

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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Rule of Content

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- “Every word, sentence, paragraph, and chapter in your book must speak to either PLOT or CHARACTER”
- Are you writing a PLOT or CHARACTER based story?

THIRD OPTION: THEME!



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



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)

I can shake
off everything
as I write,
my sorrows
disappear.
my courage
is reborn.
- Anne Frank

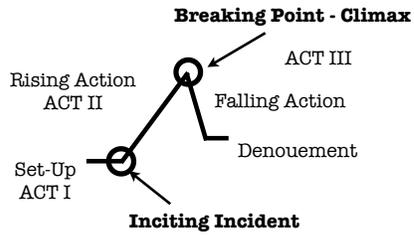
"Writing is a form of therapy; sometimes I wonder how all those who do not write, compose, or paint can manage to escape the madness, melancholia, the panic and fear which is inherent in a human situation."
- Graham Greene

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)

Theme Worksheet

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Theme Worksheet

Identifying Theme

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

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

Keys: End 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 Contrast?

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: *He ate cheese.*
- Compound sentence = two independent clauses joined by a conjunction: *He ate cheese but hated brie.*
- Complex sentence = one dependent clause joined to one independent clause: *Because brie is yucky, he wouldn't eat it.*
- Compound-complex sentence = one (or more) dependent clauses joined to two independent clauses: *Brie, being expensive and he wanting to appear rich, he ate the plateful.*

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

Active vs. Passive

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- **Active verbs emphasize the the person or object performing the action / Passive verbs emphasize the person or object receiving the action, often hiding the actor entirely.**
 - *I wrote a story about a comic detective. / A story about a comic detective was written by me.*
 - *I screwed up. / Mistakes were made.*
 - *The war was won. / We won the war.*
 - *He receives a message. / A message was received by him.*
 - *It was discovered by the detective that he had no alibi. / The detective discovered he had no alibi.*

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

- Voice
- POV
- Setting
- Tense
- Genre



Voice

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- 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?*



Point of View

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- POV = Point of View
 - Who are we experiencing the story through?
- First Person POV
- Third Person POV
 - Omniscient
 - Limited
 - Neutral Detached



Second Person POV? (no)

First Person

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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

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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

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- The stage
- Another Character
- Place & Time
 - Connecting to known elements
- Why is this the setting?
 - Theme?



Tense

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- 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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- **Read:**
 - "Everyday Use" by Alice Walker
- **Prewriting:**
 - Points and Pacing Worksheet #2
 - Theme Worksheet
- **Write:**
 - One Page (<300 words) **SETTING** description with a **MOOD**
 - **Third person, NO dialogue, minimum action. Observe**

To Share —
Email to me by Sunday afternoon:
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