

Let Me Help You

Sell Your Homework

12-Week Course of Study:

*24 Ways to Write
Stories for Kids*

Lesson 11

**CONCEPT
SURPRISE ENDING**

By Professor Dick Bohrer, M.Sc., M.A.

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“Sermons have their place but not in stories for children.”

HA!
WHO SAID?

Perhaps the most difficult story to write, some people think, is the story based on a theme or concept.

But every story is based on a theme. The theme of **LINDY'S CHRISTMAS CANDLES** is “love conquers all.” She did two foolish things and got in a peck of trouble with her landlord. He even threatened to put Lindy and her mother out of the apartment on Christmas Eve.

But in her own way, she won all hearts when she went downstairs and sang her carols, holding that last candle up close to her heart.

She was forgiven, her momma was pleased and all the tenants were warmed by the experience of singing carols together on a wintry evening.

THE DECISION has the theme “Prayer changes thing.” We're conscious at the beginning that the mother

has shut herself up to pray for her wayward son, even if it means that she must shut herself off from all her friends and from all that has been her former life.

Her heart was broken by her daughter's action. She is desperate that her son not go the same way.

She's powerless to do anything other than pray. And, in the end, we find that prayer—and the God who answers prayer—changes things.

THE LETTER FROM LOWER MARS has the theme, “Let go and let God.” Our boy must learn that he cannot bring about changes his own way—by writing the publisher and getting the teacher sued, if not fired. He has to let the Lord use him as an instrument in another way. Then the change comes.

Virtually, any principle from Scripture can become the theme of a story. Precepts and moral statements not from the Bible are often used, as well.

“A rolling stone gathers no moss” could be the unstated theme behind the story of a child who stops at nothing to become the student at the head of his class or the one who wins a Sunday School award or a competition in his town.

Themes are almost never stated in words in the story. They are the underlying concept that governs the plot of the story and that determines the outcome.

My theme of my sample story for this chapter is “You can lead a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink.”

Or it might be “Beauty is in the eye of the beholder” or “unshared beauty brings unshared love.”

Select a principle—perhaps even one of these—and build a story on it. Remember to have something at stake that means much to one of your characters.

AFTERBIRTH

By Dick Bohrer

“Daddy,” Jodie called, letting the kitchen door bang behind her. “Daddy, Bertha’s going to calve tonight.” She couldn’t keep the anxiety out of her voice.

“Dad?” she called again, even though she knew where he was. She leaned over his chair in the living-room and put her cheek against his. “Bertha’s going to calve tonight,” she said again.

“I heard you. How come you

didn’t put the curtains back up? You know I hate—”

“Mom and I are in the yard with Bertha,” she said, picking up the curtains she had left draped katty-corner across the table. She frowned as she stood on a chair and lifted the rods back into place.

“Goodbye, my beautiful view,” she said.

“Oh, don’t be silly. It’ll be there in the morning.”

“But what could be more beautiful than our farm and a sunset sky? I love the view from every window of our house. Mother and I always have. Curtains are for city folk.”

“You don’t mind peeping toms?”

“You’ll leave your books and come out with us, won’t you?”

He didn’t answer.

“Daddy,” she said, letting her worry give strength to her tone, “you’ll come, won’t you? Bertha may need you.”

“What could I do that you couldn’t do? You’re the farm girl that will never leave the farm.”

She winced. He took every opportunity to rub it in.

“But Mommy and I told you before you married us that the farm is our life. We could never leave it. Ever.”

“Humph,” he said.

“But now that you’re a farmer too, you should watch a cow give birth.” She pulled at his arm.

“I’ll never be a farmer.”

“Sure you will, Daddy. You’re learning fast. Please come.”

He scraped his chair back from the desk and carefully put a bookmark in his page as he stood. “I’ll come this time, but—”

“Bertha will be a lot calmer with all three of us there, Daddy,” she interrupted, not wanting to let him even voice that he might not come another time.

She pushed him gently out the back door and closed the screen quietly. The cow was lying in the yard beside the house, lowing with expectation.

They sat down on the grass beside Jodie’s mother, half-way up the little hill that sloped up toward the macadam road that ran by their farm.

Bertha moaned long groans as contractions gripped her sides.

“Can’t you give her anything to help the pain?” he asked.

“This is the way it has to be,” her mother said. “She only needs us if it comes breech.”

“Is it coming breech?”

“I don’t think so. But we’ll soon see.”

“I hope it doesn’t,” he said. “I hate to see an animal suffer.”

“Haven’t you seen any animal give birth before?” Jodie asked.

“How could I? We don’t have cows in New York City.”

“Didn’t you even have a cat?”

“No. My brother was allergic to anything with fur.”

“You poor man,” Jodie said. “No wonder you don’t like farming after only two months of it. You don’t know what farming is. It’s not just hoeing weeds out of corn. It’s the sky and earth and the things of the earth. It’s the thaw of spring and the joy we have when it comes time to plant the seeds.

“It’s the happy wait we have as God nourishes the seeds with rain and sun. It’s watching things sprout and grow. It’s reaping the harvest.

“It’s the thrill of watching our animals give birth. It’s the excitement of having life all around us.”

He put his arm around her shoulders and squeezed her. “I didn’t know you were so eloquent.”

“What does that mean?”

“Oh, it means that you just made a speech like a politician.”

“That was no speech,” she said. “It’s love.” She smiled up at him. “I love my farm. I love my world. And I love you for taking my world when you married Mom and me.”

“The only world I ever knew,” he said, “was pickles and pastrami in delicatessens on brownstone-lined streets with car horns honking and mobs of people moving uptown and down. There were taxis and subways and museums and—every corner you turn is a new diversion.”

“Then why—?”

“And then I met your mother and you. I just wanted you both. I thought I could ignore your conditions.”

“They weren’t our conditions.” Jodie looked from her mother to him. “They weren’t our conditions at all. We just knew you would come to love farm life if you’d give it a chance. You’d even want the curtains down so all the beautiful world could come in every window.”

Bertha’s bag of waters broke and the birth process began.

Jodie felt her father’s interest rising, and she could feel his body strain in sympathetic contractions with the cow.

They were watching quietly when a motor hummed from the clump of alders down the road.

They were hardly conscious that the approaching automobile stopped behind them until they heard a falsetto voice pipe, “Mommy, the cow’s doing a doo-doo.”

Jodie felt her father freeze. “It’s just some high school guys,” she whispered.

“No, Jimmy,” another falsetto voice answered, “It’s having a baby.”

They heard loud laughter behind them.

“Don’t let them say another word,” Jodie turned to her mother. “Don’t let them ruin—everything.”

“But, Mommy,” the first voice said, “the baby looks like a doo-doo.”

There was a roar of laughter from the car.

