All About Short Stories

Short Story Definition

A short story is a piece of prose fiction that can be read in a single sitting, develops a single incident in one location with a small group of characters in a short period of time, and is a story of plot. Short stories tend to be less complex than novels.

Short Story Structure

Four Main Parts: a) **Plot** b) **character** c) **setting** d) **theme**

A) Plot: The plot is a series of events that make up the story, with a beginning, middle, and end. It is the action of the story with five main parts:

1) Introduction: -also called the exposition-the beginning of the story that introduces main characters, setting, and clues about action, hints at the conflict, and arouses readers' interest. There is an inciting incident or a point of action that begins the conflict in the story. (The complication is the event that introduces the conflict.)

2) Rising action: major part of the plot, develops clues and actions hinted at in the introduction and includes conflict, characterization, description, dialogue, and a series of steps leading to the climax of the story.

3) Climax: turning point of the action, the high point of interest, main conflict is possibly resolved. The events of the story all lead up to this point. The protagonist makes a discovery of some kind, accepts it and may or may not agree with it, and he makes a choice based on this information.

4) Falling action (anti-climax): gives/explains any details that could not be given before, and/or events after the climax; events that take place after the climax, leading to the conclusion. Conflicts may or may not be resolved.

5) Denouement: conclusion or end, winds up the story with a happy, sad, surprise, or indeterminate ending.

Plot may also be represented on a diagram:

Climax

Rising action

Falling action

Introduction

Conclusion/Denouement
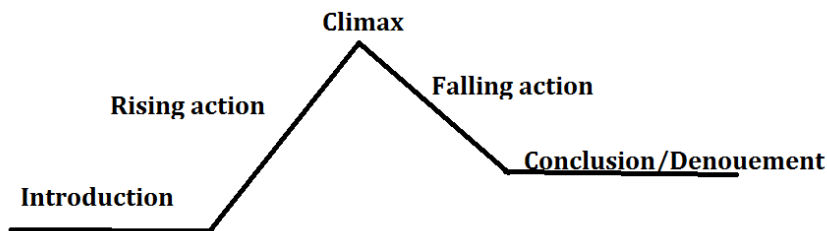
B) Character: Short stories have few characters, and the story usually revolves around just one main character. The term character refers to both the people in a story as well as their characteristics. Characters are:

1) Characterized through four methods:

a) Telling about the character's physical appearance: the writer describes how the character looks and dresses, as well as any mannerisms and what he does.

b) Telling the readers the character's thoughts: the character's private thoughts are revealed.

c) Giving the character's own words (dialogue)-the character is revealed through his own speech

d) Telling the reactions of others towards the character: what they say about him and how they behave toward him.

...and characters are...

2) Presented in two ways:

a) Directly-the writer tells the reader about the character and if he is good or bad, etc.

b) Indirectly-the writer shows the reader the character through his actions-what the character thinks, says, and does, and the reactions of others towards him.

Types of Characters:

1) Protagonist: the main character in the story Example: Ralph in *Lord of the Flies*

2) Antagonist: The character or force opposing the protagonist. Example: The Joker in *Batman*

3) Dynamic character: a character that develops and changes in a permanent way during the story. Example: Scout in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

4) Static character: A character that remains unchanged by the end of the story. Example: Sherlock Holmes

5) Round character: fully developed with many traits and details.

6) Flat character: not fully developed by the writer and with only one or two traits.

7) Stereotype character: A recognizable character from a type of person or group based on a judgement of that type of person. Example: the lazy fat person or the happy drunk.

8) Stock character: A well-known type of character that is easily recognized from frequent use and used as a contrast to other characters or to poke fun at. Examples: the wicked witch or the mad scientist.

C) Setting: The setting includes the time and place of the story as well as the mood, atmosphere, weather, and what is going on in society. Setting influences the characters and the story.

1) Time: When the story takes place - might include time of day, year, historical era, the future.

2) Place: Where the action takes place-inside, outside, city, country, etc.

3) Weather: Snowy, rainy, stormy, etc. These all have an impact on the story.

