

**Everything You Need to Know to
Write a Novel**

**with
Chris Mandeville**

chrismandeville.com

Topics

- The Story Idea & Genre
- Story Structure; Story Planning / Plotting
- Character and Character Arc
- Conflict & Tension
- Point of View and Tense
- Voice
- Setting
- Putting it All Together
- Editing and Revision

The 2 Most Important Things

You Know a Lot



Story Comes First



Story:

- What is a story?
- What are the essential elements?

A story must have...

Setting

Characters

(or things that act as characters)

Plot – something happens

A beginning, a middle, and an end

THE STORY IDEA - Types

- "What if" concept
- Character
- Scenario
- Plot, plot event, plot twist, ending
- Setting
- Theme/message

Test Your Story Idea

- Emotional pull/resonance of the idea
- Why does it interest you?
- Will it hold your interest?
- Why would it interest a reader?
- Is this idea right for a *novel*? Longer? Shorter?

Book Length

From Writer's Digest:

Short story: 1,500 to 30,000 words

Novella: 30,000 to 50,000

Novel: 55,000 to 300,000 words

Literary agent Lori Perkins of the L. Perkins Agency in New York says it's much easier to sell a first-time novelist's book to a publisher if the word count falls between 80,000 and 100,000 words, or roughly 300 double-spaced, typed pages—which is average novel length.

Perkins is quoted as saying: "One-third of the novels that come into the agency are rejected because they're too long or short. The cost greatly increases on books larger than 100,000 words, so agents and publishers are less likely to gamble on a manuscript the size of a dictionary."

Genre

Genre is a literary category that answers the questions:

What kind of story is this?

Where would it be on the library/store shelf?

Genre helps us form expectations about a story

What special genre considerations are there?

Book Length by Genre

80,000 and 89,999 words is a good range for literary, mainstream, women's, romance, mystery, suspense, thriller and horror

- SF/F tend to run long: 90 – 125K+ words
- Chick lit tends to be shorter and faster 70 – 75K
- Westerns 50 – 80K
- Memoir 70 – 90K
- Young Adult 55 – 80K+ words (trending longer)
- Middle Grade 20 – 55K
 - Upper MG 40,000 – 55,000 words
 - Simple MG 20,000 – 35,000 words

From Writer's Digest

Now that you have The Idea, what do you do next?

There's no right answer,
though lots of people debate it

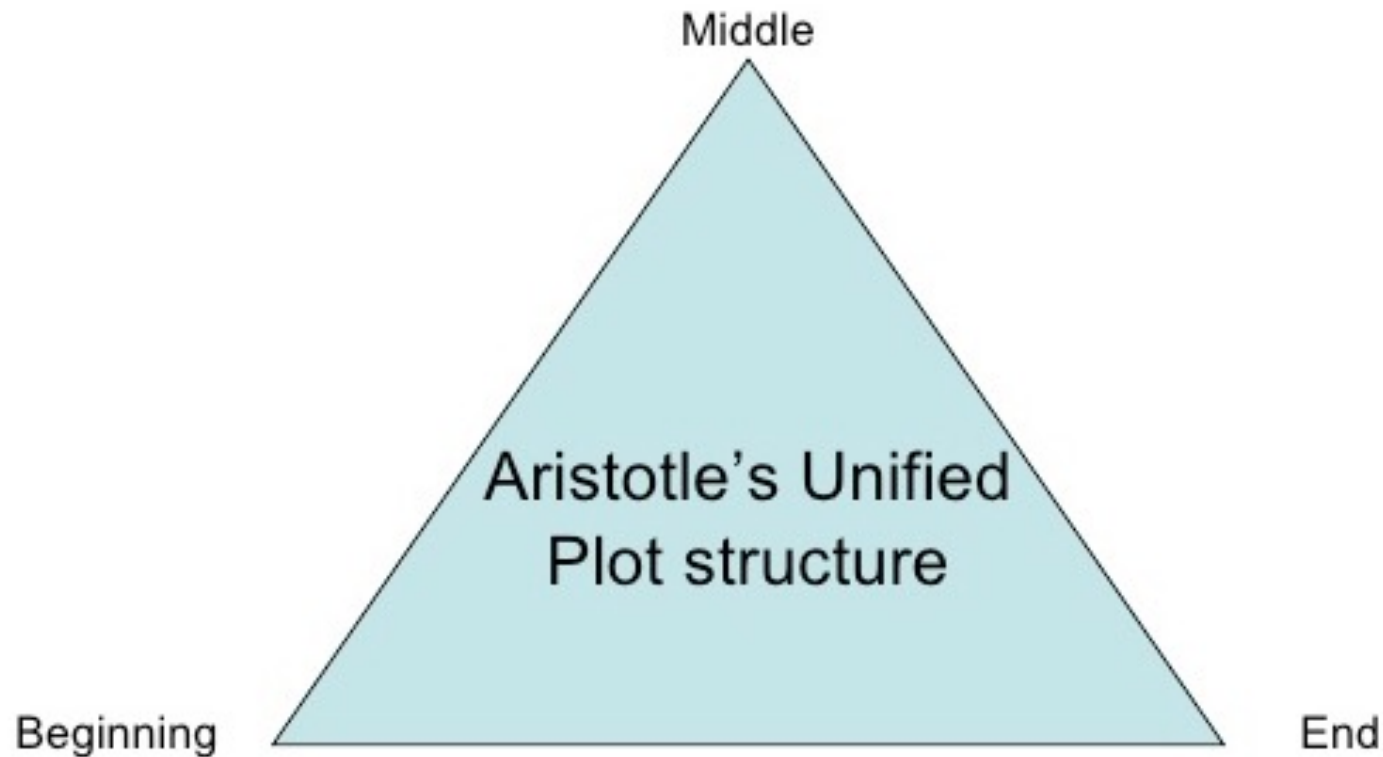
- Research
- Brainstorm
- Outline
- Read
- Watch movies
- Talk about it with others
- Partake in experiences that relate
- Just Write

Plotters vs. “Pantsers”

- Plotters plan
- “Pantsers” ~~don't~~ have *some* plan, even if it's largely unconscious
- RECOMMENDATION: keep a destination in mind

Story Structure

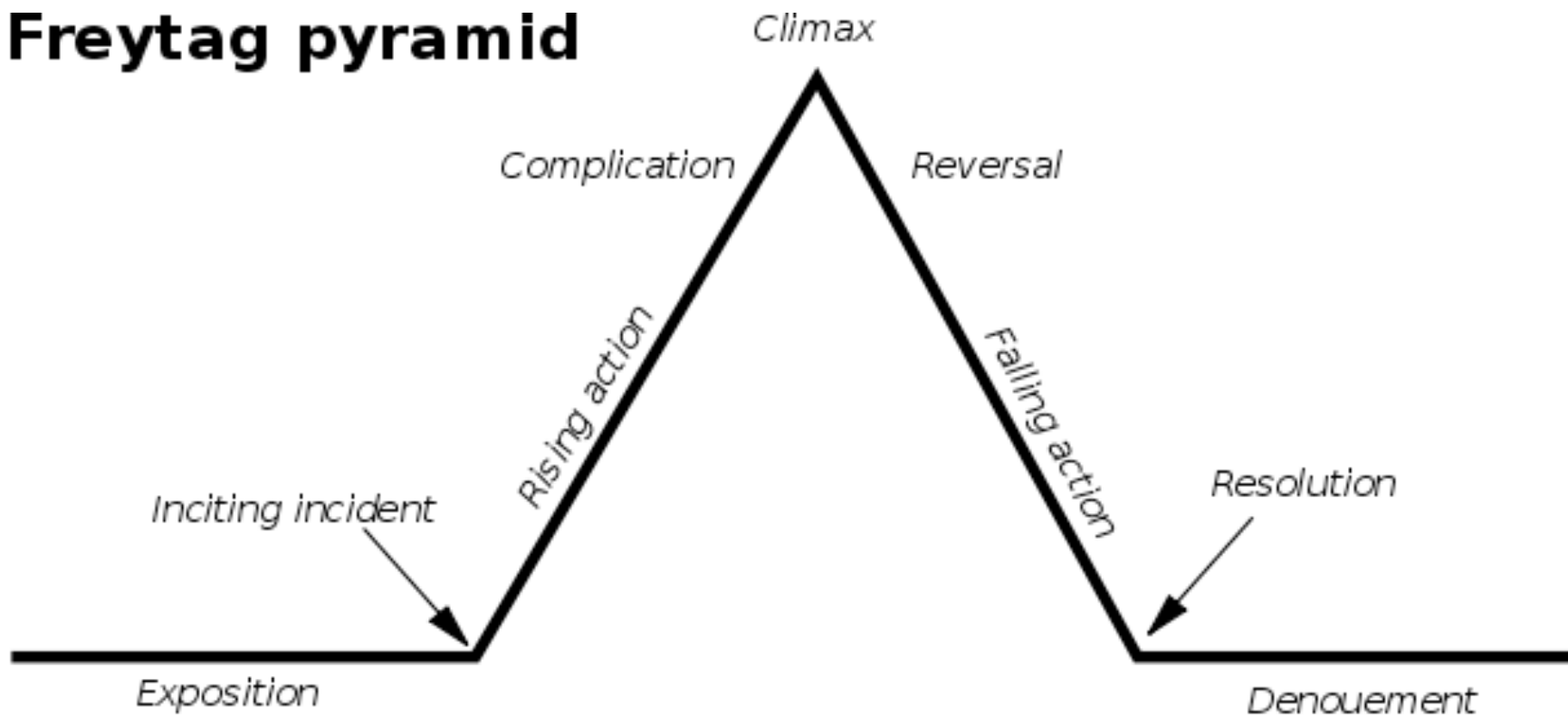
the structural framework that underlies the order and manner in which a story is presented to a reader, listener, or viewer



