

Describing Plot

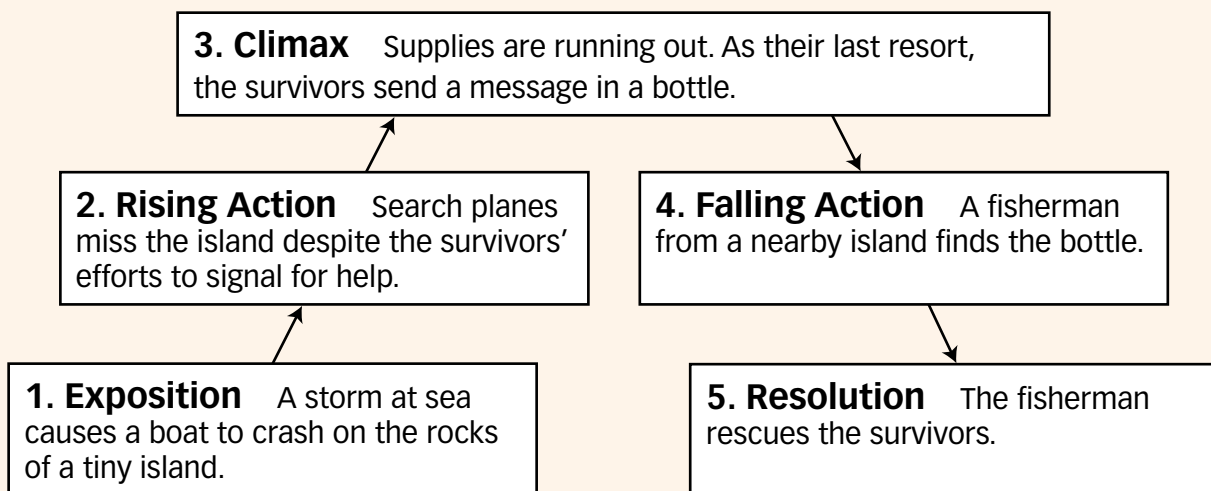
Theme: *Adventure and Conflict*

In a story or play, the **plot** is the series of episodes, or events, that make up the story. These episodes are moments in the story that are driven by a **conflict**, or struggle, that the main character tries to overcome. Like a trail of footprints, the episodes in a plot lead to the **resolution**, or the end of the conflict.

Look at the images below. What series of episodes led up to the last image?



Read the following diagram to see one idea for how the plot may have unfolded.



In most stories and plays, one event leads to another, unfolding in a way that increases tension and builds up to a turning point, called the **climax**—the moment of greatest suspense, surprise, or excitement. Think of plot as a roller coaster ride: The events move you up until you reach the very top, and then send you zooming down to the story's end!



Read the first two paragraphs of the short story.

Genre: Historical Fiction

Alma's First Cattle Drive *by Nancy Seago*

Blinding lightning flashed across the sky, followed by deafening thunder and driving rain. Alma had grown up listening to her father's astounding stories of cattle drives. She had always wanted to join in, but her father told her she wasn't ready. Now, he was finally giving her the chance to prove to him that she would be more help than trouble on the trail. This was her first cattle drive, and the weather was Alma's first challenge.

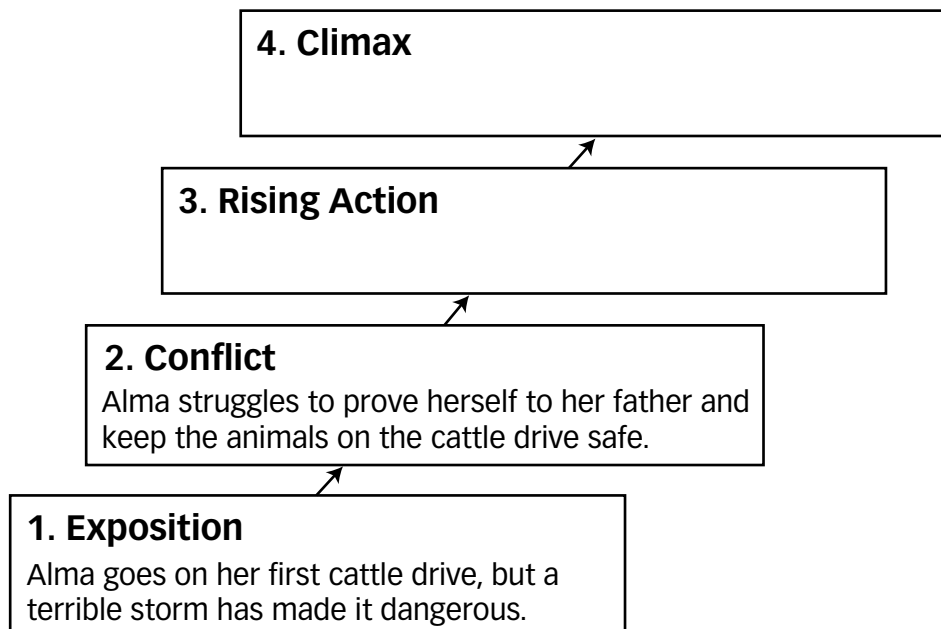
When they reached the river, Alma instantly noticed that the water was dangerously high. When the cattle began to cross at a shallow spot, Alma was the only one to notice a calf getting swept up in the current. Alma charged into the water and stopped her horse downstream from the calf to keep it from losing its footing.

