Storytelling

WORKING METHOD

PLOTS / CHARACTERS / DRAMA EFFECTS / NARRATIVE SETTINGS

Let's read and let's write

Be welcome in our Story&Drama collection which aims at developing your knowledge in storytelling and at providing you with narrative concepts and creative tools.

Writing a story is not simple, but with a bit of methodology based on the most successful artworks in various artforms, everybody is able to write a science-fiction novel, a comedy show, philosophical comics, an album of electro songs, a philosophical music video, a documentary film, and anything else in fiction.

So we wish you good reading and we also wish to hear all the great stories that you will tell the world, starting here!

Story&Drama
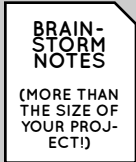
Steps of work + working documents

Working out a story is a complex task, because the story is a complex object

To build a story, we have to make **plots** and **characters**, to arrange them into **structures**, and from that write a complete **script** with **scenes**, **descriptions**, **dialogs**.

If we start writing the final script from nothing, the result might be too poor to satisfy our **audience**. If we start writing a big project without a method, we take the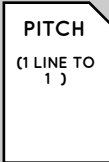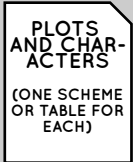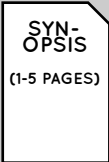 risk not to know what to start with, to get lost in the work documents, to mix and confuse the versions, to lose track of some ideas.

So, to make sure we will obtain our script in the end, all along the process we need to **organize the work in steps** and to **elaborate some documents** progressively:

1/ Project setup	2/ Brainstorm and Research	3/ Pitch, plots and characters development		4/ Writing / rewriting		5/ Making
From first idea to specifications	From documentation to pitch	From pitch to plots and characters		From synopsis to treatment to script		Publisher, director, producer, drawer...
SPECIFICATIONS (BUDGET, DEADLINE...)	BRAINSTORM NOTES (MORE THAN THE SIZE OF YOUR PROJECT!)	PITCH (1 LINE TO 1)	PLOTS AND CHARACTERS (ONE SCHEME OR TABLE FOR EACH)	SYNOPSIS (1-5 PAGES)	TREATMENT (5-40 PAGES)	Final work: Book, comics, show, album, movie, event, etc

(Note: the sizes of the document are indicative, they will vary according to our project. Of course we do not write a long-feature movie or an epic novel as we write a short-story, a narrative poem, a song, a one-page comic, etc. What is important here is the proportions and the idea that there's a step-by-step, progressive development.)

Working documents

Firstly, there are 2 documents that we will probably want to keep and feed during the whole creative process:

The Board journal

The **Board journal** is a daily tool to **develop, transform, store** our work: each time we work on our project, we take notes of the date and time and keep track of our thoughts, artistic intentions, philosophical considerations, plans, problems, scenes we have in mind, fragments of dialogs that came to us in our sleep, etc. Later, in 2 weeks, 3 months, 1 year, we will find very useful having kept those precious notes.

In this journal we might also note our **doubts, hesitations, projects, lists** of characters and sketches of plots that are candidates to belong to the final story, and all other work data.

One important point: Do not worry about the **quality**, it is **just research**, the Journal is our **secret laboratory**. Accept everything that comes, we will make cuts and selections later. Everything can bring good ideas – bad elements are useful to define the good ones, by contrast.

Board Journal

- **10 of March**
  "Reading books about the main topic and taking notes"... "Notes about the psychology, goals and motivations of the main character in plot 1"

- **11 of March**
  "Notes about the philosophy of the story about the problem of ..."

- **12 of March**
  "Brainstorm about the general structure of plots..."

- **13 of march**
  "First sketch of a structure of 2 interconnected main plots with 1 side plot each..."

Working documents

The Bible

The "**Bible**" (nothing to do with the sacred book, we do not have to crucify Jesus a second time to make a good Bible) is a **reference document** that allows us to store all the data, descriptions and lists about the story elements we are **sure** of: the plots, characters, scenes we finished building, the characters and their relationships, and all the other elements that will belong for sure to the final story.

It is more structured than the **Journal**:

● In the **Journal**, we **elaborate** the materials.

● In the **Bible**, we keep only what is **finished** and **ready** to be transformed into a synopsis and finally a script.

Equipped with those documents, we can start working.

As you will see, we divide the work into 5 main steps :

● 1. Setup of the project
● 2. Brainstorm / documentation
● 3. Plots and characters development
● 4. Writing
● 5. Sending.

And to make it even more clear, we will feed the demonstration by taking 4 different (fictitious) projects of stories. Ready? Let's go!

Bible

ACT I Introduction			ACT II Development				ACT III Conclusion		
Exposition	Catalyst + Goal	Question	Process	Process	Process	Process	Crisis	Climax	Answer

MENTOR	SKEPTIC	MENTOR	SKEPTIC
HERO		ENEMY	
HELPER	HELPER	HELPER	HELPER
HELPER	HELPER	HELPER	HELPER

STORY	
PLOT	
CHARACTER	
Goal Motivation	___ ___
+	-
Property 1 Property 2 Property 3	Property 4 Property 5 Property 6

Synopsis

This plot starts this way,
continues that way,
ends that way.

1/ Project setup

From first idea to project specifications

Our project of story is determined by several groups of **parameters**. From reality, they determine fiction.

Our **setup** step starts by **taking those parameters into account** and to make many small decisions which, accumulated, will finally make **a close portrait of our wanted final work** : the **project specifications**.

● There are the parameters we control and decide, like the **general idea** of the story, the **themes**, the **philosophy**, the **aesthetics**.

● There are external and material constraints that are sometimes imposed, like the **budget** and the **working time**.

● There are formal constraints that we choose but that have their own rules, like the **media**, the **genre**, the **standard formats**.

● There is the permanent constraint of trying to reach an **audience**, that we search for, but that we do not directly control.

➲ Examining those parameters can give us much **material** to build our story with.

According to the **level** and **ambition** of our project, we might not need to define all of the **parameters** in the most precise details. Then, just skip those that are not relevant in our case.

During all the process of setting up our story, we keep notes in our **Board journal**. Those materials will be re-used later, during steps 2 and 3.

So, let's now study all the **parameters** that can have an influence over the setup of our project of story.

1/ Project setup

The general idea

Let's define first **what our story is about**.

