

STORY CRAFT

***“The most powerful words in English are:
‘Tell me a story’.”***

Pat Conroy, *My Reading Life*

Steve Nallon’s STORY CRAFT offers insight and understanding into the art and practice of story, looking at why we tell and need stories, as well as the nuts and bolts of creating plots and characters. STORY CRAFT also has sections on day-to-day writing techniques and literary devices.

One of the unique features of Steve’s STORY CRAFT is what he calls the **21 Story Steps**, which offers pupils a way of building their own stories from what he outlines as the 21 constituent elements that make up a plot. Importantly, because these elements of story don’t dictate content, the plots created by the students can be as varied and imaginative as they wish.

Also included in this teacher’s handbook are summaries of Steve’s talks on **‘The Gothic Story World – Exploring the Gothic Tradition and its Legacy’**, **‘A Christmas Carol: Exploring Charles Dickens’s Classic Tale of Time’**, **‘Young Adult Fiction – Change and Discovery at the Story FunFair’**, as well as his inspiring interactive workshop, **‘How to Make a Story...’** In addition, this handbook contains colour-coded annotations of chapters one and two of Steve’s YA novel, *The Time that Never Was*. These annotations highlight character information, expository elements (such as time and place), the mystery aspect of the tale, the central task action, and the narrative design of the story.

STORY CRAFT is geared to the National Curriculum requirements in English study Key Stages 3 and 4 but can be adapted for both Key Stages 2 and 5. Class activities and lesson plans are suggested throughout.

Some of the questions covered in STORY CRAFT:

Why do human beings tell stories?

What's the difference between a story and a plot?

What are the essential elements of a plot
that you can't do without for a story to be a story?

Where do creative ideas come from?

What do we mean by 'action'?

How do you make up a story?

What are the '21 Story Steps' of *A Christmas Carol*?

How do you create a character?

What are the different ways in which a story can be
presented?

What is meant by 'exposition'?

What is a mystery story?

How do you create a story that has a twist?

Who is the protagonist of a tale?

What is meant by 'foreshadowing'?

Can a story be told as a series of letters or emails?

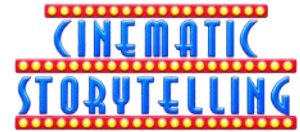
What is a mentor character?

What do we mean when we say a story must have a
beginning, middle, and end?

What do we mean by 'genre'?

What is an inciting incident?

What do the terms *in medias res*, *praesens historicum*, and
deus ex machina mean?



Detailed PDF workbooks are available to download without charge from the STORY CRAFT TALKS page of the www.nallon.com website. These examine all aspects of story, and, uniquely, draw on examples across the whole of the storytelling media, including narrative fiction, theatre, and filmmaking. Expect, then, to find references not only to Austen, Dickens, and Shakespeare, but also *Little Mermaid*, *Top Gun: Maverick*, and *Wicked*.

PLOT AND CHARACTER covers how to structure a story, the key building blocks of a plot (the **21 Story Steps**), and the tools needed to create engaging characters.

WRITING SKILLS looks at expositional techniques, the creation of dialogue, as well as the importance of vocabulary and use of metaphor.

THINKING STORY considers the intentions and purposes of a story, plus why human beings are drawn to narrative fiction.

NARRATIVE DESIGN examines how a tale is told, who is narrating it, and why they're telling it that way. There is also a detailed look at the narrative setting of the story, including time, place, and culture.

ENHANCING THE TALE considers the ways a story can be made more dramatic, dynamic, and engrossing – for example, by developing themes, creating sub-plots, or imposing a time limit.

CINEMATIC STORYTELLING explores the ways the invention of cinema and the moving image has created new ways of showing and presenting a story.

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Steve's STORY CRAFT talks and classes are geared to the National Curriculum requirements in English study at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. The specific and relevant areas covered by STORY CRAFT are listed below.



Department
for Education

English programmes of study: key stage 3

National curriculum in England

Key stage 3

Subject content

Reading

Pupils should be taught to:

- understand increasingly challenging texts through:
 - making inferences and referring to evidence in the text
 - knowing the purpose, audience for and context of the writing and drawing on this knowledge to support comprehension.
- read critically through:
 - knowing how language, including figurative language, vocabulary choice, grammar, text structure and organisational features, presents meaning
 - studying setting, plot, and characterisation, and the effects of these
 - making critical comparisons across texts
 - studying a range of authors, including at least two authors in depth each year.

Writing

Pupils should be taught to:

- write accurately, fluently, effectively and at length for pleasure and information through:
 - writing for a wide range of purposes and audiences, including:
 - well-structured formal expository and narrative essays
 - stories, scripts, poetry and other imaginative writing
 - applying their growing knowledge of vocabulary, grammar and text structure to their writing and selecting the appropriate form
 - drawing on knowledge of literary and rhetorical devices from their reading and listening to enhance the impact of their writing
- plan, draft, edit and proof-read through:
 - considering how their writing reflects the audiences and purposes for which it was intended
 - amending the vocabulary, grammar and structure of their writing to improve its coherence and overall effectiveness.



Department
for Education

English programmes of study: key stage 4

National curriculum in England

Key stage 4

Reading

Pupils should be taught to:

- understand and critically evaluate texts through:
 - reading in different ways for different purposes, summarising and synthesising ideas and information, and evaluating their usefulness for particular purposes
 - drawing on knowledge of the purpose, audience for and context of the writing, including its social, historical and cultural context and the literary tradition to which it belongs, to inform evaluation
 - identifying and interpreting themes, ideas and information
 - exploring aspects of plot, characterisation, events and settings, the relationships between them and their effects
 - seeking evidence in the text to support a point of view, including justifying inferences with evidence
 - distinguishing between statements that are supported by evidence and those that are not, and identifying bias and misuse of evidence
 - analysing a writer's choice of vocabulary, form, grammatical and structural features, and evaluating their effectiveness and impact
 - making critical comparisons, referring to the contexts, themes, characterisation, style and literary quality of texts, and drawing on knowledge and skills from wider reading
 - make an informed personal response, recognising that other responses to a text are possible and evaluating these.

Writing

Pupils should be taught to:

- write accurately, fluently, effectively and at length for pleasure and information through:
 - adapting their writing for a wide range of purposes and audiences: to describe, narrate, explain, instruct, give and respond to information, and argue
 - selecting and organising ideas, facts and key points, and citing evidence, details and quotation effectively and pertinently for support and emphasis
 - selecting, and using judiciously, vocabulary, grammar, form, and structural and organisational features, including rhetorical devices, to reflect audience, purpose and context, and using Standard English where appropriate
- make notes, draft and write, including using information provided by others [e.g. writing a letter from key points provided; drawing on and using information from a presentation]



What is the Purpose of a Story?

KS3 states that pupils should ‘understand increasingly challenging texts through knowing the purpose, audience for and context of the writing’, and KS4 goes further, saying pupils should be able to critically evaluate such texts. We would say that these skills include the many reasons a writer might want to tell a story and also why we as human beings need stories in our lives.

Key Words and Concepts:

Maturation, Transition and Becoming. Empathy. Understanding of self. Identity. Inner world. Safe Environment for the Exploration of Conflicts. Understanding Otherness. Connection and Causality. Ideology. Propaganda. Assimilation of Meaning. Moral Codes. Healing. Psychology. Laughter. Sensationalism. Escapism.

Stories are an essential part of our human survival kit. When we’re very young, our need for Story is like an unquenchable thirst, and that’s because it’s stories that help us to understand ourselves and the world around us.

Story is the playground of the mind, where we can imagine a place beyond the one we live in, but it’s also in a way an emotional gym, for it’s in the world of Story where we can explore and develop feelings and passions. And related to this is the idea that Story is a safe environment for human beings to examine and reflect on emotional conflicts and complex moral dilemmas. As Bruno Bettelheim says in *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, “the child intuitively comprehends that although these stories are unreal, they are not untrue ... [the] concern is not useful information about the external world, but the inner process taking place in an individual.”

One of the key reasons, then, why human beings tell stories is that they give us the ability to ‘walk in another’s shoes’ and so see how people who aren’t like us perceive the world. And for that we don’t just need imagination – we need empathy (from *em-pathos*, meaning ‘in feeling’), for empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of others.



In his series of lectures on the novel, E.M. Forster said, ‘The king died and then the queen died’ could be a story, but ‘The king died, and then the queen died of grief’ is a plot. Forster’s point was that when you say ‘The king died, and then the queen died of grief’, you are constructing a connecting relationship between one event and the other. Causality and learning how life events connect are, then, key reasons why human beings tell stories.

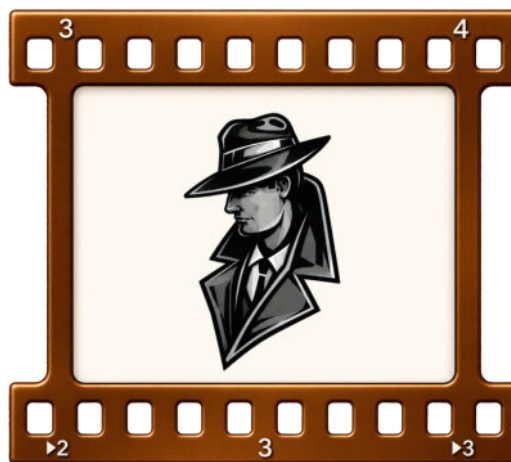


Of course, the power of a story doesn’t end on the last page, for after we have read a book, we may think about it, mull it over, consider it, question it – and in so doing the story stays with us and becomes part of

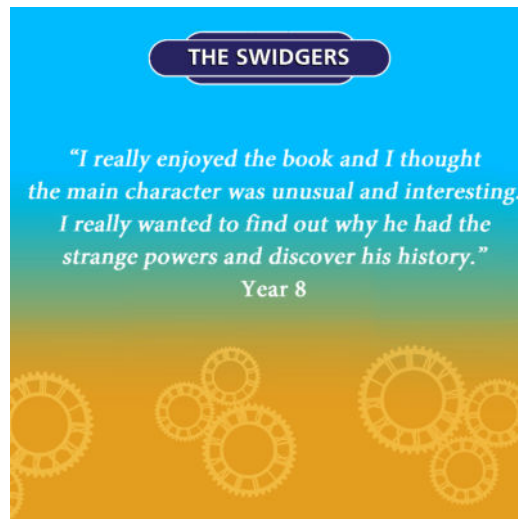
how we think. In other words, we assimilate its meaning in such a way that Story becomes part of how we perceive the world and feel about life.



Another reason we like reading is that stories allow us to escape into another world – and don't mock escapism if you've never lived a life where you needed to escape. People have difficult domestic situations, and so a book with a captivating tale offers a few hours in another world, where the reader can forget the cruelty of their own. And it's such readers that often become the storytellers of the future. As John Gardner says in *On Becoming a Novelist*, "one finds novelists are people who learnt in childhood to turn, in times of distress, to their own fantasies or to fiction, the voice of some comforting writer, not to the human beings near at hand." The psychology of the storyteller, therefore, is often found in the stories they write, and appreciating that can help in the understanding of an author's intention.



And related to this point is the idea that if you have suffered trauma, telling your story can be part of your healing. Psychologists know that as well as empowering you, the process of sharing your tale with others can lead to insights and revelations about yourself and your situation.



Transition. Maturation. Becoming. If the plot of most stories can be summed up as 'change through conflict', then one of the purposes of Story could be said to be the nature of change itself. In other words, Story becomes, at least in part, a way of understanding the importance of change in our lives. Witnessing and reading stories about 'becomings' in others can prepare us for potential transitions in our own lives. This is especially the case in Young Adult fiction.



Stories offer us moral codes by which to live as well. In simple terms, stories can act as morality tales, guiding us to understand what is right and what is wrong, but of course that morality depends on the ideology of that particular society and indeed the storyteller. While some stories will affirm moral codes, other stories will question them, or even undermine them in an attempt to bring about an alteration of attitudes in that society.



This takes us on to another purpose of Story, and that is where people tell stories in order to change society for the better, as they see it. George Orwell never went as far as saying his stories could change the world, yet he was explicit about the moral and political purpose of his writing. He spoke in *Why I Write* of his “desire to push the world in a certain direction, to alter other people’s idea of the kind of society that they should strive after.” But he also acknowledged that Story needs to be more than just politics. “Anyone,” he wrote, “who cares to examine my work will see that even when it is downright propaganda it contains much that a full-time politician would consider irrelevant.”

And this brings us in a way to the other end of the spectrum of Story’s purpose, because we mustn’t ignore the idea of ‘Story Funfair’, where Story’s primary purpose is to divert, entertain, make us laugh, arouse sensations and even sometimes with horror and ghost tales, scare us to death!



CLASS ACTIVITY: Ask the class to come up with reasons why people enjoy and tell stories. From these, formulate six 'Purposes of Story'. Once you have your six, ask your class to put these in order of importance, as they see them. There's no right or wrong answer here. However, their priorities will reveal a lot about the students and the group!





What is the Difference between Story and Plot?

KS3 specifically states that pupils when reading should study ‘setting, plot, and characterisation’, and KS4 goes further by adding that pupils should be able to ‘critically evaluate the relationships between them and their effects’. We would suggest that this includes what plot structure is, how it works, and the fundamental difference between plot and story.

Key Words and Concepts:

Plot. Story. Structure. Setting. Protagonist and Antagonist. Back Story. Action. Character Motivation, Flaw and Arc. Task and Strategy. Mentor. Catalyst Event. Inciting Incident. Forces of Opposition. Time Limited Plot. From Ignorance to Knowledge. Crisis, Dilemma and Climax. Character Rebirth. Resolution.

In his series of lectures on the novel, E.M. Forster defined a story as “a narrative of events in their time-sequence.” In other words, the ‘story’ is all that happened in chronological order. However, ‘plot’ is different, because plot doesn’t necessarily present or reveal what happens in time order – in fact, it rarely does. In a mystery whodunnit, for example, you wouldn’t want to know the identity of the murderer at the time the murder was being committed. The point of a whodunnit is to discover the culprit – and you have to wait for the detective to work that out by putting all the pieces together. And that is what gives you the plot.

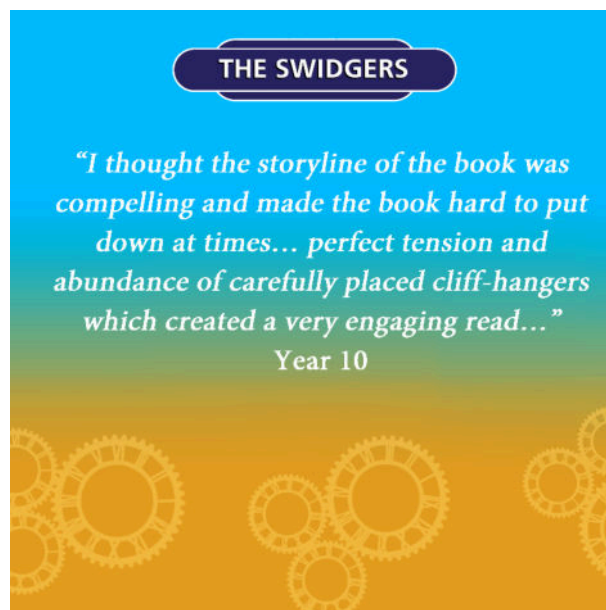
In his lectures, E.M. Forster added this: “‘The king died and then the queen died’ is a story. ‘The king died, and then the queen died of grief’ is a plot. The time-sequence is preserved, but the sense of causality overshadows it.” The point here is that ‘The king died and then the queen

died’ is a simple statement of two facts, one thing happened and then another thing happened. But when you say ‘The king died, and then *the queen died of grief*’ you are constructing a relationship between one and the other. You are in effect making one a direct consequence of the other. And so causality, or causally linked events, where one thing happens because of whatever came before it, is one of the key requirements of a plot.

Another way to consider the difference between story and plot is to think of the story as the raw material and the plot as the way that material is structured. In other words, the story is everything that occurred, whereas the plot – or rather and more accurately *plotting* – is how that ‘everything’ is then connected and motivated. In this way of thinking, if a large pile of bricks and several barrels of cement make up the story, the construction of the house would be the ‘plotting’, and the final building itself would be the ‘plot’.

“The structure of a narrative is like the framework of girders that holds up a modern high-rise building: you can’t see it, but it determines the edifice’s shape and character.”

David Lodge, *The Art of Fiction*



What are the key elements that make up a plot?

The story theorist Robert McKee sums up plot as “the writer’s choice of events and their design in time.” Another story thinker, John Truby, says something similar, but expands the idea of plot by saying it is “the under-the-surface weaving of various lines of action or sets of events so that the story builds steadily from the beginning through the middle to the end.” German writer and novelist Gustav Freytag (1816 – 1895), on the other hand, divided plot into five different parts consisting of:

- 1) Exposition, then Conflict
- 2) Rising Action
- 3) Climax
- 4) Falling Action
- 5) Denouement or Resolution.

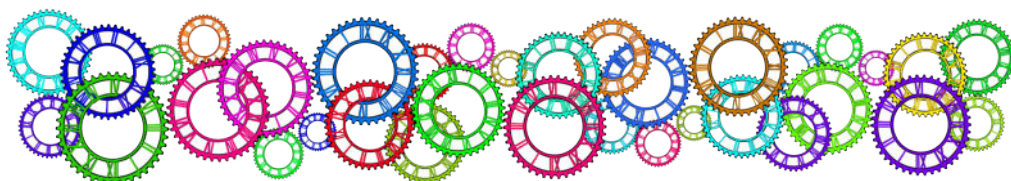
Gustav’s theory, because of its rising and falling shape when drawn, became known as ‘Gustav’s Pyramid’, and some people nowadays call it ‘The Story Mountain’.

But a more detailed way to think about story is by asking what are the key elements that make up a plot? – and these we would call the **21 Story Steps**. The advantage of this approach, unlike the Story Mountain, is that it offers a practical tool guide in aiding children with their ‘imaginative writing’, which is a specified criterion of KS3. Put simple, the 21 Story Steps structure gives students a way of building their own stories. Importantly, because these 21 elements of story don’t dictate content, the plots created by the students can be as varied and imaginative as they wish.

“Get the story structure in shape before starting to write the script. You must at least know the beginning, the middle and how it ends.

Approximately, at least.”

Jonathan Lynn, *Comedy Rules*





How To Create a Story: The 21 Story Steps

KS3 specifically states that pupils should be able to write for ‘a wide range of purposes and audiences’, and that work should include ‘stories, scripts, poetry and other imaginative writing’. KS4 talks about pupils being able to write and narrate accurately, fluently, effectively, and states that this should be achieved through ‘selecting and organising ideas, reflecting on whether their draft achieves the intended impact, and restructuring their writing’. And we would suggest that includes learning how to plot and construct a story of their own.

When writers create a story, what ‘building blocks’ do they use to construct it? Well, one way of exploring that question is to ask: what are the key elements of a story that you couldn’t do without if it were to be a story? And these are what we would call the **21 Story Steps**. Let’s have a look at what they are...

*** Protagonist and Antagonist** – Most stories have a central character (the protagonist) who is trying to do something and another character (the antagonist) whose aim is to stop them from doing it. The writer John le Carré once said that ‘The cat sat on the mat’ is not the beginning of a story, but ‘The cat sat on the dog’s mat’ is. Why? Because as soon as the dog comes along and sees his mat occupied by the cat, there’s bound to be trouble – and it’s the conflict between the protagonist and the antagonist that is usually the main dynamic of a story. There are other terms it is possible to use in this context, including ‘hero’ and ‘villain’, but here, it should be said, that the instigator of the plan is technically the protagonist, and that character is not always the same as the ‘hero’. Also, it should be noted, protagonist and antagonist are gender neutral terms.

“All drama is conflict. Without conflict, there is no action. Without action, there is no character. Without character, there is no story.”

Syd Field, story theorist

“All good plots come from well-orchestrated characters pitted against one another in a conflict of wills.”

James N. Frey, American writer and creative writing teacher

“Don’t just write a strong female protagonist. Be one.”

A.D. Posey, poet



Back Story – This is what has happened before the story began, but which is still relevant to what is going on right now. The back story is also sometimes called ‘The Ghost’, because what happened in the past is still ‘haunting’ people in the present. This is particularly the case when a character is dealing with a past trauma. Think here of the events of Godric’s Hollow and that literal scar on Harry Potter – ‘Under a tuft of jet-black hair over his forehead they could see a curiously shaped cut, like a bolt of lightning’ – which becomes the physical embodiment of Harry’s back story.

