

## Unit 3 Story Sequence

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In Unit 3 Mr. Pudewa teaches the students how to write a story using the Story Sequence Model. You can learn more about this unit from the teacher's perspective in *Teaching Writing: Structure and Style* on the second half of disc two.

Below are some commonly asked questions about narrative writing.

### **We are really struggling to create an outline. How do we manage when the original is not three paragraphs?**

Instead of choosing three words per sentence, you create this outline by asking questions about the story using the Story Sequence Model.

First read and discuss the story with your student. After discussion, decide on the central conflict. When reading the story, you might find that somewhere in the story you come across the line, "Now one day...." This often identifies the beginning of the conflict. If your story isn't as obvious, you will have to do some investigation. Decide who the main character is, and then ask, "What does that character need or want?" You might come up with a couple of things. Now ask, "Where is the highest point (the climax) of the story?" This will help you identify the central conflict.

For instance, in the story of King Midas, he wants the gift of the golden touch. But is the highest point in the story when he gets it? No! The action and conflict continue to rise as he uses the gift until he discovers a second need—to be able to eat! This, then, is the central conflict.

Once you know this, the rest is easy. Start with the first paragraph (Characters and Setting). Identify the characters that are in the beginning of the story and describe them. If there was a minor conflict (like the wanting of the golden touch), this can be part of the first paragraph because it is really defining the characters. If your story was very short, you might need to add in some information. What might the character have looked like? Acted like? Where did he live? What did he wear? Remember, you are using this paragraph to set the mood of the story. For King Midas, you are indicating that he was a generous man but not very far-sighted, and his love of gold surpassed his wisdom. In return for his generosity, he got what he asked for—the gift of the golden touch.

#### I. King Midas

1. good king, comfortable kingdom
2. sad, never enough gold
3. beggar, vineyard, invited in
4. beggar = god, reward, wish?
5. golden touch!

Now work on the second paragraph: Problem or Conflict. Start with the problem (everything he touched turned to gold). Then build the action. In King Midas, it starts out fine—he is happy because he is getting richer. It all goes well until he tries to eat, and then he becomes terrified. The climax is at the end of the second paragraph—he calls for help. [confusing since par. 3 starts w/ climax. Maybe: His fear ends with his calling out for help.]

#### II. happy, everything touched gold

1. orders feast
2. sat down to eat
3. food gold! Frightened
4. tried eating fast, no good
5. starve?
6. All gold worthless if dead

## 7. Cries out

The third paragraph is the Climax and Resolution—how is the problem solved? In addition to solving the problem (good or bad), have your student include the falling action or what happened after. The story can end with a conclusion or moral, but it should have a clear ending.

### III. beggar/god returns

1. not happy with gift?
2. No! food/happiness better, gold [I'd stick to 3-4 words]
3. Go wash
4. Washed, pebbles to gold
5. Free!
6. Never greedy again

Many students will just want to start writing their story. Insist that they work out the outline first. It does not need to be detailed, but the main parts should be worked out and ideas considered before writing. It will make for a much better story in the long run. Trust the system!

If you find the sorting of the story difficult, *Teaching the Classics* will help you understand how the plot structure of literature works. It also helps you study any novel you read to get the most out of it. Check out [www.excellenceinwriting.com/tcs](http://www.excellenceinwriting.com/tcs).

With young children, work through the story sequence orally on every story you read (or every chapter out of a story). After working out the sequence on 20-30 stories, the process will be easy.

### **What do we do if a character isn't introduced until later in the story?**

The first paragraph is to introduce the characters that are in the beginning of the story. If a character doesn't show up until later (the wolf in the "Boy Who Cried Wolf," the prince in "Cinderella"), don't mention him until he shows up.

### **If my student decides to change the characters and setting, do we have to recreate the outline?**

Not necessarily. Some of the details might change, and the ending might have a different outcome, but this can be achieved without completely changing the original outline. Once they have the basic sequence in mind, students can usually make the adjustment on the fly. Have your student run his ideas by you. If he seems to have a good progression in his mind, let him fly. If the story is getting garbled, help him recreate the outline using the changed characters and setting. Be sure he keeps the same problem and doesn't completely change the story.

