

*"Once upon a time there
was a duck. The duck died.
The End."*



**DE
NIEUWSTE
SCHOOL**

SHORT STORY READER

extremely short stories.

Introduction:

In this short story reader you will find information about the structure of short stories. That's the technical bit. You'll need to study the terms because you'll need them on your test.

If you have any questions about this reader, please let me know.

Kind regards,

Maurice

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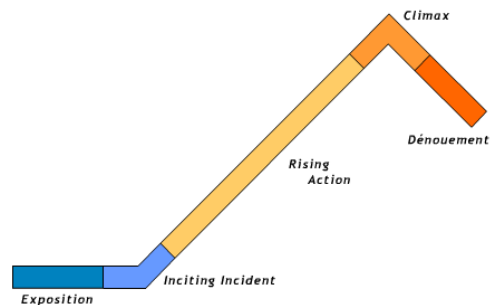
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Short Story Unit:

Plot diagram:

To truly understand the plot of a short story it should be broken into several parts, each contributing to our understanding of the story. To see the role of each of these elements it is helpful to visualize them in a plot diagram that shows the order in which they appear and their relationship to each other. A roller coaster analogy works well to do this.



On a roller coaster, the first step is to get strapped in and prepare yourself for the ride ahead. In a short story, this beginning section is known as the exposition which gives us a sense of where the story takes place and who is involved.

After the short beginning, your roller coaster suddenly changes direction and you begin a steep ascent up to the highest point of the ride. In a short story, this is known as the inciting incident. It is a single event that introduces the central conflict and therefore starts the action in the story.

As the roller coaster climbs our sense of anticipation and excitement grows. In a short story, the rising action sees our protagonist wrestling with a series of challenges, thereby creating suspense. At the very top of the ride, we arrive at the point of highest tension. In a short story, this turning point is referred to as climax of the story. It is where the central conflict is resolved. This, generally, is the most exciting part of the story and is key in revealing the author's message.

Following the climax we have the unwinding of the story or the dénouement. This is the part of the roller coaster where you have gone through the point of highest tension and will now see how the ride ends. In a short story the author uses this to tie up and loose ends that may still exist.

Why a roller coaster?

The plot diagram is a visual representation of the various elements of a short story and the general order that they occur in. While individual stories may deviate from this outline, the majority of stories follow a similar pattern.

The triangle, or roller coaster design, is meant to represent the development of the key aspects of the story. The angle at which the story will develop may alter depending on when the climax takes place but each of these elements will be present in some manner.

Each of the elements is identified on the diagram and each has a specific role to play in the development of any story.

Exposition:

The exposition of any short story serves as the introduction to the setting and key characters in the story.

The length of the exposition is determined by location of the inciting incident (see next element). Anything before the inciting incident considered to be part of the exposition.

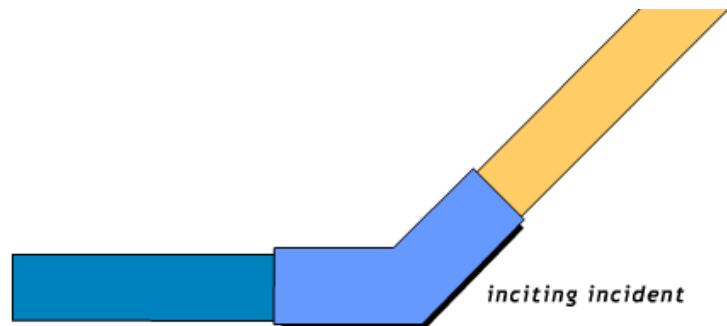


Apart from establishing the setting and introducing the main characters, the exposition will provide any background, or antecedent action, necessary for us to understand the story as it opens.

Inciting Incident:

The inciting incident is the trigger that begins the conflict. It is an event that indicates the focus of the story and establishes the main challenge facing the central character, or protagonist.

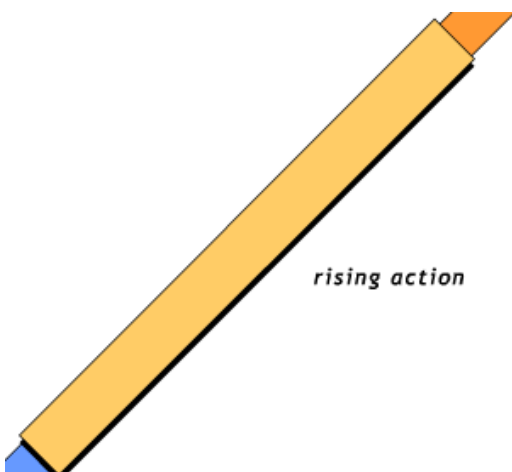
Although a crucial element, the inciting incident can often be missed on a first reading but should be more obvious once the story has been completed. This event should relate directly to the climax, or turning point, of the story.



