

Screen

Writing for the Screen

Lesson #2: Developing Stories



ACMI acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we are presenting and learning today, the Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation. We pay our respects to Elders past and present and emerging.

We extend our respect to all First Peoples of this land and who may be present in this lesson today.

Today we are meeting virtually, tuning in from many places. Take a moment to think about the land you are on and who the traditional custodians are.

acmi



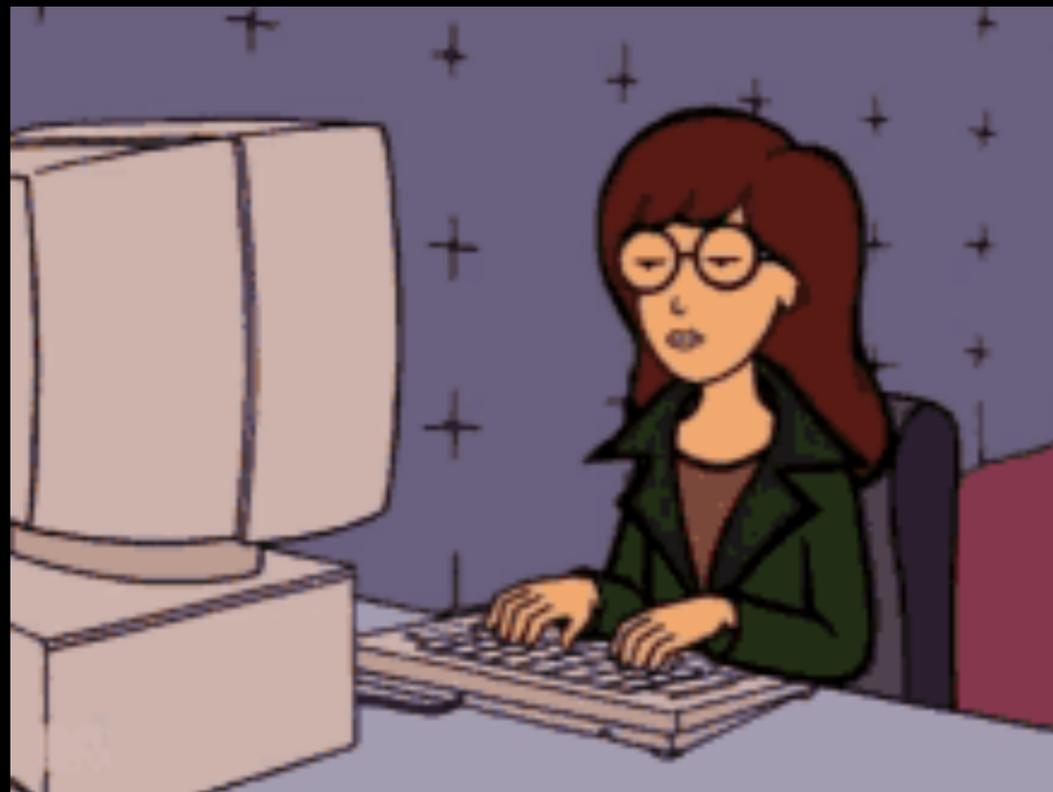
What we are here to do!

- Learn more about storytelling, particularly for the screen
- Work with an original idea you come up with
- Show you the steps that screenwriters go through
- Look at the ways film scripts are both different and similar to books



What we are here to do!

