

Dear Creator,

This document is designed to help you create a pitch document by asking the crucial questions needed to develop a character driven series. We hope you find it helpful and look forward to seeing what you come up with in the very near future.

GoCreate!

Chris Mack Director Creative Investment and Development

NETFLIX ESSENTIALS

CHARACTERDRIVEN

Viewers develop relationships with characters not plot.

Their engagement depends on whether they relate to the character and understand their motivation.

If they don't find the character interesting, they won't care if the character gets what they want.

TEASE THEM AT THE START

The audience subconsciously decides whether they will watch your show in the first 5 seconds!

A good teaser will give the audience a taste of who the character is, the central conflict and the world.

Every episode should have a teaser unless the start of the episode is picking up exactly where the last episode ended. Usually in the middle of a dramatic plot twist.

NARRATIVEDRIVE

Does not mean the pace of the show needs to be fast.

Hero should be proactive in trying to obtain their goal. Overly reactive heroes are boring.

Each scene should move emotional arc and/ or plot forward. Viewers want new information from their scenes.

LEAVE THEM HANGING

Plot Cliffhangers are usually dramatic events or plot twist.

Emotional Cliffhangers are revelations to the hero that have an impact on their emotional arc. These can be small or big moments. But always impactful.

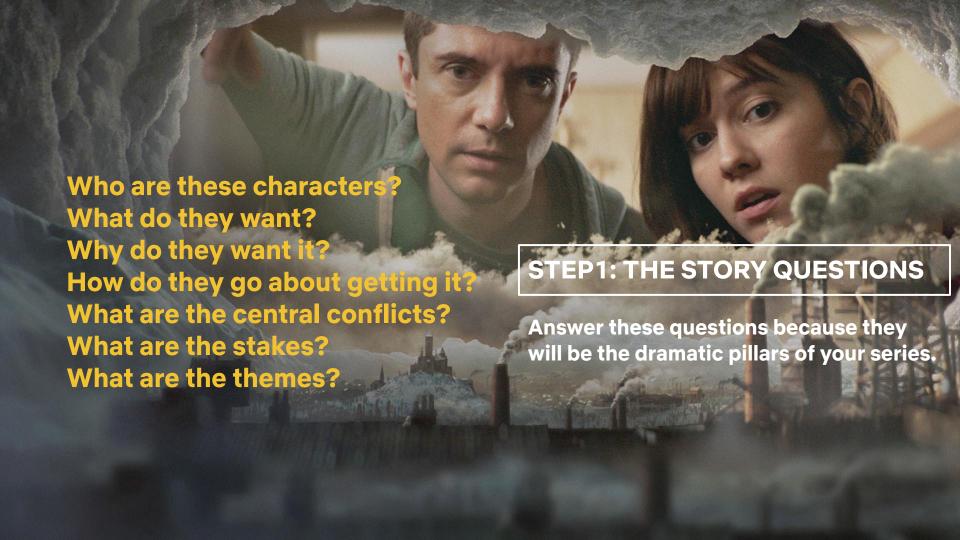
Sometimes the reveal can be only to the viewer and not the hero.

Needs to be compelling enough to drive viewer interest to the next episode.



- 1. The Story Questions
- 2. Overview
- 3. World
- 4. Tone
- 5. Character Descriptions
- 6. Season Summaries
- 7. Potential Episodes





Who is Walter White?

A down on his luck high school chemistry teacher who is diagnosed with cancer.

What does he want?

External - Money Internal - to be "awake"

Why does he want it?

External - to provide for his family Internal - to make up for the past

How does he go about getting it?
Cooking and selling the purest meth in New Mexico.

Case Study: Breaking Bad

For educational purposes only.

What are the central conflicts?

Family. Drug dealers. The law.

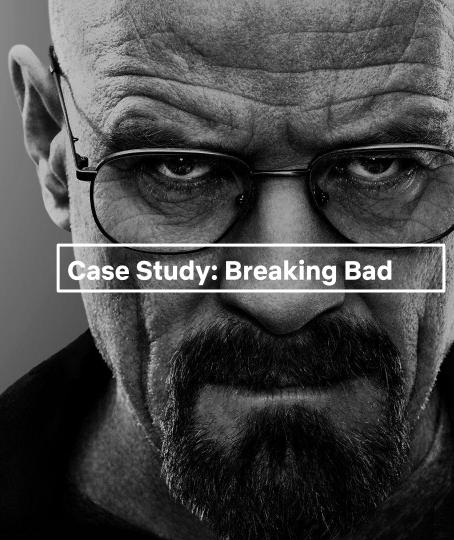
What are the stakes?

Divorce. Death. Jail.

