

Let Me Help You

# Sell Your Homework

12-Week Course of Study:

*24 Ways to Write  
Stories for Kids*

*Lesson 8*

**MULTIPLE PROBLEM  
OTHER PROBLEM**

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# **Problem-and-Multiple-Solution Story**

This kind of story is the “if at first you don’t succeed, try and try and try **AGAIN!**”

**With this chapter, we come into a form found frequently in Our heroic figures try and try and try to solve their problems—notice there are three tries.**

When it looks as if all they’ve earned is failure, they make a final desperate attempt and win a result. Often, they find success.

Occasionally, that last effort is allowed to end in failure. Frequently, there is an unexpected result.

**One danger for beginning writers is that they follow a formula rigidly.** Read your complex problem and solution stories in the magazines and you’ll find you are scarcely aware of any structure that the author is following.

Analyze it and you’ll see the bones beneath the flesh; but the professional in any art covers technique with polish. He makes his art look so natural, so easy—why, anyone could do it!

The structure for this kind of story looks like this:

1. Problem
2. Resolve to solve it
3. Attempt #1
4. Failure
5. Attempt #2
6. Failure
7. Attempt #3
8. Success or failure or unexpected result

**The problem must be a real problem,** one your reader can identify with, one he may well have found difficult, if not impossible, to solve himself.

Is there discord in the church’s young peoples group and everybody’s leaving?

Has someone made serious mistakes trying to win a neighbor to Christ?

Has one of the Seven Deadly Sins—pride, envy, lust, wrath, avarice, greed, sloth—gripped our hero?

Are his parents on the verge of di-

voiced?

Are his neighbors taking him to court?

The problem **MUST** be solved; but don't leave it to God to do in the sense that the solution comes from out of the blue.

**We Christian writers are in a real dilemma.** We know that "absent from the body" means we're "present with the Lord."

We have every reason to be optimists. Doesn't our Father work out everything for us after the counsel of His own will? Doesn't Romans 8:28 still hold good? Hasn't He said, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world?"

He can ennoble every desperate situation we or our characters might ever face.

But put that into your story and critics will say it's all "easy believism."

In real life and in much literature, the hero-protagonist really suffers with seemingly no hope of finding any comfort much less a solution.

Sidney Carton went to the guillotine with wonderful words on his lips in Dickens' *Tale of Two Cities*, but he still lost his head.

**We're not pessimists. It's very difficult for us to allow our stories to end on a dismal note.** The world sees this and accuses us of being a Pollyanna or a Goody-Two-Shoes. We've got to let our heroic figures suffer. We suffer, and many of us will go to our graves with our suffering

unrelieved.

C. C. Cameron has written that—  
**"There is no failure, save giving up.**

**No real fall, so long as one still tries.**

**For seeming set-backs make the strong man wise.**

**There's no defeat, in truth, save from within;**

**Unless you're beaten there, you're bound to win."**

**Let's not interpret that to mean that self-effort will win the day.** We are not the master of our fate, the captain of our souls. But the resident Holy Spirit, lodged within us, won't allow defeat, ultimate defeat; but He surely can allow great suffering.

It is conceivable that our Christian family will lose the suit. I did.

The parents may well go on into divorce.

A Christian sister might well be molested by her own brother. It happened in David's family in the Bible!

Now, this is no call to saturate the world with stories of lust and sin-sin-sin. It IS a call to let the therapy of the Holy Spirit using the Scriptures meet the real problems that will face our characters.

But don't drop a verse in at the third attempt to solve the problem and say, "Aha! I see it all now." Use scriptural principles. Let them bear upon the character's problem and help him solve it.

But use finesse.

**Are you a student of human personality?** Do you really watch what goes on around you? Who says what? How people on the spot, trying to avoid a difficult question or accusation, will usually try to subtly change the subject or will turn the challenge into a question back at the adversary?

Close your eyes and listen to conversations. Notice how people talk in half sentences. Make note of the surprising redirections a conversation can take.

People interrupt each other and bring up their own stories that bear on the subject. Women do this more than men, I notice.

When you read stories and when you watch television, do so as a critic and as an analyst. See if you can predict how the conversation will flow. See how early you can guess how the plot will shape up and how it will turn out.

**Make notes so that you can later review the plot.** Try to see the writer at work as you analyze his story.

Did he mislead you so he could surprise you at the end?

Did he prepare you for the outcome?

What special effects did he use?

**How did the hero fail and fail and fail in his effort to win?**

How did he finally come to success or ultimate failure—or an unexpected result?

You may find you will be doing

more library research than you expected to find examples of this kind of structure. You may not find a story's structure until you are well into it, of course. But the exposure to all sorts of stories will serve you well.

