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## Story Goal

The story goal is the driving force behind the plot of your adventure novel. It's what the hero wants or needs to obtain. For example, in *Star Wars Episode IV A New Hope*, it was to destroy the Death Star. The hero is working toward one end, to achieve the story goal and that is the fuel to the engine that moves them forward.

Let's review what the story goal is:

### **Story Goal - Something we want**

What does your hero want? This is referred to as the story goal. The story goal is what the hero ultimately wants to happen in the end. Perhaps what he wants to change or gain, or in many cases, to take back. It is the driving force behind every thing he does and it's what the reader expects to happen at the end. Achieving the story goal is what completes the heroic quest. The reader will identify with your hero and willingly take the journey right along with him. It is important to fully develop this area so that the reader wants it as much as the hero does.

You will need to understand that the story goal is not necessarily the first desire or motivation your hero has. In some cases, your hero must go against what he wants in the beginning in order to reach the story goal. In the *Mandolorian* series, Mando goes from job to job just trying to earn a buck. He is a loner and wants to stay that way. When he comes into contact with the plight of the endangered baby Yoda, he changes tactics. He becomes the personal protector of this wee green cutie against the Empire who will stop at nothing to get their hands on him.

The contrast between what the hero desires for himself and what the story goal is can make for a compelling story where the hero personally suffers for the greater good. The hero will obviously accept the challenge and save the world, but it doesn't mean he started there.

Remember that the goal of all stories is to create an emotional experience. To plan out a noble quest for your character to embark on and your reader to care about, you need to understand the story goal in terms of need and want. Your character will pursue the story goal based on both external goals and internal needs.

Answer the following questions:

What does your hero want to happen at the end of the story?

Why do they want that?

What is the obstacle to that goal? (The villain or opposing force)

## The Mentor

Obi-wan to Luke, Gandalf to Frodo, Grandpa Joe to Charlie, Albus to Harry; all famous mentors we are familiar with. If the hero has something to learn, he must learn it from somewhere. Events may teach the hero lessons, but typically in an adventure story, it is a person that comes alongside and teaches the hero about his situation, himself, and life. That person is the mentor.

A mentor is a character specifically created to prepare the hero for the mental, physical, or emotional hurdles he will face in his journey. He helps the hero overcome an inner conflict to achieve the story goal. He will help unlock the new world for your hero and therefore, can be an integral character in your story.

If your hero doesn't already have the knowledge, skills, or determination needed to complete his mission, creating a mentor can be a great way to keep your story moving forward and make the hero's ultimate success more realistic. It helps the reader believe the simple country farm boy really can turn around to save the kingdom from the evil prince in less than 12 chapters.

Please note, this is your story and you do not have to include a mentor in it. There are many stories where the hero can achieve the story goal without an experienced guiding hand. That being said, if you decide to include one, make sure that the mentor truly serves a purpose.

Author Kristin Keifer shares her ideas for ways mentors can assist the hero and further the story goal:

**THEY CAN SHARE A LITTLE WISDOM** - Making mistakes is a hallmark of any hero's journey. Fortunately for your hero, it's likely the mentor has been in his shoes before and can offer a little wisdom to help him better navigate his struggles.

**THEY CAN SAVE THE DAY** - Your hero will probably find himself in a tough situation more than once throughout your story. To give him the tools he needs to overcome, a mentor can lead by example, helping your protagonist out of a bind early in your story's plot.

**THEY CAN PROVE THE VILLAIN IS EVIL** - To showcase the consequences of the villain's abilities and desires, a mentor can serve as a story's sacrificial lamb, prompting the hero to actively engage in overcoming the villain. Think of Aslan in the *Chronicles of Narnia*.

**THEY CAN GUIDE THE WAY** - If your hero finds himself on new terrain, who better to serve as a physical guide than one with knowledge and experience of the landscape? Allow your mentor to lead the way!