“The most important things to remember about back story are that (a) everyone has a history and (b) most of it isn’t very interesting. Stick to the parts that are, and don’t get carried away with the rest.”

Stephen King, *On Writing*



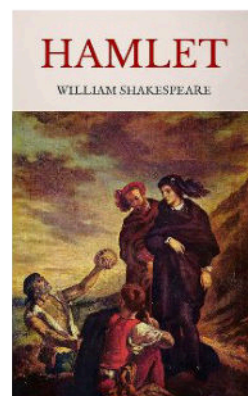
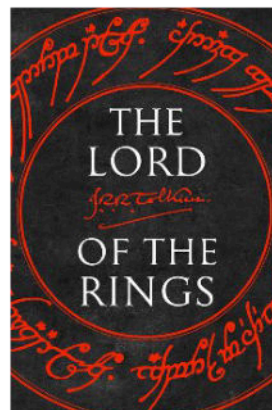
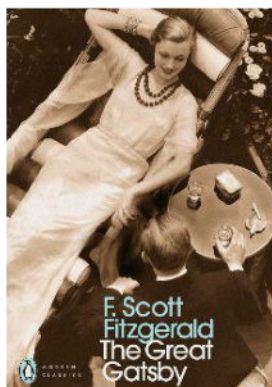
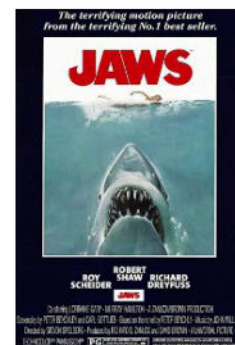
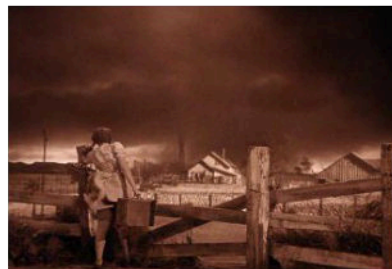
*** The Day of Change** – This is when something happens that creates an imbalance in the life of a character. The Day of Change is referred to by writers as the ‘Catalyst Event’ because it’s what upsets the apple cart and the status quo. The Day of Change can be internal, as in puberty in coming-of-age stories (*Romeo and Juliet*, *Catcher in the Rye*), or external,

as in a sudden change in the weather, especially storms (*Robinson Crusoe*, *The Martian*). *The Wizard of Oz* involves both types of change, as the tornado is real, but it also represents the inner turmoil of a teenager. She's not called Dorothy Gale for nothing. The Day of Change can also result from a new arrival in town (*Jaws*, *Agamemnon*), unexpected information that makes you reevaluate the situation (*Hamlet*, *The Matrix*), or a chance find, coincidence or encounter that can upset the balance of your world (*The Lord of the Rings*, *The Great Gatsby*). But a Day of Change is not enough in itself: it must incite a need to alter things back to what they were or create a new and acceptable equilibrium.

Catalyst, noun. 1. Something that makes a chemical reaction happen more quickly without itself being changed. 2. An event or person that causes great change
Cambridge Dictionary

"Discontent is the catalyst for change."

Mike Murdock, singer and pastor

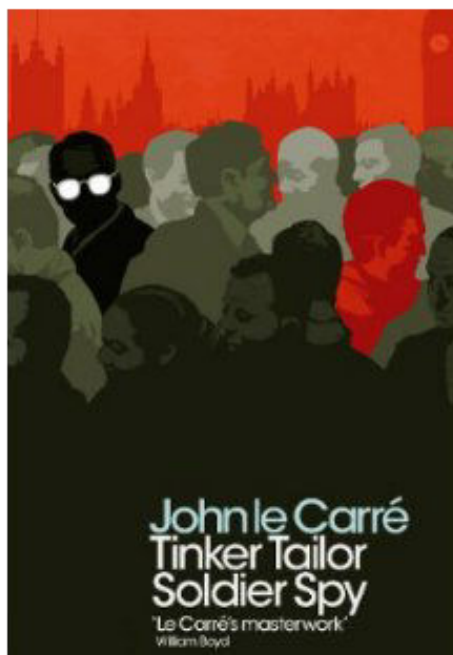


*** The Trigger for Action** – This is when an incident in the tale incites the desire in a character to change things or correct something that has gone wrong. That’s why this event is often referred to by writers as the ‘Inciting Incident’. And it’s the action that follows from this trigger that drives the story forward – where action can be defined as the purposeful intent of the character to achieve their goal. That’s why the ‘action’ of any tale is always a verb, such as *to win, to find, to make, to sell, to escape, to discover...*

“The inciting incident is how you get (characters) to do something. It’s the doorway through which they can’t return, you know. The story takes care of the rest.”

Donald Miller, *A Million Miles in a Thousand Years*

The Puzzle – In any story, especially a mystery, there is usually a secret to be uncovered or revealed. The mystery element of a tale raises curiosity, and this is important because one of the reasons why people keep on reading a story is that they want to know what happens next.



Who’s the mole?

The Inner Flaw or Problem – This is what is lacking or missing in the character that needs to be put right in order to make the character a more complete and better person. The Greek word for this, which Aristotle uses in his *Poetics*, is *harmatia*. A flaw can be a psychological need – those aspects of a character’s nature that are lacking within them, for example, a need to be more self-confident – or a moral need – how a character must learn to act differently towards others, for example, being less bossy. And often in a story what a character learns about themselves and why they must change becomes part of how they ultimately achieve their goal.

“Tell me what you want and I’ll tell you who you are.”

Anton Chekhov, writer

*** Motivation and Desire** – There is always a reason behind a character’s actions, and this usually comes from a want or desire in that character. However, what someone wanted at the start of a tale isn’t always the same as what they want by the end – and this is because the story journey can alter how a character sees themselves and the world they live in. A classic example of this is Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*.

“An intention comes into existence through a motive. The intention always wants to attain a goal. The goal is always identical with the elimination of the motive. Therefore, the intention becomes extinct as soon as the goal is attained.”

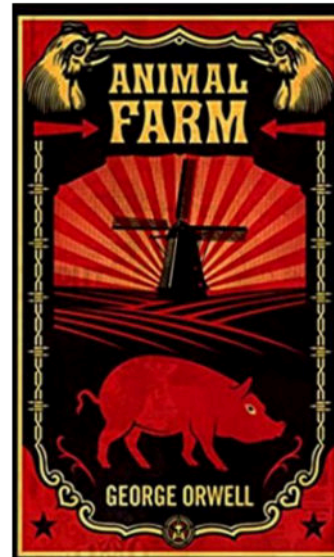
Eugene Vale, *The Technique of Screenplay Writing* (1944)

The Character Arc – This is what writers call the internal change that occurs in the character as the story progresses. An arc in geometry is a curve between two points, and storytellers use the term ‘character arc’ because as the character moves through a story, there is a transition between what they were like at the beginning point and what they are like

by the end point. The 'arc' can be many shapes – smooth and gradual or rapid and acute – depending on the story you are telling.

The final lines of *Animal Farm*:

'Twelve voices were shouting in anger, and they were all alike. No question, now, what had happened to the faces of the pigs. The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which.'



*** The Task and the Strategy** – In a story, the main character is sometimes given a task to complete, or they have to come up with some sort of action plan in order to achieve their goal. Either way, the character needs to find the right strategy and tactics to attain what they want.

CLARA: Now, what's the plan?

DOCTOR: Who said I've got a plan?

Doctor Who, 'The Snowmen', written by Steven Moffat

Helping Hands and Opposing Forces – Usually, in a story, there are numerous forces and obstacles which work against the main character and their plan. Apart from the antagonist (sometimes called the villain), these opposing forces can include the weather, objects that go wrong, and gateways or thresholds that the main character can't get past. But often, as well, there are allies, helpers and gifts that can assist the protagonist on their way. If the helper is an older and more experienced figure, then this character is referred to as the 'Mentor'. Think, for example, of

Dumbledore in the 'Harry Potter' series, and Granny in the Time Adventure series THE SWIDGERS.

Note here that there is a section on the www.nallon.com website called ORPHANS AND THEIR MENTORS, which discusses in detail the nature of the Mentor, as well as the history and story tropes of tales in popular culture focusing on the orphan child.



Time Limit – Often, a story will have a deadline to be met, which means that the main character must complete the task within a fixed period of time, thus upping the jeopardy and the story stakes. In storytelling, this is usually referred to as 'The Clock'. Think here of how many of the challenges in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* are time limited.

"Everything is an experiment until it has a deadline. That gives it a destination, context, and a reason."

Brian Eno, English musician, songwriter and record producer

**BACK
TO
THE FUTURE**



Setting – This is the world of your story and includes the time period, the physical space, and that world’s moral and political culture. ‘World building’ is the phrase that writers use for creating an environment that is believable and credible, even if it is a fantasy, a dystopia, or has a supernatural setting.



The Unexpected Outcome – This is when a character thinks something will go one way, but instead it goes in the opposite direction. In *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone*, Harry Potter thinks he’s in trouble after his first experience on a broomstick: ‘Now he’d done it. He hadn’t even lasted two weeks.’ Harry is marched away by Professor McGonagall, but instead of being expelled, as he expected, he’s taken to meet Oliver Wood. “I’ve found you a Seeker,” McGonagall says. “The boy’s a natural. I’ve never seen anything like it.” Harry Potter goes from believing he’s going to be sent back home forever to becoming a Quidditch Seeker in a matter of moments – a complete turnaround to the opposite. The Greek word for this, which Aristotle uses in his *Poetics*, is *peripeteia*. It’s important to say that stories aren’t just built on ‘*What happens next?*’ but ‘*Wow! What happened next was such a shocker!*’ – for it’s those unpredictable or unforeseen events in a story that keep people turning the page until they get to the very final ‘twist’.

JAFAR: The universe is mine to command! To control!

ALADDIN: Not so fast, Jafar! Aren’t you forgetting something?

JAFAR: Huh?

ALADDIN: You wanted to be a genie? You got it!

[cufflinks form on Jafar’s wrists]

JAFAR: What?

ALADDIN: And everything that goes with it.

[Aladdin holds up the black genie lamp, which then sucks Jafar into it]

JAFAR: No! No!

From *Aladdin*, directed by Ron Clements and John Musker, with original screenplay by Ron Clements, John Musker and Ted Elliott

From Ignorance to Knowledge – This refers to the moment of realisation when a character discovers, for example, that someone they thought they knew well is not what they seemed, or said they were at all. The Greek word for this that Aristotle uses in his *Poetics* is *anagnorisis*. A well-known example of the change from ignorance to knowledge is in Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations* where Pip had believed his benefactor to be Miss Havisham, but it turns out it was the convict Magwitch. And most 'Harry Potter' stories have characters who at important points in the plot are revealed to be other than they seemed to be. The twitching and stammering Professor Quirrell has been wearing a turban to conceal the fact that he allowed himself to be possessed by Lord Voldemort; 'Mad-Eye' Moody is discovered to be Barty Crouch Jr, a Death Eater formerly presumed dead; Ron's rat Scabbers is really Peter Pettigrew, and Tom Riddle is revealed to be the Heir of Slytherin. And it's worth saying that the idea of ignorance to knowledge doesn't just involve people, for it can apply to objects and places too.

'You've always had the power my dear, you just had to learn it for yourself.'

Glinda in *The Wizard of Oz*



*** The Hour of Despair** – This is the lowest point that the character faces in the story – the rock bottom, you might say. This part of a story is sometimes referred to by writers as the ‘Nadir’ (the word nadir comes from the Arabic *naḍhīr*, meaning ‘opposite’ — the opposite, that is, of the ‘Zenith’, the highest point of the celestial sphere). The nadir is the moment in the tale where the character is at a maximum remove from their goal. A plot can have several low spots, but the one where all seems lost and unwinnable is what we’re talking about here. Writers also use the term ‘Crisis Point’ for this part of the tale – and importantly it nearly always comes just before the climax.

“Never let a serious crisis go to waste. And what I mean by that is it’s an opportunity to do things you think you could not do before.”

Rahm Emanuel, American politician and diplomat

The Impossible Choice – Nothing in a story is ever easy for a character. Often, there is a difficult dilemma that must be faced and a choice made. In *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial*, Elliott would like his extra-terrestrial friend to remain on Earth, and E.T. would like Elliott to fly away with him – but both not are possible. The words the characters say are simple enough – “Stay” and “Come” – yet, given all that has gone before, they have tremendous emotional impact.



The Reversal of Fortune – This refers to the change of fortune in story. It can be slow and gradual, but more often it goes from the worst situation to the best situation in a matter of moments. This is because that sort of dynamic is exciting to read or watch. Yet how that reversal of fortune is achieved shouldn't be too obvious. The rule is to give readers what they want, but in a way they don't expect it. Think here of the sudden importance of the idea that 'the wand chooses the wizard' at the climax of *Deathly Hallows*. It turns Harry's situation completely around, but it's only clear afterwards why exactly that reversal came about.

The Confrontation or Battle – This is the final encounter between the protagonist and the antagonist. The outcome of this meeting decides how the story action will end. What we're talking about in colloquial terms is 'the final showdown', 'the supreme ordeal', or 'the shoot-out'. In courtroom dramas, this usually takes place on the witness stand, and in Westerns, on a deserted street at high noon.

"We may stumble and fall but shall rise again; it should be enough if we did not run away from the battle."

Mahatma Gandhi, peace campaigner



* **The Climax** – This is when the protagonist reaches their goal. It may or may not be that they achieve or complete the task, but whatever happens, the important point of the climax is that nothing will be the same again. The climax, then, is the apex, top, pinnacle, and zenith of your tale.

“The climax is the stage at which the protagonist finds release from their seemingly inescapable predicament.”

John Yorke, *Into the Woods*



The Rebirth – this is when the protagonist changes inside and becomes different in some way and grows as a person. This often relates back to the inner flaw or what was missing or lacking in the character at the beginning of the tale but has now been fixed as a result of what has happened in the story. And often here there is what appears to be a physical rebirth of some kind. An example of this is in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, where Harry Potter is thought to be dead, but is then revealed in fact to be very much alive.



* **The Resolution** – This is the final element of a story or narrative in which the strands of the plot are drawn together, loose ends are reconnected, and matters that need to be explained are cleared up. The resolution could be said to be the aftermath or breathing space following the climax, and in theatre plays this part of the story is traditionally called the *dénouement* (from the French word *dénouer*, meaning ‘unknot’). The resolution is also that part of the tale that gives you a sense of what may come next for the characters and the world they live in. If the opening of a story starts with ‘*Once upon a time...*’, then it’s the resolution that says ‘*And they all lived happily ever after.*’



THE SWIDGERS





How the 21 Story Steps Can be Adapted and Reinvented

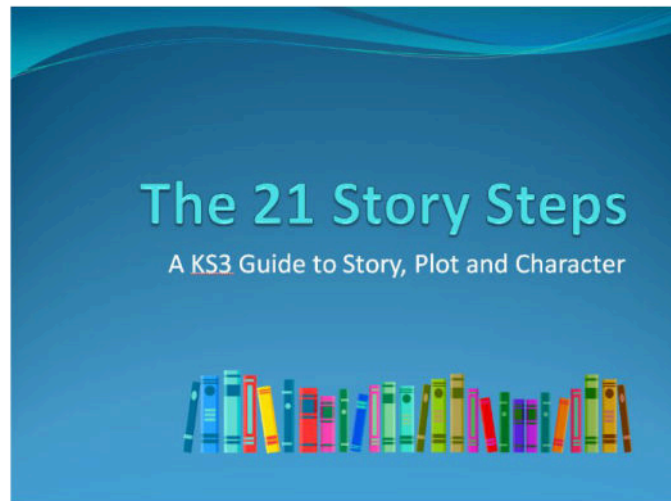
These, then, are the universal **21 Story Steps** which all writers use to construct their tale. In principle, they can be applied to any story, from *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *A Good Girl's Guide to Murder*, to *Romeo and Juliet* and *An Inspector Calls*.

Some of the 21 Story Steps are essential elements in that you can't do without them for your story to be a story. If you and your class want to simplify the 21 Story Steps, concentrate on the starred (*) plot elements, but note these are usually kept in a particular order. The Day of Change comes first, leading to the Trigger for Action, the Story Action, and the Task or Strategy. The Hour of Despair is usually just before the Climax, and the Resolution, obviously, comes at the end.

It is possible to do without certain Story Steps, such as the Time Limit, the Inner Flaw and the Character Arc, but leaving these out will leave the tale less captivating and less emotionally involving. Many story elements, such as Back Story, the Unexpected Outcome, and From Ignorance to Knowledge, can be moved around within the plot structure, depending on the type of tale being told.

No storyteller treats the 21 Story Steps as if they are some sort of blueprint with rules that must be strictly adhered to. The opposite, in fact, for it's the variations, deviations, and exceptions that make a story truly original, engaging and entertaining. All stories, then, have their own unique perspective – and they wouldn't be any good if they didn't – but

you'll find that the 21 Story Steps remain key components to pretty much every tale you choose to tell, watch or read. And knowing and understanding what they are and how they work can help creatively in making up stories of your own.



A 21 STORY STEPS PowerPoint file is available without charge via the School Visits page of the www.nallon.com website.

CLASS ACTIVITY: Go through the 21 Story Steps with your class, explain with examples how they work, then ask the students to come up with a 'Day of Change'. Next, divide the class into groups where every pupil is allocated a different story element, so that each pupil is involved in the creative process. After the different groups have completed their stories, bring them together to see the various directions each story took from the same beginning.

Discovering the 21 Story Steps of *A Christmas Carol*

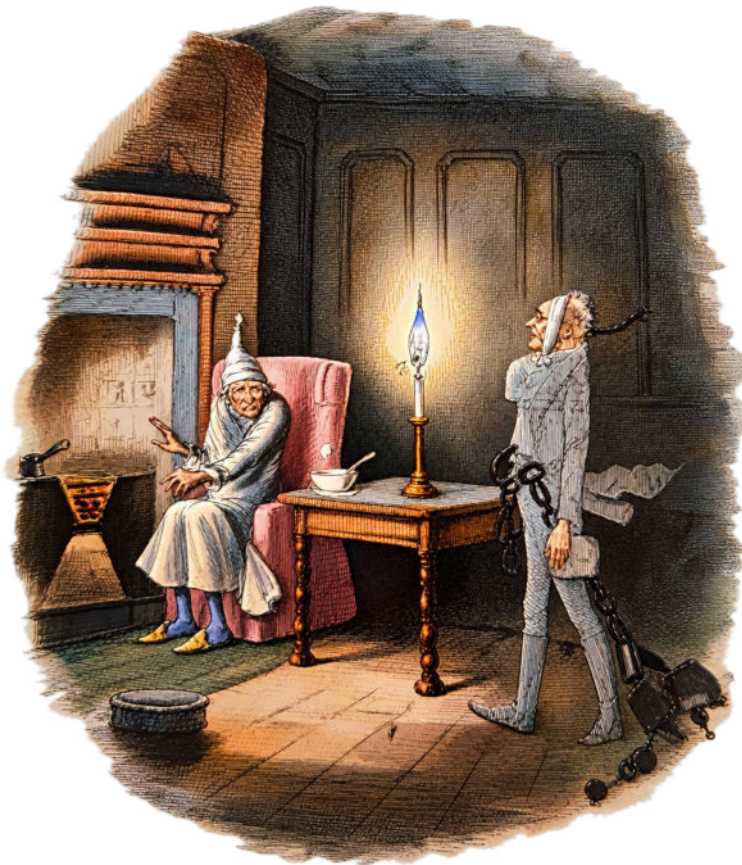


No storyteller keeps exactly to the 21 Story Steps as if they were some sort of magic formula, for there are always adaptations, deviations, and exceptions. In *A Christmas Carol*, a tale that does include most of the Story Steps in its structure, Charles Dickens brilliantly develops and varies the key elements in such a way that makes his tale truly original. What matters, then, is *how* writers modify and reinvent these Story Steps in their creation of an engaging, entertaining, and imaginative work.

The Inner Flaw or Problem – Scrooge’s problem is pretty obvious: he’s cut himself off from the world like an oyster in its shell (“It’s enough for a man to understand his own business, and not to interfere with other people’s”). Scrooge’s moral need – how a character must learn to act towards others – is that he must reconnect with that world and the people in it. His psychological need – that aspect of a character’s nature that is lacking within them – is that he must believe that it is possible for him to change.