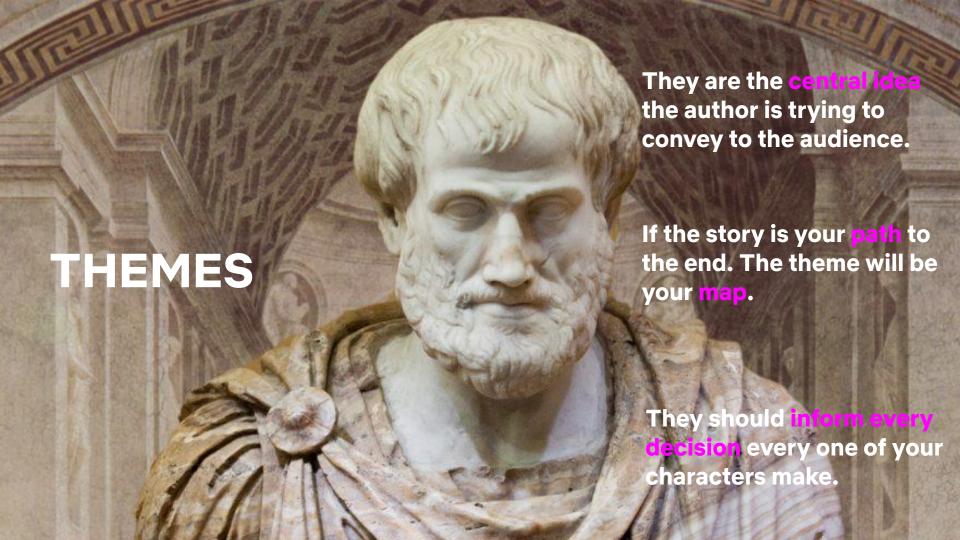
CENTRAL CONFLICTS GENERATE STORY!

In this case, the writers can generate stories from 3 different conflicts, all with very high stakes!

Repeat this exercise for all of your main characters.



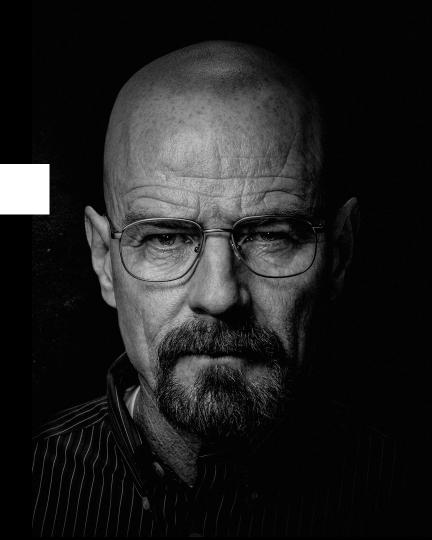
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STEP TWO: THE OVERVIEW

Includes:

- A short synopsis.
- Why this series?



STEP TWO:

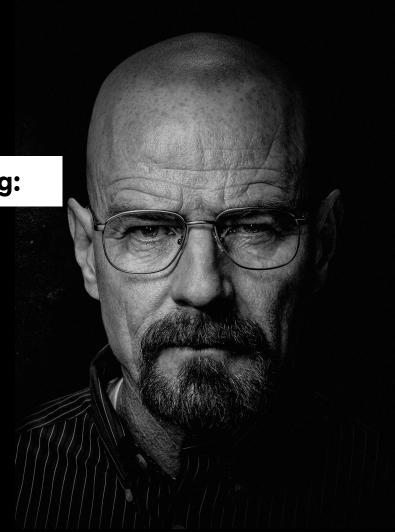
THE OVERVIEW

The Synopsis Should Have The Following:

WHO is the hero and what do they want?

WHY now and what happens if they don't get what they want?

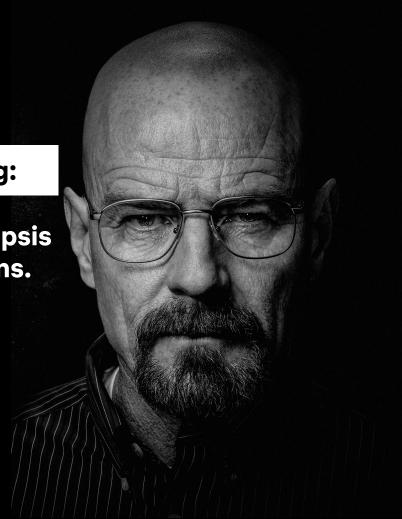
WHAT is the central conflict?



STEP TWO: THE OVERVIEW

The Synopsis Should Have The Following:

 You will find the outline for your synopsis in the answers for your story questions.