“Jimmy, shame!” several voices

said in falsetto as they continued laughing and drove off.

Her dad got to his feet and went into the house.

Jodie knew the eloquence was gone.

She followed him in and stared after him as he returned to his desk and opened his book at the mark.

She went into her bedroom and shut the door. She took the curtains off the bed and hung the rods.

And, as the car of laughing boys drove out of sight, she put her thumbs in her ears, stuck out her tongue, and waved her fingers at them in the only gesture of anguish she knew.

Then she dropped across her bed, unable to stifle her groans.

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By now, if you’ve been writing a story to match each of these lessons, you may have discovered that your characters have a mind of their own.

You may want Jodie’s dad to come-to-realize that he does love the farm after all, and he’s been a fool to hold out for his city streets.

But those infernal high school boys keep mocking. There’s nothing for dad to do but go inside to get away.

Oh, he could have really broken with his past by becoming angry with the boys for spoiling a significant moment in the life of his new family. But he isn’t man enough for that.

Any man who would shut out a

beautiful view won't see any beauty in any nature—especially in the birth of a calf.

I wanted him to be a man. He preferred to be a mouse.

Let him.

All Christian stories don't have to end in "happy-happy-happy-all-the-day." We have sorrow and disappointment in our lives. They are certainly in the Bible. Why can't we have them in our books? You can't count the girls who have wept over **LITTLE WOMEN**.

And, oh, it's an art to make readers cry. I myself choke up over the reunion of Jacob and Joseph. I wrote one page of **THEY CALLED HIM SHIFTA** 25 times, trying to make it the emotional peak of the story.

There are some parts to this writing craft that just ain't all that easy!

Damon Knight in **CREATING SHORT FICTION** says that "character, setting, situation, and emotion will generate a theme."

And he points out a very good warning to writers. We're not to conceive the theme and inflict it on the characters so that they act like automatons. They need room. You can have a general idea about your theme, but let your characters run with a long rope.

Jean E. Karl says that concept stories "deal with moral and ethical principles, attitudes about conduct, and appreciation of the world in which the child exists."

How do you avoid preachiness? Get

your reader to laugh. Show him his fears are groundless. As he sees the real facts, he'll drop his anxieties. As you create a mood of joy and beauty, he'll realize what pleasures lie where he once quaked.

Concept stories can turn the dentist and the doctor and the nurse with the needle and the barber into friends. You go from the known to the unknown and turn that into the known—all on a level that will register with the age reader you are trying to reach.

A number of books in your library will have a concept at their base.

In **NOBODY ASKED ME IF I WANTED A BABY SISTER** by Martha Alexander (New York: Dial Press, 1971), a young boy learns after he has no success in giving his infant sister away that maybe baby sisters are good for something after all.

"When you get big enough," he said, "maybe we could play horse and wagon."

He visualizes himself lounging in the wagon as his sister (about four) pulls it.

YOUR TURN: Children laugh at his selfishness until they realize they also harbor ideas like that. Do a story that brings to light a selfish plot in some child's heart.

In **THE KING'S FLOWER** by Mitsumasa Anno (New York: William Collins, 1976), "There was once a king who had to have everything bigger and better than anyone else."

This is true of his castle, his crown, his bed, his toothbrush, his alarm clock, his breakfast, his knife and fork,

his chocolate bars, his toothache, and his bird cage.

He orders the biggest flower pot to grow the biggest tulip but learns when an ordinary tulip blossoms from an ordinary bulb that “perhaps biggest is not best after all.”

YOUR TURN: Pick a cliché and illustrate it with a story. State the theme you’ve found in it at the end so the reader sees what you have meant to do. “Big things come in small packages” could be your theme. Or “All that glitters is not gold.”

Reuben in **DO I HAVE TO?** by Stacey Quigley (Milwaukie: Raintree Children’s Books, 1980) learns to act responsibly when things go wrong.

He doesn’t want to write a thank you note. And he forgets.

When he remembers, he decides to draw a picture for a thank you note.

His father tells him, “Good manners mean thinking of others, not just yourself all the time. Sometimes that takes extra work. But in the long run, manners make life easier.”

YOUR TURN: Since those saved by grace are admitted sinners, they often do not have the manners of the religious unsaved. Stories that present good manners to Christian children are too few these days.

DUGAN THE DUCK by Gale Brennan (Chicago: Children’s Press, 1980) does not want to learn to swim. He chooses instead to walk in galoshes and wave a pink umbrella like a sword.

He wards off Wencil the wolf by acting like a musketeer, and he saves three duck friends the wolf had cornered.

Moral: “Don’t be afraid to be differ-

ent. Our differences make us special.”

YOUR TURN: Stories like this encourage youngsters who are short or skinny or buck-toothed or who have to wear a uniform when everyone else can wear anything they want. Write a story of your own that would fit the moral above. This would especially fit a Christian child who may be the only one in the class.

In **LEO THE LOP (TAIL TWO)** by Stephen Cosgrove (Los Angeles: Price/Stern/Sloan, 1979) a rabbit, discontented with looking cute and furry tries to act brave and eventually succeeds in rescuing from a forest fire the animals who had mocked him.

Moral: “Being cute and furry doesn’t mean you can’t be brave.”

YOUR TURN: The same would be true for being short and fat. Ethiopians call such children “Dah-bo” meaning “bread.” They would lumber like a loaf of bread in games on the playground. Write a story that would encourage such a child. Make it more than simply “Jesus loves you” even if you’re fat or skinny or have ears like airplane wings.

In **ANYHOW, I’M GLAD I TRIED** by Judith Vigna (Chicago: Albert Whitman, 1978), the viewpoint character hates Irma Jane, a mean girl in her class.

She determines to be nice to her even though she knows every attempt at friendliness will be in vain. She gives her a cake on her birthday and is spurned.

The book ends as she says, “I guess I’ll never know if she liked her cake. But anyhow, I’m glad I tried.”

YOUR TURN: This is how a Christian girl should act. Perhaps yours doesn’t and must learn a lesson. Or you might do a story about a Christian child who is spurned by everyone in the class and must figure out a way to win friends. Sometimes it comes

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through beating up the meanest bully. Boys are like that. They love the victor.

A PERFECT NOSE FOR RALPH
by Jane Breskin Zalben with illustrations by John Wallner (New York: Philomel Books, 1980).

Summary: When his stuffed panda's fuzzy black nose fell off and got lost, a little boy decides to find a perfect nose with which to replace it.

The dedication reads: "To Alexander with love—the perfection we all want isn't always there, but all we can do is just try."

When his panda bear loses his nose, Reggie searches for a new one in his mother's button can and in a tool chest. He tries a cotton ball, two bright silver snaps, some wool thread, and a cherry. Finally, he draws what he wants the nose to look like and sews it on with needle and coffee-colored thread. The result was just right. "It's a perfect nose for Ralph" we learn on the last page.

