

What makes a good story? Why are stories important? These questions fueled my journey as I pursued my interest in storytelling. My research path led me to uncover the many connections storytelling has with literature, paper, religion, and psychology. I read many myths and legends from different times and regions. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* by Joseph Campbell became a central focus in my research. The hero's journey exists to reflect our deepest desires. Everyone wants to overcome something; they want to succeed. The hero's journey can be found in every piece of literature and film. I decided to create my own story based on the elements of a hero's journey.

The inventions of writing, paper, and eventually books affected the development of stories. This visual book employs gouache and colored pencils to design vivid, colorful illustrations. Watercolor is used for its dreamy softness. The story is a metaphor that depicts my own life. This hero's journey has seventeen stages and reflects my experience at Oxbow.

Davide

## **The importance of storytelling**

Daide



*“We dream. And then occasionally we attempt to share our dreams with others. In recounting our dreams we impose narratives upon the barrage of images and notions that our dreams produce. We also make stories out of the blips and bleeps of our daytime existence. The human brain is a narrative creating machine that takes whatever happens and imposes chronology, meaning, cause and effect. We manufacture reasons and explanations for everything that happens.”*

- Anne Bogart, *What's The Story?*

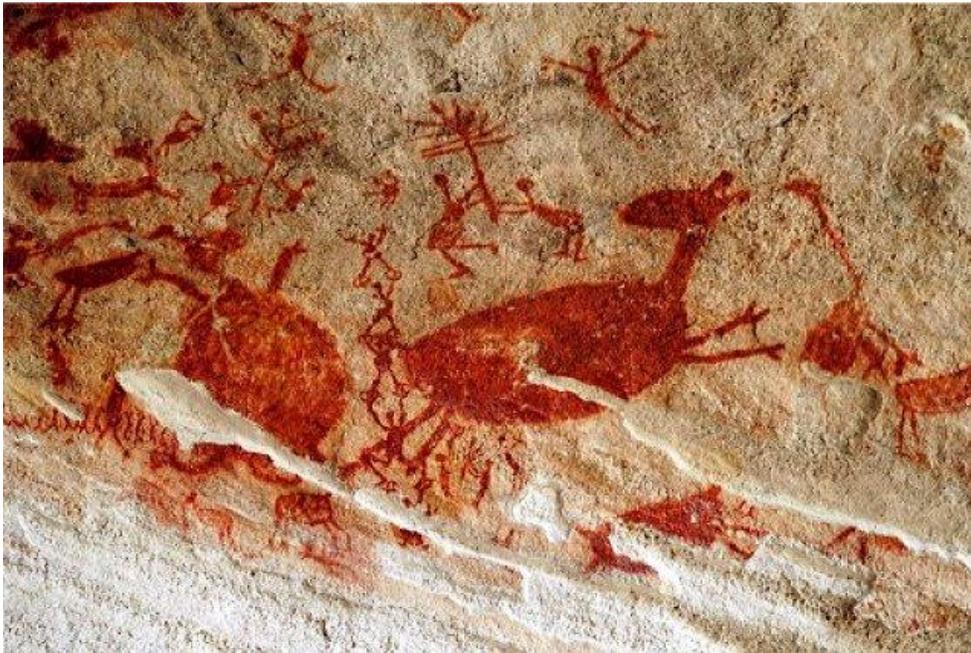
Humanity and storytelling are deeply intertwined. Since the beginning of our existence, we have told stories about our lives. They have constantly evolved along with us through the ages, always changing, but still managing to keep the same of wanting/ needing to connect. The human condition has remained the same, this is why stories will evolve and change in details but keep the common themes that have been explored and written about for hundreds of years.

## HISTORY

The human need for expression has stemmed out in different ways, such as storytelling, religion, and literature are all outcomes. Storytelling is a way to explore feelings, gain perspective, teach a lesson, and to entertain. It is a fundamental part of being human. Though it is not possible to know when storytelling first began, the first evidence of storytelling is the cave paintings on the sides of rocks inside caves. The first cave paintings were found inside the Pettakere cave on the island of Sulawesi in Indonesia. According to the *Ancient History Encyclopedia*, archeologists found the paintings to be “at least 35,400 years old. That likely makes it the oldest-known example of figurative art anywhere in the world—the world’s very first picture.” The paintings depict important animals or hunting scenes.

