Module 1: First Principles

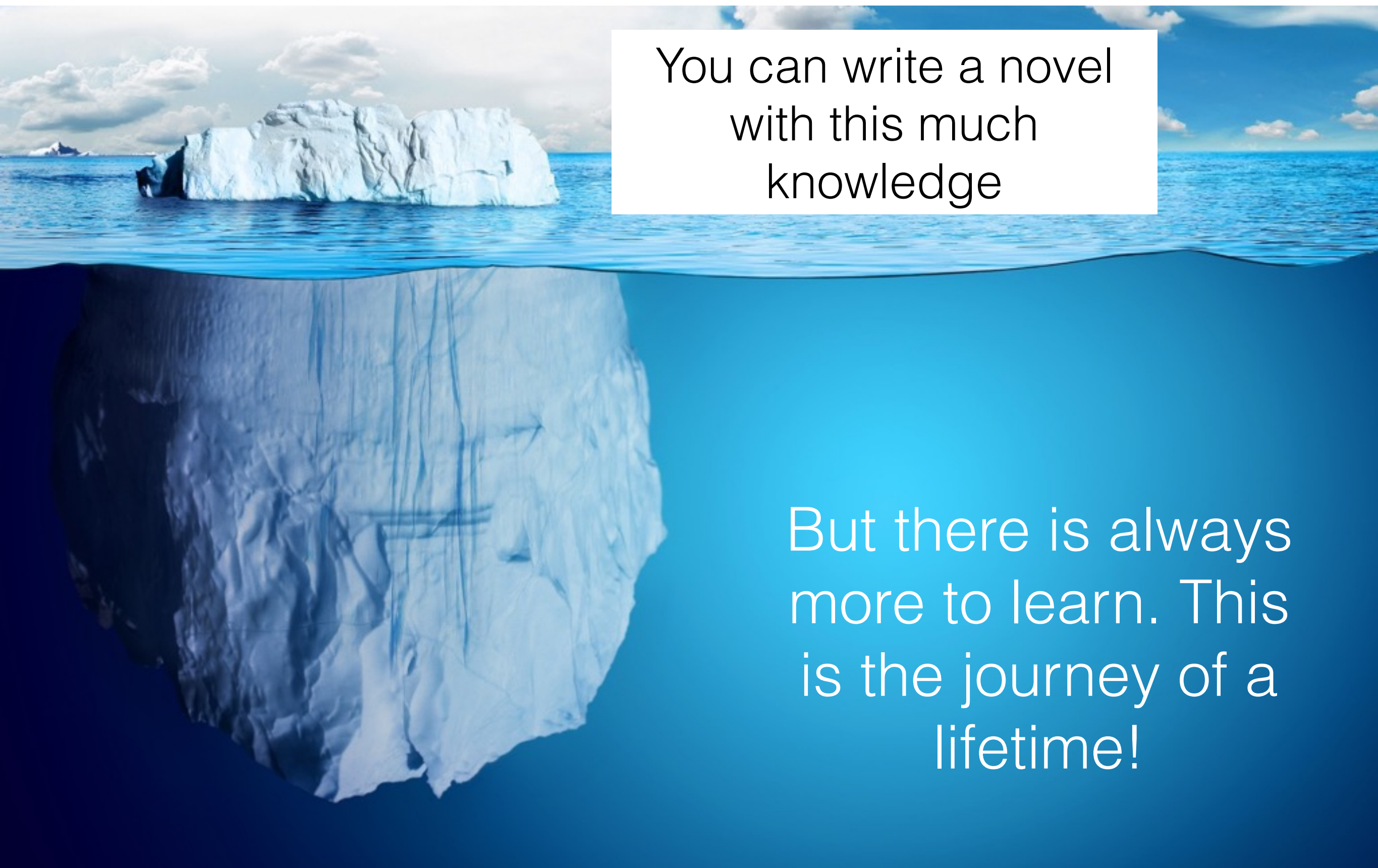## Story Structure

HOW TO **WRITE** A NOVEL

"I do not over-intellectualize the production process. I just keep it simple: Tell the damn story."
Tom Clancy

"Most people know what a story is until they sit down to write one."
Flannery O'Connor

