

Science-Fiction Geschichten schreiben

Modul Science-Fiction &
Speculative Fiction

Informatik
13. Mai 2024

FH Zentralschweiz



Mögliche Welten erfinden - SciFi

- Genre, Speculative Fiction...stellt «**Was-wäre-wenn**»-Fragen über die Zukunft, neue Technologien und den Platz der Menschheit im Universum.

Antworten auf «Was wäre, wenn ...»?

Mögliche Welten erfinden - SciFi

Vor dem Schreiben sollte man die folgenden Fragen beantworten:

- **Was** ist das Grosse Neue Ding?
 - Wissenschaftlich basierte Entwicklung, die für das Narrativ entscheidend ist
- **Wie** würde es die Welt in der Geschichte verändern?
 - Die Welt sollte von dieser Entdeckung/Anwendung beeinflusst werden
- **Wen** würde es betreffen?
 - Betroffene sollten Ehrfurcht/Angst empfinden oder eine andere bedeutende Reaktion haben, die zum Handeln zwingt
- **Welche Konflikte** ergeben sich daraus?
 - Jemand will den Markt kontrollieren, die Welt verändern, andere unterdrücken, schnell Geld machen
 - Das «Grosse Neue Ding» sollte zentral für einen Konflikt sein (jemand will etwas, ein anderer hindert ihn, es zu bekommen und das «Grosse Neue Ding» sollte hier zentral sein)

Antworten auf «Was wäre, wenn»?

- Was wäre, wenn Sie eines Morgens mit der Nachricht geweckt würden, dass ein Raumschiff über dem Campus in Rotkreuz schwebt?
- Was wäre, wenn wir nach USA fliegen würden und nicht mehr zurück könnten?
- Was wäre, wenn Computerimplantate unser Sprechen übernehmen würden?
- Was wäre, wenn Sie Teil eines Experiments wären?

Antworten auf «Was wäre, wenn»?

- ... die Stärke von Science-Fiction ist **nicht** die Zukunft vorausszusagen.
- ... Gute Science-Fiction reflektiert und untersucht die **wichtigen und provokativen Themen der Gegenwart**.
- **Sie stellt Fragen** zum Leben in anderen Welten oder zu den Fähigkeiten des menschlichen Geistes oder fragt nach den Gefahren des Zusammenbruchs unserer Umwelt.
- Und dann denkt sie sich Antworten darauf aus.
- Um Sci-Fi zu entwickeln, ...müssen Sie mit faszinierenden Fragen anfangen.
- Stellen Sie sich folgende Fragen:
 - Welche Ideen interessieren Sie? (andere Planeten, politische, wirtschaftliche Systeme, ...)
 - Was finden Sie spannend? (neue Entdeckungen, Veränderungen, Konzepte zu Gender, KI, ...)
 - Was macht Ihnen Sorgen? (Folgen des Klimawandels, Privatsphäre, Kollaps unserer Gesellschaft, ..)
 - Was wäre, wenn....?

Antworten auf «Was wäre, wenn»?

- **Kernfragen zur SciFi-Story**

- Wann und wo in Zeit und Raum spielt die Geschichte?
- Welche Fragen zu dieser anderen Welt stellt Ihre Geschichte? (Was wäre wenn, wonach fragen Sie)
- Welches Grosse Neue Ding führt die Geschichte ein, das entscheidend für das Narrativ ist und es von unserer Welt abgrenzt?
- In **welcher Beziehung stehen die Akteure** zum Grossen Neuen Ding?
- Welche **moralischen und ethischen Fragen** zu diesem Neuen Grossen Ding werden in der Geschichte erstellt?
- Auf welche Weise ruft die Geschichte Gefühle wie Ehrfurcht und Faszination **angesichts der technologischen Errungenschaften und Veränderungen** hervor?
- Auf welche Weise ruft Ihre Geschichte **Reaktionen wie Furcht und Angst** hervor, die mit Dissonanz verursachenden wissenschaftlichen Entdeckungen in Ihrer Welt zusammenhängen?

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Exercise

The Beginning

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First sentences: Beginning in the Middle

We discovered that ***many first sentences*** put the reader in the ***middle of things***.
That exploration became the basis for this first exercise.

Examples:

- “Gegen zehn Uhr abends schlenderten sie die Strasse hinunter und plauderten miteinander.” Ray Bradbury, Marionetten, e.V.
- „Es war eine von Gregory Powells Binsenwahrheiten, dass Aufregung nie zu etwas Gutem führe.” Isaac Asimov, Runaround
- „My last night of childhood began with a visit home.” Octavia E. Butler, Bloodchild

First sentences: Beginning in the Middle

Now, ***write five of your own opening lines for five different stories***. When you read, look for opening lines that immediately pull the reader into the story. And if you keep a journal or notebook, consider starting a new section and adding one first sentence a day—for the rest of this semester.

