



Narrative and Storytelling

Advanced Writing ENGL 220

Why do humans tell stories?

“Storytelling is one of the few human traits that are truly universal across culture and through all of known history...People in societies of all types weave narratives, from oral storytellers in hunter-gatherer tribes to the million of writers churning out books, television shows, and movies. And when a characteristic behavior shows up in so many different societies, researchers pay attention: its roots may tell us something about our evolutionary past.” - Jeremy Hsu



Why do humans tell stories?

- In hunter-gatherer societies, storytelling has documentable survival value.
- Our brains are wired for storytelling at a deep level.
- Young children create play around storytelling that fits classic narrative forms.



What elements make a story?

- Let's list some elements that we think are essential to make a story:



Elements that make a story

- Beginning, middle, and end (BME) – Aristotle taught us this in *Poetics*.
- A sequence of events.
- A sympathetic character.
- A complication.
- A resolution.



More about what stories need

- The audience cares less about “what happens next?” and more about “how will what happens next affect this character I am invested in / care about?”
- The audience cares more about a good story and story elements and less about grammar, spelling, similar issues.

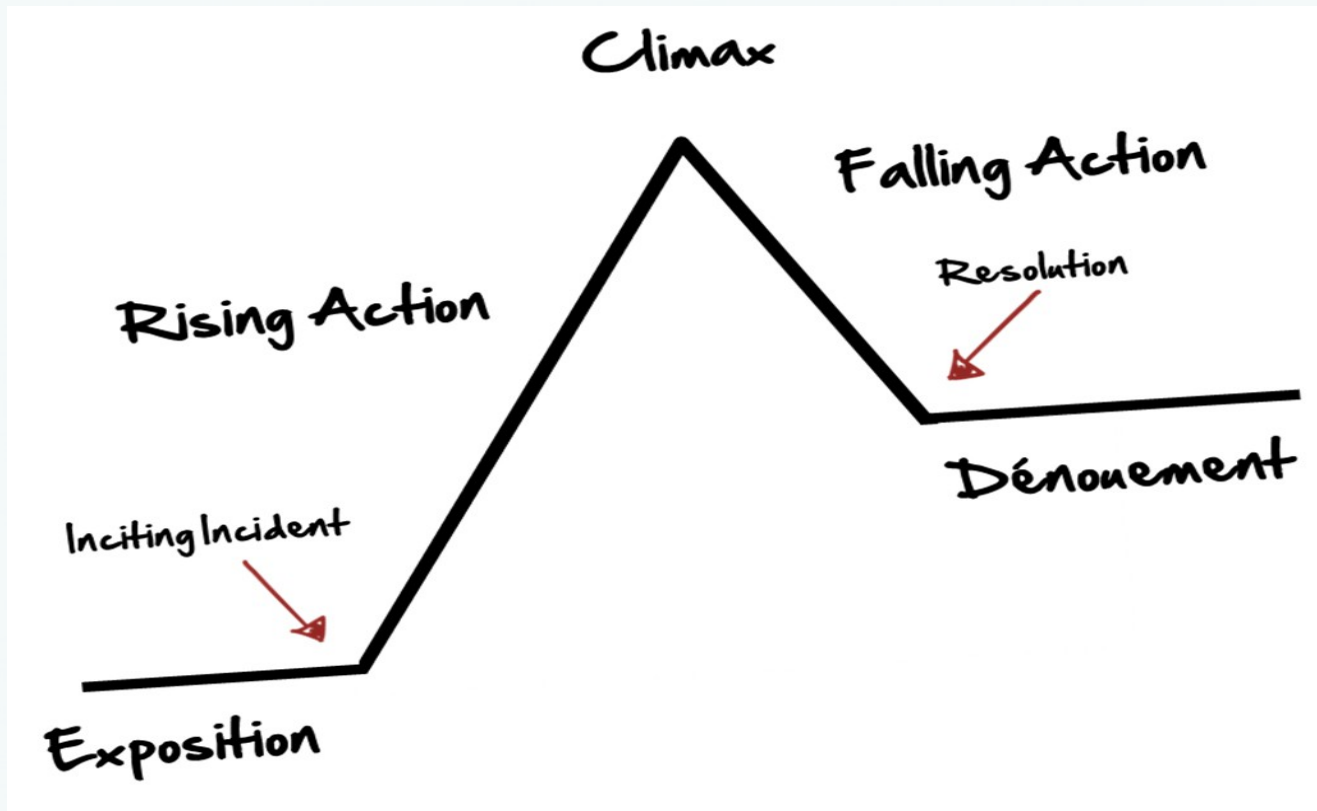


What do good stories do or have?

- They have the ability to keep the reader's attention.
- They have the power to immerse the readers in another world.
- They trigger an emotional response.
- They provide insight that raw facts alone can't.
- They teach lessons.



Narrative arcs



What is your favorite story?

- Write a brief analysis of your favorite story (movie, TV show, book/book series, etc.) using the points from the previous slides.
- Can you map your favorite story onto the typical narrative arc shown? How does it differ? What do flashbacks (for example) do to the arc?
- Then you will pair up and explain your analysis to a partner.
- Then you each will briefly share your findings with the class.



Academic essays and storytelling

Do academic essays tell stories? How do they differ from the points we have discussed? How are they similar?





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Much of this information
came from *Storycraft 2nd*
edition by Jack Hart.