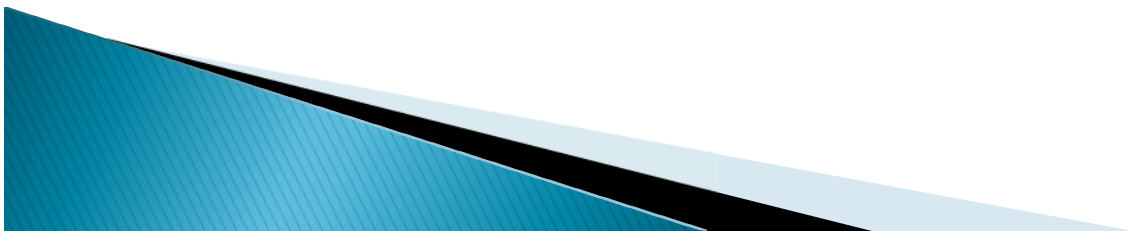


What Makes a Good Story?

Willamette Writers Conference 2020
www.patriciasantosmarcantonio.com

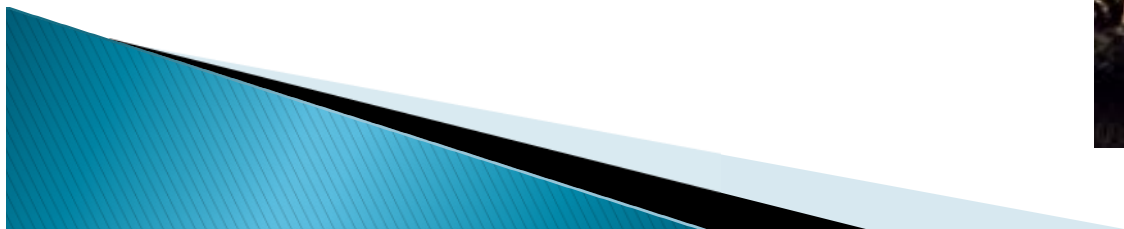
Elements

- ▶ **Storytelling (plot)**
- ▶ **Interesting characters**
- ▶ **Stirs our senses**
- ▶ **Voice**
- ▶ **Does it speak to your emotions?**



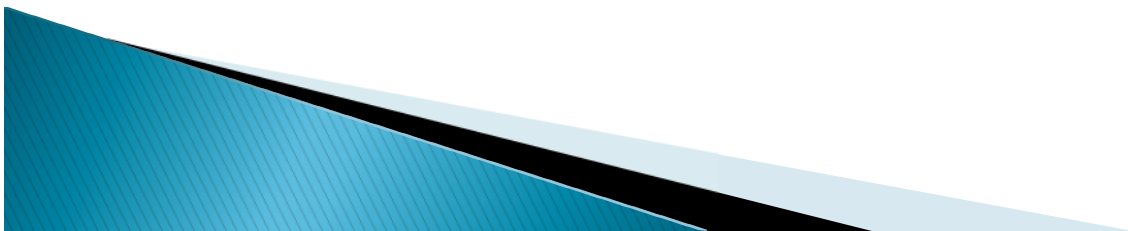
Storytelling (Plot)

- ▶ Getting from A to B
- ▶ What happens
- ▶ Keeps you turning pages
- ▶ Full of surprise
- ▶ Twists

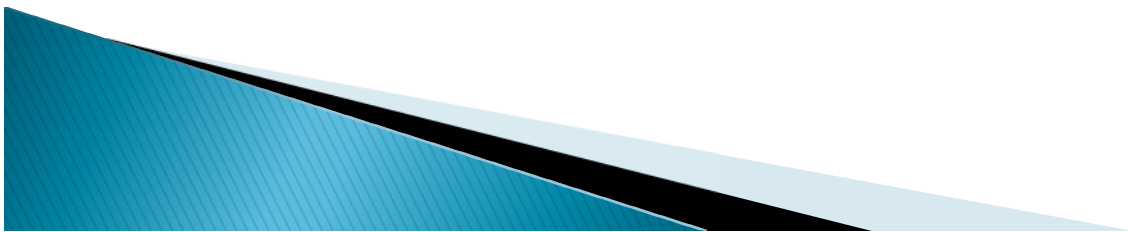


Not all is physical action...emotional action

- ▶ Gone Girl – Gillian Flynn
- ▶ The Accidental Tourist – Anne Tyler
- ▶ Second Nature – Alice Hoffman