The Day of Change – This is the arrival of Marley. Marley first appears in the knocker, but his return is foreshadowed in the opening line. Marley is essentially the herald of the tale, and, as such, he has three main

functions. The first is to tell us what will happen – three Spirits will visit Scrooge. Second, Marley acts as a call to action for Scrooge to change his ways. To this end, Marley shows Scrooge what will happen to him if he does not. Third, Marley offers the reader an early glimpse into the unknown supernatural world into which they are about to journey.



The Back Story – The Ghost of Christmas Past takes Scrooge back to his 'back story'. It's not normally possible to visit your own back story, except in time travel stories, or, perhaps, in dreams. In *A Christmas Carol*, though, it does happen because we have entered the world of the supernatural, where anything is possible. And the creation of such a tale in an era when time travel tales were almost unknown shows us Dickens's remarkable powers of imagination and story inventiveness.



The Task/Strategy – In most stories, the main character is given a task to complete, and so they have to come up with some sort of action plan in order to achieve their goal. However, Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* works in a different way. Marley's ghost is the one who tells Scrooge that he must change his ways, and to help bring this about, Marley informs Scrooge that he will be visited by three Spirits. Later, the Ghost of Christmas Past is more specific about his purpose when he says that his aim is Scrooge's welfare and 'reclamation'. And to help make this happen, the Ghost of Christmas Past shows Scrooge his past, including his lonely school days and the happy time he had working for Mr. Fezziwig.

The strategy then in *A Christmas Carol* is clear, but it's in the hands of the three Spirits, not Scrooge. If this is the case, what is Scrooge's own **Action Task**?



Scrooge is what you might call a passive character, in that he does not initiate the 'strategy' or 'action plan'. However, that doesn't mean that Scrooge hasn't got things going on inside him.

The key to Scrooge's internal action can be found all through the tale, but particularly in the scene at his nephew's Christmas party, where Dickens writes, 'When this strain of music sounded, all the things that Ghost had shown him, came upon his mind; he softened more and more; and thought that if he could have listened to it often, years ago, he might have cultivated the kindnesses of life for his own happiness with his own hands, without resorting to the sexton's spade that buried Jacob Marley.' Scrooge is made *to think* and *to feel* (both verbs) and so it's *thought* and *feeling* brought together that becomes Scrooge's **Action**. Ultimately, Scrooge's task action is to change, and it's through these acts of contemplation as Ebenezer observes each scene that cumulatively lead to his reclamation or redemption.



Time Limit – Often in a story there is a deadline to increase the jeopardy and the stakes in a story, yet with *A Christmas Carol*, it seems to be the opposite. In fact, in this magical tale, Time in its most literal sense collapses, for the hours Scrooge is away with the Spirits do not make up one long night measurable by a clock. There’s the journey to his past and his time at his old school, his time at the Fezziwig party and also his time at the home of his former fiancée Belle. Then, during the visitation of the Ghost of Christmas Present, as Dickens makes clear, Scrooge enjoys the whole Christmas season of twelve days. Yet none of these hours and minutes and days can be measured simply by the turning of a dial. But that’s exactly how Scrooge does think of Time – as something that should and can only be quantified by the ticking of timepieces and the clanging of bells, both of which heavily feature in the narrative.

But Fred, Scrooge’s nephew, offers Scrooge a different perspective. He sees Christmas Time “as a good time: a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time: the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely.”



This view of Time is more abstract than literal. And part of the journey of Scrooge in the tale is to learn to think of Time more in this way. Scrooge visits his Time Past, his Time Present, and his Time Future, and is fundamentally changed by each. However, what Scrooge comes to understand is that to be complete as a human being, he must live, as he says himself, “in the Past, the Present, and the Future”. And what he discovers on his journey is that to live in the Past is *to be alive to Memory*, to live in the Present is *to know your fellow Man*, and to live in the Future is *to be open to Hope*. So when Scrooge says, “The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me”, what he is really expressing is the need of all of us to be in communion with all ourselves, and, as Fred puts it, our “fellow-passengers to the grave.” And if this new thinking is achieved, ‘Time’ will be always be measured by love and not by the turning dials of a clock on the wall.

Protagonist and Antagonist – As noted earlier, the central ‘action plan’ of the story is in the hands of Marley and the Phantoms. This technically makes the spectres collectively the protagonists, with Scrooge

the one resisting their offer of help (compare here the angel Clarence and George Bailey in the movie *It's a Wonderful Life*). However, as *A Christmas Carol* is a redemption story, the central conflict and struggle is mainly within Scrooge himself, for he doesn't believe he can change.



Yet, in the **Protagonist-Antagonist** relationship, there is Scrooge's crucial final **Confrontation** with the Ghost of Christmas Future. It's here, in the graveyard, that Scrooge comes to realise that he was the corpse he saw earlier that lay abandoned and uncared for (**From Ignorance to Knowledge**).

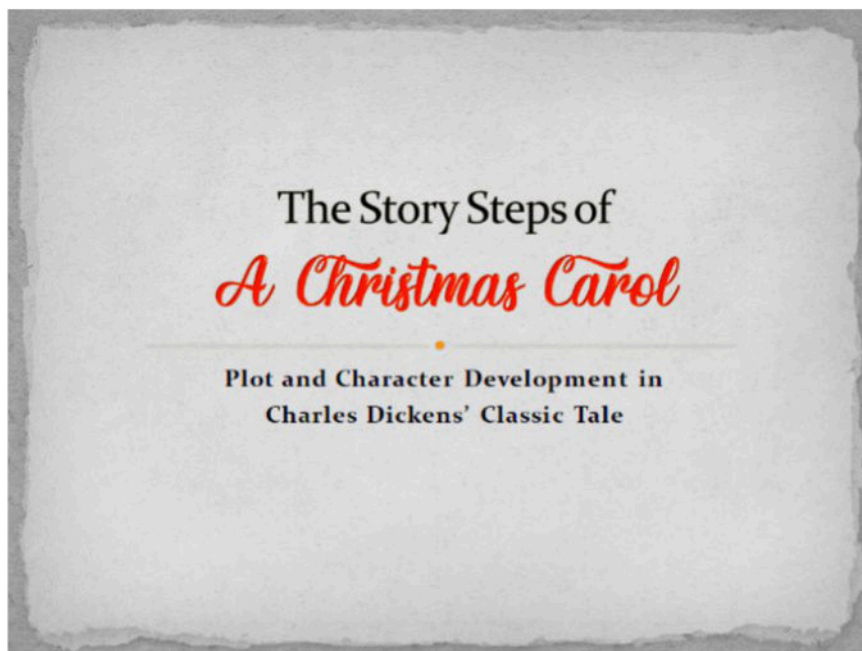


Understanding that he *is* the dead man, who, in death, is left alone, unloved, and wanted only by rats gnawing at the door, is Scrooge's nadir (**The Hour of Despair**) and **Crisis** point.

The **Climax** is that Scrooge isn't really dead – far from it – for he wakes up very much alive and kicking (**Reversal of Fortune**). Scrooge is now a changed man from what he was (**The Character Arc**), and, furthermore, on waking up, he's born anew (**Rebirth**) – "I don't know how long I've been among the Spirits. I don't know anything. *I'm quite a baby*. Never mind. I don't care. *I'd rather be a baby*. Hallo! Whoop! Hallo here!



Scrooge, Dickens tells us in the **Resolution**, ‘had no further intercourse with Spirits, in that respect, but lived upon the Total Abstinence Principle, ever afterwards; and it was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge.’ Dickens says too that Scrooge became a second father to Tiny Tim. Perhaps Scrooge read to Tiny Tim those stories that he had enjoyed as a child – especially of Ali Baba, and Robinson Crusoe and his parrot – and maybe Uncle Ebbie even did the voices. The point is that the resolution gives us some sense of the character’s future, but rarely goes into details. That doesn’t, however, restrict the ‘fancy’ of the reader!



A PowerPoint file covering the Story Steps of *A Christmas Carol* is available without charge via the School Visits page of the www.nallon.com website.

The 21 Story Steps of *The Time That Never Was*

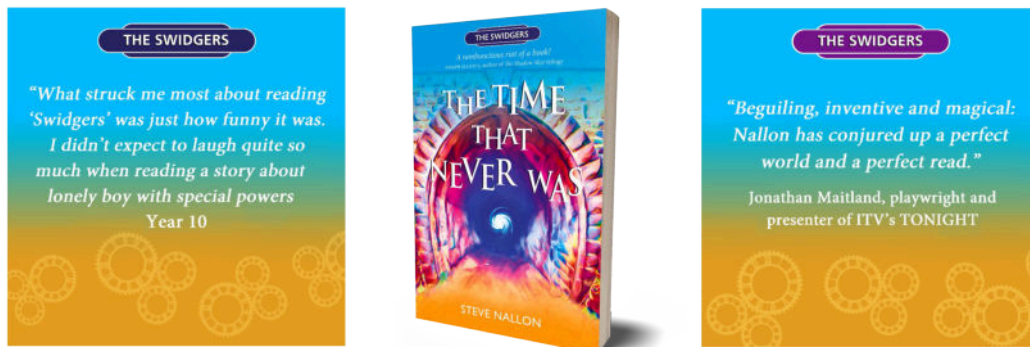


Key Themes of the Young Adult book series THE SWIGGERS: Identity. Who and What Am I? Becoming. Maturation. Struggle for Survival. Growth and Learning. Outsiders. Body changes. Internal conflict. Mentor. Dark Worlds. Life Values. Non-violence.

The Time That Never Was is a coming-of-age tale, and so **The Day of Change** is when William, the **Protagonist/Hero**, begins to feel that something is different within him. For the first time in his life, William – a *Swidger* who alters people's timepaths for the better – senses exactly what is about to happen if he does not intervene: *'Hang on a second... What was that? Save his life! Where did that thought come from? And how could I know? Because our kind never know.'* Not by coincidence, as the plot later reveals, an attack from a mysterious power comes on this same day that William is experiencing these inner changes, or 'Swidger growing pains', as Granny later describes them. Very strangely, the attack comes via a seemingly inexplicable hail storm.

This mysterious hail storm and its consequences become **The Trigger for Action**, because William from then on wants to know (**Motivation and**

Desire) why there has been this attack, and why he is different from other *Swidgers* (**The Puzzle**). And so *to discover* and *to understand* become the central **Actions** of his story.



But William is just a boy, so how will he manage to do this when he isn't even sure what's happening to him? Plus, he's an orphan (William's **Back Story**) who has no protector. Well, that's where the role of Granny comes in. As mentioned, *The Time That Never Was* is a coming-of-age story and in such tale, there is usually an older helper figure – that is the **Mentor** character.

Granny (**The Mentor**) recognises straight away that William isn't ready to take on the mystical power that seeks him out. This is because, first, William isn't daring enough, and second, he needs to develop a different way of thinking (both of these are **Inner Flaws** in William). Yet Granny knows as well that William needs to understand more about what being a *Swidger* is, so she takes him to meet Echo in Dungeness – and the tale that Echo tells on the beach is essentially the **Back Story** of the *Swidgers*.

But William, while in Dungeness, has plans of his own, and when he is alone in Echo's converted railway carriage, William begins his search (William's **Strategy**) in order to find out more about himself. This does lead to an understanding of sorts (**From Ignorance to Knowledge**). Afterwards, and for the first time, William dreams (**Character Arc**).



On the return to London, Granny decides to put William in places and situations where he must learn to think in new ways (“For the battle ahead, my little stick of rhubarb, you must become a poet, develop a corkscrew mind, learn to think round corners, and, most importantly, imagine”). Putting William in positions where he has to take the initiative for himself is essentially Granny’s **Strategy**. For example, Granny abandons William in the school staff room just as he is adding a strange liquid she has given him to a barrel of cider. The headmaster comes in, and so it’s up to William to explain himself and get out of his predicament. The potion William puts in the barrel of cider leads to much comedy and farce, but this action (William’s **Set Task**) also results in William being expelled from school. This is the main turning point at the mid-section of book one. Now free from school obligations, Granny can take William where he’ll be safe from harm – the Old Coach Inn.

Much of the first half of *The Time That Never Was* is focused on Granny’s action plan to make William more daring (Granny’s **Strategy**), but it was also her intention to get William expelled from school (Granny’s **Goal**) because she knew he wouldn’t be safe there. With this achieved (the **Climax**), her next **Task Action**, to protect William, can begin.

On arriving at the Old Coach Inn – a Gothic world of gravestones, prophecies, and cobwebs – William realises the house has a secret (the House’s **Puzzle** and **Back Story**) so he becomes determined to find out what it is. And his action plan (William’s **Strategy**) is to explore behind the concealed doors and along the house’s hidden, secret passageways.



The ruler of the Old Coach Inn is Aloysius (**The Antagonist/Villain**). Aloysius is determined to keep William in his place and retain his control over all those who live in this strange and often spooky house. And this he does by intimidation and threats of violence (Aloysius' **Strategy**). Although William eventually works out the secret of the house (**From Ignorance to Knowledge**), this discovery leads to an encounter between Aloysius and William. Aloysius, who has a special gift of Time, takes complete and utter control over William. This is one of William's low points in the tale.



Yet it becomes clear that William's arrival at the Old Coach Inn has altered the power dynamics in such a way that there must be a battle for supremacy between Aloysius and William. Aloysius believes that by setting fire to the parchment (Aloysius' **Strategy**) that spoke of William and his future, he can destroy any possibility of William taking over from him. However, a burning fragment of the parchment does exactly the opposite, and a destructive blaze destroys the house (**The Unexpected Outcome**). This leads to a cliff-edge struggle between William and Aloysius (**The Confrontation**), and in the battle, William nearly loses Granny (**Crisis Point**). William, however, sees an unexpected opportunity and uses the

helmet Granny wore to protect her from the fire to unbalance Aloysius (**Reversal of Fortune**) – who then falls to his death (**The Climax**).



In **The Resolution**, Granny now feels able to tell William things about being a *Swidger* that she couldn't explain before. Granny, William, and the survivors of the fire then journey to London hopefully to begin a new life.



So that's the story of *The Time That Never Was* – but what about that mysterious attack at the start of the tale and the questions about who or what made it? The point here is that **THE SWIDGERS** is a trilogy and the **Antagonist** of the second book, *The Time They Saved Tomorrow*, is revealed to be that mysterious force we first encountered in the early chapters of book one. The Despiser, a malevolent and powerful force of Time, has from the beginning sought out William's gift and he's done it in a very crafty way (The Despiser's **Strategy**). What becomes clear is that it's William's *Swidger* gift that is the story's 'clock' (**Time Limit**). You see, the moment William truly understands what makes him different, well, that's when the final attack will come (**The Confrontation** of book two). And what's more, The Despiser (**Villain/Antagonist**) cannot be killed or destroyed. So how will William, a *Swidger* who cannot by his nature use

any form of violence, defeat this dark force of time? Well, that's revealed in book two, *The Day They Saved Tomorrow*.



Note that in THE SWIDGERS there are many strategies and, indeed, many counter-strategies. There are also several different kinds of antagonists that result in various crisis points all through the tale – the first attack, the confrontation with the headmaster and later the encounters with Aloysius. The role of Granny changes too. Although she begins as a helper ‘Mentor’, Granny becomes what is essentially a joint protagonist with William. The point here is that stories don’t work within hard or strict rules. Actions change, and so do the roles characters play. And it is by constantly varying the building blocks of a story that a writer can create – hopefully – a fresh and original tale.



A PowerPoint file covering the Story Steps of *The Time That Never Was* is available without charge via the School Visits page of the www.nallon.com website.

NARRATIVE DESIGN

KS3 specifically talks about pupils ‘selecting the appropriate form’ and ‘drawing on knowledge of literary and rhetorical devices from their reading and listening to enhance the impact of their writing’ – and this, we suggest, includes what we would call narrative design.

Key Words, Concepts and Literary Terms:

First Person Narration. Third Person Narration. Subjective Narration. Objective Narration. Past Tense. Present Tense. Historical Present. Point of View. Perspective. Narrative Voice. Hindsight. Retrospective Narration. Stream of Consciousness. Direct Speech. The Epistolary Form.

“Design is a funny word. Some people think design means how it looks. But of course, if you dig deeper, it’s really how it works.”

Steve Jobs, co-founder of Apple technology

Remember E.M. Forster’s observation that “the king died and then the queen died is a story, but the king died and then the queen died of grief is a plot.” Fair enough, but what Forster didn’t say was how that tale should be told. From the point of view of the queen or the perspective of their son or daughter? Or even from the sidelines through the eyes of the court jester? Think of it like this: if story is everything that occurred, and plot is the why, the where, and the when those things happened, then narrative design is how that tale is then presented and communicated.

What we’re talking about then is who tells it, the way they tell it, and the perspective from which they tell it – meaning, is the tale told with hindsight (retrospective narration) or as if it were happening right now? All these are narrative choices and together they make up narrative design.

And there are other narrative decisions that have to be made as well. For instance, what sort of narrative voice should the story have? Will the narrative be told as an objective narration, a subjective narration or even as a stream of consciousness? Is the tale to be communicated in first person or third person? Will it be written in present tense or past tense or a mixture of both? Are events to be imparted exclusively through narrative description or might some aspects be told through letters, diaries, and emails (the epistolary form) or exclusively through direct speech (as in a play, drama or monologue)? These are important questions, not least because all these decisions have to be made well ahead of any actual writing.

CLASS ACTIVITY: Take the class through the various narrative options set out in Narrative Design. Then, ask the class which would be the best way for the story created in the ‘21 Story Steps’ assignment to be told and presented: as a play, as a first person narration, as a collection of letters, or something else?



writing skills

KS3 addresses the need for pupils to be able to write ‘well-structured formal expository and narrative essays’ and this should include the ability to amend ‘the structure of their writing to improve its coherence and overall effectiveness.’ KS3 also specifically talks about ‘knowing how language, including figurative language, vocabulary choice, grammar, text structure and organisational features, presents meaning’ – and all these are what we would call writing skills.

Key Words, Concepts and Literary Terms:

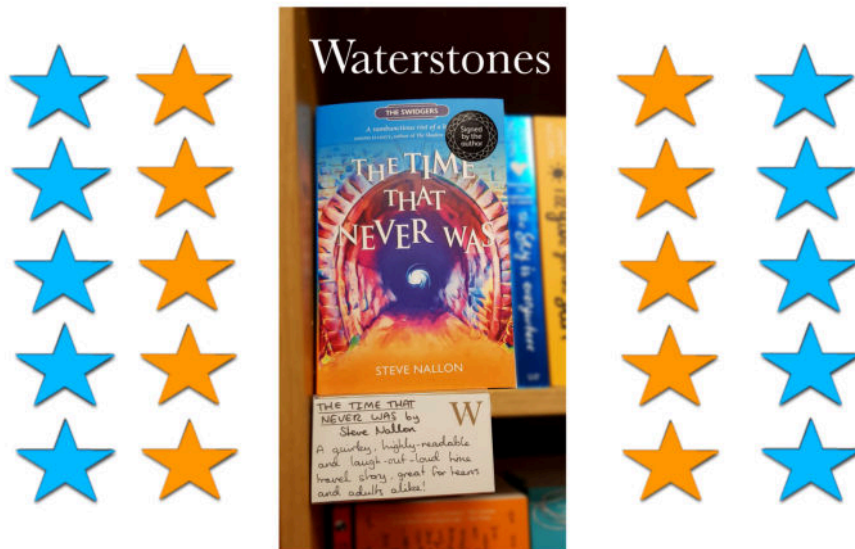
Exposition. Story Information. Story Stakes. *In media res*. Back Story. Foreshadowing. Retrospective Narration. Genre. The Mystery Tale. Curiosity. Historical Present (*Praesens Historicum*). Story Tropes. Narrative Conventions.

What are Writing Skills?

Writing skills simply mean the techniques and methods used by a writer to tell an engaging tale. In the opening chapters of *The Time That Never Was*, these include setting out what ‘the stakes’ are (why what happens in the story matters), foreshadowing what is to come (giving hints as to what will happen later in the tale) and establishing through exposition important story information (essential facts about where we are and who the main character is). There are also hints as to the central mystery that will be the heart of the tale. Furthermore, it is important to establish early in the narrative that William’s story is a ‘retrospective narration’ (meaning William is telling his story at a time later in his life).

William’s storytelling (or ‘narration’) sometimes switches between telling his tale in the past tense (*‘I-was-doing’*) and telling it in the present tense (*‘This-is-what’s-happening-right-now’*). This is possible in storytelling

because there is what is known as the ‘historical present’ (sometimes also referred to as the ‘dramatic present’, the ‘narrative present’, and the ‘vernacular present’, or even its Latin name *praesens historicum*).



