

THE STORY GRID GUILD
Writing Sprint for the week of April 20, 2020

Scene Assignment Type: A “Cast of Hundreds” scene with third person omniscient narration but focused on individual Points of View.

Examples are the opening of Bob Fosse’s *All that Jazz* and Chapter 18 in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*.

Character Number One: Your protagonist is putting forward their “Code 1.0” behavioral system publicly. That is, they are using their best habits to cause the effects that they find most comfortable and successful for them. In the case of *All that Jazz*, we’re seeing the character “Joe Gideon” expressing his genius, while also discovering his ordinary world as a predatory self-loathing tyrant.

Likewise, in Chapter 18 in *Pride and Prejudice* we’re witnessing Elizabeth and Darcy enacting their best Elizabeth and Darcy Code 1.0s. Elizabeth is the brilliant outsider who can undermine the confidence of her society “betters,” i.e. Bingley, Darcy etc., with her wit and intelligence. She has an inverse discriminatory worldview and finds the rigidity of her culture boring and ridiculous, but is taken aback by the inability of her family to put on the proper show at a proper ball.

Darcy meanwhile is taken aback by this outsider’s poking of his carefully constructed worldview as well as everything her family represents...their assault on his class’s decorum and behavior as represented by their boorish manners is quite unexpected. As a gentleman, he does his best to ignore and stand apart from the demonstrations.

The point of a “cast of hundreds” scene is to put your protagonist/s into the cultural soup. To let them behave in their way so as to reveal how their Code 1.0 works for them. You need to create a power dynamic in the scene. In *All that Jazz* we see Joe Gideon use gentle persuasion and kindness to move his agenda forward even as he breaks peoples’ hearts. In *Pride and Prejudice*, we see two equally matched verbal boxers square off and fight to a verbal draw. But Elizabeth ends up losing this round due to the behavior of her supporting player family.

Your protagonist is actively moving through a series of judgements and evaluations of other people, testing what pieces of humanity can best serve their pursuit of their of the moment “want” and subconsciously what will be required for them to get what they need.

Character Number Two: The protagonist’s authentic love interests. For *All that Jazz*, the woman and young girl in the back of the theater watching Gideon do his thing peer over his shoulder as he puts on his show. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the reader knows that Elizabeth and Darcy are cut from the same cloth and Austen puts in little hints to support that intuition. In this scene, however, each thinks of the other as rather a nuisance and someone they have to “put up with.”

The rest of society: The rest of the characters in the scene play specific archetypes/roles in the particular ordinary world being dramatized. So, we have the variety of cattle call dancers, the dyspeptic producers of the show etc. in *All that Jazz*. And we have the variety of humanity from the local small-town descending upon the high class Bingleys at their party.

Analyzing the Scene:

You may find the prompt is enough to get you writing without having to sweat the story grid structural details.

But you may find it easier to flow into the writing process by outlining the scene before you start scribbling.

Whatever the case, follow this simple process.

If you are energized by the prompt...just start writing and follow whatever pops into your mind without any hesitation or second guessing.

If you are befuddled and need to think through an outline, head on down to the “analyzing the scene” and “five commandments” prompts below.

Answering these questions should start poking ideas out of you. Once you get excited about a particular idea...start writing. You don’t have to answer all of the questions before you begin. Just use as many as you need to generate some sentences.

You may get stuck before you complete a first draft of the scene. If that’s the case, go back to the questions below and work through them as long as it takes to get you writing again. Don’t revise the previous material until you’ve put together a first draft. So, if you decide to change the inciting incident in order to solve the crisis, change it later after you’ve created the rest of the scene.

The key element here is to only outline and edit when you find yourself stuck. And when you’re writing, don’t break to outline or edit until you absolutely have to.

Here are our SG scene tools.

A STORY EVENT is an active change of life value for one or more characters as a result of conflict (one character’s desires clash with another’s).

