

A Well-Told Story

Name: _____

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Everyone loves a good story.

The world is teeming with stories! Libraries are full of books, and countless hours are spent in front of the television—all in the hope that we can enjoy a good story.

As much as we love good stories, we *hate* poorly told stories. It is incredibly disappointing to spend the time reading a book or watching a movie, or listening to someone tell a story, then by the end have no idea what it was *about*. For a story to hold our attention, it needs to not only make sense but also catch our interest. In almost all circumstances, the plot must involve some sort of conflict or change of fortune.

However, a plot is not the only thing needed for a good story. Interesting and relatable characters are also needed. What if you were watching a movie and one of the characters was completely unrelatable, unlikable, and unbelievable? Even if the plot were interesting, it would be hard to care much about the fortunes of that character because he did not interest you.

Sometimes what contributes to a good story is the setting. How different would the plot be of a particular story if it were set in outer space? Or perhaps, how different would the story be if it were *not* set in outer space? What if the storyteller didn't even bother to indicate where or when the story was taking place? We have to get situated in a setting before we can really enjoy the elements of the story. Even if the setting of the story is pure fiction, we need to envision it taking place *somewhere*.

The most enduring stories tend to include something a little “extra,” for example, some sort of unexpected twist: *He’s his father! The real hero is the guy nobody every expected! She’s not really dead after all!* This reversal of expectations catches you off guard; but in hindsight, you realize the plot was tending toward this reveal all along. The storyteller was planting little clues to both prepare and surprise you.

Discussion Questions

- 1. What are some of your favorite stories? Identify the plot, why you care about the characters, and the setting. Is there some reversal? What clues did the storyteller “plant” along the way?**
- 2. Try telling a story from your childhood but do not include any details of the setting. Don’t describe anything about where or when this story took place. Can you do it? Is it an interesting story?**