

3-Act Story Structure

It's time to outline your novel in detail! Last week we covered how to bring your main character to life, and this week we're going to start putting everything together with the 3-Act Story Structure. (By the end of today, you'll be dying to start writing your first draft!)

The 3-Act Story Structure is a very common writing technique for plotting stories that are both plot and character-driven. It keeps your story on track by ensuring a continual flow from the beginning, middle, to end while constantly defining the plot in each part while allowing the character to develop every step of the way. I never write a book without it and never will! At the end of the day, why reinvent the wheel? The best part of the 3-Act Story Structure is that it's compatible with every genre! No matter the genre (or multiple genres), the 3-Act Story Structure will perform as the perfect machine to build your entire book. The 3-

Act Story Structure gives your plot meaning while making your characters come alive to connect with your readers.

So let's get started <3

The 3-act story structure is divided into – you guessed it – 3 acts.

Act 1.

#1 The Hook

#2 The Inciting Incident

#3 The Rise

#4 The First Plot Point

#5 The First Pitch Point

Act 2

#6 The Rising Action

#7 The Chaotic Midpoint

#8 The Second Plot Point

#9 The Second Pinch Point

Act 3

#10 The Clam Before The Storm

#11 The Disaster

#12 The Darkest Moment

#13 The Hope Renewed

#14 The Climax

#15 The Victory

#16The Finally

Copy the information below into a document of your choice and fill out each question to develop your entire story!

Act 1.

#1 The Hook

The hook revolves around the main character's internal conflict AKA how their greatest fear (which you wrote down in the character mood board) keeps them from what they believe will bring them true happiness or their goal. Most of the time, the characters' greatest fear, more misbelief about the world, is created from a moment in their life; believe it or not, but this is actually where the internal conflict for your character starts, even if it's years before the inciting incident happens.

Question: What is your main character's greatest fear, and how is that keeping them from obtaining their goal or finding true happiness? Are they aware of their greatest fear? And if so, how are they avoiding that fear?

Answer:

#2 The Inciting Incident

This is the moment that sets your main character's adventure in motion! The inciting incident is the setup to the entire story; it's the push that throws your character on their journey, forces them out of their comfort zone, and makes them confront their greatest fear to achieve true happiness or their goal.

Question: Looking through your main character's eyes, what do they see during the inciting incident, and how does it make them feel? How does the inciting incident push your character outside their comfort zone and direct them towards confronting their fear? (time to be a psychologist and dig deep into your character)

Answer:

#3 The First Plot Point

Your character's life has officially been turned upside down and is full speed ahead! It's time for your character to respond to the inciting incident. However, due to their fear, they respond hastily or possibly horribly, setting up all the roadblocks and obstacles for the rest of the story. It might seem like a good idea to the character at the moment, but the decision has great consequences and therefore builds the rest of your story.

Question: How will your character's fear influence their reaction to the inciting incident? Will they pick fight or fleet?

Answer:

#4 The First Pitch Point

Pitch points are the tiny turning points or new information that gives your reader a little sneak peek into something that might happen and sets up roadblocks for your main character along the way. Pinch points are those little reminders of your antagonists or villain's power or possibly a roadblock that the villain themselves puts in the place of the main character. You don't have to have a villain in your story to have a pinch point; the "villain" can also be the opposition, which keeps coming back to haunt the protagonist.

Question: How can you hint to your readers that the antagonist or opposition facing your protagonist is looming in the distance? Does your character sense that anything is wrong, or are they oblivious?

Answer:

Act 2

#5 The Rising Action

This is when their reaction to the inciting incident comes back to attack them with the first set of roadblocks. At this point in your story, your main character has a goal, and they are actively on the path to obtaining it; basically, they're running a race with the finish line in their mind, but they're not willing to jump over the hurdles; thus they keep falling. This is when they think they're on the right path, but everything starts to unravel. The Rising Action elaborates on the story's overall theme and ties that in with the conflict and roadblocks built in this part of the story.

Question: Describe all the roadblocks your character is going to face between here and the midpoint (AKA the plot twist) in one sentence. How does each roadblock lead to the next?

Answer:

#6 The Chaotic Midpoint

This might come as a surprise, but the midpoint takes place...Drum roll, please... smackdown in the middle of your story! A significant event must occur at this point in the story (and typically not something good); at this point, your main character

should feel that their goal or what they believe will bring them the greatest happiness is being directly threatened. This is basically the giant plot twist of your story! It's game-changing and epic and should throw in a crazy twist. Basically, you need to shake up your main character and completely shift their plan to achieve their goal.

