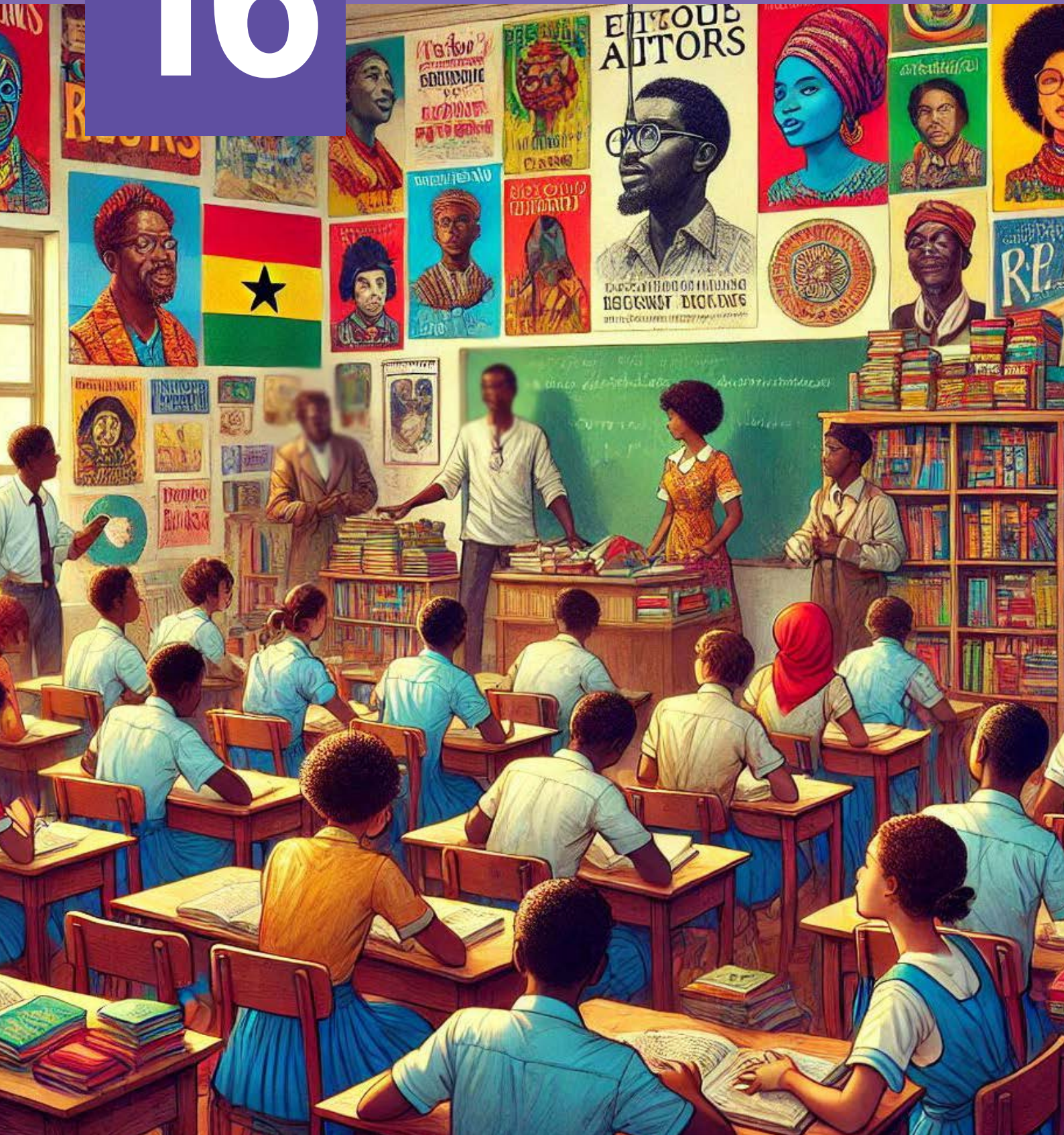


SECTION

16

LITERATURE



Plot

INTRODUCTION

Language use in communication takes many forms. By looking closely at the patterns of Language in created works of literature, we can learn much about the power of language to bring people together harmoniously and with renewed resilience.

