

Four Places to Find a Great Story

by Joan Verlezza

You've decided to write your first novel. Congratulations! It's a journey of some distance and you've taken the first step. What's next? The first step is to find a story that captures your imagination. If you find a story that fascinates you, you will write a story that captures and holds your readers. Where can you find a fascinating story?



1. Listen to Aunt Thelma.



That old lady you've been trying to ignore through all those family dinners might be the repository of some wonderful tales. I have a friend who tells the story of Dr. King coming to town to lend his support to a labor union effort. She remembers sitting next to her father at dinner while they discussed the momentous events of the time. Talk about a great story! Many families have been through emigrations and have settled and made their way in foreign cultures; not an easy thing to do and the setting for some remarkable tales.

2. Read the newspapers.

A recent Sunday edition of a major newspaper ran a story about teens with no adult accompaniment crossing the border to the U.S. Some are intercepted by Border Patrol, placed in custody and must appear before a judge to determine whether or not they will be deported. Why are they risking their lives and all of this trouble to get here? There was also a story about a young architect who has designed a way to turn a phone booth into a lending library. Here's a good place to play the what- if game. What if a clandestine organization started to use a network of these installations to pass along messages or contraband? What kind of complications would ensue? In each of these situations, with a little bit of imagination, you can put yourself in the places of the people involved and you can write their stories.



3. Read the classics.



West Side Story is the account of two young people who fall in love in spite of the hatred that exists between their respective communities and families. Does that sound familiar? It's the story of Romeo and Juliet transported from renaissance Verona to New York City in the 1950's. Basically a story of intense sibling rivalry, John Steinbeck's East of Eden is a retelling of Cain and Abel. Classical literature is full of sibling conflicts and family discord. You can transfer the same disputes and tensions to our time or any other.

4. Sit and watch people go by.

I had a best friend named Marcella while I was growing up. We used to sit anywhere we could, at bus stops, at the beach, in the library and make up stories about people we saw. If someone looked happy we'd imagine wonderful things happening in their lives. If they were grumpy we'd concoct stories about the way life had gone wrong for them. Watch people and try to put yourself in their places. Let your mind wander and you will come up with some great narratives.



There are great ideas all around you. Listen carefully to the stories told around the family table. Pay attention as you read or hear news accounts and ask yourself how people are feeling. What's going on in their minds and hearts? Think back to the great works of literature you've read. All of these are great places to find great plots.

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About the Author

Joan Verlezza has been researching and collecting family anecdotes since childhood. She believes every family has stories worth telling. Warming Up is her first novel. She blogs at <http://secondavenuestoryclub.blogspot.com>. Her work has also been featured in the New England Poetry Anthology.

Download an excerpt at <http://secondavenuestoryclub.blogspot.com>.

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