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You want readers to love your story, to pick up your book and be so immersed they won't be able to put it down. To do that, though, you need to have a great plot. But what is plot, and how do you craft one into a great story? In this guide, we're going to talk about plot in literature. I'll share a broad definition of plot, then dive into the approach we use
at The Write Practice (called The Write Structure). Finally, you'll learn the six elements of plot that make stories entertaining and memorable. We'll touch on story arcs, the different shapes a plot of a story can take. We'll also look at several plot diagrams to better
understand how plot works visually. Finally, you'll learn exactly how you can use your new understanding of plot in your own stories. You can learn more about it
here. What Is Plot? Plot Definition Plot is a sequence of events in a story in which the main character is put into a challenging situation. What are the 6 Elements of Plot and Structure We will define each below, but here are the six elements
of plot: These elements are the major events in a story, and they're essential in all creative writing, whether you're writing a novel, screenplay, memoir, short story, or other form. Even skilled writers who do not use these intentionally are incorporating them into their writing subconsciously because they are what brings movement, conflict, action,
and life to compelling plots. You can learn more about each below or in my new book, The Write Structure. Story vs. Plot There's a difference between in his book, Aspects of the Novel. A story is just an event, almost a recitation of facts. The mouse ate a cookie isn't a plot—it's
just a story (albeit a cute story). A plot requires cause and effect. The mouse ate a cookie and then asked for a glass of milk is a plot because it's causal. I'll let Forster explain it better: "Let us define plot. We have defined a story as a narrative of events arranged in their time-sequence. A plot is also a narrative of events, the emphasis falling on
causality. 'The king died and then the queen died,' is a story. 'The king died, and then the queen died, no one knew why, until it was discovered that it was through grief at the death of the king.' This is a plot with a mystery in it..." -
E. M. Forster To trim that down: The king died and then the queen died is a story. The king died and then the queen died of grief is a plot because it's causal and connected. Hemingway's famous six-word story is an amazing example of plot: "For sale: baby shoes, never worn." Why are they for sale? Because the baby never wore them (and oh, it's so
sad). These aren't disconnected facts; this is actually a miniature plot. More on that in a moment. How Plot Works Plot has a specific structure. It follows a format that sucks readers in; introduces character development, and world building; and compels readers to keep reading in order to satisfy conflict and answer questions. Plot is about
cause and effect, but, most importantly, plot is about choice: a character's choice. In other words, the difference between plot and story is that a plot is not just the recitation of facts; the facts you include in your plot each have a purpose, putting a character into a situation where they must make a decision and pulling the story toward its conclusion.
The 6 Elements of Plot So how do you build a plot with this cause-and-effect thing? Fortunately, the answer is simple: you break plot down into its components of plot are like puzzle pieces. If you want your reader to see the shape of each component and fit them into their proper place. Does anyone
else feel like this puzzle piece is closing a hole in the universe or something? Just me? Too much Dr. Who, I guess. In The Write Structure, we talk about the six essential elements of plot: 1. Exposition. At the beginning of the story, the exposition establishes characters and setting. Not all your world-building happens here, but this is where you show
your readers what "normal" is for your characters. That way, readers will know what's wrong when we hit the next step. Learn more in our full exposition guide here. 2. Inciting Incident is an event in a story that throws the main character into a challenging situation, upsetting the status quo and beginning the story's movement,
either in a positive or negative way. This movement culminates in the climax and denouement. Learn more in our full inciting incident guide here. 3. Rising action, or Progressive Complications. This is the largest part of the story, and where most of the conflict takes place. You know that quote about getting your characters up a tree, then throwing
rocks at them? This is rock-throwing time. Here's where you raise the stakes and begin building up to the story's climax. It's crucial that your readers know what's at stake here; it's also critical that they clearly understand the conflict. Learn more our full rising action guide here. 4. Dilemma (or crisis, according to Story Grid). This is the most
important element, what you've been building toward, the moment when a character is put into a situation where they must make an impossible choice. Learn more in our full dilemma guide here. 5. Climax. This is the worst (i.e. best)
moment of tension in the whole story, setting your readers on edge. Learn more in our full climax guide here. 6. Denouement or Resolution. Now, at the end of the story, you're establishing "normal" all over again—but the new normal, incorporating the changes and experiences of your characters. Your readers can sit with your characters a little in
their new normal, emotionally wrapping everything up so your reader can put the book away without flipping back through the pages to see what they missed. It's a scene-closure with enough finality to deserve those two words: The End. Learn more in our full denouement guide here. Historical Note: One of the earliest writers to talk about this
structure was Gustav Freytag, the German author who wrote in the middle of the 19th century. His basic structure became known as Freytag's Pyramid, and he was the first to talk about many of the five elements of plot we discuss above. While we salute Freytag for bringing language to these plot points, we believe Freytag's Pyramid is an outdated
and misunderstood plot framework. You can read more about Freytag's Pyramid and whether you should use it in our guide on the five act structure here. How to Create a Plot Outline: Start With the 6 Key Elements The cool thing about those six elements is that they can make up your first six plot points when you're creating an outline. In fact,
putting together a plot outline doesn't have to be complicated, all you need are six sentences, one for each element, and you'll have a strong outline to begin your story with. Give it a try in the Practice section below! What about the Falling Action? In The Write Structure, the plot framework we've developed at The Write Practice, we don't use the plot
point falling action, which you might see in other frameworks. Why do we exclude it? Falling action is usually described as the events that wind down the plot after the climax, but in most stories, the climax happens near the end of a story, usually in the third to last scene. Thus, the falling action and denouement are virtually indistinguishable. To
avoid confusion, we believe the falling action should be phased out from use as an element of plot. You can learn more about why we don't consider falling action a plot element here. Do Short Stories Have These Elements? Yes! In fact, every scene and every act in a story should have each of these elements as well. In a short story, however, these
elements will be necessarily abbreviated. For example, where rising action might have many complication in a short story. What Is a Plot Type: Stories Come In 10 Types Stories have been told for thousands of years, and as they have evolved, they have started to fall into patterns, patterns we call plot
types or story types. These types of plot tend to be about the same underlying, universal values and share similar structures, characters, and what Robert McKee calls obligatory scenes. There are 10 major plot types: Adventure Action Horror Thriller Mystery Love/Romance Performance/Sports Coming of Age Temptation/Morality Combo While plot
types are related to genre, they also transcend genre and have been consistent throughout history, dealing with the timeless, universal values behind stories. We fully explore these values, each of these ten types of plot, in our complete Plot Types guide here. What Is a Plot Diagram: Story Arcs Can Have Many Shapes While all plots have a set
structure, they can have many shapes or arcs. These arcs can be visualized in a plot diagram is a visual representation of a story on an axis. Here are five of the most common story arcs, visualized in plot diagrams. For more on each of these, check out our complete story arcs guide here. Rags
to Riches Plot Diagram Rags to riches is one of the most basic plot diagrams. A character starts in a bad place at the start and things get better and better. Here's how the plot points work in rags to riches: The exposition sets up the protagonist's generally negative situation in life. The inciting incident presents an exciting opportunity to improve their
life, in some way. During the rising action, things are getting better, but also more complicated, with new problems, and (likely) villains, constantly appearing, threatening all their gains or risk losing them. The climax plays out the choice the
protagonist makes, and how they ultimately triumph. The denouement resolves the plot with a happy ending. This is a relatively simple plot diagram. Now, let's look at a few more complicated shapes. Man In a Hole Plot Diagram In a "man in a hole" story arc, a common arc, the main character starts out in a good place, gets into trouble, and then gets
themself out of it, to finish the story with a happy ending. Here's how the plot points work for a man in a hole arc: The exposition sets up the character into a hole, a problem that worsens throughout the rising action. The rising action contains all of the plot between the
descent into the hole to the character getting themself out of it. The turning point of the story comes at some point in the middle of the rising action (sometimes called the midpoint) when the main character faces a final dilemma, one that threatens to push them back into the hole. In
the climax, they finally climb all the way out of the hole. In the denouement, we see the resolution of their situation and how they're once again enjoying their lives. Related to the man in a hole" arc is the "double man in a hole" arc, one of the
most popular shapes for stories, appearing in many bestselling novels and blockbuster films. Like man in a hole, it begins with a character who is in a great place, but soon gets into trouble, and the story ends with a happy ending. Here's
how the plot elements work in this arc: The exposition, as always, introduces us to the protagonist, their world, and the elements that will soon interrupt their general well-being. Like the man in the hole story arc, the inciting incident in a double man in a hole arc pushes the main character into a hole, a problem or situation. The rising action of this
story arc contains a lot of movement, as the problem worsens before reaching a turning point (sometimes called a pinch point) when things begin to improve before reaching the midpoint. However, soon after, the main character descends into another hole, perhaps caused by the same problem or a new one. The dilemma occurs at some point in this
second hole, likely at or near the bottom. This is followed by the climax, in which the protagonist's choice plays out. The denouement resolves the story with a happy ending. Cinderella arc. Here's how it works with the six elements: In
the exposition, the main character is in a very bad place. The inciting incident is actually a positive event, often a meet cute or a potential opportunity. From there, the character slowly improves their station through the rising action, until a turning point flips them back to their original low and perhaps beyond. The dilemma often occurs in a "dark"
night of the soul" place or immediately after. This is followed by a climax in which the character's fortunes dramatically rise. The plot elements usually are usually arranged like this: The protagonist begins low in the exposition. Their
fortunes begin to improve after an inciting incident. Things continue to improve in the rising action, culminating in a midpoint turning point, when things begin to go terribly wrong. The protagonist struggles to hold on to their good fortune. The unravelling increases right up to the dilemma, which ultimately seals their fate. The final, inevitable tragic
climax confirms the tragedy. The denouement "resolves" the plot with the characters, and audience, reflecting on the result. This last plot diagram might look the most recognizable, since it's built on a misunderstanding of how plots move. All stories do not follow this
exact shape, and by forcing stories into this shape, we only cause confusion. The one requirement is that a story must move, there must be some kind of change, but the shape that story arcs, check out our full story arc guide here.
