The Proto Project

A Common Core State Standards-Aligned Discussion Guide

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"A well-calculated balance of suspense and humor for middle school readers."
Kirkus Reviews

Book Summary

When Jason meets his mom's billion-dollar invention, an artificial intelligence device named Proto, he accidentally gets caught up in a mysterious adventure. Proto goes missing, and then people go missing. Now Jason and his coolest-neighbor-ever, Maya, must risk their lives to prevent global mayhem. But who is behind this devious plot? Is it another AI? The FBI? Or any other abbreviation with an I? What exactly is there to learn about artificial and human intelligence while fighting for your life against a legion of furry puppies or a battalion of drones? A lot- if you live to tell about it.

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An Introduction

How to use this guide:

Objective:
In this guide, students, teachers, and book trailer newbies will find the basics of a step-by-step planning process for a creative digital representation of any story. Book trailer producers are encouraged to explore the story elements presented in this guide prior to using technology to tell their stories, while keeping in mind that book trailers are very short story teasers. These 45 second to 1 minute long productions are designed to pique a reader's interest enough that they feel compelled to read the book!

Supplies:
Three-ring binder
Pencils
Markers
A story producer's desire to represent through technology!

Print the graphic organizers included in this guide.
Work through the process. Then, transfer the good planning completed in this packet to a digital storytelling platform of your choosing.

Book trailer producers can work in groups or individually.

Plan to host a book trailer presentation extravaganza! Encourage all directors and producers to present their book trailers to the class.

Students are encouraged to actively engage in discussion about aspects of the story prior to beginning the book trailer construction process. The discussion component of this guide is divided into four sections. Each discussion question section is structured in such a way to prepare students for each aspect of the book trailer construction process.

Tools:
With regard to technology, upon completion of the lessons in this guide, students have the option to choose from a wide variety of software programs with which to create their book trailers. Anything will do. Listed below are just a few of the options available.

Camtasia	**Movie Maker**	**Photo Story**	**iMovie**
PowerPoint	**Scratch**	**Spark**	**Voice Thread**

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Discussion: Chapters 1 to 7

"Jason's mind began to wander, and he contemplated how awesome it would be if his mom wasn't just a theory person but actually built droids like ones right out of Star Wars."

- Jason's mother is Dr. Shannon Elaine Pascal, a scientist and one of the brightest minds working at Recode Global. And yet, in this scene, Jason is wishing that her contributions would be more exciting than what he perceives them to be. Consider Jason's relationship to his mother. Analyze his awareness of who she is and what her contributions to the field of artificial intelligence have been.
- Explore the notion of "recoding the world". What does the phrase mean to you?
- Predict why it was important for Jason's class to take a field trip to Recode Global on that particular day. Do you think that Dr. Pascal, Jason's mother, might have had any influence on arranging for Jason to be present at Recode Global when he was? If so, why would that be?
- Consider Jason's character. Describe his strengths. What does he want? List his challenges.

"He is thinking constantly. Humans, together with technology like Proto, can assist in the design, build, and operation of the tech we develop here. All of those things we introduced today from exoskeletons to nanobots—"

- Explore Jason's initial reaction to Proto. Being that he had no prior notion as to what an AI protype was like, describe how you think Jason felt when he first came in contact with Proto.
- When an individual responds to situations in a literal manner, they are exact, word for word, and very to-the-point. Identify phrases in which Proto responds to questions and surroundings with a highly literal response. What do these reactions reveal about Proto's character?
- Dr. Pascal explains that, in addition to having programming to guide him, Proto has been given morality, which means honesty, integrity, and goodness. Explain why Jason's mother felt giving Proto morality would be important to do.
- Jason's mother also said that Proto's "... main governing principle is to work with humanity, not against it." Explain why she felt establishing this governing principle was a key factor for Proto's functionality.
- Describe your impression of Proto. Identify his strengths, weaknesses, and limitations.

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Discussion: Chapters 1 to 7

"No," Maya said. "Pinky and King Kong don't work for Recode, but they managed to pretend they're innocent caterers for the field trip. They have a fancy education at a leading academic institution in technology—not baking—and a pretty clean record. Then they show up here mysteriously and drive off with your mother. Are you getting it now?"