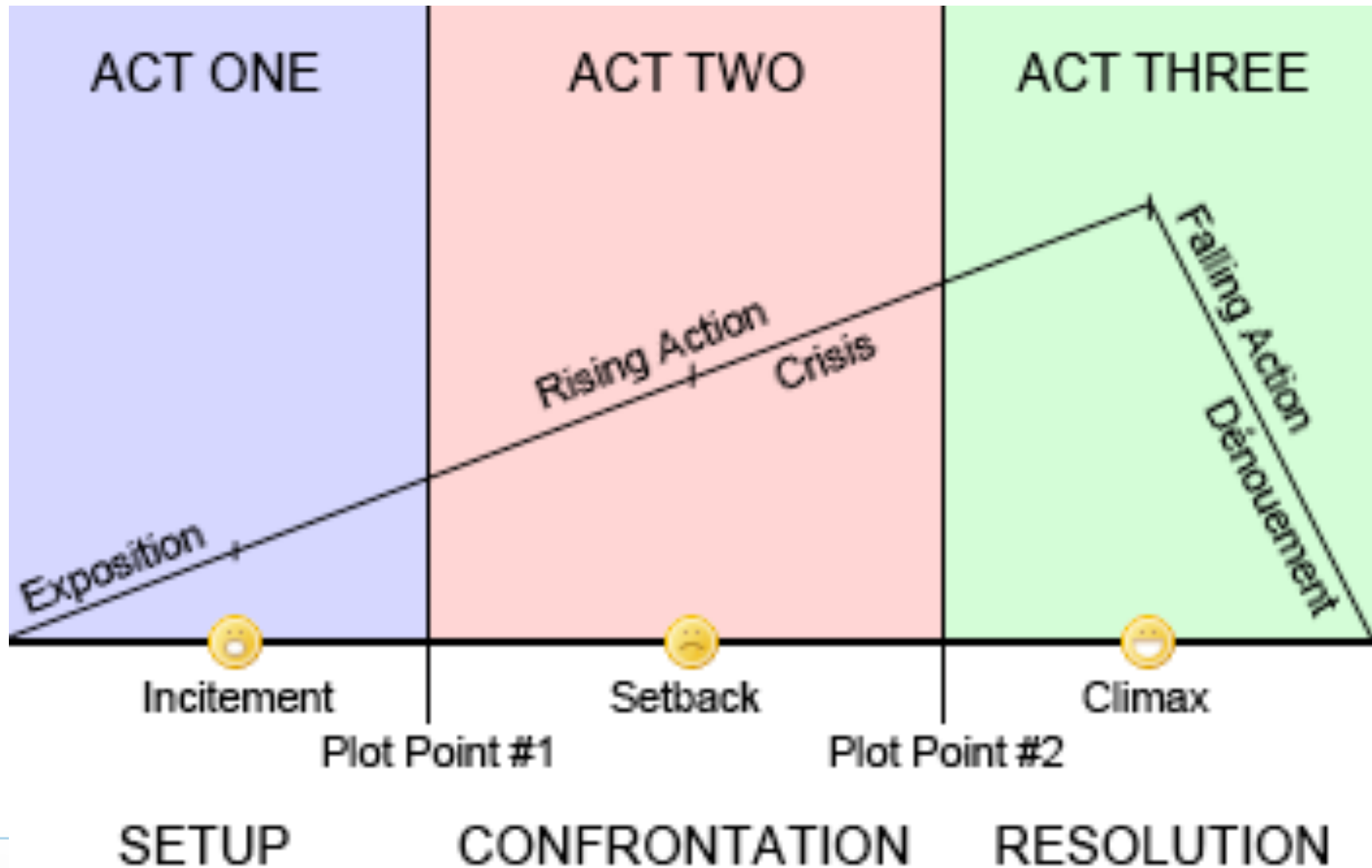
1. Every good story has a beginning, a middle, and an end.
2. The incidents that make up the plot are linked by cause and effect.
3. A story is about a “change of fortune” for the protagonist.

