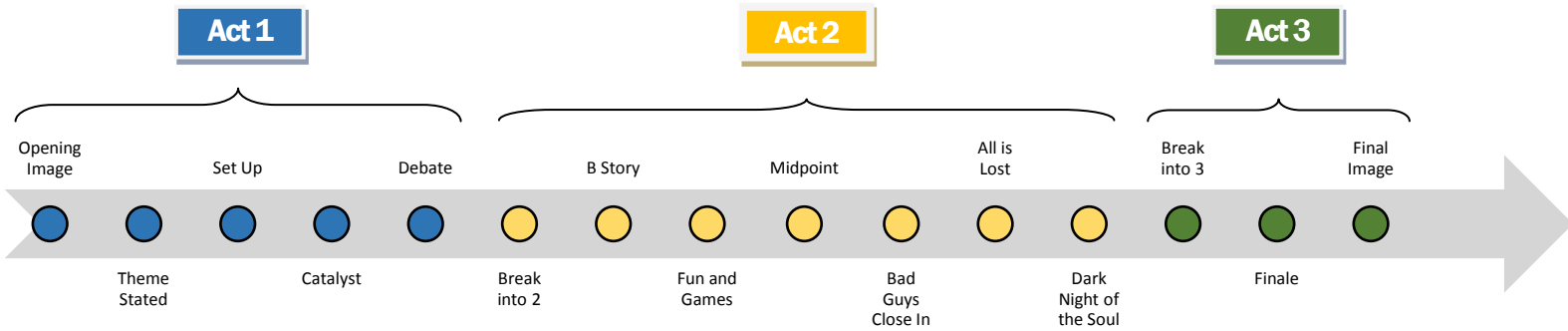


INTRODUCTION TO THE 15 BEATS



Act 1:

1. Opening Image – A before “snapshot” of your main character/hero and their world
2. Theme Stated – A statement made by a character (normally not the hero) that hints at what the hero’s arc will be (i.e., what the hero must learn/discover before the end of the book.)
3. Set-up – An exploration of the hero’s status quo life and all its flaws. This is where we learn what the hero’s life and world look like before its epic transformation.
4. Catalyst – An inciting incident that happens to the hero which will catapult them into a new world or new way of thinking.
5. Debate – A reaction sequence in which the hero debates what they will do next, usually presented in the form of a question.

Act 2:

6. Break into 2 – The moment the hero decides to accept the call to action, leave their comfort zone, try something new, venture into a new world or new way of thinking.
7. B Story – The introduction of a new character or characters who will ultimately serve to help the hero learn the theme.
8. Fun and Games – This is where we see the hero in their new world. Also called “the Promise of the Premise,” this section represents the “hook” of the story. Why the reader picked up the novel in the first place.

9. Midpoint – Literally the middle of the novel, where the “Fun and Games” culminates in either a “false victory” or a “false defeat.” Something should happen here to “raise the stakes” and push the hero toward real change.
10. Bad Guys Close In – If the midpoint was a false victory, this section will be a downward trajectory where things get consistently worse for the hero. If the midpoint was a false defeat, this section will be an upward trajectory where things get seemingly better. Regardless of trajectory, the hero’s inner demons or “internal bad guys” are also closing in.
11. All is Lost – The lowest point of the novel. This is an action beat where something happens to the hero that, combined with those “internal bad guys,” pushes them to rock bottom.
12. Dark Night of the Soul – Another reaction beat (similar to the Debate) where the hero takes a moment to react to everything that’s happened leading up to this moment. The darkest night before the dawn, this is the moment right before the hero figures out the solution to their big problem and learns the theme.

Act 3:

13. Break into 3 – The aha moment! The hero realizes what they must do to not only fix all of the problems created in act 2, but more importantly, fix themselves.
14. Finale – The hero proves they have truly learned the theme and enacts the plan they came up with in the “Break into 3.” Bad guys are destroyed, inner demons are conquered, lovers are reunited. The hero’s world is not only saved...it’s a *better* place than it was before.
15. Final Image – A mirror to the “Opening Image”, this is the closing “snapshot” of who the hero is now that he’s gone through this epic and satisfying transformation.

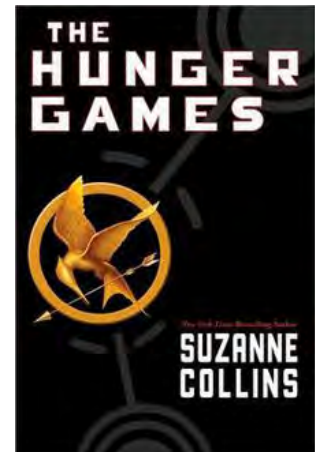
THE HUNGER GAMES

Suzanne Collins

Save the Cat! Story Genre: Dude with a Problem

Book Genre: Young Adult/Dystopia

Total Pages: 374



Opening Image (p. 1 - 2)

Katniss wakes up in her house in District 12 on the day of the “reaping.” We’re quickly introduced to Katniss, her sister Prim, her mother, and her underprivileged life. They are poor and often hungry.