**THEY CAN TEACH THE HERO NEW SKILLS** - Whether it be a physical skill or a new body of knowledge, let your story's mentor be the one to teach the hero exactly what he needs to know to keep moving forward.

**THEY CAN DISH OUT SOME HUMILITY** - Your hero will win some and lose some, but early success can poison his perspective. Fortunately, a mentor can pop your hero's ego bubble and put him in the proper mindset to tackle any obstacles in his journey.

**THEY CAN PROVIDE ENCOURAGEMENT** - With wisdom and experience on his side, a mentor can offer the kind of encouragement that has the power to push through your hero's mental roadblocks and set him back on the path to success.

Use the following worksheet to brainstorm the mentor character if you think you will be using one. Skip this step if you are absolutely certain you will not have a mentor.





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# Elements of Story

There are five elements to every story and you are going to work on them before you ever write a single page of your middle grade book. These are commonly known as setting, character, plot, conflict, and theme. And while tradition holds that these are present in every story, we are going to look at these a little bit differently.

Just knowing you need a character is not going to give you that interesting character like Junie B. Jones that we covered in the previous unit. You must create a real human being. The reader then likes him and even identifies with him. He is someone to care about.

This method of identifying the five elements in a more personal way comes from author Daniel Schwabauer. He has done an excellent job at helping young authors relate to these elements and create better stories as a result.

With this in mind, let's talk about some of the elements from this deeper perspective. From previous lessons, you will understand that a plot is essentially a blueprint for your story. It is what organizes the rising action and final resolution. At its core, **the plot tells us what to include in the book but not**

**why a reader would care.** Why the hero wants to save the village is where the real story is. Therefore, instead of "plot" we will discuss the third element of our list in terms of a story goal, or something we want.

Taking this approach will allow you to stop just thinking about a character, and instead become the character. The elements of your story need to be more personal. Let's look at the five elements from a motivational aspect:

## **Setting - The world we live in**

Setting is far too often minimized as primarily the location and time of your story. This is only a fraction of the value of this element because the setting really encompasses the entire storyworld. Setting helps us understand the characters and their lives, the culture - how people dress and speak, their history and what motivates them. The storyworld is deserving of attention and planning because it touches every single aspect of your story, it is present on every page and in every situation.

## **Character - A hero we care about**

Often referred to as the "protagonist," your hero is so much more. He is a human being,

with habits, desires, fears, quirks, weaknesses, strengths... all of the things that make us identify with him and therefore, care about him. Creating a truly dimensional character is the backbone of your novel. If readers don't care about your character, don't like or identify with him in any way, then they won't care about any of the story. In fact, the story goal or other characters, the epic battles, or falling in love - none of this will matter if readers don't care about your character.

### **Story Goal - Something we want**

What does your hero want? This is referred to as the story goal. The story goal is what the hero ultimately wants to happen in the end. Perhaps what he wants to change or gain, or in many cases, to take back. It is the driving force behind everything he does and it's what the reader expects to happen in the end. Achieving the story goal is what completes the heroic quest. The reader will identify with your hero and willingly take the journey right along with him. It is important to fully develop this area so that the reader wants it as much as the hero does.

### **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.

### **Theme - The lesson we learn**

The lesson that the hero learns, and in many cases, learned by all the primary characters, may seem trivial or unimportant when weighed against the other elements. In most cases, it is treated as a sub-plot. But what gives a story actual substance are the lessons that are learned. In the absence of a moral arc, your story will be mere fluff and will not strike a chord deep inside the reader. This is because at our core, we are all born with an innate sense of right and wrong. We expect every story to recognize that human condition and share in the journey we travel in order to learn those lessons.

Now that you understand the five elements a bit more, let's explore each one as we dig deeper into our premise and develop more of our story outline.

# 7

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## Chapter 5 The Middle of Nowhere

Chapter 5 continues Act 2, also referred to as part of the messy middle. This chapter comes after the new world journey begins and yet is still a way off from our next key chapter (Chapter 9). Therefore, it is important that you not rest and allow a lull in this section. You have hooked the reader, and he is geared up and ready to save the world with your hero. So, what's next?