Do a quick **brainstorm**, gathering all possible element: ideas, themes, intuitions, intentions, fragments, desires, memories, sketches…

All those elements are potential germs for **stories**, **plot points**, **characters**, **scenes**… Let's store them in the **Board journal.**

Intentions - Messages to send – What do we mean?

Ask ourself: with this story, **what do we want to show, prove, express, focus on?**

Answering those questions will provide us our **messages**.

Once we have a **message**, we can develop it into several: just transform it into its possible **contradictions** and **variants**; sometimes it gives a better angle, or it is useful to set up the **Antagonist**'s dramatic data …

➲ Our **messages** will be used to build **plots** and **characters**, and also to design the **pitch** during next step.

1/ Project setup

Impacts wished

Imagine our work is already done: what great **effects** does it have on the audience we selected? When we clearly know the effect we want to produce, it is much easier to design the plots and characters that precisely fit our dramatic needs.

Define the **impact** we want the final work to have on our audience, what we want to make them:

- Think
- Feel
- Understand
- Suffer from
- Laugh with…

It could be for example:

- The audience should laugh every 5 seconds
- They should learn to like a miserable tramp
- They should feel revolted and in the end want to stop using plastic bags because it destroys the beautiful ocean life
- Etc…

and then let's conceive the plots and characters so that they lead precisely to this result.

This will be used as **guidelines** to build conflicts, to set up the properties of the characters, and to build plots.

This method is more demanding than improvisation, but it is also more likely to lead the creator to the right creation, and not to a random final work.

1/ Project setup

Genres

Genres can feed our work with **patterns** and **models**.

Position the future story in a genre, that will give us **frames** and **elements**: typical plots, typical characters, typical themes.

The goal is not to re-use them as such, but to create while being aware of what the audience already knows and expects.

The **standards** helps us to set up our work partly in conformity, partly in opposition to them:

- A tragedy that ends well
- A political pamphlet told by an angry child (pamphlet + children story)
- A philosophical puppet show (genres: philosophy+puppets), etc.

➲ Make and keep in the **Board journal** a list of the genres the story belongs to.

Reference-works - List and study typical stories

From the **audience** we defined and the **general ideas** we started with, we can **list standard plots** like **archetypes of stories** or **typical series of actions** that we abstract from **famous** works. Indeed, since those reference-works proved interesting, efficient and successful, we can take profit in analyzing them, and try to take the best out of it and to re-use it in our work as **models** and/or **counter-models**.

1/ Project setup

Budget

How much money is needed? Money is involved at several levels: some is needed to **produce the script**, and some is needed to **produce the final work from the script**.

● Even a short-movie costs several thousands dollars… do not try to do a 1 million dollars movie if you're a beginner…

● If we are writing a theater play, the number of actors needed is an important factor. Even if it looks like a good idea to stage a revolutionary crowd demonstrating, economically it is not possible to pay 100 actors during several months of rehearsal. Such a reality determines the quantity of characters we can create. The same scene in a novel has no cost…

● For a story in the desert in the future, we had better tell it through a novel or comics, unless we can get a big, big movie budget…

● In audiovisual medias, our script will have a cost to get transformed into a final work. In cinema, a helicopter fight is more expensive to shoot than a car race, that is more expensive than a bike duel. But as an audio track, the three of them cost nearly the same.

● If we sell our stories, our creative time has a cost. Our partners may want us to work up to a certain amount of money, matching a certain amount of work. So we have to design a story that is writable within those conditions. Budgets conditions the working time that conditions the complexity of the story.

Who can finance?

Authors has several ways to pay for the costs of their projects:

● Finding a producer, agent
● Getting a grant, a help to writing
● Crowdfunding

1/ Project setup

Time (project duration, deadline?)

How much **time** is available to write the script?

● If we have only 2 available months, that is very hard to write a good 200 pages novel...

● A long-feature movie is often not less than one full year. Frequently, it takes several years.

So, let's be realistic: do we have the needed resources?

We can use techniques and tools to manage our working time.

● Organizing one's **writing time on a regular basis** sounds like a good idea. Professional writers work several hours each day.

● To manage the attention while doing intellectual work during hours, the **Pomodoro method** can help.

● When we deal with a very big project, we can use a **task planning software** based on Gantt diagrams, they allow to manage deadlines and to control the evolution of many tasks. It is a way not to forget about what has been done and what remains to be done, like "review plot 5" or "build the love story of the Hero of plot 1" or "develop the synopsis of the 5 plots of the second part into a full treatment and send it to the producer".

1/ Project setup

Skills, resources needed

How many people are needed to realize the story? Can we obtain collaborations?

Some projects need skills that the author of the script do not have.

It is the case with:

- scriptwriters who are not directors,
- comics scenarists who can not draw,
- lyrics authors who do not sing or play,
- playwright writers who do not play, etc.

So, who do you need, for how long time, on which conditions? Perhaps we will be able to decide it only later, but we will have to decide.

1/ Project setup

Media

Can we shape our work for a given **media**, taking account of its artistic and economic constraints?

Better think about it from the beginning, to avoid spending time working on a story that no media will be able or likely to **publish** or **show** or **distribute**.

● A novel can last 50 pages, but practically that does not make sense because of the costs (graphic design, printing...) of the publishing process... A 50 pages book has no future. But, for an e-Book, no problem!

● Imagine someone creates a great show that needs 3 sound ingeneers, 4 "VJs", and 5 technicians, + an music orchestra. Who will pay all of those over-talented people?

Each **media**, each art, each **genre**, has its rules of:

● Creation

● Production

● Distribution

● Promotion

The better we know those rules, the better we can shape our work so that it passes all the tests and gets to success. Why not making a quick **inventory** of the possibilities of our media, to keep the mind open and not to miss the occasion to innovate?

● For example, while starting a movie, it is good to remind its variants: mute, white and black, Technicolor, video, panorama, camera-to-shoulder, 3D, stop-motion, slow-motion, time-lapse, color effects... Perhaps some scenes could be based on them.

So, what is a reasonable and realistic **format** for our work?

1/ Project setup

Size / duration (in pages, in minutes)

We might want to give our work an optimum **size in pages** or **in duration** for time-based media.

That data determines **the quantity and size of plots and scenes** we have to build, the **number of characters** we have to create.

Scale it to the **standards**, unless you have a good reason to break this rule.

