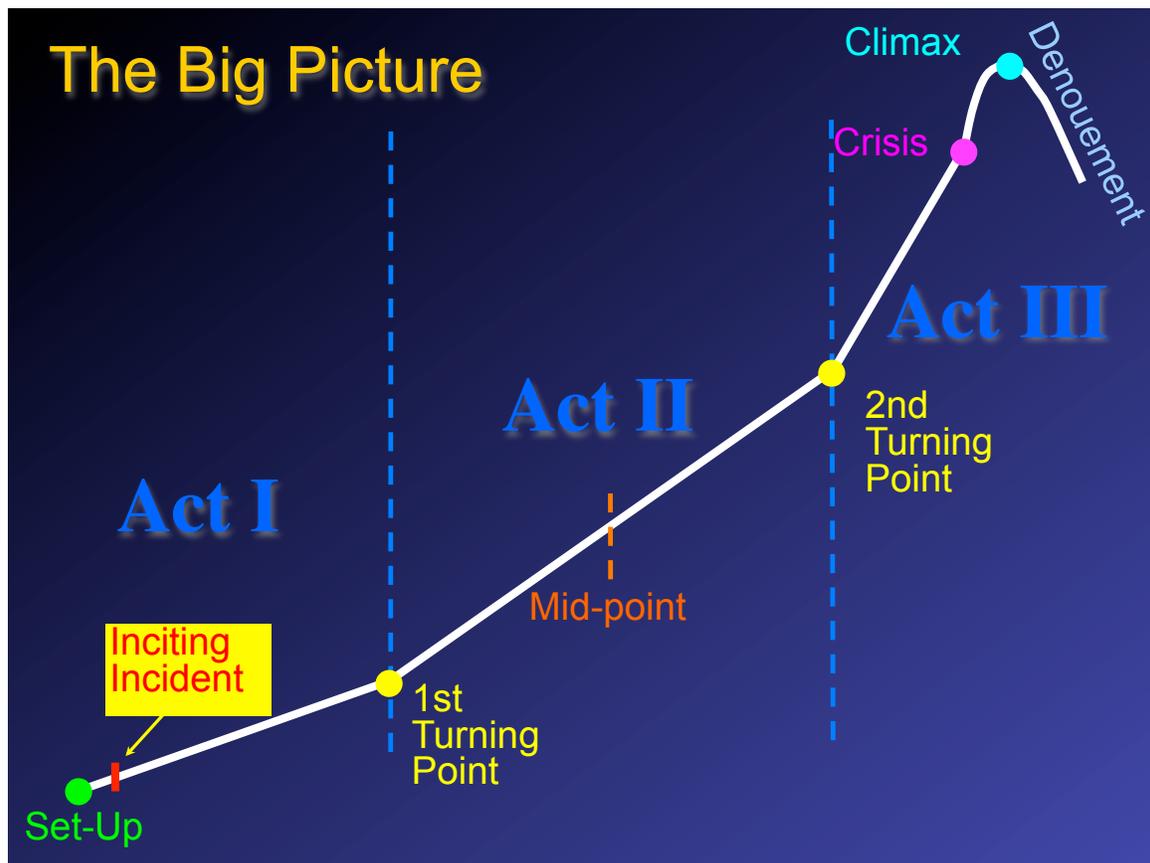


Week 3: Outlines, or The Road Map of Your Story

Reading: <http://wisdomhomeschooling.com/images/courses/creativewriting/conflictandplot.pdf>



Every story has three parts: a Beginning (Act I), a Middle (Act II), and an End (Act III). As the plot progresses, the dramatic tension rises.

The Set-Up

The set-up gives vital information at the start of the story.

- Who are the main characters?
- What is the story about?
- Where is the story located?
- Is it a comedy or drama, history or tragedy?
- What is the time period, duration (story time), location (physical setting or geography), and level of conflict (man vs. man, man vs. himself, man vs. environment)?

Catalyst, Unbalance, or Inciting Incident

The catalyst upsets the balance in the protagonist's life. It arouses in the main character a desire to *restore balance*. It causes the inception of an object of desire. It propels an *active pursuit* of this object or goal.

First Turning Point

The first turning point is often where the main character must make a choice to *accept* the mission or quest thrust upon him by the inciting incident. Thus, the central question or conflict of the story must be present. It brings him into a new world, where what was

normal before no longer exists. It therefore propels the action in a new direction and raises the stakes.

The Midpoint

This is the middle of your story. At the midpoint, your main character has done everything in his own power to achieve the goal—he has gotten as far as he can *under his own steam*. But he has not had to change in any substantial way. Often the midpoint is a sort of “false ending” where it seems like your hero has failed (a false defeat) or succeeded (a false victory). The key is that he still has to learn his lesson.

Second Turning Point

The second turning point comes at the end of the “middle” and leads us into the “end.” It again raises the central question of the story. At this point, the stakes are even higher than they were at the first turning point and the main character usually makes a choice. The action of the story speeds up as we get closer to the climax or crisis.

Crisis

This is the moment of ultimate decision. This must be present in your story. It must also be a true dilemma; your character must have a real and difficult decision to make. The crisis reveals the story’s most important value or meaning—and the protagonist’s true character.

Climax

Your character makes the decision. He resolves the problem. He answers the question. The protagonist overcomes the obstacle in his way and finally achieves what he set out to do—or he does not overcome the obstacle, but has gained a new perspective on the problem and on life itself. He may not even want what he originally set out to do anymore.

Resolution, New Balance, or Denouement

The resolution ties up loose ends. It can show the effects the climax has on the world or characters of your story. It shows what the new balance, or the new normal of the world looks like.

Outlining Myths

Contrary to what you might think, outlining a piece of fiction does not stifle creativity. Rather, it lets creativity blossom within the structure you have created. If you figure out your story, or the bones of your story, before you begin writing—the writing will come much easier. Additionally, your end result will be stronger for following the structure of classic storytelling.

Remember that you are not locked into the outline once it is written. The outline is merely a road map to help keep you on the right path—but sometimes you will want to take a detour, or you will realize that your outline itself took a detour from the main story. As you are writing your short stories you will discover that some things you planned work and some things do not. You have the freedom to make changes.

Homework

Develop your five sentences into a fleshed-out outline of your story, filling out each of these headings: (1) Set-Up, (2) Catalyst, (3) First Turning Point, (4) Quest Part 1, (5) Midpoint, (6) Quest Part 2, (7) Second Turning Point, (8) Crisis, (9) Climax, and (10) Resolution. Write a paragraph for each. Start with the skeleton and then fill in the details. Use your imagination. Think of as much as you can that *happens* in your story. No detail is too small or too weird. Aim for 2-3 pages double spaced.