The writing craft is like an iceberg

You can write a novel with this much knowledge

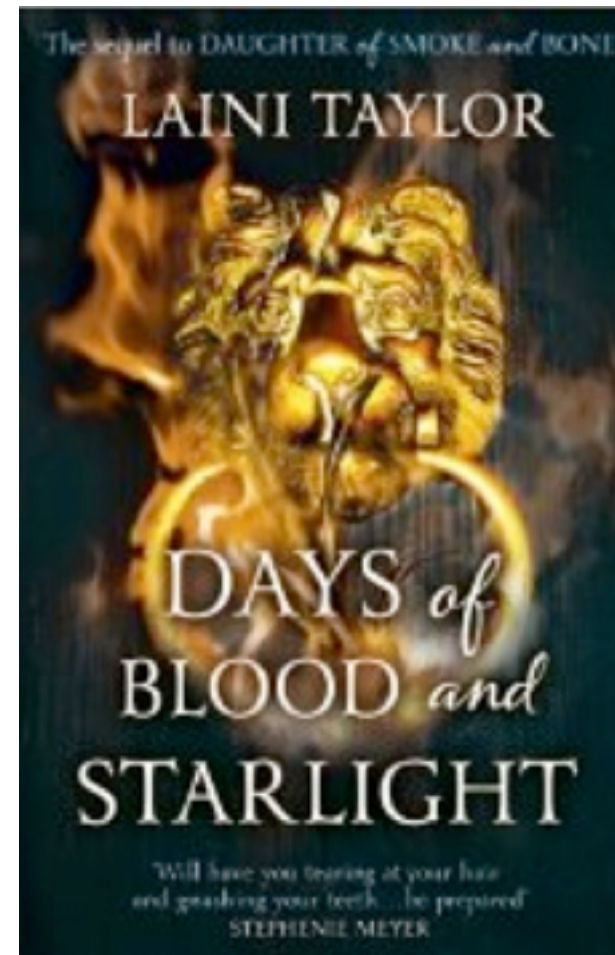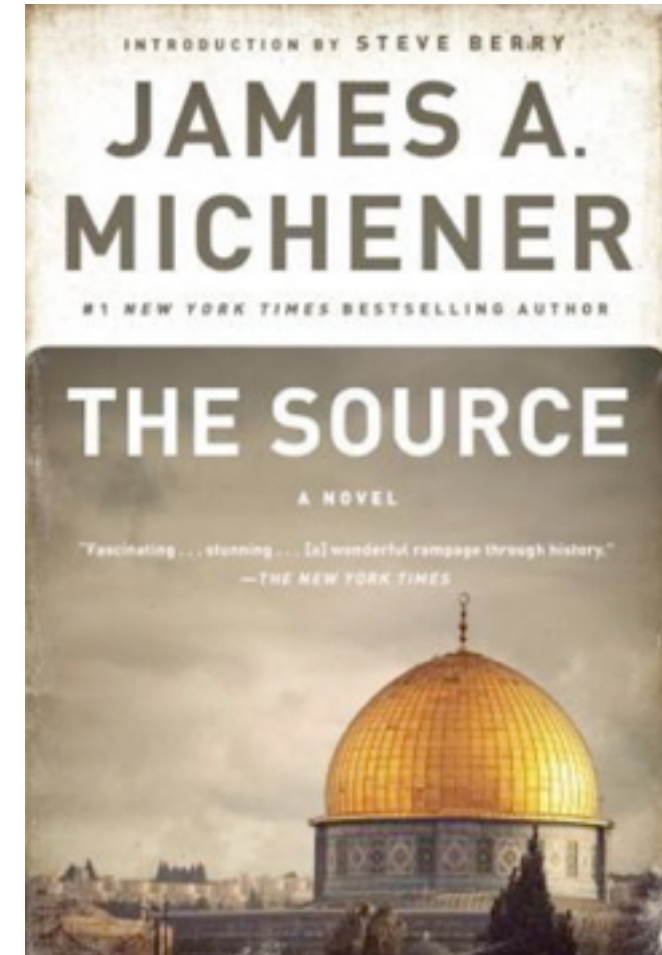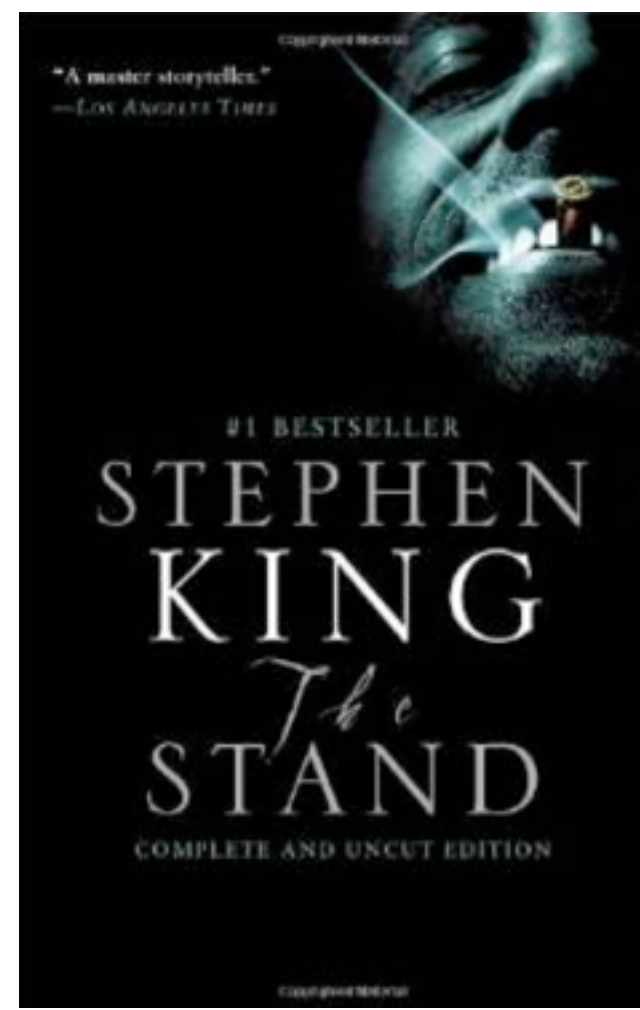But there is always more to learn. This is the journey of a lifetime!

