

An Introduction to Literature and Short Story

- **Literature is defined as:**

- 'Written works, e.g. fiction, poetry, drama, and criticism that are recognized as having important or permanent artistic value are referred to as literature.'

Or

- 'The body of written works of a culture, language, people, or period of time is called literature.'

- **Some of the major genres of English Literature are as under:**

1. Poetry
2. Drama
3. Novel
4. Prose

- **Poetry**

The term poetry is hard to define but we can say that poetry is an imaginative awareness of experience, expressed through meaning, sound, and rhythmic language and evokes an emotional response.

Poetry includes whatsoever of painting can be made visible to the mind's eye.

- **Prose**

Prose is distinguished from poetry because of its complete lack of any metrical structure and variety of rhythm and has a closer correspondence to the patterns of everyday speech.

- **Drama**

Drama is a prose or verse composition, especially one that tells a serious story, intended for representation by actors who mimic the characters and perform the dialogues and actions of the written narrative.

- **Novel**

A novel is a fictional prose narrative of significant length, typically having a plot that is unfolded by the actions, speech, and thoughts of the characters.

- **Why do we study Literature?**

1. Literature reflects human ideas, beliefs, and societies.

2. Literature helps us to discover ordinary human ways of understanding life.
3. While reading literature, we explore significant differences and this allows us to even experience perspectives of those separated from us by time and social barriers.
4. Getting to know the human psyche would help us discover pride in our own culture, gain respect for others, and be humble.
5. We find different human responses and reactions in poems, essays, diaries, narratives, and in the characters of narratives. Exposure to such varied responses helps us gain a greater knowledge of the human psyche and at the same time, we are familiarized with a greater knowledge of ourselves and our own responses because we surely compare our lives to those in literature.
6. We learn about the good and evil forces; experience the injustices prevalent in this world and it cultivates a sense of wisdom in us. Good literature assists us in becoming a better person.
7. Literature provides us with a worldview of things and gives us a mature perspective of things.
8. Literature serves as an entertainment. It also introduces us to the literary figures, movements and multi-dimensional characters.

- **English Literature History**

- English Literature was produced in England from the introduction of Old English by the Anglo-Saxons in the 5th century to the present. (*The Anglo-Saxons were a cultural group who inhabited England in the Early Middle Ages. They traced their origins to settlers who came to Britain from mainland Europe in the 5th century.*). This is the first period in the history of English literature. The works of those Irish and Scottish authors who are closely identified with English life and letters are also considered part of English literature.
- Anglo-Norman period extends from 1066-1350. The Normans were the first to bring the culture and the practical ideals of Roman civilization to the English people. They brought to England the wealth of a new language and literature, and English gradually absorbed both. (*Norman: a member of a group of people from northern France, especially those who invaded England in 1066 and became its rulers*).
- The age of Chaucer extends from 1350-1400. The age was one of unusual stir and progress. The five main writers of this age are: Langland, Wyclif, Gower, Mandeville and above all Chaucer.
- The fourth period is the revival of learning extending from 1400-1500, and it denotes, in its broadest sense, the gradual enlightenment of the human mind after the darkness of the Middle Ages. The names 'Renaissance' and 'Humanism' are often applied to the same movement. The term Renaissance is used to denote the whole transition from the Middle Ages to the modern

world, and is more correctly applied to the revival of art resulting from the discovery and imitation of classic models in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

- The Elizabethan Age ranging from 1550-1620. The main characteristic of the age was the comparative religious tolerance. The age of Elizabeth was a time of intellectual liberty, of growing intelligence and comfort among all classes, of unbounded patriotism, and of peace at home and abroad.
- The Puritan Age extends from 1620-1660. The Puritan movement may be regarded as a second and greater Renaissance, a rebirth of the moral nature of man following the intellectual awakening of Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.
- The Restoration Period ranges from 1660-1700.
- Next comes Eighteenth Century literature which extends from 1600-1780.
- The age of Romanticism extends roughly from 1780-1850.
- After Romanticism comes the Victorian age, produced during the reign of Queen Victoria (1837-1901). This age forms a link and transition between the writers of the romantic period and the next different literature of the 20th century.
- Lastly comes the Modern Age and Post-Modernism. Modernism as a literary movement reached its height in Europe between 1900 and the middle 1920s. The term postmodern literature is used to describe certain characteristics of post-World War II literature.

- **What is a Short Story?**

- ✚ A short story is fictional work of prose that is shorter in length than a novel. Usually, a short story focuses on one incident, has a single plot, a single setting, a small number of characters, and covers a short period of time.

- ✚ Edgar Allan Poe, in his essay "The Philosophy of Composition," said that "a short story should be read in one sitting, anywhere from a half hour to two hours." In contemporary fiction, a short story can range from 1,000 to 20,000 words.

