

LA 7 Student Notes Elements of a Story

THEME -- The theme in a piece of fiction is its lesson or the point that the author is trying to get across to the reader.

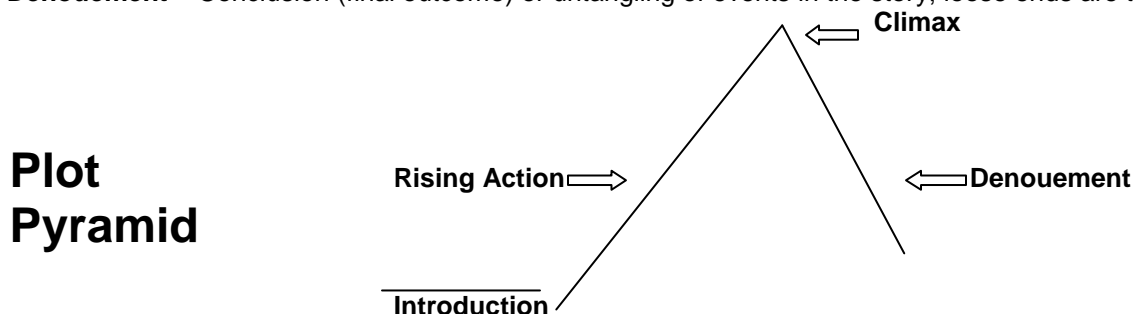
- The theme may be the author's thoughts about a topic or view of human nature.
- The title of the short story often points to what the writer is trying to say
- Some simple examples of common themes from literature, TV, and film are:
 - ✓ *Life/death*
 - ✓ *Love/hate*
 - ✓ *war*
 - ✓ *good/evil*
 - ✓ *family*
 - ✓ *freedom*
 - ✓ *heroism*
 - ✓ *hope*
 - ✓ *prejudice*
 - ✓ *loneliness*
 - ✓ *personal growth/change; loss of innocence*
 - ✓ *envy*
 - ✓ *power/ambition/greed*

SETTING -- The time and location in which a story takes place is called the setting.

- For some stories the setting is very important, while for others it is not.
- There are several aspects of a story's setting that may contribute to a story (some, or all, may be present in a story):
 - ✓ **place** - geographical location. Where is the action of the story taking place?
 - ✓ **time** - When is the story taking place? (historical period, time of day, year, etc.)
 - ✓ **weather conditions** - Is it rainy, sunny, stormy, etc?
 - ✓ **social conditions** - Does the story take place in another culture? During a war?
 - ✓ **mood or atmosphere** - What feeling is created at the start? Is it bright/cheerful, dark/frightening, sad?

PLOT -- The plot is a planned, logical sequence of events having a beginning, middle, and end.

- The short story has only a main plot so it can be read in one sitting. All stories have five essential parts of plot:
 - ✓ **Introduction** - The beginning of the story where the characters, setting and/or situation are revealed.
 - ✓ **Rising Action** - Series of events move the story forward and the conflict in the story is revealed
 - ✓ **Climax** - Highest point of interest and the turning point of the story. The conflict/problem is resolved?
 - ✓ **Denouement** - Conclusion (final outcome) or untangling of events in the story; loose ends are tied up.



CONFLICT-- Without conflict there is no plot; it makes the plot move forward and ties it all together. Conflict is not limited to open arguments; rather, it can be any form of opposition that faces the main character (protagonist). Within a short story there may be only one central struggle, or there may be one major conflict with many minor ones.

Two Types of Conflict:

1) **External** - Struggle with a force outside one's self.

- **Character vs character:** Protagonist struggles with physical/mental strength against another person.
- **Character vs environment** - Protagonist struggles against surroundings for survival
- **Character vs. circumstances** - Protagonist struggles against fate, or the circumstances of life facing him/her.
- **Character vs supernatural** - Protagonist struggles against supernatural forces (aliens, ghosts, monsters, etc)

2) **Internal** - Struggle within one's self

- **Character vs inner self (psychological)** - Protagonist struggles to make some decision, overcome emotions, resist an urge, choose between right and wrong, etc.
- **Character vs. inner self (physical)** - The protagonist struggles to overcome physical limitations or illness.