Chapter 5 is where we start to look at the ups and downs of the heroic quest. The hero will pursue a short-term goal that will move him a step closer to the story goal but he will encounter an obstacle or problem. This will most likely be a disaster that causes him to reevaluate his plan or even the entire process. He might want to quit, but he doesn't. He forms a new plan and acts on it.

You must allow your hero to occasionally make progress towards the story goal so that even though he loses often, he still wins. That being said, even when he wins, he goes from the frying pan into the fire. This is the time where his commitment is tested in small ways, repeatedly. This can be anything from an argument that creates dissension in the ranks to a raid on the enemy's camp that fails.

What you need to establish in Chapter 5, and every chapter in the messy middle, is where this chapter is going and what needs to happen to get it there. You can also look at it this way: **What does the hero want and what gets in his way?**

Despite all of the failures your hero will face, it is important that you do not make him appear stupid or completely incapable. The actions he takes need to be somewhat clever, even if he fails. This means that if he gets taken captive by the villain, it's not because he decided to run into the enemy camp late at night carrying a torch and making noise.

Your hero will have to fail, just do it in a way to avoid making him do "stupid" things unless there is a specific reason for it. Like in the example above. If the hero had to raid the camp to get the treasure map away from the villain, so he lit the torch and scrambled around in front of them to get their attention and distract them from his gang sneaking around the other side to get the map, then it's okay if he gets captured. He was brave, not stupid.

Your hero can still do dumb things for the right reasons. To save someone or to make up for a wrong he did, are understandable reasons. They will not cause an emotional separation between reader and hero like plain stupidity will.

# RESEARCH WORKSHEET

Research Topic \_\_\_\_\_

KEY INFORMATION

STATISTICS & DATA

LANGUAGE & SLANG

Notes

Website Resources Used

# WORLD BUILDING WORKSHEET

Location \_\_\_\_\_

Brief description

What are the people/culture like?

How is the climate & terrain?

Describe using 5 senses

What do people do all day?

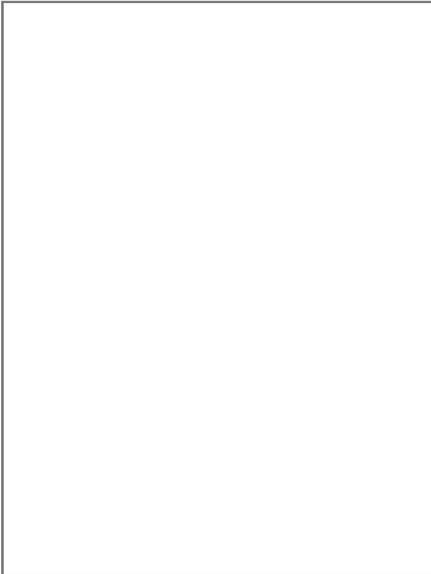
Website Resources Used

Notes

# CHAPTER KEY ELEMENT PLANNER

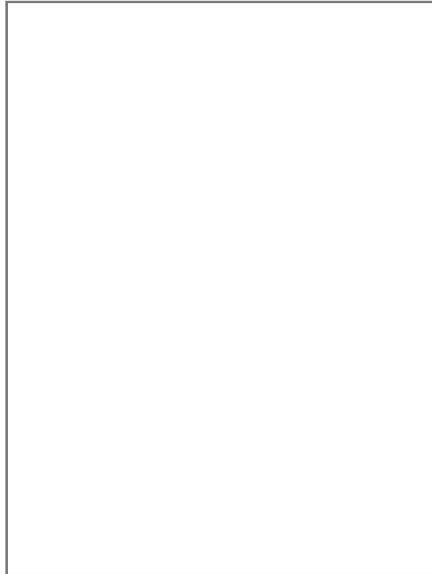
## Goal

What does the hero want at the beginning of the chapter?