4) Mood or atmosphere: the feeling created in the story.

5) Society: The social conditions of the characters and their place in social hierarchies, as well as their politics and economic conditions.

D) Theme: The theme of a short story is its central, controlling idea or some insight or universal truth about life. To find the theme, ask what idea the writer was trying to convey to the reader-what is his message? Also ask how the protagonist changed and why and if he learned anything. Sometimes the title may give an additional clue, along with literary devices such as irony or symbolism.

Theme can be stated in a sentence, and it may be connected to the moral of a story, if there is one, but theme and moral are not the same things.

Example: People are afraid of change. (*"The Lottery"* by Shirley Jackson.)

Theme can be stated in two ways:

1) Explicit: the theme is stated directly.

2) Implicit: the theme must be inferred from the story. (The reader must
   Interpret the writer's meaning.)

Short Story Elements

A) Conflict:

Conflict is the central focus of the plot that makes it move and around which everything revolves in the story. Conflict is anything or anyone in opposition to the protagonist, and there may be one or more conflicts.

Two kinds of conflict:

1) Internal conflict:

Man Vs. self - a struggle within one's self. For example, a character must make a decision, overcome a challenge of some kind, or wrestle with conflicting beliefs.

*Dilemma: a protagonist must choose between two undesirable actions.

2) External conflict: - a struggle with a force outside one's self, including...

a) **Man vs. Man** – the protagonist struggles against another character, either physically or psychologically

b) **Man vs. Society** – the protagonist struggles against ideas or customs of other people, such as racism or religious beliefs.

c) **Man vs. Nature** – the protagonist struggles against the forces of nature, such as a storm, the environment, or animals.

d) **Man vs. the Supernatural/the unknown**: - the protagonist struggles against supernatural forces such as ghosts, gods, or other unseen forces.

e) **Man vs. Technology/machine**: - the protagonist struggles against something mechanical or some kind of technology.

f) **Man vs. Circumstances**: - the protagonist struggles against destiny, fate, or his situation in life.

B) Point of View:

Point of view is the perspective from which the story is told, or through whose eyes the reader is seeing the action. To find the point of view, ask who is telling the story, who is the narrator, and how much does he know, and how much of the protagonist's and other characters' thoughts are revealed.

1) <u>First person</u>: The protagonist or one of the other characters tells the story. The first person "I" or "we" is used, and the reader experiences the story through this person's eyes only.

2) <u>Third person</u>: The story is told by a narrator who is outside of the main action of the story and uses third person pronouns such as "he" or "she". The narrator may or may not be the writer or another character.
There are three types:

a) <u>Limited omniscient</u>: the thoughts of one character, usually the protagonist, are shared by the reader, giving only one perspective on the story.

b) <u>Omniscient</u>: (= "all-knowing") The thoughts of all the characters are revealed to the reader. The narrator knows everything and can make his own observations.

c) <u>Objective</u>: the reader shares the experiences of the narrator and views the story from the perspective of the narrator only. No comments or observations of the characters are given, and the narrator records events as a camera would. The objective point of view is similar to a movie. The interpretation of the story is up to the reader.

3) <u>Innocent Eye</u>: The story is told through the eyes of a child.

4) <u>Stream of consciousness</u>: the story is told as if the reader is inside the head of one character, and all that character's thoughts and actions are shared.

5) <u>Second Person</u>: the main character in the story is referred to as "you" – the second person pronoun.

<u>Short Story Literary Terms</u>

<u>Allusion</u>: a reference to something well known, such as the Bible, historical event, or piece of literature that will give greater understanding of the meaning of the story.

<u>Atmosphere</u>: the general mood or feeling of a story.

<u>Chronological</u>: events occur in order of time from first to last.

<u>Coincidence</u>: the occurrence of an event, or series of events, that can happen by chance or accidentally at the same time or at different times but that seem to have a connection.

<u>Deus Ex Machina</u>: -"God is in the machine"- a convenient way of resolving a situation that often does not make sense to the logic of the story's plot.

