

Pixar Story Formula

AND 22 RULES

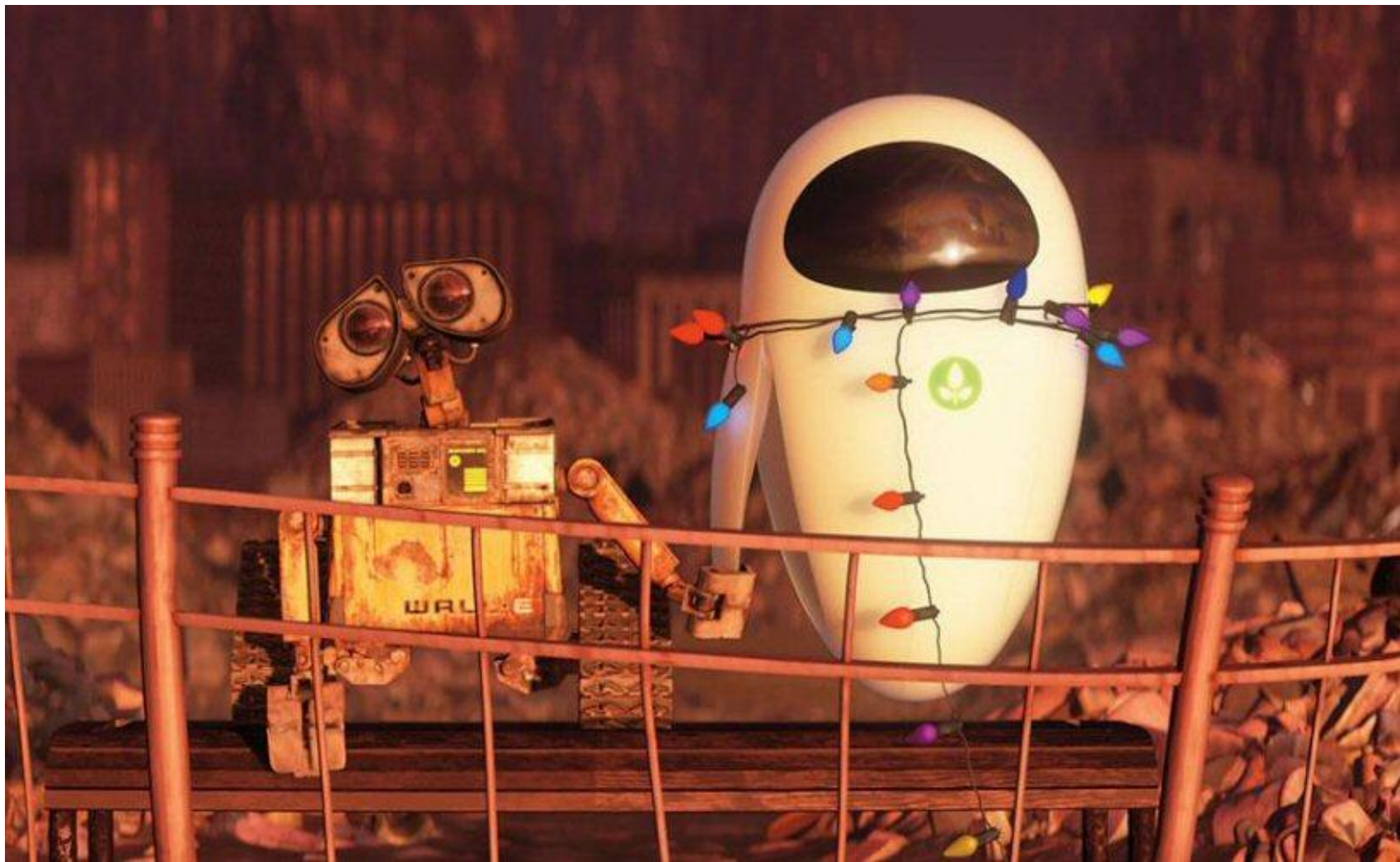
PIXAR'S
22 Rules
to
Phenomenal
storytelling



[1]

You **ADMIRE** a **CHARACTER** more
for **TRYING** than
for their
successes.





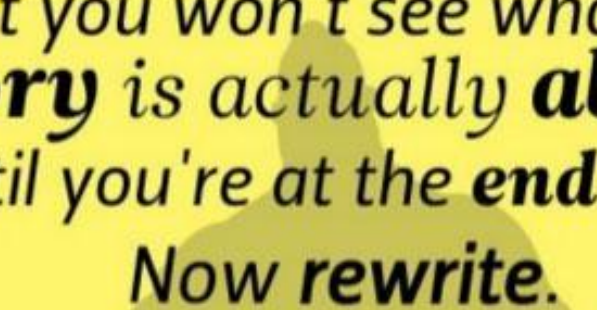
[2]

Keep in mind what's
interesting to an **AUDIENCE**
NOT what's **FUN** to do as a writer.
They can be very **different**.