Plot Diagram

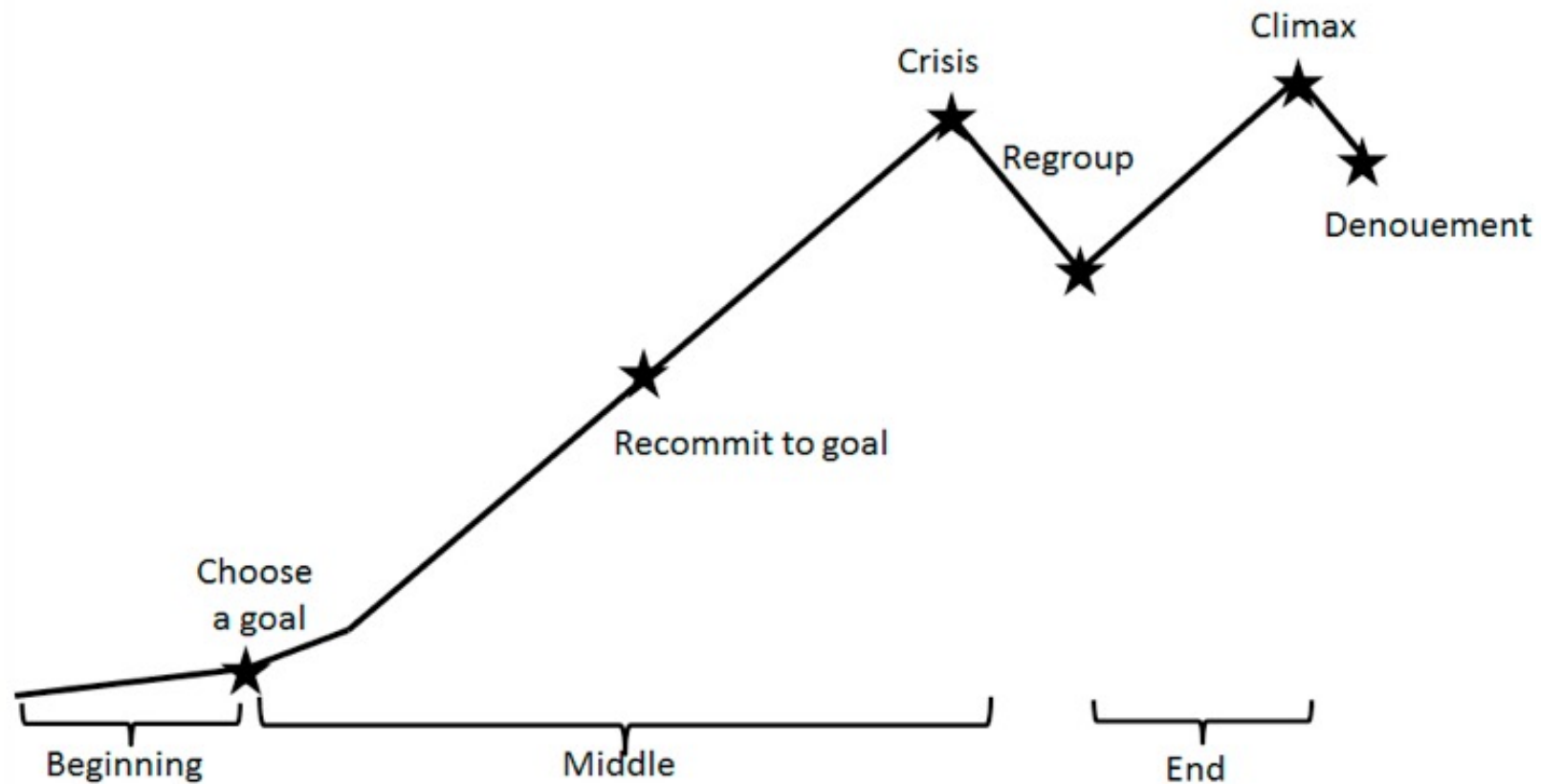
Freytag pyramid



Three Act Structure



Today's Story Structure



Story Planning / Plotting

- what's going to happen -

Plot is the sequence of events that happens in a story.

Story planning includes as many or as few plot points as work for you.

Methods for Story Planning

- Relationship Diagrams
- Index Cards
- Plot Diagrams
- Storyboarding

Story Planning Tools

- Save the Cat
- Hero's Journey
- Plotting Grid
- Scrivener

Scene and Sequel

Scene: something happens

Sequel: character responds

Scene vs. Sequel

A **Scene** has this three-part pattern:

- Goal
- Conflict
- Disaster

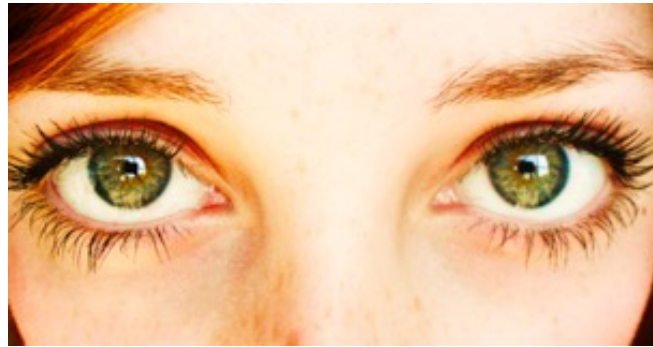
A **Sequel** has this three-part pattern:

- Reaction
- Dilemma
- Decision

Character

Why Do We Need Characters?

Readers see through character's eyes



It's all about...EMOTION

Characters make readers feel...and turn pages



Creating Characters

1. The Broad Stokes
2. The Fine Points

PART ONE: Broad brushstrokes

Defining your character's "TYPE"

Archetypes

Personality Types

Stereotypes

Archetypes

"ancient patterns of personality that are the shared heritage of the human race" Carl Jung

hero • mentor • trickster • chief • bad boy • best friend • free spirit

SOME

SOURCES:

Hero's Journey

Zodiac

Tarot

Gods & Goddesses

Native American Totems

Personality Types

“a collection of personality traits that are thought to occur together consistently, especially as determined by a certain pattern of responses to a personality inventory”

The Free Dictionary

perfectionist • ESFJ • observer • middle child • INTP • solitary

SOME

SOURCES:

Myers-Briggs assessment

Personality Disorders

Birth Order

Pop-psychology Quizzes

Stereotypes

“Stereotypes are generalizations, or assumptions, that people make about the characteristics of all members of a group, based on an image (often wrong) about what people in that group are like.” www.colorado.edu

nerd • jock • brain • dumb blonde • stoner • goth • company man

SOME
SOURCES:

Junior High
Sit-Coms
Comedians

PART TWO: Narrow brushstrokes

“Name, rank and Social Security Number”

“Tall Harvard grad in his mid-sixties seeking mature woman who likes walks on the beach, fine wine, and Dostoevsky”

“36-24-36”

Filling in the Details

| | | |
|------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------|
| Gender | Location | Personality traits |
| Name | Occupation | Favorites |
| Age | Family | Goals & dreams |
| Physical traits | Relationships | Fears & phobias |

BAINBRIDGE ISLAND



UC DAVIS
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA



Milestones

- Birth story
- Family
- Where resided
- Toddlerhood
- 1st day of school
- Sports & hobbies
- Siblings
- Friends
- Love interests
- Pets
- Landmark events



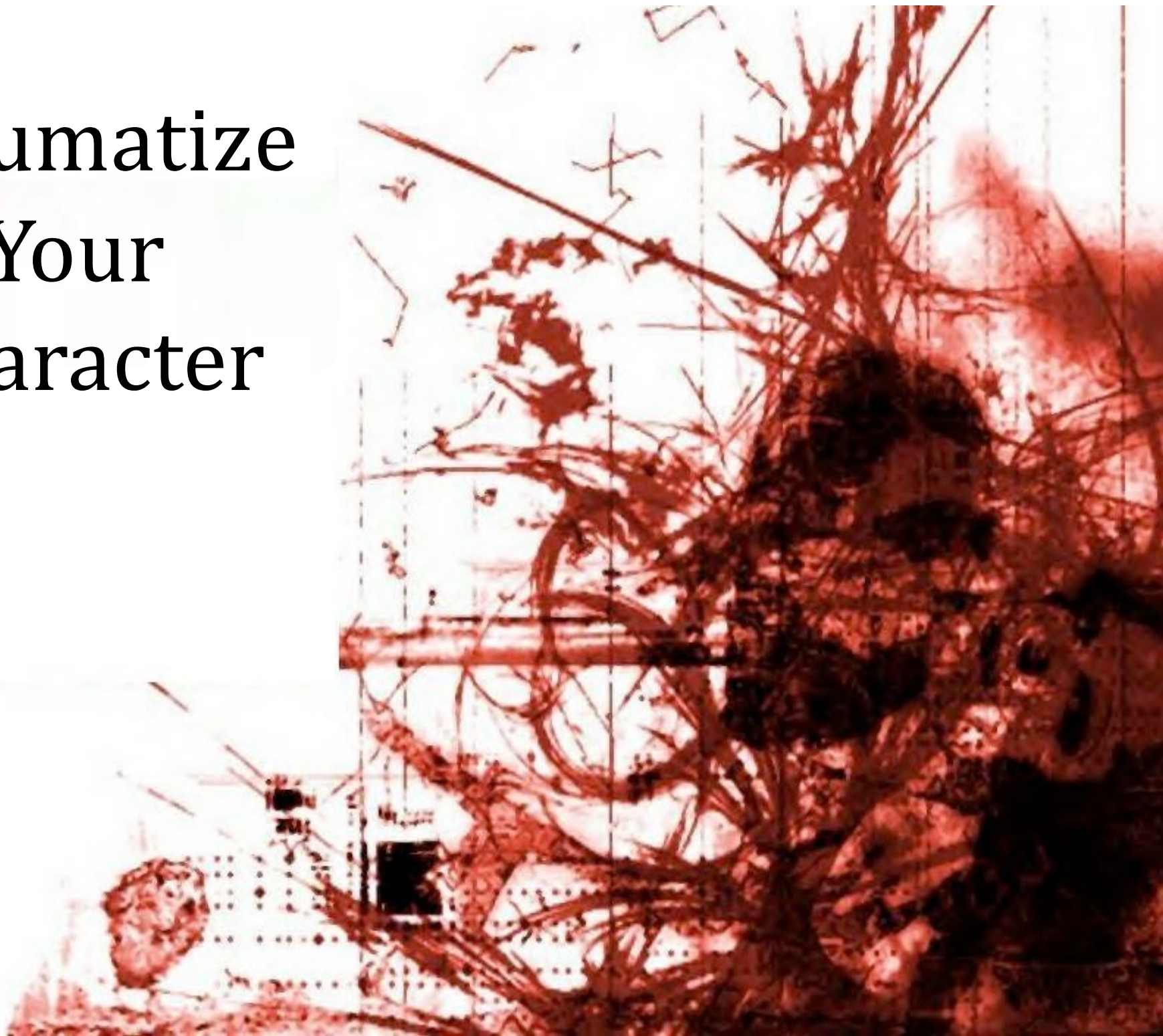
Timeline of Milestones

收养
Adoption



Use date for historical story, otherwise use age of character

Traumatize Your Character



How do we do all this for our own characters?