YOUR TURN: This is "if at first you don't succeed, try, try again." It's single problem and solution. Many children give up if something is hard to do. What did you once or what do you now find hard to keep doing? Write it into a child's day.

EDITH AND THE DUCK-LING
by Dare Wright (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1981) illustrates a child's wistful yearning for a long-delayed tomorrow.

Summary: Text and photographs show how Edith the doll cares for a duckling after its mother disappears.

A doll, Edith, and two teddies—Mr.

Bear and Little Bear—take an abandoned nest of eggs into the house to hatch them under a heating pad. When a baby duck hatches and they find they cannot keep it in the house, they build a pen. When the duck has grown, it flies away. Edith waves the bird good-bye and calls out that she will see it again in the spring. She turns to her companion and asks, "Oh, Mr. Bear, why is spring so far away?"

YOUR TURN: Something they held dear must leave them. They yearn for its return. This happens when older brothers and sisters leave home or when daddy goes to war or to live with another woman. Many children know the break of heart that separation brings. Write a story to meet this need.

FINDERS KEEPERS by William Lipkind and Nicolas Mordvinoff (San Diego: Voyager books, Harcourt Brace & Company, 1951, 1979).

Library of Congress summary: Two dogs each claim a bone they have found and ask passersby for help deciding ownership.

First sentence: Two dogs were digging in the yard.

They ask a farmer, a goat, an apprentice barber, and then a big dog who runs off with the bone.

They fight to get their bone back and each chew an end with no further word.

Concept: What's mine, not yours, is better when it's ours.

YOUR TURN: See the good lessons you can teach with the concept story. These make good illustrations in Sunday School. Use this concept (above) to enlarge on such a verse as "Love seeketh not its own" (1 Corinthians 13: 5).

WHEN I'M JEALOUS, written and illustrated by Jane Aaron (New York: Golden books, 1998).

Library of Congress summary: A fictional story presents jealousy as a normal part of life and discusses how to deal with it. Includes a parent's guide in a question-and-answer format with examples and suggestions.

First sentence: Sometimes I get jealous.

A collage figure admits jealousy despite parental admonition. He confesses being jealous of friends and his baby sister and admits how jealousy makes him feel. He likes it when he can make those feelings go away.

Concept: Admitting a weakness and recognizing its evils helps us overcome.

YOUR TURN: A story for Christian kids would bring in the biblical solution of 1 John 1:9 and other verses. Deliverance is more than recognizing a weakness. We Christians have the Holy Spirit in our heart to help us live the resurrection life. We are new creatures in Christ. Our stories need to bring this out so children know sound doctrine at an early age. Don't let an adult in your story tell this to a child. Show it so he/she realizes it out of the circumstance that makes the story.

WE'LL PAINT THE OCTOPUS RED, written by Stephanie Stuve-Bodeen and illustrated by Pam DeVito (New York: Golden Books, 1998).

Library of Congress summary: Emma and her father discuss what they will do when the new baby arrives, but they adjust their expectations when he is born with Down's Syndrome.

First sentence: When my mom first told me I was getting a new brother or

sister, I wasn't very happy.

But happiness comes as she thinks of all the things she will do with the baby.

When a challenged child is born, she decides none of her plans need to change.

Concept: We treat the challenged as we would treat anyone else.

YOUR TURN: When I interviewed Everett Koop at Children's Hospital in Philadelphia before he became surgeon general, he said he had never known one of the hundreds of challenged children he had delivered over the years who didn't bring love and happiness to its family. Put such a child in a Christian family and let us see the results.

FENWICK'S SUIT by David Small (New York: Farrar Straus Giroux, 1996).

First sentence: Fenwick worked in a crowded office, yet he felt alone.

A lonely young man thinks his drab clothes are keeping him from being popular.

He buys a gaudy suit that changes his personality. He struts and poses.

A secretary praises his new look.

The next day, achy and feverish, he stays home but the suit, now animated, goes to work in his place.

The suit returns and climbs back in the closet.

The next day he follows the suit to work, catches it and boxes it. It becomes a blimp with him in the breast pocket.

"How humiliating! My clothes are wearing me!"

He rides an unraveling thread to the ground.

When his life returns to normal, he is

still ignored at work.

“Maybe it’s the way I wear my hair,” he told himself.

YOUR TURN: Write about a character who is never satisfied with being himself. He thinks his failures in life are the cause of something he can do or wear or say. Have him realize it is the life of the Lord Jesus lived out in him that will make him different.

Maybe your third grader thinks that his not tying his shoes or brushing his teeth is the reason his class's ball (his class's ball team lost) team lost.

MAMA AND DADDY BEAR’S DIVORCE by Cornelia Maude Spelman and illustrated by Kathy Parkinson (Morton Grove, Ill.: Albert Whitman and Company, 1998).

Library of Congress summary: Dinah Bear feels sad and scared when her parents say they are going to divorce.

First sentence: Dinah had three favorite people—her mama, her daddy and her sister Ruth.

But when divorce comes, Dinah needs reassurance that Mama will always be her mama and daddy will always be her daddy and that they all love her very much.

Concept: Only love comforts and endures when families break apart.

YOUR TURN: Divorce sadly occurs in Christian families, too. Write a story that will encourage a child who must trust the Lord in such a situation.

THE STRAIGHT LINE WONDER by Mem Fox, pictures by Marc Rosenthal (New York: Mondo Publishing, 1997).

Library of Congress summary: Despite the admonitions of his friends, a straight line enjoys expressing himself

by twirling in whirls, pointing his joints and creeping in heaps.

First sentence: Once upon a time there were three straight lines.

One straight line breaks free from his restraining friends by jumping in humps and twirls and points and heaps.

A film director makes him a star.

His friends say, “Why, we knew him when . . .”

Concept: Friends and family say, “No.” “Don’t.” “Stay.” until the visionary makes a success. Then they are proud of him.

YOUR TURN: This is touchy because we want our children to respect and obey their parents. It becomes a real issue when a child knows he can do something his parents believe he can’t. This works with adults as well when a husband wants to start his own business in something he knows well and his wife doesn’t want him to spend family money on something that “probably won’t work.”

SLEEPY LITTLE OWL by Howard Goldsmith, illustrated by Denny Bond (New York: Learning Triangle Press, an imprint of McGraw-Hill, 1997).

First Sentence: Little Owl was a tiny screech owl.

Last sentence: Now he knew night time was his time to play.

Unhappy that he must go to bed in the morning, an owlet goes to play. He finds he is in an unfriendly world with mice, woodpeckers, frogs, chipmunks.

His parents find him asleep on a bed of moss and bring him home.

