

Why are you sending me a free book?

Spark Young Writers are involved with a European wide project with teenagers from Norway, Portugal, Italy, Spain and Ireland. One part of this project is to write Fan Fiction on the book you have been sent! One of our lead writers William Gallagher, has written some hints for you, so that once you have read the book, you can write some Fan Fiction based on it.

Ten Tips for Writing Fan Fiction – by William Gallagher

The whole point of fiction is that you can do what you like. However, when it's fan fiction, you're using someone else's characters and you're setting stories in someone else's fictional universe. Here are ten tips for writing your stories in their world.

- 1) Your story must be complete
It's very tempting to write a little extra scene that tells us what happened, for instance, in a conversation the book didn't show us, but that's not enough. You are telling a new story and it can't be just a moment within another.
- 2) Don't write 'to be continued'
Face it, you only wrote 'to be continued' because you couldn't think of an ending.
- 3) Don't assume your readers have read the book
Find a way to introduce the characters and set up this situation so that new readers will understand. But do it in a way that isn't boring for readers who know these tales as well as you do.
- 4) You can't change a character
If a character in the book is a girl who loves engineering and hates apples, you can't have her be a boy who likes apple pie.
- 5) The reset switch
You also can't write a story in which this girl learns to love apples. You can put your characters through anything, but at the end, they have to be the same characters. It's called the reset switch and the idea is that it means any fan fiction can slot in to the original book's timeline, it doesn't contradict anything.
- 6) Introducing new characters
Don't create a character who is really yourself coming in to the story. There's even a term for that: it's called writing a 'Mary Sue' character.
- 7) The story has to affect the characters
No matter how brilliant a plot you create, if it isn't about something that concerns or affects the characters from the book, it's boring. Make the story be about something that matters to the characters.

It's fine to have a favourite character and write a story about them. But whether you pick the lead character or the smallest one from a single chapter, your story then has to be about them.

- 8) What affects you
Remember what excited you about the book. Aim to write a story that does that for your reader too.
- 9) It sounds as if writing fan fiction is a list of things you can't do. But there is a solution to all of this and it is exactly why and how fan fiction can be great. You don't change anything, you go deeper into what's already there.

Doctor Who is the best example of this: it was the fan fiction stories about the Doctor that introduced the idea of how lonely he or she is. The Doctor is still the Doctor, but we see into him or her more deeply.

- 10) Be yourself
Don't try to write like Jonathan Stroud or anybody but yourself. This is another author's world and characters, but it's your story.
- 11) Breaking my rules
Go right ahead. Always. (See, we've already broken the rules by having an 11th tip!)

What next?

Your group will most likely be looking at writing FanFiction in their first session in September or October, so you can share your story with the group, or just enjoy hearing what everyone else thought! If you hate the book and don't want to join in, don't worry, that's OK too. And if you want to break William's rules, he says to tell you he completely approves – so long as you do it brilliantly! The writing is the most important thing.

You can see Jonathan Stroud talk about his books and this project by visiting <https://readon.eu/community/fanfictionlab> - it might provide some inspiration!

Once you have finished your story, please upload it to the readon.eu website and Jonathan Stroud will read it. To do this, you will need to create an account. Click Log In at the top right of the page, select Register, and complete your details. There are loads of fun things to engage with, you can submit book reviews, get book recommendations and participate in online author events.

Jonathan Stroud will be coming to the **Birmingham Literature Festival on Sunday 6th October** and as a Spark Young writer you can get a **free ticket** to come and see him. **There will also be opportunities to participate.** More details to follow.