The Objective

To get into the habit of beginning your stories in the middle of things. Because you are not obligated to finish these stories, this exercise lowers the emotional stakes and helps to shakeup and surprise the imagination.

Exercise

The Story's History

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The Story's History

- In "First Sentences: Beginning in the Middle," we illustrate how most stories and novels begin in situation, in the middle of things. But you might ask, what about the "beginning" of the story itself?
- Each story has a history; all characters have pasts; the plots of most stories or novels are affected by something that happened before sentence one on the first page.
- It might be helpful to think of the story as a straight line with sentence one appearing somewhere beyond the start of the line—ideally near the middle.

The Story's History

- First, return to a favorite story and make a ***list of events that occurred before page one***.
- Ask: How do these events affect the story after page one and move the story to resolution?
- Do this exercise with several stories and novels.

The Objective

To understand how stories and novels—and the characters in those stories and novels—all have a history that affects their forward movement and resolution.

Exercise

Begin a story with a first “given” line

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Begin a story with a first “given” line

The Exercise

Begin a story with this line: Where were you last night?

The Objective

The objective is to once more start the story in medias res—in the middle of things.

Notice how this question begins in the middle of a situation.

For example, "last night," the subject of the question, has already happened.

- If one character asks another this question, there are already two people "on stage.
- "And the question will probably produce a conflict. But don't get hung up on making it a line of dialogue—it can be used many different ways.

Begin a story with a first “given” line

Example

"Where you last night?"

Tony asked, wiping down the bar in front of me with a gray towel.

He doesn't look me in the eye.

"Vegas," I said, fingering an earring, noticing how bald he is, how short.

"Where do you think?"

Of course, I didn't really spend the night in Vegas or in any place worth mentioning, but when you're forty-one and planted on a bar stool, it's nice to think you still have possibilities, even if you can only reach them in your head.

Exercise

Here are many different means a writer might use to begin

Here are many different means a writer might use to begin

- **With a generalization**

- “My mother believed you could be anything you wanted to be in America.” *Amy Tan, "Two Kinds"*

- **With a description of a person**

- “He was lifting his knees high and putting his hand up, when I first saw him, as if crossing the road through that stringing rain, he were breaking through the bead curtain of a Pernambuco bar. I knew he was going to stop me.” *V. S. Pritchett, "The Sailor"*

- **With narrative summary**

- “An unfortunate circumstance in my life has just recalled to mind a certain Dr. Crombie and the conversations I used to hold with him when I was young. He was the school doctor until the eccentricity of his ideas became generally known.” *Graham Greene, "Doctor Crombie"*

- **With a setting and only one character**

- “After dinner, with its eight courses and endless conversation, Olga Mikhailovna, whose husband's birthday was being celebrated, went out into the garden. The obligation to smile and talk continuously, the stupidity of the servants, the clatter of dishes, the long intervals between courses, and the corset she had put on to conceal her pregnancy from her guests, had wearied her to the point of exhaustion.” *Anton Chekhov, "The Birthday Party"*

Here are many different means a writer might use to begin

- **By establishing point of view - First person**

- “Since Dr. Wayland was late and there were no recent news-magazines in the waiting room, I turned to the other patient and said: "As a concerned person, and as your brother, I ask you, without meaning to offend, how did you get that scar on the side of your face?" *James Alan McPherson, "The Story of a Scar"*

- **With several characters but no dialogue**

- “During the lunch hour, the male clerks usually went out, leaving myself and three girls behind. While they ate their sandwiches and drank their tea, they chattered away thirteen to the dozen. Half their conversation I didn't understand at all, and the other half bored me to tears.” *Frank O'Connor. "Music When Soft Voices Die"*

Here are many different means a writer might use to begin

The Exercise

This one is in two parts.

First experiment with different types of openings for different stories until you feel comfortable with the technique of each.

Then see how many ways there are to open one particular story you have in mind.

How does the story change when the opening changes from a generalization to a line of dialogue?

The Objective

To see how experimenting with several ways of opening your story can lead you to a better understanding of whose story it is, and what the focus of the story will be.

