

Spoiling the Ending Doesn't Spoil the Story

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People *hate* to know the ending before they've read the story or watched the movie. At least that's what they think. A study in the September issue of *Psychological Science* reveals that contrary to this popular belief, knowing the ending actually enhances readers' enjoyment of a story. Watch below as Stephen Colbert tries to spread the joy by revealing, "Rosebud is a sled, Bruce Willis is dead, Soylent Green is people, and Darth Vader is Luke's father."

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Nicholas Christenfeld and Jonathan Leavitt of the University of California, San Diego, gauged readers' reactions to spoiled and unspoiled versions of 12 classic short stories. Each version was read by at least 30 subjects, and data from subjects who had read the stories previously were excluded. Subjects strongly preferred the spoiled stories, particularly when an ironic twist appeared in the plot.

Separate research indicates that people have an aesthetic preference for objects that are perceptually easy to process, which may explain why subjects liked knowing how the stories would end. "Once you know how it turns out," Leavitt speculates, "you're more comfortable processing the information — and can focus on a deeper understanding of the story."

For more on Christenfeld and Leavitt's research on spoilers, read coverage from [The Guardian](#), [Science News](#), and [MSNBC](#).