The Rule of So What?
From Nancie Atwell’s In the Middle

Strong writing in every genre answers the question SO WHAT? Well conceived and executed writing has a purpose, a point, a reason it was written. The good writer looks for and finds the meanings, the significances, the implications in the subject he or she has chosen.

Sometimes the SO WHAT? is subtle and implicit. Sometimes it is explicitly stated. But an expert reader finds something to think about because an expert writer found something to think about. Robert Frost wrote, “No tears in the writer, no tears in the reader.” If you don’t find the deep meanings in your life or your characters’ lives, your readers won’t find the meaning either. It is not enough to simply outline the chronological events of story. How those events wrought a change, an altered perception, and understanding in your characters’ lives or in your own is what is required. If your reader asks SO WHAT? after they have read your piece, you have not done your job as a writer.

A good writer often discovers the SO WHAT? through the thinking involved in the writing process. But even with hard thinking, some topics may not have a SO WHAT? These pieces can be abandoned or put on hold.