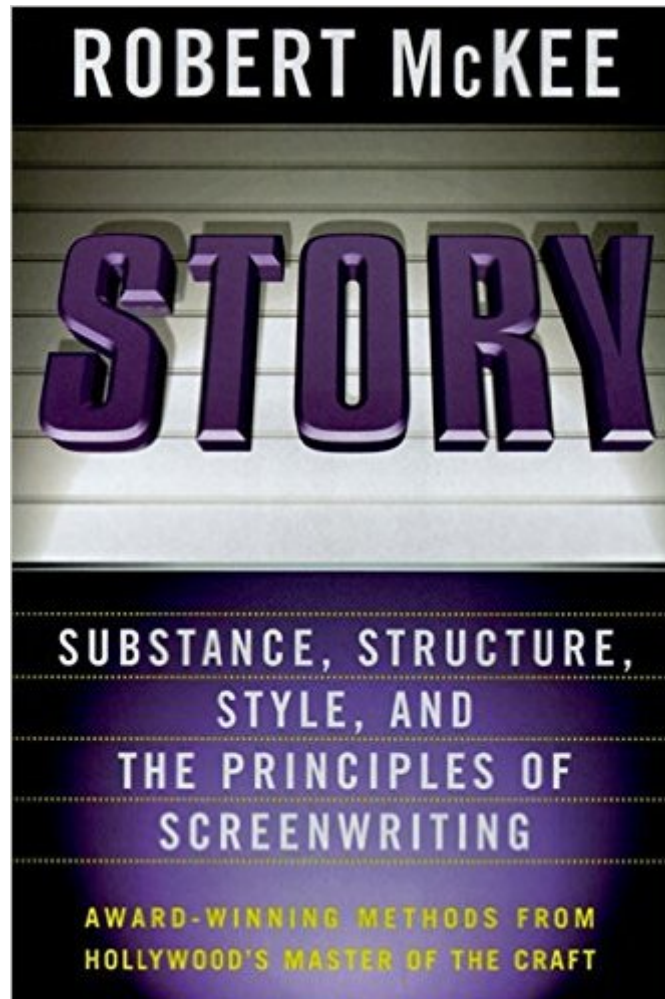


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Story: Substance, Structure, Style And The Principles Of Screenwriting



Synopsis

Robert McKee's screenwriting workshops have earned him an international reputation for inspiring novices, refining works in progress and putting major screenwriting careers back on track. Quincy Jones, Diane Keaton, Gloria Steinem, Julia Roberts, John Cleese and David Bowie are just a few of his celebrity alumni. Writers, producers, development executives and agents all flock to his lecture series, praising it as a mesmerizing and intense learning experience. In *Story*, McKee expands on the concepts he teaches in his \$450 seminars (considered a must by industry insiders), providing readers with the most comprehensive, integrated explanation of the craft of writing for the screen. No one better understands how all the elements of a screenplay fit together, and no one is better qualified to explain the "magic" of story construction and the relationship between structure and character than Robert McKee.

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Customer Reviews

As a novelist, I long resisted the suggestion of a film director friend to read this book. After all, what could a screenwriting book tell me about the novel form? Well...I was wrong. *Story* offers sound concepts that can save any storyteller hours of frustration. *Story* is simply first rate as a tool for diagnosing that horrible sinking feeling we all get when we know something isn't quite right with our tale...but we just can't figure out what. I was so impressed with the book, I signed up for the seminar. McKee is entertaining, sure. But as I sat there with my well-marked copy of the book in hand (shocked, by the way, at how few others had bothered to read the [\$\$\$] book before forking over at

least ten times more for the seminar...I mean these are writers, right...and writers supposedly read?), it became painfully clear that McKee was simply marching through the text, page by page, using exactly the same examples, usually verbatim. If you are intelligent enough and sufficiently committed to your craft to read *Story* closely (and I mean closely, with a pen and highlighter), the seminar is a waste of time and money. Other than a scene-by-scene analysis of *Casablanca* and McKee's personal thoughts on politics and religion, it simply does not go beyond the book in any meaningful way.