Interesting
Characters are the
heart of good
stories



We identify with them or hope to be like them



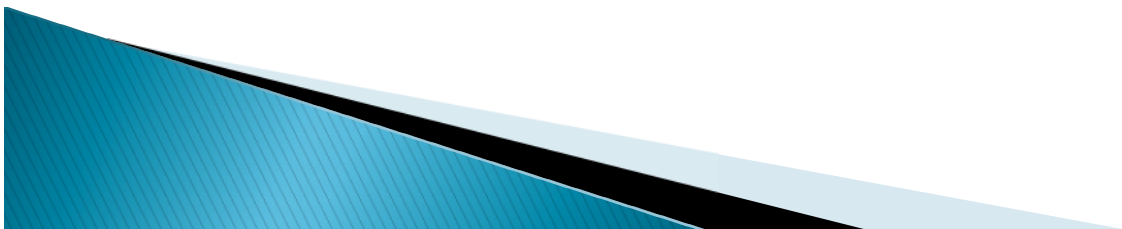
Incredible backstories



Just plain fascinating...



As a result, we care what happens to them

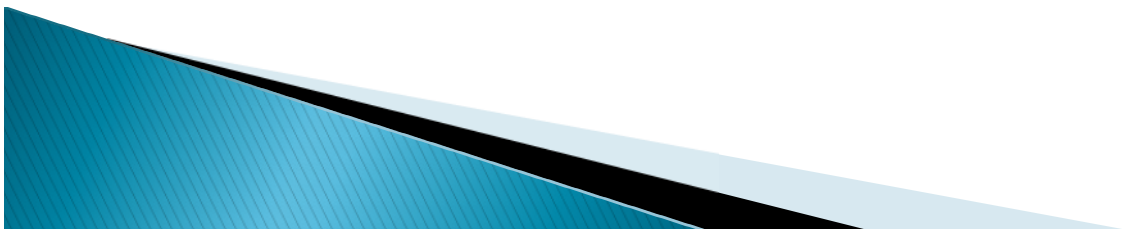


Do the characters change?



