Margaret Peterson Haddix (b. 1964) dreamed about writing novels as a child. Her interest in writing was sparked by her father’s imaginative tales; however, she did not think she could support herself writing stories. She worked as a newspaper reporter after college but never gave up her dream. Eventually, Haddix quit her job and began working on her first novel. Haddix has now written more than a dozen young adult novels.

**SETTING A PURPOSE** As you read, pay attention to the clues that help you understand how Bailey feels and thinks about her life.

“Contrary to popular opinion,” the MRI technician says, “this is not a torture device, it was not invented by aliens, and it does not enable us to read your thoughts.” Bailey looks doubtfully at the huge machine in front of her. She has already forgotten what MRI stands for. Does that mean there’s really something wrong with her?

“Just joking,” the man says. “But you wouldn’t believe the questions I get. This won’t be a problem for you at all unless . . . you’re not claustrophobic, are you?”

“No,” Bailey says. But she has to think about the question. Wearing a hospital gown, sitting in a wheelchair, she has a hard time remembering what and who she is. Bailey Smith, sophomore at Riverside High School, all-around ordinary kid.

*But I won’t be ordinary if that machine finds something awful in my brain . . . .*
“Good,” the technician is saying. “Because I have to admit, some people do go a little nutso in there.” He’s a short man with glasses; he seems amused that some people might not enjoy his precious machine.

“Bailey will be fine,” Bailey’s mother says firmly from behind the wheelchair.

“Mom,” Bailey protests, shorthand for “Mom, you’re embarrassing me,” “Mom, you’re bugging me,” “Mom, you’re driving me crazy.” Bailey has said that word that way a thousand times in the past couple of years: When her mother said she shouldn’t let her bra straps show. When her mother thought people went to homecoming with dates. When her mother asked why Bailey didn’t like Hanson’s music anymore. The complaint “Mom” was usually so perfect at conveying Bailey’s thoughts. But it sounds all wrong in this huge, hollow room.

“Well,” the technician says, “time to get this over with.” Bailey lies down on a narrow pallet sticking out of the machine like a tongue. The technician starts to pull a covering over her head, then stops.

“Almost forgot,” he says. “Want to listen to the radio while you’re in there?”

“Okay,” Bailey says.

“What station?”

Bailey starts to say Z-98, the station everyone at school listens to, the only station Bailey ever turns on.

“Country 101?” the technician teases. “Want to hear cowboys crying in their beer?”

“No,” Bailey says. She surprises herself by deciding, “Something classical.”

As soon as she’s in the tube, Bailey regrets her choice. All those throbbing violins, those crashing cymbals—Bailey knows next to nothing about classical music and cares about it even less. The slow, cultured voice of the announcer—

“And now we’ll hear Mozart’s finest concerto, at least in my humble opinion”—could drive anyone crazy. Or nutso, as the technician had said.

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1 pallet (pāl´ət): a bed-like platform, sometimes covered with padding or cloth.
“All right,” the technician’s voice comes over her headphones. He’s in the control room, but he sounds a million miles away. “Hold very still, and we’ll get started.”

There’s a noise like the clip-clop of horses’ hooves—not real horses, but maybe a mechanical kind someone might create if he’d never heard real ones. The noise drowns out the classical music, and in losing it, Bailey realizes why she asked for it in the first place: She knew she’d never have to listen to it again. If she’d chosen Z-98, some song she liked might be ruined for her forever. She could imagine hearing an Ace of Base song six months from now and thinking, *That’s the song that was playing the day they found out about my brain tumor—*

*But if there’s a tumor, will I even be alive six months from now?*

Something catches in Bailey’s throat and she has to swallow a cough.

*Silly,* she chides herself. *Nobody’s said anything about a tumor.* The only real possibility the emergency room doctor mentioned, ordering all these tests, was a stroke, which was too ridiculous to think about. Old people had strokes. Bailey is only sixteen.

*Maybe they’ll just find out I made the whole thing up.*

But she hadn’t. Her arm had gone totally numb, right there in algebra class. She hadn’t been able to feel the pencil in her fingers. And she hadn’t been able to see right, she hadn’t been able to hear much—Mr. Vickers’s raspy voice had seemed to come at her through a tunnel. Still, she might not have said anything about it if Mr. Vickers hadn’t called on her to go work a problem on the board.

