

What Happens Next?

(One way to create a plot)

- What does your main character want?
- Is it a worthy desire?
- Is it a desire that can sustain an entire novel? (Or, if you're writing a short story, is it a desire that can sustain the whole story?)
- What is the first thing the protagonist does to achieve his or her desire? (Action!)
- How is the protagonist thwarted? (Action, again.) And how does this raise the stakes, or make the situation worse?
- What action does the protagonist take next to achieve his or her desire?
- How is this thwarted?
- Repeat the last two steps as many times as necessary, until...
- The point of inevitability: The protagonist makes one final effort, and either succeeds in gaining what s/he wants, or fails, or possibly decides s/he wants something else instead.

Susan Fletcher handout from ORA Conference, February 6, 2009

Thinking about Your Main Character

Boy or girl?

Age?

Where does MC live?

What people does MC love?

What does MC love to do?

Who is in MC's family--both living with MC and living away?

Who are MC's friends?

Enemies?

Pet or pets?

What music does MC like?

What kind of clothes does MC wear?

What kinds of clothes would MC like to wear?

Who are MC's heroes?

Who is MC's favorite character in a book?

Does MC play sports, play music, act, sing, do art?

What is MC's favorite time of year and why?

Are there any other important things about MC not mentioned here?

What does MC want?

Exercises:

1. Describe MC's bedroom in as much detail as you can, reflecting the answers to the questions above.

Depending on the level of your students:

A. Just describe the bedroom in as much detail as you can, reflecting the answers to the questions above; or

B. Imagine a friend of MC coming into the bedroom for the first time. Describe the bedroom from the friend's point of view. What does the friend learn about MC just from looking at the bedroom? What does the friend's reaction tell us about the friend?

Then, describe the same bedroom from the point of view of MC's mother (or father). What does the parent's reaction tell you about MC, the parent, and their relationship? How does this description differ from the friend's description?

2. The school bus is coming in 3 minutes. MC looks in his/her folder/binder/backpack and realizes that the homework s/he did/tried to do the night before is not there. Tell what happens, using details from the bedroom and all of the questions above. Hint: in fiction, trouble is good.