

GREATHOUSE STORIES

GreatHouse Story Workbook

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1. Story Elements

Premise

The story idea stated in a single sentence. Suggests the essence of the story.

Seven Key Structure Steps

The seven key story structure steps are the major stages of the story's development and of the dramatic code hidden under its surface. They are:

1. Weakness and need
2. Desire
3. Opponent
4. Plan
5. Battle
6. Self-Revelation
7. New Equilibrium

Character

Create characters by drawing from the original idea and connecting and comparing them in a character web. Then, decide the function each is to perform in helping the hero develop.

Theme (Moral Argument)

The author's moral vision or how people should act in the world. Instead of making the characters a mouthpiece for a message, express the theme inherent in the story idea through story structure that surprises and moves the audience. Hero must make a moral choice typically near end of story. To be a true choice, hero must either select one of two positive outcomes or avoid two negative ones.

Setting (Story World)

Create the world of the story as an outgrowth of the hero. It will help define the hero and show the audience a physical expression of his growth.

Symbol Web

Symbols are packets of highly compressed meaning. Determine a web of symbols that highlight and communicate different aspects of the characters, the story world and the plot.

Scene Sequence (Scene Weave)

Before writing scenes, develop a list of every scene in the story with all the plotlines and themes woven into the tapestry. Place in a sequence.

Scene Construction & Dialogue

Write the story, constructing each scene so that it furthers the development of the hero. Write dialogue that doesn't just push the plot but has a symphonic quality to it, blending many "instruments" and levels at one time.

2. Premise

The story stated in one sentence. It is the simplest combination of character and plot and typically consists of some event that starts the action, some sense of the main character, and some sense of the outcome of the story.

1. Write something that may change your life.
2. Look for what's possible. Explore options and brainstorm the many paths the idea can take and choose the best one.
3. Identify the story challenges and problems.
4. Find the designing principle.
5. Create the basic character change equation

Examples

The Godfather. The youngest son of a Mafia family takes revenge on the men who shot his father and becomes the new Godfather.

Casablanca. A tough American expatriate rediscovers an old flame only to give her up so that he can fight the Nazis.

Star Wars. When a princess falls into mortal danger, a young man uses his skills as a fighter to save her and defeat the evil forces of a galactic empire.

Avoid Split Premises

Split premise: A man *falls in love* and *fights* his brother for control of a winery.

Single premise: Through the love of a good woman, a man defeats his brother for control of a winery.

3. Designing Principle

(Abstract. Deeper process going on in the story)

The designing principle is what organizes the story as a whole. It is the internal logic of the story, what makes the parts hang together organically so that the story becomes greater than the sum of its parts. It is what makes the story original. It is the seed of the story.

Examples

The Godfather.

Premise: The youngest son of a Mafia family takes revenge on the men who shot his father and becomes the new Godfather.

Designing Principle: Use the classic fairy-tale strategy of showing how the youngest of three sons becomes the new “king.”

Tootsie.

Premise: When an actor can't get work, he disguises himself as a woman and gets a role in a TV series, only to fall in love with one of the female members of the cast.

Designing Principle: Force a male chauvinist to live as a woman.

Harry Potter Books.

Premise: A boy discovers he has magical powers and attends a school for magicians.

Designing Principle: A magician prince learns to be a man and a king by attending a boarding school for sorcerers over the course of seven school years.

Moses, Book of Exodus.

Premise: When an Egyptian prince discovers that he is a Hebrew, he leads his people out of slavery.

Designing Principle: A man who does not know who he is struggles to lead his people to freedom and receives the moral laws that will define him and his people.

4. Character Change

After premise and designing principle, the most important thing is the fundamental character change of the story's hero. Character change is what the story hero experiences by going through his struggle. At its simplest level, it can be represented by a three-part equation.

