

1. Let's learn about the elements that make up a story.

Most stories and nonfiction passages have certain **elements**, or features, in common.

Main Character

A story is usually about someone. The most important person in the story is called the **main character**. In a nonfiction passage, the **subject**, or main topic, of the passage is like a main character. While the focus of a story is often the main character, the focus of a nonfiction passage is the subject.

A main character is not necessarily a person. Many stories have animals as main characters. Likewise, the subject of a nonfiction passage might be a person or an animal, but it could also be an event or an idea. To find the main character or subject when you read, ask yourself **who** or **what** the passage is mostly about.

2. Sequence of Events

In almost every passage you read, the events occur in a sequence, or an order, that makes sense. In some stories, the sequence follows a pattern of cause and effect—one event leads clearly to the next. In other stories, the events are told in the order in which they happened. This element is known as **sequence of events**.

Sometimes, time-order words, such as **first**, **then**, and **finally**, tell you when things happen. Words or phrases such as **as a result** and **because** indicate cause and effect.

Writers of nonfiction passages also give details in recognizable patterns. A newspaper article about an important scientific discovery might describe the events leading up to the discovery in a cause-and-effect pattern. Nonfiction passages about a person's life or the history of a country might list events in the order in which they occurred. Look for dates in nonfiction passages to determine the sequence of events.

3. **Conflict and Resolution**

Often, the events in a story lead toward the **resolution** of a **conflict**. The **conflict** is the main problem, or challenge, that the main character or characters face. The **resolution** of a story is the way the characters finally solve, or deal with, the conflict.

A resolution may be good or bad, happy or unhappy. When the conflict is resolved, it no longer exists. For example, a story's conflict might involve a dragon that is passing through a kingdom and destroying villages along the way. A knight comes to slay the dragon, but he is wounded in the battle. Both the dragon and the knight die. The resolution is not happy because the hero dies, but the conflict no longer exists.

Nonfiction stories have conflicts as well. People and countries face struggles, just as those in stories do. To find the conflict of a passage, ask yourself what the main problem is. The resolution is the solution, or the way the conflict ends.

4. **Setting**

A story also has a **setting**. The setting is the location in which a story takes place. The setting is not only the physical location, but also the time period. A story may take place in the past, in the present, or in the future. Likewise, many nonfiction stories focus on a particular place or time period.

5. Let's practice following the sequence of events.

Read this story.

More Than Just *Little Women*

Many people have heard of the book *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott. Many people might also know that the character of Jo in *Little Women* is based on Alcott herself. Yet many people might not know that Louisa May Alcott wrote many other books and stories, including thrillers.

Louisa May Alcott was born in 1832. Along with climbing trees, the young Louisa enjoyed writing, and she often put on plays for her sisters and friends.

When she grew up, Alcott held many jobs to help support her family. In 1854, her first book, *Flower Fables*, was published. During the Civil War, Alcott worked as a nurse. The letters she wrote during that time were published in a book called *Hospital Sketches* in 1863. Between the years 1868 and 1869, Alcott wrote *Little Women*. Alcott was also the author of many mystery and suspense stories, which she wrote under a different name and sold to magazines. One of her thrillers, *A Long Fatal Love Chase*, was published in 1995—more than 100 years after Alcott's death.

6. **What happens first in the life of Louisa May Alcott? What event follows? What event comes next? What is the last thing to happen?**

Events happen in an order that makes sense. In this passage, we learn first when Louisa May Alcott was born and then how she spent her childhood. We next learn the sequence of events of her adult life: the jobs she had and the books she published.

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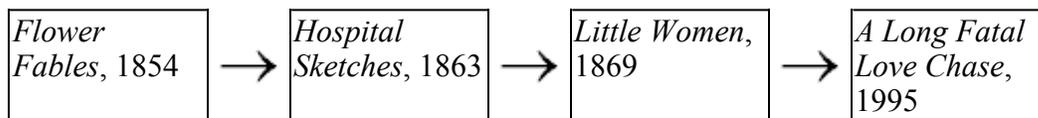
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7. **You can show the sequence of events by using a timeline.**

Here is the sequence of Louisa May Alcott's published works.

Louisa May Alcott's first book, *Flower Fables*, was published in 1854. In 1863, she published *Hospital Sketches*. A few years later, she published *Little Women*. In 1995, one of her thrillers, *A Long Fatal Love Chase*, was published.

Now, let's put the events in a timeline.



8. Let's think about the subject of the passage.

Who or what is this passage mostly about?

This passage is about the author, Louisa May Alcott. Louisa May Alcott is the subject of the passage.

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9. Let's think about the setting.

The setting includes the physical location where the action takes place and the time during which the story takes place.

