NaNoWriMo Project

About a year ago, when I first began thinking about participating NaNoWriMo (National Novel Writing Month), I thought it would be a cinch, honestly. I thought to myself, “I write fast. I have tons of ideas. This will be a snap.” Well, I could not have been more wrong—NaNoWriMo was challenging, taking a toll on my time as well as my creative energy. By the end of the month, I was exhausted, I was proud of myself for finishing, but I was not entirely happy with my work. I told myself, “I can never do this again.” That is why I decided to undertake the task of NaNoWriMo for a second time, one year later, as an honors project. I refused to give up. I wanted to turn writing a novel in a month into an experiential learning project, because I knew this would give me the incentive to not only complete a dynamic work that I would be proud of, but it would also push me to branch out in my writing.

When I write, I usually do not have hardcore symbolism or deeper meaning in mind— I usually just write what comes to me. Writing what flows into your mind moment to moment and strengthening the integrity of the writing is important in NaNoWriMo. However, I wanted to add another level to my work, striving for pure, uninhibited writing while at the same time incorporating significance and symbolism into my novel. I knew from the start I was interested in writing a stream- of- consciousness piece, and I ended up writing the novel in one long paragraph to contribute to this particular style. The tone of the novel is very scattered and hectic, but at the same time it is organized and flows well due to the themes and symbolism that help pull it together.

At first I had no idea how to incorporate symbolism into my work. I was afraid that a “deeper meaning” would end up making my novel too complex, and I wanted the themes and symbolism to be straightforward. But then I wondered if it was even possible to make use of symbolism while at the same time wanting to create a fresh, straightforward piece. I though at first that it may be an oxymoron, that I was getting myself in too deep, and when I began to research the incorporation of symbolism, my efforts were futile as I was worried my style would seem too forced. All the while, I had to keep writing, and I refused to give up hope. If I was going to add symbolism, I decided, it had to come naturally.

Then, suddenly, I had a realization—symbolism ended up finding its way in on its own. From then on, I played on what I already had to create core themes in the novel. The novel itself has a simple plot; it basically outlines the main character’s unique perspective on her own life and how she goes about solving her problems and looking at her past and future, all the while terrified of her present.

The symbolism in my novel includes a slew of daddy issues represented by the heroine’s own writing career as well as the notion of a “guardian angel,” a fear of growing up manifesting itself in The Yellow Kitchen (which is, in fact, the title of my completed work), the fun room, and the “adult switch.” The alternative title of my work, *The Sun Shower*, is representative of the main character’s reflection on what love means for her. When I hit bouts of writer’s block, I even took the symbolism into my own hands in a “write- what- you- know” kind of way—my heroine is preoccupied with the notion of symbolism to give her life meaning; these little tidbits I drew from my own life allowed me to persevere in the writing without getting stuck.

Because of the simplistic backbone of my work, it was easy to make symbolism work without making the tone to heavy or causing the theme to have too much going on. In fact, the simplistic theme and the amount of symbolism balanced each other out perfectly, and they were both strengthened by another unexpected aspect of my work—its multi- modal nature.

From the beginning of this project, I wanted my main character to seem real—I wanted my audience to love her at times, and hate her at other times, pity her at times, and envy her, as well. I wanted her to be believable, to appear to be a real person. One way I did that was by not naming her or anyone else in her life—that way, she could be whoever the reader wanted her to be. They could see themselves in her, or see her as their friend or their long- lost twin, whatever they wanted. Another way I did that was by making the novel multi- modal. If you take a glimpse into someone’s brain, there isn’t just one long paragraph of thought. There are memories, funny stories, silly internet cartoons, song lyrics, memorable quotations—I wanted all of that on the page. And I managed to do that by placing hyperlinks, photographs, song lyrics, and quotations into their appropriate locations so that my heroine, everyone’s heroine, could seem more real and more vibrant. This multi- modal novel is not what I expected to create, but I think the different mediums I added into the piece, other than just writing, made it more fun to write and makes it more interesting to read.

Another interesting aspect I added to my novel was the incorporation of the heroine’s own writing into the piece. About halfway in or so, I grew tired of the same old long paragraph of the main character’s thoughts. To change it up, to keep myself on my toes, and to keep writer’s block out, I made my main character a writer. By introducing this facet of her life, I was able to coherently incorporate her own writing into my work, like a novel within a novel, in a way. I used examples her writing as a way to represent landmarks in her life and how she grows and learns as a human being. I also added an extra layer into her works. By adding symbolism into her short stories and poems, I was able to tie her life together in a clear way while at the same time rekindling the father- figure problems she has encountered in her past. She even addresses this theme in her own work, adding to the complexity of the novel while at the same time reinforcing the integrity of the writing. While keeping all of this straight was difficult at times, it allowed me to create a dynamic character in an already forceful and moving novel.

Throughout each day of this project, I documented my progress and my ideas into a blog- like format so that I could flesh out my ideas and build on them. This blog was a way to brainstorm as well as keep track of my work and its progress. While it was challenging to write part of a novel each day in addition to writing a short blog about it, I feel like I needed a format to get everything out there, especially if I hit a significant road block in my writing. This blog has been posted on the Honors Facebook page as the dissemination of my project.

I chose to participate in NaNoWriMo again because I wanted to create something I could be proud of, and I succeeded in doing so. I finished a 46,000- word novel in a single month, and every word contributed. Not only that, but the unexpected multi- modal element struck my writing as well, which made the novel even more dynamic. I simply wrote during the month of November; I did not editing and tried as hard as I could to just go forward in the story and not backward. However, I am not done with it yet—my next endeavor will be to pull aspects of both my NaNoWriMo novels into one complete, connected work, so that I can combine the strengths of each piece into what may someday be a personal masterpiece. While I was proud of my work in the month of November, I am not one- hundred- percent satisfied with it, which is why I am not ready to lay it to rest just yet. I would like to expand upon it and combine it with other things I have worked on in the past to create one piece that I am totally happy with. I want to be totally confident in sharing my novel with an audience, and it needs a little tweaking before I can call it done. While this project is completed, this particular novel is still a work- in- progress that I will not stop working on until it is totally finished.