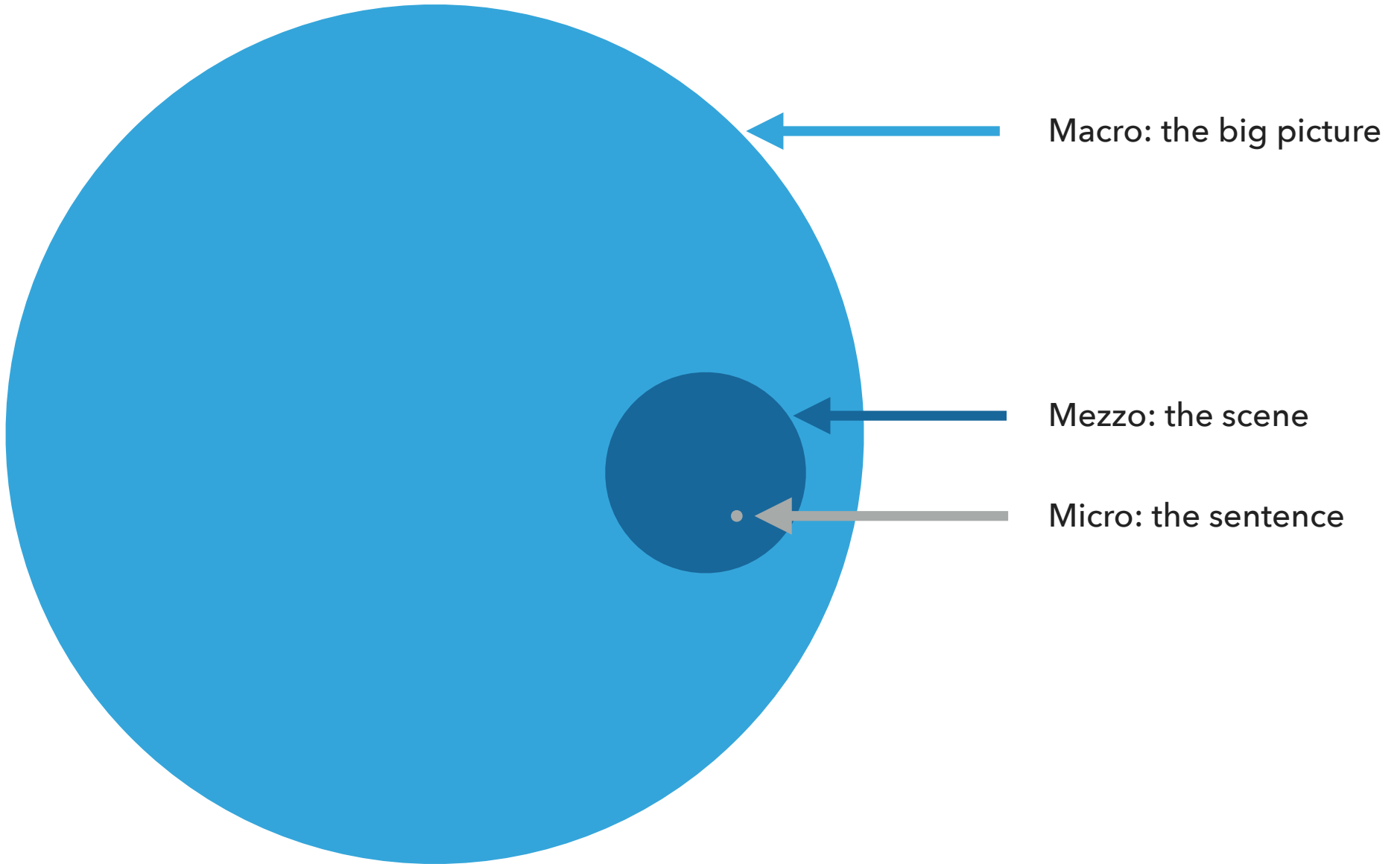


SEEING THE WHOLE

ASSESSING YOUR ARCS



LESSONS FROM ESSAY REVISION

- ▶ An essay presents an argument
- ▶ One of the tricks of essay writing is to have an easy-to-follow train of thought that builds to its ultimate point
- ▶ Revision: trace the “idea flow”
- ▶ Example: “The Memory Hole” by Michael Chabon

