Plot

Feature Menu

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What Is Plot?

Plot is the series of related events that make up a story or drama.

- Like links in a chain, each event hooks our curiosity and pulls us forward to the next event.

- The ability to identify the elements of a story aids in comprehension, leads to a deeper understanding and appreciation of stories, and helps students learn to write stories of their own.

- Discerning the way reading material is organized is important to comprehension
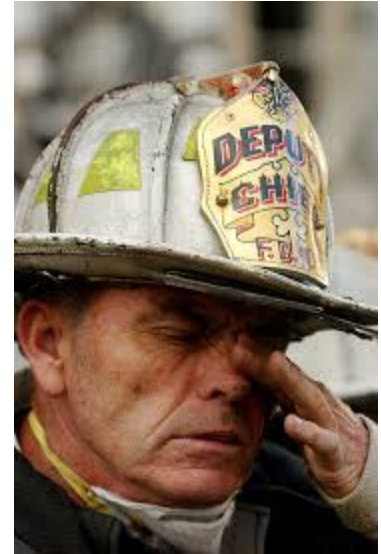
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Conflict

Conflict is the struggle or clash between opposing characters or forces. Conflicts may be

external:
firefighter vs. fire

or

internal:
firefighter vs. his or her fear

Conflict

An **external conflict** may be a struggle between

- Man vs man

- Man vs a group
- Man vs something nonhuman

- Man vs Society

- Man vs Nature

- Man vs unnatural

- Man vs any physical force

Conflict

An **internal conflict** is a struggle that takes place within a character's mind or heart.

- Characters struggle with themselves to make decisions.

- This internal conflict is also known as Man vs Self.

Conflict

Quick Check

Rainsford knew he could do one of two things. He could stay where he was and wait. That was suicide. He could flee. That was postponing the inevitable. For a moment he stood there, thinking. An idea that held a wild chance came to him, and, tightening his belt, he headed away from the swamp.

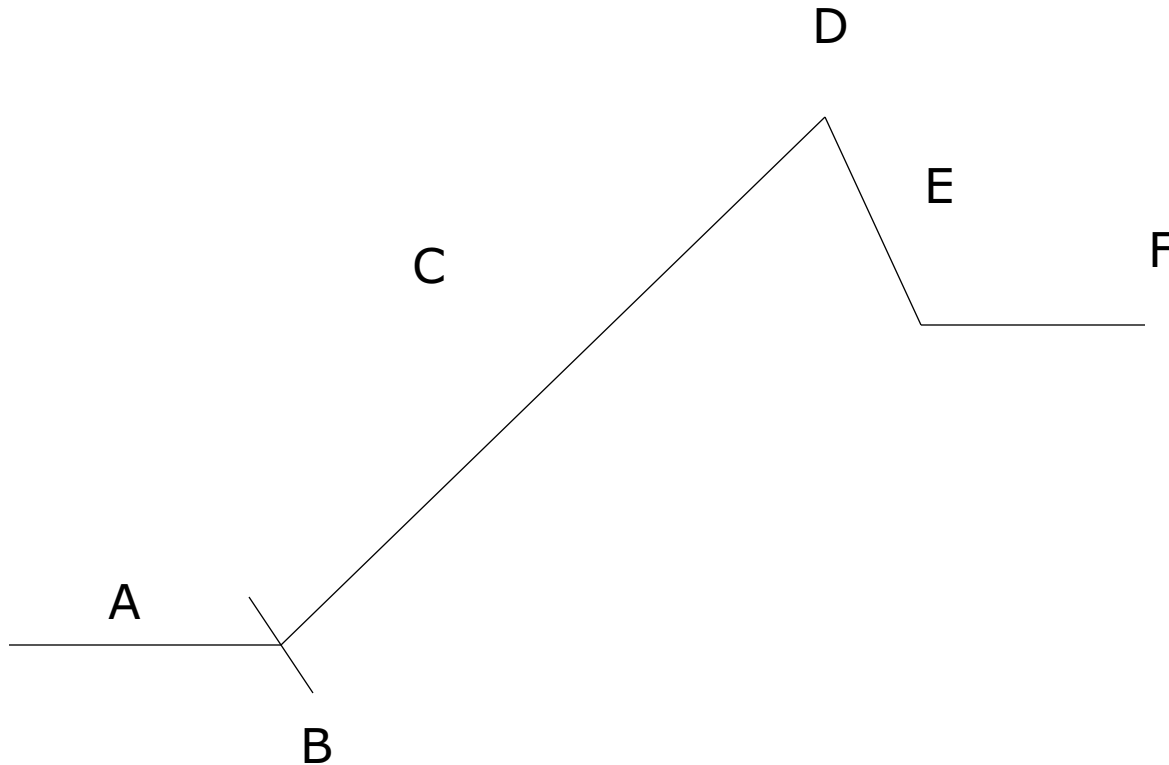from "The Most Dangerous Game" by Richard Connell

Is this an external or internal conflict?