Although archeologists do not know their exact purpose, they know the paintings told a story. Archeologists first hypothesized that the paintings served as decorations. However, after closer examination, they never found any signs of living in the caves.

Through these paintings, we are able to see the minds of our ancestors. Scientists believe that ancient humans didn’t have the mental capability to create or imagine before this time. Through the rock paintings, humans now can see the evolution and shift that happened thousands of years ago. The Article, “*A journey to the oldest cave paintings in the world,*” explains, “Such



sophisticated thinking was a huge competitive advantage, helping us to cooperate, survive in harsh environments and colonize new lands. It also opened the door to imaginary realms, spirit worlds and a host of intellectual and emotional connections that infused our lives with meaning beyond the basic impulse to

survive. And because it enabled symbolic thinking—our ability to let one thing stand for another—it allowed people to make visual representations of things that they could remember and imagine.” Deeper thinking became a tool to survive. It was through deeper thinking that we learned and began making connections. It led humanity to think creatively and emotionally. This understanding is what gave us our humanity. We get to see the connections our ancestors were beginning to make. The cave paintings have a special meaning to humanity.

As humans evolved, so did their stories. Storytelling became a way to preserve religion, culture and wisdom. This was done in all civilizations before writing was used. The website [teachercertification.org](http://teachercertification.org) explains, “For Native Americans, the telling of stories passed down from generation to generation remained their primary form of wisdom communication even after the

written word had spread across the globe. Native American oral storytelling traditions allowed tribes to transmit their mythological, spiritual and historical understandings of themselves and the worlds they inhabited to their children and their children's children." Oral tradition was a way to keep a story going, most were transformed into a song to remember the words. Talking is still humanity's best method for communicating. Oral tradition is incredibly important because it touches us in a way only speech can. Though written word is now our main way of preserving literature, oral tradition can be found in poetry, and some native tribes prefer oral tradition over written word.

Writing was discovered by many civilizations to communicate long distances for trade. The discovery led to the civilizations using writing to record. The first people used stone tablets, animal hides, bones, and shells to write. It wasn't until the first dynasty in Egypt that the first version of paper, papyrus, was invented. Respected scribes were the ones responsible for recording the history, laws, and stories of their civilization. Much of what we know comes from their work. Greece, Rome, Persia, India, and China all began to do the same. Wealthy people and the church mainly used parchment, which was used in the Hellenistic Period. This was the beginning of the middle ages, as literature became exclusive to the very wealthy and the church. For this reason we have so little literature other than religious and historical text from this period. The Chinese created paper. Books, then, were the next creation. The creation of books was tedious and challenging. Books were rare and few people even knew how to read. Humanity was released from this dry spell during the Renaissance. In this time, Johannes Gutenberg created the printing press. As a result, mass production of literature and media could be distributed. Literature really took off from here. Different themes started being explored; writing and reading became common. Currently, electronic tablets and books are the newest form.

With the discovery of paper and books, something else was revealed. Now that it was possible to record language; literature could develop. The writer Joshua J. Mark says, "This new means of communication allowed scribes to record the events of their times as well as their religious beliefs and, in time, to create an art form which was not possible before the written word: literature." Storytelling now began to develop in different ways; in the beginning, most stories were intertwined with religion. Religion was the beginning of literature, science, and philosophy. It was through religion that people asked and studied the most essential themes, questions of life and death. Religion was the beginning of social structure, government and morals. The only reason was because most of what was written; monks were the ones to write.

Religious leaders controlled what was recorded so many of the stories were in forms of hymns, songs, myths, and religious texts. Literature really took off then, storytelling blended with humanity. Religious texts like The Holy Bible, and The Quran are ageless pieces of literature that tell stories about humanity's creation. Epics like The Odyssey and The Epic of Gilgamesh are ancient stories still told today. Lastly, The Great Gatsby and Don Quixote are stories written to entertain. All of these examples are from different time periods. Storytelling comes in every piece of literature. In one-way or another, there is a story being told.