For example:

- Theater play: 1-2h
- Movie: 1h30-2h30
- Short-movie: 1mn-20mn
- Book: 100-800 pages, very frequently around 200-300 pages

- A theater play can hardly last 20 minutes because then the production cost would be too high: the actors would not engage to play just 20 minutes, and most of the people in our virtual audience would not spend one hour driving just for a 20 minutes show.

- Identically, a show cannot last 4 hours, because then the audience could and would not sit in the same place for so long.

1/ Project setup

Audience

● Who is our virtual **audience**, who is the story designed for, who do we want to touch?

● Why would they like our work?

● Which kind of works do they usually like, and what are the typical structures, themes, types, situations of those works?

● How will they get to know about it - through which medias, which promotion strategies?

➲ Categorizing "who is it told to?" will constantly help us to decide whether an element fits in our project or not.

Obviously, we do not tell in the same way to a 6yo boy than to a 80 yo couple, and a urban audience does not have the same cultural preferences than a rural audience.

● A mainstream and quality production like <u>**FRIENDS**</u> had a huge audience, but still, the 65 years old people were not much interested in Chandler's provocative jokes or in Rachel's boyfriends.

● The study of the audience can go very far, when it is about public communication or mass advertisement. The big TV advertisers test their videos on viewers to make sure of the **impact**. A good script of 30 seconds takes months of creative work, synthesis, studies, and meetings.

● Cinema is also a field of intense selection, where authors who obviously did not aim at any significant audience are quickly rejected.

1/ Project 1 - Heroic fantasy novel

The general idea

We start writing a **heroic fantasy novel** that takes place in several past civilizations.

Intentions - Messages to send

We want to promote **a peaceful attitude between cultures**, to contradict the real wars of our world.

We want to **take position in favor of cultural diversity** and to promote dialogue and positive exchanges.

Impacts wished

We want the reader to **identify** to the Hero, an Ambassador, especially **to his skills of empathy and non-violent communication**.

We also want to render the **force, charisma and power** of many characters, strong warriors, experienced diplomats, tricky spies, religious, political and military authorities that the Hero will have to fight or to collaborate with. We want all of those characters **to feel real and deep**.

We want to **fascinate** the audience with the use of magic weapons based on **wisdom** opposed to **violence**: we want the audience to **believe** in that peaceful ethics.

Genres

We read **heroic fantasy** novels, major works of literature from the civilizations we selected, a few biographies of diplomats and specialized handbooks.

Reference-works - List and study typical stories

We analyze some major works of **heroic fantasy** and **science-fiction**. We meet **themes** like the opposition between rich cities and desert countrysides, snowy landscapes and tropical shores, some **types of plots** like wars for power, internal diplomatic struggles, etc.

The **Non-Violent Communication theory** invented by Marshall Rosenberg will impregnate the Hero.

Budget

Minimal. As expenses, we will just need to buy a few books.

Time (project duration, deadline?)

We have around one year of free time to spend.

Skills, resources needed

Writing, reading, searching, imagining, thinking...

Media

We have contacts to publish the **novel** as a **book** or **eBook**.

Size/Duration (in pages, in minutes).

Around 300 pages / 90 000 words.

Audience

We aim at an audience of **fantasy novel readers**, people who like to read, enjoy imagination, want to travel and escape through a book. We will give them what they want, that we also enjoy much: spectacular fights, tensions between leaders, dreamy erotic scenes like in the series GAME OF THRONES...

1/ Project 2 - Electroclash album

The general idea

We are **a band of 5 young women** aged from 19 to 26yo and we make punchy **electro**. We released an amateur 10 songs album. We performed in bars and party places. We now want to make a professional **concept-album of electro songs** based on a feminist message with lyrics that match our music - vibrant, surprising, electric, wild.

Intentions - Messages to send

We want to **assert a kind of femininity opposing the standard of the cute teenage girl**. This young woman is wild, free, independent, she decides and she is responsible for herself. She shows an accurate taste for thinking, smartness and moral debates. She has different standards and does not hesitate to assert and defend them against any attacker.

Impacts wished

We want the listener to **feel like dancing and singing!** We want our songs and live shows to:

- **Catch the attention, punch the mind and body.**
- **Make the audience laugh.**
- **Seduce, poke, pinch the listener.**

Genres

We are clearly rooted in the field of what we call **electro-clash**. This genre is alive, successful, and inspiring.

Reference-works - List and study typical stories

So, let's **listen** at the major albums and songs of **Coco Rosie, Uffie, Sexy Sushi, Crystal Castles...** Let's also **analyze** their songs and their lyrics, and keep as models or transform what we prefer from it.

Budget

We write the lyrics by ourselves. We need instruments, computers, softwares, but most of them we own them already. We will have to pay for the studio recording. Album sales and shows are supposed to pay us back.

Time (project duration, deadline?)

Deadline: 6 months to write around 10 new songs.

Skills, resources needed

We have the resources needed to compose the music and lyrics and play them in a studio and live.

Media

We will release our album on an independent label. It will be available as a CD and also on the web.

Size/Duration (in pages, in minutes).

We want to design **10 songs**, for an album duration of **around one hour**. The songs will have more or less text, some being purely or mainly instrumental.

Audience

We know our audience: it is our current audience plus all the people like them that we want to conquer too. We are not megalomaniacs, but we like being on stage and sharing the creative energy, so we need good songs to catch and keep the audience's attention. Our audience is young people, 2/3 of girls. They like a music that sounds like them: glamour and despaired, idealistic and disgusted, sexy and fresh.

1/ Project 3 - Hip-hop photocomics

The general idea

We are two friends: a **writer / scriptwriter** having published books, articles and scripts; and a **photographer** and **graphic designer** who worked for an agency.

Together, we aim at writing and making a **comics in styled photographs** telling **the fictitious autobiography of a black blind rapper in Chicago**.

Intentions - Messages to send

We want to **represent the world of rap/hip-hop culture an unconventional way**. Black and handicapped, the Hero will be an example of **humble courage** showing that talent can bring people closer.

Impacts wished

We want to **inform** our audience about the everyday life difficulties of the American underclass, to help people **renew their watch** over it.

Genres

This project crosses genres. It makes a **comics** with real **photos**; it tells about **music**; it tells about Chicago as in some **engaged journalism,** but also a **poetic** way like in the novels of Richard Brautigan or Hubert Selby Jr.

Reference-works - List and study typical stories

We read **realistic novels, social TV series like** <u>THE WIRE</u> **or** <u>THREME</u>, and we listen to **many rap albums**.

