

# What is a narrative?

**“A story with a**

**beginning...**

**middle...**

**end.”**

# Want more?

**“A piece of writing characterized by a main character in a setting who encounters a problem or engages in an interesting, significant, or entertaining activity or experience.”**

# Want even more?

- ✓ **Clear, well-developed characters & characterization**
- ✓ **Scenes**
- ✓ **Engaging dialog (including internal dialog)**
- ✓ **Telling detail**
- ✓ **Themes**
- ✓ **Imagery, symbolism and metaphor**
- ✓ **Writer's voice**

# Having some trouble picturing that?

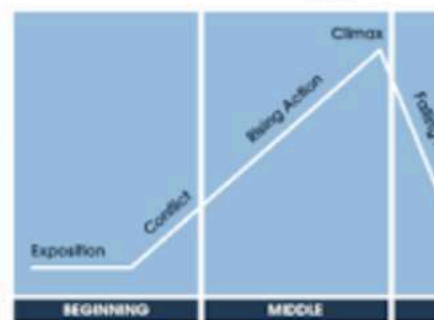
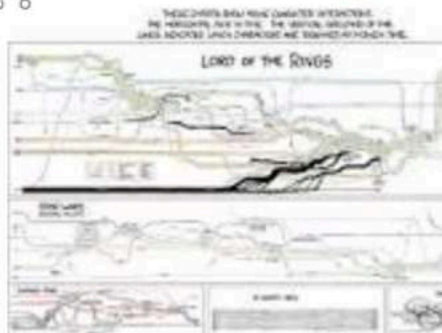
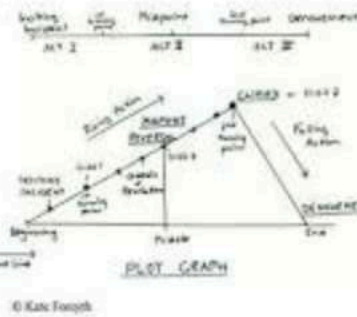
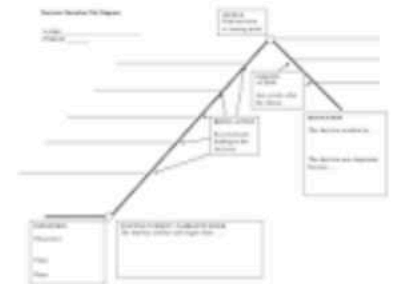
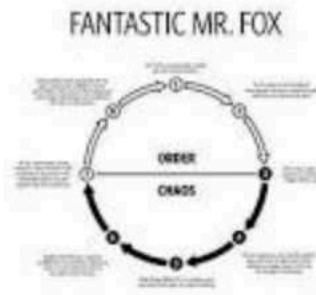
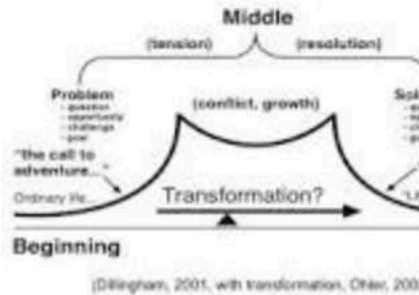
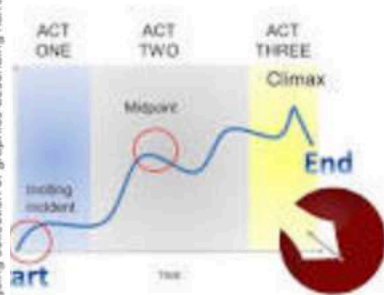
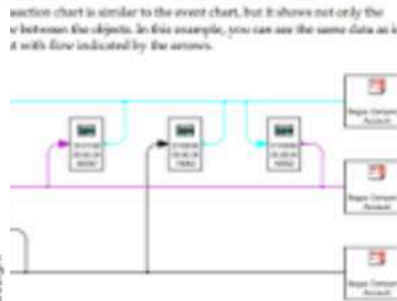


