UNIT 1

Reader's Workshop

Plot and Conflict

Will the hero save the world and win the girl? Can the young soldier survive the war? How will the family stay alive on the deserted island? Good stories are all around you—in novels and short stories, on television, and in movies. How do they capture your imagination and keep you riveted? Read on to find out.

Part 1: Conflict—The Fuel of a Story

A knight must slay a fierce dragon. A girl faces the consequences of betraying her friend. No matter what they're about, all good stories are fueled by conflict. A conflict, or a struggle between opposing forces, can be external or internal.

- An external conflict involves a struggle between a character and an outside force, such as another character, a force of nature, or society.
- · An internal conflict is a struggle that takes place within a character's own mind, as he or she wrestles with difficult thoughts, feelings, or choices.

Whether it is external or internal, a conflict is what drives a story forward, from its beginning to its end. How will the characters handle the conflict? What obstacles will they face? Such questions prompt you to keep turning the pages.

Examine the different types of conflicts described in this graphic.



Included in this workshop: READING 6A Students analyze linear plot developments to determine whether and how conflicts are resolved

External

Character vs. Character Ling overhears Julian bragging about his malicious plan to ridicule her best friend. Angered, she confronts Julian and becomes even more incensed when he denies every word. (Ling vs. Julian)



TYPES OF CONFLICTS

External

Character vs. Force of Nature

A blinding snowstorm hits while Yoni is hiking in unfamiliar territory. Suddenly, he loses his bearings and has no idea how to find his way home. (Yoni vs. snowstorm)



External

Character vs. Society

The year is 1961. Sarah works in a factory at a time when workers must put in long hours and deal with dismal, even dangerous, conditions on the job. (Sarah vs. poor working conditions)



Internal

Character vs. Self

Hannah accepted Raj's marriage proposal against the strong wishes of her family. If she marries him, they will never speak to her again. It's one day before the wedding, and Hannah is doubting her

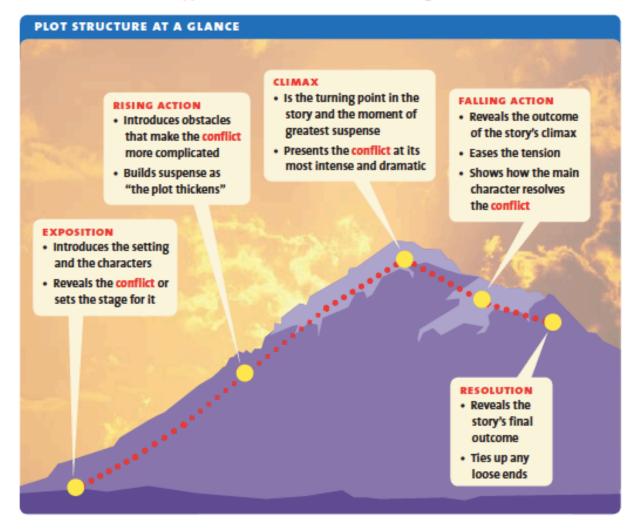
decision. (marry Raj and alienate her family vs. call off the wedding and lose her true love)



Part 2: Stages of Plot

To draw readers into a story and maintain their interest, a writer must do more than simply introduce an intriguing conflict. He or she has to create a plot in which every development builds upon the conflict. A **plot**, or the series of events in a story, typically includes five stages of development. In a linear plot, the order in which these stages occur follows a pattern. It's important to remember, though, that not every story follows the pattern exactly.

Take a look at the following graphic, which shows a linear structure. Notice what happens to the conflict at the different stages.



Of course, the plot's development does not have to follow this traditional pattern to be effective. A plot's development just needs to be suspenseful, coherent, constantly moving ahead, and satisfying. When evaluating plot development, you might want to keep those qualities in mind.