Budget

Very low. One goal is to cover the cost of the creative work.

Time (project duration, deadline?)

We plan the making and publishing of the story over several years, as a part-time job. The main time-consuming task will be the promotion.

Skills, resources needed

We have the creative skills we need. We will have to find an agent to promote our story and all of its subproducts.

Media

We will tell only very short stories, anecdotes, moments, flashes - accumulated they will tell a long story. Some will take 1 page, some will be told in 3 frames only.

We plan to exploit **several media** and thus **several channels of distribution: book and e-book** collecting the whole series; **smaller e-books**, spreading parts of the story; and sometimes, **1 page or 3 cases** will be published on partner magazines and webzines, partly to promote the rest of the work.

Size/Duration (in pages, in minutes).

Hundreds of short-stories, from a few frames to a few pages maximum.

Audience

The audience is adult and mainstream. The Black people and the minorities may like it even more, but the story is designed to touch anybody with a heart.

1/ Project 4 - The Squatt, webseries

The general idea

We are different professional partners working on a project of **web-series**: "The Squatt". It tells about **an alternative community of artists, hackers and activists in a collective housing in Berlin**, Germany, nowadays.

Intentions - Messages to send

We want to **give voice to those young alternative artists** who bring revolutionary concepts and challenging ideas, enthusiasm and creative skills.

Impacts wished

Make the audience **identify to our lead characters**, to help **spread their ideas and attitudes**.

Prove and show that another life is possible, aside from the world of salary jobs, family, consuming society, a life based on social sharing and creation.

Contradicts some stereotypes and taboos: show that free love and free sex can work, that drugs are nice, etc.

Ideally, we would like to **influence our audience, stimulate them to react, give them reasons to engage in an alternative way of life too.**

Genres

We will mix several genres: **comedy, drama, police stories, drugs stories, political story, love stories**...

Reference-works - List and study typical stories

FRIENDS and other soaps will help us define how to deal with many characters and link them.

Budget

Each episode will cost **50 000 dollars** in average. The teams will be paid. The series will be shot in cheap conditions. The special effects will be in the writing style more than in the post-production effects.

Time (project duration, deadline?)

The project will be realized over **several years**. The first 6 episodes of the season will be sketched, then the first one will be realized. According to the success of this pilot, the rest will be written and realized or not.

Skills, resources needed

We need many skills to realize the episodes. That is the job of the producer.

Media

The first media is the **web** on some on-demand video websites. But we will also try to get prizes in **festivals**, and to make a **DVD** edition.

Size/Duration (in pages, in minutes)

We plan making a first season of **24 episodes lasting 10 minutes each**. Each episode is centered on a major and a minor plots among the core set of characters.

Audience

The series is designed for the 15-40 yo people in Germany, Europe and the western world. It includes many elements of their culture and condition. We try to get more than 50 000 watchers per episode in one year.

2/ Brainstorm and research

From documentation to synopsis

In the **setup** step, we gathered much **material** and our project has been roughly **described**. It's time to **explore, refine and deepen it**.

During this step, we search for information that we process and transform to match our project. We take this information from:

Books	TV and radio programs	Discussions
Articles	Websites	Personal experiences
Dictionaries and encyclopedias	Maps	Forums
Documentaries	Interviews	Pictures

We adapt the documentation to the type of project:

● A movie about autism? Spend a week in an institute.

● A cartoon about homosexuality? Let's interview some gays and lesbians, read books and magazines by and about the topic.

● A film about tennis? Play it, read magazines, biographies, training manuals!

● A novel about war? Read some strategy, soldier's testimonies, and so on.

➲ Each time we think an element is interesting, we **search** about it and **feed** our **Board journal** with plots, characters, properties. We **gather** anecdotes, true stories, collections of strong words, symbols, moments, impressions, ideas, theories, and **organize** them – in lists, in diagrams… **We collect data and process it** until they match our constraints.

What we are searching for, is quality elements, strong ideas.

Spending time searching, not to take the first idea that comes in mind but take time to **think twice**, we make it more sure to have **quality** in the final script.

The **documentation files** of a project should take at least as much room as the project itself, and **the more the better!** 1000 pages of note for a project of 100 pages looks like a good ratio. The audience will thank us, in the end, for having given to them such a powerful, intense artwork! the critic will praise this work, the producer and the distributor will finance it. They will all give us the awards in fame and money that will allow us to make better works. In the end, we will die, like everybody else, but us, we will die happy artists leaving a work behind.

2/ Brainstorm and research

Project 1 - Heroic fantasy novel

We gather **knowledge** to find inspiration.

History books lead us to take medieval Europe, Ming China and Mali Empire as models for our past societies.

Anthropology books give us many names, titles, social structures, archetypes, typical characters and stories, customs, religions, products, artists, thinkers, roles…We discover the concept of **trickster** and decide to have one among our main characters.

We process those data to make fiction worlds from it. We design authorities and hierarchies of power and influence in those worlds. We shape each of them with a background and its own style.

Project 2 - Electroclash album

We study the current **condition of girls** like us: the debate about **genders, feminism, equality of rights**, including economical rights, the general context of the crisis, culture around us. So we read books and articles, watch TV programs and web documentaries, to get anecdotes, true stories, tendencies, attitudes and ideas to encourage and condemn, etc.

In parallel, we scan the most we can from the **electro/techno cultures**, in quest for great songs and great concept-albums to take inspiration from.

Project 3 - Hip-hop photonovel

We read **biographies**, rap **magazines** and **albums**.

We put some elements in common to give the Hero a rather standard **lifeline**: broken home, early experience of violence, drug-dealing from the age of 13, murder at 18, jail during 8 years (he loses his eyes in a fight), and then the beginning of a career in rap.

We also read much about what it is to be **blind**: biographies of blind people, psychology books… and we can also experiment it ourselves: try to live blind for one hour, one day, one week, try to feel it from the inside.

Our **documentation** gives us elements to **design characters and plots** in which the central character will be involved, sometimes as a simple witness.

Project 4 - The Squatt

We scan **soap-operas** and **TV series**, especially those based on a **group** or a **community of central characters**.

We quickly start to design a gallery of individual characters, the ones who live in the community, around 20 people, all very different. Those 20 profiles have to be based on reality, so we take time to link them to some themes and topics: one is a **lesbian**, one is a **dealer**, one is a successful **artist**, one is a political **activist**… Idea after idea, we fill our Board journal with interesting data.

