



GMCD
Misa Ramirez
Presented March 2011

Melissa Bourbon, who sometimes answers to her Latina-by-marriage name Misa Ramirez, gave up teaching middle and high school kids in Northern California to write full-time amidst horses and Longhorns in North Texas. She fantasizes about spending summers writing in quaint, cozy locales, has a love/hate relationship with yoga and chocolate, is devoted to her family, and can't believe she's lucky enough to be living the life of her dreams.

She is the author of the Lola Cruz Mystery series with St. Martin's Minotaur, A Magical Dressmaking Mystery series with NAL, and The Tricked Out Toolbox with Turquoise Morning Press.

Lesson One: Overarching Goals & CSQ

Happy Tuesday! Hope you are ready to dig into GMCD. I know I am! Buckle your seat belts, here we go...

Every story needs certain elements. They are non-negotiables. Characters must have goals, and each goal must be driven by a specific motivation. There must be conflict, or tension, which prevents the character from reaching his/her goal, and, finally, there must be what is called disaster. That is really just the raising of a question which keeps the reader interested and turning the pages. Think of the disaster as a scene cliff-hanger. Nothing more, nothing less.

This workshop will be broken into eight lectures/lessons (2 per week), each focusing on the elements of goal, motivation, conflict, disaster (and how they fit together), and scene & sequel.

Today, we begin with GOAAAALLLLL!!!!

First off, what is the definition of goal?

If you thought to yourself...

the object of a person's ambition or effort; an aim or desired result...

...you'd be right. Good job! Okay, but what does that mean in terms of your characters?

Simply put, **EVERY SINGLE CHARACTER IN EVERY SINGLE SCENE MUST HAVE THEIR OWN GOAL**. Read that again. **EVERY SINGLE CHARACTER IN EVERY SINGLE SCENE MUST HAVE THEIR OWN GOAL** You've probably heard "Everyone in the hero of their own journey", right? It's absolutely true, and it's crucial that you remember that as you craft your characters and scenes. Characters' goals help make them layered and multi-dimensional.



(Having characters with opposing goals also provides built in conflict, which we'll get to in the next lecture.)

We're going to tackle GOAL by looking at examples. I'm going to use my book, [A Deadly Curse](#), as well as the movie [A Knight's Tale](#). Why? Because I LOVE both! And second, because they effectively demonstrates everything we're talking about in this class. If you haven't read A Deadly Curse or seen A Knight's Tale, I highly recommend that you stop everything and do both of these things right now! A caveat... you don't have to if you don't have the time or inclination, however the examples will probably make more sense to you do.

There are two main characters in A Deadly Curse: Johanna Rios and Ray Vargas. Today, we'll be talking about Johanna. She is a high school teacher and Ray is the principal. Johanna is obsessed with the Mexican legend of la Llorona (the crying woman) because she descended from her. She believes she (and her family) is cursed and she wants to be free of the hold la Llorona has on her.

The main character of A Knight's Tale, played by Heath Ledger, is William Thatcher. He's a peasant, and what he wants more than anything else in the world is to change his stars and become a knight.

STOP! Think about that. What does Johanna want?

She wants to keep herself and her sister safe from the curse. **That's her main goal.** If she doesn't, what has happened to her mother and every other woman in her family, will happen to Carmen and her. This goal drives her decisions and the internal plot, if you will.

And what about Will Thatcher? What does he want?

He wants to be a knight. That's it. That's his goal. **That single desire propels every one of his actions throughout the entire movie,** A Knight's Tale. Every scene gets him a step closer to realizing his goal, or it puts in place an obstacle which he must overcome on his journey toward his goal.

Now, if you take these broad, or overarching, goals and rephrase them, they becomes the Central Story Questions. The Central Story Question is the question that is posed (usually at the beginning of the story), the question that the audience (the readers, in the case of your book) continues to ask and wonder about throughout the movie or book.

So Johanna's goal is to keep her sister and her safe and to not become victims of the curse that plagues her family. **Rephrased, it becomes the Central Story Question: Will Johanna manage to keep her sister and herself safe and unaffected by the curse of la Llorona?**

Will's goal is to change his stars and become a Knight. **Rephrased into a Central Story Question, the reader will be asking: Will William Thatcher become a knight (will he be able to change his stars, as his father told him he could)?**



If you are writing a mystery, you have an automatic goal built in: Will your sleuth solve the crime. However, there is always something bigger at stake. What does your character want which propels him/her to get involved? In my Lola Cruz mystery series, for example, the first book, *Living the Vida Lola*, has Lola acting as the lead investigator for the very first time. She has a lot at stake. She can't fail. So her goal is to prove to her coworkers, her family, and herself that she can figure out what happened to the missing woman, Emily Diggs. **Rephrased into a Central Story Question: Will Lola solve her first case as lead investigator, thereby proving to her coworkers, her family, and herself, that she is a good private investigator?**

Here are a few more examples:

The Proposal:

Margaret's Goal: Margaret wants to secure a green card so she can stay in the country.