Exercise

Fiction has a confluence of details that real life seldom has

Fiction has a confluence of details that real life seldom has

- As a writer of fiction, you have to be more loyal to the fiction than to the facts that inspired it.
- Remembering being chased by a vicious dog as a child may give you just the right flavor of terror to vividly describe a thief's fear while fleeing the police in your story.
- Or you can invest a fictional event with remembered emotion or use a real-life scene as a back-drop for your imagination, changing the feelings and consequences entirely.

Fiction has a confluence of details that real life seldom has

The Exercise

- Choose a central dramatic incident from your life.
- Write about it in first person, and then write about it in third person (or try second person!).
- Write separate versions from the point of view of each character in the incident.
- Let it happen to someone ten or twenty years older or younger than yourself.
- Stage it in another country or in a radically different setting.
- Use the skeleton of the plot for a whole different set of emotional reactions.
- Use the visceral emotions from the experience for a whole different story line.

Fiction has a confluence of details that real life seldom has

The Objective

- To become more fluent in translating emotions and facts from truth to fiction.
- To help you see the components of a dramatic situation as eminently elastic and capable of transformation.
- To allow your fiction to take on its own life, to determine what happens and why in an artful way that is organic to the story itself.
- As Virginia Woolf said, "There must be great freedom from reality."

Exercise

Characterization

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Characterization

The Exercise

- Write a page in the first person, assuming the voice of someone of the opposite gender.
- This can be a description, a narrative, or a segment of autobiography.
- The main point is to completely lose yourself and become another.

The Objective

- To learn how to draw convincing verbal portraits of characters different from yourself and to make them sympathetic, rounded, and complex even though you don't especially "like" them or admire what they represent.

Characterization

Example

Since I broke my hip, I haven't been out of the apartment in three months. A young lady—she couldn't be more than six-teen or seventeen—brings in two meals a day, breakfast and supper. I either have to get my own lunch or go hungry. She comes in carrying a tray covered in silver foil. Her name is Debby, and she works for the state.

It must have been a shock for Debby the first time she saw me naked. I wasn't expecting her that early and it was end of July and hot as blazes. I tried to cover my parts, but I wasn't quite quick enough. She looked away and said, "I've brought you some waffles, Mr. Pirjo, I hope you like them." Then she made herself busy getting me my knife and fork, but I could see she was upset. Why didn't they tell me she was coming at eight in the morning? Every time Debby comes by, I ask her to stay a while and sit down and have a cup of coffee with me, but she says she has five more people on her list or something like that; she's in and out of here so fast, she's like a little rabbit who you only see the tail of.

Exercise

Readers need to know certain basic facts about your character

Readers need to know certain basic facts about your character

- They should have some idea of their appearance and approximately how old they are. A writer can, of course, say something direct, like "Marvin Highsmith, sixty-eight years old, owned a Chevy pickup."
- But it's more interesting and dramatic to suggest a character's age, rather than to present the reader with a naked number.

Readers need to know certain basic facts about your character

The Exercise

Make a list of some of the ways you can suggest approximate age.

Wrinkles and gray hair are the most obvious.

Many are more subtle. You should be able to list at least a dozen.

The Objective

To make the best use of your powers of observation.

The more precise the detail, the more convincing it is.

How a person adjusts to the aging process tells us a good deal about her personality—this is as true for a fictional character as for a real one.

Readers need to know certain basic facts about your character

Examples

- How much hair
- Condition of hearing
- What the T-shirt says
- What sort of shoes she is wearing
- Condition of skin
- Posture Quality
- Timbre of voice
- Walking pace

Exercise

Naming your Characters

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Naming your Charakters

- The names you choose have a strong and subtle influence on how your readers will respond to your characters.
- You may have to rename a character several times before you get it right.

Naming your Charakters

The Exercise

Name the following characters, keeping in mind that you can plant, within a name, a clue to their role in your fiction.

- A petty, white-collar thief who robs his boss over several years.
- An envious, bitter woman who makes her sister miserable by systematically trying to undercut her pleasure and self-confidence.
- A sweet young man too shy to speak to an attractive woman he sees every day at work.
- The owner of a fast-food restaurant who comes on to his young female employees.
- A grandmother who just won the lottery.

Naming your Charakters

Examples

- Petty thief: Robin Blackman (robber, blackmail)
- Shy young man: Tod Humbolt (humble)

Exercise

Oh! That sort of person.

.

Oh! That sort of person

The Exercise

- First work with a story that you've already written, one whose characters need fleshing out.
- Write the character's name at the top of the page.
- Then fill in this sentence five or ten times:
 - He (or she) is the sort of person who ...

The Objective

To learn to select revealing concrete details, details that often tell us more than the character would want us to know.

