SEEING THE WHOLE

ASSESSING YOUR ARCS

Macro: the big picture

Mezzo: the scene

Micro: the sentence
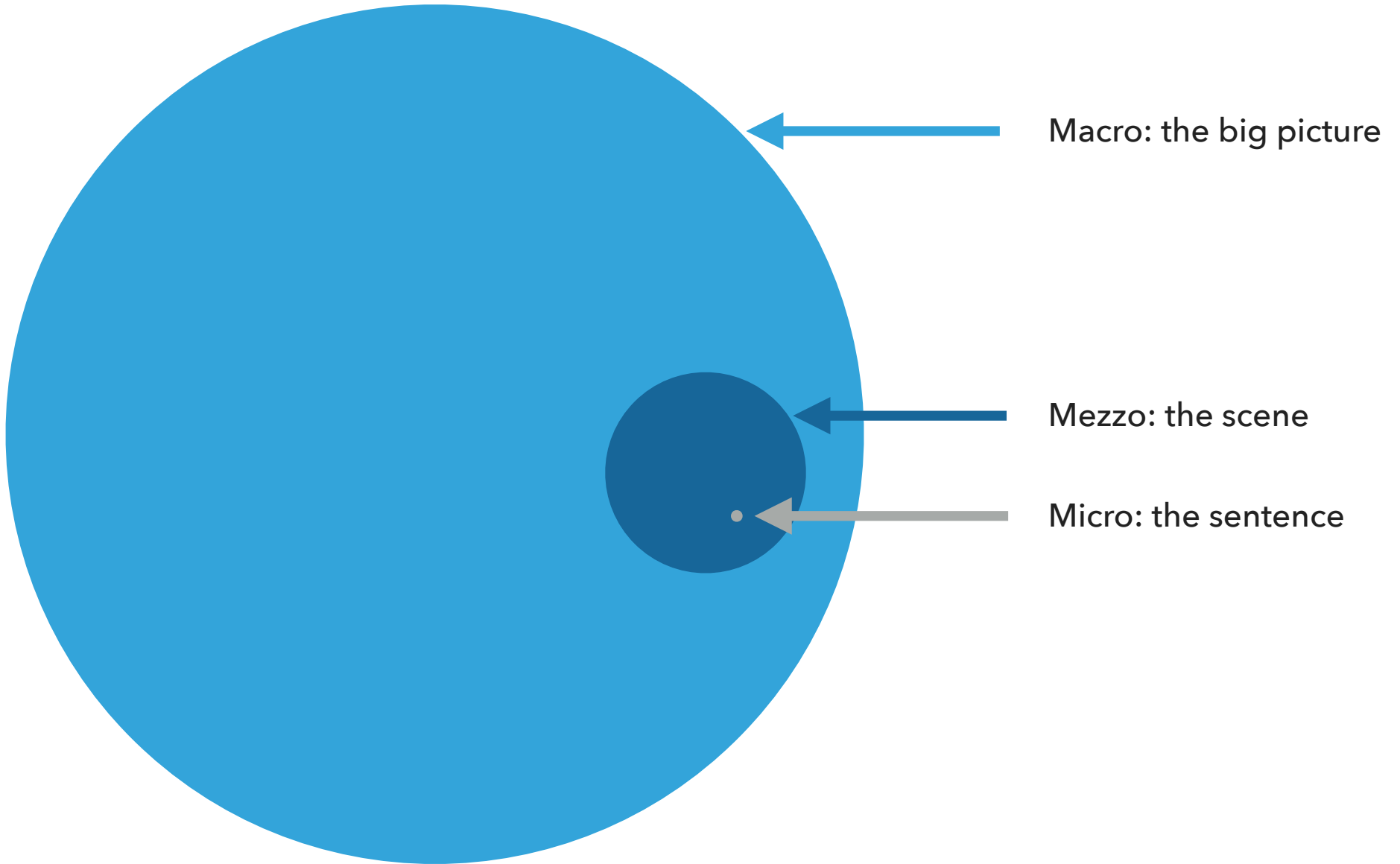
LESSONS FROM ESSAY REVISION

▸ An essay presents an argument

▸ One of the tricks of essay writing is to have an easy-to-follow train of thought that builds to its ultimate point

▸ Revision: trace the "idea flow"

▸ Example: "The Memory Hole" by Michael Chabon

THE IDEA FLOW IN "THE MEMORY HOLE"

▸ My children create artwork and we often throw it away and feel a little guilty about it.

