About This Lesson: Plot and Conflict

Common Core State Standards

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<th>Grade 6</th>
<th>Grade 7</th>
<th>Grade 8</th>
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<tr>
<td>RL 3 Describe how a particular story’s plot unfolds in a series of</td>
<td>RL 3 Analyze how particular elements of a story interact (e.g., how</td>
<td>RL 3 Analyze how particular incidents in a story propel the action.</td>
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<td>episodes as well as how the characters respond or change as the plot</td>
<td>setting shapes the characters or plot).</td>
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<td>moves toward a resolution.</td>
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Lesson Objectives
Tell students that, in this lesson, they will learn to
- define plot and conflict
- identify internal and external conflicts
- describe the stages of plot
- trace the development of conflict

Strategies for Teaching
How you use this interactive lesson will reflect your personal teaching style, your instructional goals, and your available technological tools. For example, Plot and Conflict can work well as both a whole-class lesson or as a targeted small-group skill review.

Here are teaching tips for each screen in the lesson.

SHARE WHAT YOU KNOW

Screen 2: What Makes a Good Story?
Divide students into groups to discuss their favorite stories and the characteristics of those stories. Then have a volunteer from each group write some characteristics in the response area. For example, students might mention action-packed scenes or realistic characters facing impossible conflicts. Once all groups have shared their responses, have the class vote on the top three characteristics.

Screen 3: The Power of a Good Story
Have students compare this list with the one they generated. Encourage them to give examples of books or movies for each characteristic on this list. For example, The Lightning Thief (Percy Jackson and the Olympians Series #1) by Rick Riordan has a compelling conflict—Percy, a demigod, and his friends must find and return Zeus’s lightning bolt in time to prevent a war among the gods of Olympus.
Screen 4: Plot in Literature
Remind students they probably talk about plots quite often with their friends or family members. Have volunteers describe what happened in a movie or TV show they recently watched. Students will most likely explain the most important events in the order they occurred. Tell them they just explained the plot. Then ask students to identify the problem the characters faced. Explain that this problem is the conflict.

LEARN THE SKILL

Screen 5: What Is Conflict?
Ask students to suggest other examples of each type of conflict—made up or from movies or stories. Or have students suggest other conflicts the images might represent. For example, an image of the tomatoes could represent characters vs. society: a town board forbids the use of a certain pesticide in farming. Some farmers defy the board and use it anyway, causing damage to the environment.

Screen 6: Name That Conflict
Have students explain how they determined the type of conflict. Tell students that an item may represent more than one kind of conflict.

To extend the lesson, have students work in small groups to create three conflicts. Have groups present the conflicts, and have the class determine the type. Or have groups write plot points for some of the conflicts.

Answers:
- Manuel sees one of his friends cheat on a test. Should he tell the teacher? *internal*
- A hiker is trapped in a snowstorm. *external: nature*
- A father of a soccer player and the coach argue about who should start the game. *external: characters*
- Janet’s parents expect her to go to law school, but she wants to be an artist. *external: characters; internal*
- A man walks out of his tent and finds himself face to face with a gigantic bear. *external: nature*
- When a superstore opens, many small businesses are forced to close. *external: society*
- Jordan quickly hides behind a tree when he sees two bullies coming his way. *external: characters*
- People fight to save Earth from an alien invasion. *external: nature and characters*
- Lily has a horrible secret and doesn’t know if she should tell her family. *internal*
- Jodi wants to go to the concert with her friends, but she has a paper to write. *internal*
- Ava and Jake are in love; their families are enemies. Should they defy their families? *external: characters; internal*
• Devon arranges a community rally to protest a law that just passed. \textit{external: society}
• Ella will never be able to pay her bills if she remains at this low-paying job. \textit{external: society}
• Juan’s parents are getting a divorce, and he must decide whom to live with. \textit{internal}
• The ship is sinking fast, and Eliza’s friend is trapped. Can she save her? \textit{external: nature; internal}
• Oliver is homeless and starving, but he knows stealing is wrong. \textit{internal}
• Anita is a great kicker, but she’s not allowed to play on the football team. \textit{external: society}
• A tornado demolishes a small town. \textit{external: nature}

**Screens 7 and 19: Identify the Conflict**
Have students take turns highlighting details that show how the setting affects the man. Enlist the rest of the class to help explain what the details reveal about the setting and the character. Have them use the details they highlighted to identify the conflict type: external—character vs. nature.

**Screen 8: Identify the Conflict**
Read each card aloud and have students vote if the statement is true or false. Before flipping the card, have students explain their reasoning. Help students understand that they need to use the details from the passage to analyze the conflict.

**Screen 9: Trace the Conflict**
Help students understand the differences between the stages. Remind students that a story usually has one main conflict but that it could have some minor conflicts. Writers often introduce minor conflicts during the rising action to add suspense and complicate the plot.

Have students choose another fairy tale or fable they are familiar with. Then have them chart the story on the plot mountain.

**Screen 10: Trace the Conflict**
Divide students into small groups and have them determine the correct order of events. Then have one member of each group move one event and explain their reasoning for moving it to that spot. If students don’t agree on the order, discuss their ideas and help them understand the correct order.

**Screen 11: Trace the Conflict**
For each plot stage, have a volunteer highlight the sentences he or she feels represent that stage. Before clicking to check, ask the class if they agree and then discuss their ideas. Based on class discussion, highlight any additional text or erase highlights. Then click to reveal the answer. Review the annotations (and delete added highlights) before moving on to the next stage.
Screen 12: Tips for Analyzing Plot and Conflict
You might do this activity as a whole class or divide students into small groups and assign each group a different story. Have each group work together to complete the sentence frames and then take turns filling out the frames on the board. Discuss responses as a class, making changes or adding notes as a result of the discussion.