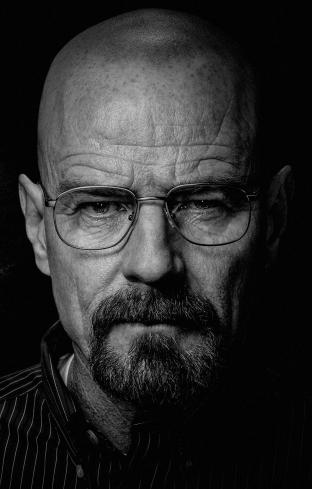


STEP TWO:

THE OVERVIEW

Case Study: Breaking Bad Synopsis

Breaking Bad is a family drama about a down on his luck, high school chemistry teacher who turns to cooking meth in order to provide for his family after he is diagnosed with terminal cancer. Armed with his intellect and the best meth on the market, he will outsmart rival drug kingpins and the DEA to become the biggest, baddest drug dealer in New Mexico. The only thing that scares him more than being killed or locked up is being found out by his pregnant wife and teenage son. Breaking bad will explore the themes of family, greed and power.



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Think "elevator pitch."

No Backstory.

Don't get into character dynamics.

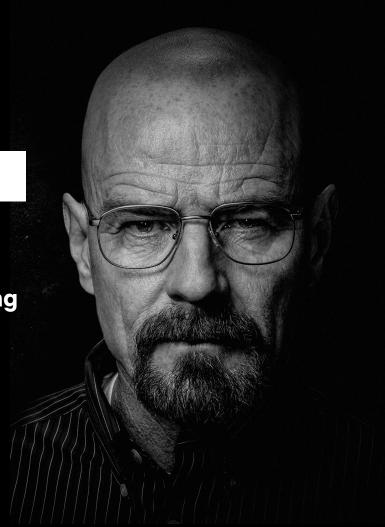
Just one paragraph.

STEP TWO:

THE OVERVIEW

Why This Series?:

- What makes the story fresh?
- Are there any relevant hotbed issues being explored?
- Is it personal? Based on IP?
- Tell us more about the themes.



STEP THREE:

TELL US ABOUT YOUR WORLD

WHERE IS YOUR WORLD?

The location should be a character in your story.

WHEN IS YOUR WORLD?

Provide a mythology if in the future or fantasy. Provide historical perspective if a period piece.

WHAT IS THE PROFESSION?

What you hero does for a living should be part of the world.

TELL US ABOUTYOUR TONE

- The tone is the feeling or atmosphere that you want to convey to the audience when they watch your series.
- Be intentional with your choices. They must help tell the story.
- From dark to light, tone usually matches the emotional resonance of your themes. Revenge=Dark: Love=Light.
- Talk about potential camera and shooting styles.
- Feel free to use movie, television and pictorial references
 to help communicate your vision.



MAKING ROOTWORTHY CHARACTERS

There are three key ingredients that make up Rootworthy Characters: Catalyst, Moral Compass, and Transformation, While all rootworthy characters need these ingredients, there isn't a set order that you need to introduce them - it's all about what works best for the story you want to tell.

THE IMPORTANCE **OF A GOAL**

Before you even worry about the 3 ingredients, a compelling story and goal is step one in the process, and helps point viewers towards the characters they are supposed to root for.

Do they have a clear goal?

- Clear, established motivation
 - An ultimate goal, whether or not the viewer knows the specifics

FILM VS. SERIES

By nature, film pacing needs to be quicker, and audiences need to see more immediate signs of the main ingredients to get and stayed invested in the character. Series have the luxury of the "slow burn" approach to Transformation and more ambiguity in Moral Compass.





For more information, contact dbrynan@netflix.com and msamson@netlflix.com

KEY INGREDIENTS

CATALYST

Underlying motivation or backstory

Audiences want to know where characters come from.

The Catalyst is the emotionally charged spark that ignites a character's journey. Catalysts should center around one central reason and not just be a disperse backstory or history of the character.

MORAL COMPASS

Guiding principles or code

Audiences want a set of rules to help level

Moral Compass is the code or rules that

set expectations for how a character will act.

actions. Moral compasses that resonate are

A "Call to Action"

Fulfilling destiny, reaching for success, standing up for yourself

Inherent Altruism

Standing up for those who can't, doing the "right' thing

Personal tragedy

Loss of loved ones, terminal illness, poverty, childhood trauma

Protecting and avenging

Doing almost anything for family or love

Uncovering truth

Doing whatever it takes to bring the truth to light

characters set for themselves and guide their Fighting for the shades of grey, and do NOT need to be in line greater good

with the morality of our world as long as they Fighting for what's really important, regardless of the cost

TRANSFORMATION

are justifiable in the story world.

Obstacles and challenges that spur growth

Audiences don't want characters to be perfect, they want growth.

Transformation shows how characters handle and grow from trials and tribulations. It can be either positive or negative, but it needs to exist. Must be consistent with their Moral Compass and make sense given their underlying Catalyst..

Difficult choices and sacrifice

Personal sacrifice for the betterment of their causes Learning to control skills/power

Slowly improving over time in a talent or skill

Overcoming hardship

Getting through the bad times, often through friendship

CHECK LIST

Do they have a compelling Catalyst?

