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Plot

3.A.3.b, e-g, j 3.A.8.a

Plot is everything that *happens* in a story. Short stories, novels, plays, and even some poems have plots. Without a plot, there wouldn't be a story to tell.

At the heart of a plot is a **conflict**, or problem, that someone—usually the main character—must face. The conflict can be with other characters, with a situation, or with a natural force. It can even be *inside* the character. For example, Max's curiosity may conflict with his fear, causing him to open the locked door in the haunted house. Readers keep reading to find out how the problem is solved.

Look A plot has a beginning, middle, and end. Look in the beginning (**exposition**) for introductions to the setting, characters, and conflict. Look in the middle to see how the conflict builds. Look for a high point—the **climax**—when the tension is at its highest and the problem *must* be solved.

Example

In "The *Hip-Hip-Hooray*," Eileen faces the challenge of flying her aunt's plane for the first time. This conflict reaches its climax when—

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| <p>(A) as another plane approaches, Eileen must bank right.</p> <p>(B) Eileen notices the fuel tank gauge showing almost empty.</p> | <p>(C) Eileen is losing control and shouting, "We're running out of fuel!"</p> <p>(D) Aunt Benicia takes over the <i>Hip-Hip-Hooray's</i> controls.</p> |
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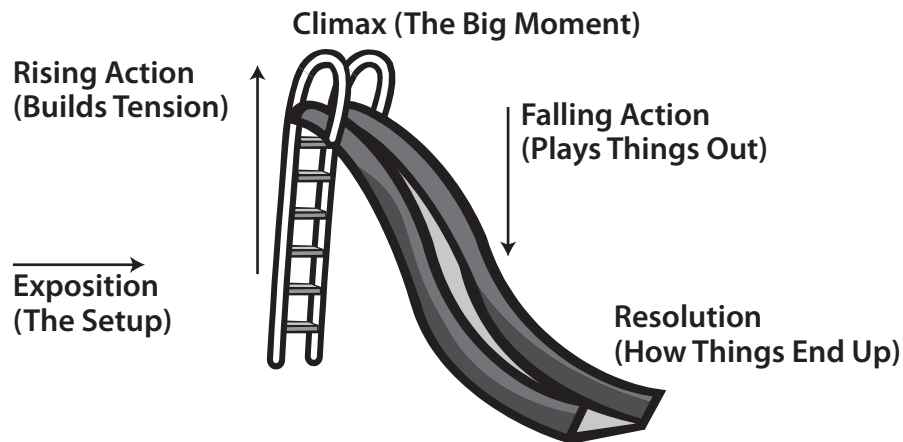
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- (A) The other plane approaching builds tension, but there are even bigger problems to face.
- (B) The tension increases when Eileen notices the fuel gauge, but the action is still rising.

- (C) Eileen is sure the plane is going to crash. The tension can't possibly get any higher. This is the plot's climax.
- (D) Instead of building tension, this action lowers it, because it helps solve the problem.

After the beginning and the middle comes the end, or **resolution** of the plot. The tension that has been building is relaxed. The problem is solved and loose ends get wrapped up. This does not mean that the problem is solved happily: the hero losing is still a resolution. By showing how things work out, the resolution lets the story *finish* instead of just *stopping*.

Imagine that Kyle is a nervous preschooler trying to go down the big slide for the first time. The diagram below shows how his story works like that slide.



Example

Explain how the conflict in “The Hip-Hip-Hooray” is resolved. Use details from the story to support your answer.

Colleen’s Answer

The conflict in “The Hip-Hip-Hooray” is resolved by Aunt Benicia taking back the controls. Readers think that the plane is going to crash because Eileen thinks the plane is going to crash. Now they know that the plane isn’t going to crash.

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Colleen identifies the moment *when* Eileen’s problem is solved. However, she still needs to explain *how* it is solved. She could say that “Benicia reminds her not to panic, and shows her the switch for the second fuel tank. They have plenty of fuel left, after all.”



Improving Colleen’s Answer

Saying “the plane is going to crash” three times is not an effective use of repetition: it doesn’t emphasize an important point. The question asks Colleen to explain the solution, not the problem.



Connections How often have you said to yourself, “Gee, this would make a great story”? Think of something that happened to you or someone you know that has the elements of a plot. Then write down what the *beginning*, *middle*, and *end* would be.