Question: What event completely shakes up your protagonist and makes them change their plan to achieve their goal? How does this plot twist directly impact their greatest fear, and how does that make your character react?

Answer:

#7 The Second Plot Point

At this point in the story, your character feels a bit defeated because they thought they were on the right path, and then the midpoint came out of nowhere and threw them off the road into a ditch. However, in the second plot point, it's time for your character to reflect and evaluate their new position. This is kind of the pep talk moment that your character either has to give themselves or somebody else gives them. They now have to take the first step off the ground and get ready to face the antagonist. It's

time for your character to make a new plan based on what happened at the midpoint.

Question: What is your main character's new plan in one to two sentences? Remember, this plan should be based on what happened at the midpoint and how that affected them. Make sure that their internal conflict is shown again within this new plan; even though they've gone through everything they have, they are still holding on to their fear.

Answer:

#8 The Second Pinch Point

The second pinch point is again something looming in the distance. It shows the antagonists' or opposition's power over the character. The second pinch point is where the first seed is dropped that grows the climax of your story.

Question: What is something small yet impactful that could happen in your story that would give the reader a glimpse into the climax? What's something that would disturb the main character's new plan without them even realizing it?

Answer:

Act 3

#9 The Clam Before The Storm

This is a bit of a breather moment for the character. They're feeling good because their new plan is succeeding, and they've had a few small victories that are making them feel pretty confident at this stage. Unfortunately, their overconfidence is blinding them to the storm that's brewing.

Question: How does your character's overconfidence in their new plan keep them from seeing the storm coming?

Answer:

#10 The Disaster

Allow your character to believe that everything is going to go as planned, make them feel success inches from their grasp, and then rip it away from them, bringing them to their knees in the truest form of defeat. This is when their greatest fear comes to truly bite them at the most important time in the character's journey. Essentially make their worst nightmare come true based on their greatest fear.

Question: Explain what the disaster is in three sentences. How does this world-shattering moment connected directly to the main character's greatest fear? How will the disaster make them confront their internal conflict?

Answer:

#11 The Darkest Moment

You have to have rain to have a rainbow; that is the darkest moment, the rainiest part of your story, right before the rainbow shines through. After the disaster, your character feels truly broken, wallowing in a bit of self-pity and possibly acting out as a response. This is your character's rock bottom moment.

Question: Based on your character's back story and personality what would their rock bottom look like?

Answer:

#12 The Hope Renewed

This is the big revelation of the entire story and the pivotal moment that sets the character back on the course to the climax. As your character is wallowing in self-pity at rock bottom, they

have a moment of clarity and finally realize that their fear was what brought them to this point. They are finally ready to overcome their fear and start making the right decisions in order to obtain their true happiness or goal.

Question: What is the tipping point for your character to finally acknowledge their greatest fear as their greatest problem? Essentially what is the lesson that you want to teach your audience through your character's eyes, and how does your character convey that message to the audience?

Answer:

#13 The Climax

Finally, the moment that everybody has been waiting for...THE CLIMAX! This is the height of the action and when everything comes to a boiling point. The climax typically happens in a single scene, for example, when Frodo finally throws the ring into the lava or when Dorothy throws the bucket of water on the witch, causing her to melt. The climax is the final test for your character to show how their internal conflict has been resolved.

Question: In two to three sentences, explain the climax. How do the events in the climax represent how the character's internal

conflict has been resolved? Essentially how has their greatest fear finally been defeated?

Answer:

#14 The Victory

The victory of your story doesn't necessarily have to mean that the character won the battle or that everything turned out the way they wanted; the victory just means that the character's experience is a personal victory because they have overcome their fear.

Question: How has your main character changed throughout their journey, and what lesson did they deliver to the reader?

Answer:

#15 The Finale

The finale is when you finally tie up all of those loose ends or unresolved topics. You want to make sure that the reader is left with no more questions and that the story feels complete.

However, if the book is part of a series, then this is where you'll want to add a cliffhanger by adding another plot twist.

Question: What loose ends do you want to tie up at the end, and if your story is part of a series, what plot twist or cliffhanger are you going to add at the end?

Answer: