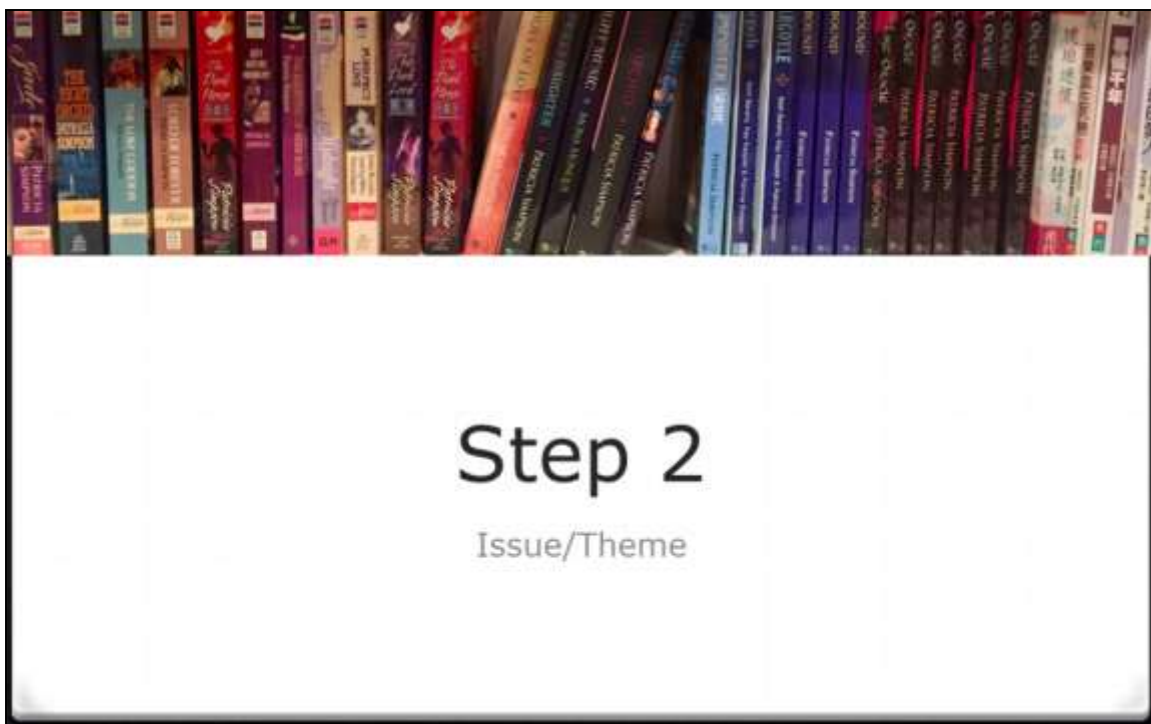




Welcome to Start a Book in 5 Easy Steps.



Welcome back! Are you ready for Step 2?

In this section, we are going to cover story issue or theme. This is a short lesson, but it's the most important building block of a book.

Goals of this lesson

- Why the theme of a book is so important.
- How to define themes.
- How to use themes to build plot, action and endings.



In this lesson, you'll learn:

Why the theme of a book is so important.

How to use issues to create a great story.

Most beginner writers tend to skip over things like theme and premise and just dive into writing. But I encourage you not to step back, take a birds-eye view of your book, and figure out why you are writing your particular story.

Theme is EVERYTHING

Theme is EVERYTHING

If you walk away with one concept from this course, I hope you'll walk away with an understanding of theme or issue. The best books in the world are born out of an author's desire to explore an issue that's close to their heart.

Why bother with a theme?

Theme defines your path.

Why bother with theme?

Writing a book without knowing your theme, is like getting in your car and driving until you run out of gas. Did you get where you wanted to go? How do you know? You never decided where you were headed. The same is true for novels.

Theme makes the ending.



Theme makes the ending

You want to take your readers on a ride. You want to say to them, “Get in. I’m taking you to a waterfall so beautiful, you won’t believe it.” You drive there. And when your reader gets out of the car, they clap their hands and ooh and ahh and tell you how right you were. It IS the most incredible waterfall.”

Theme drives your plot.



On the other hand, if you just get in the car and drive until you run out of gas, your reader will be wondering what the point is. “More of same, they might say? Why should I keep reading this? Meh.”

Take it from me...without a theme, you WILL run out of gas. Probably around page 200. And—the HORROR—your readers might get bored.

Theme drives your plot. You WANT that.

Theme fires the action.



Theme also fires the action of your book.

Ever watch a fight scene where you couldn't wait for it to be over? This occurs when the hero isn't fighting for a personal cause. Give your hero a reason—a deep-seated issue—to fight for, and you end up with Rocky or Gladiator. That's what you are aiming for.

