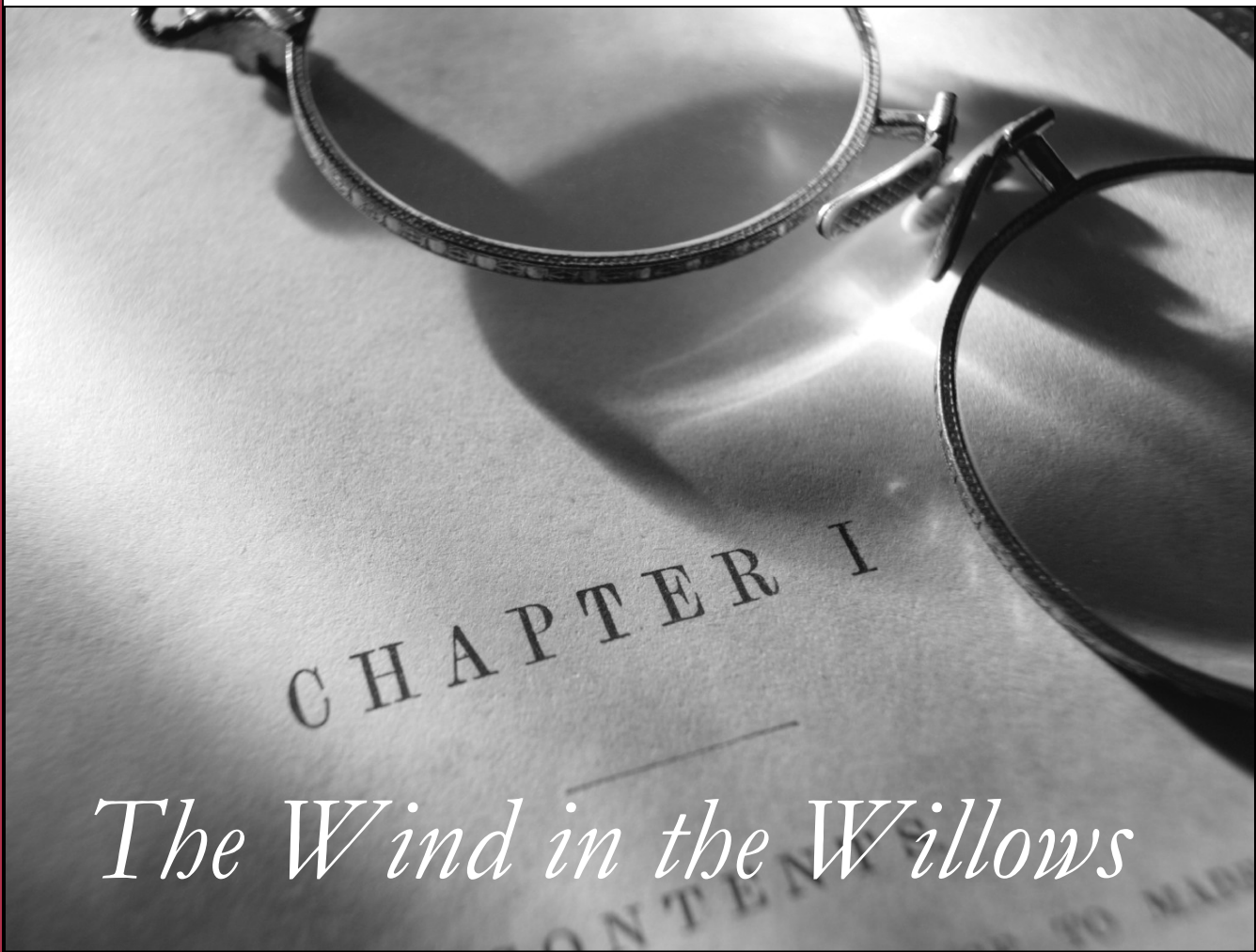


The Classics Club

Lit Courses on DVD

with Adam Andrews



The Wind in the Willows

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Kenneth Grahame Biography

Kenneth Grahame was born on 8 March 1859 in Edinburgh, Scotland, though he grew up on the banks of the Thames River in southern England, where he was raised by his grandmother.

