# Creating Conflict

| Lesson Objective | (Prewriting) Students will use the components of plot to develop the conflict in a concise short story. | |
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| Vocabulary | **conflict:** a struggle between two forces | |
| Reviewed Vocabulary | climax, exposition, falling action, fiction, plot, resolution, rising action | |
| Instructional Materials | **Teacher** | **Student** |
| | • Teacher Masters<br><br>• Demonstrate—An assignment for a short story. You can choose from the themes in ***Demonstrate— Possible Themes*** (optional), or connect the assignment to your class's current reading.<br><br>• Demonstrate (optional)—An idea for a story of your own, based on the writing topic you will assign.<br><br>• Timer | • Student Booklet |

## Preview

**Conflict is an essential element in stories. In literature, conflict is a struggle between two forces. To appreciate a story when we read, we must understand the main conflict and how it is developed in the story. When we write our own short stories, we must develop the main conflict with details and keep our stories focused in order to interest our readers. This lesson will help you plan details that develop the conflict in a very short story (one or two pages).**

| Teacher Note |
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| Allow two class periods for this lesson, including time for students to draft their stories. |

## Engage Prior/Informal Knowledge

| Teacher Note |
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| This lesson follows the "Conflict Resolution" lesson of the Reading Module. Prior to this lesson, students should be familiar with the components of plot structure. Allow extra time for review, if needed. |

1. Students complete a silent warm-up to review what they already know about the elements of plot.

   Display the *TM#1: Engage Prior Knowledge—Silent Warm-Up* and direct students' attention to their copies.

   **Take 3 minutes to complete the worksheet to review what you know about conflict and plot in literature.**

   Set the timer for 3 minutes.

2. Review student responses.

When 3 minutes have passed, ask students to share their responses.

> **In reading, what is a conflict?** *(a struggle between two forces)*

> **What are the five parts of the plot diagram?** *(exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution)* **We will review what each of those means when we practice with our own stories later in the lesson.**

Label the parts of the plot diagram on the display.

> **One way to write a focused story is to decide on a specific conflict you want to develop, determine what the climax of the story will be, and plan the plot elements of your story with that conflict and climax in mind.**

## Demonstrate

1. Demonstrate deciding on a topic.

> **For this assignment, you will write fiction, or a story about imaginary events. However, you can base your story on something that actually happened and add creative details.**

| Teacher Note |
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| Be sure to prepare a short story assignment for this lesson. You might choose a theme from the list of themes in *TM#3: Demonstrate—Possible Themes (optional)* and have students select a topic that develops that particular theme. You might also assign a story topic that aligns with the current class reading. For this Demonstrate section, you can use either the script below or your own original story idea to model planning story elements on a plot diagram. |
| Students may benefit from reading a short text and thinking about how the author "planned" the conflict and the climax before writing. Have students practice thinking about what planning might look like in a story that's already written. |

**I am going to write about a student named Jane, who was in high school and stayed out past the time her mom had told her to come home. This is a very specific event, so it's a good topic for a story.**

Display the *TM#4: Demonstrate—Creating Conflict Planner*, and point to each section as you explain.

**The first step in the planner is to finish the sentence, "I am going to write about the time when…." This shows that your plot idea is specific, which will make your story more focused. I have written my idea for a story on this line.**

2. Demonstrate planning the main conflict.

**Second, I want to decide what the main conflict—or struggle between two forces—in my story will be.**

**In literature, the conflict is directly related to the characters. Conflicts are created by characters' personalities and goals, and by their reactions to problems.**

**In this story, the main conflict will be between the two main characters, Jane and her mom. I have written this on my planner. When I develop my story, I will think about the conflict by thinking about my characters' personalities and goals, and about their reactions to the problems I create in my story.**

3. Demonstrate planning the climax.

**Next, I plan the climax of my story—when the story is the most intense. The climax is not the beginning of a story, but we start planning with the climax to help us choose our details carefully. This is important when we are writing a short story of just a page or two and must keep our writing very focused. The climax is just one place to begin planning a story. Some writers start planning their writing by setting the scene or**

considering how the story will end. For this lesson, though, we will practice starting with the climax.