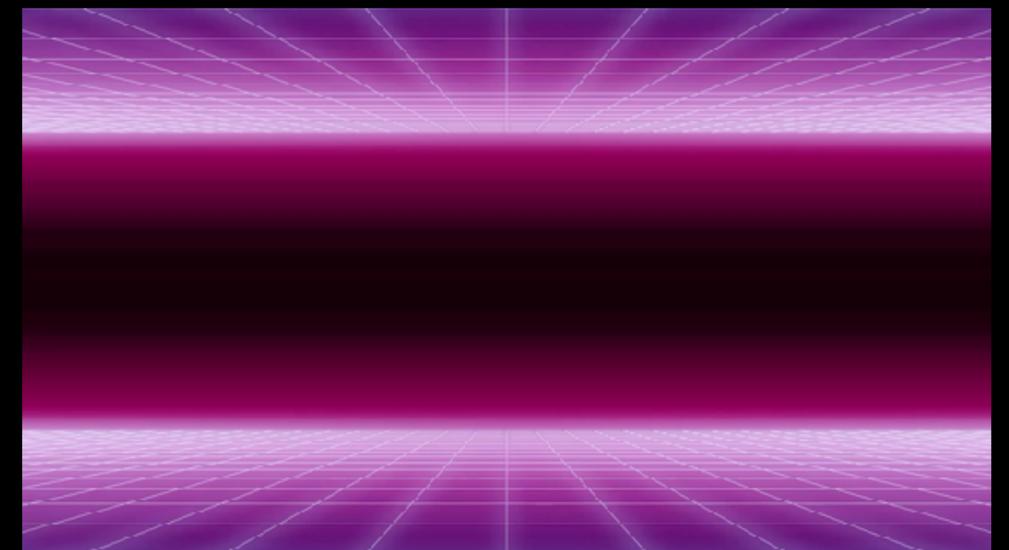
- Explore ideas for film scripts that might be 3-10 minutes (3-10 pages)
- We won't be covering how to turn your story into an actual film (sorry!)
- We're here to teach you storytelling and writing skills you can use now, and in the future



The first lesson was about ideas

- Coming up with a premise and how to find the essence of your film idea (including problem).
- What methods worked for you?
 - What if method?
 - Visual prompt?
 - Matching visual prompts?

If you don't have it handy, quickly jot down (or come up with on the spot) your character, their everyday world/life, and the problem your character will face

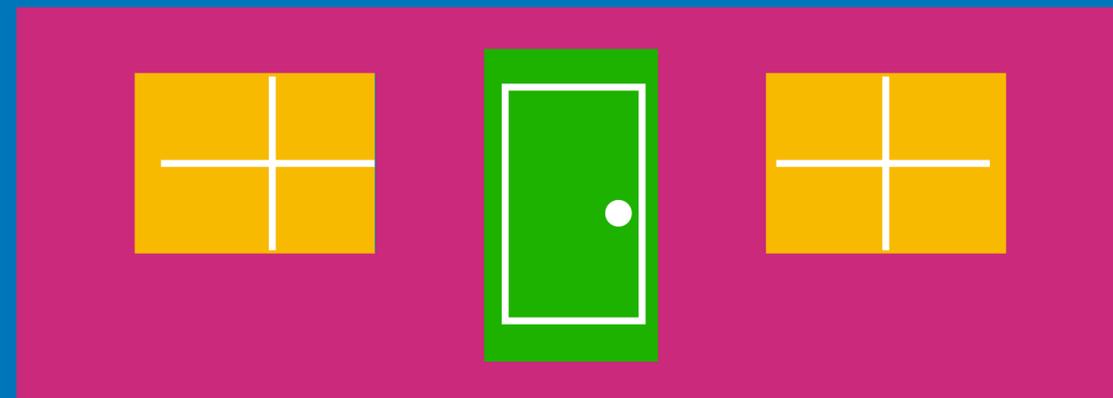


Here's what we are building

Writing your script



Structuring your story



Finding your characters

Coming up with a premise



Today's lesson is about developing :

- Characters: getting to know them even more
- Obstacles and stakes
- Plot and character questions



Premise (rehash)

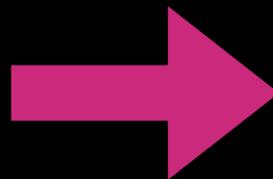
- Your idea in its simplest form
- A sentence or two
- Important information
- Doesn't give away the end
- **Setup** = character(s) and their world
- **Problem** = the thing that turns the character's world upside down
- **Premise** = **setup** + **problem**



Prose vs. script

- Scripts look very different from novels and short stories
- They have their own layout, formatting, special rules
- Although scripts look different, most of the preparation documents are written up as prose (normal writing)

This is a piece of prose. It's just words written out normally with no fancy formatting, just the usual rules of grammar.



