

Writing Fiction About the Coast of Maine

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This summer I had the opportunity to explore the coast of Maine through fiction. I set out to further my understating of the coast through research and travel, and to produce short stories that provide an accurate and authentic representation of Maine. I began my research by reading short stories and novels set in Maine, such as “*The State We're In*” by Ann Beattie, and “*Empire Falls*” by Richard Russo. I also read non-fiction works, such as “*Salt in Their Veins*,” a collection of interviews with coastal inhabitants. These readings gave me an excellent overview of how Maine has been portrayed in the literature of the past century, and also helped me identify reoccurring character types, themes, and settings. Additionally, these works managed to take me where my travels around the coast could not and provided many differing perspective on Maine. As well as reading books set on the coast, I read stories and novels from authors whose style I wanted to emulate within my own works. My selections included “*Vampire in the Lemon Groves*” by Karen Russell, “*Get into Trouble*” by Kelly Link and “*Civil Warland in Bad Decline*” by George Saunders. Some works, such as “*Officer Friendly*” by Lewis Robinson managed to both provide me with stylistic models and an examination of coastal Maine. I paid attention to word usage, plot, sentence structure, and tone and thought about how I could marry an energetic, sharp and witty voice, like those of Saunder's, Link's and Russell's, with a coastal setting.

Before this summer, I had visited only a few places in Maine, and, thus travel was a central facet of my research. I was able to explore many locations, including Bar Harbor, Bangor, Portland and Saco, and tried to gain an understanding of the sort of life that one might lead in these places, and the people who might lead it. Through travel, I was also able to look at my readings more critically and detach a more mythic vision of Maine, one that might have existed many years ago, from what I saw and encountered as I traveled up and down the coast.

The culmination of this process of travel and research was a body of work that is set, and deals primarily with the coast of Maine. I tried to include a wide variety of narrators, and I explored many themes that I thought were pertinent, including socio-economic divides, the process of growing up and remaining in a small town, and engagement with the natural world, especially the sea. I also paid attention to aspects like tense, word usage, phrasing and sentence structure, and how these contribute to an overall atmosphere and engaging voice. I have completed this summer with over 90 pages of work that I am proud of, and hope to edit and improve upon in the coming two years.

This summer has allowed me to my grow intellectually, as a writer and reader. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, many of my preconceived notions about both Maine fiction, and the coast of Maine itself, were challenged and dismantled. I believe that I have gained an important understanding of a complex location as well as a glimpse into the perspective of the varied people who might inhabit it.

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