

STORY TEMPLATE

THE SHORT STORY



A plot is two dogs and one bone.

--- Robert Newton Peck

I think a short story is usually about one thing, and a novel about many. . . . A short story is like a short visit to other people, a novel like a long journey with others.

— M. E. Kerr

“The king died and then the queen” is a story.

“The king died and then the queen died of grief” is a plot.

— E. M. Forster

A short story is, in some ways, like a photograph -- a captured moment of time that is crystalline, though sometimes mysterious, arresting, though perhaps delicate. But while a photo may or may not suggest consequences, a short story always does. In the story's moment of time something important, something irrevocable has occurred. The change may be subtle or obvious, but it is definite and definitive. -- Marilyn Singer

A short story collection is the literary equivalent of a Whitman's Sampler. The reader pokes around to see what's interesting -- reads some stories the way you'd snap up the Truffle or Caramel, flips past others the way you'd put back the Bad Mint Coconut Swirl. A short story is bite-sized. Like good chocolate, it's intense. It's long enough to make you care about the characters -- but it resolves in a way that's satisfying, rather than seeming unfinished or overdone. -- Sharyn November

WHAT IS A SHORT STORY?

It's a piece of prose fiction, usually under 10,000 words, which can be read at one sitting. Artistically, a short story is intended to create an impression via character, conflict, theme, setting, symbols and point of view. Every detail contributes to this one impression -- a unity of effect. A short story is personal -- a part of the author -- and today is more concerned with character than action.

SOME ELEMENTS OF THE SHORT STORY

WHAT IS CHARACTERIZATION?

Well, there is **direct characterization**, where the author comes right out and tells the reader what a certain character is like. . .

“For he was a quiet man, not given to talking about himself and the things he had done.” --Maurice Walsh.

More effective is **indirect characterization** -- In this case, the author gives certain information and lets readers draw their own conclusions regarding the character of a person in the story --

1. Character's name, i.e. Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown."
2. Character's appearance.
3. What the character says.
4. What the character thinks (where story is told in first person or third person omniscient).
5. What ot people think of the character.
6. How animals react to the character.
7. What the character does, i.e. how the character acts in a particular situation.

WHAT IS IRONY?

Irony is a literary technique by which, through characterization or plot, the writer indicates something **opposite** to what is stated --

1. **Rhetorical (verbal) irony** -- saying the opposite of what is meant. Writer may use this method to reveal a character's weaknesses, prejudices, etc.
2. **Dramatic, tragic, or situational irony** -- reader knows more about the situation than the character -- giving a second meaning for the reader.
3. **Cosmic (fate) irony** -- destiny controls one's fate -- where one has little influence or significance -- a soldier returns from war and is killed in a car accident, etc.

WHAT IS SYMBOLISM?

A **symbol** is something that stands for something else. Such as: the cross standing for Christianity or the Star of David standing for Judaism. There are **conventional** symbols. In addition, there are **natural** symbols. Such as the sun standing for knowledge, shadows for distrust, etc.

