

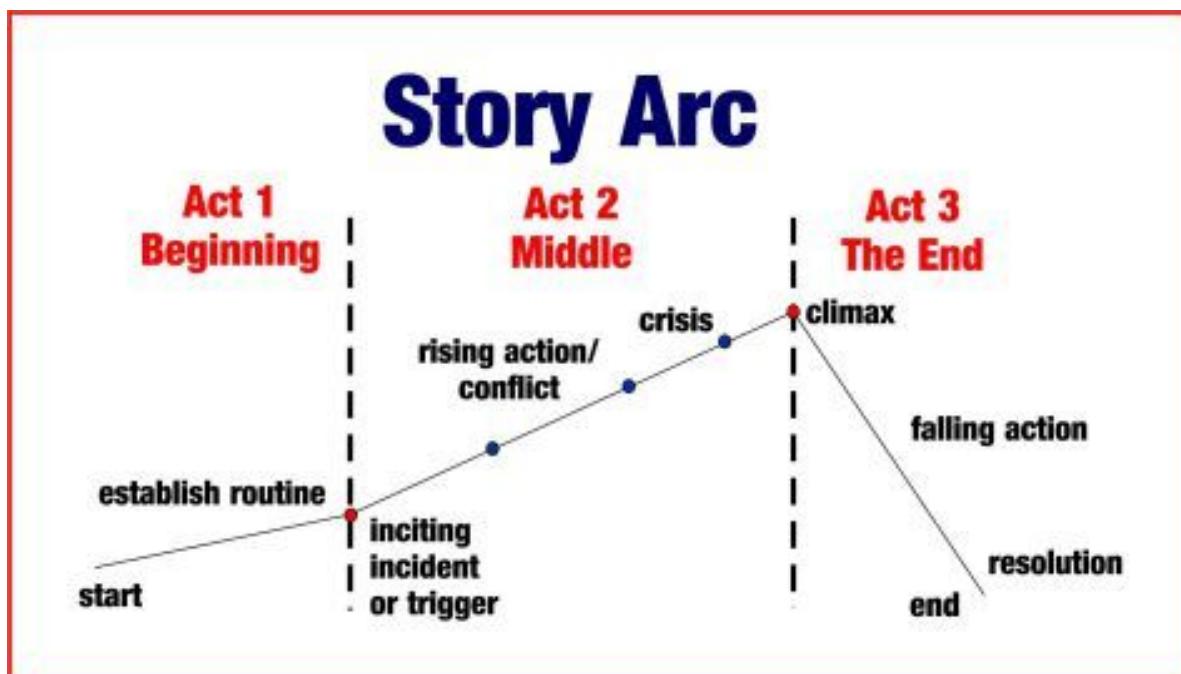
Into Another World

SEPTEMBER 3, 2015 by SUSAN LEIGHNOBLE

Following a Story Arc

When you write a novel or even a short story, your storyline will follow an arc. Knowing and understanding the nature of this arc can help you ensure that your story stays on course or let you know if the story is getting away from you.

A story arc covers the beginning, middle and end of your story. Characters also have arcs – typically covering internal growth or change. If your story is about just one main character, then your story arc and your character arc could be the same. But if you have a large cast of characters, each character will have their own arc. Some may be ending their own arc while others are just beginning. Your story arc will tie or weave these arcs together. Subplots of your story will also follow this same basic arc.



(<https://susanleighnoble.files.wordpress.com/2015/09/arc.jpg>) Story Arc components

Beginning/Establish Routine – This is where the reader is introduced to the characters, and we get a taste of what happens in their everyday life.

Example – *Think of Cinderella sweeping the ashes or Harry Potter living with the Dursley's.* **Trigger/Inciting Incident** – Something beyond the protagonist's control triggers the spark of the story causing the protagonist to act.

Example – *For Cinderella, it is the appearance of the fairy godmother. For Harry, it is the appearance of a mysterious letter which leads to him finding out he is a wizard.*

Rising Action/Conflict – The trigger results in a quest which often has obstacles, complications, conflict and trouble for the protagonist.

Example – *Cinderella must endure the antics of her stepmother and stepsisters after her happy time at the ball. Harry stumbles through learning to be a wizard while finding clues about what the Dark Lord wants.*

Crisis/Critical Choice – Along the way, there should be incidents of crisis followed by brief breaks. Often the protagonist must make a crucial decision. This is where we find out what type of person the character truly is. At the critical choice, the protagonist must decide to take a particular path.

Example – *Cinderella decides to fight her Stepmother for her right to try on the glass slipper. Harry decides to stop Professor Quirrell from stealing the stone.*

Climax – This is the highest point of tension in your story and comes from whatever choice your protagonist made during the critical choice. It doesn't have to be a huge battle between good and evil. It can be something as simple as an important decision being made.

Example – For Cinderella, it is the point where she attempts to escape her locked bedroom as her stepsisters try on the glass slipper. In Harry’s instance, it is his battle with Professor Quirrell.

Falling Action – This is where the consequences of the critical choice and climax play out. It should show the changed status of your characters – especially the protagonist. The changes must make sense with how the story unfolds. The outcome should be probable as nothing should happen for no reason.

Example – Cinderella meets up with her prince and gets married. And for Harry, it is his time in the hospital where Professor Dumbledore divulges the meanings behind the recent events.

Resolution – This is where the story wraps up. Your characters return to their lives but now are perhaps wiser or changed.

Example – We see Cinderella and her prince driving off in the carriage, presumably to live happily ever after. Harry gets back on the train to return to the Dursley’s but this time knowing that he will return to Hogwarts for another year of school.

If you search the Internet, you can find more complex diagrams of the story arc. Some use different terms or add more steps, but these are the basics of a story arc. Knowing these steps of the arc can help you in planning your story or at least making sure you stay on track.

This entry was posted in Writing and tagged novel writing, story arc, writing. Bookmark the permalink.

Reference

Leighnoble, S. (2015). *Following a Story Arc*. [online] Into Another World. Available at:
<https://susanleighnoble.wordpress.com/2015/09/03/following-a-story-arc/>
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