Concept: Don’t leave your world. Happiness lies in the routines of home.

YOUR TURN: This is the opposite side of the coin from “The Straight Line Wonder.” Both sides of

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these issues are out there. As you write, consider both sides of issues. You may find mother lode in an angle you might not have thought you would.

KOMODO! By Peter Sis (New York: Greenwillow books, 1993 in pen and ink and watercolor).

Parents of a boy who loves dragons take him to the island of Komodo to see the only real dragons on earth.

They see none and are disappointed. He sees a dragon and more dragons everywhere he looks.

He thought Komodo was the best place he'd ever been.

YOUR TURN: Using this same concept that beauty is where you find it, tell of a child's delight in enjoying something that others either devalue or can't see.

THE MOON LAKE by Ivan Gantshhev (Salzburg, Austria: Picture Book Studio, 1981. Watercolor by the author).

An old shepherd, the only one who knows the location of the lake where the moon bathes when she comes to earth, carries the secret to his grave.

His young son, searching for a lost sheep, discovers the lake and its jewels.

Greedy men confiscate the jewels when he takes them to town to sell. They frighten him into telling them the lake's location and die when they fail to leave the lake, though warned, before sunrise.

The young son never takes jewels to town again, but uses them on collars for his sheep and as lights on his window sills.

YOUR TURN: Using this concept, "Greed kills" (greed is one of the "seven deadly sins" of literature), tell a story like this where someone tries to share a treasure with similar results.

THE PAINTER AND THE WILD SWANS by Claude Clement with lovely Japanese style acrylic pictures by Frederic Clement (New York: Dial Books for Young Readers, 1986) 24 pp.

Summary: Transfixed by the beauty of a passing flock of white swans, a Japanese painter finds that he cannot work until he sees them again.

First sentence: In a village in Japan there once lived a painter named Teiji who was loved by all the world.

Everyone loved the exquisite paintings Teiji painted. So many people wanted his pictures, he was rich and lived comfortably. One day he saw a flock of white swans flying overhead. Captivated by such beauty, he sold everything and followed the flocks to an island in a lake where he became transformed into a swan himself and flew off after them into the gray sky.

YOUR TURN: The concept here is that beauty is more to be desired than riches. How easily this would transfer into a salvation story.

This is the story of Pilgrim at the wicket gate where he saw the more-to-be-desired cross of Christ and his burden fell away (*Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan). It is the story of the Matthew in Luke's Gospel of whom John Oxenham wrote this little poem from *Bees in Amber*:

*I heard the call "Come follow,"
That was all.
My gold grew dim,
I rose and followed Him.
I rose and followed—
That was all.
Who would not follow
If they heard Him call.*

THE REAL HOLE by Beverly Cleary and illustrated by DyAnne DiSalvo-Ryan (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1960 and 1986).

Summary: With interference and suggestions from his twin sister Janet, four-year-old Jimmy sets out to dig the biggest hole in the world.

First sentence: Jimmy and Janet are twins.

Young Jimmy, using a real shovel his father gave him, digs a hole in the back yard, declaring it will be the biggest. He tells those who come to see it that it's a big hole he is going to keep. Father says such a hole is a danger in the yard. He brings home a baby spruce tree which they plant in Jimmy's "real grown-up hole."

YOUR TURN: A youngster boasts that what he is doing is the biggest and best in the world, not realizing that what he is doing may be harmful to someone else. His father, with more sense, finds a better use for what has been done. This is the Tower of Babel concept. Your child could build a tower of pop cans that will be as big as a house. His father suggests it may fall and hurt someone. He suggests turning the cans in and giving the money to the missionary fund at church.

SAM, BANGS AND MOONSHINE, written and illustrated by Evaline Ness (New York: Henry Holt and company, 1966). CALDECOTT AWARD.

First sentence: On a small island, near a large harbor, there once lived a fisherman's little daughter (named Samantha but always called Sam), who had the reckless habit of lying. Her father called it "Moonshine."

She had a young friend Thomas who believed every word she said was true. She told him she had a baby kangaroo and sent him far and wide each day to find it.

The day she sends him to find her mermaid mother in a cave behind Blue Rock, Bangs her cat follows Thomas.

A storm threatens Thomas and washes Bangs out to sea. Sam's father scolds her for lying and goes for Thomas. Bangs returns home. Sam takes a toy kangaroo rat to Thomas.

"What's its name?"

"Moonshine," answered Sam as she gave Bangs a big wide smile.

YOUR TURN: The concept here is that liars cannot hide their lies. The truth will come out eventually. Use a lie to get your character into trouble. Then use bad results and confession as part of the conclusion. Your setting could be school, church, home, work, nursing home, on ship board, on the mission field.

SELL YOUR HOMEWORK: THE CONCEPT STORY

Research Sheet

Title: _____

Author: _____

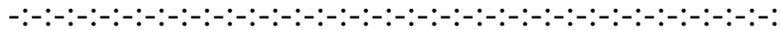
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First Sentence: _____

Concept: _____

How Concept Colors the Story: _____



Title: _____

Author: _____

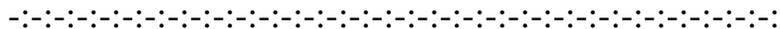
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Library of Congress Summary: _____

First Sentence: _____

Concept: _____

How Concept Colors the Story: _____



Let's Write a
**Story That Ends in
Surprise**

**Never in a thousand years
would anyone think
this story would end like
THAT!**

Surprise ending stories aren't in demand as they once were, but you've got to be kidding. Every youngster loves a surprise.

O. Henry brought these stories to a peak. Remember his "Gift of the Magi" where neither the young wife or young husband had a Christmas gift for his loved one.

Each one sold his dearest possession to buy a gift for the other.

She sold her hair to buy a gold chain for his watch, and he sold his watch to buy lovely combs for her hair.

The reader was surprised by the ending. It spoke to hearts of the depth and warmth of human devotion in the midst of abject poverty.

Surprise ending stories usually proceed in chronological order. Then

they reach a turning point when either a crisis occurs, a threat looms or an unusual decision must be made.

The direction of the story changes. Surprising events occur that force the reader to exclaim that he never in a thousand years would have thought the story would end like that.

Detective stories often use a surprise ending to reveal who the criminal really is.

The turning point may hinge on something that happened before the story began. It may build on a threat of something to come that was hinted at in the beginning. It may precipitate itself from events immediately preceding the turning point.

The conclusion may mean life or death or it may free or cripple the heroic figure. Above all, the hero's humanity comes through as it did in O.

Henry's stories.

And it did in King Solomon's story, too.

When he had to judge between two mothers who each claimed a living child as her own, he became part of a surprise ending story in I Kings 3.

23. Then said the king, The one saith, This is my son who liveth, and thy son is the dead; and the other saith, Nay; but thy son is the dead child, and my son is the living.

