

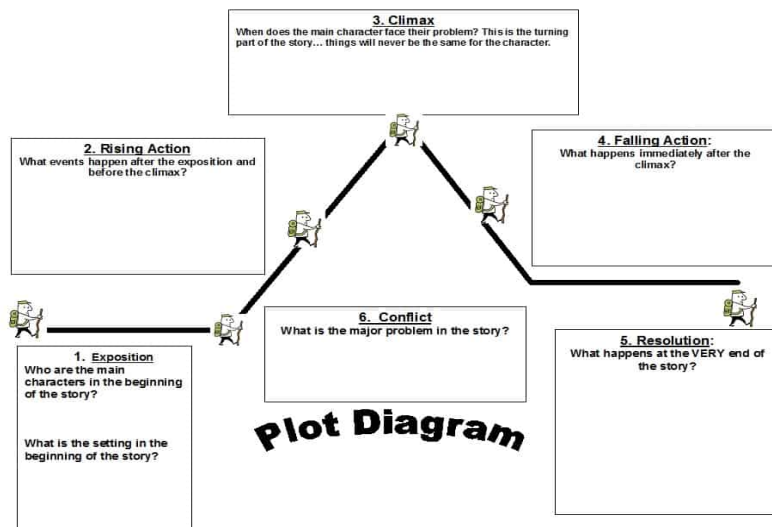
FILM ANALYSIS ESSAY #1—NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

For the first film analysis essay, we will focus on a basic narrative analysis, rather than looking at more technical issues in cinema, like camera angle and movement, lighting, editing, and framing, which we will save until the second film analysis essay. Thus, the first film analysis will involve employing and applying the formalist critical vocabulary typically associated with literary analysis, especially regarding stories, either short or of novel length. Accordingly, animated films work fine for this exercise (though not for the second film analysis essay).

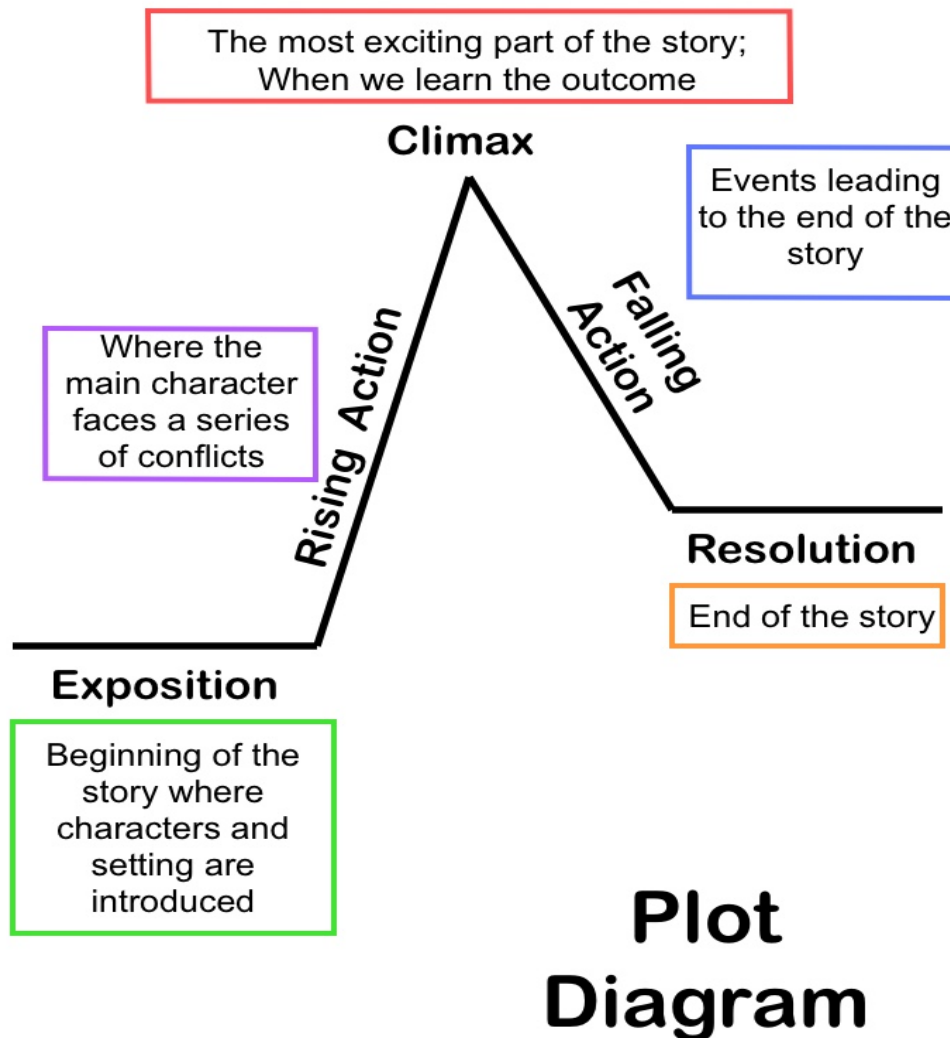
The key vocabulary of narrative analysis include:

