

How does the structure of “The Monkey’s Paw” contribute to the development of theme?

In this lesson you will learn how the structure of the text impacts theme by analyzing the author's choice of endings.

Let's Review

THE MONKEY'S PAW (1902)

from *The lady of the barge* (1906, 6th ed.)

W.W. Jacob

I.

WITHOUT, the night was cold and wet, but in the small parlour of Laburnam Villa the blinds were drawn and the fire burned brightly. Father and son were at chess, the former, who possessed ideas about the game involving radical changes, putting his king into such sharp and unnecessary perils that it even provoked comment from the white-haired old lady knitting placidly by the fire.

"Hark at the wind," said Mr. White, who, having seen a fatal mistake after it was too late, was amiably desirous of preventing his son from seeing it.

"I'm listening," said the latter, grimly surveying the board as he stretched out his hand. "Check."

"I should hardly think that he'd come to-night," said his father, with his hand poised over the board.

"Mate," replied the son.

- Theme: Don't interfere with fate or you will be unhappy
- Mr. White and his family learn the hard way
- Focus on author's structural choices

Let's Review



Setting



Characters



Choice of Endings

Core Lesson

- 1 Reread the last few paragraphs of the text, paying attention to the ending.
- 2 Ask: “How does the ending relate to the theme of the text?”
- 3 Ask: “How would a different ending have changed the meaning of the text?”

Core Lesson

1 Reread the last few paragraphs of the text, paying attention to the ending.

But her husband was on his hands and knees groping wildly on the floor in search of the paw. If he could only find it before the thing outside got in. A perfect fusillade of knocks reverberated through the house, and he heard the scraping of a chair as his wife put it down in the passage against the door. He heard the creature slowly back, and he found the monkey breathing his third

The knocking ceased suddenly, although the echoes of it were still in the house. He heard the chair drawn back and the door opened. A cold wind rushed up the staircase, and a long loud wail of disappointment and misery from his wife gave him a moment's pause. She came down to her side, and then the street lamp flickering on a quiet and deserted road.

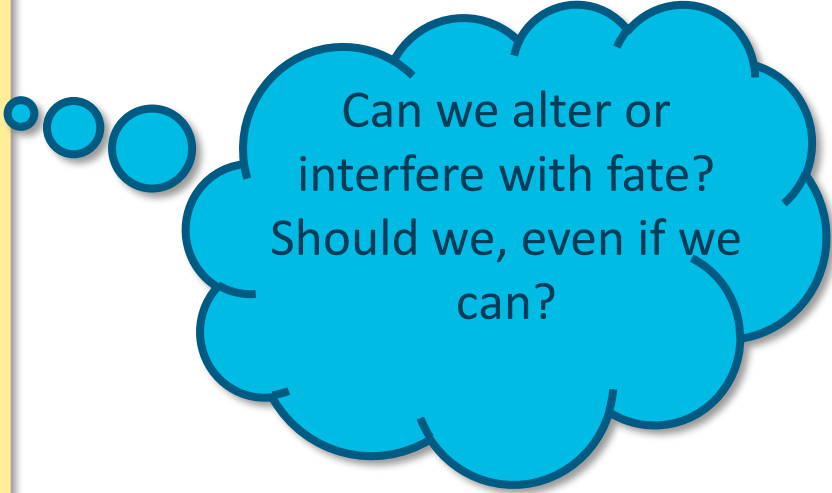
- The knocking at the door signals to Mr. White that his son has returned.
- He makes a final wish and the knocking stops.
- His wife then opens the door onto an empty street and wails in sorrow, with Mr. White at her side for comfort.

Core Lesson

2 Ask: “How does the ending relate to the theme of the text?”

- ✓ Mr. and Mrs. White probably regret ever making a wish with the monkey’s paw.
- ✓ Theme: Humans should not interfere with fate or they will be sorry.
- ✓ If Mr. and Mrs. White had never made a wish, their son would still be alive.

Mr. White learned the lesson of the theme early on in the story.



Can we alter or interfere with fate?
Should we, even if we can?

Core Lesson

3 Ask: “How would a different ending have changed the meaning of the text?”

Let’s imagine that Mrs. White did open the door, and when she did, her son stood there perfectly healthy and cheerful. The Whites would be ecstatic to have their son back and would question whether the monkey’s paw was so bad after all. By ending the text this way, the theme would be in question for the reader. There wouldn’t be as great of an impact on the reader – we wouldn’t be taught “a lesson” through the theme.



Core Lesson

How does the structure of “The Monkey’s Paw” contribute to the development of theme?

The structure contributes to the development of theme because the way the author chose to end the story deepens the reader’s understanding of what they are supposed to be taking away from the text. The theme – that humans should not interfere with fate or they will be sorry – is reflected in the author’s choice of a rather unhappy ending for Mr. and Mrs. White, which has a great impact on the reader’s comprehension that this is the “lesson” they should take with them.

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