



Statue Stories Chicago: The Public Writing Competition Give Lake Ontario a voice!

Behind the Art Institute of Chicago, is the Fountain of the Great Lakes. Within the famous fountain is the wistful figure of Lake Ontario. She sits apart from her sister lakes, gazing into the distance with arms outstretched. But what does she have to say for herself?

Write a Monologue!

Monologos means “speaking alone” in Greek, but we all know that people who speak without thinking about their listener can be very dull indeed. Your challenge is to find a ‘voice’ for your statue and to write an engaging monologue in 350 words.

Get under your statue’s skin!

- Look closely and develop a sense of empathy with the sculpture and imagine how it would feel. How does Lake Ontario feel about her sister lakes?
- Invite your listener to feel with you: create shifts in tempo and emotion, use different tenses, figures of speech and anecdotes, sensory details and even sound effects.

Finding your sculpture’s voice?

Write in the first person and adopt the persona of your character:

- What kind of vocabulary will you use - your own or that of another era/dialect?
- Your words will be spoken so read them aloud: use their rhythm and your sentence structure to convey emotion and urgency.
- Read great monologues for inspiration, for example Hamlet’s *Alas Poor Yorick*, or watch film monologues, like Morgan Freeman’s in *The Shawshank Redemption*.

How will you keep people listening? Structure your monologue!

- How will you introduce yourself? With a greeting, a warning, a question, an order, a riddle? Grab and hold your listener’s attention from your very first line.
- Think of your monologue as a story, with you as both narrator and lead: how will you build a sense of development, suspense and atmosphere?
- Your final line is the most important of all: how will you say goodbye and make your exit?

Do some background research before you begin- find out about your statue

Google around and become an expert on your statue. You are sure to discover interesting facts, anecdotes, jokes or quotes to weave into your monologue. You may want to explore more about the lakes themselves; this may help you to find more character.

The Subject: *Fountain of the Great Lakes* by Lorado Taft, 1907-13 Art Institute of Chicago.

What do I look like? Where am I?

This monumental fountain of nymphs and flowing water was designed as a tribute to America's Great Lakes. The piece mirrors the interconnected flow of water. Your task is to give a voice to Lake Ontario.

A little background

- Taft's sculpture gives the Great Lakes a feel of quiet dignity. The Wyandot must have felt this too, as they called Ontario 'Lake of Shining Waters'.
- Taft was accused of having a conservative view of art and being a 'worshipper of the Greek'. He defended himself, 'We are living in a world of beauty, but few of us open our eyes to see it.'
- Not only is it the 14th largest lake on the planet, but a lake on Saturn is named after Lake Ontario.

In Taft's own words:

'The motif of the group is not profound. 'Lake Superior' on high and 'Lake Michigan' at the side both empty into the basin of 'Lake Huron,' who sends the waters on to 'Lake Erie' whence 'Lake Ontario' receives them. As they escape from her basin and hasten into the unknown, she reaches wistfully after them as though questioning whether she has been neglectful of her charge.'

Some points to keep in mind:

- **The audience is not used to speaking to statues!** It's an unexpected experience and so, the piece needs to be engaging from the start.
- **Every word counts!** It's a short word limit, so avoid 'filler'!
- **The project sets out to reach new audiences:** people who like looking at public art and statues as well as people who didn't know they did! We hope for wide public appeal.
- **Use the physicality of the statue.** If a statue has a broken nose, you might want to refer to it.
- **Refer to the location and surroundings** of the statue. What's it doing in that place specifically? Does it explore the areas at night when nobody is around?

Have you found your story and your voice? Then get writing!

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