When we are done with a first sketch of the characters, we also have to study and give details about the city, the locations where the plots will take place, the kind of problems the characters will meet, etc..

3/ Plots and characters development

The **first idea** might be one that everybody can have: then, everybody will find it poor, too usual, valueless. The **audience** prefers what is smarter, unique, unseen, striking and fascinating.

To help building **better ideas** and organize them, we can use tools, softwares, databases, heuristic maps... We make the point about this technical side of storytelling in **Story&Drama 3.Experts**.

From the selected **genres** and **reference-works**, we abstract typical **patterns** of **plots**, **characters**, **properties**, that we could adapt to our project.

● If our plan is to write a Jewish **GODFATHER**, then isolate what is typical in this movie - ex, the struggle in a family for succession? the struggle of a clan against its enemies? - and use it as a base to build our own story.

● Do we want to write a gangster story? Then let's analyze 5-10 of the most famous ones, find the main lines, abstract the values systems, the archetypes, the conflicts. We can then re-use what we found, mix it, melt it, re-cut it, marry it with opposite elements, subvert it, transpose it...

From the list of **messages** and **impacts** that we defined during the setup step, we translate them into **plots** that mean the same than those **messages** and have the **impacts** we want.

● We are writing a stand-up comedy sketch that will last 10 minutes. we want to make people laugh very frequently, like every 10 seconds in average. This impact will be obtained through the structure.

● We want to write a really provocative show, so we make a little list of the most shocking and forbidden themes, and we have fun mixing them together to obtain something even more horrible. That provides us some new plots, situations and characters that match our first intentions.

We get ready to design a **general structure** of the final work.

3/ Plots and characters development

From our **setup** and our **research**, we now have a much better idea about what our **final work** should look like. We gathered a big quantity of **materials**.

We now need to **decide what to keep and how to use it**.

This step may lead us backwards to the brainstorm and research step: we might need to get more documentation about a precise topic when we decided to use it as an element of our **script**.

Design the pitch

The **pitch**, also known as **high concept**, is a sentence or a short paragraph that describes the story's **main idea** and can be seen as the shortest expression of the quality of a story. It has to be… interesting, catchy, mysterious, meaningful, challenging, entertaining, or other major qualities.

It does not belong to the final script, but it may be transmitted to our working partners and to decision-makers to know whether or not they are interested in **supporting** our project of story. It can also be used to **promote** the **story** in the **media** once it has been turned into a full artwork.

Writing a pitch is a decisive exercise to force us to center the story soundly around **one strong axis**.

Here are a few remarkable **pitches** from famous artworks:

● "Satan takes control over Moscow" (**THE MASTER AND MARGUERITE**, novel by Mikhaïl Bulgakov),

● "An unsuccessful male actor becomes a successful feminist actress" (**TOOTSIE**),

● "An extra-terrestrial lost on earth wants to go home" (**E.T.**),

● "How Mr. Milk became the first gay Mayor" (**MILK**), etc.
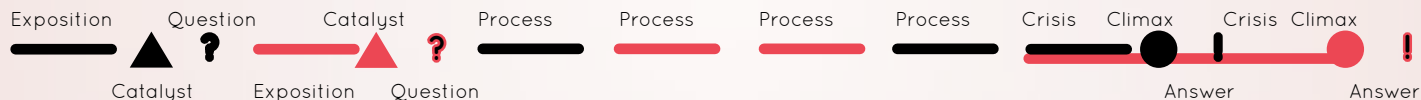
3/ Plots and characters development

Design a plots structure

To obtain the **plots structure**, we can **start from any side of it**: by developing the plots, or the plots structure, or the characters, or the sets of characters, as well.

Indeed, everything is complementary, one choice here has a consequence there. If we create a character, we necessarily involve it in a plot, and vice-versa.

We can develop a plot from a Hero and a structure from this plot, then give it a side plot and give it a set of characters.

● We can start from one event, then build a plot around it, and elaborate its set of characters later on.

● For example, we can decide to write two interlaced plots:

We can start sketching plots in just 3 steps – the 3 Acts – then arrange and mix them together - and develop them later, like in this example:
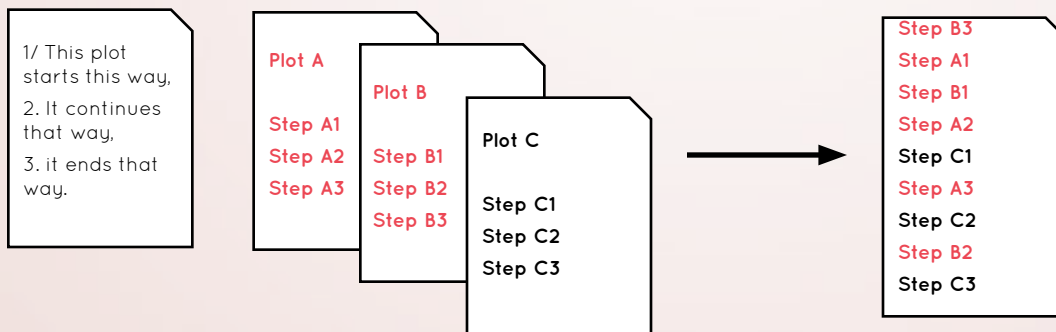
3/ Plots and characters development

Detail each plot with its plot points, dramatic turns, processes, info revelations...

Once we have a general outline of the plots structure, we have to develop each of our plots a more detailed way. We can do so by writing a quick sum up of those plots.

Use one sentence or one short paragraph by plot point, not more!

