Course Title: Building a Young Adult Novel: Plot and Structure as the Blueprint of Your Story
Course Code: NVL 36 W
Instructor: Ann Jacobus, MFA (she/her)

Course Summary:

This course will give student writers who shun outlining a deeper intuitive understanding of the essential plot points for any story and the ability to apply them to their current and future YA novels. These include the “normal world,” the inciting incident, obstacles and turning points, the crisis or “darkest moment,” the climax, and resolution. We will also examine the fundamental and essential forces that drive a plot—character internal and external goals, motivation, and conflict, as well as the elements that differentiate YA literature and make it exciting and popular.

Students will craft a “Plot Plan” from a one-page template for their work-in-progress that will be due at the end of the course, and produce up to 2500 words of new or revised prose, an average of one double-spaced page a week. Optional writing prompts and/or exercises will be posted to help writers craft plot-essential scenes. Students will be expected to work on their writing throughout.

Weekly lectures will be recorded in Zoom for live or later viewing, and posted for reading in Canvas. In addition to weekly assigned chapters from Martha Alderson’s The Plot Whisperer, and short craft articles and videos, we’ll refer to two acclaimed YA novels for required written discussion questions (so read them as soon as possible, especially The Poet X). In the second half of the course, we will break into groups to “workshop” each other’s writing, after reviewing best practices for doing this successfully.

Students will receive detailed feedback from the instructor on plot plans as well as on new or revised prose; constructive input from classmates in workshops; and they will know how to gently and thoroughly provide feedback on classmate writing themselves.

To learn and improve, artists need a safe space in which to share their work. All students will be relied upon to show the utmost respect and consideration for their fellow writers in class and during workshops.

*Please see course page for full description and additional details.*

Grade Options and Requirements:

- No Grade Requested (NGR)

Please contact the Stanford Continuing Studies office with any questions
365 Lasuen St., Stanford, CA 94305
continuingstudies@stanford.edu
650-725-2650
This is the default option. No work will be required. No credit will be received and no proof of attendance will be provided.

- **Credit/No Credit (CR/NC)**
  Students must attend or watch at least 7 class sessions and respond to discussion questions and writing exercises for those sessions.

- **Letter Grade (A, B, C, D, No Pass)**
  Students must attend or watch at least 7 class sessions, respond to discussion questions and writing exercises, and submit their final novel plot plan and 2500 words for workshop.

Writing a novel is difficult. Grading is based in most part on your willingness to push yourself, try new things, and share your insights with classmates—with extra credit if you manage to have some fun.

*Please Note: If you require proof that you completed a Continuing Studies course for any reason (for example, employer reimbursement), you must choose either the Letter Grade or Credit/No Credit option. Courses taken for NGR will not appear on official transcripts or grade reports.*

**Tentative Zoom Schedule***:

**Lectures**: Tuesdays at an hour sometime between 9:00am and 2:00pm Pacific Time, based on a class poll prior to the first Zoom meeting. All lectures will be recorded for those not available to attend live sessions.

**Office hours**: Thursdays 12:00-1:00 pm (PT). Based on class preference this can be an open Q&A and/or informal (live) chat discussion on Zoom for the first weeks of the course. In the last 4-5 weeks, students may make individual appointments if desired. For those located in other time zones, arrangements can be made for mutually convenient appointment times.

Please don’t hesitate to contact the instructor at any time during the course if you require extra time or help for any reason.

*Please note that the Zoom schedule is subject to change. The live video sessions are recorded; student attendance is optional*

**Tentative Weekly Outline:**

**Week 1**
Lecture: What is Plot? What is Story? What’s the Difference Between YA and Adult Fiction?
Student introduction exercises (short written)
Reading/Links: *The Plot Whisperer*, chapter 2 & 5
“Wired for Story,” by Lisa Cron on TedX

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The Difference Between YA Lit and Adult Lit by Ann Jacobus
Handout: Novel Plotting Plan Template
Writing exercises

**Week 2**
Lecture: *Character* Goals and Motivation Drive Your Plot
Reading/Links: "7 Secrets to Powerful Character Motives," by P.S. Hoffman
*The Plot Whisperer*, chapters 6 & 7
Discussion questions and exercises

**Week 3**
Lecture: The Inciting Incident: Upsetting Your Young Character’s Normal World
Also, how to “workshop.”
Handouts: Workshop Critique Guidelines, and Workshop Response Sheet
Reading/Links: *The Plot Whisperer*, chapter 8
“What is the Inciting Incident?” at blog.reedsy.com
“Learning to Say No Thanks: Standing Up For Your Creative Vision,” by Kasey Leblanc
Discussion questions and exercises

**Week 4**
Lecture: Mounting Obstacles and Turning Points Prepare Your Protagonist for Change
Also, how to be “workshopped.”
Reading/Links: “The Secret to Creating Conflict,” by Joe Bunting
“4 Ways to Take Criticism Like a Pro,” by Robert Lee Brewer
Discussion questions and exercises

**Week 5**
Lecture: Bird’s-Eye View of Plot: Picture Books! Guest lecturer, author and Pixar story instructor Annemarie O’Brien
Picture books referred to: *The Dot* by Peter H. Reynolds, *Harry the Dirty Dog* by Gene Zion, illustrated by Margaret Bly Graham, *Prancing Dancing Lily* by Marsha Diane Arnold, *Bill in a China Shop* by Katie McAllaster Weaver
Reading/Links: “Learning Plot From Picture Books,” by Ann Jacobus
Discussion questions

**Week 6**
Lecture: The Halfway-Point: The Protagonist is All-In and No Going Back
Reading: *The Plot Whisperer*, chapter 9
Discussion questions and exercises
Workshops

**Week 7**
Lecture: Crisis! The YA Protagonist’s darkest Moment Leads to Growth and Transformation
Reading: *The Plot Whisperer*, chapter 10
Discussion questions

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Workshops

**Week 8**
Lecture: Story Climax—What We've Been Building Toward the Whole Time
Reading/Links: *The Plot Whisperer*, chapter 11
“How to Write the Climax of a Story,” by Jenn at herdedwords
Discussion questions

**Week 9**
Lecture: Resolutions, and “What’s Your Story About?”
Reading/Links: *The Plot Whisperer*, chapter 12
“What Exactly is a Logline and Why Do I Need One?” NY Film Academy

Workshops
Final revised Novel Plot Plans due

**Week 10**
(Up to) 2500 words due
Questions and review as needed
Moving forward
Reading/Links: *The Plot Whisperer*, chapter 13