Weakness x Action = Change

$W \times A = C$

1. Write premise line
2. Determine basic action of hero
3. Opposites of this action for W and C

* * *

Example

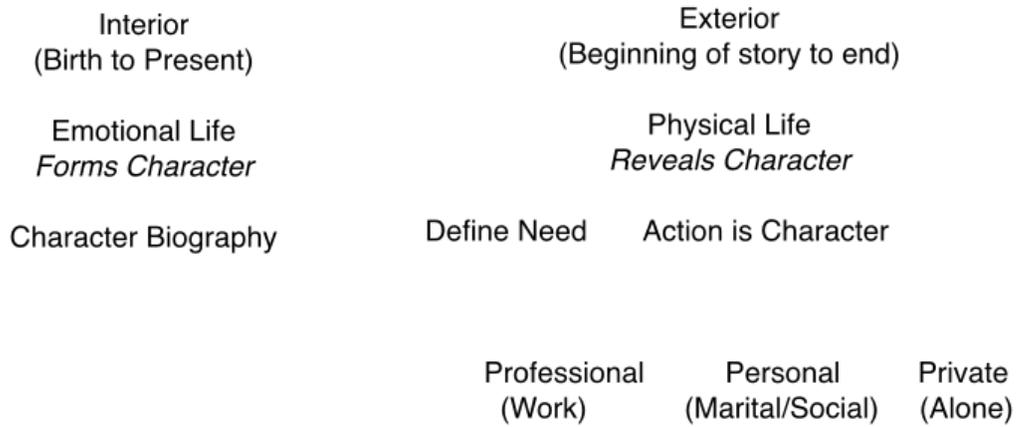
An uptight, henpecked man becomes involved with a gang of outlaws and gets a divorce.

W = uptight, henpecked man

A = involved with outlaws

C = gets a divorce

5. Character Elements



6. Character Sympathy

Identification with a sympathetic Hero should take place as early in the script as possible. There is a recipe for character sympathy that contains 9 essential ingredients. As a general rule, never write a story without employing at least 5 of them and probably better using 6 or 7.

Courage

Only brave people take action and only action drives plot forward. Courage must be exhibited up front and if not the story is in trouble.

Unfair Injury

After courage, the second greatest way to bond with reader/audience is through this.

Skill

We admire people who possess the grace, expertise, and mental acumen to become masters of their own chosen work. Doesn't matter as much as Hero is expert at it. We can forget a great deal if, when it's time for him to get down to business, a Hero delivers.

Funny

A robust and playful sense of humor.

Just Plain Nice

Hero has a good heart. Decent, helpful, honest and treats others well.

In Danger

An imminent threat of personal harm or loss.

