

## Short Story Terms

### **Plot Terms**

**Plot:** The plot is the organized sequence of events in story.

**Introduction:** The first few sentence, paragraph or pages of the piece, in which the characters are introduced, the setting and mood are established and the action begins.

**Inciting incident:** an event or occurrence which causes the action to begin.

**Rising action:** Conflict and action occurs and complications arise during this part of the plot.

**Turning point:** or Major Crisis: At the turning point a decisive change occurs. It is the moment when the protagonist's choices go well or poorly; events turn, for the last time, either for or against the protagonist.

**Falling action:** or denouement: After the turning point the level of tension decreases as the conflicts are resolved. This is usually the shortest section of the plot.

#### **Ending types:**

Wrap up or summary ending: The author answers most or all of your questions. Loose ends are tied up and the conflicts are resolved.

Hint ending: The resolution of the conflict is hinted at but not specified. Some loose ends are tied up but not all.

Surprise ending: The ending is unexpected and surprising. Wrap up, hint and open endings can also be surprise endings.

### **Conflict**

- prime and necessary ingredient of fiction (without it, you don't have a story)
- usually represents some obstacle to the main character's goals
- short stories contain and build upon **one** main conflict

The main forms of conflict are:

- a) **person versus person**-- two people struggle physically, verbally, or emotionally.
- b. **person versus himself/herself**-- a person struggles to decide something.
- c) **person versus nature**-- a person struggles against a natural force.
- d) **person versus society**-- a person struggles against the demands of a group.
- e) **person versus the machine or person versus technology** – since machines do not usually have conscious action, this is rare

## Symbolism

Symbolism is being used when a person, object, action or word in a story takes on a meaning far beyond its usual meaning - used to represent an abstract idea.

Eg. A white dove carrying an olive branch symbolizes peace

Eg. The callused feet of a man can symbolize his hard-heartedness

## Two Fancy Latin Terms

### Deus Ex Machina (god in a machine)

- the inclusion of a coincidence or implausible event that comes just in time to solve a problem in a story
- sometimes referred to as "hand of god" ending
- avoid these - they're a sure sign of desperation

### In Medias Res (in the middle of the action)

- refers to a story that contains no "introduction"
- plunges reader right into the action
- background information then provided by flashbacks, explanations and dialogue

## Characters

### A. Types of Characters

1. Round character: seems real and whose character is revealed to you in some detail.
2. Flat character: exist in the story but you know little about them.
3. Static/Stock character: the use of a stereotype or caricature to represent a type of person.

### B. Types of Characterization

1. Direct Characterization: author explicitly tells the reader about the character's looks and personality -  
"He was a quiet man."
2. Indirect Characterization: author gives information about the character and lets the reader draw own conclusions ("shows" the reader)

### Authors use the following to "show" personality:

1. Character's name and appearance
2. What the character says
3. What the character thinks
4. What other people think of the character
5. How animals react to character
6. What the character does (eg. how the character acts in a particular situation)

## Narration

- A. Narrator:** The narrator tells the story. The narrator of the story can be a major character, a minor character or an outsider who doesn't take part in the action at all.
- B. Narrative:** A story with a narrator is called a narrative. The narrative may be told as though events are occurring at this moment, as a record of past events or as a mix of both.
- C. Narrative point of view:** The narrator may tell the story from one of several points of view
- i) First Person: The narrator uses "I" to report personal thoughts and feelings as well as the actions of others.
  - ii) Second Person: The narrator uses "you". (very uncommon in fiction)
  - iii) Third Person Limited: The narrator uses "he", "she" or "they" to report the actions of the characters. The narrator sees only what an observant mortal might see.
  - iv) Third Person Omniscient: The all-knowing narrator uses "he", "she" or "they" to report the thoughts and feelings as well as the actions of the characters.

## Mood

The mood or atmosphere is the general feeling of a literary work. Atmosphere is usually established at the beginning and is often closely related to the setting. It is unlikely that an author would set a romantic piece in a graveyard on a cold, dark, windy night or a scary story in a peaceful, sun dappled porch in spring. Mood and setting are so closely related that some people include mood as part of the setting.

## Setting

**The setting is the where and when of the story.**

- A) Geographical location: the region of the universe in which the piece is set. This might include the country, region or city in which action occurs.
- B) Specific location: the exact location of the action. This might include the room, the particular street corner, the part of the yard, the neighborhood, the store or the office where the story takes place.
- C) The "When": this can also be quite general or more specific. It can include the era, year, season, and date, time of the day in which the story takes place.

## Style

- The style of a short story is the way in which the writer uses language
- Reflects the writer's personality showing through
- Elements of Style:
  - a) diction (choice of words)
  - b) syntax (sentence structure)
  - c) types of figurative language
  - d) patterns of sounds and rhythms

## Theme

### A. What is a theme?

- This refers to the controlling idea or central insight of a piece of writing.
- It is a generalization about life that is implied by the story.
- Derived by deciding what the central purpose of a story is and what the protagonist has learned about life.

### B. Rules for Theme Statement

- Must be expressed as a single sentence
- Must be a statement about life that the author wanted to illustrate through the story (has to be important enough to keep the author's bum in a chair for the months or years it took to write the story!)
- Must not be so specific that it is limited to the details of just one story
- Must not be so general as to be applicable to millions of stories
- Must be supported at several points throughout the plotline (not just isolated incidents)
- Must be a meaningful statement that could be debated – not simply a statement of fact
- Must not be a cliché

### C. How to Develop a Theme

- Begin with a single topic (love, jealousy, dishonesty, honour, war, etc. )
- Write out what you think the author is trying to say about these topics
- ADD TO THIS!!!! Develop full note on how to detect and defend choice of theme

## Credibility Aids for the Short Story

- Fine detail - sense of being right there
- Use real places familiar to reader
- Give "eye witness" account
- Introduce your own doubt to help achieve acceptance of the fantastic
- Use an historical backdrop
- Employ human nature, as we all know it
- Match facial expression, tone of voice, and content
- Dramatize for a sense of reality and involvement
- Avoid contradictions
- Use terminology appropriate to subject
- Make it plausible
- Reduce coincidence since it weakens credibility
- Avoid formulaic approaches that sound artificial
- Close all loopholes (don't "drop" reader)