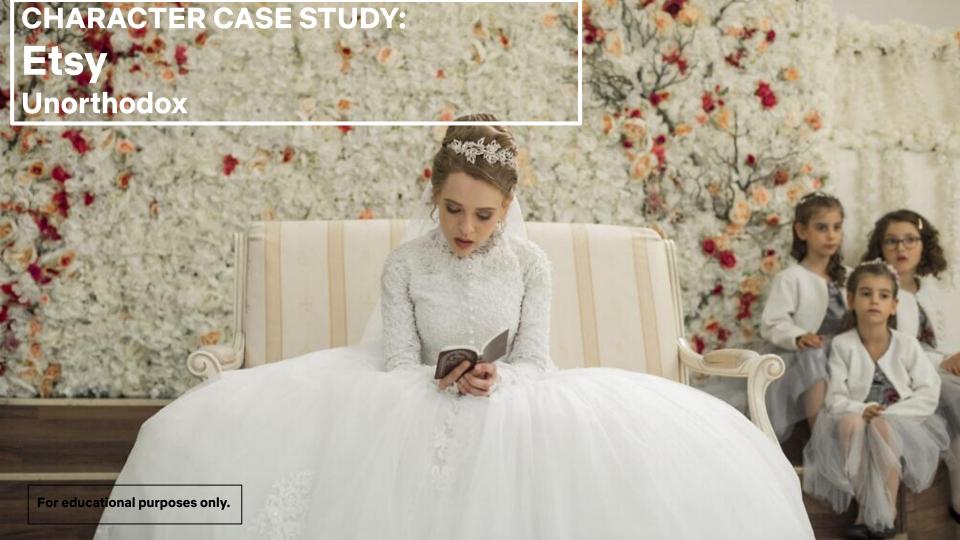
- Backstory that shapes Moral Compass
- Catalyst that is understandable, relatable, or emotionally charged
- ☐ Catalyst that feels organic and true to the character

Do they have a defined **Moral Compass?**

- Clear rules and codes they live
- Boundaries for things they will/won't do
- Moral Compass that's tested through Transformation

Do they have a believable Transformation?

- Clear path/potential to growth
- ☐ Transformation that's in line with their Moral Compass, has a strong connection to their Catalyst



ETSY

"I'm different."



CATALYST

She gets pregnant and her husband asks for a divorce.



GOAL

Escape to Berlin.



STAKES

The consequences of failure should be high. Death. Loss of freedom. Loss of money. Loss of love. For Etsy - Loss of identity. She will be an outcast. The stakes couldn't be higher.



MORAL COMPASS

A Survivor with integrity.

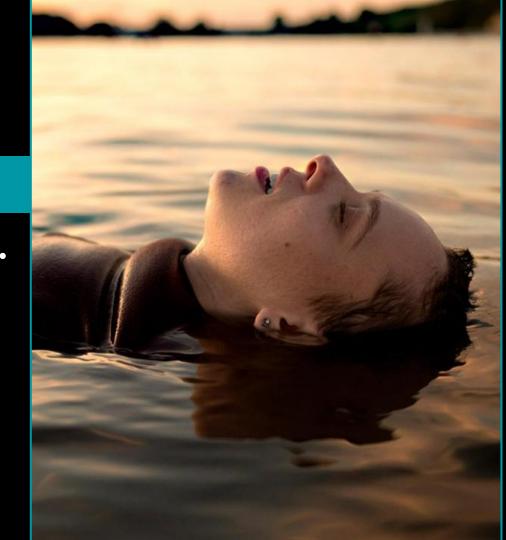
She does what is necessary to live. But not at the expense of her soul.

The broken eruv.



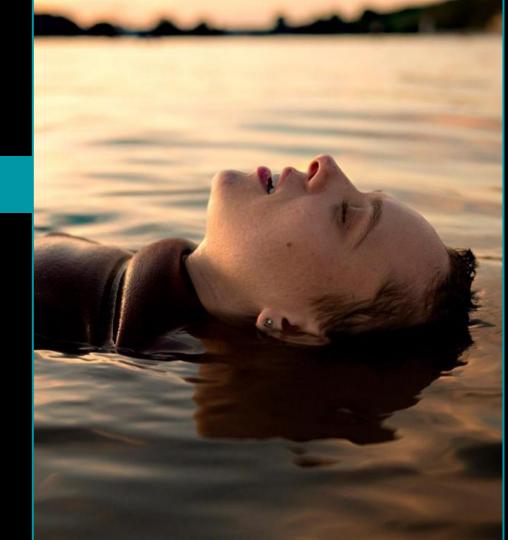
CONFLICT

Change is driven by conflict.
The more formidable the conflict, the better.



