

## Plot

### What is plot?

Plot is the reason you sat down to write this story in the first place. Probably. Maybe you had a character or place in mind and wanted to craft a story around it, but likely you have a certain tale you want to tell and you will use the other factors of fiction writing to bring it forth.

Plot ideas start simply: boy meets girl, aliens invade Earth, woman inherits fortune, etc. We all know a few stories that start this way. Plot, however, is what happens after that initial setup. For example:

*Aliens invade Earth → Earthlings abandon planet and move to space → in space they meet more aliens → befriend aliens → aliens help humans invade and take back Earth.*

Or something like that.

Writing plot is both easy and difficult. The easy part (in my experience) is thinking up the basic situation, but the hard part is finding convincing ways to tell the story. The hardest, of course, is bringing the story to a satisfying ending without saying, "...and then she woke up." Like any artist, I study the masters to see how they carry their plot out, what twists they incorporate, how they reveal the basic information, etc.

Write down a short synopsis of two plotlines from a book, movie, play, etc. that particularly affected you. In what ways did the teller move through the plot? What techniques did he or she apply?

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### Reading

"Blue Water Djinn" by Téa Obreht (Published by *The New Yorker* at [http://www.newyorker.com/fiction/features/2010/08/02/100802fi\\_fiction\\_obreht](http://www.newyorker.com/fiction/features/2010/08/02/100802fi_fiction_obreht) )

**After reading, consider the following question about the plot?**

- 1) What is the main plot of the story?
- 2) What are the subplots?
- 3) How do the subplots intertwine with the main plot and move it forward?
- 4) What clues does the writer offer throughout the story as to the actual situation? Did you suspect something before it was revealed, or were you surprised?
- 5) Where there any “red herrings” or clues added by the author to throw off the reader? What were they?
- 6) How does the author build tension?
- 7) What are the various conflicts/complications that move the plot along?
- 8) How are the conflicts resolved (if at all)?
- 9) How do the other literary devices affect the plot (setting, character, imagery, etc.) and in what ways do they do they move it, adjust it, etc?
- 10) In three lines, write the setup (beginning), climax or shift (middle) and resolution (end) of the story.
  - a. SETUP: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. CLIMAX: \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. RESOLUTION: \_\_\_\_\_

**Writing Exercise**

Practice maintaining a consistent writing flow (in prep for NaNoWriMo) by writing a succinct story. Pick one plot piece from each column below and try to tie them together into a more cohesive tale with a clear beginning, middle, and end. (Of course, you can use some other ideas, too.)

*Again, try to write past the point of comfort. Last week, we went 40 minutes, and we felt like that was a long time. But we are training for the NaNoWriMo Marathon, so we need to work on our stamina!*

**The Set Up**

- Character adopts a dog
- Two criminals get locked in a van
- The barn is painted blue
- Teacher’s pet gets an “F”
- Planning a party

**The Climactic Moment**

- A snowstorm
- Character chokes
- Character sees ex-lover in the store (or somewhere else)
- Character joins the military
- Someone vandalizes the public pool

**The Resolution**

- A child is born
- The boat sinks
- Character gets a good night’s sleep
- The team loses the game
- The Gods go back to sleep