PLOT									
ACT I Introduction			ACT II Development				ACT III Conclusion		
Exposition	Catalyst + Goal	Drama QUESTION	Process	Process	Process	Process	Crisis	Climax	Drama ANSWER

3/ Plots and characters development

We can also represent any plot this way (or any other way):

PLOT	ACT I Introduction	Exposition	
		Catalyst+Goal	
		Drama question	
		Process	
	ACT II Development	Node	
		Process	
		Node	
		Process	
		Node	
		Process	
	ACT III Conclusion	Crisis	
		Climax	
		Drama answer	

3/ Plots and characters development

Build the **sets of characters** of each plot from their **Hero**,
give the **Hero** an **Antagonist**, give them **Mentors**, **Skeptics**
and **Helpers** (if needed!):

HERO			

SET OF CHARACTERS

→

HERO		ENEMY	

SET OF CHARACTERS

→

MENTOR	SKEPTIC	MENTOR	SKEPTIC
HERO		ENEMY	
HELPER	HELPER	HELPER	HELPER
HELPER	HELPER	HELPER	HELPER
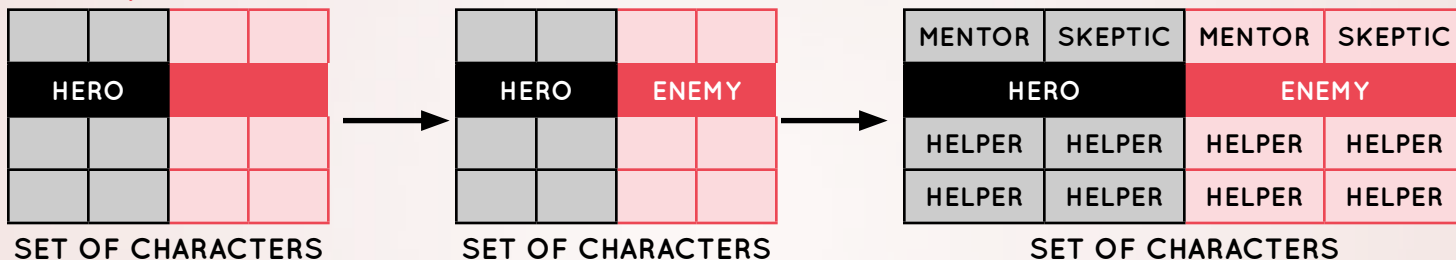
SET OF CHARACTERS

3/ Plots and characters development

Build each **character's set of properties** of each character of each plot – generally in this order: Hero, Antagonist, then members of their teams:

PLOT	
HERO	
Goal Motivation	____ ____
+	**-**
Property 1 Property 2 Property 3	Property 4 Property 5 Property 6

CHARACTER

PROPERTIES

PLOT	
ENEMY	
Goal Motivation	____ ____
+	**-**
Property 1 Property 2 Property 3	Property 4 Property 5 Property 6

CHARACTER

PROPERTIES

PLOT	
HELPER	
Goal Motivation	____ ____
+	**-**
Property 1 Property 2 Property 3	Property 4 Property 5 Property 6

CHARACTER

PROPERTIES

Balance the dramatic properties together

Use the **Story&Drama 3. Experts** tool to design sets of values and attribute them to sets of characters.

3/ Plots and characters development

Project 1 - Heroic fantasy novel

Pitch: "A very empathetic and intuitive Ambassador sent to declare war actually works for peace, betrays his side and prevents a generalized war between 5 civilizations".

Isolated but smart, he has the special ability to travel through a magic door. He will have to oppose and calm down all the conflicts in the societies he crosses.

Some major **plots** tell the enterprises of warriors and conflict-makers - the Antagonists of our Hero. Some minor **plots** explore sides of life in Europe, China and Mali: a rural family in Europe, the women of a monastery in China, and a poet in the court of the Emperor of Mali.

We develop all our plots and characters in **detailed schemes**. We then arrange them in a **general outline**.

Project 2 - Electroclash album

Pitch: We could define the album as "a chronicle of modern life from the point of view of a 17yo rebellious girl who makes fun of authorities, declares war to sexism, claims freedom and hedonism, and fights for love..."

We select **themes and concepts** to design the world of this girl. We create **characters** around her - her best friend, ex-boyfriends, school, family and city...

Then we build **song sketches** around **short, explosive plots**. For some, we start from a few lines we had the intuition of; for some others, we start from a joke, an ambiance, a memory, a famous quote... We also **link** those plots, events and characters to other plots, events, characters, so as to obtain **a coherent overall story**.

Project 3 - Hip-hop photonovel

The **pitch** could be: a 30 black blind rapper witnesses his life experiences from hiw watch with the eyes of the soul. He sees beyond the surface, beyond the standards, and converts the experience of violence and misery into something aesthetic and nearly mystic.

We design the **core of the plots to build**: a series of everyday life events that, accumulated, will describe the dramas and beauty from the ghetto. We firstly build main lines, that we style later on with more details. We obtain a collection of **mini-stories sketches**.

Project 4 - The Squatt

The **pitch** would be something like: 20 young people living in a Berlin community have 20 different ways to revolution the world - or at least, their little world.

In this story, the **characters** are very important, so we start by dealing with them. We sketch a **theme structure for those 20 core characters**. We give each of them a different **identity**: job, skills, hobbies, passions, past traumas, existential goals, future problems. Some are best friends or lovers, and some are enemies. We try to **balance** them so that they can represent the best and the worse of our society. 4/ Writing the synopsis

4/ Writing the synopsis

We can finally start writing for good!!

We write a half-controlled, half-improvised way: we follow our pitch, our outline, our sketches of plots, but we also need to invent many new details.

The plot structure becomes a synopsis

The synopsis is a **sum up of a plot or a story**.

It is **short**, from half a page to 3, 4, 5 pages maximum. It is written a **dense** and **simple** way. It should not be literary yet, but on the contrary it should show **clearly** the general move-ment and the main features of the story.

One way to write it is to take the **list of plot points** of the overall arrangement, and to **re-shape it, give it a bit of style, rhythm, ambient**...

Thus, let's imagine we have a story in 6 plots:

● 2 major plots being quite long, told in 10 scenes each,

● 2 secondary plots, told in around 5 scenes each,

● 2 very minor plots, one short back-story told in 1 scene, and one short love story told in 6 brief scenes.

● So in total, we have around 20+10+1+6= 37 paragraphs. Our synopsis stands in those 37 paragraphs more or less rewritten.

Often, we will have to make changes to the plots and characters,

adapt, re-cut, because of contradictions, disharmonies, gaps in time, problems of realism... Do not worry, this is normal. Edit it continuously, solve the problems one by one.

Better working progressively

from a first draft of the plot structure, develop a complete draft of each structure, when it is done make a more precise outline of the plot structure. From that, develop the plots again with more details. This way, our matter grows and we never lose the general line, the general intention.

4/ Writing the synopsis

Project 1 - Heroic fantasy novel

We can now write a **synthesis**. We have the main plot of the diplomat, the plots about the leaders of each of the 5 civilizations, a few side plots in each culture to allow the reader to explore those worlds deeper.

