Allegory



Unlocking the Deeper Story

Now all this is an allegory; these [two women] represent two covenants. One covenant originated from Mount Sinai [where the Law was given] and bears [children destined] for slavery; this is Hagar. (Galatians 4:24 AMPC)

ALLEGORY IS AN ARTISTIC FORM OF STORYTELLING

Derived from the ancient Greek word "allegoria," meaning *to imply something else*, an allegory is a story with two levels - a surface story and a deeper symbolic story, representing an historical event, Biblical truth, prominent political figure, or social narrative. Characters are often animals named for the specific qualities, strengths, or weaknesses of the real people they represent.

WRITING FROM A DISTANCE

Allegory offers us an opportunity to explore difficult, painful, or vulnerable parts of our stories from a safer distance and a fictional character's perspective. For example, author Sarah Fitzgerald was just eight years old when her sister was tragically killed in an accident. Overwhelmed by grief, Sarah wrote as a way "to get her feelings out." Because she "couldn't bear to write directly about" her sister, Sarah instead wrote a moving story about a pair of dolphins sisters.

Sarah's surface story is a touching children's tale. Her deeper story is the symbolic retelling of her personal journey through grief and learning to be happy again.

WRITING YOUR STORY AS AN ALLEGORY

1. Start with the hidden story.

- What part of your story is difficult to put into words, too painful or too vulnerable to write about directly?
- Could you explore this part of your journey more safely from a distance or a fictional character's perspective?

2. Break down your hidden story.

- What is the theme of this part of your story? Pain? Anger? Vulnerability? Loss? Being disbelieved? Grief?
- What is the real-life climax of your hidden story?
- What action points led to this climax?
- Who are the real-life characters?
- What are their key characteristics?
- What is the real-life resolution? Your story doesn't have to end positively to be told. Open-ended journeys or those held in the tension of "not yet" resolutions are valuable and worth writing.
- What "falling action" points led from climax to resolution?

3. What symbols will help your tell your deeper story?

Weather, nature, place, sounds, words, objects, time, textures, colors, images, abstract concepts?

4. What is the theme of your surface story?

Surface stories tend to be very different from the deeper, symbolic stories.

5. Break down your surface story.

- What significant obstacle will your characters face? List the "rising action" points that build toward your story's climax and the "falling action" points that lead toward resolution.
- What is the significance of the climax in your character's lives?
- List your characters. Who do they represent in real life? What are their primary characteristics? What animals or objects will represent each? Will their names reflect their primary characteristic?
- Where and when does your surface story take place?
- Toward what resolution are your characters heading? What is its impact on the story and on each character?
- How does your surface story parallel your deeper story? Do your symbols, characters, action points, and plotline slowly reveal the hidden message of your deeper story?