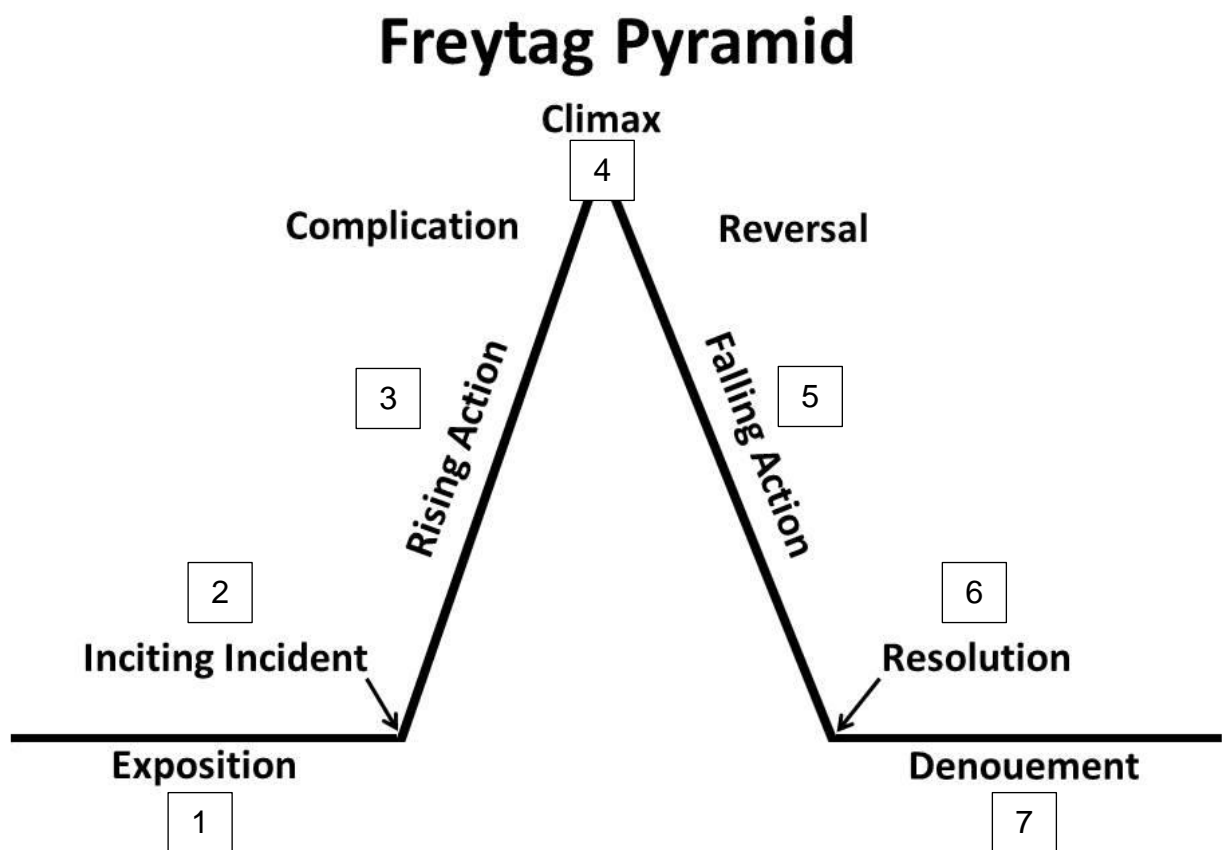# Freytag's Pyramid for Structuring Fiction

Gustav Freytag was born in Poland, July 13th 1816. He was a novelist (writer) and playwright (he wrote plays). Freytag saw common patterns in the plots of novels (stories) and developed a diagram to analyse them. He diagrammed a story's plot using a pyramid like the one shown below:

Freytag Pyramid

Climax

4

Complication

Reversal

3

Rising Action

5

Falling Action

2

Inciting Incident

6

Resolution

Exposition

Denouement

1

7

Challenge: Look at Freytag's Pyramid for Structuring Fiction. Working together, what do you think each of the 7 areas of his pyramid mean? Try to define each area.

Extension: Think of a storyline within a book (or film) where this structure has been followed. Write down what happens for each of the 7 areas.

1. Exposition: Setting the scene. The writer introduces the characters and setting, providing description and background.

2. Inciting Incident: Something happens to begin the action. A single event usually signals the beginning of the main conflict.

3. Rising Action: The story builds and gets more exciting.

4. Climax: The moment of greatest tension in a story. This is often the most exciting event. It is the event that the rising action builds up to and that the falling action follows.

5. Falling Action: Events happen as a result of the climax and we know that the story will soon end.

6. Resolution: The character solves the main problem / conflict or someone solves it for him or her.

7. Dénouement: (a French term, pronounced: day-noo-moh) The ending. At this point, any remaining secrets, questions or mysteries which remain after the resolution are solved by the characters or explained by the author. Sometimes the author leaves us to think about the THEME or future possibilities for the characters.

You can think of the dénouement as the opposite of the exposition: instead of getting ready to tell us the story by introducing the setting and characters, the author is getting ready to end it with a final explanation of what actually happened and how the characters think or feel about it. This can be the most difficult part of the plot to identify, as it is often very closely tied to the resolution.