(continued)

Explore how to answer this question: "How does the story's plot build to a climax?"

One plot episode leads to the next until Alma must act. This critical moment is the climax.

Read the following plot diagram. Fill in the rest of the diagram to finish mapping out the plot.



As you read the story's ending, think about its resolution, or how Alma's conflict is solved.



Close Reading

On page 54, Alma’s quest to prove herself is challenged when the weather creates a dangerous situation for the cattle. Find and **underline** the sentence here that shows the end result of Alma’s efforts.

Hint

The final part of the story includes the resolution. Remember that the main character’s problems are usually solved at this point.

Continue reading “Alma’s First Cattle Drive.” Use the Close Reading and the Hint to help you answer the question.

(continued from page 54)

Alma stayed there in the stinging rain, her horse breathing hard beneath her. She was cold and hungry, but she kept her horse on the edge of the shallow riverbank until each animal had safely passed.

When she finally rode ashore, her father waved to get Alma’s attention. He paused for just a moment to tip his hat to her before they continued. Alma knew then that she had proven herself to be a valuable member of the team.

Circle the correct answer.

Which sentence best shows the resolution of the story?

- A** “She was cold and hungry, but she kept her horse on the edge of the shallow riverbank until each animal had safely passed.”
- B** “Alma stayed there in the stinging rain, her horse breathing hard beneath her.”
- C** “When she finally rode ashore, her father waved to get Alma’s attention.”
- D** “Alma knew then that she had proven herself to be a valuable member of the team.”



Show Your Thinking

Explain how you could tell which choice was the resolution of the story.



With a partner, discuss the episodes that took place in this story. Decide whether the resolution is a satisfying conclusion to the story’s events.



Read the drama. Use the Study Buddy and the Close Reading to guide your reading.

Genre: Drama



To help me understand the plot of this drama, I'm going to identify its episodes.

Close Reading

How is James and Jamaal's problem solved? **Circle** the episode at the end of the play that resolves their conflict.

Underline sentences that illustrate the play's rising action, climax, and falling action. How do these events work together to lead to the story's resolution?

Lost in Time *by Marcus Factor*

- 1 [Curtain rises on an elaborate museum exhibit featuring a gigantic T-Rex skeleton. Two boys gaze up at it with awe.]
- 2 JAMAAL: Look at the enormous size of that thing's teeth!
- 3 JAMES: That *thing* is the tyrant king of the dinosaur world—the ferocious and infamous *Tyrannosaurus rex*.
- 4 JAMAAL: Cool! Mr. Flin will have a field day with this guy!
- 5 [As they glance around, the boys discover they're alone.]
- 6 JAMES: We've lost our class! They must've kept going!
- 7 JAMAAL: Well, we'll just have to find the mummies, right?
- 8 JAMES: Yeah, but we have a ton of territory to cover.
- 9 [The boys begin walking. As they pass the T-Rex, a tremendous roar booms out and they jump back, terrified.]
- 10 JAMAAL: Is it just me, or did that skeleton make noise?
- 11 JAMES [*breathing heavily*]: Yes. Sound effects, I suppose. We have to find our class—we're four hours from home.
- 12 JAMAAL: Feels like we're in the jungle a billion years ago.
- 13 [A vast variety of dinosaur sounds resonate as the boys continue trekking through the museum. Suddenly, a distressed teacher hurriedly runs onto the stage.]
- 14 MR. FLIN: James! Jamaal! I've been searching everywhere! What were you . . . [*extremely distracted*] . . . This is a remarkable new exhibit. We have just enough time to get the class and take in the dinosaur display before lunch!



Read the excerpt from a novel. Then answer the questions that follow.

