



FIGURE 2.1 Dramatic Arc

- **Establishing Incident:** Background information, scene setting, or an introduction to the actors or an initial conflict or problem that sets off the action, arousing curiosity and suspense.
- **Rising Action:** The developing crisis, possibly leading to other conflicts and suspense.
- **Climax:** The emotional high point, a turning point marking a change for good or ill.
- **Falling Action:** Resolution of tension and unraveling of conflicts; may include a final surprise.
- **Resolution/Reflection:** Conflicts come to an end but may not be fully resolved, and writer reflects the event's meaning and importance—its significance.

Examine the story to see if it is well told. Does it let readers into the narrative point of view, enabling us to empathize with the writer? Does it arouse curiosity and surprise by structuring the narrative around conflict? Does it lead to a change or development (see Figure 2.1), which you can analyze to see how a narrative creates and resolves its mark tension.

Look also to see how *dialogue* is used to portray people, help readers understand their point of view, and heighten the drama. There are three ways to present it: through quoting, paraphrasing, or summarizing. **Quoting** dramatizes the dialogue around them.

Paraphrasing reports the content of what was said but doesn't quote the actual words or use quotation marks. **Summarizing** gives the gist without the detail:

I asked her if the thought I should buy the Burton. She said it was cute and if I wanted to go ahead and buy it. (Brandt, par. 2)

Summarizing gives the gist without the detail:

I was read my rights and questioned. (Brandt, par. 19)

Kind Description of People and Places

Look for descriptions of people and places to see how the describing strategies of naming, detailing, and comparing are used to convey vividly what people look like and how the narrator saw, heard, smelled, touched, and tasted. For example, take a look at Desmond-Harris's description of People and Dillard's description of a place:

Naming

Detailing

Comparing

My hair has recently been **straightened** with my first (and last) relaxer and a Gold 'N Hot hairton on too high a setting. Hers is **shocked** back with the mixture of Herbal Essences and Blue Magic that we formulated in a bathroom laboratory. (Desmond-Harris, par. 6)

The cars' tires laid behind them on the **snowy** street a **complex** trail of beige chunks like **crenelated** castle walls. I had stepped on some earlier; they squeaked. (Dillard, par. 5)

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SIGNIFICANCE

Read finally to understand the story's autobiographical significance. This is the point the writer is trying to make—the purpose for writing to a particular audience. Notice how writers convey mixed or ambivalent feelings, how they acknowledge still-unresolved conflict, how they avoid making the story seem clichéd or sentimental. To convey the richness of meaning that makes the event worth writing about, writers tell as well as show

by remembering feelings and thoughts from the time the event took place. It was an immense discovery, pounding into my hot head with every sliding, joyous step, that this ordinary adult evidently knew what I thought only children . . . knew. (Dillard, par. 13)

by reflecting on the past from the present perspective: I mourned Tupac's death then, and continue to mourn him now, because his music represents the years when I was both forced and privileged to confront what it meant to be black. (Desmond-Harris, par. 9)

by choosing details and words that create a dominant impression: Brandt, for example, describes her rapidly changing feelings, naive optimism, fear, humiliation, excitement, shame, worry, relief. This cinematic technique of quick cuts from one feeling or thought to another conveys the volatility of her emotions.

Readings

Jean Brandt

Calling Home

As a first-year college student, Jean Brandt, when she was thirteen, felt embarrassed, worried, and reflective about her experiences. Brandt's story, "Calling Home," is a reflection on her feelings of longing for home and family.