

# Foreshadowing

Give us a hint...

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Presented by  
Johnny Worthen

**[www.JohnnyWorthen.com](http://www.JohnnyWorthen.com)**

# A Definition

- **Foreshadowing:** The literary device foreshadowing refers to the use of indicative words/phrases and hints that set the stage for a story to unfold and give the reader a hint of something that is going to happen without revealing the story or spoiling the suspense. Foreshadowing is used to suggest an upcoming outcome to the story.

# Foreshadowing Spectrum

- Levels of obviousness
  - “He vowed that day to get even no matter what - even if it took until the end of the book he’d make Angela pay!”
  - “His warm smile left him. He took a deep breath and spat.”
- Levels of detail
  - “It would be a night to remember.”
  - “If anyone touches this button, Mr. Bond, my entire plan will be ruined in a spectacular special-effects driven orange-fireball montage of destruction and I will be defeated.”

# Clues in a *Mystery*

- “I see dead people.”
  - Plot point + extra meaning/foreshadowing
    - Plot Twist
    - Makes sense at the end. (Sixth Sense!)
- “Penelope’s perfume bottle was not where she left it.”
  - Important detail or red herring?
    - Misdirection is as important as direction
    - Options, puzzles, angles

# Prophecy

- Mystical
  - MacBeth
    - Arc: “fair is foul and foul is fair”
    - Detail: “Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill shall come against him”
    - Surprise: “Fear not, Macbeth. No man that’s born of woman Shall e'er have power upon thee”
  - Dreams/Ghosts/Seers/Prophets/Ancient Texts
- Contemporary
  - The Cornetto Trilogy
    - Shaun of the Dead / Hot Fuzz / World’s End

# Beware Spoilers

- Foreshadowing has to be delicate and often obfuscated or it will spoil the suspense instead of adding to it.
- “If anyone touches this button, Mr. Bond...”
  - No biggie. Low level mystery
    - The question becomes “how” and “who”
- “Dr. Acula is here to see you, detective, about those mysterious murders you’re investigating.”
- Movie Previews - amirite?
- Blurbs, Covers and Marketing Material
  - Gotta give a little, but not too much.

# Meta Foreshadowing

- First Person Narrator
  - Is going to be alive at the end
- Historical Fiction
  - Napoleon is going to have a bad time at Waterloo
  - Dances with Wolves: Kevin Costner's new Indian way of life won't last long

# Seeking Attention

- Foreshadowing often draws attention to itself with contrasting style and mood to signal an important clue
  - “Tommy was ever so happy. He loved life and Stephanie and knew in his glowing heart they’d be happy forever. Little did he suspect the misery to come.”
    - Change in mood is startling and thus a memorable foreshadowed clue



# Nothing to See Here

- Foreshadowing often obscured
  - “Pat spent a year with his aunt in Perth to recover from an unknown ailment, many people believed to have been caught a loose woman.”
    - Small detail slipped in casual dialog, long description, etc.
  - The important detail is not the disease, but the place.
    - Later explains how Pat knew about Australian Toad Venom
  - Often requires the reader to make connections
    - Perth = Australia
    - Pay off in the end
      - Reader involved in the story
        - Feels smart for figuring it out beforehand
        - At least it makes sense\*

# Makes Sense: Plot Twists

- Foreshadowing lets the writer justify later event and prepare the reader for “unexpected” twists.
- OR NOT - Surprise Plot Twist
- “I saw that coming” vs. “I didn’t see that coming”
  - If too drastic a turn, the reader can feel cheated and lied to — you lose trust
  - Deus Ex Machina
  - A foundation of expectation and possibility is vital to be fair to the reader
    - No matter how hard the turn, the reader should be somewhat prepared for it
      - Crying Game, Fight Club, Soylent Green

# Chekov's Gun

- “One must never place a loaded rifle on the stage if it isn't going to go off. It's wrong to make promises you don't mean to keep.”
- Foreshadowing is A Promise You Make to the Reader
  - If you break your promise, you suck (and lose the trust of your reader)
    - The tipped bottle was the key to the whole mystery
    - Somebody pushes that button
  - Even red herrings should be tied up
    - Wrong answer, move along
    - His surly look was due to his palsy not malice.

# Common Tropes

- The Weather
  - Storm Coming / Change in the Weather
- Brief disassociated glances at a characters, objects, details, etc which haven't been attached to the story yet.
  - Cook in Hunt for Red October
    - Lamp-shaded in Kiss Kiss Bang Bang
- End of Chapter Teaser
  - They'd found a safe place... or had they?

# Writing Foreshadowing

- Know what you're saying
  - Theme
- Know where you're going:
  - Waypoints and ending (at least)
- As you're building up the story toward an end, clues will naturally fall into place
- Good device to intentionally add spice to an otherwise bland but necessary chapter.
- Symbolism offers rich menu for foreshadowing

# Q & A / Work Session

- What'd I miss?
- Really? You want to talk about that?
  - Well okay... whatever.

# Would you like to know more?

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- Please sign the guestbook while you're there!
- [www.johnnyworthen.com](http://www.johnnyworthen.com)