Storytelling is so ingrained into language that many studies have found children exposed to stories really benefit from it in a number ways. First, a strong link between vocabulary, writing, and language with storytelling were found. In the article, "*The importance of storytelling*", Karen Simpson writes, "Children develop reading and writing skills through understanding the language patterns of stories, through word play and developing their vocabulary – they learn not just to select the right words, but to use those words in the right way, to express their meaning and have the desired effect on their reader." Another study found a

shocking discovery, In the article, “*The importance of Storytelling*”, the Minister of State at the Department for Education, Nick Gibb explains “A 2003 American study called ‘The early catastrophe’ by Professors Hart and Risley, found that an American child from a professional family will experience 2,153 words an hour by the age of 3. This compares to a child from the most disadvantaged background who will experience only 616 words an hour. That amounts to a 30-million-word gap between the least and most advantaged 3-year-old.” Vocabulary use is often overlooked, this difference of words has significant impact on children already causing some to be behind.

Vocabulary use and comprehension are very important because they directly correlate with the ability to read and understand. If you can understand what someone or something is saying, then it is easier for one to think critically. As the cognitive scientist Daniel Willingham has written, “ It is possible to read a text slightly pitched above your understanding, as the meaning of unfamiliar words can be deduced from the context. However, as the number of unfamiliar words increases, your ability to ‘get the gist’ drops rapidly.” Gibb remarks, “Keith Stanovich has dubbed this positive feedback loop ‘the Matthew effect’, after the verse in the Gospel of Matthew telling the parable of the talents: “to those who have, more shall be given, but from those who have not, even what they have shall be taken away.” This explains that those who know many words can easily understand others with the use of context clues. But when a person doesn’t have a large amount of accumulated words, context clues cannot help since there are more too many unknown words, thus losing the understanding of what is being read. Storytelling is an important tool for learning, for it can be used to help with another important human quality: building Empathy.

There are different perspectives in which you can tell a story. By being able to manipulate the perspective, the writer is able to make the reader/listener feel and understand what they’re expressing. Storytelling can build empathy between people. Dr. Paul Zak conducted a study in 2013. The study showed that stories are able to change the way we act by changing the chemistry in our minds, Dr. Paul Zak explains, “The researchers drew blood from participants before and after they saw the story and found that two chemicals were produced: cortisol, which focuses our attention on something important, and oxytocin, which is associated with care, connection, and empathy.” Oxytocin increases sensitivity to social cues, it motivates us to help others. A negative example of the the power of perspectives in story, comes from the movie *Jaws*. The movie is about the capture of a man eating shark. The story inspired fear of sharks when there wasn’t any before. The article “*How 'Jaws' Forever Changed Our View of Great White Sharks*” the writer Charles Q. Choi states, "at the turn of the 20th century, there was this perception that sharks had never attacked a human being," said George Burgess.” People became so paranoid of sharks because the film had made them seem like vengeful evil animals. Choi says, “The movie certainly gave sharks too much of an ability to engage in revenge," Burgess said.” People gave in to their fear, and consequently, sharks are paying for it. 200 million sharks are killed yearly. The international shark protection initiative SHARKPROJECT speaks of “approx. 200 million animals killed around the world each year.” Although sharks are hunted for many reasons, food, souvenirs, shark liver oil, the movie helped in reinforcing the fear humans have of them. "It was good blue-collar fishing. You didn't have to have a fancy boat or gear — an average Joe could catch big fish, and there was no remorse, since there was this mindset that they were man-killers." In this case, by making the creature scarier than it actually is, really hurt the species.

Storytelling holds great power to preserve themes, ideas, and questions. Tales from thousands of years ago are still being told today. Stories teach us of our history and culture. They have the power to change perspective and inspire. Stories are used to describe and teach lessons and morals. Each one of us holds many stories, but it is how we tell them to really feel an impact on others. Composing a good story can take time and hard work.

Many components are used to create a good story; there are so many components put into a story, the process of creating one is almost as beautiful as the story itself. Many people agree that a good story is that which can transport the reader or can make the reader feel. The story has to be interesting. According to the American Press Institute (an organization for the advancement of journalism), “A good story is about a topic the audience decides is either 1) interesting, or 2) important.” A great story achieves both goals by using storytelling to turn news that is important into coverage that is interesting, too.

## **THE HERO'S JOURNEY**

Myths are the oldest forms of stories. They capture the reader's mind and have managed to exist for thousands of years. Joseph Campbell, a mythologist, found many similarities between myths from different times, regions and cultures. He discovered that most plots that involve a hero tend to be written in the same way. He hypothesizes because it is what humans idealistically would like. The plots and stories are projections of our greatest desires, fears, and hopes.