We **cut** some parts of the plots to make the story lighter and quicker, more essential. We **decide how to tell** each plot we designed: live, or told by a character, or told live during a flash-back?, etc. We **distribute** effects to improve the **dramatic intensity**. We **give roles** in plots to characters, the major ones being involved in 10 plots, the minor ones in only 1 or 2 plots.

Project 2 - Electroclash album

We start **arranging themes** that we find important. It leads us to **develop** several **concepts of songs**:

● A parody of a Barbie doll song, sounding like Barbie under electroshock

● An ironical song where a young woman begs a man to love her

● A claim of sexual independence by a young woman who "does not need men"

We continue building a quick outline of around 10 songs to write, exploring the universe of this 17yo girl from various angles.

Project 3 - Hip-hop photonovel

Since the plots are in general **unlinked** and only share the rapper either as an **actantial** character or as a simple witness, and since the stories are made to be published in general **separately**, we do not need to write a full synopsis of all the stories. We just write those that inspire us and structure and sort them out only later on.

As a consequence, we write **many short synopsis of plots** that we will improve later on.

Since this work is a **collaboration**, the ideas of plots can come either from the writer or from the photographer. Then it is possible to realize one story of the series from a text by the writer, and another story from a picture by the photographer. The creative process in this project is a **2-ways dialogue**.

Project 4 - The Squatt

This project is **long and complex**, and there will be **several types of synopsis**, at several **scales**.

We need to write a synopsis that describes the first season of the series. It is even better if we can write a quick synopsis for more seasons - to inform our producer and the other decision-makers, and also to prepare better the first season, and not to forget to leave exploitable data for the following seasons.

We also need to write a synopsis for each 10 minutes episode.

4/ Writing with tools and softwares

Checking tools

Once our **plots structure** is built and our **synopsis** written, we can **check it with tools**, that will help finding problems to solve:

- Ratio of actantial roles/characters
- Improve dramatic tension
- Balance of forces
- Rhythms
- Check the evolution of the prognosis
- Characters and sets of characters
- Places
- Chronology and time effects

You can find detailed descriptions of those checking tools in **STORY&DRAMA 3. EXPERTS**.

Softwares

Many softwares can help the author during the various step of the creative process. Some have been made especially to help authors write scripts, while some others are more general tools that can be adapted to the specific needs of authors. We can use graphic tools to make plans and outlines, maps to represent networks of concepts, slideshows to show lines of action step by step, etc.

You can find detailed descriptions of those softwares and their possible uses in **STORY&DRAMA 3. EXPERTS**.

4/ Writing the treatment

Now the synopsis / outline becomes a treatment

The treatment is a 3 to 10 pages work document that describes the whole story in its main lines with a certain level of detail. It tells each plot point of the outline in the order of the telling. It sums up the action, but does not render dialogs, details, and non-actantial characters.

The treatment can be transmitted to our friends and working partners – agent, publisher, director, producer... It allows the author to get a first feed-back from a general draft of the story. If it is rejected, at least the author did not spend too much time on it and another development is still possible.

For short works, one does not need to write a treatment, except for very dense genres, like an advertisement or a music video, in which every detail counts and has to be scripted in details.

● For long works with many plots and characters, it is often more relevant to write a synopsis then a treatment before starting to write the final script.

● A synopsis over 5 pages will give birth to a 40 pages treatment that will get converted into a longer sequences description over 100 pages then a scene description over 200 pages and finally the complete 500 pages script of the first season of a TV series.

During the writing of the treatment, our spontaneous creativity can focus on and control:

● The verbal or visual style

● The psychology

● The ambiance, the decorative elements

● The precise timing of the narrative flow

● And other parameters

4/ Writing the treatment

Project 1 - Heroic fantasy novel

Our **synopsis** for the **300 pages novel** is made of **3 pages**.

After we checked it with tools (actantial roles, dramatic tension...) and edited it, we can now **extend** it.

We **add details**, short decorative plots, we focus on the atmosphere. Each event that was described in 1 line in the **synopsis** is now developed over 1-2 paragraphs. In the end, the longer version of the synopsis, the **treatment**, takes around 20 pages. We write it once, let it rest, re-read it and improve it if we can. When we are done, we **pass** it around to a few friends and work partners: do they think it is ready to get turned into a full novel, or is it still too perfectible?

Project 2 - Electroclash album

We take every song sketch and brainstorm it again: we define more precisely what it tells, how, to who, with which words, expressions, sounds.

We build lyrics from the music or the contrary or both simultaneously. It gives us constraints of quantity and size of the lyrics (count of syllables...)

We start **writing the lyrics of the 3 first songs**. It leads us to new ideas that we use to enrich the other projects of songs. We perform them in front of a small audience to test them, get a feedback and improve them.

Project 3 - Hip-hop photonovel

Now we reached the step when several drafts of short stories have been scripted, some others have been shot by the photographer either as pure tries or as propositions for final works. This first collection helps us **designing and finishing some new stories**. The world of the blind rapper becomes more precise, more textured, and some gimmicks start to appear clearly - a way to watch things, some places, some people, some slang expressions...

Project 4 - The Squatt

The **synopsis** of the first season gave birth to the synopsis of each episode. Now each episode **synopsis** is on its way to become a final **script**. To write it, just **develop** the **treatment** from the **synopsis**. Here, it consists in **transforming lines of action into a flow of sounds** (music, voices, atmospheres...) **and pictures**. In the treatment, we do **not** write the final dialogues and soundtrack etc, but we start thinking about it from closer.

Each episode **synopsis** takes around **1 page**. We develop it into **3, 4, 5 pages** in which we dedicate our attention to structure the **rhythm**, the **intensity** and the **points of view** of each scene.

4/ Writing the script

Finally we get to write the final script from the synopsis and/or the treatment

Since we prepared our writing from the beginning, we finally just have to **follow our plans,** scene by scene.

One great advantage is that we already know all the drama, we do not have to care any more about the **structure** of plots or intentions of characters or "what will happen next": we know it already! So there's **no risk to get lost** in the plans if we created the story data properly - even in big projects with tons of plots and characters and connections between them.

This step should be a **pleasure**, it is the moment when our characters and scenes take their full dimension, the moment when we can really feel the dramatic tension everywhere.

We can even try several versions of the script from the synopsis or from the treatment, that will not change the structure!

If one day we are not in good shape for writing, we can just rewrite it from the plans the next day.

