

CREATIVE WRITING COURSE

PART 4 - THEME - PERSPECTIVE AND TENSE

THEME

Some books are a study of phenomena or emotion. They take a theme and explore it, via the characters, plots and events in their storyline. Not all books will have a clearly defined theme. But the more the author understands their theme, the easier their choice of content. If a book is a slice of life, defining its theme, will help you to know which slice to write about.

e.g.: The bitterness of unrequited love, the power of redemption, the corruption of power, the fickleness of friendship, the hardship of war, the universal nature of love, etc.

Over-arching theme - In broad terms, it is the main theme of the book. But, it might help to imagine the Harbour Bridge, being low at one end, rising in the middle and diminishing at the far end. So, an overarching theme, covers the simple introduction of a theme, with its testing, examination and exposure, through the story, the characters, the plots, etc. and then terminating in a conclusion at the end of the piece. The theme may be tied into the journey of the protagonist, antagonist etc.

THINK - Wall Street - Theme 'Financial Greed'.

1. Introduction: Young trader wants to get rich - wants money. Theme introduced.
2. Gordon Gecko: we see him buy in, break up companies, lay off workers - theme is opened up for discussion, is tested. An assertion about financial greed is posed: greed is good.
3. Gordon [antagonist] is caught in a sting - and our protagonist is sent to jail. Theme is concluded. Greed isn't good.

In effect the theme, like our protagonist has had its own journey.

Practical: Theme

Task: Define the theme of your book in brief.

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PERSPECTIVE

In order to fully understand *point of view* in literature, we need to explore the different perspectives from which a story may be told. Bear in mind that the Perspective is the scene as viewed through the eyes/mind of the chosen character. The story, however, can be told from any one of several points-of-view regardless of the perspective chosen.

First Person - [I, we]

In a first-person narrative the story is told by a narrator who is also a character within the story. The narrator reveals the plot by referring to this character's viewpoint as "I" (or "we" if plural). First person is often used to directly convey the narrator's unspoken thoughts. Frequently, the narrator's story revolves around him-/herself as the protagonist, allowing their inner thoughts to be conveyed openly to the reader, whilst not necessarily to other

characters in the book. It also allows the reader to further understand the character, by the

way they tell the story.

e.g.: I could picture it. I have a rotten habit of picturing the bedroom scenes of my friends. We went out to the Cafe Napolitain to have an aperitif and watch the evening crowd on the Boulevard.

From *'The Sun Also Rises'* by Ernest Hemingway.

Second Person - [you]

This is probably the rarest mode in literature (though quite common in song lyrics). In second person narrative, the narrator refers to one of the characters as "you". This makes the reader feel like a character in the book. Second-person is often paired with first-person, allowing the narrator to make emotional comparisons between the thoughts, actions, and feelings of "you" versus "I".

e.g.: You are not the kind of guy who would be at a place like this at this time of the morning. But here you are, and you cannot say the terrain is entirely unfamiliar, although the details are fuzzy. You are at a nightclub talking to a girl with a shaved head. The club is either Heartbreak or the Lizard Lounge. All might become clear if you could just slip into the bathroom and do a little more Bolivian Marching Powder. Then again, it might not. A small voice inside you insists that this epidemic lack of clarity is a result of too much of that already. From *'Bright Lights BIG City'* by Jack McInerney

Third Person - [he, she, it, they...]

In third-person the narrator refers to each character as "he", "she", "it", or "they", but never "I" or "we" (first-person), or "you" (second-person). In third-person it is necessary that the narrator is an unspecified entity or uninvolved person that conveys the story, but not a character of any kind within it. This form provides the author with the greatest flexibility, perhaps why, it is the most commonly used form in literature.

e.g.: Dwarves are not heroes, but calculating folk with a great idea of the value of money; some are tricky and treacherous and pretty bad lots; some are not, but are decent enough people like Thorin and Company, if you don't expect too much.

From the *'Hobbit'* by JRR Tolkien

Narrative tense

The narrative tense or narrative time determines the grammatical tense of the story; whether in the past, present, or future.

Past tense

Past tense is the most commonly used form for story telling and literature in the English language; events in the plot are depicted as occurring before the current moment or time at which the narrative was constructed or expressed to its reader. (e.g. "They drove happily. They had found their way and were preparing to celebrate.")

Present tense

In present tense events are depicted as occurring now—at the current moment—in real-time. (e.g. "They drive happily. They have found their way and are now preparing to celebrate.") In English this tense, known as the "historical present", is more common in spontaneous conversational narratives than in written literature.

Third-person/Past-tense -

e.g. He found it so easy and so pleasant to cry that he didn't try to stop for a while, until he

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First-person/ Past-tense

e.g. Freud was a very great man, but I never get the impression that anyone ever effectively stroked his penis.

The Dice Man- Luke Rhinehart

Scene: A man lets off a fart on a first date.

Task: Write the above scene in the first person using the past tense.

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First-person/Present-tense

e.g. When I step into the hallway and walk to the elevator, my covered clothes over my arm, my tie knotted correctly and straight, and my face shaved clean, I pass a Filipino maid pushing her cart and I take notice that she smiles. And even bows her head. **The House of Sand and Fog - Andre Dubus III**

Scene: A female employee has had enough and walks out on the job

Task: Write the above scene in the first person using the present tense.

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