Example

Meyer Wolfsheim is the sort of person who boasts of wearing human molars for cuff links.

Exercise

What do you know about your characters?

What do you know about your characters?

The Exercise

- Work with one of your completed stories that has a character who needs fleshing out.
- Take out a sheet of paper and number from one to thirty-four.
- At the top of the page, write in the title of your story and the main character's name—and start filling in the blanks.

What do you know about your characters?

1. Character's name
2. Character's nickname
3. Sex
4. Age
5. Looks
6. Education
7. Vocation/occupation
8. Status and money
9. Marital status
10. Family, ethnicity
11. Diction, accent, etc.
12. Relationships
13. Places (home, office, car, etc.)
14. Possessions
15. Recreation, hobbies
16. Obsessions
17. Beliefs
18. Politics
19. Sexual history
20. Ambitions
21. Religion
22. Superstitions
23. Fears
24. Attitudes
25. Character flaws
26. Character strengths
27. Pets
28. Taste in books, music, etc.
29. Journal entries
30. Correspondence
31. Food preferences
32. Handwriting
33. Astrological sign
34. Talents

What do you know about your characters?

Note:

- This exercise should be done ***after you have written your story.***
- It is designed to discover what you know about your characters after you have written your story—and what you don't know.
- ***And why not apply this list to some of your favorite stories?***

The Objective

To understand how much there is to know about a character that you have created.

You needn't include these details in the story, but their presence in your mind will be "felt" by the reader.

Exercise

What do your characters want?

What do your characters want?

- It is true that in fiction, in order to engage our attention and sympathy, the central character must want and want intensely.
- The thing that character wants need not be violent or spectacular; it is the intensity of the wanting that counts.
- She may want only to survive, but if so, she must want enormously to survive, and there must be distinct cause to doubt she will succeed.
- Sometimes want is expressed in terms of need, wish, hope etc.—and it is amazing how many times these words appear in the first two pages of stories.
- Wants ... aren't always simple and straightforward things, just as peoples' motives are seldom unmixed. The more complicated and unsuspected—both to her and to us—are a protagonist's aims, the more interesting that character will be and the more interesting will be the unfolding of her story.

What do your characters want?

The Exercise

- Look at the stories you've already written and ask
 - What does the central character want?
 - What are her motives for wanting this?
 - Where in the story is this made clear to the reader?
 - How do we learn what the central character wants? Dialogue? Actions? Interior thinking?
 - What or who stands in the way of her achieving it?
 - What does that desire set in motion?

The Objective

To understand how your central character's desires shape her life. To see characterization as more than description and voice and mannerisms.

Exercise

Creating a character's background, place, setting, and milieu

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Creating a character's background, place, setting, and milieu

- You are what you buy, own, eat, wear, collect, read, and create and you are what you do for a living and how you live.
- If somebody broke into your home or apartment while you were away, chances are he could construct a good profile of who you are. You should be able to do exactly that for your characters even when they are "offstage."

Creating a character's background, place, setting, and milieu

The Exercise

- Create a setting for one or more of the following and furnish a place with his character—you create the character through observation of the setting.
- The place can be any kind of locale—house, a specific room in a house, outdoor grounds, an office, a cell, even a bed.
- The description must incorporate enough characteristic things so that the reader can visualize the absentee dweller accurately.
- Try to avoid stereotypes such as
 - An unsuccessful painter
 - A former movie star who still thinks she's famous
 - A cocktail waitress down on her luck
 - A member of a lunatic-fringe political group
 - A fugitive from the law
 - A supermarket checkout woman who just won the state lottery

Creating a character's background, place, setting, and milieu

The Objective

- To be able to select details that will create a character and furnish the world of that character.
- Note which details indicate the circumstances of the subject—such things as success or
unsuccess, social status and habits. Which details indicate emotions, personality,
intelligence, character, and outlook on life?

Creating a character's background, place, setting, and milieu

Example

Jeremy told me that after the accident his mother set up his room like the face of a clock.

As I stand in the doorway, at what must be six o'clock, I see what he means.

Straight ahead, against the far wall is Jeremy's bed—twelve o'clock. His mom made the bed with tight hospital corners and his pajamas, black and white striped like a prisoner's uniform, are laid out for him. His desk is at three o'clock. Braille copies of *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Wuthering Heights* sit next to a small cassette recordings of our Psych textbook. Tapes for American History, Econ., and Chemistry are stacked alongside.

