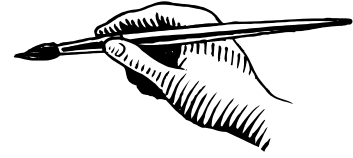


# The Art of Voice



© 2008 Catherine Kean, Nancy Robards Thompson, and Teresa Elliott Brown

Presenters:

Teresa Elliott Brown

Catherine Kean

Nancy Robards Thompson

Michelle Grajkowski, Literary Agent, 3 Seas Literary Agency

Tessa Woodward, Assistant Editor, Avon

**Summary:** Through observation and analysis of first paintings to iconic masterpieces by artists such as Monet, Picasso, and Pollock, this workshop examines the use of artistic technique and compares it to the development of the writer's voice using creative exercises.

## 1. Slide presentation

Who painted these works of art? How do you know that?

**Conclusion:** An artist can be identified by composition, technique, subject matter, choice of color, etc. Just as you can identify a painter's work without seeing the signature or name plate on the work, so you can identify a writer's voice.

## 2. What is writing voice?

Voice is the way a writer puts words on paper. Every writer has a unique voice rooted in her past and present experiences, ethnic background, upbringing, education, values, etc.

Writing voice is different from character voice. An author's writing voice isn't character specific. It encompasses the manuscript as a whole, in terms of sentence structure, word choice, and figurative language.

## 3. Editor/Agent perspective on voice

Agent Michelle Grajkowski of 3 Seas Literary Agency and Assistant Editor Tessa Woodward of Avon tell why a distinctive writing voice is important for selling in today's market.

## 4. Development of voice

Through these Monet slides, we see how his painting style developed from caricatures to the water lily paintings for which he's famous. It took time for him to develop his style, to find his own "artistic voice." He had to know the basic tools of his trade, before he could venture off into his own style—just like an author has to learn basic writing craft before developing her or her own voice.

**Brainstorming Exercise:** Compare the tools of the artist to tools of the writer.



Perspective = Voice

Examine Manet and Renoir paintings of the same scene. These artists used the same painting tools, but came up with very different interpretations which show their own unique styles.

#### 5. Voice is organic

When you first put words on paper, you've used your writer's voice. But what makes a New York Times best selling author's voice better than yours? Or is it? Obviously they've mastered basic writing skills but haven't been limited by them. They've learned how to use different layers of their unique perspective and translate them into a universal language that pulls us into their story.

#### 6. Elements of organic voice

Organic voice and the layers of unique perspective originate in the emotional filters in our lives; these come from our life experiences, past and present, and the five senses through which we understand our world.

Examples of emotional filters:

Smell of roses

Positive experience: Smells like a well-tended summer garden

Negative experience: Overpowering, like an ex-girlfriend's cloying perfume.

Salt

Positive: Makes food taste better

Negative: Salt poured on wound; ouch!

Sound of a baby crying

Positive: Motherly instincts; need to nurture and comfort

Negative: For a woman who can't have children, it's a reminder of her physical infirmity

Group exercise to show how author voice is connected to individual perception and use of the five senses. Brainstorm what we'd see, hear, taste, touch, and smell in an artist's studio. Use these to create positive and negative metaphors/imagery connected with these ideas.



#### 7. Examples of figurative language

Nancy Robards Thompson: Excerpt from *With Violets*, written as Elizabeth Robards, September 2008, Avon A, ISBN# 9780061579127,

Catherine Kean: Excerpt from *A Knight's Reward*, April 2008, Medallion Press, ISBN# 9781932815993

Teresa Elliott Brown: Excerpt from *Remembering How to Make Music*, 2006 and 2007 Golden Heart® Finalist Manuscript

8. The difference between voice and craft

Agent Michelle Grajkowski of 3 Seas Literary Agency and Assistant Editor Tessa Woodward of Avon discuss what makes a strong submission. They'll talk about those that feature weak writing but a strong voice; and submissions that have a weak voice but flawless writing.

Conclusion: a writer must know the tools of the trade as well as be willing to "put herself on the line," as in draw on her emotional filters.