Rising Action:

The rising action contains the series of events that build suspense and interest in the story. Most stories develop through these incidents or situations, which add to the complexity of the story.

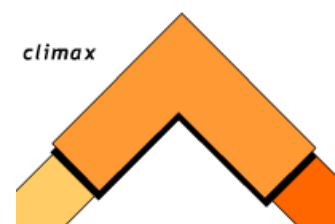
It is in the rising action that an author will develop suspense as we start to anticipate a certain outcome. There may also be foreshadowing, where the author hints at a possible direction in the resolution of the conflict, which occurs at the climax.

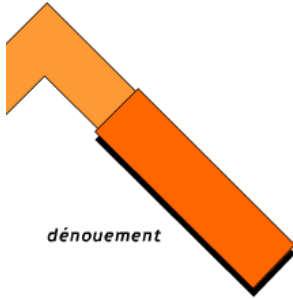


Climax:

The climax of a short story is the point at which the central conflict is confronted by the protagonist and dealt with successfully or they are defeated by this opposing force.

Whether or not the author has the protagonist dealing successfully with the main conflict or whether they are defeated by it, is crucial in determining the main message or theme of the story. There should be a direct relation between the climax of a short story and the central theme.





Denouement:

This is the "last breath" of any story. We see how the protagonist has responded to the central conflict in the climax and are given the denouement as our opportunity to take in this response before the story is over.

While the length of the denouement may vary, most modern stories have a very short wrap-up following the climax. It helps to focus attention on the central themes and messages of the story.

DIY:

Read the following short story and indicate the exposition, inciting incident, climax and dénouement.

A poor girl, named Cinderella, was raised by her demanding stepmother and her jealous stepsisters. One day a messenger from the king arrived inviting all young ladies to a ball to be held for the prince to choose his wife and future queen. The stepsisters were very excited but Cinderella was told she would not be allowed to go because she didn't have anything suitable to wear.

On the night of the ball, after everyone had left, Cinderella wished that she could go to the ball too. Suddenly, a fairy appeared and granted her wish, giving her a beautiful gown, but added that she would have to be home by midnight. At the ball, Cinderella and the prince spent the night dancing together. All of a sudden, at the stroke of midnight, Cinderella ran off without saying goodbye, but she did leave behind a glass slipper that had fallen off her foot as she fled.

The prince vowed to find the girl who fit the glass slipper and make her his wife. He searched the land and eventually came to Cinderella's house. After the stepsisters tried to make it fit their foot, Cinderella tried on the glass slipper. To the amazement of all, except Cinderella, her foot fit exactly. The prince realized he had discovered the beautiful girl he had danced with on the night of the ball. He proposed immediately, Cinderella accepted and they lived happily ever after.

The End.

Answers:

Exposition: A poor girl, named Cinderella, was raised by her demanding stepmother and her jealous stepsisters.

This opening sentence qualifies as the exposition because we are introduced to the central character and are provided with background information so that we understand how the story has evolved to the point where we begin to read it.

Inciting Incident: One day a messenger from the king arrived inviting all young ladies to a ball to be held for the prince to choose his wife and future queen.

The arrival of the messenger is the inciting incident because it triggers the conflict, later resolved in the climax. The stepsisters try to deny Cinderella the opportunity to go to the ball, but with the help of her fairy godmother, Cinderella proves that it is her destiny to fall in love with and marry the prince. The announcement of the ball sets this conflict in motion.

Climax: To the amazement of all, except Cinderella, her foot fit exactly.

This is the climax of the story because it resolves one of the main conflicts; that being the social conflict between a poor girl and a rich prince falling in love. Once the slipper fits, the prince's search is over and he dedicates himself to Cinderella, no matter what her social standing.

Dénouement: He proposed immediately, Cinderella accepted and they lived happily ever after.

The dénouement, or unknitting of the story, is achieved through this final sentence. This element in the plot diagram follows the climax and relates to the conclusion of the story. We get a sense of how the story will continue beyond the point where it is written. A careful reading of the dénouement also helps to reinforce the central theme or message of the author.

Setting:

Setting is the “where and when” of any story. Along with identifying the time and place of the story, setting shapes our emotional response to the story. Specific details can help us to see that a story may be a mystery, comedy, or science fiction. We begin to anticipate the direction of the story with a clearly described setting.

Sensory details are used to describe the setting. These details that appeal to any of our senses (sight, sound, touch, taste, smell). Effective descriptions use as many of these details as possible to make the setting seem realistic even if it is fictitious.

Setting is the first key element of any short story. It is necessary to provide this information early so that the audience has some context for the events that will follow. As a result, setting is a key part of the exposition. While the setting may change as the story evolves, the audience needs a clear indication of the setting in the exposition.