The first stage that happens in the story is “A call to adventure”. This is the part of the story where the hero discovers the other world. In the book, The Hero with a Thousand Faces, by Joseph Campbell, he writes, “A blunder-apparently the merest chance- reveals an unsuspected world, and the individual is drawn into a relationship with forces that are not rightly understood” (Pg.51). This can happen in a number of different ways. The situation can be used to bond the reader and the hero. As the tension and conflict begin to unfold, the hero usually ignores the call. The story seems to end here; the hero ignores the call and goes back to their normal lives. He explains, “Refusal of the summons converts the adventurer into its negative. Walled in boredom, hard work, or ‘culture,’ the subject loses the power of significant affirmative action and becomes a victim to be saved” (Pg.59). Oftentimes the hero will refuse the call and will be harassed, or the circumstances will pressure them to do so. An example of “The call to adventure, and “The refusal of the call” is in the movie Narnia. Lucy (Hero) the little girl, discovers the wardrobe, after she meets the satyr she decides to go back and leave Narnia.

When the hero answers the call they will be met by the protector and are given some sort of magic to help with the journey. “The first encounter of the hero-journey is with a protective figure who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass” (Pg. 73). The hero from here crosses the first threshold. With their protective figure to guide and defend them, they are able to begin their journey. “With the personifications of his destiny to guide and aid him, the hero goes forward in his adventure until he comes to the ‘threshold guardian’ at the entrance to the zone of magnified power” (Pg.77). As the hero starts the journey, they soon find out that the quest is much harder than believed so. An example of “Meeting with the mentor”, “Crossing first threshold”, is the genie from the movie Aladdin. The Genie guides him to make his wishes.

The next stage is “The belly of the whale”. “The hero, instead of conquering or conciliating the power of the threshold, is swallowed into the unknown, and would appear to have died.” (Pg.90). The listener then gets to understand that the story is much more complicated

than thought to be. From here, the hero finds new understanding of their new world. In the movie, The Lion King, the lion *Simba* (hero) decides to leave his childhood, and his life of ease to take his right to be king.

The next events that happen are usually the favorite part of the story, "Initiation". In this part, the hero begins with "The road of trials". This is the main part of the story; we witness the hero accomplish several trials in order to get through. "Once having traversed the threshold, the hero moves in a dream landscape of a curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trials. This is a favorite phase of the myth-adventure. It has produced a world literature of miraculous tests and ordeals." (Pg.97).

In the story this is where the hero fights the monster or the villains. In The Hunger Games, *Katniss* and *Peeta* have to go through the games. They have to kill the other competitors, and the challenges the game masters throw at them.

Throughout the hero's journey, the hero may encounter a strong powerful figure (usually female) and the hero will bond with her in some way. The character may range from a god to a normal human whom the hero gains support from. "Woman, in the picture language of mythology, represents the totality of what can be known. The hero is the one to come to know. As he progresses in the slow initiation which is life, the form of the goddess undergoes for him a series of transfigurations: She can never be greater than himself, though she can always promise more than he is yet capable of comprehending. She lures, she guides, and she bids him burst his fetters. And if he can match her import, the two, the knower and the known will be released from every limitation" (Pg. 116). In most cases, the hero and the female figure will have some type of interpersonal relationship that represents perfect love (romantic love, mother and child, brother). Annabeth from The Percy Jackson series is a perfect example. In the beginning, Annabeth is smarter, and stronger than Percy. But she helps Percy reach his full potential.

The next challenge is one that is hard to surpass, something tempting will cross the hero's path. In classical myths, the temptation is usually in the form of a woman. The purpose of this is to gauge the heroes' worthiness. It's a test of strength. "But when it suddenly dawns on us, or is forced to our attention, that everything we think or do is necessarily tainted with the odor of the flesh, then not uncommonly, there is experienced a moment of revulsion: life, the acts of life, the organs of life, women in particular as the great symbol of life, become intolerable to the pure, the pure, pure soul" (Pg.122 This contrasts the pure love of the hero with the goddess, with this lustful fever of libidinous love. For the female hero, the conflict is real temptation other than a man. In the movie, The Little Mermaid, the antagonist Ursula, disguises herself as a beautiful, young woman named Vanessa; She tempts the prince in being with her instead of the protagonist, Ariel.

