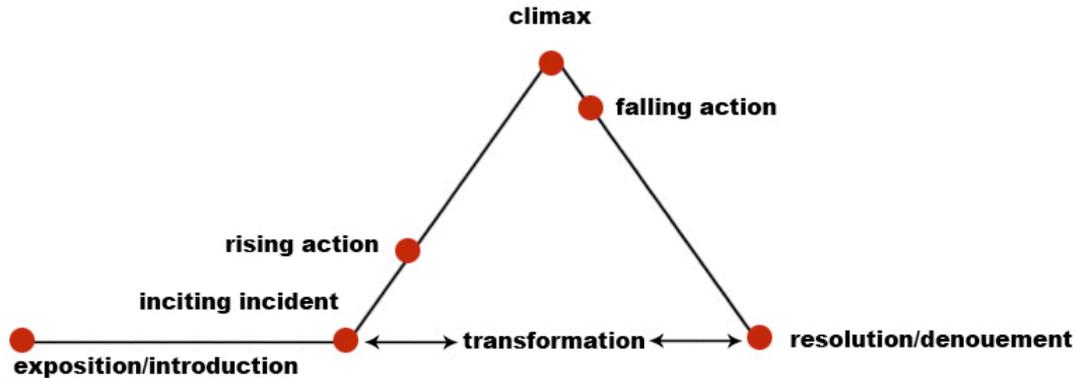# Dramatic Arc

The Dramatic Arc is one of the most popular and recognizable narrative structures in Western culture. Also referred to as a classical dramatic structure, this arc has its roots in classical Greek drama. Aristotle declared that plays have a consistent structure of "a beginning, middle, and end" (Wise, 1962). Centuries later, Gustav Freytag, a German dramatist and novelist, expanded Aristotle's structure (Madej, 2008). Freytag's pyramid-like diagram of five main tragic stages (Freytag, 1900) evolved into a broadly applicable structure directed toward narratives. The diagram below is an adapted version of multiple variations of the Dramatic Arc (Freytag, 1900; Ohler, 2008).

Dramatic Arc Stages

Stages:
The Dramatic Arc consists of six basic stages. The precipitating event (inciting incident) introduces a conflict that creates increasing tension (rising action) as the characters deal with a problem. The tension rises to a climax at which point the problem begs for resolution while at the same time any resolution seems impossible. The events that resolve the problem realize the characters' victory, increased understanding, or a return to status quo. Loose ends are then wrapped up through a resolution. The six stages of the Dramatic Arc are:

1. Exposition/Introduction:
Introduces the main characters and sets the scene.

2. Inciting Incident:
This concept refers to the moment where a problem or conflict is introduced, which drives the rest of the story.

3. Rising Action:
Intensity of events increases and the conflict grows.

4. Climax:
Turning point when events and situations change, for better or worse.

5. Falling Action:
Suspense is prolonged as difficulties are confronted and questions are recognized and sometimes answered. The central character typically overcomes conflict in this stage.

6. Resolution/Denouement:
Remaining issues are reconciled. A sense of normalcy is reinstated. Characters, choices, and actions are validated, and future possibilities are presented.

Kishōtenketsu

Kishōtenketsu reflects the structure and development of Chinese and Japanese narratives. The Kishōtenketsu model looks similar to the Dramatic Arc, but consists of just four basic stages: Introduction, Development, Twist, and Conclusion. Stories using the Kishōtenketsu structure convey seemingly disconnected events that are tied together by the conclusion of the story. The distinguishing feature of Kishōtenketsu is the element of surprise brought on by the twist. The twist seems disconnected from the introduction and development of the story until the conclusion, at which point the audience begins to make connections to the crux of the story, often reframing earlier interpretations of the events. The narrative is typically left open-ended, with partial resolution. Good examples are the films *Rashomon* (1950) and *Inception* (2010).
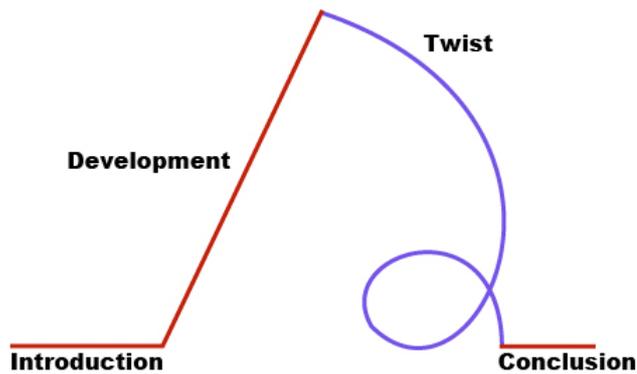
Kishōtenketsu Stages