For me *_Story_* by Robert McKee is an incredibly useful book in terms of analyzing stories after the fact. If you read a popular, well-crafted book or view a movie or TV show with those qualities and want to understand how it works, what makes it tick, you would be hard pressed to find a better book, and you should just order this book now -- you're in for a treat. If you're an aspiring writer, *_Story_* may be extremely helpful for you (as evidenced by the many glowing reviews here), but it might also be problematic in ways you don't expect. It's from this perspective that I'm writing this review. Writing fiction is an incredibly personal experience, so to be clear I'm not saying that people who love this book as a writing how-to are wrong. I think if you have a certain mindset or approach to writing, this book will be extremely helpful to you. But if you don't, you may want to approach *_Story_* with some caution (which I'll explain in a minute). Some fiction writers employ a very methodical, intellectual approach, putting stories together like watchmakers carefully constructing a complex timepiece, creating detailed outlines first and using them as blueprints to build their stories. This is a completely valid way to work -- in fact, I'm envious of such writers and wish it worked for me. If you already know that you are this sort of writer, you should just order *_Story_* right now, because you almost certainly are gonna love it and find it incredibly useful. Some writers employ a more organic, intuitive approach, where creating a story is an unstructured process of discovery (the so-called "pantsers", because they work from "the seat of their pants"). In my view this is also a perfectly valid way to work, not inherently better or worse than being a dedicated outliner. If you know that you're this sort of writer, you may find *_Story_* intellectually compelling (because it surely is), but it might also mess with your head (see below). I personally am neither a hardcore outliner nor a committed pantsers. I am finding that I produce my best, most satisfying work when I bounce back and forth between the two approaches. I can't go full organic because I get lost in the work and find that I constantly have 16 ideas that I can't choose between, and each one of those leads to 16 other ideas, and so on. On the other hand, for me employing a rigorous outlining approach is too intellect-driven. I feel I lose the creative spark and fascination that made me want to write the story

in the first place. Instead, deliberately or not, I find myself "solving" my story structure like a sudoku puzzle, overtaken with concern about hitting the right points in the right way at the right time, and things like, losing control of my story that way. Which brings me back to _Story_. As someone else here said, McKee isn't telling you, "These are rules! You must follow them!" He's describing principles of storytelling he's developed over years and years of experience and analysis. The thing is, his approach is extremely methodical and intellect-driven, it has a gravity that's going to pull you in that direction. It's so intellectually appealing it's like your brain can't let go of it. Like I said earlier, if your writing mindset and approach are on the same wavelength as what McKee teaches, this is gonna be awesome for you and you're going to love it. If you're not, this can really mess with your head and your writing for a bit. That said, this is good material even for someone like me, and I am glad I read it. There are useful ideas here, and it's good to be aware of them even if you're not going to go about building stories the way McKee teaches. But if you go about putting McKee's tools into practice and it just doesn't work for you, or you're simply not that kind of writer to begin with, don't panic if it feels like your brain has been taken over by McKee for a while. :-) This too shall pass, and afterwards you will probably feel like you have learned things that will be useful to you at some point down the road.

There are many good works on screenwriting available. I have read several, including those by Field, Seger, and others. They have all been helpful and offer something valuable. By reading several of these books, I have gained much more than reading just one. At the very least I understand the different approaches to story, structure, etc., and am better equipped to employ my own style and method. That said, Story by Robert McKee is the cream of the crop. The book is beautifully written, tremendously insightful. I have gleaned more from this book than any of the others. Anyone with a pen and paper or typewriter can write a screenplay. For those who wish to create a masterwork with feeling characters in compelling situations, this book is a must read. It explains the why and the how, and reveals what we as screenwriters struggle toward: a good story, well told. My only gripe was that I didn't want it to end. So I have started reading it again. My work is decidedly better thanks to Robert McKee's book. Now I fear that any books I read from this point will pale in comparison. I hope that I find another gem, and am proven wrong, but to save others from this fate, I urge you to read this book last!

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