

Elements of the Short Story

Characteristics of a short story:

- A fictional piece of writing that can be read in one sitting
- A narrative – it has a beginning, middle and an end
- One unified plot and one chain of cause and effect
- Centers on a single incident, situation, or character
- Usually limited to one or two settings
- Has FEW characters with one protagonist
- A conflict is present, plus complications which may provide suspense
- Has a definite outcome
- Usually appeals to the emotions

Elements of Plot

Plot Diagram:

The events that take place within a story and their effect on the characters form the plot. The plot has six distinct parts: **exposition, initial incident, rising action, climax, falling action (denouement), and conclusion**

Exposition: The beginning of the story where the characters, setting and/or situation are revealed (background knowledge).

Initial 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.

Rising Action: The series of events that happen between the initial incident and the climax of the story. It involves obstacles and complications, the cause and effect. It creates suspense.

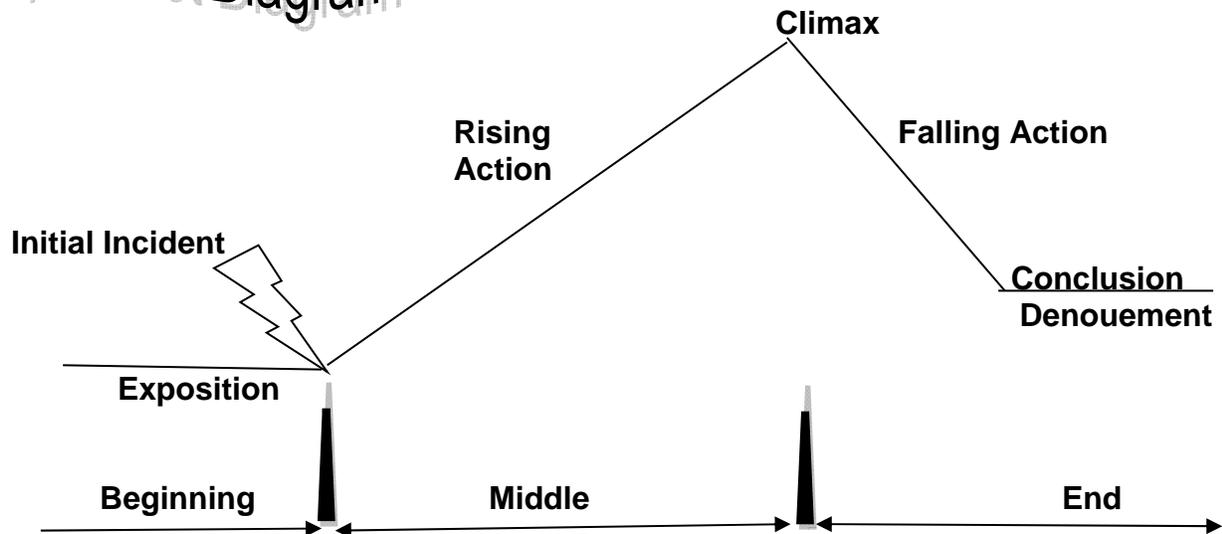
Climax: The turning point of the story and the highest point of tension. It is the point at which the conflict is to be resolved.

Falling Action: The part of the story right after the climax.

Conclusion: The final event in which the conflict in the initial incident is completely resolved.

Denouement: This is a final revelation in a story. It is usually provided by the author or by one of the characters, and it reveals all secrets that have not been told. It serves to tie up any loose ends and explain what has happened to the main characters following the climax. Often an explanation is given about why and how the story ended the way it did. However, not all stories will have a denouement. It is an optional element of the plot – it may or may not be used.

The Plot Diagram



Character

Most short stories will have two dominate characters:

Protagonist: usually the main character. The protagonist faces a problem and, in his/her attempt to solve the problem, comes into conflict with an opposing force (antagonist) and will change as a result of this conflict. The protagonist does not need to necessarily be a good person or have good qualities. A bad person could be the main character in a story and thus be the protagonist. (AKA Gru in Despicable Me movies)

Antagonist: a character or force that opposes the protagonist. If the character's main conflict is with nature, then nature is the opposing force. (ex. the hurricane would be the antagonist in a short story about a man saving his family from an oncoming major tropical storm)

Character Motivation: Motivation makes a character think or act the way they do in a story.