The following is my attempt to give you an example of the three failures and then one of the three possible results.

### **Lindy's Christmas Candles**

By Dick Bohrer

**When Lindy woke, the sky outside had darkened toward evening and it was cold.**

**Turning on her side, she rolled forward so the comforter would pull up behind her. Then abruptly, she leaned back so it would make a little wall down the length of her back. She leaned against her little wall and looked out at the room.**

**Her bed was in the kitchen and when Momma cooked supper, it got warm and snuggly. Momma wasn't home now. She worked. She worked afternoons at the laundry and nights at the hotel.**

**She came home to supper and took a nap while Lindy watched TV. Then, after supper, she and Lindy went to the hotel where she worked in the kitchen and Lindy slept on a couch in the manager's office.**

**Lindy closed her eyes and imagined the fun she would have at the**

hotel tonight.

Tonight was Christmas eve.

“Christmas eve,” she said out loud.

There would be cakes and cookies and candy and a tree so pretty and bright with lights and angel hair. The manager was giving a party for all the helpers and she would be there, too.

“I wish we had a tree,” she mumbled out loud to herself as she looked around the kitchen. She had pinned up her Christmas pictures she’d colored at school.

“Why didn’t I draw a tree?”

*(Problem)*

As her thoughts turned to Christmas, she pondered what she could give her mother. She had two pot holders she’d made at school and two coat hangers she’d learned to crochet covers for.

But she had nothing to give her mother—pleasure.

Nothing, that is, but three candles she’d found in a drawer of an apartment in her building after the people moved out. She’d saved them for a long time, waiting for something special.

*(Resolve to solve it)*

She leaned under her bed and pulled out an old cigar box. Inside were the candles and the pot holders. She held the candles under the covers up by her heart as she won-

dered what she could do with them.

“Jesus bids us shine like a clear, pure light,” she sang to herself as she turned the candles around and around in her fingers. “Like a little candle, shining in the night . . .”

She stopped singing.

*(Attempt #1)*

“Shining in the night?” she asked out loud. “Why, shining in the night!”

A big smile spread across her face. She pulled back her comforter and pulled her thin legs out from under.

She slipped off her pajama bottoms and stretched back under the covers again. She brought her underwear and her thick red stockings out from under her pillow. She’d put them there to keep them warm.

She dressed quickly under the covers, singing over and over, “Like a little candle shining in the night.”

She got out of bed and slipped into her shoes, tying the bows an extra turn so they wouldn’t come undone.

She ran to the door and took her coat off the nail. Pulling it tightly around her and buttoning the four big buttons, she opened the door and ran out onto the landing.

The cold air snapped her nose and bit her ears. She ran down the zigzag stairs to the back alley below and then ran back away from the building as far as she could into the

vacant lot behind her building. Then, turning, she looked back and counted up the floors to find her own kitchen window.

“There it is,” she said, “and I would be able to see it from here if I was Momma.”

She ran back to the porch and up the stairs. By the time she got to her fourth floor door, she was breathing heavily. The door banged behind her as she ran to her bed and took a candle out of her box.

“Jesus bids us shine like a clear, pure . . .” she sang softly. She brushed aside the gauze curtains and stood the candle on the window sill. She let go and it fell on its side.

“Why won’t you stand up?” she asked the candle.

She hunched her head over against one shoulder and made a face and thought.

“How do you make candles stand up?” she said as she pulled at a tight black braid.

She smiled suddenly.

“Oh, I know.”

She opened the can Momma kept on the stove and took out a box of matches. She knew she wasn’t supposed to touch matches.

“But this is a special occasion,” she said to herself.

She lit the candle and went back to the window. Pushing the curtains aside again, she stood there, letting the flame melt the wax on the bottom end. She stood the candle in the

little puddle she made, held it for a moment, and took her hand away.

It stood.

She clapped her hands and stepped back to look.

“Momma will see it clear across the lot,” she said. “It’ll give her pleasure, real pleasure. I know it will.”

She went out the door and looked at the candle burning behind the window glass. It looked so nice from the porch. It was making shadows dance against the wall of the kitchen.

She stepped slowly down the stairs, keeping her eyes on the little flame. She had to see if she could see it all the way down.

*(Failure)*

“You there!” a man’s voice barked at her. “You there!”

She turned and looked. “Me?” It was the manager.

“Put that candle out. You wanna burn this whole house down?”

She turned and looked back at the candle.

“You heard me! Git!”

She ran back up the stairs. She could hear him saying to somebody. “Land sakes! She was trying to burn the whole house down.”

She took the candle out of the window and blew it out. It *was* near the curtain, she admitted to herself, but it wouldn’t have caught the house on fire. She was sure of that.