“I can’t . . . ,” she tried to say, but she couldn’t seem to make her brain think the words right, she couldn’t get her mouth to move. She tried to stand up but fell down instead. Mr. Vickers had Paula Klinely take her to the nurse, the nurse called her mother, and now she’s in an MRI tube listening to the clip-clop of fake horses.

The clip-clopping stops and the violins come back.

“You moved,” the technician says over the headphones with the same tone of exaggerated patience as the classical music announcer. “We’ll have to do that one again. The less you move, the quicker we’ll be done.”
“I’m sorry,” Bailey apologizes, though she’s not sure he can hear her. If she’s going to die at sixteen, she wants people to remember her as a nice person. She can imagine people giving testimonials at her funeral: She was always so good, so kind to animals and people alike. Her best friend, Allison, could reminisce, And if she found a spider indoors, she was always very careful about carrying it outside instead of killing it. She hopes Allison would remember to say that. Maybe this technician would even come to the funeral.

I never get close to the patients, he might say. I view everyone as just another brain scan. But here was a kid who was always so gracious and noble. She knew she was dying, but she was always concerned about other people. She always asked about my family, my pets, my—

Bailey can’t think what else the technician might be impressed by her asking about. She decides he should break down in sobs at that point.

The clip-clopping starts again. Bailey concentrates on not moving. She’s very glad the MRI can’t read her thoughts.

When the MRI is finally done and the technician pulls her out of the tube, Bailey scans his face for some expression—of pity, maybe, or better yet, boredom.

“Well?” she says.
“What?” he asks, looking down at the controls that lower her pallet.

“What did you find?” she asks, forgetting that she is supposed to be acting like she cares more about his dog than her life.

“Oh, I’m not allowed to discuss results with patients,” the technician says. “Your doctor will review everything and then talk to you.”

He’s less chatty now. Does that mean anything?

Bailey climbs back into the wheelchair—something else that’s ridiculous, because isn’t she perfectly capable of walking now? The technician pushes her out to the waiting room, where Bailey’s mother is intently reading *Golf Digest*. To the best of Bailey’s knowledge, Bailey’s mother has never played golf in her entire life.

“Well?” Bailey’s mother asks. But she directs the question to Bailey, not the technician. “Are you all right?”

“I’m fine,” Bailey insists.

Bailey’s mother lays her hand on Bailey’s shoulder, something she never would have done under normal circumstances. Bailey doesn’t pull away.

The technician is on the phone.

“They have a room ready for you now,” he reports. “An aide will be by in a few minutes to take you up there.”

He leaves, and Bailey and her mother are alone.

“Do you really feel okay?” Bailey’s mother asks. “You haven’t had another . . . episode?”

“No. I’ve just got a little headache,” Bailey says. But it’s just the edge of a headache—nothing Bailey would mention if she weren’t in the hospital. “Do I really have to stay all night?”

“That’s what the doctor said. They can’t schedule the other tests until tomorrow. And—” Mom stops and starts over. “Look at it as a chance to play hooky. To avoid biology class.”

She smiles brightly at Bailey, and Bailey resists the urge to retort, “I’d rather dissect frogs than die.” But she realizes she’d said exactly the reverse only a week ago in the school cafeteria: “I’d rather die than dissect a frog.” She remembers the exact moment she spoke the words: Sunlight had been streaming in the window behind Allison, grease was congealing on the school lunch tacos, all her friends were laughing.

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2 *dissect* (di-sēkt´): to cut apart or separate into pieces, especially to study more closely.
Oh, God, did I bring this on myself? Bailey wonders. I didn't really mean that. God, I’ll dissect a billion frogs if you want me to. If you let me live. But she knows from TV disease-of-the-week movies that bargaining with God never works.

“Mom, what do you think is wrong with me?” Bailey asks, and is amazed that the question comes out sounding merely conversational. She wants to whimper.

Mom keeps her smile, but it seems even less genuine now.

