



HOW TO CRAFT AN  
EMOTIONAL JOURNEY  
FOR YOUR READERS



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“YOU ARE NOT  
THE AUTHOR OF  
WHAT READERS  
FEEL, JUST THE  
PROVOCATEUR  
OF THOSE  
FEELINGS.”

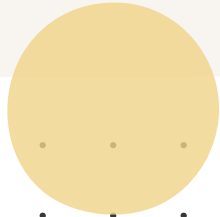
-DONALD MAASS





## YOU'VE PROBABLY HEARD:

- Show, don't tell
- Make us care
- Strengthen the voice
- Tighten the pace
- Keep things fresh
- Raise the stakes



.....  
.....  
But what does this  
look like through an  
emotional lens?  
.....  
.....  
.....





**“STRONG  
WRITING DOESN'T  
AUTOMATICALLY  
PRODUCE STRONG  
FEELINGS.”**

**-DONALD MAASS**

**An emotional journey is  
what often makes a story  
memorable**



# WHAT IS THE RIGHT BALANCE BETWEEN SHOW VS TELL?

Wrong Question to ask!

How can I get across what characters are going through?

How can I get readers to go on emotional journeys of their own?





# WHY DO SO MANY PEOPLE LOVE AN UNDERDOG?

Connection comes from experiences we are familiar with, not unfamiliar worlds, big picture stakes, and perfect/overpowered characters.



World details matter when they matter to the characters we connect with. That's what gives them impact.



“...FMRI STUDIES REVEAL THAT WHEN WE’RE READING A STORY, OUR BRAIN ACTIVITY ISN’T THAT OF AN OBSERVER, BUT OF A PARTICIPANT.”

-LISA CRON

“...feelings don’t just matter, they are what mattering means.” - Daniel Gilbert





# Let's Try It:

Aunt blames Sue for Bob's death.

She needs the wand for a spell to bring him back to life.

Sue, inherits a wand that can turn anything to gold

Sue doesn't know her father, Bob, is secretly a wizard

Sue's aunt, an enchantress, wants to steal the wand

Bob died retrieving the wand for Sue since they are poor.

The aunt regrets not being close to her brother



THINK BACK TO YOUR  
FAVORITE BOOKS.  
WHY ARE THEY  
FAVORITES?

PLOT?

CHARACTER?

WORLDBUILDING?

NOW ASK YOURSELF...WHY ARE  
THEY *REALLY* YOUR FAVORITE?

Characters that feel  
'real' to us are ones  
that have caused US  
to feel. Because while  
those characters are  
fictional, our feelings  
aren't.





Now that we've discussed why it's important, let's talk about how to make it happen

[REDACTED]

	Is a compelling situation (plot) enough to keep a reader emotionally invested throughout the story?
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LET'S REVISIT OUR ORPHAN (SUE)  
AND THE MAGIC WAND HER DEAD  
FATHER (BOB) GOT FOR HER.

Which version  
stirs emotion  
more  
authentically?





Why doesn't stating an emotion work?

Emotions are subjective, fluid, messy, complicated things. To simulate them, you can't use a clean cut label.



It doesn't feel authentic.

When you're angry, do you think "I am angry?"



You can use these cues to guide the reader on their own journey.

Spark the emotions you want them to feel.

Pave the path they walk on by setting up trail markers directing them to the big “X” you want them to reach.





## A GREAT WARM UP EXERCISE TO SIMULATE AN EMOTION:

1. Pick an intense moment for your character
2. Write down all the emotions related to this moment, big and small.
3. Write down how your protag would act out these emotions. Push further than you think you should.
4. Add something small to the setting that has personal significance to your character related to this feeling.

Remove the emotions you wrote down in Step 2.







CREATE THE  
EXPERIENCE.

The emotion will  
follow.








# THIRD LEVEL EMOTIONS




# PLAY AGAINST SIMPLE, EXPECTED FEELINGS WHILE MAINTAINING AUTHENTICITY

Humans are complex



Ray Bradbury's  
Fahrenheit 451  
focuses on Guy's  
excitement during a  
life-threatening  
situation



Daphne Du Maurier's  
My Cousin Rachel  
dance around  
Philip's feeling of  
abandonment and  
misery



## THIRD LEVEL EMOTION EXERCISE

1. Select a moment when your character feels something strongly. What is that strong emotion?
2. What else are they feeling? Write down 2 - 3 more emotions.
3. Now, what ELSE are they feeling? Write as many as you can think of.



## EXAMINE THIS THIRD LEVEL IN FOUR WAYS:

1. Analogy - objectify it: what does it feel like to have this emotion?
2. Moral Judgment - is it good or bad to feel this way?
3. Alternatives - what would a better person feel?
4. Justification – it's the only possible thing to feel right now and here's why



## **YOUR HOMEWORK:**

**Write a new passage using third level emotions.**

**Try your best not to use a direct emotional word to describe the moment.**

**Creating a longer passage gives readers time to process and draw their own conclusions about the scene.**



“TELL A READER HOW TO FEEL, AND THEY WON'T FEEL IT. LIGHT AN UNEXPECTED MATCH, AND A READER WILL IGNITE THEIR OWN FEELINGS, WHICH MAY PROVE TO BE THE MORE OBVIOUS AND PRIMARY.”

-Donald Maass

