

# Elements of Short Fiction: Plot & Setting

*by Anthony Starros, M.F.A.*

## What is a short story?

### Short Story:

a short story is a narrative that displays some sort of change, slight or grand.

**Plot:**

how and/or why a story progresses—plot focuses on *causality*:

*Narrative:*

*“The king died—then the queen died.”*

*Plot:*

*“The king died—then the queen died of grief.”*

## **Conflict:**

the force & counterforce of a story—it is what creates the “drama” or the “tension.” It is the struggle between opposing forces. “What’s at stake?”

## **Rising Action:**

The early events in a story that build anticipation and begin setting up the *conflict* that will be driving the storyline, adding suspense, and engaging the reader.

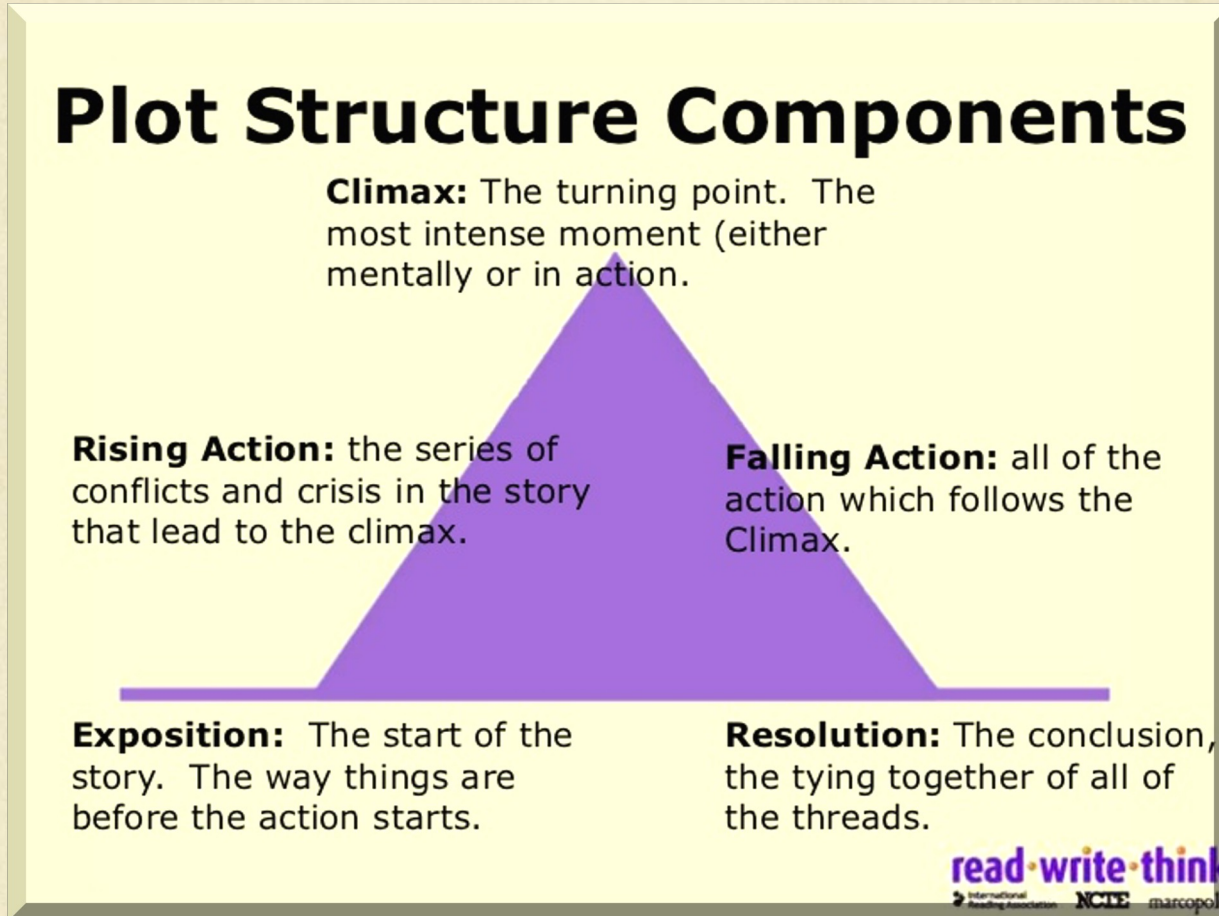
## **Climax:**

“the turning point” – the point of highest interest in the narrative – the point where the most important part of the action takes place, where the central character could win or lose all that’s “at stake.”