INT. STUDY - DAY

Garry looks at his computer.

GARRY

This is what a script looks like

The Protagonist

- The character that the audience follow throughout your story.
- The one we care about and whose journey we follow
- The protagonist is the character that goes through the most change. They won't be the same person they were at the start.



The Antagonist

- In opposition to your protagonist
- To force change in the protagonist
- Doesn't always have to be an 'evil' character
- Can also be a character who is forced together with the protagonist - think buddy cop films.
- Feuding best friends or even the love interest in a romantic comedy - opposites attract!
- You might also have an antagonist force instead of an antagonist



Creating a Character

- What do they **want**?
- What do they **need**? (this is something they don't really about themselves yet- it's what they need to learn)
- What is their **weakness**?
- What is their **strength**? (they will need to call on this some point)
- What is their biggest **fear**?
- Do they have a hidden talent or **special skill**?



Character

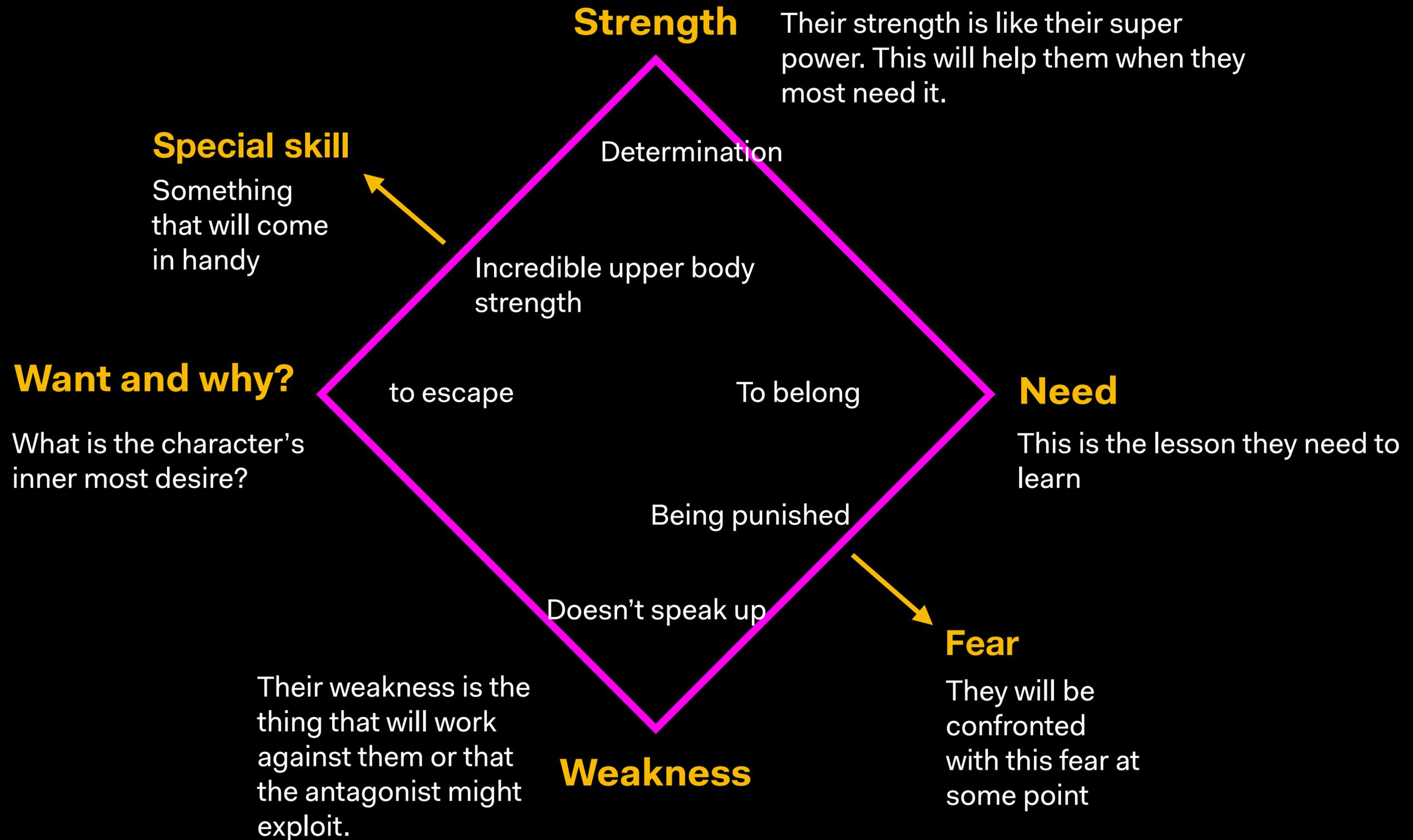
Tim the Turtle

Here are my character questions and answers:

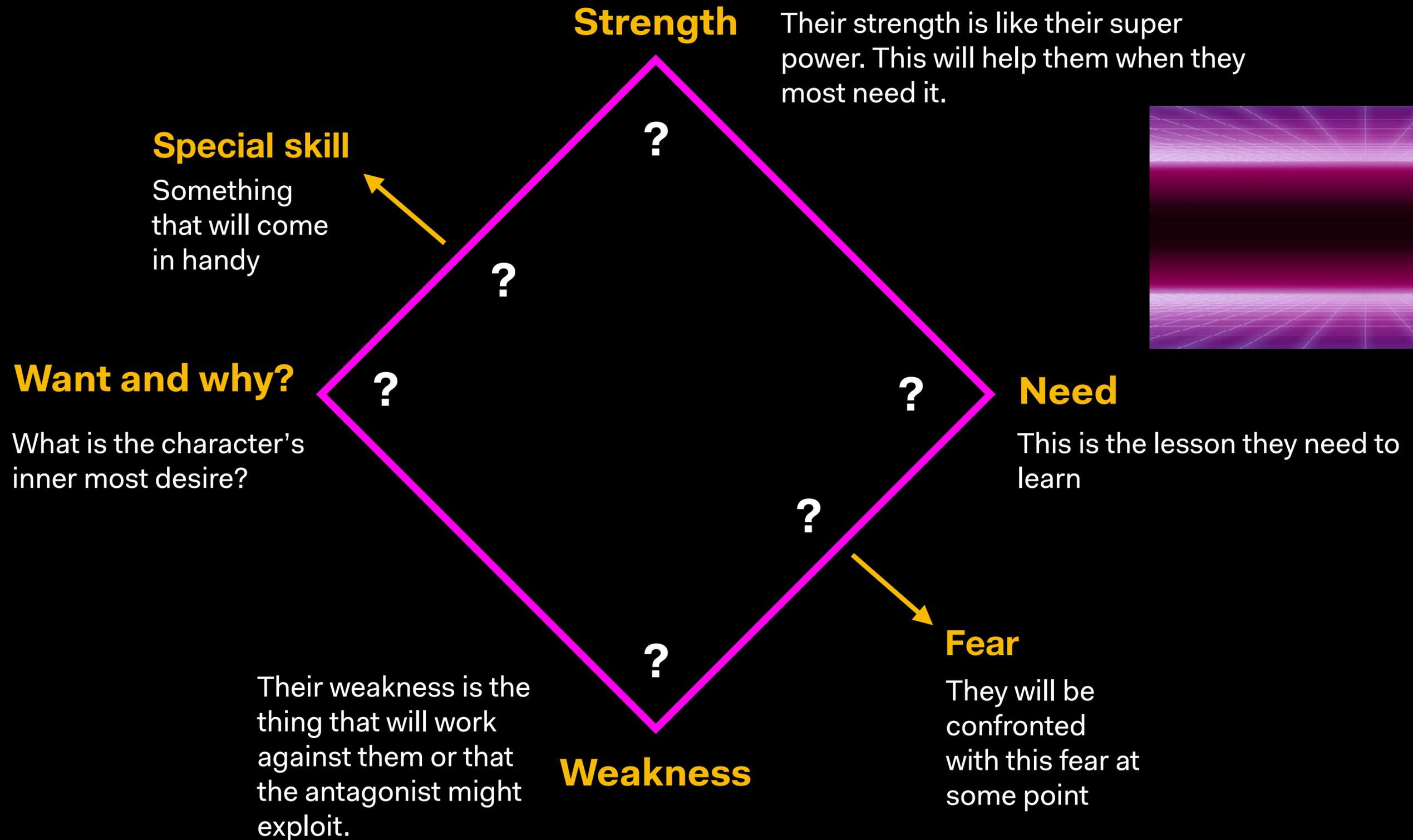
- **want:** to escape
- **need:** to belong
- **weakness:** doesn't speak up for himself
- **strength:** determination
- **fear:** being punished
- **special skill or quirk:** incredible upper body strength



