

Tobi's Down and Dirty Guide to

Using Emotional Wounds

**To Create Characters and Stories
Your Readers Can't Put Down**

About Me

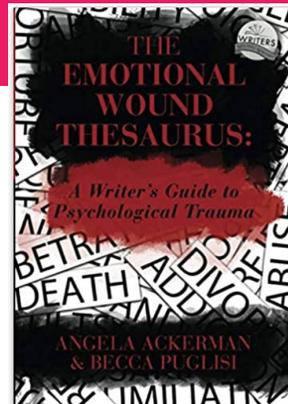
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Writing HEAs with Heat and Humor as
Tobi Doyle

- I write romance and mystery as Tobi Doyle
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- President, Kiss of Death
- Intensive Genre Writers, Huntington, WV
- I speak in absolutes (must, need, should) and I don't mean it. Writing is a creative art, do what works for you!
- HANDOUTS CAN BE FOUND AT:
<https://tobidoyle.com/RWA2021>

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Resources: Emotional Wound Thesaurus by Angela Ackerman and Becca Puglisi



What's an emotional wound?

That time when...

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You farted REALLY LOUD in grade school and the kids teased you mercilessly for weeks.

Your pants were unzipped while you gave a presentation in front of the entire class.

Your parents had a screaming match at Back to School Night.

Your significant other cheated on you.

It's not a phobia...and don't be cliché

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- A phobia is an irrational fear
- Character can be phobic of clowns...
- BUT...if the character's family dresses up as clowns on their 18th birthday to intentionally upset the character—they may believe their family doesn't respect or understand them and they'll never be truly loved or understood.
- Clichéd when fear is challenged in 3rd act.

Overcome the misbelief not the fear

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This scene adds humor and tension, but Indiana Jones isn't growing as a human being.

Why does it matter?

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That negative experience can have lasting repercussions that will change the character and their reactions to future situations.

“Triggers” to this wound create fabulous conflict in your writing, and are super uncomfortable in real life...

They are real and believable and engage the reader.

Lisa Cron on Story

— — —

- Past negative experience (wound) changes the character and their reactions to future situations.
- We read to see how the events of the story AFFECT the character.
- Otherwise, it's just a series of things that happened.

Which characters need emotional wounds?

All of them

Just kidding...kind of

Primary characters (protagonists
and antagonists)

Secondary characters— especially if
you plan a series/serial

Tobi's Hot Tip on Emotional Wounds and Protagonists

Focus on one emotional wound per character.

Romance has 2 or more protagonists...make their wounds and their reactions TRIGGER the other protagonist's wound.

Character may not know they have the emotional wound or are reacting because of it. Think of your real life friends...

Beauty and the Beast

Main Characters:

Belle

The Beast

Gaston

Maurice



Belle

WOUND: Social misfit. (Being rejected by one's peers p. 180)

FEARS: Being stuck in her small town forever. Having dreams or hopes that society says she cannot obtain. Being told she can't do something because of who she is.

BELIEVES: She is defective.

TRIGGERS: facing a situation where she needs help/support but having no one. Being treated differently because she's a woman, well-read, etc.

Beast

WOUND: Cursed because of his horribly selfish past behavior. (A Physical Disfigurement p. 84)

FEARS: Being unable to love and be loved, and not being able to end the curse.

BELIEVES: No one will ever love someone who looks like me.

TRIGGERS: People staring, being seen

Make the protagonist's coping mechanisms a trigger for the other character

Belle:

Triggers: Being treated differently or ordered to do something.

She is defensive, and a bit passive/aggressive.

Beast:

Triggers: being seen, stared at...he likes to retreat, stay hidden in the dark

He doesn't trust anyone. If someone gets close, he lashes out.

Beast doesn't like being seen, so he says something hurtful to make her go away... which makes Belle prickly and defensive and in his face about his behavior.

Internal Goals

Belle:

Internal Goal: To keep her father safe

Internal Motivation: He's the only one who loves her unconditionally

Internal Conflict: It means being separated from him for eternity

Beast:

Internal Goal: To learn how to love and be accepted

Internal Motivation: Needs love to break the curse

Internal Conflict: Doesn't believe anyone could love him

Does the internal GMC trigger the emotional wounds

Belle wants to be understood and accepted but the only man who understands her, her father, must be saved by her becoming a prisoner.

