

Week Twelve: Resolutions

No reading.

The Resolution

Instead of being rooted to the ground like the set up, or in the swirling emotional place of the climax, the resolution is about making some sense of all that has happened in your story.

Last class, we discussed these questions:

- What do your characters want?
- Do they get what they want?
- Do they *not* get what they want?
- Does what they want *change*?
- What does your character *feel*?

Now the climax of your story is over. The resolution is where you touch on the consequences of what happened.

- if your characters get what they want—what is that like?
- If your characters did *not* get what they want—how do they cope?
- If what they wanted changed—how do they attempt to achieve this new goal?

If you are struggling with the resolution, it can be helpful to go back and re-read the beginning of your story. Beginnings and endings are two areas that usually need a lot of revision, and in the best stories they connect.

How to make the beginning and ending connect

1. **Bring back the setting.** Grounding the reader in the same place where you started will help them remember where your character began their journey, and highlight what has changed. (This can be a parallel setting.)
2. **Don't end too soon.** A common mistake writers make is ending a story too quickly. They get tired of writing and want the story to be over. Or they get scared and drop the ball mid-sentence. This can make your reader feel cheated and unsatisfied. The tone of your ending should be a slow goodbye.
3. **Focus on the theme without being too obvious.** Is your story about loneliness? True love? Courage? Find a way to tie this in without hitting your reader over the head. A good way to discover the theme is go back to the inspiration for your story. What's the first thing that got you excited enough to sit down and start writing?
4. **Use the five senses (smell, taste, touch, sound, sight).** Sensory descriptions can slow down the pacing and bring emotional clarity without being overly explicit. It also allows the reader to experience a situation alongside the character, to feel what they feel.
5. **Give a hint of the future.** Tie up the burning questions, but not everything. Leave something to your reader's imagination; let them finish the story.

The Last Line

There are five elements to a great closing line:

1. **Summation.** The closing line should give readers a sense of finality, a sense that the main issues of the plot have been taken care of and that he can safely leave the characters without worrying that anything more momentous is going to strike.
2. **Theme.** At its heart, story is theme. We dress it up with plot and characters, but the theme is what the story is *about*. So it's only appropriate we strike a final emotional note

in our last sentence. Although not necessarily evident out of context, books use their final lines to reinforce themes of war, love, trust, hope, redemption, etc.

3. **Pacing.** The final line—and the lines building up to it—should provide the appropriate pacing to guide readers to an instinctual understanding of the coming end. Just as a song builds to a climax and then tapers into the subsequent notes to ease listeners back into silence, the end of a story must slow its pacing to ease readers out of the narrative. Most stories end in punchy sentences, which were preceded by longer, lyrical, sometimes almost dreamy paragraphs, which the authors used to ease back from the action of the story, so they could hammer home one final point before releasing the reader.
4. **Farewell.** Not all closing lines will feature the main character. Sometimes authors will “zoom out” to show the reader a broad view of the story, rather than a close-up of the protagonist. However, most often, the closing line is the last chance to say goodbye to the characters for both the author and the reader.
5. **Continuation.** Finally—and a bit contradictorily—the closing line should also indicate that the story *isn't* over; that, in fact, the lives of the surviving main characters will continue long after the reader closes the back cover. A great last line should leave your reader satisfied that you have said everything that needs to be said—and at the same time, it should stand as a launch pad for the reader’s imagination to leap off into its own flight of fancy about what happens next.

Your last line will depend on the story that precedes it: its tone, pacing, and the mood you want to strike with the ending. But if you can incorporate all or most of these elements into your final words, you just might be on your way to the kind of ending that grabs hold of readers and refuses to let them go.

In-class exercise: Everyone gets a sheet of paper and free writes for 10 minutes, answering questions about how their story has changed from beginning to end.

Homework

Write your resolution!