
Principles of Five-Act Structure and Change Paradigm Summary

John Yorke, *Into the Woods: A Five-Act Journey into Story* (NY: The Overlook Press, 2015)

Story shape is a mirror of opposites.

ACT 1

**Protagonist has a problem and leaves their familiar world
A call to action**

No knowledge of problem	Hero introduced in their ordinary world
Growing Knowledge	Limited knowledge of problem
Awakening knowledge	They receive the call to adventure/inciting incident that serves as catalyst for the next act and the whole story

ACT 2

**They go on a journey
Pursue short-term solution to their problem based on character flaws**

Doubt - refusal to acknowledge problem	Reluctant or refuse the call to action
Overcoming Reluctance - beginning to acknowledge problem	Encouraged by mentor
Acceptance - acknowledging problem	Cross threshold and enter special world—second inciting incident where protag realizes they cannot remain the same. Must choose between new and old self.

ACT 3

They find what they're looking for, and they take it back

Experimenting with Knowledge of problem	They encounter tests, allies, and enemies.
MIDPOINT-KEY KNOWLEDGE—big change or breakthrough—Protagonist's need overcomes the want for the first time	Approach inmost cave, crossing a second threshold where they endure the supreme ordeal, but don't know how to handle it correctly. Should ramp up jeopardy and raise the stakes. Protagonist discovers truth about themselves and learns what they are or are not capable of. They embrace their new self, and they can never go back.

Experimenting post-knowledge with knowledge of problem Take possession of their reward

ACT 4

The take it back, the consequences of taking it pursue them

Doubt - consequences of knowledge	Pursued on the road back to ordinary world.
Growing Reluctance	Growing anxiety / fear
Regression - Full knowledge	Worse point
Undergoes a spiritual death - crisis point	They must either embrace change or reject it. Ultimate question: will they revert and die or change and live?

ACT 5

They overcome the consequences and solve their problem
Shows consequences of accepting the call
Cross third threshold - experience resurrection and transformation

Reawakening: Final choice	Protagonist enters with one concrete objective to defeat the antagonist, overcome their demon, win their prize, get the girl, etc. Antagonist will be the embodiment of the protagonist's flaws. Faced with the worst point, the protagonist wavers, unsure how to act until there is a new call to action. An opportunity presents itself, inviting them to rededicate themselves to change.
Re-Acceptance: Final battle or climax	They make their choice, accept the call, and commit themselves to the course of action that they must pursue relentlessly to its logical conclusion, which in turn leads to...
Total Mastery: Master of knowledge – resolution One final choice	The most dangerous and most profound task they will need to achieve to overcome their flaw. Return with elixir, boon, or treasure to benefit the ordinary world or cure the flaw.

Stories are built from acts, scenes and beats. All these units have all the parts of narrative structure:

Set-up—Inciting Incident
Confrontation ending in Crisis Point
Climax and Resolution

Act 1 and Act 5 are mirror images of each other Act 2 and Act 4 mirror each other and both halves of act 3 mirror each other. Can use opposite images in the mirror birth/death, joy/sadness, acceptance/refusal, etc.

Act 1 (problem/call to action)			Act 2 (journey)			Act 3 (discovery)			Act 4 (consequences)			Act 5 (reawakening)		
Part 1 Set up- Inciting incident= explosion of opposition			Part 2 Crisis point			Part 3 Turning point: Subversion of expectation Inciting Incident			Part 1 Set up- Inciting incident= explosion of opposition			Part 2 Crisis Point		
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