Character Diamond



Character Diamond - your turn!



Plot and character questions



As well as introducing the problem, your premise should setup a dramatic plot question. It might also include a character question.

Despite his family's baffling generations-old ban on music, Mexican boy Miguel dreams of becoming an accomplished musician like his idol, Ernesto de la Cruz. Desperate to prove his talent, Miguel finds himself trapped in the stunning and colorful Land of the Dead following a mysterious chain of events.

What questions does this synopsis of *Coco* raise (even though there are no question marks!)? What's the most obvious 'plot' question the film will eventually answer? What character questions jump out at you?

Plot and character questions



Character

Despite his family's *baffling generations-old ban on music*, Mexican boy Miguel *dreams of becoming an accomplished musician* like his idol, Ernesto de la Cruz. Desperate to prove his talent, Miguel finds himself *trapped* in the stunning and colorful Land of the Dead following a *mysterious chain of events*.

Plot

Plot and character questions



Character

World

Tim the Turtle can barely remember his life before becoming the Turner family's pet. But he dreams about it. A lot. One day, after the Turners are particularly mean to Tim, he decides enough is enough – and decides to escape. But how will a turtle escape this suburban fortress of a home?

Problem

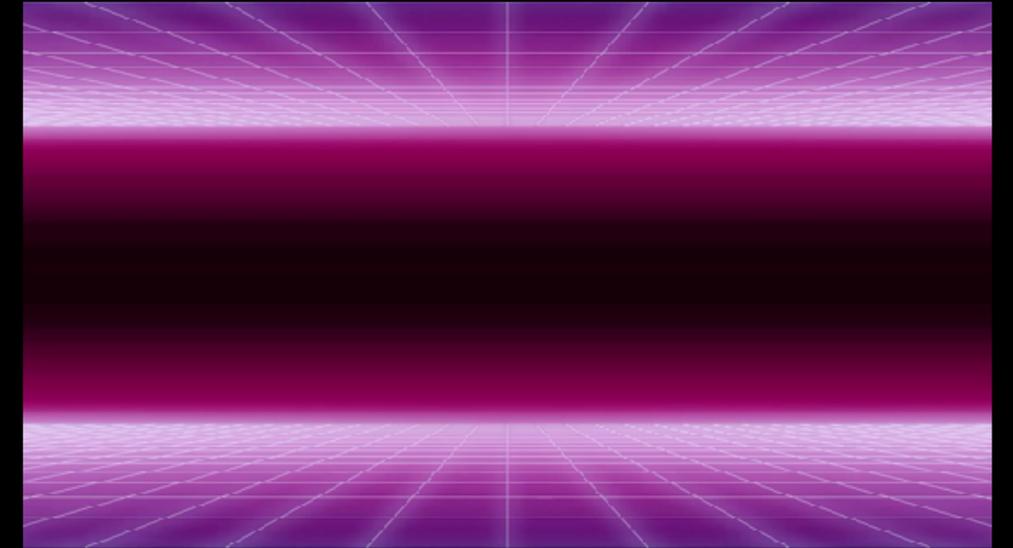
What is the plot question?
Can we add a character question?

Character question: And does true freedom lay on the other side of the fence?

Plot question: Will Tim manage to escape and be free of the Turners?

Character question: Will Tim find happiness on the other side?

Your turn



My plot question is:

My character question is:

Stakes and obstacles

Obstacles

- The obstacles are the **things that get in the way** of the protagonist achieving their goals, or at least make it harder for them to get there.