1. Plot
2. Character
3. Setting
4. Symbol
5. Style
6. Tone
7. Irony
8. Imagery
9. Theme

The first task in the body of the essay is to address the plot, character, and setting of the film. We adhere to the following structure for plot: exposition, rising action, conflict, crisis, climax, falling action, and resolution/denouement. Setting and character are covered in the exposition of the plot. You may follow the diagram below:



Or perhaps you prefer this one:



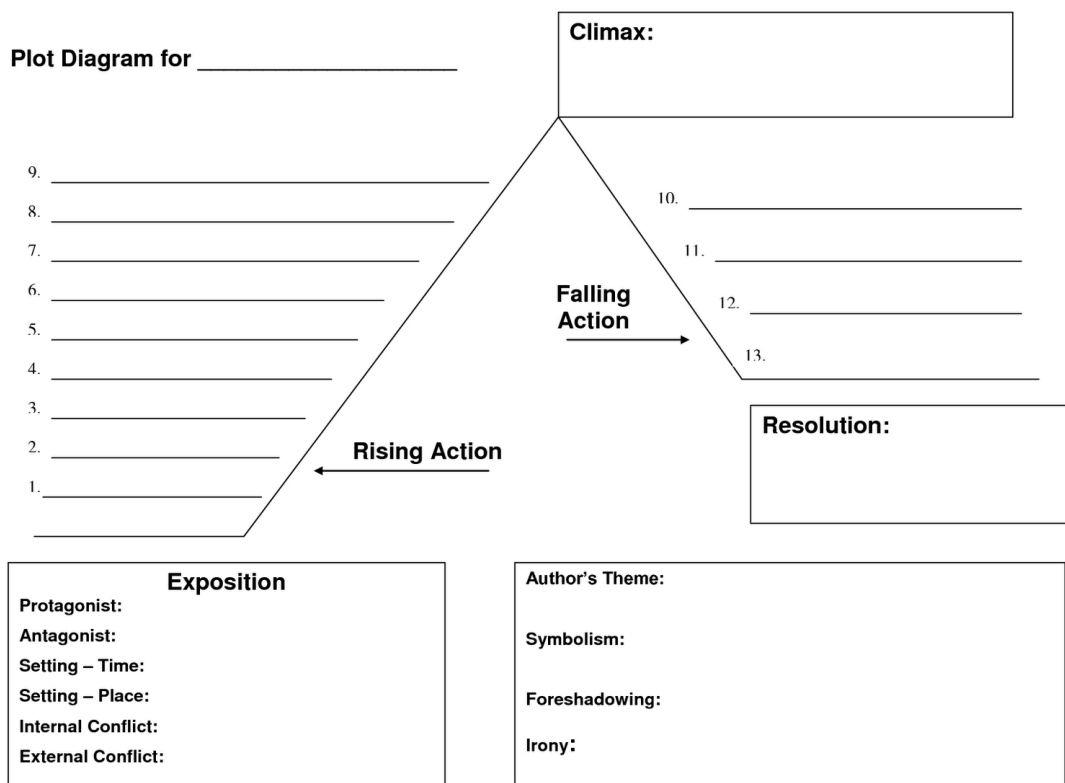
You should literally plot the vocabulary of plot to the film and identify the specific moments when each term is realized. First of all, what is the exposition of the film? Where and when does the story take place in space and time? What is the physical environment? Is it mountainous or urban? Is it a small village or a cavernous valley? Does it take place across several geographic locations? In addition, what is the social environment? How would you describe the space in terms of the economic class of the characters? What is their racial makeup, their educational background, etc.? Then, you should address the characters in the film. Who are the protagonist(s) and antagonist(s)? Who are the major and minor characters? Who are the developed and undeveloped characters? Which characters do you know in three dimensions? Which characters do you know in only one or two? Which characters are mere shadows of real human beings?

