

## Notes: The Short Story

### I. Types of Short Stories:

a. **Fiction**– based upon the author’s imagination; characters, events and action are MADE UP

i. *Escape Literature*– written purely for entertainment value; usually NO THEME, or the theme is not essential; aka pulp writing

ii. *Interpretive Literature*– contains one or more THEME; written to sharpen or broaden our view of life and it should lead to a new insight into life

#### *iii. Some Genres*

1. Fantasy– a radical departure, sometimes bizarre or grotesque, from our sense of the “real” world

2. Science Fiction– a sub genre of fantasy that deals in a speculative manner the achievements of science

3. Allegory– an extended narrative, where a second meaning runs parallel to the surface story

b. **Non-fiction**– based on real people and events (may be historical or contemporary); includes biography, autobiography, newspaper

### II. Significance of the title:

The title should give a hint about the plot, the conflict, the characters or the theme.

### III. Setting:

- a. **Time and Place**– introduced very early in the story
- b. **Initial Incident**– the first thing that happens in a story; purpose is to catch the reader’s attention, set up the conflict and introduce the characters
- c. **Mood/Atmosphere**– the emotional setting of the story (ex– dark, light–hearted, satirical)

### IV. Plot:

- a. **Parts of the plot**:

INTRODUCTION, RISING ACTION, CLIMAX, CONCLUSION



- b. **Plot Devices**:

- i. *Episodic Plot*– a plot that focus on one event
- ii. *Parallel Plotline*– two plot lines that run concurrently in the story; sometimes one is the literal meaning and the other the interpretive meaning as in an allegory; or it could be two similar plots that when read together are more revealing
- iii. *Main Plot vs Sub Plot*– a sub plot is a minor storyline within the larger story

- iv. *Stream of consciousness*– the flow and flux of thoughts and feelings as they pass through a narrator or characters mind.
- v. *Epiphany*– a moment of sudden, profound revelation and wonder. Can be experienced by the reader or by a character in a story.

c. **Types of Endings:**

- i. *Comedy*– the protagonist SOLVES THE CONFLICT ie “lives happily-ever-after”
- ii. *Tragedy*– the protagonist DOES NOT SOLVE THE CONFLICT; the protagonist may die or lose everything (often because of his/her own fault)
- iii. *Indeterminate*– aka open ended story; no real ending; the reader must make up his/her own ending
- iv. *Deus ex Machina*– “god from a machine”; a sudden, unexpected ending where the protagonist is saved by a new character or unexpected event.

V. Characters:

a. **Types of Characters:**

- i. *Protagonist*– the main character
- ii. *Antagonist*– the person or force that opposes the protagonist
- iii. *Round*– we know a lot about the character
- iv. *Flat*– we don't know much about the character

- v. *Stock or Stereotype*– character that is considered to be TYPICAL; we recognize the character without a lot of information; ex– dumb jock, emo kid, mad scientist, lame parent who tries to be cool
- vi. *Static*– the character does not change
- vii. *Dynamic*– the character changes; the change should be logical, gradual and realistic
- viii. *Foil* – two characters who contrast each other in a significant way.

#### b. Methods of Characterization:

- i. *Direct*– the author tells you everything you need to know about the character; ex “He was a tall man who could be very stubborn.”
- ii. *Indirect*– the author shows you what the character is like through actions, dialogue, interactions with other characters, theme, symbols, etc; ex “He reached up and removed the cereal from the very top shelf and thought ‘she will never change my mind about this.’”

#### c. Requirements of a Character:

- i. *Consistent*– the character must behave consistently and realistically; behaviour patterns should not suddenly change without a logical reason
- ii. *Plausible*– the character should be believable and life like; the reader should be able to identify with the character
- iii. *Motivated*– the character should have a reason for his/her words and actions

## VI. Theme:

- a. **Defintion**: what the reader learns from the story; this is not a moral; should provide insight into life and/or humanity; the author's message
- b. **Two Types of Theme**:
  - i. *Explicit*- the author tell the reader the theme (usually expressed by one of the characters)
  - ii. *Implicit*- the reader must find the theme for his/herself (must read between the lines)

## VII. Point of View: how the story is told

- a. **First Person**: Story is told in the "I" form; the speaker becomes the central character; reader in able to get into the mind and emotions of narrator only (the rest of the characters must vocalize their thoughts or feelings before we know what they are)
- b. **Third Person**: Story is told in the "he, she, they" form.
  - i. *Limited Omniscient*- we know only the thoughts and feelings of the central character; other characters must vocalize their feelings and thoughts for us to know them
  - ii. *Omniscient*- the story is told in the third person but the reader knows what all of the major characters are thinking and feeling

VIII. Conflict: the problem(s) or opposition that the main character must face; that which stand in the way of the protagonist's happiness or success

a. **Internal Conflict**: Person vs Self- the protagonist struggles and battles against some part of himself (emotions, beliefs, self image, a difficult decision, etc)

b. **External Conflict**:

i. *Person vs Person*- may involve an actual physical battle, a difference of opinion or a struggle for supremacy

ii. *Person vs Environment*- protagonist versus some element of his/her world: animal, insect, landscape, illness, weather, natural disaster, machine

iii. *Person vs Society*- protagonist against the rest of society; society may stereotype the protagonist and not see the REAL person; the protagonist will do something of which society does not approve; the protagonist struggles for acceptance, respect or approval

IX. Elements of a Short Story: This list is not exhaustive and focuses on concepts with which you are less familiar

a. **Tone**- the author's attitude towards his/her subject; ex critical, empathetic, mournful; the reader is meant to feel this way too

- b. **Universal Symbol**– a symbol that is understood by everyone across a culture; ex black=evil, white=good
- c. **Contextual Symbol**– a symbol that requires the context of the story for meaning; ex in *Lord of the Flies* the conch symbolizes rules and order because it brings the boys together and they obey it. Outside of these literary works the conch may have no meaning or simply a different meaning
- d. **Diction and Syntax**– the choice and arrangement of words in a literary work; it should reflect the subject, style and goal of a work
- e. **Double Entendre**– a word or phrase that is open to two interpretations; usually one of the interpretations is lewd or inappropriate
- f. **Juxtaposition**– the placement of two objects, characters or ideas side by side so as to invite the reader to compare/contrast them
- g. **Verisimilitude**– used to describe a literary work that is to the reader believable and realistic in action and character
- h. **Archetype**– Greek for “primitive form”; used to describe a plot pattern or character that we all recognize in our collective unconscious; ex the man who offends God and is punished, the innocent virgin
- i. **Dilemma**– a plot device where the protagonist is presented with a problem in which none of the possible outcomes is

acceptable. The purpose of this device can be to either heighten suspense and/ or reveal characterization.

j. **Foreshadowing** – the technique of establishing clues or hints within a narrative which may suggest a possible outcome.

k. **Irony**: A meaningful discrepancy (difference) in elements of a story or plot. This discrepancy is meant to call attention to elements of a story, such as character or theme. There are three types:

1. **Verbal irony** – discrepancy between what is said and what is meant. Ex. Telling someone they “look cool” when the opposite is meant → **Sarcasm.**

2. **Situational Irony** – discrepancy between what is expected to happen, and what really happens.

3. **Dramatic Irony** – discrepancy between what a character says and thinks and what the reader or audience knows to be true.