Beast needs to break the curse SOON and has no idea how to love or be emotionally intimate.

External Goals

Belle:

Goals: Get out of this provincial place.

Motivation: She's looking to find where she fits in.

Conflict: She has to live with the Beast in order to free her father and ensure his safety.

Beast:

Goals: Be loved by someone.

Motivation: break the curse.

Conflict: He's a beast and believes he's unlovable.

Do the external goals trigger the wound?

Belle wants to explore the world, and instead becomes a prisoner to the Beast who, at first, doesn't try to understand her or even get to know her.

Beast doesn't like being seen or touched, but in order to make her fall in love, he's going to have to be emotionally intimate.

Protagonist Versus Antagonist
Make sure neither can resign from the conflict.
Consequence of not obtaining goal = death

Death can be physical, emotional, spiritual, social, career, financial,
etc

Antagonists

Gaston:

Wants Belle because she's beautiful and the "best". He doesn't care that she's not interested.

The Witch:

Although the curse happened before the story begins, the rose is a reminder that he needs to fall in love soon or remain cursed.

Antagonists without wounds and GMCs are like...



If I were to rewrite this...

— — —

Gaston and the witch need compelling reasons to behave badly. Search emotional wounds that lead people to seek revenge...

Gaston's "need" for Belle would be linked to his need for perfection, and his fear of imperfection.

What if...

Gaston learned his father had a second family?

p. 204

Fears: Falling into poverty
(explains why he became the best hunter)

Believes: If I had been better, father would have stayed.

Triggers: Coming in second.
Discovering the person he is dating is also dating someone else.

What if...

He was raised by parents who loved conditionally?

p. 230

Fears: Being anything less than exceptional

Believes: I am only worthy when I achieve great things.

Triggers: Losing, failing, rejection, or a parent openly praising a sibling

What if...

Use the Emotional Wound
Thesaurus to help trigger new
ideas

What if Gaston's father was in love with Belle's mother and blamed Maurice for her death and his inability to have his own HEA. He's raised Gaston to believe Maurice is evil, selfish, and Gaston should protect Belle.

Overcoming the wound to earn the happy-ever-after

Belle has to learn that leaving will not make her feel like she has a place to fit in. She needs to accept who she is and that she is lovable.

Beast has to forgive himself for his past transgressions, learn to be unselfish, and accept that he is lovable, even as a beast.

Belle's External Goal: Leave this Provincial Town
Motivation: Find Acceptance
Conflict: She will leave her father

Faces social and emotional death.

Belle's Internal Goal: Keep father safe
Motivation: He's a prisoner
Conflict: She'll be separated from her Father

Faces social and emotional death.

Beast's External Goal: Break Curse

Motivation: He'll remain a beast and servants cursed

Conflict: He must love and be loved by someone

Faces social death and physical death of servants.

Beast's Internal Goal: Learn how to love
Motivation: break curse
Conflict: He doesn't believe he's capable

Risks emotional death and physical death of servants.

Gaston's External Goal: Marry Belle
Motivation: She's the best
Conflict: She's not that into him...

Risks social death

Note: Gaston doesn't have an internal GMC

Can Belle, Beast, or Gaston resign from the conflict?

Gaston: Absolutely, for the Disney story. This is why he's cliched and cartoonish. But if we were to change his backstory and add a wound...

Belle: No. Her father will die, she must save him. AND he's the only man who loves her unconditionally, gives her a place to fit in.

Beast: No. He needs to fall in love and be loved or he and the household will remain cursed.

Each scene raises the stakes, but also triggers the wounds making it harder for the characters to obtain their goal.

When Beast gets angry at Belle for searching the castle, she runs away. He saves her and is injured. Nursing him back to health, he shares the library and the mirror. After seeing her father sick, Beast allows her to go home...giving into the curse because he's learned to love.

Up the stakes throughout the story

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Belle's fear of not having the townspeople rescue her father from Gaston's plan to put him in a sanitarium results in her "showing" them the Beast.

Gaston gets townspeople to attack Beast and castle.

Beast, believing he's unlovable and lost, allows it to happen.

Belle realizes she's in love with the Beast and can't get the townspeople to stop attacking him.

Questions?

