of my favorites are Frosty the Snowman and Miracle on Thirty fourth street. Watch one for a while, until you get the holiday feeling, then turn the sound off. Watch the pictures and let your mind go.

4) Use all of these pictures and sensations and feelings in your story.

If you are writing about a little girl in a big family, think back to what holiday dinners were like for you.

Did everyone talk at once? Does your character like this or does she feel overwhelmed? What is it like to be the smallest one in a room full of adults? Is there a cousin or neighbor that is constantly picking on her? Do the children get bored and decide to explore the forbidden attic?

5) Once you have a scene in mind, write down all of these questions. Don't worry about answering them until you have run out of questions. Then think back to the picture, sound or feeling that you associate with and answer the questions.

6) Now describe everything that you can about the characters. What are their ages? What do they look like? Are they the youngest or oldest in their family? Where do they live? What is their favorite thing? What are their best friend's names? Who is their arch nemesis and why?

Get as much detail as possible down.

Once you can describe all of these things, the pieces of your story will begin to fall into place. More importantly, your characters and your scenes will be real and alive. Be brave and put as much of yourself into these stories and your characters. Your readers will love you for it.

Caterina Christakos is the author of *How to Write a Children's Book in 30 Days or Less*. For more writing tips go to:

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Let's NOT Talk Turkey

How to Write a Holiday Tale that Isn't a Turkey

By Kristin Johnson

The carving. The leftovers. The endless stuffing. Actually, you love the stuffing, cranberries and turkey trimmings. However, it's been seven years and you know your family will throw the turkey out the window if they have to eat the bird one more Christmas (and never mind the lectures about starving children in Ethiopia—or better yet, send them the turkey if you can get it through security.)

The Pilgrims and your third-grade teacher started something by preaching the turkey gospel. But if you didn't have turkey—as your vegetarian friends remind you, it's so much better than Big Macs—what would you serve?

Some ideas:

Lasagna—it's always a crowd-pleaser.

Slice avocados and combine with sliced cucumbers, chopped green olives, diced tomatoes, and sliced onions for a winter red/green salad.

Serve Mexican and have a "Feliz Navidad" party.

Serve Holiday Noodles—Thai, lo mein, crispy, or egg noodles tossed with scallions and covered with red curry powder or red pepper.

Get your Omega-3 boost from salmon, made festive with salsa and guacamole toppings.

Make a "Christmas pizza": green peppers, tomatoes, goat cheese, green olives...let your imagination run wild!

Of course, don't forget the Christmas cookies!

Enjoy the turkey-free healthy and tasty holiday traditions you've created.

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Kristin Johnson is co-author of the "highly recommended" Midwest Book Review pick, *Christmas Cookies Are For Giving: Stories, Recipes and Tips for Making Heartwarming Gifts* (ISBN: 0-9723473-9-9). A downloadable media kit is available at our Web site,

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