Story instinct from years of reading, watching, talking … and life!
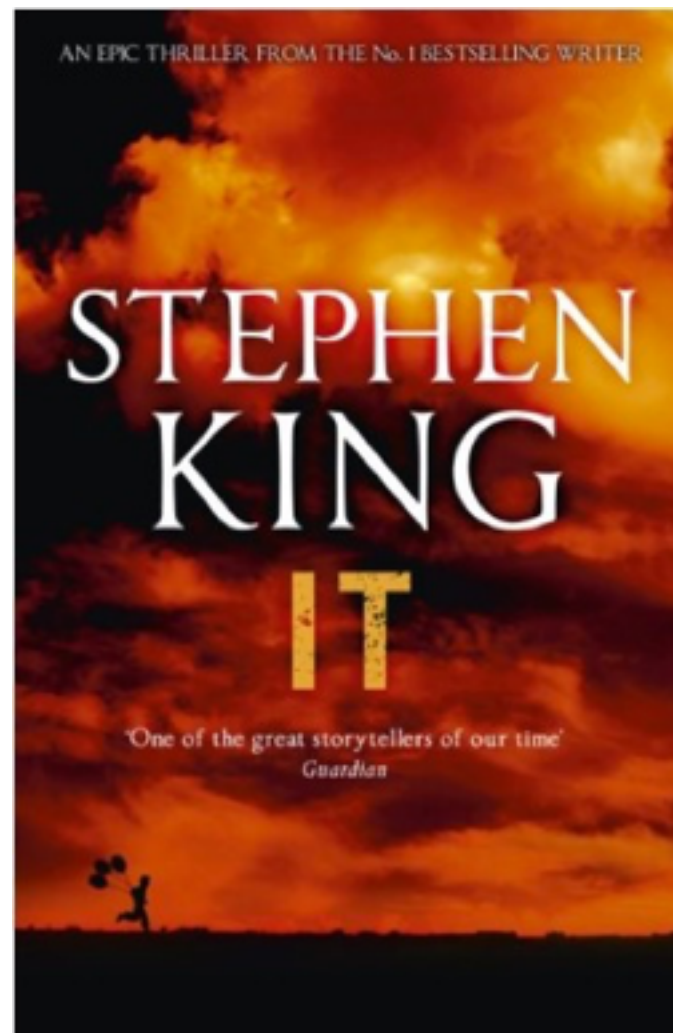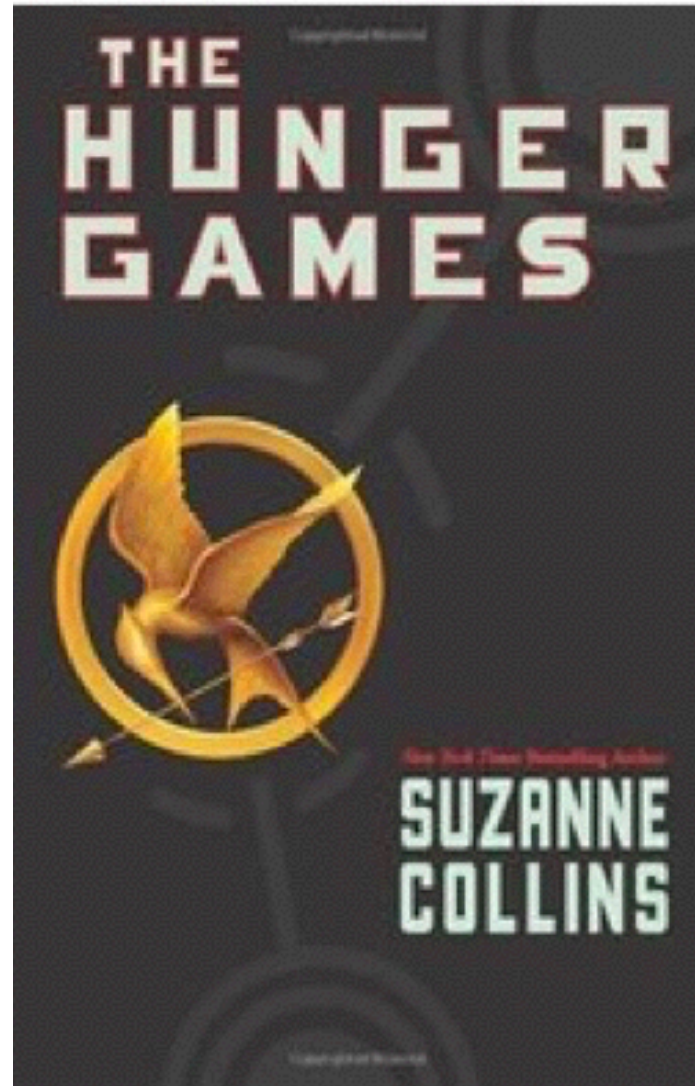
What makes a satisfying story?

Think of your top 5 books and movies. Why were they so satisfying?

What do the best-selling stories have in common?

It's not about sentences. It's about story. That's what we remember.

The Hunger Games trilogy by Suzanne Collins. IT by Stephen King … and Harry Potter … and LOTR …
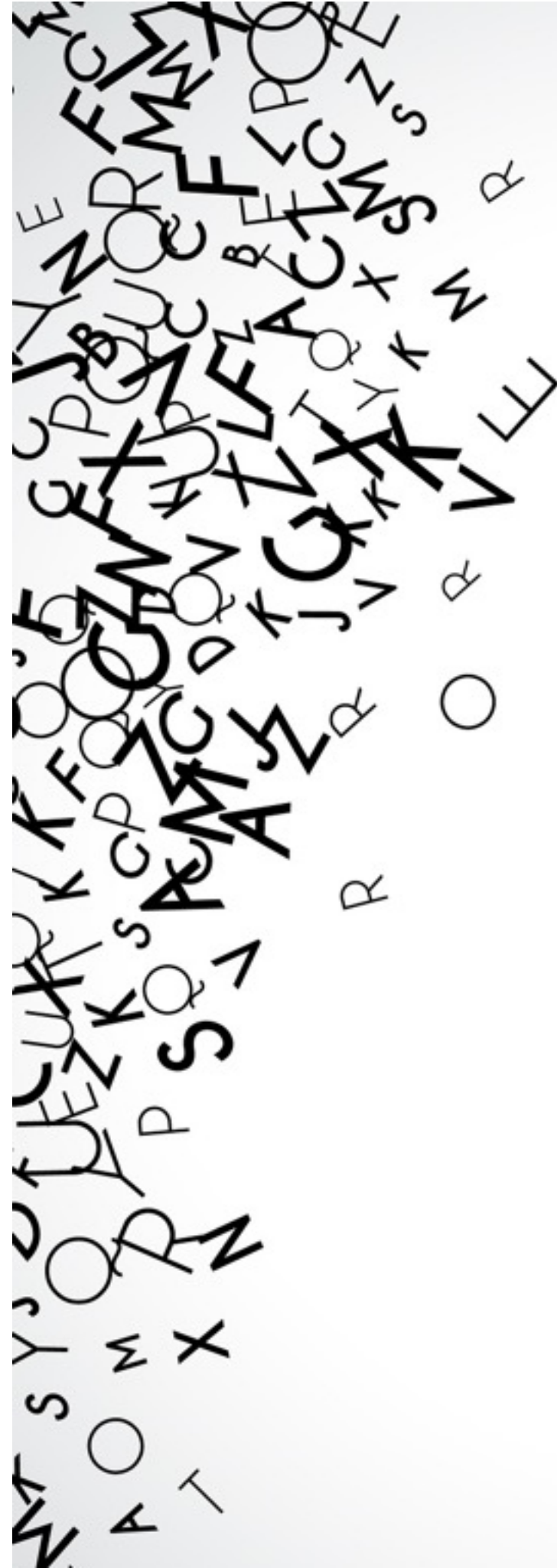
- Main character we can root for. Good vs evil theme, plus justice and freedom

