

From:

Libby Gleeson (1999).  
*Writing Hannah*  
Chapter 5

## 5

# STRUCTURE

When I first started writing fiction, I used to think that the only thing wrong with a piece which wasn't working was its content. I would decide that the characters weren't right or the idea for the story wasn't strong enough—even though intuitively I may have doubted the decision. If it didn't feel right I put it in the bottom drawer. Now I am more inclined to test if the problems are not structural.

When writing the picture book, *Uncle David*, I found the story, written in the first person by the main character, Ned, lifeless. I was confident the ideas were good, but couldn't see a way to realise them. After many attempts, I chose to write the story from the point of view of a friend of Ned's and to create a circular structure, ending where I had begun. It worked. Structure. The way the story is put together. The scaffolding upon which the elements of the story must be carried. To find it, look beyond character and place and language. Look beyond catchy opening sentences and twists which end the tale. Determine the patterning that lies beneath the surface.

Is the story a linear sequence of events that lead, in real time, from a beginning to an end? Does the story begin in the middle of a sequence of events, flash back to a beginning and then proceed to the end? Does it combine the two with a linear sequence punctuated by flashbacks or incursions from another character which

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reveal other elements to the story or a parallel story? Is there a sub-plot or plots? Is there no linear structure, but instead a deep examination of one event told from different points of view?

There are many ways to construct a story, but in *Hannah and the Tomorrow Room* I am limited by my decision to stay with the structure of the previous two novels. The book will open with Hannah's monologue. From then, it will be a simple, linear sequence of events, beginning with the creating of the new bedroom and Hannah's excitement and delight at this symbol of her new maturity. Then will come the discovery that Grandpa and not Hannah will be moving into it.

At this early stage I know little more than this. Hannah is determined to drive Grandpa from the room and the family, so I need a structure for the actions she will take. I imagine I will need three attempts to reclaim her room, building in significance and drama. The first will be silly and trivial. Maybe others in the family will be unaware of what is happening. It will fail in its objective. The second will be more dramatic and will be noticed and probably commented upon. It will also fail. The third will be of the greatest significance. It will draw in the whole family and will be part of the climax of the book.

It is no coincidence that I choose to have a sequence of three actions. One failed attempt at disturbing Grandpa would contain some tension, but not enough to fully engage the reader. The same lack of tension exists with two attempts. A third attempt that has been built up to by increasing drama is the most satisfying form. To go beyond three seems to take it into a rambling, formless tale. It is as if the reader expects three. It is the form we are familiar with from childhood, listening to stories of Little Pigs, Bears and Billy Goats Gruff.