Exposition

Exposition is a statement of story information. What we are talking about here are the essential facts that are needed for the reader to understand what is happening in the tale. For example, we need to have information on who the characters are and their relationships with each other, as well as where we are and when we are. We also need to know what the present situation is, usually meaning what has just happened, what is happening right now, and what is likely to happen very soon.

But there are several problems with exposition. First, it rarely occurs naturally in real life, meaning that people don't usually communicate with each other by making 'statements of story information', and if they do, these statements are usually dry and flat, with little emotional or dramatic impact. Second, pure exposition is essentially a static element in a story, in that there's no action or forward motion. In other words, while everything is being explained, the plot stands still. However, there are ways round these problems and one is the principle of 'Show, Don't Tell'.

Exposition certainly isn't easy to write, but, on the other hand, it is an aspect of creative writing that is a skill and a craft which can be taught and learnt.

CLASS ACTIVITY: First, ask the class to come up with ten 'Story Facts' – maybe two or three about a character, a couple more about where and when the story takes place, and a few apparently random bits of information that will need to be known in order to understand something that happens later in the tale. After you have a list and everyone is happy, take the class through some of the expositional techniques and devices set out in the 'Exposition' chapters of the **WRITING SKILLS** workbook, which is downloadable from the 'School Visits' page of the www.nallon.com website. After you've gone through these, ask the class to write a story opening that gets all ten facts across using these techniques. The idea of the exercise is that the exposition shouldn't read like a long list of details – but instead arise naturally out of the action of the tale.



The Historical Present

Historical present is a term from linguistics and rhetoric which simply means the employment of the present tense when narrating past events. Mrs Boffin, for example, uses it in Charles Dickens's OUR MUTUAL FRIEND:

‘Your exact words,’ said John, laying his hand on hers.

‘That’s a very good arrangement,’ cried Mrs Boffin. ‘Keep it there, John. And as we was all of us in it, Noddy you come and lay yours a top of his, and we won’t break the pile till the story’s done.’

Mr Boffin hitched up a chair, and added his broad brown right hand to the heap.

‘That’s capital!’ said Mrs Boffin, giving it a kiss. ‘Seems quite a family building; don’t it? But the horses is off. Well! When I cries out that night, “I know you now! you’re John!” John catches of me, it is true; but I ain’t a light weight, bless ye, and he’s forced to let me down. Noddy, he hears a noise, and in he trots, and as soon as I anyways comes to myself I calls to him, “Noddy, well I might say as I did say, that night at the Bower, for the Lord be thankful this is John!” On which he gives a heave, and down he goes likewise, with his head under the writing-table. This brings me round comfortable, and that brings him round comfortable, and then John and him and me we all fall a crying for joy.’

‘Yes! They cry for joy, my darling,’ her husband struck in. ‘You understand? These two, whom I come to life to disappoint and dispossess, cry for joy!’

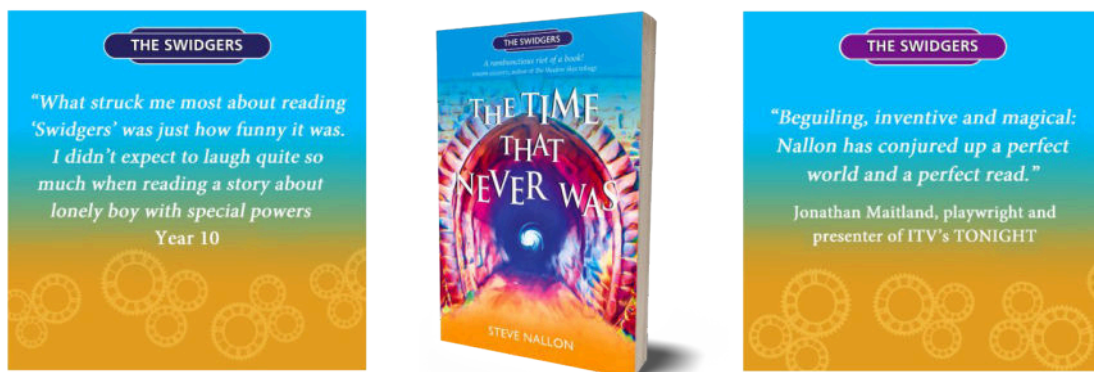
Bella looked at him confusedly, and looked again at Mrs Boffin’s radiant face.

‘That’s right, my dear, don’t you mind him,’ said Mrs Boffin, ‘stick to me. Well! Then we sits down, gradually gets cool, and holds a confabulation. John, he tells us how he is despairing in his mind on accounts of a certain fair young person, and how, if I hadn’t found him out, he was going away to seek his fortune far and wide, and had fully meant never to come to life, but to leave the property as our wrongful inheritance forever and a day. At which you never see a man so frightened as my Noddy was. For to think that he should have come

into the property wrongful, however innocent, and--more than that--might have gone on keeping it to his dying day, turned him whiter than chalk.'

The historical present has been widely used in writing about history, where it is sometimes referred to by the Latin term *praesens historicum*. It is a rhetorical style that naturally heightens the dramatic force of the narrative by describing events as if they were still unfolding.

In a way, you could argue that a mainly past tense narration that occasionally drops into the historical present for the most dramatic moments takes advantage of the best of both worlds. Yes, it's right to use the past tense because the past is past, but the occasional use of the present tense gives any narrative an immediacy and excitement. And that's sometimes the way William chooses to tell his story in *The Time That Never Was*, especially in those parts where there is dangerous or thrilling action.



The 'Hook'

A hook at the beginning of your story or narrative is there to capture the reader's attention early. It can be a visual image, an action, a sound, a speech, an idea, or just a still moment in time. But the key to an effective hook is that it immediately lets the reader know the story's mood and sets the tone of your tale. It can also offer a glimpse or snapshot of your character and the world they live in. The hook, then, operates as a kind of

‘overture’ to your story, setting the mood, the atmosphere, and the theme.

“Like lightning. So sharp, fierce and bright it blinded. And it’s that flash where I must begin my story. I couldn’t tell at first where it came from... except I knew, somehow, it wasn’t the sky...”

**The opening lines of *The Time That Never Was*,
the first in THE SWIDGERS book series**



In Medias Res

The phrase *in medias res* translates as ‘in the middle of things’ or ‘in the middle of the action’. This can have two applications in storytelling. First, it can simply mean starting the story in the middle of some sort of event or ongoing action. Second, *in medias res* can mean having a plot structure where you open your narrative in the middle of the story in terms of its time sequence – not necessarily the exact middle, just later in the tale. For example, at the crisis point or the moment where the protagonist has an impossible choice to make. Then, via a flashback or some other storytelling method, the narrative goes back to where the tale began in terms of the inciting incident and so on. Of course, with this structure, some of what happens in the tale ends up being given away. However, having the crisis moment on the opening page of a book can be a very dramatic way of engaging or ‘hooking in’ the reader. This type of hook raises curiosity as to how the character got themselves into all that trouble in the first place, propelling the reader forward into the narrative of the tale itself.

Foreshadowing

Foreshadowing is a narrative device that offers clues, hints, or warnings about events that will follow in the story. Writers use this technique to build suspense, create anticipation, and to ensure that major plot twists or endings feel earned and believable rather than appearing random. Two classic examples are the prologue in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, which explicitly states that the 'star-cross'd lovers' will take their own lives, and the scene in John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*, where Candy's old dog is shot and killed out of mercy, which quietly foreshadows the tragic way George has to deal with Lennie at the end of the novella.



What is meant by Genre?

Genre simply means what kind of story it is – the category you would put it in based on its particular style or content. Think here of all those shelves in bookshops that have labels saying Romantic Fiction, Gothic Horror, Science Fiction, Westerns, LGBTQ+ and so on.

Genre, then, is that aspect of a work that deals with its classification. The word genre comes from the French, literally meaning 'a kind' or 'a

type'. The etymology of genre is based on the Latin word *genus*, meaning 'birth, family or nation'. Both genus and genre contain the *gen-* root because they indicate that everything in a particular category belongs to the same family, or group and so have the same origins.



Another way of thinking about genre is to consider those story tropes which you usually find in particular kinds of tales. What we're talking about here are those events, characters, images, and actions that recur constantly in certain types of tales and so act as a story 'short-hand' in telling you what sort of tale it is. The point is that it's the nature of genre to raise particular expectations. Think of the haunted house tale with tropes such as the warning to stay overnight, cats that hiss at the empty air, odd noises blamed on the plumbing, a sudden injury, sleepwalkers, and at the climax, the immolation fire that destroys the house.

The conventions of any genre and its defining characteristics are qualitatively neutral in that they are basically the same whether you are a genius or a hack. That said, certain genres are seen to be more prestigious than others: literary fiction is higher up the scale than chick-lit, and Shakespearean tragedy has always been more respected than monster movies.

Some thoughts on genre from writers and directors...

"My first book was a historical novel. I started writing in 1974. In those days, historical novels meant ladies with swelling bosoms on the cover. Basically, it meant historical romance. It was not respectable as a genre."

Hilary Mantel, writer

"In America, before they make a film, they always ask you: 'What shelf is the video going on?'"

Anthony Minghella, screenwriter

"I just watched so many Westerns as a kid that you end up using archetypes and sort of tropes of that genre, because there's a language there and you can twist it and turn it on its head or play to it or go sideways at any time."

Gore Verbinski, American film director

"Literary genres are not just external labels. They are techniques, approaches, infrastructures, methods that facilitate the concepts behind our writing."

Bernardine Evaristo, *Manifesto On Never Giving Up*



What is a Mystery Tale?

The term ‘mystery’ comes from the Latin word *mysterium*, meaning ‘a secret thing’. Any story with a secret to uncover is essentially a mystery tale. The appeal of the mystery story is curiosity – *what happened, who did it, and why?* Mysteries have a particular appeal to the human mind simply because we are creatures who are naturally curious and we don’t like anything in life that is unexplained.

In writing a mystery, there is always a balance to be had between keeping the mystery hidden until the moment of greatest dramatic impact, yet at the same time, revealing enough story information that the reader has at least some understanding as to what is going on. Striking the right balance between the two is the main issue of the second chapter of *The Time That Never Was*.

Some thoughts on the mystery tale from writers...

“Mysteries abound where most we seek for answers.”

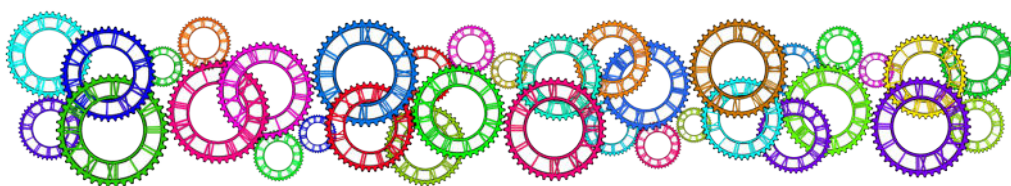
Ray Bradbury, science fiction writer

“Novels are narratives, and narrative, whatever its medium – words, film, strip-cartoon – holds the interest of an audience by raising questions in their minds, and delaying the answers.”

David Lodge, *The Art of Fiction* (1992)

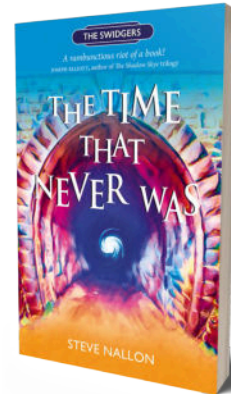
“You ask or imply a question at the beginning of the book and you absolutely self-consciously withhold the answer. It does feel cheap and meretricious but it absolutely works.”

Lee Child, thriller writer



Teacher's Guide: A Colour-Coded Annotation of

THE TIME THAT NEVER WAS



What follows is an annotated guide to the opening two chapters of Steve Nallon's Young Adult fiction novel *The Time That Never Was*, offering a fascinating insight into the technique and craft of writing at the most detailed level. Writers are constantly balancing between character profile, exposition, plot and action, and all the time making decisions about the choice of words, metaphors and the tale's overall narrative design. The annotated analysis of the first two chapters of *The Time That Never Was* takes you through the options by means of colour coding individual sections, passages, and lines to highlight the different aspects of storytelling. However, to avoid information overload, these annotations have been divided into three separate PDF files, all of which are downloadable from the 'Schools Visits' page of the www.nallon.com website.

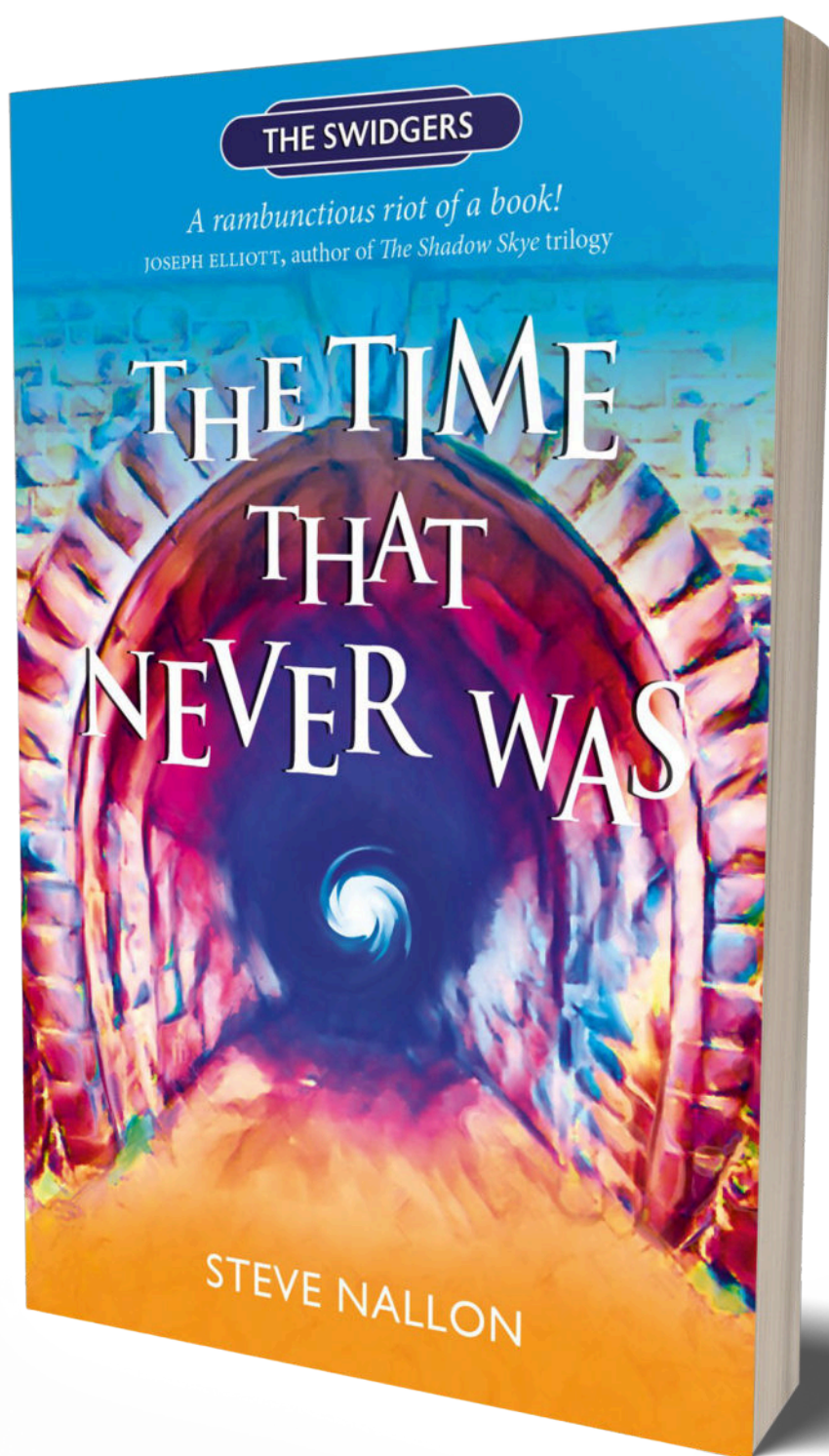
Exposition – Character details, who and what William is, plus essential story information about place, time and setting. Also colour coded in this PDF is that information which does not seem immediately essential, but will prove crucial later in the tale.

Task Action and Mystery – The specific task William is undertaking as we join the story, plus the mystery element of the genre tale, and those occurrences that have never happened before, indicating that this is for William a 'Day of Change'.

Narrative Technique – Foreshadowing, tense shifts, and the overall mode of telling, namely, retrospective narration. Story stakes and important turning points are also featured in this colour-coded annotation.

CLASS ACTIVITY: Take the class through the various examples set out in the annotated first two chapters of *The Time That Never Was*. As you do so, establish the different types of story information and techniques that are being used. Note, for example, how much of the story exposition is part of the task action ('Show, Don't Tell'), and how it is spread throughout the whole of chapter one and into chapter two. After you've done this, ask the class to examine the first chapter of any book they are currently reading, get them to highlight the same type of story information, and say what expositional technique is being used. Alternatively, a text-only PDF of opening chapters of *The Time That Never Was* is available for pupils to fill in for themselves once examples have been offered and explained.





The Opening Chapters of *The Time That Never Was*



- Character Information – The Who
(Who William is, his age and where he lives.)
- Character Information – The What
(What William is – he's a *Swidger*!)
- Character Information – The Limits of Power
(In any fantasy tale, it's important to establish not just the nature of a character's special power but also the limits of those capabilities.)
- Time, Place and Objects that are all important to the story
- Information that proves to be important much later on in the tale
(The relevance, for example, of the postman is not revealed until book two, *The Time They Saved Tomorrow*.)
- The Day of Change
(Stories often begin with a sudden imbalance in the status quo in person's life – sometimes it's an internal change, sometimes it's an external intervention. In *The Time That Never Was* – a coming-of-age tale – The Day of Change involves both. However, it is the internal sense that things are different which is highlighted here.)
- The Mystery Element of the Tale
(This is the external intervention in William's life and the nature the nature of this 'attack' is outlined in chapter two.)
- The Task
(What William must do that day)
- Retrospective Narrative
(William is remembering what happened from the perspective of when he is older.)
- Tense Shifts

CHAPTER ONE

The title of a chapter can act as a form of foreshadowing

Saving the Man

LIKE LIGHTNING. SO sharp, fierce and bright it blinded. And it's that flash where I must begin my story. I couldn't tell at first where it came from... except I knew, somehow, it wasn't the sky...

FORESHADOWING

I was there that Saturday because, for me, a busy street is better than my empty house. Why the house was empty, well, that can wait. It's not important anyhow. All that mattered that sunny morning was – *The Man*.

I should say to you straightaway that our kind usually do what we do and then move on. Yet that day, something made me keep on following. Even after my task was complete. And that one thought changed everything. My whole life. And yours, too.

STORY
STAKES

This is what happened. I was standing outside the Crossed Keys pub. By the door. Well, they'd never let me into the bar. Not then. Too young. Besides, by the door is a good place to wait. So many people passing by, so many lives to change.

The High Street in Chipping Barnet is on a hill and the Crossed Keys pub is about halfway between the underground station at the bottom and the old church at the top. It's a steep walk up and people normally take it slowly but when I saw The Man, he'd already passed the Post Office. Getting faster and faster with every step. That pounding stride men have when they're late for something. Yes, it's the ones who rush who can be the worst.

I didn't know when the harm would come or what it would be. We never do. But I did know it was vital to stop *The Man* and *The Accident* coming together in *Time*. You see, that is what our kind do. We change Timepaths. We hinder. Block. Impede.

Retrospective Narration

Use of Past Tense

THE TIME THAT NEVER WAS

TASK
ACTION

Or simply just get in your way. And it's those precious seconds that will save you from whatever danger is ahead. That is the gift our kind offer humans. Or try to.

Oh, but this guy – *The Man* – *is quick*. Only a few steps away now. I need to stop him before it happens.

But what delay to use?

Dropped wallet?

No, left that back at the empty house.

Shoelaces undone?

Not an option. Today I'm wearing slip-ons. And I'm only a boy, so can't ask for a light. Not that I smoke or ever would.

Oh no, he's about to pass me.

Yeah, there he goes.

But what's that he's carrying across his shoulders? A holdall? I hadn't noticed it before. Looks heavy. A tool bag, I think. I'm guessing he's on his way to work. Even on a Saturday morning.

Oh, but I should've stopped him by now.

Yes, I could just bump into him but the pavement's bursting with people and it's his Timepath alone I must alter, no one else's.