## Narrative Design - Plot Charts, Diagrams

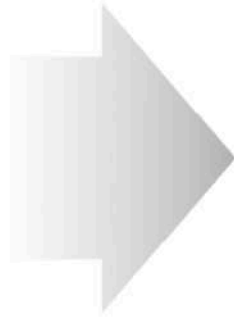
### Diagrams

Collection by Gabriel Willingham

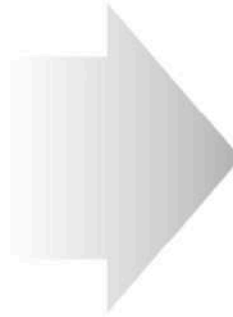
Ongoing collection of graphics describing narrative design.



**Situation**  
Desire

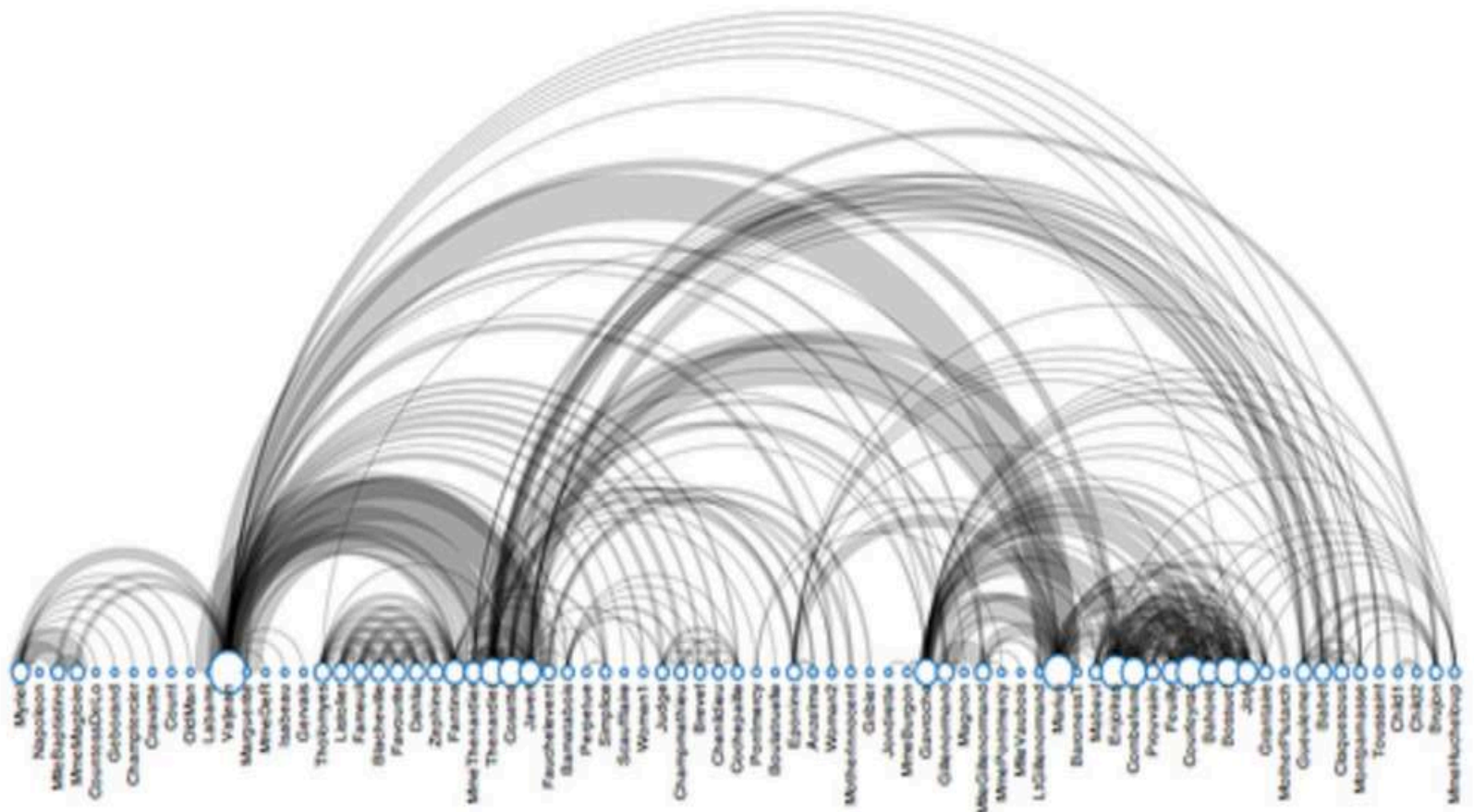


**Complication**  
Obstacle



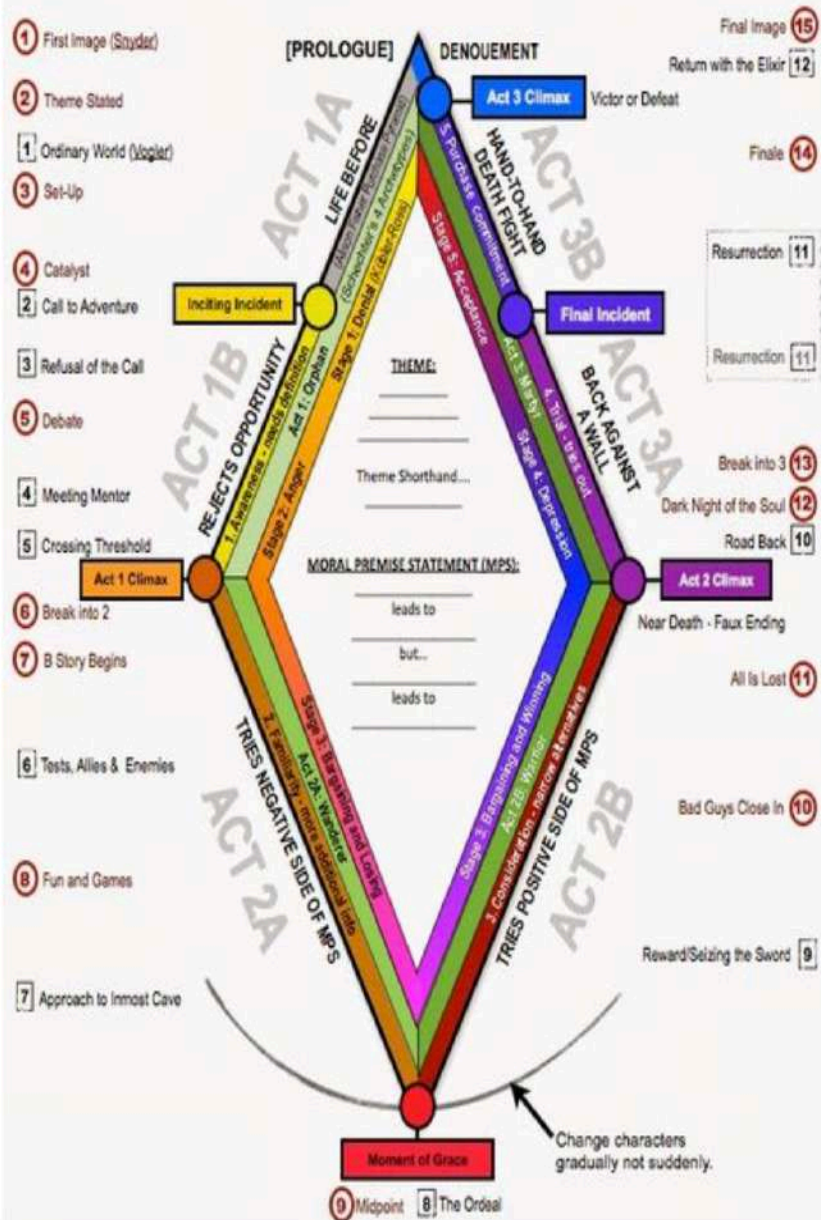
**Solution**  
Outcome

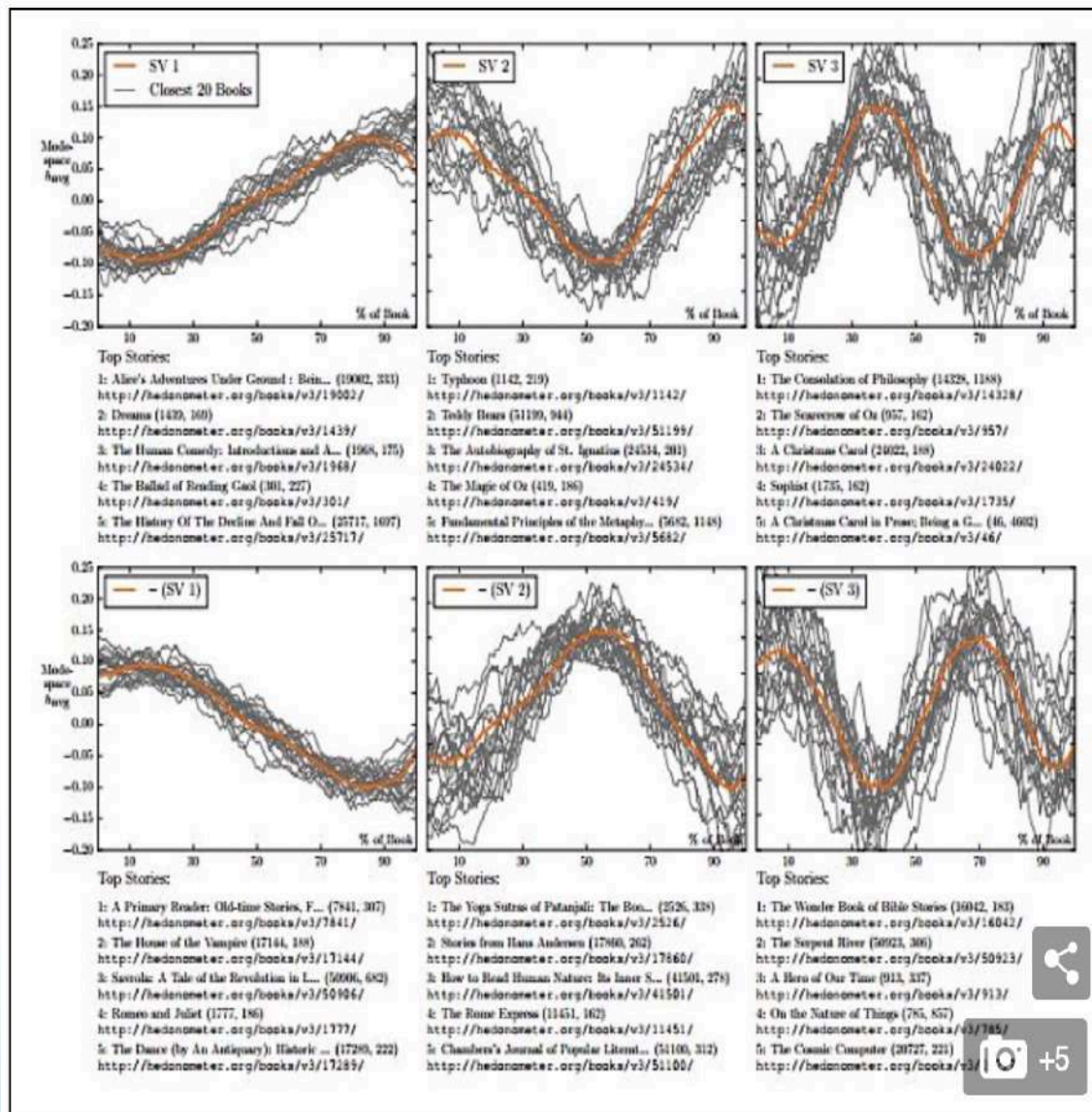
# The Crucial Story Arc



# The Story Diamond Key

