

Spotting a Narrative Thread

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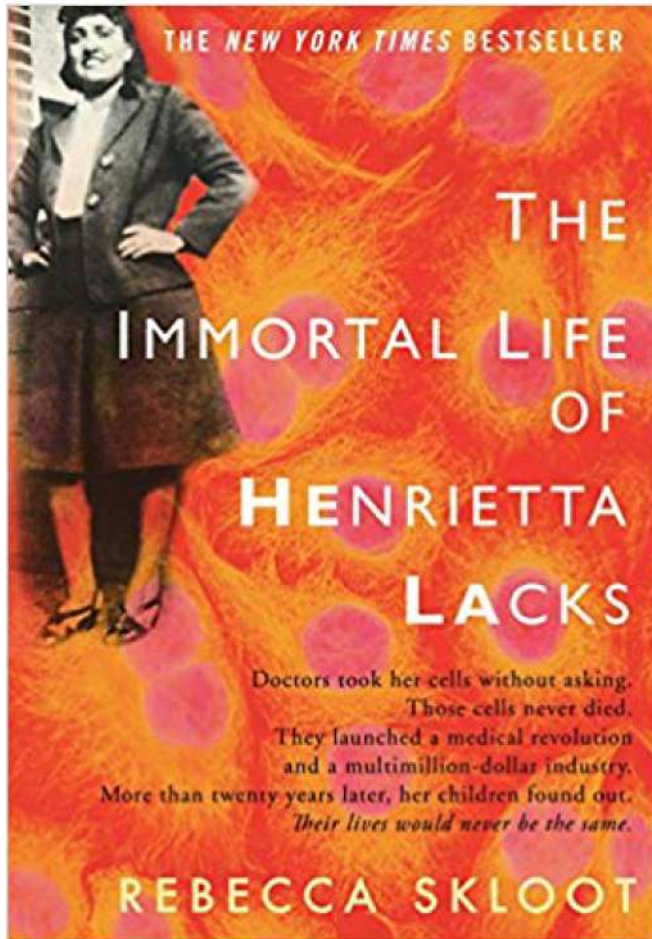
What Makes a Narrative?

A **central question**
drives the story

The needs and desires of a **character**
propel the story forward, through a series
of **scenes** that show **action**

Narrative is Not All-or-Nothing

HeLa or bust!!!!



No.

Narrative is Not All-or-Nothing

- You don't need a complete narrative to do narrative storytelling
- In fact, science stories seldom have a complete narrative thru-line
- That's okay

The Central Driving Question

(often unstated)

- Can you state the central driving question in one sentence?
- Why does this question matter *now*, for *this audience*?

Some Examples

- Who *is* this person?
- What was *that* experience/time/place like?
- Why did that happen?
- How does this thing/process work?
- Will this wild idea succeed?
- Will this person/species/ecosystem/whatever survive? (If so, how? Or if not, how will it face its known death?)

What's in a Character?

- Have wants and needs, which drive the story
- Are revealed through
 - Actions: Choices, Language, Gestures, etc.
 - Dialogue
 - Relationships
 - **Relevant** physical characteristics
 - “Status” markers

Tireless tracker rewrote the book on dinosaurs in Maryland



The Washington Post
MAGAZINE

By Brian Vastag
April 19, 2012

With the **coiled energy** of a stalking cat, Ray Stanford **splashes** out of the stream and onto a rocky sandbar, his **knee-high, hunter-green boots** leaving shallow heel prints that fill with water and begin to melt. **Crouched, Stanford scans, head down, wavy silver hair** dappled in the sunshine. Birds tweet. Water rustles. It's 3:30 p.m.; the sun is at mid-angle, throwing good shadows. Stanford picks up a flat slice of pale yellow rock, a rough triangle the size of his hand. He **rubs it with his thumb, tilts it this way and that. "You see that?"** he asks. A splayed mark etches the rock's surface. **"It looks like a little three-toed dinosaur was here."**

Questions to Ask about Potential Characters

- Who has the most at stake?
- What is their central need/want (as it relates to this story)?
- What actions do they take that will drive the story?
- Are they compelling and relatable?
 - Note! Regular people are motivated too

The Right Character to Drive *Your Story*

... is **not** always the obvious one

Face of Hope



- Todd Nelson,
wounded hero
- Robert Hale,
Army doctor

SCIENCE FOR THE CURIOUS
Discover
MAGAZINE

By Liza Gross
September 2014

By Col. Robert Hale's count, Todd Nelson had already cheated death twice when he arrived at Brooke Army Medical Center in San Antonio. A 34-year-old senior logistics supervisor based in Kabul in Afghanistan, Staff Sgt. Nelson had escaped injury on hundreds of convoys by relying on speed, agility and a little luck. On a hot August day in 2007, a month before he was due to go home, his luck ran out...

... When Hale, one of the Army's top facial trauma surgeons, first saw Nelson, still clinging to life, he also saw the young man's future. Hale knew that even if his patient survived, no doctor could fully restore what was lost in Afghanistan: the face that Nelson and his friends and loved ones knew as Todd.



Scenic Action

- What key scenes can you witness or reconstruct?
- How do they relate to the central driving question?
- What action will/did take place in those scenes?
- How will this action move the story forward?
- What will your scenes will reveal about your character(s)?
- What sensory details will convey the appropriate information + mood?
 - Light, sound, smell, taste, sense of the space, etc.

The Tribe That's Suing The US Government To Keep Its Promises



BuzzFeed.News

By Nidhi Subbaraman
November 17, 2016

One April evening last year, Kathy Boyd stepped onto her deck and lit a cigarette, as she often did after dinner. She loved the quiet and majesty of the nearby forest, even if it was remote and cell towers were too far away to service her house. But that evening she didn't linger to watch the sun dipping behind the pine and cedar trees — her heart was going berserk.

Can the Ivory-Billed Woodpecker Be Found in Cuba?



 Audubon

By Mac McClelland
May-June 2016

... They **crash** forward through the uneven landscape, jeep **rocking** violently and Gallagher and the media trying to keep from **slamming**



into one another in the backseat. Until they **stop**. Stuck. Mired in a deep mud trench. Everyone **ejects**, and rocks are **collected and thrown** under the tires and into the muck ahead, and after a while the truck is **dislodged**. And then more **crashing**—and some very near **tipping**—and then they get stuck again.

Four Ways to Weave in Narrative

- **Anecdotes** that reveal character through actions, scenic detail, dialogue
- **Scenes** that show how some process unfolds
- **Gestures or behaviors** that reveal character
- **Sensory details** that establish a mood and immerse readers in a different reality