ELEMENTS OF NARRATIVE

**PLOT**

The plot is how the author arranges events to develop their basic idea. It is the sequence of events in a story or play. The plot is a planned, logical series of events having a beginning, middle, and end. The short story usually has one plot so it can be read in one sitting. There are five essential parts of plot:

* **Exposition** - The beginning of the story where the characters and the setting is revealed.
* **Inciting Incident -** one point in the rising action that introduces the conflict and pushes the story forward
* **Rising Action** - This is where the events in the story become complicated and the conflict in the story is revealed (events between the introduction and climax).
* **Climax / Turning Point** - This is the highest point of interest and the turning point of the story. The reader wonders what will happen next; will the conflict be resolved or not?
* **Falling action** - The events and complications begin to resolve themselves. The reader knows what has happened next and if the conflict was resolved or not (events between climax and denouement).
* **Resolution / Denouement** - This is the final outcome or untangling of events in the story.

It is helpful to consider climax as a threefold phenomenon:

1. The main character receives new information
2. Accepts this information (realizes it but does not necessarily agree with it)
3. Acts on this information (makes a choice that will determine whether or not they will gain their objective).

**CONFLICT**

Conflict is essential to 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 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:**

**External** - A struggle with a force outside one's self.

**Internal** - A struggle within one's self; a person must make some decision, overcome pain, quiet their-temper, resist an urge, etc.

**There are three *kinds* of conflict:**

* **Human vs. Human** - The leading character struggles against other characters or animals.
* **Human vs. Environment** - The leading character struggles against the forces of nature or societal ideas, practices, or customs of other people.
* **Human vs. Self** - The leading character struggles with themselves; with their own soul, ideas of right or wrong, physical limitations, choices, etc.

**CHARACTER**

There are two meanings for the word character:

* The person in a work of fiction.
* The characteristics of a person.

**Persons in a work of fiction - Antagonist and Protagonist**

Short stories use few characters. One character is clearly central to the story with all major events having some importance to this character – they are the **PROTAGONIST.** The person (or force) that opposes the main character is called the **ANTAGONIST.**

**The Characteristics of a Person**

In order for a story to seem real to the reader its characters must seem real. Characterization is the information the author gives the reader about the characters themselves. The author may reveal a character in several ways:

* Through direct statements by the author/narrator (Direct Characterization)
* Their physical appearance
* What they say, thinks, feels and dreams
* What they do or do not-do
* What others say about them and how others react to them
* Characters are convincing if they are: consistent, motivated, and life-like (resemble real
* people)

**Types of Characters**

1. **Rounded Characters** - many-sided and complex personalities that you would expect of actual human beings.
2. **Flat Characters-** personalities that are presented only briefly and not in depth.
3. **Dynamic** - many-sided personalities that change, for better or worse, by the end of the story.
4. **Static** - These characters are often stereotypes, have one or two characteristics that never change that are emphasized e.g. brilliant detective, drunk, scrooge, cruel stepmother, etc.

**SETTING**

The time and location in which a story takes place is called the setting. For some stories the setting is very important, while for others it is not. There are several aspects of a story's setting to consider when examining how setting contributes to a story (some, or all, may be present in a story):

* **place** - geographical location. Where is the action of the story taking place?
* **time** - When is the story taking place? (historical period, time of day, year, etc.)
* **weather conditions** - Is it rainy, sunny, stormy, etc.?
* **social conditions** - What is the daily life of the character's like? Does the story contain local colour (writing that focuses on the speech, dress, mannerisms, customs, etc. of a particular place)?
* **mood or atmosphere** - What feeling is created at the beginning of the story?
* Is it bright and cheerful or dark and frightening?

**POINT OF VIEW**

The point of view is the perspective from which the story is seen or told. It is important to look at why the author has chosen a particular point of view and how that influences the reader’s access to the characters situations? The three most common point-of-views are:

* **First-person narrative:** the protagonist tells their story directly to the reader using “I”. This point of view tells us only what one character thinks and feels from a vantage point “inside” the characters mind.
* **Third-person limited:** refers to the main character as “he” or “she” or “them,” which shows us only what one character thinks and feels from the perspective of someone “outside” the story.
* **Omniscient narrative:** reveals the minds of several or all characters, knowing and telling from and all-seeing, “God-like” perspective, “outside” the story.

**THEME**

The theme in a piece of fiction is its controlling idea or its central insight. It is the author's underlying meaning or main idea they are trying to convey. The theme may be the author's thoughts about a topic or view of human nature. They may use various rhetorical/literary devices to emphasize their theme, such as: symbol, allusion, simile, metaphor, hyperbole, or irony.

Consider how certain literary elements in a work (conflict, setting, character, etc.) contribute to the main idea.

General rules for stating a theme are:

1. Use complete sentences.
2. Make a point about a specific topic. For example: A statement like, “The theme of the story is love” is incorrect - What about does the story say about love? Answer this question and you have a theme
3. Do not use absolutes or sweeping generalizations. For example: always, never, everyone, must, everybody, etc.
4. Do not use [clichés](http://www.knowledgerush.com/kr/encyclopedia/Cliche/), e.g. Crime doesn't pay.
5. A theme must be based on and supported by the entire story (all the major details – specific details can be listed to support the theme even though they are not part of the theme statement).

Some typical thematic topics include: love, war, death, coming of age, adolescence, family, gender identity, relationships, racism, discrimination, friendship, etc.

A typical them statement reads as follows:

* *Romeo and Juliet* suggests that love, when taken to an extreme, is negative rather than positive.
* *The Chrysalids* suggests that limitations or differences are not an indication of inferiority.