



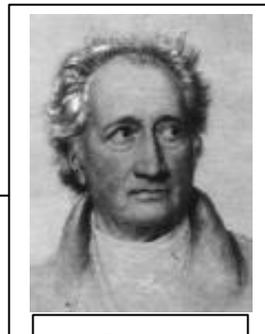
Politi's 36 Dramatic Situations!

HEY! Whose list is this, anyway?

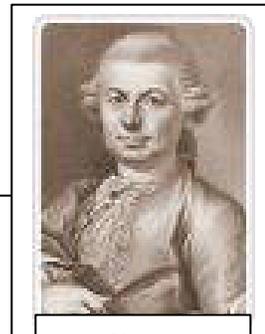
Georges Polti was a 19th century French writer who speculated that there were 36 dramatic situations that could be found in, and that form the basis for, all stories.

Polti claimed that his list was based on a list created by a 19th century German writer named Johann Goethe.

Goethe claimed that *his* list was based on a list created by 18th century Italian dramatist, Carlo Gozzi.



Goethe



Gozzie

Well, whoever wrote the original list; we use the list today to help us in our own situation writing.

1.

Supplication: To beg for something that one does not have.

This plot usually takes at least three people.

1. **Supplicant**
2. **Persecutor**
3. **Powerful Decision Maker**

Our Hero, the **Supplicant**, usually needs to beg for help from the **Powerful Decision Maker** in order to escape from the wrath of the **Persecutor**.

Example:

In *The Wizard of Oz*, **Dorothy** seeks help from **The Wizard** so that she can go home, and escape the wrath of the **Wicked Witch of the West**.

Plot Twist 1:

Dorothy eventually must kill the **Wicked Witch** in order to go home.

Plot Twist 2:

The Wizard is just a funny old man with a balloon.



2. Deliverance: To be saved from peril.

Our main three players are...

1. Threatened
2. Threatener
3. Rescuer

The Rescuer saves the Threatened from the Threatener.

Note: Sometimes this story is told from the point of view of the Rescuer, and sometimes it is told from the point of view of the Threatened.



Example:

This story happens whenever Superman saves Lois Lane from... Whatever.

3.

Vengeance of a Crime:

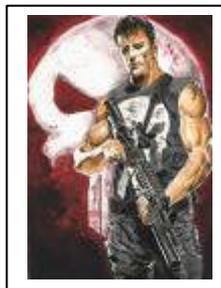
This story requires only two characters:

1. The Avenger
2. The Criminal

The Avenger hunts down The Criminal for a past crime.

Example:

"They" killed The Punisher's wife and family. Now, The Punisher hunts "Them" down. 'Nuff said!



4.

Vengeance taken upon a Kinsman for a Kinsman:

"One family member takes vengeance on another family member for something that was done to yet another family member."

For this story you need...

1. An Avenging Family Member
2. A Victim Family Member
3. A Guilty Family Member



Example:

Luke wants to kill Darth Vader for killing Luke's father only to find out that Vader is his father.

Plot Twist: Vader is the Guilty Family Member, and the Victim Family Member.

5.

Pursuit:

A Fugitive Runs from Justice or Injustice



The primary characters here are...

1. Punishment
2. The Fugitive

Example:

The HULK (Bruce Banner) is always on the run from The Military.

Note: Unlike with “Vengeance for a Crime,” the “Pursuit” storyline is usually designed with the idea of creating sympathy for the fugitive, not the justice system.



6.

DISASTER!

It’s the end of the World, as we know it, and nobody feels fine.

This story can have any number of characters, but the basic idea is that something terrible has happened, and the main characters must cope with it.

This story has many examples:

1. A meteor or comet crashes into the Earth – *Meteor, Armageddon, Deep Impact*
2. Machines can destroy the Human Race. – *Terminator, Matrix*
3. Aliens Attack. – *Mars Attacks, Independence Day, War of the Worlds*
4. Humans damage the Earth and destroy civilization. – *Waterworld, The Core, Mad Max*

7. Falling Prey to Cruelty or Misfortune:

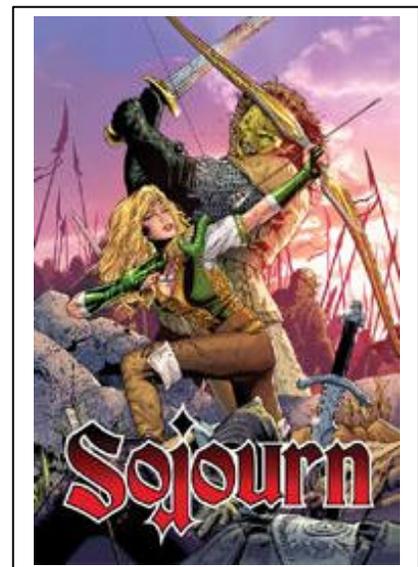
Once things were happy, but not anymore

This story requires only two basic things.

