

Is The Theme Running Throughout The Story?

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**Is The Theme Running Throughout The Story?**

**By Nick Vernon**

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Creative Writing Tips -

It's no use coming up with a theme and not using it. Short stories are about a character or characters and about one situation or happening in those characters' lives.

By concentrating on that one thing, our stories are focused. You will need to focus to maintain a level of intensity and sticking to the theme enables us to do that.

Let me give you an example...

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Scenario One

Let's say your story is about a young man (main character) who is being harassed (one situation) by the school bully (secondary character.) Let's place the setting in grade school.

Now if we focus on that single happening and in our story say.... What started the bullying What the main character felt, confronted with this problem What the main character did to overcome this problem If the main character won or lost against the bully...

Then we'll be focusing only on that incident which is what our story is about.

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Scenario Two

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Now if we took that situation further and in our story said that this character grew up and was bullied in high school and then later by a colleague...

That will be listing three incidences, which will weaken our story because we are not focusing.

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Remember a short story is short.

We don't have too much leeway to develop too many things so we have to be selective with what we choose to concentrate on. Short stories work best when they span over a short period of time.

Like in scenario one, this incident might span over a couple of days or a week, where in the second scenario, it spans over a number of years. The shorter the time span the more intense the story.

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Your theme should begin at the beginning, run through the middle and conclude in the end. So let's put a theme to the first scenario...

'Strength Comes From Within And In The End Prevails.'

How can I have this theme running throughout my story?

Initially I will portray my main character as a weak individual. But I will excuse his weakness, by saying perhaps that...

"He comes from a closely knit, loving family and initially doesn't know how to deal with such a conflict."

As my story progresses, I will gradually show his inner strength and I will do this through incidences, which will show his maturity, like...

·He helps out by caring for his younger siblings and contributes with the housework.

And

·I can show him cutting the neighbours' lawns or delivering newspapers before school to show that he contributes economically too.

If I do this, my ending (when he wins against the bully) will be believable because I have developed his inner strength. My theme would have run its course.

Is your theme running throughout the story?

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### **Does Your Story Have A Theme?**

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Creative Writing Tips -

It should.

A theme is a one-line explanation of your story.. Every story should have one because our stories are about something.

When I say should, I mean that this isn't always the case. Especially so for beginner writers, who may not know, that the theme carries the story. Or even those who've been writing for years may not be aware of the importance of a theme.

And a theme is important.

A theme is what will keep you on track as you write the story.

What happens if you write without a theme in mind? Two things...

1.You stray from the subject

or

2.You write more than one story.

Let me give you an example of a story written with a theme in mind...

The theme to a story I once wrote was, 'Vanity Leads To Destruction.'

Very briefly, this story is about a female character that believed herself to be so beautiful, in the end she lost everything.

Writing this theme on a post-it note and sticking it on my computer, I was always reminded that my story had to revolve around this theme. Having a theme helped me stick to the story I had intended on writing and not stray from it - not even a little. It also helped me to focus only on what was essential to my story.

So according to my theme, 'Vanity Leads To Destruction'... Every action my character performed was to show her vanity Her goals sprung from her vanity What motivated her was her vanity Her words (dialogue) showed her vanity How she handled situations showed her vanity The interaction with other characters showed her vanity The conflict was a result of her vanity The highest peak in my

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story, the climax, showed an intense moment of whether her goal would be met (whether her vanity would work for, or against her) And the ending? The ending showed how she was led to destruction

because of her vanity

By following my theme, everything in my story was precise.

If I showed my character not being vain in any instance, then I would've strayed from my theme.

Does your story have a theme?

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If you didn't consciously write with a theme in mind, then your story won't have one. Chances are, your story isn't focused. But then again there is the other possibility... At times we fluke things.

Perhaps without consciously knowing, a theme is running through your story.

Check your story to see if this is the case. If it is, are you sticking to the theme?

If you find that some parts of your story are straying from the theme, those parts will need to be changed to accommodate the theme.

Now the other possibility...

You don't have a theme and none is running through your story. That's okay. We can still save it. Read through your story and see what it's about. Then come up with the most appropriate theme to it – A theme that makes sense yet won't mean too much work to change the story.

Rewrite those parts that don't accommodate the theme.

It is easier if we come up with a theme while we are at the plotting stage. It saves all that rewriting but not to worry... You won't make the same error again in your next story!

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