- *Analytical thinkers* use knowledge, facts, and information to make sure they get things right. Examine moments in the story in which Maya demonstrates having a strong analytic mind. Predict reasons why she possesses this strength.
- Jason tends to be a pragmatic thinker, being that he deals with things in sensible, realistic, and practical ways. Tell how Maya's analytic tendencies balance Jason's pragmatic ways.
- Proto describes the concept of consequentialism, being that the morality of an action is defined by its consequences. Make a connection with Dr. Pascal's earlier statement that Proto's primary governing principle is morality, which is knowing the difference between good and evil.
- Determine the influence both Jason and Maya have on Proto's overall perception of human intelligence.

The avatar began to shrink in her robe like the Wicked Witch in The Wizard of Oz. "Technology is the answer, but it hasn't been able to change the dismal mentality and tragically selfish behavior of humankind."

- The title of Chapter 7 is A Deadly Deadline. Identify the deadline the title is referencing. Who is in trouble and why?
- To acquiesce means to submit or comply silently or without protest. Consider Thaddeus's role in the chapter. Explain why he acquiesces to Madame X. Which character is more powerful?
- Make a connection between Madame X, Thaddeus, and Dr. Pascal. Why is Dr. Pascal so important to them? What do they want from her? What is standing in their way of getting what they want?
- Consider Madame X's words printed above. Do you agree with her position that technology is the answer to life's troublesome issues? Explain your answer.
- In stories, the object of desire is something that people want and, in many cases, are willing to fight and kill for it. Explain why Proto is the object of desire for both good and evil.

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Activity 1: Character Analysis

Effective book trailers concentrate on only a few main characters and leave out the minor characters. Rather than including every single character in the story, book trailer producers focus on those that are most critical to the overall story.

It is not necessary to present characters as they physically appear in the story. After deeply analyzing key characters, students may discover symbols or colors that better represent the characters' true nature.

Use the Character Analysis Graphic Organizer (Guide, pg. 7) to develop a deeper sense of characterization for all of the characters featured in the book trailer.

Procedure:

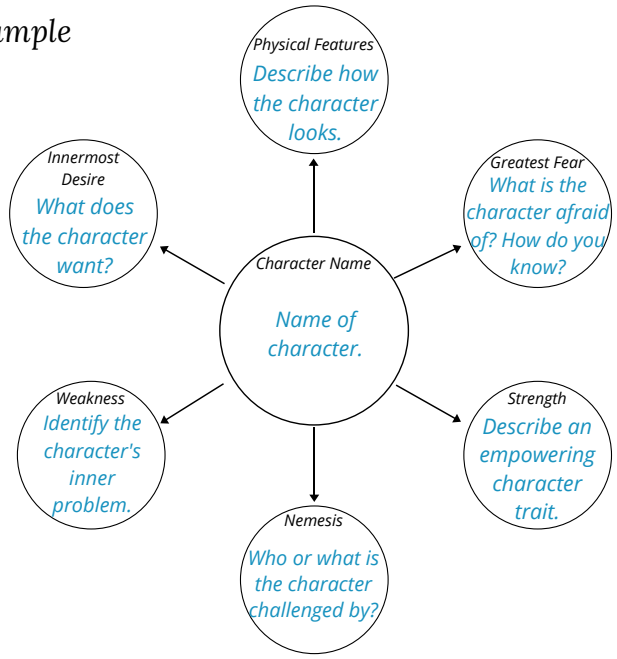
- Print one copy of the Character Analysis Graphic Organizer per character depicted in the book trailer.
- Consider each aspect of characterization by describing how details were represented in the trailer, keeping in mind how they connect with other characters in the story.
- If you're using the Character Analysis Graphic Organizer to plan for creating an original book trailer, complete the analysis and file it in your binder.

Which characters do you feel are the most important to the story? Print a copy of the Character Analysis Graphic Organizer for each character.

Consider each character's traits as they connect with the story and each other.

Save your analysis in your binder. It will be very helpful when you're working through the rest of the Book Trailer Construction Guide.

