



Writing Subtext: What Lies Beneath

Linda Seger

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Partly a how-to book, partly an exploration of this important topic, Writing Subtext explores all the underlying meanings that lie beneath the words, images, and actions in film, which are also applicable to any kind of fiction writing. Replete with examples from films, as well as examples from real life, Writing Subtext helps the writer figure out how to find and write subtext.

Writing Subtext: What Lies Beneath Details

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Varina Denman says

I will be reading this book again and again! And praying I can learn all these techniques. #fingerscrossed

Paula Berinstein says

I love a book that gets me thinking, and this one really does. I've known what subtext is forever, but I didn't realize how critical it is to the texture of a work, and how important for actors.

Seeger explains that subtext drives a story, and now that I think about it I see why. Subtext grows out of a character's motivation. It *is* motivation. The character may not tell you what she wants, but her goals and desires underlie and manifest themselves in everything she does. So it's the writer's job to show us what she's really after in symbolic and oblique ways. Brilliant!

While the book is extremely useful, I couldn't grasp it in one reading. There's just too much to think about. So after I've pondered it a while, I will return to it again. Some of that pondering will involve looking at my own work and assessing how much subtext I've inserted without realizing it, because that hasn't been something I've consciously thought about. Whether or not I've done it well up to now you can bet I'll be working on it in the future.

Another great book for writers from the industry's first script consultant. (Great for novelists too!)

Emma Sea says

This is a brilliant book, and the clarity makes it ideal for someone who has pretty much never heard of subtext. Rather than adult writers, I'd recommend it as excellent for high school or entry-level college students: the ones who have *no idea* that anything is going on beneath the surface in books, plays, and films. Every student I've ever met would benefit from this book. Each chapter is followed by a list of prompts or interrogations for addressing your own writing, so you could use this as a class text.

This is very readable, with great examples of subtext in films from classic to contemporary, in all kinds of genres, from *Remains of the Day* to *Avatar*, *Casablanca* to *Airplane* (a personal fave). Seeger breaks the subtext down fully and clearly, supported by the script and director's notes, and shows the reader how (and why) to pay attention to the choice of language or action.

James Pitter says

With so many books available covering the basics of writing, e.g. structure, plot, characterisation, etc, I was surprised to learn how few authoritative publications there were on the use of subtext as a means to create emotional impact. In fact, at the time of writing this review, I noticed just four dedicated books on Amazon attributed to the subject. Of course, there are other retail outlets, but I didn't notice any further options there, either.

After a long and exhaustive search and having read some positive reviews, I eventually settled on *Writing Subtext: What Lies Beneath*, by Linda Seger. It was worth the wait (and the frustration). One of the things which quickly became apparent to me when I began reading the book was the many different forms of subtext, some of which I never new existed. Or, perhaps I did, but had simply not thought of them as being subtext. Dialogue – sure, description and gestures – maybe, but subtext in images, metaphors and genre? Okay, maybe that explains my Amazon sales figures. But, seriously, next time you watch a great movie or TV show and try to analyse the source of those layers of meaning, chances are they have been created using some form of subtext. I realise many writers are probably already well-versed on the value of this subject, but, for the uninitiated like me, the contents of this book were a big deal.

Chapter one begins with a *definition and exploration of subtext*, with subsequent chapters discussing the many techniques of expression highlighted earlier. There are helpful excerpts of successful scripts the author uses to emphasise a point as well as exercises and tips for discussion at the end of each chapter, just in case the reader hadn't been paying attention.

This is a genuinely good book, packed full with helpful advice and tips for writers of every discipline. It's perfect for anyone looking for guidance on ways to create more insight and depth to their work.

Jeanne says

The book is focused on screenplays, but it's still useful for writers of any kind of fiction. Has a lot of good advice on different types of subtext and how to incorporate it into your work.

Paula Cappa says

While there is quite a lot in this book in helping writers to understand the mechanics of subtext (not just the meanings beneath the words but what informs the text i.e. the implicit meaning), most of this book focuses on subtext from films: *Double Indemnity*, *The Big Short*, *Cheers*, *Ordinary People*, etc. So if you are a screen writer or playwright, I think you'll be happy to learn about the uses and methods on how subtext motivates, communicates, and can present scene conflict and tension. I'm a writer of novels and short stories so I was disappointed, expecting this book to also address novel writing. It doesn't. But there is a lot here to get you thinking and examining about character motivation and plot driven stories. Seger says, "subtext makes us ask why." I did like how she explains the psychology beneath subtext, what's true, what's evasive, certainty vs. uncertainty, conscious and subconscious subtext. Very helpful.

Glenn Mitchell says

A Good Introduction

Writing effectiveness subtext is a challenge. Linda Seger provides writers with a good introduction to the topic. She provides lots of film examples.

Muath Aziz says

Third book to read by Linda. A smooth read as you expect from her. (So smooth that I actually finished two books today, I've never even been able to finish a book in one day not to mention two!). I was especially eager for this one and gladly I wasn't disappointed for subtexting is a skill I lack.

The understanding of subtext can, not only be used in writing scripts, but also in real life when interacting with others and trying to understand them. Of course movies/novels are all about human interaction; Agatha Christie is a genius in the field of human social relationships I always believed.

Text is just the tip of the iceberg of meaning. The way the text is said and the way it is delivered by voice and gestures (this applies to movies but not novels).

- Do you think this dress look nice?
- yeah, it's fine. (You look fat in it)

Pauses can translate into subtext too

- Are you okay?
- yeah.... I'm fine. (I'm not okay)

Subtext can be told visually to tell character's backstory. From what the character is wearing we can tell what's her job and education. You can tell she is a nurse without the need for text. You can tell he has a bad past from the cuts in his face, without telling that explicitly.

Not to mention of course rain and lightning in horror movies, upbeat music in comedies, cliché sunset-beach-walk in romance. Also genres have their own subtext. If a house burns in a comedy you laugh, because he was so stupid and forget to turn off the oven.

Eren Bu?lal?lar says

Ba?ar?s?z bir kitap.

Yazar 20-30 sayfada aç?klanabilecek bir fikri, ?i?ire ?i?ire 180 sayfaya ç?karm???. Güzel bir ba?lık bulmu?, piyasaya vermi?. Hollywood'un ünlü senaryo dan??manlar?ndan biri oldu?u için çok sataca??n? dü?ünmü? olabilir. Güle güle harcas?n.

Yazar?n alt-metin s?n?fland?rmalar? da??n?k, özensiz. Verdi?i örnekler özlü bir biçimde ifade edilmemi?. Freud'dan ba?ka bir teorik altyap?s? yok gibi bir ?ey. Kitab?n ba?l???nda "yazmak" var, ama yazarl?ktan

ziyade, yaz?lm?? senaryolar?n basit ?özümlemesinden ibaret. Bu kadar s?? kitaplar? sevmiyorum. Ya da ?öyle diyeyim: Giri? düzeyinde, temelin temeli bir kitap yazd?ysan, bunu ba?l???nda belirt: Bebelere için alt-metin filan de.

Yazar? kitab?n?n yeteri kadar ?i?medi?ine ikna olmu? ki, bir de sonuna bir meslekta??ndan berbat bir mektup ile, Avatar filminin alt-metinsel "çözümlemesini" eklemi?. Bakhtin a?lad?.
