

## What was the Question?

*"I start with a question. Then try to answer it."*

—Mary Lee Settle (1918-2005), author

The best way to start a novel is with an Inciting Incident, right? The event that changes the main character's life – shoves them out of their normal world – and sends them on a journey.

But there's something that a good story needs before an Inciting Incident: the Story Question. I first learned the importance of the Story Question from My Book Therapy, best-selling author Susan May Warren's coaching community for writers. The Story Question asks a question of the heart and mind – the great "what if?" It functions like fuel for your car – the Story Question keeps your story running. If you lose sight of your Story Question, you lose the focus of your story.

How do you discover your novel's Story Question? Ask yourself these four questions:

1. **Why does your story matter to you?** (If your story doesn't matter to you, it won't matter to your readers.)
2. **What is your story's theme?** (Theme = overall idea of a book. Distill it down to one word: forgiveness, honesty, trust).
3. **What is your hero/heroine learning about the theme?**
4. **What do you want to say about the theme through your characters?**

Here's how I discovered the Story Question for my upcoming release, *Catch a Falling Star*:

1. *Catch a Falling Star* matters to me because I've dealt with life not going according to plan and had to learn how to handle disappointments.
2. The story's theme is trust – specifically learning to trust God when life doesn't turn out the way we want it to go.
3. My hero and heroine both learn that God's plans are better – even when their hopes are disappointed/delayed.
4. As the author of *Catch a Falling Star*, I am showing that trusting God is a choice. Sometimes we have to let go of our dreams to embrace the life God has waiting for us.

By answering these questions I decided that my novel's Story Question is: *What if life doesn't go according to plan? Do you keep pushing for Plan A? Do you pull Plan B out of your back pocket? Do you settle? And where does God fit in all of this?*

If you're just starting your work-in-progress (WIP), take the time to think through your Story Question before starting to write any scenes. Already started your WIP? Hit PAUSE. Then answer the four questions and determine your Story Question before you go any farther in your story.

Once you've determined your Story Question, write it out and post it over your computer so you see it when you're writing. That way, you never lose sight of what you're aiming for as an author: Using your characters to answer your Story Question.

***What Story Question are you trying to answer in your manuscript?***

Author Bio: Beth K. Vogt believes God's best is often behind the doors marked "Never." Despite being a nonfiction writer and editor who said she'd never write fiction, Beth's second inspirational contemporary romance novel, *Catch a Falling Star*, releases May 2013 from Howard Books. Beth is also the Skills Coach for My Book Therapy (MBT), best-selling author Susan May Warren's writing community. (60 words)