[3]

Trying for theme is important,
but you won't see what the
story is actually **about**
until you're at the **end** of it.
Now **rewrite**.



Common Themes

- Alienation - the effects of; the loneliness of; to cure it
- Ambition - getting what you want; stunted by it; thwarted
- Betrayal - the pain of; in love and friendship
- Coming of age - loss of innocence
- Courage - courage to deal with conflict; lack of; developing; conquering
- Deception - how to deceive; the results of
- Escape - from life; routine; prison; family pressures
- Death - how to escape; what happens after; consequences of
- Fear - driven by; dealing with; conquering
- Freedom - loss of ; gaining; handling; fight for
- Good vs Evil - survival of one despite the other; triumph of one over the other
- Isolation - physical and emotional

- Jealousy - trouble caused by; denial of; driven by
- Justice - the fight for; injustice; truth vs justice
- Loss - of life, innocence, love, friends, to avoid
- Loneliness - no man is an island, or hell is other people
- Love - love fades; is blind; can overcome all obstacles
- Lust - for power; for sex
- Power - the search for; the loss of; what we are willing to exchange for
- Prejudice - racism; bigotry; snobbery; dealing with
- Security - the loss of; finding the need for; how we act when security is shattered
- Spirituality and god - the struggle to find faith; live without faith etc.
- Survival - man vs nature



Daniel Arriaga ©DISNEY/PIXAR



[4]



Once upon a time there was
_____. Every day, _____.
One day _____. Because of
that, _____. Because of that,
_____. Until finally _____.

Once Upon a Time

.... And every day

....until one day

...and because of that

...and because of that

...and because of that

...until finally

...and ever since that day

- Once upon a time...
- And every day...
- Until one day...

- And because of that...
- And because of that....
- And because of that...
- Until finally...

- And ever since that day...

Adapted to 3 minute animation

BEGINNING (Act I)

2 - 3 events

Ends in inciting incident

MIDDLE (Act II)

3 - 5 events

Leading to Climax

END (Act III) Resolution

2 - 3 events

CLIMAX

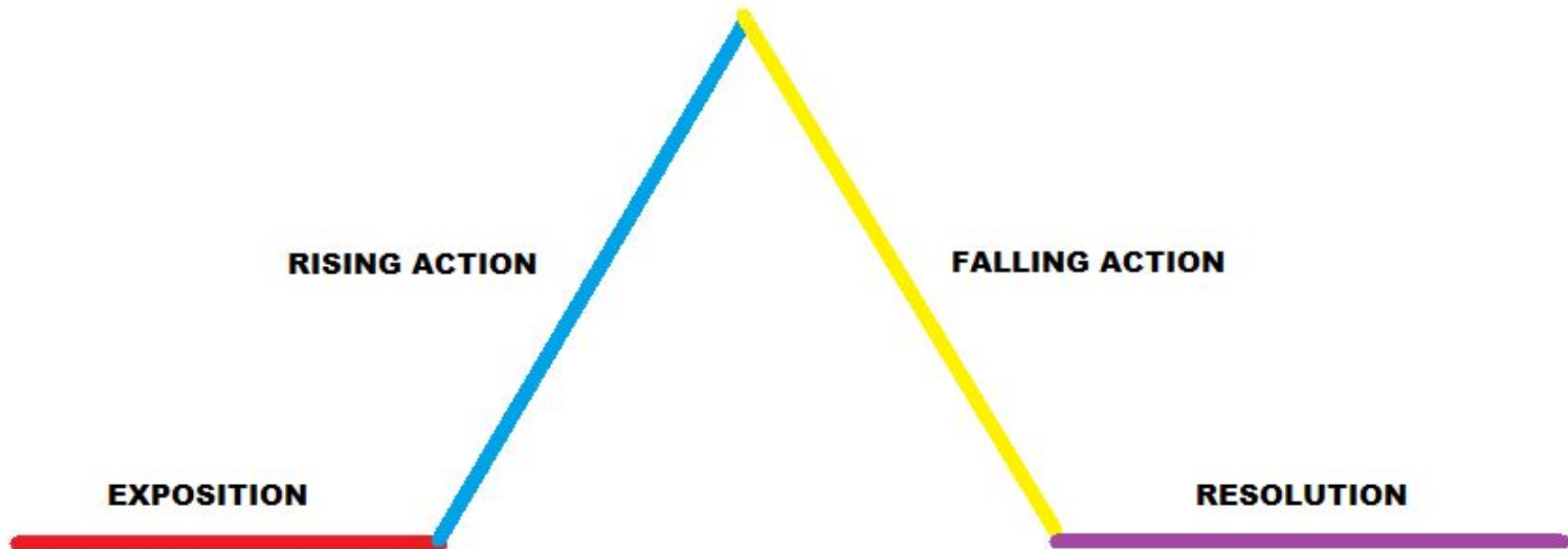
RISING ACTION

FALLING ACTION

EXPOSITION

RESOLUTION

PLOT



Remember

- You are writing for a 3 minute short animation
- You are primarily writing action (i.e. what we would see)
Show character thought and feeling through action

[5]

*Simplify. Focus. Combine
characters. Hop over detours.
You'll feel like you're losing valuable
stuff but it sets you free.*



[6]

What
is your
character
good at,
comfortable
with?