24. And the king said, Bring me a sword. And they brought a sword before the king.

25. And the king said, Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one, and half to the other.

26. Then spoke the woman whose the living child was unto the king, for her heart yearned over her son, and she said, O my lord, give her the living child, and by no means slay it. But the other said, Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it.

27. Then the kind answered and said, Give her the living child, and by no means slay it; she is the mother of it.

You see the humanity coming through here. Mother love yearns over her own and is willing to give him up to another rather than see him slain.

Surprise ending isn't all that simple. It does test your ingenuity. Some writers have used it to make intriguing stories.

Albert, a young turtle in **ALBERT'S TOOTHACHE** by Barbara Williams (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1974) complains about a toothache.

"Turtles don't have teeth!" his father complains.

No one believes Albert through an entire day.

Finally, his grandmother asks him where he hurts and he points to his left toe.

"A gopher bit me when I stepped in his hole," he says.

YOUR TURN: This surprise ending is built on a misunderstanding. Albert thinks his toe is his tooth. But your surprise ending could be built this same way. Elijah's servant thought it was a little cloud, just the size of a man's hand. It turned out to be a hurricane.

In **THE HOUSE ON EAST 88TH STREET** by Bernard Waber (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), the Primm family fell in love with the crocodile they found in their bathroom the first day they moved into the house on East 88th Street.

How they laughed at his tricks. He became part of the family. But Lyle's owner writes twice that he will come to take Lyle away.

When the croc becomes famous, the owner, an actor, comes to take him on a world tour.

All is grim for the Primm family.

Then, to their surprise, the actor returns with the croc. Lyle had been brokenhearted since leaving them.

Lyle never talks. He just performs tricks and housework.

YOUR TURN: Some husbands are like Lyle—

never talking, just doing tricks and the housework. The kids would love that. Dad would do the dishes.

Most clever is a youngster in **GILLESPIE AND THE GUARDS** by Benjamin Elkin (New York: Viking Press, 1956). Three brothers become palace guards because of their powerful eyesight.

The king offers jewels to anyone who can fool his guards.

Many try and fail.

Gillespie, a youngster who plays with the prince, tries.

Each day he takes a load of leaves or sand or stone or wood off the palace grounds in a little red wagon.

The famous guards pass him on each time, finding nothing wrong with leaves, sand, stone or wood.

Finally, Gillespie goes to collect his prize and wins—to the astonishment of all

He had been stealing red wagons!

YOUR TURN: A clever device this. This kind of wit appeals to editors and, of course, to kids. Tuck this device in your back pocket and use it some time. Focus our attention on something innocent while our hero is getting away with the inventory—so to speak.

MRS. MUGGLE’S SPARKLE by Ruth Gembicki Bragg (Saxonville, Mass.: Picture Book Studio, 1990) contains fold-out pages.

Summary: Mrs. Muggle searches for her lost pet bird whom she trained to say “I love you.”

The first sentence begins with “One day . . .” The book opens telling that Mrs. Muggle is cleaning her bird’s cage when the bird suddenly takes flight out the window. She searches the

sky, scans the trees, examines flowers to no avail. She drives into town and finds Sparkle in a dime store making love to another parrot. She takes both birds home. Ultimately, five eggs hatch and their first words were not “I love you.” They were “I’m hungry.”

YOUR TURN: Some surprise ending stories are not outrageous surprises but just ordinary twists. But a surprise is a surprise and kids do like them. Old Testament kings had surprises when the prophecies recorded against them came true. How about an arrow in your chest!

KING OF THE ZOO by Claire Schumacher (New York: William Morrow & Company, 1985).

Summary: The naughty, but good-hearted, zoo animals play a joke on their keeper, the “King of the Zoo.”

This chronological narrative goes through a 24-hour day. The zoo is neat and clean before the people come in. The animals complain about the sameness of their diet when Alphonso brings their food. They want candy and ice cream like real kids. He’s exhausted at day’s end after listening to everyone complain about his zoo.

He goes home, forgetting to lock the monkey cage. The animals run loose all night and hide from Alphonso next morning. When he bursts into tears, they all appear and tell him they’ll clean up the zoo. They want him to be their “King of the Zoo.”

YOUR TURN: The surprise is that there are those who do care when we think no one notices. This can make an appealing story. Naaman the leper is surprised when the little captive girl comes up with a cure for his leprosy and sends him to Elijah. He had never noticed before that she was even there.

THE LAST TIME I SAW HARRIS by Frank Remkiewicz (New York: Lathrop, Lee and Shepard Books, 1971) 32 pp.

Library of Congress summary: When a fierce windstorm blows away his clever parrot, Edmund is inconsolable and goes with the family chauffeur on a long search through town and country.

Edmund has taught his parrot the color wheel. When he taps hard on a card, the parrot says the color.

When a storm sucks Harris out a window, Edmund is devastated. In care of Higgins, the family chauffeur, he sets off on a world-wide search to find Harris.

As Edmund holds color cards in the faces of birds of all sorts, the chauffeur uses colored panels from cars in wrecking yards to repair his dented limousine.

Edmund becomes so frustrated by the fruitless search he pounds the car's colored trunk with his fist. "Purple" comes a cry from a tree top.

It's Harris!

YOUR TURN: The title plays on a familiar song, "The Last Time I Saw Paris." We knew what the chauffeur was doing, but we never dreamed he was providing the solution and the surprise. This helps make the story clever.

ONE SUNDAY MORNING by Yumi Heo (New York: Orchard Books, 1999).

Library of Congress summary: Minko and his father have an active morning at the park, taking a carriage ride, seeing the animals in the zoo, and riding the merry-go-round.

The surprise comes on the last page.

The wonderful day in the park was only a dream.

YOUR TURN: This kind of surprise is a disappointment to readers. We end with "Oh, is that all?" However, it IS a method we can use.

MADELINE'S RESCUE with story and pictures by Ludwig Bemelmans (New York: Puffin Books, 1953). CALDECOTT AWARD.

Library of Congress summary: A hound rescues Madeline from the Seine, becomes a beloved school pet, is chased away by the trustees, and returns with a surprise.

First sentence: In an old house in Paris that was covered with vines lived twelve little girls in two straight lines.

The surprise is a puppy for each girl.

(Note: This story is in verse.)

YOUR TURN: This story has the kind of charm we love. Captive girls, harsh trustees, a dog they love and then puppies for all. This is the kind of surprise we get from the "Let down your nets" instruction the Lord gave to Peter.

THE SECRET FRIEND by Joyce Dunbar and illustrated by Helen Craig (Cambridge, Mass.: Candlewick Press, 1999).

Library of Congress summary: Panda feels a little hurt after helping best friend Gander write a letter to Gander's secret friend.