Wounds can be

Opposing or Similar

Opposing wounds for MCs

- Create higher conflict
- Tricky if MCs in romance
- Tricky to have reason to be together (why are they involved in each other's lives?)

Similar wounds for MCs

- Same background
- different POV
- different reaction

Using social,
emotional, racial,
religious
differences as a
wound.

Questions to consider:

Why do you want that specific wound?

Are you the right person to write this story?

RESEARCH! Check out reddit, Google, etc., for communities and ask questions, research, and consider getting paying a sensitivity reader.

Example: Protagonist versus Antagonist (Buddy Film)

The external
wound.

Wound:

Misbelief:

Fear: W

Trigger:



emotional

own house.

Give your secondary characters emotional wounds, too.

Quint - Loner

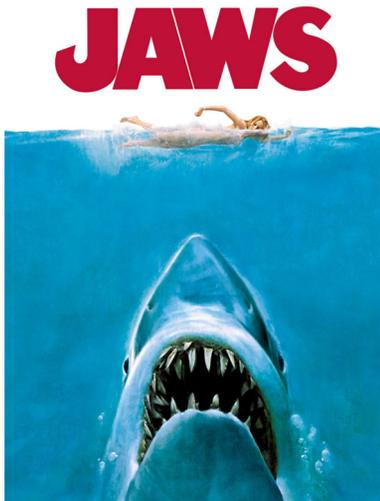
Wound: USS Indianapolis survivor pg 306

- Hooper - Oceanographer...
- Wound: Socially awkward pg 106
- Misbelief: People will never



The antagonist...

Predator



The Mayor

Wound not revealed

Misbelief: He's responsible for the entire town and failure is unacceptable

Fears: being blamed for the town losing tourists

Triggers: being questioned/doubted

More practice

— — —
Wound Example: Accidentally Killing Someone pg 110

Wound	<i>They accidentally killed someone, maybe by instigating a prank or dare that went horribly wrong and ended in injury or death.</i>
Fear	<i>They fear responsibility; making decisions that impact others.</i>
Belief	<i>They may believe that they are a terrible and worthless person who is undeserving of love.</i>

Wound Example: Having a loved one's die because of another's negligent act pg 208/302

Wound	<i>Sibling died attempting a dare.</i>
Fear	<i>Not being in control; people who are impetuous</i>
Belief	<i>They should have been able to stop it.</i>

External Conflict

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Protagonist's external conflict should trigger their fear of being responsible for another's life.

Job promotion at a security firm to a hostage retrieval team.

Hostage in a armed conflict...forced into protecting others

Monster in the basement/Aliens/neighbor needs help

Internal Conflict

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Protagonist's internal conflict should trigger their misbelief that they are a worthless person.

Have a few scenes that prove or disprove that lie scattered in your story.

Romance subplot fear of being exposed/certain love interest will hate him for their past.

Midpoint—see who they could be if they healed the wound.

Fail again at healing wound, plays into black moment. Avoid clichés.

Climax, succeed because of recognizing wound and attempt to heal.

Internal Goal	To be forgiven.
Internal Motivation	They feel responsible and possibly want to make amends.
Internal Conflict	they fear their belief that they are worthless and a terrible person will be reinforced.

External Goal: Based on story Job/Survival/Survival

Motivation: Career death/physical death

Conflict: Financial needs & Triggers wound/life-threatening situation

Your turn!

What is your protagonist's wound/fear/belief & GMC?

— — —

WOUND:

EXTERNAL GOAL:

EXTERNAL MOTIVATION:

FEARS:

EXTERNAL CONFLICT:

BELIEVES:

INTERNAL GOAL:

INTERNAL MOTIVATION:

TRIGGERS:

INTERNAL CONFLICT:

QUESTIONS?

Final Pieces of Wisdom

- You need an antagonist in your story. The stronger the better, too.
- Your antagonist has to win at least once. (Otherwise your protagonist is an idiot.)
- Yes, you need an editor.
- Yes, you need beta readers.
- People who don't replace the toilet paper roll when it runs out are the worst kind of human.

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Email me your questions!

Resources:

The Emotional Wound Thesaurus
by Angela Ackerman and Becca
Puglisi

Lisa Cron Story Genius

Michael Hauge 6 stages

Angela Ackerman and Becca
Puglisi OneStopForWriters.com

Jane Friedman Fiction University

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