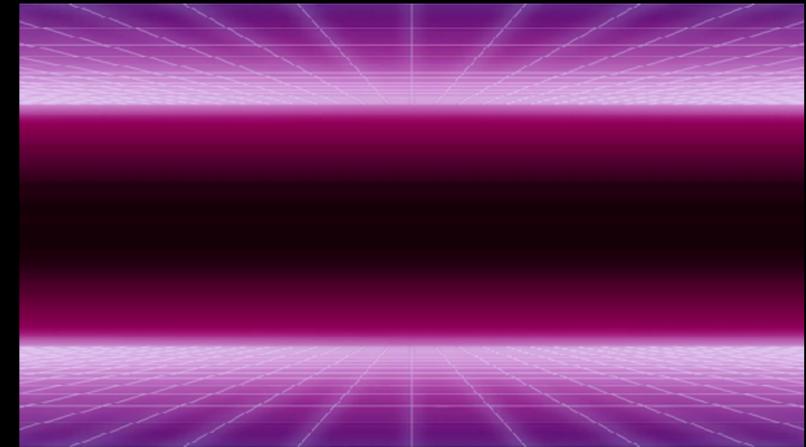
Tim's obstacles?

Stakes

- The stakes are **what the protagonist risks to lose** if they don't succeed in their goal. A good film always has high stakes for the characters. It's what keeps us watching.

What are the stakes for Tim?

Stakes and obstacles



Obstacles

- The obstacles are the **things that get in the way** of the protagonist achieving their goals, or at least make it harder for them to get there.

Your character's obstacles?

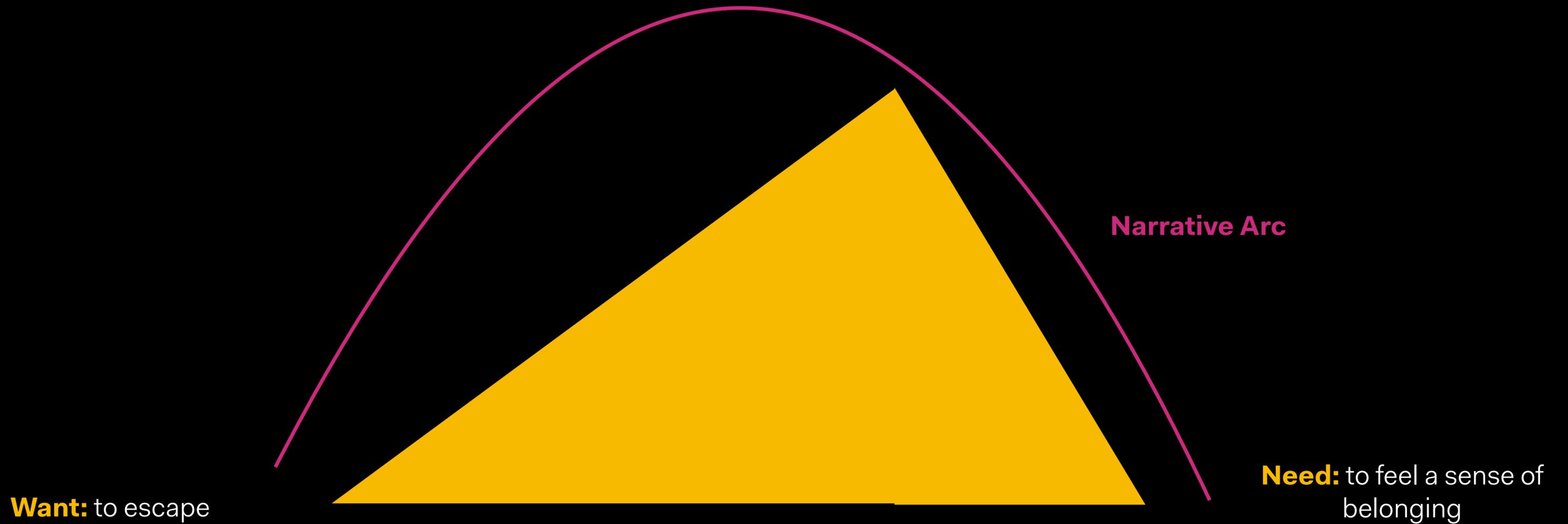
Stakes

- The stakes are **what the protagonist risks to lose** if they don't succeed in their goal. A good film always has high stakes for the characters. It's what keeps us watching.