First sentence: Today I am going to write a thank-you letter," said Gander.

In a give-and-take conversation through the whole story, Panda helps his friend write a proper letter and mail it in a shoebox.

Pouting that Gander has a secret friend not he, Panda is surprised by the address when Gander brings the letter from the shoebox.

It reads, "To my dear secret friend, Panda."

YOUR TURN: Write a story of a deep disappointment of yours (or someone you know) that turned out to have a surprise ending. Point up the spiritual experience that was involved.

THE GOLDEN LOCKET by Carol Greene and illustrated by Marcia Sewall (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1992).

Worried sleepless that robbers will steal a gold locket her cat dug up under her apple tree, Miss Teaberry gives it to the milkman to give to an enchanting young girl in the next town.

The girl sends her three puppies which she sends on—through the milkman—to a winsome young boy.

That boy sends back a parrot which goes to the girl. She sends a horse which goes to the boy.

The boy sends three lambs. The girl, pigs.

The boy a hairy ox with fleas.

To solve the escalating problem, Miss Teaberry arranges a tryst for the boy and girl to meet. They fall in love and marry.

Miss T. stays home from the wedding to weed her zinnias.

The milkman goes to the wedding.

The book ends with "So did the cat."

YOUR TURN: You do a story in which a person in the middle sends crazy things to someone who sends crazy things back like Miss Teaberry. Have some surprising ending that will startle your reader.

TWO OF EVERYTHING by Lily Toy Hung (Morton Grove, Ill.: Albert Whitman and Co., 1993).

First sentence: Once long ago in a humble little hut, lived Mr. Haktak and his wife, Mrs. Haktak.

An old Chinese farmer, when carrying home an old brass pot he has dug up, finds it doubles anything put into it.

Complications arise when his wife and then he fall in.

The new farmer has a new farmer's wife.

Both couples, now best of friends, live side by side in duplicate houses. But only one house has the magic pot inside.

YOUR TURN: Complications always enhance surprise-ending stories. The fact that the magic pot remains inside one of the houses suggests other stories may yet come, and it is an indication of which couple is the original couple. Little touches like this help a story catch an editor's eye.

In my sample story that follows, the hinge is Scottie's statement to Lois: "I can win more people to Christ being a success in this play than you can, moping around about 'living for Jesus.'"

Becky has confronted him with her Christian conscience and love for the Lord and has warned him about carnality.

In his self confidence, he rushes headlong toward the success he sees as part of his destiny.

Interestingly, we want him to fail.

He's the protagonist, and yet we pull for his downfall.

The surprise comes in finding how it comes about. Then, again, maybe it's

not all that much of a surprise.

But it does illustrate the principle that the surprise must come naturally out of the conflict of the story.

Here, again, I'm pulling scenes out of my life. I had to shout down the length of a high school hallway to assure the drama teacher my voice could carry.

I got the lead in my senior class play. I pulled the spiritual confrontation from a later period of my life to work against the success of this earlier part.

Writers can do that.

I'M A BIG BOY NOW

By Dick Bohrer

"Pardon me, young lady," I called down the long hall to the pretty girl standing near the far stairway. "I'm working my way through astronomy college. Could I interest you in a subscription to 'Starlight' magazine or one called 'Twinkle Twinkle?'"

The girl stood motionless, her hand on the railing. At least she could have answered me.

(Describe the problem)

"Well, Becky?" I called.

She turned to speak to a girl on the stairs below her. "I'll meet you out front in half an hour, Lois," she said. Then she turned toward me. "I heard every word you said, Scottie."

"There, Miss Cavitt," I said to the assistant director standing beside me. "My voice does carry. Do I get the part?"

"I'll still have to talk to Mr. Bronson about it tonight, Scottie. Even though we need a tall, skinny boy like you for the part, I don't promise you anything."

"Aw, thanks, Miss Cavitt," I said.

"The cast will be announced tomorrow," she said as she walked toward the stairs. "Good night."

"Good night, ma'am." When she was out of sight, I swung around and started racing toward the opposite end of the hall.

(Opposition)

"Hey, Becky," I shouted. "My voice does carry and they need me."

Becky didn't say anything. She didn't whoop or holler or even smile. She just looked at me out of her big brown eyes and bit her lower lip.

So I said, "You know, I've always liked Miss Cavitt. She's an awful hard director, but she's fair. She'll do anything she can to help a guy. Don't you think she'll get me the part?"

Becky answered me very quietly. "You know I don't like what you're doing, Scottie."

"You don't like what I'm doing? And just what do you mean by that?"

(Identify what's at stake)

"You promised the Lord your life the same time I did," she said. "And now you're trying out for a part in an all-school play—and an off-color one at that."

“But I’m not going back on my commitment, Beck. I still mean it.”

“How can you mean it? What is there for the Lord in an off-color play?”

We pushed out of the school door and sat down on the steps. This was going to be a long battle.

“I can be a witness for the Lord in what you call an off-color play,” I said. “It may be lusty, but it’s not dirty. It’s a Broadway play. It’s sophisticated.”

“But the Bible says to flee youthful lusts—to run away and have nothing to do with them.”

“But think of the witness I can be to the cast and to the stage crew—and to the kids at school. And if Lois gets the part of the crazy landlady, I’ll have a chance to win her to the Lord, too.”

(Force an immediate decision)

“Can’t you be a witness without that play?”

“Listen, Becky,” I said firmly. “What this world needs is more Christians in important places. You gotta get, you gotta be, you gotta do in this world so that the guys will listen to what you say.”

“But that’s not true,” she said. “It takes the Holy Spirit living in us and through us. You know that.”

“Becky, the guys see you for what you are. I bet I can win more people like Lois to Christ being a success in this all-school play than you can,

moping around about ‘living for Jesus.’”

She was beginning to get me mad.

(Antagonist resists)

“Scottie Wilson, you know the Bible says—”

“Don’t you ‘Bible says’ me,” I told her. “I know just as much Bible as you do.”

“Oh, Scottie, I don’t want us to fight,” she said. “It’s just that this is so important.” Then her voice softened. “I found a poem that says just what I want my life—just what we should want our lives—to be like.”

“You found a poem, huh?”

“Yes, and it’s this:

Take my life and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee.
Take my moments and my days
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.
Take my love, my Lord, I pour
At Thy feet its treasure store.
Take myself, and I will be,
Ever, only, all for Thee.

(Unexpected results)

There was a clatter of applause behind us. “Bravo! Bravo!”

“Mr. Bronson!” I said. “Where did you come from?”

“I just came out the door and heard this young lady reciting so eloquently. I didn’t know you could act so well, Becky. We’ve got a part for you in our big new play. Miss Cavitt was just talking to me about

you not five minutes ago. She had been watching you during part of Scottie's tryout."