We have listened to stories from our parents and grandparents at home. We have also been narrating stories amongst ourselves in class and out of class. Most of us have also been watching movies, series and telenovelas. The stories we tell or listen to have beginnings, middle sections and endings. There are also things that go into the beginning of the stories, the middle and the endings. That is basically what we call the structure of a plot. In this section, we are going to study the structure of a plot otherwise known as the elements of a plot.

By the end of this section, you should be able to

- Investigate briefly the sequence of events across a number of texts and explain how such a sequence contributes to the overall meaning.

Key Ideas

- The plot of a story refers to the sequence of events that makes up the story.
- Exposition refers to the part of the story where the setting, characters, situations and background information are introduced and established.
- Rising action: This refers to the series of events that build upon each other and create tension, conflict and suspense as the story unfolds.
- Climax: the most intense and critical moments in the story, where the story reaches its peak and the outcome is decided.
- Falling action: It is the part of the plot where the conflict begins to unwind, and the story starts to be resolved.
- Resolution/Denouement: This is the final part of the story, where loose ends are tied up, and the narrative reaches its conclusion.

STRUCTURE OF A PLOT

A plot in literature typically follows a structured sequence of events, can be broken into sequence of events, which can be broken down into several key components which can also be called the Elements of a Plot. Here is a common structure:

1. **Exposition:** This is the introduction to the story. It reveals the setting, introduces the main characters, and provides background information that is crucial for understanding the context of the story.

2. **Inciting incident:** A significant event that sets the story in motion. This incident disrupts the status quo and introduces the main conflict or problem that the characters must face.
3. **Rising action:** A series of events build up the tension and develop the story's conflict. These events complicate the situation(s), creating suspense and driving the narrative toward the climax. Characters face obstacles, challenges, and make decisions that influence the direction of the story.
4. **Climax:** The climax is the turning point of the story, where the main character faces the conflict head-on, and the outcome begins to be determined.
5. **Falling Action:** After the climax, the story begins to wind down. The consequences of the climax play out, and the tension decreases as the story moves toward its resolution in the aftermath of the events and characters start to find solutions to their problems.
6. **Resolution (or Denouement):** The story concludes, and the conflict is resolved. The resolution ties up any loose ends and provides closure for the characters and the reader. Sometimes, some resolutions are open-ended and so they set the stage for a possible sequel.

Note: A sequel is a work that continues the story or expands upon the events and characters of a previous work. It is a story that continues the narrative of a previous work, often with the same characters, setting or themes. A successful movie will often lead to a sequel (rarely as good as the first).

Plot is an essential element in narrative, in drama, and often in poetry, though it manifests differently in each of these literary forms owing to their distinctive structures and purposes.

1. Plot in Narratives:

Narratives encompass various forms of storytelling, including novels, short stories, and memoirs. The plot in narratives refers to the sequence of events that unfold within the story.

In most narratives, the plot follows a traditional structure: exposition (introduction of characters, setting, and situation), rising action (conflicts and complications), climax (the turning point or moment of greatest tension), falling action (events leading towards resolution), and resolution (the conclusion of the story). The plot in narratives is designed to engage readers by presenting a coherent and often linear/chronological sequence of events that build to a climax, keeping the reader invested in the outcome. The plot drives the narrative forward, revealing character development, themes, and the overall message of the work.

2. **Drama:** This refers to works intended for performance, such as plays. The plot in drama is conveyed primarily through dialogue and action. Dramatic plots often follow a structure similar to narratives, but they are divided into acts and scenes. The plot unfolds through interactions between characters, with each scene advancing the story. The structure often includes:
 - a. **Exposition:** Introduces the setting, characters, and initial conflict.
 - b. **Rising action:** The conflict develops, leading to increased tension.

