

Creative Writing 1

with Johnny Worthen

Week 2 – The Plot Thickens
Themes & Details



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Today's Plan

- Theme
- Mechanics of Writing
- Story Elements



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Some Useful Programs

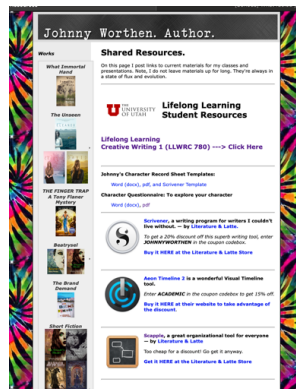
Scrivener



Aeon Timeline



Scapple



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Discussion of Reading

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THEME: It's what it's all about

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- Theme is **the subject of a piece of writing.**
 - Overarching & Unifying Idea(s)
 - Base Note:
the longest-lasting element of a fragrance



Rule of Content

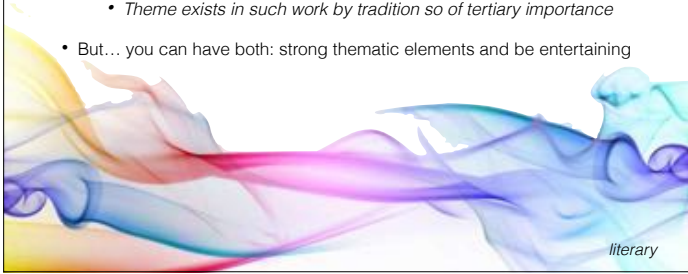
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- Every word, sentence, paragraph, and chapter in your book must speak to either:
 - PLOT or CHARACTER or **THEME!**



Optional

- Not every story has or wants an identifiable theme — It is a luxury
- Sometimes stories are just entertainment
 - *A good story, mental margarita, comedies*
 - *Theme exists in such work by tradition so of tertiary importance*
- But... you can have both: strong thematic elements and be entertaining



Writing as Therapy

Writing is creative expression

Reflection of an author's psyche

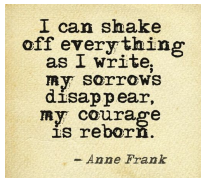
A place to consider, resolve and heal

Serves a purpose even if it's never read

- These struggles are translated as Theme

Transcends the simple craft of narrative

Subconscious relationships (psychoanalysis)



"Writing is a form of therapy; sometimes I wonder how all those who do not write, compose, or paint can manage to escape the madness, melancholia, the panic and fear which is inherent in a human situation."
 — **Graham Greene**

Theme as Lighthouse

Helps navigate construction

Gives ideas on what details to include

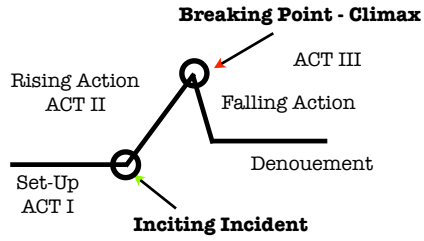
Background Illumination

Always there as bass note

Connects the disparate parts

Thematic Acts

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Act 1: ask question

Act 2: explore the question

Act 3: answer the question (or not)



Great minds discuss ideas;
average minds discuss events;
small minds discuss people.
Eleanor Roosevelt

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Theme Worksheet

Theme Worksheet

Identifying Theme

Concern: What is happening in your life that's bothering you? (e.g. "I don't feel well")

Question: Boil down one of those problems into a question. (e.g. "Am I going to die?")

Keys: Boil down the question into keywords and key phrases. (e.g. "death")

Contrasts: List some opposites and contrasts of your keywords and key phrases. (e.g. "life")

Thematic Pairs: Place Keys and Contrast side by side. (e.g. "death/life")

Finding Thematic Elements

What conflicts can you imagine to pose your Question?

Imagine a character representing your Keys.

Imagine an antagonist representing your Contrast.

Imagine a situation where these Thematic Pairs are explored.

What items, places, situations could you use to symbolize the Question, Keys and Contrasts?

