



CANADA
4-H Saskatchewan

Exploring 4-H at Home



Community Engagement
and Communications

Pillar: Community Engagement & Communications

Project: Writing Skills: A to Z

Activity: Writing A Short Story
Story Prompts
Story Cubes



Short Stories

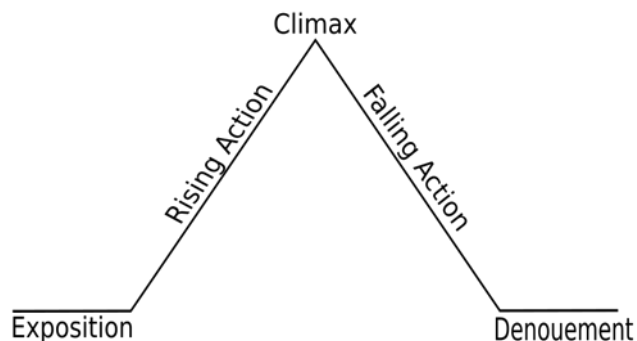
A short story is a piece of fiction, usually less than 5,000 words. A story of 1,000 words or less can be called flash fiction. Short stories usually contain these five elements: plot, setting, character, conflict and theme.

How a short story works

Plot is what happens in the story. The story begins with the introduction of the main character or characters and the setting. The setting shows where the story is taking place and the connection of the characters to each other. This part of the story can also be referred to as the exposition.

The conflict of the story is shown with rising action. Events become complicated. There is more and more tension, as the main character struggles to reach his/her goal. When the stakes are the highest the climax or turning point of the story is reached, and the issue is resolved. The main character might get what he/she wanted or he/she might see another resolution. The conflict is resolved or not, the tension is greatly lessened and the loose ends are tied up. This may also be referred to as the denouement. During, or after reading the story the reader understands what the theme of the story is.

The rising action, climax, falling action and denouement (resolution) is shown in the following illustration known as Freytag's pyramid. Freytag was a nineteenth century novelist.



More about characters

Short stories use few characters. There just isn't room for a lot of people. Each character must be there for a good reason. The goal of the short story writer is to make his or her characters real and believable.

Let's say you're creating your main character. Draw a picture with words. What does he look like? What are his likes and dislikes? What does he believe in? What are his dreams? And in this story, what does he want?

Show, don't tell

Okay, you know your characters. Now, try to show your readers what they're like through their actions, not by telling them. For example, if you wanted to let your readers know that your main character, Lizzie, loves cats, you could write, "*Lizzie loved cats.*" That would be telling them.

Or, you could write something like: *When Lizzie was eight, she adopted two cats from the SPCA. When Lizzie was ten, her parents told her that she could have her own smart phone for her birthday. "That would be nice," Lizzie said, "but what I'd really like is another cat."*

Those two lines show you that Lizzie loves cats.

More about conflict

If there is no conflict there is no plot. Many short stories are about the main character or characters wanting something. Conflict is basically, anything that stops the main character from getting what he/she wants. If he/she were to get what he/she wants in the first paragraph, that would be the end of the story.

For example, think about this twist on the fairy tale, Cinderella: Cinderella wants to go to the ball. Her stepsisters think that's a wonderful idea. They help her shop for a gown, do her hair and makeup and off they all go. She meets the prince there and they get married. No conflict – no story.

There are four different kinds of conflict.

- Man versus man or man/woman against the forces of nature, or animals.
- Man/woman against circumstances.
- Man/woman against society, ideas, rules or those in authority.
- Man/woman against him or herself. Character struggles with temptation, physical limitations, choices, etc.

What is the climax and theme of the story?

The climax, or turning point is the highest point of action.

The theme of a story is the main idea that the author is trying to get across. Some common themes of stories, books and movies are:

- Things aren't always what they seem to be.
- Don't judge a person by outward appearances.
- People can change

How a story is told: point of view

Point of view means, who is telling the story? From whose point of view is it being told? Point of view is important because it has a huge effect on the story.

First Person view

If the main character or another character is telling the story, the point of view is first person. First person viewpoint shows the thoughts and feelings of the person telling the story, but the storyteller or narrator cannot know or tell the thoughts and feelings of any of the other characters.

Third Person view

In third person limited viewpoint, the story is told from inside the head of one of the characters, often, but not always, the main character. Third person limited viewpoint shows the thoughts and feelings of one character. In third person omniscient or all seeing viewpoint, the author is usually not a character in the story but he/she knows everything about everybody.

Second Person View

Second person viewpoint is not that common. A second person viewpoint story puts the reader in the story and creates the illusion that the story is happening to him/her. Second person point of view is seldom used in fiction but has been popular with "Choose Your Own Adventure" type of books.