- Overcoming incredibly difficult obstacles. High stakes. Friends and family involved.

- Ultimately a fight to the death and our hero/ine wins - good over evil. Life returns to a new equilibrium and the reader can breathe again

Structure: Overall design, layout or organization of your story. High level. Demonstrates movement.
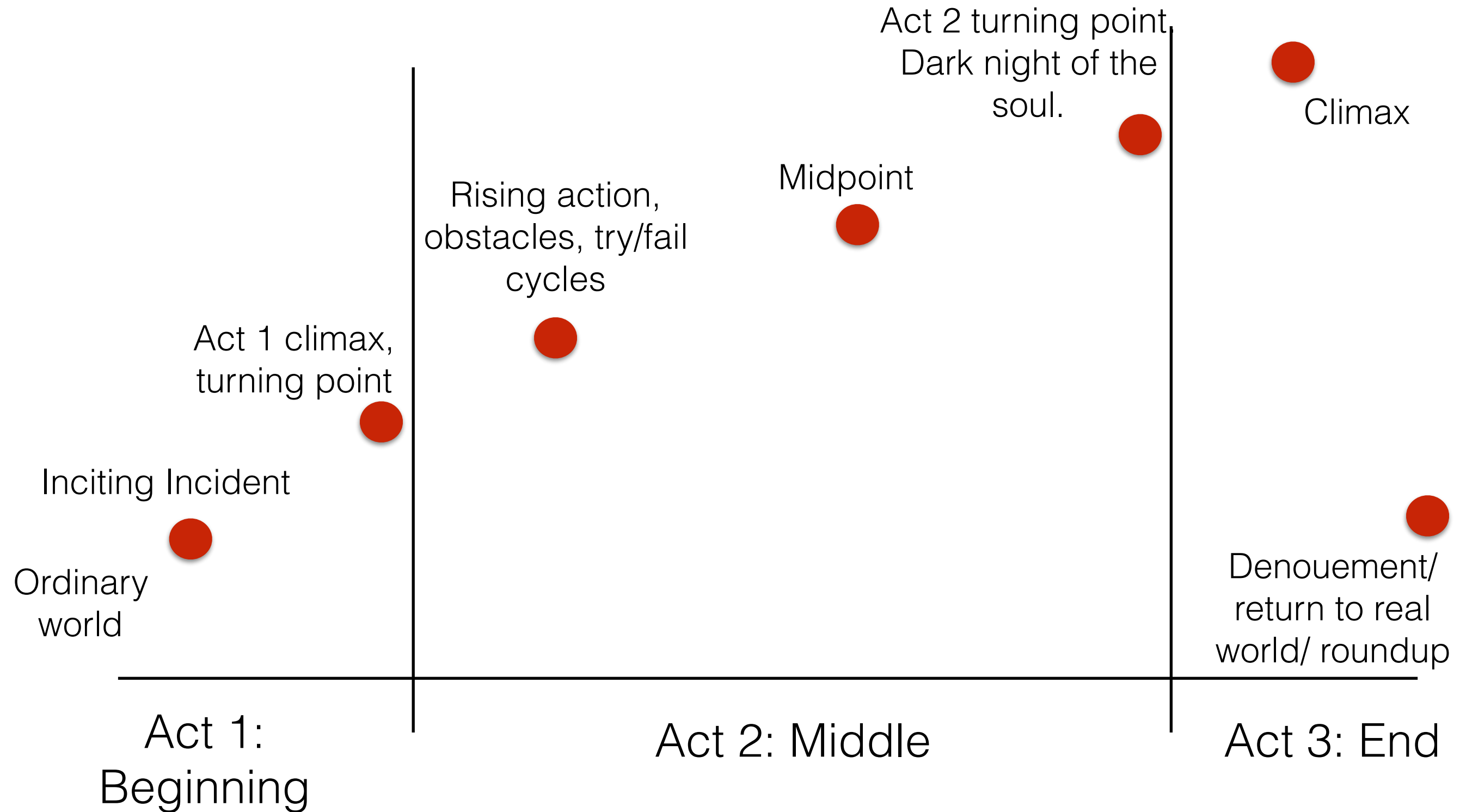
Plot: Specifics of what happens in the story and why. Series of events that make up your novel.

Character - Who is in the story and what do they want? Who or what tries to stop them getting what they want?

Outlining vs Pantsing: Ways of writing the novel e.g. plotting in advance or as you go along

Three Act Structure goes back to Aristotle's Poetics

Act 2 turning point,
Dark night of the soul.

Climax

Midpoint

Rising action,
obstacles, try/fail
cycles

Act 1 climax,
turning point

Inciting Incident

Ordinary
world

Denouement/
return to real
world/ roundup

Act 1:
Beginning

Act 2: Middle

Act 3: End

Just like life :) How you do the day … or solve a problem

Ordinary world: Katniss in Panem, hunting for food for family. Struggles of oppression. Presents the world, the protagonist & opposition, makes us want to know more. Establishes tone and genre.