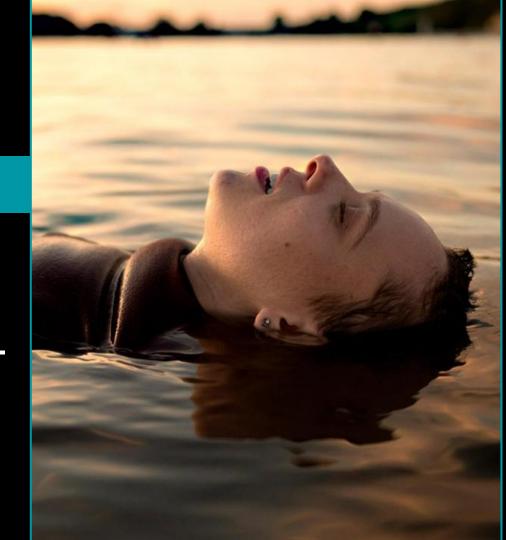
CONFLICT

External conflicts for Etsy include her community, her husband and his cousin. And the outside world.



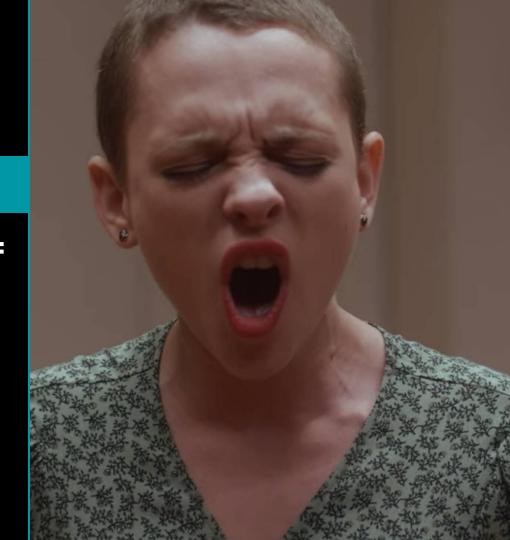
CONFLICT

Internal conflict. Sometimes, the hero themselves can be their own worst enemy. Pride. Idealism. Love. In Etsy's case -Doubt.



TRANSFORMATION

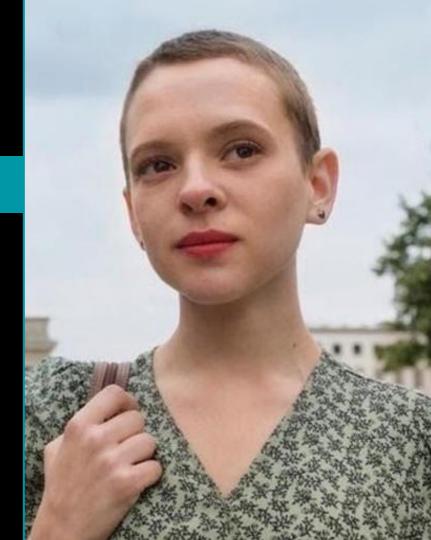
External + Internal change = layered character.



TRANSFORMATION

Etsy's external change is escaping Brooklyn to live in Berlin with her mother.

Her internal change is being someone who didn't have an identity to finding her voice.





What is their relationship to the hero?

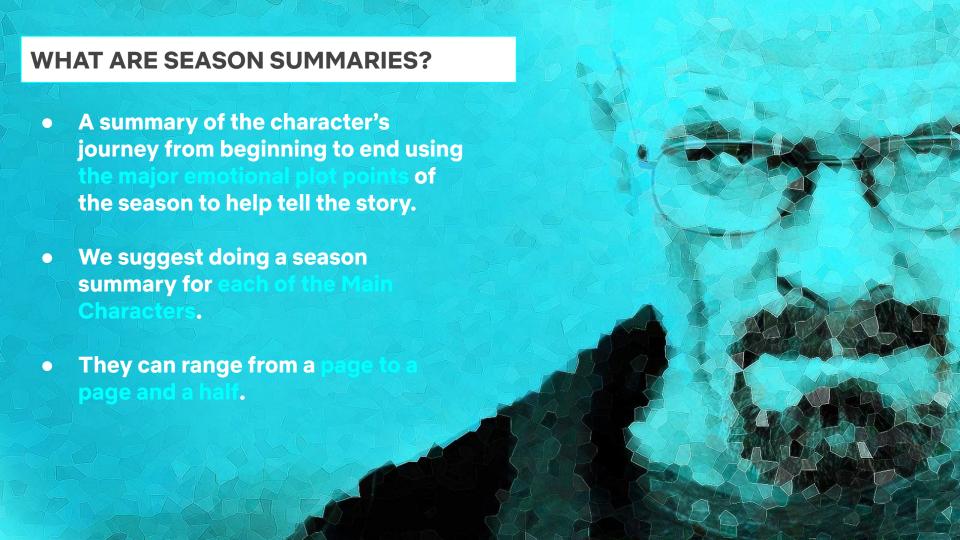
If an ensemble, tell us how do they compete against each other.

Characters going for the same goal but for different motivations makes conflict, which = great drama!