- Motivation is defined as the reason characters think, feel, or act in a certain way (true in both 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
- Protagonist and antagonists can be motivated characters

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

Method	Definition	How might this look in a story?
Direct	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.
Indirect	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:

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

Character Types

Type of Character	Definition
Round	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A character that we know a great deal about • Usually the single fully developed character in a story • Complex and has many personality traits • Realistic character that appears real and not clichéd
Flat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A character that we know relatively little about (one or two traits) • Usually a minor character
Static	A character that does not change from the beginning of the story to the end
Dynamic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A character that undergoes a permanent change in their personality, attitude or thinking by the end of the story • A round character • Change can be positive or negative
Stock/Stereotyped	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A character that is stereotyped (follows a predetermined pattern of characterization) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ The “dumb blond” ➤ The “jock” • Familiar figure that can be recognized in other pieces of literature • Necessary to fiction because the author doesn't need to give major details and the reader is not distracted by their presence in story
Motivated	A character, usually the protagonist, who has a need, a want, or a goal to achieve in the story
Plausible	A character who is believable, like a real person, and who behaves with consistency and motivation
Character Foil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A character whose behaviour or attitude or beliefs serve as a contrast to the behaviour, attitudes, or beliefs of the protagonists • Purpose: helps the reader better understand the personality of the protagonist when directly contrasted with an opposite character Ex. In Disney's <i>Beauty and the Beast</i>, the Beast's character is foiled with Gaston's character. Gaston's good looks and terrible personality highlights the Beast's tragic situation.

Setting

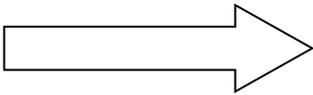
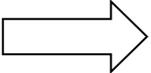
- Setting is **where** and **when** a story takes place.
 - Look for descriptions of place, time, weather conditions, social conditions, mood or atmosphere
- Setting can describe a geographic location: general location (ex. Kelowna), time (ex. lunch hour), month (ex. September), year (2017), specific locations (e.g.: Dr. Knox Middle School)
- Setting can also include historical locations. (ex. Omaha beach during the Allied invasion of German occupied France during WWII)
- More advanced descriptions of setting can include the social or emotional or moral environment of the characters. (ex. the home life of a family oppressed by racism or the isolation of a character that is bullied at school and at home)
- A good understanding of setting is important because it can explain why a character is faced with a certain problem or why they may handle situations in a certain way.
- The physical setting may also help establish the emotional setting – the **ATMOSPHERE** of the story – the feeling or **MOOD** which the author wishes the story to evoke.

Point of View

What is meant by the term “point of view” or P.O.V.?

Point of view is the perspective from which the story is told. Effectively, it is who is narrating the story.

There are **3** different types of point of view. They are:

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| <p>1) Limited Omniscient</p> <p>2) Omniscient</p> <p>3) First Person (observer & participant)</p> |  | <p>Third Person
(He/She/They/Him/Her)</p> |
| |  | <p>(I/Me/We/Us)</p> |

Point of View	Definition	Benefits to using	Disadvantages to using
Limited Omniscient (outside story teller or author narrator)	The story is told in the third person, and the narrator can see into the mind and thoughts of one character. The narrator is not a character in the story but can provide insights to the protagonist's thoughts, feelings and actions.	Realistic, we see world through one person	Limited field of observation, difficulty having character aware of all important events
Omniscient	The story is told in the third person, and the narrator can see into the minds and thoughts of all characters. The narrator is not a character in the story but has an all knowing perspective. The author moves from character to character, event to event, having free access to the thoughts, feelings and motivations of all the characters.	Most flexible; author can control easily inform reader about everything important	Author can come between reader and story, shifting from character to character may create confusion
First Person a) observer b) participant	a) someone is telling the story who is not physically in it. b) The narrator is a character in the story. The story is told through the use of personal pronouns.	Eyewitness account gives immediacy, realism, author can create dramatic irony	Bias or limited knowledge of narrator, might not be the real truth and only the character's version of the truth

Conflict

What is meant by the term conflict?