- **Short Story has been defined in different ways such as:**

- A piece of fictional writing usually less than 5000 words that contains these basic elements: characters, setting, plot, conflict, resolution, climax, dialogue, protagonist, and antagonist.
- A short story is a brief work of fiction. The short story resembles the longer novel but generally has a simpler plot and setting. In addition, the short story tends to reveal character at a crucial moment rather than to develop it through many incidents.
- This is a form of prose fiction, a creative non-poetic kind of composition.

- **A Short Story is based on the following components:**

❖ **Setting:**

The time and location in which a story takes place is called the setting. For some stories the setting is very important, while for others it is not. There are several aspects of a story's setting to consider when examining how setting contributes to a story (some, or all, may be present in a story):

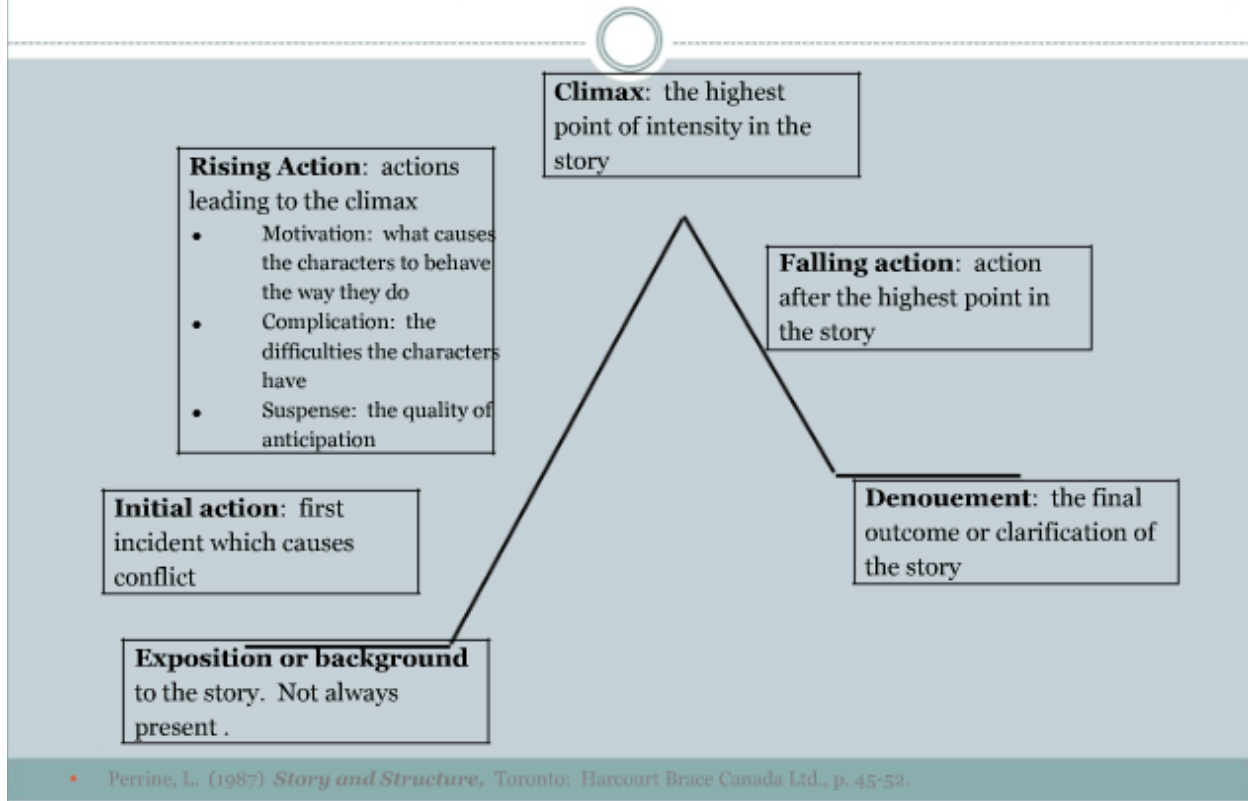
- a) Place - geographical location. Where is the action of the story taking place?
- b) Time - When is the story taking place? (Historical period, time of day, year, etc)
- c) Weather conditions - Is it rainy, sunny, stormy, etc?
- d) social conditions - What is the daily life of the characters like? Does the story contain local colour (writing that focuses on the speech, dress, mannerisms, customs, etc. of a particular place)?
- e) Mood or atmosphere - What feeling is created at the beginning of the story? Is it bright and cheerful or dark and frightening?

