

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.

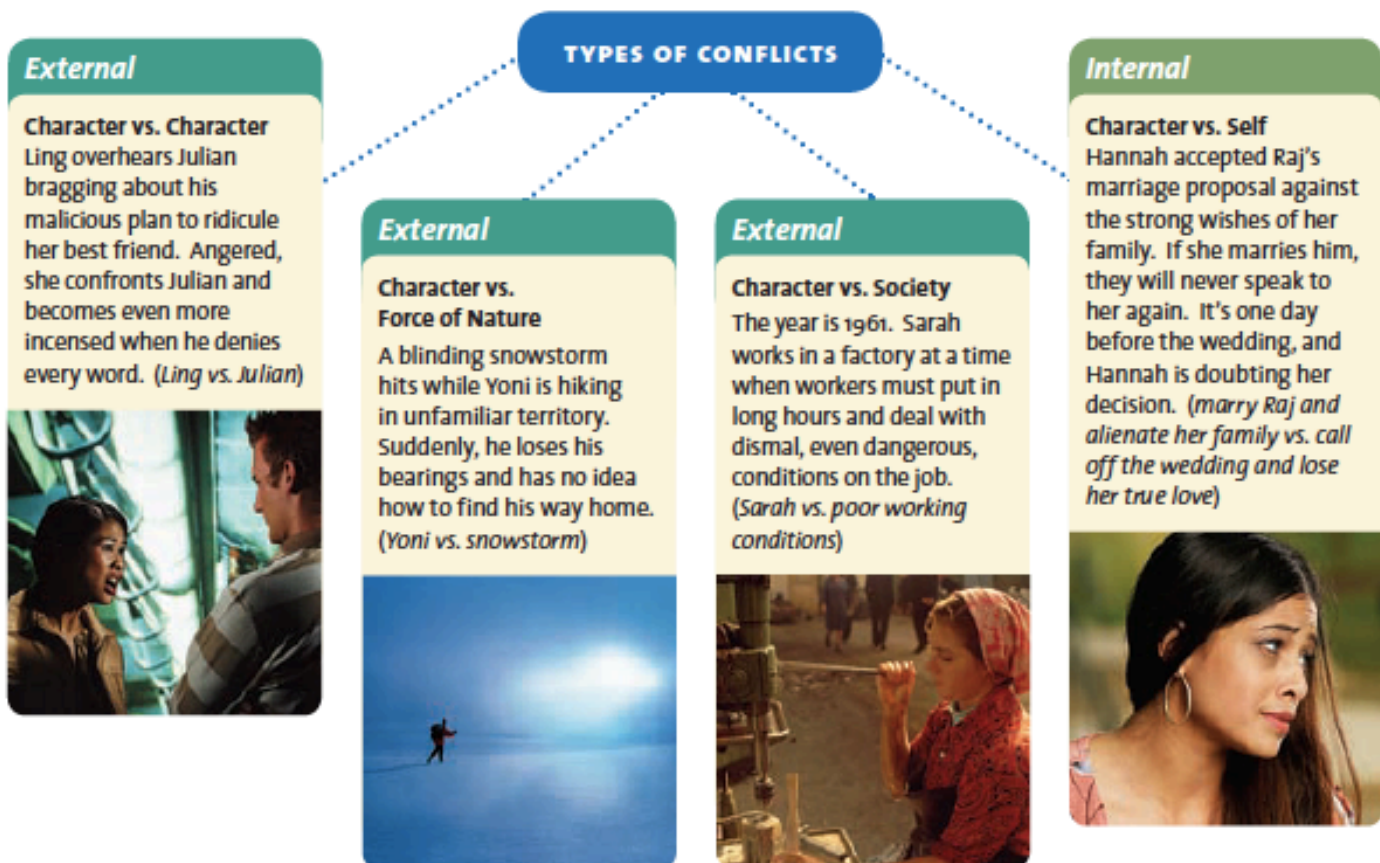
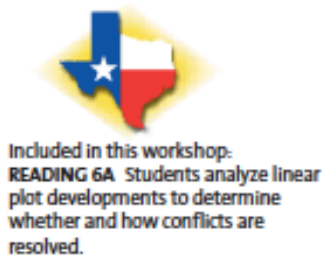
Part 1: Conflict—The Fuel of a Story

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.