The hero may come in conflict with the father figure who the hero must gain respect or trust or approval. The figure can be someone of great status or high authority. The hero and the figure must reconcile in order for the hero to be on a higher plane: "For the son who has grown really to know the father, the agonies of the ordeal are readily borne; the world is no longer a vale of tears but a bliss-yielding, perpetual manifestation of the Presence" (184). The quote explains how if the son has matured enough to really understand the father figure, the wisdom and help of the father figure will change the hero's life from sad to happy. In movie The Karate Kid Dre Parker (hero) after many weeks of training, and learning, Dre receives the respect and trust from Han (mentor) his teacher.

In the process of resisting the temptation and the harmonization with the father, the hero now realizes and is able to transcend into a greater plane. The hero is now armed with the new

knowledge and power to go forth and face the greatest challenge yet. This realization is where the “apotheosis” takes place. The apotheosis is the act of transcending or the “highest point in the development of something.” ‘Initiation’ also talks about the death of the hero’s old self and rebirth of his new self. The change can sometimes be seen by the change in the way they look.

The “Ultimate boon” is the climax of the story. This is where the hero finally defeats the ultimate monster and the world is freed. The boon may be gathered after the defeat of the greatest challenge. After the retrieval of the boon, the hero has finished his journey. “The ease with which the adventure is here accomplished signifies that the hero is a superior man, a born king. Such ease distinguishes numerous fairy tales and all legends of the deeds of incarnate gods. Where the usual hero would face a test, the elect encounters no delaying obstacle and makes no mistake”(pg.173). Throughout the journey, the hero has been preparing for his ultimate test. So much so that they make no mistake and nothing goes wrong. An example of the ultimate boon is in the animated film, Finding Nemo. When the father, Merlin (the hero) and his friend Dory (ally, guide, goddess) find Nemo (child).

As we reach the climax of the story, the refusal of the return begins. The hero now having retrieved the ultimate boon wishes to stay in the other world where they have found happiness. In some stories, the story ends here with the hero never returning home and staying. “When the hero-quest has been accomplished, through penetration to the source, or the grace of some male or female, human or animal, personification, the adventurer still must return with his life-transmuting trophy. The full round, the norm of the *monomyth*, requires that the hero shall now begin the labor of bringing the runes of wisdom, the Golden Fleece, or his sleeping princess back to the kingdom of humanity, where the boon may redound to the renewing of the community, the nation, the planet, or the ten thousand words. But the responsibility has been frequently refused”(pg.193).

If the hero is going home, the magic flight happens. This stage is about the journey home. The hero makes the journey quick as s/he is fleeing or short on time. This journey is a method to gain excitement after the climax of the story. This scene is regarded as almost comical since the hero spent so much fighting now flees: “If the hero in his triumph wins the blessing of the goddess or the god and is then explicitly commissioned to return to the world with some elixir for the restoration of society, the final stage of his adventure is supported by all the power of his supernatural patron. On the other hand, if the hero’s wish to return to the world has been resented by the gods or demons, then the last stage of the mythological round becomes a lively, often comical pursuit” (pg.197). If the hero has to bring some sort of elixir back to the ordinary world, the hero’s job isn’t over until he brings the elixir. In the movie E.T. the famous scene where the group of kids get lifted off the ground and float in the air while riding their bicycles to escape with E.T.’s help is an example of “The magic flight”.

As the hero races to escape, an unexpected character aids them. The hero needs help to get back home and this is where it happens. The helper can be someone unexpected who abandoned the hero, or someone unknown. The rescue is a method of humanizing the hero and changing them to be like us. It is a way for them to connect with the reader since we all need help sometimes. “This brings us to the final crisis of the round, to which the whole miraculous excursion has been but a prelude—that, namely, of the paradoxical, supremely difficult threshold crossing of the hero’s return from the mystic realm into the land of common day. Whether rescued from without, driven from within, or gently carried along by the guiding divinities, he has yet to re-enter with his boon the long-forgotten atmosphere where men who are fractions imagine themselves to be complete. He has to confront a society with his ego-shattering, life-

redeeming elixir, and take the return blow of reasonable queries, hard resentment, and good people at a loss to comprehend” (pg 216). The whole journey becomes a prelude, now that he has to restore the ordinary world where everyone is imperfect, and normal. The hero has to catch up with what has happened in the ordinary world while they’ve been missing.

