



# Session 3 Narrative

Dramatic Narrative

Dramatic Tension

Cause and Effect

Story, Plot and Structure

# Key Concepts

## Dramatic Narrative

A dramatic narrative is a series or sequence of connected events. A story told directly to an audience by a narrator. Most simply put, an account of something that happened.

## Story, Plot and Structure

All are ways to think about narrative, but each has a slightly different function.

A narrative **STORY** is a chronological succession of events.

A narrative **PLOT** is how these events are ordered and interconnected.

Narrative **STRUCTURE** is how these events and actions are organized into units of action (usually scenes and acts)

## Cause and Effect

Central to the understanding of plot is the idea of cause and effect. The novelist, E.M. Forster explains the concept like this 'The King died and the Queen died' is a **STORY**. BUT 'The King died and the Queen died of grief,' is a **PLOT**, because the two key events (or 'plot points') incorporate cause and effect.

## Dramatic Tension

Playwrights keep the tension escalating and the drama building, scene by scene, so that the audience is consistently engaged in the story. Traditionally, in classic drama, a plot usually peaks at a point of climax – the highest point

of tension in the play – after which the story's resolution must take place.

Narrative not only gives the audience a story to follow, it helps create suspense, pace and pay-offs for an audience. It also arguably fulfills a human need to find meaning, patterns and structure in our own lives.



Now watch this short film to hear from playwrights about how they find their narrative and the importance of writing about something you're interested in and intrigued by. <https://youtu.be/QHS3tQDpTao>

# Discuss This

**'Truth is stranger than fiction.'** Turning 'real events' into a dramatic narrative is harder than creating an imaginary one. Do you agree? What might be some of the challenges of dramatizing real events?

# Group Exercise

## Identifying the Narrative



Watch the YouTube clip of a news story about the rise of hate crime in the UK following the Brexit result <http://bitly.ws/9GPH>

### 1. Can you identify some of the elements that are used to create a narrative for the news story?

#### The following might help you

- A problem, in this case the violent protest in Independence Square
- A backstory, history or timeline which is necessary for viewers to understand the present situation.
- A sequence of events, which will probably incorporate a beginning, middle and end (even if the news story is left open-ended without a clear resolution.)
- Two sides with conflicting values and objectives.
- Two different versions of what happened and a series of accusations and defences offered by both.
- An array of characters with different points of view.
- A **DRAMATIC QUESTION** in this case – will the number of incidents continue to escalate and what will happen to the victims?

### 2. Are there any characters you can pull out of the news story around whom a fictional narrative could be focused?

**Whose story might you find most interesting?** E.g. a protester sleeping in the square, the Channel 4 journalist, a Ukrainian policeman, the EU Foreign Affairs minister, an injured bystander

## Group Exercise



**Listen to the audio clip of the play once or twice and read along with the text.**  
***Her Naked Skin*, 2008, by Rebecca Lenkiewicz.**

Beginning with the famous moment when Emily Davison stepped out in front of the King's horse at the Epsom Derby in 1913, the play follows a group of Suffragettes through their struggles to achieve equality in Edwardian London. As thousands of women of all classes serve time in Holloway Prison in their fight to gain the vote, a romantic friendship forms between Lady Celia Cain, who is trapped in a frustrating marriage, and a young working class seamstress, Eve Douglas. *Her Naked Skin* examines the personal, historical and cultural challenges faced by these women through the prism of this central relationship, alongside the conflicting attitudes of leading politicians and the families of the imprisoned suffragettes.

**Afterwards discuss the scene with reference to the following questions**

- What is the catalyst for the play? i.e. what kick-starts the play's narrative?
- What PLOT POINTS can you identify in these scenes? (These are significant points in the story, including events, actions, complications, and revelations, which cause the plot to escalate and keep the narrative moving forward.) Can you guess at any of the future consequences?
- Discuss the relationship between the writer's plot (connected events and actions) and the writer's structure (how those events and actions are organized and presented).
- What do you think is the balance in the play between real, historical events and imagined ones? How much do you think the writer invented? Why do you think she felt it necessary to invent anything at all?
- What are the DRAMATIC STAKES for the two oppositional groups of characters in these two scenes? (The politicians and the suffragettes). (Dramatic stakes refer to the risks incurred by any character or group in pursuit of a goal – for example, what they stand to lose or gain if their goal is not met and why that matters to them.)
- How might opposing dramatic stakes help shape the narrative?