Stages:
The four basic stages of the Kishōtenketsu story structure are:

1. Introduction (Ki)
Description of characters and/or place. Create the setting of the story.

2. Development (Sho)
Description of event(s) that lead to the twist. Major changes do not occur.

3. Twist (Ten)
A new unforeseen and unheralded event that sheds a different light on the previous events and makes the reader or viewer question any conclusions they may have formed so far. This is the crux or climax of a Kishōtenketsu narrative. Anglo cultures might call this a *curve ball.*
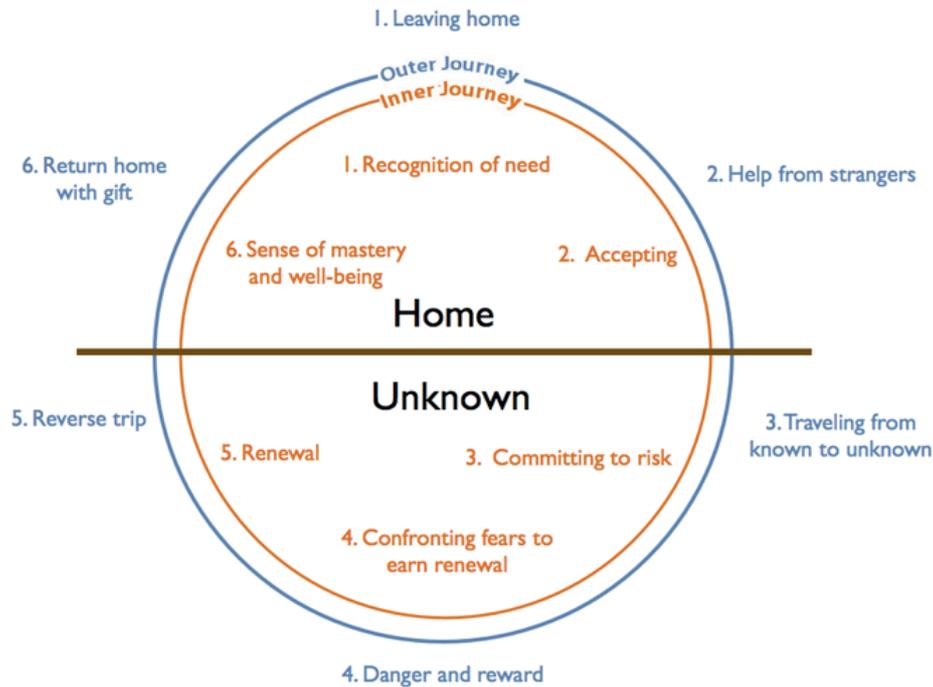
4. Conclusion (Ketsu)
Kishōtenketsu narratives often end without resolution; questions still remain. The story concludes by bringing together several disparate ideas to prompt listeners to consider possible resolutions.

Hero's Journey

Hero's Journey is a universal story motif first identified and named by Joseph Campbell. Campbell's studies (1991, 2008) in comparative mythology and cross-discipline interests helped him recognize commonalities between stories told in diverse cultures (e.g., Native American, Catholicism). Campbell's structure is quite detailed, but basically charts the story of an individual who leaves home to venture into the unknown on a quest, is tested by hardship or ordeals on the journey, and returns home triumphant and with a gift to help his community. Often the hero goes through a period of hopelessness. The story may be truncated by the hero's failure or death, but even then a gift is given in the form of a warning or message. The hero may be aided by real or supernatural beings.

In Campbell's narrative structure, symbolic, spiritual, and psychological elements are critical. Symbolic meanings often complement the physicality of the story. Understanding the hero's inner journey as it changes in tandem with the physical journey is necessary to grasp the depth of the narrative. Recently, Hero's Journey has been adapted to illustrate other more contemporary life journeys, such as students making their way through school while seeking knowledge and people working their way through life's hardships, such as loss of a loved one or a diagnosis of cancer. Traditionally Hero's Journey was viewed as a masculine narrative structure but has been applied to and recast for real life and fairytale heroines. The feminine retelling often includes leaving comfortable but problematic domesticity or escape from domestic abuse and eventual recognition of assets, skills, and courage. The kindness of other women or helpful supernatural animals often aids the heroine's journey.

