

## WRITING A STORY

### WORKSHEET 1: DEVELOPING PROBLEMS

As we saw in the lesson, all stories need to *start with a problem*. Stephen King, the famous author of over 30 novels and numerous short stories, says that for him every story begins with a difficult or worrying “situation” – a problem of some kind. In *Carrie* (his first bestseller), the title character is being bullied by the other girls. In *Misery*, a crazy fan takes her favourite author prisoner. In *The Shawshank Redemption*, an innocent man is locked away for life for a crime he didn’t commit.

Stephen King goes so far as to say he “doesn’t plot” a story. He just allows the “situation” (problem) to work itself out and to see how his characters react. Of course experienced authors (like King) know how to “make trouble” for their characters, and do it almost by instinct. Young writers need to have practice in “developing problems” in an interesting way.

Let’s get in some practice now.

#### ACTIVITY 1

Choose one of the following, and sketch (in writing or in diagrams) how it might develop into an interesting story.

- (1) Felicity has a dream one night. The next day, she sees the dream come true. It happens again. She seems to have the ability to see the future.
- (2) Will is top of his class. No one else is even near him in ability. But one day a new boy, Marcus, arrives – and he’s even smarter.
- (3) Phoebe hates her arch rival, Cindy. One day, Cindy does something so terrible, so unforgiveable, that Phoebe knows she needs to get revenge.
- (4) Mr Bates, the drama teacher, has decided to put on “The Wizard of Oz” at the end of the year. Competition immediately sets in between the school’s two leading musical talents.

#### ACTIVITY 2

- (1) Look at your favourite book or film and work out (a) what the initial problem for the central character(s) is, and (b) how the story develops from there.
- (2) You are a famous Hollywood scriptwriter. A producer rings up and says “I need a story straight away! Come up with a good idea and I’ll pay you a fortune!” Choose your genre – action, romance, comedy, fantasy or whatever – and work out (a) the basic problem that gets the story going and (b) how it develops from there.