Grahame attended St Edward's School in Oxford and wanted to attend Oxford University but his family could not afford tuition. Instead, he went to work at the Bank of England in 1879. He spent almost thirty years at the bank, rising to the post of Secretary by the time he retired in 1908.

In 1899, Grahame married Elspeth Thomson. The couple had one child, Alastair, whom they nicknamed "Mouse." Legend has it that Alastair's wayward and headstrong nature provided Grahame with his model for Toad of Toad Hall, whose adventures animate the plot of *The Wind in the Willows*. Alastair was plagued by health problems throughout his life, and committed suicide as a young man in 1920.

Grahame published stories in London periodicals from a fairly young age. Some of these were collected in 1893 and published as *Pagan Papers*. In 1895, Grahame published another collection, *The Golden Age*. Three years later came *Dream Days*, his final collection of stories for children. *Dream Days* is notable because it includes *The Reluctant Dragon*, Grahame's second most famous work.

Grahame published *The Wind in the Willows* in 1908 to immediate success. He would never attempt a sequel. *The Wind in the Willows* has remained consistently popular with children and adults ever since its initial publication, and has been retold many times over on stage and screen.

Kenneth Grahame died in Pangbourne, Berkshire in 1932. He is buried in Holywell Cemetery, Oxford. Grahame's cousin Anthony Hope, also a successful author, wrote his epitaph, which reads: "To the beautiful memory of Kenneth Grahame, husband of Elspeth and father of Alastair, who passed the river on the 6th of July, 1932, leaving childhood and literature through him the more blest for all time".

The questions in this syllabus correspond to the questions that appear on screen during the *Wind in the Willows* presentation. Numbers in parentheses after each question correspond to *The Socratic List*, which is included as Appendix A in the *Teaching the Classics* basic seminar, available at www.centerforlit.com/ttc.htm.

Notes on the Discussion

Setting

When does the story happen? (2)

In what season does the story take place? (2c)

Among what kinds of people is the story set? (1h)

Character

Who is the story about? (3)

Make up a list of adjectives that describe Mole. (3f)

Is Mole a “sympathetic character”? Do you identify with him and hope he will succeed? (3q)

Make up a list of adjectives that describe Rat. (3f)

What does Rat think is the most important thing in life? (3m)

Make up a list of adjectives that describe Toad. (3f)

Are Toad's struggles symbolic of human life generally in some way? (3p)

Is Toad a "sympathetic character"? Do you pity him? Do you despise his weaknesses? (3q)

Who else is the story about? (4)

Conflict: Toad

What does Toad want? (5)

What categories of conflict apply to this story? (6g-k)

