

The Short Story

A good short story is a brief piece of fiction that deals with a single, crucial incident in the lives of its characters.

A good short story contains the following elements:

- a) Setting
- b) Conflict
- c) Plot
- d) Characters
- e) Point of View
- f) Theme
- g) Irony

Setting

Setting Reveals

- 1) Time & Place of the story – not only physical location, but also its historical, societal and geographical locations
- 2) Atmosphere – time of day, weather, indoor vs. outdoor, etc. Does the setting affect (or reflect) the character's emotional state? Does it help to explain their motivation? (Term known as pathetic fallacy). The atmosphere in a story can reflect a character's depression, joy, etc. A story's atmosphere may also influence the characters' reactions and cause them to react a certain way; for example, a character may respond angrily in a crowded, busy, or hectic atmosphere.

Conflict

Types of conflict in stories:

Human vs. human

Human vs. nature

Human vs. society

Human vs. technology

Human vs. fate

Human vs. self

Conflict is essential to the plot. Without conflict there is no plot. It is the opposition of forces which ties one incident to another and makes the plot move. Conflict is not merely limited to open arguments; rather it is any form of opposition that faces the main character. Within a short story there may be only one central struggle, or there may be one dominant struggle with many minor ones.

There are two types of conflict

- 1) **External** – A struggle with a force outside one's self
- 2) **Internal** – A struggle within one's self; a person must make some decision, overcome pain, quiet their temper, resist an urge, etc.

Plot

Plot is the sequence of events that make up the story. It is the storyline. It is the series of events or incidents that happen to the main character. In a well-composed story this series moves forward with increasing interest and tension to a climax and a new situation is evolved.

The typical PLOT or storyline follows a beginning, middle and end structure with sequence of events.

Introduction

Rising Action

Climax

Falling Action

Conclusion

Characters

In a short story, the number of characters is limited – usually there are no more than six. Descriptions of the characters cannot be long. The few sentences used to present a character need to be keenly illuminating

External Qualities:

Outward qualities are important because they may reveal inner traits. Look for such things as posture, manners, voice, dress, and habits.

Internal Qualities:

These are revealed by:

- Background
- Speech
- Thoughts
- Action

There are two major types of characters in a short story:

- Protagonist:** The main character in a story; the main character must always overcome conflicts.
- Antagonist:** The character or things that oppose the protagonist.

Characters are...

- **Individual** – round, many-sided and complex personalities
- **Type** – flat, display few characteristics, can be quickly typecast, stereotypical
- **Developing (dynamic)** – many sided personalities that change, for better or worse, by the end of the story
- **Static** – stereotype, have one or two characteristics that never change and are emphasized

Point of View

Point of view of a story is the perspective the author establishes to tell the story.

First Person: The story is often told by the protagonist or one of the characters who interacts closely with the protagonist (using pronouns I, me, we, etc.). The reader sees the story through the person's eyes as he/she experiences it and only knows what he/she knows or feels. A major advantage of first-person narrators is that their restricted view can create irony – a discrepancy between what is said and what readers believe to be true.

Unreliable Narrators: These types of narrators misrepresent events and misdirect readers. These first-person narrators may be self-serving, mistaken, confused, unstable, or even mad.

Third-Person Narrator: Writers can also use third-person narrators who are not characters in the story.

Omniscient (3rd person): Some third-person narrators are omniscient (all-knowing) narrators, moving at will from one character's mind to another. One advantage of omniscient narrators is that they are objective; they have none of the dishonesty, gullibility, or mental instability that can characterize first-person narrators. Their perception is not limited to what any one character can observe or comprehend.

Limited Omniscient: This type of third-person narration restricts focus to a single character.

Objective: This type of third-person narration simply reports the dialogue and the actions of characters.

Theme

The foundation on which the author may build the story – the underlying or central idea. It is a reflection on some significant aspect of life.

Irony

A turn of events or a reversal of a situation. The opposite of what is expected occurs. **Irony adds meaning to bring out the story's theme.** There are three types of irony:

1. Irony of speech/verbal irony – the character says one thing but means the opposite
2. Irony of situation – is the difference between what is expected and what it turns out to be
3. Dramatic irony – involves the reader. The reader knows more about what is happening than the characters do. The reader has omniscient view of things.