



Credit: Quentin Blake

# Literary Devices & Story Elements

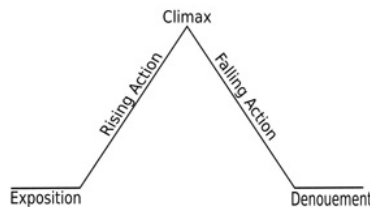
The short story terms & definitions presented provide you with a glossary of vocabulary to assist you in reading, analyzing & writing on short stories and longer forms of fiction (novels & plays).

## Character

- **Protagonist**  
Main character of the story, who is directly engaged in conflict, and whose actions we follow in detail. The main character may be heroic, villainous, sympathetic, repulsive, or somewhere in-between.
- **Antagonist**  
A character who creates conflict for the main character/protagonist. This may be another character, an external force, or even traits portrayed within the main character.
- **Flat Character**  
A one-dimensional character who has only one or two easily defined traits. Most minor characters are flat. Not to be confused with a static character.
- **Round Character**  
A more complex character, who has numerous, well-defined traits. Round characters are generally capable of identifying and choosing between right or wrong. Usually a protagonist is a round character; in most short stories, no more than one or two characters are round. Not to be confused with a dynamic character.
- **Dynamic Character**  
A character who changes physically, emotionally or mentally throughout the story; experiencing a life-changing realization. The realization may or may not change the character's actions, but the character will never be able to view the world in quite the same way. Not all protagonists are dynamic. Rarely does a short story have more than one or two dynamic characters.
- **Static Character**  
A character who undergoes no significant change.
- **Stock Character**  
A character type used repeatedly, often a stereotype like the mad scientist of horror stories or the blonde airhead of teen movies. Stock characters are usually encountered in popular fiction. However, excellent writers have sometimes used stock characters in original ways.
- **Direct Characterization**  
Occurs when the author describes the character explicitly to the reader or when the description is revealed through another character in the story.  
Relies on TELLING not showing.
- **Indirect Characterization**  
Occurs when the character's personality is revealed implicitly through his actions. In order to read and understand, the reader must analyze and draw conclusions on their own. Relies on SHOWING not telling.

## Plot

- **Exposition**  
The introduction (usually early) in a story where necessary background information is provided. This usually is where the setting and main characters are introduced.
- **Rising Action**  
The series of relevant incidents that create suspense, interest, and tension in a narrative. This part of the story includes key decisions, characters' flaws, and further background information that together create turns and twists leading to a climax. This also includes the inciting incident (central/main conflict).
- **Climax**  
The high point of tension in a plot. This is generally where the story reaches a turning point, in which there is no return.
- **Falling Action**  
Falling action occurs right after the climax. Falling action wraps up the story/narrative, resolves loose ends, and leads toward the final resolution.
- **Resolution (Denouement)**  
The moment in which a plot reaches its final outcome. Mysteries are solved, questions answered, and the main conflict settled.



## Conflict

- **Conflict**  
The central problem or issue to be resolved in a plot, involving the main character struggling against another character(s) or obstacle.
  - **Person vs. Self (Internal Conflict)**  
When a character undergoes a psychological conflict of the mind. This conflict is often regarding a personal and difficult decision that needs to be addressed.
  - **Person vs. Person (External Conflict)**  
When a character is in opposition with another or several characters.
  - **Person vs. Society (External Conflict)**  
When a character is fighting against society/a community of people.
  - **Person vs. Nature (External Conflict)**  
When a character comes into conflict with an animal or force of nature.
  - **Person vs. Supernatural (External Conflict)**  
When a character comes into conflict with a supernatural being or force – something beyond humanity. E.g. ghost, zombie, monster, etc.

## Point of View

- **Point of View (Narration)**  
The perspective from which a story is narrated.
- **First Person Narrator**  
The narrator, is usually the protagonist recounting his or her experiences as they happened in the past, or as they are happening in the present. He/she can report actions and interpret them from his/her understanding. They refer to themselves as "I".
- **Third Person Omniscient Narrator**  
A narrator that is not a character in the story, but sees into the minds of different characters. The narrator is all-knowing. He/she has unlimited knowledge, and shares the thoughts and feelings of each character in the story.
- **Third Person Limited Omniscient Narrator**  
A narrator that is not a character in the story, but sees into the mind of one (major or minor) character, sharing their thoughts & feelings with the reader.
- **Objective Narrator**  
A narrator that only describes the characters actions, but does not enter characters' thoughts.
- **Unreliable Narrator**  
A narrator who misinterprets the story due to prejudice, madness, etc.
- **Naïve Narrator**  
A narrator who is too innocent to understand the story fully.

## Literary Devices

- **Setting**  
The geographical location and time period in which a story takes place. It is important to recognize the setting in order to develop an understanding of the characters, the character's motivation, and the larger context/meaning of the story.
- **Atmosphere (Mood)**  
The feeling, emotion, or mood that the author creates in a story through the use of descriptive language.
- **Tone**  
The overall attitude or emotion the author expresses about his/her topic.
- **Foreshadowing**  
A hint that is fully understood only in retrospect (looking back) after the reader discovers more information later in the plot. The term does not simply mean an omen or an explicit prediction of something that will happen later.
- **Flashback**  
An interruption of the chronological sequence of the story to introduce an event of earlier occurrence. This is usually used to provide the reader with information to help them better understand a character's motivations or the plot.
- **Epiphany**  
A sudden moment of realization in a story, often triggered by a significant event.

- **Irony**  
Refers to how a person, situation, statement, or circumstance is not as it would actually seem. Many times it is the exact opposite of what it appears to be.
  - **Verbal Irony (Sarcasm)**  
When the character says one thing but his/her actual words actually intend the opposite meaning.
  - **Situational Irony**  
Occurs when the opposite of an expected situation takes place.
  - **Dramatic Irony**  
Occurs when the reader is aware of something that is going to occur in a story, while the characters remain completely unaware.
  
- **Denotation**  
The literal dictionary definition of a word.
  
- **Connotation**  
The underlying/secondary or figurative meaning of a word.
  
- **Allusion**  
A reference to a specific well-known person, place, historical event, or another work of literature.
  
- **Metaphor**  
A comparison between two things without using "like" or "as." Often comparing abstract ideas to concrete objects.
  
- **Simile**  
A comparison between two things that are not alike, using the words "like" or "as."
  
- **Personification**  
Giving human qualities, characteristics, or abilities to something non-human.
  
- **Hyperbole**  
An exaggeration for effect.
  
- **Symbol**  
An object that suggests more than its literal meaning. A symbol can be a physical object or an action. Symbols are used to suggest larger meanings radiating from the specifics of their story.
  
- **Motif**  
A recurring object, concept, or structure in a work of literature. A motif may also be two contrasting elements in a work, such as good and evil
  
- **Theme:** A universal truth, message, or lesson that the author is trying to convey to the reader. The theme **cannot** be expressed in a single word. A theme must be identified in a complete sentence, and often contains a cause and effect. You should consider the characters' actions, and the result or consequences of their actions.
  - Topic: *Greed*
  - Theme: *Greed has the power to corrupt even the most innocent beings.*