Plot: Toad

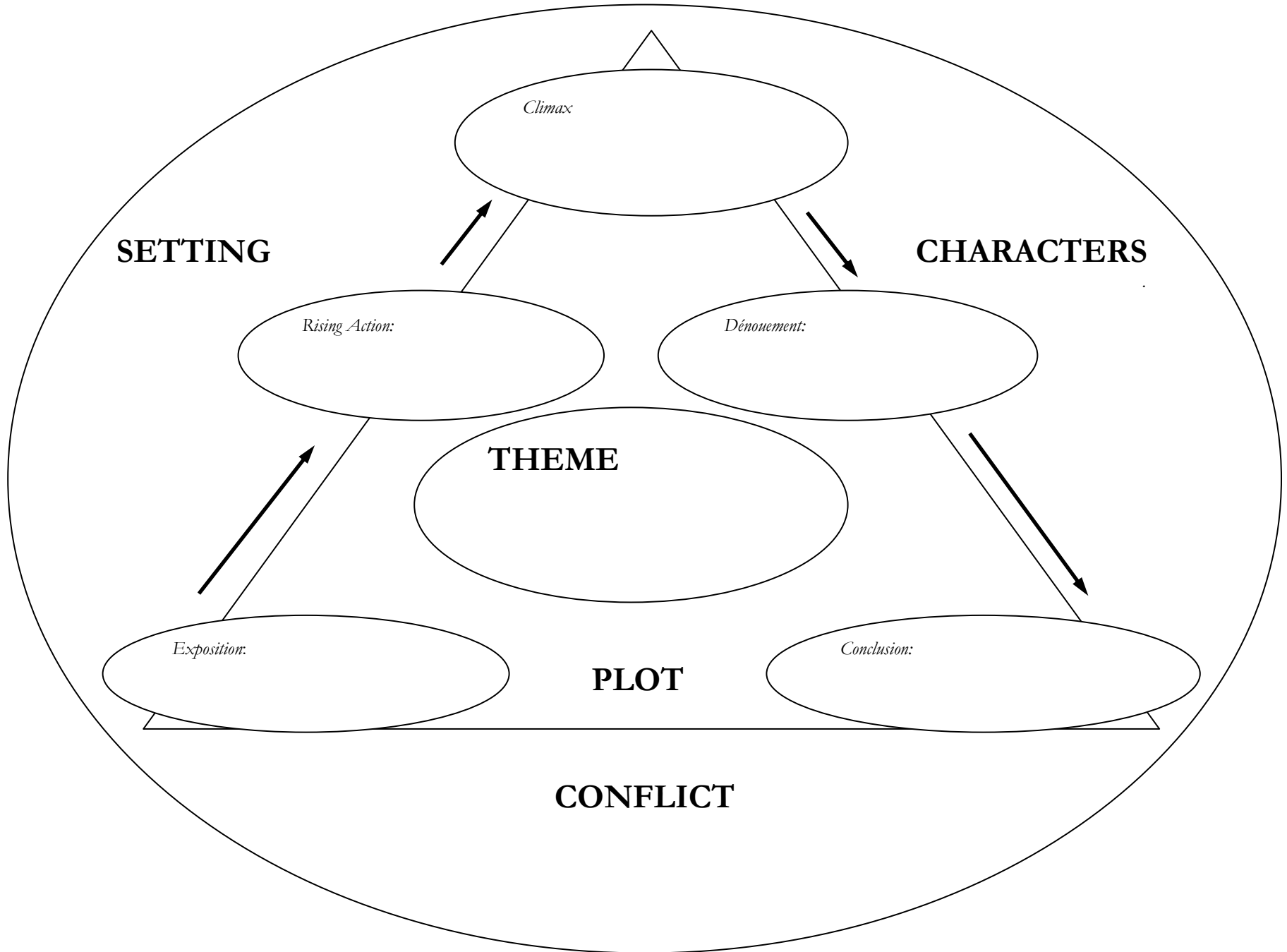
What major events take place in the story because of the conflict? (8a)

Do Toad's objectives or goals change throughout the story? How? Why? (5f)

What events form the highest point or climax of the story's tension? (9d)

How does the story end? (10)

***The Wind in the Willows* by Kenneth Grahame: Story chart**



Conflict: Mole

What does Mole want? (5)