The hero now has returned home, or he cannot without one last task. “The crossing of the return threshold” gives the hero time to mend anything broken and for the reader to receive closure. This part of the story represents rebirth into the hero’s home. “The two worlds, the divine and the human, can be pictured only as distinct from each other - different as life and death, as day and night... The realm of the gods is a forgotten dimension of the world we know. And the exploration of that dimension either willingly or unwillingly, is the whole sense of the deed of the hero” (pg 217). The divine, and human world are extremely different, that world has been forgotten here, the only thing that links them, is the hero's deed. Mulan returns from war and back to her hometown in China. She is met with thousands of her admirers. Only she and her partners know the full story of what happened.

The hero now is master of both worlds; he is able to move freely through both without any consequence. As the story now comes to an end, we also witness the hero have the freedom to live. They now have the power to live their lives out in any way and pick a path they choose to go. Sometimes what you find is that the hero, now changed, cannot seem to fit in with his past life and seeks other adventures. “The whole sense of the ubiquitous myth of the hero’s passage is that it shall serve as a general pattern for men and women, wherever they may stand along the scale. Therefore it is formulated in the broadest terms. The individual has only to discover his own position in reference to this general human formula, and let it assist him past his restricting wall. Who and where are his ogres? Those are the reflections of the unsolved enigmas of his own humanity. What are his ideals? Those are the symptoms of his grasp of life” (pg. 121).

Myths and legends are a method for people to explore and understand themselves and each other. This is why literature is so important in society. Storytelling is the window to our hearts and minds. With epic stories about monsters, we are able to express pieces of our humanity. Humans always want to accomplish set goals and succeed during their lifetime. They want to do good on that test or assignment. They want to help others who are struggling. We like to hear stories about people who conquered, surpassed and won. Because our deepest wish is to do so.

## **ANALYSIS**

The classical tale of Prometheus and how fire was given to men is a great story to view the hero’s journey. Some of the stages can be seen clearly. Prometheus’s love for humanity is what makes him a hero, singularly saving them with the gift of fire. The story is an example of the hero's journey that can be analyzed. Though the story doesn't have all 17 stages, the story has enough that it can be considered a hero's journey type of story. In this story both Prometheus and Pandora are protagonists in the story.

### ***Ordinary World***

Prometheus is a titan who lives on Mount Olympus along with the other gods. Prometheus lives with his brother, Epimetheus (afterthought), both of whom are sympathetic to humans.

### ***Call to Adventure***

Prometheus notices the humans are suffering because of famine and cold. Due to the fact that his brother, Epimetheus; gave the best gifts to the animals, disadvantaging humanity.

### ***Refusal of Call***

Prometheus stalls and ponders on what gift should he bless humanity with. When he decides that he wants to bless humanity with fire, but Zeus does not allow it.

### ***Supernatural aid***

### ***Crossing the first Threshold***

Despite Zeus's warnings, Prometheus abandon Mount Olympus and left forever.

### ***Belly of the whale***

As Prometheus is walking along the shore, he notice a stalk of fennel. He notice that if lit, the spark will live for a while before the spark dies out.

### ***Road of Trials***

Prometheus gets the idea of stealing a spark of fire and using the reed to keep it lit as he heads back to where the humans live. In this time, he teaches humans how to cook, build houses, and how to do metal work.

### ***Temptation***

Though the temptation does not directly tempt Prometheus, Zeus tempts Pandora with his gift that is a box.

### ***Atonement with the Father***

Pandora is sent to Epimetheus for him to marry by Zeus. Epimetheus is greatly honored, though it is a trick to punish humanity.

### ***Meeting with the goddess***

The goddess Athena warns Pandora to never open the box.

### ***Apotheosis/ The ultimate boon***

Pandora is mortified and ashamed for opening the box. The box contains thousands of evil spirits that cause havoc and conflict in our lives. Prometheus is caught and punished by getting tied by chains to a rock. Every morning Zeus's eagle pecks out Prometheus's liver.

### ***The Ultimate Boon***

### ***Refusal to Return***

### ***Rescue From Without***

Prometheus is released from the chains by the hero Hercules many years later.

### ***Freedom to live***

Prometheus is free to roam the world, now aware of the intentions and capability of the gods of Olympus.

