

The Escape

BY J. B. STAMPER

Boris looked down the long, dark hallway of the prison. It looked endless.

He was being taken to a place that few people had seen. But everyone feared it. Solitary. The other prisoners said the word with a shudder.

Behind him, the guard laughed. “Well, this will teach you a lesson,” he said. “Once you’ve been in solitary, there will be no more bad behavior from you.”



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Boris forced his feet to move down the hall. He knew there was no hope for him.

Seven years ago, he had committed a crime. It was a crime so terrible that even he could not believe that he had done it.

Now he was in prison for the rest of his life. He was trapped like an animal in a cage. He could not face it any longer!

That's why he had tried to escape.

It had been just after sunset. He was all alone in the courtyard. The guard who was supposed to be there had made a mistake. He had left Boris alone.

Boris had run for the wall like an animal. He had climbed up and was almost over. Then he had heard the words, "Freeze, prisoner!"

And he had frozen.

That was just yesterday. Now he was headed to an even worse cage.

"You don't have to put me in solitary," Boris said to the guard in a scared voice. "I'll never try that again. I promise!"

The guard just laughed. "You'll learn your lesson," he said again. "Maybe they'll let you out after a few months. But you're a tough one. I know what you did to get inside. You don't deserve anybody's pity."

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Boris felt hopeless. It was no good trying. He would just have to deal with it, somehow.

They were coming to the end of the hallway. Boris saw the door at the end. He saw the bars across the small window in the door.

He knew that this was it. The others had told him what it would be like inside.

They were right. The guard unlocked three locks.

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Then he swung open the door. He pushed Boris inside.

The room was like a pen. It was long and narrow with one bed. High up there was a small window with bars across it.

The walls were of old, rough stone. To Boris, it felt as if they were closing in on him.

His breath started to come in short gasps. His heart pounded. Boris turned to the guard.

“No,” he begged. “I can’t take it here. Let me go back to where I was. I’ll never do anything wrong again.”

“You should have thought of that earlier,” the guard said. Then he slammed the heavy door in Boris’s face.

Boris reached for the door. He grabbed the bars in his hands and tried to shake them.

“You’ll be sorry!” he yelled after the guard.

The guard just looked back and laughed.

Boris sat down on the bed. He shut his eyes. He didn’t want to look around the cell. He was afraid that he would lose his mind.

Thunder woke Boris from a terrible nightmare. In the meantime, rats were running at him, screeching.

He opened his eyes. He was afraid the rats were

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really there. He hated rats more than anything. It was his biggest worry . . . that there might be rats in solitary.

Boris looked around the cell. It was almost dark. Then a flash of lightning lit up the cell. The light fell on the wall at the head of his bed.

In those few seconds of light, Boris saw something that made his heart leap. One of the stones in the wall looked different. There was a thin crack in the cement around it.

Boris tried to fight off a new feeling of hope. But he couldn't help himself.

Maybe another prisoner had dug around the rock. No one could see the crack unless they were lying on the bed. He had only seen it because of the lightning.

His hands were shaking. He reached down and grabbed the large stone. He moved it back and forth.

Then, suddenly, it came loose! Boris pulled, and the rock fell forward into his hands.

As Boris stared into the hole left by the rock, a flash of lightning lit it up. A tunnel stretched before him . . . with a rat hurrying down into it.

Boris jumped back in horror when he saw the rat.

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He thought about putting the large stone back in place.

Then another flash of lightning cut through the darkness of the cell. The tunnel lit up in front of him. It seemed to welcome him to freedom.

Boris measured the size of the tunnel with his eyes. It was narrow at the beginning. But then it became wider. It looked wide enough for him to crawl through.

Another flash of lightning lit up the tunnel. He searched for any sign of the rat.

“Maybe I didn’t see it at all,” Boris whispered to himself. “Maybe it was just a shadow of my nightmare.”

Boris peered into the tunnel. He saw no sign of the rat. But his eyes fell on something else. There was a scrap piece of paper lying on the tunnel floor, near the entrance.

He reached in and pulled it out. He felt its dry surface. The paper was wrinkled with age.

He waited impatiently for the lightning to light up the cell again. When it did, he quickly read the message on the paper.

“To the next prisoner who find this paper,” Boris read. “I escaped the horror of this cell by this

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passage. May you share my good luck.”

The light faded away before Boris could finish reading the message. He sat in the darkness, shaking with fear and hope.

The message seemed to be written in a dark red liquid. He guessed that it was the blood of the person who had written it.

At last, the lightning came again. He read on, “This is the only way out!” The message was signed with two initials, “N.G.”