“I’m no doctor,” she says. “But I think you blacked out because you skipped lunch to do your history report. That’s all.”

“I had a candy bar,” Bailey says.

“My point exactly,” Mom says, and laughs, and Bailey feels much better. Mom wouldn’t dare criticize Bailey’s eating habits if she thought something was really wrong.

Bailey’s room is in the main part of the hospital, not the pediatric wing, a fact that worries Bailey’s mom.

“Are you sure?” she asks the aide who is skillfully maneuvering Bailey’s wheelchair past several carts of dinner trays. “She’s only sixteen. Don’t they—”

“Listen, lady, I just go where they send me,” the aide responds. He’s a thin man with sallow skin and a dark braid hanging down his back. Bailey can’t decide if he would have been considered cool or a scuzz in high school. Probably a scuzz if he ended up as a hospital aide. Then she decides she shouldn’t think things like that, not if she wants people to remember her as a nice person.

The aide is explaining to Mom that lots of kids have checked in lately; the pediatric wing is full. He makes it sound like a hotel everyone wants to stay at.

“But if she’s not in the pediatric wing, I can’t spend the night with her,” Mom frets.

“Nope. Not according to what they tell me,” the aide agrees.

They arrive at the door of Bailey’s room. At first glance Bailey thinks the mistake is even bigger than Mom feared: She’s been given a bed in a nursing home. The room is crowded with people at least a decade or two older than Bailey’s own grandparents. Then Bailey realizes that only one of the old people is actually in a bed. The rest are visitors.
“Coming through,” the aide says, only barely missing knocking down one man’s cane and another man’s walker. “Oh, look, Aunt Mabel’s got a roommate,” someone says. “Won’t that be nice.” But they’re all looking back and forth from Bailey to her mother, obviously confused. “She fainted,” Bailey’s mother announces. “She’s just in for a few tests.” It’s a cue for Bailey to say, once more, “Mom!” This time she keeps her mouth shut and her head down.

The old people nod and smile. One woman says, “She looks just like my granddaughter. I’m sure she’ll be fine,” as if the resemblance could save Bailey’s life. Another woman adds, “You know those doctors. They just don’t want to get sued.” As Bailey silently climbs from the chair to the bed she sees that her mother is smiling back at the old people, but the corners of her mouth are tighter than ever.

A nurse appears and whips a curtain between Bailey’s bed and the old people. The aide fades away with a strange little wave, almost a salute. That one hand gesture makes Bailey want to call after him: Wait! What happens to most of the people you wheel around? Do they die? But the nurse has begun asking questions. “I know some of these won’t apply to you,” she apologizes, “but it’s hospital policy . . . .” Bailey can’t help giggling at “Do you wear dentures?” and “Do you have any artificial limbs?” The nurse zips through the questions without looking up, until she reaches “Do you do recreational drugs?” “No,” Bailey says. They asked that in the emergency room, too.

“Are you sure?” The nurse squints suspiciously at Bailey. “Yes,” Bailey says. “I have never done drugs.” She spaces the words out, trying to sound emphatic, but it comes out all wrong. “My daughter,” Bailey’s mother interjects, “has never taken anything stronger than aspirin.” It’s true, and Bailey’s glad it’s true, but she wants to sink through the floor with humiliation at her mother’s words. How can she care about humiliation at a time like this? Someone comes and takes ten vials of blood from Bailey’s arm. Someone else starts what he calls an IV port on the back

emphatic
(ĕm-fā′tĭk) adj. If something is emphatic, it is expressed in a definite and forceful way.
of Bailey’s left hand. It’s basically a needle taped into her vein, ready for any injection she might need. Someone else takes her blood pressure and makes Bailey push on his hands with her feet, then close her eyes and hold her arms out straight.

“Good,” the man says when Bailey opens her eyes.

_I did that right? So I’m okay?_ Bailey wants to ask. But something about lying in a hospital bed has made Bailey mute. She can barely say a word to her own mother, sitting two feet away.

“Visiting hours are over,” the man tells Mom in a flat voice.

“But my daughter—,” Mom protests, and stops, swallows hard. Bailey is stunned. Mom is never at a loss for words.