Can Your Story Have More than One Plot? Main Plots, Subplots, and Internal Plots Most great stories, if you dissect them, are made up of not one but two or three plots. You have: The Main Plots, which contains most of the story and adds another dimension (love stories
make up roughly ninety percent of subplots) The Internal Plot, which shows the development of the main character as they grow in maturity or selflessness If you want to learn more about how to use subplots, I recommend checking out our full subplot guide here. The Components of Plot: Examples Let's look at a few examples of plot elements at
work in two well known stories. Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone by J. K. Rowling Also known as Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone to those familiar with the U.K. version. Exposition: We're introduced to the Dursleys and to Harry, our protagonist and main character. Inciting Incident: Harry is sent a letter that, we learn later, accepts him
into Hogwarts, an academy of magic, sending the Dursleys, who deny the existence of magic, into a fit, and causing Mr. Dursley to confiscate the letters. Rising action/progressive complications: We meet Hagrid who puts an end to the Dursley to confiscate the letters. Rising action/progressive complications: We meet Hagrid who puts an end to the Dursley to confiscate the letters.
there's a troll loose in the dungeons. Our heroes realize that all the strange things happening in Hogwarts have to do with Voldemort. Dilemma: Do Harry and his friends go into the dungeon to save the sorcerer's stone and risk possible death and almost certain expulsion, or do they turn back and allow Voldemort to capture the stone and return to
full strength. Climax: Holy crap, (SPOILER, if you somehow haven't read this book) it's Quirrel! All the conflict and questions have led to this amazing moment, in which Harry has to make a choice: to side with evil and possibly
get his parents back, or choose to continue to suffer that grief and fight the evil bad guy. Resolution: Harry wakes up in the hospital wing. The major issue of the story was addressed in the climax, but now, Dumbledore wraps up the few loose ends, tells Harry what happened, and shares some of the consequences of Harry's decisions. ("What
happened down in the dungeons between you and Professor Quirrell is a complete secret, so, naturally the whole school knows" is one of my favorite lines in any book ever.) Oh, and the Gryffindors Win Everything. Then, he's heading back home, looking forward to next year, and while there are still questions and challenges ahead of him, enough has
been resolved that the reader can put the book down with a contented sigh. (Or in my case, turn right back to page one and start again. Ahem.) Harry's new normal has been established. To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee Exposition: We're introduced to the town of Maycomb, to the Finch family (Atticus, Scout, and Jem), and to the setup of racism
in the deep south of 1930s Great Depression America. Inciting Incident: Atticus, a lawyer, agrees to defend Tom, a black man, on charges of raping a white woman—placing him in direct conflict with pretty much everybody in the town, especially Bob Ewell, the father of the white woman accusing Tom. Rising action/progressive complications: The
investigation and then the trial ensues. A mob attempts to lynch Tom, until Scout diffuses the situation. Then, the courtroom scene. Ouch. Racism wins out over justice, and it looks like Tom is going to be executed. Dilemma: Scout must decide whether to give up hope in humanity and the possibility of true justice, and it looks like Tom is going to be executed. Dilemma:
mistrustful, or continue hoping that people can be good (like Atticus) and risk being naive and disappointed. Climax: Bob Ewell, humiliated by the trial, vows revenge, confronting Jem and Scout at night on their way home alone. In the struggle, Ewell breaks Jem's arm. However, Boo Radley, their hermit neighbor, rescues them, finally giving Scout the
chance to see him. Resolution: At the end of the story, Scout reaches a complicated and painful but honest conclusion: everyone is a person with good and bad to them, and injustice is unfortunately a deeply ingrained part of the system. Scout has grown in maturity, even at the cost of her innocence. (By the way, K.M. Weiland has an incredible
database of stories in which she breaks down the plots of movies and books alike. Check it out and enjoy.) Though the types of stories all have these six components of plot. Plot Questions to Ask Yourself So how do you achieve an amazing plot structure?
There are a few simple questions to ask yourself about every scene that can help you whittle away problems and connect what needs connecting. For Exposition: What is "normal" at the beginning of this book? Remember, your character needs to grow and the loss of this normal is part of the price paid. For Inciting Incident: What kind of
story are you telling? Each story type has a unique type of inciting incident, and it's good to be familiar with them. Check our inciting incident guide for all the types. For Rising Action: What's at stake? What's the cost if your protagonist blows it? If you can't answer this, your reader won't be able to, either. It needs to be built up enough that your
reader cares. It can be good to keep a list of the issues and questions you're creating in this section; there's nothing more satisfying than to have all the little loose ends wrapped up later. For the Dilemma: What impossible choice will your protagonist face? Will they have to choose between two bad things (e.g. sacrifice or self-preservation) or two
good things (e.g. love or money)? What are the consequences of that choice? What will happen if that choice doesn't work out? For the Climax? This needs to emotionally be the crux of everything you've built up to, and the stakes need to be in genuine danger. If there's no real threat, then there's no reason
for your reader to care. This climax has to matter, even if it's about something as simple as selling enough magazines to send a little girl to camp. For Denouement: What is "normal" at the end of this book? After the storm passes and the water calms, what has changed? If you're writing a series, here's where you're establishing what "normal" will
look like in the beginning of book two. (Note: you can move this step to the end, but I find it's really helpful if you know where you're going as you plan.) Need more plot help? After you work on practicing this story structure in the exercise section below, check out my new book The Write Structure which helps writers make their plot better and write
books readers love. Low price for a limited time! Get The Write Structure - $9.99 $5.99 » Do you struggle with any of the elements of plot? Let me know in the comments. It's time to apply this to your writing. For this lesson, you have two options for your practice: Create a six sentence plot outline for your story, one for each of the six elements above.
