
Structures: Patterns of Meaning

Plot Elements

Plot: A plot is a chain or series of related events that tells us what happens in a story. Plots are built with the following basic elements: exposition, conflict, rising action, climax, and resolution.

Exposition: The introduction or exposition gives us the setting, characters, and basic situation. In addition, it often reveals the conflict or problem between two or more characters or two or more opposing forces.

Setting: The setting is the time and place of a story.

Conflict: A conflict is a struggle between opposing characters or forces. In an *external conflict* a character struggles with another character, society, or a natural force. In an *internal conflict* a character struggles with himself or herself; it is a struggle between his or her opposing needs, desires, or emotions. The conflict in a story is what drives or causes the rising action and climax. Solving the conflict or problem is what brings about falling action and resolution.

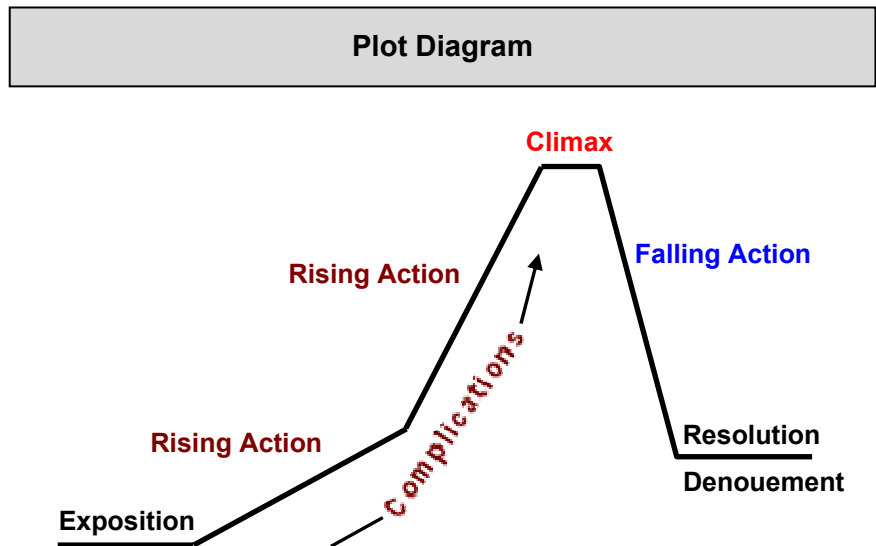
Rising Action: This phrase describes what happens as the main character tries to solve the problem or end the conflict. Each time the main character or protagonist tries to solve the problem or conflict, he or she is confronted with a complication. In other words, rising action is a series of complications that make it increasingly difficult for the main character or protagonist to solve the problem or conflict.

Complication: A complication is something that occurs during the rising action that also makes the problem or conflict even more difficult to solve.

Climax: The climax is the point in a story that creates the greatest suspense or interest. It is often called the "turning point" of the story, and it is usually the last time the two opposing forces will confront one another. At the climax something happens that reveals or tells us how the conflict will turn out — or how the problem or conflict will be resolved.

Falling Action: The series of events between the climax and the resolution.

Resolution: The resolution is the final part of the story, in which the conflict is resolved and the story is brought to a close. All of the loose ends are tied up — meaning all of our questions have been answered and we know what happens to whom. **Denouement** is another word often used to describe this portion of a narrative.



Subplots and Parallel Episodes

Subplots are plots that are part of the main story but are not as important. In other words, they are a minor plot that relates in some way to the main story.

For example, Spider-Man has a conflict with the Green Goblin in one movie and Doc Oc in another; how those conflicts came to be and how they are resolved are the stories told by the plot of each movie. But Spider-Man also has problems with Mary Jane in both movies; how his problems with Mary Jane developed and how they are resolved is a subplot in each of the two movies.

Another example is the conflict between Superman and Lex Luthor; how that conflict came to be and how it is resolved is the plot of the story for the first movie. But Superman also likes Lois Lane and they have a hard time getting together; how Superman resolves his problem with Lois Lane is a subplot.

Parallel episodes are elements of a plot that are repeated.

A good example of parallel episodes is the story of the Three Little Pigs.

You may remember that in this story the big bad wolf threatened to blow down the house of each of the three little pigs. The wolf began by blowing down the house of straw; he then blew down the house made of wood; finally, he tried to blow down the house made of bricks. Each time he approached a pig's house, he began by saying, "I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house down."

Because the wolf repeats his actions, they are parallel episodes.

Strategy: Figuring Out and Summarizing Plot

A strategy called "*somebody wanted but so*" can help you figure out most plots. Think of "*somebody*" as the main character. "*Wanted*" is what that character wants. "*But*" means complications develop that make it harder for the character to get what he or she wants. "*So*" is how it all works out at the end. See page 1 of your *Interactive Reading* handbook for more details.

Characters

Character: A character is a person or an animal in a story, a play, or another literary work.

Characterization: Characterization is the way a writer reveals or shows us the personality of a character. Characterization is not the person or animal himself or herself — it is what kind of individual he or she is or is becoming and how that is shown to us.

Protagonist: The main character in a work of literature. The protagonist is involved in the story's main or central conflict. Spider-Man and Superman are protagonists.

Antagonist: The character in a story who opposes the protagonist. The Green Goblin, Doc Oc, and Lex Luthor are antagonists.

Other Reading Concepts and Skills You Should Know

Context Clues: Hints given to us about what a word or phrase means. Such hints or clues come from the way an author uses the word or phrase in a sentence, paragraph, or setting.

Foreshadowing: Foreshadowing is the use of clues or hints to suggest events that will occur later in the plot. Foreshadowing is used to build suspense, interest, and anxiety in the reader.

Infer: To infer is to come to or draw a conclusion based on information you are given. It is to begin to believe or have an opinion that something is probably true because of information you have learned. When you have done this you have made an inference.

Predict: To predict is to state what will happen in the future, and to do so based on facts and other evidence. To make predictions in a story, look for clues that the writer gives you. Try to connect those clues with other information you may have — information from the story you are reading, other stories, or your own life experience.

Writing Concepts: Informational, Reading, and Writing Terms

Proposition or thesis: An important idea or opinion; a statement in which you or another person expresses a judgment or opinion.

Reason: In informational and persuasive materials reasons tell us why you believe a proposition or thesis to be true. A reason is a cause, fact, or other item that explains why something happens, exists, or is true.

Support: When used as a noun it means the facts, statistics, examples, and other items you offer to show that your proposition or thesis is correct. When used as a verb it means to offer the material that shows your proposition or thesis is correct.

Anecdotes: Brief stories, including personal experiences; they are often used to show that something is true.

Definitions: The meanings of words or phrases.

Examples: Specific instances that illustrate, demonstrate, or show reasons or facts.

Fact: A fact can be verified, proved, or shown to be true. It can be proved by direct observation or by checking a reliable source. Facts include the results of scientific research and surveys.

Opinion: A belief or attitude.

Opinions from experts: A belief, attitude, or conclusion about something from someone with special training, knowledge, skills, or experience in the area being discussed, examined, evaluated, or talked about.

Statistics: Facts in number form.

Evaluate: To evaluate is to carefully consider or examine something in order to make a judgment, draw a conclusion, or form an opinion about it.

Evaluation: An evaluation is the act or process of carefully considering, judging, or drawing a conclusion about something.

Narrative: A narrative is a story or a description of events told as a story.

Narration: Narration is the kind of writing that tells a story.

Revise: To revise is to change something because of new information or ideas. Some of the things you can revise are plans, opinions, persuasive essays, and narratives.