

Writing Your family History
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Session 2-Writing Techniques & Tips

Last Time

- Features of good creative nonfiction: apparent/deeper subject, timely, good story, reflective, good writing
- Forms/Genres: personal essay, travel, personality profile, memoir
- Research

Writing Exercise

- Writing about your family or your past can be scary. Take a few minutes to write about what you are afraid of. What's the worst that could happen if you write this story?



Discussion

“Don’t Flinch” by Jack Smith

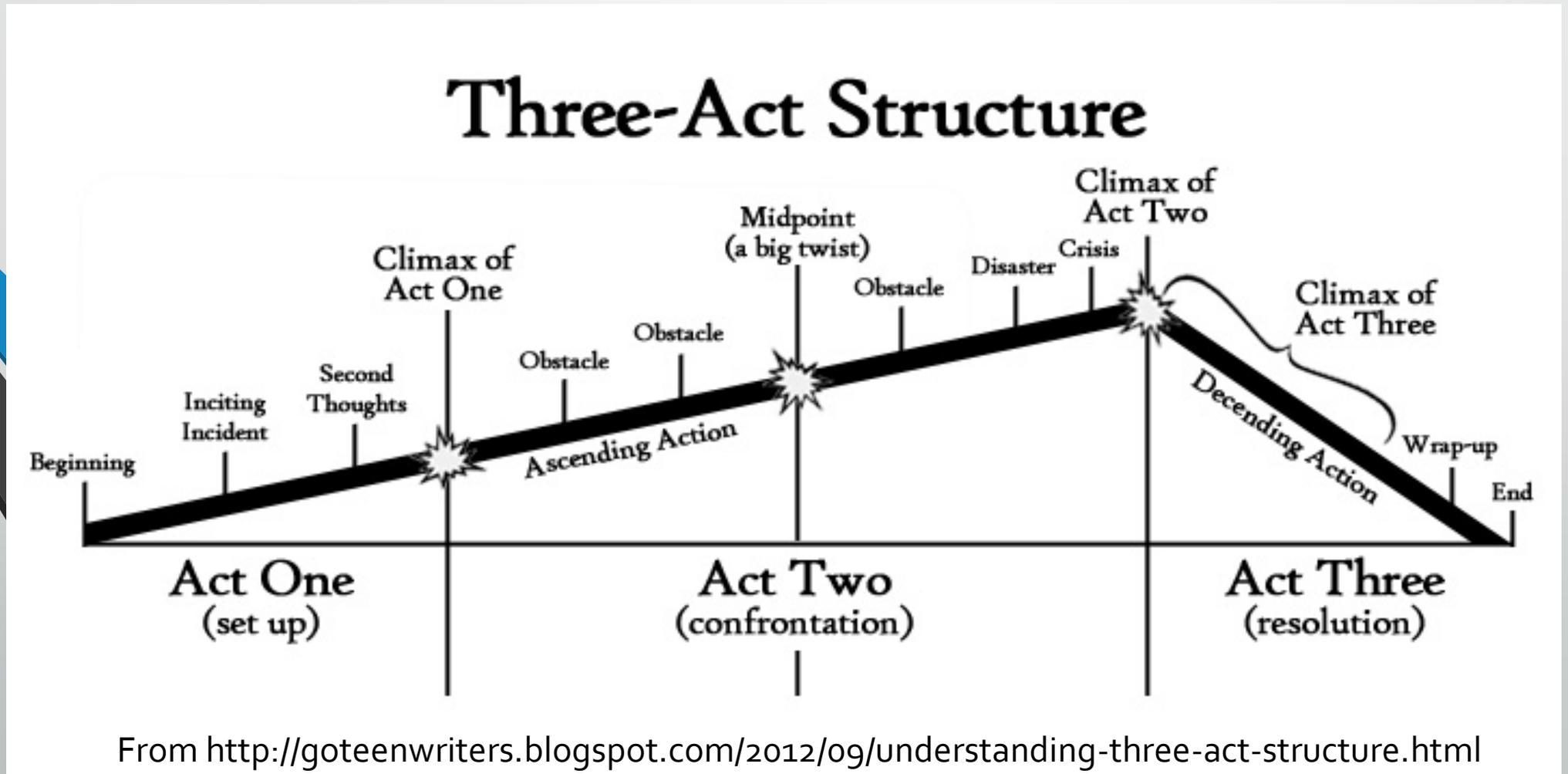
“Telling a True Story,” by Philip Gerard

