

A Core Questions Worksheet for Big Idea Books

WHAT'S YOUR GLOBAL AND INTERNAL GENRE?

Worldview Revelation + Big Idea Subgenre

WHAT'S THE PROTAGONIST'S OBJECT OF DESIRE?

As the author, you're the Protagonist. Your Object of Desire is to learn the Truth about your Controlling Idea/Theme/Big Idea. You've been on a journey toward Wisdom and now you're sharing that with readers.

WHAT'S YOUR EXTERNAL GENRE?

If it's not abundantly clear which External Genre is right for your story, try thinking about whether there is another important value shift you'll be highlighting in addition to Ignorance-Wisdom. This could be a value shift for you, for the readers, or for another character in the story. That value shift (Life-Death? Honor-Shame?) may lead you to the right External Genre.

An important value shift in my story is:

That value shift works best with this External Genre:

If you're still unsure, consider the options and choose two that you believe might work. Review some of the Obligatory Scenes and Conventions of each to see which ones will serve the story well. Be willing to change your external genre in the next draft if you discover it's not working.

Options for my External Genre are:

- 1.
- 2.

Some Obligatory Scenes and Conventions that would fit my story well in each External Genre:

- 1.
- 2.

WHAT'S YOUR POINT OF VIEW?

Very often, you'll use several POVs, as [Malcolm Gladwell does in *The Tipping Point*](#). You can play with your POV/narrative devices a lot in a Big Idea book, so don't sweat this one on the first draft. In subsequent drafts, decide what POV your Evidence requires. For example: personal anecdotes (first person); scientific data (third person omniscient); prescriptive advice (second person).

WHAT'S YOUR STORY'S CONTROLLING IDEA OR THEME?

This is the point of your book! The Big Idea itself! Write it out in a few hundred words when you begin your first draft. Discuss it with a friend, fellow writer, or developmental editor and come back to it often as you work on the Middle Build/Evidence portion of the book. Keep improving and *shortening* the Controlling Idea until you can state it in a single, powerful sentence. Test your idea by asking Shawn's 3 key questions:

1. Is it succinct?
2. Does it describe the climactic value shift of the entire story, positively or negatively?
3. Is it as specific as possible about the cause of the value shift?

The First Draft of my Big Idea:

My final one-sentence Big Idea, which also reveals the value shift in my book as specifically as possible:

SUMMARIZE YOUR:

BEGINNING HOOK

Here's where you present the Inciting Incident that prompted your investigation. It's not always true, but often the Beginning Hook takes up less than the first 10% of a Big Idea book. Can you offer readers a compelling, personal story about why you wanted to write this book in your first 5,000-7,000 words?

Here's a one-paragraph summary of the story I want to tell in my Beginning Hook:

MIDDLE BUILD

This is the meaty Evidence (the Big Idea's version of Progressive Complications), where you present your own ideas/research and other people's ways of looking at the topic. This is also where you answer the questions raised in your Inciting Incident and test your own answers.

10 potential pieces of Evidence (stories, data, scientific research, etc.) for my Middle Build are:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

THE HOW-TO

Depending on the type of Big Idea you're putting forth, you'll want to include prescriptive how-to advice for putting it into practice either in your Middle Build or in the Ending Payoff.

Can you offer a prescriptive "how-to" for applying your wisdom? Explain how you'll do that and whether that will make up a big chunk or a smaller part of the book.

ENDING PAYOFF

This is a restatement of the Big Idea you started with. But this time, after a short recap of your best Evidence, ideally you'll surprise the reader by going deeper. In Shawn Coyne's words, the book must "turn." The promise of the book at the beginning must be paid off, but with a twist:

The pursuit of the idea and applying it potently reveals a deeper truth, one that the storyteller delivers to the reader at the ending payoff.

Can you show some hidden meaning at the end, for a deeply satisfying "aha" moment? Jot down some ideas you can circle back to later, after you've amassed all your evidence:

THINGS TO NOTE AND APPLY TO YOUR FIRST DRAFT AS YOU WRITE:

CONVENTIONS OF THE BIG IDEA STORY:

- The overarching Big Idea is both surprising and inevitable
- Ethos, Logos, and Pathos persuade the reader
- Narrative cliffhangers tease the reader and help drive the story

OBLIGATORY SCENES/ELEMENTS OF THE BIG IDEA STORY:

- The Big Reveal that defies Conventional Wisdom (Readers discover what they previously believed about the topic is wrong!)
- Evidence (stories, anecdotes, case studies, data)
- A How-To Prescription for applying the knowledge and wisdom gained
- Entertaining or Compelling Anecdotes

CONVENTIONS OF THE WORLDVIEW-REVELATION STORY:

- A strong Mentor
- A Social Problem as subtext
- Shape Shifters
- A Point of No Return when the Protagonist (the author in a Big Idea book) can never go back to the way things used to be
- An Ironic Ending (win-but-lose or lose-but-win)

OBLIGATORY SCENES OF THE WORLDVIEW-REVELATION STORY:

- An Inciting Challenge
- The Protagonist denies responsibility for responding to the Challenge
- The Protagonist lashes out against the requirement to change
- The Protagonist learns the Antagonist's Object of Desire
- The Protagonist's initial strategy against the Antagonist fails
- In an All is Lost Moment, the Protagonist must change Worldview
- The Protagonist's Gifts are expressed
- The Protagonist is rewarded with a deeper understanding of the world.