A WORKING SCENE contains at least one Story Event. To determine a Scene’s Story Event, answer the following four questions:

1. What are the characters doing? The narrative device/point of view of *All that Jazz* is third person omniscient, extraordinarily God-like so we get to step into the private life of Joe Gideon and watch him select a small number of dancers for his next show at a cattle call. The narrative device/point of view of *Pride and Prejudice* is also third person omniscient, but with occasional free indirect style from the POV of Elizabeth. It's clear however that we're following Elizabeth throughout the novel. She is attending a fancy ball put on by a wealthy bachelor from London, negotiating her way through what a woman of her age is required to do at such events.

2. What is the essential action of what the characters are doing in this scene? Take each character and figure out what their object of desire is for this scene. What does the protagonist wish to accomplish? Who is your protagonist? What does the protagonist want? Who is/are the antagonist/s? What does the antagonist want? What are everyone you put on stage doing to get their desires met?

3. What life value has changed for one or more of the characters in the scene? Someone is going to "win" the scene. And one of the other people will lose the scene. That means that someone will get what they set out to achieve. The others will fail to get what they want. Evaluating the life value shift for your characters will enable you to get a tight grip on the conflict. Gideon gets what he wants in *All that Jazz*. Elizabeth does not get what she wants in *Pride and Prejudice*.

4. Which life value should I highlight on my Story Grid Spreadsheet? Clearly considering the win/lose dynamics in a scene will home in on conflict. When you have a "cast of hundreds" you need to collect a global want for the crowd. In *All that Jazz* the crowd wants Gideon's approval and eventually for him to give them a job. In *Pride and Prejudice* the crowd (which is made up of local people for the most part with the exception of the super important high-class people from London who are slumming for the summer) wants to pass as sophisticated.

HOW THE SCENE ABIDES BY THE FIVE COMMANDMENTS OF STORYTELLING

Inciting Incident:

Choose an unexpected event to drop into the scene that will require the protagonist to actively process. In *All that Jazz*, the appearance of Gideon's wife and daughter at the back of the theater drops in to his running of the audition. For *Pride and Prejudice*, the unexpected event is the fact that Elizabeth's crush, Mr. Wickham, is not at the ball.

The drop-in unexpected event (a phere) is a tool to achieve the protagonist's scene desire or an obstacle that prevents them from achieving their scene desire.

In these cases, the drop-in of Gideon's wife is an obstacle for the protagonist to rationalize his commitment to his art. Gideon is an archetypal "artist." He justifies his immoral behavior by throwing himself on the altar of the necessities of creation. The "show" is everything and if that requires him to sleep with people in the cast in order to emotionally manipulate them in such a way as to pull out their best performance...he'll do just that.

In Elizabeth's case, Wickham's not being there is an obstacle for her to rationalize her commitment to her class.

Progressive Complication: After the unexpected event drops in, have at least two complications that threaten or encourages the goals of the protagonist. That is, they either make the likelihood of the goal to be realized lesser or greater than the prior beat/s. In these cases, we have Gideon's having to contend with clearly unqualified dancers and difficult decisions about who to keep and who to cut. In P and P, we have Elizabeth required to dance with undesirables like Mr. Collins.

Turning Point Progressive Complication:

Metabolizing the phere event will eventually lead to the value shift of the scene, which is the turning point progressive complication. The goal value state of the protagonist will be realized or not. In *All that Jazz* Gideon confirms that the dancers he's chosen are willing to do anything for him...even change their names. In P and P, Elizabeth witnesses a member of her class make a very large faux pas, insinuating that Bingley will succumb to a country girl, Elizabeth's sister, in the presence of Mr. Darcy.

Crisis: With the value shift changing comes the crisis of the scene. What does the protagonist do in the face of not achieving their goal or getting it met? The crisis must boil down to a best bad choice or irreconcilable good. What does Gideon do? What does Elizabeth do?

Climax: The protagonist acts out their crisis decision. Gideon plunges right into an irreconcilable goods choice (what's good for him is not good for any of those dancers). Elizabeth makes the best bad choice to not censure her fellow countrymen.

Resolution: Gideon goes on his merry way. Elizabeth and her family are at the mercy of Darcy's decision to share his judgements about the Bennet family with Mr. Bingley.