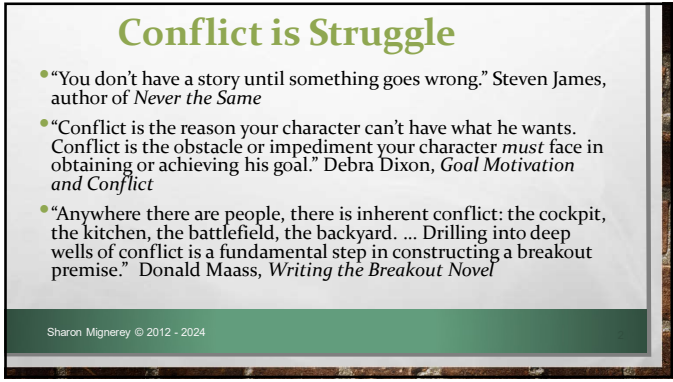
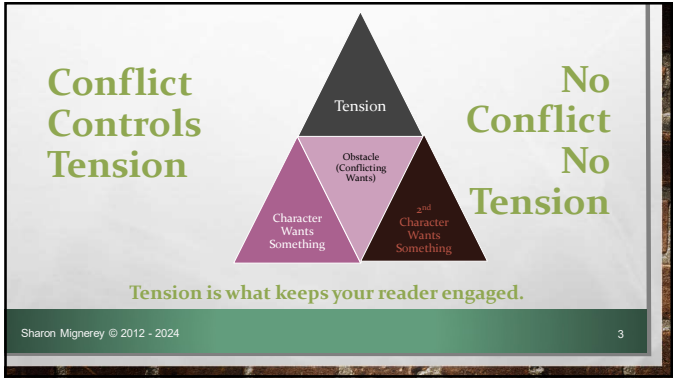


1



2



3

Conflict: Public and Private Stakes

- The outcome must matter deeply to the protagonist.
 - Story level
 - Scene level
 - Right now
- The outcome affects
 - Family
 - Community
 - Perhaps a wider community



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External Conflict

- Conflict keeps your character from:
 - Possessing something (the jewel, the job, the love interest)
 - Relief of something (blackmail, domination)
 - Revenge for something (loss, betrayal)
- Conflict comes only if the goal is important to your character.
- External conflict is a primary building block of plot.

- Character vs. Self
- Character vs. another Character
- Character vs. Society
- Character vs. the Supernatural
- Character vs. Nature

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Make External Conflict Personal

No matter how big the tapestry of your story, external conflict must, **MUST** be personal for your story to be compelling!

- Beware of intellectual conflicts
 - Tend to engage the mind over personal stakes (follow your career vs. follow your bliss)
 - Protagonist tends to escape unscathed
- Embrace emotional conflicts
 - Deeply personal with big stakes (an elderly woman takes on a swindler)
- Have micro-tension present in every paragraph.

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Anatomy of External Conflict

- Shared goal and opposing values
- Shared values and opposing goal
- Both opposing values and opposing goals

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Internal Conflict

- Internal conflict is the key to character motivation.
- Internal conflict is often wanting two mutually exclusive things.
- Internal conflict is the unique fingerprint of your character that sets your story apart from all others.
- Internal conflict is the source of the major reversal or black moment in the story.
- The key to internal conflict is this belief: "I will do anything. Just don't ask me to fill in the blank."

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Simple Internal Conflict

- "I will do whatever is needed to solve the story-level conflict, just don't ask me to (fill in the blank)."
- Your character wants mutually exclusive things.
 - The greater the need, the greater the conflict.
 - The conflict cannot be resolved unless one of the wants goes away.
- Character stuck between pursuing a dream and playing it safe.
 - Ask why
 - Drill down 5 to 7 layers to find that deepest reason

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Basic Human Needs within Internal Conflict

- The need for Safety
- The need to Belong
- The need to be Acknowledged by others
- The need to Matter
- The need to Express Yourself freely
- The need for Love

Schema = a shortcut
A rule that says
“based upon by
experience, this is
how life works

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Internal Conflict and Schema

- Schemas usually develop in childhood
- On a sliding scale, show up as
 - Poor self esteem
 - Self sabotage
 - Mistrust
 - Social exclusion
 - Perfectionism
 - The need to fit in
 - The need to control
- Character arc is gradual release of old habits and patterns to new
- Tragedies have characters who do not evolve.
- Often the fodder for antagonists or villains.