CHARACTER

1) What is character? There are two meanings for the word character:

- A person in fiction: short stories have few characters; may be the protagonist, antagonist or minor character.
 - ✓ **Protagonist:** most important (main) character to the story; reader generally is on his/her side
 - ✓ **Antagonist:** opposes the main character; creates conflict with the protagonist (problems, obstacles)
- The characteristics or qualities of a person: In order for a story to seem real its characters must seem real by being: consistent, motivated, and life-like (resemble real people). We learn about characters in several ways:
 - ✓ his/her physical appearance
 - ✓ what he/she says, thinks, feels and dreams
 - ✓ what he/she does or does not do
 - ✓ what others say about him/her and how others react to him/her

2) Character Motivation: what makes a character think or act the way they do

- ✓ Motivation is defined as the reason characters think, feel, or act in a certain way; this is true both in fiction and in real life.
- ✓ A character with motivation is immediately more realistic and effective than one without, or one whose reasons are not made clear by the writer.

POINT OF VIEW - Point of view, or p.o.v., is defined as the angle from which the story is told.

- **First Person Point of View:** The narrator (teller of the story) participates in the action of the story.
 - ✓ Uses the pronouns I, me, we, us
 - ✓ The reader sees the story only as the character tells it so only knows what the character knows or feels (often used in mysteries to build suspense)
 - ✓ When reading stories in the first person, we need to re realize that what the narrator is recounting might not be the real truth. We should question the trustworthiness of the information.
- **Third Person Point of View:** Here the narrator does not participate in the action of the story as one of the characters, but lets us know exactly how the characters feel from outside the action.
 - ✓ We learn about the characters through this outside voice.
 - ✓ Sometimes the narrator is an outside story teller and sometimes it is the author.
- **Omniscient Point of View:** A narrator who knows everything about all the characters is all knowing, or omniscient. The author can move from character to character, event to event, having free access to the thoughts, feelings and motivations of all of his characters.
 - ✓ Information is introduced where and when the author chooses.
 - ✓ Also uses third person point of view with pronouns, he, she, him, her, they, them, etc.

As you read a piece of fiction think about these things:

- ✓ How does the point of view affect your responses to the characters?
- ✓ How is your response influenced by how much the narrator knows and how objective he or she is?
- ✓ First person narrators are not always trustworthy. It is up to you to determine what the truth is.

Literary Devices: Specific ways of using language to create a mood (emotion), or picture in the reader.

- **Simile:** A simile describes something by comparing it to another thing using **like**, **as** or **than**.
 - ✓ The snake moved **like** a ripple on a pond.
 - ✓ The night was **as** dark as the inside of a closet.
 - ✓ She seemed taller **than** a giraffe.
- **Metaphor:** A metaphor is a word or a phrase used to describe something as if it were something else.
 - ✓ A wave of terror washed over him. (*The terror isn't actually a wave, but a wave is a good way of describing the feeling*)
 - ✓ The road was a ribbon of moonlight.
 - ✓ It's raining cats and dogs.
- **Alliteration:** This is when words start with the same sound to gain a particular effect or feeling. You'll also find this used in advertising and newspaper headlines.
 - ✓ The **s**lippery **s**nake **s**lid **s**ilently through the grass.
 - ✓ The **r**ough, **r**ugged **r**ocks **a**woke a **r**age in me.
- **Onomatopoeia:** This occurs when a word used sounds just like the noise it describes
 - ✓ The waterfalls **roared** over the rocks and plunged down into the river.
 - ✓ The broken glass **crunched** under his feet as he crept forward.
 - ✓ The wind **whistled** through the trees.