I walk close behind him, matching his every step. That tool bag of his has slipped a bit down his back and now I can see a wooden handle sticking out. A hammer, I suppose. No, too heavy. He'd feel me take it. And our kind must avoid being noticed. What else is there? Pieces of copper pipe. He's a plumber, I guess.

Wait... is that a metal file?

Yeah, that would work. He'd hear that when it hit the ground.

But do it quick, *William*, do it quick. Whatever is about to happen to *The Man* could happen any second.

I'm just a pace behind him. I fix my eyes on that metal file sticking out of his holdall. Tricky, but possible. Don't think he'll be able to tell it was me, not with so many distractions.

Just ahead there's someone in a pink rhino costume, collecting with a charity bucket. Hah! My plumber does a side-step to avoid it. But that's good because now I have a chance to reach inside.

Use of Historical Present

William tends to use italics when he is having internal questioning with himself

TASK
ACTIONTASK
ACTION

THE TIME THAT NEVER WAS

Yeah, I was right, it's rough and scratchy. A workman's file. I carefully pull it away with my fingers and then gently let it drop to the pavement.

My idea was good. The Man should have heard it clang and so turned back to pick it up. Those seconds would have been enough. But that never happened because, right at the wrong moment, a car blasted its horn and the clang was drowned out.

Why do humans rush so much? Always battling against Time. Yes, there he goes, marching on.

I've said it's best if our kind don't draw too much attention to ourselves, but there are moments when we have no choice. Like right now.

'Hey, Mister!' I call. 'You've dropped something.'

My plumber half turns his head but still carries on walking, so I pick it up and shout, 'This metal file. It fell out your bag!'

Has he heard me? Yes, he's stopped.

At last, The Man's Timepath has been altered.

'Thanks, mate!'

Australian. *I didn't expect that.* Not sure why.

Of course, it would have been better if he had come to me – extra seconds always help – but no, he was one of those that just stood there so it was up to me to walk up the hill and hand the file over.

'Life of their own, these,' said the Aussie. 'Second one gone walkabout this week.'

I watched as my plumber put his metal file securely back in his bag.

'Cheers, kid,' he said. And with that, he was on his way up the hill again.

Well, that should have been it. *Timeline changed. Task complete. Move on.* Yet that day my eyes stayed on him and I saw what I hoped I would not see: he started to run.

Oh no, The Man was trying to make up the Time he'd lost. The precious seconds I'd just given him.

Reflective

Reflective

UNEXPECTED
OUTCOMETASK
ACTIONTASK
ACTIONTASK
ACTION

THE TIME THAT NEVER WAS

This sometimes happens. But you accept it. You've done what you had to do and should do no more. That's just the way things are. If The Man wishes to catch up with Time, then so be it. He doesn't know that today Time will not be his friend. Nor that those precious seconds I gave him would have saved his life –

Hang on a second... What was that? Save his life! Where did that thought come from? And how could I know? Because our kind never know.

This isn't right. Not right at all. We change Timepaths, but to feel what will happen next – the fate we're saving you from – impossible. Never had I had such thoughts before. Yet now I did. Somehow, I knew.

The Man is running to his death.

What to do? Turn and go? But how can I? I mean, this a human life at stake. Yet to run after him would go against everything I'd ever done before.

So, what would it be, up the hill or down? Scurry away or follow? Well, sometimes in life there never really is a choice.

As soon as I chased after him, I knew in that moment that my world would never be the same again. I couldn't tell you why. Just felt it inside. I could not yet know the battles I would live through or the horrors I would witness. Nor how I would become somebody I never expected to be. Perhaps you think I'm making too much of such a moment, but I tell you, I'm not, because, as my story will reveal – *just one thought can change everything.*

I'm tall for my age, not as fit like some of the lads at school, but I can run fast when I need to. As I do now.

Bit too quick. Nearly knock over a small boy. Oh, but he's too busy pretending to shoot his daddy with a toy pistol so doesn't see me. I have to swerve though, and when I do, I bump into the postman with his sack of letters. He does see me. And what a strange look I get.

As I dash and dart among the shoppers, I catch sight of my plumber. He's now nearing the top of the hill where there's a

STORY
STAKES

FORESHADOWING

SAVE
THE MAN
ACTION

THE TIME THAT NEVER WAS

SAVE
THE MAN
ACTION

bend in the road and the street turns. Opposite is the old church, looking grey and tired. Along its wall are roadworks with men in yellow hats digging a deep trench. Good, it's blocked off that side, plus the temporary traffic lights are now on green, which means my plumber can't cross.

Yes, I'm right. My Man has had to stop by the coffee shop. *But wait, maybe this is where whatever it is will happen.*

SAVE
THE MAN
ACTION

I feel something... and it's getting stronger... stronger than anything I've sensed before. Oh no! Death is right there waiting for him. *But how will it happen?* No, no, I can't sense that yet...

Not that I can do anything about it because I'm still a bit of a distance from The Man. Plus there's a crowd of people in the way.

I try and ease myself between the Saturday shoppers who, like him, are waiting for those lights to change. And as I do, I glance into the coffee shop full of Saturday mums and dads and their playful toddlers. An old lady in a big purple hat with her back to me moves a pram away from the door so she can leave.

SAVE
THE MAN
ACTION

But what I see stops me in my tracks. A reflection in the coffee shop front window. The glass is slightly angled so the window acts like a mirror and what it reflects isn't so much the church opposite, but its roof and the sky above, bright and open. And right now something is hurtling down through the air, heading straight towards the church. It's big. A rock? No, it's gleaming white with jagged edges. More like a crystal.

Then I realise – ice! A huge boulder of ice. And it's about to hit the church roof.

What's strange, as I think back now, is that it seemed as if my mind's eye were witness to what would happen even before it struck. I could see it all – the crystalline ice would pierce a hole in the slates as if it were a bullet. The wound would be deep, but there'd be no yawning gash, for the hit would be precise and exact. Almost as if the ice had known all along the job it had to do.

Someone I was yet to meet would often tell me that all human life was at the mercy of the next tile that fell. Ah, but you must

Retrospective Narration

FORESHADOWING

THE TIME THAT NEVER WAS

wait to hear from her. Yet she was right. *Chance is everywhere.*

I now spin around from that reflection in the coffee shop window and see the impact of the ice on the church roof for real. The roof tiles are already falling everywhere and the workmen below are forced to clamber out of their trench. Those yellow hats won't be enough to save them. In the scramble, a workman knocks over a sign that says: DANGER: EXPOSED ELECTRICAL CABLES.

But what happened next, I did not foresee, for from the sky now comes a huge boulder that strikes the tarmac right in front of me, scattering ice like diamonds.

There's screaming all around. From a mother with an already crying child. From a little girl who, without thought, lets go of her balloon. From a man too drunk even to know why he is even screaming. The postman I bumped into earlier now stands beside me. He doesn't scream, just stares ahead, a letter yet to be delivered in his hand.

People don't know where to turn. And nor do I, but through the many cries I hear something only I could. Another strike of ice. Smaller than the first two but with it comes danger... No, more than danger: *Death*.

I can feel it. The Man is about to die and only I can save him.

STORY
STAKES

The last line of a chapter should ideally make you want to turn the page and read on as 'What happens next?' is of key importance in any story.

CHAPTER TWO

The First Attack

FORESHADOWING

SAVE
THE MAN
ACTION

THE STRIKE FROM the sky on the church roof had startled everyone and the crash onto the tarmacked road brought panic, but in the commotion no one but me had heard that third hit of ice on the roof of the coffee shop. And that was the moment I knew it would be a falling tile from that roof above us that would kill The Man. For it would land exactly where The Man was standing. Where he is will be where he'll die.

Without thought, just the instinct that makes us who we are, I grab at his tool bag and pull it towards me. The Australian is strong and fit, but that unexpected tug does what it was meant to do. He loses his balance and falls backwards. A split second later the tile flies by, passing before his eyes like the blade of a guillotine. The grey tile then crashes onto the hard Yorkstone paving and shatters into a dozen harmless fragments.

And all my plumber says is, 'Jeez!'

Well, he was an Aussie. So that was that. My job, I thought, was finally done. I could walk away and that would be that. Oh, but how wrong I was. For in truth, a whole new life was about to begin.

TURNING
POINT

You see, in the reflection of the window, I saw another loosened tile on the church roof beginning to pull itself away. Most of the others had landed harmlessly on a pile of rubble nearby, yet, as this last one slid over the ridge of the roof, it was as if it already knew its target, for it shot through the air, pointing like an arrow with its aim in sight. And, as it disappeared into the trench, a cold wave of fear washed over me.

THE TIME THAT NEVER WAS

It was then it happened.

That flash. Blinding. Penetrating. Like lightning. Only... not lightning.

Something more powerful. Something somehow released. And with that burst of light, came a menacing noise, like the cracking of a whip.

My eyes adjusted. It was then I realised. That strange and frightening light just now hadn't come from the sky. No, its genesis was that dugout pit beside the church.

There is a change here in how William is perceiving things. What he is therefore describing in this section is, as it were, what he is seeing in his 'mind's eye'.

Creeping and threatening, out from that hollow ground emerged two lengths of electrical cable; spewing sparks. Each had a severed end like the mouth of a snake and the flares spat out were not white and pure but green and vicious. These cables, muddied orange in colour, now twisted and curled – *as if alive!* Not really cables at all but two venomous vipers in battle.

One rose high in the air and struck its coiled twin down with a blistering bolt, but its foe fought back with its own strike and once more they were evenly matched. The first rose up high again and then hit its rival with such a mighty blast that it fell back, shaken and wounded. The attacker then moved in for the kill, with a vicious bolt cracking through its opponent's head. The victor now raised itself higher, twisting this way and that, as if on the lookout for fresh prey.

The cable snake grew tall and lifted itself high above us all. It was clearly able to strike out at any moment and in any direction, and so much so, that those nearby could do nothing but watch in helpless desperation. Among them, that postman, still gripping his letter, and the little girl who had lost her balloon. Only now she was terrified.

'Whaaaaah! Wah!' she cries.

Don't do that, I think, or the serpent will notice you.

Too late, it has, for it now moves towards her, spitting venom.

'Abhssss! Abhhsss! Ahaaarrssssshhrrrrr!'

The serpent's mouth widens, as if ravenous and ready to kill.

THE TIME THAT NEVER WAS

Is the viper about to strike?

Yes, it is! I turn away in horror. And yet again I see it all in the reflection of the coffee shop window. The cable, snake, or whatever it was, strikes and in an instant the little girl becomes no more than charred and blackened cinders.

I feel a deep empty pain within me, the like of which I have never lived before. A dark shadow spreads far and wide that seems to last beyond forever.

But then everything suddenly stopped. And I mean, really stopped. No noise, no movement. Not from anywhere. Not from anyone. It was as if people all around me had become cast in fear like statues.

I then turned away from the coffee shop window, but as I did, the world came alive again – and there was the little girl. Living and breathing!

How to explain the impossible? Had Time somehow moved backwards? Or had what I'd seen in the window reflection been some sort of a vision?

But there was no time to make sense of it, for the cable snake was already on the move. After a bend and a stretch, it began to advance in my direction, with its head pointing straight at me. Only then it began to swivel its neck, as if examining and curious.

All of a sudden, it turned away and fixed its glare instead on the postman who, without thought for himself, now grabbed the little girl and flung her behind him. She screamed and screamed and screamed some more but at least now seemed safe from further harm. The postman then took his sack from his shoulders and threw it to the pavement. He opened his arms wide as if to say to the devouring monster, 'Take me, not the child!'

The cable snake swung its head from side to side, as if, this time, deciding what to do next. 'Will I? Won't I?', it appeared to be thinking. It then stretched itself to full height – and spat out a vile green blast of light.

Again, I spun about in fear, for again, I couldn't watch. Yet once

INTERNAL
QUESTIONING:
Trying to make
sense of the
mystery

THE TIME THAT NEVER WAS

more I saw what was happening in that strange window mirror of the coffee shop. The poor postman – not old, not young, nor thin, nor fat, just, I thought, an ordinary everyday man – was no match for that flashing rod of lightning. It pierced his chest with a strike so powerful I could hear bones break. Scorched and seared, his body then suddenly splattered into a mass of burning red and black.

In that moment it was not pain or grief I felt but a strange absence. A loss of something not yet understood. And then once more, everything froze. There, right in front of me, was the exploding body of the postman, suspended in mid-air. The world again had become a landscape of petrified silence.

What was happening? Had the minutes and seconds somehow – I don't know – stopped? Or was I in some sort of Circle of Time?

I was so confused, I didn't know what to think. The reflections in the coffee shop window couldn't be true, yet they felt so real. None of this was happening and yet it was. All I knew for sure was that never had I been so afraid.

Perhaps, I thought, if I close my eyes it'll go away.

So I do. But now I feel an unearthly bitter cold more frightening than whatever was in front of me. I open them again and turn from the window.

The impossible has happened once more. The postman, back on his feet and alive. The little girl, still there, and still screaming.

The only way I can describe all this is that it was as if *The Now*, the moment we live in, was ever changing. As if Time itself was somehow shifting between *What Is* and *What Could Be*. At least that's what I thought. I wish I could explain it better, but I can't. What I can tell you is it felt like the beginning of madness.

Then I sensed it. The way our kind do. Something truly terrible was about to happen...

Oh no... was it my own life that was about to end?

Would the next strike be my *Now*? Not the little girl's, not the postman's. Mine. If I'm struck down there'll be no coming back for me. Better that way, I think, because it is for the human

William is still trying to make sense of what it is that he has been seeing in his head.

THE TIME THAT NEVER WAS

world that our kind exist. Yes, I might look like a boy, a young lad you might see every day, but I am not what I seem. Besides, my short life has been lived unnoticed and unwanted. There's little to leave behind. The house I left this morning was – and always is – empty. Loveless, too. Few will miss my passing.

And so I shut my eyes again and accept my fate. I then sense the snake coming nearer and nearer.

Oh, it's close, so very close!

Yet nothing happens. I open my eyes. The snake pulls away. I watch as it jerks its head side to side then up and down.

What's it doing? It's almost like it's mocking me. Laughing even.

That head now twists itself towards the mother and her crying child, then back to the postman, as if to say, 'I can take her if I like. Or him.'

But then it stills. It has decided. The cable snake rises high and lurches back upon itself. And strikes! It's scarred and molten mouth flies past my head to attack whoever stands behind me. I turn.

It is The Man! The plumber.

But as look again I see the snake hasn't aimed at his body – more his bag of metal tools. There's a sudden blazing green light as the snake's mouth hits its target. The canvass bag explodes in incandescent flames. The plumber is thrown back by the shock.

I reach out to help, and for all I know I do touch him, but I feel nothing except a tingle as he speeds by. His body lands on the Yorkstone slabs. Is he alive or dead? I cannot tell. Is it pain or loss I feel? Neither. Just defeat. Somehow, I've been tricked.

Just for a moment I have hope. Perhaps, I think, Time will shift once more and the *Now* will change again and I will see the plumber back on his feet as I had with the postman and the little girl.

But that *Now* does not happen. And Time moves on.

The dirty coil has done its worst and it slowly drops to the earth. Its severed end lands where the ice had fallen on the road. Sparks fly, briefly, as it makes contact with the melting water. And then it seems to die. No more a snake, just a grubby, muddy orange cable.

TASK ACTION
TO SAVE
THE MAN
HAS FAILED

THE TIME THAT NEVER WAS

Back to normal
perception
with a bang!

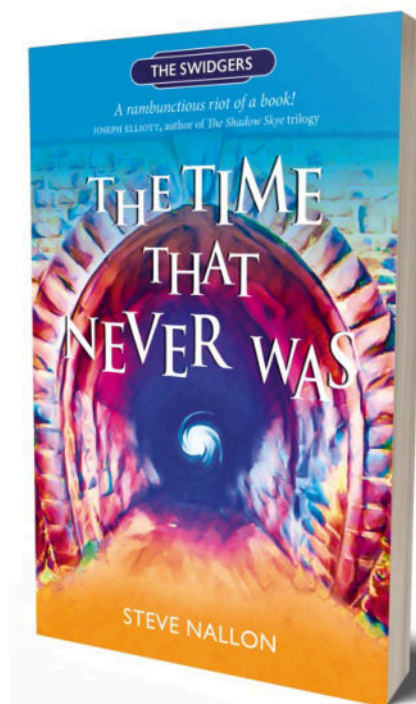
Then – *SMACK!*

A hit. Like one almighty punch. Something heavy landing on my head. A yellow hat comes running towards me. No, two yellow hats. I blink.

There's something in my eye. A thick, blurry crimson. I wipe my face. My hands are red. Blood? I fall. And as I do, I wonder, 'Will anyone even come to my funeral?'

And with that final thought the blurry crimson fades and is replaced by blackness.

It's not unusual for the main character in a fantasy tale to have a death-like experience early in the story and William in **THE SWIDGERS** is no exception.



A SWIDGER TIME ADVENTURE

The Time That Never Was
Book One in the Series

STEVE NALLON



Luath Press Limited

EDINBURGH

www.luath.co.uk

The Gothic Story World

Exploring the Gothic Tradition and its Legacy

Summary: The talk considers the rise of the Gothic, its settings, motifs, tropes, recurring character archetypes, themes, and philosophy. There's a look, too, at its literary style and the seminal exponents of the genre as well as Gothic's continuing legacy in modern day popular culture.

Year Groups: The talk is adaptable across a range of ages and year groups, including KS3, KS4 and KS5.

Main Takeaway: The core insight of the class is how the Gothic combines narrative, philosophy, style, and symbolism into a whole organic form.

The Age of Reason in the eighteenth century gave rise to a world where science and rationality began to take the place of mythology and superstition. Yet, this same era also saw the burgeoning of the supernatural Gothic in both literature and art. 'Why so?' asks the talk. Was it an emotional pushback against reason, the appeal of the sublime aesthetic of 'delightful horror' as set out by Edmund Burke, or simply that what appears unfathomable always leaves open the possibility of the supernatural? The talk explores these questions before moving on to consider the specific story tropes and characters of the Gothic tale, including ancestral curses, the persecuted heroine, incarceration, hauntings, revenge, dark secrets, dreams, madness, abusive male power, the stylistic use of heightened prose, coded language, and symbols. Here paintings by Goya, Blake, and Doré are offered as visual illustrations of Gothic iconography and the philosophy behind 'The Sleep of Reason'. There's also a look at the way Gothic architectural spaces became such an integral part of the Gothic narrative

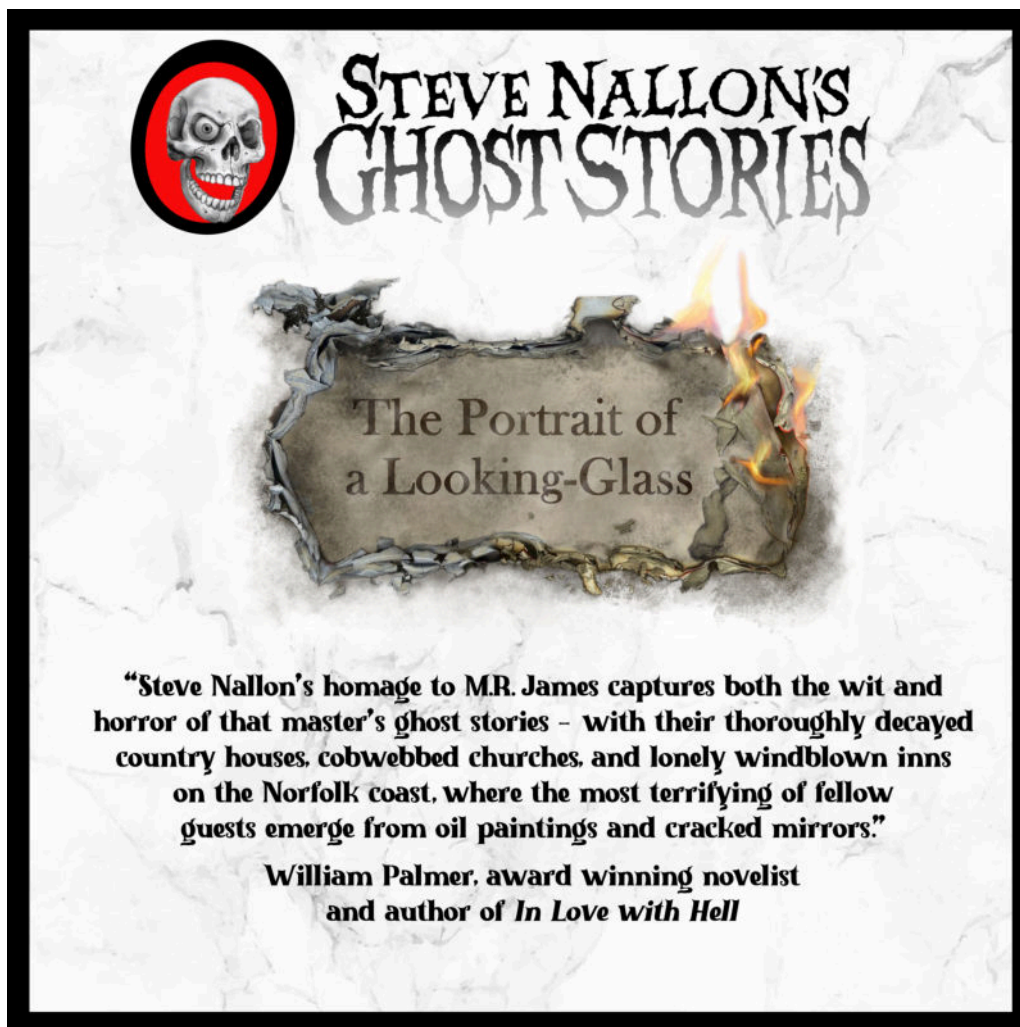


Both classic and modern tales are discussed, including Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*, Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber*, Susan Hill's *The Woman in Black*, Edgar Allan Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher*, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, and Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* and *Great Expectations*. Other key Gothic writers who feature in Steve's talk include Emily Brontë, Sheridan Le Fanu, Thomas Gray, Oscar Wilde, Matthew Lewis, Mary Shelley, Daphne du Maurier, Arthur Conan Doyle, M.R. James, Ann Radcliffe, Shirley Jackson, Stephenie Meyer, Patrick Ness, and Sarah Waters.