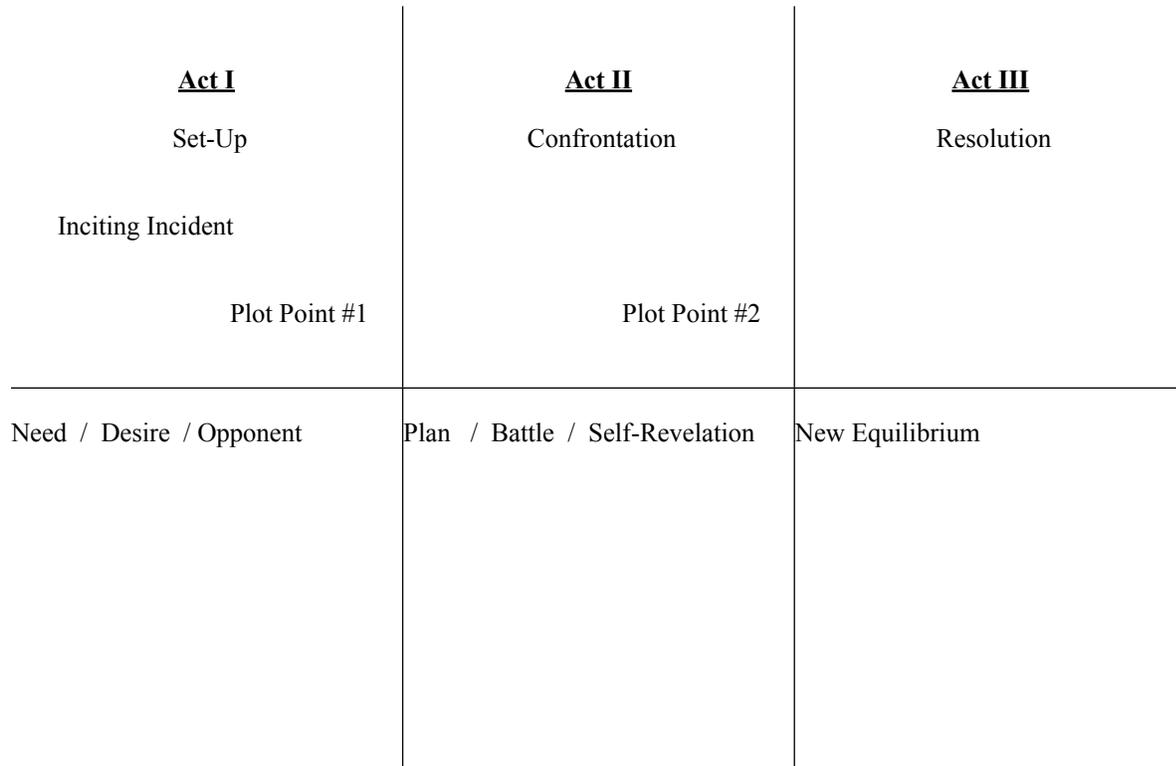
Loved By Friends & Family

Shown that Hero is loved by family and friends.

Hard Working

Obsessed

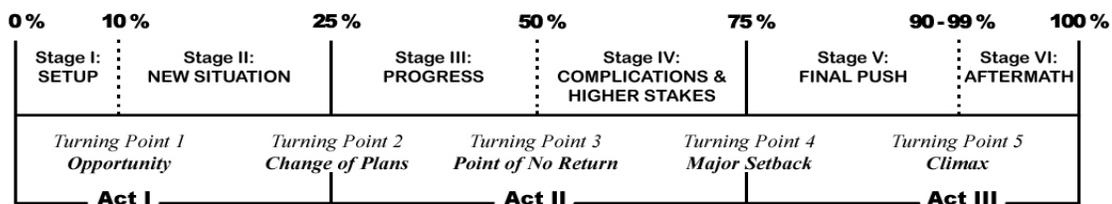
7. Basic Structure Diagram



The three acts are separated by two plot points. A plot point, often called a reversal, is an event that thrusts the plot in a new direction, leading into a new act of the story. Plot Point #1 is the moment when the hero takes on the problem.

8. Six Stage Structure (From Michael Hauge)

SIX STAGE PLOT STRUCTURE



The SETUP reveals the hero's life up to now until presented with an Opportunity which begins the story and triggers the Hero's desire to move to a new New Situation which results in a Change of Plans when the Hero's general desire is transformed into a specific, visible outer motivation. The Hero begins to make Progress (the plan to achieve the outer motivation seems to be working) until the Hero passes the Point of No Return and is so fully committed to reaching the destination that there is no longer the option of turning back. This leads to Complications & Higher Stakes because the outside world is now closing in on the Hero. The conflict builds until the hero suffers a Major Setback and it seems to the reader that all is lost. The Hero then begins a Final Push by retreating momentarily, then putting everything on the line until the Climax where the Hero faces the biggest obstacle of the story, and the outer motivation is finally resolved, moving the Hero to the Aftermath, which reveals the new life the Hero will live, having completed his/her journey.

9 Story Workbook Sheet

Story Premise

Designing Principle

Seven Key Structure Steps

Weakness / Need

Desire

Opponent

Plan

Battle

Self-Revelation

New Equilibrium

Characters

Hero (Protagonist)

Weakness

_____ X (Action) _____ = Change _____

Villain (Antagonist)

Other Characters

Theme (Moral Argument)

Setting (Story World)