"But—" Becky tried to interrupt him.

"No buts about it, young lady. It's all settled. Report tomorrow morning before school. We're having final tryouts then. You do believe in tryouts, don't you?"

"Yes, but—"

"Fine. And I'll give you a copy of the script then. It's a great play, Becky, and with you and Scottie in the lead parts, we may open on Broadway ourselves. See you tomorrow. I've got to run." With a wave, he turned and ran to a waiting car.

"Did you hear that?" I shouted. "I got the part. Whoopee!"

"Scottie, you're shouting."

"And you're going to take the other lead, aren't you? You said, 'Yes.'"

(Antagonist resists second time)

Just then Lois came out the doors. "What's all the noise, you guys?"

"I got the lead in the all-school play," I told her. "And they want Becky to try out for the other lead, only she doesn't want to."

"Doesn't want to? Becky, are you nuts?"

"No."

"She doesn't think she is," I said, "but I do—"

Lois cut me off. "Why don't you want it? Who told you you could

have it? What did he say? What did Miss Cavitt say? Why won't you tell me?"

"Well, give us a chance, Wordy," I said. She can say more in ten seconds! But I saw Becky biting her lip. And when Becky bites her lip, it means she's thinking and maybe she's worried.

Lois's not being a Christian must have been what was puzzling her. How could she tell Lois without appearing like a kook. Well, she wanted opportunities to witness. I didn't help her out.

"Well, answer me," Lois demanded.

"Oh, Lois," Becky finally said. "Try to understand me. I don't want to be associated with this—what Scottie calls a sophisticated play. I don't want to have people find double meanings in everything I say. I love the Lord Jesus. I want to tell people about Him instead of—instead of feeding their appetites for off-color comedy. And I'm going to make that clear to Mr. Bronson tomorrow."

(Unexpected results)

"Oh, what a clod!" Lois laughed. "Becky, you're too much. You get the chance every girl in the senior class has been moaning over and you want to turn it down for God? Oh, how noble! How fine! How dumb!"

Attagirl, Lois, I wanted to say. But I didn't.

“Won’t anyone understand the way I feel?” Becky said.

“You don’t want understanding,” Lois jabbed. “You want a white robe and a harp. Okay, be a saint. See if I care.”

“Lois, you’re my friend!”

“Not any more I’m not. I don’t like fanatics. Never did.”

(Rejection)

She took my arm and started to march me off down the walk away from Becky. She turned and called over her shoulder. “See you around, clod.” And then to rub it in, she made sweeping gestures and called out, loud enough for Becky to hear, “I want to be a clod for—God!”

“You’re mean,” I told Lois. “I didn’t know you were so spiteful.”

“I’m not spiteful, Scottie,” Lois said. “I’m just putting on a big act. But Becky doesn’t know it and it’ll shake her up. Really, I like Becky. She’s got something different that I like. She’s not like a lot of other girls.”

“Then why do you treat her like you just did?”

“Like I said, dum-dum. But don’t you dare tell her I’m watching her or I’ll rip you apart with my bare fingernails.”

I shook Lois off, promising I wouldn’t tell, and went back to look for Becky. I could have talked to Lois then about the Lord myself, but I wanted to wait.

A guy has to think these things

out. When I was a success, she’d listen.

I looked all around for Becky, but she’d gone. I had boys club at church that night, so I didn’t call her like I usually did.

(Antagonist resists the third time)

The next day before school, I was in Mr. Bronson’s office. There were a bunch of us around his desk. Lois was there. She hadn’t gotten the part. She froze when they gave her the script to read. But she got a job on the stage crew.

We’d been talking about Becky when she came in.

“Here she comes now,” I told Mr. Bronson.

“Yes, here she comes now,” he said. “Come here, Becky, and give these people the show that you gave me last night.”

He picked up a paperback book from his desk and held it out to her. “Turn to your first entrance on page seven. You’re a business girl, living in a somewhat questionable apartment in New York with two girl friends. You’ve stumbled over a paper bag containing a fortune in jewels and when the word leaks out, you get all sorts of visitors.

“Scottie here will be a wandering vagabond who sells magazines from door to door.”

“Playboy?” one of the guys called out.

“No, Humpty-Dumpty,” I said.

Everybody laughed.

“Now, Becky,” Mr. Bronson said, “let’s start. Curtain!”

Becky put the book behind her back.

“Mr. Bronson, I don’t want to do it. I didn’t come here to try out for the part.”

“You what?”

“I don’t want the part. I came here to talk to you—privately.”

“I think everybody here would understand anything you might want to say privately,” Mr. Bronson said. “Now just why don’t you want the part?”

“Well, it’s because I’m—” she faltered and her eyes flickered over to me for help. “It’s because—well—it’s because I’m a Christian.”

“And just what do you mean by a statement like that? What do you think we are?”

(Unexpected results #3)

“The lions,” I said. It just came out. I couldn’t help it.

Everybody laughed again.

Becky flushed.

“And just what has being a Christian got to do with not taking this part?” Mr. Bronson persisted.

Becky held the book in front of her and looked down at her feet. And then she looked up at him and said, “When I became a Christian—when I took the Lord Jesus as my Savior—well, I gave Him my life. I want to spend my life serving Him, not—”

“Not serving the devil,” I cut in. I don’t know why I say things like that. I didn’t mean to hurt Becky, but I like to make the guys laugh and everybody really roared at that one.

(Rejection #3)

Becky tried to explain.

“That wasn’t what I was going to say! That wasn’t—”

But everyone was laughing so loud that no one could hear her.

When she saw she couldn’t get anywhere, she pushed the book into Mr. Bronson’s hands, turned, and ran from the room. And as she left, all the guys started to whistle and applaud.

She was still mad when I saw her after lunch.

“You ruined everything, Scottie. Everything! I tried to tell them about the Lord and you—you of all people—made me a laughingstock.”

“Becky,” I said, “you’ve got to learn you can’t witness to people by telling them you’re so goody-good. They think you’re crazy. Like I told you, get to be a big shot—take that part, earn their respect—and then people like Lois and the crowd will listen.”

“They would have listened today if it hadn’t been for your wisecracks.”

“Oh, cut it out. With you everything is either black or white. It’s either right or wrong. Well, what I did wasn’t wrong. Had you laughed along with us, it would have given

you the exact opportunity you wanted to win friends and influence people, Lois included. But no! You had to go and get mad. I gotta get to class. The bell's gonna ring. See you around."

And I left.

She's not going to ruin my life.

(Protagonist backs off—angry—but destined for success)

I didn't see much of her after that. I was busy after school every day practicing. Lois made up with Becky, I guess. I saw them around a lot together.

When the school paper printed a picture of the cast and a big personality sketch of me, my phone began to ring more and more. The girls and guys that were big stuff on campus began calling me up and inviting me over.