Read this story.

What is the setting?**The Sleepover**

"Good night, girls!" Mrs. Walinski said as she turned off the lights and closed the door.

"Sleep well, Amber," Trisha mumbled as she drifted off to sleep in the bunk bed above Amber. They had gone into extra innings at their softball game that day. After three-and-a-half hours of softball, Amber wasn't surprised that Trisha was tired. Amber only wished that she could fall asleep so easily.

Amber's eyes slowly adjusted to the darkness. Everything in Trisha's bedroom looked blurry and threatening. Amber closed her eyes and imagined herself safe in her own bed with her parents close by. She still felt frightened. She hummed her favorite song in her head, but that didn't help, either. Amber had been excited to sleep over at her teammate's house, but now she worried that she would never get to the sleeping part!

Then, Amber thought about the day's game. She had made a great catch at home plate and tagged out a runner. She remembered the cheering crowd and her teammates' smiling faces. Suddenly, the dark didn't seem scary at all.

10. What is the setting?

Ask yourself where most of the action takes place. In this story, two locations are mentioned: Trisha's bedroom and the park where the softball game takes place. Don't be fooled! Even though Amber thinks about the softball game, the action that is happening right now, in the story's present, takes place in Trisha's bedroom. When Amber thinks about the game, she is in Trisha's room. The location of the story is Trisha's bedroom.

Ask yourself when the story takes place. The story's details reveal that Amber is sleeping over at her teammate's house and that Amber wishes that she could fall asleep as easily as Trisha. Therefore, the story must take place at night.

The setting of the story is at night in Trisha's bedroom.

The Sleepover

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11. Read the story again.

Identify the conflict and resolution.

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12. What is the conflict?

Ask yourself what the major problem is. In the story, Amber spends the night at her friend's house, but the darkness and the unfamiliar place frighten Amber so much that she cannot fall asleep. The conflict is that Amber is tired and wants to go to sleep, but she is scared and cannot.

What is the resolution of the conflict?

Think about the things Amber does to overcome her fear and get to sleep. She closes her eyes and pictures herself safe in her own bed. She hums her favorite song in her head. Finally, she remembers her catch at home plate and how happy and proud everyone was. Remembering the catch helps Amber overcome her fear and fall asleep. This is the resolution of the conflict.

Now, try to work through the next problems step by step.

1. Let's practice looking at sequence.

Read the story below.

Watching Chloe

"Sure, Mom. I can watch Chloe while you take a shower," Dylan said.

No sooner had his mother closed the bathroom door than Chloe began to cry.

Dylan tried everything he could think of to make his baby sister stop crying, but nothing worked. First, he made funny faces. Then, he wound up her favorite musical toy. Next, he jangled the mobile above her crib. He even picked her up and walked back and forth across the room, making cooing noises.

Chloe continued to wail.

"Why did I think I could watch Chloe?" Dylan wondered. "I don't know how to take care of a baby. I only know how to do one thing."

Then, Dylan had an idea. He put Chloe in her carrying-seat and brought her into his bedroom. He placed her gently on the floor where he could see her. Then, Dylan turned on his electronic keyboard and began to play. Chloe stopped crying, as if to listen to the music. A big smile spread across her face, and Dylan happily continued to play.

What is the first thing Dylan does to get Chloe to stop crying?

- A. He plays music.
- B. He walks back and forth with her.
- C. He makes funny faces.

Read each answer choice. Think about the **sequence**, or order, in which Dylan tries different things to make his sister stop crying.

Look at the answer choices.

Is **choice A** the **first** thing Dylan does to get Chloe to stop crying?

- A** no
- B** yes

2. Look at the choices again.

Watching Chloe

"Sure, Mom. I can watch Chloe while you take a shower," Dylan said.

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Dylan tried everything he could think of to make his baby sister stop crying, but nothing worked. First, he made funny faces. Then, he wound up her favorite musical toy. Next, he jangled the mobile above her crib. He even picked her up and walked back and forth across the room, making cooing noises.

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- A. He plays music.
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- C. He makes funny faces.

Think about the sequence, or order, in which Dylan tries different things to make his sister stop crying.

Playing music is the last thing that Dylan tries.

Is **choice B** the **first** thing Dylan does to get Chloe to stop crying?

- A** yes
- B** no

3. Now, look at the choices and answer the question.

Watching Chloe

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Think about the **sequence**, or order, in which Dylan tries different things to make his sister stop crying.

Playing music is the last thing that Dylan tries.

Walking back and forth with Chloe is not the first thing Dylan does.

Is **choice C** the **first** thing Dylan does to get Chloe to stop crying?

- A** yes
- B** no

4. Let's find the setting, or where the story takes place.

Read the passage again.

