

Study Guide for Literary Elements

Write it Down! Literary Club
2011-2012

I. MOOD, TONE, COLOR, CHARACTERIZATION

A. Mood: The overall feeling of a story. Emotions you, the reader, feel while you are reading.

B. Tone: The way feelings are expressed; the attitude the author takes towards the audience, subject, or character, as conveyed through the author's words or details.

-(www.blms.issaquah.wednet.edu/Teachers/.../Tone-Moodwkst.pdf)

1. Part of **the range of tone** includes playful, somber, serious, casual, formal, ironic, stuffy, etc. The choice of a single word can change the tone of a paragraph, even an entire essay. Just as volume and the pitch of one's voice changes throughout the day, the choice of words and the way we put our sentences together convey a sense of tone in our writing.

C. Color evokes **emotion**. Writers use color to help us understand the feeling of the character. In *Out of the Dust*, Karen Hesse opens the novel by using the color red. "I hollered myself red the day I was born. Red's the color I've stayed ever since." What is she trying to say here? What does this say about Billie Jo, the protagonist?

D. Characterization is the method an author uses to reveal a character's personality through the use of description, relationship, or commentary by the author or another character.

1. A **protagonist** is the main character of a story.
2. An **antagonist** is the character who opposes the protagonist.
3. **Flat characters** are two-dimensional in that they are relatively uncomplicated and do not change throughout the course of a work. By contrast, **Developing characters** are complex and undergo development, sometimes sufficiently to surprise the reader.

II. LITERARY TERMS

A. Figurative language is a **tool** that the author uses to help the reader **visualize** (or see) what is happening in a story or poem. Some common types of figurative language are: alliteration, allusion, anecdote, assonance, cliché, hyperbole, idiom, imagery, irony, metaphor, onomatopoeia, pun, personification, simile, soliloquy, and symbol.

1. **Alliteration** – the repetition of initial consonant sounds in words.
2. **Allusion** – a literary reference to a familiar person, place, thing or event.
3. **Anecdote** – a short summary of a humorous event or a personal story used to make a point.
4. **Assonance** – the repetition of vowel sounds without repeating consonants, for ex., "Blind eyes could blaze like meteors."

- 5. Cliché** – an overused word or phrase that springs quickly to mind but just as quickly bores the user and the audience. A cliché gives the reader nothing new or original to think about, for ex., “Her face turned red as a beet (cliché)” instead of “Her face turned a deep shade of red (good!).”
- 6. Hyperbole** – big exaggeration for effect.
- 7. Idiom** – the language peculiar to a group of people.
- 8. Imagery** – the use of words to create a picture in the reader’s mind.
- 9. Irony** – using a word or phrase to mean the exact opposite of its literal or normal meaning. There are three kinds of irony:
 - a. Dramatic irony**, in which the reader or audience sees a character’s mistakes, but the character does not.
 - b. Verbal irony**, in which the writer says one thing and means another.
 - c. Situational irony**, in which there is a great difference between the purpose of a particular action and the result.
- 10. Metaphor** – a comparison of two unlike things in which no word of comparison is used.
- 11. Onomatopoeia** – the use of a word whose sound suggests its meaning.
- 12. Pun** – a play on words.
- 13. Personification** – a literary device in which an inanimate object takes on human qualities.
- 14. Simile** – a comparison of two unlike things in which the words like or as are used.
- 15. Soliloquy** is a speech delivered by a character when he or she is alone on stage. It is as though the character is thinking out loud.
- 16. Symbol** – a person, place or thing, or an event used to represent something else, such as the dove is a symbol of peace.

B. Point of view is the **vantage point** from which the story is told.

- 1. Omniscient** point of view allows the narrator to share the thoughts and feelings of all the characters.
- 2. Limited omniscient** point of view allows the narrator to share the thoughts and feelings of only one character.

C. Conflict is the problem or struggles in a story that **drives** the action. There are three types of conflict (discussed this year):

- 1. Man vs. Man.** This external conflict involves 2 or more characters in conflict with each other.
- 2. Man vs. Nature.** This is also external conflict and involves a character and the natural elements, such as in “Out of the Dust” with Billie Joe and the dust.
- 3. Man vs. Himself.** This is known as internal conflict and reveals a struggle, usually moral, within one character.