Rephrased as a CSQ: Will Margaret succeed in securing her green card which will allow her to stay in the US?

Gran Torino:

Walt's Goal: To deal with the death of his wife--in his own way.

CSQ: Will Walt figure out how to cope with his grief?

**note: what a character *wants* may not always happen, or it may manifest in an unexpected way. For example, Walt does figure out how to deal with his wife's death, but not in a way he ever would have imagined. He's a curmudgeonly, racist, ill-tempered man at the beginning of the movie. Actually, he's curmudgeonly, racist, and ill-tempered at the end, too! But his journey... his goal and how he copes with dealing with his grief...evolves in a way he didn't choose.

The same happens for Johanna Rios and for Will Thatcher. What they want and how they think they can deal with it changes because of the situations they're forced to face. The resolution to their goals, then, changes.

Okay, your turn.

Homework:

Your first task is to choose 5 books or movies, identify what you think the overarching goal of the main character is, and rephrase it into a Central Story Question. Share them here!

Next, think about your WIP and your main character. What is his or her **Overarching Goal**? What does he/she want more than anything else? What is it that drives him or her?



Write it down. Evaluate it. Is it the thing that propels him/her forward throughout the story? If you answer no, or you're not sure, rethink it. Either you are missing something, or you need to develop your character and/or plot a bit more!

Once you have your character's overarching goal, turn it into a Central Story Question (CSQ), beginning with: Will [your character's name] blah blah blah....

Once you have a Central Story Question firmly planted in your mind, write it on a sticky note and attach it to your computer monitor or, as I do, type it into your header box in your document. That way it's always right there in front of you. If you start to lose your way in the story (drifting away from the CSQ and your hero/heroine's overarching goal) it's there to remind you and pull you back.

Do these things and post them to our forum. Our next lecture is Thursday where we tackle MICRO GOALS! Get ready!!!



Lesson Two: Micro-Goals

Micro Goals

Okay, here we go! Hope you are all doing great and ready to move on.

Let's go back to Johanna Rios from *A Deadly Curse*. She is troubled by the curse placed on her and her family. In the first scene (after the prologue and in Jo's pov), we see her sister Carmen deciding to go out with her boyfriend instead of with Jo. Not for the first time, Jo realizes that she can only do so much to keep her sister safe. Carmen wants a family. She wants Jo to find someone to love. She's sure the curse won't affect them... that it was all in their mother's imagination. Jo never buys into the illusion. This is the first time we glimpse the CSQ--that Jo needs to keep Carmen, who's unconcerned, safe.

Sometimes seeing it in a movie is a little easier to understand. Let's look at the opening scene in *A Knight's Tale*, Will Thatcher is a peasant squire who wants to be a Knight. The scene opens. He and his two friends are with the knight they serve. But that Knight, it turns out, is dead. He, against the better judgement of his friends, will ride in the jousting match in the Knight's place, hiding his identity, thereby, at least temporarily, realizing his ultimate desire: being a Knight.

Will jousts, and amazingly, he wins. He's had a taste of what it feels like to be a Knight, and for him, there's no going back. He comes up with a plan which he proposes to his friends: that he take the place of the knight in the jousting tournaments...permanently.

This is the first seed of the CSQ. We now know exactly what Will wants. The question in our minds is will he be able to pull it off? After all, he's just a peasant, and surely he'll be found out. He just got lucky the first time, and his luck can't possibly last.

In our minds, we have the question firmly planted. *Will William Thatcher become a Knight?*

This is a start, and it will help your audience know and root for your hero/heroine.

But here is where the work really begins. Now you need **scene, or micro goals**. Without them, your story will be unfocused. In *A Knight's Tale*, we get the CSQ right out of the gate, but we also get a micro-goal, or a scene goal.

Will's first micro-goal is to make his one-time gig as a jousting knight a permanent gig. It is a very specific goal. There are two parts to this goal. One is internal: he is still motivated by his overarching goal which is that he wants to be a Knight (or symbolically change his stars). This is his internal goal all along.



The external goal of the scene is represented by the first step he takes to achieve his dream. First he must convince his friends, Roland and Wat, to join him. A knight, after all needs peasant squires, and he needs them to play the part. But, as I mentioned earlier, *EVERY CHARACTER MUST HAVE HIS/HER OWN GOAL*. Roland and Wat want to go home to England. And more than that, they don't want Will's proposed deception to land them all in a hangman's noose. (This all plays to conflict, which, again, we'll talk more about next time, but it's important to note that they each have their own goals and they are in opposition to one another.)

During this scene, Will does end up convincing them to be part of his plan, and so he reaches this micro-goal. It's a mini success, and the completion of a scene.

But then, we have a sequel. That is, a transition scene, or a response scene. Becoming a knight isn't as easy as simply making the decision to do so. His first goal was to get his friends on-board with his plan of changing their stars, but that simply raises a new goal... how, exactly, will he do it?

