



WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY

Video: Sir Belvidere Plot



(progressive pattern of action and person-against-nature conflict)

Progressive Pattern of Action

The progressive pattern of action is the most common form of action found in children's stories from various cultures around the world. Since children's stories are usually short and must move quickly to hold the attention of young readers, this pattern of action allows for problems and complications to begin very soon. Each complication provides the character another struggle to overcome and keeps the action moving until the story reaches a peak of excitement. At this point the solution is revealed. The remainder of the story is spent connecting the loose ends, bringing the story to a satisfying end. Children tend to prefer a story with an optimistic ending that leaves them hopeful that all will be well, even when the story ends on a sad note.

Person-Against-Nature Conflict

The person-against-nature conflict is often found in survival stories. Whether the character is faced with a natural disaster or the dangers of a remote locale and wild animals, nature is cast as the antagonist.

In most books, several conflicts are combined in the same story. Initially, a reader may find the main character faced with crisis after crisis as he or she struggles against the forces of nature. When delving deeper into the story, however, the reader may find the same main character struggling against an inner conflict. For example, when faced with an imminent rescue from a remote mountainside, does the main character leave immediately or stay behind to look for his friend lost in an avalanche? If he leaves, he can get the medical attention needed to save his foot from amputation, injured by severe frostbite as a result of spending days wandering in a blizzard. But what will be the outcome for his friend?

References:

Lukens, R. J. (2007). *A critical handbook of children's literature*, 8th ed. Boston: Pearson.

Nikolajeva, M. (2002). *The rhetoric of character in children's literature*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow.