



STORYTELLING: NARRATIVE STRUCTURES

Lewis Evans



What you'll need for today's session

- Smart Phone, Tablet or Laptop for Kahoot quiz later.
- Connection to hotspot or WIFI.

Aim

- To identify and define 3 narrative structures commonly used in film.

Learning objectives

1. Identify key elements within 3 narrative structures.
2. Demonstrate the ability to apply narrative structures to story/ film examples.

Introduction

- What we are doing today.
- What do we know about the topic currently?
- What's your favourite film.

What is Narrative Structuring?

- Narrative Structure = how it happens (how you're telling your audience, the order in which you're giving them information)
- Christopher Nolan – Memento (2000).



NARRATIVE STRUCTURES

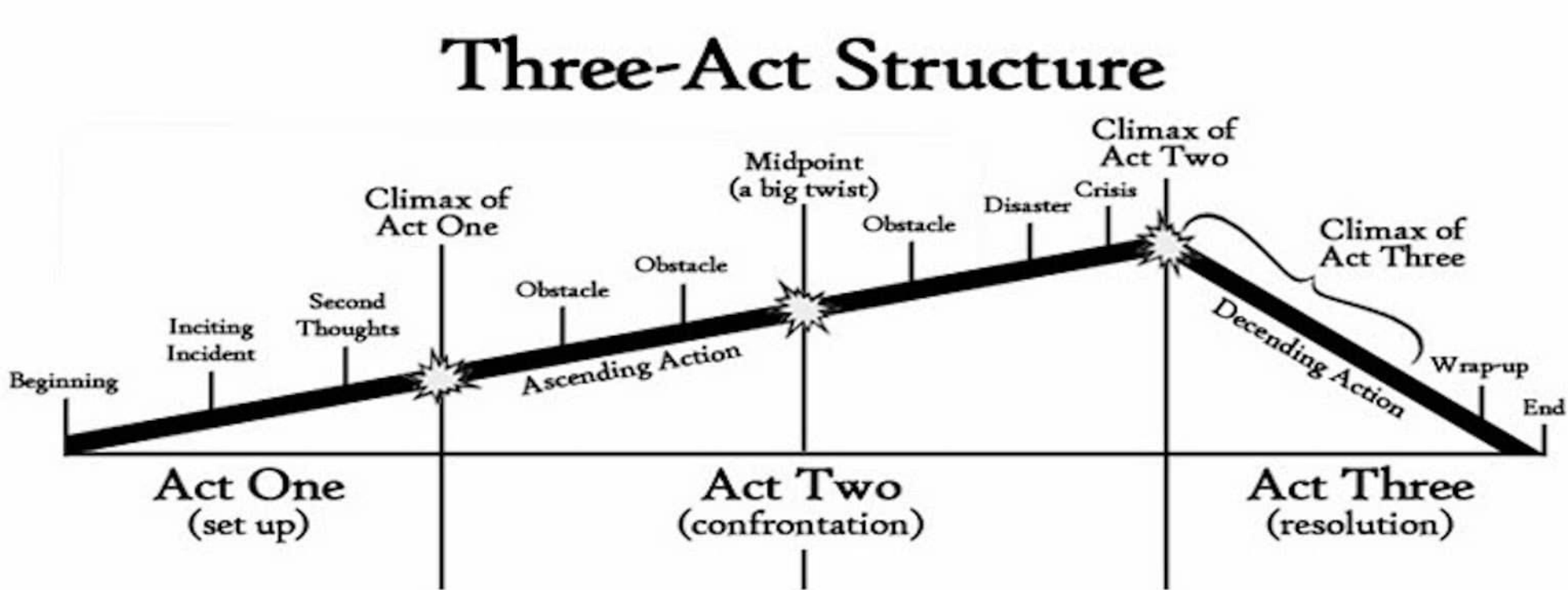
Structure 1:

The 3-Act Structure

- The most commonly used narrative structure.
- Beginning, middle, end, and in that order. Simple.
- Arguably the oldest narrative structure.
- Aristotle's theory on Greek Tragedies – Poetics (4th century)
- Writer Syd Field then refined Aristotle's work into the now familiar 3-act structure in his book - The Foundations of Screen Writing (1979).

