Short Story Plots

Grade Level: 6-9

Introduction

The plots of stories are generally comprised of five main components: an introduction, the rising action, the climax, the falling action, and the resolution. Short stories are a great way to experience the elements of this plot structure over a short span of reading. These different components can then be plotted into an infographic to visually represent the development of tension and resolution in a given story. These infographics provide a clear survey of the events of a story and can be compared to examine the similarities and differences in different authors' approaches to the traditional narrative structure.

This lesson plan leverages EBSCO's Poetry & Short Story Reference Source database and can be adapted for middle or high school. It asks students to compare the structures of several short stories and observe the commonalities between all of them. It also provides an opportunity for students to collaboratively create their own story and apply the formula to their original narrative.

Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.2, 5, 9; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.3-5; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.L.1-3 | NCTE 4-6, 11, 12

- R.2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
- R.5: Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.
- W.3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.
- SL.1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Essential Questions

1. What are the main elements of plot structure?
2. Why do almost all stories follow this structure?
3. How can authors play with this structure, and what effect would this have on the narrative?

Objectives

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

1. Identify key points in stories.
2. Summarize the events of a story in a concise manner.
3. Organize key points of stories into chronological action categories.
4. Develop an original narrative in a collaborative manner.
5. Compare the plot structures of multiple stories.
6. Revise writing to achieve consistency and cohesiveness.

Materials

- Computer/laptop
- Access to Poetry & Short Story Reference Source
- Paper, markers and sticky notes or Canva (via internet)

Procedure

1. Introduce or review the concept of plot structure using the following terms: introduction (exposition), rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution (denouement). Brainstorm with students what generally occurs in each of these sections of a story based on their understanding and write their ideas on the whiteboard. For example:

   - Introduction: characters introduced, setting established, prior events acknowledged, etc.
   - Climax: protagonist and antagonist struggle, pivotal information revealed, characters put in dangerous or stressful situations, etc.

2. Search "JN Infographics: Short Story Plot Points" on Poetry & Short Story Reference Source for a selection of short stories with plot point infographics available. Have students read two or three of the short stories listed.

   - Have students summarize the events of the story in a paragraph (4-6 sentences).
   - Discuss the stories in relation to the terms above.
     - How would you divide the story into the different plot structure sections?
     - What occurs in each section of the story?
     - How long is each section? Are they relatively equal or do some sections take up more of the story?

3. Show and discuss the Poetry & Short Story Reference Source story infographics for the stories that students read. What are the similarities between the plot structures? Are any stories particularly different?

4. Divide students into groups of five and have them conduct a Write-Around to develop their own original narratives. On a sheet of lined paper (or using a shared device), one student writes an introduction to a story and then passes the paper to the next student, who will write the rising action. This continues for the climax, falling action, and resolution.

5. Allow students time to revise their stories without changing the major plot points. They may choose to rewrite the story with a consistent voice, add clarifying details, improve transitions, etc. Students may workshop their stories with classmates.

6. Have students apply the plot structure model to the newly-created narratives. They should create a plot infographic for their stories, using those on Poetry & Short Story Reference Source as models. Students can either continue to work in groups, choosing one or two of the group's stories to work on, or can work individually on their own stories. The infographic can be constructed using paper and markers or on online graphic design tools like Canva. If created by hand, students may want to create a draft by putting plot points on sticky notes and receive teacher feedback before finalizing.

Assessment

Formative Assessment

Conduct smaller evaluations that track progress towards final unit goal. Students can pass in their stories and infographics for assessment and feedback on creative writing or short story unit goals. The original Write-Around activity should be included with the final draft.

Name: _____ Date: _____ Class: _____

Short Story Summary

Title: _____ Author: _____

Summarize the events of the story in a paragraph (4-6 sentences).