

A Musical's Ten Plot Points

(Six are adapted from *Beating Broadway* by Steve Cuden. The other four are David Quang Pham and his mentor's {Janelle Lawrence} dramaturgical models.)

1. **Opening Number** establishes the stasis at the beginning of Act I – the "Normal World"

- Establish the storytelling devices (song style, dance style, sound)
- Establish the "World of the Musical" (Characters, theme, spectacle, style, etc.)

2. **Inciting Incident** changes the world forever

- The inciting incident works best when it is thrust upon the hero as an outside event
- Inciting incidents must establish clear goals for the hero (and the audience)
- This "Master Goal" is called the "super objective" - what the hero will fight for
- The "I Want" song clarifies the hero's goals for the audience and points the way forward (the journey to attain the Want)
- The inciting incident launches a series of trials that comprise the rising action of the book

3. After the inciting incident occurs, the hero will reach a decision-making point: The **Point of No Return**

- This is their big decision - they must actively choose their course of action (this contrasts with the inciting incident, which is thrust upon them from the outside.), so they **MUST** move forward
- The hero immediately begins action, which brings forth many obstacles that they must overcome (conflict)

4. The hero realizes a major change must be made to achieve their goal so they do a **Midpoint Reversal Before Intermission** at the end of Act I – the major transition in the musical

- The reversal often occurs, where the hero now realizes they must take charge of their destiny (it's now or never)
- When the hero has had enough of being pushed around, they decide to take action; they realize it's possible for them to control their own destiny
- Act I ends with a major change that the audience eagerly anticipates coming back to after the intermission

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5. **Beginning of Act II** must get the audience quickly back into "the world of the musical"

- Catches the audience up on what took place during the "intermission break"
- Often is a light amusing musical number that re-introduces the action and sound of the musical and sets the audience up for what is to come

6. Defeat is all but certain in the one of the most powerful moment of **The Big Crunch**

- It appears that all is lost and the hero must fail / that hero has failed
- Appears to be "the dark night of the soul" for the hero
- Often occurs at the end of the "middle part" and transitions the action into the final third of the musical
- For this moment to really work well, it should be very bleak
- Conflict remains high – the conflict has increased significantly since intermission
- *Remember, the goal should never be easy; it requires effort where much will be lost and the hero will be scarred forever and ultimately transformed, along with those around them

7. **Climax**

- The climax must be emotional and most exciting, active, powerful moment in the musical, full of *energy*
- They do not need to always be musicalized
- If not musicalized itself must be preceded by a high-packed energy song (the **11:00 number**, a term still used that originated back when musicals began at 8:30pm)
 - o 11 o'clock number is a theatrical term for a big, show-stopping song that occurs late in the second act of a two-act musical. It was so named because in the days when musical performances would start at 8:30 pm, this song would occur around 11 pm
- The climax must be inevitable, believably brought about by the main characters' own actions
- There must be only one solution, only one way out of the mess, only one way to achieve their goal
- The hero must come up with the plan of action themselves

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- The plan of action they come up with ideally should be unexpected, something not evident to the audience
- The climax is difficult for the hero to endure, but is potentially life-altering

8. The action is completed by the **Resolution**

- The resolution is the result of the rising action's being well set-up throughout the entire show
- The hero is now required to overcome a FINAL OBSTACLE (or two)
- Hero strives to achieve their super-objective
- If they meet their goal, they arrive at the resolution by EARNING IT (it has not been easy, and they have been forever transformed by the journey. An easy goal is very unsatisfying to an audience.)
- The hero has ultimately overcome their "flaws," and recognizes the impact of all their actions
- Somewhere during the climax and ultimate resolution the audience experiences the catharsis

9. The hero goes what they need, not what they want in **The Re-Stasis**

- The journey has changed the character(s), and the world around them forever in a fundamental way
- The audience has also been ideally changed from the journey

10. Close the musical with **The Finale**

- The finale is a musicalizing close of the musical, summing up the journey and/or themes presented in an unforgettable tune that the audience will always remember
- Ideally it will keep the audience thinking about the themes for days after the musical ends
- Often a reprise is used for the final number
- The opening number and the final number are two of the most lasting images that audience will remember of the play, so composers and directors work extra hard to make the moments memorable