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Writer's Palette



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Parts of Speech:

Nouns

Verbs

Adjectives

Adverbs

Prepositions

Conjunctions

Pronoun

Interjection

Sentence Structures

Simple sentence = one independent clause

Compound sentence = two independent clauses joined by a conjunction

Complex sentence = one dependent clause joined to one independent clause

Compound-complex sentence = one (or more) dependent clauses joined to two independent clauses

The Best Writers Know How To..

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Use a mixture of sentence structures

Use active verbs over passive verbs

Use well chosen words that add power and meaning

Stay focused on story instead of getting lost in language

Love words and language, but not to fall in love with their own writing

Avoid Lazy Language

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Lazy Nouns: stuff, things, people, everyone, no one, guys, girls, men, women, kids, animals

Lazy Verbs: is, am, are, was, were, had, did, went, moved, walked

Lazy Adjectives: good, bad, pretty, ugly, nice, mean, cute, friendly, old, young, hot, cold,

Lazy Adverbs: slowly, quickly, angrily, nicely, sadly, happily, softly, loudly

Word Choice

Compare the following:

The chilled wind slithered through the broken glass and whipped the dingy grey curtains.

The warm breeze floated through the opened window and tousled the dove grey curtains.

“The difference between the almost right word and the right word is really a large matter — ’tis the difference between the lightning-bug and the lightning.”
Mark Twain

Rewrite this Paragraph

- It was an ordinary day in a small town. Flowers bloomed in the neighborhood yards. Kids played on the lawns and dogs rolled in the grass. There was nothing that seemed unusual to the boy riding his bike down the street. His thoughts were on the upcoming baseball game and getting to practice on time. He peddled fast, hoping to be the first one on the field and to show his coach he was ready to play.

Keep all the details but paint it Dark or Light by using word choices and focus

Story Elements

POV

Setting

Voice

Tense

Genre



Point of View

POV = Point of View

Who are we experiencing the story through?

First Person POV

Third Person POV

Omniscient

Limited



Second Person POV? (no)

First Person

I sat down beside her on the little bed. I stole a glance at her shapely thighs and stroked her hair over her ear, preparing to plant the tenderest of kisses there.

She was cold. Low body fat had its drawbacks, I thought.

I reached to pull the bedspread over her and brushed against her neck. It was cold. I put my hand on her thigh. It was cold too.

I rolled her over. She flopped like a stringless marionette. Half her face was pale as the nearby lace curtains, the other was a bruised plum.

I caught my breath like I'd stepped in an ice bath. I told myself not to jump to conclusions. Don't jump. Don't conclude. You're jumpy, Tony, I said to myself. I often call myself Tony when I talk to myself. It's my name, so it works out.



Third Person

Eleanor turned her head and, still resting it on her arms, stole a glance at David.

He hadn't seen her, or if he had, he'd already moved on to the more active stares.

He'd grown of course. Nearly six feet tall, now. Big shoulders. His mop of brown hair over his pale complexion was as untamed and thick as she remembered. He had a new scar under his eye, small and well healed, but Eleanor noticed it. He had stubble and a scratch on his lip from where he'd shaved that morning.

Eleanor's hands were shaking. She realized she'd been holding her breath. She forced an exhale.

"Miss Anders," Mrs. Hart said. "I was asking you if you were paying attention."

The class released David from their stares and turned them at her.



Setting

The stage

Another Character

Place & Time

Connecting to known elements

Why is this the setting?

Theme?



Voice

The personality telling the story or providing information is the writer's main voice.

How is the story presented?

Author through narrator and POV

Epic?

Humorous?

Honest? / Deceitful?



Tense

Past

Recollecting story

Present

Experiencing

Pros & Cons to each



Future? (no)

Genre



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Taps into established Tropes

Tropes: Significant or recurring theme or motif

Motif: pattern

Connection and Crutch



Homework for Week 3

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• **Prewriting:**

- Theme Worksheet
- Points and Pacing Worksheet #2

• **Write - Use Standard Manuscript Format**

- 1-2 Paragraph description with mood

• **Read:**

- "Guidelines for Critique Sessions" handout
- "Everyday Use" by Alice Walker

To Share —
Email me by Monday morning:
johnny@johnnyworthen.com
or - bring 13 copies to class