The Tools of Fiction Writing: Plot

Think of the story you are telling as fiction. Plot = conflict. Your main character wants something, but something/one else is standing in their way.

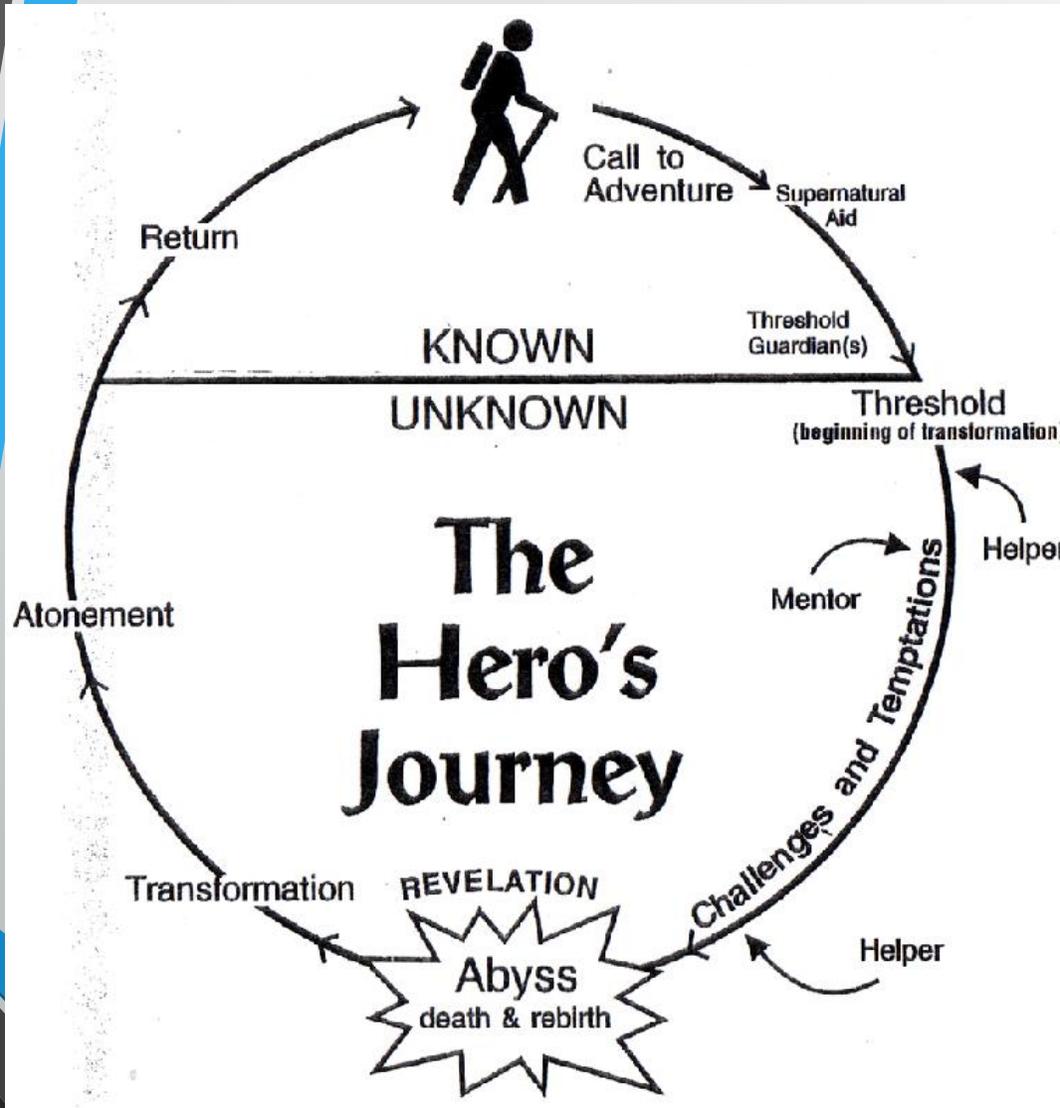
- Beginning- Help the reader bond with your main character.
- Rising Action- introduce what is making their life difficult (external & internal)
- Turning Point/Midpoint – the point of no return, something that changes them
- Reaction- your main character faces the internal difficulty holding them back (or realizes the external conflict is actually an internal one)
- Climax- Emotional self awareness and personal growth
- Denouement- what has changed now? Why can't they go back to the life they had before?