He formulates a new goal. He must learn joust. Will, Roland, and Wat work day in and day out until Will is ready. This is the sequel. He's reached his goal of becoming ready to enter the tournament and take his place as a Knight.

New scene.

Will, Roland, and Wat head to the tournament. Getting there, and being able to compete is his new goal. He doesn't know that he needs papers to show his lineage in order to joust. Enter Geoffrey Chaucer (played by the amazing Paul Bettany). Will, Roland, and Wat run into him on their way to the tournament and learn that they haven't a chance in hell of fooling anyone without those papers. This is the scene's conflict. Will has his goal: to joust in the tournament. What's going to prevent him from doing this? The fact that he's a fraud with no family crest, no papers, nothing to show that he's a Knight.

Now, remember, every character is the hero of his own story. Chaucer, it turns out, has his own goal: to get some clothes (he happens to be naked, his clothes lost in a gambling match). Ultimately, they come to an agreement. Chaucer is a writer, after all, and in trade for clothes, he'll create the papers Will needs to compete.

End of scene.

All of these micro-goals are still serving to advance Will and the story toward the overarching goal, remember. The CSQ is still front and center in our minds. Can Will change his stars and become a Knight? Now, thanks to Chaucer and his own goals, Will is one step closer.



The sequel, or the response scene, is Chaucer presenting the papers at the registration table at the tournament. Will they be accepted as authentic, or will they all be found out?

Of course, they are accepted, and Will is able to compete. A new goal will formulate: to win the heart of Joselyn, and then to win the jousting match, and so forth, each bringing Will a step closer to his heart's desire: to change his stars and become a knight.

Whew! That feels like a lot to process!

More Homework! Think about the first micro-goal (or two) your character has in the first scene or two. Are they working to help him/her achieve his/her overarching goal?

If they are, awesome! If not, try to fine tune or rework them. Share if you'd like, and let me know if you have questions.

Next lecture Tuesday. Enjoy your weekend and your crafting of micro-goals



Lesson Three: Motivation

A character's GOAL is defined by asking WHAT it is that they want.

A character's MOTIVATION, then, is defined by asking WHY they want it._____

motivation

noun

the reason or reasons one has for acting or behaving in a particular way :

the general desire or willingness of someone to do something

Goals must make sense to the reader. We need to be able to understand the goal the character has for him/herself. The way to create that understanding is to give relatable reasons, or motivations, for those goals.

Simply put, EVERY SINGLE GOAL THAT A CHARACTER HAS MUST BE MOTIVATED BY SOMETHING BELIEVABLE OR LOGICAL. This is true for supporting characters and villains, as well as heroes and heroines.

Motivation helps flesh out your characters.

Let's go back to A Knight's Tale.

The first thing we learn about Will Thatcher is his goal. He desperately wants to "change his stars" and become a Knight. This is WHAT he wants.

The question we, the audience, must understand in order to root for Will is WHY he wants to "change his stars" and become a Knight. If we don't understand the WHY, then we won't care about Will as a character, and we certainly won't care about whether or not he attains his goal.

So WHY does Will want to become a Knight?

We see right from the beginning that he wants a better life than that of a peasant squire, and becoming a Knight will give him a different future. Is it a lofty goal? Definitely! But we see that Will is driven and will stop at nothing to change his stars, so it's obviously important to him. We think that maybe, perhaps, it IS possible, even though we know a peasant can't really become a Knight. Because we buy his motivation, though, we're hooked and rooting for Will.

Wanting a better life, one that is in line with who he is on the inside, then is the motivation which goes with Will's overarching goal. (At one point Roland says to him that he's already a Knight on the inside, solidifying what we already know of Will and what we imagine a Knight to be:



honorable, worthy, and valiant. Will will prove this over and over throughout the movie, demonstrating his worthiness.).

The macro goal(s) and motivation(s) are essential to understanding what makes your hero/heroine tick.

The micro goals and motivations are essential to propelling your story forward.

EACH SCENE HAS A GOAL. EACH GOAL NEEDS A MOTIVATION.

Back to A Knight's Tale. One of Will's external goals is to keep his real identity hidden as he competes in the jousting tournaments.

His motivation for this is fairly obvious. If his real identity is found out, he'll be hung. Will keeps his identity a secret, creating a Knightly persona: Sir Ulrich Von Lichtenstein from Gelderland.

In the first lecture, we learned that in an early scene Will's external goal was to convince his friends, Roland and Wat, to join him in his deception. What is his motivation for getting his friends on board with his plan? Will knows he can't succeed alone. Every Knight needs squires.

Roland and Wat's goal is that they just want to go home, their motivation being that they've been gone too long, not to mention that going along with Will could land them in the hangman's noose.

Goal and Motivation.

Will's next goal is to actually learn how to joust. His motivation? He can't possibly win unless he become adept with a lance.

Next Goal: Will barter with Chaucer to create a pedigree for him. Motivation? He can't compete without official papers showing his lineage.

Chaucer's goal? To get some clothes!! Motivation? Well, he's naked.