Pay special attention to the inciting incident and dilemma. Tackle your work in progress. Take one of the components of plot (exposition, inciting incident, rising action, climax, denouement), and show that point in your story. Set your timer for fifteen minutes and go through one of the plot exercises above. If you are already a Write Practice Pro
member, post your practice here in the Practice Workshop for feedback. Be sure to give feedback to a few other writers and encourage each other. Not a Pro member yet? You can join us here as a Write Practice Pro monthly subscriber and see what a difference a professional writing community can make as you pursue your writing goals! About the
 "answering" the dramatic question and conflict. The arc of a story's plot features a causal relationship between a beginning, middle, and end in which the conflict is built to a climax and resolved in conclusion. For example, A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens features one of the most well-known and satisfying plots of English literature. I will honour
Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach. Dickens introduces the protagonist, Ebenezer Scrooge, who is problematic in his lack of generosity and participation in humanity-especially during the
Christmas season. This conflict results in three visitations by spirits that help Scrooge's character and the reader understand the causes for the conflict. The climax occurs as Scrooge's dismal future is foretold. The above passage reflects the second chance given to Scrooge as a means of changing his future as well as his present life. As the plot of
Dickens's story ends, the reader finds resolution in Scrooge's changed attitude and behavior. However, if any of the causal events were removed from this plot, the story would be far less valuable and effective. Common Examples of Plot TypesIn general, the plot of a literary work is determined by the kind of story the writer intends to tell. Some
elements that influence the plot are genre, setting, characters, dramatic situation, theme, etc. However, there are seven basic, common examples of plot types:Tragedy: In a tragic story, the protagonist typically experiences suffering and a downfall, The plot of the tragedy almost always includes a reversal of fortune, from good to bad or happy to
hero, bringing about recognition and realization. Then, the hero undertakes a quest to solve or reverse the situation. Rebirth: This plot type generally features a character's transformation from bad to good. Typically, the protagonist carries their tragic past with them which results in negative views of life and poor behavior. The transformation occurs
when events in the story help them see a better worldview.Rags-to-Riches: In this common plot type, the protagonist begins in an impoverished, downtrodden, or struggling state. Then, story events take place (magical or realistic) that lead to the protagonist's success and usually a happy ending. Good versus Evil: This plot type features a generally
"good" protagonist that fights a typically "evil" antagonist. However, both the protagonist and antagonist can be groups of characters rather than simply individuals, all with the same goal or mission. Voyage/Return: In this plot type, the main character goes from point A to point B and back to point A. In general, the protagonist sets off on a journey
and returns to the start of their voyage, having gained wisdom and/or experience. Aristotle first developed the formula for plot structure as three parts: beginning, middle, and end. Each of these parts is purposeful, integral, and
challenging for writers. Itcan be difficult for writers to create an effective plot device in terms of making decisions about how a story beginning: The beginning of a story holds great value. It has to capture the reader's attention
introduce the characters, setting, and the central conflict. Middle: The middle of a plot requires movement toward the conclusion and meaning into the story. End: The end of a story brings about the conclusion and
resolution of the conflict, generally leaving the reader with a sense of satisfaction, value, and deeper understanding. Freytag's PyramidIn 1863, Gustav Freytag added two components: rising action and falling action. This dramatic arc of plot structure, termed
Freytag's Pyramid, is the most prevalent depiction of plot as a literary device. Here are the elements of Freytag's Pyramid:Exposition: the beginning of the story, in which the writer establishes or introduces pertinent information such as setting, characters, dramatic situation, etc. Rising Action: increased tension as a result of the central
conflict.Climax (middle): pinnacle and/or turning point of the plot.Falling Action: also referred to as denouement, begins with consequences resulting from the climax and moves towards the conclusion. Resolution: end of the story. Differences Between Narrative and PlotPlot and narrative are both literary devices that are often used interchangeably
However, there is a distinction between them when it comes to storytelling. Plot involves causality and a connected series of events that make up a story. Plot refers to what actions and/or events take place in a story and the causal relationship between them. Narrative encompasses aspects of a story that include choices by the writer as to how the
Foster-HarrisIn his book, The Basic Patterns of Plot, Foster-Harris presented three types of plot. Happy Ending Plot: These plots end on a happy note when the central character makes a sacrifice or resolves the conflict. Also, there is a positive and light-hearted ending to the story. Unhappy Ending: In this type of plot, the central character acts
logically that seems right and fails to completely resolve the conflict. The story also might end with conflict resolution but one or more characters lose something or sacrifice something. Tragedy: This type of plot poses questions by the end about the sadness and its reason as the central character does not make a choice for a sacrifice, or
otherwise.Master Plots - Ronald R. TobiasThe term master plots occur in the book of Ronald R. Tobias, 20 Master Plots. Some of the important ones are Quest, Adventure, Pursuit, and Rescue. These are followed by Escape, Revenge, The riddle, Rivalry, and Underdog, while Temptation, Metamorphosis, and Transformation follow them. Some others
are Maturing, Love, and Forbidden Love. Sacrifice and Discovery are two other master plots with Wretched Excess, Ascension following them. The important feature of these plots is that they all follow the style their title suggests. Seven Types of Plots - Jessamyn WestBesides thematic plots, Jessamyn West, a volunteer librarian has
listed seven basic and major plots for a story. His argument seems based on the type of characters. A woman against technology woman against technology woman against self woman against supernatural elements woman against religion
or godsWhy it is Good to Break Traditional Plot Structures and create a new one. This creativity is the hallmarks of a literary piece as breaking the traditional plot structure makes the literary piece in the process a unique addition to
the long list of such other pieces. This also makes the writer flout new ideas about plots such as Slaughterhouse-Five by Kurt Vonnegut presents a non-linear storyline. Linear and Non-Linear PlotsThese two very simple
terms, linear and non-linear in the literary world with reference to plots, define how a plot has been structured. A linear plot is constructed on the idea of chronological order having a clear beginning, a defined middle, and a definite ending. However, when an author, such as the referred novel in the above example shows, breaks away from the
normal plot structures, it becomes a non-linear plot. It does not have any beginning or for that matter any ending or middle. It just presents fractured and broken thoughts or incidents in a way that the readers have to construct their own story. Examples of Plot in LiteratureWhen readers remember a work of literature, whether it's a novel, short story.