In this first glimpse into Katniss’s life, we see her one and only priority: survival.

We also see glimpses of Katniss’s very close relationship with her sister, Prim, of whom Katniss is very protective. Katniss dresses for a day of hunting and slips out of the house.

Theme Stated (p. 9)

Katniss’s friend Gale (A Story character) suggests they run away and leave the district. Katniss thinks it’s a preposterous idea.

Her whole life has been about just surviving—playing by the Capitol’s rules to protect her family. But soon she’ll learn that in order to “win,” she’ll have to defy the Capitol...not just survive it. This story is so much bigger than just “surviving,” it’s about righting an epic wrong. Living up to her true potential as the face of a revolution. It’s the theme of the book...and the whole series.

Set-up (p. 1- 20)

Katniss sneaks off and meets Gale, her friend and hunting partner. We learn that Katniss knows how to hunt with a bow and arrow (something she learned from her deceased father). Gale is attractive even though Katniss claims there is nothing romantic between them.

Life is tough in “The Seam” (the poorer area of District 12) and Gale and Katniss are both the providers for their families. They both feel disdain toward the Capitol but only dare to voice it while they’re alone in the woods together.

Katniss returns home to prepare for the reaping, which we learn is the process of choosing (by a type of lottery) one teen boy and one teen girl from each of the 12 districts of Panem to compete in a televised fight to the death. This is explained to be a punishment for an uprising among the districts 74 years ago and a reminder that the Capitol holds all the power.

Catalyst (p. 20 – 33)

Katniss's little sister, Prim, is chosen as the girl tribute for the Hunger Games and Katniss jumps in to “volunteer as tribute” to protect her sister. Things are never going to be the same again.

Debate (p. 33 – 60)

The question is not whether or not Katniss will go to the Hunger Games (she already volunteered.) The question is whether or not she can win. The long debate section of this novel covers all the preparations for the Hunger Games including: saying goodbye to her friends and family, getting some last minute advice from Gale, and the train ride with Haymitch (Katniss and Peeta's supposed mentor.)

But before Katniss leaves to board the train, her friend Madge (the mayor's daughter) gives Katniss a Mockingjay pin and Katniss promises to wear it in the arena. Katniss doesn't know it at the time, but this pin represents resistance to the Capitol. It's a symbol of revolution and rebellion. And by wearing it, Katniss is marking herself as the revolutionist that she needs to become.

Break into 2 (61-72)

Katniss and Peeta arrive at the Capitol, the upside-down version of District 12. Everything here is glamorous, luxurious, indulgent, colorful and the people are gluttonous and clueless.

Katniss is immediately sent to the make-over center where her stylists begin work on transforming her—from the simple, disheveled, provincial girl from a poor district, to a beautiful, polished, sparkling tribute (an upside-down version of herself!). She is being dressed and prepped for this crazy new, antithesis world.

B Story (p. 130)

The B Story is the love story between Katniss and Peeta. And the resulting love triangle between Katniss, Gale, and Peeta. Although Peeta was technically introduced way earlier in the book, it's this moment that he “enters” the story in a meaningful way and becomes important. During his televised interview with Cesar Flickerman, Peeta confesses his love for Katniss, making the audience believe that they are star-crossed lovers, doomed to die. At first Katniss is furious that he did this and thinks it will make her appear weak. But Cinna (her stylist) and Haymitch assure her that it's only helping her image.

But Katniss is plagued by confusion. She's unsure of her true feelings for Peeta. She'd rather just hate him, because she knows once they step into the arena, they will become enemies. But it's admittedly hard for her to do that. Up until this point, he's been nothing but nice to her, and she's been able to convince herself that it's all for show. And that he'd just as soon kill her once they entered the arena. One of the brilliant elements of the love story Suzanne Collins has crafted is trying to figure out if Katniss is right. Does Peeta really love her? Or is he just playing the game like Katniss is doing in order to survive (her number one goal)? But eventually, as all good B Stories should do, Peeta will teach Katniss the ironic theme: that there's more to life than survival.

Fun & Games (p. 72 - 194)

Preparation for the seventy-fourth annual Hunger Games begins as Katniss and Peeta undergo training and mentoring. They make a noteworthy entrance at the opening ceremonies in their infamous "fiery" costumes. Katniss wows the Gamemakers, earning her an almost unprecedented score of 11.

In a poignant moment on the roof of the training center, Peeta tells Katniss that he knows he's not a real contender in the games. Then, he restates the theme by saying, "I keep wishing I could think of a way to show the Capitol that they don't own me. That I'm more than just a piece in their games." Peeta wants to die with his dignity intact. He wants to defy the Capitol.

Katniss, of course, has not yet learned the theme, so she doesn't understand what Peeta is talking about. "That's how the game works," she replies. She's still all about survival. Playing by the rules to get out alive. That's all she can think about.

Then, it is *literally* fun and "games" when the Hunger Games officially begin and Katniss (plus 23 other tributes) are raised into the arena. This is the Promise of the Premise, the reason we picked up the book, and the very title of the novel. On the first day, Katniss secures herself a backpack of supplies and camps out in a tree for the night. When the Capitol projects the dead tributes in the sky that night, she is relieved to see that Peeta is still alive.

