HOW A STORY WORKS

Readers know where they are on the plot map based on the details the author reveals.
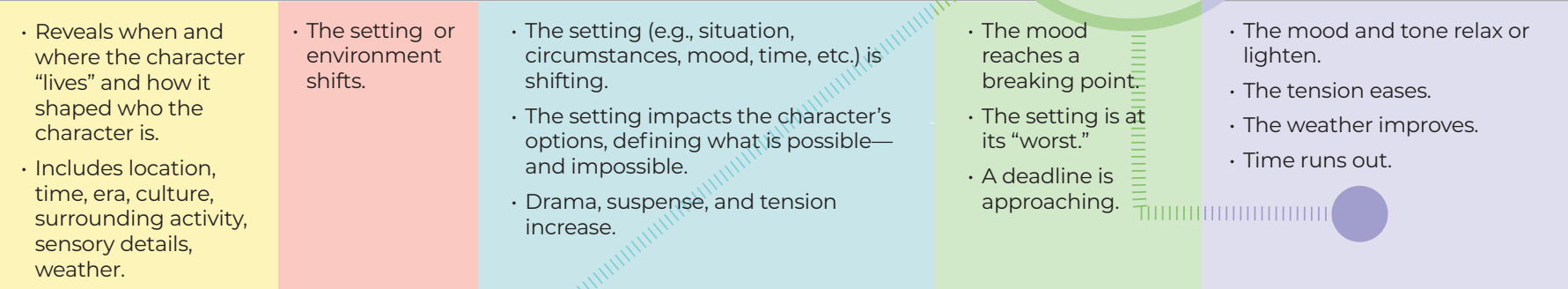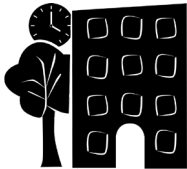
	EXPOSITION description	PROBLEM conflict	RISING ACTION problem gets worse	CLIMAX crisis	RESOLUTION final status
CHARACTER	• Details about physical appearance and mannerisms relevant to the upcoming conflict. • The character's "default" personality. • Insights into his relationships and reputations. • Backstory that reveals goals, hopes, motivations, motives, desires, needs, etc.	• Conflict arises because of a character's flaws, fears, anxieties, weaknesses, or vulnerabilities.	• Each attempt to solve the problem reveals reactions that may affect the character's optimism and outlook. • Reveals more about the character's values. • Exposes more character weaknesses. • Exposes more character strengths. • Shows the character reluctant to make a difficult decision. • Shows the character making the wrong decision(s).	• The character is in crisis. • Insight into what he is willing to risk. • More insight about what's at stake and his fear of failure. • The character is forced to make a decision. • He may receive outside help or advice.	• The character relaxes and returns to his "default" personality. • The character experiences success/joy, demonstrates empathy, or reaches acceptance (apologies, punishment, death). • The character reflects and discovers more about himself. • The character may change, stay true to himself, or fail to learn from his experiences.

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SETTING	· Reveals when and where the character "lives" and how it shaped who the character is. · Includes location, time, era, culture, surrounding activity, sensory details, weather.	· The setting or environment shifts.	· The setting (e.g., situation, circumstances, mood, time, etc.) is shifting. · The setting impacts the character's options, defining what is possible—and impossible. · Drama, suspense, and tension increase.	· The mood reaches a breaking point. · The setting is at its "worst." · A deadline is approaching.	· The mood and tone relax or lighten. · The tension eases. · The weather improves. · Time runs out.

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PLOT

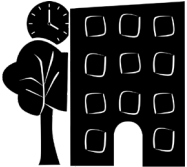| EXPOSITION	PROBLEM	RISING ACTION	CLIMAX	RESOLUTION
· May describe relevant or important events from the past. · May provide historical context.	· A danger may present itself. · An obstacle reveals itself, explaining why the character can't have what he wants.	· A series of progressively more complicated events and decisions. · Each scene or small moment adds a complication or obstacle (e.g., violence, threats, complaints, dishonesty, inaction, haste, deflection, etc.). · The risk and fear of failing increases. · The character may be chasing an external reward (e.g., physical prize), an intrinsic/reward (e.g., personal satisfaction), or dodging a negative consequence or punishment.	· Events force the character to make a hard choice or difficult decision. · The "right" answer or solution is revealed. · May include last-minute information or an unexpected twist.	· Includes the final scenes, events, and actions. · The outcome of the original conflict is solved or resolved.

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