The stakes for your character?

Plot question: Will Tim make it out and be free of the Turners?

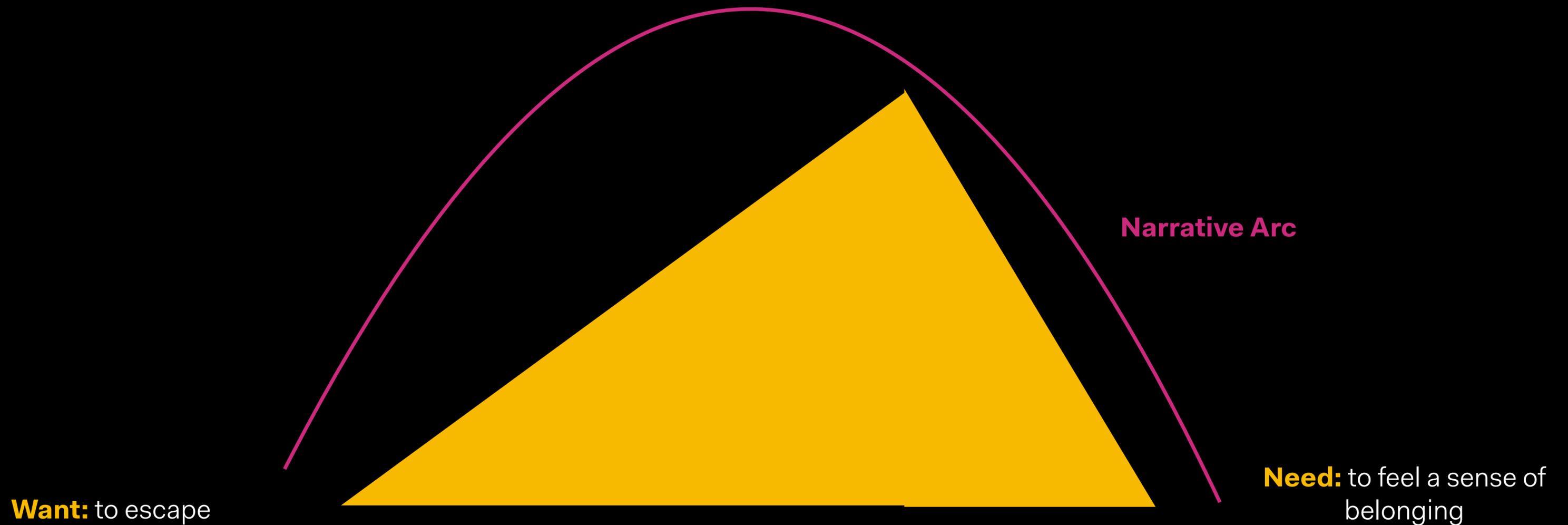
Character question: Will Tim find what he's looking for after escaping?



Stakes = if Tim doesn't escape, he'll be trapped forever with the cruel Turners

Plot question: Will Tim make it out and be free of the Turners?

Character question: Will Tim find what he's looking for after escaping?