play, or narrative poem, their lasting impression often is due to the plot. The cause and effect of events in a plot are the foundation of storytelling, as is the natural arc of a story's beginning, middle, and end. Literary plots resonate with readers as entertainment, education, and elemental to the act of reading itself. Here are some examples of plot in
 literature:Example 1: Romeo and Juliet (Prologue) - William ShakespeareTwo households, both alike in dignity(In fair Verona, where we lay our scene), From ancient grudge break to new mutiny, Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean. From forth the fatal loins of these two foes Apair of star-crossed lovers take their life; Whose misadventured
piteous overthrowsDoth with their death bury their parents' strife. The fearful passage of their death-marked loveAnd the continuance of their parents' rage, Which, but their death bury their parents' strife. The fearful passage of their death-marked loveAnd the continuance of their parents' rage, Which, but their children's end, naught could remove, Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage; The which, if you with patient ears attend, What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend. In the
prologue of Shakespeare's famous tragedy, the arc of the plot is told-including the outcome of the story. However, though the overall plot is revealed before the story and the relationship between their cause and effect. Each character's action drives forward connected events
that build to a climax and then a tragic resolution, so that even if the reader/viewer knows what will happen, the play remains an engaging and memorable literary work. Example 2: Six-word short story is attributed to Ernest Hemingway, although
there has been no indisputable substantiation that it is his creation. Aside from its authorship, this story demonstrates the power of plot as a literary device and in particular the effectiveness of Aristotle's formula. Through just six words, the plot of this story has a beginning, middle, and end that readers can identify. In addition, the plot allows
readers to interpret the causality of the story's events depending on the manner in which they view and interpret the narrative. Example 3: Don Quixote - Miguel de Cervantes "Destiny guides our fortunes more favorably than we could have expected. Look there, Sancho Panza, my friend, and see those thirty or so wild giants, with whom I intend to do
battle and kill each and all of them, so with their stolen booty we can begin to enrich ourselves. This is noble, righteous warfare, for it is wonderfully useful to God to have such an evil race wiped from the face of the earth.""What giants?" Asked Sancho Panza. "The ones you can see over there," answered his master, "with the huge arms, some of
which are very nearly two leagues long.""Now look, your grace," said Sancho, "what you see over there aren't giants, but windmills, and what seems to be arms are just their sails, that go around in the wind and turn the millstone." "Obviously," replied Don Quijote, "you don't know much about adventures." Don Quixote is considered the first modern
novel, and the complexity of its plot is one of the reasons for this distinction. Each event that takes place in this overall hero's journey is connected to and causes other actions in the story arc of the character reflects all elements of both
Aristotle's plot formula and Freytag's Pyramid. Synonyms of PlotThere are several synonyms that come close to the plot in meanings such as narrative, theme, events, tales, mythos, and subject, yet they are all literary devices in their own right. They do not replace the plot. a secret plan or scheme to accomplish some purpose, especially a hostile
unlawful, or evil purpose.a plot to overthrow the government. Synonyms: cabal, intrigueAlso called storyline. the plan, scheme, or main story of a literary or dramatic work, as a play, novel, or short story. a small piece or area of ground. a garden plot; burial plot. a measured piece or parcel of land. a house on a two-acre plot. a plan, map, diagram, or other
graphic representation, as of land, a building, etc.a list, timetable, or scheme dealing with any of the various arrangements for the production of a play, motion picture, etc.. According to the production of a play, motion picture, etc.. According to the production of a play, motion picture, etc.. According to the production of a play, motion picture, etc.. According to the production of a play, motion picture, etc.. According to the production of a play, motion picture, etc.. According to the production of a play, motion picture, etc.. According to the production of a play, motion picture, etc.. According to the production of a play, motion picture, etc.. According to the production of a play, motion picture, etc.. According to the production of a play, motion picture, etc.. According to the production of a play, motion picture, etc.. According to the production of a play, motion picture, etc.. According to the production of a play, motion picture, etc.. According to the production of a play, motion picture, etc.. According to the production of a play, motion picture, etc.. According to the production of a play, motion picture, etc.. According to the production of a play, motion picture, etc.. According to the production of a play, motion picture, etc.. According to the production of a play, motion picture, etc.. According to the production of a play, motion picture, etc.. According to the production of a play, motion picture, etc.. According to the production of a play, motion picture, etc.. According to the production of a play, motion picture, etc.. According to the production of a play, motion picture, etc.. According to the production of a play, motion picture, etc.. According to the production of a play, motion picture, etc.. According to the production of a play, motion picture, etc.. According to the production of a play, motion picture, etc.. According to the production of a play, motion picture, etc.. According to the picture, etc.. According to the picture, etc.. According to the picture, etc.. Acc
 plan secretly, especially something hostile or evil.Synonyms: frame, hatch, brewto mark on a plan, map, or chart, as the course of a ship or aircraft.to draw a plan or map of, as a tract of land or a building.to divide (land) into plots.to determine and mark (points), as on plotting paper, by means of measurements or coordinates.to draw (a curve) by
means of points so marked.to represent by means of such a curve.to devise or construct the plot of (a play, novel, etc.).to prepare a list, timetable, or scheme of (production arrangements), as for a play or motion picture. The stage manager hadn't plotted the set changes until one day before the dress rehearsal.to make (a calculation) by graph.to plan
or scheme secretly; form a plot; conspire to devise or develop a literary or dramatic plot to overthrow the government or coordinates, as on plotting paper a secret plan to achieve some purpose, esp one that is illegal or underhanda plot to overthrow the government or coordinates, as on plotting paper a secret plan to achieve some purpose, esp one that is illegal or underhanda plot to overthrow the government or coordinates, as on plotting paper.
representation of an individual or tactical setting that pinpoints an artillery targeta diagram or plan, esp a surveyor's mapinformal to lose one's ability or judgment in a given situation © William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd. 1979, 1986 © HarperCollins Publishers 1998, 2000, 2003
2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2012to plan secretly (something illegal, revolutionary, etc); conspire(tr) to mark (a course, as of a ship or aircraft) on a map(tr) to make a plan or map ofto locate and mark (one or more points) on a graph by means of coordinatesto draw (a curve) through these points(tr) to construct the plot of (a literary work) "Collins English"
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Publishers 1998, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2012(tr) to arrange or divide (land) into plots "Collins English Dictionary — Complete & Unabridged" 2012 Digital Edition © William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd. 1979, 1986 © HarperCollins Publishers 1998, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2012The organization of events in a work of
fiction.plotful adjectiveplotless adjectiveplotless adjectiveplotless nounoutplot verb (used with object) overplot verb (used with object) replot verb (used with object) unplotted adjective of ground," Middle English: "smal
area, patch, stain, piece of ground," Old English: "piece of ground" (origin obscure); in the senses "ground plan, outline, map, scheme," variant (since the 16th century) of plat 1, itself partly a variant of Middle English, Old English plot; in the sense "secret plan" (from the 16th century), by association with complot; the verb is derivative of the
nounOrigin of plot1C16: from plot 2, influenced in use by complotOrigin of plot2Old English: piece of land, plan of an areaSee conspiracy. Plot, conspire, scheme imply secret, cunning, and often unscrupulous planning to gain one's life. To
conspire is to unite with others in an illicit or illegal machination: to conspire to seize a government. To scheme how to gain power. Examples have not been reviewed. The furor, for those lucky enough to have missed it, had nothing to do with the actual plot of the
movie, which was about Clark Kent learning to love his poorly-behaved dog Krypto. The home secretary says a powerful new crime to target suspects who are found to be preparing mass killings will ensure their plotting is taken as seriously as terrorism. That is the central plot point of "Wag the Dog." The narrative wisely stays close to Turner and/or
Vasquez; there are enough twists and tendrils in the main overlapping plots without running off into less related matters. Police said the attack had been plotting to kidnap its owner, a Russian dissident. plosive plot
armorBrowse#aabbccddeeffgghhijjkkllmmnnooppqqrrssttuuvvwwxxyyzzAboutCareersContact usCookies, terms, & privacyHelpFollow usGet the Word of the Day every day! 2025 Dictionary.com, LLC In a narrative or creative writing, a plot is the sequence of events that make up a story, whether it's told, written, filmed, or sung. The plot is the
story, and more specifically, how the story develops, unfolds, and moves in time. Plots are typically made up of five main elements: 1. Exposition: At the beginning of the story, character is in crisis and events leading up to facing the conflict begin to unfold.
The story becomes complicated. 3. Climax: At the peak of the story, a major event occurs in which the main character faces a major enemy, fear, challenge, or other source of conflict. The most action, drama, change, and excitement occurs here. 4. Falling Action: The story begins to slow down and work towards its end, tying up loose ends. 5.
