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ParkerVision, Inc.
8493 Baymeadows Way
Jacksonville, Florida 32256
e-mail: sales@parkervision.com
Tel: 904-737-1367
Fax: 904-731-0958
www.parkervision.com

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Introduction to Scriptwriting

Stories can be divided roughly into two categories, those that are **PLOT** driven and those that are driven by **CHARACTERS**. Stories are often a blend of both, and even within these two most basic categories there must be the important element of conflict. We'll discuss how plot, character and conflict relate to one another.

online LESSON: 1

Objectives:

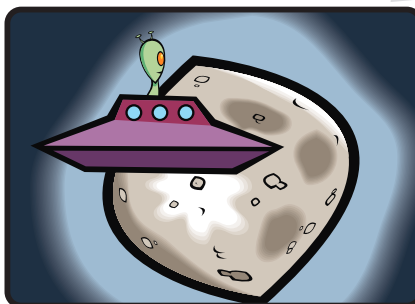
After completing this section you will be able to:

- Identify different types of plots
- Describe external and internal conflict
- Select a story for adaptation

Plot-driven stories follow a pattern of action and reaction. Something happens, and the viewer watches to see how the characters will react and what happens next. Plot-driven stories follow a recognizable pattern. The story begins with a setup, where the problem, challenge or obstacle is introduced; this is followed by rising action (more intense or exciting developments) that builds to a peak and then ends with the problem resolved. Plot-driven stories tend

to have more types of external conflict. Characters do not change their fundamental view of themselves or the world. The Indiana Jones series is a good example of plot-driven stories. Mysteries are often plot driven. Although the characters have obstacles to overcome, their basic beliefs remain the same throughout the story.

What can make a plot-driven story better? Increase the tension and conflict by giving the characters a problem, and then make it increasingly difficult to overcome. Create a powerful antagonist to provide opposition. The antagonists don't have to be human; the environment (tornadoes, avalanches, volcanoes) or simply a deadline will do.

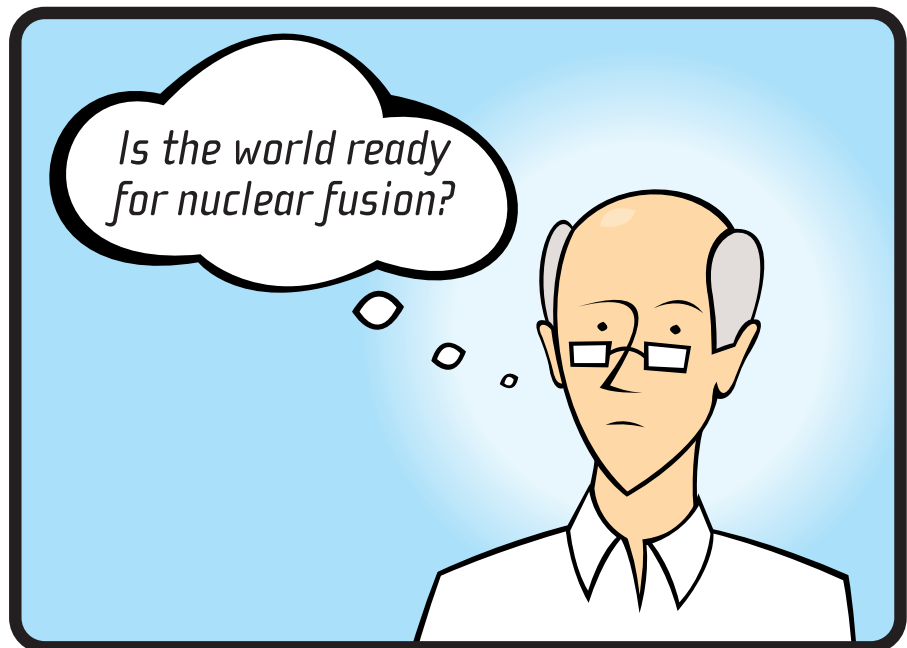


online
LESSON:
2

If a story is character driven, what is going on inside the character's mind and heart becomes more important than the mechanisms of the plot. The main character is tested throughout the story.

