> That's the rule of dramatic writing. You start at this dot. You go to that dot, and you stop. You're gonna encounter stuff along the way. The stuff that you encounter along the way will be determined by your imagination. You'll say, 'Oh my God, what if this, what if that, what if that?' But you have to be unafraid to be challenged.
>
> *—David Mamet*

CHAPTER RECAP

Your job is to tell a story. The story has a hero, and he/she wants one thing. The story begins when something precipitates an event. Be excited when you get yourself into a situation that you can't think your way out of, because that guarantees your audience won't be able to either. Be simple in your storytelling so that your audience can follow; they have to know what story they're following so that you can mislead them. Anticipate their desire to jump ahead so you can throw them through a loop. Be wary of what David calls "location sickness." If it isn't essential to the story and the plot, dispense with it. A good rule of thumb is, if you think you might cut it sometime, cut it right now.

David sees a dramatist as one who is not inspired by solutions, but rather by situations, and he uses Aristotle's Poetics as a guide. Aristotle maintains that the hero of a story must undergo two things: recognition and reversal of a situation. David cites Oedipus and Moses as examples of the tenets of *Poetics* in action. The hero, simply put, does not understand. Something has to happen from the outside that inspires the hero in a way that he/she didn't realize before. Aristotle asserts that there must be the unities of time, place, and action. Work on mastering these unities.

View each scene as an attempt to solve the problem of the narrative. The scene inevitably fails to solve this problem, leading you to the next scene, which contains more information to help ameliorate the situation but also brings more trouble. The third

SUBCHAPTERS

- Aristotle's Rule for Story
- The Hero's Journey
- Aristotle's Unities
- Keep the Story Simple
- The Basic Rule: Tell the Story
- Cut It if You Think You Should
- Master the Rules by Writing

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scene comprises even more information but at the same time gets us in even deeper. This leads us into the second act, which is where the difficulty in writing any drama—especially tragedies—lies. The hero is stuck in the second act. Nothing has worked, and all of his/her good ideas have been unsuccessful. The hero struggles with coming back to a sense of self or purpose in a confusing, tumultuous world. At the end of the second act, the hero's quest is clarified, enabling him/her to go on to the third act. These steps demonstrate drama as an exercise in failure, as well as lies.

TAKE IT FURTHER

- Read Aristotle's *Poetics*, and familiarize yourself with the stories of Oedipus and Moses.
- David enjoys the works of Howard Lindsay and Russel Crouse. The famous pair knew how to write successful dramas, comedies, and musicals. Read Lindsay and Crouse's plays *State of the Union* and *Life With Father*, then watch the film adaptations. You can find the 1947 film *Life with Father* here. Take notes about how each play/film is structured and look out for David's rules for drama in action.

ASSIGNMENT

- Choose a recent president or another powerful world leader whom you are somewhat familiar with. Write an outline of this person's political and personal career that follows the structure set out by Aristotle in *Poetics*. Begin with a problem (one that is political, personal, or both) that this leader (or "tragic hero") has to solve. Why does he or she have to solve it? What will happen if this leader fails? How does he or she attempt to solve it? What happens that actually makes the problem worse? What does the tragic hero do at the end of this story? Does the hero end up succeeding or succumb to an enormous downfall? What does the hero realize about himself or herself at the end of this quest? Share your outline with your classmates in The Hub.

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