“Stray” by Cynthia Rylant

Literary Analysis: Plot

The plot of “Stray” is the arrangement of events in the story. The elements of plot include:

- **Exposition:** introduction of the setting, characters, and basic situation
Conflict: the story’s central problem
Rising action: events that increase the tension
Climax: high point of the story when the story’s outcome becomes clear
Falling action: events that follow the climax
Resolution: the final outcome

All the events in a plot follow one after another in a logical way. Like most stories, “Stray” centers on a conflict or struggle. You keep reading because you want to find out who will win the conflict or how the problem will be solved. At the climax of the story, you know who wins. The problem is solved. The story ends.

DIRECTIONS: The following questions focus on the exposition, the rising action, and the falling action in “Stray.” Answer each question in the space provided.

1. The exposition introduces the setting, characters, and basic situation. Here is one exposition detail:

**Exposition detail:** Snow has fallen.

What is another exposition detail?

**Exposition detail:**

2. The events in the rising action come before the climax. There are many events in the rising action of “Stray.” Here is one event in the rising action:

**Rising action event:** Doris meets the dog.

On the following lines, write two additional events that happen in the rising action.

**Rising action events:**

a. ________________________________

b. ______________________________________________________________________

3. In “Stray,” the story winds up quickly after the climax. Here is one event in the falling action:

**Falling action event:** Mr. Lacey tells Doris he took the dog to the pound.

What is another event that happens in the falling action?

**Falling action event:**

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Reading Comprehension Assessment

1. In “Stray,” the puppy wags its tail timidly. How does Doris behave timidly when her father sees the dog?

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2. The author of “Stray” writes, “Mrs. Lacey grudgingly let Doris feed it table scraps.” Explain how the word grudgingly reveals Mrs. Lacey’s feeling about the dog.

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3. Use your prior knowledge about how children feel about their pets. Explain how this knowledge helps you predict how Doris will feel about the stray.

4. In “Stray,” why do Doris’s parents ignore her when she points out how good the dog is?

5. Mrs. Lacey tells Doris to act more grown-up when the puppy has to leave. What does Mrs. Lacey want to do?

6. In the plot diagram, write two events that are part of the rising action of “Stray.” Then, on the lines below, explain how each event helps to increase tension in the story.
7. When Doris cries herself to sleep in “Stray,” what prediction do Doris and the reader make about the dog’s fate? Give two examples from the story that support this prediction.

8. The falling action of “Stray” shows a different side of Doris’s father. How is he different? Why does the author wait for the falling action to show this side of him? Explain your answer.

9. Near the end of “Stray,” Mrs. Lacey smiles at her husband and shakes her head. “as if she would never, ever, understand him.” Explain her reaction.

10. Think about what the story suggests will happen to the stray. Then consider what really happens. Why does the resolution come as a surprise? Use details from the story to support your answer.