THE IDEA FLOW IN “THE MEMORY HOLE”

- ▶ My children create artwork and we often throw it away and feel a little guilty about it.
- ▶ I lost more of my childhood artwork than my kids have lost, and I can't say it's had a bad effect to have lost it.
- ▶ Mostly, when I see the artwork of my youth, I'm mortified by it.
- ▶ It's not that I'm trying to excuse throwing away my kids' artwork. I realize how fleeting this all is.
- ▶ But we can't capture every moment. It's all fleeting. We can't save it all.
- ▶ The truth is, I'm squandering the treasure of my life. Every day offers you something of value, but most of it, you throw out.

LESSONS FROM ESSAY REVISION

- ▶ The idea here is to be able to get at the underlying significance of each unit of the piece of writing.
- ▶ How can we do this with a story?

UNIT BY UNIT SYNOPSIS

- ▶ Units can be of varying sizes
 - ▶ Beats within scenes
 - ▶ Scenes (usually 60-130 in a novel)
 - ▶ 15-25 key scenes/events/developments
 - ▶ Acts
- ▶ Learning to scale your summaries is pretty useful

UNDERLYING SIGNIFICANCE

- ▶ But the real goal here is to get at the “underlying significance of each unit”
- ▶ Straight summary of your story’s various beats, useful though it is, does not get at the underlying significance
- ▶ The underlying significance tends to be about character and relationship transformation

THE INSIDE OUTLINE

- ▶ Jennie Nash developed this tool
- ▶ You can do it with any level of units, but it's best to start with the 15-20 key events to get a look at the whole story
- ▶ Jennie calls these "scenes"; I prefer "story events"
- ▶ For each, you also note the "point," which refers to why the scene matters

THE INSIDE OUTLINE

▶ Scene: [What happens]

▶ Point: [Why it matters]

▶ Scene:

▶ Point:

▶ Scene:

▶ Point:

THE INSIDE OUTLINE

- ▶ Scene: An invitation to the Prince's ball arrives and Cinderella feels bad as her step family treats her cruelly before they go
- ▶ Point: Establish Cinderella as sad, lonely, and destitute

- ▶ Scene: Fairy godmother arrives and outfits Cinderella with all she needs
- ▶ Point: Cinderella is excited and radiant

- ▶ Scene: The Prince falls for Cinderella and they spend time together
- ▶ Point: She loses track of time and is thus in danger of losing all

THE INSIDE OUTLINE

- ▶ Scene: An invitation to the Prince's ball arrives and Cinderella feels bad as her step family treats her cruelly before they go
- ▶ Point: Establish Cinderella as sad, lonely, and destitute
- ▶ **Because of that**
- ▶ Scene: Fairy godmother arrives and outfits Cinderella with all she needs
- ▶ Point: Cinderella is excited and radiant
- ▶ **Because of that**
- ▶ Scene: The Prince falls for Cinderella and they spend time together
- ▶ Point: She loses track of time and is thus in danger of losing all

THE INSIDE OUTLINE TIPS

- ▶ The character has to be in the scene
- ▶ Why it matters = meaningful consequence; what meaning does the protagonist take from the event?
- ▶ It helps to know your overall plot arc and the overall character arc (that is, how the character changes)

THE INSIDE OUTLINE TIPS

- ▶ Step 1: figure out the key events or scenes
- ▶ Step 2: consider the point of each (why it matters)
- ▶ Step 3: how does the previous event's point lead to the subsequent scene

CAVEAT/DISCLAIMER

- ▶ YMMV. This may be groundbreaking; it may not
- ▶ It's not the only tool
- ▶ The general concept, however, is important for editing/revising: find some way to be able to trace each unit of the story, its relation to subsequent units, and the underlying significance of each unit of the story.

HANDS ON

- ▶ In the breakout session, you'll have an opportunity to try this out
- ▶ And I'll refine my tips a little
- ▶ Downloads available at my site: stormwritingschool.com/rew
 - ▶ A copy of The Memory Hole with my notes on the "idea flow"
 - ▶ To come: My inside outline for Cinderella, these slides, all the handouts I'll use in the breakout session, and a response video to questions that arise in the breakout session.