

## English 12

### The Short Story

A *short story* is fictional work of prose that is shorter in length than a novel. Edgar Allan Poe, in his essay "The Philosophy of Composition," said that a short story should be read in one sitting, anywhere from a half hour to two hours. In contemporary fiction, a short story can range from 1,000 to 20,000 words. Because of the shorter length, a short story usually focuses on one plot, one main character (with a few additional minor characters), and one central theme, whereas a novel can tackle multiple plots and themes, with a variety of prominent characters. Short stories also lend themselves more to experimentation — that is, using uncommon prose styles or literary devices to tell the story. Such uncommon styles or devices might get tedious, and downright annoying, in a novel, but they may work well in a short story.

There are four important parts that make up a short story:

#### **Setting Character Plot Theme**

These, in combination with numerous others, must be understood and examined critically in order to have a complete and thorough understanding of what it is a short story is about. Through this critical analysis of a story we can make connections and draw conclusions about ourselves, our world, the world of others and also to other literary and non fiction works.

In order to critically analysis a story we must have an understanding of the form of the short story and therefore the parts that make it a whole.

#### **THE SETTING**

The setting is the time and the place of the story. It can be only a minimal part of the story or it can have a greater effect on other elements of the story such as character, plot, conflict or theme. When considering setting we need to not only describe what we know or understand about the time and place, but also how this may affect any other element.

Local colour can play a large part in developing the setting and atmosphere of a story. It refers to detail in a story that is specific to a particular region or environment.

This brings us to the atmosphere or mood of a story, which is most often introduced in the setting. Although atmosphere can change within the story, we can refer to it as a part of the setting, therefore giving background that flavours

the outcome of the plot. The atmosphere is commonly used as a means of foreshadowing events that may follow. One common use of foreshadowing to be aware of is the author's use of weather. To determine descriptors for setting, ask yourself, "How do I feel when I read this?" Your answers, in the form of adjectives, will indicate what tone you are getting from that passage. Remember to state why you feel that this is so.

## **THE CHARACTERS**

Characters are the people (and sometimes personified animals) in a story. We break them down into three divisions

- 1.) By what **their role or function** is in the story
  - a. The **protagonist** is the main character in the story. All the action revolves around this character.
  - b. The **antagonist** is the major character (or sometimes force) that opposes the protagonist.
  - c. **Minor characters** are all the characters who play less important roles in the story but are still necessary to the story.

### **2.) By how much we know about them**

- a. A **round** character is one that we know many details about. We can describe them in a way that allows us to feel we know them.
- b. A **flat** character is one that we know very little about.

### **3.) By their movement or momentum in the story.**

- a. A **dynamic** character changes slowly over the course of the story. They are somewhat different people at the end of the story than they were in the beginning.
- b. A **static** character makes no change and remains the same.

### **4.) By any particular or interesting qualities they may have.**

- a. A character **foil** is one who, in his or her characteristics, shows us contrast with the protagonist and therefore helps us to understand the protagonist better.
- b. A **realistic** character is one who, to us, seems to be normal or believable. They are multidimensional and have complex relationships and motivations.
- c. A **stereotyped** or **stock** character is one dimensional, totally predictable and recognizable to the reader as a "type" of person.

Characterization is the process through which we learn the characteristics or qualities of a character. We can learn these characteristics in a number of direct

or indirect ways. The author can state them explicitly; we can infer them through the actions, appearance or speech of a character; we may learn them through another character; or it may be that we learn them from the character themselves telling us what they are like.

A character sketch is a short description and analysis of a character that includes adjectives, specific examples and quotations from the story. When writing a character sketch we do not normally include the physical appearance or dress of the character unless we feel that it somehow symbolically shows other characteristics.

A character's motivation is what causes the character to do what he does as well as the aim or goal in taking that action.

## **THE PLOT**

Essentially, the plot is what happens in the story from beginning to end. The conventional plot has five parts:

The exposition or introduction is where the setting and atmosphere is usually introduced. We meet the main characters, establish conflict and learn the event (complicating incident or activating circumstance) that introduces this central conflict.