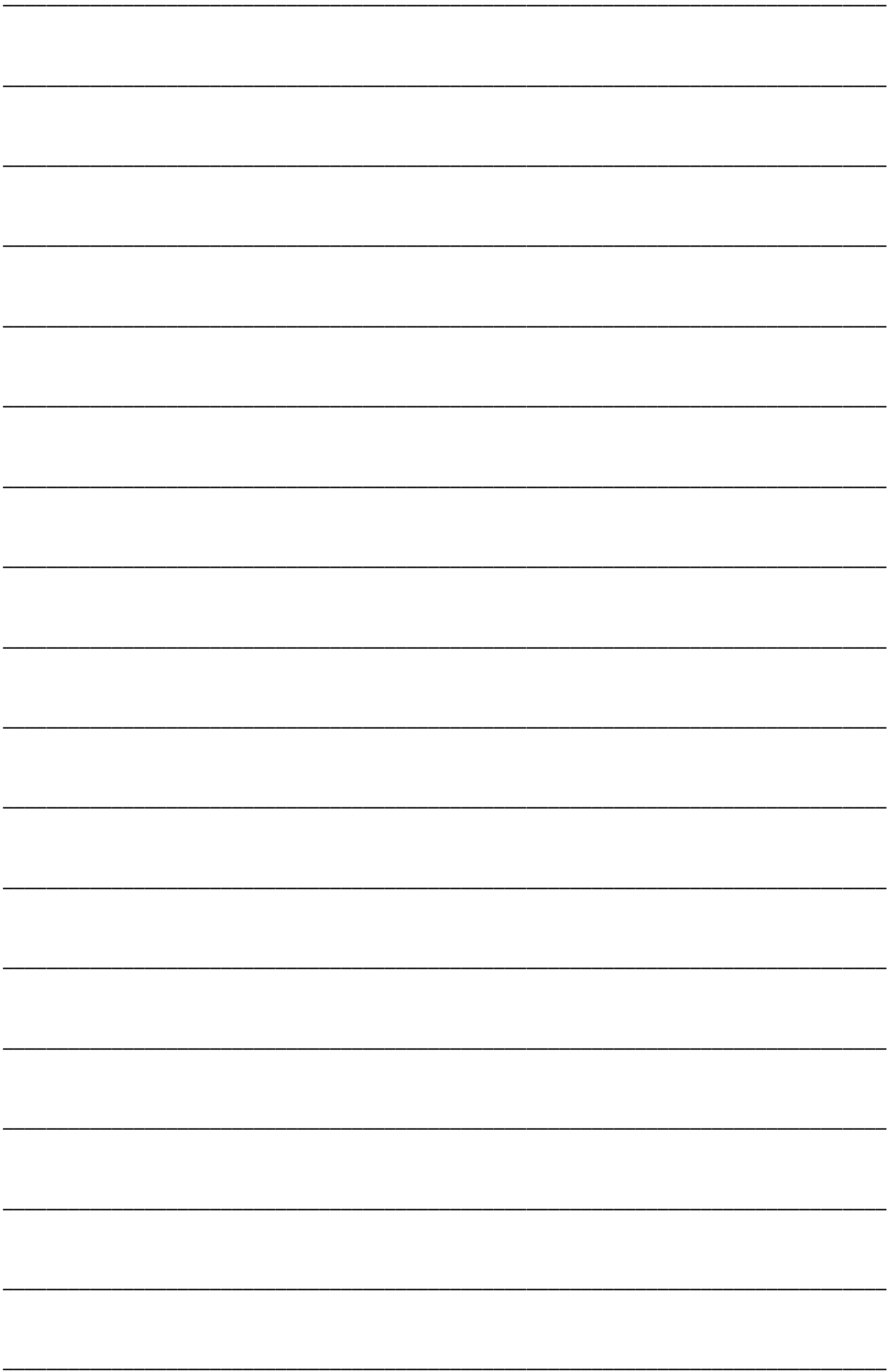
Tips for story writing

1. Think of an idea
 - Think about your favourite books and pull inspiration from them
 - Predict how books are going to end and use your alternative ending as a start for a new story
 - Write about real life experiences
 - Many stories start with the author's own experiences – they just make changes to make the story more compelling or change names/places to protect identities
2. Create a character and a setting
 - Who is your main character? An adult? A child? An animal?
 - Write out your character description to get a feel for where your story will go
 - What is special about your character?
 - Where is the setting?
 - A park? In a house? Outer space?
3. Come up with the conflict
 - You need a conflict to make a compelling story
 - Examine stories you love and identify the conflict
 - The conflict doesn't need to be intense – it could be simple, as long as it drives the plot forward
 - Example conflicts: Two students are competing for the top place in a science fair; A person is shipwrecked and needs to find a way home
 - Six types of conflict:
 - Person vs person
 - Person vs nature
 - Person vs self
 - Person vs society
 - Person vs supernatural
 - Person vs technology
4. Determine the Turning Point
 - This is the point of the story where the main character has an “eureka” moment.
 - It is usually in the middle of the story
 - After this point, you will see tools in place to resolve the conflict
5. The resolution
 - This is how you fix the conflict
 - Link the conflict to the turning point for a meaningful resolution
6. The end
 - What happens after the conflict is resolved?
 - Have the characters achieved their goals?

Activity: Writing Prompt

Sometimes it is difficult to come up with a story idea. In writing exercises to help creative juices flow, writers will sometimes use “writing prompts” to get them started. Use one of the following writing prompts to write your own short story:

- On a dark and spooky night...
- I woke up this morning and I was a bird!
- Today, I discovered I could turn invisible.
- A strange and mysterious parcel was delivered to my door today
- The day started out like any other, but by lunchtime, everything changed.



Story Cubes

Story Cubes are one of the most valuable story-telling tools for writers of all ages. Similar to writing prompts, they inspire writers to come up with cool story ideas. And since they are in the shape of dice, you never know what idea combination you'll get when rolling them!

