

STRUCTURE

What we mean by the 'structure' of a story is probably best explained by what it isn't.

The mix of narrative, dialogue, description, pace, rhyme, rhythm is 'composition' and we're covering that in a later session.

Some people say there are only seven stories in the world, some say ten, these are 'plots'.

So 'structure' is what is left – the basic shape of the story. When you read a book or watch a film you know how far along you are, by how many pages or how much time is left. When you listen to a story you get this feedback by recognising its structure and how far your storyteller has taken you.

This session looks circular stories, there-and-back stories, 'nested' stories, 'envelope' stories and linear stories.

But first a short diversion. Just what are those seven plots?

Standard version:

Plot Type	Example Story
The Fatal Flaw	Achilles
The Love Triangle	Tristian & Isolde (and King Mark)
The Doomed Lovers	Romeo & Juliet
The Innocent Dupe	Candide
The Temptress	Circe
The Descent into the Underworld	Persephone
Rags to Riches	Cinderella

There are others, below is the version favoured by Wikipedia when we went to press:

Plot Type	Example Story
Overcoming the Monster The protagonist sets out to defeat an antagonistic force which threatens the protagonist and/or protagonist's homeland	Theseus, Beowulf
Rags to Riches The poor protagonist acquires things such as power, wealth, and a mate, before losing it all and gaining it back upon growing as a person.	Great Expectations
The Quest The protagonist and some companions set out to acquire an important object or to get to a location, facing many obstacles and temptations along the way	The Illiad

Voyage and Return The protagonist goes to a strange land and, after overcoming the threats it poses to him/her, returns with nothing but experience.	Orpheus
Comedy Light and humorous character with a happy or cheerful ending; a dramatic work in which the central motif is the triumph over adverse circumstance, resulting in a successful or happy conclusion	Much Ado About Nothing
Tragedy The protagonist is a villain who falls from grace and whose death is a happy ending.	Julius Ceasar
Rebirth The protagonist is a villain or otherwise unlikable character who redeems him/herself over the course of the story	Beauty & The Beast

Circular Stories

They go all the way round and end up where they started.

A circular story sees the hero go through many events, each time expecting to improve his situation, but ultimately finding himself back where he started. One example is the nursery song 'There's a hole in my bucket, dear Lisa'. The sample circular story below is a version of a well-known traditional Japanese tale 'The Little Cobblestone Maker'. You can see icons for the different stages of this story drawn in felt tip around a baking potato, a great artefact for a single teller to manipulate while telling the story. It looks interesting to the audience, acts as an aide memoire for the teller and concentrates the viewer's gaze on the potato, rather than the face of a self-conscious beginner storyteller. Groups of pupils could just as easily create large-scale drawings for display around all four walls of their telling space.



The Little Cobblestone Maker

Once upon a time the little cobblestone maker was sitting and chipping away at a big mountain making cobblestones like he'd always done, when the King passed by in his carriage.

"Oh, look how grand and powerful the King is", said the little cobblestone maker. "I wish I could be the King." And as he wished he was. The little cobblestone maker became the King in his carriage.

But as he sat in the carriage the sun beat upon him through the window and the sweat began to trickle down his brow.

“Oh, look how grand and powerful the sun is”, he said. “I wish I could be the sun.” And as he wished he was. The little cobblestone maker became the sun.

But as he beamed down upon the earth a cloud floated by and blocked out his rays.

“Oh, look how grand and powerful the cloud is”, he said. “I wish I could be the cloud.” And as he wished he was. The little cobblestone maker became the cloud.

But as he drifted across the sky the wind blew him off and afar.

“Oh, look how grand and powerful the wind is”, he said. “I wish I could be the wind.” And as he wished he was. The little cobblestone maker became the wind.

But as he turned this way and that and blew as hard as he could he came upon a mountain. And no matter how hard he blew he couldn't move that mountain.

“Oh, look how grand and powerful the mountain is”, he said. “I wish I could be the mountain.” And as he wished he was. The little cobblestone maker became the mountain.

But as he stood stout and tall he felt a sharp and painful, chip, chip, chipping at his foothills. He looked down and saw a little cobblestone maker chip, chip, chipping with his pickaxe.

“Oh, look how grand and powerful the little cobblestone maker is”, he said. “I wish I could be the little cobblestone maker.” And as he wished he was. The little cobblestone maker was a little cobblestone maker again.

And he sat chip, chip, chipping, happily ever after.

