

The

A

B

C

's

of Ending a Story:

Learning Plot from Picture Books

by Marguerite (Maggie) Sheffer

Contents

- What *is* story structure?
- *Storytime!* 5 story forms
- *Explore:* Read + Discuss Picture Books
- *Play:* Write a Picture Book



Story structure

*is something we
learn early*



Story structure

as a container



that holds and conveys many different themes, characters, perspectives, worlds

These containers can be

*varied &
unconventional*



...and even when they “break the rules”..

*fragmented
surreal*

my theory is these adventurous structures “work’ on us, in part, because they still rely on our shared expectations of what a story is and is shaped like.



“Object” by Méret Oppenheim



“Broken Cups and Saucers”
by Glen Taylor



“My Grandmother’s China”
by Glen Taylor

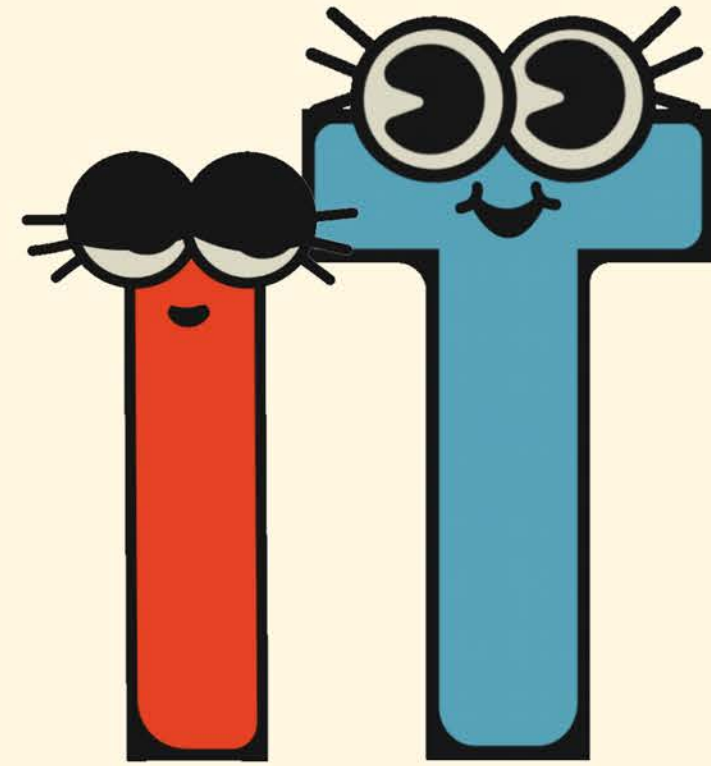
a few caveats

-only represents western story forms (see the work of Matthew Salesses and others for more on non-western story forms!)

-this isn't academic analysis, this is my working-writer working-theory

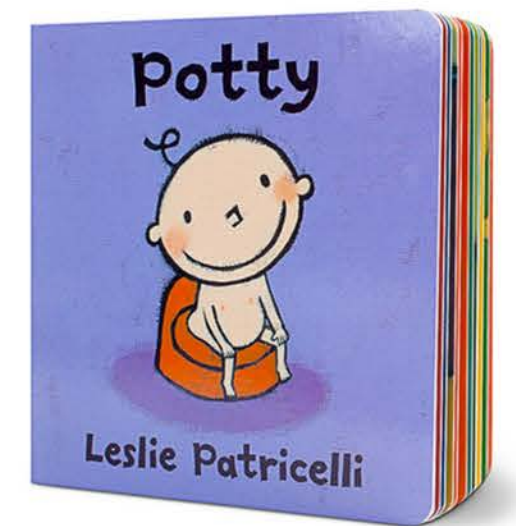
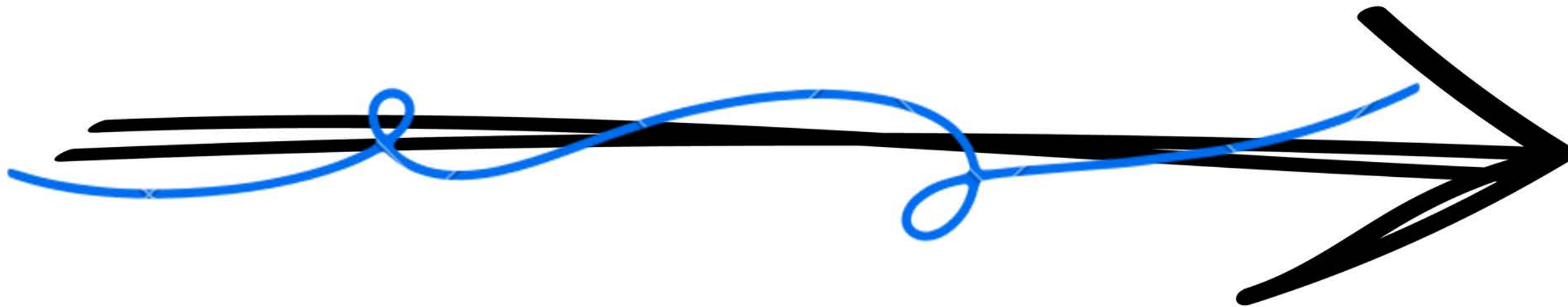
-many “shapes” overlap!