1. A misfortunate
2. A misfortune or master of misfortune

Example:

In the Crossgen comic, *Sojourn* the five mystic lands are crushed under the rule of a dark overlord named Mordath who oppresses the innocent people.



REVOLT:

8.

Rise up against the Machine!



This storyline requires ...

1. A Tyrant
2. A Conspirator

In order for this storyline to work it must be established that the power system is tyrannical or corrupt in some sort of way, and that the conspirators are the good guys.

Example:

In *The Matrix*, Neo, Morpheus and Trinity battle the machine race and their oppressive programs to save the human race.

9. Daring Enterprise:

We set out to do the impossible.

This story needs...

1. A bold Leader (willing to take the risk)
2. An object or objective
3. An adversary



Example:

In *Fellowship of the Ring*, Gandalf, Frodo, and a small band of adventurers set out to destroy the ring of power with the Dark Lord Sauron, the Wizard Sarumon, and an army of Orcs against them.

Abduction: 10.

Taking away a person by force, threat, or deceit. Kidnapping!



Example:

Venom knew that Spiderman would come to save Mary Jane.

Three elements make this story work:

1. An Abductor
2. The Abducted
3. A Guardian Figure

Note: The guardian figure doesn't always need to be the hero in an abduction story. In *Hansel and Gretel*, the abducted children *save themselves* from their captor, the Wicked Witch.

11. the Enigma

“Riddle me this one, Batman!”

A story with three elements...

1. An Interrogator
2. A Seeker
3. A Problem

The Interrogator usually leaves clues for the Seeker to follow in order to solve the problem. There is usually also a time limit involved.

Example:

The Riddler often leaves clues for Batman to solve in order to prevent a crime or save innocent lives.



12

Obtaining

Trying to make a deal for what you want.

This is a common story involving...

1. A Solicitor (who wants something)
 2. An Adversary (who won't part with that something)
- Or
1. An Arbitrator (negotiating an agreement)
 2. Disagreeing Parties (refusing to see eye to eye)



Example:

Pepe Le Pew seeks the love of Kitty, but she resists because he stinks!

13. Enmity of Kinsmen: “The Family Feud”



Example:
Juggernaut hates his half-brother Xavier.



When two or more members of a family don't get along, and infighting ensues.

Rivalry of Kinsmen: 14.

Actually, this is very similar to number thirteen, but in this version, one kinsman is usually treated better than the other. “Rivalry of Kinsman” almost always has a “Mom always loved you best!” factor.

15

Murderous Adultery

In this storyline, there is always a plan to kill a spouse for the love of another. This usually starts out as an affair, but then grows violent as one of the adulterers convinces the other to kill the unsuspecting, or sometimes suspecting, spouse.

16.

MADNESS!

Somebody is going crazy, and somebody is going to pay for it!



Oh Yeah, He's lost it.

To do this storyline you only need two characters: The character that's going crazy, and the victim who is being terrorized by the character that is going crazy.

In the movie, *The Shining*, the main character, Jack begins to slowly go crazy and terrorize his family while they are trapped in an empty hotel in the mountains.

17. Fatal Imprudence

We all make mistakes from time to time. In this plot a mistake goes terribly wrong. Usually, a hasty decision made in anger or out of pride leads to great loss.

Usually, somebody angers a greater power and has to pay the price.

Great moments in Fatal Imprudence!



Let my people go!



No!

18

Involuntary Crimes of Love

The primary characters here are...

1. the Lover
2. the Beloved
3. the Revealer

“I Love You!”
 “I Want to Marry You!”
 “Wait a minute! You’re Who??”

The most common version of this story is found in the Greek tragedy of *Oedipus*. In this story, the main character, **Oedipus** unwittingly kills **his father** and marries his mother, **Jocasta**. Years later, he finds out what he has done from the blind prophet **Tiresias**.

19

Slaying of a Kinsman Unrecognized

The **Slayer** kills (or nearly kills or harms) the **Unrecognized Victim**, who is actually a relative or friend of the Slayer. Thus a seemingly justified act suddenly becomes unjustified.

Only two characters...

the **Slayer**
 the **Victim**

*Go back to 18 and read the Oedipus example again.

20

&

21

Self-sacrificing for an ideal Self-sacrificing for another

“Tis a far, far better thing I do...”

These situations are placed together because they are so similar.

A story with three elements...

- The Hero
- The Ideal or Other Person
- The Creditor or the Person or Thing Sacrificed

Arguably the greatest storylines, producing the greatest tragic heroes of all time, the hero in this situation gives up something dear in order to prove a point. The most dramatic examples of this situation are:

Socrates drinking poison for **his beliefs**. - Historical
Jesus dying on the cross for **the sins of the world**. – Biblical
Sydney Carton going to the gallows for **the man who married the only woman he ever loved**. – Literary (*Tale of Two Cities*)

All Sacrificed for a Passion 22

In a romantic setting, this situation could represent giving up something precious for the love of another person, but it can also be used to describe total sacrifice of a thing because of greed.

