

WOARO Worksheet

Here are a series of exercises to consider aspects of storytelling and WOARO (want, obstacle, action, response, and outcome).

For more information about WOARO, locate The Leap Presentation at www.couniosandgane.com/teachers.

1. Identifying WOARO:

1. This exercise helps identify the individual pieces of want, obstacle, action, response, and outcome.
 - a. Read a short story.
 - b. Identify who the main protagonist is. What is the single thing this character wants? What is the one thing that drives the character through the story?
 - i. How does the writer state this want? Do they say it directly (for example in a character's thoughts), visually, or through dialogue?
 - c. Are there multiple protagonists? Identify each of their wants. Do the characters' wants work against each other?
 - d. What stands in the way of the protagonist? What is the obstacle?
 - e. Is the main obstacle the character who is the antagonist of the story or a situation the protagonist finds himself in? If the antagonist is a character, what does this character want? How do those wants or that situation work against the hero?
 - f. What actions does the protagonist take to move around the obstacles? Are these actions successful?
 - g. Does the obstacle or antagonist allow these actions to work? What responses are taken to counter these actions?
 - h. If the actions are not successful, does the character change tactics and take different actions? Does this help progress the character towards the want?
 - i. Does the hero eventually get what they want? If so, why? Was it a particular action that allowed this to happen?
 - j. If the hero didn't get what they want, what happened to stop them? Was it the response of the obstacle or antagonist? Why are they no longer able to proceed toward their want?
 - k. Whether the protagonist gets what they want or not, does this stop them from still desiring their want?
2. Action and response is the engine that moves us through a scene. These exchanges of action and response will work in large sections across the page, but also between paragraphs, and individual sentences or dialogue between characters.

- a. Take a single scene from a piece of writing, whether it is a short story, novel, or play.
 - b. Identify the want and obstacles that begin the scene.
 - c. Identify actions that the main character takes and the multiple ways that the obstacle or antagonist responds to these actions.
 - d. How do actions and responses occur? Are they physical actions a character takes, thoughts, or are they things characters say?
 - e. Are there moments when the main character or protagonist becomes their own obstacle? Do a character's thoughts or emotions get in the way of their want? Are they tempted away from their want by short-term outcomes?
 - f. Locate a short exchange between characters, most easily found in dialogue, or within a character's own thoughts and feelings when there is internal conflict. Identify the actions of the main character, and the responses of the antagonist or the action of the protagonist to personal obstacles.
 - g. Can you identify the larger movements of action and response that carry readers through a scene?
3. Read a longer piece of writing (a long short story, novella, or novel) and discuss:
- a. Does the protagonist have a want that carries through the entire story from beginning to end?
 - b. Does the protagonist pursue smaller goals throughout the story? For example, a character may want a treasure, but might first need to get a map in order to find the treasure. How do these smaller goals shape the story?
4. Character and WOARO:
- a. There are different levels of a character's want. There are the singular wants that drive a story, but there are also primary wants that drive a character through life. For example, Oedipus wants to end the plague affecting Thebes, but his life goal is to avoid marrying his mother and killing his father.
 - i. Locate a character in a piece of writing and identify what they want within the story.
 - ii. Are there any clues as to what the character wanted before the main action began?
 - b. What internal obstacles stand in the way of a character? These could be memories, emotions, poor self-awareness ("I am stupid and no one loves me."), or false-thinking or world-view.
 - c. What actions does a character take? How do these actions define the character? For example, a businessman and a thief may both want money, but they achieve it in very different ways.
 - d. Up to this point, we've discussed how obstacles respond to the main character, but the protagonist also responds to the obstacle, as well. How

does a character respond to other people's actions? For example, if confronted with a problem, do they yell and scream or are they resourceful, seeking a new solution?

5. Theme and WOARO:
 - a. Story often explores its theme through the wants, actions, and outcomes of its characters. Choose a story and locate the wants of the different characters.
 - b. Do the characters have opposing wants (e.g. a thief and a detective)?
 - c. Do any of the characters have similar wants? Do they take different actions to achieve those wants?
 - d. What is the outcome of these wants and actions? If they are opposing, who succeeds? If they have similar wants, what actions lead to success? What does this tell you about the theme of the story?

2. Text to Text

1. Use WOARO to make connections between two pieces of storytelling, whether they are novels, short stories, films, television shows, songs, or other pieces of writing or artwork.
 - a. Do the main characters have similar wants, are the actions they take towards their goal identical? Review the example of the businessman and thief from above.
 - b. Main characters are often defined by the obstacle or antagonists they face. Can you identify two stories that have similar wants but very different obstacles? How do these different obstacles change the way we see the protagonist?
 - c. The genre of a story (romance, drama, action) is often defined by the actions of the main character. Can you find two stories from the same genre, whose wants and obstacles contrast one another?
2. Compare WOARO to alternative structure (e.g. Freytag's pyramid or the Hero's Journey).
 - a. Taking a story, locate the sections of the alternative structure:
 - i. Freytag's pyramid: inciting incident, rising action, complication, climax, reversal, falling action, resolution, and denouement
 - ii. Hero's Journey: The Call to Adventure; Refusal of the Call; Meeting the Mentor; Crossing the Threshold; Tests; Allies, and Enemies; Approach to the Inmost Cave; Ordeal; Reward; The Road Back; Resurrection; Return with the Elixir
 - b. Now locate WOARO within the same story.
 - c. What are the connections between the two story structures? Does a character's want or actions or the obstacle's responses coincide with certain moments of the other structure?

3. Using the exercise above on theme (1.5), contrast the wants and actions of two stories with similar themes.

3. Text to World

1. Research a news story and identify the central conflict.
 - a. Who is involved? There may be more than one or two sides to this event.
 - b. What do the people want?
 - c. What obstacles stand in their way? If it is a story about two people or groups, do their opposing wants create an obstacle?
 - d. What actions are the people taking to get what they want? Does this increase the conflict?
 - e. Can you think of alternative actions that could be taken? What might be possible responses from the other people involved?
 - f. What is the present outcome? What are the other possible outcomes?
2. Does a fictional story, song, or film explore a similar conflict?
 - a. What does the writer or artist suggest are possible conflicts caused by characters' opposing wants and actions?
 - b. Does the story offer any other solutions to the conflict?

4. Text to Self

1. WOARO can be useful way to look at your own life goals.
 - a. What do you want?
 - b. What obstacles stand in your way?
 - c. What actions can you take to work around the obstacle?
 - d. Consider possible responses or outcomes.
2. Can you identify with a character in a story who has a similar want or faces a similar obstacle? What actions do they take and do they have a positive effect in the life of the character? If not, what lessons can be learned from their mistakes or outcomes?