

UNSTUCK IN THE MIDDLE

W.A.G.E.

World: Is there something unique, exotic, and truly compelling about the world in which the book is set? Here, world can be understood to mean many things—the world of a family or a certain occupation or lifestyle, the real physical world of the story’s journey, etc.

Is that world at a point of transformation or disruption? Are there larger public stakes to serve to underscore, symbolically, the more private/intimate stakes of the protagonist’s journey?

Active: Does the protagonist engage in the journey in an active, propulsive way? Is he or she the driving source of the narrative? Are we engaged in a real, momentous journey?

Goals: Does the protagonist DESIRE something that the reader can understand and root for along the way? Is the pursuit of this goal of life-changing significance to the main character?

Would the lack of achievement of this goal register as a deep loss to the character and to the reader? Does its pursuit test the character(s) in greater and deeper ways during the course of the story?

Emotion: Does the story include a strong emotional component? Does the main character’s journey create a significant change of heart, lead him/her to experience losses and triumphs, make sacrifices, deal with difficult but compelling emotional issues to which the reader can, somehow, relate?

Does the story deal with political, social, psychological issues that have some relevance to the reader’s (contemporary) life?

YOUR STORY'S WORLDS AND YOUR CHARACTER'S PLACE IN THEM

(World can refer to physical environments/settings as large as a planet and as small as a room, a family, a peer group, the world of some creative pursuit or occupation, clubs, etc.)

WORLD: _____

HOW CHARACTER SEES THEIR PLACE IN IT: _____

HOW OTHERS IN THAT WORLD SEE YOUR CHARACTER: _____

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DEEPENING GOALS

For UNSTUCK IN THE MIDDLE Webinar

OPENING:

- What does your protagonist want as they come into the story?
- What concrete/tangible goal are they driving toward?
- What emotion do they believe (or hope) they'll feel if that goal is satisfied?
- What impact does the inciting incident have on your character's relationship to the initial goal?
- Does a new goal take the place of the initial one, or does your protagonist try to pursue both?
- How do they mesh? How do they conflict?

MIDPOINT:

- How does this new goal become even more personal and vital to them during the course of the story?
- At around the midpoint, what do they realize they've sacrificed in their pursuit of their goal(s)?
- What makes them firm their resolve to continue?
- What makes it so they couldn't quit their pursuit, even if they wanted to?
- How does what might feel like a straightforward pursuit become even bigger/more complicated than they initially imagined?
- Do they drag other people along with them in their pursuit?
- Or do other people insert themselves into the pursuit, risking some aspect of their own lives along the way?
- How does the world around the character impact the pursuit of this goal?
- What larger forces stand against your character?
- What larger forces serve as unexpected allies?

ENDING:

- What people and forces mass against your character, making a victory seem almost impossible?
- When all seems lost, who or what helps your protagonist make that final push toward success?

(Un)Stuck in the Middle

TECHNIQUES FOR MAXIMIZING THE MIDDLE

1. Consider additional **plot layers** and **plot lines**.
2. Employ the “**Twister Effect**,” having a natural or other disaster strike the story and turn everything upside down.
3. Drive toward a **mirror moment**, in which a character is made to reckon with themselves, their decisions, the story stakes, and the expectations of other characters. Bring them low early on and build back up from there.

Make sure that every **scene** is working for you. "Be careful that the scene adds something necessary to the story's development: information, revelation, discovery, sudden change..." – Elizabeth George.

4. Find additional ways for your **antagonist** and protagonist to interact. Make sure your antagonist is a present, ongoing force in the story.
5. Offer up **emotional or practical reveals** a little at a time. **Seed them** throughout the narrative. Keep the reader engaged and asking questions (but not at the risk of being obscure or cagey.)
6. Heap on the **obstacles**. **Make things worse**—physically, emotionally, intellectually—for your protagonist. Then worse, still.
7. Instead of a three or four act structure, consider your novel's strong **halves**.
8. Introduce a **game-changing character** halfway through—or **elevate the importance** of a seemingly **minor character**. Who can enter the scene and throw your protagonist off-course? Who can re-enter his/her life?
9. Consider **adding a viewpoint character** with important goals and desires of his/her own.
10. Engage your **contagonists**—characters who are on your protagonist's side but who interfere with his/her progress in the story.
11. Make your **climax** your **midway** point. *Yes, really!*

QUICK SCENE INTENTION LIST

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1. What is your viewpoint character's intention upon entering/embarking upon the scene?

2. What drives your character (motivation) and why does it matter (stakes)?

3. What character or force is present to interfere with that intention?

4. What does the opposition character or force intend for that moment?

5. In what overt ways is the viewpoint character's intention made clear to the reader?

6. In what ways is your viewpoint character made to adapt/change strategies during the scene?

7. Does your viewpoint character succeed or fail? What are the repercussions for the rest of the story?

A HERO/HEROINE'S JOURNEY IN FOUR SENTENCES

Once upon a time, in a world where things just felt wrong, something happened to someone, and she decided she would pursue a goal. So she devised a plan of action, and even though there were forces trying to stop her and she'd made other plans for her life, she moved forward with the help of a companion, because there was a lot at stake—both for her and for her world. And just as things seemed as bad as they could get, and she lost something precious to her, she realized something important, and that understanding led to her potential triumph. But when offered the prize she had fought so hard to gain, she had to decide whether or not to take it, and in making that decision, she satisfied a need that had been created by something in her past.

Based on the **GARY PROVOST SENTENCE**