

Plot, Setting, and Character

What makes you willing to spend two hours at the movie theater or a week reading a book? Is it the thrill of action-packed events or a connection to the characters? Is it a fascination with the setting, such as a faraway galaxy? Plot, conflict, setting, and characters all play a role in holding your interest in a story.



COMMON CORE

Included in this workshop:
RL 1 Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly. **RL 3** Analyze how different elements of a story interact.

Part 1: What Drives a Story?

The idea for a story might begin with an observation or a thought that interests a writer. To build a story from that idea, a writer creates a plot structure using the elements of fiction listed here.

- **Setting** is the time and place of the action. The time might be the historical era, the season, or the time of day. The place might be a country, a neighborhood, or a room. In many stories, setting influences the plot and affects the characters' feelings.
- **Characters** are the people, animals, or imaginary creatures that take part in a story. The characters' behavior affects what happens.
- **Plot** is the series of events in a story. The plot usually centers on a **conflict**, a struggle between different forces. Conflict fuels the action, moving the plot forward. A conflict can be external or internal.

TYPE OF CONFLICT	EXAMPLE
 <p>External Conflict is a struggle between a character and an outside force. This force might be another character, a group of characters, or nature.</p>	<p>A sea captain attempts to guide his boat to shore in the middle of a deadly storm.</p> <p>▶ (sea captain vs. nature)</p> <p><i>Other Examples</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A boxer faces an opponent. • A girl has a fight with friends.
 <p>Internal Conflict is a struggle within a character's mind. This kind of conflict happens when a character must deal with opposing thoughts or feelings.</p>	<p>A girl strongly disagrees with her friends, but she wants them to like her. Should she speak her mind or stay silent?</p> <p>▶ (girl vs. herself)</p> <p><i>Other Examples</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admit needing help or do it alone? • Take a risk or play it safe?

MODEL 1: SETTING

This author draws you into the story by providing specific details about the setting. How might the setting influence what happens?

from *The Clay Marble*

Novel by Minfong Ho

The last rays of afternoon sun were filtering through the forest as we approached the Border. Gradually the trees thinned out and the path widened. Several trails merged into ours. It seemed as if all the paths out of Cambodia were converging on this one spot on the Thai border.

5 I could barely contain my excitement. I imagined mountains of rice lining the horizon, and piles of tools and fishnets everywhere. Perhaps there would even be mounds of sweet moist coconut cakes and banana fritters. "Hurry," I urged my brother.

10 Yet, as we finally emerged from the forest, all we could see was a vast barren plain dotted with shrubs and scraggly trees, flat and desolate.

Close Read

1. What details about the setting do you find in lines 1–4? One detail has been boxed.
2. Describe what the narrator expects to see when she crosses the border. Then describe what she actually sees. How might the actual setting affect the narrator and the story?

MODEL 2: CONFLICT

Here, a girl watches from the deck of a ship as her brother is left on a deserted island. What do you learn about the conflict in this excerpt?

from *Island of the Blue Dolphins*

Novel by Scott O'Dell

Against my will, I screamed.

Chief Matasaip grasped my arm.

"We cannot wait for Ramo," he said. "If we do, the ship will be driven on the rocks."

5 "We must!" I shouted. "We must!"

"The ship will come back for him on another day," Matasaip said. "He will be safe. There is food for him to eat and water to drink and places to sleep."

"No," I cried.

