

A Hot Object

by Chazda Albright -

<http://greatstorybook.com/how-character-meets-plot-part-i-a-hot-object/>

This entry is part 3 of 16 in the series [Devil in the Details](#)

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There are many ways a writer can develop both the plot and the protagonist at the same time. This is one of them.

A *hot topic* is one that people are talking about on a regular, daily basis. Hot topics are news worthy bits, gossip column fodder - the break room chats and disputes. A Hot Object is a writing device. Specifically, it is **any physical object that is important to a character and where the significance or meaning of that object *changes* with the character as the story unfolds.**

The key here is that the importance of the Hot Object must change, must have an arc. If the [protagonist](#) has a character arc (and they always, always should), then so must the Hot Object associated with that character.

What Makes A Hot Object Hot?

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A good example of this and one most will recognize is Harry Potter's wand. For most wizards (in any book, not just the Harry Potter series), a wand is a magic tool and nothing else. It might be super cool and special in some way, but that isn't enough to make it a Hot Object.

A Hot Object can be something as temporary as a branch of apple blossoms so long as the object has a sort of character arc.

So why is Potter's wand a Hot Object? The wand itself has a sort of character arc, and it's an arc that underscores and informs what Harry is experiencing. Let's take a deeper look at this example, to break down how this works in more detail.

First Stage: Cool Object

When it's time for Harry to get his wand, we learn that a wizard has a special affinity – a relationship – to their wand. When he finally discovers which wand should be his, Harry's scar is affected (something special happens) and the proprietor of the wand shop remarks at how unique this is. We realize there is something particularly special about this wand, and in turn, Harry. Most writers would stop here. The wizard hero has his special wand. Cool. So far, not a Hot Object.

Second Stage: More Than Just Cool

We later learn that the wand is linked in some way to the Big Bad, he whose name shall not be said. It's revealed that the two wands were once one, and so Harry and his archenemy are linked magically. Because Harry is still learning wizardry, this could well mean he is prone to evil in some way. He's concerned about this, it brings his whole identity into question. This is the beginning twinkling of a Hot Object, when we realize that the object is more important than we first thought. This isn't enough to be an arc for that object and so not enough for it to really be considered a hot object.

Third Stage: Cool Object Builds to Hot Climax

When Harry's special wand is destroyed, we worry with him that he may lose the war against evil and ultimately lose himself, his sense of identity as a good wizard. We are building to a climax and this is when BAM! - the wand is now a Hot Object.

An invisibility dress (or cloak) is only a Hot Object if it has a story that echoes that of the person wearing it.

Fourth Stage & Coming Full Circle: Death of the Hot Object

When Harry overcomes the loss of his wand and realizes that he no longer needs it, the story takes another [dramatic turn](#). NOW the wand is really a strong Hot Object because not only has the wand "died" - in the sense that it was destroyed and cannot be brought back in some way, but its story has finished, permanently. We understand the wand and what it means in a different way, and that new understanding

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alters how we see Harry and everything that happened before.

It pulls us back into the story, retrospectively, so that we see things differently.

The hot object's end (in this case: the wand) isn't determined until we are certain of what the thing really means to Harry and who he has become after its loss.

...a hot object does not have to be destroyed in order to have a death.

It's worth noting here that a hot object does not have to be destroyed in order to have a death. What I mean by this is that what counts is how the protagonist feels or relates to the object. Once the object is no longer important to the hero, that object is dead. If the hero throws his gun in the river, it's dead. If the hero throws her binkie (pacifier) in the trash, it's dead.

Hot Objects for Little Ones? YES!

Can you do this in a [pre-reader children's book](#)? Absolutely.

Potty training. The significance of the potty (the Hot Object that perhaps starts as an antagonist and ends as a friend) and therefore the identity of the newly potty-trained character as a Big Girl or Big Boy who no longer needs diapers is a perfect example of how an ordinary object can become intrinsically important to the identity of the protagonist and in their discovering their new identity.

Other examples like this:

- Letting go of the cuddly blanket.
- Spitting out the pacifier for good.
- Not sucking fingers anymore. The protagonist's fingers can be the Hot Object if the way in which the protagonist views and uses the fingers actually changes so that the meaning of those fingers changes – for the protagonist, and therefore for the reader as well.
- Eating properly (the spoon is the hot object).

Any Thing that is as transformational as the protagonist works in this capacity. You don't want to do it by accident. Do it with great intention, and the parents reading your story to their kids will also become fans of your work.

What do you think? Have you read a story lately with a really good hot object in it? I'm curious. Share below and let me know.

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