

CREATE SHORT STORIES YOUR READERS WILL LOVE

STARTING POINTS

A great way to witness to the love and forgiveness of Christ, is to write stories that show how people can change and grow, stories which demonstrate compassion and kindness in action, stories which have believable characters and positive endings.

For where else does unselfish love come from, if not from God?

- Put simply, your job is to invent a character, give him a problem, then help him towards a solution.

When you read a short story, you don't get to know everything about the characters. As a writer, the more you know about your protagonist, the better. Once you have a strong sense of who this person is, you can throw a challenge at him and know what he'll do next.

Let me introduce you to the fictitious Dorothy. She's idealistic, principled and totally honest. But... she can be judgemental and dogmatic. She becomes angry when she feels threatened.

- What kind of problems would Dorothy find difficult? Does she have a step-daughter who will NOT do as she's told? Does she have an elderly father who won't listen to her advice? Has her faith been shaken by her circumstances?
- Here she is, turning to you, the writer, for help. Can you create an inciting incident which gets the reader firmly on her side, and which makes Dorothy face her problem? As she tries to solve it, can you create tension and convince the reader that hope is slipping away? That Dorothy will never be any different. Then something happens, something that causes her to grow as a person, and to change.

GET YOUR READER ON THE PROTAGONIST'S SIDE

Have you ever met someone like the fictitious Ben? He's self-confident and wildly energetic, but he can be devious and manipulative, and he sometimes tells lies. He's a workaholic, always striving to impress people with his big house, his amazing car, and so on. Just like everyone else, what he really needs is to be loved and accepted.

- Your reader doesn't have to like your protagonist, but she must feel an empathy for him. Your job is to help the reader understand Ben, perhaps catch a glimpse of why he's like this. Then you can work on his problem and a possible solution, or at least give him the will and ability to move on.
- What would make Ben realise that possessions are not the most important thing in life? What circumstances would make him want to change?

CATCH YOUR READER'S ATTENTION

Start by writing a strong opening line. A good exercise is to study the first lines of stories by different authors.

- Do they make you want to read on?
- What makes them interesting, or not?
- Do long sentences work, or do you prefer shorter ones?

It can be difficult to start a story, to find the words that draw the reader in. This is when you must remember that your first draft is not your final draft, and at this point a bad sentence is better than no sentence at all.

- It's a good idea to start well into a scene. Dorothy may have made her step-daughter a nice cup of hot chocolate, and asked if she's had a good day at school, but that's not going to grab anyone's attention. An angry voice and the slamming of a door tells the reader that there's been a row, and suggests the recipient of this outburst may not be coping. The hot chocolate abandoned on the table tells us the child isn't happy either.

KNOW WHOSE STORY YOU'RE TELLING

- In other words, who do you want the reader to identify with?
- Whose viewpoint will you take? In the example above, is it to be Dorothy's or her step-daughter's? Try writing your story from one person's point of view, telling us how he/she sees things. Perhaps Dorothy will try hard to understand this girl who thinks her step-mother is old-fashioned and bossy, and NOT HER REAL MOTHER. Perhaps the girl is afraid of being abandoned all over again. Perhaps she fears losing her father to 'this new woman'.

A LIGHT SHINING AT THE END OF A DARK TUNNEL.

- Work towards a satisfying end. Of course, Dorothy herself isn't perfect, and neither she nor her step-daughter is going to change overnight. As a reader I want to be left with a feeling of hope, at least a glimpse of a better way forward.

WHEN MERCY TRIUMPHS OVER JUDGEMENT

- Our readers need to feel the triumph of good over evil, of light over darkness, of generosity over meanness. If we include in our work the ideals that really matter to us, the things we believe in, we can play a small part in the amazing way God encourages us all to change for the better.

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