In the early morning an alliance of "Careers" stops under her tree. She is shocked to see that Peeta is among them. She thinks his talk about dignity the night before was just another game to mess with her head. He is clearly in it to win it.

After almost dehydrating, Katniss eventually finds water and sets up camp near a pond, but awakes to a wall of fire coming at her. Forced into another tree, Katniss encounters Rue, the 12-year-old Tribute from District 11 who reminds Katniss of her little sister. Rue helps Katniss by warning her about a Tracker Jacker nest above them. In trying to drop the nest on the Careers below, she gets stung three times and has horrific hallucinations.

Midpoint (p. 193 - 195)

Tormented by the Tracker Jacker stings and the hallucinations, Katniss staggers and falls. She knows the Careers are coming back for her. But then she sees Peeta come through the trees. Instead of stabbing her with his spear, he pushes her up and tells her to run. The stakes are raised and A and B stories cross when Katniss realizes that Peeta just saved her life. Maybe he wasn't playing a game after all. Maybe he really *does* have feelings for her.

This is a False Defeat moment because Katniss (and we, the readers) know they *both* can't win. So what's the point in loving someone who will have to die if you are to survive?

Well, the answer, as Katniss will learn, is our theme.

Bad Guys Close In (p. 195 - 232)

After a False Defeat Midpoint, the Bad Guys Close In of this novel is a clear upward trajectory, things are seemingly improving for Katniss. She's earning some "wins" in the arena.

After the Tracker Jacker venom works its way out of her system, Katniss forms an unexpected alliance with Rue. Together they share information about the other Tributes and the arena. Rue tells her that she doesn't think Peeta's lover boy act is an act. They make a plan to destroy the Careers' food supply, figuring that the Careers can't get food on their own and without their supply they will starve.

Katniss and Rue set their plan in motion. During her mission Katniss learns that one of the Careers injured Peeta and left him for dead. Katniss blows up the Careers' supplies. The explosion causes her to temporarily lose hearing, but the plan was a success!

All is Lost (p. 233 - 236)

The next day Katniss finds Rue stuck in a trap. The boy tribute from District 1 stabs Rue with a spear and Katniss kills him with one of her arrows. Rue makes Katniss promise she'll win for both of them. In a "Whiff of Death" moment, Katniss sings a song for Rue as Rue dies.

Dark Night of the Soul (p. 236 - 244)

To pay respects to Rue, Katniss decorates her dead body with flowers. She receives a gift of bread from District 11 (Rue's district) and says a verbal thank you to them. She remembers her promise to Rue and vows to win for her.

Break into 3 (p. 244 - 262)

When it is announced that there's been a change of rules and now two Tributes can win the Hunger Games if they are from the same district, Katniss involuntarily calls out Peeta's name. It is this instinctive reaction that makes us believe that she really does have feelings for him, despite what she's been telling herself.

Katniss's Act 3 plan is to find Peeta so they can win together. Although she rationalizes her decision by telling herself she's only going to look for Peeta in order to maintain the "star-crossed lover" façade so the audience will keep rooting for them and sending gifts.

Finale (p. 262 – 374)

The Hunger Games is a perfect example of a Five-Point Finale

1. Gathering the Team – Katniss finds the badly-wounded, almost-dead Peeta and helps him into a cave. The two are now a "team." They must work together if they want to win.
2. Executing the Plan – At first it seems Katniss's plan is working. She kisses Peeta and Haymitch sends down a pot of broth, signaling to Katniss that if she wants more gifts, she's going to have to keep up the love act. Despite everything, Katniss still hasn't learned her lesson yet, she is still faking it to try to survive. Or so she thinks.

Peeta is getting worse. The Gamemakers announce that all the remaining tributes need something and that "thing" will be available in a backpack in the center of the arena. Katniss knows they're trying to lure the remaining tributes together to keep the action alive, but she doesn't have a choice. She knows Peeta's medicine will be there but Peeta won't let her risk her life to get it. So she drugs Peeta to get him to sleep so she can go get the medicine. This is the first unselfish act that Katniss does. It is not in the name of survival. It's for Peeta.

Katniss gets the medicine and Peeta gets better quickly. Together they manage to survive until there are only three tributes left: Katniss, Peeta, and Cato. (This crazy plan is still working!) The Gamemakers drive the three remaining tributes together and unleash genetically mutated wolves on them. Cato is killed.

3. The High Tower Surprise – Just when Katniss and Peeta believe they've won the Hunger Games and their plan has worked, the Gamemakers announce that they are revoking the revision of the rules. Only one Tribute can win.
4. The Dig Deep Down - Katniss is furious that she has been fooled by the Gamemakers and the truth finally sets in. The lesson is learned. She can't just survive. She has to rebel. She has to show the Capitol that they don't own her (just as Peeta said earlier). She gathers the poisonous berries that Peeta collected earlier and tells Peeta that they will eat them together, so that there will be NO victor. Katniss demonstrates that she's willing to forfeit her survival in order to make a statement. To die with dignity...for a cause.