Let's skip ahead in the story to the point where Will is jousting with an opponent who can't possibly win. The opponent's goal is to finish the match without being un-horsed. His motivation? To keep his honor.

What about Will? His goal is to win the match. He's done that already. Does he need to win the last round against an opponent who's got nothing left in his fighting arsenal? Will decides that he doesn't. So his motivation in making the last round a draw is to allow his opponent to lose with his honor intact. Will is honorable as a he imagines any Knight would be. He shows mercy, which he sees as a strength (one of several examples of Will demonstrating the inherent qualities which make him a Knight in his heart).



Here's an example of another secondary character's goal and motivation. Kate is the blacksmith who teaches Will to dance. She's not respected by the other blacksmiths because she's a woman. At one point she proposes to make Will new armor. It will be light and he'll be able to move in it. Her goals? To make Will's new armor and to go to France. Her motivations? If she succeeds and creates armor that Will likes, she will have proved her skill as a blacksmith and Will will take her with his ragtag team to France.

Here's an example from my first book, *Living the Vida Lola*. It's a mystery series (with romance). The heroine is Lola Cruz, a PI. At one point in the book, she goes to a tattoo parlor. Her goal? To get information about a guy and a tattoo which may have been given there. Her motivation? Getting this information will fill a hole in her case and bring her a step closer to solving it.

Each scene in a mystery acts in the same way. The goal is to get information; the motivation is always that that little piece of the puzzle will eventually help solve the mystery.

Even your villains need motivation!

In *A Knight's Tale*, Count Adhemar is the villain. His macro goal is to marry Jocelyn. His motivation is that she's a prize to be won.

His goal, once it becomes clear that Will is vying for Jocelyn's heart, is to destroy Will. His motivation? To eliminate the competition. Everything he does serves to advance this goal.

In mysteries, suspense, and thrillers, the villain is the murderer. Unless the murderer is a sociopath, he/she has a goal which is motivated by some desire or need which, in his/her mind, justifies the killing. Example: Laurie is desperate to be loved by Billy, but Billy's wife is in the way.

Goal: To be loved by Billy
Motivation: He's her soulmate.

The goal and motivation, in Laurie's mind, warrant dealing with the conflict:
Conflict: Billy's got a wife.

Homework:

You've already crafted overarching or macro goals for your hero and heroine. Now it's time to write down what is motivating them. Each internal and external goal needs a motivation.



Track your character's goals and motivations for the first several scenes. Make sure that what motivates your character's is in line with who he/she is! Will isn't suddenly going to be motivated by money; that isn't what his journey is about. Knowing your character will help you refine his/her motivations.

Motivations should always be in line with the CSQ and the overarching/macro goals of your characters.

Examples of External & Internal Goals

Opening Scene in *Living the Vida Lola*:

A little background: Lola Cruz is a fledgling detective. She works to balance her life as an independent woman with her family's traditional Mexican traditions and expectations.

Overarching Goal:

Lola wants to prove herself as a detective by solving the case of missing person, Emily Diggs

CSQ: Will Lola solve her first case?

Scene One:

Internal Goal: Lola is determined to find missing mother Emily Diggs.

Internal Motivation: She gets emotionally involved in her cases, against Manny, her boss's rules, and can't stand that a child is without his mother.

External Goal: Lola wants to prove to Sadie, her coworker and major thorn in her side, that they are equals.

External Motivation: Sadie goes out of her way to belittle Lola, and Lola wants Sadie and Manny to see her as a detective, not as an incompetent.

Scene Two:

Internal Goal: Lola wants to discover a clue about Emily Diggs by visiting her home.

Internal Motivation: Lola wants to prove to herself that Manny didn't make a mistake in making her lead on the case.

External Goal: To make a good impression on Mary Bonatee and ask good questions.



External Motivation: Asking the right questions and connecting with Mary Bonatee will let her get one step closer to the truth.

Later in the book... Lola and Jack, a newspaper columnist and her high school crush who she's reunited with over this case, are having dinner.

Internal Goal: To believe that Jack feels about her the way she feels about him.

Internal Motivation: She's loved Jack since forever, and now she is finally on a `date' with him and this is their chance.

External Goal: To run through the facts of the case, so far, and determine a hypothesis about what happened to Emily Diggs.

External Motivation: She values Jack's perspective and wants confirmation about her progress on the case.

Note: Even in the `romance' sections of the book, there's always progress made in the case. Every single scene must advance either the mystery or the romance, often both.



Lecture Four: Conflict

Of the elements we're discussing in this class, CONFLICT is the most crucial to your story. You can have characters without strong goals or motivations, and conflict will still keep the story moving forward.

But even if you have the greatest characters ever, solid goals and motivations--but no conflict, chances are your story will stall.

Stories that succeed without conflict are few and far between. Conflict is the key to advancing your plot. Conflict = Drama. Drama is taking your fictional story and making it come alive for your readers.