Edit the script

Once a **first version** of the script has been written, there are probably a few mistakes, hesitations, lacks of details, problems of realism, inconsistencies, etc. So let's **improve** what can be improved in the details, cut, paste, delete, polish, rewrite, reshape, adapt… We obtain a clean, final script.

4/ Writing the script

Project 1 - Heroic fantasy novel

We showed our treatment to some friends around and in general they said it was great, except a few problems here and there. We solve the problem, then we start **converting this treatment into the final script**.

Each paragraph of the treatment that was a line in the synopsis will become a page or a scene in the final script.

We pay attention to the **style** of the prose and **dialogues**. We refine psychological reactions, we detail descriptions of characters and places and events.

Project 2 - Electroclash album

At this step, either we already had enough inspiration to finish some of our lyrics, or we have developed some advanced sketches for most of the songs we have to write. So, it is rather easy, we just have to find the right words and rhymes and melodies to make the **final version of each song**. If the inspiration is weak, perhaps some heavy bassline, a line of speed, a glass of Gin tonic and a joint can help? For many artists in music, it could work :-)

Project 3 - Hip-hop photonovel

We can now **finalize a first collection of short-stories** from those we previously made. We restructure some of them, mix them or split them, re-cut them. We sort them out in a different order, so that the series starts by giving its reader the impression to be lost in the world, as the blind Hero was. It allows us to write the last stories we need to complete the first collection. But we know that the creation of this series will anyway be a permanent and daily effort over several years, according to its success.

Project 4 - The Squatt

The **treatments** over 3 to 5 pages become **final scripts** over around **10 pages** (in average one minute of film is described by one minute of script. So, 10 minutes per episode = around 10 pages per **script**.)

We add the **dialogues**, giving each character a special voice and tone and register. We also add all the typically **audio-visual layer**. In the **treatment**, some action could still be a bit abstract. In a final **script** on the contrary everything has to be translated into concrete words, pictures and sounds.

In the end, we obtain **our first 6 scripts over 10 pages each**. We test and check them, then they are ready to be made into movies.

5/ Sending or making

Send the script to partners / boss / sponsor / publisher

In **written media** such as literature, we are done when we have written our final work from the synopsis or the treatment. So we just have to transmit the script and see what comes.

In **audio/visual media**, including theater and performing arts, we can now send or pass the script to our partners, to make the final work from it - the movie, the comic strip, the cartoon, the dance show, the puppet animation, the stand up comedy show, etc...

We are done!

5/ Sending or making

Project 1 - Heroic fantasy novel

3 months later, **we wrote the 300 pages** of the final novel. Most of it was rather easy and pleasant to write, since the plots were well-designed. While writing, we noticed that we had left a few scenario gaps and technical mistakes, so we **fixed** them.

We first **pass** the script to our friends and partners to get their opinion. They will comment the intensity of action, the themes, the style. Some of their suggestions will lead us to **rewrite** the script at some points.

When we feel it is the best we can do, then we **print** it and/or **send** it to our **publisher**, **literary agent**, and **cinema and TV agents** in case they would be interested in buying the adaptation rights.

Project 2 - Electroclash album

All the songs have been written.

We rehearse them, test them in front of an audience, then record them. The album gets released, receives a fantastic critical acclaim, the record is sold at 2 million copies in 2 weeks, so we start sniffing cocaine and believing we are the queens of the world, then we all die from a collective overdose after the crazy concert and our legend is born :-)

Project 3 - Hip-hop photonovel

In this precise project, the end of the creation tasks is the beginning of the **promotion** tasks.

Someone will have to work to find **outlets** for the mini-stories, for example web-blogs accepting to present an episode weekly as a banner, a print magazine about rap publishing 1 page a month, a publisher to print the series on paper and on ebook stores, etc. Someone else will make a **website** to centralize all of the available contents of the series.

Project 4 - The Squatt

The script is sent to the **producer**. He/she will probably ask for some changes here and there.

When everything is OK, the script is **transformed** again. It becomes a **storyboard** or a **technical document** that describes the details of the shooting - place/stage, timing, actors and technicians needed, etc. The **actors** get a **copy of the script** and start rehearsing the dialogues. **Technicians** also **study the script** to plan and prepare lights, sound takes, positions of the cameras, etc.

When everybody did his/her job, the **shooting** is ready. When the series has been **released** and gets successful we continue writing it.

The next steps

We hope this working method in storytelling got you interested.

Of course this was just a first approach and a general frame that anyone can adapt, develop, recut, re-script :-)

What is sure is that for any ambitious work, even of a short size, the working time and the documentation volume are much bigger than the duration time and the volume of materials of the final work. Indeed, 30 seconds of movie can cost 6 months of script-writing, and 100 pages of novel can take 1000 pages of research and documentation. To provide such an effort, the storyteller has to have methods!

We wish you good luck in your next stories and if you want to make a bit of your artistic way in company of Story&Drama, you're welcome, colleague!

Story&Drama Services

You may need:

PROJECT COUNSELING / MONITORING

You have ideas, intentions, projects of stories to tell, but you lack experience and you seek for support.

➲ I can guide you.

SCRIPT-DOCTORING / SCRIPT ANALYSIS

You wrote a script... but you need to test it?

➲ I can help you analyze the strong and weak points of your project, and provide you tools and methods to check and improve what is wrong.

STORY DEVELOPMENT

You need stories for your works or your communication.

You know about the elements : audience, media, budget, meaning, emotion...

➲ I can write it for you according to your instructions.

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You want to learn storytelling, to develop your knowledge in narrative art.

➲ I am there to teach you everything I know about storytelling.

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The Story&Drama Collection

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Discover narrative tools in theory and practice: plots and composition, characters, drama effects, genres, media, registers, chronologies, spaces, drama tension, value systems, psychology...

- **STORYTELLING - INTRODUCTION**
- **STORYTELLING - WORKING METHOD**
- **STORYTELLING 1 - BEGINNER**
- **STORYTELLING 2 - ADVANCED**
- **STORYTELLING 3 - EXPERT**

Analyzes

Observe narration masters at work in those Analyzes of famous artworks:

Cinema

- **THE GODFATHER**
- **PULP FICTION**

TV Series

- **GAME OF THRONES**

Music

- **SONGWRITING**
- **MUSIC VIDEOS**

Literature and theater

- **THE LITTLE PRINCE**

Comics

- **CALVIN AND HOBBES**