5. Executing the New Plan – Katniss and Peeta prepare to swallow the berries but the Gamemakers stop them just in time and announce that they have both won. They are lifted out of the arena and separated to recover before returning home. The Capitol organizes a celebratory reunion of the two lovers on television and Katniss plays it up for the cameras. She is still unsure of her feelings for Peeta but she has to continue the charade because the Capitol is furious at her for making them look like fools with the berry stunt. When Peeta discovers that Katniss has been “faking it” for the cameras he is crushed. He really does have feelings for her. But he agrees to continue the charade for the press. But was Katniss really faking it? She’s still not sure. It’s something she vows to figure out after this is all over and she’s safe at home.

Final Image (p. 373 – 374)

Katniss and Peeta join hands for the cameras as they prepare to disembark the train that has brought them back to District 12. She is returning home a victor. And she doesn’t know what will happen (will the Capitol seek their revenge on her or let her be?) or even how she feels about Peeta. But one thing is for certain: she is not the rule-playing, survival-obsessed girl she was before. She is a rebel.

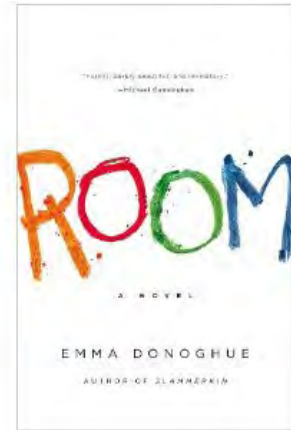
ROOM

Emma Donoghue

Save the Cat! Story Genre: Rites of Passage

Book Genre: General Fiction

Total Pages: 321



Opening Image (p. 1 - 6)

Jack wakes up in Room on his fifth birthday. He is happy. Carefree. We get a first glimpse of the world he was born into.

Theme Stated (p. 13)

Before the book begins, Emma Donoghue has quoted a poem by the Greek poet, Simonides.

“My child, such trouble I have. And you sleep, your heart is placid; you dream in the joyless wood; in the night nailed in bronze, in the blue dark you lie still and shine.”

The theme of the book is childhood innocence. How far a mother will go to protect it. And what happens when it is lost.

Jack is kept ignorant of the horrors of his mother’s circumstances and eventually he will have to learn to deal with the truth. He will have to grow up.

Set-up (p. 1 - 74)

Through Jack’s point of view, we are introduced to Room where Jack lives with Ma. We learn that although Room seems to be some kind of prison for Ma, to Jack it is the whole world. The world he accepts. Everything else is “TV” (as in not real) because his only knowledge of life outside this Room has come from what he’s seen on TV. In the first few pages, we learn that Jack still breastfeeds. We are also introduced to “Old Nick” who we realize is the man holding them prisoner, but through Jack’s eyes, he is simply the man who comes at night (from whom Jack has to hide) and brings them things. Like food, clothes, toiletries and “Sundaytreat.” But what’s clear to us (and not to Jack) is that Old Nick is some kind of rapist. Who comes in every night while Jack is meant to be asleep, and has sex with Ma.

It is clear that Ma has gone through a lot of trouble to keep Jack's life happy and carefree. They exercise, sing songs, watch TV, read books, and play games. Although many of the games are meant to try to break them out. (Like "Scream" which consists of screaming at the skylight and a game where Jack puts in random numbers on the door keypad). But to Jack, it's all fun.

The set up of this book is long. But Emma Donoghue gets away with it because she inserts several smaller "mini" catalysts along the way to keep the story interesting. Through various key moments, we see that Jack is slowly starting to question his world. He's getting older and things aren't making as much sense as they used to. He's no longer able to simply believe everything his mother says. Rationale is kicking in. And the more evidence we see of this, the more we know that change is coming. We know the story is going somewhere. It's not 75 pages of status quo. And in a stasis=death moment around page 48, when Jack accidentally scares "Old Nick," causing a fight and Ma to wake up the next morning with bruises around her neck (bruises that Jack finally recognizes as fingerprints from Old Nick's hand), we realize that things can't go on like this. All of these smaller catalyst moments build and build until we finally get to...

Catalyst (p. 74 – 80)

After the fight between Ma and Old Nick, Old Nick gets angry and cuts the power in Room as a punishment. Jack and Ma are forced to live in the dark and the cold and eat slimy cold vegetables. We know (even if Jack doesn't) what Ma is thinking: This can't go on. Her son's life is now in danger. It's time to do something.

Debate (p. 80 - 135)

Both Ma and the reader know that something has to happen. They have to try to get out of Room. But how will they do it? This is a debate section for both Jack and Ma. For Ma, the question is: "What is the best escape plan? And will it work?" For Jack, there are several questions running through his head: "Why does Ma want to leave Room? What is outside of Room? Can I carry out Ma's crazy plan?"

It is also revealed in this section how Ma came to be in Room. She was kidnapped when she was 19 (seven years ago) and brought to this room, which is a converted garden shed in the backyard of Old Nick's house.

