

LIFEWITING 10-WEEK #3: ACCEPTING THE CHALLENGE

Welcome back! Yes, I know, the ten-week class should, ideally, have matched the “Hero’s Journey” perfectly week for week, one step for each week. But we had to lay down some foundational material first. But now, we can do it!

Week #1 you were **confronted with the challenge** of actually fulfilling your dreams, actually GOING FOR IT. Admitting you want to be a writer, to express your dreams and fantasies in such a way that an audience can find and reward you, and be enriched by your experience.

Week #2 we explained the Hero’s Journey and applied it to the terrific film “The Pursuit of Happyness.” You also got homework: to write a story every week, or a story every other week, using these principles. Then to share your results with others on the Facebook Lifewriting page. If you are a normal person, you may have felt a bit of overwhelmed, and perhaps anxiety. You may, in other words have considered **REJECTING THE CHALLENGE**. You also got the second movie-watching assignment: THE MATRIX.

A brief comment: if you are dealing with fear, or fear-based avoidance patterns, and need to align your emotions USE THE ANCIENT CHILD program. This is why we included it. The LIFEWITING 10-WEEK program is designed to be the most complete writing class ever created. Period.

Week #3 brings us up to date. The third principle is “Acceptance of the Challenge.” Obviously, if you’ve made it to week #3, you have done this. Congratulations! So let’s take a look at the “Matrix” and apply the full H.J. to it:

1. Confronted with Challenge. Neo’s mind is blown when he discovers his reality is an illusion. “Agent Smith” is the “agent” of this awakening.
2. Rejection of the Challenge. Fear. He cannot believe. Doesn’t want to be involved. This can’t be happening.
3. Acceptance of the Challenge. Things have become too strange and threatening. He is offered the choice of Red and Blue pills: take the “blue” and he goes right back to sleep. Take the “Red” and it’s “down the rabbit hole.”
4. Road of Trials. Neo awakens from his sleep. Begins to learn. Enters the accelerated learning program and discovers his unique capacity. Spars with Morpheus and learns his limitations. Etc. etc.
5. Allies and Powers. Morpheus, Trinity, etc. The power which must awaken is his ability to “see through the illusion” to the “underlying code” that creates it. Thereby breaking the rules of the computerized reality.
6. Confront Evil-Defeated. Morpheus is captured.
7. Dark Night of the Soul. As a result of this capture, we enter a sustained series of escalating action sequences, leading to a desperate confrontation with Agent Smith in which Neo is “killed.”
8. Leap of Faith. Trinity expresses that she loves him, the fulfillment of a prophecy that she would love “The One” who can see through the illusion. Neo’s unconscious mind and heart are connected to her, and he believes and awakens.

9. Confront Evil--and emerge victorious. He defeats Agent Smith and sees through the illusion fully, "streaming code" filling the screen. A fabulous film moment!
10. The Student Becomes the Teacher. Couldn't be more obvious: he talks directly to the audience, telling us to "awaken" to our potential. This message is thousands of years old, AT LEAST as old as Tibetan Buddhism which says we are asleep, demons feed on us as we dream, and if we awaken to reality, however painful it may be, we gain unspeakable power.

One of my very favorite movies. I will probably watch it every year for the rest of my life!

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Who is the "Hero" in the Hero's Journey?

Once you have begun to understand the thread of "story", you need to go to the next question. And that leads us into CHARACTERIZATION, the second major piece of the puzzle. Every story is about a human being attempting to make sense of her life. Overcome an obstacle.

It can be said that there are only two things to write about: people, and their world.

It is also said that there are only two important questions to ask: "who am I?" and "what is true."

Or "what is the world?" and "how do I know if my opinions are correct?"

All of these overlap, and I will leave it to you to figure out how they are connected. The SIMPLEST model of human existence that has real use is the classic Greek Triad:

Body, Mind, Spirit.

In more practical terms? Fitness/health/survival, Career/education, and Emotions/deep values.

In other words, if you write a story, if it connects with one of these arenas, the audience will quickly empathize. If it connects with two of them, you get deeper connection. And if you connect with all three: paydirt.

We'll go into this more next week, as well as explore the BEST model of human existence.

Here are Tananarive's thoughts on basic CHARACTERIZATION:

HOW TO BUILD A CHARACTER:

Because characterization is so essential to powerful storytelling, I suggest that you begin there. Some of your plot elements may change when you know your character better. I suggest a CHARACTER SKETCH where you force yourself to walk in your character's shoes even before your story begins—an exercise that might turn into a scene in your story. Here are some areas to think about as you create a character sketch:

--Age, occupation, education, political leanings and interests, religious/philosophical beliefs, socioeconomic background (childhood/present), home country or region (childhood/present), most important familial relationships (negative/positive), most important friendships (negative/positive). What other elements might you include in a character sketch?

REMEMBER: Your resume and character sketch are for YOU, the author—not necessarily the reader. Once the character becomes three-dimensional, some would suggest that you don't look at the sketch again. But at the very least, you should fight the temptation to have long paragraphs of dry character traits and history. SHOW US how your character has been shaped by the experiences; don't simply recount them. You might use only a small percentage of what you discover while you sketch your character in broad strokes. Think of back story as seasoning rather than substance: your meal might taste great with salt and pepper, but if you dump the whole bottle in at once, you overwhelm the meal and ruin the flavor.

Here are some principles (not rules) to remember in CHARACTERIZATION:

- Your story exists for the protagonist, not the other way around.
- YOU must believe in your characters before your reader will.
- A character is not compelling because of what happens to him/her—a character is compelling because of the way he/she responds to challenges, setbacks and adversity.
- Beware of writing “witness” characters who do not themselves grow or change.
- Characters must show who they are through photographable action.
- As a learning writer, avoid an emotionally detached narrator.
- When writing “The Other,” avoid stereotypes even if exhibited by people you know.
- Do not fall prey to “author convenience,” where a character is acting out your needs instead of his/her own.

Do your homework. Write that story, and watch the next movie.
Your movie: Let's try CASABLANCA!

Write with Passion!
Tananarive and Steve