**“And besides,” she said, “how can I give Momma pleasure now?”**

**She sat on her bed and thought. She couldn’t get her little song out of her mind.**

**“Jesus bids us shine in a clear, pure light. Like a little candle shining in the night.”**

*(Attempt #2)*

**She scratched her neck and sang it again.**

**And then she thought. “I know. I’ll make her a Christmas tree.”**

**She went back down the stairs to the vacant lot. There, she counted the landings on her building. It had apartments on both sides with a firewall in between. The stairs from each floor angled out half a flight down and then angled back toward one another on the floor below. There were four floors, so that meant eight landings and there were six turns.**

**She counted the landings and the turns twice to make sure and then scurried back up the stairs. She took a knife out of the kitchen drawer, pulled out the breadboard, and made seven nicks down the length of one of her candles. She counted the pieces that would make and found she’d have eight.**

**She rolled the candle over and made six nicks and counted them again.**

**“Seven.”**

**Then, slicing with the knife, she**

**cut the candle through into seven pieces. She knew she shouldn’t be using the knife.**

**“But it’s for Momma,” she said, and then she felt better.**

**She cut the other candle into seven pieces and, after emptying her cigar box, she scooped all the pieces in and closed the lid.**

**Out on the steps, she put a piece of candle on each side of the banister separating the two apartments on her floor. Then she lit each one, there on the tippy edge of the porch.**

**“He won’t mind this,” she said to herself. “This is outside.”**

**Then she ran down a half flight on her side and put down another candle piece at the turn and lit it, too. She went to the third floor and put down two candles beside the banister, and she lit them.**

**She sat on the banister and swung her legs over so she could run up the half flight on the other side. She put down a candle piece on that turn and lit it.**

**She went down to the third floor and swung over to her side again. She never went to the other side of the banister without feeling that she was going where she wasn’t allowed.**

**She put candles on the landings and the turns down to the second floor on both sides and then down to the first. She lit each one.**

**When she had all her fourteen**

candle pieces in place and burning, she ran out across the vacant lot so she could look down Putnam Avenue to see her mother coming. It was the time now that she always came.

But Momma wasn't in sight.

Lindy turned and looked back at the apartment house. She was right. It looked like a giant Christmas tree with great branches. Each branch had a light at its tip and there were two lights at the trunk.

"It's BEAUTIFUL," she said. "Oh, Momma," she turned to look down the street again, "please come."

*(Failure)*

Suddenly, she heard the loud noise of a door slamming and a lot of shouting. People were running up the stairs and kicking her candles off the landings.

She ran back, calling, "Don't do that. Don't do that! It's for my Momma!" She burst into tears. "It's for Momma."

"I told you she would burn this house down," the manager was shrieking. "What are you—a firebug?" He grabbed her ear and gave it a sharp twist. "You gonna burn this house down?"

"It was for Momma," she wailed.

"You get back up to that apartment and, if I see you lighting ANY more matches, you and your momma are gonna be put out on

the street, Christmas eve or no Christmas eve. Ya hear? Now git!"

Sobbing, Lindy ran back to her kitchen and lay down on her bed. She lay there quietly and then she stood up.

"I've got to think of something to give Momma pleasure," she said, wiping the tears off her cheeks. "I've got to think of something."

She held her third candle in her hand, turning it in her fingers as she thought.

She went out the door again and walked slowly down the stairs. When she got to the bottom, she stood on the porch looking out across the vacant lot to the lights way down town where her Momma was.

*(Attempt #3)*

Holding her unlighted candle in front of her heart, she began to sing.

"Away in the manger,  
No crib for his bed,  
The little Lord Jesus  
Lay down His sweet head.  
The cattle . . ."

She heard the door to the manager's apartment behind her open.

"What do you want? I told you to git up to your room."

Lindy kept on singing.

"The cattle are lowing,  
The Baby awakes.  
The little—"

**“I told you—”**

**“George!”** a lady’s voice called from inside. **“Let her.”**

The door opened wider and the lady came out. She listened as Lindy finished the carol.

**“Why are you singing, honey?”** she said.

Surprised by the lady’s gentleness, Lindy began to cry.

**“I just wanted to give my Momma pleasure when she gets home,”** she said slowly, taking long sobbing breaths. **“I tried to put a candle in my window, but he wouldn’t let me. And I made a Christmas tree out here—and he got mad. I haven’t got nothing to give my Momma pleasure.”**

**“Is that your Momma coming now—way down the street across the lot?”** the lady asked.

Lindy’s eyes brightened, and she nodded her head in big nods.