Sample



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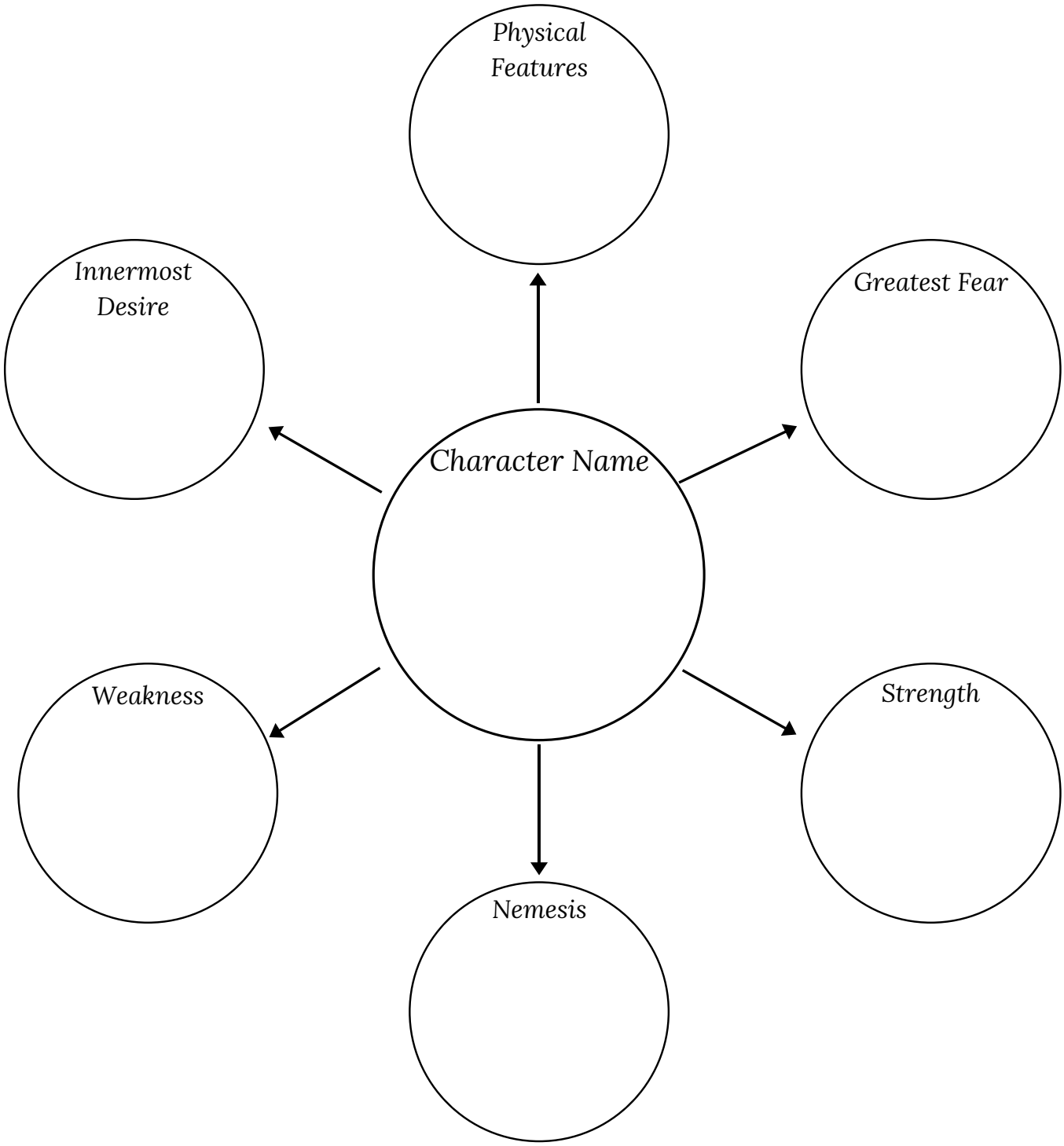
Character Analysis Graphic Organizer



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Discussion: Chapters 8 to 10

"No, no. Jason couldn't say anything. Where there was good, there was evil. Mom had warned him. It was more important to find her right now. Clearing her name could come later. Proto must be kept secret, even from Dad, to protect both of his parents."

