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YOUR BIG IDEA

Original vs. Unique:

There are a few things to understand about a fictional book. Certainly, it is a long, drawn-out lie meant to entertain and twist us into knots that keep us turning pages until it's unknotted. Fiction is like all art... very subjective. That means art is based on personal preferences. However, one thing that can be said for certain is that **there is no such thing as coming up with an original storyline**.

Don't worry, it's okay. There are only so many possible storylines, for example, boy meets girl, someone travels through time, a stranger comes to town, a guy sets off on a noble quest, and so on. Therefore, don't worry about coming up with an original story idea. **What you are looking to write is not something original but something unique**.

To understand the difference, look up each of these words and write the definition here:

Original:

Unique:

Creating a unique story is taking a storyline that has already been written before and putting your unique spin on it. It will be different from the original because of the characters you create and how you write, and the twists and turns you put in the story. In other words, you are telling the same old story in a cool new way.

You can do that by adding a twist to an old tale. Cinderella is one of the best examples. Scholars disagree as to exactly how many versions of the popular fairy tale exist, with numbers ranging from 340 to over 3,000, including picture books and musical interpretations.

Whether your story is an adaptation of a classic story or a unique version of a typical plot, it must be filled with characters we care about doing things we could only dream of. They will face giants and legends and get defeated and come back bruised, but not destroyed. Remember that your readers are kids. They have vivid imaginations. To a kid, the line between reality and imagination is pretty blurred. You can create amazing and fascinating stories that will be sure to keep your readers hooked page after page.

This workbook will guide you through all the steps to help you craft amazing characters and unique situations that will be sure to thrill your readers. Let's practice taking something borrowed and turning it into something new.

Choose three famous or classic stories and write a plot idea that puts a new twist on them.

Story - _____

New Plot Idea:

5

The Cost

Growing up I remember watching television shows. Back then there was no such thing as streaming movies over the internet. Television (TV) stations were all we had and unlike today's variety of cable stations, the selection was limited.

One show my dad loved was Star Trek and we all watched it every Saturday night since it was the only TV in the house. Yes, it was normal to only have one television.

In the "old days" of Star Trek, the actor William Shatner played Captain James T. Kirk and the original series aired in 1966 for three seasons. When I was a kid in the early 80s, they only played reruns of the series. However, they soon began making Star Trek movies and even a television series recreation Star Trek; The Next Generation in 1987.

To get the point I am going to make, you need to understand that the original Star Trek was so popular that a total of twelve movies and six spin-off television series have been made. The series' followers were referred to as "Trekkies" and even held conventions for the fans to dress up and attend.

One of the most iconic things from the original 1960s show was Captain Kirk's chair on the bridge of the Enterprise. It was not a marvel of design, but it's where he sat for all 79 episodes. It was iconic. When you thought of Captain Kirk, you thought about him sitting down in his captain's chair, giving out orders to his crew or making life and death decisions.

In 2002, Paramount Pictures decided to sell that chair and a Trekkie fan picked it up for a mere $304,750! Now, I don't know what year it is when you are doing this workbook, but at the time of that Trekkie's purchase, that money would have bought you a decent sized home in the city.

Was Captain Kirk's chair worth almost $305,000? Most would say, "No, it's not!" But you would be wrong. The chair was worth that much. Why? Because someone was willing to pay that much for it. One of the most basic rules of a capitalist society is that an item's value is the highest amount someone is willing to pay for it.

In a story, the cost of the story goal is what the hero is willing to "pay" for it. This is the suffering. **The true value of the story goal is best determined by what your hero is willing to suffer, or "pay," to attain it**. In the popular series *The 39 Clues* by Rick Riordan, siblings Amy and Dan Cahill endured tremendous suffering from violent, yet distant family members as they raced around the world to track down hidden clues and inherit their beloved grandmother's fortune. They were willing to pay a lot to get that inheritance, and to keep it out of the hands of their greedy relatives.

Let's review again what the element of conflict is...

> **Conflict - The ways we suffer**
>
> Conflict is a part of every story because it is a part of life. Without conflict, there is no value in achieving your story goal. In fact, there must be many conflicts, bigger and more elaborate ones. Conflict causes suffering. The hero must suffer and in kind, the reader will suffer right along with him. Suffering is a part of life and one that every human can identify with. Why? Because there must be a cost to attaining the story goal. Suffering helps us to value the achievement that much more. What is it that fitness gurus preach? No pain, no gain.

