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The Five Essential Elements of Storytelling

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**Introduction**

I received an Instructional Development Travel Grant to attend the 39th Annual Iowa Summer Writing Festival for a working workshop, June 23rd through 28th, 2019, offered by The University of Iowa, in Iowa City—a UNESCO City of Literature in the Creative Cities Network.

From the catalog:

**Cities Network.**

To attend the 33rd Festival, 2019, offered by The University of Iowa, I received an Instructional Development Travel Grant sponsored by the University of Wisconsin Baraboo/Sauk County, English at the University of Wisconsin Baraboo/Sauk County, where she teaches courses in English, Creative Writing, and Literary Magazine. From the catalog:

**Youth Writing Project, Between the Lines: The Iowa Young Writers’ Studio, The Iowa Spanish Creative Writing Program, the Nonfiction Writing Program, the Playwrights Workshop, the International Writing Program, the Nonfiction Writing Program, the Playwrights Workshop, the International Writing Program, the Iowa Poetry Reading Series, the Iowa City Center for the Book, The Iowa Review, and The Examinined Life Journal.**

*Drawn to this mecca of 125 workshops to choose from, I attended Five Elements of the Novel, taught by Kelly Dwyer, M.F.A. Each day of workshop was focused on one of the following five essential elements of storytelling — plot, character, dialogue, point of view, and theme — with evenings reserved for individual writing to be shared in group the next day. Also explored were practical strategies for creative inspiration and motivation toward the daily practice of writing.*

**Workshop Methodology**

A staple in writing courses, the writer’s workshop model supports students in taking their writing seriously and viewing themselves as writers. The purpose of the workshop is to generate new written work through exercises which are then shared with the class. Students respond to guided writing prompts, listen while others read their words out loud, and receive immediate peer feedback. Hearing dialogue read aloud by your classmates is key to crafting narrative plausibility. Students fine-tune the ability to both provide and receive constructive criticism within a supportive atmosphere of collaboration.

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### The Five Essential Elements of Storytelling

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Instructional Development Travel Grant Award 2018-19

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### Five Elements

- **Plot (What happens?)**
- **Character (Who are these people?)**
- **Dialogue (What do these characters say or avoid saying to each other?)**
- **Point of View (Who is telling this story?)**
- **Theme (What is the underlying concept or universal insight?)**

### Aristotle’s Poetics

Human beings were relating stories to one another long before Aristotle identified what he believed to be the essential ingredients for a compelling tale. From the oral tradition gathered around the fire, all the way to the Hollywood Blockbuster, the best stories are catharsis through conflict and resolution.

#### 1. Plot (What happens?)

The inciting incident is the event or decision that begins the story. The conflict is the struggle of the protagonist against an opposing force. The climax is the point where the conflict or crisis reaches its highest peak. The denouement is the resolution of the story.

- **Catharsis**

  - The release or purging of emotions, cleansing, or spiritual renewal.

- **Resolution**

  - Rising Action

- **Climax**

  - Beginning Middle End

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### References