

Class 14 Slides

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- what is the “designing principle”
- how does designing principle differ from premise
- how do you find the designing principle
- examples of designing principle
- examples of designing principle from stories in our program
- writers’ work
- questions

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Premise is your plot stated in one line.

The designing principle tracks the deeper process that will unfold over the course of the story, and it is unique to your story.

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This process may be based on:

- a unique character change,
- a special plot sequence,
- a thematic sequence,
- the development of the story world,
- an ingenious way the story is told.

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In short, the designing principle is your overall story **strategy** stated in one line.

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Key point: the designing principle is what organizes the story whole.

It is the internal logic of the story, what is original about the story, the seed of the story.

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The Godfather designing principle:

Use the classic fairy tale strategy of showing how the youngest of three sons becomes the new “king.”

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There are many possible designing principles you can glean from your premise. Each brings inherent problems you must solve.

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Like a detective, you “induce” the principle of the story from the premise.

You go from specific premise to the abstract principle, then you go back and change the specific premise based on the designing principle.

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Key point: original ideas are made, not found.

First ideas are never original. But they may have a nugget of gold within them.

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Tootsie

Premise: When an actor can't get work, he dresses as a woman only to fall in love with one of the actresses on the show.

Designing principle: Force a chauvinist to live life as a woman.

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Moses

Premise: When an Egyptian prince discovers that he is Jewish, he leads his people out of slavery.

Designing principle: A man who does not know who he is struggles to lead his people to freedom and receives the new moral laws that will define him and his people.

SLIDE

Breaking Bad

Premise: When a chemistry teacher finds out he has terminal cancer, he starts making and selling meth to pay for his treatments and set up his family for after he's gone.

Designing principle: Take the lead character from "Mr. Chips to Scarface."

"From protagonist to antagonist."

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So every episode tracked the incremental move of Walter White from Mr. Chips to Scarface, from Dr. Jekyll to Mr. Hyde.

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The designing principle of Breaking Bad is the biggest reason it is one of the 5 best TV shows of all time.

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Jurassic Park

Premise: When a theme park with live dinosaurs breaks down, the humans must use all their wiles and courage to escape terrible death.

Designing principle: What if you took the two greatest heavyweights of evolution -- dinosaurs and humans -- and forced them to fight to the death in the same ring.

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Designing principle for *Heart of Darkness*

A storyteller's trip up the river into the jungle is the line to three different locations simultaneously:

1. to the truth about a mysterious, and apparently immoral man,
2. to the truth about the storyteller himself,
3. backward in civilization to the barbaric, the moral heart of darkness in all humans.

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Ulysses

Premise: A day in the life of a man in Dublin.

Designing principle: A modern odyssey through the city, over the course of a single day, wherein one man finds a father and the other man finds a son.

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A Long Day's Journey into Night

Premise: A family deals with the mother's addiction.

Designing principle: As a family moves from day into night, they are confronted with the sins and ghosts of their past.

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Meet Me in St. Louis

Premise: A young woman falls in love with the boy next door.

Designing principle: The growth of a family over the course of a year, shown by events in each of the four seasons.

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A Christmas Carol

Premise: When three ghosts visit a stingy old man, he regains the spirit of Christmas.

Designing principle: Trace the rebirth of a man by forcing him to view his past, his present and his future over the course of one Christmas Eve.

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Citizen Kane

Premise: The life story of a rich newspaper baron.

Designing principle: Use a number of storytellers to show that a man's life can never be known.

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The Sting

Premise: Two con artists swindle a rich man who killed one of their friends.

Designing principle: Tell the story of a sting in the form of a sting, and con both the opponent and the audience.

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4 Weddings and Funeral

Premise: A man falls in love with a woman, but first one and then the other is engaged to someone else.

Designing principle: A group of friends experiences four Utopias (weddings) and a moment in hell (funeral) as they all look for their right partner in marriage.

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It's A Wonderful Life

Premise: When a man prepares to commit suicide, an angel shows him what the world would be like if he had never lived.

Designing principle: Express the power of the individual by showing what a town, and a nation, would be like if one man had never lived.

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Harry Potter and...

Premise: A boy discovers he has magical powers and attends a school for magicians.

Designing principle: A magician prince learns to be a man and a king by attending a boarding school for sorcerers over the course of seven school years.

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Rachel

A struggling art dealer searches for an eccentric artist in 1980's New York city following a trail of his bizarre sketched clues only to discover he is on a hallucinogenic vision quest searching for her.

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Roseann

Premise: When a spiritually vacant workaholic sex toy executive goes to Maine to set up a conference center, an evil cult hell bent on ownership of her property tries to drive her out of town until a sea captain ghost intervenes to save her life, her project and her spiritual beliefs.

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Lisette

After his attempted murder, a memory loss patient must find the homeless man that saved his life and took his prized possession to restore his past and find his killers before they get to him or his savior.

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Assignment for next class

IF YOU ARE WRITING SCENES FOR YOUR STORY:

1. write the next three scenes in the story where there is dialogue

Be sure to start by listing the premise in 1 line

2. write your hero's weakness in 1 line

3. write the endpoint of your hero's character change

ie, his or her self-revelation

IF YOUR STORY IS AT ANY OTHER STEP OF THE WRITING PROCESS

4. follow the instructions for that month's assignment

5. send in any question about story in general or about your story in particular.

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Caution: don't skip a step in the writing process!

For each new story idea, start with the Premise assignment and work through the steps in order.

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Remember: hand in only one assignment at a time.

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Next class: Wednesday, November 15