I move to five o'clock and touch his empty bookcase. On the third shelf up, his initials, J.M.—Jeremy Malone—are etched deep in the wood. I close my eyes and run my fingers over them. Jeremy made this bookcase a year ago—about two months before his motorcycle accident on Route 9. Jeremy told his parents to take his books away. The closet door, at nine o'clock, has been scrubbed with Murphy's Oil Soap. His stereo sits at ten o'clock, power off, but the volume turned nearly to its maximum. His posters of Easy Rider and the Budweiser girl are gone.

Exercise

Dialogue

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Dialogue

Dialogue generally goes for the heart of the story, the ex-change that matters, the confrontation.

Dialogue

The Exercise

Have a fellow writer do this exercise with you.

Make up situations involving two people who disagree about something—for example, two friends who have planned to shoplift something and one is getting cold feet.

Or a landlord and a tenant disagree about the terms of a lease.

Next, tape your dialogue as you and your friend "act out" the two "roles" in a scene.

Don't decide what you're going to say ahead of time.

Improvise, through dialogue, as you go along. Then transcribe the dialogue exactly as it was said. Here is where your writer's ear comes in.

Read over the written account of your scene. How much of the original exchange is useful for your story? How much of the dialogue might you summarize? And are there any "perfect" lines that you would keep? Finally try writing the scene using the transcribed dialogue to give shape to the scene. How much of the original dialogue would you keep?

Dialogue

The Objective

To hear and see how real talk is repetitive, disjointed, and boring.

At the same time, to train your writer's ear to transform actual speech into carefully crafted dialogue.

Exercise

The Plot

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The Plot

So, get to know your characters by placing them in a situation and then discover what happens.

Our exercise "What If?" is designed to provide you with several organic ways to move your story forward toward complication and resolution.

Always, always with character in motion.

The Exercise

Break your story idea down into three sentences of three words each.

That will give you a beginning, a middle, and an end and help you understand the architecture of the work.

By having to choose three verbs, you'll be forcing yourself to consider the three parts of the action.

The Plot

The Objective

To see if your story, like a good stool, has three legs to stand on.

Examples:

- Cinderella can't go. She goes anyway. Cinderella gets Prince.
- Boy meets girl. Boy loses girl. Boy gets girl.
- Man lures rats. People won't pay. Man takes children.

Exercise

The “Skeleton Story”

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The «Skeleton Story»

The simplest stories are fairy tales and myths in which a central character—who is on some sort of quest or journey—is continually on stage and secondary characters only appear to assist or thwart her.

The Exercise

- Write a linear story, in which a strong main character is on a quest for something important and specific (e.g., a shelter for the baby, medicine for a sick mother, or the key to the store-house where a tyrant has locked away all the grain from a starving population).
- The object is a given—don't explain its importance. The main character starts acting immediately.
- She then meets a (specific) obstacle; finally, she triumphs over the obstacle by means of a magic or supernatural element that comes from the outside. You may introduce minor characters, but the narrative should never abandon your main character.

The «Skeleton Story»

The Objective

The writer must be able to handle and control basic plot before moving on to more subtle elements like motivation, subtext, and ambiguity.

The «Skeleton Story»

Example

The Nanny—A Fairy Tale

There was once a young woman named Mia who wanted a baby. The urge to produce another life in her own body hit suddenly, like a squall or a virus. Before this, she hadn't particularly liked children. She never made eyes at babies on buses, and usually asked for another table when seated near children in restaurants. She tolerated the children of friends but never played with them the way some guests did. Yet now, without warning, she longed for an infant to nurse, to rock, to carry like a prize in a bundle strapped to her chest. She could imagine exactly the shape and the weight of a baby in her arms. "A baby?" said her husband, Beau. "You don't know a diaper from a linen handkerchief. Babies are loud, they're smelly, and they cramp your sex life. We're fine as we are." Mia worked on Beau. Walking through the park she'd point out babies sleeping like sacks in strollers, crowing and waving from backpacks, or toddling on creased legs. "Let's eat Chinese tonight," Beau said. If only Mia could find the secret crack in his heart, the place where the gates would swing open when the magic words were said, letting the idea of their own baby enter like the children of Hamelin.

The «Skeleton Story»

Example

The Nanny—A Fairy Tale

...

Mia took to sitting on playground benches, thinking. She could leave Beau and find a man who shared her longing. But she loved the fullness of his laugh, the way he sang as he cooked, the curls behind his ears when his haircut was over-due. She knew she'd miss the stories he read her from the morning papier and the way he kneaded her shoulders after work. Maybe she could trick him, pretend her cycle had become unpredictable, blame nature. But she'd never been able to lie well, not even to her mother. One day as Mia sat on a bench near a wading pool, a gray-haired nanny sat down beside her, starched uniform gleaming in the sun. "Have any children?" she asked, starting to knit. Mia smiled and shook her head. "Too bad. You'd like a child, wouldn't you? Not married? Men are hard to find these days, they say." Though partly put off by the nanny's presumptuousness, Mia shared her problem. "My husband doesn't want children. At least not yet." "Stalled adolescence," the nanny diagnosed. "See it more and more.

