

LESSON 3: FINDING THE HEART OF YOUR STORY



WHAT IS THE HEART OF YOUR STORY?

Your theme is the core of your story, the thing that resonates with your audience on a broad level, and encompasses all of the action within the story.

Topic vs. Theme

Topic is specific to your story. It includes plot points, motif, character arch, research, etc.

Theme is broad. It encompasses all of the above. It is the big picture, and often conveys the main message or take away of the story.

Examples:

- A Christmas Carol
 - » Topic: Appreciating the spirit of Christmas. A miserly man faces his own past in an effort to save his soul.
 - » Themes: Wealth vs. happiness, Generosity
- Les Miserables
 - » Topic: social injustice in nineteenth-century France; the long-term effects of the French Revolution on French society. A man imprisoned for stealing a loaf of bread tries to escape his past by remaking himself and becoming an honorable man.
 - » Themes: Justice vs. Mercy, Redemption

How Do You Figure Out Your Theme?

The Thing Your Character Wants = Plot

The Thing Your Character Needs = Theme

K.M Weiland

Theme definition: An idea, concept, or lesson that appears repeatedly throughout a story, reflects the character's internal journey through the external plot, and resonates with the reader.

DIY MFA

Inclusive: applies to all of us

Universal human experience

Not the "moral" or message

Common themes: Love, redemption, justice, courage, Nature of life,

Break Down Your Theme Step by Step

- Tips and Clues
 - » Sum up your story in as little words as possible. The theme, or the heart of your story, should be one word, or one short phrase.
 - » How has the character changed? What have they learned? (want vs. need)
 - » What message or moral do you want your audience to take away?
- Exercise
 1. Start with a Synopsis: Write a paragraph about what your story is about, including plot, character arch, motifs, setting. Think: back of a book or Spark Notes overview.
 2. Write a pitch: 3 sentences max about what your story is about. Think: "elevator pitch"
 3. Finally: Narrow down themes.



CHALLENGE

Boil down your theme from a current piece of writing, or from a well-known book or story using the exercise above.

Email your challenge to laurelnakai@gmail.com by Aug 8