Jack is completely overwhelmed. Ma is finally coming clean about "Outside," and the mind-numbing truth that Jack has to try to digest: Room is not all there is. There is a whole outside world. Everything they watched on TV is not fake, it's real. And it's outside this room. This, of course, comes as a huge shock for Jack and he has trouble coping. And even more difficult for him to accept is the realization that for the escape plan to work, Jack will have to leave Ma (for the first time in his life), leave Room, and step into the unknown: The Outside world.

Break into 2 (135 - 155)

Enacting the Great Escape plan, our hero taking an active step to leave his old world behind and enter the new one. Ma and Jack pretend that Jack has become very ill and has died from lack of proper care. She rolls Jack up in Rug and tells Old Nick to bury him somewhere far away. Unknown to Old Nick, Jack has been practicing unrolling himself from Rug. While in Old Nick's truck, Jack manages to unroll himself and jump from the truck. Old Nick spots him and runs after him. Thankfully, Jack is saved by a person walking his dog who sees the spectacle, gets suspicious and calls the police. Old Nick flees the scene, the police come, they find Room and break Ma free.

B Story

The B-Story in Room is Jack's relationship with Tooth (his mother's rotten tooth that fell out earlier in the book). He has it with him during the Great Escape and afterwards, it is really his only friend and connection to his old life in Room. So the farther he gets from Room, the more he clings onto it. Similar to the "Wilson" in *Castaway*, this inanimate object makes Jack feel safe. And his relationship with Tooth changes as Jack adjusts to the outside world.

Fun & Games (p. 155 - 197)

Jack and Ma are in "Outside," which for Jack is quite the upside version of Room. He immediately notices (and is overwhelmed) by all the differences. To him, everything feels wrong.

Jack and Ma are placed in a psychiatric facility while they get adjusted to being outside of Room. They have to wear masks all the time to protect themselves from germs. There are several great fish out of water moments: Jack doesn't understand how the toilet flushes on its own, doesn't know how to use a shower, doesn't understand words people use, doesn't like that the plates are blue, doesn't like the way the hair conditioner smells, bumps into things because his spatial perception is all out of whack from being in that small room all his life. Jack wants everything to go back to the way things were. There are too many new things to try to absorb at once. He is having a rough time adjusting.

Meanwhile Ma just wants to go outside the building and do all the things she hasn't been able to do in seven years. But Jack is too afraid to go outside.

Midpoint (p. 197)

The "magical midpoint" often features a "public coming out" of the hero as he tries out his new identity. In ROOM, this is when Jack goes outside (as in outdoors) for the first time. He "comes out" of the facility that has been sheltering him and faces the scariness of the outside world. Granted, he doesn't like what's out there and runs back in, but he does it.

The midpoint in ROOM is interesting, as there is really two journeys happening here. Jack's and Ma's. For Jack, the midpoint marks a "defeat." So far, he is really not liking "Outside." All he wants is to go back to Room. He has gotten his first cold, is still not adjusting well, worries constantly about everything, misses his "routine," still has to go up and down the stairs on all fours, and overall, just isn't happy. Jack just wants to go back to the way things were.

For Ma, on the other hand, the midpoint represents a "victory." She thinks she's gotten everything she's wanted. She's out of Room, escaped from Old Nick (who has been caught and arrested), has her freedom back, her family, fresh air, etc. But for both Ma and Jack, their respective victories and defeats are false because...

Bad Guys Close In (p. 198 - 248)

While Jack's life slowly improves (and he starts adjusting to life on the Outside), Ma's life quickly deteriorates. Reality seems to be sinking in for Ma. She's realizing that at some point she's going to have to get back to real life and pay bills, and deal with all the media attention they've been getting. It is in this section that we learn the details of Ma's first baby. The one who died during childbirth (because of Old Nick's negligence).

During therapy sessions, it's clear to us (and somewhat to Jack) that Ma is starting to lose it. She's overwhelmed by everything that's happening, and is not coping well. Ma's father flies in from Australia and doesn't want to meet Jack (it's too disturbing for him, knowing he's the son of his daughter's rapist). This sends Ma over the edge with rage.

And finally, the crux of the Bad Guys Close In section is when Ma agrees to do a TV interview about her experience and the TV interviewer insinuates through her questioning that Ma may have made poor choices for Jack. After this, Ma goes into a comatose state of depression.

Meanwhile, Jack is starting to show signs of improvement. He's now able to climb up and down the stairs on two feet (as opposed to all fours), and he has the courage to venture out of the clinic with his aunt and uncle (without Ma) to see a dinosaur exhibit. Something he NEVER would have done a few days ago.

All is Lost (p. 248 - 249)

Jack returns from his field trip with his aunt and uncle to find Ma unconscious after having overdosed on pills.

Dark Night of the Soul (p. 250 - 284)

Jack is sent to live with his grandma and "steppa" (his nickname for his step grandpa) while his mother recovers in the clinic. It's evident he's regressing now, after the trauma with his mother. He has difficulty being away from her and his grandmother is having a hard time dealing with him and

his issues. He doesn't want to sleep alone and insists on sleeping in the room with Grandma and Steppa. He sucks on Tooth all day long, gets frustrated at one point and punches Grandma, refuses to get out of bed. When Grandma tries to take him to the playground, he has a miserable time and can't relate to other kids. But soon they receive word that Ma has stabilized and Jack is even able to talk to her on the phone. However, she tells him that he still can't see her for a while.