The «Skeleton Story»

Example

The Nanny—A Fairy Tale

...

Want a solution?" Without waiting for an answer, she pulled a pomegranate out of her knitting bag. "Serve him this for dessert tonight and for the next two nights and have some for yourself, too. Be sure he sucks the sweet red part and doesn't eat the seeds. If he balks, tell him it's better than kiwi." Mia did as she was told, carefully watching Beau savor the sharp sweet taste and spitting the seeds on his plate. She was so preoccupied that she dripped the juice down the front of her blouse. At first Mia noticed no change in her husband. But on the third day, while sipping cappuccino in an intimate Italian restaurant, he said, "What the hell. You want a baby? What are we waiting for?" And Beau took Mia home to bed. Months later, her stomach as full as a spinnaker, Mia sat again on the bench near the wading pool, resting her legs. The nanny sat down next to her as she had before, uniform crisp, oxfords firmly tied. Eyeing Mia's belly with a smile, she pulled out her knitting and said, "Looking for a nursemaid?" *Christine McDonnell*

Exercise

From situation to plot

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From Situation to Plot

.... suggest thinking of plot in these terms:

- In the beginning you present a particular character in a situation.
- The situation should have opposing forces and alternatives.
- And your central character should have choices—ways of acting or not acting.
- The situation should evolve from its original elements.
- It should grow more complicated, more grave, and finally reach a point of crisis.
- Thereafter follows the resolution of the crisis and the story.
- Almost always things will have changed.

From Situation to Plot

The Exercise

In a few sentences, create a specific character in a specific situation.

Complicate his life with opposing forces and alternatives within that situation.

Ask, given the situation:

- What would my character want?
- What would my character do?
- How would he act or react?
- How will those actions propel the story toward a point of crisis and a final resolution?

Practice creating characters involved with specific situations. Then outline mini plots for how you would complicate their situations and move them toward an ending. Keep this outline brief.

From Situation to Plot

The Objective

To understand how the most effective plots are those driven by character.

To see how a character within the given of any situation creates his own destiny.

Exercise

What-if? How to develop and finish stories

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What-if? How to develop and finish stories

The Exercise

- Look in your files for a story that seems stuck, a story that has a story block.
- Next, write at the top of a separate sheet of paper the two words What If.
- Now write five ways of continuing the story, not ending the story, but continuing the story to the next event, scene, etc.
- Let your imagination go wild. Loosen up your thinking about the events in the story.
- Your what if's can be as diverse as your imagination can make them.

The Objective

- To illustrate that most story beginnings and situations have within them the seeds of the middle and end.
- You just have to allow your imagination enough range to discover what works.

What-if? How to develop and finish stories

Example

One writer began a story about a young boy, Paul, who shop-lifts with a cousin. The story opens when they take something more expensive than they have ever taken before. This raises the stakes immediately. After writing a superb opening scene of two and a half pages, the writer didn't know where to go with the story.

Below are her five “what if’s?” for this beginning.

1. Paul decides to admit to shoplifting but hopes not to implicate his cousin.
2. Paul is excited by shoplifting something more expensive and talks his cousin into going back again soon.
3. The store security guard notices their theft and decides to set a trap. (Involves some point-of-view issues.)
4. Paul feels brave now and steals something from his step-father—something Paul has wanted for a long time.
5. There is a time shift to five years later when Paul commits a major burglary.

The writer continued the story with the fourth idea because she felt it was a more interesting and complex development of Paul's situation. If she hadn't explored several alternatives, she might not have gotten to this story line.

Exercise

Magnifying conflict

Informatik
13. Mai 2024

Magnifying conflict

Great fiction is tense with conflict between characters, within characters, between characters and forces opposing them.

The Exercise

Take a story you have completed and go through it and intensify the conflict, magnifying the tension and shrillness at every turn, even to the point of absurdity or hyperbole.

Add stress wherever possible, both between characters and within them as individuals. Exaggerate the obstacles they face. Be extreme.

Magnifying conflict

The Objective

To create an awareness of the need for a high level of tension while encouraging a healthy regard for how easily it can become excessive. This exercise is not meant to "improve" the story, although it often provokes new and more dynamic descriptions and dialogue. It raises the writer's consciousness about the need for conflict in fiction.