Think about a simple situation:

**A woman's dream is to be a private investigator. Her family is supportive.

It's great that the family is on board with the woman's dreams, but how far will this take you in the story?

Not very far!!! What's missing?

CONFLICT, of course!!!

Consider this:

**A woman's dream is to be a private investigator. Her family thinks this is a career for a man, not a woman, and they let her know how they feel every chance they get. At times, they forbid her to continue in her career as a PI.

Okay! Now we have some built in conflict that will continue throughout the story. At every turn, our heroine must prove to herself and her family that she's capable of succeeding as a PI, that it's not only a man's job, and she must defy them when they forbid her to continue. That's internal conflict.

This is Lola Cruz's conflict throughout the Lola Cruz Mystery series. This conflict stems from her parents' cultural (and gender) expectations versus Lola's own American sensibilities. They see Lola through their old fashioned, cultural lens, but Lola lives her life through her assimilated Mexican American eyes, trying to find balance between both worlds.



Let's go back to **A Knight's Tale**, fast-forwarding a bit in the story.

Enter Count Adhemar, played by Rufus Sewell. We see him talking to Jocelyn as they watch Will compete in a jousting match. He studies Will, commenting to Jocelyn that Will is fearless because, unlike most Knights, he doesn't look away at the last moment, thereby protecting his eyes. This is a bit of foreshadowing, which builds tension in the story. We sense that Will fearlessness will contribute to Count Adhemar bringing him down.

This is an overarching conflict. Count Adhemar and Will are enemies, out for the same things (Jocelyn and winning the tournaments) and this conflict exists throughout the entire story.

Will Thatcher verses Count Adhemar in the pursuit of Jocelyn and jousting champion.

It's the same for Lola Cruz. Throughout the entire series, Lola has the conflict with her family over her career choice. She also has the ongoing conflict with her love for Jack, and the reasons they can't be together.

Lola Cruz verses her family's expectations.

So, these are macro conflicts.

Think about **Gone With the Wind**. What is the conflict that exists for Scarlett throughout the story? Scarlett constantly battles with 'Southern society' and how she doesn't fit the mold or meet traditional expectations. This her strength and her weakness.

Scarlett verses traditional Southern Belle life.

Summed up, the macro conflict is really the opposing goals of the hero/heroine (protagonist) and the villain (antagonist) (or a situation which sets different expectations). In Lola Cruz's case, the antagonist in terms of this big conflict is her family, but the antagonist within the mystery plot is the villain/killer.

In **Ella Enchanted**, Ella is 'gifted' with obedience. This becomes a conflict throughout the story/movie as Ella struggles with the 'gift'. Add to that the conflict of the Uncle (Edgar,) who wants to be king and therefore tries to kill the prince, using Ella's 'gift' to his advantage. There is conflict at every turn.

Opposing goals: Prince Char who is set to inherit the throne verses Edgar who wants to be king.



You've Got Mail: *Opposing Goals:* Keeping The Shop Around the Corner open verses Fox Books putting The Shop Around the Corner out of business.

The Proposal: *Opposing Goals:* Margaret trying not to get deported verses the Immigration guy determined to prove the engagement of Andrew and Margaret is a fake.

There is usually some sort of BIG CONFLICT in a story. This goes back to the Central Story Question and that big question the reader wants answered.

***Will Will Thatcher change his stars and become a Knight (or will the conflict between Will and Adhemar prevent Will from attaining his goal)?

***Will Lola Cruz defy her family's expectations and the traditions of the Mexican culture thereby succeeding in solving her first case?

***The romantic CSQ / conflict is different: Will Lola and Jack move beyond the high school crush of the past and into an adult relationship?

***In The Proposal: Will Margaret be deported (or will the immigration guy win?)?

***The romantic conflict: Will Andrew realize that he loves Margaret, and visa versa?

***In You've Got Mail: Will The Shop Around the Corner be put out of business by Fox Books?

***The romantic conflict: Will the hero and heroine's love survive after the truth of their identities is revealed?

Homework:

You probably already have some semblance of the major conflict in your story written into your Central Story Question, but summarize it here:

What are the opposing goals (macro conflict) in your story? (As in the examples above, the romantic conflict is going to be separate from the story conflict though they parallel each other, and work together to create layers in your book.)



Now, moving on...

Whatever you call it (macro, overarching, major conflict), each story has some sort of broad conflict that guides the story.

But just as you have overarching goals for your characters (Will wanting to change his stars), you also have those smaller scene goals. It's the same with conflict. You have the the broad conflict, but each scene must have conflict, as well. These mini conflicts propel the story forward. As stated earlier, in a mystery with romance, every scene must advance either the mystery or the romance. Sometimes a scene will advance both.

In a romantic suspense, the same thing must happen. Every scene must advance the suspense or the romance.

If you are writing a straight romance, every scene must advance the romance in some way.

How do you do this?

With scene conflict.