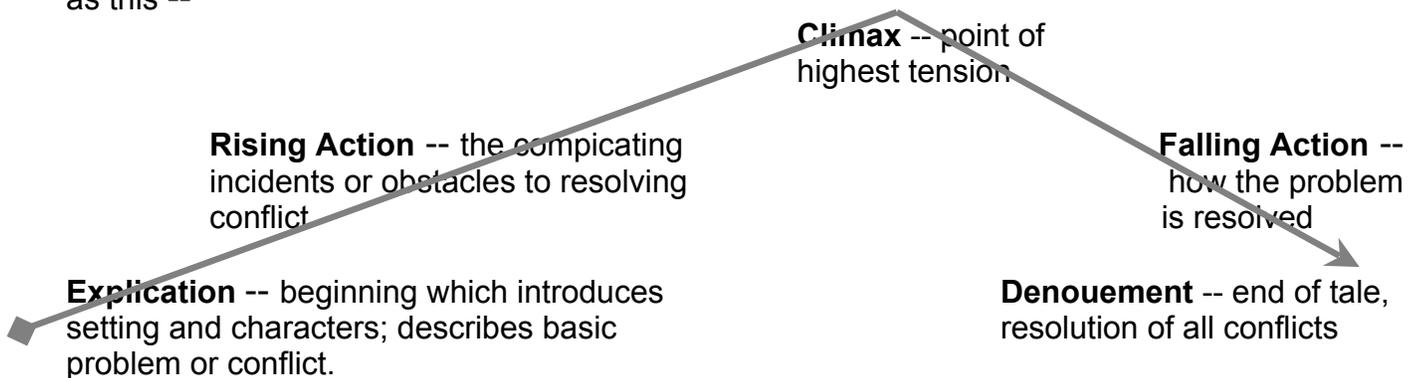
Symbols are much used in short stories. They may be people, objects, or the action itself to symbolize meaning -- such as death, love, grief.

Often symbolism is **personal** to the author and may be hard to decipher. In these cases, the reader may need to know about the author's background.

Note: Don't confuse **symbol** with **metaphor**. "Joe is a peacock" is a metaphor in which Joe is the subject and peacock is the **vehicle**. A symbol is based on the vehicle; that is, peacock could symbolize vanity.

WHAT IS PLOT?

Plot is the plan of action in the story. many modern short stories do not have well-defined plots. However, those that do generally follow a **plot plan** called Freytag's Pyramid, such as this --



The **turning point** is also important in a plot. It is the point in the plot at which the end is inevitable. It may or may not be the same as the **climax**. For example, in "Little Red Ridinghood," the turning point is when Little Red speaks with the Wolf; the climax is when the Wolf impersonates Grandma. Some standard plot twists include the **flashback**, a **surprise ending**, an **anti-climax**, and may well take advantage of a plot device such as **foreshadowing**. A plot may also be built upon recurring **parallel** events or a **circular** plot.

WHAT IS THE THEME?

The theme is the meaning or purpose of the story. A theme should—

- ✓ Be specific to the story.
- ✓ Be universal.
- ✓ Provide unity to the story.
- ✓ Be an integral part of the story.
- ✓ Present a new awareness of life.

Themes are sometimes characterized as conflicts -- man vs. man, man vs. nature, man vs. himself, good vs. evil, etc. Themes can be more specifically stated -- grace under pressure, the desire for love, etc:

WHAT IS POINT OF VIEW?

The **point of view** is the relationship of the narrator and the story. Sometimes this is called the method of narration.

Five Methods of Narration	Advantages	Disadvantages
<p>First-person major – main character simply tells his story (i.e. Huckleberry Finn)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. illusion of storyteller speaking out loud 2. excellent for use of verbal irony 3. reader identifies with character more easily – “I” 4. authority of eye witness more real and immediate 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. may give impression of conceit 2. reader cannot expect narrator to be unbiased
<p>First-person minor – a minor character who “happens to be there” (i. e., Dr. Watson in Conan Doyle’s stories)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. may describe main character directly and/or all characters 2. suspense created by concealing main character’s thoughts 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. his/her presence must always be justified
<p>Third-person omniscient (all-knowing) – narrator knows the thoughts of all the characters in a story</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. author can reveal thoughts of any or all characters’ thoughts 2. author can comment and explain significance 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. may result in lack of focus and emphasis 2. not realistic 3. hamper reader from reaching own conclusions
<p>Third-person ordinary (limited) –narrator tells only what he perceives</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. flexible – allows main character to die at end 2. author can describe and comment on character 3. more objective – dramatic – reader makes own judgments 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. limits reader’s knowledge of actioto what central character experiences and observes 2. reader loses depth of understanding based on character’s thoughts and feelings
<p>Third-person central character – narrator tells only what the central character thinks, feels, does, etc.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. effect of first person narration with no danger of egotism by narrator 2. allows reader to draw own conclusions regarding the other characters 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. may lack intimacy of first-person narration

WHAT IS TONE?

