Subplots and Parallel Plots

All stories have a plot. Otherwise, they would be boring and lame. Good stories also have subplot or parallel plots. These are things happening on the side of the main story. When you analyze plot (see the plot handout for the plot diagram), you include anything that advances the main story. These all come together to build the plot. There will be; however, things that happen on the sidelines, romances or adventures, that are not necessarily important to the main plot. These are subplot, and they have reasons for being there.

1. **Build up supporting characters:** Subplots are often there to build characters who are not quite the main character. They can tell you more about their motivation and personality, making them more believable, better characters.

2. **The can have immediate impact on the main story:** Though what happens in a subplot is not really part of the main plot, it affects what happens in the main plot. For example, if Johnny and Kate start dating, how they act around their friends when they are together could change.

3. **OR They can contrast the main story:** Sometimes a writer tells a secondary story so that you, as the reader, will compare the two. They are showing opposites to help you to see the intensity or importance of one.

4. **Show Motivation:** Without subplots, you may not know why the protagonist does what they do. You may not know that they are harboring a giant secret that changes everything.

5. **Give the reader more info:** You as the reader, may need extra info that they can’t present in the main plot, so they add it in a subplot.

6. **Have a beginning, middle, and end:** Subplots have to follow the same rules as the main plot. Without a beginning, middle, and end, it is frustrating to the reader.

Knowing how a subplot works is the first step. This is an important way for writers to add depth to their stories. Without subplots, stories are more like fairy tales, simple.