Characters:

Characters are the people, animals, or imaginary creatures in a story. The action of the story revolves around the main character or protagonist. In fiction, it is the characters that give the story life and seize the reader's attention – the more “real” or “alive” characters are, the better the story will be.

The process that the author uses to make their characters “real” or “alive” is referred to as “Characterization”.

A story's key characters will be introduced in the exposition. However, characterization is often developed in the rising action where the conflict is made clear to use. We often witness a change in the personality of the protagonist towards the end of the story because of the

conflict they have faced. To fully understand a character we need to pay attention to their personality throughout the piece.

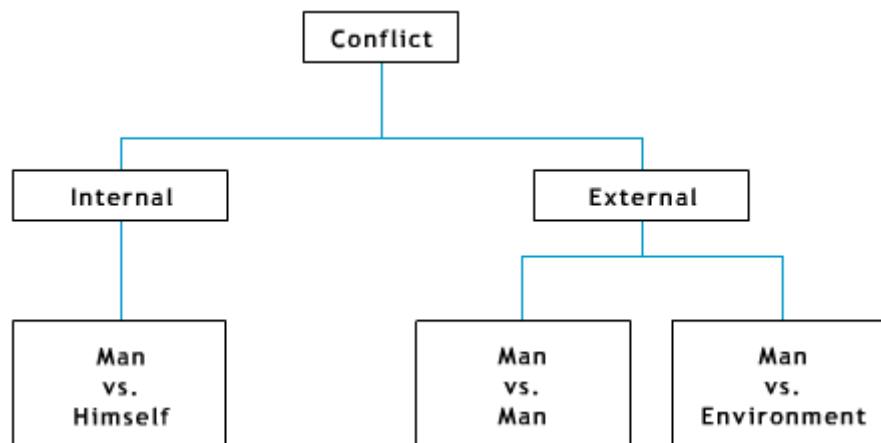
Conflict:

The key aspect to the plot of any story is the conflict. Conflict is best thought of as a struggle between the protagonist and another force. This opposing force could be another character, the forces of nature, or a struggle within the protagonist. The main conflict is usually made clear to us early in the story.

The way in which the protagonist deals with this conflict, and their success or failure in doing so, is the most significant indication of the intent of the author in writing the story.

The central conflict will become apparent to us early in the story during the exposition or with the inciting incident. The rising action traces the protagonist attempting to deal with the central conflict. As the tension builds, we reach the moment of truth where the protagonist will either deal successfully with this conflict or it will defeat them. This is referred to as the climax of the story.

There are two basic types of conflict: **Internal** and **External**.



Conflict is best thought of as a struggle between the protagonist and another force. This opposing force could be another character, the forces of nature, or a struggle within the protagonist.

The manner in which the protagonist deals with this conflict, and their success or failure in doing so, is the most significant indication of the intent of the author in writing the story.

Internal Conflict:

An internal conflict takes place within the mind of the protagonist. We do not see the struggle take place but we may see the result of this conflict through the actions and words of the main character. Where present with external conflicts, these internal struggles are the most significant conflicts.

Internal Conflict – Man vs. Himself:



When the protagonist seems to be struggling with a decision, or is dealing with a challenge to their belief system, they are experiencing an internal conflict. When these inner conflicts are met and dealt with the character often learns more about themselves and we, by extension, learn these lessons with them.

External Conflict:

An external conflict is a struggle between a character and an outside force. This force is visible to us and can often involve other characters in the story. This external force may also be an element of nature or the environment itself.

External Conflict – Man vs. Man:



Often two or more characters come in conflict with each other. When we see two characters arguing we are witnessing an external conflict. A war, a chess match, or a debate all pit one person against other people or groups of people. This type of conflict is often brought out through dialogue between characters.

External Conflict – Man vs. Environment:



A character who is opposed by the forces of nature is coming in conflict with his environment. A story about a boy lost in the wilderness and struggling to survive is an example of this type of external conflict. It is also true that a country person might experience conflict with their environment when moving to the city. The setting of the story will be an important part of any conflict between a character and their environment.

Climax:

The climax is the key moment of every work of fiction. As the moment the central conflict is resolved, the climax reveals the author's intent in writing the story. Also known as the theme, this message is what the story is all about. Because of this, identifying the climax is crucial in helping us understand and appreciate all stories.

Conflict begins in the Inciting Incident.

The conflict in a story is triggered when we see the first encounter between the protagonist and the main antagonist. Our interest is grabbed with this first glimpse of the direction of the story.

Conflict continues to build in the Rising Action.

The tension and excitement increase as the central issue between the protagonist and the opposing force becomes clearer. Our anticipation grows as we await the final confrontation and begin to predict the outcome.

At the Climax, the Conflict has reached its peak.

