



ELA Virtual Learning

Creative Writing

May 11, 2020



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Lesson: Mon. May 11

Objective/Learning Target: Students will learn how a story's structure affects its *controlling idea*.



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Warm-up: Let's revisit [Robert McKee's chapter from *Story*](#). (If you haven't already, download or print this in order to rotate it so it reads correctly.) Today, read the first few pages about controlling ideas.



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Lesson: In short, controlling ideas are like themes. What's at stake for the story's main characters, and what is the underlying value? (Some values might be *survival*, or *justice vs. injustice*, or in the case of the *Seinfeld* episodes I've been referencing lately, *success vs. failure*.)

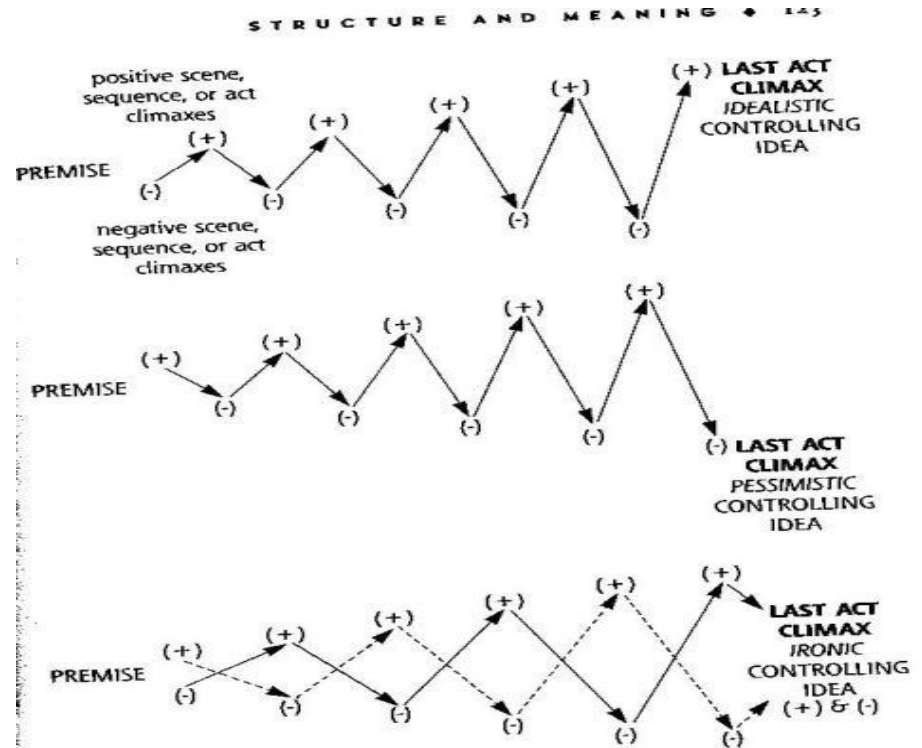


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Practice: Outline an episode of a television show (you've already done this if you've been following along). Next to each scene summary, mark a (+) or (-) to show whether the main action was a net positive (+) or negative (-) result in terms of the character getting what he or she wants (their motivation). Do you notice a pattern? Are there more negative or positive actions? Where does the story end?

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Lesson (cont'd): According to Robert McKee, the final “value” in the story structure determines its controlling idea-idealistic, pessimistic, or ironic.





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Lesson (cont'd): An ironic ending, he says, is the most relatable. We see both values and say “life is just like that.” For example, in an episode of *The Simpsons* called “The Mansion Family,” Homer gets to be rich for a weekend when he house-sits for Mr. Burns, but by the end of the episode things have returned to normal. Instead of reflecting on the “wealth” he has figuratively (family), he breaks down in tears. We relate because we share his fantasy but know it’s highly unlikely.



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Additional Practice: Actively watch another episode of a television show you've been studying. Do you notice a pattern of positive vs. negative scenes? How does an episode typically end? Idealistic (an “up ending” that feels hopeful), pessimistic (a “down ending” that feels more cynical), or ironic (both existing at the same time)?



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Additional Practice/Resources:

[How to Become a Television Comedy Writer](#)

[Screenwriting Glossary](#)

[Screenplay Formatter Add-On for Google Docs](#)