## Get Writing

For this exercise, your tutor will bring in two or three current stories taken from local or national newspapers. Or you could bring in a story that interests you, that you have sourced yourself. Before you get started, it might help you to take a look at the example narrative that you'll find towards the end of this worksheet.

1. Choose the story that interests you the most. Identify a DRAMATIC QUESTION
2. Write down a list of the actual events in the story in the order that they happened (as reported). NARRATIVE
3. Isolate the event or action that you think is the most interesting. Now see if you can create a new PLOT by taking this as your starting point. Think about which PLOT POINTS you want the audience to be able to see, and which will form part of the background to the action on stage.

### Tips

The aim of this exercise is not to 'reinvent' history, but to find a new and original angle on the story. You are free to invent new events, actions or characters that are linked to your starting point. Think about how the events may be causally linked.

4. When you have a list of plot points, think about your STRUCTURE. How will you arrange the plot points? Will you tell the story in a linear way? Or will you disrupt linear time?

Try and commit to a beginning, middle and end point (or trigger, climax and resolution), even if you can't fill in the remaining gaps.

### Tips

Think about the catalyst, trigger or 'inciting incident' that might kick-start the narrative. Do you have a central character to tell your story, or many different ones? What kind of narrative form would suit the source material?

Please see overleaf for an example story

## Example Story



Below is a sample version of the exercise using a news story about Malala Yousafzai, the Pakistani schoolgirl who, was shot in the head by the Taliban in response to her campaigning work for female education. Watch the following video news clip about Malala Yousafzai <http://bitly.ws/9GPJ>

### Dramatic Question

When Malala is transferred to the UK hospital for treatment, how does this create tensions and conflict within the local community, both Muslim and non Muslim?

### Narrative

- a) At the age of 9, Malala Yousafzai writes a blog for the BBC about life under Taliban rule in her home town of Mingora.
- b) The next year, after campaigning in support of education for girls, banned under Taliban rule, Malala is awarded the International Children's Peace Prize.
- c) In 2012, as her profile increases, the Taliban issues death threats to Malala and her family. In October, Malala is shot in the head and neck by the Taliban, who ambush her school bus. Two friends are wounded alongside her. She remains unconscious and in a critical condition.
- d) Malala is transferred to a hospital in Birmingham, UK, for intensive rehabilitation.
- e) A group of Islamic Clerics in Pakistan issue a fatwa against the people who tried to kill her. The Taliban reiterate their goal to assassinate Malala and her father.
- f) Malala becomes an international heroine. Worldwide protests are held over the incident and leaders call for action. Gordon Brown issues a UN petition in her name demanding that all children in Pakistan are in education by 2015.
- g) Police name 23-year-old Atta Ullah Khan, a graduate student in chemistry, as the shooter in the attack.
- h) In July 2013, on her 16th birthday, Malala makes her first public speech after the attack, to the UN, calling for worldwide access to education.
- i) Malala is nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize and publishes a book about her experiences.
- j) Malala continues to live in the UK and runs the Malala Fund which raises money and awareness about the importance of education for girls.

**Trigger** We will isolate the incident of Malala's assassination attempt as our starting point.

**Plot** Our story begins when a Pakistani schoolgirl is shot on a school bus. If you want to change the name and details of the real girl, Malala, at this point, you can – this may help give you the moral and creative freedom to fictionalize the real human events. You also might want to change the gender, age, or ethnicity of the girl to fit your own experience and interests.