- Explain why Jason is ultimately responsible for his mother's safety.
- Tell why Jason must protect Proto from everyone, even his father.
- In this scene, identify the forces for evil, as well as the forces for good. How is Jason able to decipher between the two?
- Predict what might happen if Jason were to reveal the truth about Proto, the billion-dollar secret.
- Make a connection between Jason's predicament and consequentialism. Tell how his actions define the consequences of the choices.

"It appears Dr. Pascal made Jason's little field trip to Recode Global more educational than she was supposed to. We were able to secure video footage that shows Jason entering the lab alone and leaving just before we had planned to remove Proto from the lab."

- In this scene, Thaddeus becomes aware that Jason has Proto. He also presumes that Dr. Pascal played a critical role in assuring that Proto is in her son's care. Predict what might happen, now that Thaddeus has this information. What might happen to Dr. Pascal?
- Is Jason's father safe? Explain your answer.
- What might happen to Thaddeus if Madame X discovers this information?
- If Thaddeus manages to obtain Proto, what might happen to all of mankind?

Jason didn't know, but he suspected the answer to Maya's question might be found with the DronePro. Patty was well-made, sturdy, and light, a feat of engineering. A plan began to formulate in his mind.

- Notice that, at this point in the story, Jason is growing in confidence, leadership abilities, and determination. He has a vision of how to save his mother, as well as the rest of the world. Describe the forces that he is up against. List the resources he has available. Identify those who are loyal to him, as well as his opposition.
- The narrative hook of a story captures the reader's attention so that they will keep on reading. Consider how this scene can serve as the hook of a book trailer. Identify how all aspects of the story are defined by the consequentialism of Jason's actions in the following scenes.

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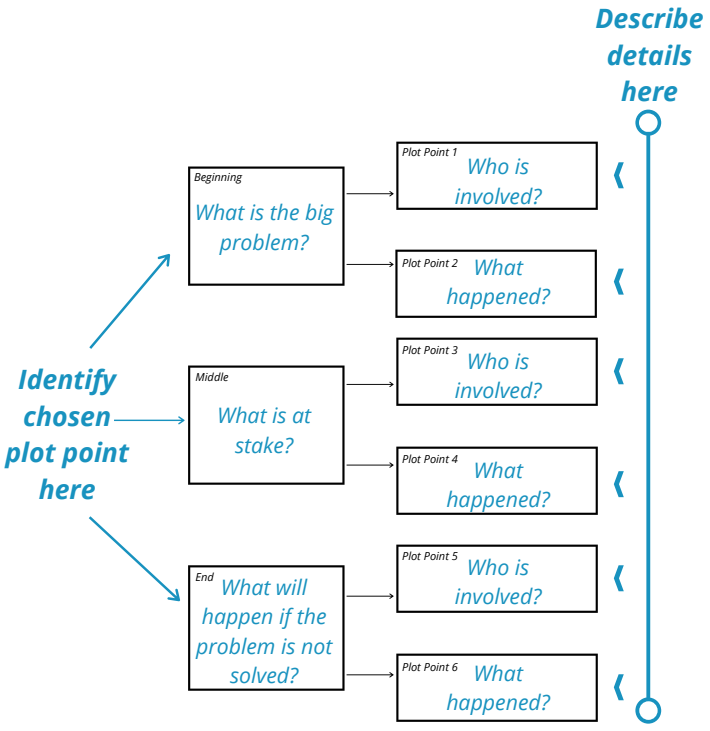
Activity 1: Pinpoint Plot Points

Overloading the book trailer with too many details causes it to be slow and uninteresting. It is best to choose a few plot points and then develop those through revealing specific detail.

Use the Pinpoint Plot Points Graphic Organizer (Guide, pg. 10) to plan for creating a book trailer of your own. Pick a few key moments in the story and elaborate on them. Highlight what makes a particular key moment memorable or interesting. Perhaps, state how it creates a plot twist, or how it sets up a conflict between characters. Tell what is at stake or ask a compelling question of some sort. Pare down the plot by deciding which key scenes best represent the overall premise of the story.