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What is the setting of this story?

- A. a home
- B. a neighborhood
- C. a school

The **setting** is the place where the story occurs. Be as exact as possible when you name the setting.

Does this story take place in a home?

- A no
- B yes

5. Read the passage again.

This time, look for the resolution of the conflict.

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How is the story's conflict resolved?

- A. Dylan plays his keyboard, which Chloe seems to like.
- B. Dylan walks back and forth, carrying Chloe.
- C. Dylan makes funny faces.

First, think about what **resolution** means.

What is the **resolution** of a conflict?

- A** The resolution of a conflict is the solution, or the way that characters deal with a conflict so that it no longer exists.
- B** The resolution of a conflict is the cause of a conflict, or the thing that a character is struggling against.

6. Read the passage again.

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The **resolution** is the way that characters deal with a problem so that it no longer exists.

Identify the central **conflict**, or problem, of the story.

What is the **conflict** in this story?

- A** Dylan's mom has asked Dylan to babysit, but he would rather play with his friends.
- B** Chloe is crying, and Dylan does not know how to stop her.

7. Now read the passage and answer the question.

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The **resolution** is the way that characters deal with a problem so that it no longer exists.

The **conflict** in this story is that Dylan's baby sister is crying, and he does not know how to stop her.

How is the story's conflict resolved?

Look at **choice A**. Is the conflict resolved by Dylan playing his keyboard?

- A** yes
- B** no

Now, work these practice problems on your own.

1.**Young Eagles**

Lucy looked at the small planes that dotted the field. Her younger sister, Deirdre, had brought the family to Young Eagles Day at the small local airfield. Now, Lucy stood to the side and watched as dozens of kids met their pilots, climbed into the aircraft, strapped themselves in, and zoomed off into the sky.

Young Eagles was a program put together by a group called the Experimental Aircraft Association. The goal was to inspire kids to learn about airplanes and flying. Lucy knew this because her nine-year-old sister loved airplanes.

Lucy would rather keep her feet on the ground. The idea of getting into one of those tiny airplanes made her feel ill.

She stared upward, her eyes tracking the small plane that held her sister.

"Are you sure you don't want to go?" her dad asked.

Lucy was about to shake her head, but instead she heard herself say, "Yes. Yes, I'll give it a try."

"Maybe if I try it," she thought, "I won't be so afraid of flying."

What is the setting of this story?

- A** a small local airfield
- B** a major city airport
- C** a meeting of the Young Eagles
- D** the cockpit of an airplane

2.

An Inuit Messenger

Today, we leave messages in many ways: with pen and paper, over the phone, or by computer. Long ago, people did not have these things, but they still left messages. The Inuit live in the cold, snowy areas of North America. Their ancestors left messages for one another about things like good fishing spots and safe trails for walking. How did the Inuit leave their messages? They made an *inuksuk*!

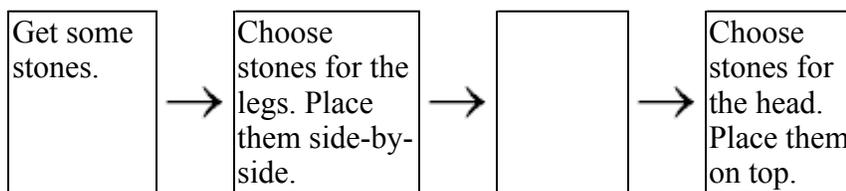
An inuksuk is a stone figure that looks like a person. You can make one of your own.

1. First, gather some small stones. You will need several short, round stones and several longer, flatter stones.
2. Select two short, round stones. Place them side-by-side, but not quite touching. These will be the legs.
3. Place a long, flat stone above the two short stones, like a tabletop. Place a few more flat stones on top. This is the body.
4. Now place a few smaller, rounder stones on top of the body to make the head.
5. Glue the stones together. After the glue dries, you can find a place for your inuksuk outdoors.

Which of these belongs in the empty box?

- A Choose stones for the body. Place them on top of the legs.
- B Place the inuksuk stones outside.
- C Glue the stones together.
- D Let the glue dry.

The boxes show some of the important events in the passage.



3. **What's in a Name?**

The Smithsonian Institution may be one of the most well known groups of museums in the world. It is in Washington, D.C., and it is made up of museums, art galleries, and even a zoo.

What, though, does *Smithsonian* mean? The Smithsonian Institution was named for the man who funded it. (To *fund* something means to put aside money to be spent in a certain way.) The man was James Smithson, and he lived in England. He died in 1829, and in his will, he left all of his money to his nephew. The will stated that if his nephew died without having any children, James Smithson would like the money to go to the United States. He wanted to fund the building of a place of knowledge, and he wanted this place to be called the Smithsonian Institution.