What is Theme?

- What you want to write about.
- Single word, usually a noun.

Injustice **Survival**
Abandonment **JUDGMENT**
Immigration

What is Theme (aka Issue)

Issues can usually be stated with one word. This word often has a negative connotation, because that's what we tend to write about: the things that bother us, break our hearts or are something we have overcome.

Issue Examples:

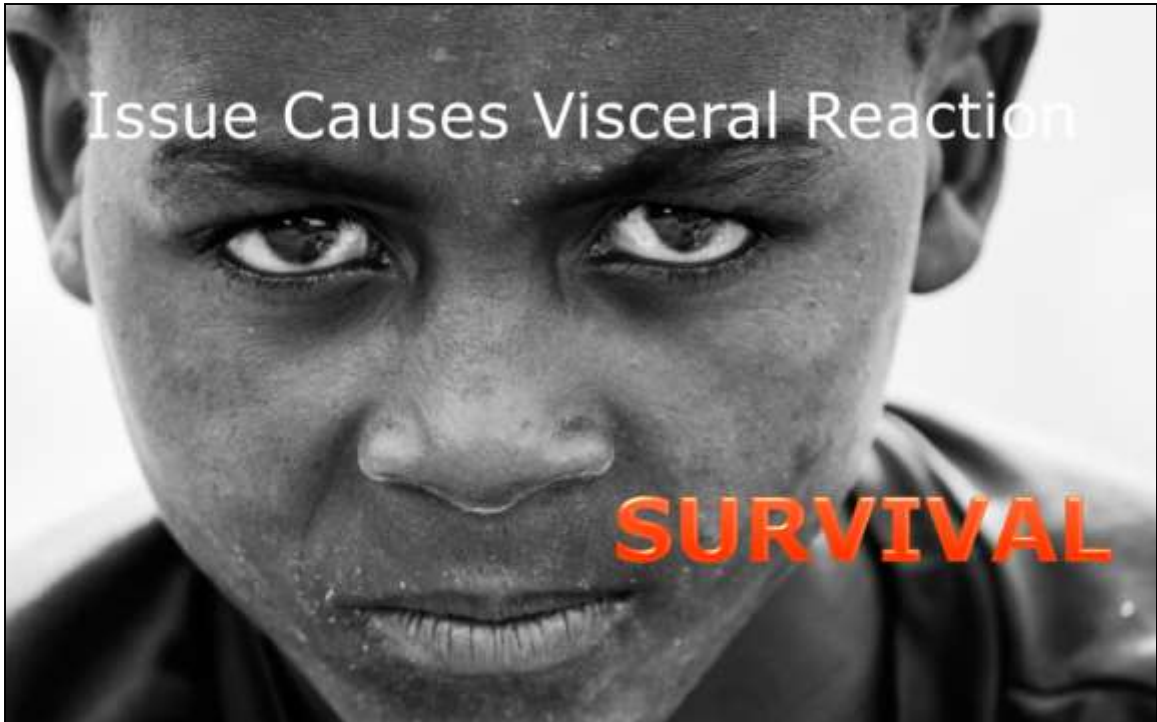
Injustice

Survival

Abandonment

Judgment

Immigration



The issue is a word that evokes an emotional reaction, especially in you. If you don't have a visceral reaction about the issue you are writing about in your book, you should stop writing that book. You won't be emotionally-invested enough to make it sing.

Case Study | Issue



Let's say you are thinking of writing a romance novel. Naturally, you think the issue you are writing about is love.

It isn't. Love by itself is too broad. It's not an issue. It doesn't evoke an emotional reaction one way or the other. In fact, if you wrote a love story where the people meet, are attracted to each other and then kiss and get married, it wouldn't be a very exciting story, would it? The book doesn't say anything and falls flat. And what couple really has that easy of a time in a relationship? No one. Why? Because everyone has issues.

Get to the Heart of the Issue

Unrequited love

Adultery

LOYALTY

TRUST

Dig deeper for the issue of your love story. How do YOU feel about love? Do you think true love lasts forever? Or is it fleeting? Do people who love each other commit adultery? What would you do if your spouse cheated on you? Forgive? Or tell him good-bye? These questions contain inherent issues.

What if, in your book, a lover who had betrayed the heroine came back into her life?

Your story, then, will center around the issue of trust.

