

Literary Terms

I. Definitions

A. Setting – when and where the story takes place.

1. **Time** – the year, decade, or century in which the story's action occurs.
2. **Place** – the location, both generally and specifically, of the events occurring.
3. **Atmosphere** – the prevailing mood present in the story.
4. **Time Span** – actual length of time that passes during the action of the story.

B. Character – person the author has created to act, to speak, and to represent the significance of what is narrated.

1. *Character is revealed by:*

- a. What he says
- b. What he does
- c. What others say about him

2. *Types of Characters:*

a. Primary – Main characters vital to the story and playing a major role in story development.

b. Secondary – Support characters necessary to the story but not of central importance.

c. Minor – Characters used to fill the story in, playing only the smallest of roles in the story.

3. *Functions of Characters:*

a. Protagonist – Central figure in the story; story revolves around him; it is “his story.”

b. Antagonist – Character who opposes the protagonist and establishes the story's central conflict.

c. Foil – Character who serves as a vivid contrast to the protagonist to give the reader insight; usually a secondary character, not included in all stories.

d. Stereotype – Character that is one-dimensional and does not have a complex, ever-changing life as real people do

C. Conflict – struggle between two forces in a story, such as one man against another, a man against all of society, or a man struggling with his own feelings or beliefs.

1. Conflict in a story must be important.
2. Conflict may alter the main character's opinions.
3. Opposing forces should be somewhat equal in strength so the story's outcome remains in doubt.

D. Plot - series of events, related by cause and effect, which lead in a definite and logical outcome.

1. Exposition – introduction of the main situation, setting, characters, and conflict.

2. Rising Action – complication of plot as conflict develops and heightens.

3. Climax – the point to which the conflict is reaching. Turning point at which the action reaches its peak and moves towards a solution

4. Falling Action – winding down of conflict after the climax.

5. Denouement – resolution of the conflict and story.

E. Theme – total meaning of the story, the author's main point. What the story is about, what it signifies.

To determine the theme of a story:

1. Examine the subject of the story.
2. Look at the portrayal of characters – how are they representative of real-life people?
3. Look at the character's situation – what is the similarity to real life?
4. Examine how characters react to each other and to certain situations and what happens to them as a result

F. Style – the particular way in which the author uses words.

1. **Sentence Structure** – length & complexity of sentences.
2. **Vocabulary** – the words chosen by the author.
3. **Tone** – attitude or feeling conveyed by author's word choice.
4. **Uniqueness** – other devices which make the story unusual or different.
5. **Figurative Language** – expressions which go beyond literal meaning.
 - a. *Metaphor* – indirect comparison of two things without the use of “like” or “as.” (Bob is a snake in the grass.)
 - b. *Simile* – direct comparison of two things using “like” or “as.” (Bob is as sly as a fox.)
 - c. *Allusion* – any reference to a historic, biblical, literary, or mythical person, place or thing.
 - d. *Irony* – contrast between what appears to be true and what actually is true.
 - 1) **Situational irony** – an unexpected turn of events that results in an outcome the opposite of what is expected by both the characters and reader.
 2. **Dramatic irony** – a situation where the reader is aware of a turn of events affecting the story's outcome, but the characters are not. Things are not as the characters think they are, and the reader knows it.
 3. **Verbal irony** – a character saying the opposite of what he actually means.
 - e. *Satire* – ridiculing or making fun of something to point out weakness, suggest the need for change, or make some other serious point.
 - f. *Plot-unifying devices*
 1. **Flashback** – an abrupt change in time to introduce information about the past relevant to the present.
 2. **Foreshadowing** – hinting what is to come through dialogue, action, or symbols.

G. Point of View – the choice of narrator *and* the position of the narrator an author takes in presenting a story. Point of view answers the questions “Who is speaking, how much does the narrator know and where is the narrator in relationship to the action of the story?” It indicates through whose eyes the reader sees what happens.

1. Choice of Narrator:

- a. *First Person* – (Narrator uses “I”) the story is told by a primary or secondary character or an observer who is an eyewitness to the action in the story. A person in the story is telling the reader about the events and the people .
- b. *Third Person* – (Narrator uses “he,” “she,” “they”) the story is told by a narrator who is not a character or part of the action taking place.

