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TRAGIC LOVE TALES (BY 6-YEAR-OLDS)

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1 SESSION, 1 HOUR

MATERIALS: *Computer and/or computer projector to view short video (optional)*

SHREK AND FIONA LIVED HAPPILY EVER AFTER. SO DID SLEEPING BEAUTY AND Prince Charming. But who wants to read about happily ever after? Blech! In this lesson students learn the perfect recipe for not-so-happily-ever-after—a tragic story. Sometimes they're tragic love stories, and sometimes they're just plain tragic (6-year-olds, it turns out, aren't always too keen to write about love). But they are always, always, *very* sad.

We start with a word of caution. You are about to write a story that is *so* sad, *so* tragic, and *so* amazing, we tell our students, that the first thing they have to do is warn their readers. We distribute a warning form for the students to fill out, in which they answer the following questions: How will the reader feel by the end of your story? Who should avoid your story, at all costs? How many tissues will readers need to wipe the tears from their faces?

Next, we distribute the “Build Me Up, Buttercup” handout and discuss the steps of tragedy writing. The first thing you need to build an epic, tragic, amazing story: a great character who almost has it all—love, friends, money, power. Why? You raise your character up, so that he or she can fall (and fall hard).

At this point we like to watch this Wile E. Coyote video (www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZ65AOjabtM) and think about the coyote's fall. Why do the writers put him up so high? So his fall can be especially spectacular.

So, we tell the students, you need to set your main character up. Ask yourself:

 How perfect is your character? And what is the *one flaw* that might bring him or her down?

 How perfect is this character's life? And what is the *one thing* that's missing?

Once students have introduced their characters, it's time to bring those characters down. As you continue your story, we say, your character has the *best idea ever* for how to get that thing he or she wants more than anything else in the world. We ask:

 What is that idea?

 And how is he or she going to make it work?

And then . . . the spectacular fall! We remind the students of their warning to the reader—this is going to be sadder than sad. Before they write the terrible end, we discuss the following:

-  How will your character's flaw get in the way?
-  How will things get worse, and worse, and worse, and worse?
-  How will he or she get so close to his or her dream—only to lose everything?

The stories are finished and shared aloud, and then class ends. Unhappily, of course.

WARNING: SAD STORY

Warn your readers that your story is going to be TRAGIC. (Make sure you tell them just HOW tragic it will be!)

Dear Reader,

You are about to read a very sad story. After you finish it, you will feel like this:

You probably shouldn't read this story at all if you are:

You will need this many tissues to wipe away your tears: _____

Sincerely,

The Author

BUILD ME UP, BUTTERCUP (JUST TO BRING ME DOWN)

Introduce your MAIN CHARACTER. Remember: He or she has an almost perfect life, except for that FLAW . . .

What is your character's name?

Where does your character live?

Can you think of two words to describe him or her?

1. _____

2. _____

How old is he or she?

What does your character look like?

What is his or her biggest FLAW?

What is the one thing he or she wants more than anything in the world? Pick one!

LOVE?

- ❖ Who will he or she fall in love with?
- ❖ Why will that cause problems?

POWER?

- ❖ What kind of power does he or she want?
- ❖ Who or what will stand in his or her way?

RICHES?

- ❖ What will he or she have to do to get rich?
- ❖ How will that cause a problem?

FRIENDS?

- ❖ Whom does he or she want to be friends with?
- ❖ What does he or she have to do to win that friendship?
- ❖ How will that cause problems?