Procedure:

- Print one copy of the Pinpoint Plot Points Graphic Organizer to use as a planner.
- Think about the overall story arc of The Proto Project. Identify three major plot points Beginning, Middle, and End.
  - ~ Decide upon plot points that are full of tension and drama.
  - ~ Each plot point should build upon the other, yet not necessarily in sequential story order.
    - **Beginning:** Identify the primary character and their predicament.
    - **Middle:** Define the *if* factor. What is at stake *if* a certain thing happens?
    - **End:** Determine the consequence of the *if* factor happening. Here is where the *hook* is established, the place in your trailer where you want to establish the compelling desire to read the book.
- Identify specific details that occurred in the story to support the major plot points.
  - ~ Tell what happened in the plot point.
  - ~ Tell who was involved in the plot point.
  - ~ Tell the consequences that occurred as a result of the action that took place in the specific plot point.
- Save your completed Pinpoint Plot Points Graphic Organizer for reference in the following planning exercise.



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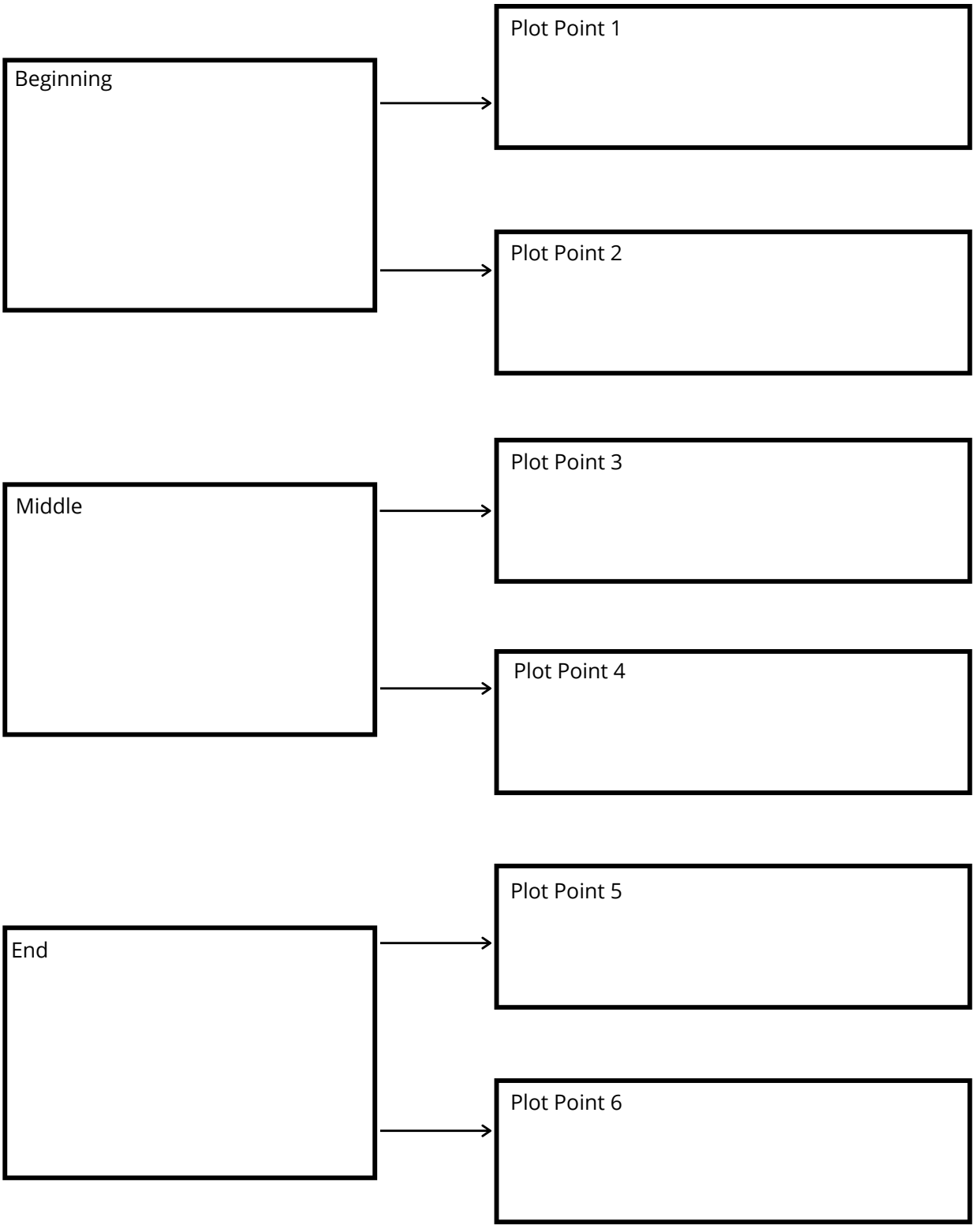
Pinpoint Plot Points Graphic Organizer



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Discussion: Chapters 11 to 15

"So here's the plan," Jason said. "I figure if our bad guys can engineer a useful toy like Patty, then Proto certainly could build us better stuff."

