

## ELEMENTS OF 3-ACT STORY STRUCTURE

### A Summary of Theses and Terminology

#### I. SET UP aka BEGINNING aka A PROBLEM IS IDENTIFIED

- A. Exposition shows the **status quo** or **given circumstances**, i.e., the world in which the Protagonist lives and identifies an **underlying need** felt by the Protagonist.

(Example: Dorothy leads a hard, unfulfilling life on a Kansas farm where the only being that seems to appreciate her is her dog, Toto.)

- B. An **inciting incident/catalyst** of plot, which focuses the Protagonist and reveals the theme; exposition ends and the **purposeful actions** of protagonist begin.

(Example: Miss Gulch presents a legal document forcing Dorothy to turn over Toto to her, but Toto escapes and runs to Dorothy.)

- C. **Protagonist declares a goal**, sets out to reach objective, leading directly to the engagement of the conflict.

(Example: To save Toto from being killed, Dorothy must run away from the farm. Dorothy's longing for a new life is now not an option but a necessity. Running away results in Dorothy being in the house when tornado hits, it takes her to Oz.)

#### II. CONFLICT aka MIDDLE aka A SOLUTION IS PROPOSED

- A. Escalating action as the **stakes** are raised for the Protagonist, usually through opposition by the Antagonist.

(Example: Dorothy's house kills the Wicked Witch of the East, but Dorothy receives the Witch's ruby slippers, The Wicked Witch of the West vows revenge. To escape the Witch, Dorothy proposes to Kansas, which means she must get the help of the Wizard, who is in the Emerald City, a journey that has many obstacles.)

- B. A **crisis/point of no return** in which the main conflict either reverses direction or rises to a much higher level.

(Example: Dorothy gets to see the Wizard, but he's a fraud.)

- C. The conflict reaches **resolution** when the Protagonist **succeeds or fails at reaching the objective**.

(Example: The Wizard is so touched by Dorothy's perseverance and longing for home that he proposes to take her back in a balloon.)

### III. RESOLUTION aka END aka SOLUTION SUCCEEDS OR FAILS

A. Acts as a coda to the main action; **fully realizes the Theme** by directing us back to the **Protagonist's underlying need** as revealed in the Set-Up.

(Example: Glinda reveals that the ruby slippers will take Dorothy back to Kansas; once there, she finds that she was more valued than she realized.)

The **Protagonist** is in search of a particular goal or objective and drives the actions of the plot.

(Example: Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, who wants to go someplace outside her Kansas farm town to find an environment where she can be valued as a person and to save her only friend, Toto, from being destroyed.)

The **Antagonist** is character or obstacle exerting equal and opposite force to obstruct the Protagonist from obtaining the stated objective.

(Example: Miss Gulch/The Wicked Witch of the West)

The **Theme** is made up of the reasons why the Protagonist's objective is important to both the Protagonist and the audience and how the Protagonist's search for a way to obtain his or her objective relates to the audience's need to resolve similar objectives.

(Example: Dorothy thinks she needs to go over the rainbow to obtain Toto's safety and to be appreciated by those around her, but finds that everyone around her actually has the same goals as she.)

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