Structure 1 – Steps

The 3-Act Structure (Maio, A. Studiobinder. 2024)





JURASSIC PARK (1993)

3-Act Structure: Jurassic Park (1993)

Act 1 – Setup:

- **Beginning** – A park worker is killed by a dinosaur, raising issues regarding the safety of the park.
- **Inciting incident** – John Hammond invites experts to the island to calm investors.
- **Climax of Act 1** – the guests witness living dinosaurs and become concerned.

Act 2 – Confrontation:

- **Obstacle** – Disgruntled staff disable the security systems, causing the dinosaurs to escape.
- **Midpoint** – The T-Rex escapes and attacks the guests, characters are separated.
- **Disaster** – The only person capable of restoring the systems is killed, leaving the park in chaos.
- **Climax of Act 2** – Velociraptors begin hunting the survivors as power is restored and escape plans form.

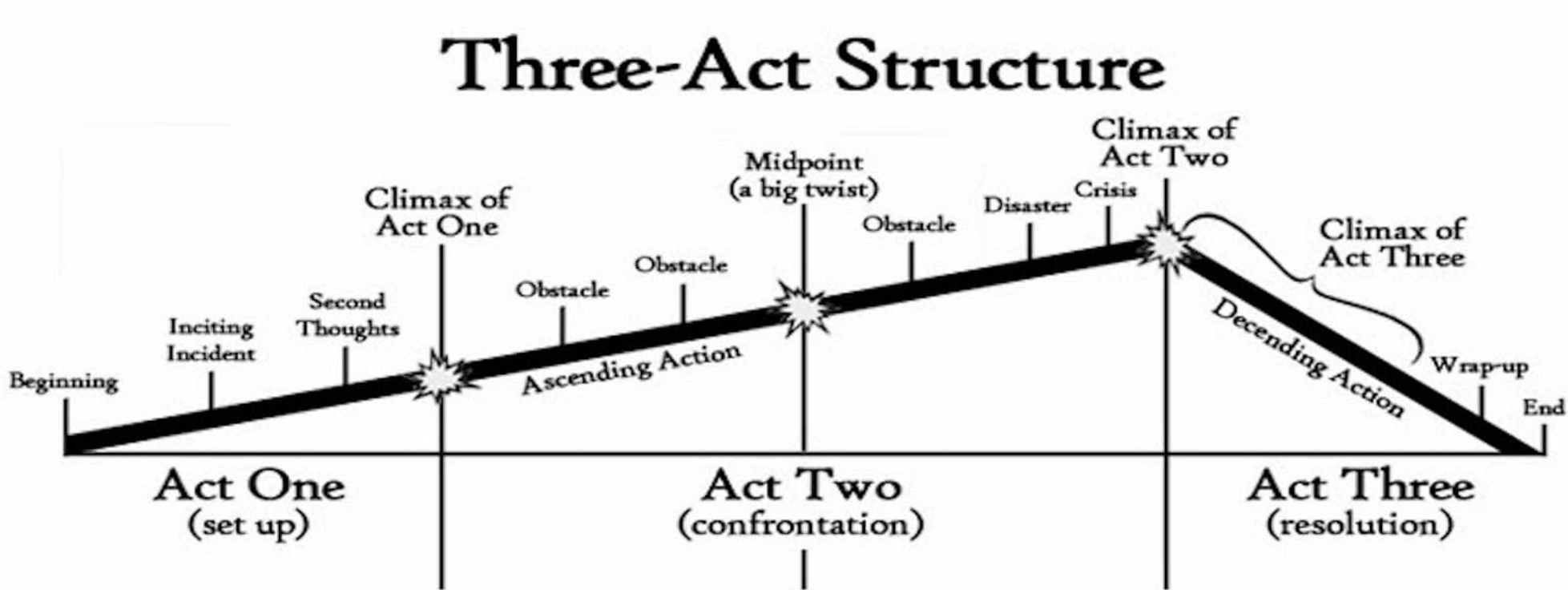
3-Act Structure: Jurassic Park (1993)

Act 3 – Resolution:

- **Climax of act 3** – The T-Rex unexpectedly saves the group by attacking the raptors in the visitor centre.
- **Wrap- up** - Hammond concedes that the park is a failure and shuts it down.
- **End** – The survivors escape by helicopter, leaving the island behind

Structure 1 – Steps

The 3-Act Structure (Maio, A. Studiobinder. 2024)