Inciting Incident: Prim is picked for the reaping

Act 1 climax, turning point: Preparing for the Games, declaration that Peeta loves her. She must stay alive & keep him alive?

Act 2: Escalating conflict, and try/fail cycles or fun & games: The character wants something, they try to get it and face conflict/ struggle along the way. The Games themselves. External and internal conflict.

Midpoint. Peeta saves her life even though she thought he'd allied with others. Rue relationship.

Dark night of the soul. All is lost. Rue is dead. Games is getting worse. Death seems inevitable.

But/ Katniss re-commits. She will win for Rue.

Fighting with tributes and the mutts … to the bitter end

Climax: The story reaches its peak e.g. hero & villain fight in a thriller. Katniss & Peeta win - but rules change - but berries! Conflict to the end.

Obligatory scene since inciting incident: will she win the games? … Yes! (but… for a series)

Resolution: Round everything up to a satisfying conclusion e.g. back to real life again. What does it mean in a bigger sense?
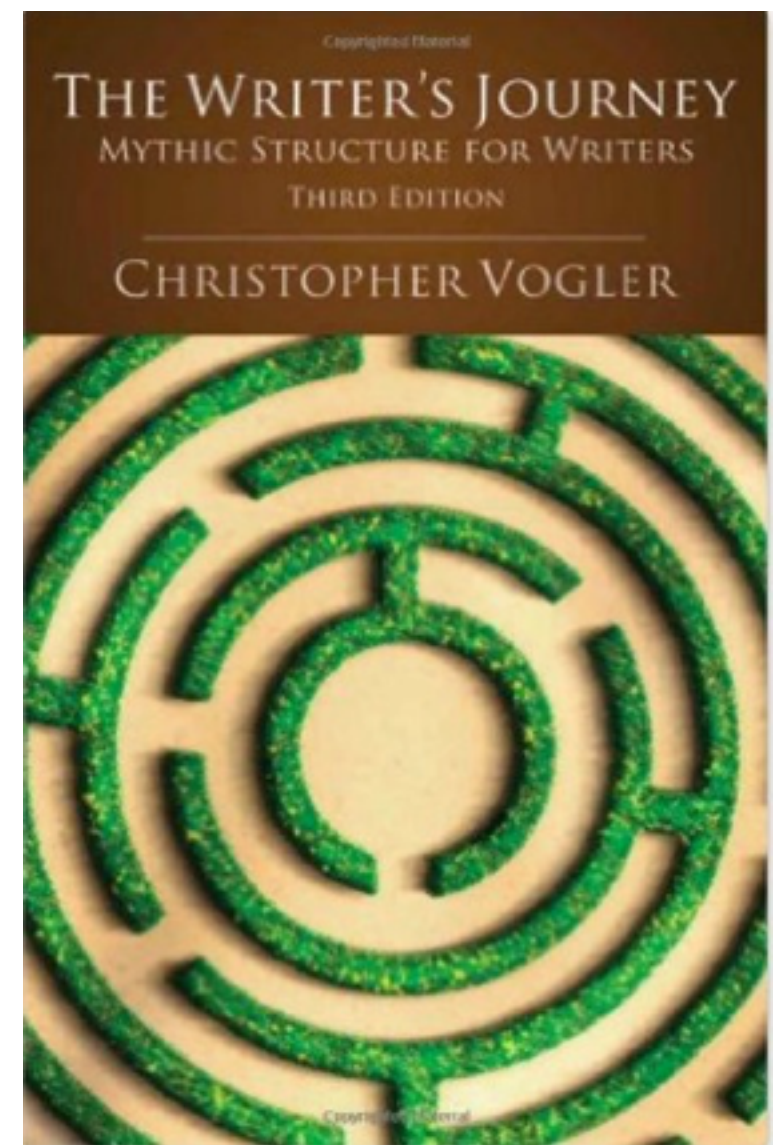
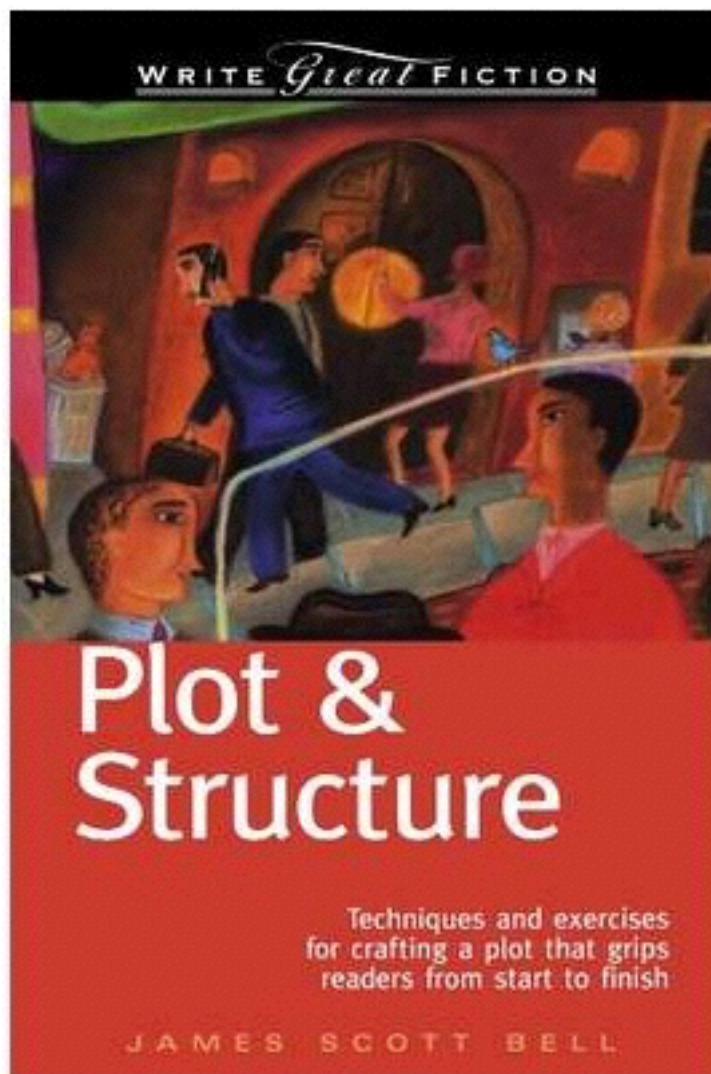A story is a journey that the reader is coming on with you.