This excerpt is from a novel told from the point of view of a horse named Black Beauty.

from *Black Beauty*

by Anna Sewell

1 One day late in the autumn, my master had a long journey to go on business. I was put into the dog-cart, and John went with his master. . . . There had been a great deal of rain, and now the wind was very high and blew the dry leaves across the road in a shower. We went along merrily till we came to the toll-bar and the low wooden bridge. The river banks were rather high, and the bridge, instead of rising, went across just level, so that in the middle, if the river was full, the water would be nearly up to the woodwork and planks; but as there were good substantial rails on each side, people did not mind it.

2 The man at the gate said the river was rising fast, and he feared it would be a bad night. Many of the meadows were under water, and in one low part of the road the water was halfway up to my knees; the bottom was good, and master drove gently, so it was no matter.

3 When we got to the town of course I had a good bait, but as the master's business engaged him a long time we did not start for home till rather late in the afternoon. The wind was then much higher, and I heard the master say to John that he had never been out in such a storm; and so I thought, as we went along the skirts of a wood, where the great branches were swaying about like twigs, and the rushing sound was terrible.

4 "I wish we were well out of this wood," said my master.

5 "Yes, sir," said John, "it would be rather awkward if one of these branches came down upon us."

6 The words were scarcely out of his mouth when there was a groan, and a crack, and a splitting sound, and tearing, crashing down among the other trees came an oak, torn up by the roots, and it fell right across the road just before us. . . .

7 "That was a very near touch," said my master. "What's to be done now?"

8 "Well, sir, we can't drive over that tree, nor yet get round it; there will be nothing for it, but to go back to the four crossways, and that will be a good six miles before we get round to the wooden bridge again. . . ."

9 So back we went and round by the crossroads, but by the time we got to the bridge it was very nearly dark; we could just see that the water was over the middle of it; but as that happened sometimes when the floods were out, master did not stop. We were going along at a good pace, but the moment my feet touched the first part of the bridge I felt sure there was something wrong. I dare not go forward, and I made a dead stop. "Go on, Beauty," said my master, and he gave me a touch with the whip, but I dare not stir; he gave me a sharp cut; I jumped, but I dare not go forward.

10 "There's something wrong, sir," said John, and he sprang out of the dog-cart and came to my head and looked all about. He tried to lead me forward. "Come on, Beauty, what's the matter?" Of course I could not tell him, but I knew very well that the bridge was not safe.



11 Just then the man at the toll-gate on the other side ran out of the house, tossing a torch about like one mad. . . .

12 “What’s the matter?” shouted my master.

13 “The bridge is broken in the middle, and part of it is carried away; if you come on you’ll be into the river.”

14 “Thank God!” said my master. “You Beauty!” said John, and took the bridle and gently turned me round to the right-hand road by the river side. The sun had set some time; the wind seemed to have lulled off after that furious blast which tore up the tree. It grew darker and darker, stiller and stiller. I trotted quietly along, the wheels hardly making a sound on the soft road. . . .

15 We saw a light at the hall-door and at the upper windows, and as we came up mistress ran out, saying, “Are you really safe, my dear? Oh! I have been so anxious, fancying all sorts of things. Have you had no accident?”

16 “No, my dear; but if your Black Beauty had not been wiser than we were we should all have been carried down the river at the wooden bridge.” I heard no more, as they went into the house, and John took me to the stable. Oh, what a good supper he gave me that night, a good bran mash and some crushed beans with my oats, and such a thick bed of straw! and I was glad of it, for I was tired.

Answer the following questions.

1 Which of these sentences shows how the plot is resolved?

- A** “We were going along at a good pace, but the moment my feet touched the first part of the bridge I felt sure there was something wrong.”
- B** “Of course I could not tell him, but I knew very well that the bridge was not safe.”
- C** ““The bridge is broken in the middle, and part of it is carried away; if you come on you’ll be into the river.””
- D** ““No, my dear; but if your Black Beauty had not been wiser than we were we should all have been carried down the river at the wooden bridge.””



2 This question has two parts. Answer Part A, and then answer Part B.

Part A

What is the main conflict in the story?

- A** The storm causes a large branch to fall and nearly hit Black Beauty and the men.
- B** The men want Black Beauty to cross the bridge, but he knows it is out.
- C** The bridge breaks and is washed away by the rising water.
- D** The master must go into town for business during a terrible storm.

Part B

Which two paragraphs from the story support the answer in Part A?

- A** Paragraph 6
- B** Paragraph 9
- C** Paragraph 10
- D** Paragraph 13
- E** Paragraph 14
- F** Paragraph 15

3 Explain how Black Beauty’s decision not to cross the bridge changes the story. Use at least **two** details from the story in your answer.



Self Check

Go back and see what you can check off on the Self Check on page 44.