

WTheck is a Chain Story?

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<http://greatstorybook.com/wtheck-chain-story/>

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A Chain Story is a type of predictable story, also known as a circle story, cyclical story or circular story. I tend to think all stories are at heart borrowing heavily from the chain story format, and it's really no wonder: they're really powerful.

Chain Story is a type of story structure that you find in a lot of great stories. These aren't just for kids, either. It's everywhere.

Artwork by Marybeth Anders.

If you're looking for a strong story structure steeped in tradition, you might try the chain story.

About Predictability and Story Structure

I was a kid who didn't like to read, and my parents were at a loss as to how to make reading fun for me. Chain stories were a story structure I really loved. Being a kid, I had no idea that there are a ton of stories that follow this pattern.

Now, don't read *story structure* or *story pattern* and think, "weak, predictable, boring." It is predictable, yes – but in a good way. These are stories where readers are given clues in the story, perhaps certain repeated phrases or situations, so that we can deduce what might come next. It's interactive storytelling.

Predictable stories also make great teaching materials, because they foster language development, memory skills, deductive skills, reasoning and - they're just fun. Some rhyme, some don't.

There are 7 types of Predictable Books, and a Chain Story is one of them.

The 7 Types of Predictable Story Structures are:

1. **Chain or Circular** (Example: **Chalk** by Bill Thomson)
2. **Cumulative** (Example: **Stuck** by Oliver Jeffers.)
3. **Pattern** (Example: **Duck! Rabbit!** by Amy Krouse Rosenthal and Tom Lichtenheld)
4. **Question and Answer** (Example: **Not a Stick** by Antoinette Portis)
5. **Repetition** (Example: **Cookie's Week** by Cindy Ward and Tomie dePaola)
6. **Rhyme** (Example: **Rhyming Dust Bunnies** by Jan Thomas)
7. **Familiar Sequence** (Example: **Opposites** by Sandra Boynton)

What's a Chain Story?

Essentially, a Chain Story (a.k.a. circle story, circular tale, cyclical story) is one that ends where it started. It comes full circle. Along the way, there can be certain words or a certain situation that is repeated. These are treated as the clues we get in figuring out how the story unfolds. But that distinctive repetition is optional.

What really distinguishes a Chain Story from all the other Predictable Story types is that it must end where it started.

Cumulative Tales are sometimes confused with Chain Stories and the terms are sometimes used interchangeably. They're not always the same and I discuss this [in more detail HERE](#).

Chain Story Love

Chain stories have always felt really satisfying to me. There's something about a character coming full circle, usually having learned something along the way – maybe even a hard lesson – that I really like. I'm not the only one who loves Chain Stories, though.

There is an entire storybook series of Chain Stories that I'm sure you know all about. Chances are good that you have at least one volume on your bookshelf right now.

Can you guess?

[If You Give A Mouse A Cookie](#) by [Laura Numeroff](#) and [Felicia Bond](#) is the first story in the *If You Give...* series, which has been in print since 1985 (over 30 years, my friends).

All of the stories in the series are Chain Stories. Here are other great examples:

[The Stonecutter](#) is an old Japanese folktale. [You can read it HERE](#).

[The Fisherman and His Wife](#) is an old European folktale, originally recorded by the Grimm brothers. [You can read it HERE.](#)

[Round the Garden](#) by Omri Glaser, illustrated by designers [Byron Glaser](#) and Sandra Higashi. This is actually written by the 8-year-old child of these two designers, but that doesn't make it any less a chain story - and it's a very sweet, imaginative one at that.

[Charlie Cook's Favorite Book](#) by [Julia Donaldson](#) and [Axel Sheffler](#). Great stuff from two of the best in the biz.

[Higher! Higher!](#) by Leslie Patricelli is an adorable Chain Story for toddlers. Honestly, it's quite brilliant.

[Sam and Dave Dig a Hole](#) by [Mac Barnett](#) and [Jon Klassen](#) is another shining example. [Here's my BOOK REVIEW.](#)

Not Just for Kids

The Chain Story structure is applicable to any kind of genre or story form, and if you look for it, you'll start to see it everywhere.

When I stepped out into the bright sunlight from the darkness of the movie house, I had only two things on my mind: Paul Newman and a ride home.

Perhaps one of the most popular YA novel excerpts, this is the first line of [S. E. Hinton](#)'s YA novel, [The Outsiders](#). It is also the last line.

Establishing a strong ending and beginning by drawing them together, relating them with each other, is one of the most powerful ways you can make your story ending pop. It's one of the reasons I suggest to my students that they start writing their story endings *first*. ([You can read about that HERE.](#))

Susan Hinton takes that idea to the limit and succeeds. Big time. ([You can download and read the novel for free, HERE.](#))

...and in film

Movies use this structure a lot and one of my favorites is **Looper** (2012). The story delves into repeated moments that give us clues to the ending. Dramatically, it begins and ends with the protagonist's death.

Total Recall (1990) begins and ends with the idea of a dream reality.

Moonstruck (1987) begins and ends with a wedding proposal (just by different brothers).

In the television series **Lost** (2004-2010), the series very cinematically ends where it begins, with the protagonist's eyeview after the crash.

What About You?

What is your favorite Chain Story and why? I really love this type of story and would love to gather a more extensive listing here.

Are you writing a Chain Story right now? Have you written one? Write below, let me know – or, as ever, write me an email.

Keep creating, no matter what.

This entry is part of the series

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