

Compare themes and
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by me and two short
stories



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The common themes that will be examined in these three stories are coming of age, danger, adventure, and mystery. The longest, and therefore most complex and well-developed story is the movie *Stand by Me*. The evidence of coming of age in this story is that the boys defy parental authority, take on a secret and depressing mission (finding and then reporting the location of the body of a missing boy) ostensibly to gain local fame, and in so doing risk retaliation by a group of older boys who originally found the body. Along the way they must rely on their own resourcefulness, subjecting themselves to the dangers listed above, as well as the danger of one or more of them being killed by the same train that apparently killed the missing boy. Reaching the destination has the boys spending the night in an unfamiliar place, traveling through mud and leech-infested waters, all the while wondering what they will see and feel when they find the boy. That's the real mystery: What do they really expect to get out of this in the end

The short story "Where are you going, Where have you been" is about an older teenaged girl, and describes a coming of age transition that is both sinister, tragic, and abrupt. We don't know if Connie will "come of age" only to be the latest local rape and murder victim or missing person once she is cornered at home alone by two men who have a plan and apparently the means and determination to carry it out. This is in contrast to the gradual, almost dream-like transition to womanhood she was making in the beginning - showing herself at local hang-outs and the local mall with a group of giggly girlfriends in shorts and tinkling jewelry. It is hard to see the adventure potential in this kidnapping in progress, complete with threats to her family if she fails to cooperate, except in the most abstract sense, but what will

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happen to her after she voluntarily steps out of the illusory safety of her house to be taken to an unknown destination and be subjected to an unknown fate that she doesn't have the power to control is also a mystery. What will she experience, and how will it affect her as a person - assuming she survives

"Fish Cheeks" is the most benign of the three stories. The main character, a Chinese-American teenaged girl, has a crush on the minister's son, and to her horror her parents have invited his family over for Christmas Eve dinner - Chinese style. It is no longer possible to conceal her non-American side. In her extreme self-consciousness, she views everything her mother prepares and everything her family does through the presumed negative view of the visitors. The danger here is psychological, having to view her family as not only different but deficient, to have a carefully maintained boundary between her public persona and her family life obliterated, to have her dreams of being Americanized and her loyalty for her family placed in opposition. It's an adventure in the sense that she will be revealed in the most honest way possible to these outsiders, and she knows her relationship with her American friends will never be the same. The mystery is a subtle one: Up until the end of the story, we don't know that all foods were purposely chosen by her mother because they were the daughter's favorites. Her mother used this dinner to showcase her daughter as she was without giving in to cultural pressure to be otherwise. But the gift of the skirt showed her mother also understood the importance to a young girl of at least being able to conform superficially to her adopted culture.

Works Cited

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