Writers of fiction, or stories about imaginary events, can use events that have happened in their lives to inspire them. In this case, there was a student named Jane who *did* stay out late, but because this is fiction, I am going to add details that I invent. I'm going to write that the most intense moment was when Jane came home late, and her mom was so worried that she had called the neighbors to the house. I have written that in the box for "Climax."

**Watch For**

Students might want to change the story details. For example, they might say that Jane's mother should not have called the neighbors. Explain that this is just one example of a simple conflict and story plot. Encourage students to focus on learning and practicing the strategy so that they can later apply it to their own stories.

Again, the climax of the story is not the beginning. So why do we start our planning with the climax? *(We start our planning with the climax to help us choose our details carefully.)*

4. Demonstrate planning the plot from the beginning.

Now, I think about the beginning of the story and plan the exposition. What is the exposition? *(The exposition includes events that will happen that set up the main conflict.)* My main conflict is between Jane and her mom, so I include events that build up that conflict. In thinking about my characters, I want them to have conflicts that a typical teenager might have with her parents, but still have a basically good relationship. Jane wants to go out late, and her mom wants to protect her. My summary of the exposition is, "Jane argued with her mom about going out, but then felt bad afterward."

**What is the rising action?** *(the part of the story that builds up to the climax)* **In the rising action, I plan action that builds up to the climax. My climax is, "Jane came home late, and her mom was so worried that she had called the neighbors." So in my rising action, I will describe the time just *before* Jane went home. During that time, Jane made her decision to stay out late, even though she knew her mom wanted her home. My summary is, "Jane was having fun with her friends so she ignored her cell phone and the 'little voice' in her head telling her it was time to go home."**

5. Plot the falling action and resolution.

    **What is the falling action?** *(what happens after the climax)* **The climax is when she got home. Again, I focus on the conflict between Jane and her mom. My summary of what will happen right *after* she gets home is, "Jane realized that her mom put limits on her because she cared about her."**

    **The resolution shows how any loose ends are wrapped up. I want to show how the relationship between Jane and her mom was actually strengthened through this conflict. My summary is, "Jane's mom agreed to trust her, and Jane agreed to remember that her mom's limits reflected her love for Jane."**

6. Show the completed story to the students.

    **When you have finished planning your story, you will add details and connect the elements to draft a short story. Here is an example of a completed first draft for this story plan.**

    Either read the completed story from the *TM#4: Demonstrate—Creating Conflict Planner* aloud to the students, or ask student volunteers to read it aloud to the class.

## Practice

1. Students work in pairs to complete the *SB#2: Practice—Creating Conflict Planner* for a story you have assigned.

**Now you will work in pairs to practice completing a planner for a short story idea. You are practicing to make sure you understand the planning steps, so you will only complete the first page of the planner; you will *not* draft the story for this idea at this time.**

Have students restate the instructions, and check for understanding.

Circulate among the students while they work, check for understanding, and provide corrective feedback as needed.

2. When students have finished, ask for volunteers to share their work. Guide students in making their planning as specific as possible.

## Independent Practice

1. Have students complete page 1 of the *SB#3: Independent Practice— Creating Conflict Planner*.

2. Collect the materials, score the work, and check for mastery. To finalize the lesson at another time, return the planners, review that the story planning precedes story writing, and have students draft their stories.

| Teacher Note |
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| The sample story presented in this lesson is an intentionally simple example, designed to illustrate the strategy. One virtue of this schema for story planning is that it allows new obstacles and new complications on the way to the climax. Further lessons should expand on this basic application of the strategy by encouraging students to add greater complexity to their characters, conflicts, and plots. |