The **tone** is how the writer feels about his/her characters and his/her plot. It may be light, romantic, sympathetic, ironic, pensive, and is usually described by adjectives.

Tone is set by --

- ✓ **Action** (i.e., a brutal murder sets a morbid tone).
- ✓ **Choice of details** in presenting facts.
- ✓ **Author's style** -- figurative language, diction, rhythm, sounds.

A writer often uses shifts in tone -- from satirical to sympathetic, from light to serious, etc. -- to shock the reader and maintain interest in the story.

WHAT IS THE STYLE?

The style of a short story is the way in which the writer uses language. Here are some of the things which make up a writer's style:

Diction -- choice of words. For example, simple one-syllable words or elaborate sentences with more sophisticated words.

Types of Sentences -- simple, compound, fragmented, complex, cumulative, compound-complex.

Use of Poetic Language -- figurative language like simile, metaphor, alliteration, assonance, symbolism, rhythmic patterns, personification, etc.

Theme -- Many writers employ the same basic theme, which may run through almost all the writer's stories.

Rhetorical Devices and Effects –

antithesis -- balancing contrasting words or ideas against each other.

apostrophe -- sudden shift to direct address (either to absent or present entity).

rhetorical question -- one not to evoke a reply but to get more emphasis than a direct statement.

chiasmus -- use of phrases syntactically parallel but with reversed elements.

periphrasis -- circumlocution, roundabout expression using superfluous words.

NARRATIVE TYPES

TYPE ONE: Interior Monologue

The reader is taken inside the mind of a character. We read his or her thoughts -- listen in.

Examples: _____

TYPE TWO: Dramatic Monologue.

The main character tells a story to another character. The reader "listens in."

Examples: _____

TYPE THREE: Letter Narration

Events are told through letters exchanged by the characters.

Examples: _____

TYPE FOUR: Diary Narration.

Events are recorded in the diary of one of the characters.

Examples: _____

TYPE FIVE: Subjective Narration.

The narrator is the main character and is telling the story to us in a time very close to the time the events happened.

Examples: _____

TYPE SIX: Detached Autobiography.

The narrator again is one of the characters -- but this time he or she is telling the story much after it actually happened. The narrator is, therefore, not so involved and, perhaps, more objective.

Examples: _____

TYPE SEVEN: Memoir, or Observer Narration.

The narrator tells a story about other characters. The narrator is a participant, an observer -- not the main character.

Examples: _____

TYPE EIGHT: Biography, or Anonymous Narration – Single-Character Point of View.

The narrator tells about others without identifying himself or telling us how he knows what he knows. The narrator tells the story through the eyes of one character.

Examples: _____

TYPE NINE: Anonymous Narration – Dual-Character Point of View.

Same as Type Eight, but the narrator presents the thoughts, feelings, and attitudes of TWO characters in the tale.

Examples: _____

TYPE TEN: Anonymous Narration – Multiple-Character Point of View.

Same as Types Eight and Nine, but the narrator presents the thoughts, feelings and attitudes of a number of characters.

Examples: _____

TYPE ELEVEN: Anonymous Narration -- No Character Point of View.

Purely description -- the narrator is not in the minds of the characters but describes actions and events only.

Examples: _____

Quoting from a Short Story

When you write about a short story or refer to a short story in a literary response journal or an essay, you will frequently need to quote from it. Below are some rules to follow when you refer to the title of a story or quote words from it. All the examples given in the rules are taken from the short story “Test” by Theodore Thomas.

RULE 1: *Whenever you mention the title of a short story, put quotation marks around it.*

Robert Proctor, the protagonist in “Test,” by Theodore Thomas, fails his driving test because he doesn’t understand the rules.