It needs to **unfold in the right way** for it to resonate in the best way.

When things happen at the 'wrong' times, the reader can feel it even if they might not know why

The Hero's Journey fits over the 3 act structure, just with more metaphor :) e.g. call to adventure - Inciting incident

http://ingridsundberg.com/2013/06/05/what-is-arch-plot-and-classic-design/

THE WRITER'S JOURNEY
MYTHIC STRUCTURE FOR WRITERS
THIRD EDITION

CHRISTOPHER VOGLER

WRITE *Great* FICTION

Plot & Structure

Techniques and exercises
for crafting a plot that grips
readers from start to finish

JAMES SCOTT BELL

"How you get from beginning to middle (Act I to Act II), and middle to end (Act II to Act III), is a matter of transitioning.

Rather than calling these plot points, I find it helpful to think of these two transitions as 'doorways of no return.' **Every story has a disturbance and two doorways of no return**."
James Scott Bell

Coming up with those is plotting :)

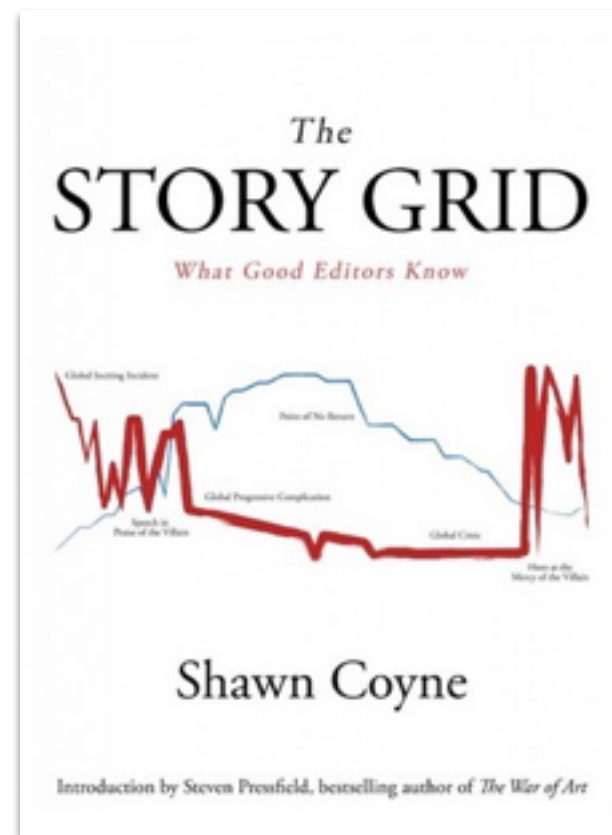Non-linear = Telling story out of order e.g. Time Traveller's Wife - *Audrey Niffenegger*. Memento.
And other varieties … but start by keeping it simple!

Genre and Structure. Conventions & Obligatory scenes

Murder mystery. Dead body found. Plot will be various clues & suspects until perpetrator is confronted. Who did it and why; justice is done or not.

Action Thriller. Ticking clock. Hero at the mercy of the villain. High stakes.

Romance. Two people meet. There's conflict. First kiss. Happily ever after (HEA)

The
STORY GRID
What Good Editors Know

Shawn Coyne

Introduction by Steven Pressfield, bestselling author of *The War of Art*

"Write for the genre nerds desperate for new stories."
Shawn Coyne

"Won't this make for cliché stories? I want to write something original."

A structure will help you be more original.

Creativity within approximate boundaries.

Use this as guideline to help you create.

"When forced to work within a strict framework, the imagination is taxed to its utmost… and will produce its richest ideas. Given total freedom, the work is likely to sprawl."