There and Back stories

They go off on an adventure and return home again. These stories usually involve a growing list of encounters that usually need to be revisited in reverse order on the way back. ‘The Old Woman and the Pig’ that we used earlier is one of these, but on the next page is a story that can be completed with the aid of the audience:

The Owl & The Lighthouse

Encourage the audience to join in with the Twhit Twoo's, a hand gesture from the storyteller helps to make sure everyone does this at the same time.

High on a clifftop at edge of a town next to the sea, there is a ruined house
get the audience to describe it

And in the house there lives an owl

Twhit Twoo

The owl is very happy flying around the house at night, except for one thing
- the light from the lighthouse across the bay

One night he decides he has had enough; he will fly over and tell the light-house keeper to turn the light off.

He flies out of the house

Twhit Twoo

get the audience to give you a short phrase to describe how (eg: through the broken window/door)

Over the town

Twhit Twoo

The dogs, that hear him, go ... *(get the audience to make the noise of the dogs)*

Twhit Twoo

The cats, that hear him, go *(get the audience to make the noise of the cats)*

Twhit Twoo

The children, that hear him, go *(get the audience to make the noise of the children)*

Over the field

Twhit Twoo

The rabbits that hear him ... *(get the audience to say what the rabbits do in response eg: hide in the bushes)*

Twhit Twoo

The mice that hear him*(get the audience to say what that mice do in response)*

Twhit Twoo

The *(get the audience to choose another animal)* that hear him*(get the audience to say what that animal does in response)*

Over the sea

Twhit Twoo

The *(get the audience to choose a sea creature)* that see his shadow*(get the audience to say what that sea creature does in response, eg: jelly fish wibble and wobble)*

Twhit Twoo

The *(get the audience to choose a sea creature)* that see his shadow*(get the audience to say what that sea creature does in response)*

Twhit Twoo

The *(get the audience to choose a sea creature)* that see his shadow*(get the audience to say what that sea creature does in response)*

And into the lighthouse

Twhit Twoo

(get the audience to describe how eg: through an open window)

And up the tower

Twhit Twoo

Up one hundred steps

Twhit Twoo

Up two hundred steps

Twhit Twoo

Up three hundred steps

He went into the lamp room and there was

Get the audience to decide who the owl met

And he/she said '**BOO**'

The owl was scared and flew away

He flew down the tower

Twhit Twoo

Down one hundred steps

Twhit Twoo

Down two hundred steps

Twhit Twoo

Down three hundred steps

And out of the lighthouse

get the audience to remember how

Back over the sea

Twhit Twoo

(get the audience to remember, in reverse order, the sea creatures he met on the way there and what they did)

Back over the field

Twhit Twoo

(get the audience to remember, the other animal, mice and rabbits and what each did)

Back over the town

Twhit Twoo

(get the audience to remember the children, cats and dogs and the noise each made)

And back to the house

Twhit Twoo

Get the audience to remember how (eg: through the broken window/door)

And he never left home again.

Nested stories

These are stories where similar events occur several times before the eventual happy ending.

Traditionally these are the 'rule of three' stories, where the eldest son/daughter goes on a quest and fails, the middle son/daughter goes on a quest and fails, the youngest son/daughter goes on a quest and succeeds. But sometimes they can be a 'rule of two' where the two are an elder, horrible, step-sister and her younger, good, sibling.

Here is how to make a useful artefact to help remember and tell nested stories:

<http://www.mythstories.com/StorCube.pdf> will give you instructions on how to make a story cube.

<http://www.mythstories.com/NesteBox.pdf> will give you instructions on how to use 3 cubes to make a nested box for this type of tale,

and most importantly, <http://www.mythstories.com/cubenest.pdf> will give you downloadable templates for the three different cubes.

Example Nested story – Kotura, Lord of the Winds

In a nomad camp in the wilds of the North, lived an old man with his three daughters.

One day in the depths of winter, a snowstorm blew up and raged across the tundra, families sat fearful in their chooms, hungry and cold, dreading that the camp would be blown away.

The old man said 'If the storm continues for much longer we shall all die for certain. It was sent by Kotura, Lord of the Winds, he must be very angry with us. There is only one way to save the camp. We must send him a wife from our clan. You, my eldest daughter, must go to Kotura and beg him to halt the blizzard.'

'I shall give you a sled. 'turn your face into the North Wind. Push the sled forward and follow it. The wind will tear open your coat-strings, do not stop to tie them. The snow will fill your shoes, do not stop to shake it out. When you get to the top of a steep hill you can stop to shake the snow from your shoes and do up your coat. A little bird will land on your shoulder, do not brush him away, be kind and caress him gently. Then jump on to your sled, it will take you to Kotura's choom. Enter and touch nothing. Just sit and wait until he comes and do exactly as he tells you.'