Research & Resources

- Tests, quizzes and analyses
- Pull from your own life (or friends')
- Interview your character
- Complete a character profile
- Find or create a visual representation
- Your imagination!

Naming

First, last, middle, nickname

CONSIDERATIONS:

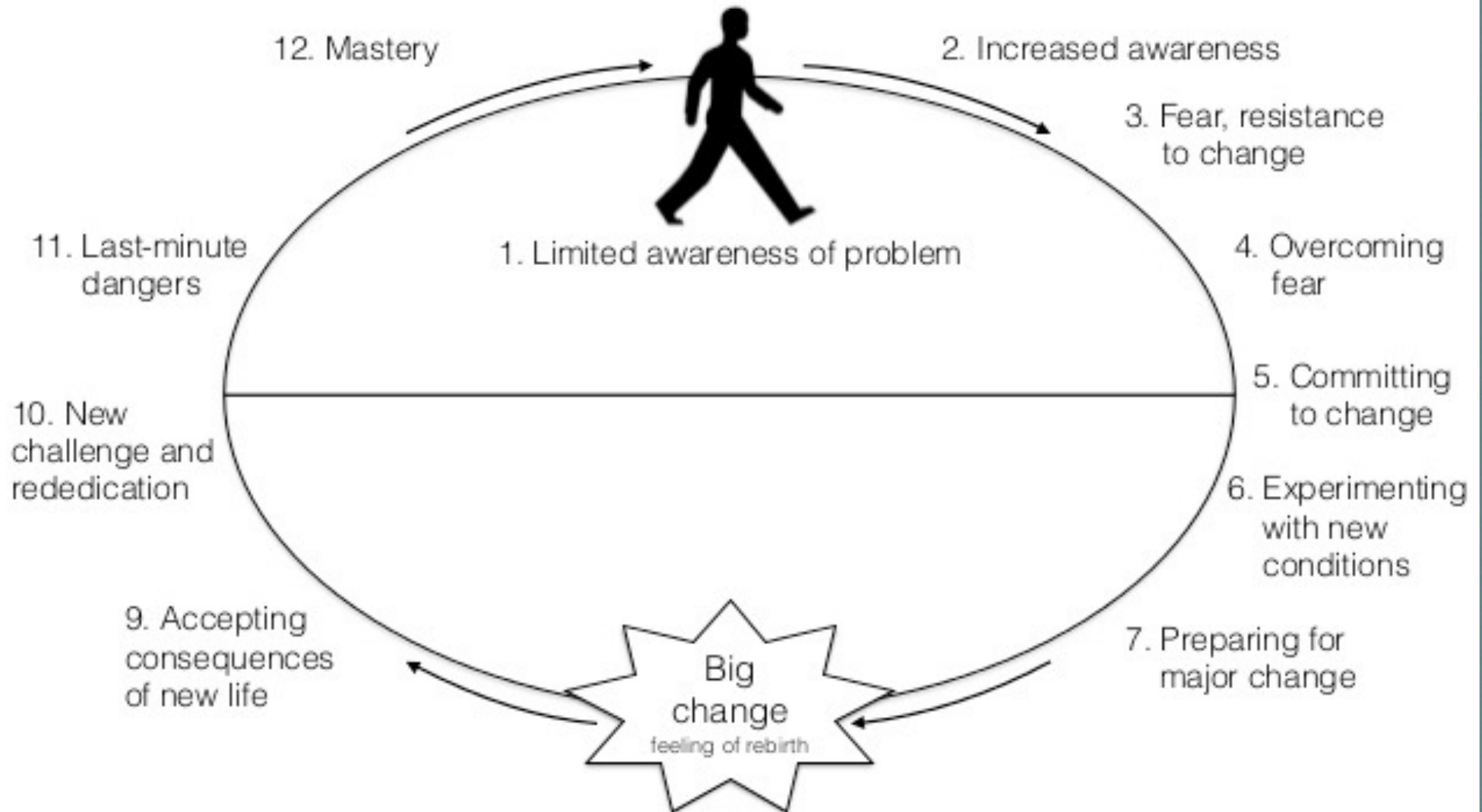
gender, ethnicity, etymology, connotations, meaning, era, genre, sound, length, pronounceability, how common, names of other characters

- choose an existing name
- use name generators
- create a name
 - typos
 - place names
 - verbs & other words
 - combos

The Character “Arc”

Growth or change in a character
over the course of the story

The Hero's Inner Journey



Conflict & Tension

Sometimes CONFLICT and TENSION
are used interchangeably –
but they are not the same thing

Definitions

Conflict: opposition, a problem, an opponent; it's what gets in the way of the character reaching his/her goal

Tension: mental or emotional strain; fear, worry; the *threat* of conflict

Tension is what the reader feels.

Creating Tension via Conflict

You want your reader to worry!

- Who will win?
- Who will lose?
- Who will be changed forever?
- What is the question or worry in the reader's mind?

Let the tension ebb, flow, and change, but not vanish

Point of View (POV)

Point of view is the perspective from which a story is told

It's the narrator's position in relation to the story

First Person

Second Person

Third Person

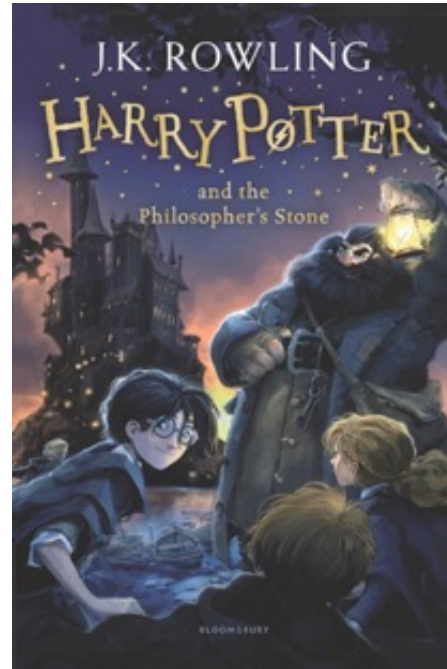
Third person limited

Third person omniscient

Different POVs

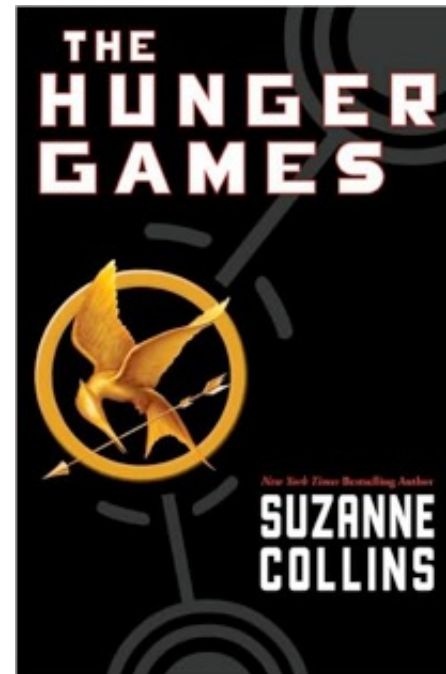
Third Person:

Harry ran home



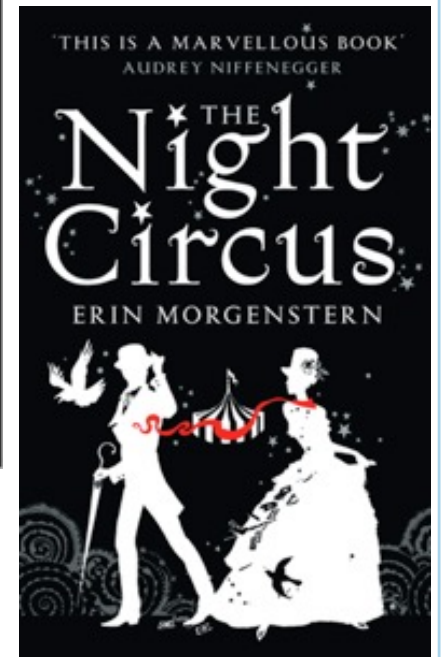
First Person:

I ran home



Second Person:

You ran home



POV: Distance

Third Person



Omniscient

Invisible Narrator

Limited

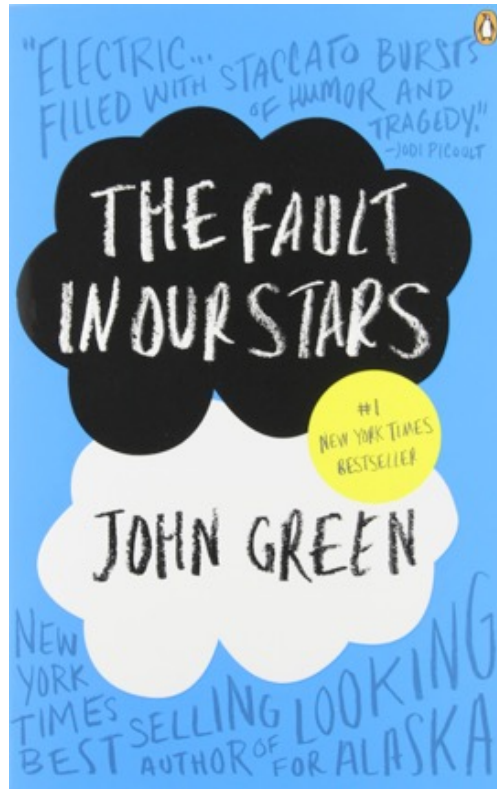
Close Third



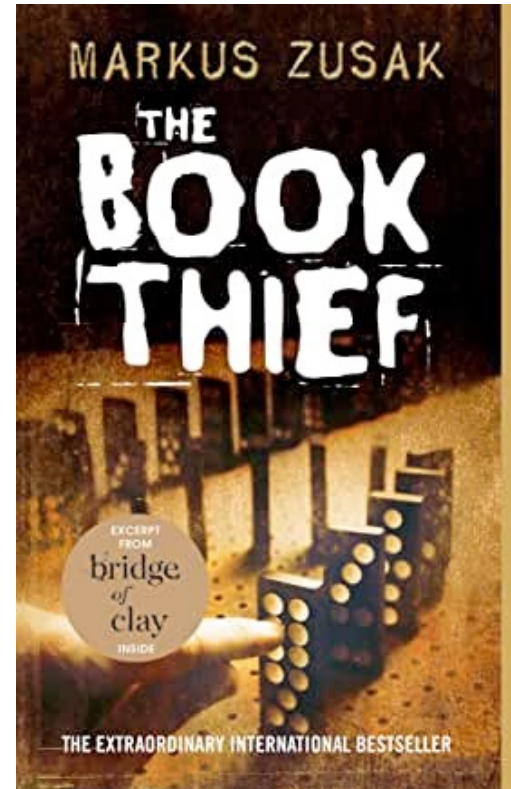
POV: Distance

First Person

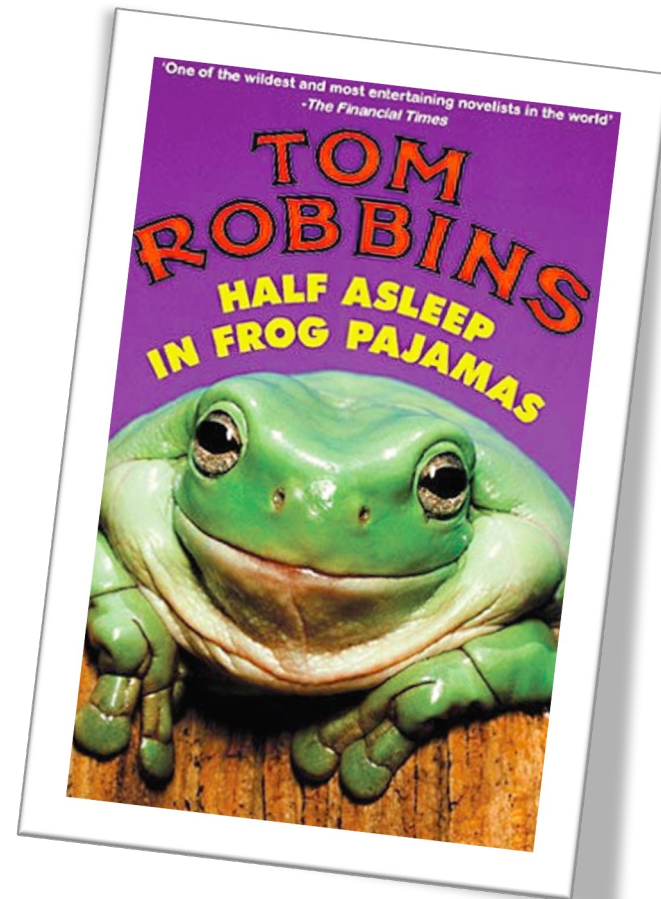
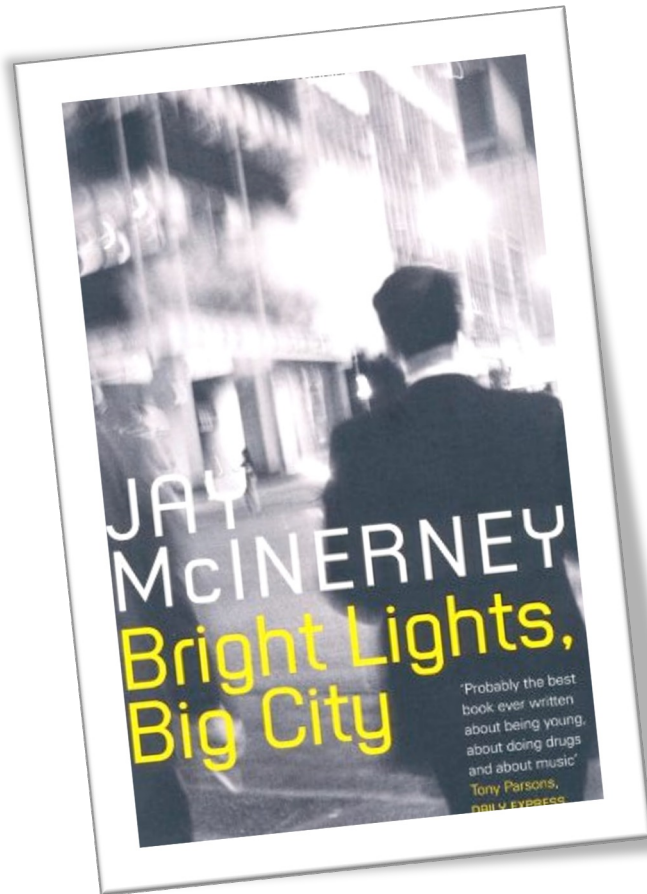
First person limited:



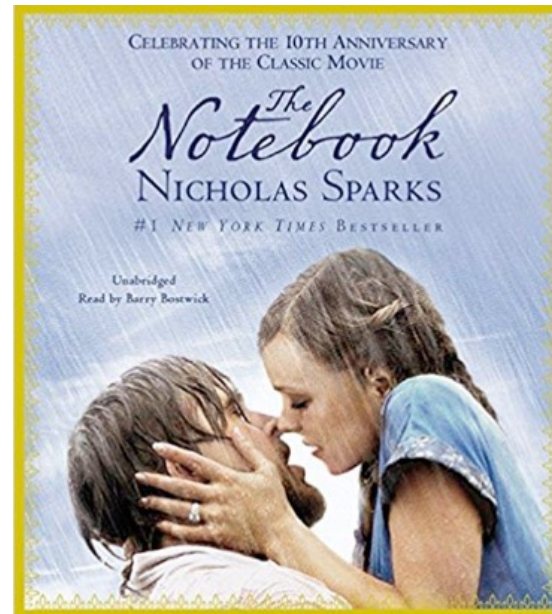
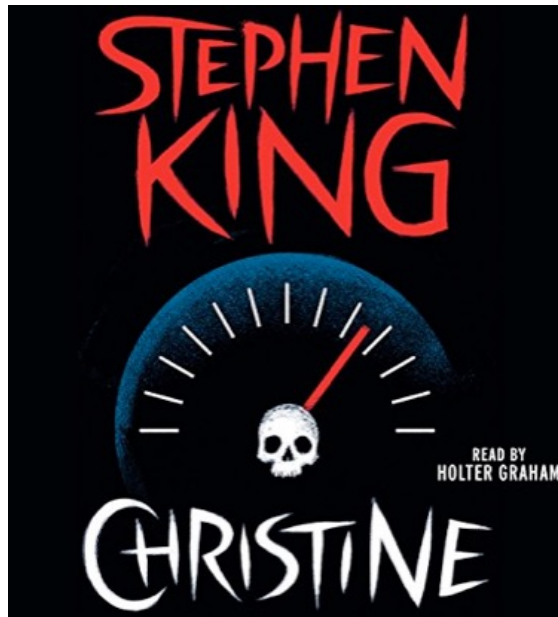
First person omniscient:



Second Person? Don't!



Mixing POV



POV Guidelines

Be consistent

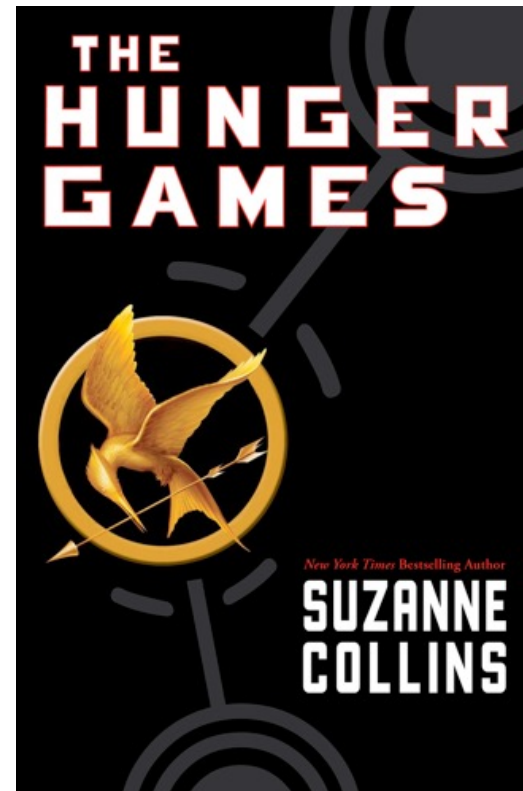
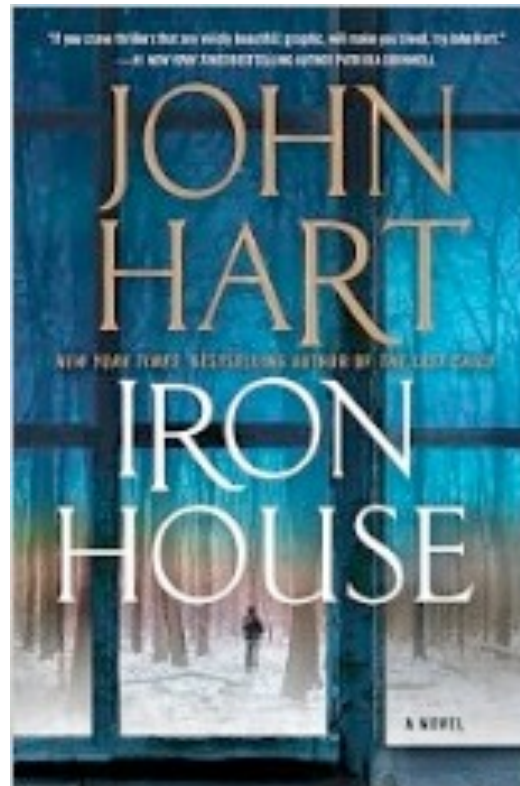
Don't mix POV in single paragraph

Learn the techniques by dissecting other novels

Start simple

Be consistent (yes, I'm repeating this)

Past Tense vs. Present Tense



Voice

- Voice is the author's style, the quality that makes his or her writing unique, and which conveys the author's attitude, personality, and character;
- Voice is the characteristic speech and thought patterns of a narrator;
- Voice is the style in which a character thinks and speaks

Blood on the Tracks by Barbara Nickless

The Burned Man

His life wasn't worth spit in a hard rain.

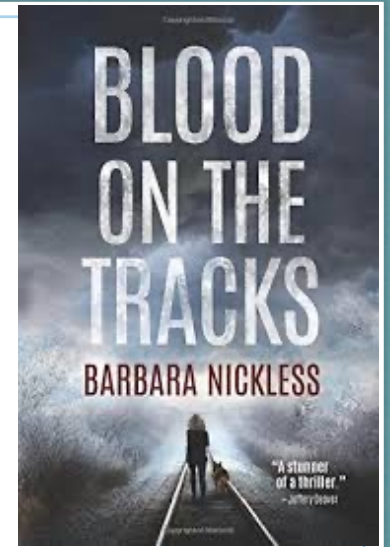
For two weeks he'd been camping under the 7th Street Bridge, smoking and dozing next to the slow roll of the Los Angeles River. Through the misery of dry-heat days and blue-neon nights, he listened to the roar of traffic overhead and wondered how a man could shed the perilous weight of memory.

Time and again, he imagined climbing the crumbling pylons of the bridge, folding his uniform neatly over the rail, and stepping naked onto the highway to let that roar take him down.

After fifteen days, and with his mind made up, he was standing on the bridge when his phone rang. His woman, calling from Denver.

"I miss you, Tucker. Please come home."

"I can't. Bad has filled every part of me. There ain't room for nothing else."

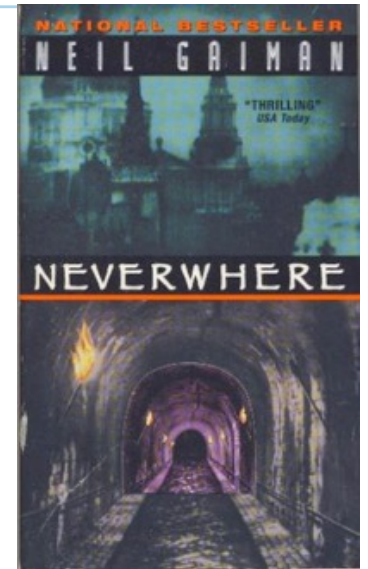


Neverwhere by Neil Gaiman

Prologue

The night before he went to London, Richard Mayhew was not enjoying himself.

He had begun the evening by enjoying himself: he had enjoyed reading the good-bye cards, and receiving the hugs from several not entirely unattractive young ladies of his acquaintance; he had enjoyed the warnings about the evils and dangers of London, and the gift of the white umbrella with the map of the London Underground on it that his friends had chipped in money to buy; he had enjoyed the first few pints of ale; but then, with each successive pint he found that he was enjoying himself significantly less; until now he was sitting and shivering on the sidewalk outside the pub in a small Scottish town, weighing the relative merits of being sick and not being sick, and not enjoying himself at all.



