

Plot Elements

Use the text to answer each question below.

1. The very beginning of a story is called the **introduction**. It's where we learn about the characters, setting and any important background information. Often called the **exposition**, this is the part of the story where we are introduced to the main **conflict**, or main problem.

According to the passage, the **exposition** is the part of the story where

- A. readers are asked to give their opinion. B. readers are invited to tell their own stories.
C. readers learn about the main conflict. D. readers are encouraged to dislike the main characters.
2. Every story has some kind of **conflict**—without it, you have no plot! The conflict is a struggle or problem that characters must face. The conflict usually takes place during all three phases—rising action, climax and falling action.

Read the following passage from a story.

Shivani pulled the last of the weeds from the garden bed and stood, putting her hand to her back. She was not done weeding, but she could see, at the very far edge of the sky, the fist of an angry storm cloud forming. She had a few more rows to work, but she wasn't sure if she would get to them before the rain began. Last week, there'd been a rainstorm, but it had been quiet and gentle, a welcome shower that encouraged the tomato plants and the eggplant blossoms to open. Maybe, her plants wouldn't survive.

Which statement best describes the **conflict** of this passage?

- A. A gardener is working in her garden. B. Spring rain makes crops grow.
C. A storm cloud is forming in the sky. D. A coming storm could destroy a gardener's vegetables.

3. There are four main types of **conflict**. Many stories will have more than one type of conflict.

1. Character vs. character: It's the most common type of conflict in a story. This is any kind of struggle between two or more people.
2. Character vs. nature: This is when a character must overcome some natural obstacle or condition.
3. Character vs. society: A struggle against society occurs when a character is at odds with a particular social force or condition produced by society, such as poverty, political revolution, a social convention or set of values.
4. Characters vs. themselves: Within a character, parts of his or her personality may struggle for dominance. This conflict is usually about making a choice.

In the story "Gregory and the Bees," a man must fight off a swarm of bees that lives in his attic. Which type of conflict is this?

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| A. character vs. character | B. character vs. nature |
| C. character vs. society | D. character vs. self |

4. Rising action is the middle of the story, when the main character faces problems and may attempt to find solutions. During this phase of the story, there's a building of interest or suspense, and the reader wonders, "What's going to happen next?"

Read the following story.

"Are you listening, Victor?"

Victor snapped to attention.

"I have no idea what Nora just said," he thought to himself. He nodded and smiled.

"Good," Nora pulled on her jacket. "I'm leaving you in charge for the day."

Victor looked around the empty kitchen, imagining all he could do with this new space. "Nora's a good boss, but she's too controlling," Victor thought. He looked at the list of tasks she'd left for him. "Easy," Victor announced. He gathered up the flour, eggs and dried fruit that Nora usually added to the cookie recipe. As he worked, he was struck with inspiration. "We could do something different here, for sure," he said out loud to the saucepans soaking in the sink. He went back to the pantry and grabbed as many spices as he could.

He sat the spices on the counter and reached for the radio that hung over the sink. A song blared from the speakers, and Victor tried to mix his batter to the beat. Just as he was dancing an especially complex set of steps, Victor knocked a whole box of salt into the large metal bowl full of cookie dough.

"Oh, man!" he wailed.

He stood for a few minutes, watching the salt crystals sink into the dough. Thinking quickly, Victor grabbed a yeast packet, tore it with his teeth, and tossed its contents into the bowl. He threw aside his mixing spoon and stuck his hands into the cold, sticky dough. "Guess I'm making bread now," he announced to the kitchen, laughing.

Which of the following details from the story belongs to the **rising action**?

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| A. "Victor looked around the empty kitchen, imagining all he could do with this new space." | B. "'Nora's a good boss, but she's too controlling,' Victor thought." |
| C. "'Good,' Nora pulled on her jacket. 'I'm leaving you in charge for the day.'" | D. "Guess I'm making bread now," he announced to the kitchen, laughing. |

5. The **climax** is the story's turning point. During the climax, the main character often faces a final challenge or conflict. It might lead the character or their situation to change in some way.

Read the following story.

Jamilah stood at the entrance to the auditorium. She could hear the sound of the crowd chanting her name, and for just a moment, she closed her eyes. She had been training for this moment for months.

