

Seven Stories

Comedy, Tragedy, Rebirth, Quest, Rags to Riches, Voyage and Return and, last but not least, Overcoming the Monster. Seven stories, seven potential themes gathered together in one small, succinct list that would cover the entire history of fiction, the entire world of storytelling that has ever, ever been told.

Tasked with choosing one to write about, eleven year old William left school with a feeling of dread. He knew facts, lots of them. Ask him pretty much anything about medieval castles for example and the chances are, he'd know the answer. Creative writing however, making things up. That was different.

"Don't worry," his mum said. "Uncle Albert is on his way, he'll help you."

William sighed. Uncle Albert had his moments and could tell a tale, spin the odd yarn, but the trouble was, he also tended to go off the subject a bit and, with an assignment due in the next day, William needed focus.

"How's my favourite nephew then?" asked Albert, arms outstretched as he stood by the bedroom door.

William looked up, then back at the notepad on the desk in front of him and continued with the doodle of his favourite castle.

"Your mum tells me you need a hand with a story and as spontaneity is my middle name..."

Albert stopped, mid-sentence as though waiting for William to add the words that simply didn't exist - largely because Albert's middle name wasn't spontaneity but Larry.

William sniggered at the thought but then wondered whether comedy, the first of the seven stories ever written could be the theme of William's first ever story and so he started to make some notes.

Albert peered over Williams shoulders.

"Of course you need a few jokes if you're going to be comedian," he said, picking a plastic gun up from the floor and pointing the beam of light in William's direction. "Or is this just a phaser you are going through?"

William paused, trying to think of something that wouldn't hurt his Uncle's feelings.

"The thing about you Uncle Albert," William said. "Is that you're only funny because you think you're funny."

He looked down at his notepad, realizing as he did so that his Uncle's lack of funniness was actually quite tragic. So he crossed out the word Comedy and moved onto Tragedy, the second story in the sequence of seven.

"Even so, I do think you're getting somewhere now," said Albert. "As well as a plot, every story needs characters; funny one's, not so funny ones, nice one's, not so nice ones."

William held up his hand. "Stop it, you're not helping and you're talking Double Dutch."

"Exactly," said Albert. "To make a good story you need a bit of Double Dutch or as I prefer, good clog, bad clog. If the characters are all goody two shoes in the first place, how could they ever develop or change their ways?"

"Like a character rebirth?" asked William, reluctantly crossing Tragedy out and moving onto story number three.

"Precisely," said Albert. "At first a nobody, but suddenly heroic and prepared to travel far and wide into dangerous places if they had to."

William looked at his Uncle, trying to imagine a younger, slimmer version and holding a sword. He then added a winding path to his doodle that stretched away from the castle and into a distance where Dragons flew above a dark forest, before crossing out the word Rebirth and changing the theme of his story to Quest.

"Of course if you're setting out on a quest, you'd need an incentive," Albert continued. "If you were poor maybe, or at least not particularly well off, you'd have the perfect incentive to risk everything to seek your fortune."

"Rags to riches then," said William, striking through the word quest, while at the same time adding a drawing of a pot of gold. It felt exciting to be constantly changing the story but as he did so for the fifth time, an unwanted realisation dawned. Suddenly dejected, he leant forward on his desk, closed his notepad and rested his head in his hands.

"We're back were we started," William said. "We've been sitting here for ages and yet we've got absolutely nowhere. I knew you'd mess it up Uncle Albert, because you always do."

Albert sat down beside William. "Every story has a journey like yours," he said, re-opening the notepad. "Sometimes it appears to finish at the same place as it started but it's the voyage the characters have been on before they return that makes it what it is."

William wasn't so sure.

“You started here,” Albert said, pointing at the castle. “Somewhere safe, but then it changed when you found your character; funny but tragic, then a hero reborn who set off on a quest to transform his rags into riches and finally, when the voyage was complete, you returned.”

William looked at his notepad once more; the words, the doodles, the crossings outs and realised Albert was right. With the help of his Uncle and for the first time in his life, William had created a story that didn't simply rely on facts. At the same time therefore, Albert had helped him to overcome his very own monster.

As he read again from the notepad, he also noticed that between them, they'd managed to cover all of the seven stories that had ever, ever been written in one glorious, haphazard adventure.

“You know why there only seven and not two more for example don't you?” asked Albert.

“No,” said William, his notepad open, his pen at the ready to gather any extra knowledge from an Uncle he was now seeing in a completely different light.

“It's because seven eight nine,” replied Albert.

For the second time, William closed his notepad and placed his head in his hands.

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