Which characters change and evolve over the course of the film; in other words, which characters are dynamic? Which characters remain the same; in other words, which characters are static? Potentially, it could take a few sentences to cover the exposition. Alternatively, it might take a few paragraphs to dispense with it, depending on what you have to say and how the narrative is constructed.

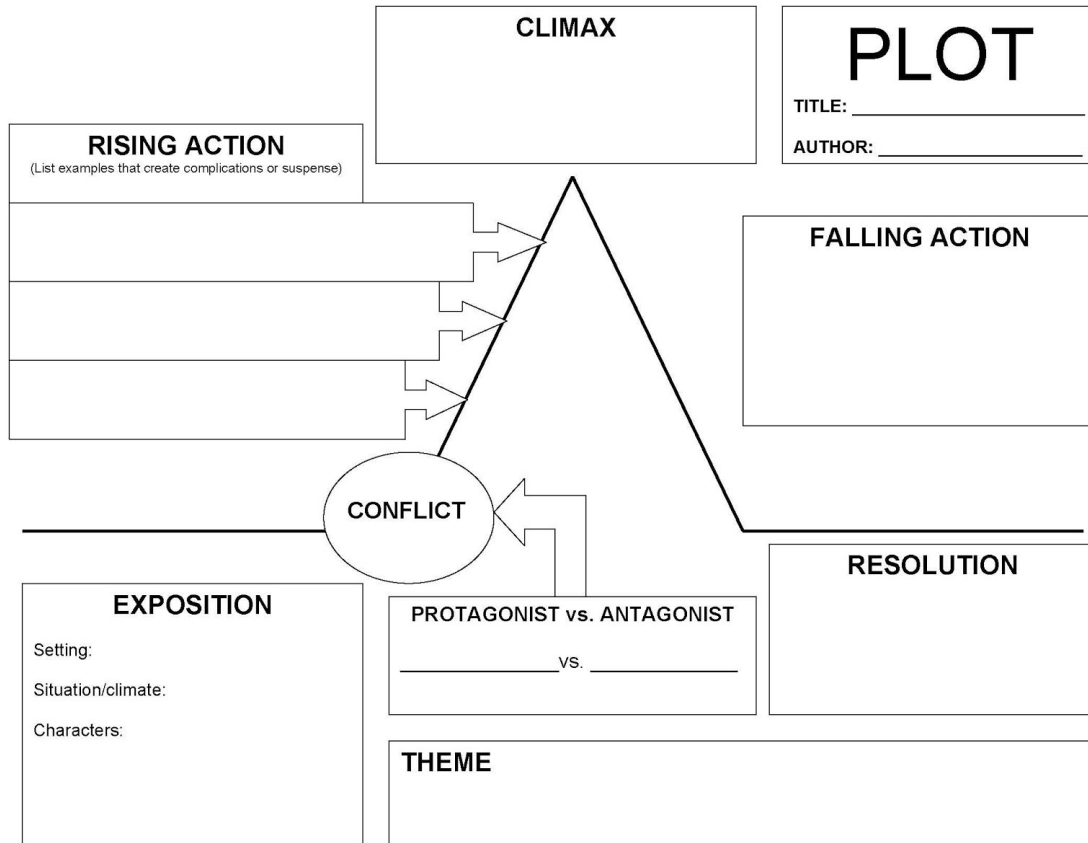
After covering the exposition, then identify the rising action of the film. You may note an “inciting incident” that takes place that drives the story forward. What is it, and how does it affect the plot? What is the conflict, and when does it emerge? How does the conflict turn into a crisis, and what kind of crisis is it? How does it impact the characters? Finally, when does the climax of the film take place, the apex of tension? What is the climax exactly, and what are the consequences of this event?

At this point, tension begins to descend. What takes place during the falling action of the film, and finally, how is the film resolved? How does it conclude?

You may use the following diagram to help you in preparing to discuss the plot:



Or you could use this one instead or in addition:



After examining the plot, then the choice of what to interpret depends on you and what the film reveals, what elements are emphasized. The first consideration is symbol. Is there an object, a person, or an action that has some kind of greater significance, like an abstract concept? Perhaps there are several symbols in the story of the film. Perhaps it might take as many as a few paragraphs to fully expound on the most significant ones. Perhaps you might accomplish the task in as little as one paragraph. Colors generally have symbolic value. Do any particular ones stand out? You may do a bit of background research on the significance and potential meanings of colors to determine how to interpret the ones that appear in your chosen film. Which meanings seem most applicable in the context of the story of your film?