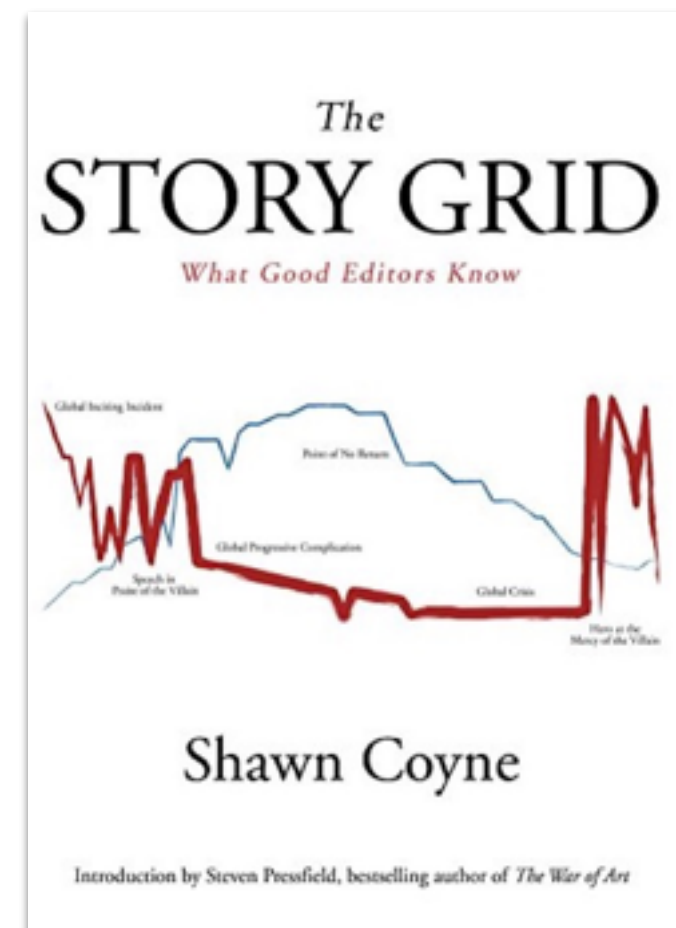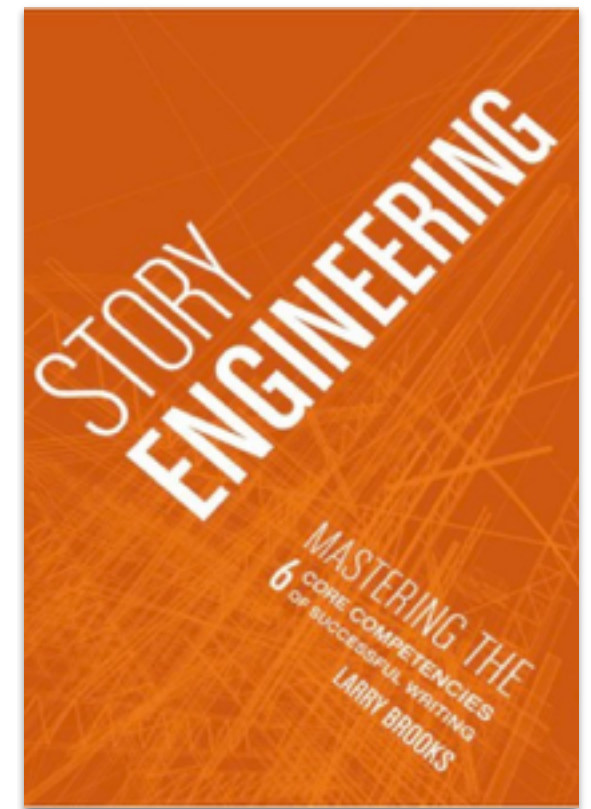*T.S.Eliot*

My own writing breakthrough! Writing in Scenes

A scene must have:
Setting, time & place
Point of view
Must advance plot or show character
Add *specific* details

Larry Brooks - *Story Engineering*

Value shift e.g. + to -, or - to - - or some kind of change
Conflict - external/internal

Shawn Coyne - *The Story Grid*

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Scene vs chapter

Most writers write in scenes. Chapters are a way to organise a book.

Some books e.g. fast-paced thrillers have **one scene per chapter** e.g. James Patterson. Some are very short & there are a lot of them.

You can put **multiple scenes into a chapter.** Use some kind of break to separate them, e.g. time stamp
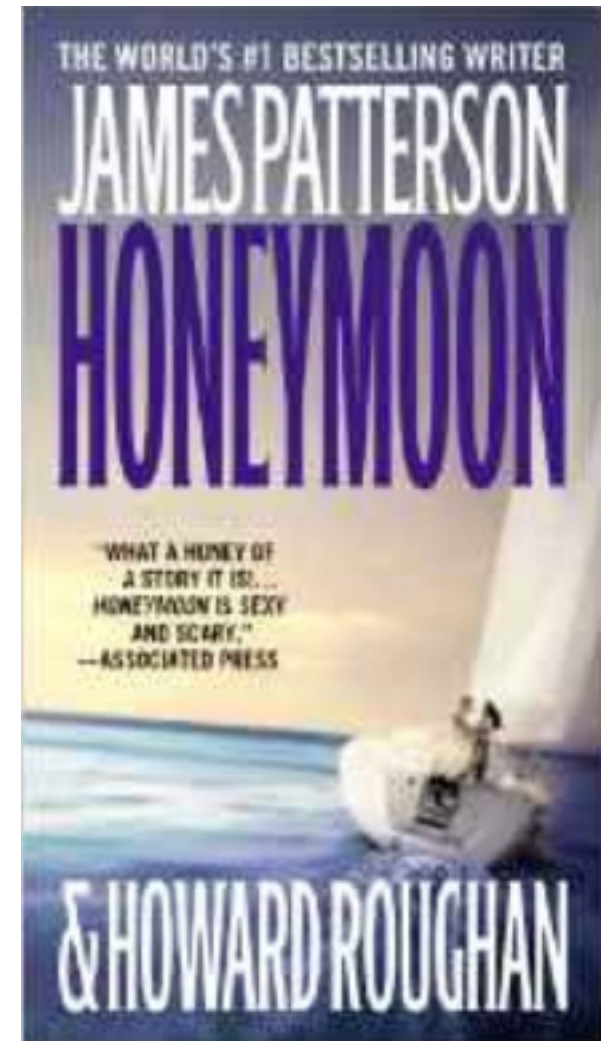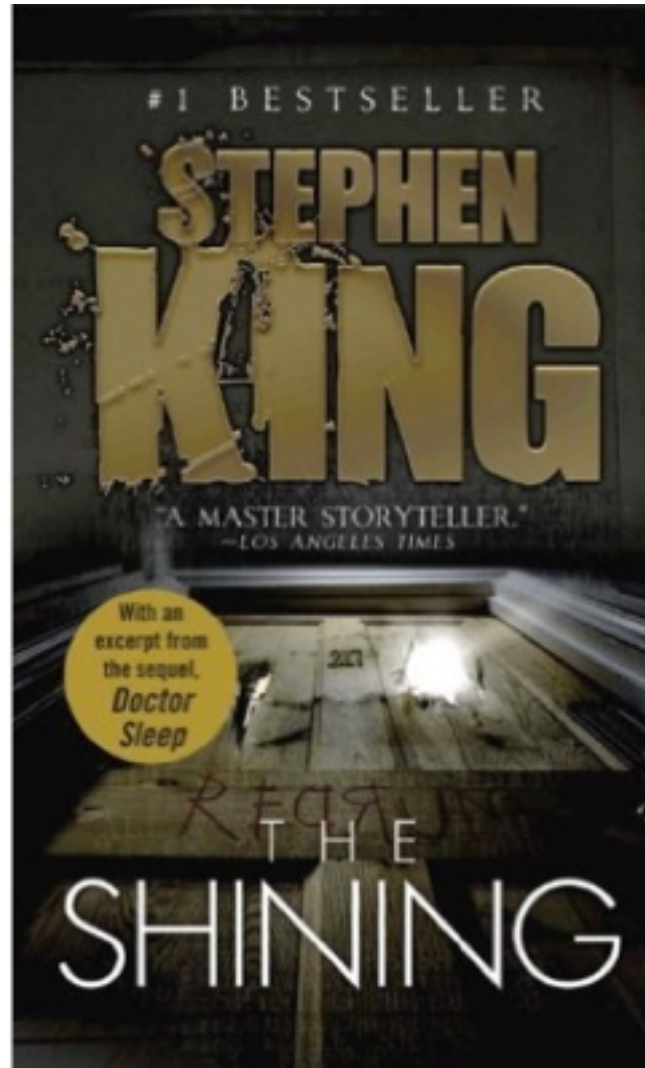
You can **break a scene across two chapters** in order to leave a cliff-hanger. This is usually done in editing as most authors write in scenes.