**“George, you get a match,”** the lady said. **“We’re gonna light this child’s candle and help her welcome Momma home.”**

*(Success)*

Then she began to sing **“Joy to the World”** and **“It Came Upon a Midnight Clear.”**

Other doors opened and folk came out on their porches. They all had their coats and scarves on because it was cold.

Someone lit Lindy’s candle. And as Momma walked slowly across

the vacant lot, people from all the apartments were singing.

**“Peace on earth,**

**Good will to men**

**From heaven’s all-gracious King:**

**The world in solemn stillness lay**

**To hear the angels sing.”**

Momma stood at the porch in front of Lindy. There were tears in her eyes.

**“Thank you, everybody. Oh, thank you. That was just beautiful. Just beautiful.”**

And then she slowly walked Lindy up the stairs, thanking everyone for the lovely welcome.

And, as they were eating supper, she said, **“You know, one time, when I was way down town shopping, I looked up Putnam Avenue and saw such a lovely big Christmas tree just about here. It had stars on its branches and then the stars fell off. It was so beautiful and so strange. What do you think it was?”**

Lindy looked at her.

**“That was something just for you,”** she said. **“Your Christmas angel made it just for you.”**

###

**Now, lets ruin the mood and look at characterization.**

Did Lindy come alive to you?

The story opens as she wakes late in the afternoon. She leans forward to

make a crease in the quilt she can lean against.

She looks at her room. She imagines the fun she will have with her mother at a party later that evening. She wishes she'd drawn a tree. It's a slow beginning to an ordinary story about a youngster on Christmas eve.

I wanted you to picture her that way.

**I filled the story with details about her ordinary kitchen.** All the way through the story you are told details about what she is doing. And from my perspective, I've decided that it's the details that carve the character out of the woodwork and give her dimension.

You are given little description of her. You're told she has black braids. You may assume she is black. Writers in the old days would have taken a page to describe her feature by feature.

**There's probably no great depth to her character—except she is persevering.** And she is loving. You *are* told what motivates her, and she does have a plausible motive.

You are told what she sees and feels. Her story is subjective. You are told everything she knows, feels and sees. You are not told what she looks like.

An objective story will tell you what she looks like and sees and feels, but it can't tell you *how* she feels or what her thoughts are. Objective tells you what's on the outside; subjective tells you what's inside as well.

**Essentially, then, we get a charac-**

**ter to live by giving her an appearance of life.**

You select her traits.

You exercise them in her environment.

You test them as she tries to solve her problem.

You flex them as she successively fails.

You refine them as you draw her to her final desperate attempt to achieve her goal.

Lindy is resolute. She keeps singing even though the manager at the end tells her once more to get upstairs.

She has strengths and weaknesses. She lights matches and uses the kitchen knife even though she knows she's not supposed to. She rationalizes so she can keep on using them.

**She rises above disappointment each time.** But we don't make her too complex. We don't want to blur the picture our reader gets.

On another note, did you recognize my attempt to tie things together? The candles provide a unifying element from first to last.

And then the particular carol speaks of angels singing, and we pick that up in the last sentence: "Your Christmas angel made it just for you."

And do you note how the word "just" throws emotion into the sentence? It makes the ending eloquent—and personal.

"Just for you."

**Now, following are some children's books that show the problem**

**and solution structure at work.**

**CLOVIS CRAWFISH AND THE SINGING CIGALES** by Mary Alice Fontenot and illustrated by Eric Vincent in ink and watercolor (Gretna, La.: Pelican Publishing Company, Inc., 1965, 1981), 32 pp.

Summary: Clovis Crawfish and his friends meet two singing cicadas and outfox the bully M'sieu Blue Jay.

First sentence: It was summertime on the bayou where Clovis Crawfish lived.

Problem: The cicada wants to find his brother and sing, sing, sing. But a marauding blue jay picking up food for its chicks poses a life-threatening problem.

First attempt: Failure. The jay captures the cicada.

But, ah, success: The cicada escapes when the chicks, fighting over him, forget him.

Second attempt: The jay recaptures the cicada.

But, ah, success: The friends have stuffed mud in the cicada's old shell and used two leaves for wings. The jay, fooled by the camouflage, flies off with the empty shell and gets a beak full of sticky mud. He flies off in a huff.

Then the cicadas get to sing, sing, sing.

A sprinkling of French phrases lends a patina of charm to the book.

**YOUR TURN:** Kids love escapes. And there are many victim creatures that want nothing more than to escape the animals and birds of prey

that have no other wish in life than to line their stomachs three times a day. Remember, your victims can be human, young and pitiful.

**IT COULD ALWAYS BE WORSE** by Margot Zemach (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1976)

First Sentence: Once upon a time in a small village a poor unfortunate man lived with his mother, his wife, and his six children in a little one-room hut. Life was so impossible with nine in one room, the frantic father ran to the Rabbi for help.