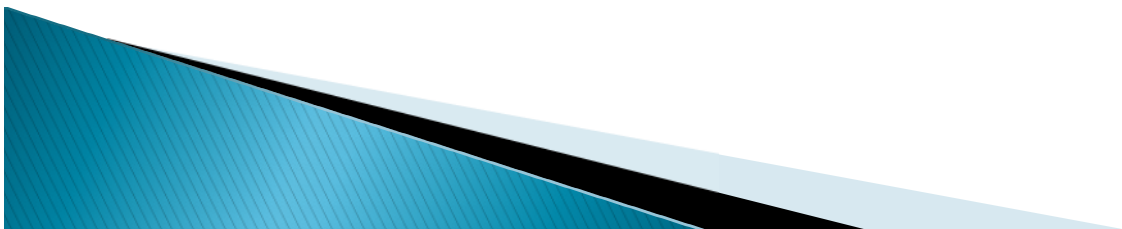


..Or not
change
at all

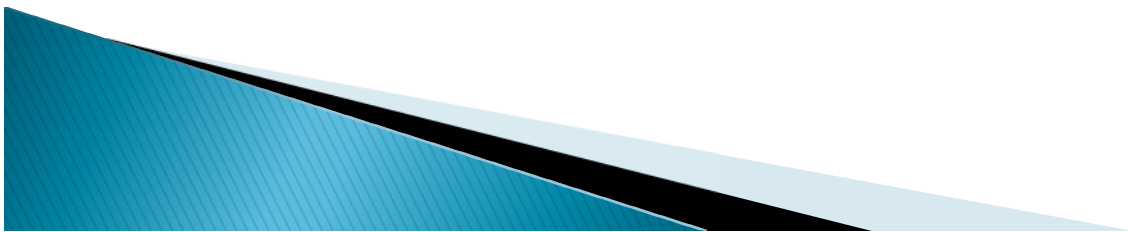


Runners up

- ▶ Captain Ahab – Moby Dick
- ▶ John Yossarian – Catch 22
- ▶ Rorschach – The Watchmen
- ▶ Hamlet
- ▶ Margaret Schlegel – Howard's End
- ▶ Spiderman
- ▶ Lisbeth Salander – The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo



Who are your
favorites and why?



CONFLICT CONFLICT CONFLICT

Conflict allows the character to grow for better or worse...

*“Why is conflict so important in a story?
...without conflict, there is no story.*

*Conflict creates story, drama, tension,
suspense. Conflict makes things HAPPEN.
Conflict challenges your character and gives
him/her the opportunity to grow and/or
change.” Shannon Curtis*



Inner and External

Internal goal

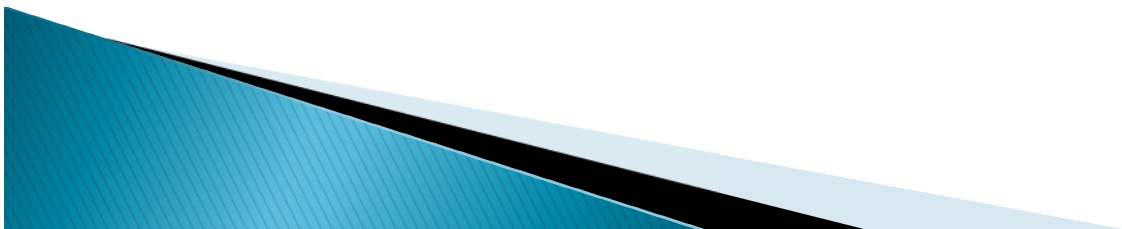
A character's need or desire. It's emotional and only belongs to your character.

Man v. himself.

External force or obstacle

Outside your character, makes him to react.

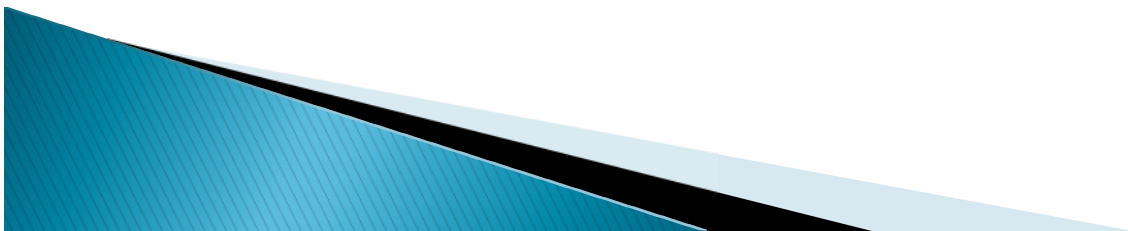
Man v. the world, man v. nature



RECIPE FOR CONFLICT

So when a character tries to attain his inner goal he or she will run up against an external obstruction and bang! there's your conflict.

Goal + Barrier, troubles, etc. = conflict





Luke Skywalker– Inner -- wants to escape to adventure and also find his place in the universe but always has doubts
External -- the Empire is standing in his way

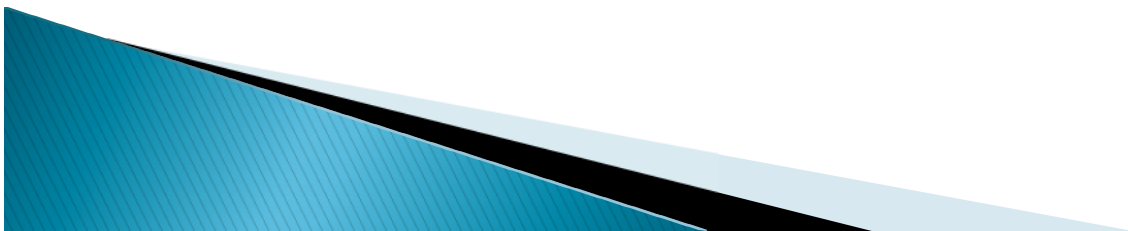
Michael Corleone– Inner –to lead a normal life away from crime, but conflict comes from love for family
External – The attack on his father and mob war