III. PLOT DEVELOPMENT and DIAGRAMMING

A. Plot is the **engine** of strong fiction, driving the reader through the story.

It is the **action or sequence** of events in a story.

The events usually follow a pattern:

1. a story is established (**exposition**);
2. a conflict or problem arises (**rising action**);
3. certain events bring about a crisis (**climax**);
4. a character takes decisive action (**falling action**);
5. and the conflict is resolved (**resolution**).

B. TYPES OF PLOTS:

1. From problem to solution
2. From mystery to solution
3. From conflict to danger
4. From danger to safety
5. From confusion to order
6. From dilemma to decision
7. From ignorance to knowledge
8. From questions to answers.

B. PLOT DEVELOPMENT CHART

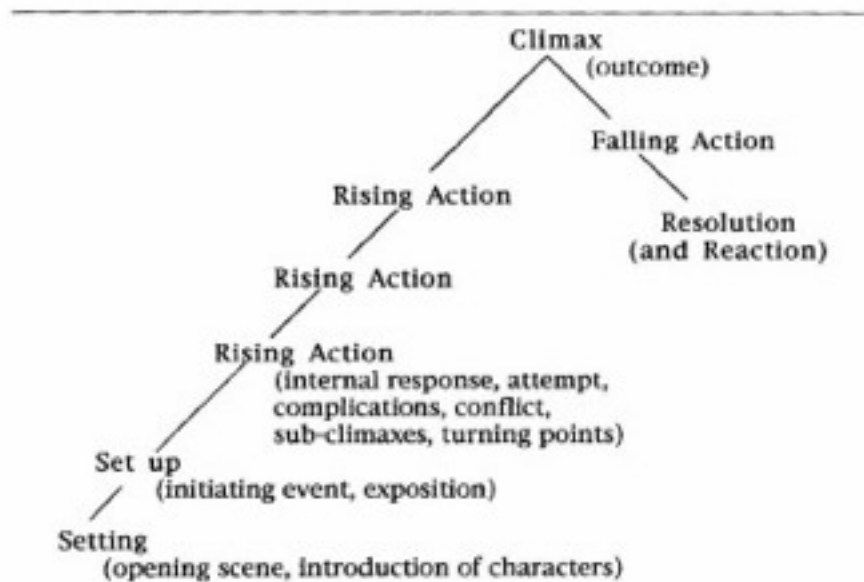


FIGURE 7-1. An adaptation of Freytag's Pyramid

IV. SETTING

A. Where, when, and in what environment(s), i.e., the place the action of the story takes place.

B. Eudora Welty said, "Every story would be another story, and unrecognizable if it took up its characters and plot and happened somewhere else... Fiction depends for

its life on place. **Place is the crossroads of circumstance, the proving ground of, what happened? Who's here? Who's coming...?"**

Writers describe the world they know. Sights, sounds, colors, and textures are all vividly painted in words as an artist paints images on canvas. A writer imagines a story to be happening in a place that is rooted in his or her mind. The location of a story's actions, along with the time in which it occurs, is the setting.

Setting is created by language. How many or how few details we learn is up to the author. Many authors leave a lot of these details up to the reader's imagination.

What Setting Tells Us

In William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily," the narrator carefully describes the house that Miss Emily lives in. This description helps us picture a decaying Mississippi town in the post-Civil War South. We also learn about Miss Emily's resistance to change.

It was a big, squarish frame house that had once been white,
decorated with cupolas and spires and scrolled balconies
in the heavily lightsome style of the seventies,
set on what had once been our most select street.
But garages and cotton gins had encroached and
obliterated even the august names of that neighborhood;
only Miss Emily's house was left,
lifting its stubborn and coquettish decay above the cotton wagons
and the gasoline pumps—an eyesore among eyesores.

Later we enter the house itself and, eventually, end up inside one particular room. The physical details of the setting become linked with the values, ideals, and attitudes of that place in different times.

Setting can add an important dimension of meaning, reflecting character and embodying theme.

Notice how the details of the setting provide the clues for solving the murder in "A Jury of Her Peers." As a result, they illuminate the deeper meaning of the story.

-Taken from <http://www.learner.org/interactives/literature/read/setting2.html>

V. SENTENCE STRUCTURE & VARIATION

A. Adding sentence variety to prose can give it life and rhythm. Too many sentences with the same structure and length can grow monotonous for readers.