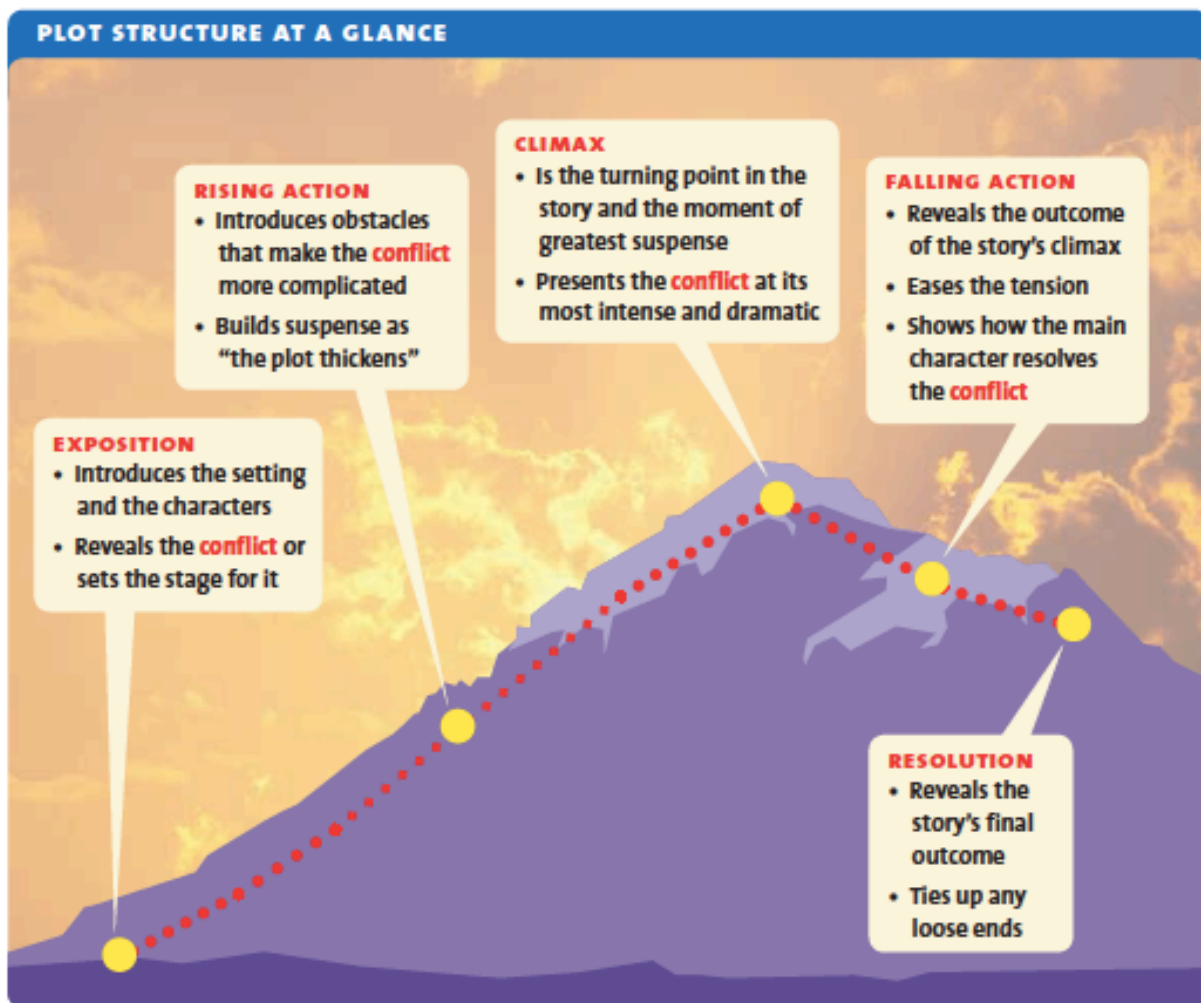
Examine the different types of conflicts described in this graphic.



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.