- In this scene, Jason tells Proto that "...the objective is to protect, not kill." Even though his mother's life is at stake, Jason's strategy is a humane one. Instead of being filled with rage or desiring retribution of some kind, Jason's plan is one of non-violence. What does his plan for Proto to develop weapons designed for "deterrence and distraction" reveal about his character?
- How would you illustrate this scene? What are some of the details that would be included in the artwork? What items would be featured in the foreground? What colors would be used? What part of the dialogue would be included in the narration?

"Because your mother would want you to," Proto pleaded. "That's the only way our collaboration can work. Remember the formula? HI + AI = The Future Today. You do want a future for all of us, don't you? We have to collaborate and have confidence in each other's abilities."

- Examine why Jason questions Proto's suggestion that he and Maya surrender themselves to Wainright and Dooley in this scene. Explain why Jason is resistant to have confidence in Proto's logic.
- Proto questions Jason's trust in his judgement. Why would Jason withhold trust in Proto's judgement or intent?
- What is the number one difference between robots and humanity? How has that difference been bridged between Proto and Jason?

"So it is nefarious corporate activity!" Maya said. "I bet they want to steal you, Proto, so they can soup up their DronePros and dominate the toy market."

"I'm afraid it could be far worse than that," Proto said."

- The word nefarious means corrupt, criminal, and monstrous. Discuss how and why Thaddeus's plans are much more nefarious than dominating the toy market.
- Tell why Jason stated that this situation is a "... scenario where AI goes bad". If AI are basically robotic in nature, how can it decipher whether the humankind they're assimilating with is either good or evil?
- Determine how Dr. Pascal's predictions have come to pass in this scene. What trait has she added to Proto to assure that this would benefit all of mankind?

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Activity 3: Picture Perfect Depiction

Here we begin visualizing images by paring down the broad overview of plot points into more concise, specific visual depictions. Remember that the images do not necessarily need to reflect the physical features of the characters. For example, if a character is kind and gentle, a photo of a rainbow or a daisy might represent the character's nature. Consider both the setting and mood, as well. Let your imagination run wild in this lesson. Your good work will pay off later.

Describe or illustrate visual images that will interpret the details listed on the right.

List the details discovered on the Pinpoint Plot Points Graphic Organizer on the left.

Procedure:

- Using the completed Pinpoint Plot Points Graphic Organizer as a reference, copy each detail listed into the corresponding space on the Picture Perfect Depiction Graphic Organizer (Guide, pg. 13).
- Consider options for visual images that reflect the intended message of the detail listed.
- Write or draw a representation of the intended mood, theme, emotion, or action depicted in each specific detail grid provided on the left.

Picture	TO SHOW	Detail 1 — *The Problem: Who is involved?*
Picture	TO SHOW	Detail 2 — *The Problem: What happened?*
Picture	TO SHOW	Detail 3 — *The Stakes: Who is involved?*
Picture	TO SHOW	Detail 4 — *The Stakes: What happened?*
Picture	TO SHOW	Detail 5 — *The Hook: Who is involved?*
Picture	TO SHOW	Detail 6 — *The Hook: What happened?*

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Picture Perfect Depiction Graphic Organizer

Picture	TO SHOW	Detail 1
Picture	TO SHOW	Detail 2
Picture	TO SHOW	Detail 3
Picture	TO SHOW	Detail 4
Picture	TO SHOW	Detail 5
Picture	TO SHOW	Detail 6

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Discussion: Chapters 16 to 20

"She can feed to us what she can see."

"Wait a second," Maya said, incredulous. "Since when did Patty start coming up with ideas on her own?"