RULE 2: *Whenever you quote an uncommon word or a longer phrase that appears in the story, put quotation marks around it and INTEGRATE the quoted material within your own sentence.*

Robert’s compassionate nature is revealed in his concern for what might have happened to the sleeping girl. He knows that, had the accident been real, she would have passed unknowingly “into the dark, heavy sleep of death.”

RULE 3: *Whenever you quote a phrase that uses only part of a longer sentence, indicate where words have been omitted by using AN ELLIPSIS.*

One of the most startling images in the story occurs in the last paragraph when the two men drag “Robert Proctor out the door...his rubber heels sliding along the two grooves worn into the floor.”

RULE 4: *Whenever you quote two or more whole lines from the story, do not use quotation marks unless they enclose dialogue. Instead, write the lines from the story on separate, indented lines within your paragraph. When several lines are cited, they should be especially significant.*

You should “set up” the quote by introducing it and justify such a long quote by explaining its importance afterwards “saying goodbye”).

The theme of the story is revealed in the final interchange between Robert and the uniformed man. Robert says,

“You can’t really mean this, I’m still dreaming aren’t I? This is still part of the test isn’t it?”

The uniformed man said, “How do any of us know?”

The author is saying that we never know when a seemingly simple action, like driving down a freeway, will have serious consequences. Our ability to make wise decisions may be tested at any time.

ACTIVITIES: Use the assigned story. Answer on a separate page

1. Write a sentence that explains what this story is about. Use the title of the short story and the author in your sentence.
2. In another sentence, discuss the main character and point out how some specific words or phrases from the story help reveal the way the personality of the character.
3. In another sentence, point out a striking image in the story. Quote a phrase that uses only part of a longer sentence and indicate where words have been omitted by using an ellipsis correctly.
4. In a sentence that comments on your opinion about the theme of the story, quote a passage that is longer than two lines. Be sure to “set up” the quote and to “say goodbye” by explaining it afterwards.

QUOTING APPROPRIATELY: “Shaving” by Leslie Norris

Directions: Complete each of the following writing assignments by incorporating quotes from the story into your own sentences. Quote only PHRASES from the story. Do not quote an entire sentence. Each quote you use must fit into an original sentence of your own. If necessary to make your point clear, write sentences explaining the significance of the phrases you have quoted.

For example:

By the story’s end, we see Barry looking out a window that is full of the “dying sunlight.” Barry stands there, “knowing it would soon be gone.” At one level, Barry recognizes that his father is dying, in the same way that the sun is fading. At another level, Barry also realizes that his own youth and strength will fade in the future.

1. The two main characters in this story are at different stages of life. Examine the ways Barry is contrasted with his father. Write a paragraph contrasting the two, including appropriate quotes.
2. The act of shaving is important because it is the act by which Barry comes of age. In a sense, Barry undergoes a rite of passage and takes up his father’s authority. Write a paragraph explaining how Barry grows up during the story.
3. The act of shaving is also presented as a kind of ceremony. Write a paragraph proving that shaving is symbolic in this story.
4. What details in the last two paragraphs indicate that Barry accepts the fact that some day his own youth will be gone? Explain in a short paragraph.

CITATION NOTES

Each group will be assigned a thesis sentence and will take **citation notes** to support that thesis -- very specific evidence from the story -- a quotation, an action or event, a detail or description or example -- not your opinion!

1. Before you begin making any citation notes, discuss the thesis sentence and re-state it in your own words.
2. Then decide how many component parts (or body paragraphs) are promised in the thesis sentence. Divide a piece of paper into columns for each component, and label each column with your **key words**.
3. As a group, go through the story and cite evidence to support each component. In the appropriate column, list your evidence for that paragraph-- examples, events, details, quotes, and so on. (page # needed for quotations)
4. When your group finishes, you should have many, many more citation notes than you would ever be able to use in a five-paragraph essay. Later, each group member will select the best evidence to use in an individual essay.

Example: The story told in “Chee’s Daughter” bears striking similarities to the Greek myth of Demeter and her child Persephone.