## ELEMENTS

A story is a collaboration of different elements to create a single multilayered insightful piece of literature. This is what makes a story so alluring, enriching the lives of those who've read or listened. However, in order for the story to be successful, each element must be interesting and have direction and purpose. John Gardner comments, "He must shape simultaneously (in an expanding creative moment) his characters, plot, and setting, each inextricably connected to the others; he must make his whole world in a single, coherent gesture, as a potter makes a pot." This is the reason why writers are considered with high intellect.

The first element and arguably the most important, is the theme. The theme is the message/point or idea the author is trying to get across to the reader. Without the theme, there is no point in reading a story. Stories can have many themes, or just one. In a well-written tale, the reader can identify the theme; the author should never have to tell the reader what the theme is. Learner.org explains, "In fiction, the theme is not intended to teach or preach. In fact, it is not presented directly at all. You extract it from the characters, action, and setting that make up the story. In other words, you must figure out the theme yourself." Some common and classical themes that are explored and written about are "the good vs. the evil", This classical theme can be seen in many stories and even in some religions. From superheroes vs. villains, to gods vs. demons, this theme plays with the morals of a society. Another common theme is "change is necessary for growth." This theme is so common; it is a requirement in the hero's journey in the part, "The belly of the whale". This is the stage where the hero makes the decision to actually go through with their choice.

Humanity is plagued with problems and questions. Whether they're simple or complicated, people are always looking to fix or find an answer. Naturally, we are drawn to stories where characters have problems. Conflict is vital in a story because without it, there is no drama and no way of hooking the reader. In the article, *Conflict in Literary Fiction* the author William Coles says, "Conflict is the source of change that engages a reader, and in a story, conflict and action does what description and telling of feelings and situations do not." All conflicts can be traced back the main seven: man vs. self, man vs. society, man vs. man, man vs. nature, man vs. technology, man vs. god/fate and man vs. supernatural. Conflicts are what give the reason for the story. The protagonist can deal with several conflicts or just one.

The characters in books are sometimes the most memorable element from a story. Readers can build emotional attachments to them. A good protagonist is one that is interesting, complicated and flawed. The characters can be any person, animal or entity that guides and aids the reader along their story. Bringing up concepts, ideas, and themes. Coles explains, "In literature, characters guide readers through their stories, helping them to understand plots and ponder themes." Characters can be flat, easy to understand, or round, complicated with different feelings and thoughts. In a good story, there is a mixture of flat and round characters. Some characters have roles that are common in many stories. In the hero's journey, the story has a set of archetypes that are common in those types of stories. Characters like the hero, the mentor, and the ally. There are countless types of characters that support the plot and theme of the story.

The setting is where the story takes place. This includes the time period and geographic place. The setting is the main way of setting the mood of the story. The setting can be as specific or broad as the author wants it to be. It could be a house in Albuquerque New Mexico in the year 2016 around midday, or a cabin in a forest. The setting can be a backdrop setting: this means the story could take place anywhere without affecting the plot. An integral setting. This means that

the setting directly affects the theme of the story and, without it, the story could not make sense. The setting guides the reader's attention through the story.

Style and tone are more technical. They affect the way the story is read and understood. Depending on the audience in which the story is intended for, the style of writing will reflect it. The style depends on the author's word choice and the way the information is being presented. For example, one would not use Old English in a picture book for children or slang in an informative essay.

The tone of the story is the attitude the author has for the subject of the story. It is the way the author talks about the subject. Comedians use a comical tone, whereas news reporters use a serious one. These tones, if interchanged, would invalidate the whole subject that is being discussed. The way the author talks about something is the way the story will be received. Tone and mood are commonly mistaken for each other: mood is the way the story feels. Tone is the author's attitude about the story.

The plot of the story is created by the other elements. It is the series of events that help the reader understand the choices the characters make. The plot is process in which the characters try solving the conflict. The plot has its own elements. The exposition is where the protagonist, characters, setting and conflict are revealed. In the rising action, the suspense and tension rise. The climax of the story is where the tension peaks. The falling action, is where everything is being strained out. The last is the resolution. The resolution is how the story ends. These plot elements can be ordered in a way so that the story makes best sense and more importantly, the most impact on the reader. Ray Bradbury says, "Plot is no more than footprints left in the snow after your characters have run by on their way to incredible destinations." Bradbury makes this remark because the plot is the journey the characters take through the story.

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