

MAY 2017 BEHIND THE CURTAIN JOURNAL ENTRY

THE VALUE OF UNDERSTANDING THEMES IN WRITING

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Identifying and clarifying themes in a written work is sometimes confusing. But it also can be rewarding. Themes crystalize the **story's** purpose. And they usually help us reflect on our own lives and how we can change for the better or appreciate what we have. **That's** the value of art and history!

Whether **you're** the writer or the reader, identifying themes can take practice and persistence.

A good start is to say, "**This** work was **about...**" But **don't** fill in the details of the plotline, characters and such. Instead, fill in a larger "**what**" that summarizes underlying threads playing out. "**This** work was about how much you can want freedom but then the hard choices that come when you get **it...**" Or, "**this** work had a lot in it about loneliness and craving **love...**"

Here are some common themes (from lists you can find on the web). There are many more but this can get your thinking juices flowing:

- Ambition
- Beauty
- Betrayal
- Courage
- Deception
- Faith
- Family
- Duty
- Fate
- Fear
- Fortune and misfortune
- Freedom
- Friendship
- Happiness
- Innocence and loss of it
- Jealousy
- Loneliness
- Love
- Loyalty
- Mystery
- Perseverance
- Person vs. nature (vs. society, vs. technology, etc.)
- Prejudice

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- Quests and journeys
- Revenge
- Sacrifice
- Suffering
- Truth

I've been struggling with portraying the main character in a particular picture book manuscript draft. Dialogue with my writing critique partners made me realize I needed to clarify the theme. That, in turn, is helping me clarify how I should write the main character.

I'll come back to this topic in a future journal entry to share more examples.