

Elements of the Short Story

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A Note to the Teacher

These materials have been prepared to help teachers with the important task of introducing students to the fundamental elements of the short story. They have been designed to be used successfully with a minimum of teacher preparation.

The posters and reproducible masters have been coordinated to familiarize students with the basic critical terms commonly used in appreciating the short story. Concepts introduced in this set should also provide a strong foundation for later study of the elements of the novel.

FORMAT

The twenty posters introduce key concepts necessary to help the average student begin to grasp the fundamentals of the short story. They are presented sequentially so that concepts introduced later build on terms presented earlier.

The thirteen reproducible masters include two pages of vocabulary review, eight separate in-depth discussions to amplify key poster concepts that students traditionally find more difficult, and a three-page final student quiz that allows teachers to assess student comprehension at the end of the study unit.

In sum, these materials have been designed with flexibility to serve your specific needs. As secondary materials, they offer a valuable supplement to whatever primary text materials you use with your class. Used on their own, they can provide a basic foundation for helping your students to appreciate the rich heritage of the short story.

Vocabulary Review

Name: _____

Date: _____

To help you understand the elements of the short story, review the important terms defined below:

Characterization: The methods a writer uses to communicate information about characters to readers.

When the author tells the reader directly about a character, it is called **direct characterization**.

When the author shows the character in action and lets readers draw their own conclusions, it is called **indirect characterization**.

Climax The moment when the action comes to its highest point of dramatic conflict. Most often, the climax occurs *before* the actual ending of the story.

Complication: Any obstacle that increases the tension of the story conflict.

Conflict: The central source of tension and drama in the story. Conflict is sometimes referred to as the **story problem**.

Description: Verbal representation of characters, scene, or action, used to make the story more vivid for the reader.

Dialogue: The actual words that characters speak. Authors use dialogue skillfully in the short story to portray character and to dramatize conflict.

Diction: The author's choice of words, the vocabulary level of the story.

Dramatic irony: A technique that increases suspense by letting readers know more about the dramatic situation than the characters know.

Exposition: Background material about the characters, setting, and dramatic situation with which the author introduces the essentials of the story to the reader.

Falling action: The part of the story, following the climax and leading to the resolution, in which there is a sharp decline in dramatic tension.

Foreshadowing: A writing technique that gives readers clues about events that will happen later in the story.

Hyperbole: An exaggerated statement used to make a strong effect.

Imagery: The use of selected details to describe one thing in terms of another. This helps suggest additional meanings and feelings.

Irony: A particular tone created when the speaker intends a meaning that is opposite to the words he or she says.

(continued)

Vocabulary Review

(continued)

Name: _____

Date: _____

Mood: The overall feeling—light and happy or dark and brooding, for example—created by an author’s choice of words.

Narrator: The speaker who tells the story. If the narrator is also a character who participates in the story, it is important not to confuse the narrator with the author—who may, in fact, hold a very different attitude toward the story.

Point of view: The perspective from which a story is told.

Point of view is said to be **omniscient** if the author is outside the story and presents the thoughts of all the characters involved.

Point of view is called **limited** when the story is told from the viewpoint of one character who can see only a part of the whole story.

Protagonist: The central character of the story.

Resolution: The conclusion of the story. The resolution includes the story’s action after the climax until the end of the story.

Rising action: The part of the story, including exposition, in which the tension rises. Rising action builds to its highest point of tension at the story’s climax.

Setting: The environment in which the story takes place.

Structure: The framework that determines how a story is put together—its “skeleton.” The structure of many stories includes four basic parts: exposition, complication, climax, and resolution.

Style: The characteristic ways that an individual author uses language—including word choice, length and complexity of sentences, patterns of sound, and use of imagery and symbols.

Suspense: Techniques used by the author to keep readers interested in the story and wondering what will happen next.

Symbol: An image, object, character, or action that stands for an idea (or ideas) beyond its literal meaning.

Theme: The story’s main ideas—the “message” that the author intends to communicate by telling the story. Themes are often universal truths that are suggested by the specifics of the story.

Tone: The clues in a story that suggest the writer’s (or narrator’s) own attitude toward elements of his or her story.

Understatement: A figure of speech in which the speaker says less than what he or she actually feels.

Verbal irony: The use of figures of speech such as hyperbole and understatement to create an ironic effect.

Style can be defined as any of the characteristic ways that an author uses language.

WHAT IS STYLE?

Every author uses the elements of style in individual ways to achieve certain effects. Like an individual fingerprint, an author's style identifies his or her writing as unique. It also has specific effects on the reader.

RECOGNIZING THE ELEMENTS OF STYLE

Many different elements go into what makes up an author's "style":

- *Word choice (also called "diction")*: Does the author use words drawn from everyday language and slang, or from a higher vocabulary level?
- *Length and complexity of sentences*: Are story sentences short and choppy, or long and complex?
- *Punctuation*: Does the author use punctuation in any distinctive ways that differ from normal usage?
- *Use of imagery and symbols*: Does the author make use of special images or symbols to tell the story?
- *Sound and rhythm*: Does the author choose or arrange words for the way they sound? How does the story sound when you read it aloud?

The effects of style choices The elements of an author's style have many effects on how readers respond to his or her story.

- *Mood*: How do the elements listed above contribute to the story's mood? For example, is the overall feeling of the story light and easy, or dark and brooding?
- *Tone*: How do the elements listed above affect the author's tone? Is the overall tone warm and inviting, or distant and reserved?

QUESTIONS TO ASK WHILE YOU ARE READING A SHORT STORY:

1. What elements of the author's style are most noticeable? How does the story's style compare with the style of stories by other authors you have read?
2. How do the elements of the story's style specifically affect how you respond to the story?