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Internal Conflict

Interrupt the Cycle To Increase Tension

- A wish or a need
- A typical, anticipated response
- The usual reaction to the response
- Reinforcement of previously held values & beliefs

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Internal Conflict through Backstory

- What happened to your character before Page 1?
- Biggest dream?
- Biggest regret?
- Biggest fear?
- What happened on the worst day of his or her life?
- What does (s)he most value? Why?
- Within the current situation, what's the worst thing that could happen?

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Put Backstory in the Back

- Backstory revelation is like peeling an onion. Reveal layers a little at a time
- Reveal skills early enough to make them believable
- Avoid:
 - Flashbacks unless the scene is so pivotal it cannot otherwise be understood
 - "Remember when" conversations
 - Long stretches of narrative where the character is thinking

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Internal Conflict and Values

- What are your characters core values?
- What tests (conflicts) in scenes challenge your characters internal conflicts?
- What mutually exclusive things does your character want?
- What belief must your character change to obtain the story goal?

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Internal Conflict

Character Arc

Black Moment & Climax

- Move away from old patterns of thinking & believing.
- Embrace a response that matches who the protagonist is becoming.

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Internal Conflict Exercise

- Identify the event that brings your story-level goal
- What is the external conflict that stands in the way success
- What is the internal conflict that puts the outcome in doubt
- Write a paragraph or an exchange of dialogue that reveals your character's core value that demands (s)he act on the primary external conflict (story goal) but that is at odds with his self interest.

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Character Drive / Plot Driven

- Is your story plot driven? (External Conflict First)
 - A situation that requires a certain kind of character
 - The question: what kind of character would be most tortured by this situation?
- Is your story character driven? (Internal Conflict First)
 - A character first, then situation
 - The question: what situation would most torture this character?

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Story-level Conflict

1. A character in
2. A situation who
3. Wants something (a goal), except
4. An obstacle stands in the way (conflict), and
5. A catastrophe can result of the goal isn't met.

Let's build a possible story with no more than 5 sentences.

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Scene Level Conflict

- Desire plus danger = fodder for change
- Consists of
 - A definite place
 - A definite time
 - A gap between expectation and reality
 - A change (by the end of the scene)
- Goal, conflict, disaster (hook / surprise)

Let's outline a scene with these elements

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Micro-Level Conflict

- **Contrasting and conflicting emotions**
 - **Within a single character**
 - **Between characters**
- **A sense of knowing exactly what a character wants right then within each beat of the scene.**

- **Have a clear POV character**
- **Write narrative and dialogue with vivid language.**

"I don't care what you do," she said.

He stood at the door next to a packed bag..

Let's rewrite to include microtension.

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Micro-Tension

- **Story Level** – the big “want” your character has and the big obstacle standing in the way.
- **Micro Level** – what does your character want this very instant? What tiny obstacle stands in the way right now?
- **Micro tension** – know exactly what your character wants in every single beat of a scene.

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In Conclusion

- **Write tense scenes.**
- **Test your characters.**
- **Be clear about your character’s goals and motivations.**
- **Make the obstacles in proportion to the goals and motivations.**
- **Give your characters (and your readers) the right payoff for the level of conflict.**

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Suggested Reading

- *Goal, Motivation, Conflict* by Debra Dixon
- *Writing the Breakout Novel* by Donald Maass
- *Fire in Fiction* by Donald Maass
- *Story* by Robert McKee
- *Techniques of the Selling Writer* by Dwight Swain.
- *Conflict, Action & Suspense* by William Noble
- *Hero & Heroine Archetypes* by Tami Cowden, Carol Lefever & Sue Vidars
- *Emotional Alchemy* by Tara Bennett-Goleman
- *The Deeper Wound* by Deepak Chopra

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