

Pattern Three: Contest Story

FAQ: Is this pattern a complete story plot?

Answer: This plot stands alone as a complete story just like a finished piece of art. It has more variations than any of the other stand alone plots due to the number of themes encompassed. This pattern can also be used as the subplot of circle, switch and character transformation..

FAQ: What are the themes of contest stories?

Answer: man vs. man, man vs. nature, man vs. himself, man vs. evil, man vs. machine, man vs. gods, man vs. God, predator and prey, the dare stories, romance

1st Contest Story Pattern

1. Motive: Predator wants to catch Prey and eat/capture him.

2. Encounter: Interesting way predator and prey meet.

2. Predator escapes prey twice by using tricks.

a. Trick one:

b. Trick two:

3. Prey escapes Predator forever due to:

*trick

*disaster

*act of god

*skill

*courage

*lucky break

*someone helps

*hard work

*truth revealed or confessed

Borrequita and the Coyote by Verna Aardema

2nd Contest Story Pattern

1. Encounter: Interesting way two characters meet.

2. Motive: Two characters challenge each other to a contest (choose a feat).

3. Protagonist's first struggle and Antagonist's first success.

4. Protagonist's second struggle and Antagonist's second success.

5. Protagonist wins contest due to:

*trick

*luck

*someone helps

*hard work

*act of god

*skill

*use of force

*truth revealed

Tortoise and the Hare (traditional)

The Princess Knight by Cornelia Funke

FAQ's About the Contest Story Pattern/Plot

FAQ: Since there are so many contest story variations, which one do you start with?

Answer: I think that the predator and prey contest stories are the simplest and have the most appeal to young writers. Just think about how The Three Little Pigs has stood the test of time. Children eat up the concept of using tricks and in predator and prey stories this is the primary element.

FAQ: Could you actually teach students to write all the different types of contests?

Answer: Definitely not. Just to write a single story based on each contest theme would be almost impossible. Taking into account that each of those themes has incredible pattern variations makes it insurmountable. Choose what is easiest and most meaningful to the age group you teach.

FAQ: Are contest stories easy for students to write?

Answer: Actually, I have found contest stories to be more challenging for students to write than the other stand alone patterns, because the actions of both the protagonist and antagonist must be taken into consideration and these actions oppose each other. Sometimes the perspectives of both the protagonist and antagonist are required to write a contest effectively. Thirdly, a great contest story relies heavily on the story complications of tricks, disasters, acts of god (weather, magic, miracles) and use of force. Collecting, changing and using story complications effectively is hard work. It isn't good enough to write "There was a frog and a dog. They had a contest to see who could get to the pond the fastest. The dog won. The End." There was a contest all right, but it simply fell apart without a story complication.

FAQ: Do contest stories and stuck stories work together?

Answer: Definitely! In the fairytales and science fiction you will see that it is very hard to separate stuck and contest stories. Sometimes the story complication in a contest story is getting stuck.

FAQ: How do the stuck and contest patterns function in fairytales?

Answer: A very rough description would be that evil hates good and makes good stuck. Good can be stuck in a place (Rapunzel in the tower), in a state such as sleep (Sleeping Beauty) or turned into another creature (The Frog Prince). Good has to obtain an item by going on a quest or meet a condition (e.g. wait for a hundred years to pass) to be released from its stuck condition and win the life and death contest.

FAQ: How do these two patterns work in science fiction?

Answer: A brief example would be a space ship getting stuck when it breaks down in space or on a strange planet. Next, an alien space ship flies up and threatens to destroy or capture it. When the alien space ship locks onto the space ship with its tractor beam, the characters are doubly stuck. If they get their warp shields up in time they will save themselves and win the contest for control. Once again, the stuck plot provided a story complication for the contest story.

Contest books you might know:

1. Tacky the Penguin by Helen Lester
2. Rainbow Fish and the Sea Monsters' Cave by Marcus Pfister
3. Dazzle the Dinosaur by Marcus Pfister
4. Trouble with Trolls by Jan Brett
5. Borreguita and the Coyote by Verna Aardema
6. The Princess Knight by Cornelia Funke
7. Emma and the Coyote by Margriet Ruurs
8. Axle Annie by Robin Pulver
9. Mike Mulligan and the Steam Shovel by Virginia Lee Burton
10. The Wolf Who Cried Boy by Bob Hartman
11. The Perfect Pet by Peta Coplans
12. John Henry by Brad Kessler
13. The Three Little Pigs by Marie-Louise Gay (retelling)
14. The Three Billy Goats Gruff by Paul Galdone (retelling)
15. The Paper Bag Princess by Robert Munsch
16. The Enormous Crocodile by Roald Dahl
17. Kate and the Beanstalk by Mary Pope Osborne
18. Clever Tom and the Leprechaun by Linda Shute