In the early twentieth century, the Gothic tradition has expanded its reach and now includes numerous subgenres across various forms and media. The talk considers the Fairy Tale Gothic (Guillermo del Toro's movie *Pan's Labyrinth*); English Gothic (the classic horror movies of Hammer Studios); Gothic Romance (*The Phantom of the Opera* and *La Belle et la Bête*); Urban Gothic (DC Comics' *Batman*); American Gothic (Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane*, Stephen King's *The Shining*); Southern Gothic (Toni

Morrison's *Beloved*, Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*); Spoof Gothic ('The New Yorker' cartoon *The Addams Family* and Richard O'Brien's *The Rocky Horror Show*); and the Gothic in opera and musical theatre (Béla Bartók's opera *Bluebeard's Castle* and Stephen Sondheim's *Sweeney Todd*). The presentation concludes by looking at how Gothic motifs and iconography are now embedded in popular culture, ranging from Goth fashion and lifestyle, to the design of the space vessel 'Nostromo' in the movie *ALIEN*, as well as its representation in Scooby-Doo cartoons, the Harry Potter novels and pretty much every Tim Burton movie.





Exploring Dickens's Classic Tale of Time

Summary: *A Christmas Carol* has a fascinating history and Steve's presentation delves into how this 'Ghostly little book', as Dickens called it, became such an immediate success and why it remains a beloved seasonal favourite to this day. A 21 Story Steps Guide of *A Christmas Carol* is also an option for the talk.

Year Groups: The talk is primarily aimed at those studying *A Christmas Carol* as a set text in Year 10 and Year 11 (ages 14 to 16) as part of KS4.

Main Takeaway: The core insight of the class is understanding exactly what Scrooge means when he says, "*I shall live in the Past, Present and Future*". All themes and narrative action culminate in this commitment, and so being aware of its values and principles becomes central to comprehending the text.

Dickens's novella first arrived in Victorian bookshops in December 1843. The decade was known as 'The Hungry Forties' and so the talk begins with the historical context of a financial depression and challenging social problems of the era. Each leading player of the tale is then considered, with particular focus on how visual imagery and metaphor give vitality to Dickens's characters.

The talk next considers the key role of 'fancy' in how Scrooge must change his very way of thinking in order to become his new self. The presentation also explores the importance of memory and the nature of time as expressed in the narrative. Life as a prison is one of the underlying metaphors of *A Christmas Carol*, so the talk examines how Dickens uses the concept of imprisonment in the story. There's an examination too of the many Gothic motifs and tropes that feature in the tale. Dickens's narrative style is sometimes described as 'cinematic'. The talk explores

what this means, offers examples, and puts forward the theory that many of the visual techniques that Dickens makes use of in his writing, such as suddenly jumping from one scene to another or the alteration in form and size of the spectres, come from his passion for magic lantern and phantasmagoria shows.

Dickens may not have been a church-going man, yet his social Christian ethics are reflected and embedded in his tale. The talk considers these, plus the narrative purpose of the many biblical references that can be found throughout the tale. The economics of *A Christmas Carol* are also discussed, as are the specific theories of Thomas Malthus that were openly disparaged by Dickens in the story.

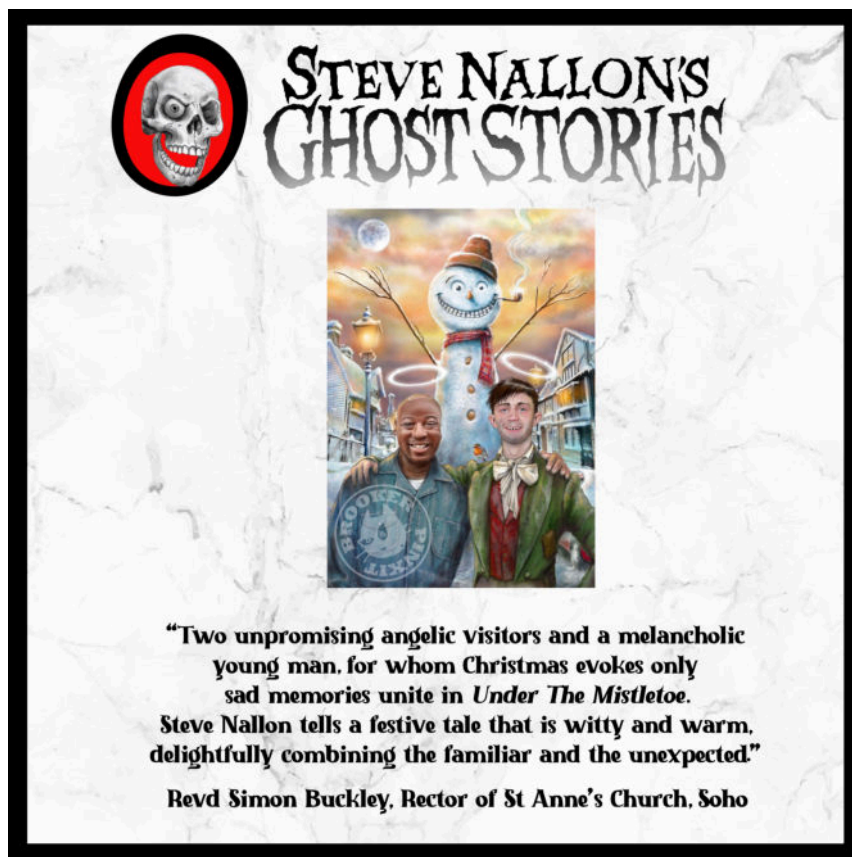
Supernatural storytelling in winter has ancient folklore roots, but it is fair to say that Dickens popularised the annual Christmas tale for the growing urban readership of his day. Steve's talk therefore includes a look at some of Dickens's other Yuletide stories, and indeed the whole tradition of the ghost story at Christmas.

The aim of the talk is to inspire as well as inform and so if pupils have a better understanding of what Scrooge means when he says, "*I shall live in the Past, Present and Future*" then the central purpose of the talk will have been achieved. And, as Tiny Tim said, "God Bless Us, Every One!"



Reading and Writing – Key stage 4

Steve Nallon's talk on *A Christmas Carol* is especially useful for Key Stage 4. The curriculum specifically states that pupils should be able to understand and evaluate texts by drawing on knowledge of the writing's purpose, audience, and context. This includes its social, historical, and cultural context, its themes and ideas, and the literary tradition to which it belongs. KS4 also states that pupils should be able to select and organise ideas, facts and key points, and in doing so cite evidence to back up their arguments and conclusions from wider reading. With all these criteria in mind, ***A Christmas Carol: Teacher's Handbook*** offers detailed extracts, quotes, and references that are discussed in the talk. These cover not only Dickens's wider writing, but also various documents from other published material that influenced Dickens's intentions and purposes in writing the tale. The handbook also includes a **21 Story Steps Guide** to *A Christmas Carol*.

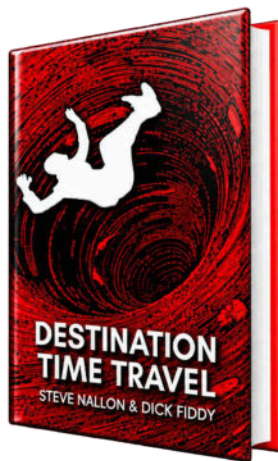




Following Steve's class, *A Christmas Carol: Teacher's Handbook* – with detailed extracts, references and quotes covered in the talk – is made available for teaching staff as a PDF. This teacher's handbook is an in-depth exploration of *A Christmas Carol*, with expansive chapters on **THE CHARACTERS OF THE TALE**, its many **THEMES AND MOTIFS**, plus sections on **THE ECONOMICS OF 'A CHRISTMAS CAROL'** and **DICKENS'S CINEMATIC WRITING STYLE**.

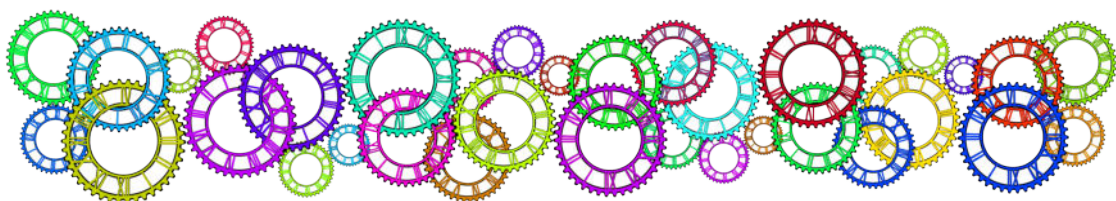
In **THE CHARACTERS OF THE TALE** each leading player of the story is considered, with particular focus on how visual imagery and metaphor give vitality to Dickens's characters. In **THEMES AND MOTIFS** the section called **The Fancy of Imagination** examines how important the concept of 'fancy' was to Dickens and why Scrooge has to change his very rigid and linear way of thinking in order to become his new self. **Memory and Reflection** considers the emotional human value in the remembrances of times past that can be found throughout Dickens's work, especially his writing concerning the Christmas season. **Life as a Prison** takes one of the strong underlying metaphors of *A Christmas Carol*, namely a sense of incarceration and confinement, and examines how Dickens applies the concept of imprisonment to various aspects of his story. Following on from this, there's a section examining how Dickens makes use of **Gothic Motifs**, especially horror, death and the supernatural. The section on **Time** asks what exactly does Scrooge mean when he says he will live "*in the Past, the Present, and the Future*"; and **Dickens's Ethical and Spiritual Christianity** reflects on the writer's personal view of faith and charity and how it is expressed and embedded in the story.

In **THE ECONOMICS OF 'A CHRISTMAS CAROL'** there's a wide-ranging look at the financial backdrop to the tale, the controversies the publication raised, and Dickens's response to his critics in one of his subsequent Christmas stories. **DICKENS'S CINEMATIC WRITING STYLE** considers Dickens's visual style of writing, which in some ways seems to anticipate the techniques of modern cinema. Of course Charles Dickens died many years before the medium was invented, but he was aware of magic lantern and phantasmagoria shows and had a strong passion for both. This section of the handbook therefore considers Dickens's prose style in this context, looking specifically at scene transitions, the way the spectres alter in form and size, and those narrative sections that are presented as a series of vignettes much like a cinematic montage sequence.



A Christmas Carol ***Dickens's Time Travel Tale***

In the opening chapter of *Destination Time Travel*, co-written by Steve Nallon and Dick Fiddy of the British Film Institute, there's a detailed consideration of Dickens's *A Christmas Carol* as a foundational time travel tale. The chapter examines *A Christmas Carol* alongside the movie *Back to the Future* and compares the different ways the two tales explore the concept of time travel.



- Young Adult Fiction -

Change and Discovery at the Story FunFair

Summary: Steve Nallon's talk 'Young Adult Fiction – Change and Discovery at the Story Funfair' considers three key areas of YA fantasy fiction, namely maturation, learning, and entertainment. The talk looks, too, at where creative ideas come from and the practical process of writing.

Year Groups: The talk is suitable for year groups across KS3, KS4, and KS5.

Main Takeaways: The first is how the 'otherness' of fantasy fiction has, throughout history, played a crucial part in shaping the psychology of young adults, and the second is the way ideas often originate in real-life incidents and how pupils can, from such experiences, create their own imaginative fiction.

Steve begins the talk by asking pupils to think of an odd event they witnessed or unusual behaviour they observed. There is then an undertaking that later on in the talk the class will take some of these odd incidents and explore how they might be creatively turned into a fantasy fiction tale.

At this developing stage in the life of the young teenager, there isn't much that they can change about the circumstances of their everyday life – whether at school, at home, or even socially. However, what a child *can* do is begin to make choices and decisions about who they wish to be, and fantasy fiction can play its part in change and development. Tales of awakening, transitioning, and maturation have been around for centuries. Many often involve a journey to a threatening world, and it's here, away from social rules and restrictions, that characters are forced to explore the full spectrum of their capabilities. It's by facing up to the challenges of such dark worlds that protagonists find out who they are – and this introduces us to one of the key ideas in Young Adult fiction: 'becoming'. But how is change brought about within the tale itself?

Universal folklore and mythology have a shared path, and this is true as well for much coming-of-age fantasy fiction. In a typical maturation story, a young person discovers within themselves or is given or offered a special power or artefact. It is then revealed to the Hero (here used as a gender neutral term) that this gift, be it internal or external, is desired by a Dark Force that is prepared to kill the Hero in order to possess it. At first, the Hero is often reluctant to take on the responsibility (the 'Refusal of the Call') but circumstances or events inevitably make the challenge necessary or unavoidable.

Usually early on in the tale, the Hero meets a Mentor figure who offers guidance, and they might also encounter friendly allies. At this stage in the tale, the Hero may well be gifted talismans or magical tokens that could be useful on the adventure. These items are sometimes known in story theory as the 'Donor's Gift'.

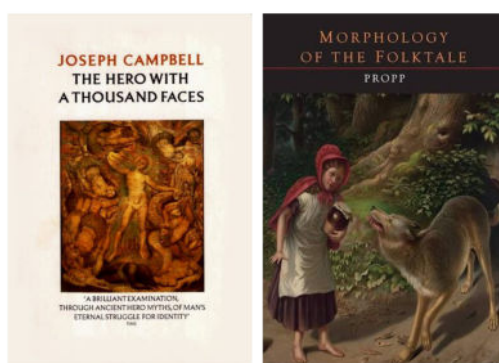
The Hero usually faces or is given some sort of task or assignment, and this often involves a journey to what writers call the 'Special World'. In certain stories this journey made possible by way of a magic portal or threshold, but if not, there is usually some sort of symbolic crossing over, perhaps by way of a bridge, river, or cave entrance, to mark the physical beginning of the expedition.

In this new, unfamiliar, and dangerous environment, the Hero will encounter obstacles and there'll be trials to overcome. The Mentor figure and Allies may be there to help, but in the end, the Hero must confront that Dark Force on their own, in battle, be it mental or physical. At this stage in the story, the Hero often goes through a kind of death experience, often at the hands of the seemingly victorious Dark Force. However, by finding a strength from within, the Hero ultimately triumphs. And it's this rite-of-passage victory, and the discovery of that inner potency, that takes the Hero on the next step towards adulthood.

Does all this sound familiar? Well, you can find this basic structure with variations throughout fantasy fiction, in stories featuring characters called Luke Skywalker, Dorothy Gale, Katniss Everdeen, Aladdin, Frodo Baggins, Harry Potter, Lyra Belacqua, and indeed, the Hero of THE SWIDGERS, William Arthur. In each case, but in individual ways, the boundaries of what the reluctant child believes themselves capable are

challenged, or even pushed to an extreme, in order that the full rainbow spectrum of their potential can be accepted and embraced. Such archetypal coming-of-age tales can be found across the globe and across history, and so, not surprisingly, many theories have been put forward to explain this recurring structure.

A well-known explanation comes from the psychologist Carl Jung, who argued that human beings share what he called a ‘collective unconscious’, which is populated by universal symbols and archetypes, including The Shadow (the Dark Force) and The Wise Man or Great Mother (The Mentor). These resonate with all human beings because, he suggests, we are telling each other essentially the One Story: The Human Story. Other thinkers in this area of story theory are Joseph Campbell, author of *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, who gave us the terms ‘Special World’ and ‘Refusal of the Call’, and the Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp, who wrote the book *Morphology of the Folktale*, and who formulated the terms ‘Donor’s Gift’, ‘False Hero’ and ‘Dispatcher’ (the character who sends the Hero on their mission). Incidentally, YA fiction is not the only type of story to use this basic structure, for it’s also a narrative pattern that’s there in the James Bond 007 adventures, except it’s the villain who has the power.



Pupils attending the talk are then asked if they’ve ever pulled someone back when a car was about to hit them or pushed them away from a path with falling debris. If so, says Steve, they could be a ‘Swidger’ like William Arthur in the time adventure book series THE SWIDGERS. This leads to a discussion around the way writers often use their own life experience as a starting point for imaginative fiction.

In Steve's case, it was an incident where, after a brief delay talking to a stranger, he came home slightly later than he intended but in doing so just missed a heavy slate tile that fell from his roof. Had it not been for that delay, he very likely would have been killed. That seemingly chance encounter that saved him from a potentially fatal incident stayed with Steve, and from this experience came the idea of the 'Swidger' – one who can sense future disasters and so acts to alter a person's timeline to prevent injury. That was the initial concept, and from that developed the specific nature of our young Swidger, the setting, the dark force that would pursue him, and the central plot action. For example, Steve decided that William Arthur, as a cosmic being, would be unable to tell an untruth or do any harm or act violently against another. His age is unspecified in the book, but it is clearly suggested he is approaching puberty. As mentioned, it's not unusual for such a coming-of-age character to have a mentor figure. Mentor, Steve explains, was the name of the man in Homer's *Odyssey* who took Telemachus, the young son of Odysseus, under his wing. Except that Mentor wasn't a man at all; 'he' was the goddess Athena in disguise. Anyway, in *THE SWIDGERS* William's mentor is based on Steve's Yorkshire grandmother, a tough-love northern matriarch, born in 1906, six years before the 'RMS Titanic' sank. 'Granny', as she calls herself in the story, is no-nonsense and strong-willed but also very funny. She sees that William is full of self-doubt but recognises as well his curiosity and insightful way of thinking. It's revealed that William Arthur is an orphan, as many are in such stories (think here of Harry, Luke, and Dorothy), and in meeting Granny, William becomes a rescued child, though some element of trauma from being alone and unwanted remains with him.

Throughout the first book, *The Time That Never Was*, our hero grows in confidence, challenges adult authority, and moves from self-doubt to self-reliance. Book two, *The Time They Saved Tomorrow*, continues the adventure. Without giving too much away, Granny and William begin to act more and more in partnership, with mutual respect for each other's strengths.

Next, the talk returns to the question set out earlier concerning unusual behaviour and strange incidents. For example, in a past class,

someone saw a woman on a crowded street walking along constantly looking down at the pavement and never ahead. Was the woman simply looking for money? If so, that could become a story of survival. However, there's always the possibility of a far more fantastical reason. Could it be, for example, that she's following a dog that's invisible to everyone but her? If so, where's the dog leading her? The point here is that every incident in life can be a potential kernel or scenario for a story. Steve then takes some real life examples offered up by those in the class and, with suggestions from all round the group, develops ideas and plots for a fantasy adventure.

At the conclusion of this interactive section of the class, Steve offers some examples of unusual real-life occurrences that led well-known novelists to write their fantasy stories:

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time by Mark Haddon. The sight of a neighbour's dog that had been brutally killed and impaled with a garden fork right in the middle of the lawn. The sadness and strangeness of this disturbing image served as the catalyst for the opening scene of the tale and title of the novel.

