



Those Who Forget History

Using Backstory to Enhance Your Novel

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Lesson Seven – Behind the Mask

Revealing Backstory Through Inner Thought

Let's face it: None of us reveal every thought that drifts through our brain. We all have secret thoughts, things we don't want to reveal to anyone except those closest to us. The same is true for you fictionals. Their inner thoughts can reveal a lot about their backstory,

Dialogue

A dialogue between your fictionals is a great way to combine inner thought and backstory.

Let's say Steve, a firefighter, and Pam, whose parents died in a house fire when she was seven years old, are sitting safe and cozy in their living room, discussing the California wildfires.

"Thousands of acres are ablaze. They're evacuating more than twenty communities. My old pal, Dave, who's in the thick of it, told me at least six firefighters have been killed."

Pam, who's never told Steve about her parents, shivers and moves closer to him. "That's awful." *Were any of those firefighters fathers or mothers? Dear Lord, keep them safe. Don't let any children go through what I did.*

See? In Pam's one simple thought, we learn that someone close to Pam died as a result of a fire. We've shown the reader a bit of her backstory, rather than told them, and avoided an information dump.

Introspection

One of the easiest ways to reveal backstory is to show your fictional thinking to herself. (*Show* being the most important word here)

Take Emily, who has just sold her childhood home after her mother's death. She's wandering through the rooms and discovers a small, locked chest shoved into the back of mom's closet.

This looks familiar. Isn't it the chest Mom inherited from her great-grandmother? She turns the chest over and finds the key taped to the bottom. *Why would she keep it locked?* As she opens it

and pulls out an envelope, she realizes it's her adoption papers. *But why would she hide them? I know Dad never looked into this box. Could he not know I was adopted?*

In this little bit of introspection, we learn that Emily is adopted. We also learn that there's some doubt about what her father knew about the adoption. Here, we've set up a bit of a mystery that will keep your reader interested and eager to read further.

One final tip for using inner thought to reveal backstory: always *show* the inner thought. *What is this*, rather than, *She wondered what this was*. Put your reader into your story, whether it's dialogue or they're simply thinking to themselves. In doing so, you'll keep your readers interested and leave them wanting more.

Assignment: Write a scene that uses inner thought to reveal your fictional's backstory.