What you need:

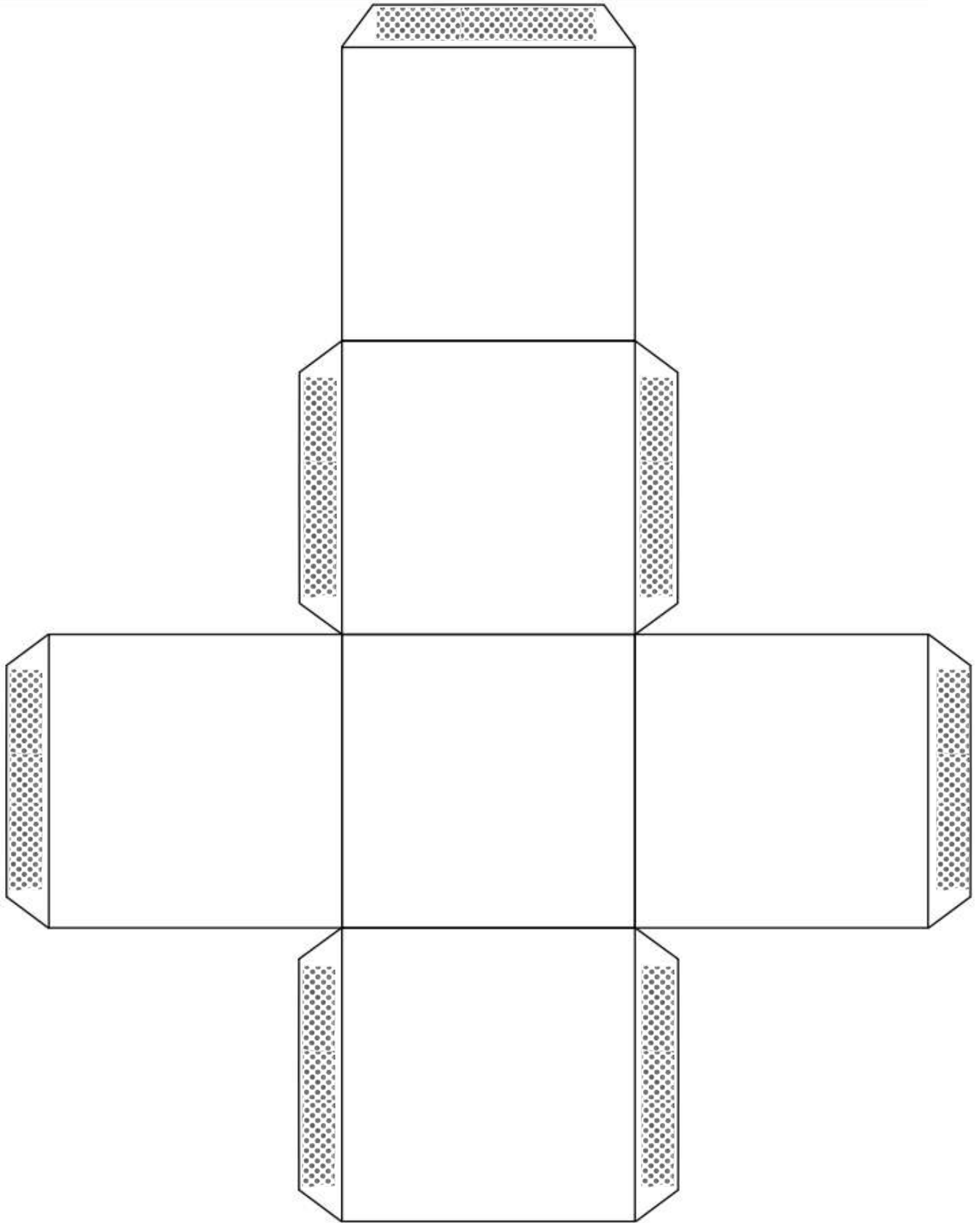
- Paper cube template
- Scissors
- Pen or fine black marker
- Colouring materials
- Glue
- Ruler
- Pencil

Instructions:

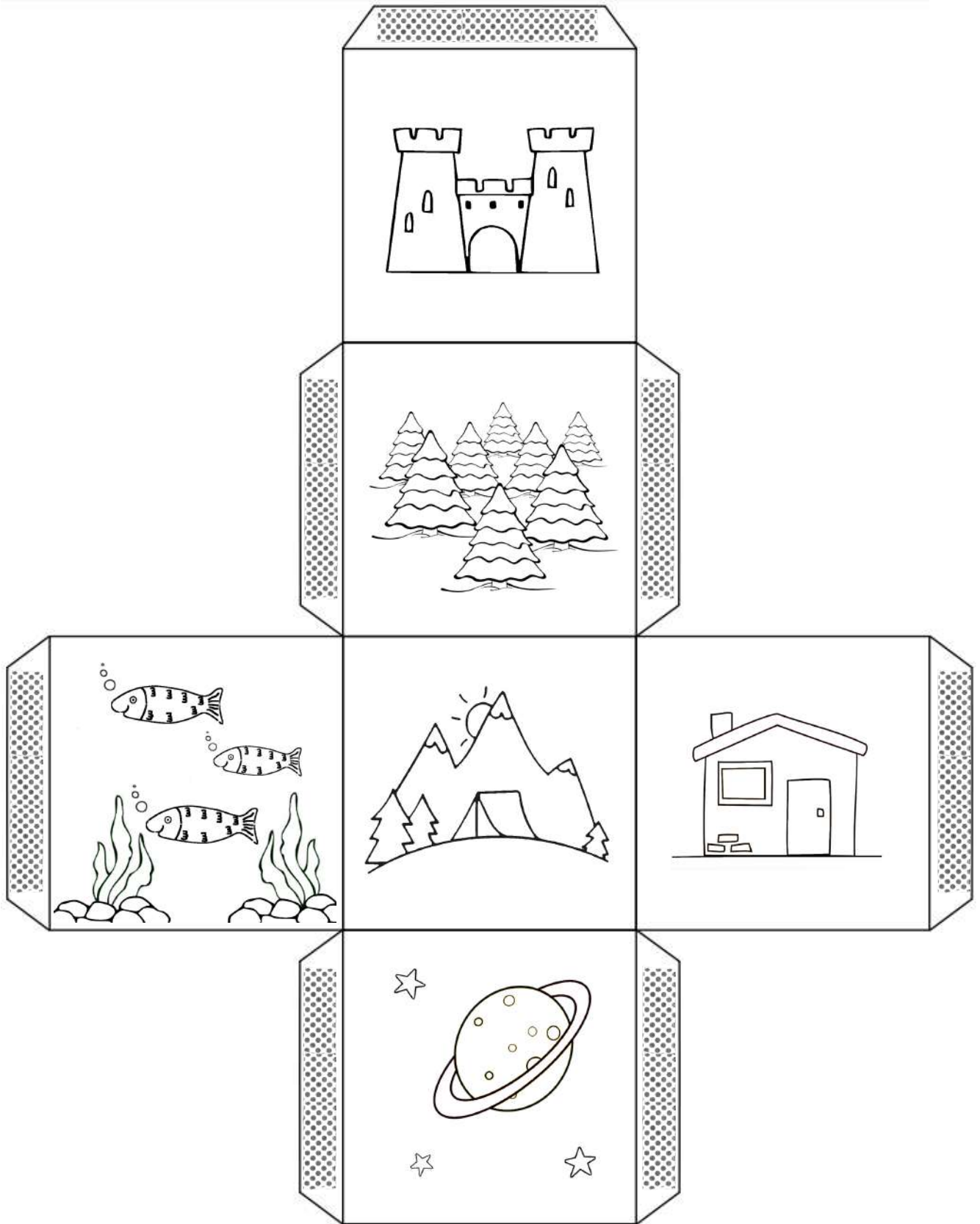
1. Print out at least 3 cube templates. If you don't have access to a printer, you can draw your own template, using a ruler and pencil.
2. Draw your images on the cubes. Designate each cube a category (ie. One for characters, one for settings, one for random objects)
3. Colour your drawings
4. Cut out the templates
5. Add glue to flaps and glue into a cube
6. Let dry and use to create unique stories.



