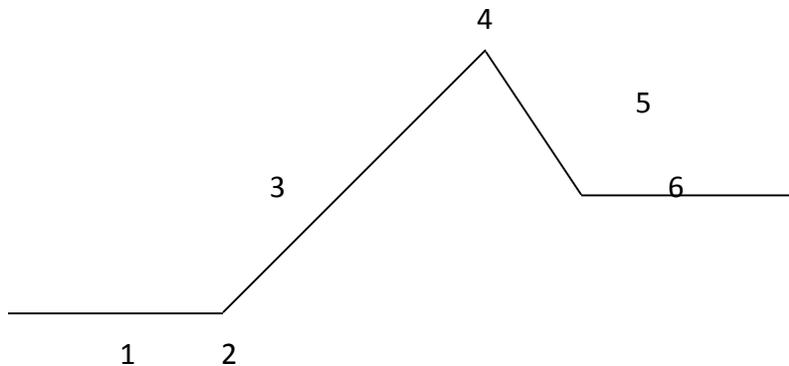


## Elements of a Short Story

### **PLOT:**

Plot is the sequence of incidents or events of which a story is composed. Most short stories follow a similar line of plot development.



### **1. Introduction / Exposition**

The part of the story that provides background information which the reader must be aware of if he/she is going to understand the story. The exposition may act as an introduction to the story, or it may be included in various places throughout the story, as the need arises, as an explanation to the reader.

The following may be considered part of the exposition:

- **Setting**

- **Characters**

- **Prior knowledge:**

Events which have occurred prior to the opening of the story and which have led up to the situation or event beginning the story itself.

- **Mood**

### **2. Initial Incident / Motivating Incident**

The first point of conflict in the story. It sets the story in motion and drives the plot ahead. The initial incident focuses on what the story will be about.

### **3. Rising Action**

All the events of the story that take place between the initial incident and the climax (this is the longest part of the story). The developed events will lead to the resolution of the conflict. It involves the obstacles and complications and the cause and effect.

#### **Complications:**

Incident or series of incidents which interfere with the plans of the protagonist. They are additional problems that must be overcome before the goal of the protagonist can be attained. Complications can add an increased element of suspense to the story.

**Suspense:**

The feeling of anxiety or uncertainty that is created in the reader about the final story outcome. Suspense is the strongest if the two forces in conflict are equal in power. The reader continues to read the story not knowing how it will end and wanting to find out how it does.

**4. Climax**

The part where the major problem/conflict is to be solved, usually the highest point of action. It is the turning point in the story. The highest point of suspense or tension in the story.

**5. Falling Action**

All the events of the story that occur after the climax, and before the resolution. The conflicts created in the initial incident are solved.

**6. Resolution**

The tying up of all the loose ends of the story that were not settled in the falling action. The final event in which the conflict is completely resolved.

**Denouement:**

Denouement is a final revelation in a story. It is the explanation of the ending. The author may explain the climax or what has happened to the main characters following the climax. However, not all stories will have a denouement. It is an optional element of the plot – it may or may not be used.

**SETTING:**

Setting is where and when a story takes place and under what set of circumstances. It is important because it gives a context to the story.

Verisimilitude: the author uses real examples of names, dates, places, and details to make the story appear true or based on truth.

**POINTS OF VIEW:**

Point of view is the perspective from which the story is told.

There are three basic types of point of view. They are:

**First Person** (I, me, we, us, our, my, etc.)

**Second Person** (you/your) \*typically not used in short stories

**Third Person** (he, she, they, their, her, him, etc.)

Point of View	Definition	Advantages	Disadvantages
<b>First Person Observer</b>	Narrator is telling the story and is not physically in the action. Ex: a news reporter watching events from a distance but speaking first hand on the situation.	Eyewitness account gives immediacy and realism. Author can create dramatic irony.	Bias or limited knowledge of narrator can create inconsistencies.
<b>First Person Participant</b>	The narrator is a character in the story. The story is told through the use of personal pronouns.	Eyewitness account gives immediacy and realism. Author can create dramatic irony.	Bias or limited knowledge of narrator can create inconsistencies.
<b>Third Person <u>Limited</u> Omniscient</b>	The narrator can see into the mind and thoughts of <b>one</b> character but is <u>not</u> a character in the story.	Realistic because we see the world through one person.	Reader is limited by the field of observation. Difficult to have character aware of all important events.
<b>Third Person Omniscient</b>	The narrator can see into the minds and thoughts of <b>all</b> characters and is <u>not</u> a character in the story.	Most flexible because the author can control perspective and easily inform reader about everything important.	Author can come between reader and story. The shifting from character to character may create confusion.

## CHARACTER:

Authors use two methods for describing characters, **direct** and **indirect**.

Method	Definition	How might this look in a story?
<b>Direct</b>	The author tells the reader directly about the characters.	Author makes direct statements about characters. Ex. John is a lively young man with blue eyes and blonde hair.
<b>Indirect</b>	We learn about characters without being directly told and we draw our own conclusions.	How the character acts, dresses, talks, responds to things, what the other characters say about him/her, how they respond to the character. Ex. A man helped a lady cross the street. We can infer that the lady might be elderly and the man is kind.

## Indirect Characterization:

- Tip: use the acronym STEAL to remember the methods of indirect characterization.

**Questions to consider:**

<b>Speech</b>	What does the character say or doesn't say? How does the character speak?
<b>Thoughts</b>	What is revealed through the character's private thoughts and feelings?
<b>Effect on other characters</b>	What is revealed about the character's effect on other characters? How do other characters feel or behave in reaction to the character?
<b>Actions</b>	What does the character do? How does the character behave? How does the character act in different situations?
<b>Looks</b>	What does the character look like? How does the character dress? What does the character's appearance say about his/her personality?

**Protagonist:**

- The main character in the story.
- The protagonist faces a problem, and in his/her attempt to solve the problem, comes into conflict with an opposing force.

**Antagonist:**

- A character or force that opposes the protagonist.
- The antagonist operates against the protagonist and tries to prevent the protagonist from achieving the goal or resolution.

<b>Type of Character</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>Flat Character</b>	A character that we know relatively little about (one or two traits max)
<b>Round Character</b>	A character with a variety of traits that make him/her believable; know a great deal about the character
<b>Static Character</b>	A character that does not change throughout the story; may be a flat or round character
<b>Dynamic Character</b>	A round character who undergoes a permanent major change in their personality, attitude, thinking or appearance by the end of the story
<b>Motivated Character</b>	A character, usually the protagonist, who has a need, want or a goal to fulfill
<b>Plausible Character</b>	A character who is believable, like a real person, and who behaves with consistency and motivation
<b>Stock or Stereotype Character</b>	A character that follows a predetermined stereotype that occurs in a popular literary genre Ex. The "dumb blonde" or the "jock" or the "nerd"

## **CONFLICT:**

Conflict is the basis of the plot. It is the problem the protagonist must resolve. It is a struggle between two opposing forces. The main conflict is introduced in the initial incident. All other minor conflicts in the story are considered complications.

### **External Conflict:**

This is a conflict between the protagonist and someone or something in his/her environment. The antagonist may be another person, an animal, society, environment, fate or the unknown. This type of conflict can be physical, emotional, or psychological.

### **Internal Conflict:**

This conflict is internal in that it occurs within the mind of the protagonist. It occurs within the character's conscience, or between traits of the character's own personality. The protagonist experiences a conflict in thought or emotion.

### **Types of Conflict:**

#### **Person vs. Person**

One person vs. another

- physical altercation or verbal

#### **Person vs. Her/Himself**

A character undergoing a personal struggle. The main character struggles with his/her own thoughts, feelings and actions. This is an internal conflict.

#### **Person vs. Nature**

A character in a struggle against a natural element (animals, weather, environment).

#### **Person vs. Supernatural**

A character in a struggle against something non-human or not of this earth (mystical animals, aliens, other creatures).