Voice

- Voice is the author's style, the quality that makes his or her writing unique, and which conveys the author's attitude, personality, and character;
- Voice is the characteristic speech and thought patterns of a narrator;
- **Voice is the style in which a character thinks and speaks: dialogue**

“A Word About Dialogue,” she said

- It must advance the story
- Use "he said" not "he commanded" or "said he"
- Or ... *don't*: drop the attribution or replace it with a beat of action
- Leave out pleasantries like "how are you"
- Don't tell your characters what they already know (*As you know, Jim*)
- Don't use adverbs; show emphasis IN dialogue or use action
- Ignore grammar: people speak in fragments and run-ons
- Match your character's vocabulary to his age, status, etc.
- Skip dialect spellings
- Read it out loud to yourself
- Have someone else read it out loud to you

Not Your Grandpa's Setting



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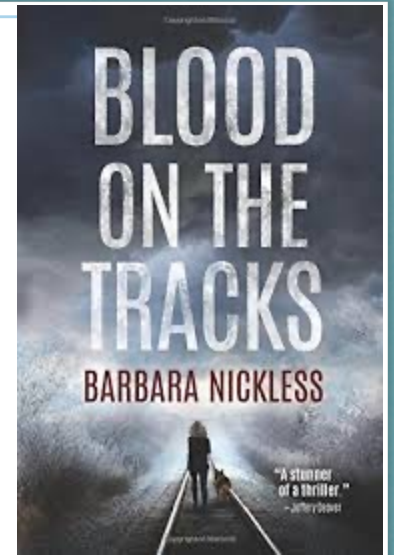
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SECOND PARAGRAPH:

For two weeks he'd been camping under the 7th Street Bridge, smoking and dozing next to the slow roll of the Los Angeles River. Through the misery of dry-heat days and blue-neon nights, he listened to the roar of traffic overhead and wondered how a man could shed the perilous weight of memory.

Blood on the Tracks by Barbara Nickless

The Burned Man

For two weeks he'd been camping under the 7th Street Bridge, next to the slow roll of the Los Angeles River through dry-heat days and blue-neon nights with the roar of traffic overhead.

Blood on the Tracks by Barbara Nickless

The Burned Man

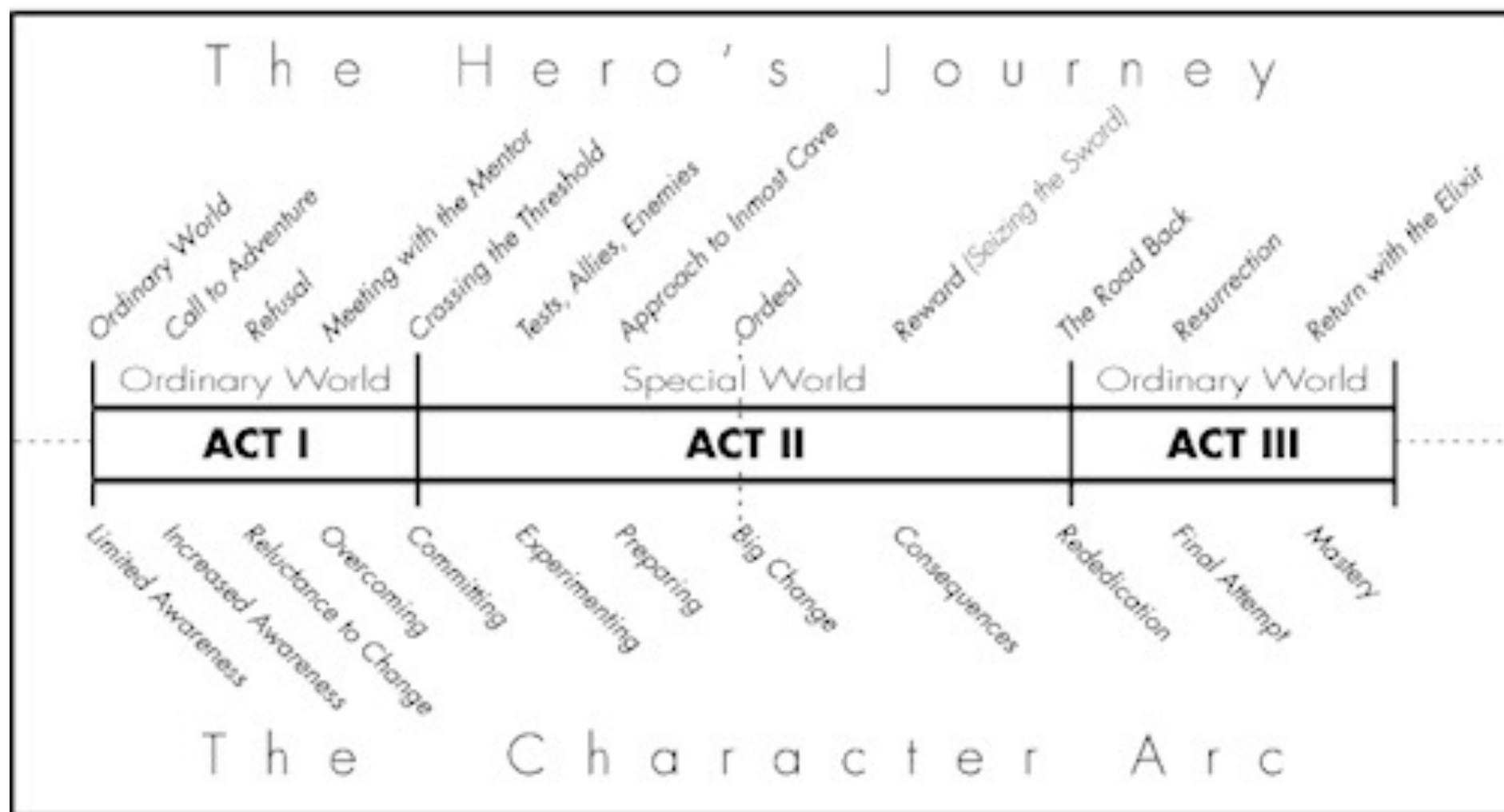
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Setting Tips

- Weave plot, character, and setting together
- Make setting integral and important to plot/character
- Sprinkle in setting details
- Choose one salient detail rather than a laundry list
- Limit repeating/reminding your reader

Connecting Character to Plot

Christopher Vogler "The Hero's Journey"



GMC: Goal, Motivation & Conflict

Book: GMC by Debra Dixon

| GMC for: _____ (character) | | |
|----------------------------|----------|----------|
| | External | Internal |
| Goal | | |
| Motivation | | |
| Conflict | | |



STORY

Before Editing:

- Complete a draft first – all the way through!
- Put ms away for awhile (like a month)
- PUT ON YOUR EDITOR HAT

Editing and Revision

Editing vs. Revising

Revising

- At the global level: revamping, redrafting, and changing the writing to get the story right
- Re-vision
- Big picture
- The writer does this

Editing

- Honing the prose, voice, pacing, and other details
- Detail oriented
- Can involve others

Revision Tips and Techniques

- Do revisions in layers/stages
- Show, don't tell (mostly)
- Use active verbs
- Use strong verbs
- Search and destroy
- The missing scene
- The unnecessary scene
- The boring scene
- Boring writing

Common Problems of Beginning Writers

- Overwriting
- Not editing out unnecessary stuff (nodded her head)
- Trying to provide mystery but creating confusion instead
- Failing to advance the plot with each scene
- Overusing adverbs and adjectives
- Overusing attributions other than "said"
- Unplanned or messy POV changes
- Not stopping the book when the conflict has been resolved
- Not giving characters flaws
- Not having characters grow and change
- Using too many conjunctions (but, however, then, and)
- The old tried-and-true story
- Not having a clear understanding of genre expectations
- Starting in the wrong place

Starting in the Wrong Place

- Start at the "mattering moment"
- There should be a goal and conflict, even if it's just a bridging conflict
- Set up what is necessary; not backstory or flashback
- Start *in media res*: in middle of a scene
- DELETE "throat-clearing" -- warming up, explainery
- Use as little description, exposition and explanation as necessary
- Weave together character, setting and plot/tension

The Sweet Spot

Don't open too early before moment of change

Don't open too long after moment of change

The Bridging Conflict

The temporary conflict
or mini-problem
or interim worry
that makes
opening material matter

The Golden Compass by Philip Pullman

One: The Decanter of Tokay

Lyra and her daemon moved through the darkening hall, taking care to keep to one side, out of sight of the kitchen. The three great tables that ran the length of the hall were laid already, the silver and the glass catching what little light there was, and the long benches were pulled out ready for the guests. Portraits of former Masters hung high up in the gloom along the walls. Lyra reached the dais and looked back at the kitchen door, and, seeing no one, stepped up beside the high table. The places were laid with gold, not silver, and the fourteen seats were not oak benches but mahogany chairs with velvet cushions.

