



WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

SPOT: High Fantasy *Jumping Into Genre: Fantasy* (developing wide reading)



Developing Reading Interests: High Fantasy

Most boys and girls enjoy similar books when they are younger, but between the ages of 10 and 13 interests often change. By adolescence, the majority of girls prefer Realistic Fiction or romance stories, while most boys prefer adventure stories, such as the quests found in High Fantasy.

According to researchers, preadolescents and adolescents are fascinated by the hero stories of High Fantasy because the quests described in these stories represent the rites of passage they may also experience as they grow up. In the past, an adolescent about to enter adulthood participated in a rite-of-passage ritual of his or her culture. Examples include confirmation or bar- or bat-mitzvah ceremonies, graduation exercises, Quinceañera parties, Guan Li or Ji Li ceremonies, or Native American fasting or vision experiences. Once the young person had proven him- or herself, he or she became a full member of the community. These ceremonies symbolized the transition from one stage of life to another.

Rites of passage are still celebrated today. But unlike the past, everyone in the community does not necessarily celebrate in the same way. Also, with the delay of adulthood, the ceremony does not always mark the complete transition between childhood and adulthood. For example, although most young people graduate from high school, many continue their education at a college or university, and as a result, extend their adolescence.

In the absence of universal rites of passage, young people often seek alternatives to define their future adult roles. For many, High Fantasy hero stories serve this purpose. High Fantasy provides readers the opportunity to try out dreams, feelings, and goals through fictional characters who experience fantastic adventures, prior to working through their own life events for real.

Significance of The Portal

Since setting is one of the most identifiable traits of Fantasy, an author's approach to creating a believable world takes on special importance, as does the comparison between the "real" and "imaginary" settings of these stories. Creating an imaginary "other" or "secondary world" in Fantasy allows the reader to, along with the character, gain a fresh perspective on everyday situations, temporarily escaping his or her problems as a way of coping with them. Characters enter the secondary world through a magical passageway, or portal. The struggle that the character faces in the secondary world often represents the internal struggle he or she faces within him- or herself. As the story progresses, the character becomes so familiar with the secondary world, he or she is able to *change it* and subsequently, change his or her destiny. This ability to initiate change in the secondary world coincides with an important function of these portals: to initiate a process of social, psychological, political, and/or spiritual transformation of the reader.

The Fantasy Story as a Portal

The fantasy story itself can be thought of as a passageway, or portal, through which both the author and reader can enter a secondary world. Fantasy exists in a place in which the impossible occurs and from which the author can blur the boundary between "imagination" and "reality." Since a portal, by definition, is a place where two entities meet,



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the use of the portal takes on added meaning when one thinks about how the book itself and the act of storytelling become an escape from the mundane. Fantasy provides the freedom to dream up solutions to contemporary problems in a place where the real and ideal meet and co-exist: in the "other-world" of the printed page.

References:

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