Break into 3 (p. 284)

There's a clear break into 3 moment when Jack cuts off his long ponytail (all on his own). His ponytail is very symbolic of his time in Room. It also marks him as Jack from Room. The media seem to identify him with his ponytail and the fact that he grew up in such conditions. Earlier when Ma asked if Jack wanted a haircut (after several people thought he was a girl), he adamantly refused. So now, in this moment, when he cuts off his hair on his own, it's clear he's making an active decision to move on. In his own five-year-old way. He's learned the theme, accepted that change is inevitable, and is embracing his new life outside of Room.

Finale (p. 284 - 317)

After his brave step into the world of Act 3, Jack shows much bigger signs of improvement. When he goes out to run errands with Grandma, it's clear that he's adjusting much more to his new environment. Things don't stress him out as much, he's not obsessively worrying about everything he sees that is different, and he's even finding things that he likes: like the car wash. At the library, Jack even makes his first friend, a young boy named Walker.

There's a clear "synthesis of Act 1 and Act 2" moment when the police send over some of Jack's things from Room. Like Rug, Remote, and Jeep. Even though he's embraced change, he still revels in the items and enjoys the nostalgia of them.

Ma is finally released from the clinic and comes to take Jack to their new apartment. He tries to breastfeed the minute they get there, but Ma explains that the milk has all dried up. We think Jack is going to have a meltdown, but he deals with the news really well, another sign that he's moved on and matured.

To continue progressing, Ma and Jack make a deal to try something new every day.

Final Image (p. 317 - 321)

Jack and Ma visit Room one last time for closure. Ma has a hard time going back, but Jack is excited. Until he steps into Room and is surprised by how different it is. He even says to Ma, "I don't think this is it." He's confused by how small it suddenly looks (after having been living in the big outside world for the past few weeks), and how weird it smells.

Jack says goodbye to Room and in a beautiful mirror to the Opening Image, they both leave through the open door that once held them prisoner. They are free.

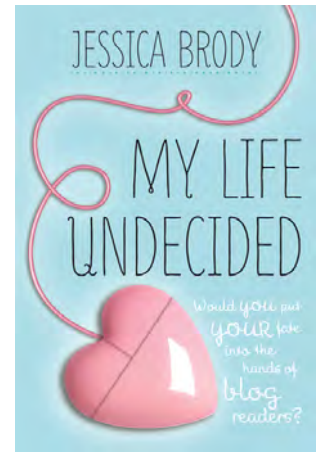
MY LIFE UNDECIDED

Jessica Brody

Save the Cat! Story Genre: Rites of Passage

Book Genre: Young Adult/Contemporary

Total Pages: 296



Opening Image (p. 1 - 5)

In the prologue fifteen-year-old Brooklyn Pierce is being arrested for an unknown crime that will be revealed in the next chapter. Our first encounter with the hero paints a clear picture of who this girl is: A screw up. Someone who makes horrible decisions.

Theme Stated (p. 21)

While Brooklyn is being sentenced for her crime, the judge says to her, “If you don’t change your behavior, young lady, and find some common sense, I have no doubt that you will end up right back in this courtroom. And believe me, next time, I will *not* be as lenient.”

This is a story about growing up. About learning to make good decisions...on your own.

Of course, all Brooklyn hears at the time is the word “lenient” and is excited that the judge is letting her off with a warning. Then she laments about the 200 hours of community service she’ll have to do. She doesn’t actually *hear* the message. It’s something she will have to learn over the course of the story.

Set-up (p. 5 - 26)

In the initial pages of the book, we learn who Brooklyn is. We see her at home, at school, and in her relationship with her über-popular best friend, Shayne (home, work, and play.) And one thing is very clear from all of these aspects of her life: she makes horrible decisions.

Play: Brooklyn is essentially “Second in Command” in the Queen Bee’s army. She’s the sidekick to the most popular girl in school (a position that doesn’t require her to make many decisions, as the Queen Bee usually makes them for her. A bad decision in and of itself).

We learn that Brooklyn was arrested for throwing a party in the model home of her mother’s latest housing development...and accidentally burning it down. We also learn that it was her best friend, Shayne’s idea to have the party and Brooklyn agreed to go along with it. And when we see Brooklyn waiting at the police station for her parents to arrive, even though Brooklyn thinks Shayne must be

being held in another room, we start to get the feeling that her best friend might have thrown her under the bus and let Brooklyn take the fall for the party. We also learn that pretty much everything Brooklyn does is to impress Shayne.

Home: Brooklyn's parents are, of course, furious with her. But we get the sense that Brooklyn's screw ups are not new. She's in the habit of getting into trouble. We also learn that Brooklyn has an older sister at Harvard, who is, in every sense of the word, perfect—smart, accomplished, well-behaved, makes wise decisions—in every way, Brooklyn's opposite. Further exaggerating Brooklyn as the “screw-up” up the family.