The first solution: Take your chickens, the rooster, and the goose into your hut to live with you.

When life got worse, the father ran back.

The Rabbi's second solution: Bring your goat into the hut.

The third: Bring your cow inside.

It's impossible! In a frenzy, he runs to the rabbi.

Final solution: Put the animals out.

Ah, what peace! The father is ecstatic.

**YOUR TURN:** Kids will see that the end result is no better than the problem at the beginning—and they'll laugh at this one. What can you do with this idea?

**THE STOP** by William Wondriska (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972) Illustrated by the author in watercolor.

First sentence: "The boys were going home."

Using tiny dots on a large panorama of Monument Valley, the writer-artist places his characters, two Indian

brothers going home after camping.

They chance on their father's colt, lame and lying in the brush.

Left to watch the pony while big brother goes for help, little brother faces three threats—six wolves, Indian warriors, and a dream of star monsters “coming down to eat him.”

The next morning his father, brother and uncles arrive; and the brothers get to ride “in front, next to their father” as they go home.

**YOUR TURN:** The setting allows the illustrator to paint some wonderful pictures. Remember, always leave room for the illustrator to work his magic. You can weave lots of stories of a little brother left to keep guard, who does so despite three threats, and who gets rewarded by getting a special privilege.

**HARRY BY THE SEA** by Gene Zion with pictures by Margaret Bloy Graham (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1965).

There's no room for Harry, a spotted white dog, under the family's umbrella. He gets lost looking for a shady spot. Strangers chase him away. A big wave covers him with seaweed, and he terrifies everyone who sees him. About to be caught by a dog-catcher, he hears his name, “Harry, Harry.”

But it's a hot dog man, crying, “Hurry! Hurry! Get 'em while they're hot.” Jumping and barking with delight,

he sees his family running toward him.

**YOUR TURN:** Here's a lost-and-found story with a humorous solution built on a misunderstanding. The author named the dog “Harry” so that the conclusion would make sense. Keep your ears peeled for common words like this you can build a story on. Perhaps your little boy, Dit, is rescued by a newsboy shouting, “Read awl about dit.” I don't know! At least I'm trying.

**MR. EMERSON'S COOK** by Judith Byron Schachner. (New York: Dutton Children's Books, 1998.)

LofC summary: Annie Burns answers an ad requesting an extraordinary cook needed to get Mr. Emerson to eat real food to supplement the nourishment he derives from nature through his imagination.

Time and time again, Annie, the new cook, can't get the philosopher, Ralph Waldo Emerson, to eat until her mother sends the mud pie cookbook Annie wrote as a child.

Annie's resolve: “If we are to live by our imagination, then we must cook with it.”

Subsequently, her apple pie and fish chowder win his heart.

**YOUR TURN:** This can be but need not be factual. The author captures interest both by using a well known and long-dead poet and by giving him a physical problem for her heroine to solve.



# OTHER PROBLEM AND SOLUTION STORIES

Clever writers have devised lots of ways to tell stories that are **COMPELLING!**

**Several other types of problem and solution stories are available to the story teller, types that can be used at camp or at daily vacation Bible school or Sunday school to tell a compelling story.**

**There is the JACK AND THE BEANSTALK method:**

1. Need (family destitute after loss of father)
2. Attempt begun to meet the need (sells cow) that ends in failure (accepts seeds)
3. Hope (beanstalk grows) brings chance of success (finding father in castle of giant who kidnapped him)
4. Failure (to rescue father) softened with a little success (steals hen that lays golden eggs)
5. Hope (climbs beanstalk) with chance of success (finding father)
6. Failure (to rescue father) soft-

tened with a little more success (steals bags of gold)

7. Hope (climbs beanstalk) with chance of success (finding father)
8. Success (finds father with help of singing harp)
9. Chase (Jack and father run for their lives, chased by the wicked giant)
10. Violent action (chopping down beanstalk) wins ultimate relief (giant is killed and father is saved)

**There is the LORENZO method (see my sample story):**

1. Problem stated (he couldn't stop popping buttons)
2. Temptation (holds breath when flattered)
3. Failure (pops his buttons)
4. Punishment postponed (spanking threatened)
5. Temptation (holds breath when flattered)
6. Failure (pops his buttons)

## SELL YOUR HOMEWORK: OTHER PROBLEM AND SOLUTION STORIES

7. Temptation (holds breath when flattered)

8. Failure (pops his buttons)

9. Restitution attempted (we'll sew them on again)

10. Failure with unalterable results (buttons lost; all subsequent rhinoceroses affected)

**This story is a violation of the principle that the hero is the one who attempts to make restitution for his own failures.** In this case, the mother attempts to correct the damage but is frustrated by the lost buttons.

