

Common Storytelling Devices

Audience Comprehension

- audience behind character(s)
 - Example: *Monsters Inc*, opening scene
- audience ahead of character(s)
 - Example: Hitchcock's *Psycho* shower scene

Common Storytelling Devices

Associations

- **A** becomes associated with **B**
 - Every time we see/hear A, we think of B
 - we may not be conscious of the association

- Examples:

a Color

a Sound

a Movement

a Prop

is associated with

a character

an event

an emotion

a place

Common Storytelling Devices

Patterns/Repetitions

- may be funny, scary, surprising, puzzling, etc
- frequently 3 repetitions
 - enough to establish pattern
 - not too many to lose interest
- *Topping the Topper*
 - Each repetition more extreme than previous
 - “You thought *that* was funny/scary/weird/gross – Wait ‘til you see *this* one!”
 - Cf. stepped “Complication” of Classical story structure
- Examples:
 - *Armageddon* -- “And then the *drill bit* broke!”
 - Warner Brothers cartoons -- *Roadrunner*

Common Storytelling Devices

Deus Ex Machina

- from ancient Greek theater
 - god descends to solve problem
 - was mechanically lowered onto stage
- Later developed very negative implications
 - = an unjustified, “out of nowhere” solution to a plot problem
 - Cheats/annoys the viewer because so improbable
- Examples:
 - “...and then I woke up.”

Common Storytelling Devices

Red Herring

- Plot element that distracts attention from the real issue
- Common in detective/thriller/murder-mystery genres
- Origin:
 - Uncertain – possibly from European dog+horse hunting
 - red herring very strong odor, distracts dogs from true scent
- Examples:
 - many, many examples in “Who dunnit” stories

Common Storytelling Devices

MacGuffin

- Any thing/person that drives the plot forward
 - The thing/person itself is not significant
 - The driving of the plot is significant
- Examples:
 - Catch the criminal
 - Steal the jewels
 - Defuse the bomb
 - Blow up the asteroid
- Origin:
 - Alfred Hitchcock – but original reference unclear

Common Storytelling Devices

The Ticking Clock

- Things must happen before a deadline
 - Adds tension, excitement
 - Sometimes literally a clock
- Examples:
 - ...before the <something> destroys the earth
 - asteroid (Armageddon)
 - alien invasion (Men in Black?)
 - ...before the killer strikes again
 - numerous TV cop shows
 - ...before the bomb goes off
 - James Bond films
 - King of Hearts: “Le chevalier frappe a minuit.”
 - ...before the evil army kills the innocent townspeople