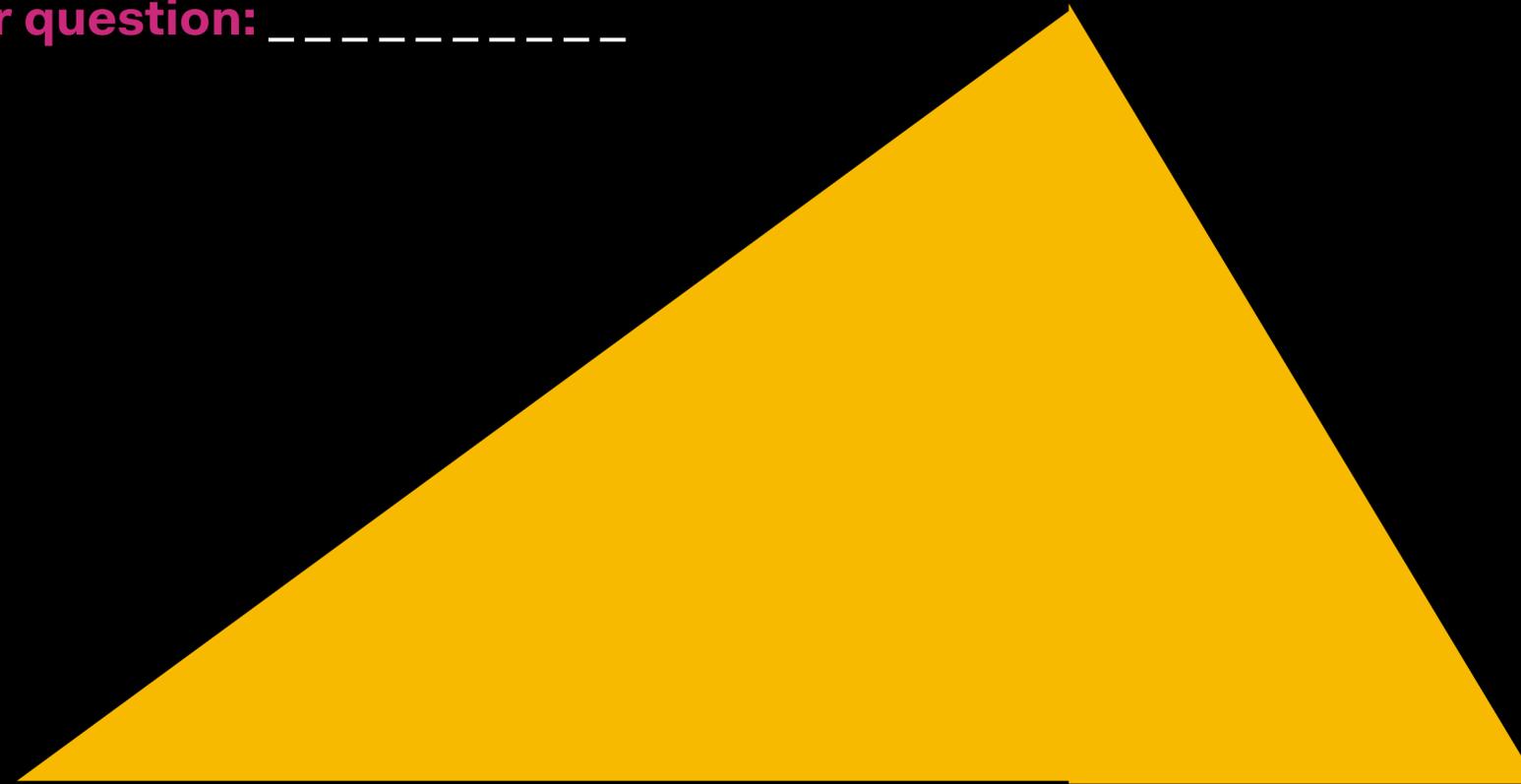


Stakes = if Tim doesn't escape, he'll be trapped forever with the cruel Turners

Think about it visually...

Plot question: _____

Character question: _____



Want: _____

Need: _____

Stakes _____

Synopsis with all that stuff included

Tim the Turtle can barely remember his life before becoming the Turner family's pet (character + their world). But he dreams about it. A lot. One day, after the Turners are particularly mean to him (problem), he decides enough is enough – and plans his escape (want). But how will a turtle escape this suburban fortress of a home (plot question) without being caught by the Turners? (stakes) And does true freedom lay on the other side of the Turner's fence (character question + need)?

What we have so far...

What's next...



Structuring your story



Finding your characters

Coming up with a premise

Lesson #3 - Structuring your story

- Getting all today's lesson stuff down
- Narrative structure
- The 5 key story beats

Good luck and we'll see you for Lesson #4!