B. Varying sentence style and structure can also reduce repetition and add emphasis. Long sentences work well for incorporating a lot of information, and short sentences can often maximize crucial points. Remember to:

1. Vary the rhythm by alternating short and long sentences.
2. Vary sentence openings.
3. Use literary elements/figurative language to create a visual feast for the reader. Add a metaphor, simile, dialogue for interest.
4. Use **great leads** to hook your readers. A lead is the beginning of the story. It can be a sentence, a paragraph, or even a page long. A great lead catches the reader's attention, enticing them to read more. A great lead adds to the writer's voice and helps the reader connect.

VI. WRITING FICTION

A. Foundations of Fiction:

1. **Setting:** where and when the story takes place.
2. **Characterization:** the method an author uses to reveal characters and their personalities.
3. **Plot:** the action or sequence of events in a story. It is the engine that drives the reader through the story.
4. **Theme:** the statement about life that a writer is trying to get across in a piece of writing. In most cases, the theme will be implied rather than directly spelled out.
5. **Mood:** the overall feeling of the work. The emotions you, the reader, feel while you are reading.
5. **Tone:** the way feelings are expressed through the author's words and details.
6. **Style:** how the author uses words, phrases or sentences to form his or her ideas. Style is also thought of as the qualities and characteristics that distinguish one writer's work from the work of others.
7. **Voice:** indicates whether the subject is acting or being acted upon.

There are two types of voice:

- a. Active voice indicates that the subject of the verb is, has been, or will be doing something. For example, "Baseball great Walter Johnson **pitched** 50 consecutive scoreless innings.
- b. Passive voice indicates that the subject of the verb is being, has been or will be acted upon. For example, "Fifty consecutive scoreless innings were pitched by baseball great Walter Johnson."

WRITING CHARACTER-DRIVEN FICTION: A FEW SUGGESTIONS

1. Know yourself – come to terms with who you are, what has shaped you, your strengths and weaknesses, your secret fantasies, your darkest feelings, your best qualities and essential flaws, neuroses and inner conflicts. Face who you are, warts and all.
2. Create characters you care about – characters who intrigue you, arouse your curiosity, engage you emotionally or intellectually, frighten you, make you laugh, make you cry, make you uncomfortable, characters who feel real and fully dimensional to you.
3. Let your characters take on their own life and surprise you as you write. Editors are looking for the unique, distinctive, flesh-and-blood character that captures our attention, causes us to care what happens, and keeps us turning the pages. Don't try to force the character to fit the plot; search the character's background and personality to see how they might make the story more interesting and credible.
4. Write the character from within, rather than from the outside. External details, action and characteristics are important, to a point. But don't neglect your character's motives and goals, no matter how noble or evil. Know your character from the inside and write from that place, even if you have to go deep into your own private world to do it. What is your character's attitude and world view? Is that being conveyed in the writing?
5. Turn off the censor inside you as you write; take creative and emotional risks. Stop writing to hide who you are, to prove you are something you are not, or to "please" others; find the courage to write freely and honestly, unconcerned about how you might be judged.

-Taken from <http://www.johnmorganwilson.com/character%20driven%20fiction.htm>

Suggested Creative Writing Exercises:

List your best and worst character traits, being both generous and brutally honest with yourself; now do the same for your main character(s).

List your greatest loves and hates, the things in life that most arouse your passion; now do the same for your main character(s).

List your most important goals, ambitions and dreams, the ones you may not dare to speak aloud; now do the same for your main character(s).

List your five greatest fears; now do the same for your main character(s).

Write down the events that have most shaped you and influenced the direction your life has taken, no matter how troubling; do the same for your main character(s).

In a few words, identify the essential inner conflict that has most held you back in life, kept you from "being yourself" or from living life to the fullest. Does this suggest a character you might want to write about, or other story material?

In a private place, alone, sit and close your eyes. Visualize a beautiful forest. You enter the forest on a winding path. As you follow the path, all your senses are alive, seeing, smelling, and hearing everything around you. The path emerges into a clearing, a lovely meadow with a group of people at the center. As you get closer to the people, you see that they are people you have known in your life who have passed on. One by one, you approach and greet each one. What happens between the two of you? What is said? What do you feel? What memories have been opened up by this exercise? What does the experience suggest in terms of deep or buried feelings – and possible story material?