

The Key Ingredients of a Story

by Tobia Gemmell

Character:

The character is who your story is about. Who is the character? Why is the story about them?



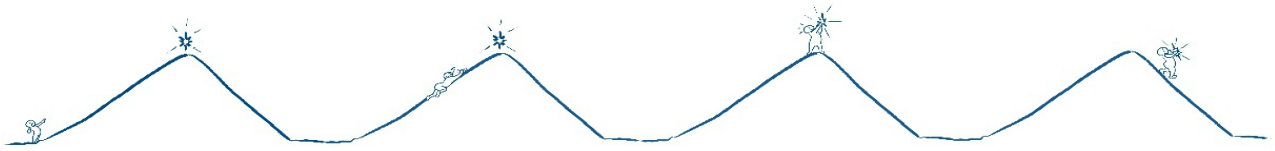
Theme:

Theme is what you want to say through your story. What is the story about? Think of it as the heart of the story. Theme is what makes the character—and the reader—think and grow.



Structure:

Structure is how your story is told, and why you tell it that way. What happens in the story? What does your character want? What does your character do to get what they want? What will they do next?



Style: Style is what the story sounds like. How does your character talk? How do you write your story? What kind of words do you like to use to describe something?



Spices of a Story

Note to students/parents: This list is not a list of rules, or something to be treated as a checklist. I do not expect, or even need, to have *all* these points met in what I read or write. These points are, however, what I seek in a story, and what make something stand out in excellence. Consider this list a kit of goals and ideas to strengthen a story.

Structure:

Conflict- What triggers the story and keeps it going. It also raises the stakes and shows the character's mettle.

Logical flow- One action should lead to another, and everything that happens should make sense. Avoid coincidences.

Reconciliation- Whether it is with friends, family, or even seemingly disconnected events, something must come together in the end.

Retribution- The villain should have his comeuppance. Even if he lives to ruin another day, he should at least feel some of the weight of his actions. Heroes who make poor choices should also face the consequences.

Triumph– The payoff. Triumphs may be of any size, but they must always be meaningful.

Character:

Idiosyncrasies– little quirks add realism, humour, and relatability. This also helps to identify the character.

Variation– a little bit of diversity not only reflects real life, but also encourages more thought. It's a chance to build characters and even create a little conflict.

Edification– growth is important. The characters should reach the end of the story both stronger and wiser, and so should the reader.

Theme:

Truth– that is what makes a story timeless and solid.

Triumph– the payoff. Triumphs may be of any size, but they must always be meaningful.

Edification– growth is important. The characters should reach the end of the story both stronger and wiser, and so should the reader.

Wisdom– Wisdom perfectly rounds out both a character and a plot.

Style:

Wit– I love humour, but it must be clever. Constant slapstick and bathroom humour won't engage the mind and comes off as cheap.

Irony– Irony works great as humour, but also works to show a lesson without being preachy.

Wonder– Our own world is just as intriguing as any fiction, so wherever the story is set the character—and reader—has a chance to be amazed.

You may notice I repeat myself on this list. For example, *Triumph* is listed under both **Structure** and **Theme**. That's on purpose, since some of these points overlap.