Just then, Boris heard the guard’s footsteps outside his cell. He threw himself over the stone and hole. He pressed his body against the wall.

He waited as the footsteps came to a stop outside his cell. He thought he would scream from the horrible tension.

Then the footsteps moved away. They slowly drifted down the hallway. Finally, the noise faded into the night.

Suddenly, Boris knew he could not wait any longer. He stuck his head into the tunnel and pushed the rest of his body through.

He tried to look back, but the tunnel was too narrow. There was no turning back now.

Boris squirmed deeper and deeper into the tunnel.

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Crawling on his stomach, he felt like a snake slithering into its hole. He felt the tunnel grow damper and colder.

Just as the tunnel began to grow slimy, it opened up and became wider.

Boris stood up on his trembling legs. He tried to see into the darkness ahead. He put his hands out in front of him and walked slowly through the black tunnel.

The rocky walls were sharp and tore at his hands. He wiped the sweat from his forehead with one hand and felt warm blood oozing from it.

Boris felt sick. His legs became weak with fear. He dropped to his knees and fell forward onto his hands. Then he felt tiny, clawed feet run over his fingers.

Boris heard his own scream echo and echo through the tunnel.

Once again, the tiny claws of a rat dug into his hands. Boris jumped to his feet, hitting his head on the low ceiling of the tunnel.

Then he felt them all around him. The rats were running over his feet. They were crawling at his legs.

Boris opened his mouth to scream. But he knew he had to be quiet. He dug a fist into his mouth. He made himself move forward into the tunnel.

All he could hope was the rats would not climb up

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his leg. If they did, he knew he would lose his mind.

Suddenly, the tunnel sloped down at a sharp angle. Boris's feet slipped forward. He landed on his back. He slid deeper and deeper into the tunnel. He no longer felt the rats around him. He no longer heard their claws scratching the rock.

Boris came to a stop where the floor of the tunnel suddenly became flat. His breath was coming in short gasps that tore at his lungs.

He picked himself up. He reached for the slimy walls of the tunnel that he had just fallen down.

Then the truth hit him like a blow. He could never go back. The walls of the tunnel behind him were too steep and slippery.

He had only one chance. He had to push on. He had to push on . . . and hope that there was an end to the tunnel.

Boris moved himself forward. He clawed at the walls with his hands, trying to hurry.

The tunnel was beginning to feel more and more narrow. His breath was coming in shorter and shorter gasps.

Then the tunnel made a sharp turn to the left. Suddenly Boris saw something that made him cry out in relief. Through an opening in the distance, he

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could see the pale rays of the moon.

He was almost there. He could smell the night air. Boris struggled toward the patch of moonlight ahead of him.

The tunnel was turning upward. Boris had to grab both sides of the wall and dig his feet into the cracks in the wall. Slowly, he pulled himself up. Boris felt the blood from his cuts run down into his sleeves.

But the pain didn't matter. All that mattered was the patch of light ahead. Boris felt the night air against his face. He was close now. Close to freedom.

Then a sound behind him terrified him. It was the sound of those clawed feet. They were following him.

Boris scrambled up to the top of the tunnel even faster. The moonlight was so bright now that he could see his hands in front of him. He felt a rat brush against his leg. But he had only a few yards to go.

With his last bit of strength, Boris lunged toward the light. He felt his head crash into something hard and cold. For a moment he was stunned.

Then he opened his eyes. In front of him, the moon shone through the bars of a heavy gate. Still pressed up against it were the cold, white bones . . . of a skeleton.

There was no escape. There was no going back. This was it. Just Boris . . . and the rats.

About Plot

Plot is the series of related events that make up the story.

Most plots involve resolving some kind of conflict, and proceed in this way:

- ☉ The introduction tells who the main character or characters are and what the conflict or problem is.
- ☉ Complications develop as the characters struggle with different possible solutions.
- ☉ In the climax, the main character or characters make a final decision that settles the conflict.
- ☉ The story ends with the resolution: the writer suggests what the characters feel or do, now that the conflict is over.

Developing a plot is no easy matter, especially when it comes to the climax and the resolution. (Most of us have seen—or, as kids, perhaps written ourselves! —that wonderful sentence that totally avoids the necessity of creating a climax and a resolution: “And then he woke up and it was all a dream.”)

To begin to ease your students into the skill, write the definition of plot on the chalkboard. As a preface to reading the story, lead students in a discussion of the plots in stories they’ve already read by asking questions such as the following: As the story opens, what kind of problem is the main character having? What complications does she or he face in attempting to solve the problem? How does the character finally solve the problem? What’s the result at the end of the story?