Let's get into



1. “Tinkle Tinkle Toot”

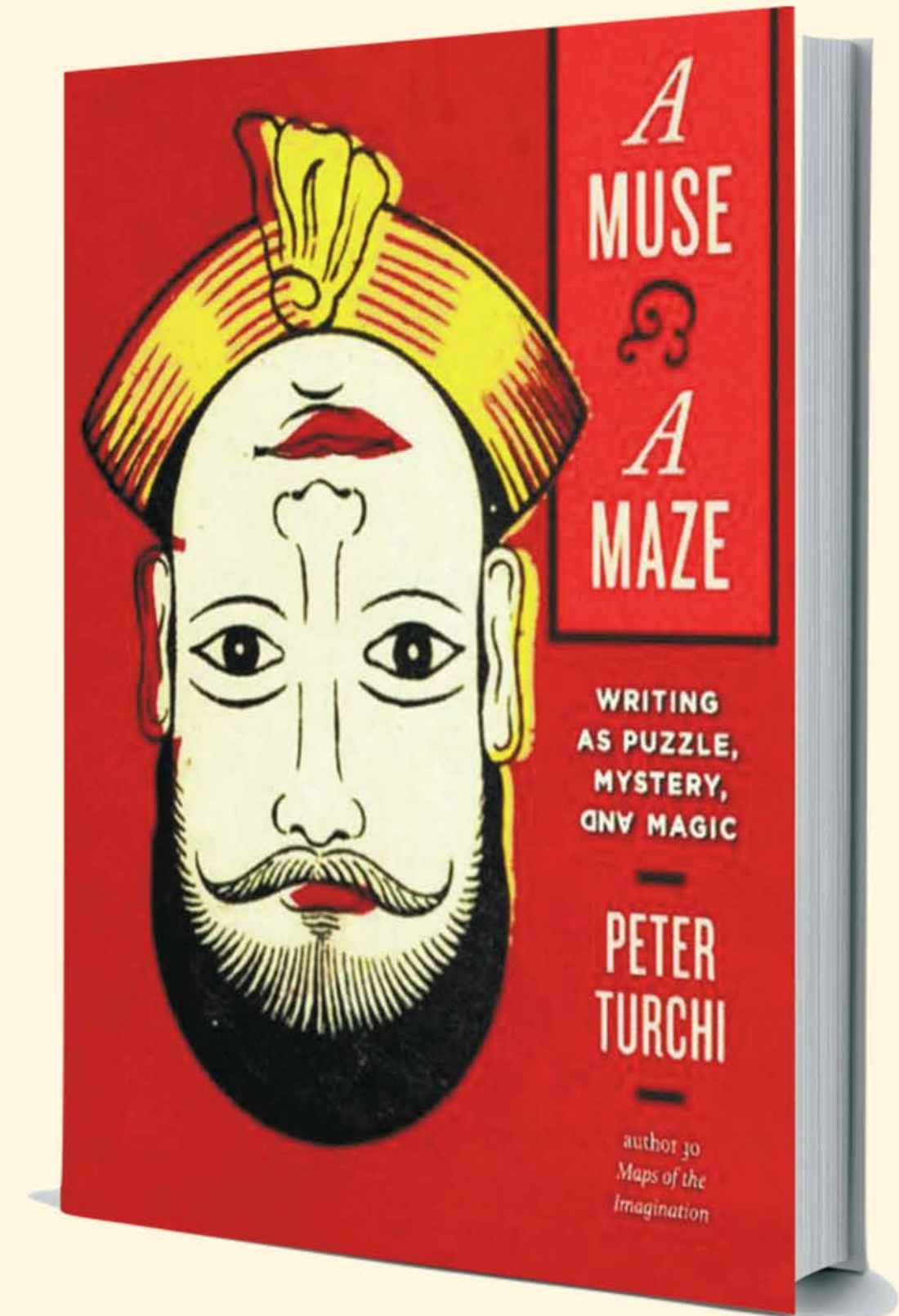
- clear goal / motivation** (immediate goal + underlying deeper goal)
- move towards goal with necessary meandering**
- achieve the goal!**



