

WRITING FOR TV FILM AND RADIO

WEEK 1

DR SARAH REYNOLDS

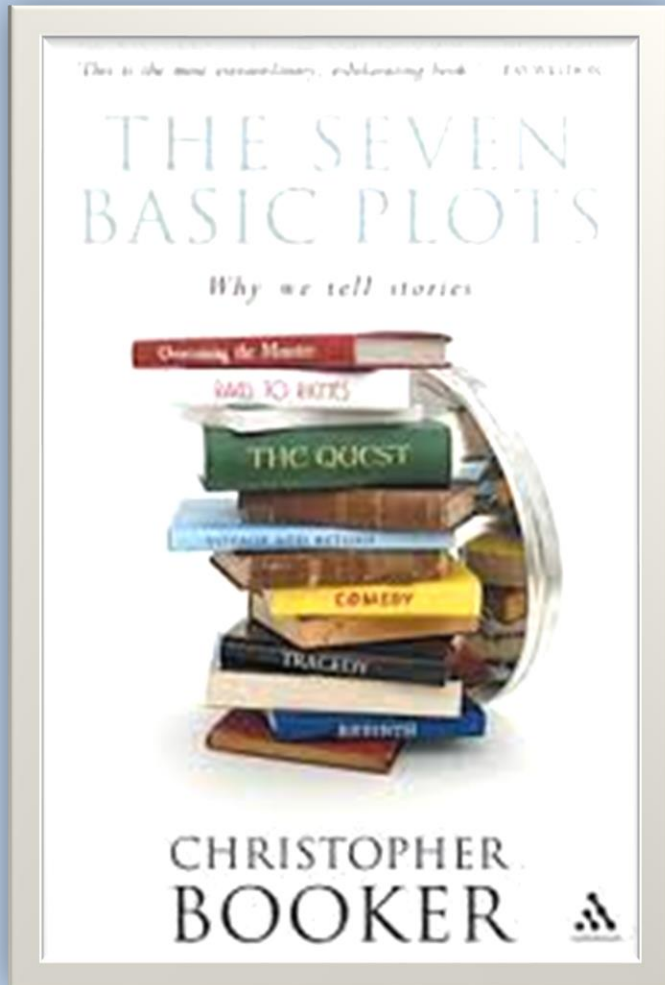
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THE PREMISE

- The storytelling should be built around a simple premise – for example: a prisoner plots escape; a woman blags her way into a top job; a scientist discovers an enormous meteorite headed for Earth.
- If you can't summarise the premise in one line then the idea is probably not simple enough.