Character-driven stories place individuals into situations that force them to react physically and mentally, but the emphasis is on how the developments affect the characters internally. Characters are given strengths and weak-

nesses so viewers feel empathy for them. Their emotional change is the main point of the story. By the end of the story, the main character has become a different person, and other characters in the story may have changed, too. An example of a character-driven story is "A Christmas Carol." The character Ebenezer Scrooge turns from a bitter, selfish man to one who appreciates life and wants to show kindness to others.



Script

There are many types of plots that move a story line forward. In the book **MASTER PLOTS** by **RONALD B. TOBIAS**, the author lists twenty basic plots. Stories often combine two or more. Under which category does your favorite story fall?

<<ACTION>>

List the twenty main plots on a sheet of paper. Try to name at least one story, novel, play, movie or television program that fits into each category.

Using the list you've completed, try to identify which are plot driven, which are character driven and which have elements of both.

THE QUEST
THE RIDDLE
RIVALRY
LOVE
WRETCHED EXCESS
ADVENTURE
DISCOVERY
TEMPTATION
FORBIDDEN LOVE
ASCENSION
PURSUIT
MATURATION
REVENGE
SACRIFICE
DISSENSION
RESCUE
METAMORPHOSIS
ESCAPE
TRANSFORMATION
UNDERDOG

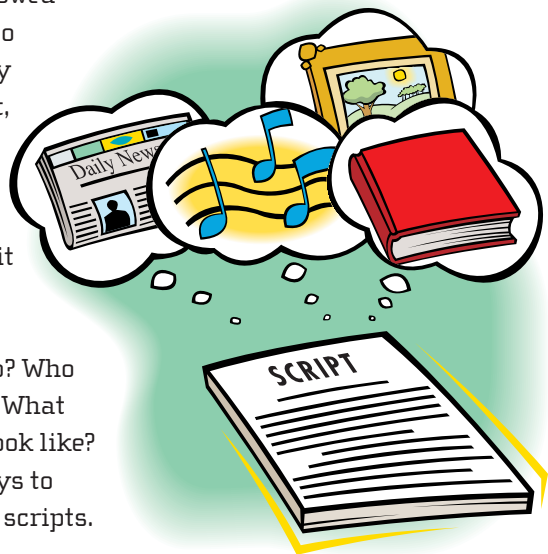
Script

online LESSON: 3

No matter what else, a good story starts with an idea, and coming up with one may be the hardest part of all. New writers tend to be influenced by the latest movies or popular television programs. Even the best actors and technical experts are secondary until you have a good idea. If you've never tried this type of writing before, one of the best ways to approach writing a script is to adapt a familiar story. Folktales, legends and fairy tales all lend themselves to adaptation. Shakespeare is one of the most frequently adapted writers in the world, and he himself borrowed quite a bit. You don't need to rework the entire story; try changing just one element, such as the setting. For example, turn the classic Cinderella story into a modern version, or set it in the Old West. What type of work would Cinderella have to do? Who would be the prince? What would happily ever look like?

There are other ways to find ideas to turn into scripts.

Ask a dozen writers where they got the ideas for their stories, and you'll probably get as many different answers. It could be a book, a painting or a song. Childhood memories sometimes spark imaginations. It might be a newspaper article. You never know what source may trigger an idea. Writers allow the "what ifs" to surface and see if anything develops. Try writing about what you know. You may feel that there's nothing interesting enough in your world to write about, but everyone has a story to tell, including you.



<<<rewind

online
LESSONS:
1-3

1. In a plot-driven story, the _____ is the most important part.
2. You can tell when a plot is character driven because the character always _____ by the end of the story.
3. What is the typical pattern for a plot-driven story?

4. What happens to the main characters in a character-driven story?

5. What is the most important thing to have before you begin writing?

Script

Treat-

A treatment is used by professional scriptwriters as a way to present their idea for a story. A treatment is a summary of the story, including the ending. It usually includes a sample of the dialogue and some screen directions. Some treatments are only a page in length, while others, depending on the scope of the project, may be much longer. Here's an excerpt of a treatment:

what?" Dustin snaps out of his daydream. Drayton tells Dustin he's thought of a way to get some fast cash. They'll become street performers for a day and pass the hat for donations. But neither of them can sing or dance.

