

## Grade 8 Playlist: Comparing Plot Structures and How They Influence Meaning and Style

*Aligns with CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.8.5:*

- Compare and contrast the structure of two or more texts and analyze how the differing structure of each text contributes to its meaning and style.

### Welcome

Most narrative structures consist of plot (the sequence of events and action within the story) and setting (where and when the story takes place). Recognizing the connections between these components reveals the overall meaning of a text and an author's style, which gives readers a deeper understanding of the author's message, or what the author intended for readers to take away from the story.

### Objectives

In this playlist, students will learn how to:

- explain how the structure of a text contributes to its meaning and style.
- evaluate the effect of one structure over another with regard to a work's meaning and style.

### Review

#### Key Terms

- A text's **structure** refers to the way an author arranges or organizes the plot of a story.
- A story's **plot** (the events within the story) is made up of five stages, or parts:
  - **Exposition** is the beginning of the story, which usually describes the setting, introduces characters, and possibly also introduces the story's central conflict.
  - **Rising action** is the series of events that lead up to, contribute to, or cause the central conflict's climax. This is when the action becomes more complicated and the characters exhibit some tension or crisis.
  - **Climax** is the turning point, or the highest point of emotion or action, in the story. It is usually the highest point of interest for readers, causing them to question or wonder what will happen next.
  - **Falling action** is when the action or events from the climax start to wind down and prepare for resolution.



- **Resolution** is the conclusion or ending of the story, when the central conflict and character crises resolve.
- Narrative **style** refers to how an author establishes images, tone, and the mood of the story through the use of figurative language, sentence structure and arrangement, diction (word choice), and the meaning of the text.

### Watch!

To help visualize common plot lines, the following video explains Freytag's Pyramid, a framework for narrative structure that uses all five stages of plot. This can help readers understand how most stories follow a plot pattern and how each point in the pattern reveals more and more about the text at hand:

- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ty1A7N\\_tyc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ty1A7N_tyc)

### Exploring the Standard

When analyzing a story's plot structure, it is important to look at the five stages of plot as well as the order of those stages. Examining the order allows readers to understand when and how events unfold in the story. Most authors choose a linear story line, in which events happen in chronological order: event A happens, event B happens, and then event C happens. Other authors choose a nonlinear story line, in which events do not happen chronologically: event C may be described first, then event A, and then B, or B and then A. These decisions reflect the way authors choose how or when they want specific story points or pieces of information to be revealed. Take a look at both options in Examples 1 and 2 below, and see how each choice affects the author's style and the text's meaning.

#### Example 1

A reader can look at most classic texts of literary fiction to see examples of linear plot lines. For instance, in *The Castle of Otranto*, author Horace Walpole tells the story of Manfred, Prince of Otranto, and his obsession with marrying Princess Isabella in an effort to keep the castle in his family. This novel follows Freytag's plot progression and uses a linear, chronological plot line.

Breaking down the plot in terms of Freytag's Pyramid looks something like this:

- *Exposition*: Manfred's son Conrad is about to marry Isabella. However, Conrad is killed when a huge helmet falls on top of him. Though devastated by his son's death, Manfred is more fearful that Conrad's death means a prophecy is being fulfilled—that his family will one day cease to rule the castle. Theodore, a peasant, tells Manfred what happened, and Manfred puts Theodore in prison.
- *Rising Action*: In order to prevent the prophecy from being fulfilled, Manfred decides to marry Isabella. Upset and scared, Isabella runs away and finds herself lost in passages beneath the castle.