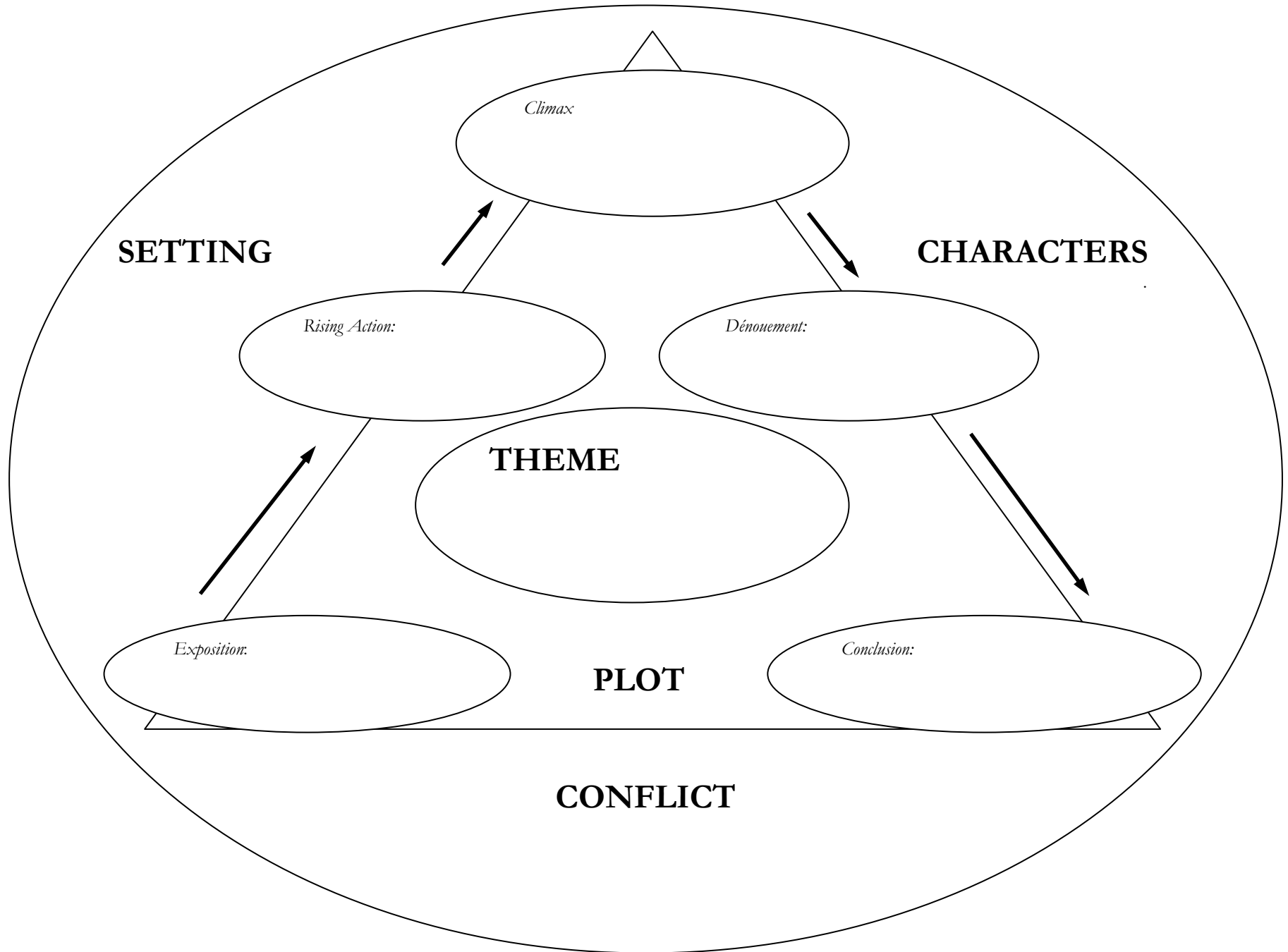
Why can't Mole have what he wants? (6)

Plot: Mole

Does Mole finally get what he's after? (9a)

What events form the climax of the story? (9d)

***The Wind in the Willows* by Kenneth Grahame: Story chart**



Theme

What is the main idea of this story? (13)

Style: Irony and Symbolism

What details in the story are just the opposite of what you would expect? (17)

Does the author use things to represent ideas in this story? (17)

Suggested Writing Assignments

1. What sort of person is Mole? How is he like you, and how is he different? What about Rat? Toad? Badger?
2. What examples of friendship do you find in this story? How do the characters show friendship to each other?
3. What is “The Wide World”? What part does it play in the events of this story? How is Toad’s view of the Wide World different from Mole’s or Rat’s view? Which view does the author want us readers to take of the Wide World?
4. What is the most important conflict in this story in your opinion? How is this conflict resolved?
5. Do you think that setting this story among animals helps Kenneth Grahame emphasize his themes? How do animals relate to Nature differently than people?
6. What does a good life look like, according to this story?

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