### **My student has conversation in his story, which makes for more paragraphs. What should we do?**

Simply double-double space between the paragraphs to show the transition between the story sequence paragraphs. Also, encourage your student to limit dialog to one or two lines. It is better to tell the story with narrative rather than conversation.

### **My son really despises story writing. I am tempted to skip it. Is there a good reason to fight through this unit?**

Here is what Andrew Pudewa had to say:

This is, in fact, a very interesting question as I myself used to question the value of it. However, in continuing to teach Dr. Webster's syllabus, I now realize, much more clearly, the profound importance of the fiction parts of this program.

As you are aware, the nine structural units consist of both fiction and non-fiction models, which develop from simple stories and reports to formal essays and critiques. One of the critical elements in the process is developing the aptitude, and in fact the habit, of asking questions about what has been read. This process begins in Unit III when the student must read a story and ask questions about it: who is in the story, when and where is it happening, what is the problem or conflict, what do the characters think, say and do, and of course, how is the problem solved and why did the author write it, or what moral or message is it conveying. This is the story sequence chart, which works for most short fiction stories, but it leads toward something much more important.

In Unit V, writing from pictures, we have a similar task, only no story with words. There are pictures, and we must ask questions about the pictures in order to facilitate the thinking that will allow us to come up with ideas to describe the events in the picture and create an outline. Unlike the story sequence chart, where we are looking for characters & setting, conflict, and resolution, the Unit V model can more accurately be labeled "event description." What do you see in the picture and why is it happening? What happened just before the picture? What are the individuals in the picture thinking or feeling? What might happen after this picture? These Unit V questions are a natural extension of Unit III and a perfect bridge to Unit VII, creative writing.

When we face Unit VII, we are facing "the blank page"--no source of ideas other than what is in our brain. To extract information from our brain, we must have the habit of asking ourselves questions. Any old topic (my summer vacation, my Grandma, my hobby, etc.) must be approached in the same manner--by asking questions--only this time it can be harder for the child since there was no story or picture to start with. Thus we see that this process of asking questions, hearing the answer in your mind, and taking a key word outline from your own thoughts is essential to creating the independent, analytical writer.

This comes to its fulfillment in Unit VIII, the essay, when we are asking children to collect and organize facts, and then, in the conclusion, to comment on those facts. What is the significance of this information? Who can use it/Why is it important? How does it affect our life or our understanding of life? These questions represent the higher level of analytical thinking necessary for advanced essay composition. Therefore it becomes very clear to the experienced teacher that the habit of asking questions, hearing the answer, and putting that answer into words (key words at first and full sentences and paragraphs after that) is indeed the essence of what the purpose of writing must be. See a problem, ask questions, and give answers, with structure and style.

Although it is tempting to question the validity or importance of the fictional or creative units (III, V and VII), we must not bypass them since they actually prepare a child for the thinking skills he or she must have for the real world of composition in high school or college. I myself used to think that story writing was pretty much a waste of time, but now I see it as an important and natural bridge for children to cross as they move toward the ability to make dynamic observations and create sophisticated, enlightening commentary on the problems and situations in the world.

The most common problem I see with parents attempting to use or teach the Unit III story sequence model is the desire to do it "just right" or to use the questions in a "legalistic" way. "But this story doesn't fit the chart..." OK. So what? The goal of the story sequence chart and of the questions allocated for each paragraph is to assist the student in completing the outline; but if an idea doesn't work, don't use it! Change it if necessary. Basically, if you can get 3 paragraphs of 3-5 lines of 3-4 words per line, you'll be fine. How you get those words may vary. The questions are there to help, but if they don't work for you, scrap them. Do something else, but please don't skip Unit III unless the effort at doing it totally kills your desire to continue through the syllabus.

For those who aren't quite sure how to teach it, relax. Use the stories in the workbook: Fox & Grapes, Bat & Nightingale, King's Feast, Lion and Shepherd, and Emperor's New Clothes. Those are tried and true stories, and anyone should be able to make them work. After a few tries with something familiar, you

should then be brave enough to try a new story yourself. And don't discount the genius of the children. They will very often have ideas even when you don't.

I hope that helps everyone. I am praying for all our teachers every day. Their efforts to help and encourage each other are surely a great service, even to the many people who never post a message but have similar concerns and questions.

Andrew Pudewa