

DESCRIBE THE PLOT | Identify Types of Problems & Solutions



Readers expect a story to have a problem.

Define problem as something that is wrong or not right.

- Reveal the flag icon. Compare it to a construction flagger warning drivers that something is wrong with the road ahead or the flag at the beach alerting swimmers that it's too dangerous.
- The warning flag is part of author stories, too. Every story has something happen that is bad, wrong, or dangerous.
- A story's problem is what makes the story interesting.



Readers expect problems to get solved.

Define solution as an answer.

- Compare it to a math problem that gets fixed or answered or solved.
- The reader wants to know *how* the character fixed or solved his problem.
- Many times, authors create an “all-better” solution. Reveal the fist-pump icon that demonstrates the feeling of success or victory. *Yeah! Everything is alright again.*

3 COMMON TYPES OF PROBLEMS

1. The main character has a **problem with someone.**

Identify WHO the main character is upset with.

- The “someone” causing the problem can be a person or animal in the same story as the main character.
- The “someone” can be multiple characters who are causing the main character’s problem.

2. The main character has a **problem with something.**

Identify WHAT the main character wants but can't have.

- “Something” can be a physical object that is lost, missing, broken, or not working (e.g., technology).
- “Something” can be bigger— like an environmental situation (e.g., the weather, a natural disaster) or a circumstance (e.g., not invited to a party, something is not fair, etc.).
- Although other characters might be involved, they are NOT the problem. These problems are often out of the character's control. They may be just part of life.

3. The main character has a **problem with himself.**

Identify WHY the main character is struggling.

- These are problems within the character that are related to his choices and feelings. He is his own problem.
- The struggle can involve a personal obstacle (e.g., an overwhelming fear, a challenging task, etc.), a difficult decision (e.g., tell the truth, cover up a secret, etc.), or a negative behavior (e.g., being naughty, greedy, jealous, etc.).
- Other characters may not be aware of the main character's inner struggle. The main character may not even realize his own problem.
- These types of problems often include a lot of self-talk—thinking, wondering, and worrying. The main character may try to hide or fix his problem without allowing others to know about it.

3 COMMON TYPES OF SOLUTIONS

1. **Something** helped the main character.

The main character tried throughout the story until the problem was solved (e.g., tried different/several ways, used specific/particular strategies, made good/bad decisions, etc.).



2. **Someone** helped the main character.

Another character, acting as a guide, helped the main character (e.g., rescued from danger, offered advice or warning, provided needed resources, collaborated to support, etc.).

3. **Something** changed within the main character.

Identify HOW things have improved.

- Although these problems are not “fixed” by the end—things are better than during the problem. Rather than solution, it's a resolution.
- These endings include a character realization (e.g., wants to do better, ready to move forward, etc.).
- The main character's attitude or actions change, or he comes to grips with the situation (e.g., chooses to be brave, decides to change, etc.).
- Sometimes things “get better” over time (e.g., hurt feelings lessen, weather improves, difficult event passes, things look better in the morning, etc.).



Readers look for the plot in a story.

The problem plus the solution is called the plot.

When retelling the plot, the reader should mention both what was wrong and how it got fixed.

The plot can be made of different combinations of problem and solution types.