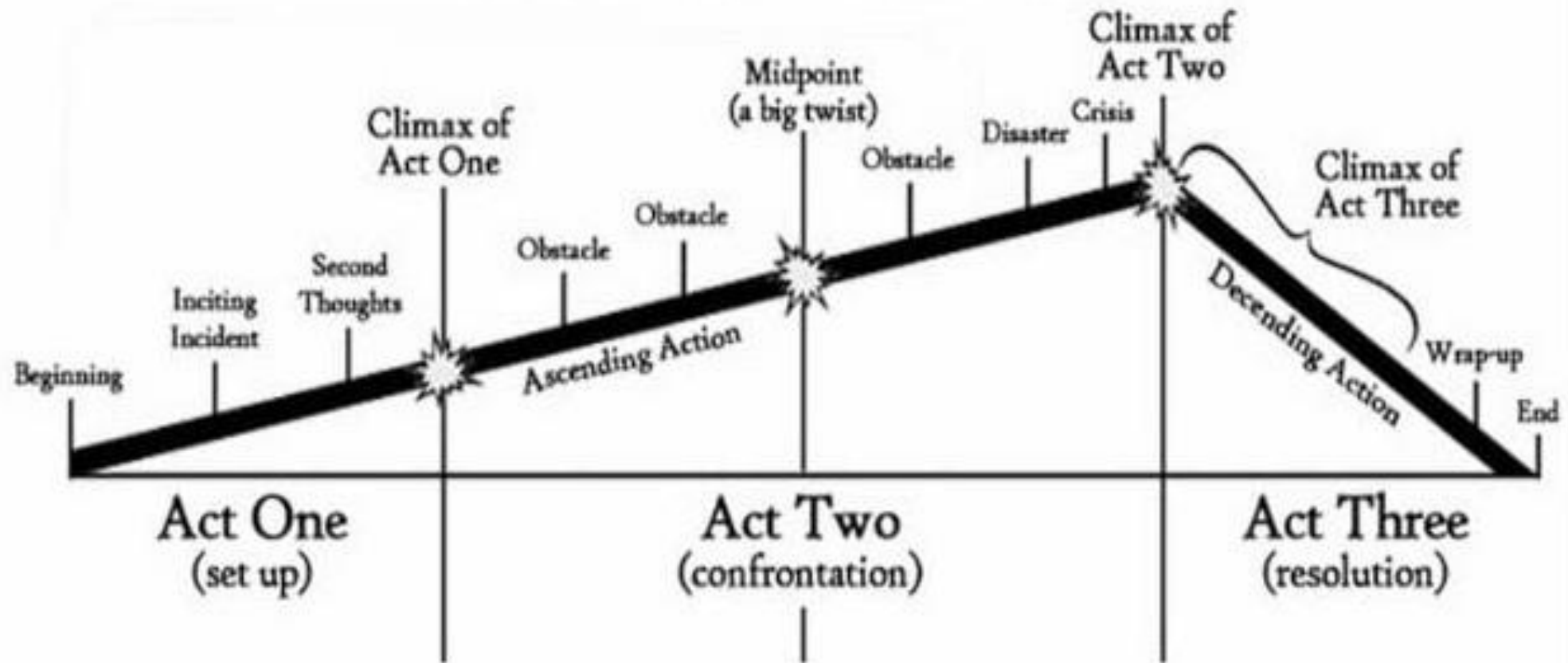


THE SEVEN BASIC PLOTS



- Overcoming the monster
- Rags to riches
- The quest
- Voyage and return
- Comedy
- Tragedy
- Rebirth