Lyra stopped beside the Master's chair and flicked the biggest glass gently with a fingernail. The sound rang clearly through the hall.

"You're not taking this seriously," whispered her daemon. "Behave yourself."

Her daemon's name was Pantalaimon, and he was currently in the form of a moth, a dark brown one so as not to show up in the darkness of the hall.

"They're making too much noise to hear from the kitchen," Lyra whispered back. "And the Steward doesn't come in till the first bell. Stop fussing."

But she put her palm over the ringing crystal anyway, and Pantalaimon fluttered ahead and through the slightly open door of the Retiring Room at the other end of the dais.

Things NOT to start with:

- Adjectives and adverbs
- Coincidence, contrivance, cliché
- More characters than necessary
- One character alone
- A dream
- Traveling
- Waking
- The most dramatic moment of story

The old beginning...



Goals of First Page:

- Hook reader with wanting to know something (plot)
- Ground reader in space and time (setting)
- Engage reader emotionally (connect to character)

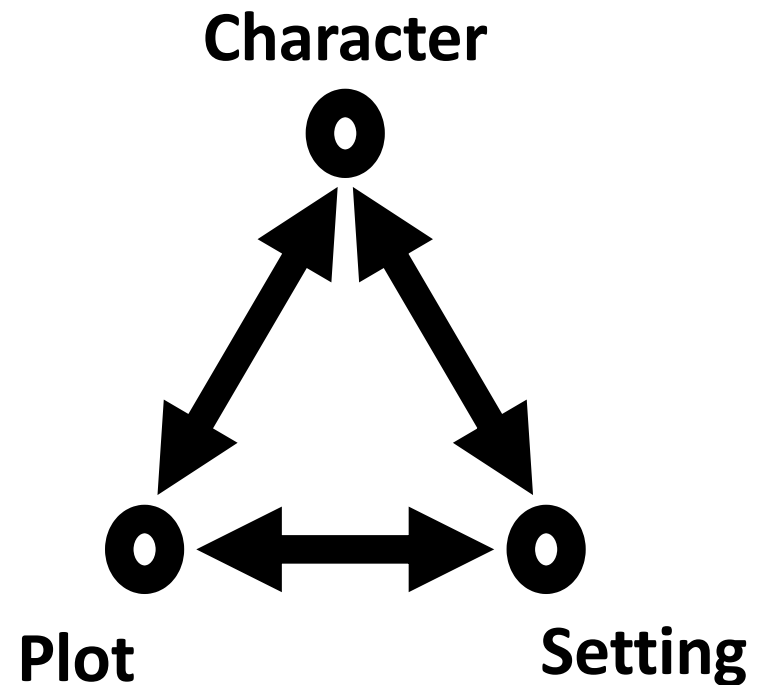
First Page Elements

- Setting
- Character
- Plot/Conflict
- Tension
- Genre indications
- Foreshadow ending
- Hook
- Voice

and a great first line

First Page Elements

- **Character**
- **Setting**
- **Plot/Conflict**
- Voice
- Genre
- Tension
- Foreshadow ending
- Hook
- Great First Line



The Hunger Games by Suzanne Collins

Chapter One

When I wake up, the other side of the bed is cold. My fingers stretch out, seeking Prim's warmth but finding only the rough canvas cover of the mattress. She must have had bad dreams and climbed in with our mother. Of course, she did. This is the day of the reaping.

I prop myself up on one elbow. There's enough light in the bedroom to see them. My little sister, Prim, curled up on her side, cocooned in my mother's body, their cheeks pressed together. In sleep, my mother looks younger, still worn but not so beaten-down. Prim's face is as fresh as a raindrop, as lovely as the primrose for which she was named. My mother was very beautiful once, too. Or so they tell me.

Sitting at Prim's knees, guarding her, is the world's ugliest cat. Mashed-in nose, half of one ear missing, eyes the color of rotting squash. Prim named him Buttercup, insisting that his muddy yellow coat matched the bright flower. He hates me. Or at least distrusts me. Even though it was years ago, I think he still remembers how I tried to drown him in a bucket when Prim brought him home. Scrawny kitten, belly swollen with worms, crawling with fleas. The last thing I needed was another mouth to feed. But Prim begged so hard, cried even, I had to let him stay. It turned out okay. My mother got rid of the vermin and he's a born mouser. Even catches the occasional rat. Sometimes, when I clean a kill, I feed Buttercup the entrails. He has stopped hissing at me.



CHARACTER – direct

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CHARACTER - indirect

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SETTING

Chapter One

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I prop myself up on one elbow. There's **enough light** in the **bedroom** to see them. My little sister, Prim, curled up on her side, cocooned in my mother's body, their cheeks pressed together. In sleep, my mother looks younger, still worn but not so beaten-down. Prim's face is as fresh as a raindrop, as lovely as the primrose for which she was named. My mother was very beautiful once, too. Or so they tell me.

Sitting at Prim's knees, guarding her, is the world's ugliest cat. Mashed-in nose, half of one ear missing, eyes the **color of rotting squash**. Prim named him Buttercup, insisting that his muddy yellow coat matched the bright flower. He hates me. Or at least distrusts me. Even though it was years ago, I think he still remembers how I tried to drown him in a bucket when Prim brought him home. Scrawny kitten, belly swollen with worms, crawling with fleas. **The last thing I needed was another mouth to feed**. But Prim begged so hard, cried even, I had to let him stay. It turned out okay. My mother got rid of the **vermin** and he's a born mouser. Even catches the occasional rat. Sometimes, **when I clean a kill**, I feed Buttercup the entrails. He has stopped hissing at me.

PLOT/CONFLICT

Chapter One

When I wake up, the other side of the bed is cold. My fingers stretch out, seeking Prim's warmth but finding only the rough canvas cover of the mattress. She must have had bad dreams and climbed in with our mother. Of course, she did. **This is the day of the reaping.**

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HOOK

Chapter One

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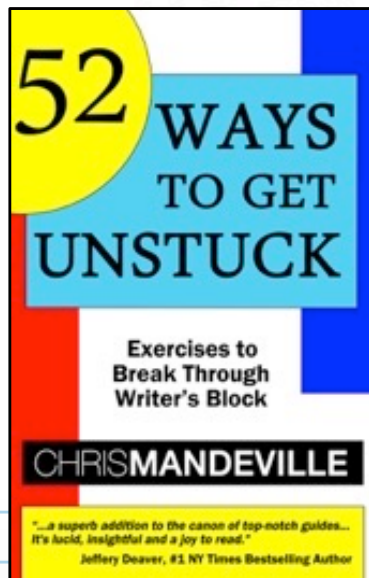
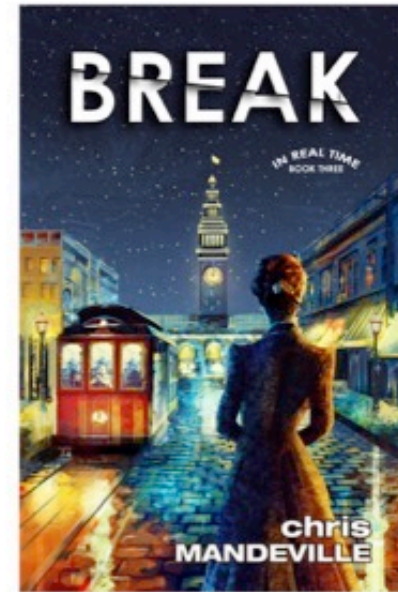
Enlist Help

- Critique Groups
- Paid Editing
- Contests
- Workshops
- Conferences
- Reading

Final Tips

- Write!
- Keep learning
- Keep reading
- Keep trying
- Write *new* stuff!

IN REAL TIME



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