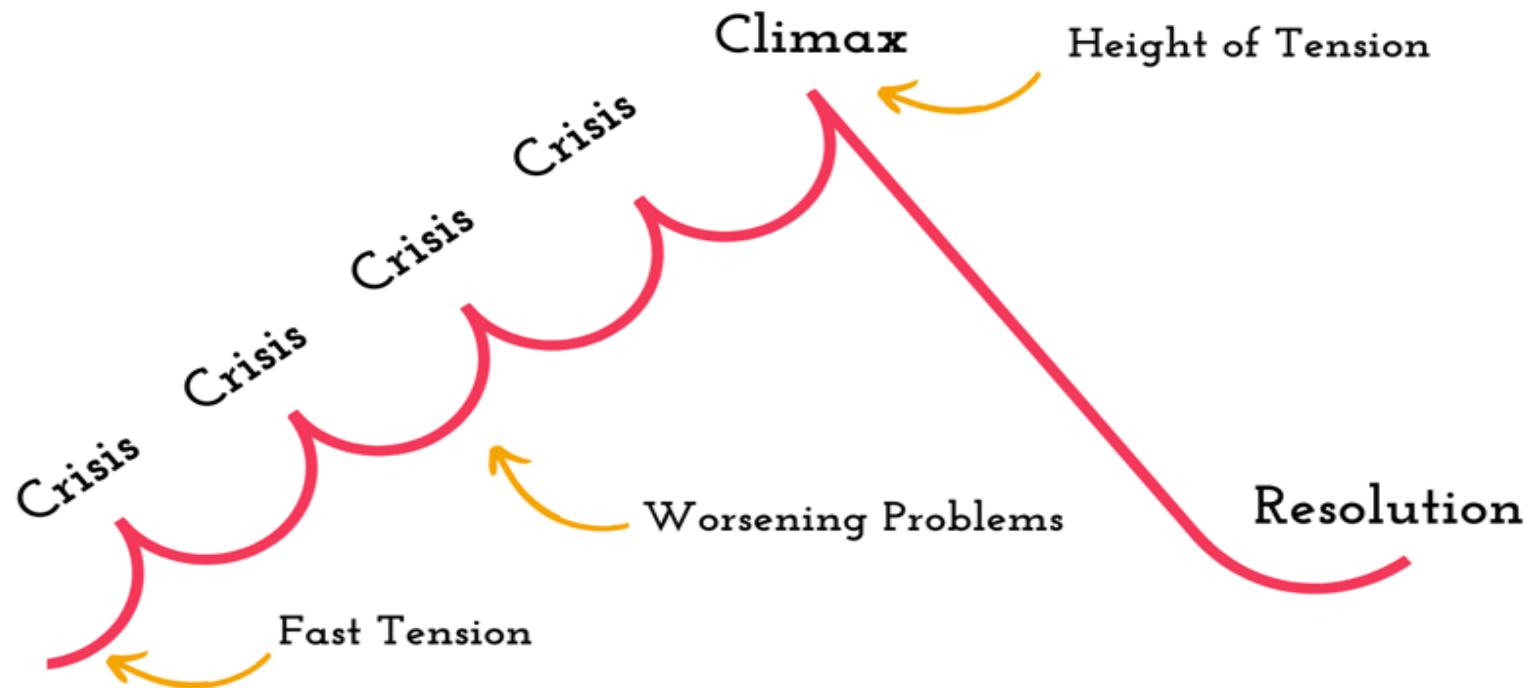
Structure 2: The Fichtean Curve

- Like the 3-act structure (Beginning, Middle, End). The focus is the difference.
- The Fichtean Curve throws audiences into the deep end, and we learn on the go.
- It was developed by author John Gardner (The Art of Fiction, 1983), to...
- Grip audiences' attention immediately and avoid wasting story time.
- Strong contender for modern audiences?

Structure 2 – Steps

The Fichtean Curve (Smith, R. Dabble, Craft your story. 2021)

The Fichtean Curve





THE WIZARD OF OZ (1939)

The Fichtean Curve case study: The Wizard of Oz (1939)

Fast tension:

- Dorothy feels out of place in Kansas, her home.
- Tornado hits and sweeps her away to the land of OZ.

Crisis 1:

- House lands on the Wicked Witch of the East.

Crisis 2:

- The Wicked Witch of the West threatens Dorothy.