Exercise

Plot Potential

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Plot Potential

The Exercise

Write five mini-stories (limit: 200 words each) to account for a single event or set of circumstances, such as a man and woman standing on a city sidewalk, hailing a cab. Each story should be different—in characters, plot, and theme—from the others.

The Objective

To loosen the bonds that shackle you to a single, immutable version; to underscore the fact that plot is not preordained but something you can control and manipulate at will, like the strings of a marionette; and to demonstrate once more that there are many ways to skin a cat.

Plot Potential

Example

(1) At 2:00 in the afternoon, John, a forty-four-year-old man in a business suit, and Dawn, a twenty-two-year-old woman in a tight skirt and high heels, came out of the Hancock Building. While John stood in the street trying to hail a cab, Dawn stayed on the sidewalk, sobbed, and blew her nose. When John finally managed to get a cab, he helped Dawn in and then got in next to her. John is Dawn's boss, and she is his secretary. At 1:45 she'd gotten a call from the hospital; her mother had a heart attack and was in intensive care. When Dawn went into to tell John why she had to leave so suddenly, he looked as though it was his mother who was in the hospital. Dawn could not understand why he was so concerned, why he was getting a cab for her, and now going with her to the hospital. He'd never been very nice to Dawn or interested in getting to know her and this show of sympathy was out of character. John held Dawn's hand in the cab and said, "Oh God, oh God." And he wondered how he was going to tell Dawn that he was her mother's lover, that they'd fallen in love the night Dawn brought her mother to the company Christmas party.

Plot Potential

Example

(2) As usual, Pauline had been totally humiliated by her father, and now he was making a fool of himself trying to hail a cab. Pauline thought that if she stood on the sidewalk and looked like she was waiting for someone, no one would connect her with her father. He'd insisted on coming to her interview with her. He insisted on sitting in the waiting room while she was in with the personnel director, and he pestered the receptionist with stories about how cute Pauline had been as a child and how smart she was as an adult. Pauline knew he did it with good intentions—he wanted her to be safe in the city, but it was driving her crazy. As he flailed his arms and tried to whistle down a cab, she took a few steps backward, and then ran. When she reached the subway station, she decided to ride to the end of the line.

Exercise

Story Elements as Given

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13. Mai 2024

Story Elements as Given

The exercises in this section are here mainly to help the beginning writer recognize effective fictional triggers.

The Exercise

Title it "Sunday." Write 550 words.

The Objective

Certain words and ideas, such as retirement, in-laws, boss, and fraud, serve as triggers for stories or scenes in fiction. Sunday is one of these. Try to think of others.

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Story Elements as Given

Example

On Sunday mornings, walking to the bathroom, I'd be treated to the sight of my roommate, Abby, in bed with a man, yet another man I didn't recognize. Every Sunday, I'd tell myself I needed to get my own apartment, or at least install some doors in this one. I used to love Sundays before Abby moved in. I'd sit in the sunny spot in the kitchen and drink cup after cup of coffee. I'd read the newspaper—first travel, then arts, weddings, the news—and then my mother would call. We'd talk about Sundays that we'd spent together—going to the planetarium, buying bras, cooking barley. Sundays, I didn't touch my students' papers I'd brought home. I didn't get dressed until 11:00 a.m. I didn't mind feeling lonely. Now, when I was halfway through the arts section, a shirt-less man came into the kitchen. I pulled my robe tighter. "Geez, I hate Sundays," he said. "They're endless. Give me a Saturday night any day. Hey, I'm Stan," he said, putting out his hand. I shook it. Abby trailed in after him. "Hi, gorgeous," she said to me. "Met Stan?" "Sure did," I said, smiling and turning back to the paper. Go away, I thought. Go back to bed. Leave me to my Sunday. The phone rang, and shirtless Stan twisted to pick it up. "Good morning," he said. "Oh. . . . It's for you," he said, handing me the phone. "Her mother," Abby said. "Every Sunday. Kind of like church, I guess."

Story Elements as Given

Example

"No, Mom," I whispered into the phone that I'd dragged out into the hall. "No, Mom. That was not my boyfriend. . . .No, he's not a burglar. . . . No, I don't know who he is. . . . No, I don't let strange men into my apartment at all hours." And on it went. My head throbbed. When I got off the phone, I went back into the kitchen. Stan was sitting in my chair. Abby was sitting on Stan's lap twirling his chest hairs. "Hey, gorgeous," Abby said. "We're going to grab a bagel and then go to the planetarium. Half-price on Sundays. Want to come?" "Better than sitting around here moping," Stan said. "Ouch. Stop pulling my hairs." He slapped Abby's hand away.