“She’s only sixteen, and—”

“No visitors after five. Hospital policy,” the man says, but there’s a hint of compassion in his voice now. “We’ll take good care of her. I promise.”

“Well . . .” Still Mom hesitates. She looks at Bailey. “I know the Montinis didn’t really want to take Andrew overnight, they were just being nice, and with your dad away . . .”
Andrew is Bailey’s younger brother, seven years old and, everyone agrees, a pure terror. Bailey’s dad is away on a business trip. Mom couldn’t even reach him on the phone from the emergency room. Bailey can’t see why Mom is telling her what she already knows. Then Bailey understands: Mom is asking Bailey for permission to leave.

They’re going to make you leave anyway, Bailey wants to say. What do you want me to do? But it’s strange. For a minute Bailey feels like she’s the mother and her mother is the daughter.

“Go on,” she says magnanimously.³ “I’ll be fine.”

But as soon as her mother is out the door, Bailey wants to run after her, crying, “Mom-mee! Don’t go!” just like she used to do at preschool, years and years and years ago.

Once they’re alone together, Bailey’s roommate, Mabel, gets gabby.

“Ten days I’ve been lying in this hospital bed,” she announces, speaking to the TV as much as to Bailey. “First they say it’s my kidneys, then it’s my bladder—or is that the same thing? I forget. Then there’s my spleen—”

Bailey can’t imagine lying in any hospital bed for ten days. She’s already antsy, after just two hours. The sheets are suffocating her legs. She hated that spring in junior high when she signed up for track and Mom made her finish the whole season. But now she longs to run and run and run, sprints and relays and maybe even marathons.

I’ve never run a marathon. What else will I never get to do if I die now?

Bailey is glad when Mabel distracts her by announcing joyfully, “Oh good, dinner.”

An aide slides a covered tray in front of Mabel and one in front of Bailey.

“We didn’t know what you wanted, ’cause you weren’t here last night,” the aide says accusingly.

Bailey lifts the cover. Dinner is some kind of meat covered in brown gravy, green beans blanched to a sickly gray, mashed potatoes that could pass for glue, gummy apples with a slab of soggy pie dough on top—food Bailey would never eat in a

³ magnanimously (māg-nənˈə-məs-lē): to do something in a courageous, kind, unselfish way.
million years. And yet, somehow, she finds that she can eat it, and does, every bite.

See? she wants to tell someone. I’m healthy. So healthy I can eat this slop and not die.

Beside her tray is a menu for the next day. Bailey studies it as carefully as a cram sheet for some major final exam. Hospital Food 101, maybe. If she were still here for dinner tomorrow night, she’d have a choice of meat loaf or fried chicken, chocolate cake or ice cream.

But of course she won’t be here tomorrow night. Because they’re going to find out, first thing tomorrow, that there’s nothing wrong with her.

She hopes.

The aide comes back for Bailey’s tray.

“You didn’t fill that out,” she says, pointing at Bailey’s menu.

“I’m just here overnight. I don’t need to—,” Bailey protests.

“Fill it out anyway,” the aide orders.


It doesn’t matter. If she’s still here tomorrow night, she knows, she won’t be hungry.

The aide glances out Bailey’s window. “Man, look at that traffic,” she moans.

Bailey looks up, puzzled, and the aide has to explain: “Rush hour.”

It’s five forty-five. Bailey is stunned that the rest of the world is going on outside this hospital room. She is stunned to realize that she should be at marching band practice, right now, with Mr. Chaynowski ordering them to do a final run-through of “Another Opening, Another Show,” before marching back to the school, packing up her clarinet, joking with her friends.

It’s too weird to think about. She’s actually glad when Mabel flips on the local news.

Three hours later Bailey is ready to scream. She can’t stand the TV. It’s into sitcoms now, old-lady ones Bailey never watches. Bailey has never noticed before, but on TV everyone smiles all the time. Everyone laughs at everything.

How dare they?
Searching desperately for something to distract her, Bailey notices her backpack, cast off in the corner. She pulls out her algebra book.

She is a normal sixteen-year-old. Sixteen-year-olds do homework on Tuesday nights.

