

# Plot Vocabulary

**action:** series of events comprising the subject of a novel, story, narrative poem, or a play; action, along with dialogue and the characters' thoughts, form the skeleton of a narrative's plot.

**ambiance:** loosely the term is equivalent to atmosphere or mood, but more specifically, ambiance is the atmosphere or mood of a particular setting or location

**anticlimax:** a drop, often sudden and unexpected, from a dignified or important idea or situation to one that is trivial or humorous; also a sudden descent from something sublime to something ridiculous; in fiction and drama, this refers to action that is disappointing in contrast to the previous moment of intense interest

**atmosphere** (also called **mood**): the emotional feelings inspired by a work; the term is borrowed from meteorology to describe the dominant mood of a selection as it is created by diction, dialogue, setting, and description

**climax** (from Greek word for "ladder"): the moment in a play, novel, short story, or narrative poem at which the crisis reaches its point of greatest intensity and is thereafter resolved; it is also the peak of emotional response from a reader or spectator and usually the turning point in the action

**closure** (from the Latin *clausura*, "a closing"): a sense of completion or finality at the conclusion of play or narrative work-- especially a feeling in the audience that all the problems have been resolved satisfactorily; some more modern narratives reject closure as too "simplistic" and "artificial" in comparison with the complexities of human living

**conflict:** the opposition between two characters (such as a protagonist and an antagonist), between two large groups of people, or between the protagonist and a larger problem such as forces of nature, ideas, public mores, and so on; conflict may also be completely internal, such as the protagonist struggling with his psychological tendencies (drug addiction, self-destructive behavior, and so on); not all conflicts in a work may be resolved successfully (or resolved at all)

**denouement:** French word meaning "unknotting" or "unwinding," denouement refers to the outcome or result of a complex situation or sequence of events, an aftermath or resolution that usually occurs near the final stages of the plot; usually the denouement ends as quickly as the writer can arrange it-- for it occurs only after all the conflicts have been resolved.

**deus ex machina** (from the Greek *theos apo mechanes*): an unrealistic or unexpected intervention to rescue the protagonists or resolve the story's conflict; the term means "The god out of the machine," and it refers to stage machinery; a classical Greek actor, portraying one of the Greek gods in a play, might be lowered out of the sky onto the stage and then use his divine powers to solve all the mortals' problems; the term is a negative one, and it often implies a lack of skill on the part of the writer.

**epiphany:** the standard term for the sudden flare into revelation of an ordinary object or scene. In particular, the epiphany is a revelation of such power and insight that it alters the entire world-view of the thinker who experiences it

**flashback:** a method of narration in which present action is temporarily interrupted so that the reader can witness past events--usually in the form of a character's memories, dreams, narration, or even authorial commentary

**foreshadowing:** Suggesting, hinting, indicating, or showing what will occur later in a narrative; foreshadowing often provides hints about what will happen next

**frame narrative:** the result of inserting one or more small stories within the body of a larger story that encompasses the smaller ones; often this term is used interchangeably with both the literary technique and the larger story itself that contains the smaller ones, which are called *pericopes*, "framed narratives," or "embedded narratives"

**in medias res** (Latin for "in the middle[s] of things"): to "begin" the story in the middle of the action

**mood** (also called **atmosphere**): the emotional feelings inspired by a work; the term is borrowed from meteorology to describe the dominant mood of a selection as it is created by diction, dialogue, setting, and description

**narration, narrative:** the act of telling a sequence of events, often in chronological order; alternatively, the term refers to any story, whether in prose or verse, involving events, characters, and what the characters say and do; a narrative is likewise the story or account itself

**plot:** the structure and relationship of actions and events in a work of fiction; in order for a plot to begin, some sort of catalyst is necessary; while the temporal order of events in the work constitutes the "story," we are speaking of plot rather than story as soon as we look at how these events relate to one another and how they are rendered and organized so as to achieve their particular effects

**setting:** the general locale, historical time, and social circumstances in which the action of a fictional or dramatic work occurs; the setting of an episode or scene within a work is the particular physical location in which it takes place

**subplot:** a minor or subordinate secondary plot, often involving a deuteragonist's struggles, which takes place simultaneously with a larger plot, usually involving the protagonist; the subplot often echoes or comments upon the direct plot either directly or obliquely