

The Seven Basic Plots

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The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories is a 2004 book by [Christopher Booker](#), a [Jungian](#)-influenced analysis of stories and their psychological meaning. Booker worked on the book for 34 years.^[1]

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Summary

The meta-plot

The meta-plot begins with the *anticipation stage*, in which the hero is called to the adventure to come, This is followed by a *dream stage*, in which the adventure begins, the hero has some success, and has an illusion of invincibility. However, this is then followed by a *frustration stage*, in which the hero has his first confrontation with the enemy, and the illusion of invincibility is lost. This worsens in the *nightmare stage*, which is the climax of the plot, where hope is apparently lost. Finally, in the *resolution*, the hero overcomes his burden against the odds.^[2]

The key thesis of the book: "However many characters may appear in a story, its real concern is with just one: its hero or heroine. It is he with whose fate we identify, as we see him gradually developing towards that state of self-realization which marks the end of the story. Ultimately it is in relation to this central figure that all other characters in a story take on their significance. What each of the other characters represents is really only some aspect of the inner state of the hero or heroine themselves."

The Seven Basic Plots are the basics of plot-writing.

Overcoming the Monster

The protagonist sets out to defeat an antagonistic force (often evil) which threatens the protagonist and/or protagonist's homeland.

Examples: [Perseus](#), [Theseus](#), [Beowulf](#), [Dracula](#), [War of the Worlds](#), [Nicholas Nickleby](#), [The Guns of Navarone](#), [Seven Samurai](#) and its Western-style remake [The Magnificent Seven](#), the [James](#)

[Bond](#) franchise, [Star Wars: A New Hope](#), [Halloween](#), [The Hunger Games](#), [Harry Potter](#) and [Shrek](#).^[2]

Rags to Riches

The poor protagonist acquires things such as power, wealth, and a mate, before losing it all and gaining it back upon growing as a person.

Examples: [Cinderella](#), [Aladdin](#), [Jane Eyre](#), [A Little Princess](#), [Great Expectations](#), [David Copperfield](#), [The Prince and the Pauper](#), [Brewster's Millions](#).^[2]

The Quest

The protagonist and some companions set out to acquire an important object or to get to a location, facing many obstacles and temptations along the way.

Examples: [Iliad](#), [The Pilgrim's Progress](#), [King Solomon's Mines](#), [Watership Down](#),^[2] [The Lord of the Rings](#), [Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows](#), [The Land Before Time](#), [One Piece](#), [Indiana Jones](#), [The Voyage of the Dawn Treader](#), [Harold & Kumar Go To White Castle](#)

Voyage and Return

The protagonist goes to a strange land and, after overcoming the threats it poses to him or her, returns with nothing but experience.

Examples: [Odyssey](#), [Ramayana](#), [Alice in Wonderland](#), [Goldilocks and the Three Bears](#), [Orpheus](#), [The Time Machine](#), [Peter Rabbit](#), [The Hobbit](#), [Brideshead Revisited](#), [The Rime of the Ancient Mariner](#), [Gone with the Wind](#), [The Third Man](#),^[2] [Chronicles of Narnia](#), [Apollo 13](#), [Labyrinth](#), [Finding Nemo](#), [Gulliver's Travels](#), [Spirited Away](#), [Uncharted](#), [The Wizard of Oz](#)

Comedy

Light and humorous character with a happy or cheerful ending; a dramatic work in which the central motif is the triumph over adverse circumstance, resulting in a successful or happy conclusion.^[3] Booker makes sure to stress that comedy is more than humor. It refers to a pattern where the conflict becomes more and more confusing, but is at last made plain in a single clarifying event. Most romances fall into this category.

Examples: [A Midsummer Night's Dream](#), [Much Ado About Nothing](#), [Twelfth Night](#), [Bridget Jones Diary](#), [Music and Lyrics](#), [Sliding Doors](#), [Four Weddings and a Funeral](#), [Mr. Bean](#)

Tragedy

The protagonist is a hero with one major character flaw or great mistake which is ultimately their undoing. Their unfortunate end evokes pity at their folly and the fall of a fundamentally 'good' character.

Examples: [Macbeth](#), [The Picture of Dorian Gray](#), [Carmen](#), [Bonnie and Clyde](#), [Jules et Jim](#), [Anna Karenina](#), [Madame Bovary](#), [John Dillinger](#), [Romeo and Juliet](#), [Julius Caesar](#),^[2] [Death Note](#), [Breaking Bad](#), [Dirty Mary](#), [Crazy Larry](#), [Hamlet](#)

Rebirth (Coming of Age)

During the course of the story, an important event forces the main character to change their ways, often making them a better person.

Examples: [The Frog Prince](#), [Beauty and the Beast](#), [The Snow Queen](#), [A Christmas Carol](#), [The Secret Garden](#), [Peer Gynt](#),^[2] [Life Is a Dream](#), [Despicable Me](#), [Machine Gun Preacher](#), [Megamind](#), [How the Grinch Stole Christmas](#)

Precursors

- William Foster-Harris' *The Basic Patterns of Plot* sets out a theory of three basic patterns of plot.^[4]
- Ronald B. Tobias set out a twenty-plot theory in his *20 Master Plots*.^[4]
- [Georges Polti's *The Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations*](#).^[4]

References

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