

## Happy Endings Have a Purpose

My nine-year-old son and I both “booed” after finishing a short story which started with two children being left alone on an island, and ended with them still there, abandoned by their only visitor, and one of the children vowing to find a way off of the island some day. I tried to console my son by saying that when I experience a sad story that ends without an “ending,” it makes me resolve to get busy making something happen in real life. I asked him, “Do stories always have to have a happy ending?” I continued, “Real life doesn’t have happy endings—it just keeps going and going.” To which he instantly replied, “That’s why we turn to stories!”

I think he’s right.

Most adults are busy, and we can sometimes accept taking a piece of a story to ponder its points as we go on with our activities; but remember being a kid, when a year seemed like eternity? Adults may have been around enough to know a hard time will pass in a day, or week, or year; but it’s hard for a child to hold out for relief which might be so far away—so they turn to fantasy. Time goes so slowly for children that they can’t always grasp from their own real lives, the sense of hope and joy they need; but they can get it from a happy ending to a story.

We all want to know that things will be okay in the end—the end of a situation, the end of a season of life, or the absolute end of one’s earthly life. We need hope for the future in order to keep going through anything less than perfect. We fuel that hope with stories, real and fictional. Stories give us a rest from our reality, and ideas to take back into reality. Sure, we can draw positive thoughts from a story that stops sadly, but that’s work, not recreation. We all—adults and children—need happy endings to feel relaxed and happy.

Life does keep going and going, but with lots of little happy moments, if not “endings.” For those who say that kids should not be taught to expect happy endings in life, I’d say they should be allowed the uplifting pleasure of happy endings in stories, AND taught to both look for and create happy passages in real life.

It doesn’t matter so much that life isn’t “happy EVER after” ONE struggle. It does matter that we CAN get through a struggle, and be happy—and so then we must be able to get through another struggle, and another. A happy ending gives hope for multiple happy endings to multiple struggles.

So don’t feel guilty for filling your kid’s heads with happy endings. And do make happiness come true, even in difficult times.

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