Work (School): The next day at school, we learn that, last year when she entered high school, Brooklyn purposefully failed her math placement exam so she could be in the same math class as Shayne.

Catalyst (p. 26 - 32)

There are several catalysts in the book, each one designed to push Brooklyn closer and closer to changing. The first catalyst is the arrest that happens in the opening image. The next catalyst happens here.

Ever since the party, Brooklyn has been unable to get a hold of Shayne. She thinks she might have gone to jail. But she eventually comes to realize that Shayne has simply been avoiding her. In the chapter, “The Queen of Charades” that begins on page 26, Brooklyn is completely dissed by Shayne in front of everyone at school as Shayne pretends she knows nothing about the party and the subsequent arrest, and pretty much disowns Brooklyn as a friend. (Which becomes obvious to Brooklyn when she sees that her coveted seat next to Shayne in the cafeteria has been taken by someone else.) This is the nudge Brooklyn will need to learn that her life can't keep going the way it's going. The status quo can't continue. Something will have to change. But what?

Debate (p. 32 - 64)

The debate is always the reaction to the catalyst. So how does Brooklyn react? She cries. Alone, humiliated, and now friendless, she runs out of the school, sobs under a tree, and meets a handsome new boy with a charming Southern accent named Hunter Wallace Hamilton III.

Then she gets in trouble for smoking, gets thrown in detention, and gets grounded by her parents.

As you can see, Brooklyn is *still* making crappy decisions. She's a stubborn hero. She pretty much flounders through the debate section. She's not sure what to do. Which is why she requires a *third* catalyst to finally push her over the edge to do something. A *triple bump*

When Brooklyn is at her first day of community service at a convalescent home, she gets in trouble for shirking on her duties and is forced to clean bed pans. Gross! She sees this as a glimpse of what her future will be like if she can't get her act together and continues to make horrible decisions. And *this* is when she finally chooses to do something about it.

Break into 2 (65 - 68)

The solution seems so simple to Brooklyn. If she's incapable of making bad decisions (which she clearly is) then the answer is to *stop* making decisions all together.

She gets the idea to start an anonymous blog called MyLifeUndecided.com. On this blog she will post all of the decisions she comes across in life and she will ask her blog readers to vote on what she should do through means of an online poll. And she vows to do whatever the poll results say, no questions asked.

The Break into 2 comes when she publishes her very first blog post (which is printed in the book). It is a clear transition into a new way of living. A step into a new adventure. It's also the start of a collection of blog posts which appear throughout the book's narrative.

B Story (p. 80 - 82)

This book has twin B stories. The first is an old lady named Mrs. Moody who lives at the convalescent home where Brooklyn does community service (whom Brooklyn met on her first day). Mrs. Moody is true to her namesake. She's a grouchy, bitter old woman who, at first, makes Brooklyn's life miserable. Brooklyn has been assigned the task of reading to the old woman. This B-Story is the friendship story. The second B story is Brian (the love story) which comes in a little bit later in the book.

Fun & Games (p. 68 - 149)

Just as she promised, Brooklyn poses all of her life decisions to her blog readers and asks them to vote on what she should do. Although she doesn't always agree with what they decide, she goes along with it anyway. The result being that she finds herself in situations she never would have found herself in before. This is the upside down version of Brooklyn's world. She never physically goes anywhere, but her life is completely different now and she's seeing sides of her school and her world that she never saw before.

Among other things her blog readers vote for her to try out for the Rugby team, join the debate team (and be partners with Brian/Heimlich), try a macrobiotic diet, go on an extra credit field trip to a science exhibit, and much to Brooklyn's massive disappointment, her blog readers decide that she should *not* in fact go to the opening of a hot new downtown club that Hunter Wallace Hamilton III has invited her to.

All the while, Brooklyn continues to spend time with her B-Story, Mrs. Moody, at the convalescent home, per her court-ordered community service. It's during her time there that she stumbles upon a secret that Mrs. Moody seems to be hiding. A secret that may or may not explain why she is, in fact, so moody.

And through her blog readers' decision for her to become Brian's debate partner, she also starts to get to know him better. (Second B-story). Although she still doesn't look at him as anything more than a friend and a debate partner.

Midpoint (p. 143 - 149)

Brooklyn's midpoint is a false defeat. She feels as though her blog readers have completely failed her. They've made *all* the wrong decisions for her. And now she's (seemingly) worse off than she was before. (And she's a dorky member of the debate team to boot!) She didn't get to go to the club opening with Hunter, she instead had to spend the evening with her parents. (Um, can someone say loser?)

And to make matters even worse, her ex-best friend Shayne *did* go to the club, convincing Brooklyn that Shayne will steal away Hunter, who Brooklyn has a serious crush on.

To top it all off, her mother is making her work at the construction site of the rebuild of the model home Brooklyn burned down.

Brooklyn feels completely defeated. Her life is officially over.

Bad Guys Close In (p. 150 - 232)

Because her midpoint is a false defeat, Brooklyn's Bad Guys Close In section is a seeming *upward* trajectory. Things can only get better from here. And they do.