- c. **Climax:** The peak of the conflict, often a moment of great decision or action.
- d. **Falling action:** The aftermath of the climax, where consequences are explored.
- e. **Resolution (Denouement):** The conflict is resolved, and the work concludes.

In drama, the plot is crucial in engaging the audience and building suspense. The audience experiences the plot in real-time, making the structure and pacing vital for maintaining interest and emotional involvement. Plot developments are often heightened by visual and auditory elements, including staging, acting, and sound effects.

3. **Poetry:** This is a literary form that emphasises language, rhythm, and imagery. While not all poetry has a plot, narrative poems do.

Plot Structure in Narrative Poetry: Narrative poems, such as epics or ballads, have a plot that unfolds in a manner similar to that of prose narratives. The plot is often more compressed owing to the concise nature of poetry, but it still includes key elements:

- a. **Exposition:** The setting and characters are introduced, often quickly.
- b. **Rising Action:** The conflict or main action begins to build.
- c. **Climax:** The peak of the narrative tension, which might be a battle, a crucial decision, or an emotional turning point.
- d. **Falling Action:** The consequences of the climax are explored.
- e. **Resolution:** The story concludes, often with a moral or reflective ending.
- f. **Lyrical Poetry:** In lyrical poetry, the plot is less prominent. Instead of a sequence of events, these poems focus on emotions, thoughts, or moments in time. However, some lyrical poems do have a subtle plot or narrative arc, often conveyed through the progression of emotions or thoughts.
- g. **Purpose:** In poetry, the plot serves to convey a story, emotion, or theme in a compressed and often symbolic manner. The use of figurative language, metre, and rhyme enhance the impact of the narrative dimension, making even simple stories feel profound or universal.
- h. **Conclusion:** The plot in narratives, drama, and poetry serves as the backbone of the story, guiding the audience through the events and emotions that the work aims to convey. In narratives, the plot is often detailed and unfolds over a longer span of time. In drama, the plot is performed and experienced in real-time, requiring a clear and engaging structure. In poetry, the plot is often condensed, with emphasis on language and imagery, yet it still plays a vital role in conveying the poem's message or story. Understanding how plot operates in each form helps readers and viewers appreciate the unique ways stories are told across different literary genres.

ACTIVITY 16.1

Click on the link below and watch a short film with two of your friends:

<https://youtu.be/Z2DxZpZLN4Y?si=KuE41PoUNslelwdA>

From the film you just watched, agree on three elements of a plot you saw in the film.

ACTIVITY 16.2

With reference to the film you just watched, present the elements of a plot to your classmates or friends bringing out how each sequence contributed to or was linked to the development of the plot of the film.

ACTIVITY 16.3

Call a friend and play a plot-game, create a story on your own based on the title below, in turn continue building on the plot of the story, example 'Hamdala's Secret', 'There once lived a beautiful girl called Hamdala who lived in Sawaba'. You and your friends should continue adding on to the story until you have formed a complete story on 'Hamdala's Secret'.

ACTIVITY 16.4

List all the sequences of the story you just created.

ACTIVITY 16.5

Create your own storylines based on what you have learnt on the Elements of a plot or the structure of a plot together with a friend.

Extended Reading

1. Selected Passages from Subjects across the Curriculum such Social Studies, Agriculture, Geography.

References

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- Azar, B. S., et al; Hagen, S. A. (2021). Understanding and Using English Grammar (5th ed.). Pearson Education.
- Roach, P. (2009). English phonetics and phonology: A practical course (4th ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Wiredu. F. J, (1992). Organised English Structure, with A Self-Study and Practice Book for students of Training colleges, the Polytechnics and the Universities: Academic Publications Accra.

Review Questions

1. State and explain the elements of a plot.
2. Create a story of your own using the structure of a plot that you have learned.

Acknowledgements



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