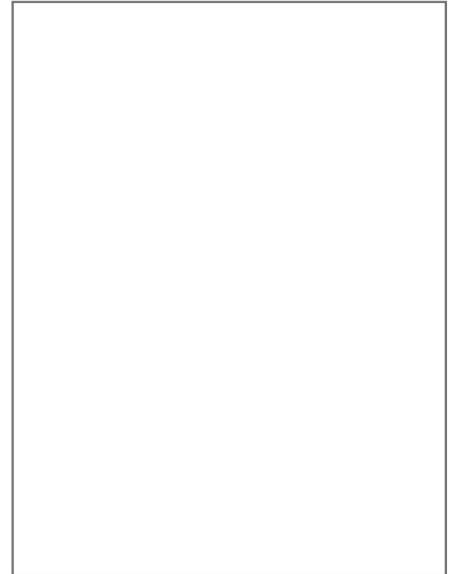
## Conflict

What stops him from achieving his goal?



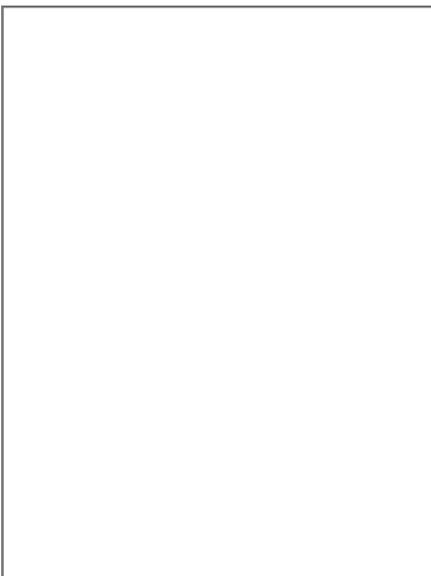
## Disaster

What happens & how does the protagonist end up worse than before?



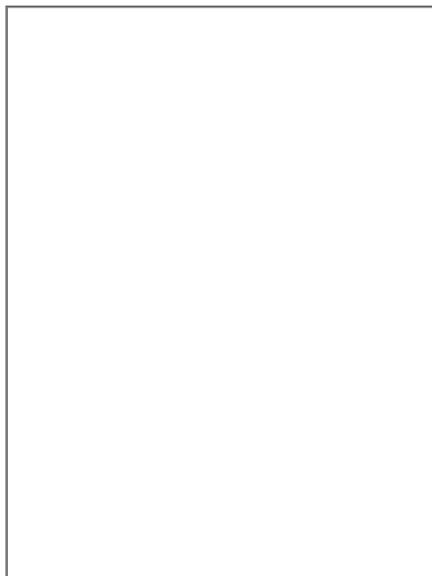
## Reaction

What does the hero react emotionally? + or - ideals?



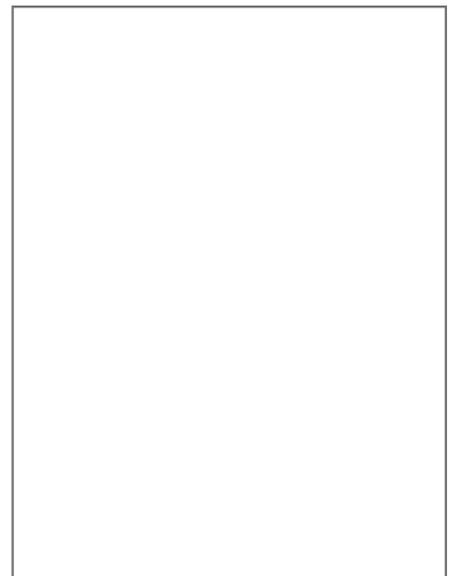
## Dilemma

What possible options are available at the hero?



## Decision

What does the hero decide to do? (what is his new path?)



# CHAPTER TIMELINE

Note the main events in this chapter.

Include general time event occurs (day/night, etc), duration (how long), location, and characters involved.



Subplot / Foreshadow Introduced

Subplot / Foreshadow Resolved