- At the height of danger, when Thaddeus and Madame X are fully aware of Jason and Maya's presence and Gus Lancaster's true identity as an ally is revealed, Proto has the wherewithall to program Patty as a spy drone. Consider the notion that a highly-advanced AI is skilled enough to direct the functionality of a drone. Discuss reasons why this action is incredulous, meaning unbelievable, distrustful, and skeptical.
- What does Gus Lancaster want? Is he trustworthy? If so, how can he be helpful to Jason, Maya, and, ultimately, Dr. Pascal?

"How could you do this?" Dr. Pascal asked. "Leo, I've known you since you were my professor in college. You were a founding member of Recode. Our mission to help humanity was clear."

- Dr. Cooper was once Dr. Pascal's highy-respected mentor. She's known him since her college days. Predict when Dr. Cooper's plans for evil actually began. How long had he been engaged in evil doings?
- Being trustworthy is a key aspect of morality. Trace the theme of trust as it is woven throughout the story.
- Was Thaddeus worthy of Madame X's trust? Why or why not? Explore reasons why, at times, Jason is not able to trust Proto.
- Discuss how having trust establishes confidence in another's capabilities.

Another reporter spoke up. "Are you aware that Thaddeus Wilshire III, board member of TechToy Industries, was consorting with Dr. Leo Cooper, chief scientist from your company, Recode Global, to wage warfare with space aliens?"

- Early in the story, Proto described the concept of consequentialism, being that the morality of an action is defined by its consequences. Discuss the overall morality of the high-stakes action that occurred throughout the plot. Examine the constant battle between good and evil. Determine how the notions of trustworthiness and friendship overpowered evil.
- The mission of Recode Global is to "recode the world". Compare and contrast Thaddeus's and Dr. Cooper's recoding intentions with those of Dr. Pascal.
- Consider the equation AI + Humanity = HI. Do you think solving the equation in this way is plausible? Possible? Conceivable? Use aspects of the story to support your claim.

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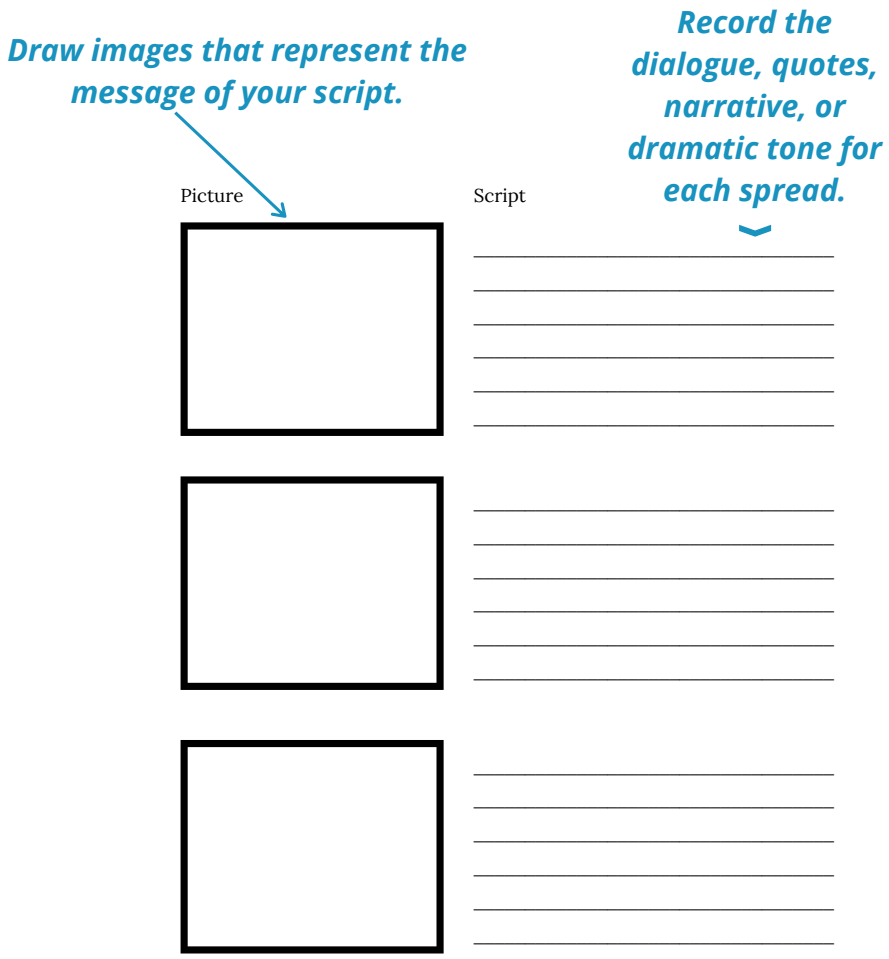
Activity 4: Story Boarding