<u>Diction:</u> the choice of words the writer makes to convey the story.

<u>Flashback</u>: looks back at events that have already occurred.

<u>Foreshadowing</u>: clues that suggest future events.

<u>Hyperbole:</u> A big exaggeration. Examples: I have a mountain of laundry to do. / I am so hungry I could eat a horse!

<u>Imagery:</u> word pictures that use the senses to draw the reader into the story.

<u>Irony</u>: the difference between what is expected and what actually happens.

a) Verbal irony: a character or narrator says one thing but means the opposite; similar to sarcasm.

b) Dramatic irony: the contrast between what a character believes is true and what the reader knows is true.

c) Situational irony: a contrast between what is expected and what actually happens.

<u>Metaphor:</u> The comparison of two unlike things. Example: "Tiny lamps of blueberry." Blueberries hanging on bushes are compared to tiny hanging

lamps. Example: "Her eyes were pools of blue." Eyes are compared to blue pools of water.

Simile: The comparison of two unlike things using the words "like" or "as". Examples: "The cat's eyes were like saucers". This gives an image of very big, round eyes. / "He is as big as a house."

Simile or Metaphor? Simile uses "like" or "as" to compare two things, but metaphor suggests that something *is* something else.

Motivation: the reason a character does something or behaves in a certain way.

Oxymoron: An apparent contradiction that has some truth. Many of Shakespeare's poems and plays have series of these "opposites". Examples: little giant / heavy feathers / loving hate

Parody: A literary or artistic work that imitates the characteristic style of an author or a work for comic effect or ridicule.

Suspense: anticipation as to the outcome of events, the method of maintaining the reader's interest, and a way of keeping the reader guessing as to what will occur next. There are three methods:

a) foreshadowing – clues about what will happen next
b) mystery – something that needs more explanation
c) dilemma – a character must choose between two undesirable actions

Symbol: an object, character, or setting that represents something more than its literal everyday meaning. An object may represent a character or situation, and it has a role in the story's development. Symbols may be referred to many times or be linked to other similar symbols and be described in detail.

Examples: black = death   box = prison of some kind   green leaf = new life

Tone: the way the writer expresses his attitude in a story by the use of syntax, point of view, diction, and the level of formality.

List of tone words:

animated	ambivalent	apathetic	accusatory	amused
absurd	angry	aggressive	acerbic	abstruse
admiring	awestruck	assertive	aggrieved	arrogant

ardent	bitter	benevolent	befuddled	belligerent
compliant	cautionary	condescending	callous	compassionate
cynical	colloquial	comic	confused	celebratory
critical	cruel	complaining	chatty	conciliatory
complex	cheerful	contemptuous	caustic	candid
detached	depressed	disapproving	docile	demeaning
evasive	docile	derisive	dignified	dispassionate
disparaging	distressed	disheartened	diplomatic	defiant
empathetic	egotistical	earnest	excited	farcical
frustrated	forceful	formal	frank	fuming
fawning	flippant	faultfinding	frivolous	gentle
gullible	ghoulish	grim	hard	hard-hearted
humble	hypercritical	incensed	imploring	intense
inane	irreverent	impassioned	informative	impressionable
incredulous	indifferent	impartial	ironic	indignant
intimate	joyous	jaded	loving	laudatory
malicious	mocking	modest	macabre	mean-spirited
mourning	nostalgic	naive	nasty	narcissistic
obsequious	optimistic	outspoken	objective	outraged
persuasive	pragmatic	pretentious	prayerful	placating
playful	pathetic	pessimistic	pensive	pompous
patronizing	philosophical	restrained	reflective	reticent
resentful	reverent	resigned	regretful	righteous
sentimental	satirical	sympathetic	skeptical	solemn
scornful	scathing	subjective	self-pitying	sulking
sensationalist	submissive	scorning	subjective	sorrowful
thoughtful	tolerant	tragic	unassuming	unbiased
uneasy	vindictive	witty	virtuous	world-weary
wretched	wonder	worried	whimsical	