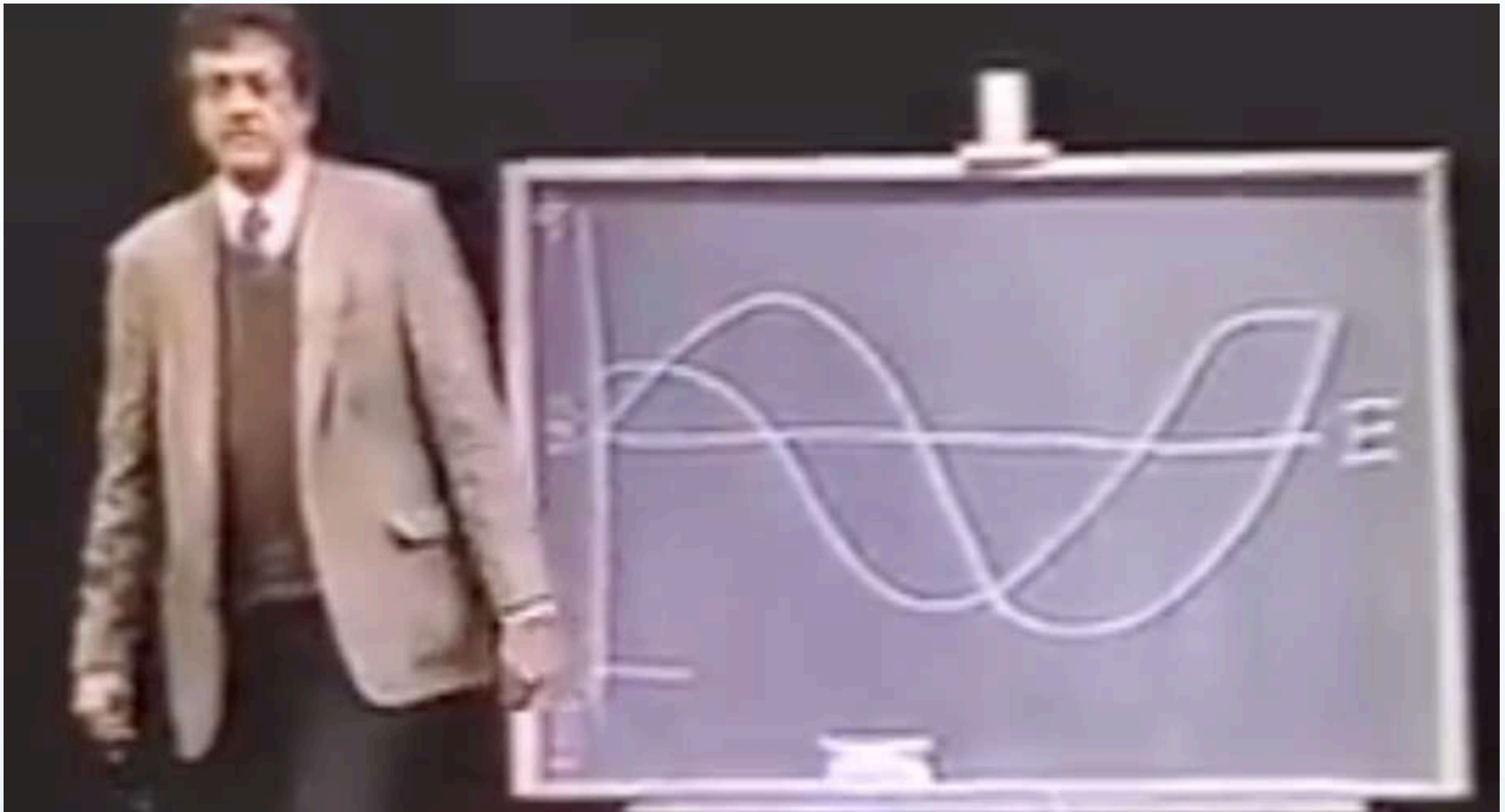
www.moralpremise.com/storyaids.php





From Cinderella and Romeo and Juliet to the stories of Oedipus and Icarus, almost every story conforms to one of just six plots, researchers have claimed. The six in order: Rise, Fall-rise, Rise-fall-rise, Fall, Rise-fall-rise, Fall-rise-fall





# The Shape of Stories

## Kurt Vonnegut

### Man in Hole



The main character gets into trouble then gets out of it again and ends up better off for the experience.