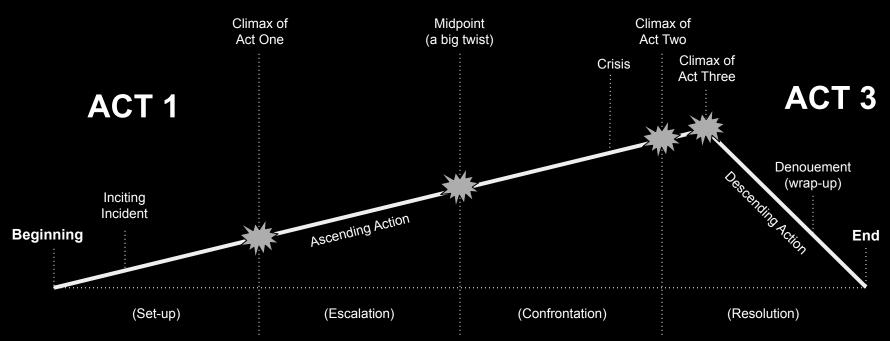
"Instead of focusing on individual episodes, think of the whole season as a layered, three act story."

Todd A. Kessler - Creator



Film

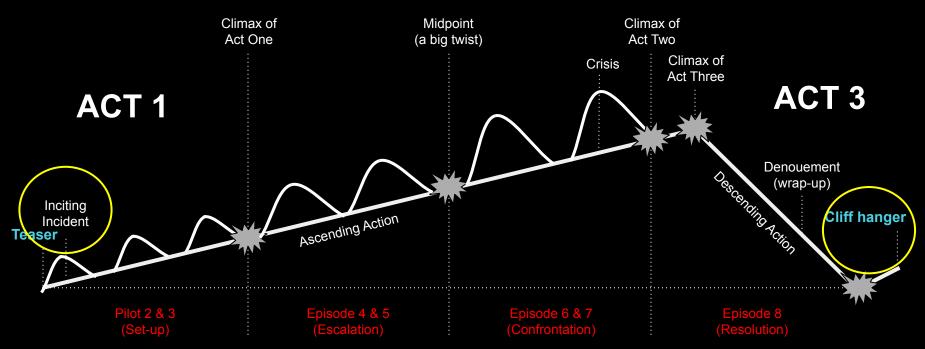
ACT 2





Season Map

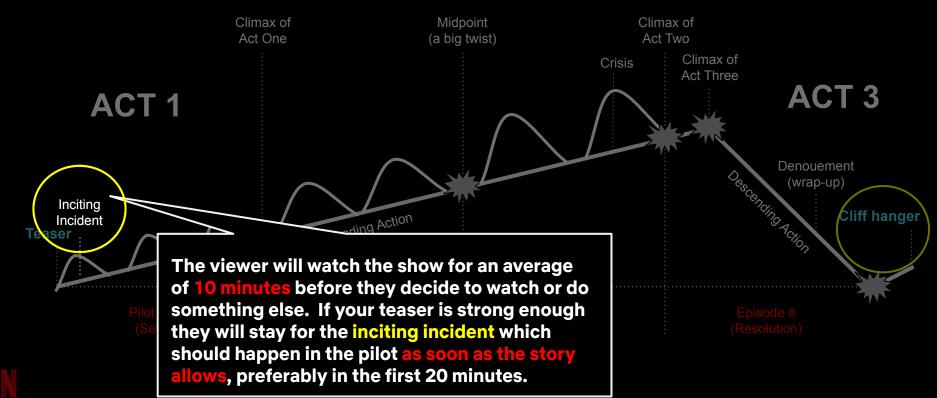
