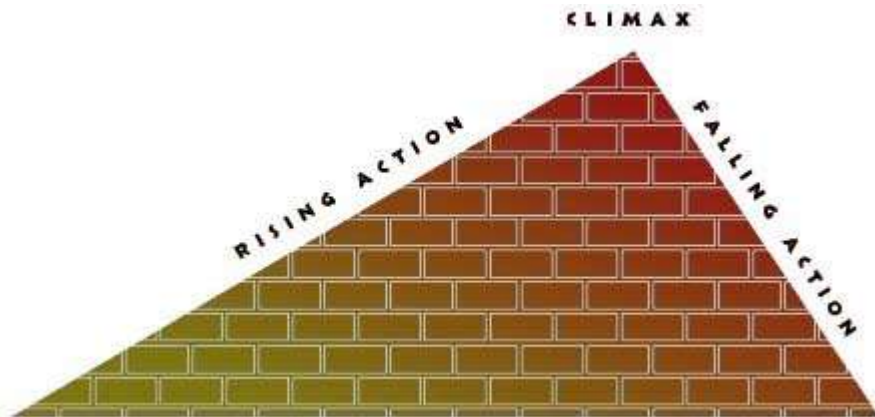


Plot

All stories have plot. Plot is the sequence of events that tell what is happening in a story. Plot is the skeleton or framework of a story. Most often, plot describes what happens first, what happens next, and what happens last in a story. Plot is simply the beginning, middle, and end of a story. For example, in "The Parable of the Prodigal Son" (Luke 15:11-32), the beginning is a son's decision to leave home, the middle is his decision to return home, and the end is his return home.

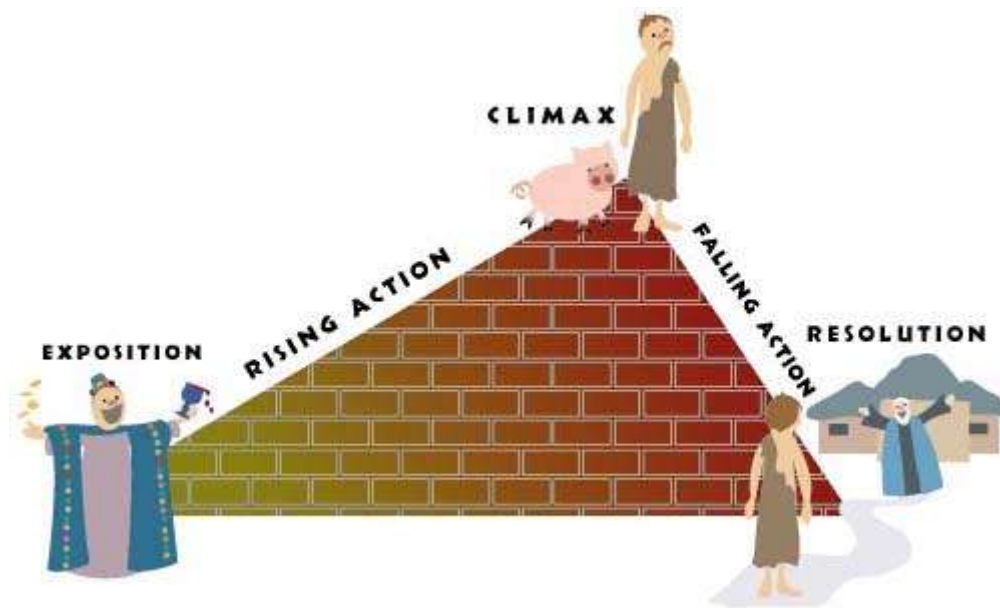


Although most stories are linear, going from beginning to end, the German author Gustav Freytag proposed a pyramid-shaped triangle that also models plot structure. This model, often called Freytag's triangle, not only describes a sequence of events but also suggests an emotional response to those events. Consequently, instead of the label *beginning*, Freytag uses *rising action*, instead of *middle*, he uses *climax*, and instead of *ending*, he uses *falling action*.



Freytag's triangle is a good start for understanding general plot structure, but it does not accurately describe what happens at the beginning and ending of a story. Traditionally a classic

story begins with the *exposition* which introduces the main character, suggesting personality traits. Following the exposition are the struggles or conflicts of the *rising action*, which lead the character to the *climax* or turning point in the story. Then following the climax, the *falling action* portrays the consequences of the character's decision, and the *resolution* tells readers how things turned out, answering the question "What finally happened?" (Many authors, though, especially contemporary authors, prefer to leave the resolution open for readers to decide the outcome.)



So, we can apply the principles of the traditional plot structure to "The Parable of the Prodigal Son." The exposition introduces the character of a younger son (we'll focus on the younger son now, but another possible meaningful aspect of this parable may address the older son as the main character) who seeks his inheritance to leave home. The rising action is the son's squandering of the inheritance through riotous living in a faraway country until he is destitute. The climax of the parable is the son's decision to return home after he has sunk so low that he is near death from starvation as a swine tender. The falling action demonstrates the consequences of the younger son's decision to return home by describing the father's joyous and the older son's troubled reaction to the return. And finally, the resolution is the father's counsel to rejoice at the return of someone who has been lost, of someone believed to be dead who is alive.

We need to clarify our definition of *climax*. Climax is the turning point in a story, the point when decisions, events, insights, actions cause consequences that affect the characters or outcome of the story. For instance, in "The Parable of the Good Samaritan" (Luke 10:25-37), the climax occurs when the good Samaritan stops on his way to Jericho to aid the wounded man. The actions of the priest and the Levite who walk by the beaten man lead up to the Samaritan's stopping, which turns the events in the story--things aren't the same after the Samaritan performs humanitarian service. Some define climax as the emotional high or most intense point in a story, and at times it may be that; however, for these lessons we will define climax as the turning point in a story.