Back to A Knight's Tale:

In the scene where Will, Roland, and Wat are heading to the tournament, they encounter Chaucer. Will tells Chaucer their destination. Chaucer sees through Will, knowing he's not, in fact, a real Knight. He presents the conflict. In order to compete in the tournament, Will must have papers proving his lineage. Will, not being a real Knight, doesn't have these.

This conflict is solved when Chaucer offers to create the necessary papers, and then ultimately when said papers are presented at the tournament and finally accepted.

In a later scene, we see Adhemar readying for a jousting match. He sees that the opponent is the prince. He withdraws and now it's Will's turn.

This is the conflict... what decision will Will make--withdraw or fight?

His decision, and the resulting conversation between the prince and Will foreshadows future events and the prince's decision to knight Will.

The bottom line is that every scene needs conflict. The protagonist must be faced with a decision, or find him/herself in a predicament, that forces action.



If Will had learned that he needed lineage papers, which he didn't have, and gave up, that would be the end of the story. But he chooses, instead, to negotiate with Chaucer and take his chances that their lie will be discovered if the forged papers are not accepted.

In the scene where Will is faced with the decision to joust against the prince or not, he faces the conflict head on. If he'd chosen not to fight, the prince would have had no basis to knight Will later on. Will's decisions and actions advance the plot.

In *Gone With the Wind*, Scalett is faced with conflict after conflict. How she responds has consequences. If she marries Mr. Kennedy, she will betray her sister. But if she marries Mr. Kennedy, she will secure her family's future. If she doesn't marry him, she and her family have no other options. This is a tough decision, and, of course, our protagonist, faces the conflict head on, taking the betrayal of her sister in order to secure the family's future.

Later in *Gone With the Wind*, when the men are out at their "meeting" and Mr. Kennedy's been killed, Rhett comes to the rescue. But Rhett is a scoundrel and not a supporter of the war or the Southern cause. Should the women trust him to help their men? Melanie, in this case, is faced with a decision. To trust Rhett to help her husband, or to not take his offered help and risk that her husband's part in an ambush that night will be found out.

She makes her decision, putting her trust in Rhett, knowing what that means to Ashley and their reputation. Conflict breeds more conflict.

Now to the nitty-gritty.

Every scene, whether happy or tragic, needs conflict. How do you build conflict?

Let's look at the definitions of conflict.

conflict

noun

a serious disagreement or argument, typically a protracted one : the eternal

conflict between the sexes | doctors often come into conflict with politicians.

- a prolonged armed struggle : overseas conflicts.

an incompatibility between two or more opinions, principles, or interests :

there was a conflict between his business and domestic life.



Conflict does not have to be action-packed. It does not have to be tragic or painful or bring about suffering. There is a place for this type of conflict--in very plot driven stories. But the best stories, books, and movies have deeper conflict. The author doesn't take the easy way out.

Yes, conflict can imply imminent disaster (like Independence Day, for example...end of the world, apocalyptic, alien invasion, Die Hard type movies or stories), but the most memorable stories involve character/internal conflict.

Think Star Wars. Yes, it's about a battle of good verses evil, but at its core, it's a story about a man figuring out who he is and what he believes (Luke, who has to come to terms with losing the parents he knows, learns he has a sister, and discovers the truth about his father).

Conflict is, as stated in the book *Story Structure Architect*, by Victoria Lynn Schmidt: "a state of disharmony between incompatible or antithetical persons, ideas, or interests. Conflict may be a war, but it may also be a psychic struggle. It is the opposition between characters or forces in a work of fiction, and this opposition does not have to come from tragedy."

This reinforces the idea that conflict can be subtle and grow out of the opposing goals of the characters in a given situation.

In *A Knight's Tale*, Will wants to WIN the jousting match. Jocelyn wants Will to prove his love for her by losing. It's a challenge and proves to be an enormous conflict for Will with enormous stakes. He must choose: WIN--which is ALL HE'S WANTED FROM THE BEGINNING, or LOSE, thereby proving his love for Jocelyn.

What will he do? His decision will potentially change the course of his story, stopping him from achieving his goal once and for all.

Ultimately he determines that love is more important, and he loses. And loses. And loses. Until finally Jocelyn gives him permission to win again, and now he's back on track with changing his stars.

The next lesson, coming shortly, will look at different times of conflict. In the meantime, look at your first scene and determine what the conflict is for the hero/heroine. Each goal will have a conflict, something that potentially prevents the hero/heroine from reaching that goal. This is true for internal and external conflicts.

These are the internal and external goals and motivations for Lola Cruz. Now I've added the conflicts:



Scene One:

Internal Goal: Lola is determined to find missing mother Emily Diggs.

Internal Motivation: She gets emotionally involved in her cases, against Manny, her boss's rules, and can't stand that a child is without his mother.

Conflict: Becoming emotionally involved in a case compromises her objectivity and can prevent her from succeeding.

External Goal: Lola wants to prove to Sadie, her coworker and major thorn in her side, that they are equals.

External Motivation: Sadie goes out of her way to belittle Lola, and Lola wants Sadie and Manny to see her as a detective, not as an incompetent.