❖ **Plot:**

The plot is how the author arranges events to develop his basic idea; it is the sequence of events in a story or play. The plot is a planned, logical series of events having a beginning, middle, and end. The short story usually has one plot so it can be read in one sitting. There are five essential parts of plot:

- a) Introduction - The beginning of the story where the characters and the setting is revealed.
- b) Rising Action - This is where the events in the story become complicated and the conflict in the story is revealed (events between the introduction and climax).
- c) Climax - This is the highest point of interest and the turning point of the story. The reader wonders what will happen next; will the conflict be resolved or not?
- d) Falling action - The events and complications begin to resolve themselves. The reader knows what has happened next and if the conflict was resolved or not (events between climax and resolution).
- e) Resolution - This is the final outcome or untangling of events in the story.

Plot Diagram



- **Conflict:**

It is any form of opposition that faces the main character. Within a short story there may be only one central struggle, or there may be one dominant struggle with many minor ones.

There are two types of conflict:

1) **External** - A struggle with a force outside one's self.

2) **Internal** - A struggle within one's self; a person must make some decision, overcome pain, quiet his/her temper, resist an urge, etc.

- **Character:**

✚ **There are two meanings for the word character:**

1) The person in a work of fiction.

2) The characteristics of a person.

1). **Persons in a work of fiction - Antagonist and Protagonist:**

Short stories use few characters. One character is clearly central to the story with all major events having some importance to this character - he/she is the PROTAGONIST. The opposer of the main character is called the ANTAGONIST.

2). The Characteristics of a Person:

In order for a story to seem real to the reader, its characters must seem real. Characterization is the information the author gives the reader about the characters.

✚ The author may reveal a character in several ways:

- a) his/her physical appearance
- b) what he/she says, thinks, feels and dreams
- c) what he/she does or does not do
- d) what others say about him/her and how others react to him/her

- Characters can be of different types i.e.

1. **Individual** - round, many sided and complex personalities.

2. **Developing** -dynamic, many-sided personalities that change, for better or worse, by the end of the story.

3. **Static** -Stereotype, have one or two characteristics that never change and are emphasized e.g. brilliant detective, drunk, scrooge, cruel stepmother, etc.

- **Point of View:**

Point of view is defined as the angle from which the story is told.

1. **Innocent Eye:** The story is told through the eyes of a child (his/her judgment being different from that of an adult).

2. **Stream of Consciousness:** The story is told so that the reader feels as if he is inside the head of one character and knows all their thoughts and reactions.

3. **First Person:** The story is told by the protagonist or one of the characters who interacts closely with the protagonist or other characters (using pronouns I, me, we, etc). The reader sees the story through this person's eyes as he/she experiences it and only knows what he/she knows or feels.

4. **Omniscient:** The author can narrate the story using the omniscient point of view. He can move from character to character, event to event, having free access to the thoughts, feelings and motivations of his characters and he introduces information where and when he chooses. There are two main types of omniscient point of view:

a) Omniscient Limited: The author tells the story in third person (using pronouns they, she, he, it, etc). We know only what the character knows and what the author allows him/her to tell us. We can see the thoughts and feelings of characters if the author chooses to reveal them to us.

b) Omniscient Objective: The author tells the story in the third person. It appears as though a camera is following the characters, going anywhere, and recording only what is seen and heard. There is no comment on the characters or their thoughts. No interpretations are offered. The reader is placed in the position of spectator without the author there to explain. The reader has to interpret events on his own.

- **Theme:**

The theme in a piece of fiction is its controlling idea or its central insight. It is the author's underlying meaning or main idea that he is trying to convey. The theme may be the author's thoughts about a topic or view of human nature. The title of the short story usually points to what the writer is saying.

Some simple examples of common themes from literature, TV, and film are:

- Things are not always as they appear to be

- Love is blind

- Believe in yourself

- People are afraid of change

- Don't judge a book by its cover

- ❖ **How to Read a Short Story:**

- **Some strategies to consider...**

- **Ease into the story.**

- ✚ Think about the title and author
- ✚ Look at the back of the book for any biographical information about the author.
- ✚ Look at any illustrations and consider their connection to the title.
- ✚ Read the first page and pause.
- ✚ Consider what you know so far about the characters, setting, conflict, and point of view.

- **Get involved in the story.**

- ✚ Be an active reader by asking questions about what is happening.
- ✚ Make predictions about what might happen.
- ✚ Put yourself in the characters' shoes.
- ✚ Form opinion about what is going on.
- ✚ Picture the events and setting in your mind.

- ✚ Write down your favorite quotations as you read.
- ✚ Make connections with what you already know.

- **Write about the story.**

- ✚ Make notes to focus your thinking while you read.
- ✚ If possible, annotate a copy of the story to: highlight, underline, circle, connect with arrows, add questions, definitions, or make comments/notes in the margins.
- ✚ Underline any unfamiliar vocabulary.
- ✚ Star important passages that connect thematically.