▸ I lost more of my childhood artwork than my kids have lost, and I can't say it's had a bad effect to have lost it.

▸ Mostly, when I see the artwork of my youth, I'm mortified by it.

▸ It's not that I'm trying to excuse throwing away my kids' artwork. I realize how fleeting this all is.

▸ But we can't capture every moment. It's all fleeting. We can't save it all.

▸ The truth is, I'm squandering the treasure of my life. Every day offers you something of value, but most of it, you throw out.

LESSONS FROM ESSAY REVISION

▸ The idea here is to be able to get at the underlying significance of each unit of the piece of writing.

▸ How can we do this with a story?

UNIT BY UNIT SYNOPSIS

▸ Units can be of varying sizes

  ▸ Beats within scenes

  ▸ Scenes (usually 60-130 in a novel)

  ▸ 15-25 key scenes/events/developments

  ▸ Acts

▸ Learning to scale your summaries is pretty useful

UNDERLYING SIGNIFICANCE

▸ But the real goal here is to get at the "underlying significance of each unit"

▸ Straight summary of your story's various beats, useful though it is, does not get at the underlying significance

▸ The underlying significance tends to be about character and relationship transformation

THE INSIDE OUTLINE

▸ Jennie Nash developed this tool

▸ You can do it with any level of units, but it's best to start with the 15-20 key events to get a look at the whole story

▸ Jennie calls these "scenes"; I prefer "story events"

▸ For each, you also note the "point," which refers to why the scene matters

THE INSIDE OUTLINE

▸ Scene: [What happens]

▸ Point: [Why it matters]

▸ Scene:

▸ Point:

▸ Scene:

▸ Point:

THE INSIDE OUTLINE

▸ Scene: An invitation to the Prince's ball arrives and Cinderella feels bad as her step family treats her cruelly before they go

▸ Point: Establish Cinderella as sad, lonely, and destitute

▸ Scene: Fairy godmother arrives and outfits Cinderella with all she needs

▸ Point: Cinderella is excited and radiant

▸ Scene: The Prince falls for Cinderella and they spend time together

▸ Point: She loses track of time and is thus in danger of losing all

THE INSIDE OUTLINE

▸ Scene: An invitation to the Prince's ball arrives and Cinderella feels bad as her step family treats her cruelly before they go

▸ Point: Establish Cinderella as sad, lonely, and destitute

Because of that

▸ Scene: Fairy godmother arrives and outfits Cinderella with all she needs

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Because of that

▸ Scene: The Prince falls for Cinderella and they spend time together

▸ Point: She loses track of time and is thus in danger of losing all

THE INSIDE OUTLINE TIPS

▸ The character has to be in the scene

▸ Why it matters = meaningful consequence; what meaning does the protagonist take from the event?

▸ It helps to know your overall plot arc and the overall character arc (that is, how the character changes)

THE INSIDE OUTLINE TIPS

▸ Step 1: figure out the key events or scenes

▸ Step 2: consider the point of each (why it matters)

▸ Step 3: how does the previous event's <u>point</u> lead to the subsequent <u>scene</u>

CAVEAT/DISCLAIMER

▸ YMMV. This may be groundbreaking; it may not

▸ It's not the only tool

▸ The general concept, however, is important for editing/revising: find some way to be able to trace each unit of the story, its relation to subsequent units, and the underlying significance of each unit of the story.

HANDS ON

▸ In the breakout session, you'll have an opportunity to try this out

▸ And I'll refine my tips a little

▸ Downloads available at my site: stormwritingschool.com/rew

    ▸ A copy of The Memory Hole with my notes on the "idea flow"

    ▸ To come: My inside outline for Cinderella, these slides, all the handouts I'll use in the breakout session, and a response video to questions that arise in the breakout session.