

Three-Act Story Writing Activity

Objective:

Students will learn basic three-act story structure and practice creative writing using this story structure.



Introduction:

Stories have been around for longer than we've been gathering around a campfire. If you look back on some of the greatest stories and study them, you will notice similarities in the ways they are constructed. In this activity you will learn one of the most common story structures and practice it by writing your own short story! If your story is science fiction or fantasy, you can also submit it to our Write Out of This World program once it's finished.

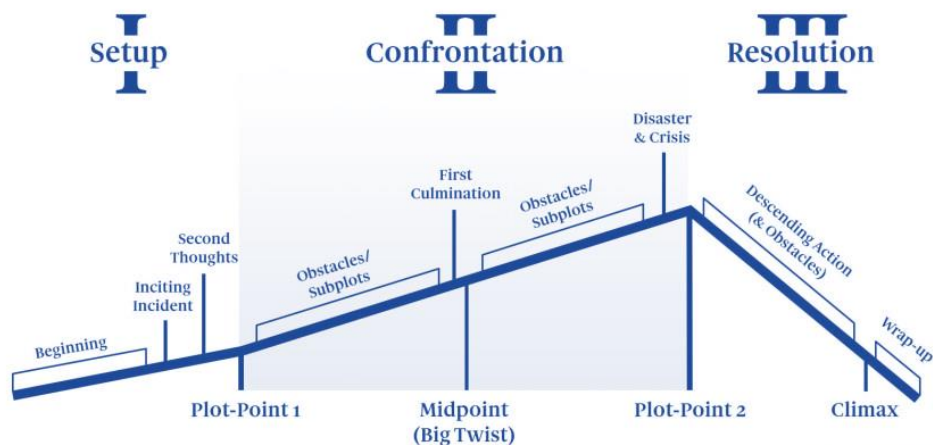


What is the three-act story structure:

The three-act story structure is one of the most commonly used story writing techniques in the English-speaking world. It is commonly used for horror, science fiction, and fantasy stories among others. This structure outlines a beginning, a middle, and an end and defines specific plot points that must take place at each stage. The traditional three-act structure includes the following parts.

- Act I – Setup: Exposition, inciting incident, plot point one
- Act II – Confrontation: Rising action, midpoint, plot point two
- Act III – Resolution: Pre climax, climax, conclusion.

Three-Act Structure





How to use three act structure in your writing:

Act 1 – The Set up

Every story needs a good hook to lure in its readers. Make your readers interested in your story and characters. Think about the way you introduce the story. Who is the main character, what is their life like, how does the conflict of the story interfere, and why should your readers care?

The main goals of act 1 are character introduction and the inciting incident that kicks off the main story conflict.

Character introduction – Try to show your readers what the character’s life is like rather than telling them. It is more interesting to read a scene of their everyday life where we learn about the character through their tone and voice than a long information dump about who they are. Avoid big blocks of world building or character backstory leading up to the inciting incident.

Inciting incident – This is the moment that must change your character’s life forever. It must be exciting and demand that your audience keep reading to know more. Show your readers the dramatic difference between this and their normal life.



Act 2 – Confrontation

In act 2 you continue to develop the characters and conflict. It is important not to let the readers get bored. Design your second act to throw the characters and the reader out of their comfort zone. Create a sense of triumph and failure for the character as they succeed and struggle.



Act 3 – Resolution

This is the grand finale! This act contains the lead up to the climax of the story, the climax, and the resolution.

Lead up to the climax – This is where tensions rise to a breaking point.

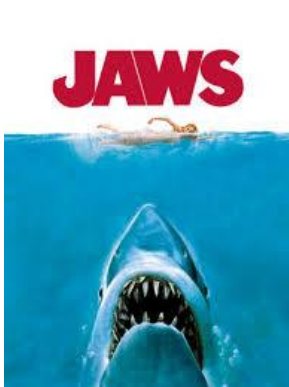
The Climax – The biggest hurdle for your character. Usually where any major plot twists happen and the conflict the character has been facing gets turned on its head.

The resolution – Time to tie up any loose ends. Any major questions in the story need to be answered by this point and leave the reader satisfied.

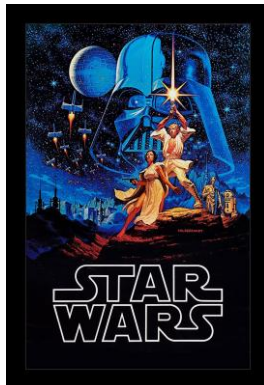


Story Genres:

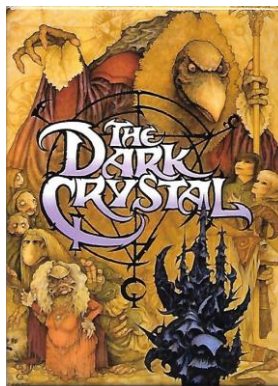
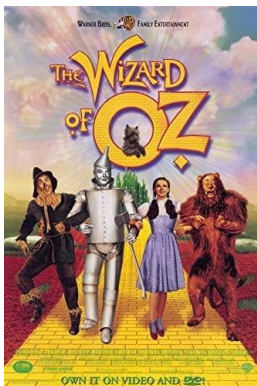
Horror – A genre of fiction whose purpose is to create feelings of fear, dread, repulsion, and terror in the audience. It feeds on audience's deepest terrors by putting life's most frightening and perplexing things – death, evil, supernatural powers or creatures, the afterlife, witchcraft – at the center of attention.



Science Fiction – A genre of fiction whose content is imaginative but based in science. It relies heavily on scientific facts, theories, and principles as support for its settings, characters, themes, and plotlines. So, while the storylines and elements of science fiction stories are imaginary, they are usually possible according to science – or at least plausible.



Fantasy – A genre in which elements of the plot or character traits cannot occur in the real world. Its plot usually involves magic or takes place on an undiscovered or unknown world. These tales serve to fuel our imaginations and satisfy our longings for adventure. Thus, fantasy directly relates to our deepest desires and dreams.





Activity:

Choose a genre and use one of the story building templates (available on our website) to write your own short three-act story!

[insert links to horror, sci-fi, and fantasy templates]

Story tips

- Think about who your **characters** are before you start writing. Know their strengths and flaws before you strike a key on your computer.
- At the beginning, **jump right into the action** (don't bother explaining everything to your reader – let them come through the character's experience of the action of the story)
- **Set** your story somewhere specific and interesting.
- Stick to a **simple story structure**: character experiences something challenging, something goes right for them in meeting the challenge, then something goes TERRIBLY wrong, then they figure out how to solve the challenge, then the story wraps up.
- Use action and details to **SHOW what's happening** (vs. Telling the reader what's happening).
- Stick with **one central conflict** that you resolve by the end of the story. If there are too many conflicts or nothing ever comes together, your reader will be bummed.
- Choose strong, specific words and avoid weak, boring words (really, very, nice, etc.), but don't go thesaurus crazy!



Extensions:

Write Out of This World – Consider submitting your story to Write Out of This World. The Write Out of This World program gives tomorrow's storytellers a platform to share their work. A short story and comic contest focused on the science fiction and fantasy genres; Write Out of This World provides authors between grades 3–12 with an outlet for their creativity. Learn more and read past winner's stories.

[Write Out of This World](#)

Collaborative Writing - Try writing a collaborative three-act story with your friends! Download the collaborative story building template.

[Collaborative Story Building Template](#)

Hero's Journey - Learn about another story structure with the hero's journey lesson plan.

[Hero's Journey](#)