

Study Guide

Elements of a Short Story

Setting: The time and place in which the events of a work of literature take place.

- Most often the setting of a narrative is described early in the story. Setting can contribute to a story's emotional effect. Setting frequently plays an important role in the story's plot, especially one that enters on a conflict between a character and nature.

Character: A person or animal who takes part in the action of a story, play, or other literary work.

- The process of revealing the personality of a character in a story is called characterization. A character is revealed through their speaking, the way they look and dress, by their inner thoughts and feelings, and by what other characters in the story think or say about the character. Sometimes the story directly tells the reader what the character's personality is like- cruel, sneaky, kind, brave, and so on.

Conflict: A struggle or clash between opposing characters or opposing forces.

- In an External Conflict a character struggles against some outside force.
- In Internal Conflict, on the other hand, takes place within a character's mind. It is a struggle between opposing needs, desires, or emotions.
- Conflict is sometimes summed up by these phrases:
 - Man vs. Man
 - Man vs. Nature
 - Man vs. Self
 - Man vs. Society

Plot: The series of related events that make up a story.

- Plot is "what happens" in a short story, novel, play, or narrative poem.
- Most plots are built on these steps:

- An Introduction or Exposition is the part of the story that introduces the characters, setting, and basic situation.
- Rising Action is the series of events that lead to the climax of the story.
- Complications arise as the characters take steps to resolve the conflict.
- Climax, is the most emotional or suspenseful moment in the story, when the outcome is decided one way or another.
- Falling Action is the series of events that take place after the climax.
- Resolution is the last part of the story when the conflict is resolved and the story ends. It establishes the way things are going to be from then on in the lives of the characters.

Theme: An idea about life or human nature that is revealed in a work of literature.

- The theme is an idea that the writer wishes to convey about a particular subject in life or human nature.
- Sometimes the reader must figure out what the theme is by looking at what the work reveals about people or life.
- Ask yourself: What is the general message about LIFE that is evident in this writing?
- A theme is not the same as the subject, which can be expressed in a word or two—for example, *love*, *death*, *childhood*.