In addition, you can consider the style of the film. Is it tightly and rapidly paced or is it slower and more deliberate? What is apparent to the viewer, and what is hidden? What does the film disclose, and what does it conceal? What is the mood or tone of the film? Is it optimistic, joyful, depressing, sedate, tragic, or enervating? What feeling do you get from watching it?

Along with style, you can consider how the issue of irony appears in the film. Irony occurs when actions do not seem to match the intentions of characters or when viewers' predictions are violated. One prominent kind of irony is a twist in the plot of the film that typically occurs at the end of a story. Once again, the topic of irony might be addressed in

a moderately developed paragraph or there might be several issues to attend to, requiring several paragraphs of explanation.

Imagery relates to the term cinematography. What kinds of images stand out in the film, and how do they serve to support your take on the implicit meaning of the film? For imagery, careful descriptive detail is important. You want to be able to paint a picture with words so that your audience can see the image with their minds as they read. You can consult the section on cinematography in the WAM book on p. 44, but the essence of what is meant by imagery is demonstrated on p. 38 in contrast to p. 37 with regard to the description of Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo*. One passage shows a great degree of "showing detail" and is therefore highly descriptive. The other passage is an example of "telling detail," where description is quite weak. To do a good job on imagery in your essay then you want to present a great deal of description where the reader can get a sense of what you have not only seen in the film but also heard. Auditory description is also a strong element of imagery. In some rare films, even olfactory description might be appropriate.

Finally, address the theme of the film in your thesis. For the theme, you should consider the main point being made in the film. For this element, you should examine chapter 3 of the WAM book and attempt to ascertain the implicit meaning of the film. Most students consider the explicit meaning of the film to be the main point rather than the implied meaning. However, the explicit meaning addresses what the film is about, not what it is saying. Your sense of the theme should instead be what you think the film is trying to actually say. There may be some divergence among viewers of the film about what the theme might be. What is important is not that everyone have the same interpretation, but rather that every compelling construction of the theme be based on evidence from the film, that one be capable of justifying it. Another issue to consider as a potential theme of the film might be the topics of cultural analysis brought up in chapter 4 of the WAM book. Perhaps, thematically, the film is making a point about political and social ideology, perhaps regarding race, gender, class, or **non-hetero-normative** sexualities and identities.

Along with the plot analysis, you can also address any **flashbacks** or **foreshadowing** in the film. Are there any breaks in the narrative where the film flashes back to an earlier period of time in the story, or are there any moments where the film hints at events that come later in the narrative?

Addendum

Here is a sample plot analysis from a student essay regarding the Korean film, *Okja*. You may use it as a model for constructing your own.

The plot of the film forms the foundation for the depiction of the true nature of the characters and organizations in *Okja*. The exposition of the plot is when Mija, a little girl that lives in the woods with her grandfather, spends a playful day in the woods with Okja, a super pig. It is given at the beginning of the film that the super pig was given to them from a company called Mirando Corporation,

which superficially seems like an environmentally friendly company but actually is a GMO company willing to earn a lot of profit from its products. The super pig is one of the company's big projects where they publicly make it an issue by promoting it as a seemingly joyful and festive event, whereas the super pigs that were forcibly bred in laboratories to duplicate numbers were killed off for their meat. The company calls in the super pigs that they have distributed around the world in the pretext of the event. However, in the rising action Mija finds out about the truth of what will happen to Okja when she is sent to New York and sets off after her. The conflict of the film occurs when Mija meets the ALF, the Animal Liberation Front, which is an association that advocates animal rights. Mija and the ALF realize they need to cooperate in order to rescue Okja from the show. Despite their efforts, the story reaches the crisis when Okja is about to get slaughtered for meat and the climax when Mija miraculously comes up with buying Okja using the golden pig she brought from home just in case. At this moment they are confronting Nancy Mirando who is a woman obsessed with the enterprising mind and making money, so she agrees to trade Okja for the big piece of gold. In the falling action, Mija brings Okja and another baby super pig safely back home and in the resolution, the ALF continues to go on protests and demonstrations in order to completely stop the Mirando Corporation from its inhumane activities against animals.