Bailey missed the end of class, when Mr. Vickers assigns the homework, but he always assigns the odd problems. She takes out a pencil and paper, and imagines what Mr. Vickers will say on Thursday: *Bailey, good to have you back. Remember to make up the homework.*

Bailey will use her airiest voice: *Oh, it’s already done. Here.* And he’ll stare in amazement.

*Why, Bailey,* he’ll say, admiration creeping into his voice. You’re such a conscientious student.

Mr. Vickers is straight out of college, and a real hottie. Lots of girls have crushes on him.

*Why, there you were on the verge of death,* he might say. And you still—

Bailey doesn’t want to think anymore about what Mr. Vickers might say. The numbers swim in front of her eyes.

The phone rings. Mabel answers it and grunts disappointedly, “It’s for you.”

Bailey picks up her phone.

“Oh, Bay-ley!” It’s Allison.

Bailey is suddenly so happy she can’t speak. She grins as widely as someone on TV.

“Bailey?” Allison asks. “Are you all right?”

“I’m fine,” Bailey says. But she’s not happy anymore. Allison’s voice is all wrong, and so is Bailey’s. She can’t seem to make her words come out right.

“Well,” Allison says, and stops. It strikes Bailey that Allison doesn’t know what to say either. Allison—who usually talks so much she could get a speeding ticket for her mouth.

“What’d you think? That I was going to be the dead person in the yearbook for our class?” Bailey jokes desperately. Their yearbook came out last week, and Allison had gone on and on about how every year the senior class had someone die, usually in a car wreck, and that person got a whole page of the yearbook dedicated to him. Last year the dead person was the head cheerleader, so there were lots of pictures. Allison and Bailey and their friends had spent an entire lunch period

**Conscientious**

(kənˈshē-ənˈshəs) *adj.*

If someone is conscientious, that person is very careful and thorough.
imagining what a memorial page might say for everyone in their class.

“Imogene Rogers, world’s biggest airhead, floated off into outer space . . . John Vhymes, biggest show-off, thought he had a better idea for running heaven than God does . . . Stanley Witherspoon, died two years ago but nobody noticed until now . . .”

It had been funny last week. It isn’t now. Bailey hears Allison inhale sharply. Bailey tries to pretend she didn’t say anything.

“So what happened after I left?” Bailey asks. “Anything good?”

“Everyone was just talking about you,” Allison says. “Do you know what’s wrong yet?”

Suddenly Bailey can’t talk to Allison. She just can’t.

“Listen, Al, some nurse is coming in in a minute to take my blood pressure. I’ll call you later, okay?”

It isn’t really a lie. They’re always coming in to take her blood pressure.

Allison hangs up. Bailey hopes Mabel’s hearing is as bad as her kidneys.

Bailey is surprised that she can fall asleep. She’s even more surprised when they wake her up at 6 a.m. for an electrocardiogram.

“But my mom—,” she protests groggily.

“They don’t want to test your mom’s heart,” the aide says. “They want to test yours.”

Bailey is climbing into the wheelchair when the phone rings.

“Oh, Bailey,” her mother’s voice rushes at her. “They said you were already up. I was just getting ready to come down there, but something awful happened—the car won’t start. I called Triple A, but it’s going to be an hour before they get out here. I’m looking for someone to give me a ride or loan me a car. . . . I am so sorry. This is incredibly bad timing. Are you okay?”

It’s easiest for Bailey to say automatically, like a robot, “I’m fine.”

“I’ll get there as soon as I can,” Mom assures her.

“I know. That’s fine,” Bailey says. But the words have no meaning anymore.
Down in the EKG room they put cold gel on Bailey’s chest and the technician runs a probe along Bailey’s rib cage. Even though the technician is a woman, Bailey is embarrassed because the probe keeps running into her breasts.

“Um-hmm,” the technician mutters to herself.

Bailey knows better now than to ask what the “Um-hmm” means. She can’t see the TV screen the technician peers into. The technician pushes harder and harder on the probe, until it feels like an animal trying to burrow between Bailey’s ribs. Bailey can’t help crying out.

The technician looks up, surprised, as if she’d forgotten that Bailey is an actual human being, capable of feeling pain.

