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Building Stories

7 – 11 year olds

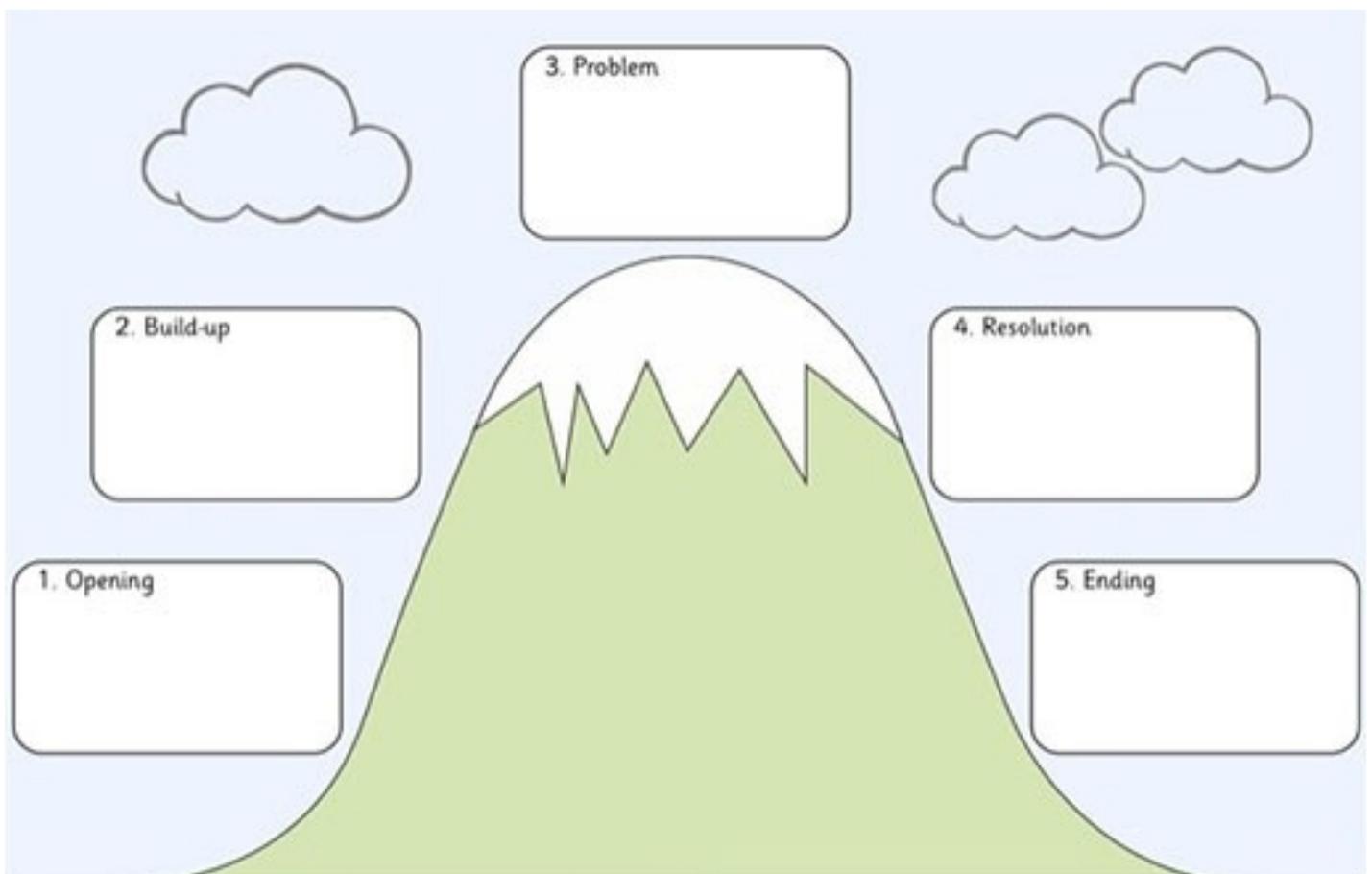
A blank sheet of paper or a clean new document sit before you. What should you do? What can you write?

Terrifying as that might seem, you are in charge.

A simple story form comprises:

- An opener where you “hook” the reader
- The build-up where you establish characters and hint at the dilemma
- The dilemma (where something goes wrong)
- The resolution (how you solve the problem)
- The ending (happy ever after?)

