



ELA Virtual Learning

Creative Writing

May 13, 2020



Creative Writing

Lesson: Wed., May 13

Objective/Learning Target: Students will learn about subplots and how they affect the main plot.



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Warm-up: For the past couple of lessons, we read an excerpt from Robert McKee's book on storytelling craft, *Story*, and watched a video of him discussing [controlling ideas](#) for stories written specifically for television. Today, [watch this video in which he discusses subplots](#).



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Lesson: Subplots accelerate the pace, McKee tells us. They can also clarify the theme or controlling idea of the central plot. Watch this [scene from *Star Wars*](#). At the beginning, Luke's discussion with his uncle reflects the main plot--his inevitable meeting with Obi-Wan who will guide him toward his true destiny. (Of course, Luke is ignorant of this now.)



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Lesson (cont'd): However, as conversation transitions away from Obi-Wan, Luke reveals a subplot: his negotiation with his uncle about staying on as a farmhand or going to the academy to become a pilot. This subplot may be short-lived (the droids attract Imperial troops who kill Luke's aunt and uncle), but it accomplishes a couple of things: we understand Luke's motivation, the pacing breaks up early expository scenes, and it helps clarify the theme of destiny.



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Lesson: In TV scripts (or teleplays), these are often referred to as “A” and “B” plots, and though they sometimes are related thematically, this is not always the case. *Subplot* implies that it’s serving the main plot in some way, and “B” plots frequently do this. In sitcoms, though, often they’re used for storylines that aren’t as complex. In my [Simpsons outline referenced last week](#), Grandpa’s story does relate thematically, but the scenes are played mostly for laughs.



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Practice: Over the past week, these lessons have encouraged you to outline and study a current television show. In your journal, brainstorm 6-7 story ideas that would fit the style of that particular show (or, if you haven't been following along, pick one!). Try to think of stories involving different characters. For example, episodes of *Friends* often involve 2-3 characters; only once in awhile does a main plot involve all 6.



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Practice (cont'd): Now, taking a look at the list you've brainstormed, do you notice any thematic similarities? What about locations or characters involved? Imagine cutting back and forth between a couple of these stories. What would that look like on the screen? Circle two or three of these ideas that seem like they could work together. Tomorrow, we'll start to outline these ideas and see whether they could combine to make a complete episode.



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Additional Practice/Resources:

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

[Screenwriting Glossary](#)

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