

STORY GRID

LOVE STORY

CHEAT SHEET

For someone just starting out, looking to build a self-sustaining fiction career, love story is the most important genre to master.

- Shawn Coyne

WHAT IS A LOVE STORY?

Romance with the possibility
of sexual intimacy.

WHAT ARE THE 3 MAIN PSYCHOLOGICAL DRIVERS IN LOVE STORY?

Desire, Commitment, Intimacy

WHAT ARE THE SUB-GENRES OF LOVE STORY?

Obsession, Courtship, Marriage

SUB-GENRE: OBSESSION

Psychological Driver:

Desire

Description:

The lovers have such an overpowering physical desire for one another to such a degree that the Life/Death value comes into play. Obsession stories usually don't end well. Most often they end in death and or damning tragedy.

Examples:

The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald

Damage by Josephine Hart

SUB-GENRE: COURTSHIP

Psychological Driver:
Commitment

Description:

The bread and butter of Love Story. It concerns the process we undergo in order to find a mate including the romantic ritual and elevation of our moral standards. These usually end in “happily ever after.”

Examples:

Pride and Prejudice by Jane Austen

Brooklyn by Colm Toibin

SUB-GENRE: MARRIAGE

Psychological Driver:

Intimacy

Description:

Concerns a committed relationship under duress. After the lovers discover unpleasant truths about each other, will they grow more intimate and understanding? Or will the stress of the unvarnished truth tear them apart. Often turns on the Loyalty/Betrayal life value. Most often ends dramatically ironic, the couple stays together but does so with deep seated resentment.

Examples:

Ordinary People by Judith Guest

The Corrections by Jonathan Franzen

OBLIGATORY SCENES OF LOVE STORY

1. Lover's Meet Scene
2. First Kiss/Intimate Connection Scene
3. Confession of Love Scene
4. Lovers Break Up
5. Proof of Love Scene
6. Lovers Reunite Scene

CONVENTIONS OF LOVE STORY

1. The Rival
2. Moral Weight
3. Helpers and Hinderers
4. Gender Divide
5. External Need
6. Opposing Forces
7. Rituals
8. Secrets

CONVENTION: THE RIVAL

There must be a triangle of relationships in which there is a rival for the affections for one or both of the lovers. The rival can also be a personal problem. One of the lovers has an addiction and/or attachment to person or behavior that must be overcome in order for the couple to commit.

CONVENTION: MORAL WEIGHT

Love Stories require a moral ascension. Those who cannot discard morally suspect behavior will be incapable of finding a committed love.

CONVENTION: HELPERS AND HINDERERS

There must be secondary characters in favor of the lovers to commit and those against. Those who are in favor take actions to help them come together while those against hinder.

CONVENTION: GENDER DIVIDE

There must be both male and female sensibilities in play. One lover is more “female” and one is more “male,” even in gay romance.

CONVENTION: EXTERNAL NEED

One of the lovers must have some external pressure on him or her to marry.

CONVENTION: OPPOSING FORCES

There must be forces, both beyond and in the couple's control, that are opposing the match.

CONVENTION: RITUALS

The lovers must establish certain behaviors that they only do with one another.

CONVENTION: SECRETS

There are secrets in every love story. Of which, there are four kinds:

1. Secrets society keeps from the couple
2. Secrets the couple keeps from society
3. Secrets the couple keeps from one another
4. Secrets one of the couple keeps from himself/herself