**“Having something happen
three times creates pattern.**

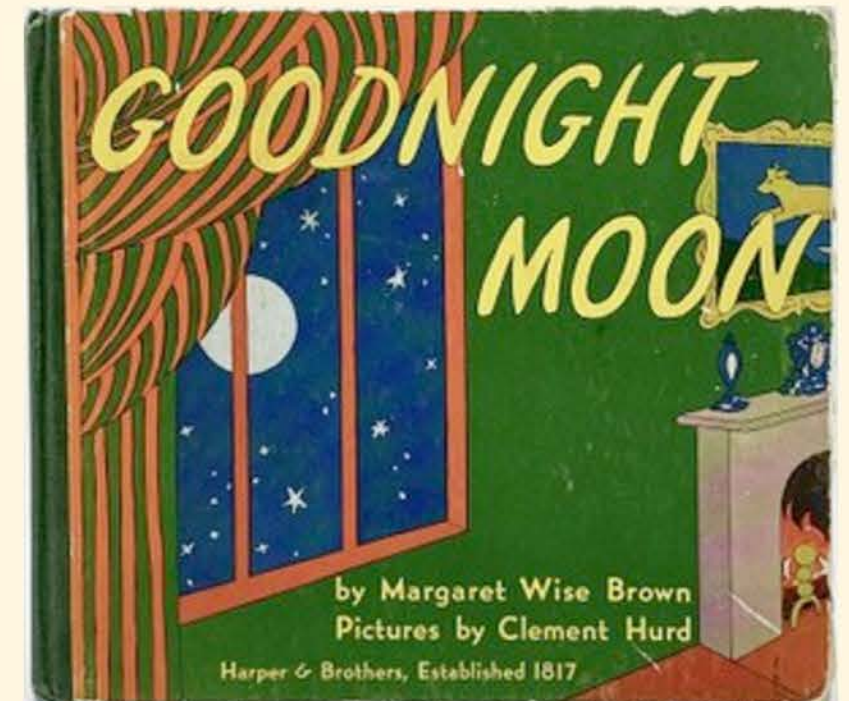
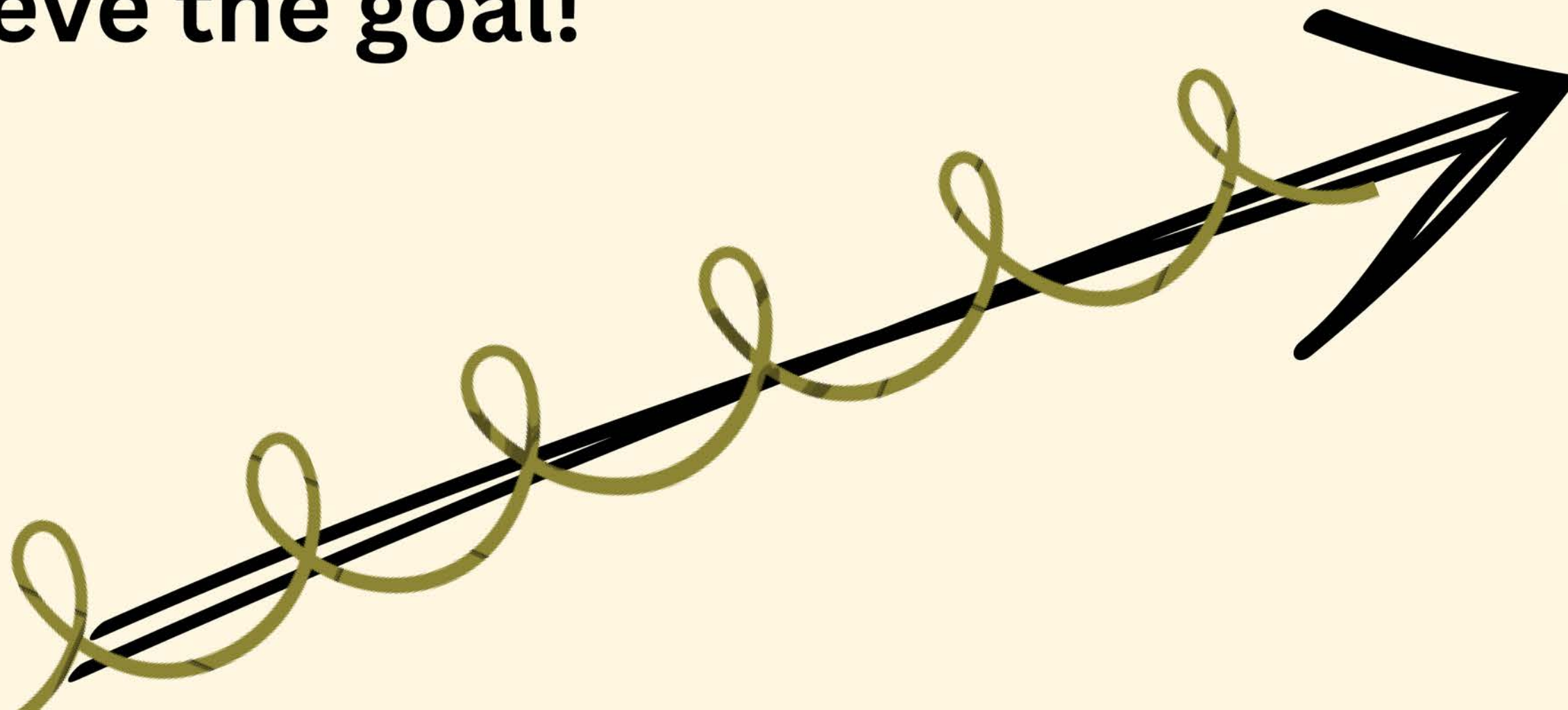
Pattern creates anticipation.”