The moment of truth finally arrives where the protagonist either overcomes the antagonist or is defeated by it. The story pivots on this single moment and leads us in the direction of the author's message, also known as theme.

Theme:

The theme of any story is what the story is all about. It is the answer to the question, "What is this story telling me?". This message from the author will relate to the story but it must also apply to our lives for it to have any meaning. We should be able to see how many of the characters and events represent people and events in our lives. In other words, these elements in the story become symbols that help us understand how the theme relates to our world.

The theme of a story becomes clear at the climax. It is at this moment that we see the author's message by how the central conflict is resolved. For example, the climax of a story about survival could result in either the rescue of the protagonist or their death. In each case, the theme would be quite different. The dénouement will often reinforce the theme and provide further evidence of it.

The theme of any story is revealed to us through the various elements that are contained within the story.

Setting + Character + Conflict (Climax) = Theme

Setting:

Setting sets the tone or mood of the story. It is our first indication of the general direction of the story and, in some respects, gives us our first clue as to the subject of the theme.

Character:

The protagonist is one of the key aspects in understanding the theme. Is the protagonist someone who needs to learn a lesson or are they a sympathetic character? The personality of the protagonist is an indicator of how the theme may unfold.

Conflict (Climax):

No other point in the story reveals the theme with the clarity of the climax. Until we see how the main conflict is resolved we are only guessing at the theme. The climax makes evident the author's message by having the protagonist succeed or fail in dealing with the opposing force.

Theme:

All the elements of a story contribute to our understanding of theme. The author controls each of these to provide us with an entertaining story and an interesting message. It is not until we finish the story that we can fully appreciate the theme.

Glossary:

Antagonist	Whatever opposing force the protagonist struggles with, such as another character, environment or something within the protagonist.
Character	<p>A reasonable facsimile of a human being; the inner self that determines thought, speech, behaviour.</p> <p>a) Round Characters are fully developed and believable.</p> <p>b) Dynamic Characters show a capacity to change.</p> <p>c) Flat Characters appear one-dimensional and have no depth.</p> <p>d) Static Characters do not change.</p>
Climax	The action or decision that determines the story's outcomes. It is the point of highest tension.
Conflict	The opposition between forces in a story.
Denouement	The conclusion of the story. The denouement ties up any loose ends and wraps up the story. Often it is the resolution of the conflict.
Epiphany	A "showing forth" or sudden revelation of the truth about a character or situation. The awareness comes through a specific event that causes the reader to see the character or situation anew. Stories remind us that we are often not ready for life's epiphanies; they come to us with a raw power that transforms an ordinary moment.
Exposition	The work's introduction in which background information is given for the plot development.
Foreshadowing	Hints or suggestions that provide clues to the resolution of the main conflict. Often they are only seen upon completion of the story.
Inciting Incident	The first action that starts the plot and introduces the conflict.
Irony	<p>Incongruity between what is expected and what happens. It can take any of the following forms:</p> <p>a) Verbal: saying the opposite of what is intended.</p> <p>b) Situational: an outcome that is the opposite of what is expected.</p> <p>c) Dramatic: a situation in a literary work that is understood by the reader but not by the character(s) involved; the characters are in a state of ignorance.</p>
Metaphor	A figure of speech that compares two unrelated items without the use of the keywords "like", "as", or "than".
Plot	A series of actions; the plan or groundwork of the story.
Point of View	<p>This is the way that the author narrates the story. It can take any of the following forms:</p> <p>a) First Person: The narrator is a character and tells the story from his/her point of view. Uses the pronoun " I " and cannot tell the thoughts and feelings of other characters.</p> <p>b) Third Person Limited: The author can be inside and outside of the characters. He can report the thoughts and feelings of only a couple of characters, including the main character. Characters are referred to as "he" or "she".</p>

	c) Third Person Omniscient - The author knows everything about all the characters and can report everyone's thoughts and feelings. He can also predict the future and report the past.
Protagonist	The central character; may be an individual or group.
Rising Action	The events leading up to the climax. Suspense is developed here.
Satire	A literary work which attacks human follies or vices, often by making fun of them. Example: Animal Farm.
Setting	The environment of the story, including objects and atmosphere.
Simile	A figure of speech that compares two unrelated items using "like", "as", or "than".
Symbol	A specific word, idea or object that may stand for ideas, values, persons or ways of life.
Theme	The central idea or universal truth that the story examine
Theme Statement	<p>A single sentence that attempts to explain the story's truth (what the story worries about). Such a sentence follows these criteria:</p> <p>a) is a generalization about life or human nature using universal terms.</p> <p>b) accounts for all the details of the story (doesn't look at only one part).</p> <p>c) avoids cliché or plot summaries.</p> <p>d) may recognize the significance of the story's title or special symbols.</p>

Source: Calgary Academy