Answer

Plot Structure

Plots are usually built in Five or Six major parts.
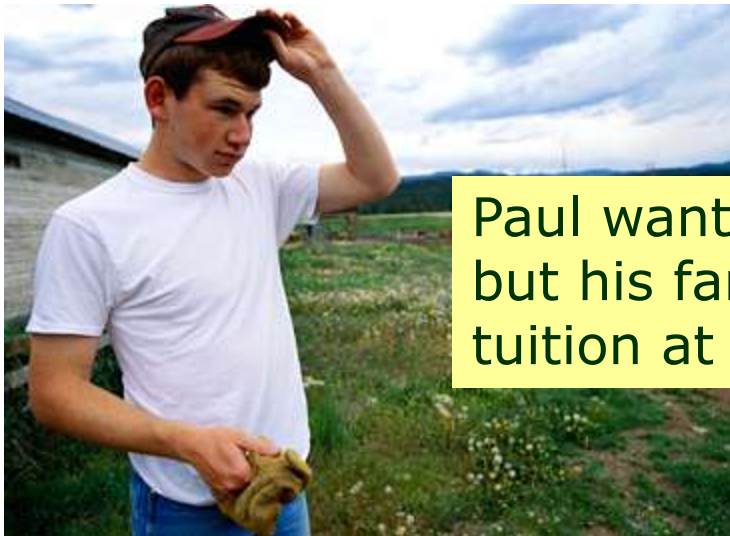
D

E

C

F

A

B

Plot Structure

1 Exposition

- Opening of the story
- Characters are introduced

- Descriptive elements that surface early in a story establish a mood that can foreshadow the events of the story. A reader might leave the exposition phase of the tale — expecting suspense or lightheartedness or dire peril.

- Setting is revealed

Paul wants to go to an out-of-state university, but his family can only afford to pay the tuition at a local college.

Critical Incident/ Inciting Incident

- The Inciting Incident is the event or decision that begins a story's problem.
- Suddenly there is a problem to be solved.
- Jolts your hero out of his everyday routine
- It is the event which sparks the fuse of your plot
- It's something that MUST happen in order for your hook–your movie's special premise–to kick in

Plot Structure

2 Complications/ Rising Actions

•The main character takes action but encounters more problems or complications.

•Multiple conflicts are addressed

•A central/main conflict will emerge

Paul goes to work on a nearby farm to earn extra money. There, he meets Miranda, and the two start dating.

Plot Structure

3 Climax

- key scene in the story—the most tense, exciting, or terrifying moment

- reveals the outcome of the main conflict

- Not just the turning point

Paul and Miranda argue about his leaving for university. Paul must choose to stay or go.

Falling Action

- Falling action may or may not occur
- In many short stories, there is little to no falling action.
- If it does occur, it will be brief and could wrap up any other minor conflicts or unknowns.

Plot Structure

4 **Resolution**

•final part of the story

Paul decides to leave for university. Miranda makes plans to visit him and wishes him well.

Timing and Pacing

The plot of a story is framed by a time span that suits the writer's purpose.

minutes

hours

days

years

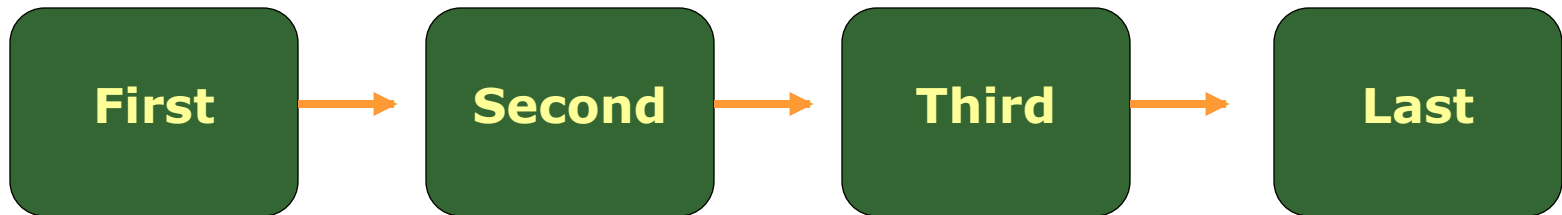weeks

Timing and Pacing

Most stories are told in **chronological order,** the order in which events unfold in real time.