“Sorry,” she says, and pushes the probe down even harder.

*I am just a body here,* Bailey thinks. *Nobody here knows or cares that I’m nice to animals and small children, that I do my homework on time. That I’m a person.* She wants to say something to make the technician really see her, but the longer Bailey lies on the cold table in her hospital gown, the more she feels like all her personality is leaching away. She is just a body.

Is that what it’s like to die?

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4 *probe* (prōb): a small device or instrument used to gather information.
Another technician in another room repeats the procedure—the cold gel, the hard probe—on Bailey’s neck and shoulders, checking out the blood vessels that lead to her brain.

This woman talks constantly—about her kids, her garden, her diet—but it’s not like she’s really talking to Bailey. Even when the woman asks a direct question, “Have you ever heard of a geranium growing like that?” the woman doesn’t stop long enough for Bailey to answer.

Bailey is crying, and the woman doesn’t even notice.

Bailey thinks she’ll have to dry her tears and wipe her eyes before she sees her mother. She can’t wait to see her mother. She wants Mom to think about all these horrible things so Bailey doesn’t have to. She wants Mom there to remember what Bailey is really like, so Bailey can remember how to act normal.

But when Bailey gets back to her room, there’s only a message. Mom’s stuck in traffic.

“Bailey is standing on the edge of something awful, balanced between two possible futures.”

Mom left the number for the Montinis’ car phone, but Bailey doesn’t call it. She turns her head to the wall so her roommate won’t see, and lies in bed sobbing silently. She’s not sure if she’s crying about the stalled traffic or the painful probe or the shame of having made jokes about dead people in the yearbook. Or the fact that whatever made Bailey faint yesterday might also make her die. It really could happen, Bailey thinks. People die of terrible diseases all the time. There’s no reason that it shouldn’t happen to me.
For the first time Bailey realizes none of her fears have been real before. When she imagined the MRI technician speaking at her funeral, the memorial page in the yearbook, Mr. Vickers’s response to her devotion to algebra, even her personality leaching away, it was just a fantasy to her. Role-playing. A game.

But Bailey is standing on the edge of something awful, balanced between two possible futures. On one side is the life she’s always known: homework and marching band and jokes with Allison and groans at her mother. Health. A future just like her past. And on the other side, over the cliff into whatever her illness is, is more time in hospital beds, more technicians seeing her innards but not really seeing her, more time crying alone. And maybe—death. Bailey longs fervently for her normal life back. In her mind it positively glows, an utterly joyous existence. Ordinary never looked so good.

But it’s not her choice which future she gets.

“Hello?” someone calls tentatively.

Bailey pauses to hide the evidence of her crying before she turns. But, strangely, she’s not crying anymore.

A man pulls the curtain around her bed, to give some privacy from her roommate.

“I’m Dr. Rogers, your neurologist,” he says. “I’ve looked at all your test results, and—”

Bailey’s heart pounds. She can barely hear him for the surge of blood in her ears. She feels dizzier than she felt yesterday, when everyone said she fainted.

“Shouldn’t my mom be here to hear this?” Bailey asks.

“She’s coming soon.”

Dr. Rogers looks at his watch.

“No. I can’t wait.”

*He’s treating me like I’m a grown-up,* Bailey marvels.

But the thought has an echo: *Grown-up enough to die.*

“This is a classic case,” Dr. Rogers is saying. “I’m surprised nobody caught it yesterday. They still would have wanted the tests, just to be sure. . . . What you had was a migraine headache.”

A headache? Not a stroke? Not a tumor? As soon as Dr. Rogers has said the inoffensive word, all the possibilities Bailey feared instantly recede. She’s a million miles away from that frightening cliff now. Of course she isn’t going to die.
How silly she’d been, to think she might. How silly, to think he’d tell her she was dying without her mother there.

Dr. Rogers is still talking, about the link between chocolate and migraines, about how common migraines are for young girls, about how it was perfectly normal for Bailey to get the symptoms of a migraine headache before her head even began to hurt. But Bailey barely listens. She’s thinking about getting her ordinary life back—ordinary life with maybe a headache every now and then. Bailey doesn’t care—her head barely even hurt yesterday. She doesn’t expect a mere headache to change anything at all. She waits for the glow to fade from her view of her ordinary life, and it does, but not entirely. Even with headaches she has a pretty good life.