2 Position of Narrator:

- a. *Omniscient* – Narrator is all knowing and allows the reader access to the minds of *all the important* characters. Narrator is “god-like” (all knowing) and can go back and forth in time. Narrator analyzes and summarizes and provides an overview of the scene when necessary. Narrator is *not a character* in the action of the story.
- b. *Limited Omniscient* - Narrator is all knowing but allows the reader has access to the minds of *some but not all* of the characters in the story. The narrator analyzes,

summarizes, and can go back and forth in time and place. Narrator is *not a character* in the action of the story.

c. *Central* – story is told from the viewpoint of only *one primary character*.

Narrator is *a character* in the action of the story.

d. *Peripheral* – story is told from the viewpoint of *a secondary character*.

Narrator is a character in the action of the story who is "on the edge" of the action. This viewpoint is useful when including attitudes, interpretations, and irony which may not be suitable if attached to a primary character. It is also suitable if an author wants to use a naive character who is unaware of the implications of what he or she is saying.

e. *Objective* – The Narrator gives all information through *dialogue and action*. This is the most realistic point of view, most closely resembles day-to-day living. The reader is not allowed to get inside the minds of the characters. Narrator is *not a character* in the action of the story.

H. Structure – the way the story is constructed as a unit.

1. Dramatic – structure in which the author follows a straight story line with exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and denouement.

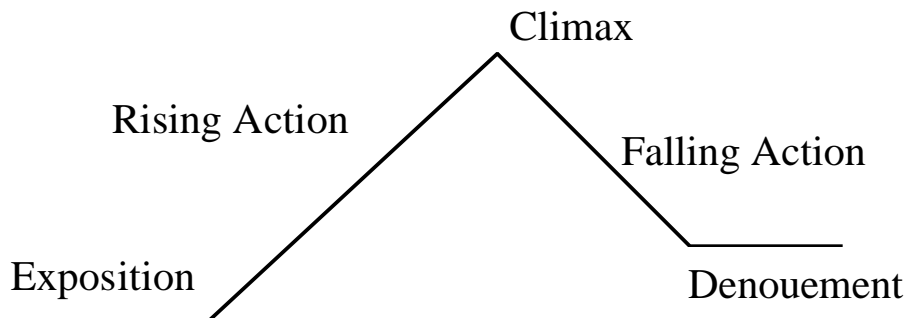
2. Stream of Consciousness – structure in which the author has the reader enter the mind of a character and the thoughts and actions of the character are presented at the same time. Very difficult to distinguish one from another because everything that goes on in the mind of the character is presented.

3. Episodic – structure in which a series of adventures are held together largely by character or setting.

4. Diary - structure in which daily journal entries are made by primary character or characters.

II. Diagrams

A. Dramatic Structure



B. Point of View

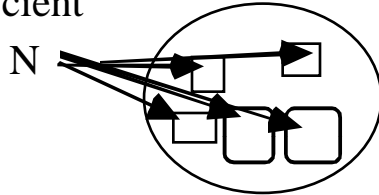
Narrator = N

Mind of Secondary Character = □

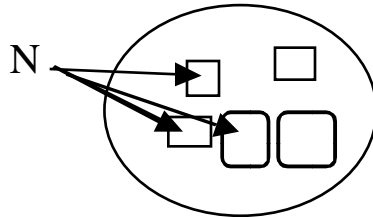
Mind of Primary Character = ◻

Story's Action = ○

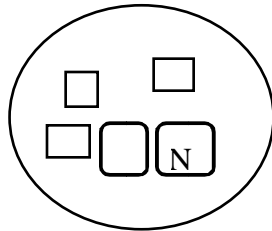
1. Omniscient



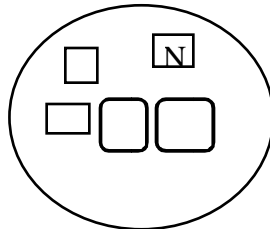
2. Limited Omniscient



3. Central



4. Peripheral



4. Objective