10 Matasaip's face was like stone. He was not listening.

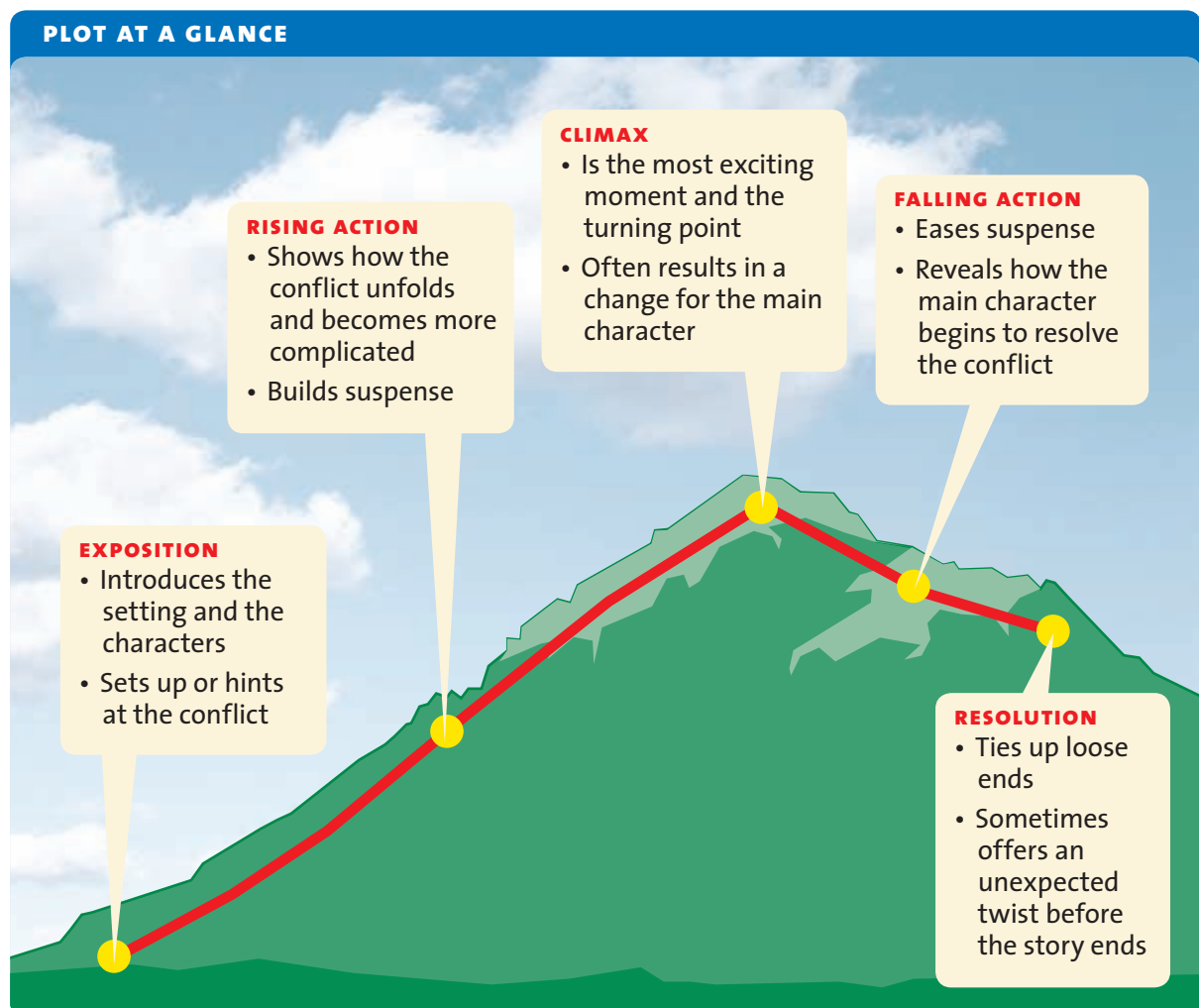
Close Read

1. Describe the conflict the girl experiences.
2. Is the girl's conflict internal or external? Explain how you know.

Part 2: Plot Development

No matter who the characters are, where the action takes place, or what conflicts occur, a story has a plot. Usually, a story begins by introducing a main character who has a conflict. The story then develops around this conflict. Important events move the story forward, often explaining past or present actions, and **foreshadowing**, or hinting at, future actions. As the story moves on, the character must find a solution to the conflict. Once the problem is solved, the story ends. This process is known as **plot development**.

A typical plot has five stages of action. By understanding these stages, you will know what to look for in a story as you follow it closely. For example, at the beginning—or **exposition**—of a story, pay attention to the details that tell you about the characters, the setting, and any potential conflicts.



**MODEL 1: EXPOSITION**

What do you learn about the setting and the conflict in the exposition of this story?

from **Last Cover** Short story by Paul Annixter

I'm not sure I can tell you what you want to know about my brother; but everything about the pet fox is important, so I'll tell all that from the beginning.

- 5 It goes back to a winter afternoon after I'd hunted the woods all day for a sign of our **lost pet**. I remember the way my mother looked up as I came into the kitchen. Without my speaking, she knew what had happened. **For six hours I had walked, reading signs, looking for a delicate print in the damp soil or even a hair that might have told of a red fox passing that way—but I had found nothing.**

Close Read

1. What can you tell about the setting in which the main character lives? Find specific details that describe the setting.
2. Review the **boxed** details. Describe the conflict that the main character faces. What does this conflict suggest the story will be about?

**MODEL 2: RISING ACTION**

At the beginning of this story, lonely Mr. Peters is granted three wishes. He uses his first wish to ask for a wife. In the rising action, what do you learn about the conflict that results from this wish?

from **THE THIRD WISH**

Short story by Joan Aiken

- One evening he was returning home along the river path when he saw Leita in front of him, down by the water. A swan had sailed up to the verge and she had her arms round its neck and the swan's head rested against her cheek. She was weeping, and as he came nearer he saw that tears were rolling, too, from the swan's eyes.

"Leita, what is it?" he asked, very troubled.

"This is my sister," she answered. "I can't bear being separated from her."

- 10 **Now he understood that Leita was really a swan from the forest, and this made him very sad because when a human being marries a bird it always leads to sorrow.**

Close Read

1. Reread the **boxed** text. What conflict is Mr. Peters facing?
2. During the rising action, the plot moves toward the climax. What future decision or action might this situation hint at, or foreshadow?

Part 3: Analyze the Text

In this story, an elegant dinner party turns dangerous when an uninvited “guest” makes an appearance. As you read, use what you’ve just learned about plot, conflict, and setting to analyze the story.



The Dinner Party

Short story by
Mona Gardner

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Please refer to your print textbook.

Close Read **Exposition** (Lines 1–13)



1. What do you learn about the setting in the exposition?
2. Explain what the young girl and the colonel are arguing about in lines 5–13. What might this topic foreshadow?

Close Read **Rising Action** (Lines 14–36)



3. Find two details in lines 14–19 that might foreshadow future events in the story. One detail has been **boxed**.

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4. Reread lines 22–24.
What is the main conflict? Explain whether it is internal or external.

Close Read

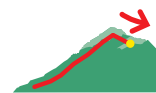
Climax (Lines 37–40)



5. What happens at the climax, or the most exciting moment?

Close Read

Falling Action and Resolution (Lines 41–47)



6. At what point in the falling action does the tension begin to ease? Explain.
7. What surprise is revealed in the resolution? How does this explain Mrs. Wynnes's earlier reaction?