

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Writing Prompt: Tools of the Trade

Charity Hume · Wednesday, March 26th, 2014

Another helpful writing prompt from Charity Hume.

When I was a child, my father's barn seemed to be a world unto itself. He had a gift for working with wood, and the tools above his workbench were mysterious and intriguing; there were hand planes, wood clamps, a rip saw for cutting across the grain, and fine toothed backsaws for complex cuts. Above the bench, racks held gradually ascending sizes of wrenches, hammers, and screwdrivers. There were sandpapers of every fineness, awls and drills for boring holes, tubes of epoxy and bottles of linseed oil. A locked cabinet held toxic paints, polyurethane, and turpentine. The floor of the barn was always covered in sawdust.

Watching people work tells us who they are, the confident way a mechanic gets under the hood of a car, an experienced pastry chef who rolls out a dozen tart shells with careful precision. Think of cooks, dentists, athletes and dancers. Where do they work? How do they use the tools of the trade? What are the sounds, sights, smells, textures and tastes of their daily routine? Research a profession by watching an expert at work. Out of this research, create a character portrait by describing in detail what he or she really knows how to do.



The Parquet Planers, (1875) by Gustave Caillebotte, courtesy of Wikipaintings

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