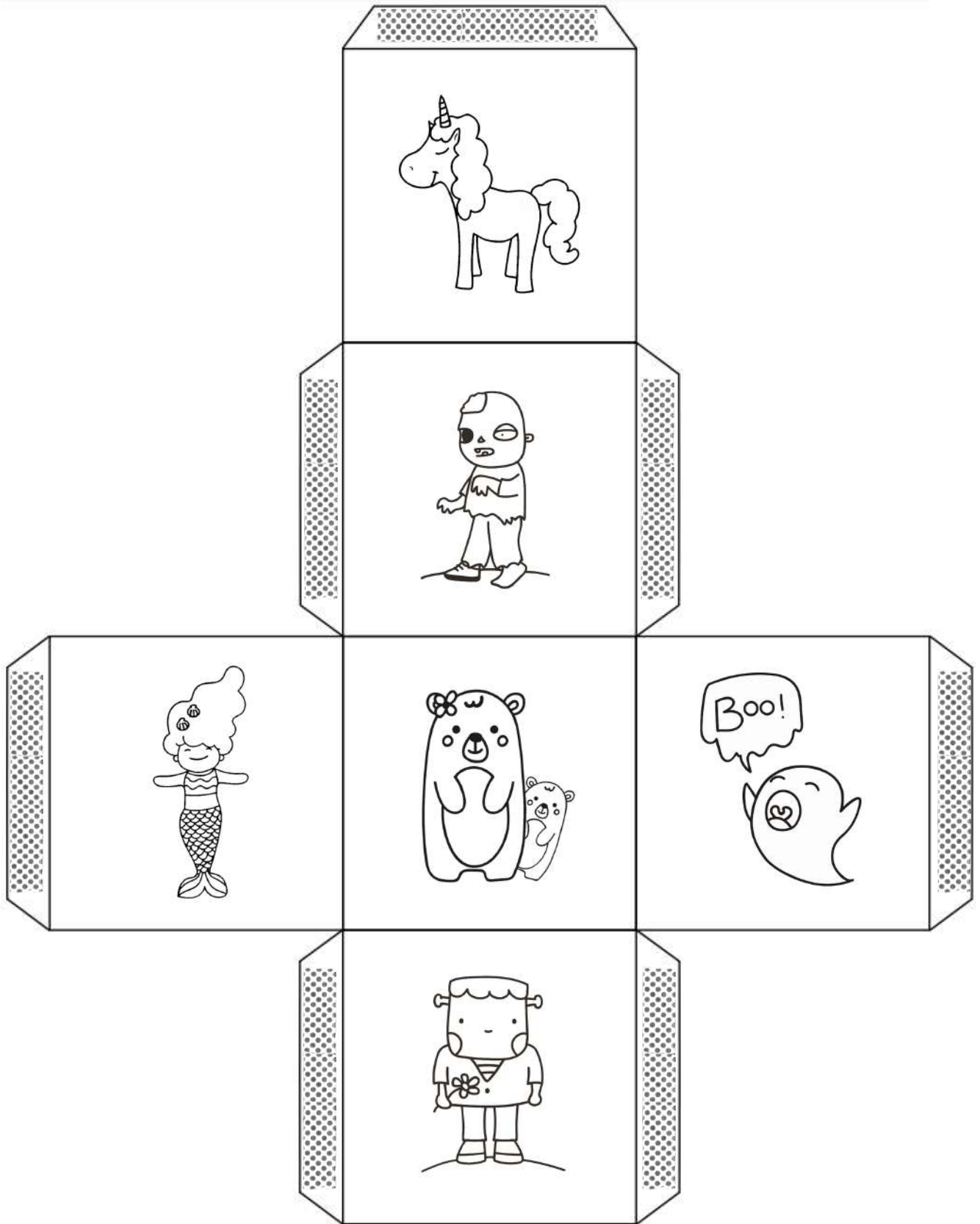
Story Cube: Template



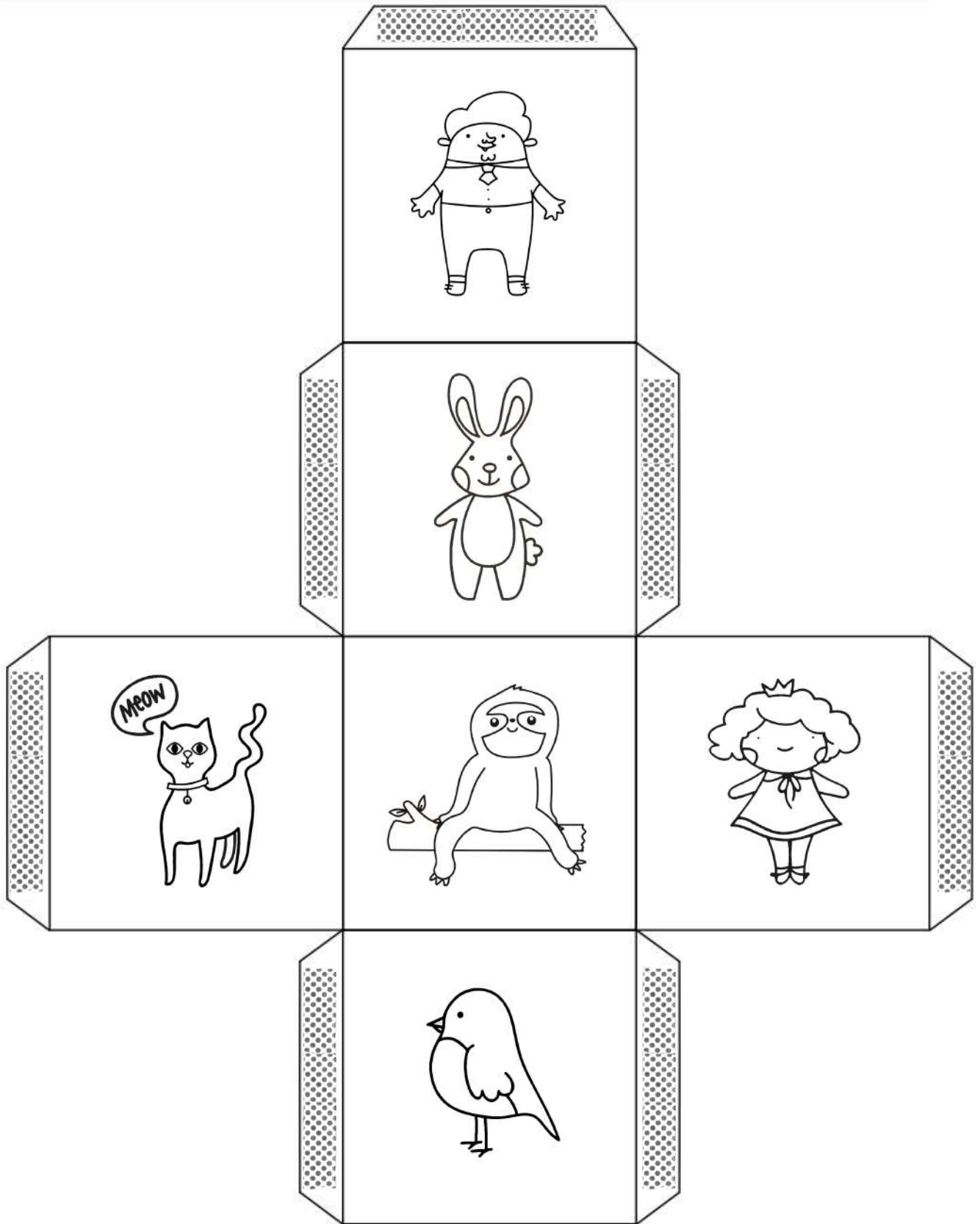
Story Cube: Settings



