

Inciting Incident

Definition of Inciting Incident

Inciting incident in a plot is an event or a point that arrives at the beginning of a play, story book, or a film that disturbs the actions and life of a [protagonist](#), and sets him to pursue the mission vigorously. It originates from a Latin word, *incitāre*, which means to start up, to put something into rapid motion, or to stimulate, or encourage something or some [character](#).

Inciting incident starts the action of a story, and sets the main question readers want to know. For instance, the inciting incident of William Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet" happens when the lovers meet and fall in love at first sight at a ball. You can easily recognize it because it introduces the major [conflict](#) between protagonist and [antagonist](#).

Examples of Inciting Incident in Literature

Example #1: *The Most Dangerous Game* (by Richard Connell)

The inciting incident of Richard Connell's "The Most Dangerous Game" occurs in the evening, when Rainsford and General Zaroff dine and discuss hunting. It starts off as a friendly conversation about their hunting adventure; however, it ends with a confession by General Zaroff that he kills people as a "game," and for fun while hunting. Soon after this confession, Zaroff proclaims that he wishes to hunt Rainsford. This revelation takes a catastrophic turn that leaves Rainsford in serious danger.

Example #2: *Hamlet* (by William Shakespeare)

“Let me not think on’t! Frailty, thy name is woman —
A little month, or ere those shoes were old
With which she follow’d my poor father’s body
Like Niobe, all tears – why she, even she —
O God! a beast that wants [discourse](#) of reason
Would have mourn’d longer —”

The inciting incident in Hamlet is the death of King Hamlet, which opens the play with the characters affected by this problem. In the very first Act, Hamlet is thrown into despair due to Gertrude’s impulsive move to marry Claudius, his uncle. She could not wait a month, an act which drives Hamlet crazy, thus creating a serious problem that needs [resolution](#).

Example #3: *Star Wars* (by George Lucas)

In “Star Wars,” the inciting incident occurs when Darth Vader attacks the ship of Princess Leia. Prior to this event, civil war was going on there. It happens when the Empire exhibits its true color by boarding a ship illegally, which is supposed to be on a “diplomatic mission.” This creates a real problem in the story. The Empire becomes cruel in its every effort to restrict rebellion; nevertheless this inciting incident shows us the beginning of deadly tensions, more of which are to come.

Example #4: *The Sixth Sense* (by M. Night Shyamalan)

The inciting incident in “The Sixth Sense” happens with the attack of Vincent on Malcom. Without the gunshot, the story would have no strong plot, and Malcom would have had no compulsion to meet Cole. The turning point in the first act comes with a revelation of Cole that he might face the same vicious tendencies which Vincent did. Taking his steps back and figuring out that Malcom would not help him, increases the problems and tensions caused by the point that Cole is just a “disturbed” child.

Example #5: *Death of a Salesman* (by Arthur Miller)

“WILLY: It’s all right. I came back.

LINDA: Why? What happened? (Slight pause.) Did something happen, Willy?

WILLY: No, nothing happened.

LINDA: You didn't smash the car, did you?

WILLY (with casual irritation):
I said nothing happened. Didn't you hear me?

LINDA: Don't you feel well?"

This play begins with Willy coming home. The [repetition](#) is a good technique to let [audience](#) notice how important a question is. The same happens in the following opening [dialogue](#), which begins the inciting incident of this play. It sets up the main question among the readers, which is "What's wrong?"

Function of Inciting Incident

Since inciting incident means to stimulate, it catalyzes the protagonist to take action or go into motion. It jolts the protagonist out of his daily routine as it is an event that sparks the fuse of a plot. It is also necessary to happen for a [narrative](#) hook to kick in. In addition, it brings the major question, [suspense](#), as well as action in the story. Thus, the main focus is main character and readers. You can find it in plays, movies, novels, and short stories.