

# [Julie question how at one point this](https://assignbuster.com/julie-question-how-at-one-point-this/)

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Keith RussellEnglish 10216 January 2017  TheElement of Shock and Surprise            Every great story has an element ofsurprise, shock, or perhaps sometimes both. It is the element of the unexpectedhappening that engages readers to continue reading a story or a book. If astory is predictable it can make it boring and non-engaging to its readers.

Sometimes a story begins with important background information that influencesthe way you react to the unexpected shocking or surprising moment in the storyand other times the shocking or surprising moment is what defines the theme of thestory. Both Battle Royal and A Good Man Is Hard to Find share acommon theme in their elements of shock being very violent. In Battle Royal the violent mistreatment offellow human beings makes the reader question how at one point this treatmentwas widely accepted as normal. In A GoodMan Is Hard to Find the reader is left to wonder how a human being couldbecome so monstrous that the violent killing of a whole family, could becomedic and pleasuring.

Ultimately it how, us, as the readers, react to thesurprise or shock that shapes our opinion and understanding of the story. Inpast times the readers response to either could have been much different thantoday.              There is an element of surprise in which astory carries more meaning and context but an unexpected event happens in thestory which changes how we receive the meaning or context.  For example, in Ralph Edison’s short story, Battle Royal, there are two main elementsof shock. Unlike in some stories the author gave the reader quite a bit ofbackground before he added in the first element of shock. The story begins withthe grandfather’s last words, ‘” Son, after I’m gone I want you to keep up thegood fight, I never told you but our life is a war and I have been a traitorall my born days, a spy in the enemy’s county…Live with your head in the lionsmouth. I want you to overcome ’em with yeses, undermine ’em with grins, agree’em to death and destruction, let ’em swoller you till they vomit or bust wideopen'” (Edison, 275).

The grandfather’s words not only haunt the narrator ofthe story, who remains unnamed, but also the reader throughout the events ofthe story. Here we have a highly intelligent young man wanting nothing morethan to prove himself capable and smart in a time when merely the color of hisskin dictated what everyone expected of him.  When the narrator of the story walked into theballroom, where the most affluent men of the town were mingling, he wasanticipating wowing them with his speech however, that would not be his firsttask of playing part in entertaining the men. He realized that first, theymeant him to blindly fight against other young men of his color (Edison 276). Before the fight began came the first big disgusting and shocking event of thestory. The author’s description of the narrator’s emotions towards the womannot only shocked the reader but also himself. The narrator said, in referenceto the naked, sensual woman, ‘” I wanted at one and the same time to run fromthe room”‘ (Ellison 277). He describes a mixture of emotions which makeshimself and the reader question if his intentions are the same as the monstrousmen surrounding him, who leered and groped at the emotionless dancing woman.

Thesecond major element of surprise to the reader in Ellison’s Battle Royal is the gruesome blind battleroyal that the young black men were forced to fight each other, nearly to thedeath, solely for the affluential men’s entertainment. Following the violentfighting matches, the narrator and the other fighters struggle for the money thedrunk white men threw on the ground, only to be tricked into being electrocuted. His unbending desire to show his true self through the end was surprising.

Ifthe author would have merely written that the narrator went to the event andpresented his speech and received the scholarship, without having to endure therevolting white men’s mistreatment of their fellow human beings, the storywould have carried a much different weight. Sometimesan element of shock and surprise is in a story where little backgroundinformation is given by the author. AGood Man Is Hard to Find, by Flannery O’Connor is a good example of thisconcept. O’Connor is well known for her often chaotic, confusing way of tellinga story, and as a reader you are oftentimes only guessing at what the meaningof the story was. In A Good Man Is Hardto Find O’Connor grants the reader some details of the family’s tripleading up the moment of the shocking and gruesome murder of the Florida-bound familyin the woods. The general theme of the story is assumed to be, what defines a” good man.” Can a murderer be a “ good man” in a sense? One of major charactersin the story is the grandmother who ultimately wants to see the good ineveryone and whom encourages her family to take a side trip to see an oldplantation which unbeknownst to her would cause the gruesome murder of herfamily.

The first surprising element in the story was the accident caused bythe grandmother’s cat and the traveling family’s strange reactions to it. “” We’vehad an ACCIDENT!” the children screamed in a frenzy of delight” (O’Connor 432). Not only were the children’s strange reactions surprising the way the familyreacted to the accident was unexpected. Although there were small hints leadingup to the accident, this was the first time as a reader, that you begin torealize something is very wrong, therefore keeping you engaged in thestory.

Themissing background information that makes the surprising events that followedthe accident somewhat confusing to story’s readers, is who exactly was TheMisfit? Who did he represent and did the grandmother really know him? O’Connerwrote, “ The grandmother shrieked. She scrambled to her feet and stood staring.’You’re the Misfit!’ she said. ‘ I recognized you at once!'” (O’Connor 433). Thewhole time the family is taken one by one into the woods to be murdered by theother men in The Misfit’s posse, the grandmother and The Misfit carry on a longconversation on rather or not he was a “ good man” and argued that if he was a” good man” how he would he allow and enjoy the murders.

The Misfit describeshis life leading up to his time spent in jail and how it felt being in prison,”” I was a gospel singer for a while…I was never a bad boy that I remember of…butsomewhere along the line I did something wrong and got sent to penitentiary. Iwas buried alive”” (O’Connor 435). As a reader after the shock passes of theviolent events in the story you are still left to wonder, was The Misfit ever a” good man?” In previous times the idea of a character in a story gruesomelykilling a whole family including a baby, would have been even more shockingthan it is today.

In both Battle Royal and A Good ManIs Hard to Find the element of shock and surprise not only keeps the readerengaged but also shapes their opinion on the important take away elements ofthe story. In Ellison’s Battle Royal the violent and shocking events that led upto the narrator presenting his speech not only began to shape his future butalso shaped the readers opinion of who he was as a person and the time in whichhe lived. In O’Connor’s A Good Man IsHard to Find quite a bit of important background is missing especiallyabout The Misfit, so we can only assume The Misfit was a psychotic monster whoorders his men to kill the whole family and kills the grandmother himself inthe end. Throughout the dialog and some of his actions he showed some sympathy, however in the end The Misfit and his posse shocking joke about the violentmurder of a whole family. As readers we have to wonder why we are less shockedat the violent events that take place in both stories than readers may havebeen in previous times.   WorksCitedEllison, Ralph. “ Battle Royal.” The Bedford Introduction to Literature.

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