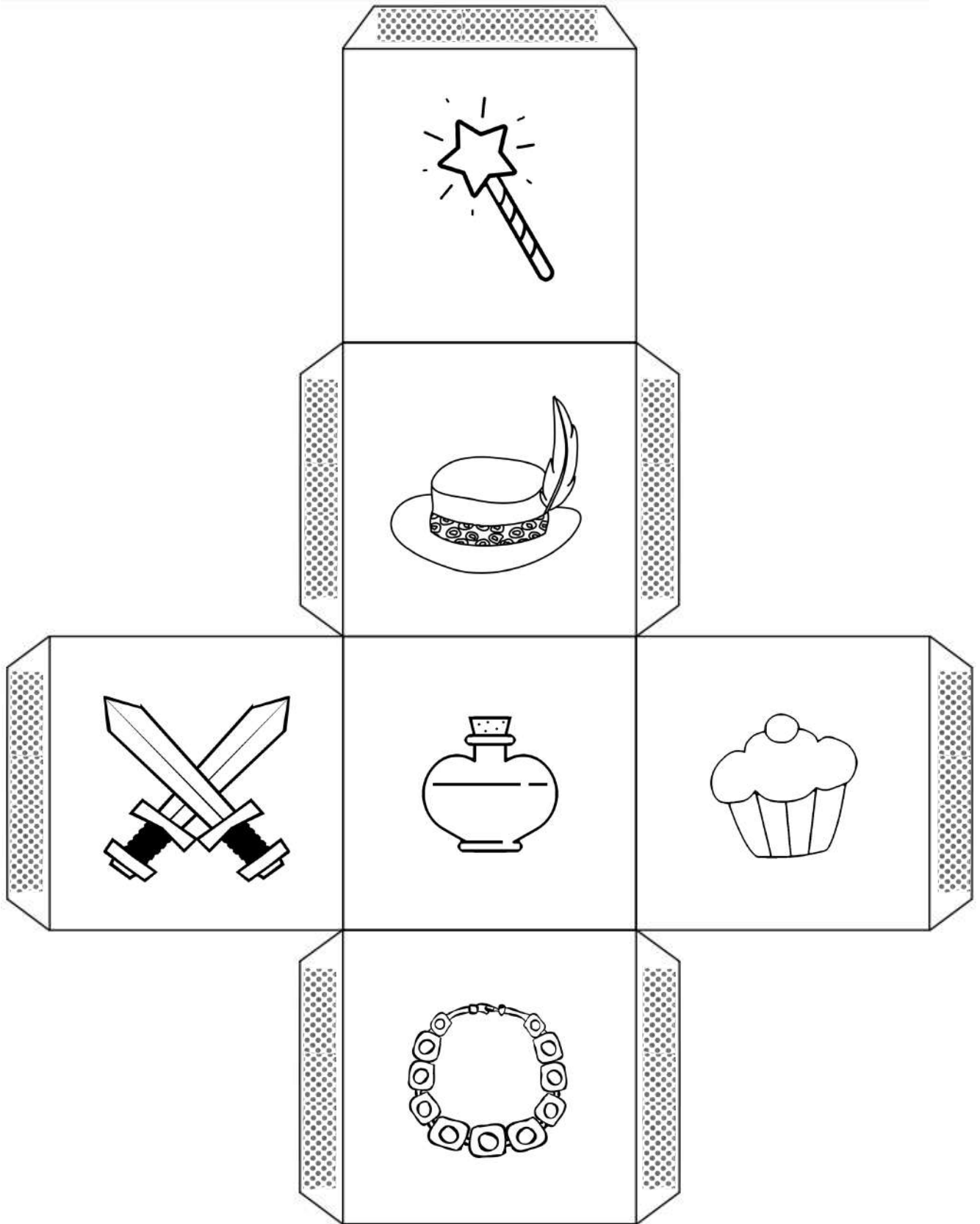
Story Cube: Character #1



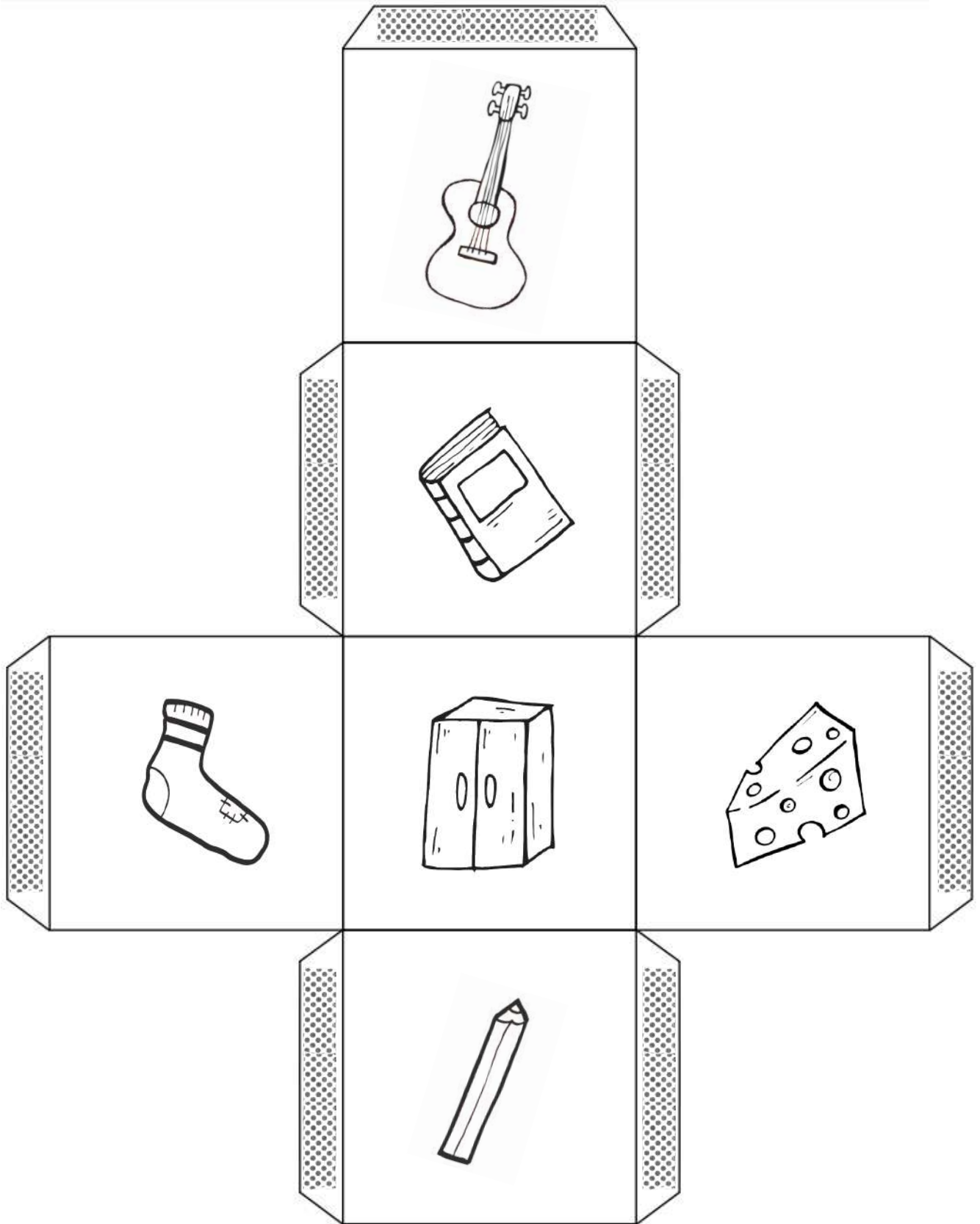