This story was originally written to be about Henery Hippitypotamus (a named coined by my young son when at two years of age we read a picture book of Noah and the Ark and he named all the animals). We were celebrating that wonderful name when we had a "come-to-realize" revelation: Rhinoceroses not Hippitypotami have the loose skins.

**There is the TINDERBOX method (from the old fairy tale) that uses a succession of three problems with solutions:**

1. Problem (witch needs help to get the tinderbox from a room under a tree where another witch left it. She promises a soldier a reward for his help.)

2. Solution (soldier retrieves the tinderbox but kills the witch when she will not tell him its value)

3. Problem (the soldier runs out of money he got from the room under the tree as his reward)

4. Solution (he discovers the tinderbox has powers to grant his wishes. He asks for gold and for visits from the local princess)

5. Problem (He is discovered kidnapping the princess and is condemned to hang)

6. Solution (powers of the tinderbox free him and revenge him. He gets the princess as his wife)

**There is the DICK WHITTINGTON AND HIS CAT method with despair and hope alternating in sequence:**

1. Problem (Dick is poverty-stricken after the death of his parents and he dreams of wealth in London)

2. Immediate solution (he gets a ride to London but this is the beginning of his problems)

3. Despair (he begs but no one gives)

4. Despair (he tries work but the job doesn't last)

5. Despair (his plea for help is spurned at Fitzwarren house and cook threatens to souse him with dish water)

6. Hope (Mr. Fitzwarren takes him into the house as a servant)

7. Hope (Fitzwarren daughter warns cook to treat Dick more kindly)

8. Hope (Dick gives up his cat to captain of Fitzwarren ship in hope of eventual profit)

9. Despair (life with the cook becomes impossible. He runs away)

10. Hope (bells of London prophesy his eventual success)

## SELL YOUR HOMEWORK: OTHER PROBLEM AND SOLUTION STORIES

11. In the meantime (the captain sells the cat to a Moorish king)

12. Success (Dick's old dream of riches comes true. His cat has earned him Moorish treasure. He weds the Fitzwarren girl. He becomes Lord Mayor of Londontown three times.)

**Many Bible stories have a structure. BALAAM's story gives us a method:**

1. Dilemma (Balaam wants to go with Balak's servants, but God has said no)

2. Resolve to solve (Balaam asks God again, hoping to get permission to go)

3. Warning (angel stands in the path with a drawn sword)

4. Escape (donkey runs off path into a field)

5. Warning (angel stands in the path again with a drawn sword)

6. Escape (donkey runs against a wall)

7. Warning (angel stands in the path with a drawn sword)

8. Violent action (Balaam beats the donkey)

9. New insight (donkey speaks and Balaam's eyes are opened)

10. Lesson learned (a chastened Balaam goes on his way, warned)

Some stories might include a failure to respond to the warning rather than the escape mentioned here.

**From the story of JACOB'S SONS AND JOSEPH we get insights into story structure.**

1. Problem (we're out of food)

2. Resolution (Jacob's sons go to Egypt for food)

3. Success (they return with food) and threat (Simeon held in Egypt)

4. Problem (we're out of food)

5. Resolution (Jacob's sons go to Egypt for food) and threat (Benjamin sent as ransom for Simeon. Jacob is deeply reluctant)

6. Failure (the gold cup is found in Benjamin's sack)

7. Problem (we're out of Benjamin)

8. Resolution (Judah pleads for Benjamin's release and offers himself as a servant to Joseph in Benjamin's place)

9. Success (Joseph reveals himself to his brethren and traces for them God's plan)

10. Ultimate happiness achieved (Joseph restored to Jacob. Food and shelter provided the whole family in Goshen)

**From DAVID AND BATHSHEBA we get another kind of problem and solution method:**

1. Problem (David must cover up his sin with Bathsheba)

2. Attack (he calls Uriah home)

3. Counterattack (Uriah declines to go to his house)

4. Failure (David's plan has failed)

5. Attack (David makes Uriah drunk so he will go home)

6. Counterattack (Uriah will not go to his home)

7. Failure (David's plan has failed)

8. Attack (David writes Joab a letter)

9. Desperation (Uriah is to die in battle)

10. Solution (the dreadful deed is done. Bathsheba mourns Uriah. David marries Bathsheba. “but the thing that David had done displeased the Lord.”)

Uriah’s counterattack is passive and unwitting. In other stories there could be an active, deliberate frustrating of the attack by the one who makes the counterattack.

