

17 Plot and Conflict

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Plot is everything that happens in a story. At the heart of the plot are **conflicts**, or problems, that make the story more interesting. The chart below shows some common conflicts.

Internal Conflict	Example
person vs. self	<i>Tim debates whether or not to admit lying to his father.</i>
External Conflicts	Example
person vs. individual	<i>Ana competes against Lois in a big race.</i>
person vs. society	<i>The whole village expects Mateo to farm instead of painting.</i>
person vs. nature	<i>Ronnie fights to keep the sailboat afloat during the storm.</i>
person vs. supernatural	<i>Hercules struggles against the plots of the goddess Hera.</i>
person vs. technology	<i>Dave's computer comes alive and starts controlling his life.</i>

Look The **initiating event** is the event that starts the conflict. It may happen near the beginning of the story. However, it may have happened *before* the story begins. In that case, the author may explain it later, or simply leave the reader to infer what happened.

Example

The main conflict that drives the action in "The Cabin" is—

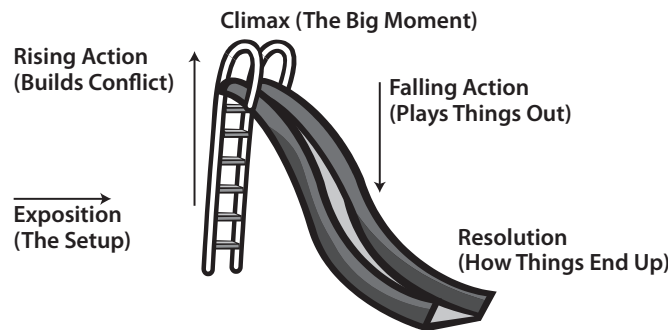
- (A) Brenda's conflicted feelings about the cabin.
- (B) Brenda's conflict with her family.
- (C) Jonathan's conflict with Robbie.
- (D) Brenda's conflict with nature.

D I S C U S S	(A) Brenda's feelings about the cabin have changed since she was younger. But is she struggling with herself about them?	(C) Neither Jonathan nor Robbie is the main character. Their problems are unlikely to be the story's <i>main</i> conflict.
	(B) The trouble Brenda has getting along with her family, specifically her stepfather and mother, is at the very heart of this story's plot.	(D) Brenda does not enjoy the woods and lake the way she once did. However, she is not struggling against them.

A plot has a beginning, middle, and end. Look in the beginning (**exposition**) for introductions to the setting, characters, and conflict. In the middle is the **rising action**, or increasing conflict, that builds tension. The highest point of tension is the **climax**.

Following the climax, the problem moves toward a solution. In this **falling action**, the tension lowers and loose ends get wrapped up. The **resolution** to the conflict helps the story really *finish* instead of simply *stopping*.

The diagram below shows how a plot works like a playground slide.



Example

In “The Cabin,” the main conflict reaches its climax when—

- (A) Brenda tells Jonathan she hates being called Bren.
- (B) Brenda finds out that her mom has left the cabin.
- (C) Robbie and Jonathan go out to do things without Brenda.
- (D) Robbie gets upset and is about to have a meltdown.

D I S C U S	(A) This dialogue builds tension, but Brenda’s problem gets a lot worse.	(C) This doesn’t build much tension. If anything, Brenda is happy to be left alone.
	(B) This is a very important point in the plot, and it makes Brenda’s situation much worse. But the problem isn’t about to be solved.	(D) When Robbie starts demanding his mom, the tension is at its highest. The problem simply has to get solved now.



Connections Have you ever said to yourself, “Gee, this would make a great story”? Think of something you’ve experienced that has the elements of a plot. Then write down what the *beginning*, *middle*, and *end* of your story would be.
