

Elements of Fiction

A **short story** is a short fictional prose narrative, often including the yarn, the sketch, the fable, and the tale. The term is often applied to any work of narrative prose fiction shorter than a novel. Edgar Allan Poe said that its distinguishing factors were that it possesses aesthetic unity and can be read in one sitting. The trouble with that definition, as the writer William Saroyan once pointed out, is that some people can sit longer than others.

Plot: is the sequence of events in a story and their relation to one another as they develop and usually resolve a conflict.

Exposition: introduces characters, scene, time, and situation.

Rising action: is the dramatization of events that complicate the situation and gradually intensify the conflict.

Climax: is the turning point or point of highest interest in a narrative.

Falling action: is the point in a narrative when the problem or conflict presented proceeds toward resolution.

Denouement: is the conclusion of the plot.

Foreshadowing: is the introduction of specific words, images, or events that suggest or anticipate later events.

Dramatic irony: is the reader's awareness of a discrepancy between a character's perception of his or her own situation and the true nature of the situation (and/or its consequences).

Character(s) (character development): The action of the plot is performed by the characters in the story, the people who make something happen or produce an effect. The reader experiences the development of characters through their actions, dialogue, and what the narrator and/or other characters reveal about them.

Flat and round characters: A person who plays a part in a narrative can be either **flat**--simple, one-dimensional, unsurprising, and usually unchanging or *static*--or **round**--complex, full, described in detail, often contradictory, and usually *dynamic*, changing in some way during the story.

Setting: is the place and time of the story.

Theme: is the generalization about the meaning of the story. (There may be underlying themes, as well as the main theme, in a fictional piece of literature.)

Style: is the characteristic way an author uses language (often habitually) to create short fiction.

Voice: is a term referring to the specific manner (style, tone, etc) chosen by the author to tell the story.

Tone: is the expression of the author's attitude toward his or her subject matter--the characters, their setting, and the action they undertake or undergo.

Symbol: a literary symbol can be anything in a story's setting, plot, or characterization that suggests an abstract meaning to the reader in addition to its literal significance.

Author: is the writer of the story.

Narrator: is the teller of the story.

Point of View: The perspective from which an author lets the reader view the action of a narrative; thus, the choice of who tells the story.

First-person narration: The telling of a story by a person who was involved in or directly observed the action narrated. Such a narrator refers to himself or herself as *I*.

Third-person narration: The telling of a story by a detached, usually anonymous narrator, a voice who refers to all the characters as *he*, *she*, and *they*. Such a narrator may view the story with full omniscience, which may or may not be impartial omniscience; or he or she may have only limited omniscience.

Omniscience: Literally, "all-knowingness"; the ability of an author or a narrator to tell the reader directly about any events that have occurred, are occurring, or will occur in the plot of the story, and about the thoughts and feelings of any character.

Limited omniscience: The ability of a third-person narrator to tell the reader directly about any events that have occurred, are occurring, or will occur in the plot of the story, and about the thoughts and feelings of one particular character, or a few characters (but not all).

Impartial omniscience: The telling of a story by a third-person narrator whose omniscience does not allow for any evaluation or judgment of the characters and their activities.

Objective narration: The ability of a third-person narrator to present what appears to be a detached perspective on the characters and the plot of the story. Setting, action, and dialogue are laid out on the page without the narrator's comments or the characters' reflection.