

Elements of Fiction: Putting it all Together

It helps to think of the elements of fiction as puzzle pieces that work together to create a story or novel.

Review: The Elements Include: Plot, Symbolism, Character, Theme, Setting, Irony, Point of View, Tone, and Style

Plot: An author's selection and arrangement of incidents in a story to shape the action and give the story a particular focus. Discussions of plot include not just what happens, but also how and why things happen the way they do.

Plot may have three parts: Rising Action, Climax, and Falling Action

- **Rising Action Complication(s)** creates some sort of conflict for the protagonist (the main character).
- **Climax** the moment of greatest emotional tension in a narrative, usually marking a turning point in the plot at which the rising action reverses to become the falling action.
- **Falling Action** or **resolution** the conclusion of a plot's conflicts and complications. The resolution follows the climax in the plot.

Character is a person presented in a dramatic or narrative work two major types are: A **hero** or **heroine**, often called the **protagonist**, is the central character who engages the reader's interest and empathy. The **antagonist** is the character, force, or collection of forces that stand directly opposed to the protagonist and gives rise to the conflict of the story.

Setting: The setting is the physical and social context in which the action of a story occurs. The major elements of setting are the time, the place, and the social environment that frames the characters. Setting can be used to evoke a mood or atmosphere that will prepare the reader for what is to come. Sometimes, writers choose a particular setting because of traditional associations with that setting that are closely related to the action of a story.

Point of View: Refers to who tells us a story and how it is told. What we know and how we feel about the events in a work are shaped by the author's choice of point of view. The teller of the story, the narrator, inevitably affects our understanding of the characters' actions by filtering what is told through his or her own perspective.

Symbolism: A person, object, image, word or event that evokes a range of additional meaning beyond and usually more abstract than its literal significance.

Types of Symbols: Conventional symbols have meanings that are widely recognized by a society or culture. Writers use conventional symbols for reinforcing meanings.

A **literary or contextual symbol** can be a setting, character, action, object, name, or anything else in a word that maintains its literal significance while suggesting other meanings. Such symbols go beyond conventional symbols; they gain their symbolic meaning within the context of a specific story.

Theme: The central meaning or dominant idea in a literary work. A theme provides a unifying point around which the plot, characters, setting, point of view, symbols, and other elements of a work are organized. It is important not to mistake the theme for the actual subject of the work; the theme refers to the abstract concept that is made concrete through the images, characterization, and action of the text.

Irony: A literary device that uses contradictory statements or situations to reveal a reality different from what appears to be true.

Tone: The author's implicit attitude toward the reader or the people, places, and events in a work as revealed by the elements of the author's style. Tone may be characterized as serious or ironic, sad or happy, private or public, angry or affectionate, bitter or nostalgic, or any other attitudes and feelings that human beings experience.

Style: The distinctive and unique manner in which a writer arranges words to achieve particular effects. Style essentially combines the idea to be expressed with the individual word choices as well as matters such as the length of sentences, their structure, tone, and use of irony.

© Kevin Cook and Indian Hills Community College