

Save the Cat Writes a Novel

Descriptions from online handout by [Jessica Brody](#)

	Plot Beat	Description	Cinderella Example
Act 1	Opening Image	Before “snapshot” of your main character/hero and their world	Cinderella scrubs the kitchen floor, dressed in rags, while her stepmother and sisters glare at her..
	Theme-Stated	Statement made by a character (normally not the hero) that hints at what the hero’s arc will be (i e , what the hero must learn/discover before the end of the book)	“Look at you.” Her stepmother smudged the soot on Cinderella’s cheek with her thumb. “You’ll amount to anything more than a scullery maid.”
	Set-Up	Exploration of the hero’s status quo life and all its flaws. This is where we learn what the hero’s life and world look like before its epic transformation	Cinderella is a slave in her own home after her father dies and leaves her in the care of her evil stepmother.
	Catalyst	Inciting incident that happens to the hero which will catapult them into a new world or new way of thinking	A scroll arrives to the house announcing a royal ball where the prince will choose his bride.
	Debate	Reaction sequence in which the hero debates what they will do next, usually presented in the form of a question	Cinderella dreams of going to the ball, but she’s just a servant. She has nothing to wear.
Act 2	Break into Two	The moment the hero decides to accept the call to action, leave their comfort zone, try something new, venture into a new world or new way of thinking	She finds an old but beautiful dress that used to belong to her mother. Now she can go!
	B Story	The introduction of a new character or characters who will ultimately serve to help the hero learn the theme	We meet Cinderella’s magical creature friends, the horse, the goat, and the mice.
	Fun and Games	This is where we see the hero in their new world. Also called “the Promise of the Promise,” this section represents the “hook” of the story, why the reader picked up the novel in the first place	Cinderella and her creature friends remake the old dress. On the night of the ball, she reveals her plan, but the sisters destroy her dress.
	Midpoint	Literally the middle of the novel, where the “Fun and Games” culminates in either a “false victory” or a “false defeat” Something should happen here to “raise the stakes” and push the hero toward real change	Cinderella’s fairy godmother comes to the rescue. She makes her a gown, a pumpkin coach, and turns her beloved creatures into her horse, coachman, and footman. Bippity. Boppity. Boo.

	Bad Guys Close In	If the midpoint was a false victory, this section will be a downward trajectory where things get consistently worse for the hero. If the midpoint was a false defeat, this section will be an upward trajectory where things get seemingly better. Regardless of trajectory, the hero's inner demons or "internal bad guys" are also closing in	Cinderella goes to the ball looking radiant in her new gown. The prince notices her, and they dance all night. Her stepmother and sisters watch with envy, not realizing it's her.
	All is Lost	The lowest point of the novel. This is an action beat where something happens to the hero that, combined with those "internal bad guys," pushes them to rock bottom	The clock strikes midnight. Cinderella runs down the stairs. She loses one of her glass slippers. But she can't go back for it. It's too late.
	Dark Night of the Soul	Another reaction beat (similar to the Debate) where the hero takes a moment to react to everything that's happened leading up to this moment. The darkest night before the dawn, this is the moment right before the hero figures out the solution to their big problem and learns the theme	Cinderella wallows in misery while her sisters gossip about the mysterious beauty at the ball. When the prince comes around testing the glass slipper, the sisters lock Cinderella in her tower bedroom.
Act 3	Break into Three	The aha moment! The hero realizes what they must do to not only fix all of the problems created in act 2, but more importantly, fix themselves	Cinderella hears the prince's voice and sees him glance toward her window as he's preparing to leave. She knows what she must do. Escape!
	Finale	The hero proves they have truly learned the theme and enacts the plan they came up with in the "Break into 3 " Bad guys are destroyed, inner demons are conquered, lovers are reunited. The hero's world is not only saved it's a better place than it was before	With the help of her animal friends, Cinderella dashes past her sisters and flags down the prince. Of course, the slipper fits Cinderella's foot perfectly. She is his true love. They embrace.
	Final Image	Mirror to the "Opening Image", this is the closing "snapshot" of who the hero is now that he's gone through this epic and satisfying transformation	Cinderella walks out of the kitchen with the prince while the stepmother and stepsisters are left staring after them, mouths open. Happily ever after.