Turning Points

Companion Text: If You See the Moon, by Zia Wells
Subject Area & Grade Level: Language Arts, 4th Grade

Objectives

After this lesson, students will be able to:

- Re-tell major events in a story
- Identify points in a story at which the plot takes a new direction
- Draw a story map

Pre-Reading

Recite the nursery rhyme "Jack and Jill" to students, and ask them at what point in the story did things change for Jack and Jill. Most students will identify when Jack fell down as a turning point, for after that point, only negative things occur. Ask students to suggest other familiar nursery rhymes, and see if they can identify turning points in them. Point out that turning points, sometimes called "plot twists," could be dramatic shifts in action from positive (or neutral) to negative, but that they can also be more subtle, such as internal shifts in the way a character feels rather than acts.

During Reading

Read the story once through without stopping. Then, tell students to take out a sheet of paper, and that while you are reading the story again, they should write down any page numbers on which they think a turning point is happening, leaving space after each number to write a description, which we will do together afterward. Finally, read the story a second time, while students take notes as you've instructed.

Post-Reading

Ask students to silently count how many turning points they think the story had, and hold up that number of fingers. It is likely that there will be some discrepancies in the numbers shared by students, so ask for volunteers to suggest, without page numbers, a turning point they believe occurred in the story. Make a list of all suggestions on the board, and then lead a class discussion about them. Be sure your list includes the following plot events:

- Cirra and Nimbu are bored.
- The moon came down to play with Cirra after she woke up at night.
- The moon realized he is stuck on earth.
- After their initial return attempts fail, the moon reaches a heightened level of concern.
- Together, Nimbu and Cirra are able to help the moon return to the sky, and join him.
- Nimbu and Cirra's games with the clouds cause them to rain, filling the river with water.

- The moon helps Cirra and Nimbu return to earth.
- Cirra and Nimbu resolve their boredom by playing in the river.

Once the class has agreed on the major events and shifts in the plot, ask students to identify where in the story they occurred, and link the major story events to the page numbers they have listed, making any necessary corrections as you go.

Draw a straight, horizontal line on the board, and label it 1 at one end and 45 at the other end, in reference to the page numbers. Have students do the same on their paper, and then have them make a mark at each point in the story where the main events occurred, by following your model on the board. (Students at this level need your modeling to help them through the intuitive use of fractions necessary to put the marks at the correct place on the line.) To further differentiate the story arc, have students redraw each chunk of line in a different color or pattern, using markers or colored pencils if available.

Use the following page numbers:

- Cirra and Nimbu are bored. (p.4)
- The moon came down to play with Cirra after she woke up at night. (p.8)
- The moon realized he is stuck on earth. (p.9)
- After their initial return attempts fail, the moon reaches a heightened level of concern. (p.14)
- Together, Nimbu and Cirra are able to help the moon return to the sky, and join him. (p.17)
- Nimbu and Cirra's games with the clouds cause them to rain, filling the river with water. (p. 27)
- The moon helps Cirra and Nimbu return to earth. (p. 35)
- Cirra and Nimbu resolve their boredom by playing in the river. (p.42)

Lastly, while looking at your chunked line, and having students look at theirs, point out how drawing a line and chunking it into major story parts like this can help them get a grasp on a longer story with a more complex plot like this one. At a glance, students can tell how long each section of the story is, and which sections make up the bulk of the plot.