| First | → | Second | → | Third | → | Last |

Timing and Pacing

Sometimes, writers might manipulate time to control our emotions. They might ⌄

•slow down time to emphasize a moment of danger ⌄

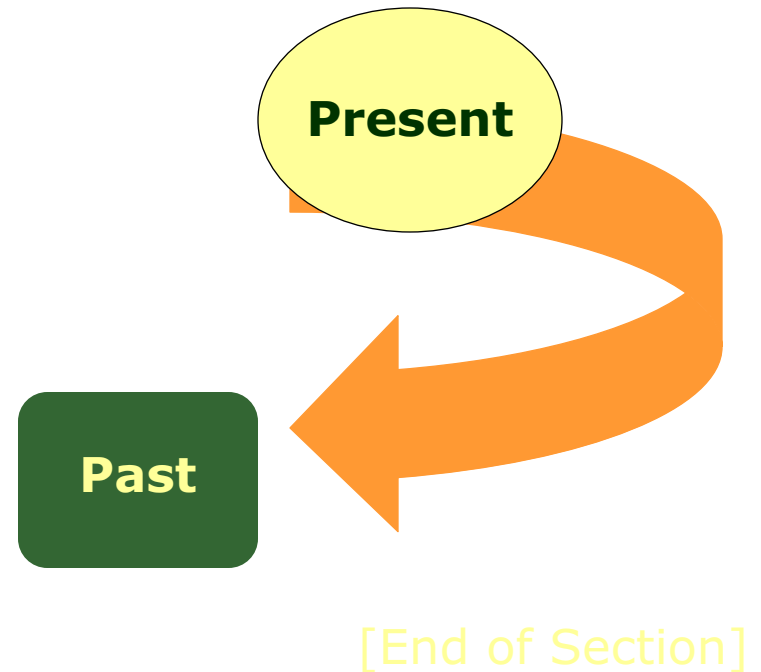•speed up time to skip over events that don't move the story along

[End of Section]

Flashback

Flashback—a scene that interrupts the present action of the plot to flash backward and tell what happened at an earlier time. Flashbacks can
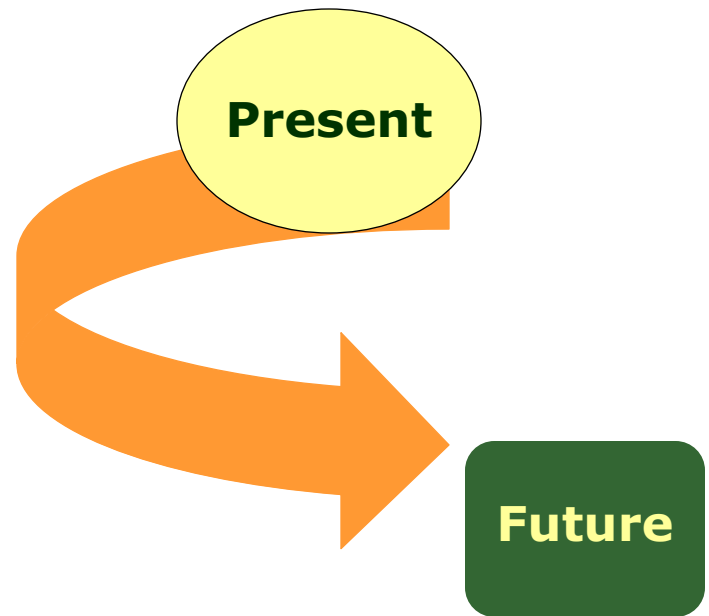
- provide background information

- strengthen our understanding of a character

Present

Past

Flash-Forward

Flash-Forward—a scene that interrupts the present action of the plot to shift into the future.

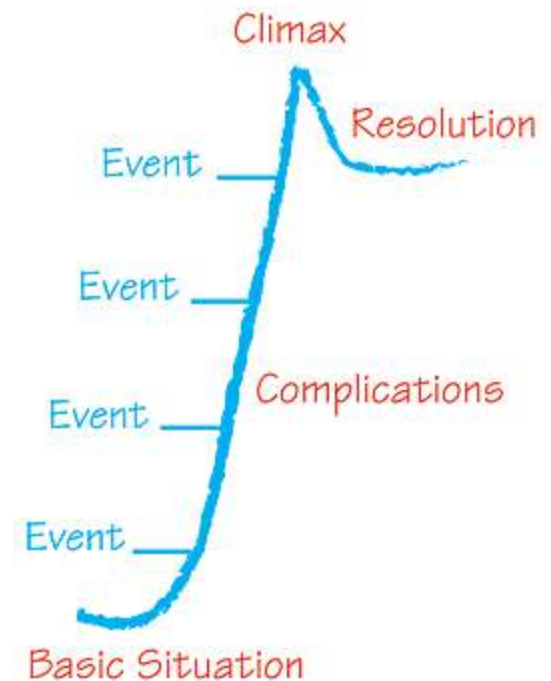- Flash-forwards can create dramatic irony. The readers know what will happen in the future, but the characters don't.

Present

Future

Foreshadowing

Foreshadowing is the use of clues to hint at events that will occur later in the plot. ▾

 •Foreshadowing can make a story more exciting by increasing suspense.

[End of Section]

Practice

PRACTICE Choose a children's story or fairy tale that is familiar to you.

• Draw a **plot diagram** like the one shown here.

• Add labels describing the key parts of the story's plot.

• Use your imagination to write a **flashback** that could occur in one part of the story.

Climax

Resolution

Event

Event

Event

Complications

Event

Basic Situation

[End of Section]

Credits

Feature Menu

Exit