Smithson's nephew died in 1835 without having had children of his own. The U.S. government wasn't sure what to do with Smithson's money. Finally, in 1846, President James Polk established the Smithsonian Institution, just as James Smithson had asked.

What is the subject of this passage?

- A** James Smithson's funding of the Smithsonian Institution
- B** the different museums and galleries that make up the Smithsonian Institution
- C** famous attractions in Washington, D.C.
- D** the actions of President James Polk

4. A Letter from "Down Under"

May 31, 2004

Dear Martin,

Hello! It's me, your Uncle Hector. I'm writing to you from the land "Down Under"—Australia. Today we visited Ayers Rock. We climbed into a few Jeeps in Alice Springs and started our trek across the bumpy dirt road. The land was very flat, with not a mountain in sight.

Then, out of nowhere, Ayers Rock appeared. You can't really tell how big it is until you get close to it. It is about 2 miles long and over 1,000 feet high. The grooves in the side of the rock run up and down instead of from side to side. That's because millions and millions of years ago, this part of Australia was under water. As Earth's crust changed and shifted and the water evaporated, the rock turned on its side! Today, wind and rain deepen the grooves of Ayers Rock. Some of the grooves even have caves!

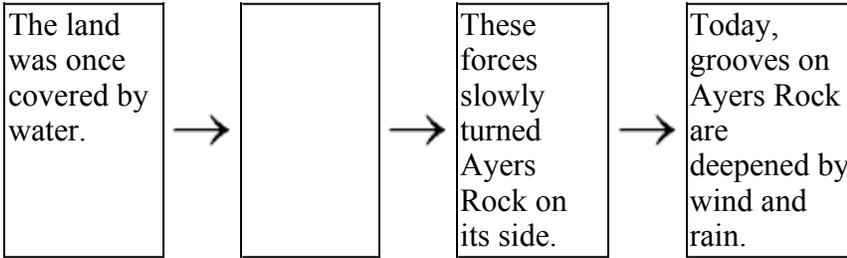
I'll show you the pictures when I return home. Say hi to your parents for me.

Love,
Uncle Hector

Which of these belongs in the empty box?

- A Earth's crust changed and shifted, and the water evaporated.
- B Ayers Rock is about 2 miles long and over 1,000 feet high.
- C The grooves on Ayers Rock run up and down instead of from side to side.
- D Some of the grooves of Ayers Rock have caves.

The boxes show some of the important events in the letter.



5. **The Story Behind NASCAR**

Millions of people tune in to watch the races. Thousands of people pack the stands to see the races live. We're talking about NASCAR. NASCAR stands for the National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing. A stock car comes from a factory, just like any other car. Take away the bright paint of a NASCAR racecar, and the car will look just like a family car! The body might be the same, but the engine has been changed so that the car can race.

NASCAR races have a criminal history. In the 1920s and 1930s, many criminals attempted to outrun the police, but they couldn't do it with ordinary cars. The criminals began fixing up their cars' engines to make their vehicles faster. Then, criminals began racing one another to see who had the fastest cars. People started coming to watch the races, and the contests became more and more popular. In 1947, NASCAR became a formal organization, and stock-car racing was no longer the sport of criminals.

What is the conflict in this passage?

- A** Criminals wanted to outrun the police, but they could not do so in ordinary cars.
- B** Drivers wanted to hold official races, but it was illegal.
- C** Many people wanted to be NASCAR drivers, but they could not afford the expensive vehicles.
- D** NASCAR was founded in 1947, but no one wanted to attend the races.

6. **Summer Plans**

Ben was bored out of his mind. His parents had decided to spend their wedding anniversary in Hawaii—alone. Ben was stuck with his grandparents in the city. How boring could it get? If he were at home on his family's farm, he could find tons of things to do. The trees always needed climbing, the lake always needed fishing, and the horses always needed riding.

Ben gazed out the window of his grandparents' apartment. Down on the sidewalk, he saw a boy about his own age, dribbling a basketball back and forth. Because there was nothing better to do, Ben decided to go out and see whether the boy wanted someone to play with.

Ben approached the boy nervously and introduced himself. As it turned out, the boy, Keiran, was hoping to enter a two-on-two basketball tournament, but couldn't find anyone to be on his team. Ben quickly volunteered. Before he knew it, he was down at the local gym, shooting hoops with dozens of other kids. There was stuff to do in the city after all!

What is the resolution of the conflict in this story?

- A** Ben makes a new friend and enters a basketball tournament.
- B** Ben and his grandparents go exploring in the city.
- C** Ben's parents return early from Hawaii and take him back to the farm.
- D** Ben watches television all day in his grandparents' apartment.