Resolution/Denoument: Also known as the denouement, the resolution is like a concluding paragraph that resolves any remaining issues and their problems change over time. II. Examples of Plot Here are a few very short stories
with sample plots: Example 1 Kaitlin wants to buy a puppy. She goes to the pound and begins looking through the cages for her future pet. At the end of the hallway, she sees a small, sweet brown dog with a white spot on its nose. At that instant, she knows she wants to adopt him. After he receives shots and a medical check, she and the dog, Berkley
go home together. In this example, the exposition introduces us to Kaitlin and her conflict. She wants a puppy but does not have one. The rising action occurs as she enters the pound and begins looking. The climax is when she sees the dog of her dreams and decides to adopt him. The falling action consists of a quick medical check before the
resolution, or ending, when Kaitlin and Berkley happily head home. Example 2 Scott wants to be on the football team, but he's worried he won't make the team. He spends weeks working out as hard as possible, preparing for try outs. At try outs, he amazes coaches with his skill as a quarterback. They ask him to be their starting quarterback that year
and give him a jersey. Scott leaves the field, ecstatic! The exposition introduces Scott and his conflict: he wants to be on the team but he doubts his ability to make it. The rising action is when Scott takes a jersey and
the resolution is him leaving the try-outs as a new, happy quarterback. Each of these stories has an exposition as character to the climax as conflicts are introduced a rising action and resolution as the story concludes. III. Types of Plot There are many types of plots
in the world! But, realistically, most of them fit some pattern that we can see in more than one story. Here are some classic plots that can be seen in numerous stories all over the world and throughout history. a. Overcoming the Monster The protagonist must defeat a monster or force in order to save some people—usually everybody! Most often, the
protagonist is forced into this conflict, and comes out of it as a hero, or even a king. This is one version of the world's most universal and compelling plot—the 'monomyth' described by the great thinker Joseph Campbell. Examples: Beowulf, Harry Potter, and Star Wars. b. Rags to Riches: This story can begin with the protagonist being poor or rich,
but at some point, the protagonist will have everything, lose everything, and then gain it all back by the end of the story, after experiencing great personal growth. Examples: The Count of Monte Cristo, Cinderella, and Jane Eyre. c. The Quest: The protagonist embarks on a quest involving travel and dangerous adventures in order to find treasure or
solve a huge problem. Usually, the protagonist is forced to begin the quest but makes friends that help face the many tests and obstacles along the way. This is also a version of Campbell's monomyth. Examples: The Iliad, The Lord of the Rings, and Eragon d. Voyage and Return: The protagonist goes on a journey to a strange or unknown place, facing
danger and adventures along the way, returning home with experience and understanding. This is also a version of the monomyth. Examples: A Midsummer and adventures along the way, returning home with experience and understanding. This is also a version of the monomyth. Examples: A Midsummer and adventures along the way, returning home with experience and understanding. This is also a version of the monomyth. Examples: A Midsummer and adventures along the way, returning home with experience and understanding. This is also a version of the monomyth.
Night's Dream, Fantastic Mr. Fox, Home Alone f. Tragedy: The protagonist experiences a conflict which leads to very bad ending, typically death. Examples: Romeo and Juliet, The Picture of Dorian Gray, and Macbeth g. Rebirth: The protagonist is a villain who becomes a good person through the experience of the story's conflict. Examples: The
Secret Garden, A Christmas Carol, The Grinch As these seven examples show, many stories follow a common pattern. In fact, according to many thinkers, such as the great novelist Kurt Vonnegut, and Joseph Campbell, there are only a few basic patterns, which are mixed and combined to form all stories. IV. The Importance of Using Plot The plot is
what makes a story a story. It gives the story character development, suspense, energy, and emotional release (also known as 'catharsis'). It allows an author to develop themes and most importantly, conflict that makes a story emotionally engaging; everybody knows how hard it is to stop watching a movie before the conflict is resolved. V. Examples
of Plot in Literature Plots can be found in all kinds of fiction. Here are a few examples, Example 1 The Razor's Edge by Somerset Maugham In The Razor's Edge by Somer
seeking higher truth. Finally, in Asia, he finds a more meaningful way of life. In this novel, the plot follows the protagonist Larry as he seeks meaningful experiences. The rising action occurs as he travels seeking an education. The story climaxes when he
becomes a man perfectly at peace in meditation. Example 2 The Road not Taken' by Robert Frost Two roads diverged in a yellow wood, And sorry I could ... Then took the other, as just as fair, And having perhaps the better claim ... And both that morning equally
lay In leaves no step had trodden black. ... I shall be telling this with a sigh Somewhere ages and ages hence: Two roads diverged in a wood, and I, I took the one less traveled by, And that has made all the difference. What is plot? Here's a quick and simple definition: Plot is the sequence of interconnected events within the story of a play, novel, film,
epic, or other narrative literary work. More than simply an account of what happened, plot reveals the cause-and-effect relationships between the events that occur. Some additional key details about plot: The plot of a story explains not just what happened, plot reveals the cause-and-effect relationships between the events that occur. Some additional key details about plot: The plot of a story explains not just what happened, plot reveals the cause-and-effect relationships between the events of the story take place. Plot is a key element of novels, plays
most works of nonfiction, and many (though not all) poems. Since ancient times, writers have worked to create theories that can help categorize different types of plot structures. Plot Pronounciation Here's how to pronounce plot: plaht The Difference Between Plot and Story Perhaps the best way to say what a plot is would be to compare it to a story
The two terms are closely related to one another, and as a result, many people often use the terms interchangeably—but they're actually different. A story is a series of events; it tells us what happened. A plot, on the other hand, tells us what happened. A plot, on the other hand, tells us how the events are connected to one another and why the story unfolded in the way that it did. In Aspects of the
Novel, E.M. Forster uses the following examples to distinguish between story and plot: "The king died, and then the queen died of grief" is a plot. The time-sequence is preserved, but the sense of causality overshadows it. Or again: "The queen died, no one knew why, until it was discovered that it
was through grief at the death of the king." This is a plot with a mystery in it. Therefore, when examining a plot, it's helpful to look for events that change the direction of the story and consider how one event leads to another. The Structure of a Plot For nearly as long as there have been narratives with plots, there have been people who have tried to
analyze and describe the structure of plots. Below we describe two of the most well-known attempts to articulate the general structure of plots. Freytag's Pyramid One of the first and most influential people to create a framework for analyzing plots was 19th-century German writer Gustav Freytag, who argued that all plots can be broken down into five
stages: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and dénouement. Freytag originally developed this theory as a way of describing the plots of other kinds of stories, including novels, short stories, films, and television
shows. Exposition is the first section of the plot. During the exposition, the audience is introduced to key background information, including characters and their relationships to one another, the exposition typically occurs in the first
act. The rising action begins with the "inciting incident" or "complication"—an event that creates a problem or conflict for the characters, setting in motion as the most important part of the plot because the climax and outcome of the story would not take place if the
events of the rising action did not occur. In a five-act play, the rising action usually takes place over the course of act two and perhaps part of act three. The climax is the moment with the greatest tension or conflict. Though
the climax is also sometimes called the crisis, it is not necessarily a negative event. In a tragedy, the climax will result in an unhappy ending; but in a comedy, the climax usually takes place at the end of the third act. Whereas the rising action is the series of
events leading up to the climax, the falling action is the series of events that follow the climax, ending with the resolution. Dénouement is a French word meaning "outcome." In
literary theory, it refers to the part of the plot which ties up loose ends and reveals the final consequences of the events of the story. During the dénouement, the author resolves any final or outstanding questions about the characters' fates, and may even reveal a little bit about the characters' futures after the resolution of the story. In a five-act play,
the dénouement takes place in the fifth act. While Freytag's pyramid is very handy, not every work of literature fits neatly into its structure. In fact, many modernist and post-modern writers intentionally subvert the standard narrative and plot structure that Freytag's pyramid represents. Booker's "Meta-Plot" In his 2004 book The Seven Basic Plots:
Why We Tell Stories, Christopher Booker outlines an overarching "meta-plot has five stages: The anticipation stage, in which the hero prepares to embark on adventure; The dream stage, in which the hero overcomes a series
of minor challenges and gains a sense of confidence and invincibility; The frustration stage, in which the hero confronts the villain of the story; The nightmare stage, in which the hero fears they will be unable to overcome their enemy; The resolution, in which the hero finally triumphs. Of course, like Freytag's Pyramid, Booker's meta-plot isn't actually
a fool-proof way of describing the structure of every plot, but rather an attempt to describe structure of plots, many scholars and critics have attempted to describe the different types of plot that serve as the basis of most narratives.