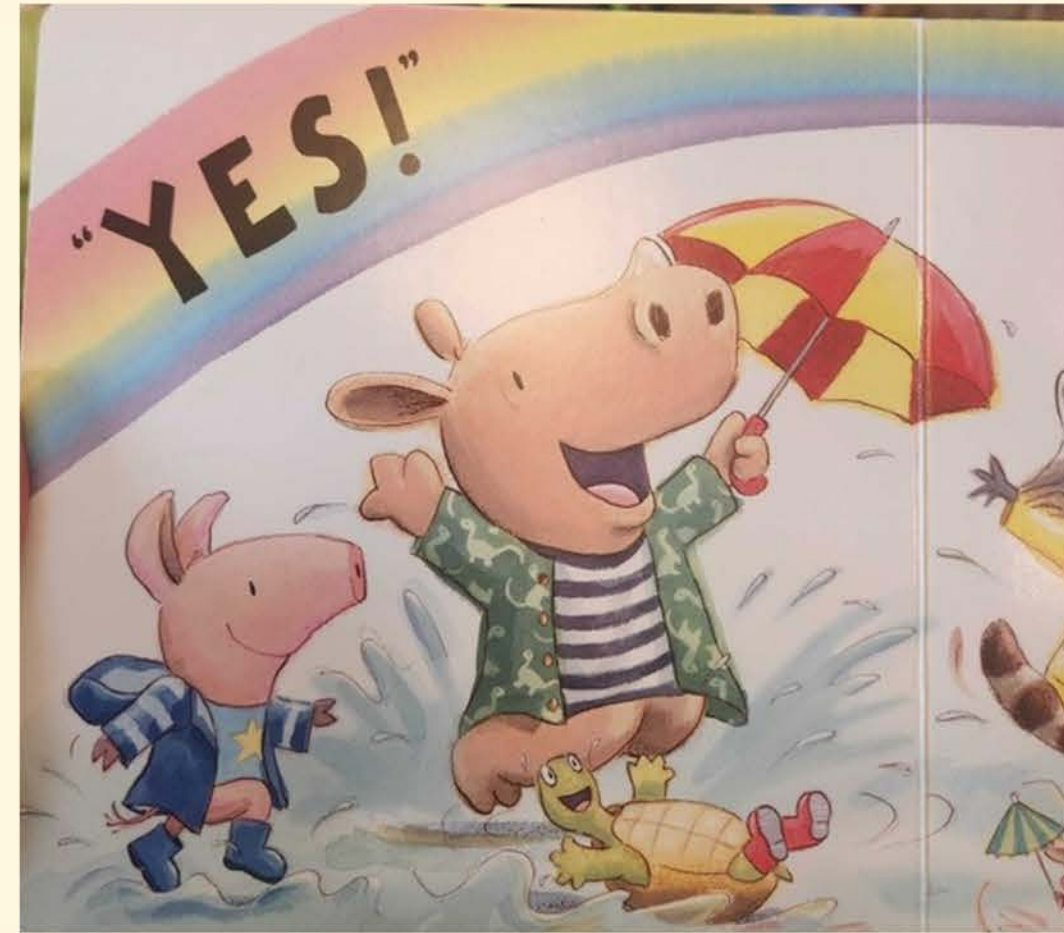
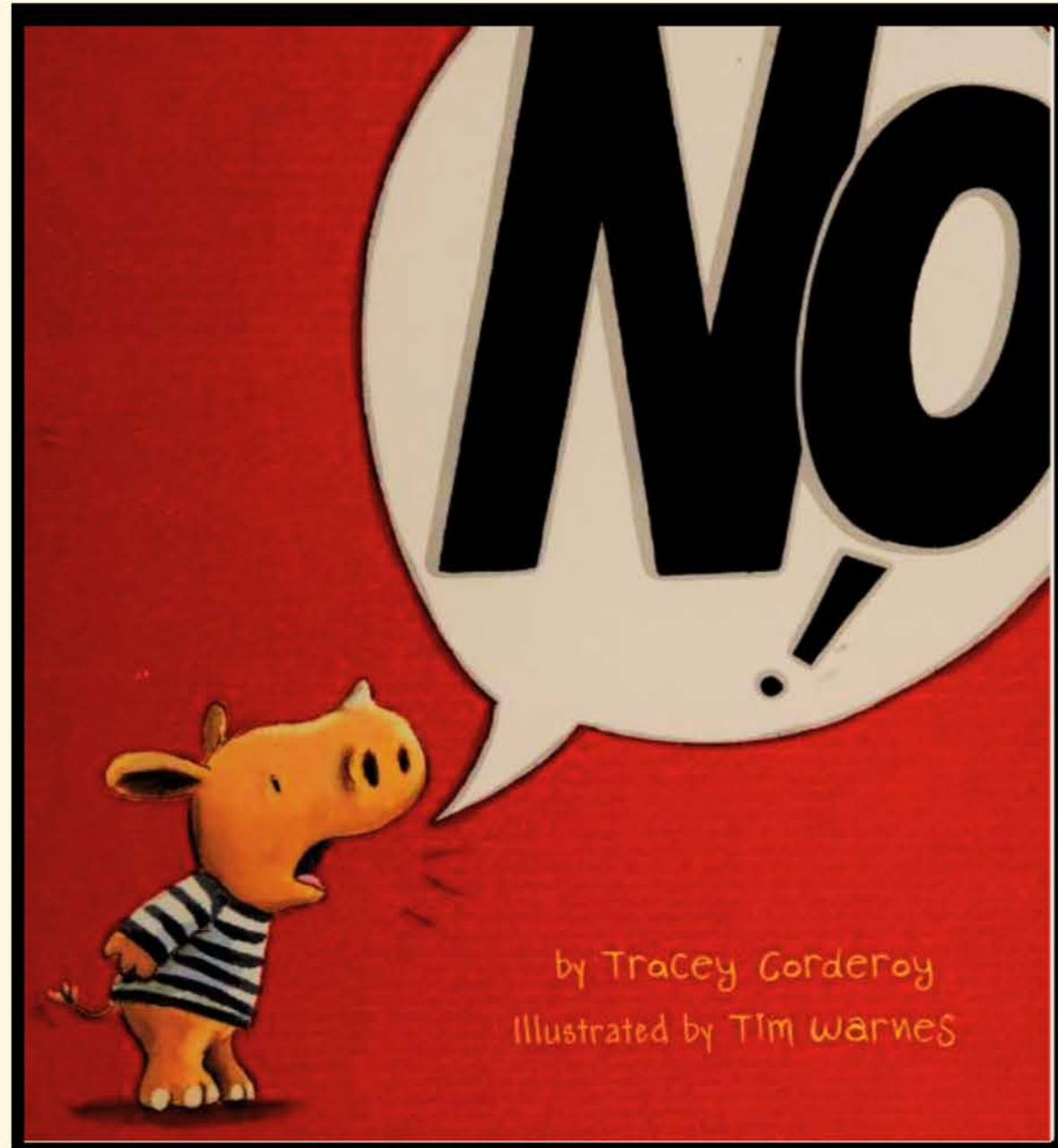
- “The Line, the Pyramid, and the Labyrinth”
from *A Muse & A Maze: Writing as Puzzle,
Mystery, and Magic* by Peter Turchi



2. Pattern: Repetition -> Meaning

- clear goal / motivation
- move towards it with **meaningful repetition**
- achieve the goal!