The Thief of Always by Clive Barker. A meticulously maintained mansion in a well-to-do neighbourhood that had an incredibly eerie, artificial atmosphere, with a strange, unseasonal air. This uncanny observation became the inspiration for 'Holiday House' into which children are lured and where each day features all four seasons, endless sweets, and Christmas every evening – only it's real purpose is as a trap to feed on their souls.

The War of the Worlds by H.G. Wells. The reading of a factual scientific report in the magazine 'Nature' in 1890s by a French astronomer detailing a 'strange light' blinking inexplicably on the surface of Mars. Wells took this cosmic anomaly ('I saw it. A reddish flash at the edge, the slightest projection of the outline just as the chronometer struck midnight') and turned it into an invasion of Earth ('An enormous hole had been made by the impact of the projectile, and the sand and gravel had been flung violently in every direction over the heath, forming heaps visible a mile and a half away'). As a political writer, Wells used the story as a way of critiquing British colonialism.



Children's stories with characters inspired by real life people include *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll (inspired by Alice Liddell, the daughter of Henry George Liddell, the Dean of Christ Church, Oxford, and a family friend of Carroll's); *Winnie-the-Pooh* by A. A. Milne (based on Milne's own son, Christopher Robin Milne, and his collection of stuffed animals); *Peter Pan* by J.M. Barrie (inspired by the Llewelyn Davies boys, a group of brothers, Barrie met while walking his dog in London's Kensington Gardens); and *Where the Wild Things Are* by Maurice Sendak (the monsters being affectionate caricatures of Sendak's own eccentric European immigrant relatives who often visited his childhood home). The point is that it's the instinct of the writer to take life experiences and mould them into stories.

Moving on from this, Steve next considers the concept of discovery in YA fiction. Any good book should introduce us to new subjects and ideas, but the key principle with YA fiction is that discovery should be active, not passive. Learning here isn't about details of history, but rather a fresh understanding that comes through the action of the tale. For example, the protagonist discovers that a key character isn't who they seem, or that their entire world view has been entirely false. What this means is that the reader, as with the hero, has to reassess all that came before. A massive reevaluation is needed in order to piece together an objective truth – and crucially, that requires an entirely new way of thinking. And this is one of the reasons why mystery stories and false identity tales are so hugely popular with young adult readers. Discovery isn't then just about finding a treasure, but rather a mental restructuring of all the events of the tale.

Following on from this point, Steve introduces the idea of ‘reader-response theory’, meaning, in general terms, the range of experiences a reader might have when immersed in the world of a fantasy novel. For example, there’s the idea of ‘walking in the shoes of others’, where the reader projects themselves into the experiences, actions, and thoughts of one of the characters, usually the protagonist. This is achieved by ‘embodied simulation’ where our brains via our ‘mirror neurons’, give us an internal echo of what’s happening to a character. Another concept is the ‘suture’ theory of reading fiction, where stylistic choices, such as short, snappy sentences, use of the historical present, and the subjective voice, ‘stitch us’ as it were, into the immediacy of scene so that we feel as if we are with the characters ourselves. Related to these theories is narrative empathy, which refers to the way a reader becomes absorbed by the tale and how that can lead to the understanding of another’s truth. It should be said, as well, that the plot itself, with its difficult choices and moral dilemmas, also allows readers to navigate emotional conflicts. Sometimes too a story can help with personal healing, for psychologists recognise that the so-called ‘safe space’ of fiction allows a developing child to deal with their own past traumas and inner turmoil. Essentially, what reader-response theory argues is that a fictional text is not a passive object; rather, it is created through the active interplay and psychological experience of the reader.

But let’s not get carried away with all this psychology, its deeper meanings, and complex functions, because the entertainment factor of a YA novel is essential too. What we’re talking about here is what you might call the ‘story funfair’ and the excitement of those thrills, bumps, and twists. And if there aren’t enough of these, the reader isn’t going to stay with the novel or even care about what happens next.

Steve next considers the huge impact the commercial success of the ‘Harry Potter’ novels had on Young Adult fiction. Publishing houses are still trying to secure the ‘next Harry Potter’, and as a result, YA fantasy has become very prescriptive concerning the way stories must be told and presented. Steve pushes back against this restrictive way of thinking, but nevertheless suggests that some basic advice might help pupils in their own creative writing.



First, consider character. If your hero is 'this' (whatever 'this' is), the plot action should take that character to the opposite of 'this' ('self-doubt' to 'self-reliance' in the case of William Arthur). And if you think in terms of 'this' to its opposite, your story will always have a clear trajectory to an end point. A popular piece of advice often offered by writers is to make the challenges faced by your lead character as difficult and as demanding as you can. However, as Steve points out, this works best if those challenges are directly related to the particular nature of your protagonist. In Steve's YA novels, because Swidgers are cosmic beings, they are incapable of lying and cannot ever be violent – and what this means is that William is forced to come up with ingenious ways of getting himself out of scrapes or dangerous situations.



As for the other characters in your story, it's useful to remember that we are all players in someone else's tale. Yes, you are the hero of your own life, but merely a secondary or even walk-on character in those of other people. So the advice here is to know the story inside out from everyone's perspective. As for the way characters talk, some practical advice is to speak aloud in different voices and, if you do that, the speech patterns and syntax will naturally come out differently.

A second basic point when putting together a fantasy tale is to set out what your rules are before writing your story. You can invent any story world you like, and your characters should be able to have any kind of existence you choose, but, once these are decided, it's crucial to stick to them and be consistent. *THE SWIDGERS* is a time-travelling tale and so, Steve explains, he had to create the tale's rules for time travel and how that would be possible well before writing began.

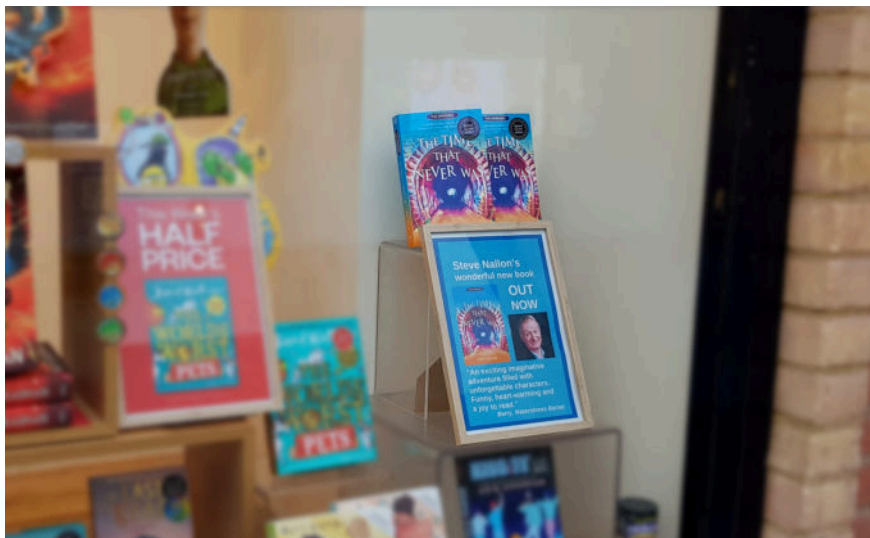


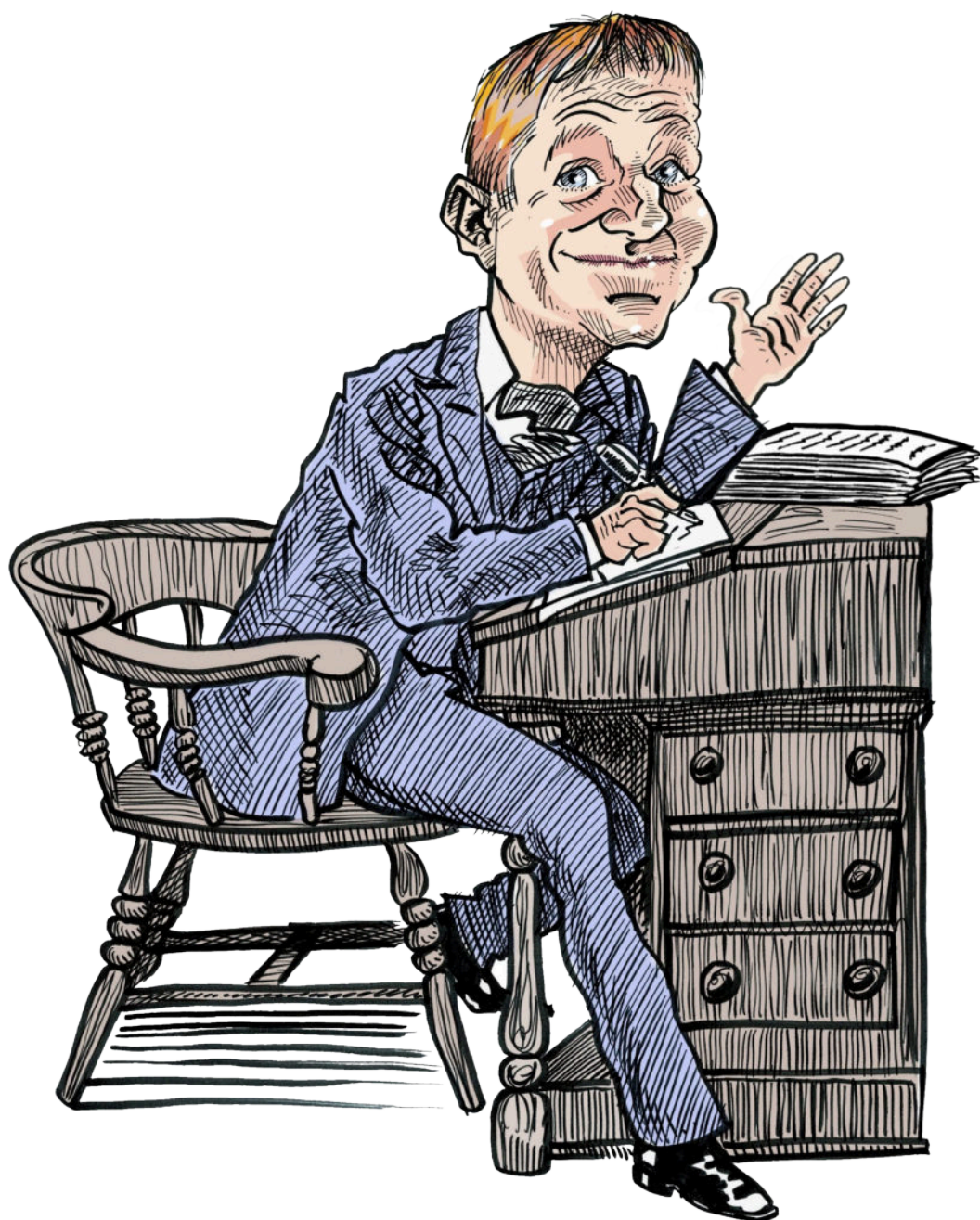
Related to the issue of preparation is the consideration of how the narrative is to be presented or told. Should it be written in third person narration or first person narration? Past tense or present tense, or a mixture of past and occasionally historical present? Again, these obviously need to be answered before a word is put to paper. Following on from that is the issue of style. Steve's attitude is that you shouldn't really be aware of or conscious of the writing as you read it. Ideally it should just flow. The style, incidentally, of *THE SWIDGERS* has been said to be cinematic, and this came about because Steve saw what was happening in the story in his head and put on paper how that action would be perceived through the eyes of young William. Anyway, some simple guidelines on style are: never use a word which isn't absolutely necessary and don't let the choice of words or expressions draw attention to themselves. Try not to start a paragraph or a sentence with the same word as the previous one. In fact, avoid any accidental word repeats, especially if the same word is used with two different meanings. That said, there is a rhetorical device called 'antanaclasis', where you intentionally repeat a word but it means something different the second time ("If you aren't fired with enthusiasm, you will be fired with enthusiasm"). Another is 'syllepsis', where one single word (usually a verb) governs two or more other parts of

a sentence but its meaning shifts between them (“She blew my nose and then she blew my mind.” — from The Rolling Stones hit song ‘Honky Tonk Women’). As Granny says in THE SWIDGERS, “Rules are like pie-crusts – they’re meant to be broken.”

A final issue if you’re writing a mystery story is that there’s always a balance to be had between revealing too little, which might leave the reader frustrated, and revealing too much, which would result in little or no suspense. As Wilkie Collins said, “Make ‘em, make ‘em cry, and then make ‘em... wait.”

Steve ends by saying that ultimately all any individual writer can do is say, ‘This is the way I do it.’ Advice is useful, but everyone is different, and not all ways of working will be suitable for every storyteller. On a practical note, some writers prefer to work in the mornings, some late at night. There are those writers who insist on producing a specific number of words per day; others prefer set hours with no word target. Some writers use longhand, some a keyboard, and there are even those who dictate their narrative in software that then produces a written text. Certain types of writers finish the whole book before attempting any rewrite, while others do rewrites as they go along. Everyone has their own system. There are no hard and fast rules to writing – and this applies to the creative process too.





'How to Make a Story...'

A Creative Interactive Workshop

Combining Story Structure and Imaginative Thinking

SUMMARY: An interactive class taking the key elements of a plot structure and using them as a springboard for students to come up with their own suggestions, and so create an original story there and then.

Year Groups: The class is adaptable for all ages and year groups across KS3, KS4, and KS5.

Main Take-away: How imagination and the mechanics of story can work hand in hand in the creative process.

The '**How to Make a Story...**' class first makes a distinction between 'story' and 'plot'. Following on from this, the key elements of a plot structure – 'Day of Change', 'Trigger for Action', 'The Plan', 'Time of Despair', 'Supreme Ordeal', 'Impossible Choice', 'Reverse Identity', 'Battle', 'Irreversible Climax', and 'Resolution' – are identified, explained and illustrated with examples. Next, these fundamental elements of plot are used as a springboard for students to come up with their own suggestions, and so create an original story.



Post-workshop: Steve puts together a summary of the skeleton plot originated during the class, and with it makes suggestions as to how students might develop the tale in their own creative writing. The essential primer to plot structure, as set out in the class (the **21 Story Steps Guide**), is then passed on to teachers, offering them the option of using it in further classwork. This manual is supported by a PowerPoint guide that offers examples and illustrations.



“We were delighted to celebrate our Year 7 and 8 students who have achieved Academic Status. As a reward for their hard work, these students enjoyed a truly inspiring session in the library with Steve Nallon, author of *The Time That Never Was*. It was a privilege to watch our students working on story creation with such a creative mind.”

David Martin, Headteacher of Katherine Warrington School, Harpenden.



Virtual Author Talk with Steve Nallon: An Inspiring Journey into Writing and Imagination

“On Friday, April 25th, 2025, as Book Week at International School of Havana drew to a close, middle school students welcomed British actor and writer, for an unforgettable virtual visit. Students learned about Steve’s fascinating books – *The Time That Never Was*, *The Time They Saved Tomorrow*, and the recent *Destination Time Travel* – all available in the library for curious explorers to discover.

“Steve captivated students with insights into the art of storytelling. He shared essential tips on crafting compelling stories, emphasizing the importance of planning, creating engaging elements, and writing in ways that challenge and hook readers. Students were inspired as Steve revealed how he approaches his writing process, offering practical strategies to ignite their own creativity.

“The highlight was a lively collaborative storytelling activity, where students teamed up with Steve to build a story from scratch. Guided by his expertise, they brainstormed characters and plot elements. This dynamic exercise demonstrated how storytelling is both an art and a fun adventure, empowering students to develop their voice and imagination. The event sparked a wave of enthusiasm for writing, reminding students that their stories matter and that with a little planning and imagination, they too can create worlds of their own. A huge thank you to Steve Nallon for such a masterclass. We all appreciated it.”

Irina González, International School of Havana, Cuba.



Student Feedback from The International School of Havana:

"I learned how to turn a blank sheet of paper into a story. The author really showed me that writing a story isn't just imagery; it's mindful."

"I liked the way he spoke with such passion and confidence, and how he provided ideas to those who asked questions."

"I think it was interesting because I had read one of his books. I liked that he talked to us because it can inspire some people to write stories. It was a very good experience."

"What I liked about the author talk was that we created a story together. We shared our ideas. Maybe, as feedback, we could write down the story we made."

"I like that he let us co-create the story of the girl that got accused of murder, but then the girl is innocent. There's conflict. In conclusion, I liked it because he showed us how he made his books and the video meeting was very interactive."

"I learnt how to make a mystery story."

"It was great. He used clear language that was easy to understand."

"The author gave us good writing advice."

"I loved it. It was very interesting because he talked about his books and how he wrote them. My favourite part was at the end, when someone said they wanted to write a story, and the author helped him to write his story."

“It was an interesting experience. It inspired me to start reading and writing stories.”

“I enjoyed it. He was skilful and knowledgeable. I learnt a lot from him.”

“I really enjoyed this author talk, and I think it was really well done. I found that the fact that he had planned what he was going to say was good. Make sure that the next talk is similar in that way.”

“I learned many things from Steve Nallon. I think Mr. Steve is an amazing writer.”



More thoughts on why human beings tell stories...

"Writing isn't about making money, getting famous, getting dates, getting laid, or making friends. In the end, it's about enriching the lives of those will read your book your work, and enriching your own life, as well."

Stephen King, *On Writing*

"I like books that expose me to people unlike me and books that do battle against caricature or simplification. That, to me, is the heroic in fiction."

Zadie Smith, writer and novelist

"It is only through fiction that facts can be instructive or even intelligible."

George Bernard Shaw, playwright and essayist

'O, I have suffered with those that I saw suffer.'

Miranda in *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare

'Yup, I know how that feels.'

Eeyore in A. A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh*

"When I was writing Laura, I recall rocking myself on the floor as I tried to imagine what it was like for my slave ancestors in the Brazil. When my characters suffered, I suffered with them. When a character I was attached to died, I cried. I felt their fears and I felt their joy."

Bernardine Evaristo, *Manifesto on never giving up*

MISS PRISM: The good ended happily, and the bad unhappily . That is what fiction means.

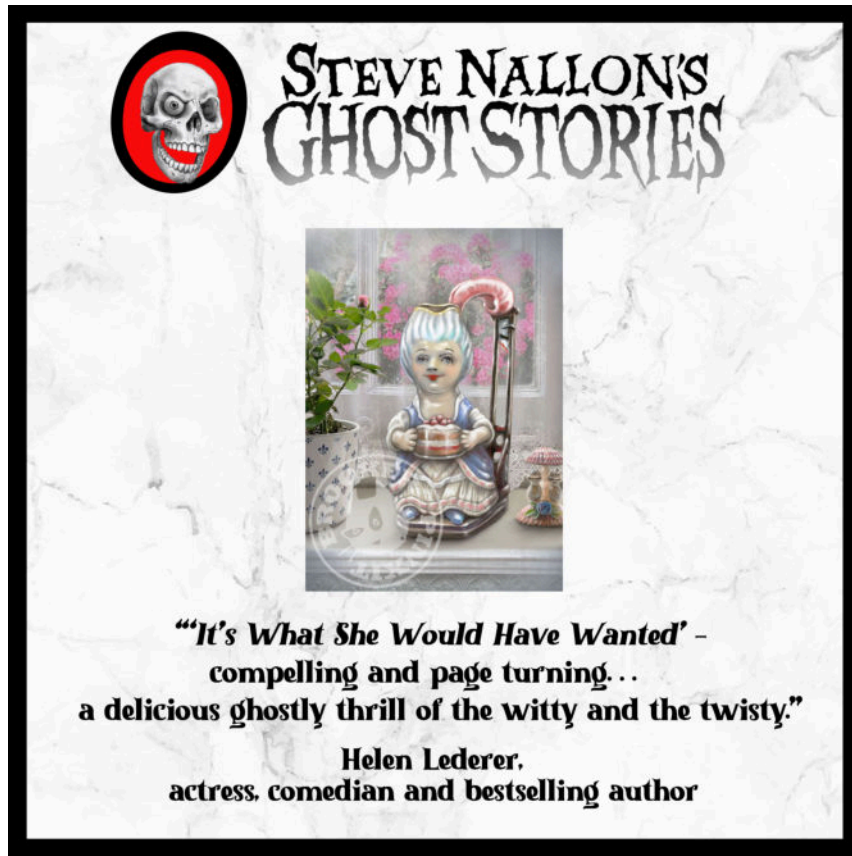
From *The Importance of Being Earnest* by Oscar Wilde

"Each book was a world unto itself, and in it I took refuge."

Alberto Manguel, *A History of Reading*

“A writer’s duty is to register what it is like for him or her to be in the world.”