Oh, sometimes there was a little drinking on the side or a little dancing, but nothing to hurt a person any. Besides, I didn't take any.

I felt I was doing my part to publicize our play. A guy's got to get SOME exposure. How can you have any fans if they don't know who you are?

I saw less and less of Becky as the weeks went by. And I didn't care.

(Protagonist wins success)

The night of the play we were all a little nervous. The whole cast was edgy.

I loosened things up in the dress-

ing room when the make-up gal tried to put lip color on my mouth. It tickled something awful. Everybody started to crack up when I shrieked.

This sort of set the tone for the evening. We went out there and had a lot of fun. Sure, the play was bad in spots, but it was really fun. A guy can't live in a hothouse all his life.

And the audience really liked it. Sometimes they would laugh so much we would have to stop talking and pantomime until we could be heard again.

If we thought people were laughing in the first act, they were rolling in the aisles in the second. I don't know why every word I said was so funny. I'd gone over my part a million times and it didn't seem funny to me.

They really applauded when the curtain came down that time.

(Move toward a confrontation)

I saw Lois when I came off stage. "Becky's outside," she said.

"So?" What did she want me to do? Cartwheels?

"You can see her out that exit, if you want to."

I went over to the door and looked out. She was standing under the street light with her head down.

"Somebody will try to pick her up if she's not careful," I said with a laugh.

"Why do you laugh like that?" Lois asked me.

“Well, why not?” I snapped. “What has she ever done to help anybody.” And then I minced my voice. “I-wanna-live-for-Jesus,” I mocked in a sing-song tone. “Well, let her live for Jesus,” I said, turning back toward the stage. “See if I care. I’ve got more important things to do.”

I knew Lois would take that back to Becky. It would do them both good.

The stage manager called, “Places, everybody,” and we all got into position for Act Three.

The audience burst into spontaneous applause when the big velvet curtain went up.

And when the final curtain calls came, I got a roaring ovation. They even stood up. It was a thrill I’ll never forget.

Afterward, we all went backstage and congratulated one another. And then it seemed half the audience started to pour in. Everyone was crowding around me, shaking my hand, talking about me and Hollywood and all. They called it a “superb performance.” I thought I’d been good, but not that good.

Nick Adams, the student body president, stopped me as I was going down to my dressing room. “We’ll wait for you and your girl, Scottie, if you want a ride to the cast party.”

“Sure do, Nickie,” I said. Boy, I’d hit the big time with the in-crowd. “Wait till I get this grease off my face.”

“Where’s your woman?” he asked. “I don’t see Becky here anywhere.”

“Becky? Becky who?” I said. Who wanted Holy Annie on a night like this? I was a star.

“You go get ready, Scott,” Nick said. “I’ll get the drinks and the gals and meet you out front.”

(Have the confrontation)

Lois and Becky were blocking the door when I came up from the dressing rooms. I couldn’t get out without passing them. They were talking and didn’t see me come, so I hid behind the door to hear what they were saying about me.

“But he’s so different,” Lois was saying. “He used to be a real nice kid, but now—”

“It’s what he wanted,” Becky said. “I could hear his applause way out in the parking lot.”

“Why didn’t you go in?”

“I couldn’t, Lois. I’ve watched the change come over him—I couldn’t go in there and applaud him now. Did you tell him I was out there?”

“Yeah.”

“What did he say?”

I decided to come out of hiding then. It was as good a time as any.

“Hi, kids, coming to the dance?” I said to them. “Nickie’s waiting out front.”

I knew Becky wouldn’t come. I just wanted to show her I was climbing the ladder.

“You’re going to the dance?” was

all she could say. She was pretty shook up.

“Sure,” I said. “Like I told you, you gotta be, you gotta do in this life.” I sort of strutted down the steps on that line and went out to the street toward Nick’s car.

Becky came slowly after me.

“Oh, Scottie, are you really going?” She was crying.

“Sure,” I yelled back as I ran down the street.

“I’m a big boy now!”

(Failure)

About ten the next morning, the phone rang and rang and rang. My mom was downtown, I guess. Nobody was home but me, and I was in bed with a headache to end all headaches.

It was Lois.

“Hey, Scottie,” she said. “I just wanted to tell you that you left too early last night.”

“Whaddya mean?”

“Well, I’ve got someone I want you to meet.”

“Reporters?” I said, waking up.

“Better than that.”

“A Broadway director?”

“It’s someone I don’t think you ever met before. At least, I never heard you mention his name.”

“A movie producer?”

“Well, it’s someone who can really do great things for you, Scottie. I just met him last night myself. Becky introduced me.”

“Well, WHO?”

“His name is—well, his name...”

“WHAT’S HIS NAME?”

“It’s—it’s—Jesus.”

###

I used the pattern given you in chapter 13 on “the Single Problem and Solution” structure. I described the problem—that Scottie wants a part in an off-color play and Becky, his conscience, opposes.

She identifies what’s at stake.

His is an easy choice, a weakening. The poem by Frances Ridley Havergal crystallizes just what Becky wants for her life—and his.

Actually, I think she goes to Mr. Bronson’s office to persuade him not to offer the part to Scottie. He, sensing that, cuts her off at the pass.

Scottie comes to an immediate decision, I think because he has already persuaded himself that he wants that part. For him, it’s not a difficult thing to decide.

And from there he heads toward success.

Once he has put Becky out of his life, his is a clear coast downward.

We move toward a confrontation, have it, and record Scottie’s ultimate failure. He isn’t able to win more people to Christ being a success. But Becky can by living for Jesus.

A cardinal rule of contriving story plots is to continually reverse the rules.

Make water flow uphill.

SELL YOUR HOMEWORK: THE SURPRISE ENDING

Make “The Little Train That Could” struggle to get down the hill instead of up.

Jack and Jill, Cinderella, Snow White, Jack and the Beanstalk—you can take essential plots and adapt them to your message for Christ and reverse them—turn them inside out and back-side-forward. And you can build intriguing stories for children.

And isn't that why we're in this ministry?

Stories can urge youngsters toward the Lord as we work the message in

naturally, interestingly, compellingly.

It can be done.

You can do it!

Now, in our last lesson, we'll discuss three more kinds of stories to write—catalog, whimsy and gospel. This will bring to 24 the different ways I'm teaching you.

I sincerely hope you are practicing them and that you are really selling the work you do at home.

Professor Dick

SELL YOUR HOMEWORK: THE SURPRISE ENDING

Research Sheet

Title: _____

Author: _____

Publisher _____ Date _____

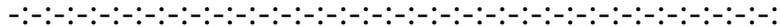
Library of Congress Summary: _____

First Sentence: _____

Synopsis: _____

Turning Point: _____

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