

Chicken Scratch Books



Tension Tool Worksheet

Building tension in a middle grade novel works best when it's heightened in each of the three turning point scenes. Then slow down the pace by emphasizing sensory recognitions. I call this the 'Sensory Time Warp Approach'. Analyze each of your turning point scenes for tension.

First Turning Point Scene—The Earth Shaking Event:

- Your protagonist's world has been shaken. They are about to make a decision that will send them on a new path to solve their problem. How can you build tension leading up to that decision?
 - Look at the page preceding the conscious decision to act in a new way. What happens on that page?
 - Is there action, or just thought? (It should be a mix.)
 - Which of the five senses does your protagonist lean on the most in this scene?
 - Can you slow down the action by adding a few sensory details?
 - Can you emphasize the deliberation by inserting a few sensory details?

Second Turning Point Scene—The Mid-Point Decision:

- Your protagonist has attempted to solve their problem in the best way they could, but it's not working. At this scene, they make a new decision that sends them onto another new path. How can you build tension leading up to this decision?
 - Look at the page preceding the conscious decision to act in a new way. What happens on that page?
 - Is there action, or just thought? (It should be a mix.)
 - Which of the five senses does your protagonist lean on the most in this scene?
 - Can you slow down the action by adding a few sensory details?
 - Can you emphasize the deliberation by inserting a few sensory details?

Third Turning Point Scene—The Epiphany Scene

- Your protagonist has failed repeatedly to solve their problem. Everything they've tried has failed, although they've been learning and understanding new things. Now they are at the place in the story where they finally figure out what they need to do to solve their problem. This scene is often just before the physical climax. How can you build tension here?
 - Look at this entire scene. What is happening?
 - Is there action, or just thought? (It should be a mix—especially in this scene.)
 - Which of the five senses does your protagonist lean on the most in this scene?
 - Can you slow down the action by adding a few sensory details?
 - Can you emphasize the epiphany discovery by inserting a few sensory details?