

a novel

VALLEY
OF
DRY
BONES

your name

a novel

VALLEY

Thank you for your interest in
Plot Prompts! I hope this
framework for a novel or short
story sparks your imagination
and jumpstarts your best writing
yet.

Millicent Anglin
Gap Year Press Founder

BONES

your name

Proposed Title

Valley of Dry Bones

Genre

Young Adult Fiction

Themes

Aging - Explore society's attitudes about aging. In a culture that often values the latest and greatest more than the tried and true, it's not surprising that aging is stigmatized. What feelings, ideas, and emotions underlie age discrimination? Why do we fear our mortality? Should older people worry about being at the mercy of a younger generation, or are intergenerational relationships valued?

Diversity - Will society ever rise to the challenge of valuing people with different abilities, experiences, ages, and perspectives? Particularly in a culture that equates extrinsic wealth with intrinsic worth, how do we appropriately value retired/non-working people?

Government - Given the demographic reality of an aging population and low population growth, consider the fiscal impact on government programs. What's the best trade-off between funding entitlement programs and investing in our children's future? How will the government manage the demand on its resources?

Description

In a time when people age out of society at seventy-five years old, a troubled teen infiltrates a corrupt system to save his grandfather.

Synopsis

Thirty years after the Department of Aging and Supportive Housing (DASH) was created to replace Medicare and Social Security, its centers have become known as death camps. Brenda Henry, the new DASH administrator, is eager to revive the agency's reputation.

Joel Cooper is a misfit teen who chafes under his parents' expectations and is sick of their constant disappointment. Joel runs away from home when Nathan Cooper, Joel's grandfather and only ally, ages out of society and is taken to a DASH center. Hitchhiking from town to town, Joel meets another headstrong teen, Maya Rivas, and joins her makeshift family.

As details of abuses against DASH residents continue to emerge, Joel convinces Maya and others to help him rescue his grandfather. When Joel learns Nathan will be euthanized—standard procedure for everyone with dementia—he's in a race against time to rescue him.

Setting

Jersey City, NJ in the year 2060. The automation of the American workforce is in full swing and massive corporate layoffs are commonplace.

Main Characters

Joel Cooper (protagonist) – Seventeen-year-old high school junior who has twice landed in juvenile detention for truancy and fighting. Labelled and bullied because of his learning disabilities, he struggles to fit in at home and school.

Maya Rivas – Eighteen-year-old social activist. She is fiercely protective of her followers and close-mouthed about her past. Though slow to warm to Joel, she eventually grows more than a little fond of him.

Congressman Evan Wright – He co-wrote the DASH legislation, which requires that housing and health care for elderly and terminally ill people be provided in government-run institutions. Resistant to claims that the centers have become internment camps for undesirables, he’s eager to preserve his legacy as he prepares to retire.

Brenda Henry – Hired to root out the corruption plaguing the US’s largest agency, she has stellar credentials including a PhD in psychology and more than two decades in public service. Though quickly overwhelmed by the extent of the malfeasance, including bribery and elder abuse, she publicly claims to be making progress.

Plot Outline

ACT 1 (Exposition):

I. Setup

- In 2030, the US government consolidated health care and housing for the terminally ill and elderly to control exploding Medicare/Social Security costs. When the DASH agency was established, it had bipartisan support from politicians who were pleased with the broader safety net and the projected cost savings. Americans hailed the move as a tax break on workers who were struggling to afford quality elder care. DASH centers spring up across the country, mostly in renovated government buildings.
- By 2060, some people are questioning the agency’s ability to live up to its promises. DASH’s outdated facilities struggle to meet demand, promised cost savings haven’t materialized, and the life span of its residents is declining. The announcement of a new DASH administrator, Brenda Henry, is widely praised.
- Despite rumors of corruption and mismanagement within DASH, Americans still enjoy outsourcing the financial and emotional demands of elder care-giving. Most families

don't visit their family members once they move into a DASH center. As the average age of independent citizens declines, older Americans increasingly fall prey to anti-aging scams.

- Joel Cooper is technically a juvenile delinquent, but he just feels misunderstood. His parents are frustrated by his inability to overcome his learning disability and have threatened to send him to a military boot camp if he doesn't stay out of trouble.
- Though his parents are looking forward to it, Joel is dreading the day when his grandfather, Nathan Cooper, will be sent to a DASH center. Though Nathan is in the early stages of dementia, his moments of lucidity are among the rare times Joel feels loved and understood.

II. Inciting Incident - Nathan Cooper is taken by DASH and Joel runs away.

III. Plot Point #1 - While hitchhiking, Joel is mugged and assaulted.

ACT 2 (Rising Action):

IV. Subplots that facilitate character development:

- A fellow runaway nurses Joel back to health and introduces him to Maya Rivas. Joel is accepted into Maya's "family" and a budding romance develops between them.
- Maya connects Joel to a burgeoning anti-DASH movement, and he becomes concerned about his grandfather.
- Joel convinces Maya and other members of the Rivas family to volunteer at DASH. They hope to reconnect Joel

with his grandfather and find information they can leak to the press to aid the anti-DASH movement.

- V. Plot Point #2 (Confrontation)** – Maya and her family betray Joel as they succumb to the corruption they uncover. Joel is indefinitely detained within a DASH center on fabricated charges.

ACT 3: (Falling Action):

- VI. Climax** – While incarcerated, Joel learns that his grandfather will be euthanized.
- VII. Resolution** – With the help of an unexpected ally, Joel and Nathan escape DASH, and Joel’s parents welcome them home. Despite the movement’s impetus to allow people to choose their end-of-life circumstances, DASH survives.

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