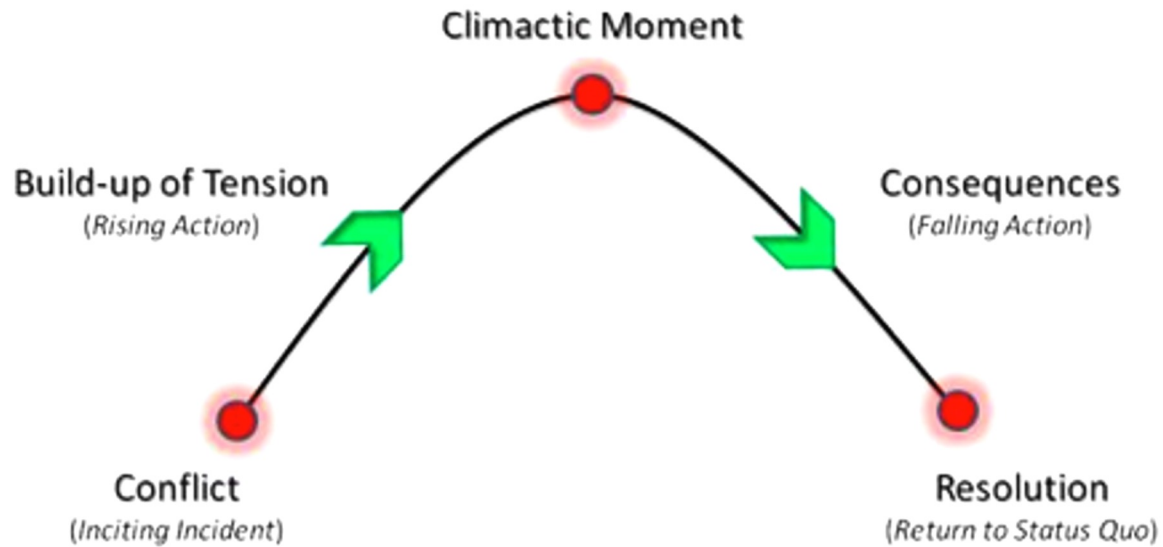
**Resolution (*Denouement*):**

the “falling action” of the narrative in which the conflict is settled or significantly altered.

# Freytag's Pyramid



## Simple Story Arc





## **Setting:**

the physical and social context in which the action of a story occurs: time, place, social environment, etc. Setting can/should be used to evoke theme & mood.

-time of day

-place (*home, office, back seat of a car, etc.*)

-geography (*country? state? city?*)

-era (*modern day, recent past, distant past, etc.*)

## **Theme:**

the unifying concept or idea of a literary work - a reader's interpretation of what the author intended the story to mean.

## **Tone:**

the author's attitude toward the theme of a story as expressed through the use of word choice, imagery, narrative, setting, and exposition.

Part Two:

## **“Popular Mechanics” by Raymond Carver**

- 1) How is the tone set? How does the setting contribute to the mood and theme?
- 2) What does the flowerpot symbolize? It's breaking? Are there any other symbols at work here?
- 3) Is there any foreshadowing? Where? How does it contribute to the plot?
- 4) What is the conflict here?
- 5) What is the resolution? What does the last line mean?
- 6) What is the theme?
- 7) How does the title contribute to the theme?
- 8) Bonus: who is more juvenile, the husband or the wife?

### Today's Activity:

- Review questions
- Discuss in groups
- Class discussion
- In-class journal entry #1

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