Booker's Seven Basic Plots Within the overarching structure of Booker's "meta-plot" (as described above), Booker argues that plot types can be further subdivided into the following seven categories. Booker himself borrows most of these definitions of plot types from much earlier writers, such as Aristotle. Here's a closer look at each of the seven
types: Comedy: In a comedy, characters face a series of increasingly absurd challenges, conflicts, and misunderstandings, culminating in a moment of revelation, when the confusion of the early part of the plot act as obstacles to a happy romantic relationship
but the conflicts are resolved and the plot ends with an orderly conclusion (and often a wedding). A Midsummer Night's Dream, When Harry Met Sally, and Pride and Prejudice are all examples of comedies. Tragedy: The plot of a tragedy follows a tragedy follows.
some sort of fatal mistake (both flaw and/or mistake are known as hamartia). When the tragic plot is based on Aristotle's tragic ending and, frequently, the hero's death. Booker's tragic plot is based on Aristotle's
theory of tragedy, which in turn was based on patterns in classical drama and epic poetry. Antigone, Hamlet, and The Great Gatsby are all examples of tragedies. Rebirth: In stories with a rebirth plot, one character is literally or metaphorically imprisoned by a dark force, enchantment, and/or character flaw. Through an act of love, another character
helps the imprisoned character overcome the dark force, enchantment, or character flaw. Many stories of rebirth allude to Jesus Christ or other religious figures who sacrificed themselves for other religious figures who sacrificated themselves for other religious figures figures for other religious figures figures figures for other religious figures 
Monster: The hero sets out to fight an evil force and thereby protect their loved ones or their society. The "monster" could be literal or metaphorical: in ancient Greek mythology, Perseus battles the monster Medusa, but in the television show Good Girls Revolt, a group of women files a lawsuit in order to fight discriminatory policies in their
workplace. Both examples follow the "Overcoming the Monster" plot, as does the epic poem Beowulf. Rags-to-Riches: In a rags-to-riches plot, a disadvantaged person comes very close to gaining success and wealth, but then appears to lose everything, before they finally achieve the happy life they have always deserved. Cinderella and Oliver Twist are
classic rags-to-riches stories; movies with rags-to-riches plots include Slumdog Millionaire and Joy. The Ouest: In a quest story, a hero sets out to accomplish a specific task, aided by a group of friends. Often, though not always, the hero is looking for an object endowed with supernatural powers. Along the way, the hero and their friends face
challenges together, but the hero must complete the final stage of the quest alone. The Celtic myth of "The Fisher-King and the Holy Grail" is one of the oldest quest stories; Monty Python and the Holy Grail is a satire that follows the same plot structure; while Heart of Darkness plays with the model of a quest but has the quest end not with the
discovery of a treasure or enlightenment but rather with emptiness and disillusionment. Voyage and Return: The hero goes on a literal journey to an unfamiliar place where they overcome a series of challenges, then return home with wisdom and experience that help them live a happier life. The Odyssey, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, Chronicles
of Narnia, and Eat, Pray, Love all follow the voyage and return plot. As you can probably see, there's lots of room for these categories to overlap. This is one of the problems with trying to create any sort of categories to overlap. This is one of the problems with trying to create any sort of categories to overlap. This is one of the problems with trying to create any sort of categories to overlap.
describe a narrative archetype, or a common plot type that has specific details and structure (also known as a monomyth). The Hero's Journey from the known world again. The journey can be a literal one, as in the Lord of the Rings trilogy, or a purely metaphorical one.
Regardless, the protagonist is a changed person by the end of the story. The Hero's Journey structure was first popularized by Joseph Campbell's 1949 book The Hero With a Thousand Faces. Later, theorists David Adams Leeming, Phil Cousineau, and Christopher Vogler all developed their own versions of the Hero's Journey structure. Each of these
theorists divides The Hero's Journey into slightly different stages (Campbell identifies 17 stages and Leeming and Cousineau use just 8). Below, we'll take a closer look at the 12 stages that Vogler outlines in his analysis of this plot type: The Ordinary World: When the story begins, the hero is a seemingly ordinary
person living an ordinary life. This section of the story often includes expository details about the story's setting and the hero's background and personality. The Call to Adventure: Soon, the hero is asked to find something or someone
or to defeat a powerful enemy. The call to adventure sometimes, but not always, involves a supernatural event. (In Star Wars: A New Hope, the call to adventure occurs when Luke sees the message from Leia to Obi-Wan Kenobi.) The Refusal of the Call: Some heroes are initially reluctant to embark on their journey and instead attempt to continue
living their ordinary life. When this refusal takes place, it is followed by another event that prompts the hero to accept the call to adventure (Luke's aunt and uncle getting killed in Star Wars). Meeting the Mentor: The hero meets a mentor: a wiser, more experienced person who gives them advice and guidance. The mentor trains and protects the hero
until the hero is ready to embark on the next phase of the journey. (Obi-Wan Kenobi is Luke's mentor in Star Wars.) Crossing the Threshold: The hero "crosses the threshold" when they have left the familiar, ordinary world behind. Some heroes are eager to enter a new and unfamiliar world, while others may be uncertain if they are making the right
choice, but in either case, once the hero crosses the threshold, there is no way to turn back, (Luke about to enter Mos Eisley, or of Frodo leaving the Shire in Lord of the Rings.) Tests, Allies, and Enemies: As the hero continues on their journey, they face a series of increasingly difficult "tests" or challenges, Along the way, they acquire friends who
help them overcome these challenges, and enemies who attempt to thwart their quest. The hero may defeat some enemies during this phase or find ways to keep them temporarily at bay. These challenges help the reader develop a better a sense of the hero's strengths and weaknesses, and they help the hero become wiser and more experienced. This
phase is part of the rising action. Approach to the Innermost Cave: At this stage, the hero must confront a fear or face an
internal conflict; or, the hero may do both. You can think of the approach to the innermost cave as a second threshold—a moment when the hero faces their doubts and fears and decides to confront Lord
Voldemort.) The Ordeal: The ordeal is the greatest challenge that the hero faces. It may take the form of a battle or physically dangerous task, or it may represent a moral or personal crisis that threatens to destroy the hero. Earlier (in the "Tests, Allies, and Enemies" phase), the hero might have overcome challenges with the help of friends, but the
hero must face the ordeal alone. The outcome of the ordeal involves a literal or metaphorical resurrection, in which the hero dies or has a near-death experience, and is reborn with new knowledge or abilities. This constitutes the climax of the
story. Reward: After surviving the ordeal, the hero receives a reward of some kind. Depending on the story, it may come in the form of new wisdom and personal strengths, the love of a romantic interest, a supernatural power, or a physical prize. The hero takes the reward or rewards with them as they return to the ordinary world. The Road Back: The
hero begins to make their way home, either by retracing their steps or with the aid of supernatural powers. They may face a few minor challenges or setbacks along the way. This phase is part of the falling action. The Resurrection: The hero faces one final challenge in which they must use all of the powers and knowledge that they have gained
throughout their journey. When the hero triumphs, their rebirth is completed and their new identity is affirmed. This phase is not present in all versions of the hero's journey. Return with the Elixir: The hero reenters the ordinary world, where they find that they have changed (and perhaps their home has changed too). Among the things they bring
with them when they return is an "elixir," or something that will transform their ordinary life for the better. The elixir could be a literal potion or gift, or it may take the form of the hero's newfound perspective on life: the hero now possesses love, forgiveness, knowledge, or another quality that will help them build a better life. Other Genre-Specific