Three-Act Structure



From <http://goteenwriters.blogspot.com/2012/09/understanding-three-act-structure.html>

The Hero's Journey



Not all stories lend themselves to this perfectly. The most important parts for creative nonfiction are: an **external conflict** that is difficult to solve because of an **internal conflict**, the **transformation** that takes place inside as the character handles that conflict, the **climax**, and **resolution**, then some sort of indicator that they are forever **changed** when they **return** to their lives.



The Tools of Fiction Writing: Characterization

- The subject of your story (can be you, or someone else) needs to be relatable. That means that the reader needs to be allowed to know their flaws, their doubts, their fears, and watch them grow.
- Nobody is boring. Everyone has compelling contradictions. Contradictions come from having a nature, and then being nurtured contrary to that nature. Pick a contradiction that is applicable to your story in some way and stick it in. What are your character's contradictions?
- Your characters must all be sympathetic. Even if they are a terrible human being, they still think of themselves as the hero of their own story. They must have once been nice to someone, have felt discomfort or hurt or vulnerable. They must have suffered from internal conflict. You don't have to put it all into your story, but you do have to know or imagine what that is/could be for every character.

Writing Exercise- Choose One

- What are your main character's contradictions? Choose one that is related to the story you are telling and write a paragraph brainstorming how you would work it in.
- Not all stories will have villains, but if yours does, who are they? What terrible thing did they do to your main character? Write a paragraph from their point of view exploring the story you are telling. What reason did they have for being terrible? What did they tell themselves to sleep easy at night?

The Inspiration Slide

- Embrace the Suck- assume what you write is going to be terrible. I give you permission to be an awful writer. No expectations. Just get it on the page.
- Your first draft will never ever do the truth or your memories justice. It's ok. That's what revision is for. We'll handle it.
- Anything can be fixed, but we can't work with nothing.
- Just like with anything, break it down into smaller chunks. Don't write the whole piece. Write just the introduction. Then just the conflicts. Then just the resolution. Or start with the end and go backwards.
- Writing doesn't always feel good, but having written always does.
- Writing is magic. You are creating something from nothing. Honor yourself by acknowledging how insanely cool that is. Even if it's not great at first, it's still SOMETHING where there was once nothing. It's the closest you'll ever get to being a god.

In Class Writing & Homework for Tuesday

- Make your own hero's journey: outline the story you are writing. Include the opening, the external conflict that starts the story, the internal conflict that makes this conflict so challenging, how your main character tackles these conflicts, the climax/resolution, and how your character is changed from this. Do not leave the library until you have an outline for your story!
- For Tuesday, endeavor to have most of your story written. You'll get more out of the class if you've written most of it by then, and we can go over where people got stuck. Finish it by Thursday, as we will be workshopping it.
- Reading: "Driving Mr. Albert" by James Paterniti