Conflict: Sadie tries to prevent Manny from making Lola lead investigator on the new case.

More on Conflict

As talked about in the previous lesson, conflict is often created through violence: guns, battles, bombs, war, fighting, etc. But the mind is fraught with conflict, too. The effects of conflict can be positive or negative.

Conflict forces change, and change is what we need our characters to do. That is the bottom line.

In Story Structure Architecture, Victoria Lynn Schmidt offers 6 different types of conflict. I'm introducing them here.

Relational Conflict: Human verses Human. This is the main conflict talked about in the previous lesson. Relational Conflict happens when the protagonist and antagonist have opposing goals. If one wins, the other loses, hence the stakes are high.

Examples:

The hero wants to buy a restaurant, but the villain wants to buy the same restaurant.

The heroine wants to overcome something in her past, but the villain doesn't want her to.

The hero and the villain are both in love with the same woman.

Young adult wants to move out of parents' house but parents don't want their child to go.



Situational Conflict: Human verses Nature or Environment. Characters disagree about what to do in response to something happening around them, or about a situation they're in.

Examples:

Characters are stuck in a snow storm. One wants to keep going, the other(s) want to stay put and wait for help.

Hero knows a hurricane is coming and wants to evacuate, but his wife won't leave.

Character has been shot, but is still alive. Friend is afraid to help get him to safety because he may be shot in the process.

Inner Conflict: Human verses Self. This conflict is based on the self doubt of the hero/heroine. Something causes an internal struggle which leads to inaction.

Character has religious background that dictates something different than what she want or needs to do now.

Hero/Heroine thinks he/she is flawed in some way and this leads to inaction or doubt.

Character may not know self well, and therefore doesn't know how to respond to a situation.

Young adult want to move out of parents' house, but mother cries and carries on and son feels guilty at causing his mother anguish.

Paranormal Conflict: Human verses Technology/Possibility. This has to do with the consequences the hero/heroine must face in light of something inexplicable, or beyond the realm of possibility.

I Robot: Robots may actually be able to feel, and kill, and pose a threat to humanity.

Avatar: How can a human exist on Pandora with the indigenous N'avi?

2001: Space Odyssey: Computer takes over!

Cosmic Conflict: Human verses Fate/ Destiny/ God. This is a supernatural element against a human.

Being angry with God over something.



Being dissatisfied with the hand you've been dealt and being victimized by it that dissatisfaction.

Young adult wants to move out of parents' house and in with girlfriend, but living together out of wedlock is a sin in their religion.

Social Conflict: Human verses Group. This is one person against the world, only the world can be a defined group like a church, a hospital, or a town. This can work really well in a mystery scene when the detective/sleuth needs information from a group he/she may not like.

The Doctor's Wife: Abortion doctors are the targets of a church/anti-abortion group which is willing to kill.

Young adult wants to move out of parents' house and into a religious commune which the parents don't agree with or like.

In order to ensure steady pacing in your story, each scene needs conflict. Scenes can have multiple conflicts (but don't overdo it! No melodrama allowed.).

Determine what your character wants and why they want it. These are their goals and motivations.

Next determine what is standing in your hero or heroine's way. This is the conflict.

If nothing is standing in his/her way, you need to create a conflict!!! These are the SCENE CONFLICTS that can be overcome, as Will's predicament about not having lineage papers was solved by negotiating with Chaucer.

The larger/macro conflict still exists (he still wants to change his stars and has many obstacles in his way, namely Count Adhemar), but he's had a mini victory. We cheer him on as he continues his journey. If your character never overcomes an obstacle, we, along with him/her, will feel beaten down by failure after failure.



Lesson Five: Disaster

Within a scene, DISASTER is synonymous with HOOK, or a CLIFFHANGER. You've given your characters specific internal and external goals which are explained by the MOTIVATIONS you've created. You've thrown the book at them, creating conflict, or pitting characters against each other with opposing goals which serve to thwart the achievement of your character's goal.

You could end your scene here, but if you do, it's a tidy ending which will allow your readers to quietly close the book and put it down. That is NOT what you want! Your Central Story Question is still in your reader's mind, but you also need to keep the scene questions coming. You want your readers to compulsively turn the pages. But how do you do that? Just when the scene conflict has been resolved, you, the puppet master, create DISASTER for your character! I know you're asking yourself, "Okay, but what IS disaster, and how do I create it?"

Let's start here. Dwight V. Swain, author to *Techniques of the Selling*

Writers explains the concept of Disaster like this:

"Disaster is a hook."

"What's a hook?"

A hook is a device for catching, holding, sustaining, or pulling anything--in this case, a reader."

1 a piece of metal or other material, curved or bent back at an angle, for catching hold of or hanging things on : a picture hook.

- figurative a thing designed to catch people's attention : companies are looking for a sales hook.