1. Leaving home

Outer Journey
Inner Journey

6. Return home with gift

1. Recognition of need

2. Help from strangers

6. Sense of mastery and well-being

2. Accepting

Home

Unknown

5. Reverse trip

5. Renewal

3. Committing to risk

3. Traveling from known to unknown

4. Confronting fears to earn renewal

4. Danger and reward

Hero's Journey Stages

Stages:
Hero's Journey may apply to a narrative even if not all of Campbell's Hero's Journey stages are included. Hero's Journey may describe the development of a story that is also described by a different narrative structure. Usually presented as a circle, these six significant stages are useful in identifying or applying and developing a Hero's Journey narrative (for more detailed stages, see Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces,* 2008; Chris Vogler's http://thewritersjourney.com/).

1. Leaving home/Recognition of need:
A sympathetic hero experiences a precipitating event or gains awareness of a need that often only the hero can fulfill. The hero must leave home to accomplish the quest.

2. Help from strangers/Accepting guidance and aid:
Hero finds a wise mentor or guide and later finds others—people, animals, nature, robots—both real and supernatural to help the hero along his journey.

3. Traveling from known to unknown/ Committing to risk:
Hero recommits to the quest as he or she leaves the comfort of the world he or she knows and enters new territory. As risk increases, so does tension in the story.

4. Danger and reward/Confronting fears to earn renewal:
Hero endures hardships, tests, and ordeals to train, prove him or herself worthy, and/or achieve quest.

5. Reverse trip/Renewal:
Hero makes the return trip establishing renewal of self, earth, and/or kin or community. One last hurdle often appears just as risk seems to be gone and tension abates.

6. Return home with gift/Sense of mastery and well-being:
Hero returns home having accomplished the quest. Hero offers physical gift or token or necessary knowledge he or she has won to mentor, loved one, or community. Homecoming is often joyous.

Classic Hollywood

The Classic Hollywood structure supports a simple but compelling narrative first articulated by the screenwriter and film professor Bill Idelson (Iuppa & Borst, 2006). The three most significant components are a hero, a goal, and an obstacle separating them. Most of the action involves how the hero overcomes the obstacle to reach the goal. The hero is usually helped by supporting characters who take on the hero's goal as their own. For the story to be engaging, the obstacle must be compelling. The obstacle could be nature, other people, or characteristics of the hero.
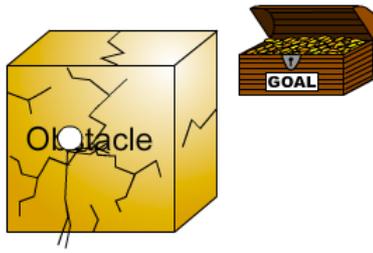
Hollywood Structure

Stages:
The simplicity of this narrative structure means if the storyline does not include these four stages, then it is not Hollywood Structure. This structure never varies.

1. Hero
Introduce and establish a protagonist—the main character who is usually the hero. Identify the hero's strengths and any flaws.

2. Goal
Introduce and establish a goal for the hero to pursue.

3. Obstacle
Introduce the obstacle that threatens failure for the hero. The obstacle may be a force of nature, an antagonistic criminal organization, a physical handicap, a lack of knowledge or a skill, etc. It may be an aspect of the hero's flaw or the goal itself.

4. Success
The hero gathers what is needed to combat the obstacle, usually making repeated attempts before achieving success.

Robleto

The Robleto structure, based on traditional Nicaraguan storytelling, was conceptualized by Cheryl Diermyer during a 2010 trip from the southern tip of San Juan Del Sur to the northern parts of Santa Lucia. Diermyer noticed a shared narrative structure when Nicaraguan community members told stories about their lives and culture. The structure is named after Robert Robleto, a cattle farmer and doctor of medicine in Nicaragua. (See the Examples section to view one of Dr. Robleto's stories.)