**These structures could be used as frameworks for novels, too.**

Now for—

## **Lorenzo**

By Dick Bohrer

**When Lorenzo was born, his skin buttoned down just like his aunts and his uncles and everybody else in his family. And in every way but one, Lorenzo was just like every other Rhinocerosis ever born.**

*(Problem stated)*

**In just one way, Lorenzo was different. He couldn’t stop popping his buttons.**

*(Temptation)*

**When Aunt Gertrude saw him soon after he was born, she goosed and gurgled and said, “What an ADORable little rhinocerosis we have here.”**

**Even though he was just a tiny baby, Lorenzo knew she was talking about him. He took a little**

**breath and held it. And he blinked his eyes five times and smiled shyly.**

**He was just about to breathe again, when Aunt Lulu burst into the room and called, “Where is this beautiful little rhinocerosis everyone is talking about?”**

**Lorenzo blinked five more times as she pulled aside the blanket and looked at him. As she tickled him under the chin, he took another little breath and held it.**

**His Uncle Erasmus stomped into the room just then and said in a deep, deep voice, ‘I want to see him, too.’**

**Lorenzo took another little breath and held it as Uncle Erasmus said in his loud, deep voice, “Say, that IS a baby rhinocerosis.”**

**Lorenzo rolled his eyes in pleasure as he listened to his relatives say he was so wonderful. He took another little breath and held it.**

*(Failure)*

**Then when Cousin Tilda came running in to say in her high, singy voice that “This is the most wonderful, beautiful, adorable, cuddly little rhinocerosis I have ever seen,” and when she ran her fingers up under his arms in a tickly “kutsie, kutsie, kutsie,” Lorenzo was so full of little breaths that he—popped his buttons.**

**Everyone gasped.**

**“Emily,” Aunt Gertrude called to Lorenzo’s mother. “Emily, come quickly. Something awful has hap-**

pened!”

There was no answer. His mother had stepped out for just a moment.

“Emily. Emily! Emily!!” everyone shouted, for no one knew what to do. This had never, ever happened before to a rhinocerosis.

“What’s wrong, everybody? What’s going on?” Mother Emily came bustling into the room.

“Lorenzo has—” Aunt Gertrude lowered her voice as if she were telling a terrible secret. “He has just—popped—his—buttons!”

And, sure enough, when she looked at Lorenzo, his mother saw that his coat-skin was completely undone and his buttons were scattered all over his crib.

*(Punishment postponed)*

“Lorenzo! You should be ashamed!” she said in a horrified voice. “I’ll spank you if you do that again!”

Her voice was so sharp that it brought a big tear to each of Lorenzo’s eyes.

“Oh, daw, daw, daw,” Aunt Gertrude said soothingly. “The poor little rhinocerosis couldn’t help that. He won’t do it again. You just sew them on again gently, Emily, and everything will be all right.”

And everything was all right, until soon after Lorenzo learned to walk and his mother took him out for a little stroll on a Sunday afternoon.

*(Temptation)*

All the other mothers and maiden aunts came running over to Emily, and they squealed and they chuckled and they ogled and they goggled over what a lovely little rhinocerosis Lorenzo was.

“He’s so SWEEEEEEET,” said one, and Lorenzo took a little breath and blinked his eyes shyly.

“Aw, he’s SOOOOOOOO cute!” another said, and Lorenzo took another little breath and smiled quietly.

“He’s just cunnin-yes-he-is!” another one said and Lorenzo took another breath.

“He’s darling, Emily, just darling!”

“He’s a honey.”

“He’s a pretty!”

“He’s such a doll!”

*(Failure)*

Lorenzo was so full of his delighted little breaths that he couldn’t take another one—and he popped his buttons again and his skin dropped to his feet.

All the mothers and the maiden aunts caught their breath in surprise and in shock.

“The shame!”

“How naughty!”

“A disgrace!”

“The idea!”

Lorenzo’s mother tried to cover him up again, so he would look decent; but she couldn’t. She gathered

up the buttons and bundled him home so fast—

**“I was NEVER so—if you EVER again DARE— Embarrassed? I was MORTIFIED!”**

Lorenzo started to cry. He knew he was going to get a whipping.

*(Punishment postponed again)*

She shook him by the shoulder. **“Next time, Lorenzo, will be the last time! You hear?”**

Lorenzo heard and he promised not to hold his breath like that. And he learned to control his buttons until—one day when his mother took him off to kindergarten.

She took him to the school office where the secretary wrote his name down on a list. She took him to the school nurse who said he was healthy enough to go to school.

Then she took him down the long hall to a door. She opened the door, and they stepped inside.

Lorenzo had never seen so many pretty little girl rhinocerosies ever before in his whole life. And the little girlie rhinocerosies had never seen as cute a little boy rhinocerosis as Lorenzo before in their whole lives.

*(Temptation)*

They came running over.