Three-Act Structure



ACT 1 – THE SET UP



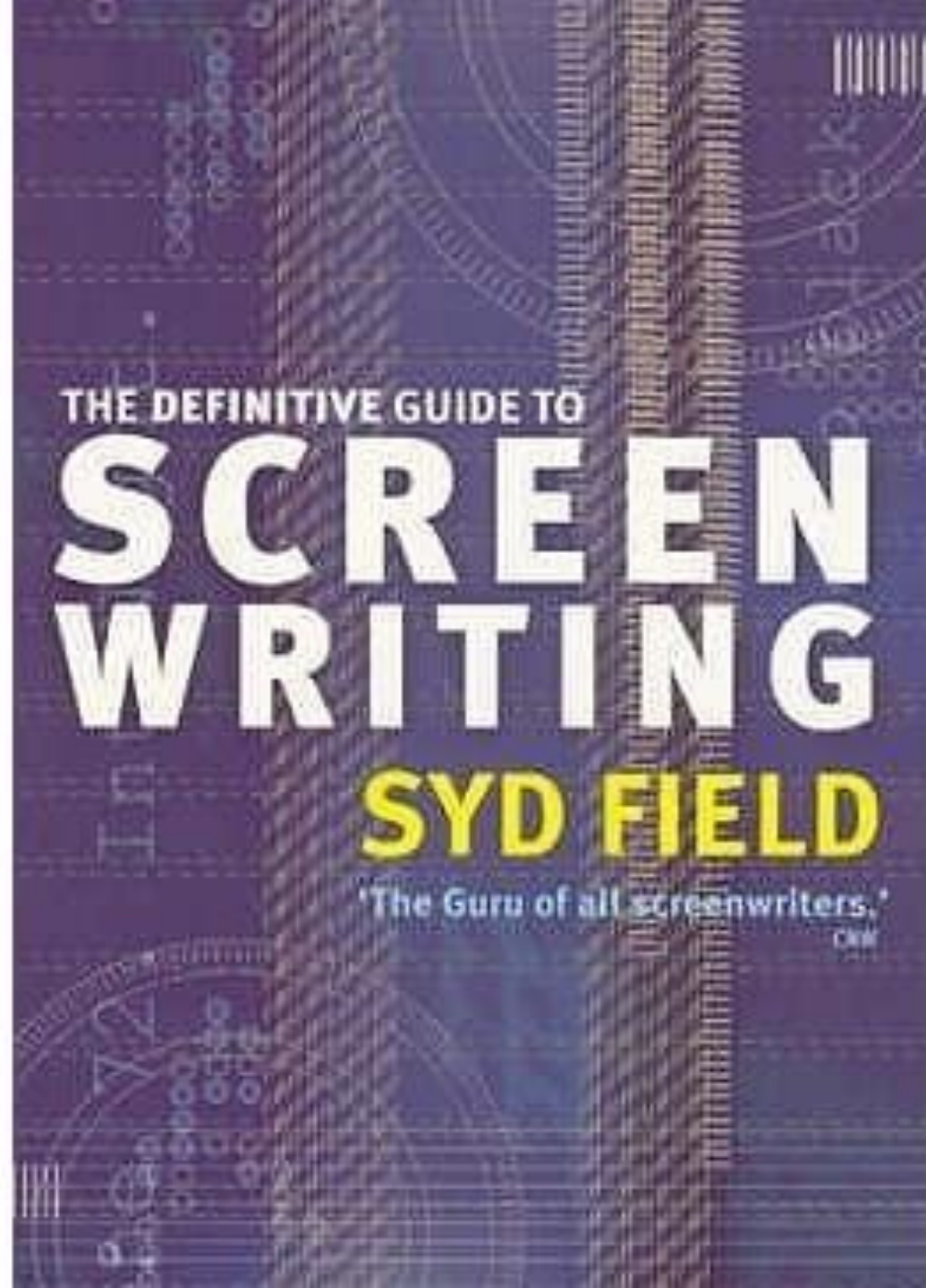
If you are writing a feature film, the first 30 pages are the set up:

- Characters
- Dramatic premise – what the screenplay is about – what drives the story
- The situation
- Relationships between main character and others
- First ten pages **HAVE** to grab your audience

ACT 2 – CONFRONTATION



- In a feature film, the dramatic action lasts about 60 pages (pp. 30-90)
- You need to know your protagonist's dramatic need - the thing your main character wants – because that is what will drive them on
- Once you know this dramatic need you can throw in obstacles to prevent them attaining their dramatic need



**“All drama is conflict.
Without conflict, you have no
character; without character
you have no action; without
action you have no story; and
without story you have no
screenplay.”**

