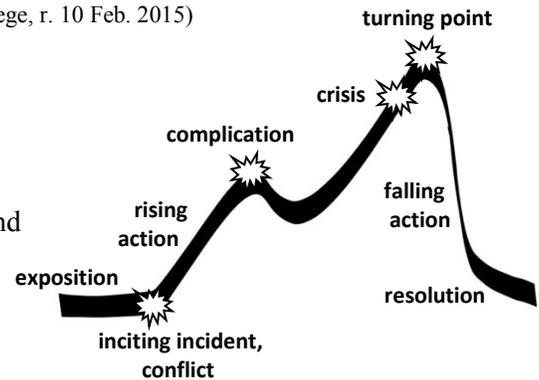


Plot terms and related tools for story analysis (Highland Community College, r. 10 Feb. 2015)

The plot curve:

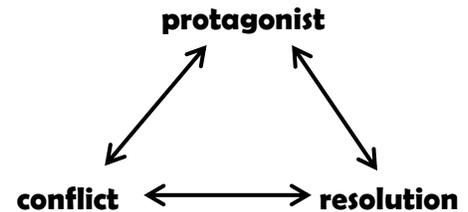
- Conflict drives reader interest...
- ...until it is resolved.
- Complications increase reader interest.
- The conflict had better happen quick, and the story had better end quick after the resolution.
- The turning point, usually at a crisis, is the point where the protagonist takes direct action to resolve the main conflict.



Protagonist = the character in whose struggle we are most interested.

Protagonist triangle: The relationships between protagonist, conflict, and resolution are interdependent (hence the triangle) and reciprocal (hence the two-way arrows):

- The main conflict is the protagonist's main struggle.
- The protagonist is the character who takes decisive action to resolve the main conflict.
- The main conflict is probably the one resolved by the protagonist's decisive action.
- The main resolution is probably the one that happens last.
- The main resolution is the one brought about by the protagonist's decisive action.
- The main resolution is when the reader's last big dramatic questions are answered.



Other plot choices by the author (these choices also are usually interdependent and reciprocal):

- start point and stop point (start close to the main conflict, end close to the theme, when the reader has all she needs to understand the meaning)
- pacing (What does the author spend little time on? Why? Much time on? Why?)
- sequencing (hint: compare the narrative sequence of events against the chronological. Then look for anomalies. They may be significant. Why did the author do that?)
- choice of protagonist (determines the conflict & resolution, and when to end the story)
- choice of narrative point of view (can be used to control sequencing, per character's awareness)

“Outside-in” criticism (aka “reader response criticism”):

- **Plot** = “the way the author **sequences** and **paces** the events so as to shape our **response** and **understanding**” (Mays 82).
- Before analyzing, write down your impressions (outside the story):
 - **response** ♥ emotional reactions, sympathies
 - **understanding** ☼ sense of the meaning, the theme
- Then go into the story: re-read it, making notes and marking it up, to see what “pushed your buttons” (shaped your response and understanding).
- Consider the analytical terms and ideas listed above and call attention to the ones you see the author using to develop the theme.

Point of view:

- First person narrator: told by a character; narrator is involved in the action
- Third person narrator: told by a disembodied voice, not a character, not involved in the action
 - all-knowing, omniscient: can listen in on what any character is thinking
 - limited all-knowing, limited omniscient: can listen in on thoughts of only one or two characters
 - objective narrator, “fly-on-the-wall” narrator: does not report thoughts or emotions; only words and acts

Works Cited

Mays, Kelly J., ed. *The Norton Introduction to Literature*, Shorter 11th edition.
New York: W. W. Norton, 2013. Print.