Story Cube: Character #2



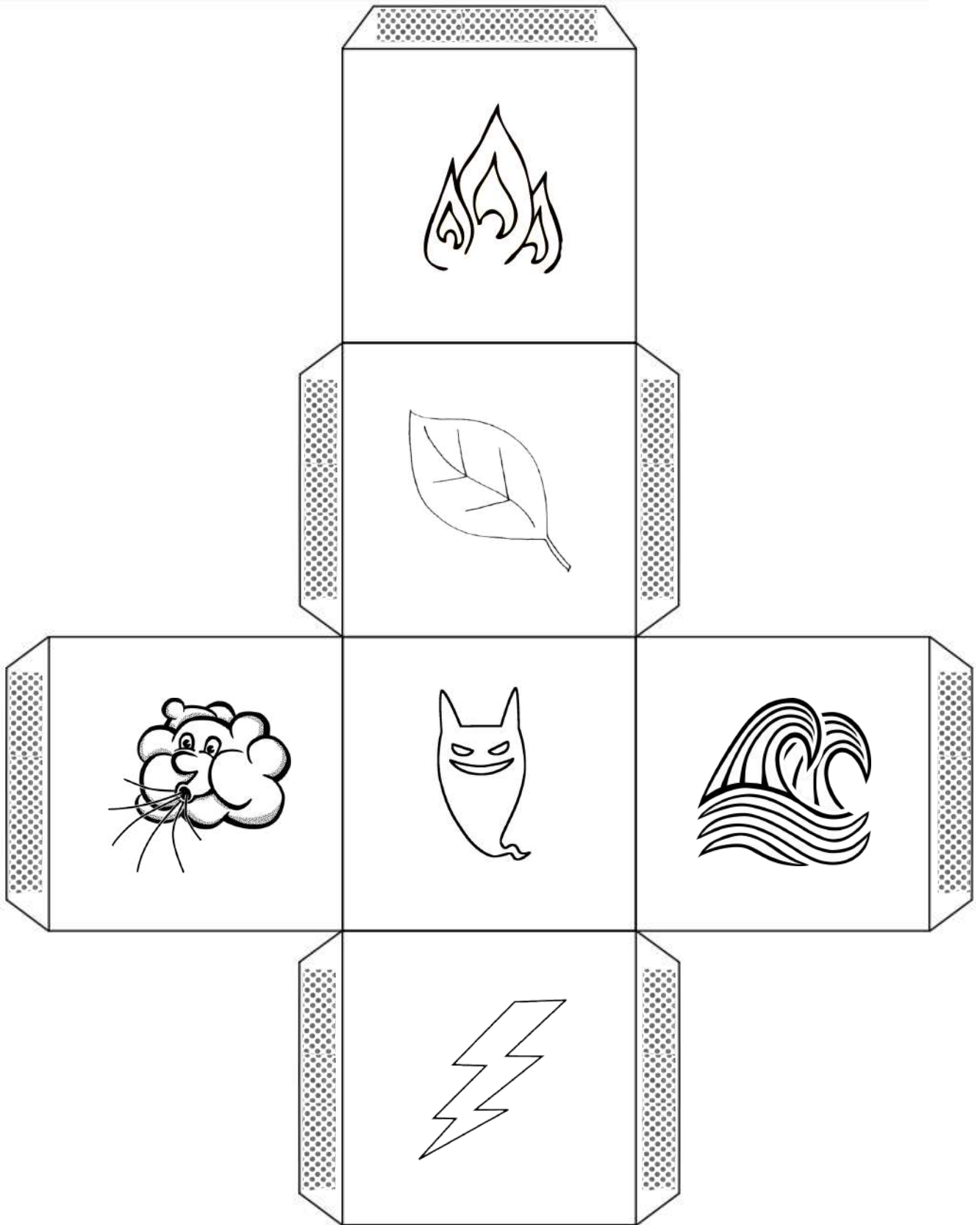
Story Cube: Objects #1