Jay Gatsby – Inner – wants to escape his past to make himself worthy of Daisy, yet wants to relive the days when Daisy in love with him. Romantic, idealistic
External – Tom and fate

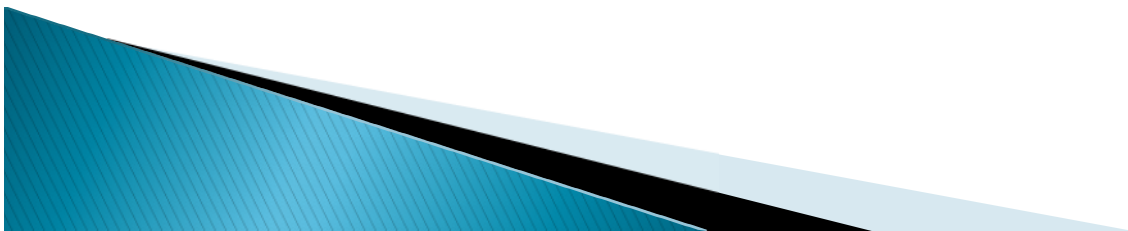
DOES GATSBY CHANGE?

Not Really but Nick Carraway does

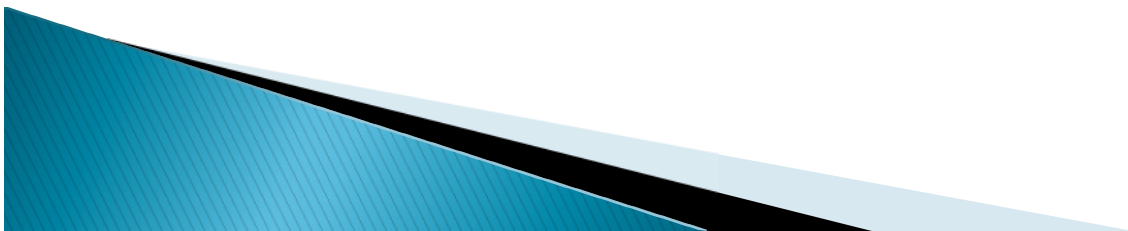
Starts out as ambitious and wanting to be rich and fit into society. But in the end is appalled by high society and the price of wealth without integrity and a soul.



Anymore
examples?

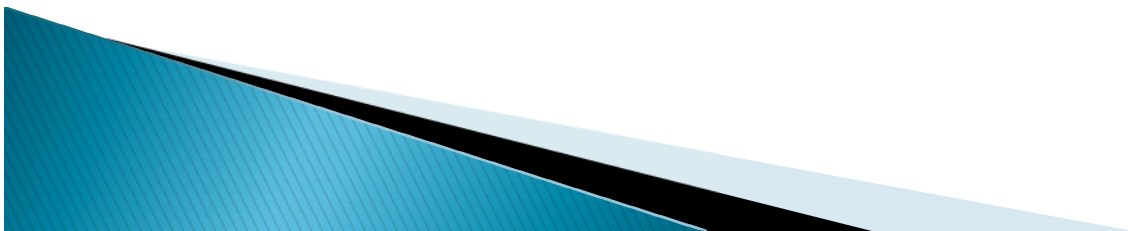


Ask yourself.
Does this story have conflict?



Does the story stir our senses?