Throw the
polar
opposite
at them.
Challenge
them.

How
do
they
DEAL?





[7]

*Come up with your ending
before you figure out your
middle. **Seriously.***

Endings are HARD,
*get yours
working
up front.*



[8]

FINISH YOUR STORY,

let go even if it's not perfect.

*In an ideal world you have both,
but **move on.***



DO BETTER

next time.

[9]

When you're **STUCK**, make a list of
***what wouldn't
happen next...***

Lots of times the
material to get you
UNSTUCK will show up.



[10]

Pull you like. a p a r t the stories

*What you like in
them is a part of
you; you've got to
recognize it before
you can use it.*



[11]

*Putting it on paper
lets you start fixing it.*



*If it stays in your head,
a perfect idea,
you'll never share it with anyone.*

[12]

DISCOUNT

*the 1st thing
that comes to mind.
And the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th
– get the obvious out of the way.
Surprise yourself.*



[13]



Give your *characters*

OPINIONS.

Passive/malleable might seem
likable to you as you write,

but it's

poison

to the audience.

[14]

Why must you tell this story?

*What's the
belief burning within you
that your story
feeds off of?*

*That's the
heart of it.*

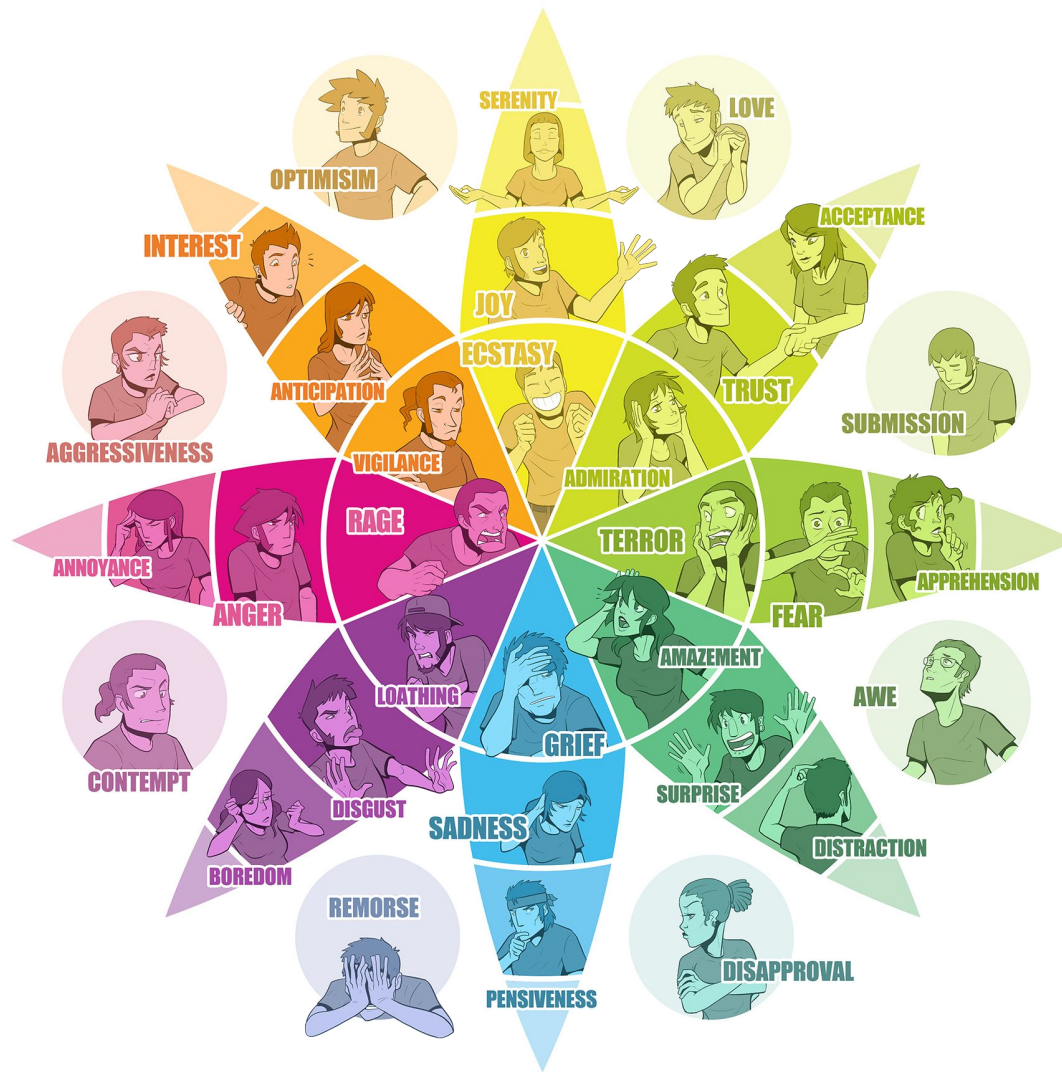


[15]

*If you were your character,
in this situation,
how would you feel?*

*Honesty
lends credibility to
unbelievable situations.*





Joy vs Sadness

Trust vs Disgust

Fear vs Anger

Surprise vs Anticipation

For example, "Rage" is the stronger form of "Anger" while "Annoyance" is the weaker.

EMOTION

Anger
Anticipation
Disgust
Fear
Joy
Sadness
surprise