ACT 2

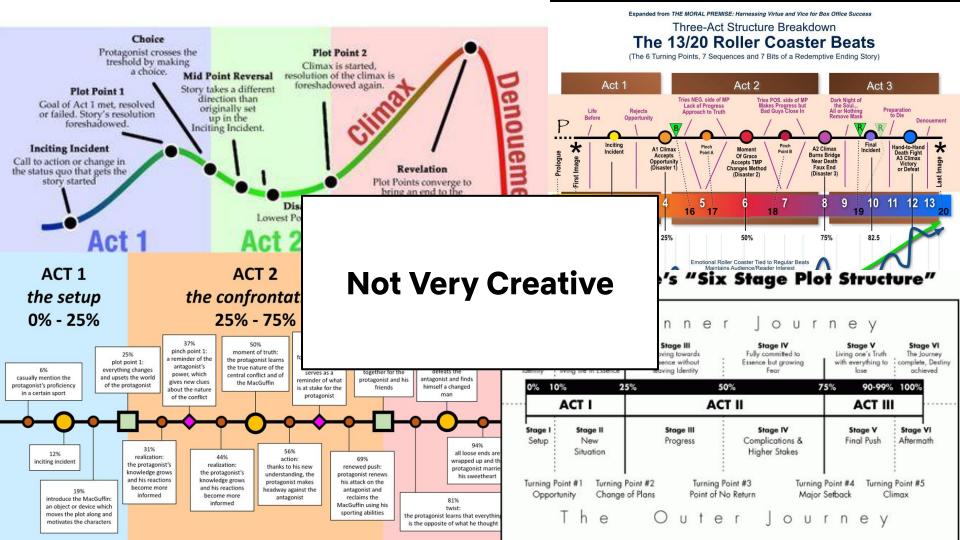


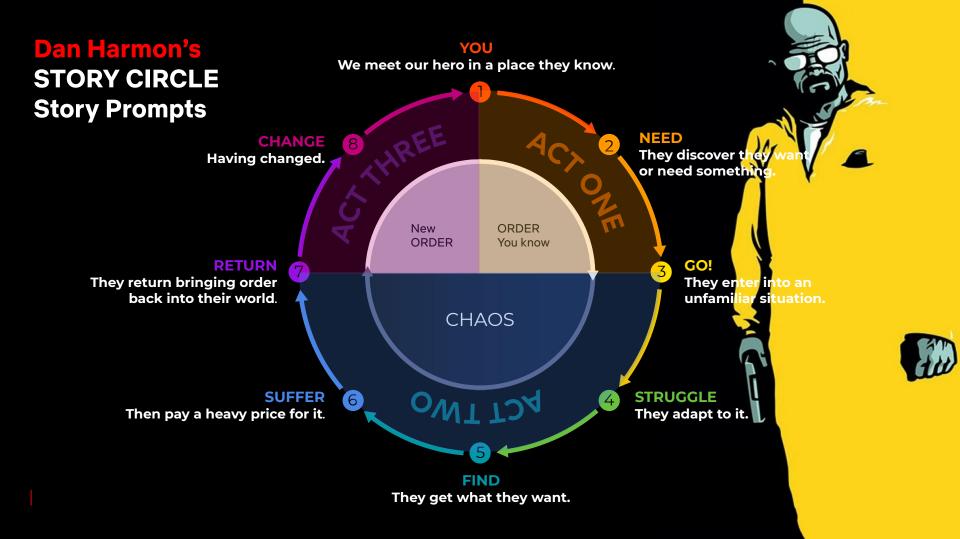


Season Map

ACT 2





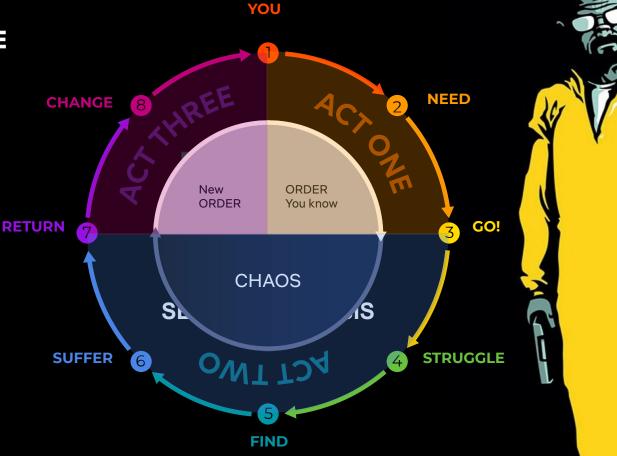


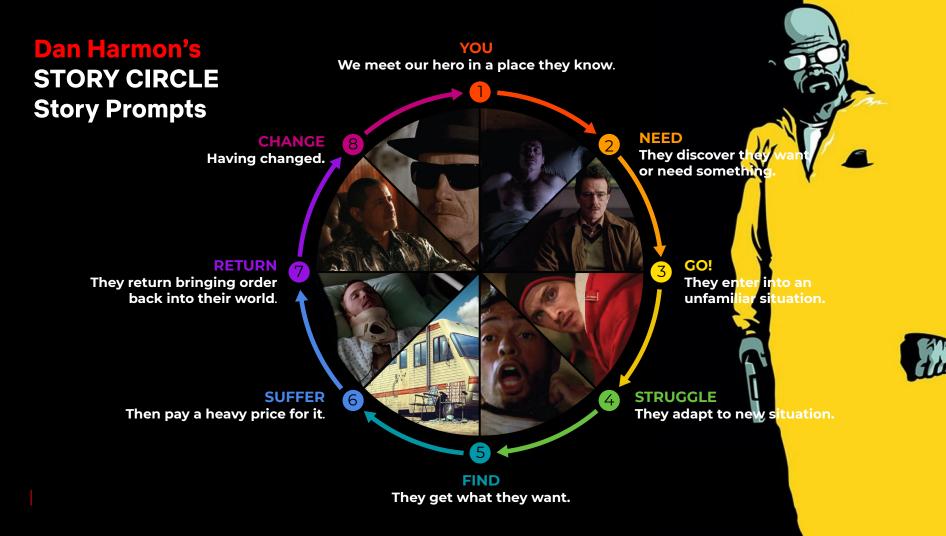
Dan Harmon's STORY CIRCLE

Allows you to plot from the Hero's emotional state.