Did Eldest Daughter do all these things? No

She stopped and began to tie the strings of her coat and to shake the snow from her shoes. She shooed the bird away.

When she arrived at the giant choom she made a fire, warmed herself and cooked some meat on the fire.

Kotura arrived home and she didn't follow his instructions either. The following morning he threw her away into a snowdrift. And the storm grew worse

Back in the Nenets' camp the Old Father said to his two remaining daughters.

'Eldest Daughter did not heed my words, I fear. That is why the wind is still shrieking and roaring its anger. Kotura is in a terrible temper. You must go to him, second daughter.'

..... and second daughter similarly disobeyed instructions and met the same fate as Eldest Daughter

Back home, the old father sent out his Youngest Daughter.

Youngest Daughter left the camp.

She only stopped to shake out the snow from her shoes and tie the strings of her coat when she reached the hilltop.

She was kind to the bird and waited until it had flown off before going on her way.

She arrived at the choom, went in and waited for Kotura

He instructed her to cook some meat. She did.

He told her to take it to their neighbour. She went outside and realised she did not know where the neighbour lived.

The bird came back and showed her the way.

She gave the food to the neighbour and returned to Kotura with the dish.

Kotura took the lid of the dish and found two sharp knives and some bone needles and scrappers for dressing hides, which he gave to Youngest Daughter.

The next day he gave her some deerskins and told her to make him some shoes, mittens and a coat by nightfall.

She started work straight away, but even with the knives, needles and scrappers knew the task was impossible to complete in a day.

The old woman came by and asked Youngest Daughter for help, she had something in her eye.

Youngest Daughter got up to help – and four young woman jumped out of the old woman’s ear and helped her make the clothes.

When Kotura returned he found the clothes and they all fitted perfectly.

He married Youngest Daughter and the storm stopped.

There are plenty of other stories that follow this pattern – why not try the 3 Little Pigs and the Big Bad Wolf, especially if you are working with younger children.

Envelope (or Shell) Stories

have their own start, middle and end but in between there are other stories. The envelope story is complete in itself; but is more interesting with the other stories interwoven in it.

They are ideal for group telling, with one person telling the ‘envelope/shell’ and others the individual stories contained.

In the example given your pupils have to make up the seven stories. Each tells the year-long adventures of one of the seven Princes and how he acquired his special power or magic object.

Example Story – Sunday and His Six Brothers

(the envelope)

- A long time ago, before the invention of the leap-year....
- A King and Queen had seven sons, each born on the same date, called Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

- The sons went to seek their fortunes together and spent their first night sleeping in a forest glade.
- Whilst they were sleeping the pathway where they entered disappeared and seven new pathways opened.
- Each son takes a different path and they arrange to meet back in the glade in a year and a day.
- In a year and a day they all return to the glade

(The seven stories that fit inside this envelope are the stories of how each brother acquired his gift:

- *Sunday has a magic telescope that can see whatever he wants to find*
- *Monday a magic violin that plays so sweetly it lulls everyone off to sleep*
- *Tuesday has the skills of a master pickpocket*
- *Wednesday has a coat with pockets that can hold anything, no matter what size*
- *Thursday has a stick that turns into an invincible army*
- *Friday has a bow and arrow that never misses its target*
- *Saturday has the ability to catch anything*

These stories are shared by the brothers)

(the envelope continues)

- They settle down to sleep.
- That night the seven paths vanish and one path appears so they all go along it.
- They reach an unhappy land
- The Princess has been kidnapped by an evil magician
- Whoever rescues the Princess will marry her
- Sunday uses his telescope and sees the evil magician locking the Princess in a tower
- The brothers dash to the rescue and arrive to find a pre-wedding feast in progress
- Monday goes in as a musician for the feast, he plays his violin and everyone falls asleep
- The brothers dash in with their ears blocked
- Tuesday steals the tower key from the magician's pocket
- The brothers dash up the tower to unlock the princess' room
- Wednesday puts the Princess in his pocket
- The brothers dash out of the castle to take her back to her father
- BUT WITHOUT THE MUSIC STILL PLAYING
- The Evil magician wakes up and sends his army after them
- Thursday lays his stick in the army's path, it turns into an army and the stick army beats the magician's army
- The brothers carry on
- The Magician transforms into an eagle, attacks Wednesday and steals the Princess from his pocket
- Friday shoots the eagle with his bow and arrow

- The Eagle drops the Princess and plummets to earth, dead
- BUT the Princess is falling through the air
- Saturday catches her
- They all return to her father

- But who shall marry the Princess? Which Prince rescued her?