- ▶ Descriptions involving sight, sound, hearing, touch and taste put us at the scene. They put us in the story.
- ▶ They enhance the story otherwise it's dry as dirt



The Book of Daniel by E. L. Doctorow

When Phyllis makes vegetable soup she keeps adding things in hopes of recapturing that smell for me. She's never touched it. I think you need tile walls. You need high ceilings with lights hanging down on chains and cafeteria trays of maroon colored plastic. The other big smell in the shelter was the smell of vomit. There was always a lot of vomiting. Kids were always getting sick and throwing up. The janitor came around with his cart, a big broom, a shovel, and a bucket of sawdust.



He covered the vomit with sawdust, and when it was all soaked up, swept up the gloppy mess with his broom and shovel. Then he'd mop around with a solution of ammonia. The ammonia smell would drown out the vomit smell for five minutes or so. But for the rest of the day the area smelled faintly of vomit. In its fainter essence it was mysterious and frightening. The smell of the insides of bodies. Maybe it was the smell of vomit which did something for the vegetable soup.




What struck
your senses?



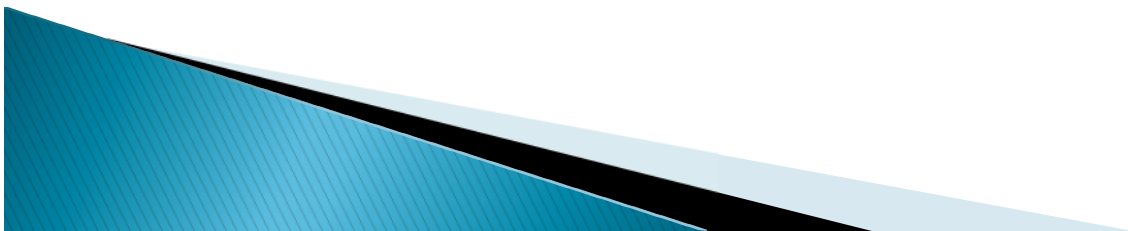
World War Z by Max Brooks

The first thing I remember when I came to was a very faint sound. At first I thought it was water. It sounded like a fast drip. . . tap-tap-tap, like that. The tap became clearer, and I suddenly became aware of two other sounds, the crackle of my radio. . . how that wasn't smashed I'll never know. . . and the ever-present howling of the living dead. I crawled out from under the microbus. At least my legs were still working well enough to stand. I realized that I was alone, no refugees, no General Raj-Singh.

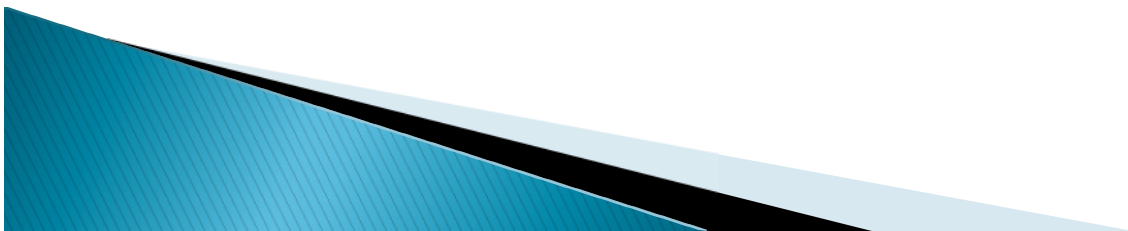


I was standing among a collection of discarded personal belongings in the middle of a deserted mountain path. In front of me was a charred cliff wall. Beyond it was the other side of the severed road.

That's where the moan was coming from. The living dead were still coming for me. With eyes front and arms outstretched, they were falling in droves off the shattered edge. That was the tapping sound: their bodies smashing on the valley floor far below.



What struck you about these
examples?



Zombies!



Voice

As if the author is speaking to you, distinct

“A writer's tone, choice of words, selection of subject matter, and even punctuation make up the authorial voice. How an author writes conveys their attitude, personality, and character. The author's voice is often so distinctive that it's possible to identify the author by merely reading a selection of their work.”—writer Ginny Wiehardt



Fight Club by Chuck Palahniuk

The phone rang in Tyler's rented house on Paper Street.

Oh, Tyler, please deliver me.