Storyboards are visual maps for book trailers by planning for the final book trailer visuals and script in a concrete manner. Movie makers use story boards to combine the script and the visuals together before actually filming the shots. Plans for sequencing and transitions are made through story boarding – be it text, sound or visuals. Once the story board script and visuals are satisfactorily completed, it is time to create a digital representation of your book trailer project!

Procedure:

- Print several copies of the Story Boarding Graphic Organizer (Guide, pg. 16).
- Using the prior Graphic Organizers as reference, plan out your book trailer script and corresponding images.
- Drawing stick figures are totally acceptable for the story boarding process. You'll have time to search for digital images or to scan drawings later.
- Powerful quotes from the text serve as effective script material. Look back over the notes you took during the construction process to discover aspects that can be dramatically developed.
- Remember to keep your book trailer script concise and to the point. Let your visuals help tell the story.
- Be certain to draft an introduction and cliff-hanging conclusion to your awesome book trailer.
- Transfer your images and script to the digital software of your choice.
- Then it's SHOWTIME!



Record the dialogue, quotes, narrative, or dramatic tone for each spread.

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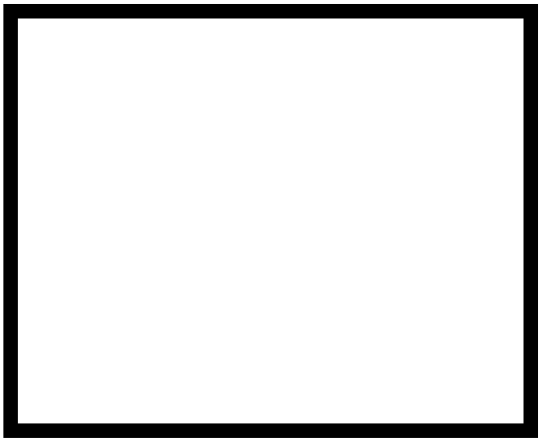
Story Boarding Graphic Organizer

Picture

Script



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Common Core State Anchor Standards

		Discussion	Character Analysis	Plot Points	Picture Perfect	Story Boarding
English Language Arts Standards > Anchor Standards > Reading						
CCSS.ELA - Literacy.CCRA.R.1	Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.	●	●	●	●	●
CCSS.ELA - Literacy.CCRA.R.2	Determine central ideas of themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.	●	●	●	●	●
CCSS.ELA - Literacy.CCRA.R.3	Analyze how and why individuals, events or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.	●	●	●	●	●
CCSS.ELA - Literacy.CCRA.R.4	Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.	●				
CCSS.ELA - Literacy.CCRA.R.7	Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.	●	●	●	●	●
CCSS.ELA - Literacy.CCRA.R.10	Read and comprehend complex literary and information texts independently and proficiently.	●	●	●	●	●
English Language Arts Standards > Anchor Standards > Writing						
CCSS.ELA - Literacy.CCRA.W.2	Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.		●	●	●	●
CCSS.ELA - Literacy.CCRA.W.4	Produce dear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.		●	●	●	●
CCSS.ELA - Literacy.CCRA.W.6	Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.		●	●	●	●
English Language Arts Standards > Anchor Standards > Speaking & Listening						
CCSS.ELA - Literacy.CCRA.SL.1	Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diver partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.	●	●	●	●	●
CCSS.ELA - Literacy.CCRA.SL.2	Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.	●	●	●	●	●
CCSS.ELA - Literacy.CCRA.SL.5	Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.	●	●	●	●	●
CCSS.ELA - Literacy.CCRA.SL.6	Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.	●	●	●	●	●