

DIRECTIONS: Read the information below on analysing a short story, then do the assignment which follows.

Short Story Elements:

As the name implies, a short story is not as long as a novel. Because of that, the author has to quickly draw you in to the lives of the characters in the story, has to keep the plot compelling, and has to make you want to turn the page and find out what happens next, in very little space. Short stories all contain the same elements. Amongst these are:

Atmosphere The *atmosphere* or *mood* in a short story is the direct result of the imagery, details, and word choice of the author. It is a description of how the story comes across. Is it happy? Gloomy? Sad? Scary?

Characters All good stories, whether short stories or novels, contain believable, interesting characters that draw you in and make you want to find out what happens to them throughout the course of events which take place. Characters may be round or flat. A *round* character is one who learns from mistakes and experiences, and continues to grow and develop. A *flat* character is one who doesn't learn from mistakes and experiences, and doesn't continue to grow and develop. One of the characters in the story is the *protagonist*, or central character, while another is often the *antagonist* or character the protagonist struggles against. The antagonist doesn't have to be a human though. In a tale which shows a man struggling in the wilderness, the man is the protagonist, while the wilderness is the antagonist. Some characters might be *stereotypes*, simplistically portrayed and lacking individual characteristics, save for the most obvious of those expected from that kind of character. Others might be *stock characters*, which we have seen so many times before in our reading that we already can tell how they will act. An example would be the bad guy in a western novel: you know he is the bad guy because he dresses all in black, wears a black hat, and rides a black horse.

Conflict What makes a story interesting is conflict, because otherwise, the story would dull and boring. Conflict may be *external*, when the conflict is with something outside the character like other people, the weather, animals, or situations. External conflict is often between the protagonist and antagonist. Conflict may also be *internal*, or inside the mind of a single character, like when a choice must be made between good and evil.

Plot The plot is the series of events that happen in the story. Many authors follow a similar pattern when writing a story. The *situation* establishes the characters and their setting. The *rising action* reveals the conflict or challenge the characters face. The turning point in the story is the *climax*, where the conflict is resolved, and the *denouement* tidies up the loose ends.

Point of View An author can choose from several points of view when telling the story. If the story is told by a character using words like *I* or *we* then the point of view is the *first person*. The person telling the story relates only what they see, do, think, and feel. They cannot know or tell the thoughts and feelings of another character. In the *third person omniscient* point of view, the narrator knows and tells the thoughts, feelings, and actions of several characters, using words like *he*, *she*, and *they*. The narrator is all-seeing, all-knowing. In the *third person limited omniscient* point of view, the narrator only knows the thoughts and feelings of one character.

Setting When you describe the time and place that the story takes place, you are describing the *setting*. The setting is useful because it can tell you something about the characters in the story and helps to create the mood and atmosphere of the story.

Suspense *Suspense* keeps you wondering what is going to happen to the characters in the story. Without suspense, there wouldn't be any point in reading the story because you would know what was going to happen already.

Symbolism Anything in a story which suggests something else is a *symbol*. Symbols are usually visual, relate to the theme of the story, and often are people, objects, or animals. A red rose for instance, symbolizes love, while daffodils symbolize springtime and rebirth.

Theme The main idea that the author is trying to get across in the story is the *theme*. Authors often make a comment on life or human nature in their stories. You must remember, though, that different readers can interpret the same story differently.

Tone How a writer expresses his or her views about a subject determines the *tone*. The work may be written in a formal or informal style, seem personal or impersonal, or come across as angry, bitter, happy, or a myriad of other feelings.

ASSIGNMENT: **If your teacher has chosen the *Crossroads 9* anthology, pick four short stories from the list below.** Otherwise, you must read and respond to any **four short stories** from the anthology your teacher has chosen to use. If you read a short story and it doesn't really "click" for you, choose another from the list. Answer the questions which follow for each short story, attach each page to your work, and hand in for feedback from your teacher.

SHORT STORY CHOICES:

1. The Jade Peony, p. 10
2. Acceptance, p.33
3. On the Sidewalk Bleeding, p.35
4. Borders, p.46
5. Thank You Ma'am, p.72
6. A Sunrise on the Veld, 77
7. G.Trueheart, Man's Best Friend, p.94
8. Bus Stop, p.102
9. The Leaving, p.106
10. The Day the Martian Landed, p.122
11. A Major Malfunction, p.152
12. The Choice, p.170
13. The Gift of Stories, The Gift of Breath, p.174
14. And the Lucky Winner Is... p.273
15. Babysitting Helen, p.300

Name:

Story Title:

DIRECTIONS: Choose one of the short stories from the list on the p.2, write the title in the space above, read the story thoroughly, then answer the questions below.

1. Who is the protagonist in this short story? Does the protagonist learn and grow (a round character), or remain unchanged (a flat character)?
2. Who or what is the antagonist?
3. Briefly describe the setting for this short story.
4. How does the setting contribute to the mood or atmosphere in the story?
5. Outline the plot of the story. Describe the *situation*, *rising action*, *climax*, and *denouement*.
6. Describe the point of view from which the story is told.
7. In your own words, describe the theme of this story.
8. Describe the writer's tone in the story.

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