And the phone rang.

The doorman leaned into my shoulder and said, "A lot of young people don't know what they really want."

Oh, Tyler, please rescue me.

And the phone rang.

"Young people, they think they want the whole world."

Deliver me from Swedish furniture.

Deliver me from clever art.



And the phone rang and Tyler answered.
"If you don't know what you want," the doorman
said, "you end up with a lot you don't."

May I never be complete.

May I never be content.

May I never be perfect.

Deliver me, Tyler, from being perfect and
complete.

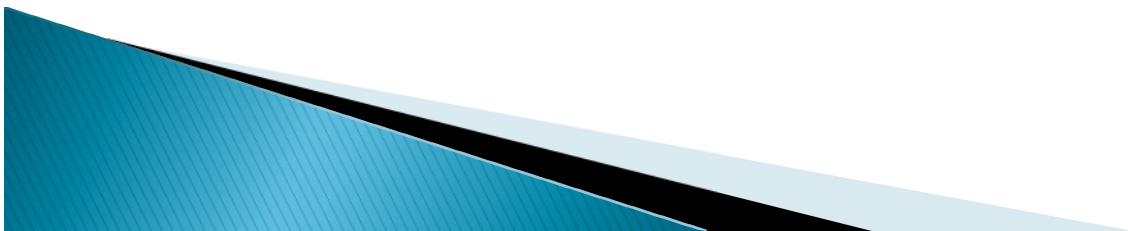
Tyler and I agreed to meet at a bar....

There, drunk in a bar where no one was watching
and no one would care, I asked Tyler what he
wanted me to do.

Tyler said, "I want you to hit me as hard as you
can."



How would you
describe that voice?



Catch-22 by Joseph Heller

"You're wasting your time," Doc Daneeka was forced to tell him.

"Can't you ground someone who's crazy?"

"Oh, sure. I have to. There's a rule saying I have to ground anyone who's crazy."

"Then why don't you ground me? I'm crazy. Ask Clevinger."

"Clevinger? Where *is* Clevinger? You find Clevinger and I'll ask

"Then ask any of the others. They'll tell you how crazy I am."

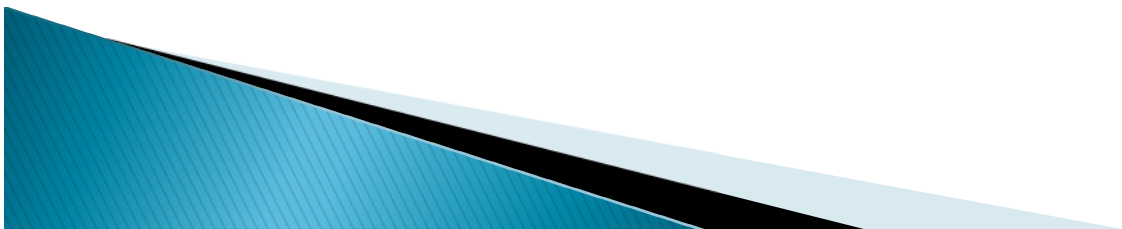
"They're crazy."

"Then why don't you ground them?"

"Why don't they ask me to ground them?"

"Because they're crazy, that's why."

"Of course they're crazy," Doc Daneeka replied. "I just told you they're crazy; didn't I? And you can't let crazy people



decide whether you're crazy or not, can you?"

Yossarian looked at him soberly and tried another approach. "Is Orr crazy?"

"He sure is," Doc Daneeka said. "Can you ground him?"

"I sure can. But first he has to ask me to. That's part of the rule."