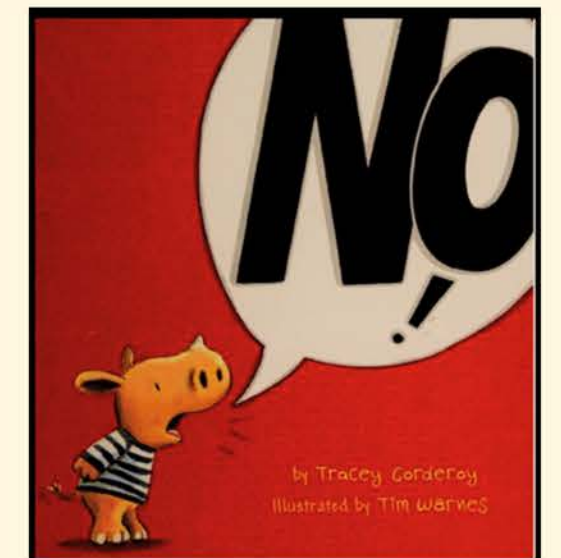
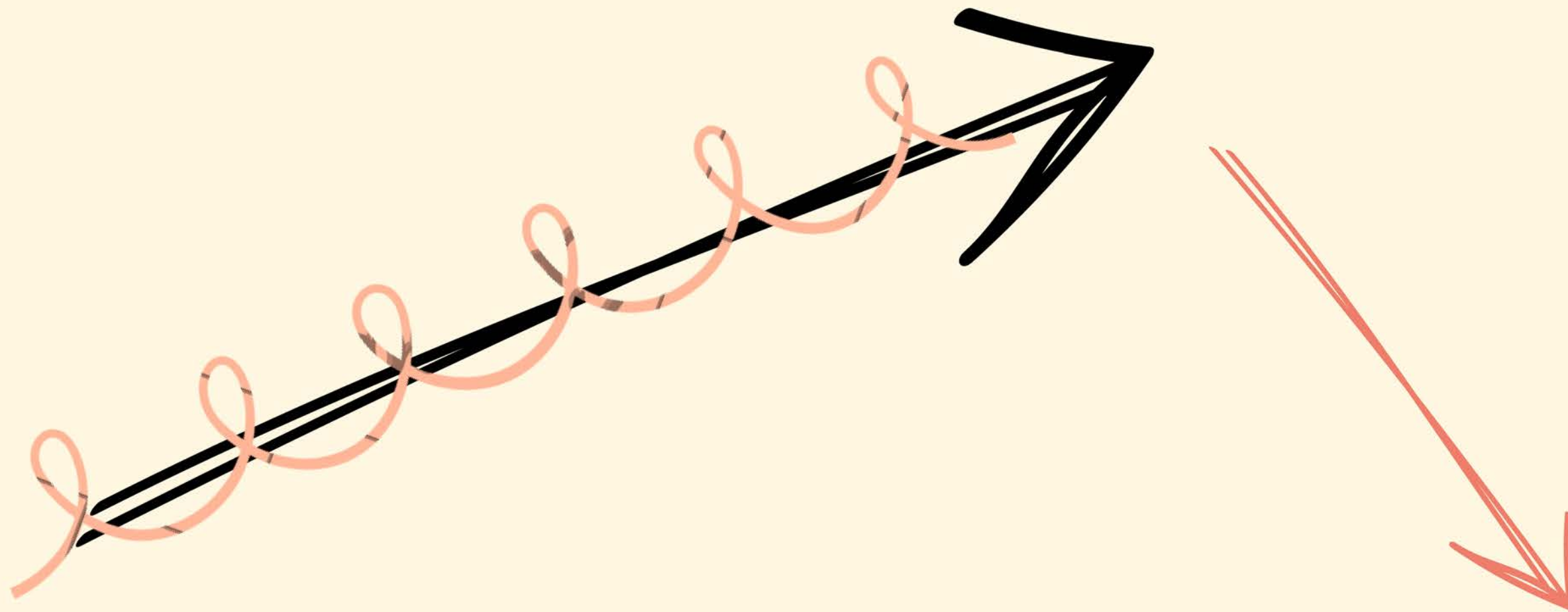




