

## How to Write A Good Story

Lee Roddy

Stories have great power. In fact, God uses stories to teach us about Himself from Genesis to Revelation. Jesus taught in parables, which are usually defined as short fictitious stories that illustrate a moral attitude or a religious principle.

Thousands of novels and short stories today pour from Christian publishing houses. Stories go where you and I may never go. Stories cross borders and touch lives which may not be known until God's books are opened at the Judgment.

Stories can change lives, as many Christian authors can testify. Some of us feel a special calling to try to make a difference in the lives of young readers by writing stories. I prayerfully seek to teach young readers who may be the authors of tomorrow. That involves parents who can encourage young students to start writing stories for fun. Some pupils may go on to develop God-given skills to where their writing will impact their contemporaries and possibly a generation yet unborn.

Stories can be written from anywhere. Preacher John Bunyan wrote the classic *Pilgrim's Progress* during 12 years behind bars in solitary confinement. Even I, once a physically handicapped and poverty-stricken country boy who wrote in a screened-in farmhouse porch, now write stories from my 8 foot by 8 1/2 foot California home office. God has blessed stories created here and made them available all over America and at least 22 foreign countries.

Teaching a child to write a story should be like a game. All games have rules, and so does writing a story. But switching analogies, just because a child has eaten cake doesn't mean he or she can bake one. Of course, baking can be learned. So can writing a story. So let's begin with the little-understood necessity of structuring a story.

A story has three obvious structural parts: beginning, middle, and ending. What is not obvious--yet is absolutely critical--is learning exactly what story elements must be written under each of those segments. Those can be simplified by using three words beginning with the letter 'O'.

The first letter 'O' comes in the beginning of a story and stands for *Objective*. The likeable, motivated, but flawed main character wants something for good reason.

The second letter 'O' comes in the long middle of a story and stands for *Obstacles*. Those are the problems the main character must overcome in order to achieve his goal.

The third letter 'O' comes in the short ending of the story and stands for *Outcome*. It tells how the main character achieves the objective or fails after valiantly trying.

Now, I'll illustrate that with a story I wrote called "Shark Pit".

First O: Objective

The story opens in California with 12-year-old Josh Ladd encountering a stranger who shows him a photograph of Josh's father. The man claims he's looking for him because he's an old army buddy. Josh knows that's a lie because his father was never in the army. Josh also sees a hand-drawn map when the stranger accidentally drops it.

The mystery develops at home when Josh learns that his father has a writing assignment for a magazine and a special map to visit Hawaii in search of some priceless hidden treasures. Josh recognizes that his father's map is identical to the one the stranger dropped. Josh's *objective* is to go with his father because Tank Catlett, Josh's best friend, now lives in Hawaii.

#### Second O: Obstacles

The story's middle shows various obstacles that Josh faces when he finally gets to the islands where he is reunited with Tank. The stranger has followed them and repeatedly tries to steal Mr. Ladd's map. Josh and Tank, with a local boy, Roger Okamoto, want to accompany Mr. Ladd when he follows the map because the boys expect it will lead to some great treasure. But the stranger constantly thwarts them.

Josh's character flaw shows when he disobeys his father and sets out with Tank and Roger to find the hidden treasure by themselves.

#### Third O: Outcome

The ending shows how disobedience plunges Josh and his friends into an ocean pit filled with sharks and no way out.

Naturally, I'm not going to tell you how it turns out because you may want to read the story. However, illustrating how I structured it with Objective, Obstacles, and Outcome should help in writing your stories.

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### Biographical Information

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Best-selling author Lee Roddy, [www.leeroddybooks.com](http://www.leeroddybooks.com), has written countless short stories and 50-plus novels, including four character character-building series for young readers. For nearly 20 years, he taught story writing at homeschool and teacher's conventions, at colleges, writers' conferences, and for *Writer's Digest* magazine. He and his wife, Cicely, live in California. They have a grown son, a daughter, and two grandsons.