- The Princess is allowed to make her choice.
- It is Saturday because he saved her when she had lost all hope.

At <http://www.mythstories.com/teachart.html> you will find - amongst other ideas - a picture of a kavad showing this story, together with links to instructions on how to make one of your own and links to sample illustrations that you could use.

On the link above, just below the kavad, under 'Story Creation Games' you will find the instructions you need to make your own Apley Manor game, as used below in:

Linear Stories

These follow a straight path, with predictable signpost incidents along the way. For example: magician captures Princess, hero learns of Princess's plight, hero rescues Princess, hero and Princess marry.

1. Changing an existing story

- Chose a story and tell it to the group
- Identify the signpost incidents, or better still, get the group to identify them for you.
- Talk about different ways these signpost incidents could be linked to create a different story.
EG: The hero could learn of the Princess's plight by hearing a proclamation / seeing her captured / being told about it by a visitor to his village/ seeing a poster nailed to a tree.
The hero could travel to her rescue by horseback/ on foot / by boat / by magic carpet / or any other means.
- Then talk about ways to alter the signpost incidents themselves.
EG the Princess was captured when she was a baby/when she was 16.
She was imprisoned in a tower/ a dungeon / in the magician's castle and made to do all the housework.
- Tell the remodelled tale.

2. Creating a new story

Make a location – use a cardboard box and turn it into a 3D model of the main setting for your story. The reason for this is to give the activity a focus, the model does not have to be a work of art (although it could be!).

Make cards for different locations within the setting, different objects that could play a part in the story, different characters that could be villains, victims or heroes.

Example – Apley Manor: A Gothic Horror
(This is ONLY SUITABLE for older children, because of the nature of the tale.)

This will create a typical Gothic Horror story with three signpost incidents:

- A villain who is up to no good – he is a repeat offender, and this incident is his modus operandi.
- An innocent young woman, who crosses the villain's path and is destined to be the next victim.
- A hero/heroine who rescues her just as it seems that all is lost.

Using an empty cardboard box on its side, pull out the long flap to reveal the ground floor plan: a butler's pantry, a scullery, the morning room, a dining room etc. Pull out the two side flaps to reveal the exterior woodland and other possible locations: a crypt, an ice-house.

You should have one card for each room together with a couple of objects that could be found in that room. For example the Dining Room could contain a Candlestick and a Carving Knife.

And a card for each of the characters who could be the villain or the hero/heroine: a vicar, the lord of the manor, the butler, the gardener, the companion, the maid etc.

And a card for the innocent young woman herself.

To create the story:

Pick one of the character cards to be the villain.

Pick one of the rooms where the dastardly deeds are done

Ask questions that will generate answers to build up the scene:

'What time of day or night did the villain carry out his deed?'

'How often – every month, every year?'

'What happened to the victims afterwards?'

The format of the questions will depend on the responses given, but you should be able to create a scenario of villainy taking place in the chosen room and involving the objects. For example: Every month, on the night of

the full moon, the vicar stabbed his victims to death in the dining room with the carving knife and he cut up their bodies and roasted the pieces over the candlestick!!!

The golden rule is that once someone has answered a question, their answer becomes part of the story and cannot be contradicted.

Then introduce the card for the innocent young woman.

Again by questioning, decide who she is (a relative/ member of the household / stranger) and just how she came to be in the dining room on the night of the full moon.

Then chose the card for the hero/heroine.

Again by questioning, decide how they realised the villain was up to no good, that the innocent young woman was in danger and how they saved the day.

In groups, build up these three signpost incidents. Use visualisation (with the cardboard box model as a starting point). Incorporate sensations and think about motivation and the role of each of the characters. Get each group to practise telling the incidents from start to finish by saying one sentence each

Once the three incidents are embedded in the pupils' minds, link the incidents to create the story. Try to use repeat phrases, rhythm, rhyme or alliteration.

Finally, tell the completed story. Notice that the three signpost incidents take up most of the storytelling time – after all, they are the crux of the whole tale.

This technique can easily be adapted for use by younger children. For example they could create a flat playing board rather than a 3D model. Most importantly they could use a child-friendly genre, rather than gothic horror.