Plotting a Story
What are the elements for creating a dynamic plot?

Grades 9-12 Lesson: Plotting a Story
Grade Band: 9-12
Arts Subject: Media Arts
Other Subject: English & Literature

SUMMARY
In this 9-12 lesson, students examine a plot's function within a story. They will identify and apply elements of a plot — conflict, climax, and resolution. Students will collaboratively write original plot summaries, then individually write original stories using the same plot. They will record and share their plot summaries through audio storytelling.

PREPARATION
Learning Objectives
Students will:

- Examine, analyze, and evaluate plot as an element of fiction writing.
- Identify and define elements of a plot — conflict, climax, and resolution.
- Write an original plot summary.
- Incorporate plot into an original story.
- Use technology to tell an audio story.

Standards Alignment
National Core Arts Standards
MA:Cr2.1.l Apply aesthetic criteria in developing, proposing, and refining artistic ideas, plans, prototypes, and production processes for media arts productions, considering original inspirations, goals, and presentation context.

MA:Cr3.1.Ia. Consolidate production processes to demonstrate deliberate choices in organizing and integrating content and stylistic conventions in media arts productions, demonstrating understanding of associated principles, such as emphasis and tone.

MA:Pr6.1.Ia. Design the presentation and distribution of collections of media artworks, considering combinations of artworks, formats, and audiences.

Common Core State Standards
ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.5 Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.6 Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, taking advantage of technology's capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically.

[ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.5](#) Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience.

[ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.6](#) Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information.

Recommended Student Materials

Editable Documents: *Before sharing these resources with students, you must first save them to your Google account by opening them, and selecting "Make a copy" from the File menu. Check out [Sharing Tips](#) or [Instructional Benefits](#) when implementing Google Docs and Google Slides with students.*

- [Story vs Plot](#)
- [Vocabulary: Plotting a Story](#)
- [Rubric: Plotting a Story](#)

Websites

- [Plot](#)

Videos

- [Story vs Plot](#)
- [Story, Plot, Genre, Theme - Screenwriting Basics](#)
- [What are the 7 Major Plots in Storytelling?](#)
- [Find Your Character Voice](#)

Teacher Background

Teachers should consider bringing in books you or your class has read to discuss and make comparisons about the plot of a story.

Student Prerequisites

Students should be familiar with fiction stories and the writing process. Basic technical skills are required for recording an audio story.

Accessibility Notes

Provide assistive technologies for students and extra time as needed for writing and creating audio files. Alternative methods of story sharing can be done through skits or a visual presentation.

INSTRUCTION

Engage

1. Distribute the handout, [Story vs Plot](#) and post the following statements on the board:

- Statement A: *The wife died. The husband died.*

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- Statement B: *The wife died, and then the husband died from grief.*

2. Ask students to distinguish between the statements. Note that statement A is simply the relaying of events and that statement B not only relays a sequence of events but notes the effects of those events on the people involved. Have students reflect on these ideas in the handout.

3. Summarize the class discussion by explaining that statement A is an example of a narrative story and statement B is an example of a [plot](#). Reiterating that plot not only spells out a story's sequence of events but reveals the impact of those events on the story's characters. Explain that it is a literary element that depends on several other literary elements for its success, such as conflict, climax, and resolution. To reinforce understanding, watch plot explanations in [Story vs Plot](#) or [Story, Plot, Genre, Theme - Screenwriting Basics](#).

4. As a class, come up with a firm definition of plot. Use the ideas explored in class to develop a student-made definition of plot. Be sure to include ideas about significant events, actions, conflict, and the effect of these elements on a story's characters.

5. Divide students into small groups. Have them come up with a few plot lines of their own following the established rules. Discuss the effectiveness of the plot lines with the class.

Build
1. Introduce or review the following terms with students, [Vocabulary: Plotting a Story](#). Discuss with students how each of these elements work together to form a strong plot.

2. Have students rejoin their small groups. Students will brainstorm popular plot patterns from movies, books, or plays they have seen/read. Have them consider the following questions: *Can you pick out which plot pattern or patterns are at work in each of them? Do your favorite books tend to have similar plot patterns or a wide variety of them? Which plot pattern do you think is most effective?*

3. Remind students that a plot moves a story from point A to point Z. Plot patterns are outlines for actual plots and not plots themselves. They can be used to help guide the development of plots and stories. Some commonly used plot patterns are discussed in this video, [What are the 7 Major Plots in Storytelling?](#), or share the following:
- From problem to solution
- From mystery to solution
- From strife to peace
- From danger to safety
- From confusion to order
- From dilemma to decision
- From ignorance to knowledge

- From questions to answers

Apply

1. In their small groups, have each group collaborate to identify a conflict they'd like to see resolved in a story. Remind students that a conflict does not have to exist between two characters. Ask them to choose a conflict with "high stakes" or a conflict that presents significant difficulty for the characters. Guide them away from "low stakes" conflict like a character who is unable to decide between wearing a red and a blue shirt (though such a harmless gesture might mask a more serious conflict.) A "high stakes" conflict might be a character who must decide between keeping a secret and divulging it.

2. As a group, write a plot summary. Plot summaries should include key events in the story and express how those events impact the characters. Allow time for students to write, revise, and edit their summaries. Tell students they will not be bound to these plot summaries and that the creative process is always open to change.

3. Draft a story with the plot summary. Students will now write independently from their groups, but each member will use the same plot. Stories will be distinguished by each student's approach to the writing. Characters, setting, dialogue, and styles will all vary. Allow students time to write their stories. Provide them with the Rubric: Plotting a Story so that they are sure to include all necessary elements: key events, the impact of those events on the story's characters, and evidence of a high stakes conflict.

4. Create an audiobook. Have students record and produce an audiobook using audio recording software or tools like GarageBand, Voice Memos, or Voice Recorder. Alternatively, students can use a video recording device like a phone camera.

5. Allow time for students to rehearse before recording. Encourage them to use the skills of a voice actor (tone, consistency, pacing, characterization, clarity), integrate sound effects, and/or use verbal visuals. Share the Teaching Artists Present video, Find Your Character Voice, so students can learn strategies for creating distinct voices and sounds by professional voice-over actor Alan Bomar Jones.

6. Illustrate or design cover art for the audiobook. Include the title, author, and a visual associated with the plot.

Reflect

1. Upload the audiobook files and cover art to an LMS (Canvas, Google Classroom, Blackboard, etc.) or shared digital folder. Give students time to listen to each other's story. Ask students to react to the story, noting what elements caught their attention.

2. Assess students' knowledge of plotting and writing a story with the [Rubric: Plotting a Story](#)**.** Write additional feedback in the "Notes" section of the rubric.

Extend

1. Students can select one story to turn into a skit or play. Allow students to create simple costumes and props to support the production. If possible, arrange for the students to perform the play for another class.

Credits

Original Writer, Kathy Cook
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