Suffering is the key to establishing value. Just allowing your hero to be yelled at or cut his finger will not cut it. There are deeper levels you will have to reach for there to be actual suffering to the point that your readers will suffer with your hero. That is crucial so readers can be extremely happy and relieved when he attains the story goal.

External Suffering:

External suffering is when your hero suffers because of something that happens to him physically, from an outside event. Pain is a fundamental part of being human, which means that it's a fundamental part of storytelling. Consider the following example:

> *The blast from the bomb ripped through the crowd. The pain shot up her leg like fire. It went through her entire body. It exploded in her head and made her dizzy. The pain was like needles that had been heated in the fire and been jammed through her skin.*

Ouch right? External suffering is more common in adventure novels like you are writing because they are based on action. Generally speaking though, it is also present in most novels of any type. It is part of being human.

Most of what the hero will suffer will be a result of his own choices. He suffers because he made a decision that should bring him closer to the story goal but it brought consequences instead. He gets punched in the nose because he fights the bully to protect the new kid at school. He is shoved down a flight of stairs by the castle guard as he tries to escape. Everything has a price and suffering is the price to be paid.

External suffering is the same as physical suffering. It might not be as emotionally moving as internal suffering, but it is a consequence of taking risks and fighting the bad guys. It is important not to overdo physical suffering so that it loses its impact.

Physical suffering is not always a result of an injury. If your hero has to ride a horse all day to escape the bandits trying to rob the stagecoach and it's his first time on a horse, I promise you he will be in a lot of pain. He will probably not be able to sit down for days. If you have ever been caught in the snow without gloves or a hat, and your socks get wet, you will understand how horrible that can be. You can even die if you are out in it too long.

It is best to think openly about different types of suffering before committing to flying arrows or falling down the mountainside. Look at the storyworld and the situation and choose the right type of suffering to support that scene.

Go back to the main events list you created in Unit II (double check for Unit 2) and review the list. Now you will brainstorm possible physical suffering that your hero may have in some of those scenes.

Below, you will write the list item and include potential physical suffering as a result. Remember, suffering will build up towards the climax and will not be in every scene, so choose wisely.

EXTERNAL SUFFERING

EVENT

SUFFERING

EVENT

SUFFERING

EVENT

SUFFERING

Determine the Meaning of the Words Using Antonyms in Context

Directions: Underline the antonym of the word in **bold** in each paragraph.

1. When Milo first arrived in the city of Eron on Planet Dashiren, he could not believe this ghastly place would be his home for the next year. But a few days later, he was delighted when he discovered an **alluring** garden in the center of the city.

2. All the food on the space station was synthetic, designed to provide healthy nutrition for decades. While Kat knew it was a very **pragmatic** approach to feeding her people, she also knew it was unrealistic to believe they'd enjoy the mushy texture and bland flavors.

3. As the slimy creature slithered past Jose, he expected it to smell as **noxious** as it looked. But the scent that floated off the creature was shockingly as fragrant as a bouquet of roses.

4. Delania tried to think of ways to make her **adversaries** into friends. Their initial encounter had been awkward and tense, but she believed they could find common ground to work together.

5. Rather than ignore year's worth of hard work, patience, and compromise, the visitors and citizens of Dashiren gathered to **commemorate** the one-year anniversary of the visitor's arrival on the planet. As they offered gifts to each other, they acknowledged how far they'd come in their partnership.

6. The leaders of the Baku and Venesti colonies had acknowledged the treaty indicating the boundary line between the two settlements. But soon after, the inhabitants of the Baku colony announced that they **repudiated** the deal and would move forward with plans to build a solar farm on Venesti's territory.

7. There was nothing ambiguous about Sandrine's reaction when she found out they were moving to Planet Dashiren. Just to make sure her feelings were absolutely **explicit,** she wrote her parents a long letter explaining why she thought this was a terrible idea.

