



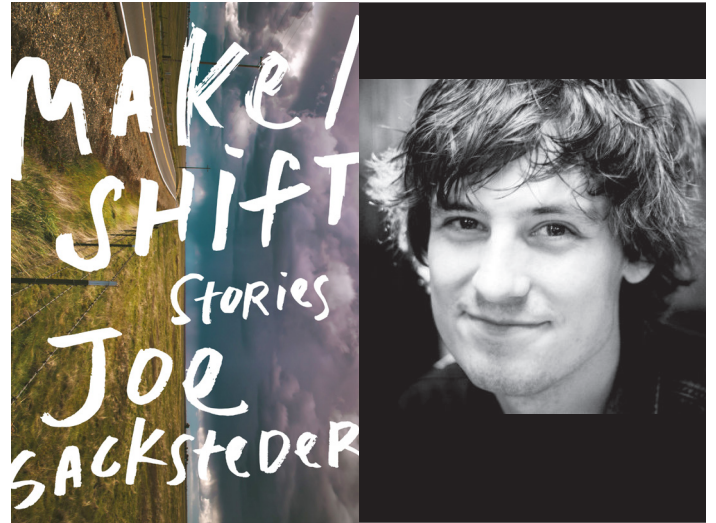
MAKE/SHIFT

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READER'S GUIDE

NINE QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. In what ways do the structures of “Earshot—Grope—Cessation,” “Make/Shift,” and “The Unquestionable Sincerity of Fire Alarms” attempt to mimic the events that those stories narrate?
2. In what ways do the final images of “The Unquestionable Sincerity of Fire Alarms” offer a commentary on the story’s many miscommunications?
3. What real-world, contemporary aspects of culture—in particular entertainment, politics, and religion—are being critiqued by the dystopian story “Ten Million Worldmarks for the Ouroborics”?
4. The nine short pieces—do you read them as prose poems, flash fiction, or something else? In what ways do they throw into flux the generic distinction and structure of the short story collection?
5. What’s so strange about the object that the protagonist of “Unearth” pulls out of the time capsule?
6. At the end of “Potentially Volatile Situation,” how do you interpret Yoon-jee’s response, “I’m learning American,” and what are this line’s larger ramifications on the story?
7. Describe the movement among seemingly disparate subject matters and images in “Enough Sealant to Pool the Concavity.”



8. What do these movements reveal about the narrator’s obsessions and traumas?
8. What are Barbara’s various reasons for attempting to relearn the difficult piano pieces at the center of “Muscle Memory?” How might the aspects of muscle memory that Barbara finds grotesque be expanded to describe situations in the story beyond piano performance?
9. Describe the “game” of “Game in the Sand.”

WRITING EXERCISES

How to write a how-to

The how-to manual is a really popular hybrid short story form. Your approach can be a direct, straightforward how-to manual with a story subtly



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woven into it, or it can use the how-to form very loosely, as a launching off point for something stranger. You can always start in one place and end somewhere entirely different and unexpected.

Often we get how-to manuals for tasks that would never require a manual. My first published story was “How to put on hockey equipment.”

Consider your major in school, your job, your social groups, your daily activities, assembling Ikea furniture...

If you have no ideas, pretend you’re leaving behind a note for your neighbor taking care of your cat.

They’re Playing My Song (particularly relatable to “Earshot—Grope—Cessation”)

We all have those songs that bear some kind of special significance in our lives. If humans have a tendency to view their lives as a narrative, what would be the most important song on your life’s soundtrack? It could be a popular song by a rock, rap, or country artist. Maybe a piece of classical music or a television theme song. Or maybe even a song a parent sang to you when you were a child. It doesn’t have to be your current favorite song; think of the whole scope of your life so far and describe how one song evokes a particularly distinctive stage in your development into the person you are today.

Floorplan Poem (particularly relatable to “Make/Shift”)

Stanza (a group of lines, kind of like the paragraph of poetry), comes from the Italian word for “room.”

With this idea in mind, start by drawing the floorplan of some place that’s important to you. It can be a house or apartment from childhood, a school, an ice rink – anywhere. It can even be outside. Try to make it as detailed as possible, especially the proportions of the rooms.

On the floors of each room, right down whatever short lines come to you: memories, features, the “vibe.”

Consider, how might we represent the room in language? Is it formal, spacious, crowded, social, grimy, clean?

Once you’ve filled each room, take us on a “tour” through the space, moving from one room to the next—either to a central “goal” or possibly back out of the space.

Let each stanza be the room. Don’t say “And now we’re going into the kitchen.” Just be in the kitchen.