

## Recollection as a Fiction-Writing Mode By Mike Klaassen

*Recollection* is the fiction-writing mode whereby a character calls something to mind. Of the various fiction-writing modes, recollection is probably the most underrated. It is also the most likely to be challenged as meriting recognition as a distinct mode.

An argument can be made that recollection should be classified merely as a subset of introspection. But a character's thoughts may include much more than recollection. Furthermore, lumping recollection with introspection:

- Downplays the unique role recollection plays in fiction
- Diminishes the likelihood that recollection will be fully analyzed and understood by students of fiction
- Reduces the likelihood that recollection will be utilized skillfully and to its full potential

A character may recall any information to which he has been exposed. That information may be from earlier in the story (as with a detective recalling a clue from the crime scene). A character may also recall information from before the beginning of the story.

To fully appreciate the role of recollection, a novelist must first understand the timeline of a story. Aristotle is credited with being the first to recognize that stories have a structure based upon their timeline: *beginning*, *middle*, and *ending*.<sup>i</sup> Today, that timeline should be updated: *backstory*, *present story* (beginning, middle, ending), and *future story*.<sup>ii</sup>

Backstory consists of events, including a character's background, that precede the beginning of the story. Future story isn't limited to science fiction, where characters may travel to and from the future; it may include an implied future for characters (such as when they ride into the sunset, presumably to live happily ever after).

Backstory may be viewed as a subset of information communicated through exposition (the fiction-writing mode for conveying information), which may be delivered via three different methods:

- by direct narration (from the all-seeing, all-knowing narrator)
- with expository devices (props, such as a diary, a message in a bottle, a treasure map)
- through characters (via dialogue, introspection, recollection)

Recollection may be used to pull backstory into "the present" of a story simply by having a character recall information or events. As with most tools of fiction-writing, however, there are numerous issues related to the presentation of recollection:

- Prompting recollection
- Verbs of recollection
- Recollection in scenes
- Recollection vs. flashbacks
- Recollection in sequels
- Recollection and epiphany
- Partial recollection
- Choosing recollection

Recollection may be the most underappreciated of the fiction-writing modes, but its power to pluck information from earlier in the story and from before the story makes it an invaluable writing tool.

#### LEARN MORE

Mike Klaassen is the author of *Fiction-Writing Modes: Eleven Essential Tools for Bringing Your Story to Life*, which is available for order at traditional and online bookstores. You may "Look Inside" the book at Amazon.com.

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<sup>i</sup> Aristotle. *Poetics*. New York: Penguin Books, 1996, 13. ISBN: 9780140446364.

<sup>ii</sup> Klaassen, *Fiction-Writing Modes*, 57. ISBN: 9781682221006.