The chanting grew louder. All around her, cameras flashed and the harsh, overhead fluorescent lights of the gym glared, but Jamilah only focused on the blue expanse of mat spread out before her. She walked up to the edge, readied her starting pose and waited for the music to begin. The auditorium quieted and there was one long moment where she could only hear her own breath. Then the music began. She stood on her toes, leaped through the air, somersaulted across the mat. She flipped once, twice, cartwheeled. She moved across the floor and couldn't stop herself from smiling as she realized she was hitting every part of her routine.

She took a few deep breaths before she remembered she could leave the floor. She walked to the sidelines, excited, waiting for the judges scores to come in. She watched eagerly as the numbers posted, 9.1, 9.2, 9.1, 9.3. The best she'd ever done. She couldn't believe the scores in front of her. She sighed happily.

Which of the following statements best describes the **climax** of this story?

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| A. Jamilah competes in a gymnastics competition that she's been training for. | B. Jamilah practices and trains for a gymnastics competition for months. |
| C. Jamilah is happy with her final scores for her gymnastics routine. | D. Jamilah walks to the sidelines after her gymnastics routine. |

6. Falling action occurs towards the end of the story, when the tension decreases. Often during the falling action phase, conflicts may be resolved and everything in the story begins to settle down.

Read the following story.

"It is the east and Juliet is the sun," Lev proclaimed. He despised the part of Romeo; he would rather play Romeo's best friend, Mercutio, but Lev wasn't very good at handling a sword.

Lev shifted on the stage and waited for Gretchen, the actress playing Juliet, to say her lines. He heard someone cough in the audience. He waited a bit longer. It was becoming clear that Gretchen was not going to appear on stage at all. Lev looked out into the audience, a little desperate, trying hard not to show his panic: all he could see was the dark of the auditorium.

Finally, he turned to the audience and smiled. "Juliet must be running late," he said, and to his surprise, the audience laughed. Lev cautiously smiled wider. "Oh, Jullieeet," he called in a sing-song voice, playfully stretching the vowels. The audience laughed louder.

Behind him, he heard a commotion and then the stage window banged open. There was Gretchen in her Juliet costume, looking flustered. "My Juliet!" Lev called. "She appears to have finally woken up from that nap!" He was almost disappointed to see Gretchen. He had been having so much fun improvising.

Gretchen gave him an icy look. She bowed stiffly from the window and Lev bowed in turn. Then he took a deep breath and readied to say his next line.

Which of the following statements best describes the **falling action** of this story?

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| A. Lev becomes nervous when he realizes his fellow actor Gretchen is not on stage. | B. Lev begins making up lines, and the audience laughs. |
| C. Gretchen and Lev continue the play. | D. Gretchen suddenly appears in her Juliet costume. |

7. The **conclusion** is how the story ends. The conflict has been resolved or ended, and loose ends of the story are wrapped up. The conclusion is also called "denouement" or "resolution."

Read the following story.

"Peaches," Javi called out. "Hey, Peaches, where are you, girl?" He hadn't seen the dog all day. Usually, Peaches spent part of the afternoon napping in the shadiest part of Javi's backyard.

Javi hadn't wanted a poodle when he first went to the shelter. But Peaches the Poodle was the first dog he saw, and he immediately loved her and wanted to bring her home.

Peaches liked to disappear for hours at a time, seemingly to keep Javi on his toes. He called her name again, "Peaches!" and waited, trying to hear the jingle of her collar. But there was nothing.

Javi was beginning to worry. He called again, "Peaches!" and then he heard it behind him. There was the tinkle of the dog collar, and then, there was Peaches, bounding towards him. She'd been hiding this whole time under the porch.

Javi fished a tennis ball from his pocket and threw it in the air. Peaches rushed to catch it, the picture of obedience. "You aren't fooling me," Javi joked. But he picked up the ball and tossed it again, much to Peaches's delight.

Which of the following statements best describes the **conclusion** of this story?

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| A. Javi finds a poodle named Peaches at his local animal shelter. | B. Peaches enjoys napping in Javi's backyard in the afternoons. |
| C. Javi loses Peaches one afternoon. | D. Peaches and Javi play catch after she returns to him. |