Now start inventing. What happens next? Does the story move to the British hospital a week later? OR do we go to the temporary home of the girl's parents in the UK as they try to deal with their grief, along with the international press interest? OR to a UK Muslim community centre where the attack divides local opinion – perhaps including a young British Muslim of the girl's own age who wants to start a vigil in her honour? Or do we go to the Houses of Parliament where the girl's case is discussed by the British Prime Minister, as protests around the UK cause violent clashes between Muslims and non-Muslims? OR do we meet Malala after her Nobel Peace Prize nomination as she struggles to cope with the pressure of life in the public eye?

You can use any of the characters from the video clip, or invent your own to help tell your story.

### E.g.

One of the girl's friends, also injured in the shooting

The girl's parents or siblings

A British Muslim girl who wants to campaign on the Pakistani girl's behalf

A doctor at the hospital who is treating the girl

A journalist who is desperate to get an interview with the girl for a major British newspaper

A police officer called to a scene of violent retaliation for the incident at a British mosque

The British Prime Minister

Start fleshing out a story, thinking about the character's goals, objectives and what is at stake for them dramatically.

See where the narrative takes you. How are the plot points causally linked?

Try to also think about your sense of enquiry into the characters, story and consequences of the various plot points –

what questions do you want to answer by developing this idea? What aspects of the story provoke, anger or disturb you?

Start fleshing out a story, thinking about the character's goals, objectives and what is at stake for them dramatically.

See where the narrative takes you. How are the plot points causally linked?

Try to also think about your sense of enquiry into the characters, story and consequences of the various plot points –

what questions do you want to answer by developing this idea? What aspects of the story provoke, anger or disturb you?

## Extension Exercise

### ***This House*, 2012, by James Graham.**

1974. The UK faces economic crisis and a hung parliament. In a culture hostile to cooperation, it's a period when votes are won or lost by one, when there are fist fights in the bars and when sick MPs are carried through the lobby to register their vote. It's a time when a staggering number of politicians die, and the building creaks under idiosyncrasies and arcane traditions. Set in the engine rooms of Westminster, James Graham's *This House* strips politics down to the practical realities of those behind the scenes the whips who roll up their sleeves and on occasion bend the rules to shepherd and coerce a diverse chorus of MPs within the Mother of all Parliaments.



**Listen to the audio clip of the play once or twice and read along with the text.**

### **Exercise**

The excerpt is from an early scene from Act 1 of the play. Once you've listened to it, write down a list of possible future events and incidents that you imagine might happen further on into the story. The purpose of this exercise isn't necessarily to guess the plot of the actual play, but to think about the existing points of conflict and dramatic stakes within the scene, and then try to extrapolate ideas for other later scenes, which will help escalate the drama.

If you want to go a step further, write a short scene using characters from the excerpt, plus any new ones you'd like to bring in. Try to form a scene that bears a causal, logical relationship to the excerpt you've heard and read.

If you want to refer to the actual incidents from 1974 that inspired the play, you can find more information about it here <http://bitly.ws/9GPL>



**Find Out More** James Graham talks about *This House* <http://bitly.ws/9GPN>



## Find Out More

### **Links**

Link to info about *Her Naked Skin* by Rebecca Lenkiewicz

Interview with Rebecca Lenkiewicz  
<http://bitly.ws/9GPS>

BBC article about the Suffragettes  
<http://bitly.ws/9GPW>

*Behind the Beautiful Forevers*  
<http://bitly.ws/9GPX>

### **Suggestions For Further Reading**

*Henry VI, Parts 1, 2 & 3, Richard III*  
by William Shakespeare

*Enron* by Lucy Prebble

*London Road* by Alecky Blythe

*A Doll's House* by Tanika Gupta

*Leave Taking* by Winsome Pinnock

*Copenhagen* by Michael Frayn

*The Coast of Utopia* by Tom Stoppard

*Behind the Beautiful Forevers* by David Hare  
based on the book by Katherine Boo

*Limehouse* by Steve Waters

*Gloria* by Brandon Jacobs-Jenkins