Bailey’s mother rushes into the room just then, apologizing right and left.

“Doctor, you must think I’m a terrible mother, not to be here at a time like this. What did you find out? Please tell me—it was just a fluke, right?”

“Mom,” Bailey protests, in humiliation, with perfect emphasis.

The complaint never sounded so wonderful before.

COLLABORATIVE DISCUSSION  Being hospitalized and waiting to hear about her test results is an emotional experience for Bailey. With a partner, discuss the events that take place during her stay. How does each event help you understand more about Bailey’s thoughts and feelings?
Describe Stories: Plot and Suspense

Stories, such as “Fine?”, follow a pattern called a **plot**, which is the series of events in the story. At the center of a good plot is a **conflict**. A conflict is a problem or struggle between opposing forces that triggers the action and events. Most plots have the following stages:

- **Exposition** provides background and introduces the setting and characters. The conflict is also introduced at this stage.
- **Rising action** includes events that develop and intensify the conflict.
- The **climax** is the story’s most exciting part and a turning point for the main character.
- **Falling action** eases the tension, and events unfold as a result of the climax.
- The **resolution** is the final part of the plot and reveals how the problem is solved.

To keep you involved and excited about the plot, a writer will often create suspense. **Suspense** is a feeling of growing tension and excitement that makes a reader curious about what will happen next in a story. At the start of “Fine?”, you learn about the story’s conflict—Bailey is in a hospital undergoing tests—and you want to find out more.

Explain Point of View

In literature, the **narrator** is the voice that tells the story. A writer’s choice of narrator is known as **point of view**.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First-Person Point of View</th>
<th>Third-Person Point of View</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The narrator is a character in the story.</td>
<td>The narrator is not a character in the story but more like a voice that tells it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The narrator uses the pronouns <em>I, me, and my</em> to refer to himself or herself.</td>
<td>The narrator uses the pronouns <em>he, she, and they</em> to refer to the characters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The narrator tells about his or her thoughts and feelings, but does not know what other characters are thinking and feeling.</td>
<td>A narrator called <strong>third-person omniscient</strong> knows what ALL the characters think and feel.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A narrator called <strong>third-person limited</strong> knows the thoughts and feelings of just one person, usually the main character.</td>
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Think about the following questions to help you analyze point of view:

- How does the author’s choice of point of view affect the story?
- What does the choice of narrator help you learn about characters and events?
Analyzing the Text

Cite Text Evidence Support your responses with evidence from the text.

1. **Identify** Reread lines 1–15. Identify the point of view of the story. Explain how you can tell which point of view is being used.

2. **Infer** An external conflict is a character’s struggle against an outside force. An internal conflict takes place inside a character’s mind. Go back through the story and record examples of the internal and external conflicts that Bailey faces.

3. **Draw Conclusions** Review lines 333–357. What does this passage tell you about Bailey’s character?

4. **Evaluate** Reread the conversation Bailey has with her friend Allison in lines 371–395. How does the scene add suspense to the plot?

5. **Analyze** The plot of “Fine?” centers on Bailey’s fear of what her illness is. Go back through the story and make a list of important events. Label each event to identify what happens at each stage of the plot—exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. Explain how each event fits its plot stage.

6. **Connect** Reread lines 22–31 and 521–527. Explain why the author repeats Bailey’s complaint. What does the author want you to know about Bailey at the end of the story?

7. **Analyze** How would the story be different if Bailey was the narrator? Name a detail that Bailey might leave out and explain why.

**PERFORMANCE TASK**

**Writing Activity: Narrative** The story “Fine?” presents Bailey’s thoughts and feelings about her impending diagnosis. Write a one- or two-page narrative that describes the situation from Bailey’s mother’s point of view.

- Think about and decide whether you will tell the story using first- or third-person point of view.
- Follow the actual story; do not change the events or plot.
- Include relevant details that Bailey shares with her mother.