The Robleto structure consists of five stages: Line of Repetition, Introduction, Climax, Journey (ies), and Close. The Line of Repetition distinguishes this structure from other narrative arcs. The narrative starts with a defining statement that is repeated throughout the narrative, often marking the end of one stage and the beginning of the next. After a short introduction by the narrator, the narrative quickly moves into the climax, which describes the character's challenge. The journey stage begins by introducing other people, places, and events. Unlike other story structures, the Robleto structure may tell of several short journeys in one story. At the end of each short journey, the narrator repeats the defining statement. The defining statement is sometimes repeated at the end, after the close, as well.
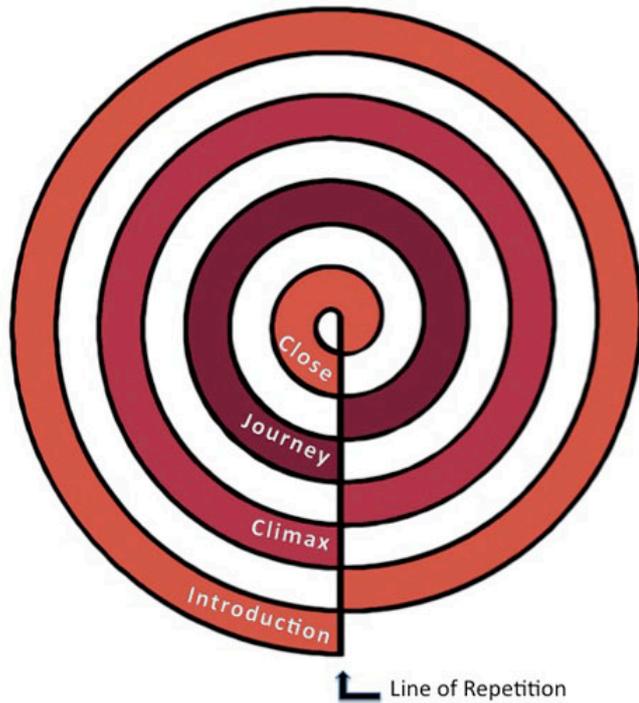
Line of Repetition

Robleto

Stages:
Line of Repetition
The story opens with a statement that is repeated throughout the story. This trademark characteristic is usually short, powerful or poignant, and simply structured grammatically. The repeated phrase or sentence grounds the story and emphasizes the defining idea. At times this patterned emphasis gives the Line of Repetition a symbolic aspect. The repeated phrase creates a cadence that imparts a poetic quality to the narrative. This defining statement is sometimes repeated after each stage and is often repeated at the end of each short journey and after the close.

Introduction
Stories that conform to the Robleto structure are generally told from a first person point of view. The introduction is short and informs the listener about the narrator, who is often the main character of the story. Any other information crucial to the story is stated, sometimes abruptly.

Climax
The climax describes the central challenge. As with most other structures, the climax is a turning point where events and situations change, for better or for worse. Unlike most other structures, the climax in the Robleto structure produces the listeners' understanding of the journey(ies) to follow rather than leading to resolution or denouement.

Journey (ies)
In this stage, listeners learn about other people and places that have an impact on the main character in some way. The journey begins by introducing other people, places, and a series of events. The Robleto structure promotes the inclusion of several short journeys in one story, which is different from other story structures. At the end of each short journey, the narrator restates the Line of Repetition. The restatement heightens the tension in a dramatic story or the comedic effect in a light-hearted story.

Close
Remaining issues are reconciled and the journey comes to an end. The close in the Robleto structure ensures the listener's understanding. Nothing is left ambivalent or unresolved. The Line of Repetition is restated and the story closes on that note of emphasis.

Narrative Elements

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narrative_structure

V · T · E	**Narrative**	[hide]
Character	Antagonist/Archenemy · Characterization · Deuteragonist · False protagonist · Focal character · Foil character · Protagonist · Supporting character · Tritagonist · Viewpoint character	
Plot	Climax · Conflict · Dénouement · Dialogue · Dramatic structure · Exposition · Falling action · Plot device · Subplot · Trope-Cliché	
Setting	Dystopia · Fictional city · Fictional country · Fictional location · Fictional universe · Utopia	
Theme	Leitmotif · Moral · Motif	
Style	Diction · Figure of speech · Imagery · Literary technique · Narrative mode · Stylistic device · Suspension of disbelief · Symbolism · Tone	
Form	Fable-Parable · Fabliaux · Fairy tale · Flash story · Folktale-Legend · Hypertext · Novel · Novella · Play · Poem · Screenplay · Short story · List of narrative forms	
Genre	Adventure · Comic · Crime · Docufiction · Epistolary · Erotic · Faction · Fantasy · Historical · Horror · Magic realism · Mystery · Paranoid · Philosophical · Political · Romance · Saga · Satire · Science · Speculative · Superhero · Thriller · Urban	
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