A struggle between two opposing forces.

- Without conflict there is no plot
- Conflict makes the plot move forward and ties it all together
- Conflict is any form of opposition that faces the main character (protagonist)
- There are two types of conflict: External and Internal

1) External: struggle with a force outside of one's self

Character vs Character – Protagonist struggles with physical/mental strength against another character. Can be a physical altercation or verbal or mental (This conflict does not have to be a physical fight; it can be more subtle as well – they are both trying to date the same girl)

Character vs Environment – Protagonist struggles against nature (animals/weather/environment) for survival

Character vs circumstances – Protagonist struggles against fate, or the circumstances of life facing him/her

Character vs Society - Protagonist is in a struggle with societal norms, values and laws.

Character vs Fate - Protagonist is against “luck” or has a series of misfortunate events.

Character vs Supernatural – Protagonist in a struggle against something non –human or not of this earth (mystical animals, aliens, other creatures).

2) Internal: struggle within one's self

Character vs inner self (psychological) – Protagonist struggles to make some decision, overcome emotions, resist and urge, choose between right and wrong. Character struggles with his/her own thoughts, feelings and actions

Character vs inner self (physical) – Protagonist struggles to overcome physical limitations or illness

Theme

What is 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.

- The theme may be the author's thoughts about a topic or view of human nature
- The title of the short story sometimes points to the author's message/lesson
- Some theme **topics** include:

✓ Life/death	✓ Hope
✓ Love/hate	✓ Prejudice
✓ War	✓ Personal growth/goals
✓ Good/evil	✓ Power/ambition/greed
✓ Family	✓ Freedom

What is a theme statement?

Theme statements say something about the topic that can be identified in the story. Theme statements express an IDEA about the topic's presentation in the story.

- 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.

Thematic Statement Construction:

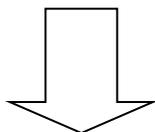
Topic + Treatment (positive/negative) = Result (what idea is suggested in the literature)

Literary Devices

Irony

What is irony?

Irony involves a contradiction 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.