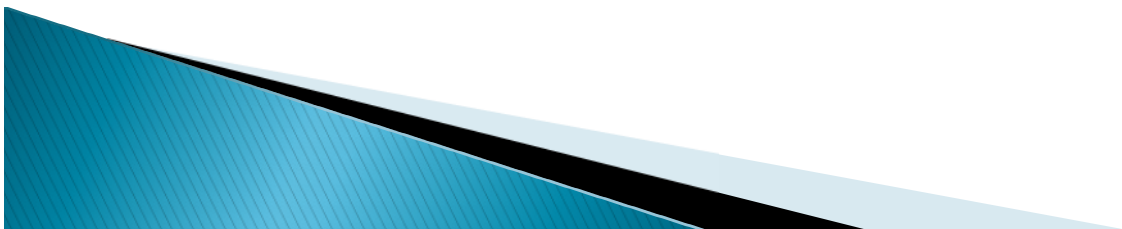
"Then why doesn't he ask you to?"

"Because he's crazy," Doc Daneeka said. "He has to be crazy to keep combat missions after all the close calls he's had. Sure, I can Orr. But first he has to ask me to."

"That's all he has to do to be grounded?"

"That's all. Let him ask me."

"And then you can ground him?" Yossarian asked.



"No. Then I can't ground him."

"You mean there's a catch?"

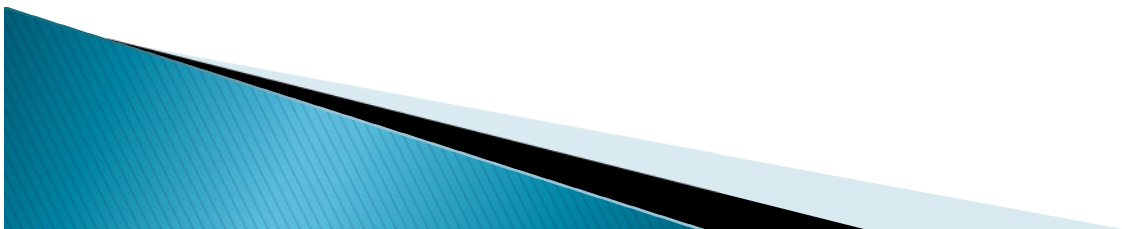
"Sure there's a catch," Doc Daneeka replied.

"Catch-22. Anyone who wants to get out of combat duty isn't really crazy."

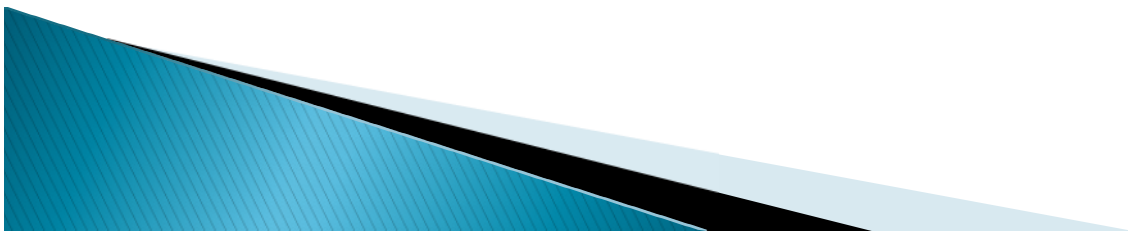
There was only one catch and that was Catch-22, which specified that a concern for one's own safety in the face of dangers that were real and immediate was the process of a rational mind...Yossarian was moved very deeply by the absolute simplicity of this clause of Catch-22 and let out a respectful whistle.

"That's some catch, that Catch-22," he observed.

"It's the best there is," Doc Daneeka agreed.



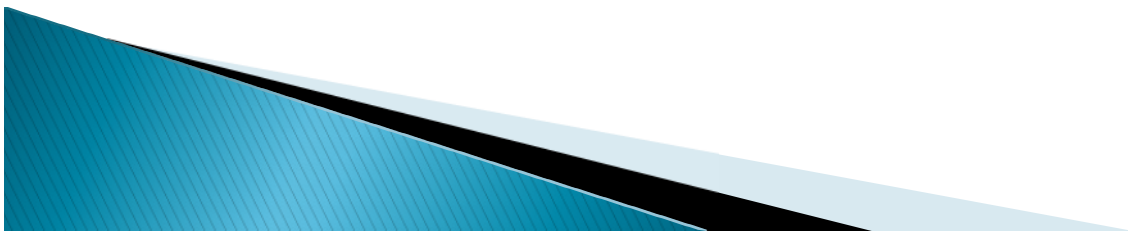
And some voices can be
quieter, but still carry a
wallop...