How long is a chapter? How many chapters in a book?

Depends on how many scenes per chapter e.g. Patterson has 117 chapters in *Honeymoon*. Approx 75,000 words, so 641 words per chapter - but more likely, longer chapters and shorter ones for pace

The Shining - Stephen King has 57 chapters. Over 100k words and fewer chapters. Multiple scenes in chapter.

Look at genre conventions & books that are similar to what you want to write

#1 BESTSELLER

STEPHEN KING

"A MASTER STORYTELLER."
—LOS ANGELES TIMES

With an excerpt from the sequel, *Doctor Sleep*

THE **SHINING**

THE WORLD'S #1 BESTSELLING WRITER

JAMES PATTERSON

HONEYMOON

"WHAT A HONEY OF A STORY IT IS!...
HONEYMOON IS SEXY AND SCARY."
—ASSOCIATED PRESS

& HOWARD ROUGHAN

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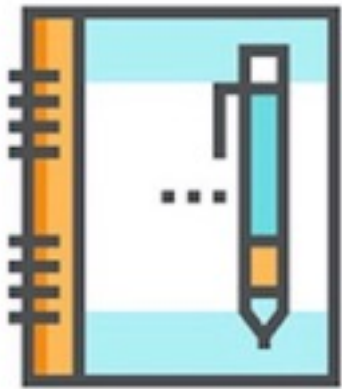
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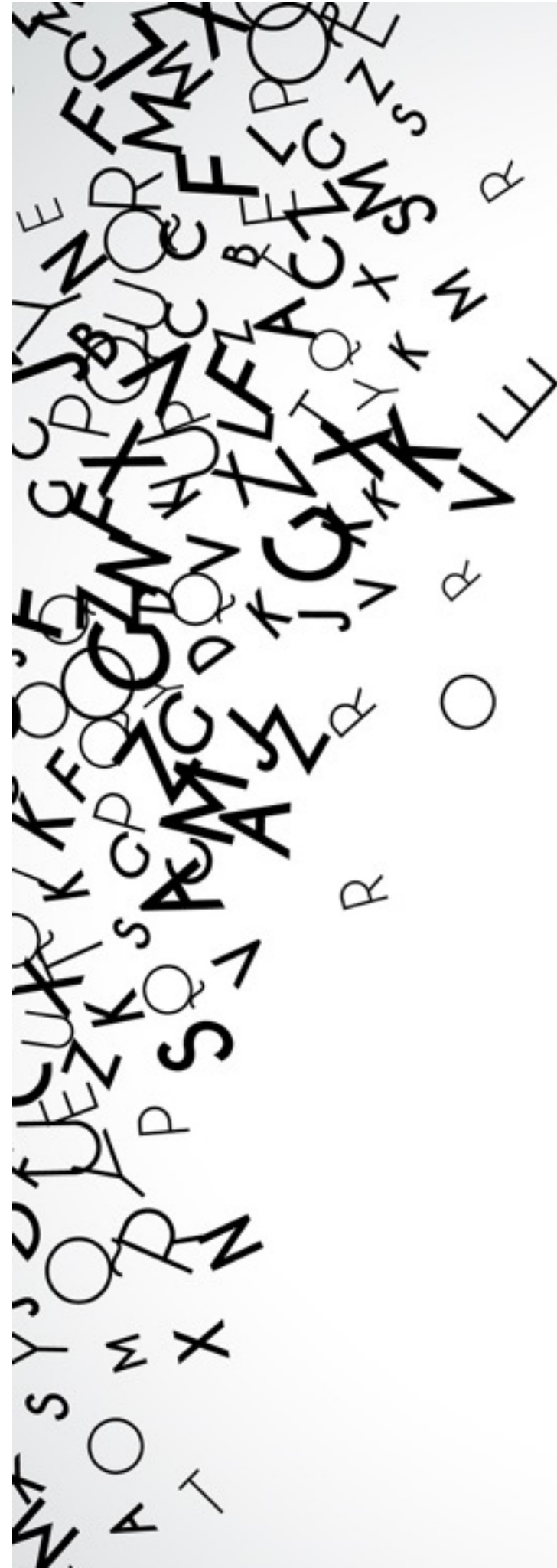
Exercise: Map out structure of your favorite book/film

WORKBOOK

- Think about (or go through) your favorite book or film. How does it map onto the approximate 3 act structure?

- If you're ready, think about your own story. Does it map to the same approximate structure? What is missing?

  As we move into the more detailed segments, we'll get deeper into structure as it relates to plot and outlining.