Zadie Smith



“Humans had built a world inside the world, which reflected it in pretty much the same way as a drop of water reflected the landscape. And yet ... and yet ... Inside this little world they had taken pains to put all the things you might think they would want to escape from — hatred, fear, tyranny, and so forth. Death was intrigued. They thought they wanted to be taken out of themselves, and every art humans dreamt up took them further in. He was fascinated.”

Terry Pratchett, *Wyrd Sisters*

“I’m writing my story so that others might see fragments of themselves.”

Lena Waithe, writer

“To read fiction means to play a game by which we give sense to the immensity of things that happened, are happening, or will happen in the actual world. By reading narrative, we escape the anxiety that attacks us when we try to say something true about the world. This is the consoling function of narrative — the reason people tell stories, and have told stories from the beginning of time.”

Umberto Eco, *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*

“His main principles were indeed as follows: everything it is possible to imagine can also exist.”

Angela Carter, novelist

“I’m just somebody who tries to write things that entertain people. And if I can do it in a way that makes them prefer to emulate the good guy than the bad guy, I’m happy.”

Stan Lee, American comic book writer, editor, publisher, and producer



“Children jump around at the end of the day, to expend the last of that day’s energy. The adult equivalent, when the sun goes down, is to create or witness drama – which is to say, to order the universe into a comprehensible form.”

David Mamet, *Three Uses of knife*

“When I think of the books I love, there’s always a little laughter in the dark.”

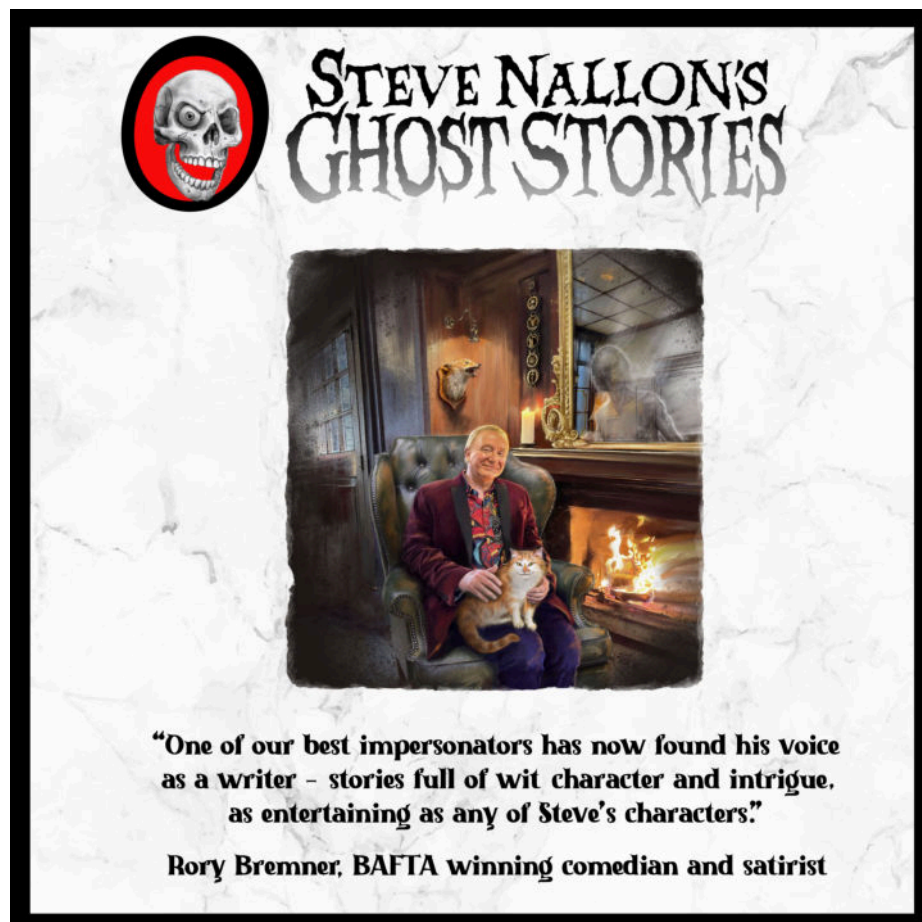
Zadie Smith, writer and novelist

“Prepare for mirth, for mirth becomes a feast.”

William Shakespeare

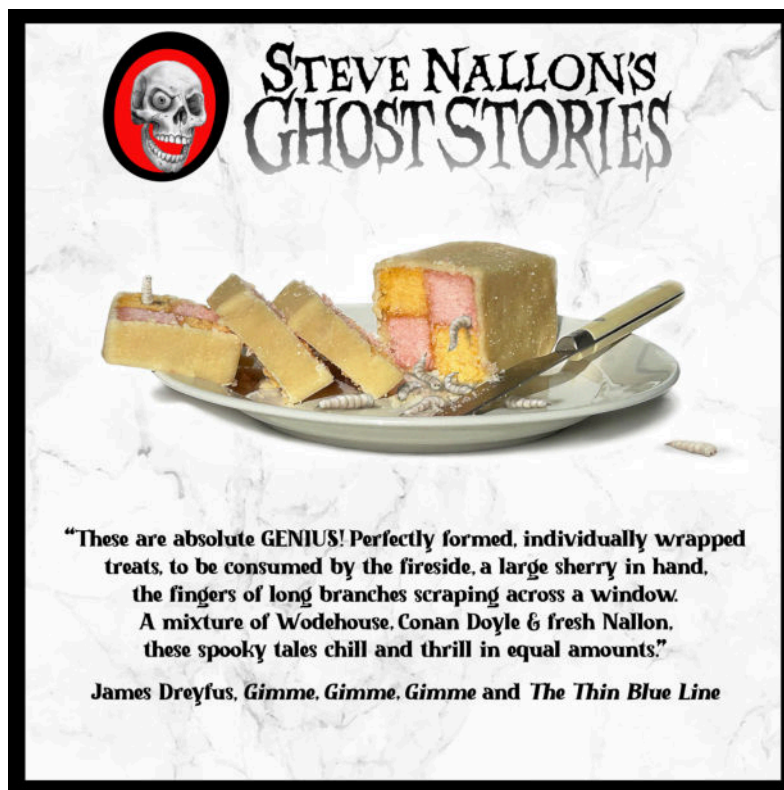
“There is nothing in the world so irresistibly contagious as laughter and good humour.”

Charles Dickens



“When you’re writing something extremely dark or disturbing or scary, or whatever, you need to remember that your reader will only go on the journey so far until you bring something back out to the light. Your stories can’t be nihilistic to the point where it becomes a chore to read all the way to the end. Illuminate the darkness, take your characters to Hell if you want, but you need to bring them back at some point. You need to match the darkness with the light.”

Margaret Atwood



“These are absolute GENIUS! Perfectly formed, individually wrapped treats, to be consumed by the fireside, a large sherry in hand, the fingers of long branches scraping across a window. A mixture of Wodehouse, Conan Doyle & fresh Nallon. these spooky tales chill and thrill in equal amounts.”

James Dreyfus, Gimme, Gimme, Gimme and The Thin Blue Line

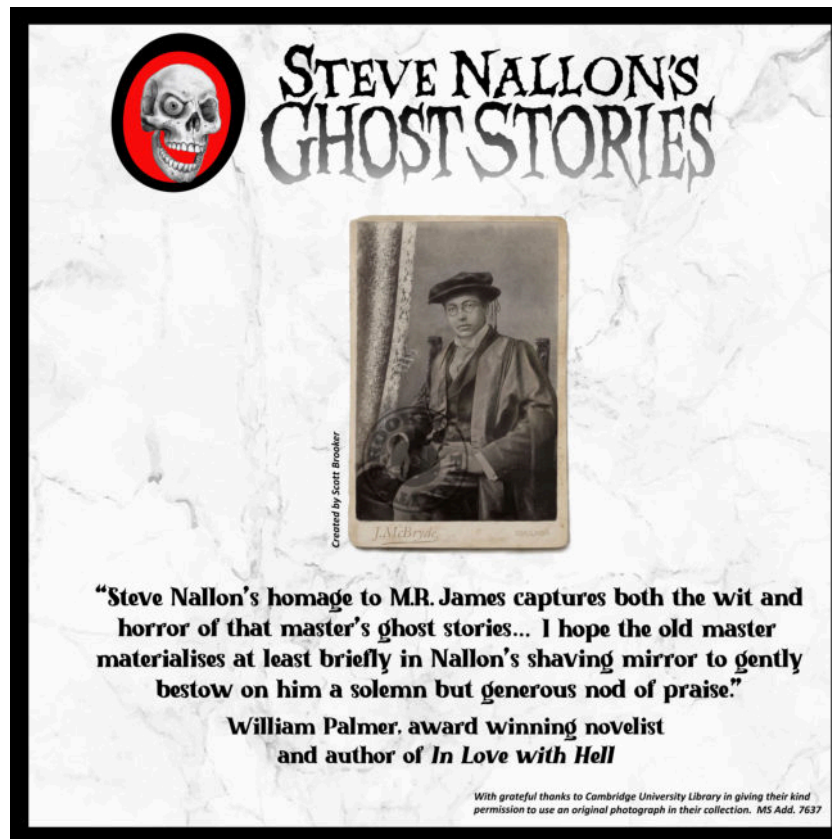
“The fiction that lasts tends to be ‘moral’, that is, it works with a minimum of cynical manipulation and it tends to reach affirmations favourable rather than opposed to life.”

John Gardner, *On Becoming a Novelist* (1983)

“My experimental gene, the need to be different, has always been there, from the moment I decided to make a virtue of my outsider status as a teenager. It’s not something I impose on my writing for superficial or spurious reasons. My creative spirit is adventurous, an exploration of the unknown, a need to transform the ordinary into something new. I write

because I have an urge to tell stories, even when I don't know what those stories will become, or what they will reveal when completed."

Bernardine Evaristo, *Manifesto On Never Giving Up*



"Every secret of a writer's soul, every experience of his life, every quality of his mind, is written large in his works."

Virginia Woolf, English writer

"Fools are my theme, let satire be my song."

Lord Byron, writer and rake

"What counts is not the philosophy of the writer (that will reveal itself in any case) but the fortunes of the characters, how their principles of generosity or stubborn honesty or stinginess or cowardice help them or hurt them in specific situations. What counts is the character's story."

John Gardner, *On Becoming a Novelist* (1983)

“[Everyone] ‘writes’ in a way; that is, each person has a ‘story’ – a personal narrative – which is constantly being replayed, revised, taken apart and put together again. The significant points in this narrative change as a person ages – what may have been tragedy at twenty is seen as comedy or nostalgia at forty... In the end, we all become stories.”

Margaret Atwood, novelist

“I’m a very organised and rational and linear thinker and you have to stop all that to write a novel.”

Hilary Mantel, author and novelist



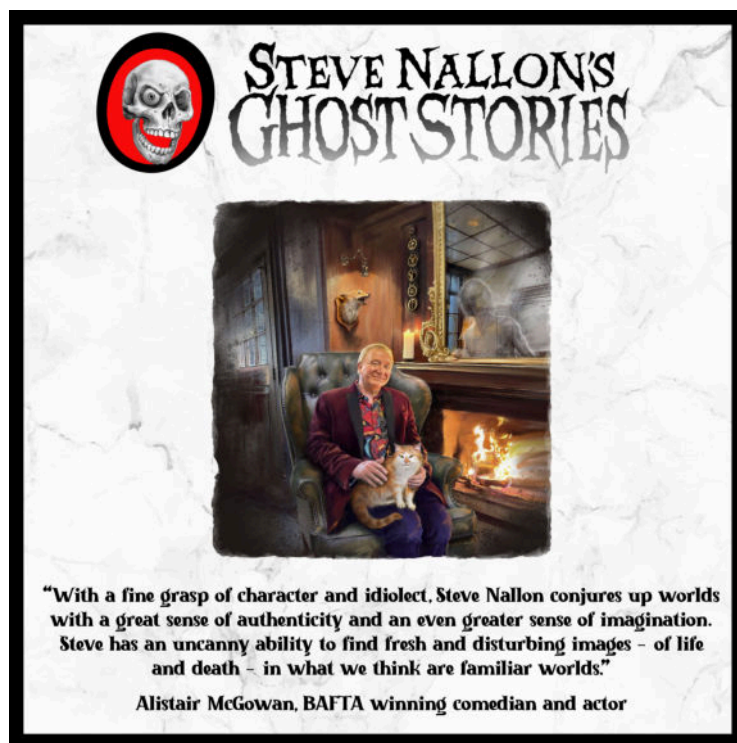
More thoughts on story structure and narrative design...

“In the first act get your principal character up a tree; in the second act, throw stones at him; in the third, get him down gracefully.”

Anonymous, writing in the *Bridgeport Herald* in 1897 but has subsequently been attributed to numerous writers, including George Abbot, George F. Kaufman and Vladimir Nobokov

“The Rising Movement. The action has been started; the chief persons have shown what they are; the interest has been awakened. Mood, passion, involution have received an impulse in a given direction.”

Gustav Freytag, in *Die Technik des Dramas*



“Get your character in trouble in the first sentence and out of trouble in the last sentence.”

Barthe DeClements, American author of children's and young adult books

“In nearly all good fiction, the basic – all but inescapable – plot form is: A central character wants something, goes after it despite opposition (perhaps including his own doubts), and so arrives at a win, lose, or draw.”

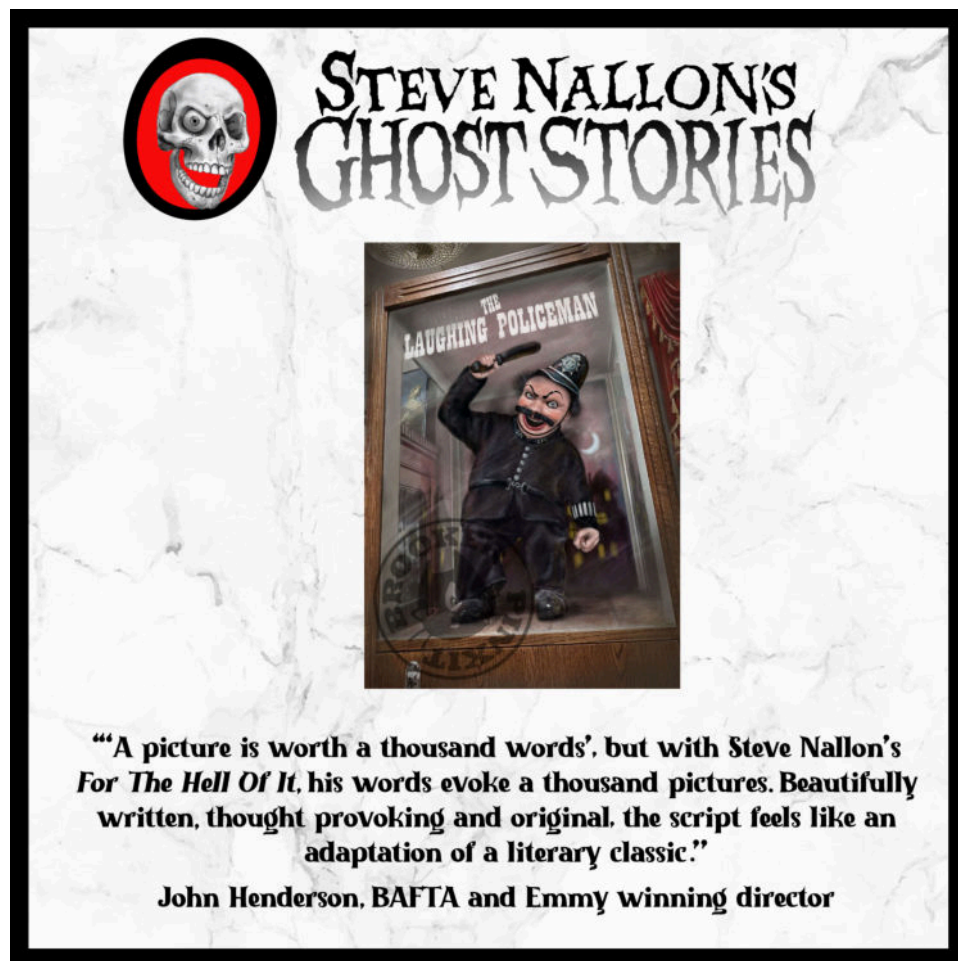
John Gardner, *On Becoming a Novelist* (1983)



“The first law, that of unity, admits of still another application to the characters: The drama must have only one chief hero about all whom the person, however great their number, arrange themselves in different gradations. The drama has a thoroughly monarchic arrangement the unity of its action is essentially dependent on this, that this action is perfected about one dominant character. But also for a sure effect, the first condition is that the interest of the spectator muse be directed mostly toward one person, and he must lean as early as possible who is to occupy his attention before all other character. Since the highest dramatic processes but few person can be exhibited in broad elaboration, the number of great roles is limited to a few; and it is common experience that nothing is more painful to the hearer than the

uncertainty as to what interest he should give to each of these important persons. It is also one practical advantage of the piece to direct its effects toward a single middle point. Whoever deviates from this fundamental law must do so with the keen perception that he surrenders a great advantage; and if his subject matter makes this surrender necessary, he must, in doubt, ask himself whether the uncertainty thus arising in the effects will be counterbalanced by other dramatic advantages."

Gustav Freytag, in *Die Technik des Dramas*



"We dramatise an incident by taking events and re-ordering them, elongating them, compressing them, so that we understand their personal meaning to us – to us as the protagonist of the individual drama we understand life to be."

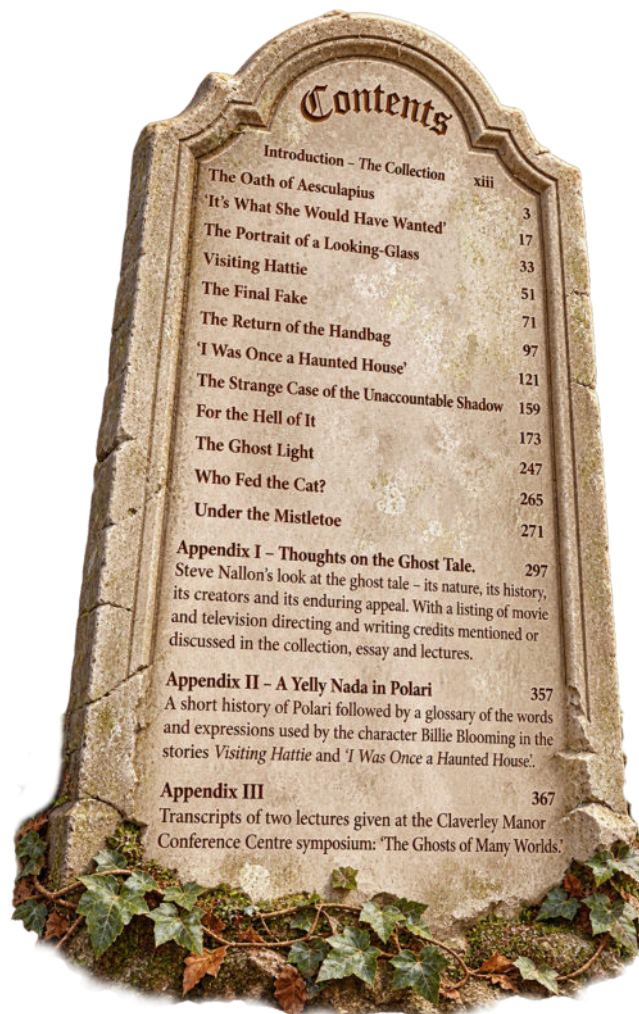
David Mamet, *Three Uses of Knife*

“We try to organise the world, which isn't organised the way our brains want to organise it. We tell stories about the people in our lives, we project ideas onto them. We project relationships with people, we make our lives into stories. I don't think we can avoid doing that.”

Charlie Kaufman, American playwright, film producer, theatre and film director

“As you get older, you realise you're only the protagonist in your own story and a blip in someone else's life.”

Jenny Zhang, American writer, poet, and essayist





STEVE NALLON

Steve Nallon is the author of *Steve Nallon's Ghost Stories* and THE SWIDGERS Young Adult Time Adventure fiction series. Steve co-wrote with Dick Fiddy of the British Film Institute *Destination Time Travel*, an exploration in film, television and prose fiction. Steve is also a regular contributor to the award-winning magazine 'Classic Monsters of the Movies'.



Steve is a member of Actors' Equity, The Royal Television Society (RTS), The British Academy of Film and Television (BAFTA), The Society of Authors, and The Writers' Guild.