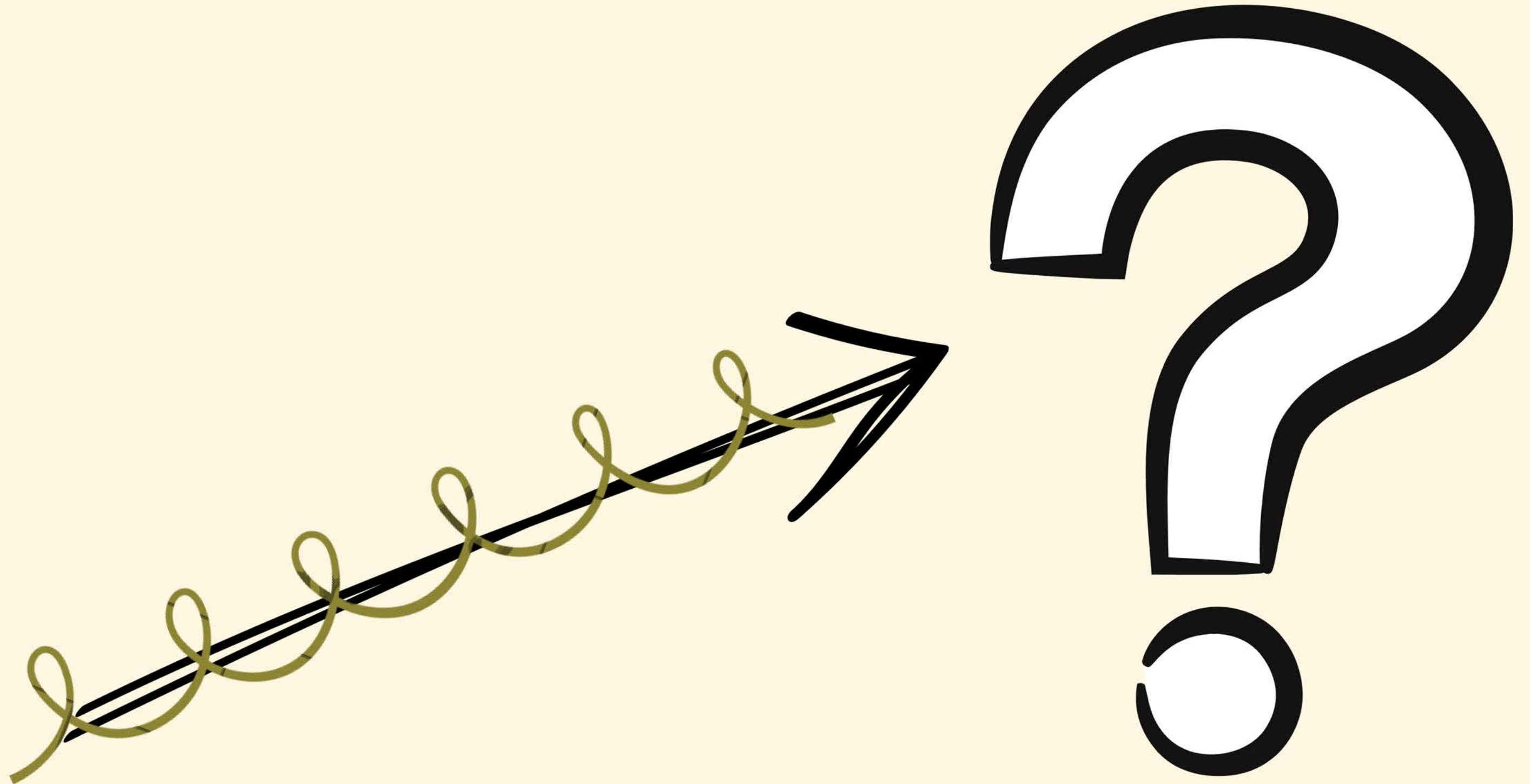
3. Reversal



- Establishes a pattern, then reverses it

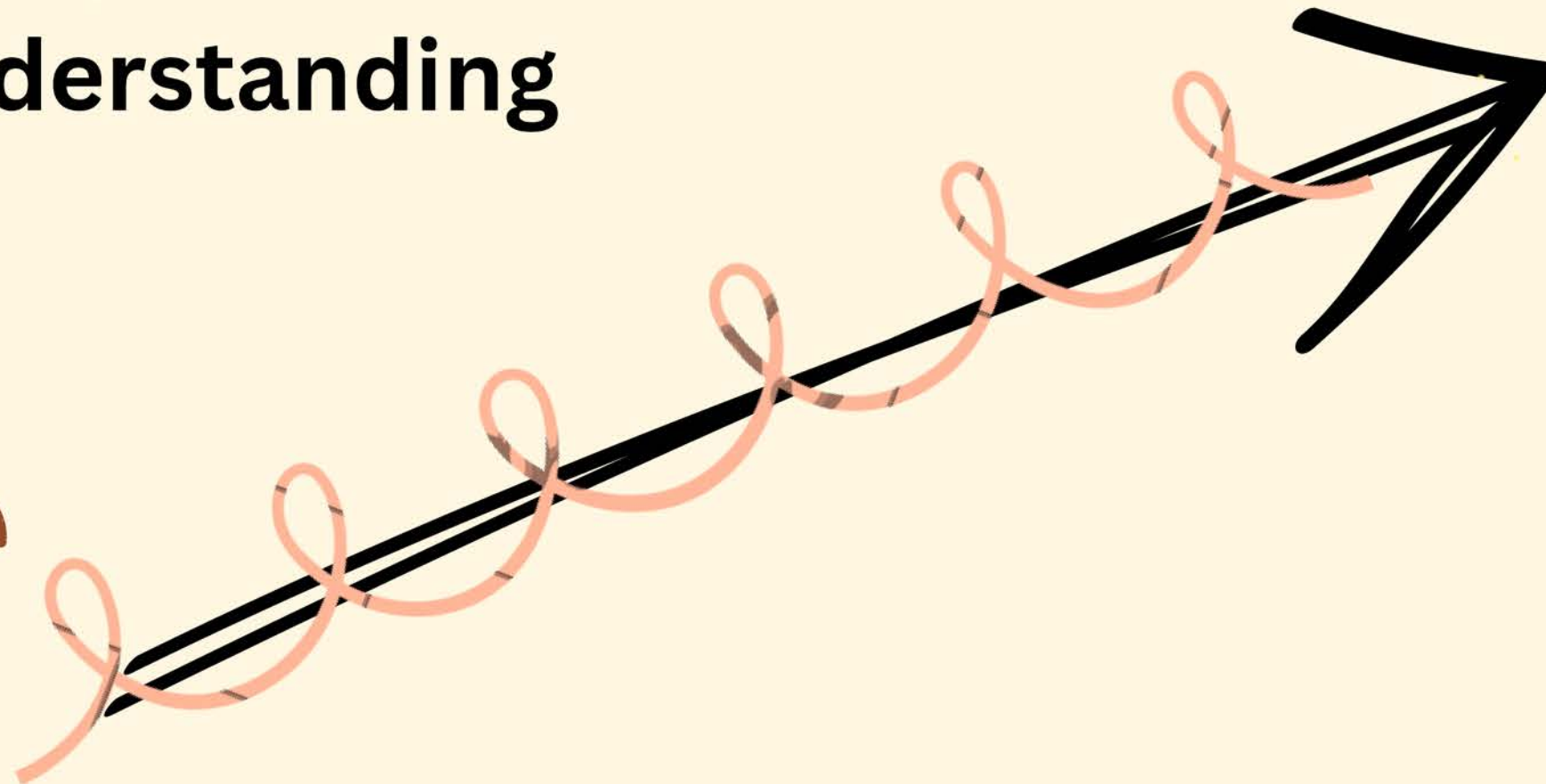
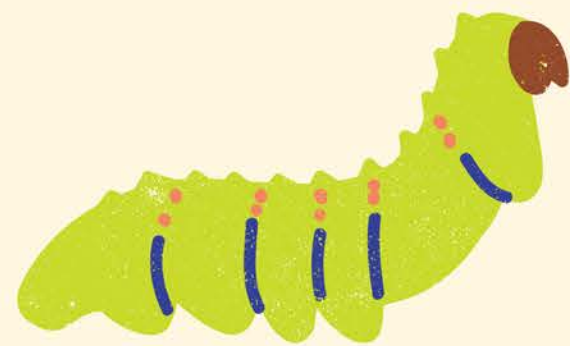


4. “Inevitable and Surprising”



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- **Liftoff!**
- **Transformation!**
- **Fulfills the pattern *while* opening up new possibilities or understanding**