She wins her first debate tournament with Brian. Her blog becomes more and more popular. Hunter Wallace Hamilton III asks her to the Winter Formal. And even Brian is seeming a bit more appealing lately, although Brooklyn still denies she has any feelings for him.

Meanwhile at the convalescent home, Brooklyn starts to get through to Mrs. Moody. She comes up with a plan to bring Brian's dog into visit Mrs. Moody (the same kind of dog Mrs. Moody had before she came to the home) and Mrs. Moody actually *smiles*. Brooklyn feels good about all the stuff that's been happening.

But of course, since she hasn't yet learned the theme (about learning to make her *own* good decisions), things can't stay good for long.

First she gets involved in a hostage situation at a convenience store (because she disobeyed her blog readers and went out with Hunter when she was supposed to be hanging with Brian and the debate team.) She becomes an instant celebrity at school and her ex-best friend Shayne tries to rekindle their friendship.

Then her blog gets posted on a popular gossip website and goes completely viral. Now everyone at school is talking about it and she knows it's only a matter of time before they figure out she's the one behind it.

She kisses Brian during a game of truth or dare and decides (without polling her readers) that she's going to quit the team, right before a big tournament.

Her internal bad guys (her not learning the theme) continue to close in until she reaches...

All is Lost (p. 232 - 241)

When she tells Brian she wants to quit the debate team, they have a huge blow-up fight. Brian storms out. He seems to have given up on her forever.

Then Brooklyn goes to her convalescent home only to find that Mrs. Moody has passed away (whiff of death).

Dark Night of the Soul (p. 241 - 265)

Just as the debate is the reaction to the catalyst, the Dark Night of the Soul is the reaction to the All is Lost.

Brooklyn reacts by first shutting down the blog that seemingly failed her and second, by agreeing to rekindle her friendship with Shayne. She soon finds herself exactly where she was at the beginning of the story: back in Shayne's "entourage." But this time, it's worse. Because this time, she's seen what life on the other side is like. She *knows* what she's missing. She's experienced another world.

She goes back to the convalescent home to work and meets Mrs. Moody's estranged son who tells her about a fight he had with his mother a long time ago. Mrs. Moody chose never to forgive him and spent her life miserable and lonely. Brooklyn decides she doesn't want to end up like that. But if she doesn't change (for real this time), that's exactly how she's going to end up.

Break into 3 (p. 266 - 267)

The Break into 3 is supposed to be the moment when the hero makes the hard change. The *real* change. Although Brooklyn has finally realized that something has to change (for good this time) she's still a bit lost about how to do it.

And she's also confused about her feelings for Brian and Hunter. She doesn't know which one to choose.

Brooklyn reopens her blog. She figures she needs help making the decision between Brian and Hunter, which is really a metaphor for the decision she has to make between her old self and her new self. The Brooklyn from the beginning and the one she's trying to become through this story. It's a caterpillar vs. butterfly moment.

In a mirror beat to the Break into 2, at the Break into 3, Brooklyn publishes another blog post, asking her blog readers what she should do. Although this isn't yet the "right" solution (as she's still trying to rely on others to make her tough decisions for her, indicating she hasn't learned the theme), the blog post itself shows she's changed tremendously. This one is much more heartfelt. Much more introspective. It's a glimpse into the real Brooklyn. The changed Brooklyn. Not the superficial, confused, follower Brooklyn we met at the beginning.

She'll eventually prove she really *did* learn the theme, she just needs a few more pages to do it.

Finale (p. 268 - 293)

The Winter Formal is tonight. And Brooklyn is supposed to go with Hunter (along with Shayne and her date). But she still hasn't made her decision about whether she should be with Hunter or Brian. She sits down at her computer to check the poll results from her blog but just before she looks at it, she realizes the truth:

She can't keep letting other people make decisions for her. She has to make her own decisions and learn to live with the consequences: good or bad.

So she deletes the blog before she looks at the poll results and decides (for herself) to go to the Winter Formal with Hunter.

Obviously Hunter is the "wrong" choice, but this decision is meant to demonstrate that Brooklyn *can* make a bad decision. And she will. No one is perfect. People make mistakes. And she will too. But more important, she can *fix* her mistakes. Which she's about to do...

In the limo, on the way to the Winter Formal, Shayne says something that reminds Brooklyn of who Shayne really is: a fraud. A representation of the world she doesn't belong in anymore. And Hunter, although he's cute and charming and has a sexy accent, is just an extension of that world.

The limo stops at a stoplight and Brooklyn glances out the window to see Brian sitting with his friends at a diner. And that's when she *knows* what the right decision is. She has to choose this new Brooklyn. This new world. And she has to choose Brian.

She leaps from the limo, with a quick apology to Hunter, and runs into the diner to win Brian back.

Final Image (p. 294 - 296)

The final image is written as one of Brooklyn's blog posts. Her very last blog post. In which she catches us (the readers of the book and the fictional readers of her blog) up on what's happened in her life since that night of the Winter Formal. And she also uses this post to say goodbye. The blog is disappearing for good. Because she doesn't need it anymore.