- Arsenic and Old Lace
- Harold & Kumar Go To White Castle

### Boy Meets Girl



The main character comes across something wonderful, gets it, loses it, then gets it back forever.

- Jane Eyre
- Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind

### From Bad to Worse



The main character starts off poorly then gets continually worse with no hope for improvement.

- The Metamorphosis
- The Twilight Zone

### Which Way Is Up?



The story has a lifelike ambiguity that keeps us from knowing if new developments are good or bad.

- Hamlet
- The Sopranos

### Creation Story



In many cultures' creation stories, humankind receives incremental gifts from a deity. First major staples like the earth and sky, then smaller things like sparrows and cell phones. Not a common shape for Western stories, however.

### Old Testament



Humankind receives incremental gifts from a deity, but is suddenly ousted from good standing in a fall of enormous proportions.

- Great Expectations

### New Testament



Humankind receives incremental gifts from a deity, is suddenly ousted from good standing, but then receives off-the-charts bliss.

- Great Expectations with Dickens' alternate ending

### Cinderella



It was the similarity between the shapes of Cinderella and the New Testament that thrilled Vonnegut for the first time in 1947 and then over the course of his life as he continued to write essays and give lectures on the shapes of stories.

# The Shape of Stories

## Kurt Vonnegut

“Structure has  
preoccupied me  
in every project.”