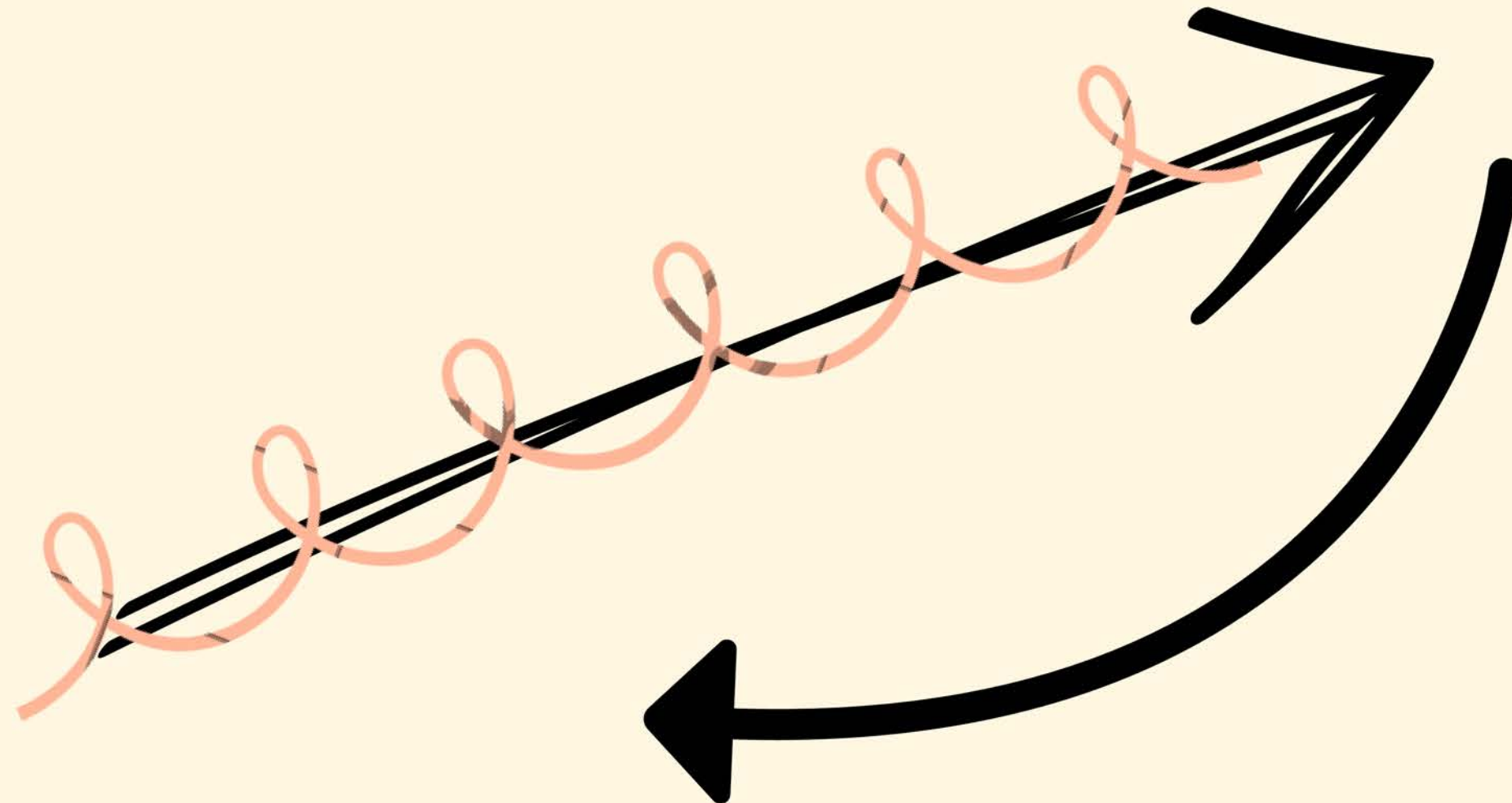
5. Into the Woods

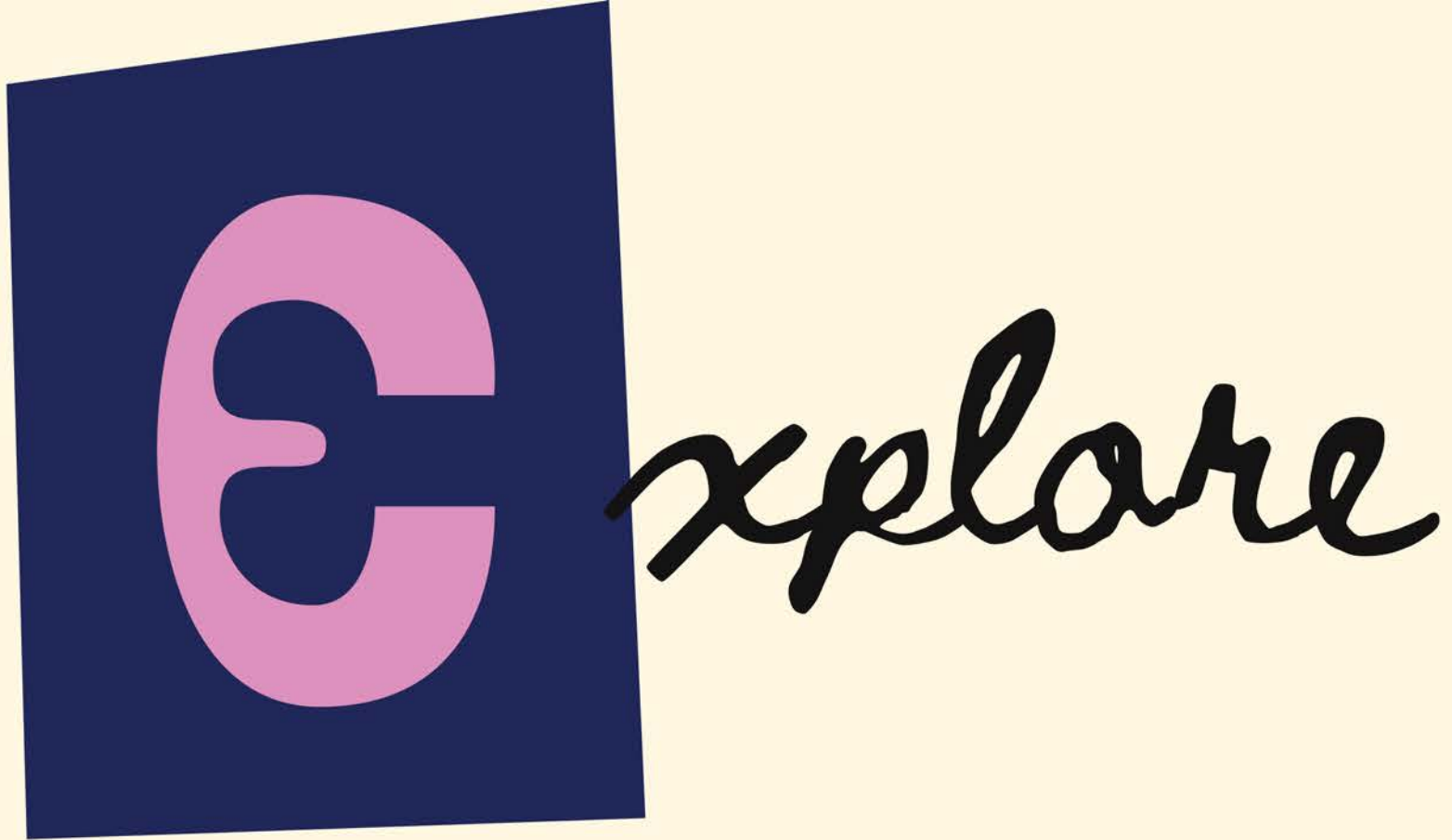


“Someday,” Yosuke Yamaguchi

6. Loop Back or “Bookends”

- Change / transformation
- Returns, in some form, to beginning scene, image, or state
 - But with expanded implications





In groups of 2-4

Pick a picture book! Read it aloud + discuss:

What do you notice about story structure?

Familiar or new?

Is the ending effective? Why?

Play

Try out the story shapes we've
observed today

A: Create a new short children's story

or

B: Take an existing project and brainstorm ways you could apply one or more of these story shapes to it.

Closing

**What do you
want to
remember?**

**What do you
want to keep
investigating?**

**What do you
want to try
next in your
work?**



he End