The only completely stationary object in the room was an enormous couch on which two young women were buoyed up as though upon an anchored balloon. They were both in white, and their dresses were rippling and fluttering as if they had just been blown back in after a short flight around the house. I must have stood for a few moments listening to the whip and snap of the curtains and the groan of a picture on the wall. Then there was a boom as Tom Buchanan shut the rear windows and the caught wind died out about the room, and the curtains and the rugs and the two young women ballooned slowly to the floor.

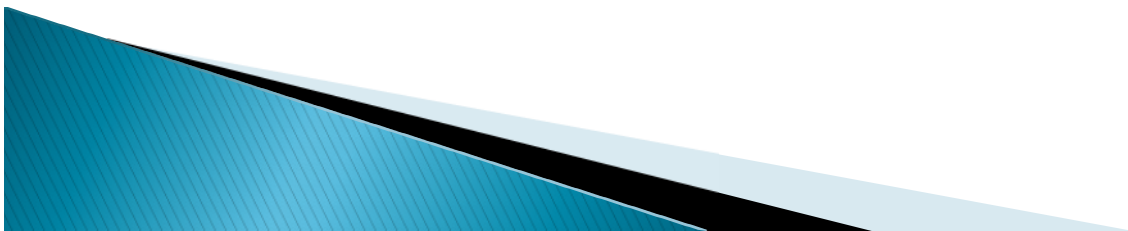


The Great Gatsby
by
F. Scott Fitzgerald



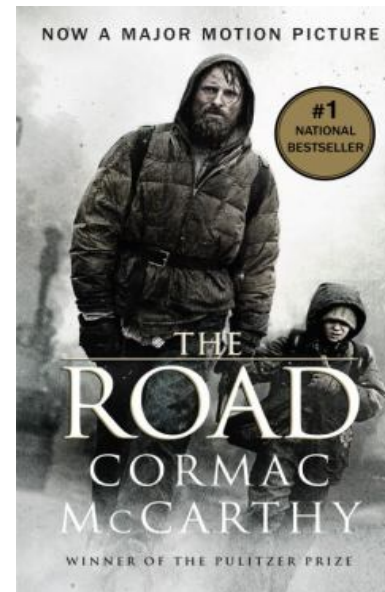
- ▶ Differences in those voices

- ▶ Any examples of your favorites?

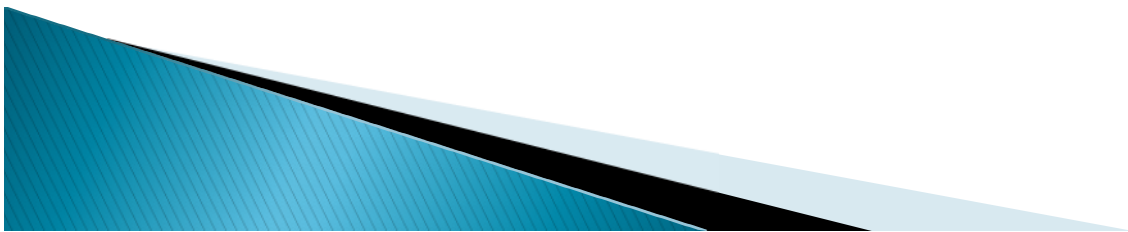


Speaks to your emotions

- ▶ How do you feel at the end of reading?
- ▶ Did you learn something about human nature?
- ▶ Did you laugh and cry with the characters?



**What stories touched
you and why?**



Good stories mentioned

To Kill a Mockingbird

Jane Eyre

Silence of the Lambs

World War Z

Harry Potter books

Pride and Prejudice

Gone Girl

The Accidental Tourist

Second Nature

Superman

Batman

The Maltese Falcon

Everything, Everything

The Philadelphia Story

The Book of Daniel

The Godfather

Sophie's Choice

Fight Club