**“Isn’t he cute?”**

**“He’s cool!”**

**“He’s got it all, man!”**

**“He’s a dippity-doo-doo-doll!”**

**“He’s a lolla-pa-loo-za!”**

**“He’s super-gob-slop-shus!”**

*(Failure)*

Lorenzo was so startled and so pleased that he took lots and lots of little breaths and held every one. The more they carried on, the more he held his breaths until—

**POP! SPLATTER! RATTLE! BANG! BING! BOOM!**

His buttons popped off, his skin slid down, and he stood there in all his nothings.

*(Punishment performed)*

Before he knew it, he was being rushed out of the school building and down the sidewalk and Momma’s hand was slapping where it hadn’t slapped before.

**“What makes you DO things like this, Lorenzo?”** His mother was shouting.

And he cried—loud, louder, loudest!

*(Despair)*

Aunt Gertrude met them at the door.

**“And just what is all this noise about, Emily?”** she asked as they went past her into the house.

**“Lorenzo popped his buttons again,”** his mother said.

Aunt Gertrude’s eyes opened wide, and she didn’t say another word.

**“What’s all the noise?”** Uncle Erasmus said, looking up from his newspaper.

**“Lorenzo popped his buttons**

again,” Mother said.

Uncle Erasmus put the paper down slowly. His eyes were as wide as saucers.

Cousin Tilda came in from the kitchen. “What’s wrong with Lorenzo?” she asked. “Why is he crying?”

“He just popped his buttons again—in school—in front of EVERYBODY!” Mother said.

Cousin Tilda turned away and went back into the kitchen, shaking her head and wiping at her eyes with her apron.

“Poor Lorenzo,” Aunt Gertrude said finally. “He couldn’t help it. He won’t do it again, will you, Lorenzo?”

Lorenzo dropped a tear.

“Sew the buttons back on, Emily. He won’t do it again.”

“But this is the THIRD time. I was never SO embarrassed,” his mother said.

“Do sew the buttons back on, Emily,” Cousin Tilda called from the kitchen. “He won’t do it again.”

“But he’ll NEVER learn!” Mother said.

“Sew the buttons back on, Emily,” Uncle Erasmus said in his deep voice.

*(Recovery attempted)*

“But—but—” Mother was still upset. “Oh, all right.”

*(Failure with unalterable results)*

She reached into her pocket to get

the buttons.

“Where are the buttons, Lorenzo? What did you do with them?”

She reached into her purse.

She felt in all her pockets.

“I can’t find the buttons,” she said.

“You what?” Uncle Erasmus asked in his deep voice.

“The buttons. They’re gone.”

“Gone?” Aunt Gertrude, Cousin Tilda and Uncle Erasmus said all at once.

“What will we do?” Mother asked.

“I’ll go look,” Uncle Erasmus said as he went out the door to walk back to the school.

“I’ll look in my sewing basket,” Aunt Gertrude said.

“And I’ll look in the odds-and-ends drawer in the kitchen,” Cousin Tilda said.

But Uncle Erasmus came back shaking his head. “They were not there,” he said.

And Aunt Gertrude came back shaking her head. “I couldn’t find any in my sewing basket,” she said.

Cousin Tilda stood in the doorway of the kitchen and said, “There aren’t any in the odds-and-ends drawer.”

“Lorenzo has popped his buttons for the last time,” Uncle Erasmus said. “There aren’t any more buttons to sew back on.”

All his life, Lorenzo never had

**buttons on his skin-coat.**

**And now, today, all rhinoceroses don't have buttons on their coats either.**

**Their coats hang on their big bodies in long folds and wrinkles because they really don't have any buttons to keep their coats on tight—any more.**

###

**Multiple p-and-s gives you more opportunity to spread out your options.** Your hero can try and try and try to solve the dilemma before getting his act together.

Think of what lengths the neighbors would go to if your character were to bring home a load of chicken manure to spread on his lawn. If he should get a bad cold that sent him to bed, leaving that large mound untouched in his driveway, the neighbors would put their problem-solving mechanisms in high gear.

**Multiple problem and solution**

**stories naturally will be longer.** They'll require far more conniving from you to put all the parts together.

You who tell stories aloud can keep these structures in mind and use them as crutches to keep the words coming despite the distractions that occur when youngsters sit en masse around you coughing, sniffing, poking and scratching.

In our next lesson, we'll discuss the come-to-realize and the factual structures of story writing. With come-to-realize we have an awakening at the end. With factual we stick to the obvious.

We are more than halfway through our series. Are you finding these lessons profitable? If you would like to let me know, e-mail me at [dick@professordick.com](mailto:dick@professordick.com).

If you have questions, ask them.

I'm here to help.

Professor Dick

