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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 closely follows the structure of a typical hero's journey. The Ordinary World: At the beginning 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's mentor throughout The Hobbit, persuades Bilbo to join the dwarves on their journey. Cross the Threshold: Gandalf takes 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. Approach to the Innermost Cave: Bilbo and the dwarves makes his way from Lake Town to the Lonely Mountain, where the dragon Smaug is guarding the dwarves' treasure. Bilbo alone is brave enough to enter the Smaug's lair. Bilbo steals a cup from Smaug, and also learns that 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 the treasure and gives it to the humans and elves. The greedy dwarves banish Bilbo 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 growing greed.) Reward: The victorious dwarves, humans, and elves share the treasure among themselves, and Bilbo receives a share of the treasure, which he takes home, along with the dagger 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 by William Shakespeare William Shakespeare's play, 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 the Lady Olivia. When Orsino sends Cesario to deliver romantic messages to Olivia on his behalf, Olivia falls 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 chaos, misunderstandings, and challenges the characters face in the early part of the plot—a source of much 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 William Shakespeare's play Macbeth follows the tragic plot structure. The tragic hero, Macbeth, is a Scottish nobleman, who receives a prophecy from three witches saying that he will become the Thane 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 Banquo, 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" and that he will not be defeated until the "wood begins to move" to Dunsinane castle. Therefore, 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's mistake (hamartia) is his unrelenting ambition to be king, and his trust in the witches' prophecies. He realizes his 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 Charles Dickens' novel A Christmas Carol is an example of the "rebirth" plot. The novel's protagonist is the miserable, selfish businessman Ebenezer Scrooge, who mistreats his clerk, Bob Cratchit, 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 Yet to Come. With these ghosts, Scrooge revisits lonely and joyful times of his youth, sees Cratchit celebrating Christmas with his loved ones, and finally foresees his own lonely death. Scrooge awakes on Christmas morning and resolves to change his ways. He not 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 slays 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 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. Jane survives the school and goes on to become a governess at Thornfield Manor, where Jane falls in love with Mr. Rochester. The two become engaged, but on their wedding day, Jane discovers that Rochester's first wife, Bertha, has gone insane and is imprisoned in Thornfield's attic. She leaves 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 roof of the burning building to her death, and that Rochester had been blinded by the fire in an attempt to save Bertha. Jane and 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 Perrault Oliver Twist by Charles Dickens The Once and Future King by T.H. White Villette by Charlotte Brontë Pygmalion by George Bernard Shaw Vanity Fair by William Makepeace Thackeray The Quest Plot in Siddhartha by Herman Hesse Siddhartha, by Herman Hesse, follows the structure of the "quest" plot. The novel's protagonist, Siddhartha, 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, Siddhartha 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 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 returns 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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