

Making Stories: Conflicts, Patterns, and Techniques

PLoP 2025 Focus Group Proposal

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Abstract

Conflicts are essential for stories. Conflicts also inspire writers. Stories need not be only fictional. Even scientific papers need stories. Patterns and pattern sequences can be conveyed better or even validated with stories. In this focus group, the participants will write their own stories with the help of selected techniques of creative writing such as fairytale cocktail, a hat full of words, or figurines from a suitcase, supervised by an experienced creative writing teacher. The participants will have a chance to read their stories and learn how others perceive them in a sort of mini writers' workshops. Based on this immediate writing experience, the position of conflicts with respect to stories and patterns in general will be discussed.

Motivation

Conflicts are essential for stories. Alice wants to return home, but absurd situations prevent her from that. Each situation brings a specific conflict itself: Alice sees different versions of herself and cannot believe they are real, but they behave the same as her, robots promise help, but they just escalate blackmailing Alice in order to keep her with them, Alice tries to convince other children she really was in strange places, but they don't believe her. . . This is just like with patterns. Indeed, these situations are drama patterns in the play based on the story of Alice in Wonderland [11]. We set it—among other places—at PLoP 2023 [13] and EuroPLoP [12].

Conflicts also inspire writers. A gardener, beggar, apple, and mouse, along with the expression “When this rain is going to stop?” randomly pulled out of hats in a technique of creative writing called fairytale cocktail

will make anyone's mind start making unbelievable stories simply because these elements are in conflict with each other.

Stories need not be only fictional. Even scientific papers need stories. Patterns and pattern sequences can be conveyed better or even validated with stories [1].

Activity

In this focus group, the participants will write their own stories with the help of selected techniques of creative writing such as fairytale cocktail, a hat full of words, or figurines from a suitcase, supervised by an experienced creative writing teacher.

The participants will have a chance to read their stories and learn how others perceive them in a sort of mini writers' workshops. Based on this immediate writing experience, the position of conflicts with respect to stories and patterns in general will be discussed.

Organizational Aspects

This focus group can accommodate up to 15 participants. It can be repeated in case of a greater interest. No writing experience is required. No knowledge of patterns is assumed. Everything will be explained on the spot.

Although it can be made shorter, for best results, we suggest allocating 120 minutes for this focus group.

Outreach

The results of the focus group could be easily extrapolated beyond its time and space delimitation. In particular, the participants could read their stories during evening leisure time. With drama patterns, short scenes based on some of the stories could be easily built and performed.

About the Organizers

Aleksandra is an experienced teacher of creative writing and drama. She organized a focus group on creative writing with patterns at AsianPLoP 2024 [3]. She worked with hundreds of children of all ages in an arts school, dozens of computer science students within a regular university course,¹ students in various fields including acting [9, 10], and even seniors within the

¹is.stuba.sk/katalog/syllabus.pl?predmet=393400

university of the third age (provided by Pan-European University). She invented several techniques of creative writing [2]. Currently, she applies them in several courses for media students at her university.

Valentino is a computer scientist. He likes to embrace stories in his scientific papers. Together with Aleksandra, he discovered the concept of a drama pattern [8].² They organized five focus groups on drama patterns at PLoP conferences (at PLoP 2024, AsianPLoP 2024, PLoP 2023, EuroPLoP 2022, and EuroPLoP 2019) and a remote PLoP 2022 PLoPourri event [4, 7, 13, 5, 12, 6].

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