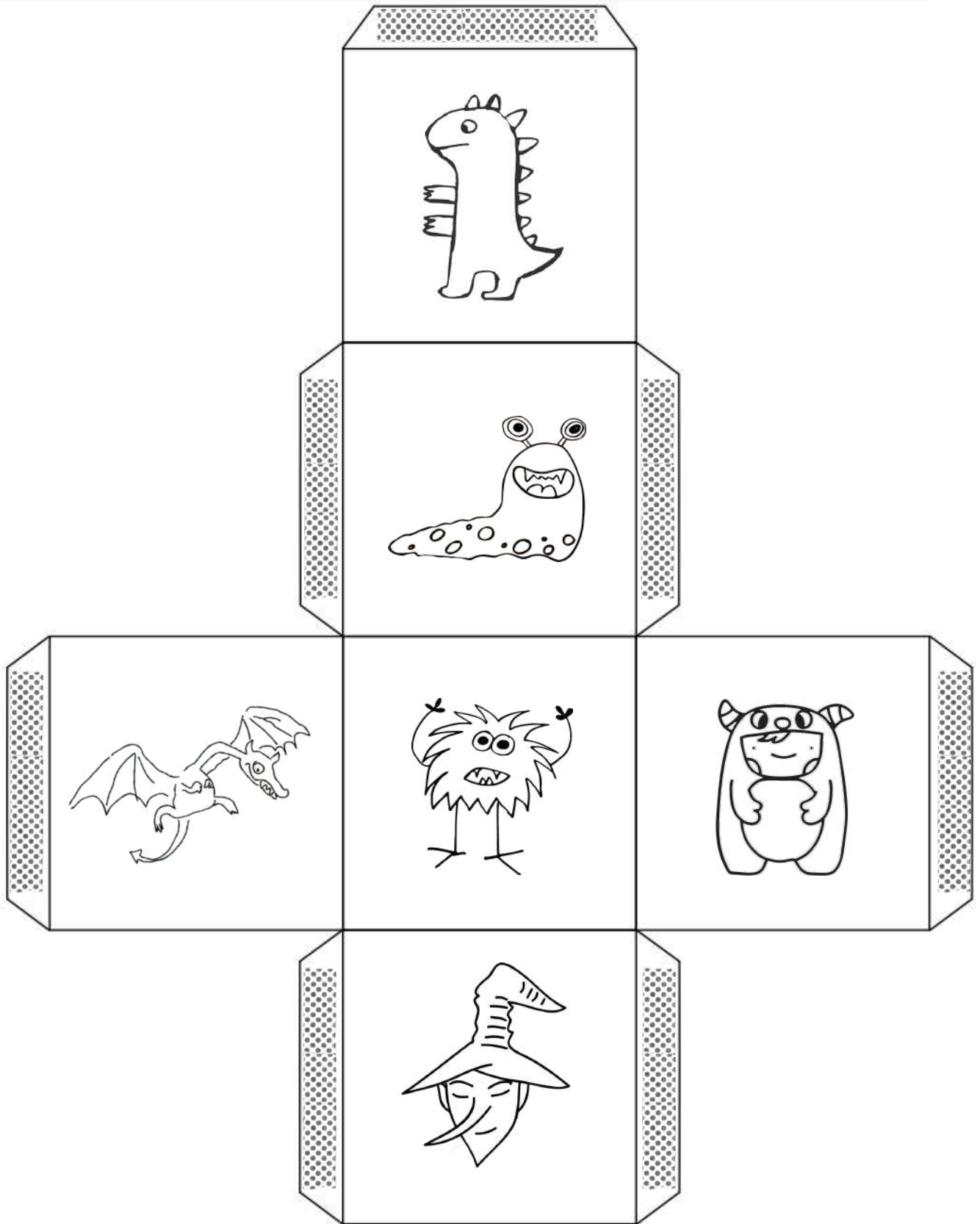
Story Cube: Objects #2



Story Cube: Elements



Story Cube: Monsters



Story Cube: Transport