9. Homework Contest:

To further examine your voice Teresa Elliott Brown, Catherine Kean and Nancy Robards Thompson are running a special contest. Check their websites for full contest details:

telliottbrown.com

catherinekean.com

nancyrobardsthompson.com



Winners will be notified October 1, 2008. Prize package includes a \$25 Amazon.com gift certificate.

10. Questions?

*Speaker Bios:*

**Teresa Elliott Brown** is a three-time Golden Heart® Finalist. Her romantic comedy *Pants on Fire* finaled in the 2004 Golden Heart® after winning the Golden Pen contest; the manuscript is currently being adapted for the screen. In 2006 and 2007, *Remembering How to Make Music* made the Golden Heart® finals. Currently this book about a woman finding joy and love while pursuing her music is undergoing revisions per editors' requests. *Bombshells*, a coming of age story set against the backdrop of the Cuban Missile Crisis, won the 2003 Jasmine Contest. When not writing women's fiction or romantic comedies, Teresa works with her husband in their recording studio and production company near Orlando, Florida. Visit her website at [telliottbrown.com](http://telliottbrown.com) for updates on her journey to publication.

**Catherine Kean** has always loved tales of heroic knights and stubborn damsels. Her debut medieval romance, *Dance of Desire*, was the launch title of Medallion Press's Sapphire Jewel Imprint. *Dance of Desire* won two Reviewer's Choice Awards, Best Medieval in industry review magazine *Affaire de Coeur's* 2006 Reader-Writers' Poll, and finaled in four contests for published romance novelists. Her second book, *A Knight's Vengeance*, finaled in three contests, including Georgia Romance Writers' Maggie Awards. Her third novel, *My Lady's Treasure*, garnered a Reviewer's Choice Award from The Road to Romance and won the historical category of the 2008 Gayle Wilson Award of Excellence Contest. Her current release, *A Knight's Reward*, is book two of her Knight's Series which continues with *A Knight's Temptation* in April 2009. Please visit Catherine's website at [catherinekean.com](http://catherinekean.com).

Award winning author **Nancy Robards Thompson** has reinvented herself numerous times. She's worked a myriad of jobs including newspaper reporter, television show stand-in, production and extras casting for movies, and several mind-numbing jobs in the fashion industry and public relations. She earned a degree in journalism only to realize reporting "just the facts" bored her silly. Much more content to report to her muse, Nancy has found Nirvana doing what she loves most - writing contemporary and historical romance and women's fiction full-time. After hanging up her press pass, this two-time Golden Heart nominee won the award in July 2002. Since then, she's gone on to sell 10 books, which critics have deemed, "funny, smart and observant." Nancy's historical women's fiction novel, *With Violets*, which is written as Elizabeth Robards, will be released in trade paperback by Avon in September 2008; her first Silhouette Special Edition, "The Accidental Princess," will hit the shelves in October 2008, and she will have three Harlequin/Silhouette releases in 2009. For more details, please visit her website at [nancyrobardsthompson.com](http://nancyrobardsthompson.com).

From the moment **Michelle Grajkowski** first opened her doors to the 3 Seas Literary Agency in August of 2000, she has been living her dream. (What could be better than surrounding yourself with great authors and their exciting and imaginative books?) Since then, she's become of a member of AAR and successfully sold into major publishing houses including Harlequin, NAL, Berkley, Dorchester, Kensington, Avon, Pocket, Random House (both here and in the UK), Knopf, Andrews McMeel, Warner, St. Martin's and HarperCollins. Currently, she is looking for fantastic authors with a voice of their own. Michelle focuses on romance, women's fiction, Chick-Lit young adult and middle grade fiction.

Assistant Editor **Tessa Woodward** has been with Avon since September 2005. She works with Carrie Feron on her impressive list of bestselling authors including Teresa Medeiros and Eloisa James, in addition to Karen Ranney and Mary Castillo. She is looking to acquire all genres of romance - especially Regency and Victorian historicals with strong heroines and sexy heroes.