In the rising action of the story events pile on events and the conflict intensifies or may be complicated. Suspense is built up in this part and there may even be moments of crisis. Typically the rising action is longer than the falling action of a story.

An anti-climax is a sudden shift from a relatively serious or elevated mood to one more comical. It may be done for comic relief, wherein the author relieves the tension of the story slightly by making the reader laugh.

The climax is the highest point of emotional intensity in a story. It is the major crisis and is usually when the protagonist's fortunes begin to turn. One method that sometimes works to identify the climax is to look directly back at the activating circumstance that led to the main conflict and identify when this begins to change.

The resolution/denouement (day-new-mahn) refers to the untangling of the plot or conflict. It constitutes part or all the falling action.

The conclusion is the end of the story. It can be an indeterminate ending in which there is no clear outcome, result or resolved conflict. It can also be a

surprise ending in which the author creates a sudden twist in the direction of the story. This may surprise the reader and/or the characters as well.

## **THE THEME**

The theme is the implied central meaning behind the story. It is a story's observation about humanity. It should never be confused with moral which is the lesson of a story.

A thematic statement is a one-sentence general statement about life or human nature that can be derived by interpreting the story's overall message. It generalizes the story's main meaning.

## **Other Devices or Features**

Conflict is the struggle between opposing characters or forces. First one must determine if the conflict is internal or external. Internal conflict is when a character is experiencing conflict with his or her own emotion and or thought. An external conflict may be

- With another character: person vs. person
- With nature, society or circumstance: person vs. environment
- With something that cannot be explained by science: person vs. supernatural

Point of View is the perspective from which a story is seen or told. It establishes the relationship between author, readers and characters.

- a. First person narrative uses "I." In this point of view we know what this person thinks and feels from the vantage point inside the story.
- b. A limited Omniscient or Third-Person narrative is when a story is told from outside the characters but in the perspective of one character. The characters are referred to as "he" or "she" and the narrator is limited to knowing only the thoughts and feeling of that one character.
- c. On Omniscient narrative tells the thoughts of emotions of more than one or all of the characters.
- d. In the objective narrative the narrator has no special knowledge and the facts are presented in an unemotional or factual way.

Contrast or Juxtaposition refers to a difference between the two things being compared. Contrast is used to place an emphasis on some element of the story. In juxtapositions positions are important; they may be placed close together to make this contrast more obvious, for example.

Irony is the result of an unexpected result and involves contrast in this result. It creates depth of meaning and impact. Three common types of irony are

- Verbal Irony occurs when what a character says contrasts with what the character actually means.
- Situational Irony is when what takes place is different from what is expected to take place.
- Dramatic Irony occurs when what character says or believes to be true contrasts with what the reader or other characters know to be true.

Satire is the use of irony to ridicule an idea, a person or a thing, often with the aim of provoking change. It often targets human vices.

Allusion is a brief, direct or indirect reference to a person, place or event from history, literature or mythology that the author hopes the reader will recognize.

Foreshadowing is a hint of events that happen later in the story.

Flashback is a sudden switch from the present to the past.

Imagery helps the reader form vivid impressions of the subject.

A Symbol stands for or represents something else.

Suspense is the feeling of anxiety and uncertainty experienced by the reader (and possibly the characters) about the outcome of events or the protagonist's fate.

An aside is a short passage usually directed at the audience or reader. This is most often found in works produced for theatre.

Comic Relief is used when the mood of the work is tragic or somber. The humour of it is used to relieve tension.

The Connotation of a word is the associated meanings of it. These are implied or suggested.

Epiphany is a sudden moment of realization or clarity.

Euphemism is the use of mild or indirect expression in lieu of something much harsher or direct.

Simile is a comparison between two things using like or as.

A Metaphor is a comparison between two unlike things. An extended metaphor takes this comparison further by giving it more detail.

Hyperbole is a purposeful exaggeration to create the effect of emphasis.

Oxymoron is when two contradictory words or phrases are placed side by side.

A Paradox is a statement that upon first reading appears to be contradictory or impossible, but upon further examination reveals itself to be true.

Pun is a play on words for humorous effect.

Pathos is the quality in a work of fiction that evokes the feelings of sadness, pity or tenderness in the reader.