Forces the Hero to be proactive.

Focuses on basic human motivations, actions and consequences.





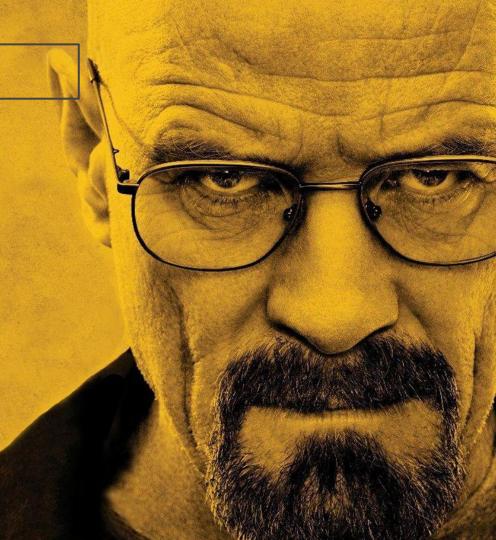
Applying the Harmon Circle in the Writer's Room

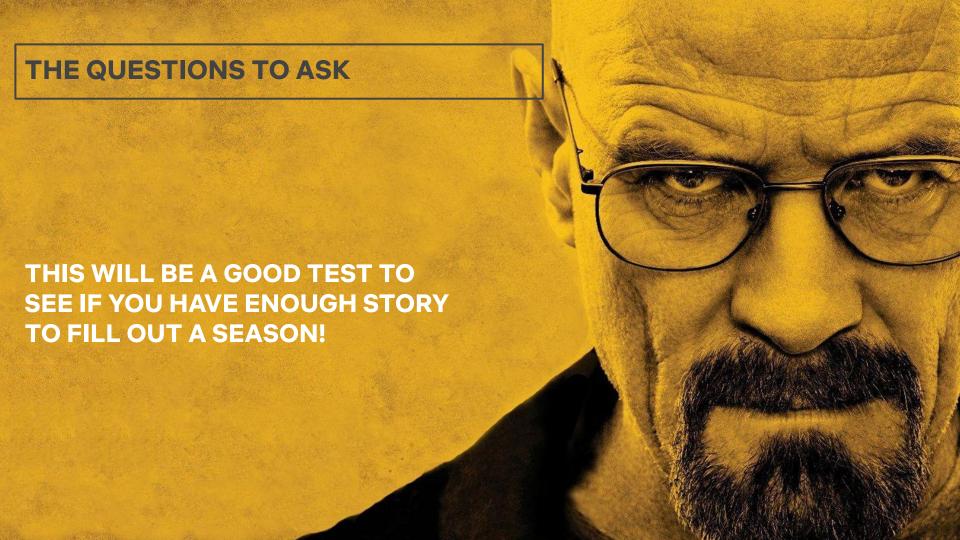


Now you have your emotional plot points which will serve as an outline for your season story arcs.

STEP 7: POTENTIAL EPISODES

- What is the main goal of your character for the season?
 - You already know this.
- Based on your research and what you know about your character:
 - What are the "mini goals" required for success?
 - What are the potential barriers to success for your character?
- List as many ideas as you can and pick the top 8 or 10.
- Only 1 or 2 sentences of description is required.





THE PILOT

- It will be the most important episode of your series.
- By the end of your pilot, the viewer must know:
 - Who is the hero.
 - What they want.
 - Their central conflict.
 - Key relationship dynamics
 - The basic rules of the world.
 - The genre.



Episode One: Walter finds out he has cancer and partners with Jessie to cook and sell meth. Walter has to kill drug dealers with chemical reaction.

Episode Two: Walter and Jessie have to figure out what to do with the bodies only to find out that one of them is still alive.

Episode Three: Walter has to decide whether to kill the drug dealer or let him go and put his family in jeopardy.

Jessie goes home hoping to get clean but gets kicked out again after taking the fall for his younger brother's joint.

Episode Five: Walter fights with family about taking chemo. He finally agrees but insurance won't cover treatment.

Episode Six: Walter needs to make much more cash and gets into business with Tuco who steals the drugs and almost kills Jessie.

Episode Seven: Walter and Jessie have to steal a truck load of chemicals in order to make good on the delivery of meth to Tuco. Now, Walter is in business with the most dangerous drug dealer in New Mexico.

"Story is about emotion.

If you don't make them
feel something.

Sadness, happiness,
even anger... You have
failed as a storyteller."

"Be a sadist. No matter how sweet and innocent your leading characters, make awful things happen to them -- in order that the reader may see what they are made of."

Kurt Vonnegut

GOCREATE