It can be useful to use a planning grid such as a story mountain:



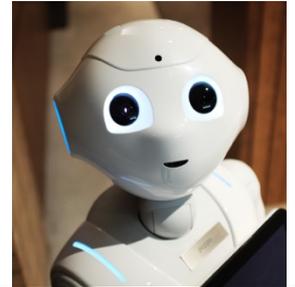
Here are some openers that you could use:

- The rusty bell rang out through the mist...
- The rope began to unravel, it was going to break...
- Panting heavily he stood on the summit...
- A ear-piercing scream split the night then nothing...
- A hug was all she needed but...
- Wally was hero and he wanted everyone to know this...

Characters

Use ones that you like and will enjoy writing about!

- Robots
- Aliens
- Dragons
- Princesses / other royalty
- Fairies
- Boys / girls
- Superheroes
- Dogs
- Monsters
- Vampires
- Ghosts



Settings

Always try to describe your setting as it helps your reader to picture the scene. In the theatre we use the set so that the audience are thinking about the play as soon as they sit down ready for a performance, however the designer starts with a description and discussions with the director and also with the script. For example:

The door sagged on its hinges like an exhausted marathon runner, unable to stand upright.

Blinded by the laser-like light he stepped gingerly into the spaceship. It appeared deserted. What was that noise? A beeping that was getting louder.

Try to appeal to your readers senses. Sounds, smells, sights, touch can be comforting or scary. For example:

The rough tongue of my golden retriever licked my hand reassuringly.

The slime covered surfaces made me think of decay and despair.

Try writing some descriptions of these settings:

- A castle
- Haunted house
- Space
- A cave
- A desert
- Mountains
- Forests
- A housing estate
- A church



Word banks to accompany the settings above:

Castle/church/haunted house: Dank, echoing, long-dead, crumbling, rat-infested, scufflings, decay, icy, empty, silent, fearful, nightmarish, shimmering, shadowy, endless, blindly, relieved, glow, softly, hissing, whimpering, perilous.



Housing estate: normal, everyday, routine, light, new, bright, below, danger, past, tremors, threat, reflections, timeless, busy, well-lit, alleys, shadows, snuffling, grunting, irritation.

Space: vast, empty, singular, silent, whine, drone, glide, spin, spiral, beautiful, deadly, atmosphere, gravity, alien, life-form, humanoid, insect-like, drive, pulse, petrifying.

Mountains: fresh, slope, scree, rocks, boulders, shale, exposed, deadly drop, hanging, screaming, nothing, void, crevice, cling, pant, gasp, effort, burst, energy, dwindling.

Forests: trunks, rough, bark, dense, vegetation, boles, brambles, snare, trap, hush, whisper, breezy, shafts, sunlight, dancing, dripping, ticking, slipping, moss-covered.

Cave: echoes, lowering, rough, scuffed, scraped, squeeze, crawl, slimy, dripping, slip, slide, out of breath, stalactites, stalagmites, dry, wonders, cathedral-like, awesome, grand, opening, escape.

Desert: arid, parched, spare, scared, struggle, drift, blink, salt, sweat, reddened, dry, gritty, grimy, thirsty, grim, oasis, cactus statues, vultures circle, harsh, sandy, ridge, dunes, river-bed, ghosts.

Figurative language

Description is vital but you can use figurative language to great effect too. Try some of these...

Similes – a comparison using ‘like’ or ‘as’

The young dragon was as volatile as a ticking bomb.

He strode towards the edge like a superhero.

Metaphors – a comparison between two unrelated things.

The man was considered the black sheep of the family.

She was boiling mad.

Alliteration – words beginning with the same letter or sound.

The sea softly, smoothly slid on to the sand.

Personification – to give things human characteristics.

The sea roared with anger and beat the rocks.

Hyperbole – This is over-exaggeration for effect.

I have asked you to tidy your room a million times.

Endings

Endings can be happy for ever after or they can be sad. Sometimes they are mysterious and do not quite explain what’s happened, or there’s a real twist!

Think of endings you know... then play “what if:”, for example:

What if Cinderella had married Buttons?

What if Sleeping Beauty was a feminist?

What if the brick house was built on a fault line?

What if Scrooge told the ghosts to go away?

What if the wolf was actually being bullied by the three little pigs?

What if Jack had never bought the beans... would the giant still have found him?

It is up to you! Write.