PRACTICE & APPLY

Screens 13 and 20: Identify the Conflict
Background About *The Enchanted April* by Elizabeth von Arnim:
This novel is set in England in the 1920s and is about four very different women who decide to rent a castle together in Italy.

Have a volunteer underline details that reveal Mrs. Wilkins’s predicament. Enlist the class to help explain what the details might reveal. For example, students might note that Mrs. Wilkins watches the other woman for a minute, trying to decide if she should approach her. This shows that she is shy and not comfortable talking to people she doesn’t know well.

Screen 14: Identify the Conflict
Remind students of the details they underlined and what they learned about Mrs. Wilkins. Then read each card and have students vote if the statement is true or false. Before flipping the card to reveal the answer, discuss their reasoning, such as details or lines from the text that do or do not support the statement.

Screen 15: Trace the Conflict
Divide students into pairs or small groups and have them work to identify the text that corresponds to each plot stage. Then discuss responses as a class, highlighting or underlining the details that helped students answer the questions.

Screens 16 and 21: Trace the Conflict
Have students work with the same partner or group to complete the plot diagram. Then have a volunteer from each group complete the diagram on the board. Have them explain the details or lines that helped them summarize the plot stages.

Screen 17: Spin a Story
Divide students into pairs or small groups. Have them spin for a topic and then work together to create a conflict and possible plot events. Then have each group share their conflicts and events.

To extend the activity, have each group write a short story based on their events and conflicts. Invite volunteers to read their stories aloud and have the class chart the events on a plot diagram.
**Screen 18: Pop!**

Have students take turns choosing an item and answering the question. Sample answers are provided. If a question asks for an example, consider asking more than one student to respond. You may want to divide the class into small teams and keep score. If a team does not give an adequate example, another team can “steal” the question. However, avoid revealing the answer until the other team responds.

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**Note:** Printable versions of all public-domain selections in this lesson are available on the following pages of this document.
from “To Build a Fire”
by Jack London

The exposed fingers were quickly going numb again. Next he brought out his bunch of sulphur matches. But the tremendous cold had already driven the life out of his fingers. In his effort to separate one match from the others, the whole bunch fell into the snow. He tried to pick it out of the snow, but failed. The dead fingers could neither clutch nor touch. He was very careful. He drove the thought of his freezing feet, and nose, and cheeks, out of his mind.

“John Henry”

John Henry was a powerful man. Day after day, he worked on building the railroad, hammering steel spikes into hard rock. He was the railroad's best steel-driving man. One day, a salesman came to show off a new invention: a drill that was powered not by human strength but by steam. The salesman boasted that the new machine could drill through rock better and faster than any man. John Henry took that claim personally. He challenged the steam drill to a duel.

John Henry gripped a sledgehammer in each hand. He swung each hammer over his head and pounded spikes into rocks without stopping. Nearby, the steam-powered drill cut into rock with an ear-splitting sound. When the time was up and the dust had cleared, the foreman measured the results. John Henry had drilled two holes seven feet deep. The machine had drilled only one nine-foot hole. John Henry was declared the winner. Man had beaten the machine!

But then, John Henry's hammers slipped out of his hands. He fell to the ground and stopped breathing. The crowd was left in shock. John Henry had beaten the steam drill but had paid a heavy price: He had given up his life to prove that a man was better than a machine.
from *The Enchanted April*
by Elizabeth von Arnim

Mrs. Wilkins watched her a minute, trying to screw up courage to speak to her. She wanted to ask her if she had seen the advertisement. She did not know why she wanted to ask her this, but she wanted to. How stupid not to be able to speak to her. She looked so kind. She looked so unhappy. Why couldn't two unhappy people refresh each other on their way through this dusty business of life by a little talk—real, natural talk, about what they felt, what they would have liked, what they still tried to hope?
“An Old Flame”

Katya had sensed something wrong the minute the transportation officer hit the WAFT button. For a moment, there had been a terrifying feeling of nothingness. Then there was a blinding green and the sensation of her limbs being pulled in all directions.

Usually, WAFTing from one place to another was instantaneous—and pain-free. Katya rubbed her arms and tried to stand. Nearby, Damon was doing the same.

“What was that?” she exclaimed.

The teenagers were interns on the medical ship Herba II. They were supposed to be transporting much-needed supplies to the new colony on Zeta.

“Judging from the dried-out terrain, I’d say we’re on the far side of the planet,” said Damon.

“Nice,” said Katya, stabbing a button on her communicator. Nothing. “That weird WAFT we just made must have busted these things. Now what?”

“Herba’s sensors are bound to pick us up.”

“I wouldn’t count on it,” said Katya. “Whatever blew out the WAFTer probably affected the rest of the ship’s instruments.”

Just then, a strange howl filled the air. “A weimacore,” said Katya. Her face had turned a pale gray.

“Aren’t those deadly? And bear-sized?”

“Bigger,” said Katya.

“Let’s go. Which way’s north?”

“Oh, no you don’t,” said Katya, pulling Damon back by his uniform collar.

“We’d never survive the subzero night. And besides, where there’s one weimacore, there’s bound to be more.”

“Hey!” shouted Damon. “It’s the Herba!” He and Katya waved their arms, yelling fruitlessly.

“We’re dead meat,” said Damon. “Hey, what are you doing?” Katya was picking up twigs. Now she was kneeling directly under Zeta’s brightest sun, rolling a twig between her palms.

“Something I learned in Girl Cadets,” she said.

“That ancient stuff? I never wasted my time on it.”
The dry wood burst into flames. By the time the *Herba II* made a second pass, a fire signaled their position. “You should never forget the old ways,” said Katya as the landing shuttle came to their rescue.