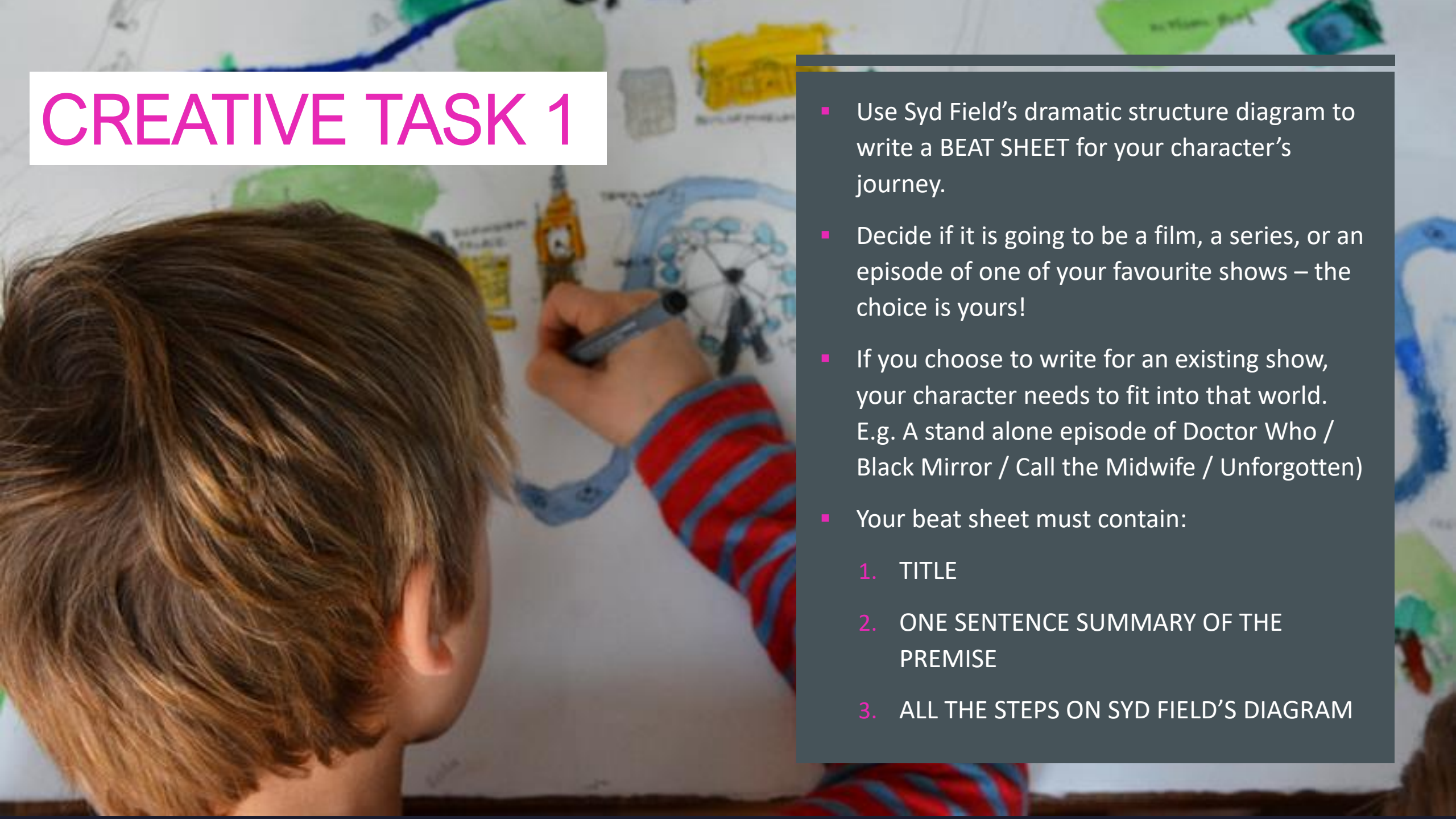
Syd Field, *Screenwriting* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1994) p. 13

ACT 3 – RESOLUTION



- In a feature film, the resolution starts at the end of Act 2 and takes us to the end of the screenplay (pp. 90 -120)
- Resolution not the same as ending – it means ‘solution’ – it resolves the story
- The end is the scene / shot / sequence at the end of the script

CREATIVE TASK 1

A child with brown hair, wearing a red and blue striped shirt, is seen from the side, drawing on a large sheet of paper. The paper features a hand-drawn map with a blue river, green areas, and a yellow building. A clock tower is also drawn. To the right of the clock tower is a circular diagram with a central black dot and several blue dots connected by lines, resembling a network or a story structure diagram. The child is holding a black marker and is in the process of drawing or writing on the paper.

- Use Syd Field's dramatic structure diagram to write a BEAT SHEET for your character's journey.
- Decide if it is going to be a film, a series, or an episode of one of your favourite shows – the choice is yours!
- If you choose to write for an existing show, your character needs to fit into that world. E.g. A stand alone episode of Doctor Who / Black Mirror / Call the Midwife / Unforgotten)
- Your beat sheet must contain:
 1. TITLE
 2. ONE SENTENCE SUMMARY OF THE PREMISE
 3. ALL THE STEPS ON SYD FIELD'S DIAGRAM

WHAT IS A TREATMENT?