1

Chapter 1 The Inciting Incident

In his book, *Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting,* Robert McKee offers this explanation, "The Inciting Incident radically upsets the balance of forces in your protagonist's life." Basically, it is an incident that will push your hero into the main action of the story and lay the foundation for the story goal.

Before the inciting incident, your hero most likely lives a normal or ordinary life. It may be drab or lacking significance, but it should be fairly normal. After the incident in Chapter 1, nothing is the same for your hero. Every story must start with something critical that affects everything else that follows it.

You can think of your story as a long line of dominoes and the Inciting Incident is the push on the first domino that gets it all rolling.

The inciting incident serves many purposes; First, it hooks the reader. This is essential. Even the first sentence should cause the reader's eyebrows to raise. In the book *Frindle,* Andrew Clements opens with, "If you asked the kids and the teachers at Lincoln Elementary School to make three lists - all the really bad kids, all the really smart kids, and all the really good kids - Nick Allen would not be on any of them." That is interesting. Why is Nick Allen not on any of those lists? The reader wants to know more.

The first line, first paragraph, and even first page will set up the inciting incident and answer the reader's initial questions about what kind of story this will be. Will it be worth reading? Is it going to be boring? Who is the hero? Will I like him? These are all questions that must be answered in the first few pages and be firmly established by the end of Chapter 1.

You can approach the inciting incident in different ways. Here are a few methods that work with adventure novels:

A problem - A devastating storm, an invading army, or the death of a beloved king under suspicious circumstances while his derelict wastrel of a son waits to seize power. The problem must have huge consequences for it to be an inciting incident and it must have some bearing on the hero, his family and friends, or all mankind.

A fight scene - Hand-to-hand combat, a sword fight, or a heated verbal argument. This can involve the hero or someone close to him. It can be in the aftermath of a large disaster such as a devastating tsunami and the scene opens with mass hysteria and suffering, with people fighting to get to higher ground; pushing and shoving others, even to their death just to save their own lives. Again, your hero

needs to be in this scene, but it's best not to make him push and shove others aside to save himself.

A new arrival - Imagine alien ships lowering through the clouds into the atmosphere to hover over the Golden Gate Bridge or a new kid shows up in the neighborhood but there is something very wrong with him. The new arrival will have a significant role in the story and is often the villain, but can be the hero that arrives in enemy territory.

The guiding principle to your inciting incident must be change. Regardless of how you start your book, the inciting incident should be known as the day everything changed. The effects of the incident must be intolerable. It must be the change that forces the conflict and starts the shifting of snow on the mountainside that becomes the avalanche of the Epic Battle. Notice I said intolerable, not devastating. We can live with devastation, but the mere definition of intolerable tells us that there is no avoiding the issue. If the hero can avoid the problem, and the reader will see that he can, then there is no story. The inciting incident must create an intolerable situation for the hero so he must act.

You will end up with a reluctant hero or an eager one. Both will not be quite ready to embrace the story goal just yet, but you are setting them up. On the next pages, you will brainstorm your inciting incident.

INCITING INCIDENT WORKSHEET

What is the inciting incident ?

How will hero react?

What are negative consequences?

Is he going to be a reluctant hero or an eager hero?

Notes

1

The Art of Minor Conflict

The middle chapters of a fiction manuscript often pose a significant challenge for writers, earning the moniker “the messy middle.” This phase typically occurs after the initial story setup and introduction of characters and conflicts but before the climactic resolution.

It’s a critical stage where the narrative momentum needs to be maintained, yet most writers find themselves grappling with a lack of direction or even writer’s block. Many novels falter here, and it’s a common place to lose reader interest.

The first thing to do is to check your storyline. You can do this by revisiting your general sketch or novel outline. You can reassess your initial plot points, character arc, and story elements to ensure that you are getting the most out of them. Often, deviations from the original plan occur during the writing process, leading to confusion or inconsistencies that show themselves in the middle chapters. By revisiting your outline, you can regain clarity on your story’s trajectory and identify areas where the story may have veered off course.

If you are still on track, then there are a few things you can do to build up the saggy middle. You can try introducing new subplots that inject fresh energy into the narrative and push it forward. These subplots can serve to deepen characterization, introduce new conflicts, or provide thematic resonance. However, it’s essential to ensure that these additions are integrated seamlessly into the main storyline and contribute meaningfully to the overall narrative structure.