Crisis 3:

- The Journey to the Emerald City

Crisis 4:

- The Witch traps Dorothy.

Climax (Height of Tension):

- The Witch tries to kill Dorothy.

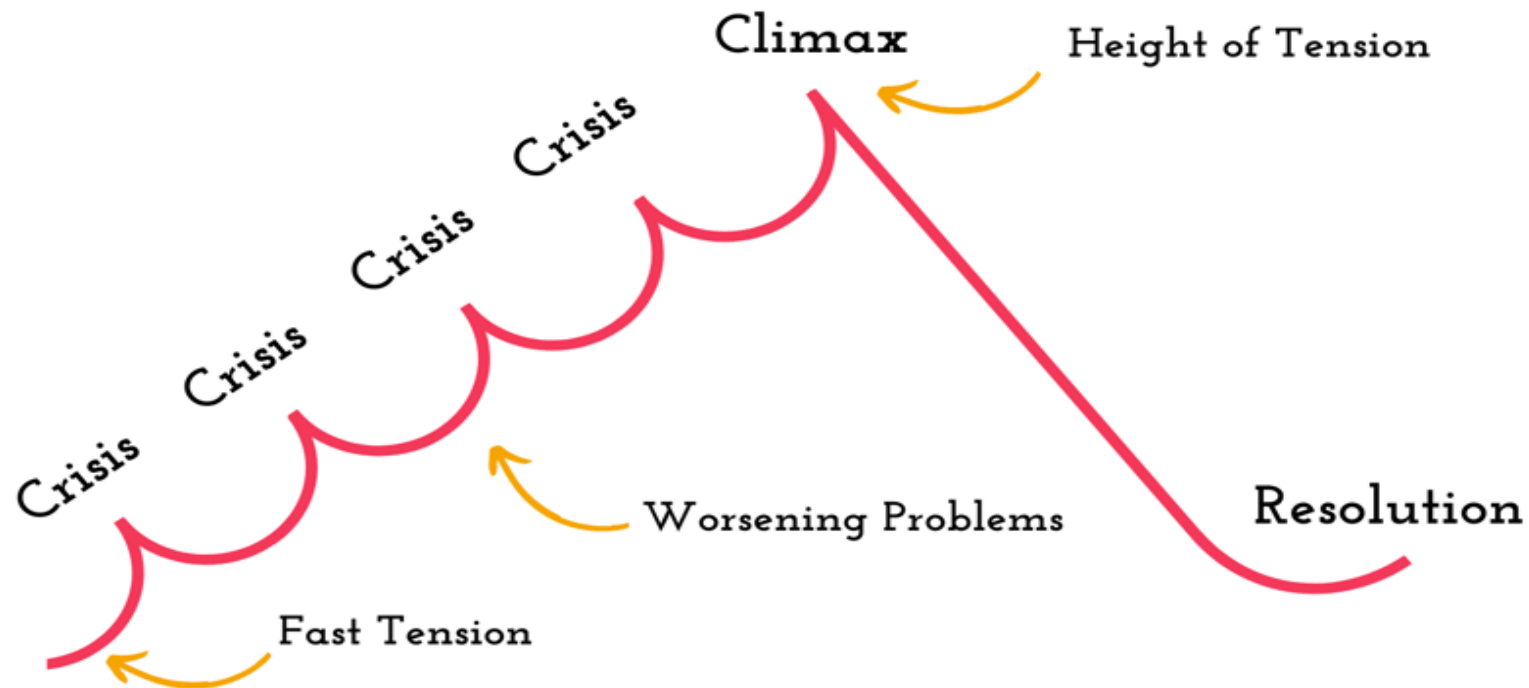
Resolution:

- The Witch is defeated.
- Dorothy realizes there's no place like home.

Structure 2 – Steps

The Fichtean Curve (Smith, R. Dabble, Craft your story. 2021)

The Fichtean Curve



Structure 3 – The Hero's Journey

- Developed by American writer Joseph Campbell in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949).
- Campbell studied many different myths, legends, folklores and stories.
- The story of the hero, their journey from the known, to the unknown and back to the known or a new state of known.
- More in-depth narrative Structure when compared to the previous 2 with a 17-step circular narrative.
- Later adapted to a 12-step circular narrative by Christopher Vogler in his book *The Writer's Journey* (1992).
- Campbell's theory is heavily debated.
- Inspired by Carl Jung's theories on archetypes.