#### **Person vs. Society**

Character is in a struggle with societal norms, values and laws.

#### **Person vs. Fate**

Character is against "luck" or has a series of misfortunate events.

## **THEME:**

The controlling idea or central insight about life that the author reveals through the course of the story. It is the **meaning, message, or purpose of a story**. It is usually implied and not stated directly. Theme always makes a comment about human nature.

Theme statements are **not** one word:

Ineffective Theme: The theme of Macbeth is ambition.

Effective Theme: The theme of Macbeth is that excessive ambition can bring about a person's downfall.

## **LITERARY TERMS:**

### **Irony:**

Irony always presents a discrepancy between appearance and reality: between what words seem to say and what they really mean: between what logically may be expected to happen and what does happen: between what seems to be the appropriate outcome of action and the actual outcome.

### **Verbal Irony:**

This is the contrast between what is said and what is meant. In other words, sarcasm. The speaker says the opposite of what is meant.

### **Dramatic Irony:**

This is the contrast between what the character thinks to be true and what we (the reader) know to be true. Sometimes as we read we are placed in the position of knowing more than what one character knows. Because we know something the character does not, we read to discover how the character will react when he or she learns the truth of the situation.

### **Situational Irony:**

This is the most common in literature. It is the contrast between what happens and what was expected (or what would seem appropriate). Because it emerges from the events and circumstances of a story, it is often more subtle and effective than verbal or dramatic irony.

### **Flashback:**

Flashback is an interruption in the flow of the story to portray an incident that occurred in the past (before the story took place).

Ex. In a story about a homeless man, he thinks back to how he lost his job and ended up homeless.

### **Foreshadowing:**

A technique in which the author gives hints or clues about what is going to happen. Sometimes the hints are so subtle that the reader misses them until the event has occurred.

Ex. A character saying, "The weather is bad Billy, I have a feeling we shouldn't go for the boat ride tomorrow," and Billy dying at sea in the storm is foreshadowing.

### **Mood:**

The overall feeling created by the author.

Ex. In "The Tell Tale Heart" the mood is tense and uncertain.

### **Tone:**

Tone is the author's attitude. Much like tone of voice, it can be sympathetic, sarcastic, condescending, grateful, etc.

### **Atmosphere:**

The feeling created by the setting.

Ex. A haunted house would create an eerie atmosphere.

**Symbolism:**

A symbol is an object or thing that represents an idea, feeling, person, or symbolic object. Symbolism is used in literature to provide meaning to the writing beyond what is actually being said. Symbols enhance the story by creating another level to the writing. There is a literal level and a symbolic level when symbolism is used in writing.

**Public Symbols:**

Symbolic meanings are fixed and have a traditional meaning in a particular culture.

Ex. A heart publically symbolizes love and affection.

**Private Symbols:**

Some symbols must be interpreted in the context of the story. Their meanings will be unique to the story depending on the usage.

Ex. A heart may symbolize love and affection. However, in "The Tell-Tale Heart," the beating heart represents truth and the narrator's guilt.

**Imagery:**

The use of description and figurative language to enable the reader to visualize the character, plot and setting, and to heighten dramatic effects. Imagery can also include select details used to describe one thing in terms of another. This comparison helps suggest additional meanings and feelings.

**Simile:**

A comparison of two unlike things using the words *like*, *as*, or *than*.

Ex. She sings like a canary.

**Metaphor:**

A comparison of two unlike things without using the words *like*, *as*, or *than*.

Ex. He is a snake.

**Allusion:**

Allusion is a reference to a famous person, place, event, or work of literature within the text. Allusions engage the reader and will often help the reader remember the message or theme of the passage. Allusions can also allow the writer to give an example or get a point across without going into a lengthy discourse.

Ex. "When she lost her job, she acted like a Scrooge, and refused to buy anything that wasn't necessary." Scrooge was an extremely stingy character from Charles Dickens', *A Christmas Carol*.