Exercise

Different Versions

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13. Mai 2024

Different Versions

Story is often determined by who we are telling the story to.

And as we tell these people our story, we add or subtract, exaggerate or play down, tolerate or condemn, depending on the identity of the person to whom we are telling our tale.

The Exercise

Here is the situation: You have just come out of the movie theater around seven in the evening and you are mugged—a person asks for your money, then knocks you to the ground before running away. Or make up your own situation.

Next, pretend you are telling the account of this event to five different people:

- you mother
- your best friend
- your girlfriend or boyfriend (or wife or husband)
- a therapist
- a police officer

Different Versions

The Objective

To become conscious of how we shape and shade the stories that we tell each other according to the listener.

Example

Telling my mother

So, I'd been to the bathroom 'cause I knew I wouldn't get to go before I made it home and no, I wasn't wearing my black mini! You don't wear leather in early autumn. Anyway, I'd asked this guy—some kid from school—what time it was, and he told me 7:10. Don't worry. He wasn't the mugger—I did not ask the mugger the time. It was Johnny Something Or Other from my morning Lit. 121. Anyway, I'm just walking down the sidewalk, heading for the car and it happened. Johnny Whozit must have heard it. He's a big kid, probably a football player or something, and that's all I could think about there, sitting sprawled all over the ground. That kid could've helped me out.

Different Versions

The Objective

To become conscious of how we shape and shade the stories that we tell each other according to the listener.

Example

Telling my boyfriend

Listen, I have never, not once, taken anything so hard. They found me sitting on the sidewalk in front of the Tivoli, my dress up around my bottom, crying, you know. Just out of my head. The policeman told me I was going to have to calm down, tell him some facts. But I couldn't even remember what film I'd been to. (I'd gone to Hairspray again for the third time. I know you think that's silly, but I've got this thing about John Waters.) I don't remember a thing past losing my pocketbook. You'd think we were in New York City or something.

Literature

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Spannung erzeugen

Wie kann man Spannung erzeugen ...

Der beste Weg, um beim Schreiben Spannung zu erzeugen, ist die **Einführung von Konflikten** oder **Hindernissen für Ihre Figuren**.

Bei diesen **Hindernissen** kann es sich um **andere Personen** handeln, z. B. um Ihren **Bösewicht** oder **Gegenspieler**. Sie könnten auch **innere Hindernisse** sein, wie **psychische Probleme**. Oder sie könnten **physische Konflikte** sein, wie ein blutrünstiges Versuchstier.

Die **Vorahnung dieses Konflikts** ist ein **wichtiger Bestandteil des Spannungsaufbaus**. Andeutungen auf das, was kommen könnte, können den Leser fesseln und ihm Lust auf mehr machen.

Beispiel in „Das Kinderzimmer“:

- »George, ich möchte gern, dass du dir mal das Kinderzimmer ansiehst.« »Stimmt etwas nicht damit?«
- »Hast du den Schrei gehört?«, fragte sie. »Nein.«
- »Hast du's nicht gesehen? Hast du's nicht gefühlt? Es ist einfach zu echt.

Beispiele für Spannung in den Geschichten

- Eine Möglichkeit besteht darin, **seltsame, mysteriöse oder abschreckende Fakten** einzubauen.
 - "Es ist kalt um 6:40 Uhr morgens an einem Märztag in Paris, und es scheint noch kälter zu sein, wenn ein Mann durch ein Erschießungskommando hingerichtet werden soll.
- Ein **Dialog**
 - "Ich war auf dem Weg zu Onkel Urek, bevor ich deine Nachricht erhielt. Ist er wieder in Schwierigkeiten? "Ein Nebel des Schweigens senkte sich herab. Niemand sah den anderen an. Schließlich sagte Feeney: „Er weiss es nicht.“
- **Gefährliche Arbeit** muss gemacht werden
 - Ein Soldat an der Kriegsfront; ein Raumfahrtingenieur, der ein Schiff von aussen repariert.
- Eine **Frist** läuft ab
 - Du hast vierundzwanzig Stunden Zeit, oder das Mädchen
- Eine **unglückliche, zufällige Begegnung** findet statt
 - Jemand aus der Vergangenheit taucht wieder auf, vielleicht ein alter Feind oder Liebhaber. Oder man begegnet der falschen Person zur falschen Zeit (z.B. „The Investigation“ – Der Mord an Kim Wall, Netflix)

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