- The Lover
- The Object of the fatal passion
- The Person or Thing sacrificed

In *Superman II*, Clark must decide between his powers to save the world and his love for Lois Lane. He chooses to sacrifice his powers for the woman he loves. The audience disagreed.



23

Necessity of sacrificing loved ones

In this situation, the hero must sacrifice a loved one in order to appease a greater good.



Abraham is told to sacrifice his only son, Isaac in order to prove his obedience to God. Luckily, an angel stops him just in time.

- The Hero
- The Beloved Victim
- The Necessity for the sacrifice

Rivalry of superior and inferior 24

This story gets the crowd to its feet. Why? Because we love it! What is a story without a little person who dares to take on a greater one? Again, like situations 20 and 21, we see examples of this story repeated again and again.

- The Superior Rival
- The Inferior Rival
- The Object of Rivalry



David
vs.
Goliath
for
Israel



Odysseus
vs.
Polyphemus
for
Freedom



Rocky
vs.
Mr. T
for the
Championship

25

Adultery

Why this one comes *after* 15 I have no idea.

This is the oldest story in the book. Somebody isn't being faithful, and that always leads to problems. Usually not a story onto itself, this storyline is usually a lead in to some other plot situation.

Important point! This story only takes place if there is a **violation of marriage** at stake.

When Archie promises to take Betty to the dance and he takes Veronica instead, that's **not** adultery.

This is a common story involving...

- A Deceived Spouse
- Two Adulterers

In Nathaniel Hawthorn's "*The Scarlet Letter*" the main character, **Hester** is convicted of being unfaithful to her **husband** with a **lover whom she will not name**.

26 Crimes of Love

This situation usually stems from a love that is either forbidden by a social or moral code.



Romeo and Juliet's love violated a social code.
To be Continued...

Discovery of the dishonor of a loved one

27

The guilty one brings shame on the family through a dishonorable act. The Dishonorer is the one who discovers the crime and levies the punishment.

- The Dishonorer

In the Disney film, *Mulan*, based on the Chinese epic poem "*The Ballad of Mulan*", **Fa Mulan** dresses as a soldier and fights in a war. When this is discovered, **the Emperor's advisor** tries to bring shame on Mulan's family.



Hua Mulan

- The Guilty One

28 Obstacles to love

Two Lovers want to be together, but some difficult obstacle prevents them from doing so.

Characters are

- Two Lovers
- An Obstacle



Aladdin wants to get with Jasmine, but the law says she must only marry a prince.

An Enemy Loved 29

“You can’t love him! He’s a Creep!!”

The Lover loves the Beloved Enemy. The Hater hates the Lover for this betrayal.

- The Beloved Enemy
- The Lover
- The Hater



Romeo and Juliet’s families hated each other, and Romeo and Juliet took a lot of heat for it.

30

Ambition

The ambitious person seeks his ambition, but an adversary keeps the ambitious person from reaching the ambition.



If Mario doesn’t defeat the Level Boss, he won’t complete the level.

31- Conflict with a God See #24

This fight can be an internal fight with beliefs, or an actual battle between a Mortal and a God.



In that Odysseus vs. Polythemus fight in situation 24, Odysseus wins, but what he doesn't know is that Polyphemus is the son of Poseidon, the God of the sea. Odysseus has to get home by boat. Doh!!

Mistaken Jealousy - 32

Ok, this one is a little bit complicated.

The Jealous person, through some Cause or Author, appears to become jealous of some Object. There may also be a Supposed Accomplice.

Elements Involved

- The Jealous
- The Object of whose possessions he is jealous
- The Supposed Accomplice
- The Cause or the Author of the mistake

33 Erroneous judgment

“Oops, My mistake”

The Mistaken One makes some judgment about or is suspicious about the Victim, instead of the Guilty Person. This is due to some Cause or is caused by the Author of the mistake.

Players

- The Mistaken One
- The Victim of the mistake
- The Cause or Author of the mistake
- The Guilty Person

In *The Count of Monte Cristo*, a young sailor named **Edmond Dantes** is accused of conspiring with traitors. This accusation is cooked up by Edmond's false friend **Danglers** and sentence is carried out by the Deputy crown prosecutor named **Vilefort** based on a letter that Edmond delivered unknowingly to Napoleon Bonaparte.

34

Remorse

"Ok, I did it, and I'm sorry!"

- The Culprit
- The Victim or Sin
- The Interrogator

The Culprit has done wrong to a Victim or committed another Sin. The Interrogator gets an admission of guilt.

Recovery of a Lost One 35

"Where have you been?"
Seeker finds a lost one.
"Nuff Said!"

Loss of Loved Ones 36

The Kinsman Spectator sees the Kinsman Slain being killed by the Executioner.



- A Kinsman Slain
- A Kinsman Spectator
- An Executioner

Young Bruce Wayne sees his **father and mother** killed on the streets of Gotham City at the hands of **a common thief**.