- Once you have your beat sheet you can start writing your TREATMENT
- Abbreviated novella written in a colourful style
- Must create visual images of the action whilst also conveying the thoughts and feelings of your characters
- Straightforward non-elaborate writing style
- No dialogue – except for the odd exception as you might in a novel
- This is a selling document, so it needs to be very compelling





TIPS FOR WRITING TREATMENTS...

1. Brevity

Initially, if you can distil your brilliant idea down into a single page that is going to excite producers, your idea is much more likely to get read and taken seriously than a speculative 20 page document.

2. The Writer's Agenda / Theme

With one-page pitches and treatments, it's really important to start off with some sort of overview that expresses the idea as succinctly and persuasively as possible, and that states your agenda as a writer for pursuing this project, and something about the story's themes – what it's about.

3. Content

It's important to demonstrate through story events and character action just how exciting, moving, emotive etc this is going to be (rather than just writing, 'this is going to be the ultimate emotional rollercoaster – exciting, moving and emotive...'). Deliver - don't tease. And if your story has the most wonderful narrative twist / reveal – tell us what it is. This isn't the place to hold back.

4. Write visually and explain nothing

The outline has to work in the same way as the script will do. It needs to dramatise the story, and leave interpretation of the story action up to the reader – in the same way as the best scripts / films. Don't explain character motivations; it gets in the way of the story action, and defeats the purpose of the document – which is to show how the story is going to be dramatised.



EXAMPLE...

‘THE CONTRACT is about the takeover of the British state by multinationals such as G4S and Serco. Although entirely fictional, it is inspired by real stories and the result of intensive research.

Between them, G4S and Serco not only provide a vast swathe of the UK’s security services (running prisons, immigration, Olympics security etc) they are also increasingly involved in health and care provision. As the state is slowly run down, the government will become increasingly subservient to the corporations. Quite simply, one day soon, the country will not be able to run without them.

These multinationals have tentacles that stretch into all of our lives. Who are they accountable to? If things go wrong, where does that leave us, the users of these services? It’s certainly in the interest of these global providers to keep any ‘blunders’ under wraps. Running old people’s homes and hospitals is big business; providers seem to be willing to go to almost any length to keep their contracts. Are these companies, like the banks, now simply too big to fail? Will they – with the government’s help – do anything to continue to serve us?’

EXAMPLE...

‘Laurie and George sit in the headmistress’s office. They have three black eyes in a row. Laurie looks totally numb. They listen to a recording George made of a group of boys shouting ferocious abuse at him. The headmistress shifts uncomfortably in her seat. She tries to turn the recording off but can’t. The abuse escalates. She pushes at the buttons trying to turn it off. The volume increases. George turns it off.

The flustered headmistress says it’s not acceptable to record other pupils without their knowledge. She talks about procedures, protocols and counselling. She says that she thought Laurie was ‘on the same page’ as the school on this matter and is frankly surprised that they would jeopardise the mediation process in this way.