~ John McPhee

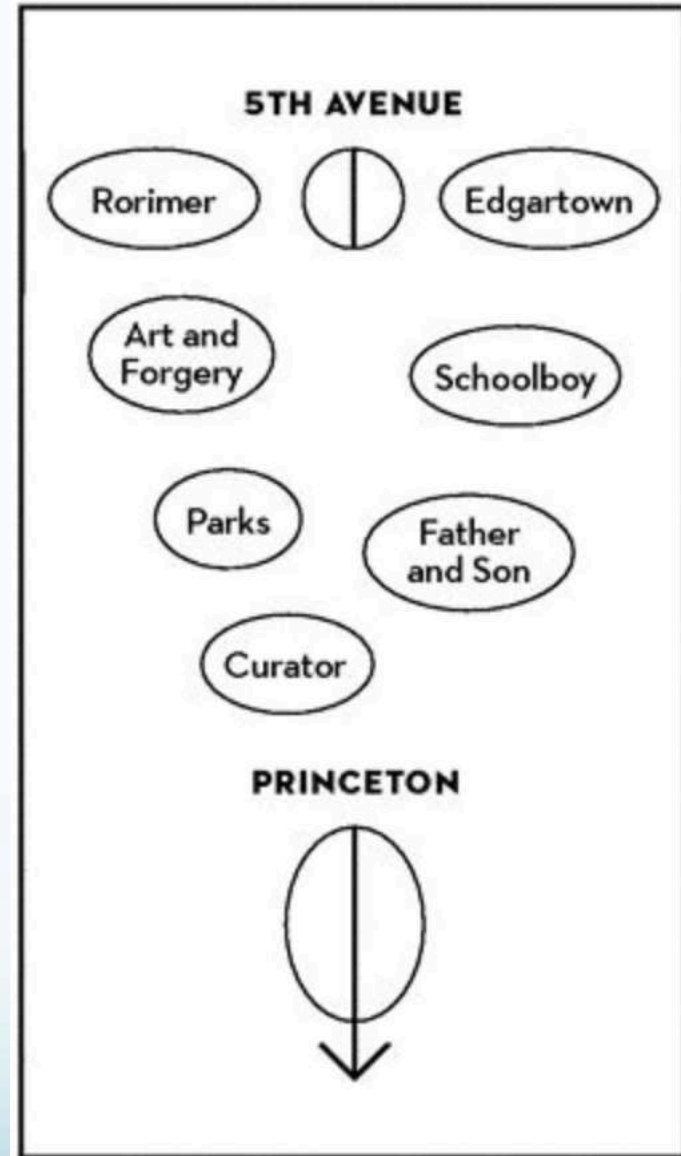
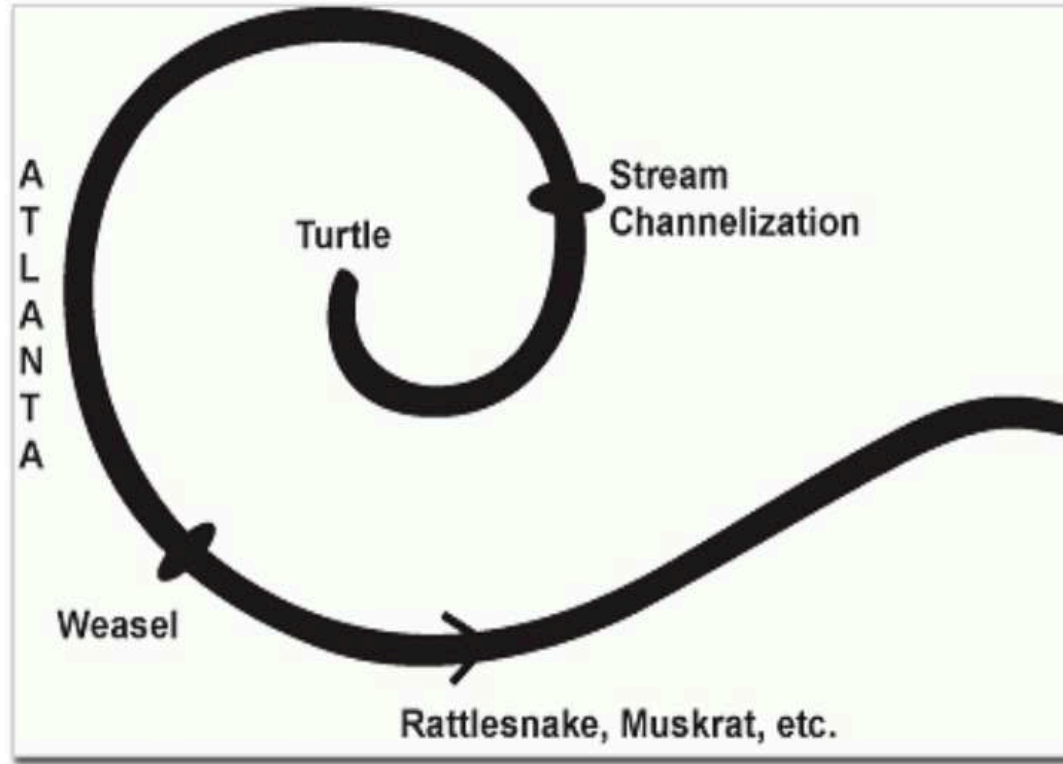


FIG. 1 *A Roomful of Hovings*

**“This is the New Yorker, so you can use any narrative structure you like. Just know that when I get it, I’m going to take it apart and make it all chronological.”**



**Dan Baum**

*My short career at  
the New Yorker.*

[danbaum.files.wordpress.com/  
2018/03/new-yorker-tweets.pdf](http://danbaum.files.wordpress.com/2018/03/new-yorker-tweets.pdf)

**“Telling a story in strict chronological order turned out to be a fabulous discipline.**

**It made the story easy to write, and may be why New Yorker stories are so easy to read.”**



**Dan Baum**

*My short career at the New Yorker.*

[danbaum.files.wordpress.com/  
2018/03/new-yorker-tweets.pdf](http://danbaum.files.wordpress.com/2018/03/new-yorker-tweets.pdf)