Meanwhile, Alexis talks with Vanessa, her best friend. "I just can't seem to get Dustin's attention. He's so cute, but he always acts like he's a million miles away. I guess there's no chance he'll ask me to the prom. He doesn't even know I'm around." Against his better judgment, Dustin lets Drayton convince him that the street performer idea will work. They lip-sync and dance to some reggae music and actually get a few donations. Things are going pretty well until Dustin spots Alexis and Vanessa walking toward them. Dustin looks around desperately for a place to hide, but it's too late! They see him!

online LESSON: 4

"JUST ASK HER!"

It's two weeks before the prom, and 17-year-old Dustin wants to ask Alexis to be his date. Dustin had a crush on her all year, but he's short on both cash and courage. Dustin's best friend, Drayton, dreams up a plan to help Dustin solve his money problems, but even he can't convince Dustin to "just ask her." Dustin is in class, daydreaming that he and Alexis are at the prom, dancing slowly to the music. She looks into his eyes ... then Drayton interrupts. "Dustin, buddy, class is over! Are you just gonna sit there all day or

Objectives:

After completing this section you will be able to:

- Write a story treatment
- Organize a story into a standard script format

Script

After the treatment is written and the story approved, it will be rewritten in script format. This breaks the story down into scenes. The scenes include dialogue and other necessary information. A final version of the script would include directions for shooting. The heading for each scene gives the number of the scene and when and where it takes place. However, scene numbers are one of the last things to be placed in the script.

This outline will be used in all the successive stages of the script as well. Following this format adds a professional touch. It also serves as an organized blueprint if the script goes into actual production.

Here are a few tips on the layout and abbreviations. The number designates the scene number. In professional productions, scenes are shot out of sequence by location, so numbers help to keep things organized. **INT** = interior; **EXT** = exterior. Next comes where the action takes place, in all caps.

Then **DAY** or **NIGHT** (in all caps) depending of when the scene takes place. Characters' names are in all caps, centered, directly above their lines. However, in dialogue names are not typed in all caps. Props that play an important part in the story are also written in caps. (See example on next page.)

Keep your first attempts simple. Limit yourself to one main character, or two at the most. Decide if your story will be plot driven or character driven. Remember that conflict drives the story, no matter which type of plot you choose. All people have the same basic needs, hopes and fears. It's natural to be interested in how others perceive life and handle challenges. That's evident by the number of movie tickets sold, television programs watched and videos rented! Try some of these suggestions, at least while you're learning to write your first script!

Script

“JUST ASK HER”

1. INT. CLASSROOM - Day

DUSTIN and DRAYTON are watching the announcements on the TELEVISION in their class.

ANCHOR

“...Prom tickets are on sale during all lunches. They're only fifteen dollars. Be sure to get yours soon because they're going fast. That's the news for today. Thanks for watching.”

The announcements end and the BELL rings. Students begin leaving class, but DUSTIN doesn't move.

2. INT. ONSTAGE - NIGHT

DUSTIN and ALEXIS dancing slowly onstage, dressed for the prom.

Single spotlight, DISCO BALL turning. ALEXIS smiles and looks up at DUSTIN as if to kiss him.

3. INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

DRAYTON, sitting behind DUSTIN, leans forward and gives him a push.

DRAYTON

Dustin, buddy, class is over! Are you just gonna sit there all day or what?

DUSTIN

(Snaps out of his daydream, startled)

What? Oh, sorry!

DRAYTON

(Shaking his head)
You're doing it again.

DUSTIN

(Looking puzzled)
Doing what?

DRAYTON

I know that look when I see it. You were thinking about Alexis.

DUSTIN

(Tries to hide embarrassment)
You're crazy!

DRAYTON

(Nodding head with a smug look on his face)
Listen, are you just going to sit there and do nothing about it, or do you want to hear my idea? I've got a plan!

Script

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1. What is the purpose of a treatment, and what should it include?

2. What is meant by "script format"?