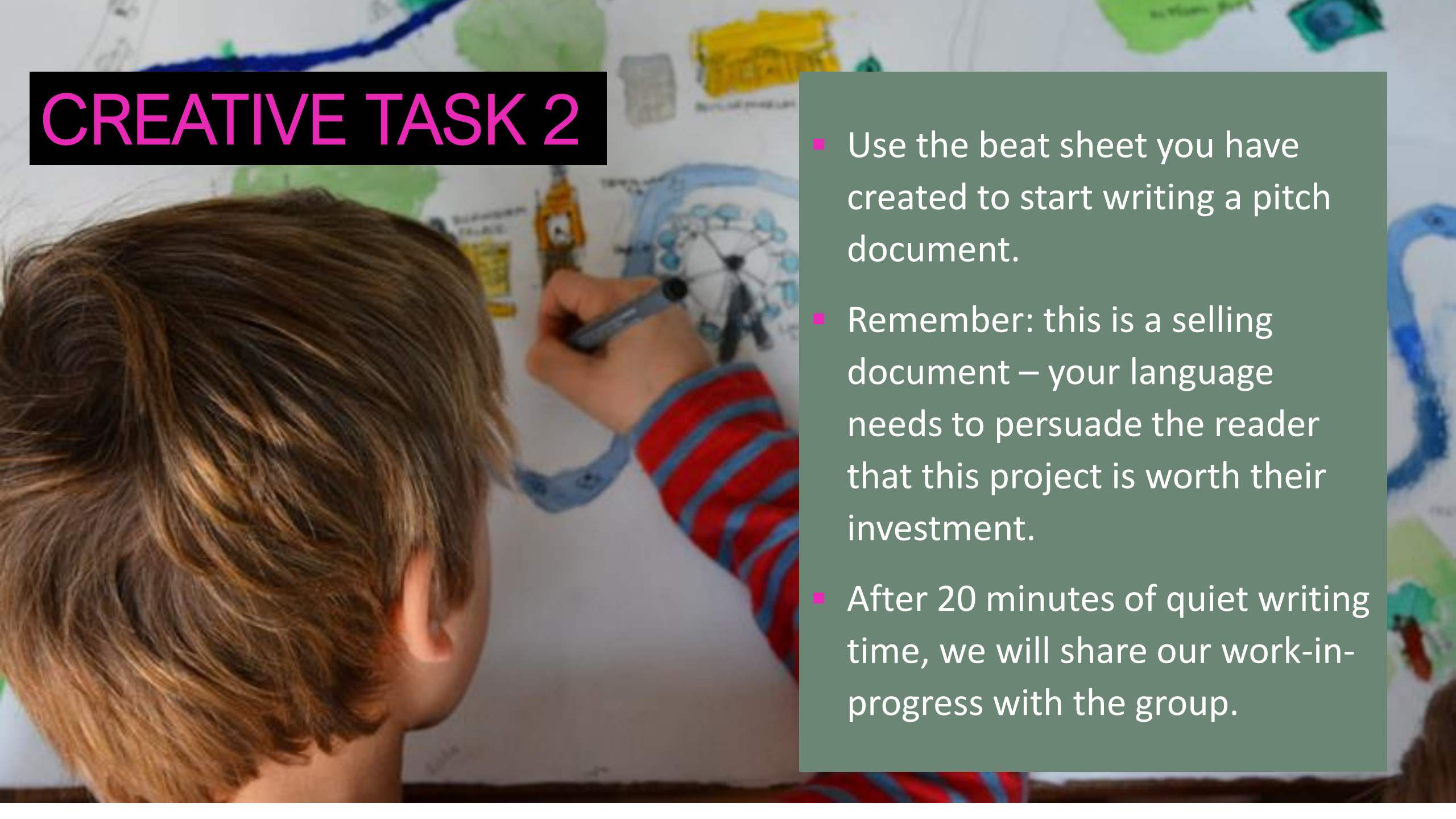
As they leave, Raymond Raisin, who is the size of a man, is sitting outside the headmistress’s office. He makes a gun gesture at George’s head as they pass and mouths ‘snitch’. Laurie and George drive home in silence.’

CLOSE READING

- Working in pairs / small groups, read the treatments and pitch documents provided.
- Which documents are written to 'sell' an idea? How effective are they?
- Compare and contrast the style, tone and storytelling techniques between pitch documents and treatments.



CREATIVE TASK 2

A young child with brown hair is seen from the side, focused on drawing on a large map or project sheet. The child is wearing a red and blue striped long-sleeved shirt. They are using a black marker to draw on the map, which features various colored areas (green, blue, yellow) and some pre-drawn elements like a Ferris wheel and a building. The background is slightly blurred, showing more of the map and other parts of the project.

- Use the beat sheet you have created to start writing a pitch document.
- Remember: this is a selling document – your language needs to persuade the reader that this project is worth their investment.
- After 20 minutes of quiet writing time, we will share our work-in-progress with the group.