Point out to students that story plots can involve internal and external conflicts. When a conflict is external, it is between a character and some outside person or force. Sometimes the conflict is internal. A character may be wrestling with him- or herself. In “The Escape,” for example, Boris must decide whether to go through the tunnel. This is an example of internal conflict, while the challenge of escaping from jail is an external conflict.

The reproducible activities in this lesson will help students summarize what they’ve learned about plot and to plan plots for stories of their own.

STORY SUMMARY

The Escape

BY J. B. STAMPER

The setting of this grisly tale is a prison. Here's the plot:

Introduction

The main character, Boris, is caught trying to escape from prison and is punished by being put into solitary confinement, a situation that he naturally dreads.

Complications

Boris discovers a crack in the wall of the cell, finds that it leads to a tunnel, and is afraid that there may be rats (his greatest fear!) inside it. Then, reaching in, he finds an old wrinkled note from a former prisoner who says that he has used this tunnel to escape the cell. So now, what to do? Crawl out of the cell and reach freedom, but possibly encounter rats? Or stay in prison for the rest of his life?

Climax

Boris makes his decision: Betting that there are no rats in the tunnel, he enters it and inches slowly along. Guess what? There *are* rats, and they pursue Boris as he edges toward a distant light that he thinks means escape. But when he reaches the end of the tunnel, he finds it barred by an impenetrable gate. And lying at the foot of the gate are the bones of the man who wrote that note so long ago.

Resolution

Boris realizes that he can neither crawl back to the cell nor escape from the tunnel. He is stuck here forever with the rats that now surround him.

.....



Name _____

Date _____



That'll Teach You a Lesson!

In stories with well thought-out plots, the main characters learn something important or change in some significant way.

In the space below, tell what you think the character learned. Then discuss your conclusions with your classmates.

CHARACTER AND STORY

LESSON THIS CHARACTER LEARNED

Boris,
in "The Escape"

Name _____ Date _____



Plot Descriptions

Choose one of your favorite fiction stories—a different story from the one you just read. Then summarize the plot. At the bottom of this page, tell what you especially like about the book.

1. TITLE OF BOOK _____

Author _____

2. PLOT SUMMARY

In the **introduction**, _____

Here are the **complications** that occur: _____

In the **climax** of the story, _____

This is the **resolution** of the story: _____

3. I like the book because _____

Name _____

Date _____

Plot

Changing an Existing Plot

If you give just a slight tweak to a story—a little change to one part of the plot—the story will take a new direction. For example, suppose we learn in the introduction to “The Escape” that Boris has been wrongly convicted: He never committed any crime, yet he’s been sentenced to spend the rest of his life in prison. How might the plot of the story change?

Write your ideas in the boxes below. Then read them to a small group of classmates. Together, combine ideas and write a new version of Boris’s story.

Original Plot

1. Introduction

2. Complications

3. Climax

4. Resolution

New Plot

1. Introduction

2. Complications

3. Climax

4. Resolution

Name _____

Date _____

Plot

Please Do Eavesdrop!

You've probably had the following experience: You're out walking or standing in line someplace. You hear someone you don't know telling about something that happened to her or him. You just hear a tiny part of the story, though, because you or the teller moves on. Yet the part you did hear intrigues you. You wonder what the whole story is.

Choose one of the five overheard remarks below. Then use it as the basis of a story plot. On the lines at the bottom of the page, write the outline of the story. Share your outline with some classmates and get their input.

What I Overheard

"... and then he ate the wrong one!"

"Well, I didn't fool you, but you sure did fool me!"

"She's so brave! She walked right up to them and said that ..."

"The next thing he did was kick the door open."

"Yeah, I lost my job, but that was because of the cat ..."

Outline of My Story

Introduction _____

Complications _____

Climax _____

Resolution _____

Name _____

Date _____



Plot Storyboard

Creating a storyboard can help you think through a plot. Draw a picture in each box that illustrates each part of your plot. Then use the storyboard to write your story.

<p>Introduction</p>	<p>Complications</p>
<p>Climax</p>	<p>Resolution</p>

Now, on a separate sheet of paper, write the story.

Name _____

Date _____



Making Improvements

Like all writers, now and then you're going to write a story that just doesn't turn out the way you wanted it to. What went wrong? Can you fix it? Maybe so, if you take another look at the plot. Try the procedure that follows.

1. Briefly summarize the plot of your story.

2. Tell what part of the plot you like best.

3. What is it that you don't like about your plot? Be specific.

4. Consult with a classmate. What are her or his ideas about how to improve that part of the plot?

5. On a separate sheet of paper, revise your story, using the ideas for improvement.