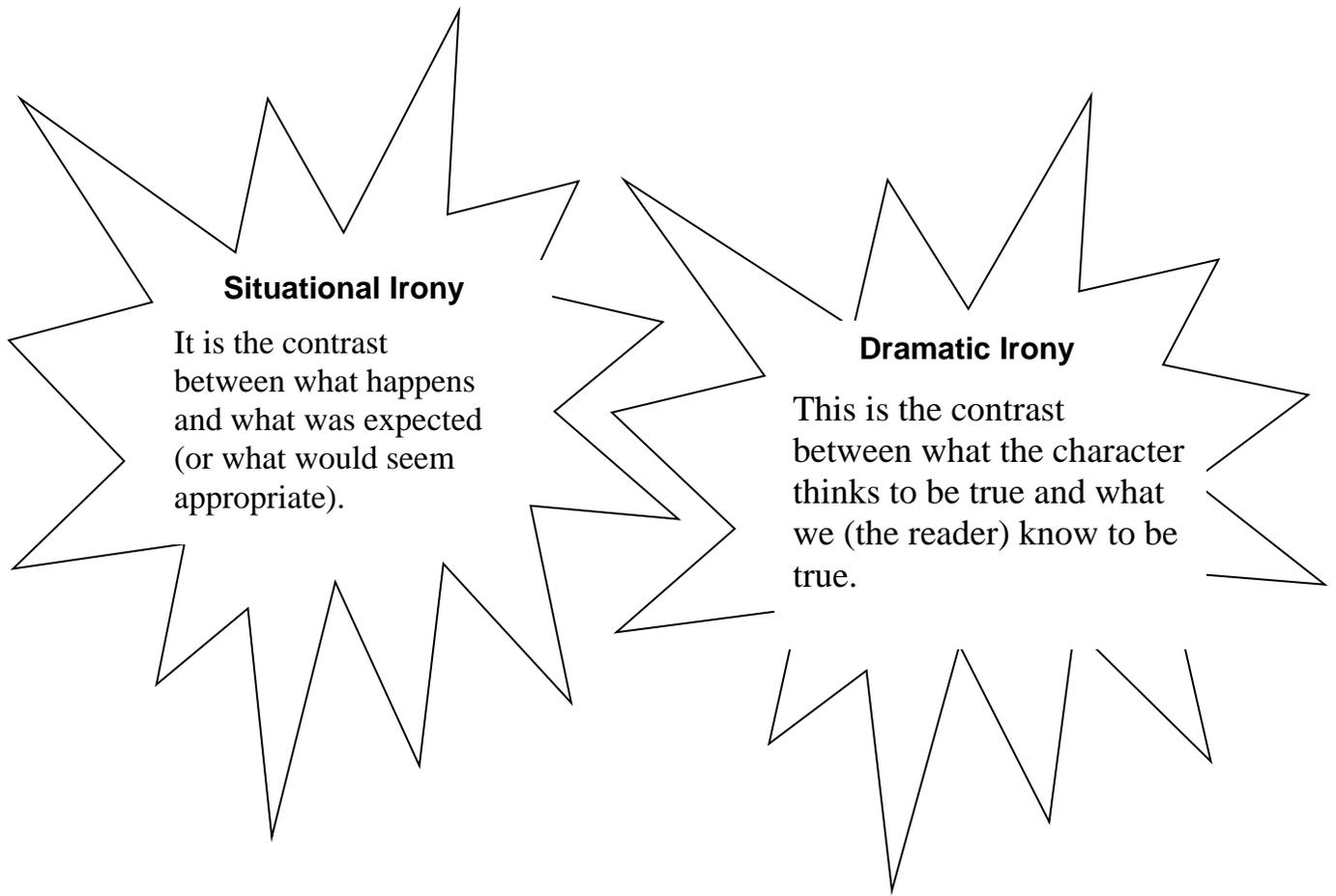


There are 3 types of irony:

Verbal Irony

This is the contrast between what is said and what is meant. The speaker says the opposite of what is meant.

Sarcasm, hyperbole, understatement are forms of verbal irony, though they are slightly less subtle than the verbal irony found in literature



Examples of Irony

Dramatic – a brother and sister are always fighting and the brother cleans the toilet with her toothbrush, which the reader knows, but the sister doesn't

Situational – a soldier returns home from years of war uninjured and is killed in a car accident

Verbal – saying to your dentist, "I love having my teeth drilled!"

Hyperbole – "You're as big as a house!"

Sarcasm – "Yeah, you're not fat at all!"

Understatement – "You could maybe stand to lose a few pounds"

Miscellaneous Literary Devices

Term	Definition
Flashback	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.
Foreshadow	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 dyeing at sea in the storm is foreshadowing.
Mood	The overall feeling created by the author E.g.: In "The Tell Tale Heart" the mood is tense and uncertain
Atmosphere	Goes hand in hand with setting, the feeling created by the setting
Tone	Tone is the author's attitude. Much like tone of voice, it can be sympathetic, sarcastic, condescending, grateful, etc. For our purpose tone, atmosphere and mood are basically interchangeable.
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.
Complication	A problem that the main character faces along his/her journey to solving the main conflicts (can be thought of as a speed bump). E.g.: While trying to battle the Germans in the war (conflict) the British had a bout of small pox that killed many of their men

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 <i>like</i> , <i>as</i> , or <i>than</i> . Ex. She sings like a canary.
Metaphor	A comparison of two unlike things without using the words <i>like</i> , <i>as</i> , or <i>than</i> . 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', <i>A Christmas Carol</i> .