Carl Jung (1959)

- Jung's archetypes =
- Persona – how we want to be perceived by others.
- Shadow – the side of ourselves we hide from others.
- Anima/ Animus – the anima represents the unconscious feminine aspects within men, and animus represents the unconscious masculine aspects within women.
- Self – the ideal balance between our persona and our shadow.
- Jung's collective unconscious = the idea that there are fundamental human traits that are inherited and shared across all humans.

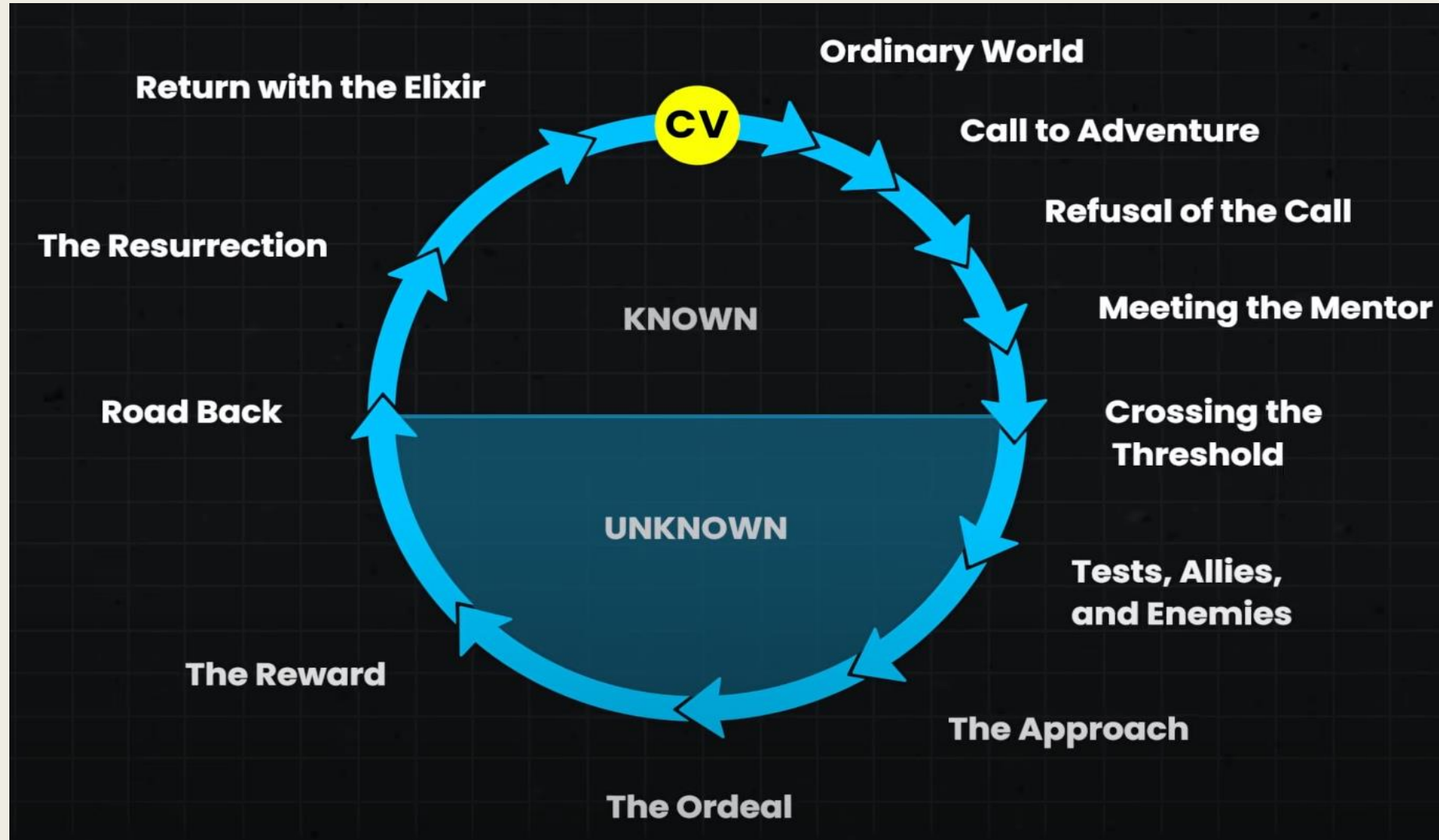
Structure 3 – Steps

The Hero's Journey 17 step cycle

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. Call to Action | 9. Atonement with the Father |
| 2. Refusal of the call | 10. Apotheosis |
| 3. Supernatural aid | 11. The ultimate boon |
| 4. Crossing the threshold | 12. Refusal of return |
| 5. Belly of the whale | 13. Magic flight |
| 6. The road of trials | 14. Rescue from without |
| 7. Meeting the Goddess | 15. Crossing the return threshold |
| 8. Temptation | 16. Master of two worlds |
| | 17. Freedom to live |