How do we apply this concept to a scene? Look at DISASTER as an unexpected development which places your character in a tight spot, or throws them for a loop, so much so that you've created an element of suspense both for the character and for the reader. Ending a scene with DISASTER leaves the reader asking what is going to happen, and THAT will keep them turning the pages.

A closer look at what DISASTER means.

Disaster can be literal, as in a specific action which occurs. Let's take a look Catherine's story about Gabrielle Taggett. She's eschewing her family's desires and opened her own restaurant. In the scene she described recently, we see Gabrielle overwhelmed with opening day. She's working to make sure customers are satisfied, that her staff knows what they're doing, that her family members (who've parked it at a table and just won't seem to leave) get out... Catherine has conflict after conflict for Gabrielle. However she's set up the story has gotten us, the readers, invested in Gabrielle's success, and so we're rooting for her.



One by one, she conquers the conflicts that Catherine has thrown at her.

-The cook quit in a huff? Gabrielle promotes the sous chef.

-Customer's waiting to be seated? Gabrielle gets XX to quickly prepare the back dining room to handle the overflow.

-Dirk and Lance Taggett won't leave? No problem. Gabrielle negotiates with them...one more drink, and they agree to leave.

Phew! Gabrielle has conquered the conflicts of the scene and we all heave a sigh of relief.

Gabrielle helps bus a table, heaving her own sigh of relief. But then she hears a little commotion at the hostess station. What now?

She:

looks up to see Marco Nave raising hell with the inexperienced hostess. She marches over to deal with that low down, no good restaurant critic, but she's shaking in her boots because this is the man who can destroy her new venture. She placates him, and seats him. End of scene.

looks up to see Marco, shakes in her boots because this is the man who can destroy her new venture. End of scene.

looks up to see Marco, shakes in her boots because this is the man who can destroy her new venture, bolsters her confidence, but it crashes again when she realizes that Marco, Dirk, and Lance have made eye contact.

Both of these are DISASTER endings. Either will work. They both set up the next scene and the conflict that will ensue. The only difference is set up (a) is ACTUAL DISASTER because we are presented with the new situation and Gabrielle actually takes a step toward dealing with it, while situation (b) is IMPLIED or POTENTIAL DISASTER because we are stunned right along with Gabrielle and we have no idea what will happen next or what trouble might ensue. Or, (c) which is also IMPLIED or POTENTIAL DISASTER because now the stakes for Gabrielle are raised...and they are also out of her hands. How any of these three men react in this situation is an unknown for her.

The end of the scene must look toward the future, with a new question to be answered (will Gabrielle let find a table for Marco? Will Dirk and Lance say anything to Marco? Or will Gabrielle use her savvy to steer Marco out, and get him to come in another day?) in the mix.

Let's look at A Knight's Tale for more examples of how to use DISASTER to end a scene.

Towards the end of the movie, Will goes back to England to compete in the final tournament. He remembers himself as a child in the very same village, and during the evening, he goes out on his horse to see his old neighborhood. This is a scene where the Goal is internal: Will wants to put his guilt at not returning to England sooner to rest. His motivation is that he's felt guilt at not being able to return sooner and show his father that he did the right thing by sending Will away... that Will was able to change his stars. And the conflict is, of course, that his father is dead and so he can't really release the guilt that eats at him.



But then the conflict is resolved because Will learns that his father actually IS alive. They reunite and all is good. But the scene ends with us seeing Count Adhemar staring up at the lighted window of Will's father, and then seeing Will climb out to fix the roof. The DISASTER is potential. We know Adhemar is going to use his newfound information about Will to destroy him.

A little later, Will's been arrested and is in the stockade.

Goal: Will wants to get out of his entrapment. Secondary goal: his friends want to protect him from the threatening crown.

Motivation: Freedom for Will. Secondary: his friends want to protect Will.

Conflict: There's no way Will can escape.

Secondary: the crowd is irate and won't forgive Will for lying.

The conflict is resolved when the prince comes on the scene. He hears Will's friends defending his honor. He remembers Will's honor which he experienced firsthand. And he knights Will, freeing him.

Disaster, again, is potential and suspenseful. Is Will going to make it back in time to compete in the tournament and defeat Ardemor.

In Living the Vida Lola, there's a scene in which Lola goes with her cousin's wife, Lucy, and Jack, the romantic interest, to a tattoo parlor to get information.

Her goal: to get information

Her motivations: to get one step closer to solving her case

The conflict: Zed's not talking and in order to get information, she has to get on the table and pretend to get a belly button piercing.

End of Scene Disaster: In walks Allison, someone Lola didn't expect to see at the tattoo parlor, which adds a complication to the case, and also blows her cover.

Your job now is to keep disaster in your mind as you write your scenes. End with a cliffhanger/hook/disaster. It's a two steps forward, one step back kind of mentality.

HOMEWORK: Take one of the scenes you've been creating/solidifying GMC for and add disaster. Use the example above with Catherine's restaurant story as an example. What are possible disasters you can throw at your character even after the conflict of the scene has been resolved? Make sure it's logical, and a natural outcome of the scene!!!