Issue Practice

Issue

Survival

Injustice

Judgment

Dissatisfaction

Belonging

Movie

Beauty and the Beast

Wizard of Oz

Gone with the Wind

Jane Eyre

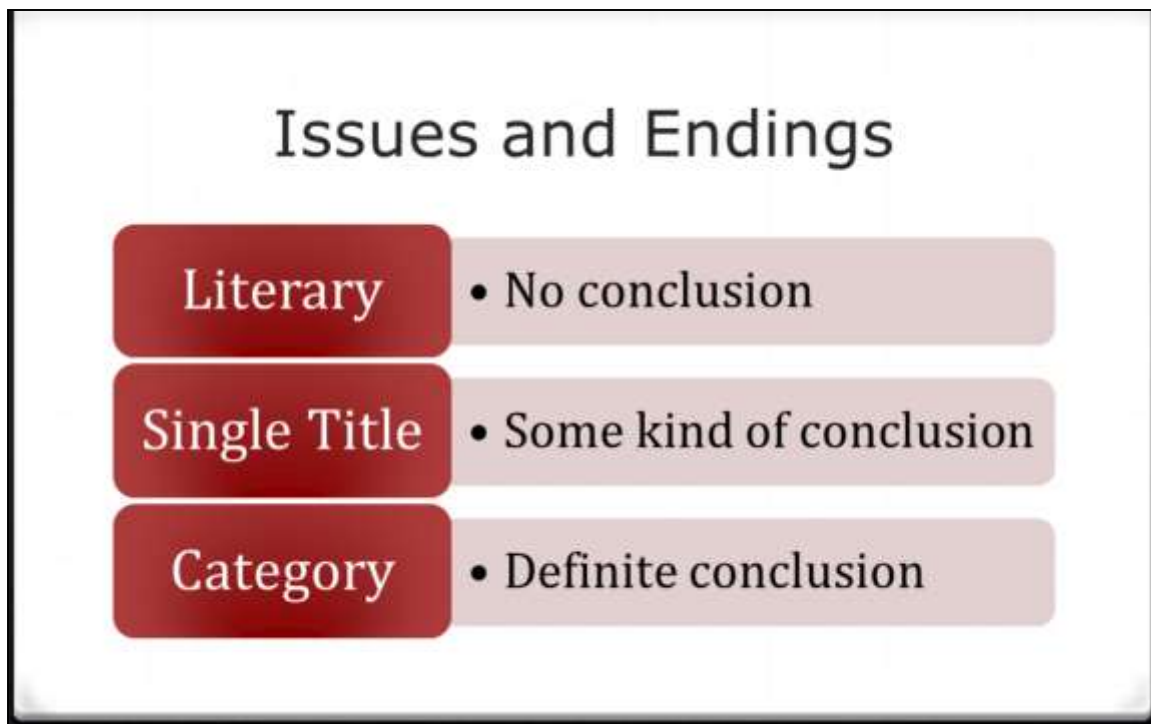
Les Miserables

Let's see how you do at identifying the issues of some famous movies. Take a moment to match the issues on the left with the stories on the right. I'll give you the answers on the next slide.

Issue Practice Answers

Issue	Movie
Judgment	Beauty and the Beast
Dissatisfaction	Wizard of Oz
Survival	Gone with the Wind
Belonging	Jane Eyre
Injustice	Les Miserables

How did you do? Are you getting a feel for how to define an issue?



Issues in Types of Books

As you explore the issue in your story, your characters are going to speak and think about the issue, and you are going to write toward an ending. Different types of books require a different treatment of the issue at the end.

A literary novel can present the issue from numerous sides, and then let the reader reach their own conclusion about what the writer was trying to say. The characters don't have to come to a conclusion about the issue.

Genre novels tend to have one or more characters come to a definite conclusion about the issue. Justice triumphs. The good guy wins. The villain gets betrayed and dies. It's all good and it's satisfying.

Multiple Issues

1

- Novels often portray multiple themes.
- Your main character should be focused on one issue that affects his behavior.
 - Keeps your story on track.
 - Provides a satisfying ending.

Novels often portray multiple themes about love, society, the human condition and other issues.

Your main character should be focused on one issue that affects his behavior.

Keeps your story on track.

Provides a satisfying ending.

Everyone has issues

- **Authors:** often write about the same issue over and over again.
- **Characters:** The best ones have an internal issue they're struggling with.
- **Readers:** want to see how the character will triumph over their issue because the reader has issues, too.

Most authors write about the same issue over and over again, because it's something that they are struggling to work through in their own psyches. Therefore, it's close to the bone for them, and their words ring true. If you write stories about injustice over and over again, that's okay. Readers who are interested in seeing how your characters overcome injustice will never tire of your writing. People want to read about characters who are working through issues in heroic ways, because often the reader is working through their own issues and not so heroically. They live vicariously through your characters. Sometimes you can inspire a reader to even change their life. And that's amazing.

Once you have established your issue, you can go on to the next step.

Everyone has
issues...

And so should your novel.





Let's move on to step 3.