Plots Apart from the plot types described above (the "Hero's Journey" and Booker's seven basic plots), there are a couple common plot types worth mentioning. When a story uses one of the following plots, it usually means that it belongs to a specific genre of literature—so these plot structures can be thought of as being specific to their respective
genres. Mystery: A story that centers around the solving of a baffling crime—especially a murder. The plot structure of a mystery can often be described using Freytag's pyramid (i.e., it has exposition, rising action, and denouement), but the plots of mysteries also tend to follow other, more genre-specific conventions, such as the
gradual discovery of clues culminating in the revelation of the culprit's identity as well as their motive. In a typical story (i.e., a non-mystery) key characters and their motives are usually revealed before the central conflict arises, not after. Bindungsroman: A story that shows a young protagonist's journey from childhood to adulthood (or immaturity to
maturity), with a focus on the trials and misfortunes that affect the character's growth. The term "coming-of-age novel" is sometimes used interchangeably—but Bildungsroman carries the connotation of a specific and well-defined literary
tradition, which tends to follow certain genre-specific conventions (for example, the main character often gets sent away from home, falls in love, and squanders their fortune). The climax of the Bildungsroman typically coincides with the protagonist reaching maturity. Other Attempts to Classify Types of Plots In addition to Freytag, Booker, and
Campbell, many other theorists and literary critics have created systems classifying different kinds of plot structures in The Basic Patterns of Plot Ronald R. Tobias, who outlined three archetypal plot structures in The Basic Patterns of Plot Ronald R. Tobias, who outlined three archetypal plot structures in The Basic Patterns of Plot Ronald R. Tobias, who outlined three archetypal plot structures in The Basic Patterns of Plot Ronald R. Tobias, who outlined three archetypal plot structures in The Basic Patterns of Plot Ronald R. Tobias, who outlined three archetypal plot structures in The Basic Patterns of Plot Ronald R. Tobias, who outlined three archetypal plot structures in The Basic Patterns of Plot Ronald R. Tobias, who outlined three archetypal plot structures in The Basic Patterns of Plot Ronald R. Tobias, who outlined three archetypal plot structures in The Basic Patterns of Plot Ronald R. Tobias, who outlined three archetypal plot structures in The Basic Patterns of Plot Ronald R. Tobias, who outlined three archetypal plot structures in The Basic Patterns of Plot Ronald R. Tobias, who outlined three archetypal plot structures in The Basic Patterns of Plot Ronald R. Tobias, who outlined three archetypal plot structures in The Basic Patterns of Plot Ronald R. Tobias, who outlined three archetypal plot structures in The Basic Patterns of Plot Ronald R. Tobias, who outlined three archetypal plot structures in The Basic Patterns of Plot Ronald R. Tobias, who outlined three archetypal plot structures in The Basic Patterns of Plot Ronald R. Tobias, who outlined three archetypal plot structures in The Basic Patterns of Plot Ronald R. Tobias, who outlined three archetypal plot structures in The Basic Patterns of Plot Ronald R. Tobias, who outlined three archetypal plot structures in The Basic Patterns of Plot Ronald R. Tobias, who outlined three archetypal plot structures in The Basic Patterns of Plot Ronald R. Tobias, who outlined three archetypal plot structures in The Basic Patterns of Plot Ronald R. Tobias
in fact Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations Sir Arthur Thomas Quiller-Couch, who in the early twentieth century outlined seven types of plots: In 1965, the University of Chicago rejected Kurt Vonnegut's college thesis, which claimed that folktales and fairy tales shared
common structures, or "shapes," including "man in a hole," "boy gets girl" and "Cinderella." He went on to write Slaughterhouse-Five, a novel which subverts traditional narrative structures, and later developed a lecture based on his failed thesis. Two recent studies, led by University of Nebraska professor Matthew Jockers and researchers at the
University of Adelaide and the University of Vermont respectively, have used machine learning to analyze the plot structures and emotional ups-and-downs of stories. Both projects concluded that there are six types of stories. Criticism of Efforts to Categorize Plot Types Some critics argue that though archetypal plot structures can be useful tools for
both writers and readers, we shouldn't rely on them too heavily when analyzing a work of literature. One such skeptic is New York Times book critic Michiko Kakutani, who in a 2005 review described Christopher Booker finds interesting ways to
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categorize stories by plot type, he is too fixated on finding stories that fit these plot types perfectly. As a result, Booker tends to idealize overly simplistic stories (and Hollywood films in particular), instead of analyzing more complex stories that may not fit the conventions of his seven plot types. Kakutani argues that, as a result of this approach, Booker undervalues modern and contemporary writers who structure their plots in different and innovative ways. Kakutani's argument is a reminder that while some great works of literature may follow archetypal plot structures, they may also have unconventional plot structures that defy categorization. Authors who use nonlinear structures or multiple narrators often intentionally create stories that do not perfectly fit any of the "plot types" discussed above. William Faulker's The Sound and the Fury and Jennifer Egan's A Visit From the Goon Squad are both examples of this kind of work. Even William Shakespeare, who wrote many of his plays following the traditional structures for tragedies and comedies, authored several "problem plays," which many scholars struggle to categorize as strictly tragedy or comedy: All's Well That Ends Well, Measure for Measure, Troilus and Cressida, The Winter's Tale, Timon of Athens, and The Merchant of Venice are all examples of "problem plays." Plot Examples The following examples are

representative of some of the most common types of plot. The "Hero's Journey" Plot in The Hobbit by J.R.R. Tolkien The plot of The Hobbit, the story's hero, Bilbo Baggins, is living a comfortable life alongside his fellow hobbits in the Shire. (Hobbits are short, human-like creatures predisposed to peaceful, domestic routines.) The Call to Adventure: The wizard Gandalf arrives in the Shire with a band of 13 dwarves and asks Bilbo to go with them to Lonely Mountain in order to reclaim the dwarves' treasure, which has been stolen by the dragon Smaug. The Refusal of the Call: At first, Bilbo refuses to join Gandalf and the dwarves, explaining that it isn't in a hobbit's nature to go on adventures. Meeting the Mentor: Gandalf, who serves as Bilbo to meet the dwarves at the Green Dragon Inn in Bywater, and the group leaves the Shire together. Tests, Allies, and Enemies: Bilbo faces many challenges and trials on the way to the Lonely Mountain. Early in the trip, they are kidnapped by trolls and are rescued by Gandalf. Bilbo takes an elvish dagger from the trolls' supply of weapons that he uses throughout the rest of the journey. Soon Bilbo and the dwarves are captured by goblins, but they are rescued by Gandalf who also kills the Great Goblin. Later, Bilbo finds a magical ring (which becomes the focus of the Lord of the Rings books), and when the dwarves are captured later in the journey (once by giant spiders and once by elves), Bilbo uses the ring and the dagger to rescue them. Finally, Bilbo and the dwarves arrive at Lake Town, near the Lonely Mountain, where the dragon Smaug is guarding the dwarves makes his way from Lake Town, near the Lonely Mountain, where the dragon Smaug is guarding the dwarves makes his way from Lake Town, near the Lonely Mountain, where the dragon Smaug is guarding the dwarves makes his way from Lake Town, near the Lonely Mountain, where the dragon Smaug is guarding the dwarves makes his way from Lake Town, near the Lonely Mountain, where the dragon Smaug is guarding the dwarves makes his way from Lake Town, near the Lonely Mountain, where the dragon Smaug is guarding the dwarves makes his way from Lake Town, near the Lonely Mountain, where the dragon Smaug is guarding the dwarves makes his way from Lake Town, near the Lonely Mountain, where the dragon Smaug is guarding the dwarves makes his way from Lake Town, near the Lonely Mountain, where the dragon Smaug is guarding the dwarves makes his way from Lake Town and the Lonely Mountain. Smaug has a weak spot in his scaly armor. Enraged at Bilbo's theft, Smaug flies to Lake-Town and devastates it, but is killed by a human archer who learns of Smaug's weak spot from a bird that overheard Bilbo speaking of it. The Ordeal: After Smaug's death, elves and humans march to the Lonely Mountain to claim what they believe is their portion of the treasure (as Smaug plundered from them, too). The dwarves refuse to share the treasure and a battle seems evident, but Bilbo steals the most beautiful gem from their company. Meanwhile, an army of wargs (magical wolves) and goblins descend on the Lonely Mountain to take vengeance on the dwarves for the death of the Great Goblin. The dwarves, humans, and elves form an alliance to fight the wargs and goblins, and eventually triumph, though Bilbo is knocked unconscious for much of the battle. (It might seem odd that Bilbo doesn't participate in the battle, but that fact also seems to suggest that the true ordeal of the novel was not the battle but rather Bilbo's moral choice to steal the gem and give it to the men and elves to counter the dwarves, humans, and elves to counter the dwarves are dwarves, humans, and elves to counter the dwarves are dwarves. and the ring. The Road Back: It takes Bilbo and Gandalf nearly a year to travel back to the Shire. During that time they e-visit with some of the people they met on their journey out and have many adventures, though none are as difficult as those they undertook on the way to the Lonely Mountain. The Resurrection: Bilbo's return to the Shire as a changed person is underlined by the fact that he has been away so long, the other hobbits in the Shire believe that he has died and are preparing to sell his house and belongings. Return with the Elixir: Bilbo returns to the shire with the ring, the dagger, and his treasure—enough to make him rich. He also has his memories of the adventure, which he turns into a book. Other examples of the Hero's Journey Plot Structure: The Comedic Plot in Twelfth Night, is generally described as a comedy and follows what Booker would call comedic plot structure. At the beginning of the play, the protagonist, Viola is shipwrecked far from home in the kingdom of Illyria. Her twin brother, Sebastian, appears to have died in the storm. Viola disguises herself as a boy, calls herself Cesario, and gets a job as the servant of Count Orsino, who is in love with Cesario. Meanwhile, Viola falls in love with Orsino, but she cannot confess her love without revealing her disguise. In another subplot, Olivia's uncle Toby and his friend Sir Andrew Aguecheek persuade the servant Maria to play a prank convincing another servant, Malvolio, that Olivia loves him. The plot thickens when Sebastian (Viola's lost twin) arrives in town and marries Olivia, who believes she is marrying Cesario. At the end of the play, Viola is reunited with her brother, reveals her identity, and confesses her love to Orsino, who marries her. In spite of the play's humor—Twelfth Night reaches an orderly conclusion and ends with two marriages. Other examples of comedic plot structure: The Tragic Plot in Macbeth by William Shakespeare Wil of Cawdor and eventually the King. After King Duncan makes Macbeth Thane of Cawdor, Lady Macbeth persuades her husband to fulfill the prophecy by secretly murdering Duncan, He does, and is named King. Later, to ensure that Macbeth will remain king, they also order the assassination of the nobleman Banguo, his son, and the wife and children of the nobleman Macduff. However, as Macbeth protects his throne in ever more bloody ways, Lady Macbeth begins to go mad with guilt. Macbeth consults the witches again, and they reassure him that "no man from woman born can harm Macbeth begins to go mad with guilt. Macbeth is reassured that he is invincible. Lady Macbeth never recovers from her guilt and commits suicide, and Macbeth feels numb and empty, even as he is certain he can never be killed. Meanwhile an army led by Duncan's son Malcolm, their number camouflaged by the branches they carry, so that they look like a moving forest, approaches Dunsinane. In the fighting Macduff reveals he was born by cesarian section, and kills Macbeth. Macbeth mistake in a moment of anagnorisis when the forest full of camouflaged soldiers seems to be moving, and he experiences a reversal of fate (peripeteia) when he is defeated by Macduff. Other examples of tragic plot structure: The "Rebirth" plot in A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens Charl who is a loving father struggling to support his family. Scrooge scoffs at the notion that Christmas is a time for joy, love, and generosity. But on Christmas Eve, he is visited by the ghost of his deceased business partner, who warns Scrooge that if he does not change his ways, his spirit will be condemned to wander the earth as a ghost. Later that night, he is visited by the ghosts of Christmas Past, Christmas Present, and Christmas Present, and Christmas Present, and Christmas Present, and finally foresees his own lonely death. Scrooge awakes on Christmas Present, and christmas Present, and finally foresees his own lonely death. Scrooge awakes on Christmas Present, and Christmas Prese only celebrates Christmas with the Cratchits, but embraces the Christmas spirit of love and generosity all year long. By the end of the novel, Scrooge has been "reborn" through acts of generosity and love. Other examples of "rebirth" plot structure: The "Overcoming the Monster" Plot in Beowulf The Old English epic poem, Beowulf, follows the structure of an "overcoming the monster" plot. In fact, the poem's hero, Beowulf, defeats not just one monster, but three, As a young warrior, Beowulf slavs Grendel, a swamp-dwelling demon who has been raiding the Danish king's mead hall. Later, when Grendel's mother attempts to avenge her son's death. Beowulf kills her, too, Beowulf eventually becomes king of the Geats, and many years later, he battles a dragon who threatens his people. Beowulf manages to kill the dragon, but dies from his wounds, and is given a hero's funeral. Three times, Beowulf succeeds in protecting his people by defeating a monster. Other examples of the overcoming the monster plot structure: The "Rags-to-Riches" Plot in Jane Eyre by Charlotte Brontë's novel Jane Eyre is an example of a "rags-to-riches" plot. The protagonist, Jane, is a mistreated orphan who is eventually sent away to a boarding school where students are severely mistreated orphan who is eventually sent away to a boarding school where students are severely mistreated. falls in love with Mr. Rochester. The two become engaged, but on their wedding day, Jane discovers that Rochester and ends up finding long-lost cousins. After a time, her very religious cousin, St. John, proposes to her. Jane almost accepts, but then rejects the proposal. She returns to Thornfield to discover that Bertha started a house fire and leapt off the burning building to her death, and that Rochester marry, and live a quiet and happy life together. Jane begins the story with nothing, seems poised to achieve true happiness before losing everything, but ultimately has a happy ending. Other examples of the rags-to-riches plot structure: Cinderella by Charles Dickens Oliver Twist by Charles Fair by William Makepeace Thackery The Quest Plot in Siddhartha, by Herman Hesse, follows the structure of the "quest" plot. The novel's protagonist, Siddartha, leaves his hometown in search of spiritual enlightenment, accompanied by his friend, Govinda. On their journey, they join a band of holy men who seek enlightenment through self-denial, and later, they study with a group of Bhuddists. Disillusioned with religion, Siddartha leaves Govinda and the Bhuddists behind and takes up a hedonistic lifestyle with the beautiful Kamala. Still unsatisfied with his life, he considers suicide in a river, but instead decides to apprentice himself to the man who runs the ferry boat. By studying the river, Siddhartha eventually obtains enlightenment. Other examples of the quest plot structure: The "Voyage and Return" Plot in Their Eyes Were Watching God by Zora Neale Hurston's novel Their Eyes Were Watching God follows what Booker would describe as a voyage and return plot structure. The plot follows the hero, Janie, as she seeks love and happiness. The novel begins and ends in Eatonville, Florida, where Janie was brought up by her grandmother. Janie has three romantic relationships, each better than the last. She marries a man named Logan Killicks on her grandmother's advice, but she finds the marriage stifling and she soon leaves him. Janie's second, more stable marriage to the prosperous Joe Starks lasts 20 years, but Janie does not feel truly loved by him. After Joe dies, she marries Tea Cake, a farm worker who loves, respects, and cherishes her. They move to the Everglades and live there happily for just over a year, when Tea Cake dies of rabies after getting bitten by a dog during a hurricane. Janie mourns Tea Cake's death, but return to Eatonville with a sense of peace: she has known true love, and she will always carry her memories of Tea Cake with her. Her journey and her return home have made her stronger and wiser. Other examples of the voyage and return plot structure: Other Helpful Plot Resources

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