Trust

OPPOSITE

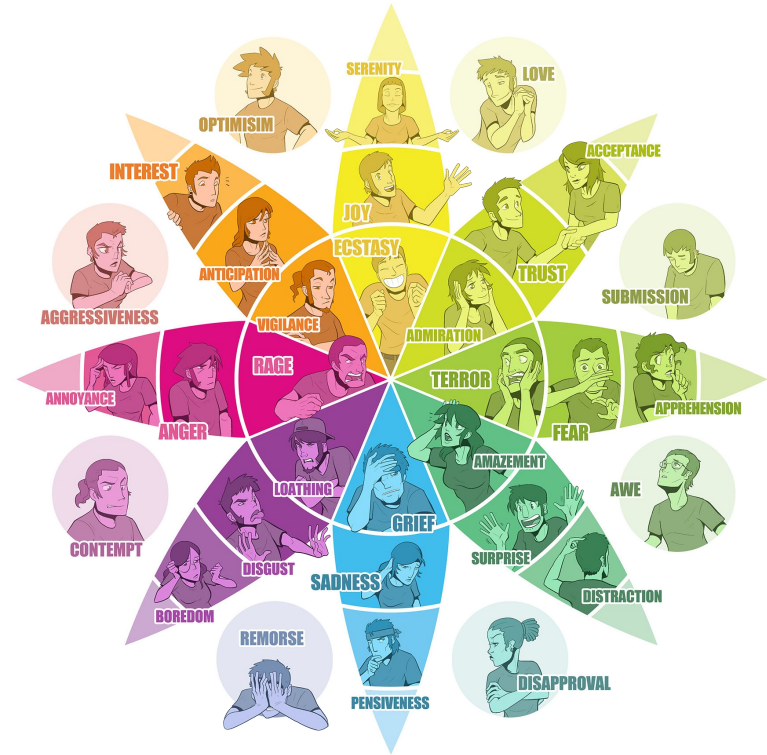
fear
surprise
trust
anger
sadness
joy
anticipation
disgust

INTENSE

rage
vigilance
loathing
terror
ecstasy
grief
amazement
admiration

MILD

annoyance
interest
boredom
apprehension
serenity
pensiveness
distraction
acceptance



[16]

*What are the **stakes**?*

*Give us reason
to root for
the character.*

*What happens
if they don't succeed?
Stack the odds against.*







Disney · PIXAR



MONSTERS
UNIVERSITY



[17]

No work is ever wasted. If it's
not working, let go and move on
– it'll come back
around to be
useful later.



[18]

You have to

KNOW YOURSELF:

*the difference between
doing your best & fussing.*

*Story
is
testing not refining.*



[19]

COINCIDENCES
to get characters into
TROUBLE
are GREAT.



COINCIDENCES
to get them out of it
are CHEATING.



[20]

*Exercise: take the **building blocks** of a movie you **DISLIKE**.
How d'you rearrange them
into what you **DO** like?*



[21]

You have to
identify with your
situation and *characters*,
CAN'T JUST WRITE 'COOL'.



*What would make
YOU act that way?*

Advice from Pixar writers

- It's the telling of a story that gives it appeal.
- It's not so much what you say but how you say it
- You have to be willing to make mistakes.... Then take time to fix them
- Good writing is rewriting
- "Be wrong as fast as you can" Andrew Stanton
- Developing a story is like an archeological dig. Pick a site where you think the story is buried, and keep digging to find it.
- The only failure is never trying, and success comes to those who simply refuse, or are too naive, to give up