Structure 3 – Steps

The Hero's Journey 12 step cycle (Rickett, M. Studiobinder. 2025)

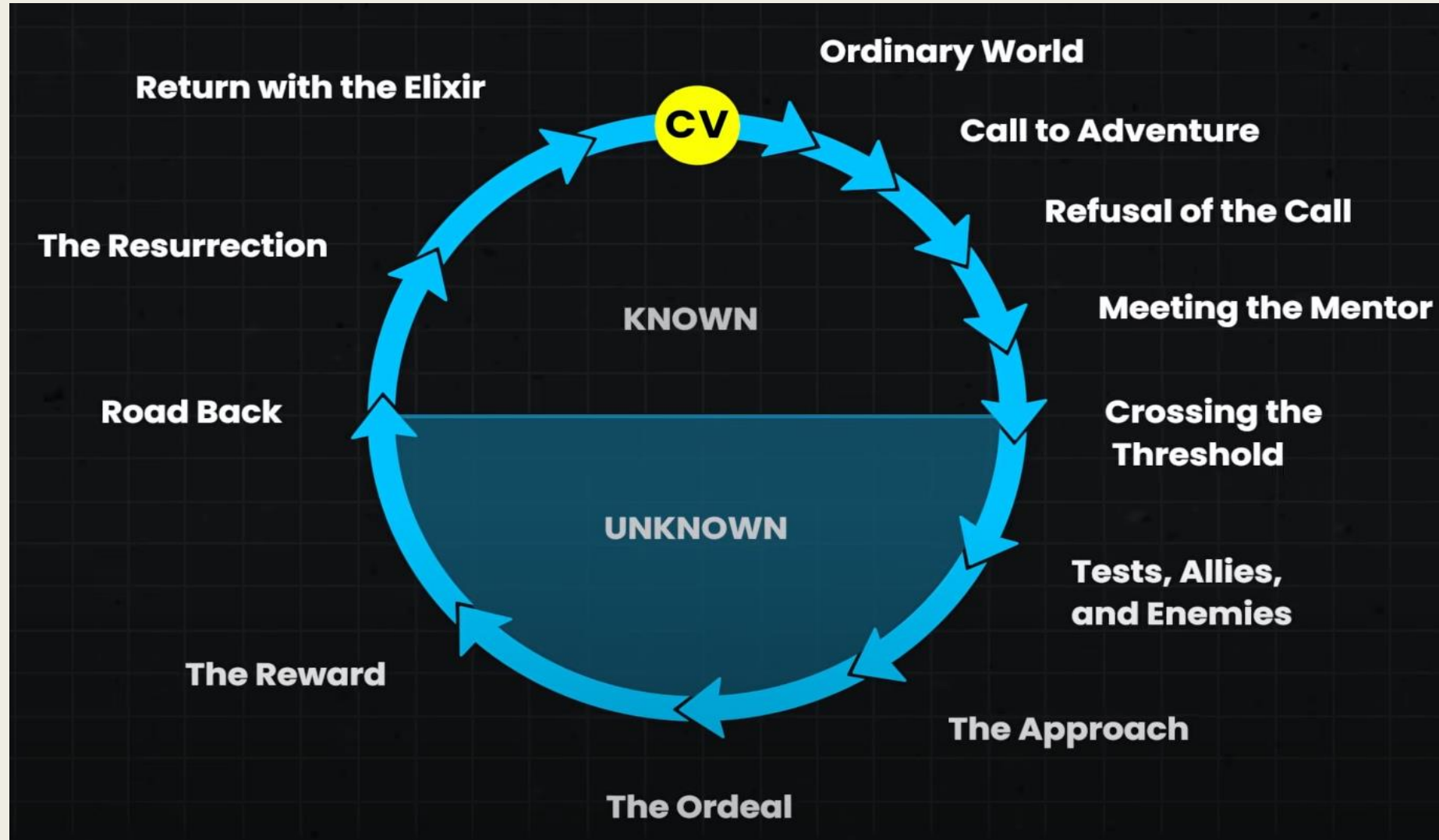




CRITICAL SUCCESS IN THE BOX OFFICE

Structure 3 – Steps

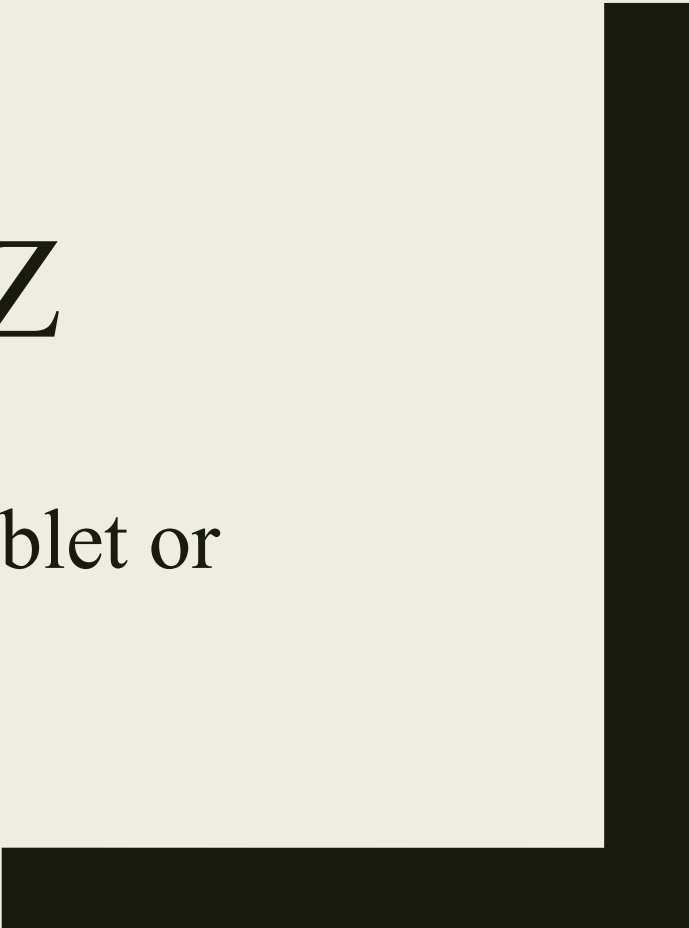
The Hero's Journey 12 step cycle (Rickett, M. Studiobinder. 2025)





ACTIVITY: KAHOOT QUIZ

You will need a smart phone, tablet or
laptop.



Conclusion

Learning outcomes

- To identify and define 3 narrative structures commonly used in film.
- Identify key elements within 3 narrative structures.
- Demonstrate the ability to apply narrative structures to story/ film examples.

Any questions?

References/ Reading and further reading list

1. Aristotle (4 century, 2003), *Poetics*. Penguin Classics (translated Version).
2. Field, S. (1979) *The Foundations of Screen Writing*. Dell Publishing Company.
3. Maio, A. Studiobinder. (2024) *What is The Three Act Structure – And why it works*.
<https://www.studiobinder.com/blog/three-act-structure/> (Accessed: 16 September 2025).
4. Gardner, J. (1983) *The Art of Fiction: Notes on Craft for Young Writers*. New York: A
5. Smith, R. Dabble, Craft your story (2021) *The Fichtean Curve: A dorsal Fin of Catastrophe*.
<https://www.dabblewriter.com/articles/writing-with-the-fichtean-curve> (Accessed: 16 September 2025).
6. Campbell, J (1949) *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Pantheon Books.
7. Rickett, M. Studiobinder (2025) *Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey: A better screenplay in 17 steps*.
<https://www.studiobinder.com/blog/joseph-campbells-heros-journey/> (Accessed: 16 September 2025).
8. Vogler, C. (2007) *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*. Michael Wiese Productions, 3rd Edition.
9. Brooker, C. (2004) *The 7 Basic Plots: Why we tell stories*. Continuum International Publishing Group.
10. Jung, C. (1959) *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Blackwell's, Volume 9, Part 1.



THANK YOU