As we spoke about in a previous section, subplots should complement the central plot while still having their own story goal and conflict. Think back to the woven tapestry I discussed in Unit 4. Weave these subplots in so that the final product is a beautiful work of art.

Minor Conflict:

Two of the key aspects of a good novel are conflict and tension, which we have discussed at length. The idea is to give your character(s) a want or even better, a need. Then, write scenes with obstacles that frustrate or deny that need. That is what keeps readers turning the page. You can do that with minor conflicts.

Minor conflicts are vital in fiction because they add depth, energy, and realism to your story. While the main story plot may revolve around significant, high-stakes conflicts, it's the accumulation of smaller, more personal struggles that infuse your story with nuance and tension. These smaller conflicts not only provide opportunities for character development, but also offer readers a glimpse into the intricacies of human nature.

It is important you understand that minor conflicts are not main plot conflicts directly related to the story goal. Rather, they are smaller conflicts that rise up from obstacles you will place in the way, most often between specific characters. By navigating through these smaller obstacles, characters reveal their strengths, weaknesses, and inner complexities, allowing readers to empathize with their struggles on a more intimate level.

The messy middle is the ideal place to weave in these minor conflicts. I mentioned that minor conflicts often deal with character's desires as well as their relationships with other characters. With that being the case, the minor conflict map is the perfect tool for you to brainstorm, create, and keep track of these minor conflicts.

When I was struggling to bring more tension into a chapter book that I was writing, I realized it was because I did not have enough minor conflicts. After I tried this exercise, it opened up a whole new world of conflict possibilities and lifted my sagging middle. It works almost the same as a basic character map.

1. Draw two empty circles. Then, connect them with two arrows, one pointing in each direction.

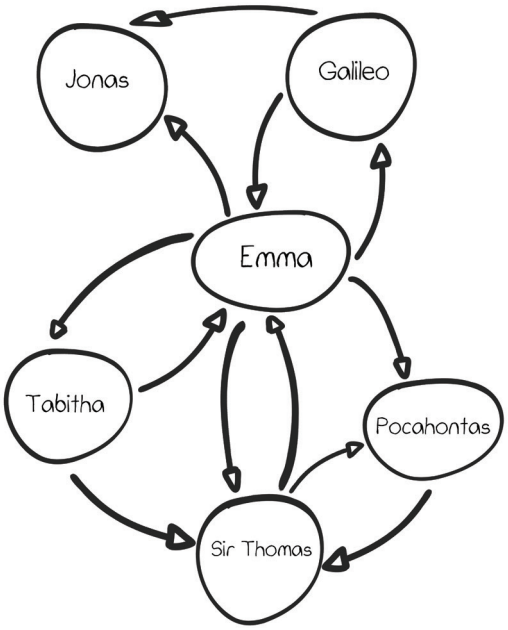
2. Now, decide which two characters have a story relationship, and the nature of that relationship: best friends? Unwilling alliances? Siblings? Boyfriend and girlfriend? Strangers? Whether human, alien, or animal, every character has multiple relationships.

3. Once you've done this, on the arrow extending from Character A's bubble, write what they want from Character B. It can be physical or internal and it does not need to be that significant to create conflict. I've listed a few common ones here. Characters can have both physical and internal needs within the same relationship, especially for main characters.

Physical: an item; a hug or smile; for Character B to go away, join, or serve Character A (in some capacity).

Internal: trust, respect, allegiance, approval, skills, knowledge.

4. Then, consider what the Character B might want from Character A. Write it on their arrow going back.



Use this want/need list to create obstacles and conflict preventing each character from getting what they want.

Because your characters' relationships to one another can be so diverse and vary quite a bit, **I have simply provided blank space for you on the next page to generate your own map.** Your finished result should look something like this as a general layout (but with want/needs filled out on the lined arrows):

Use these minor conflicts to weave in greater depth to your story—especially through the messy middle. Just remember that not every need or want between characters will be satisfied. Your main character may never get a hug from his mentor and your sidekick might not get the approval she seeks from another member of the gang. That is okay.

You will know which conflicts make sense to resolve and which should be left unsatisfied. As long as they prop up the main story goal, your saggy middle will be in fit shape in no time!