

# Story and Novel Terms

*This list of terms is a building block that will be further developed in future grades. It contains the terms you are responsible for learning in your grade nine year.*

**Short Stories:** A fictional tale of a length that is too short to publish in a single volume like a novel. Short stories are usually between five and sixty pages; as a result, they can be read in a single sitting. Usually, short stories concentrate on a single event with only one or two characters.

The short story has three elements: **plot**, **characterization**, and **setting**. In addition, short stories also contain other devices/features including: **theme**, **conflict**, **point of view**, **suspense**, **foreshadowing**, and **flashback**. Theme is so vital to the short story, however, that some people consider it the fourth element, rather than a device or feature.

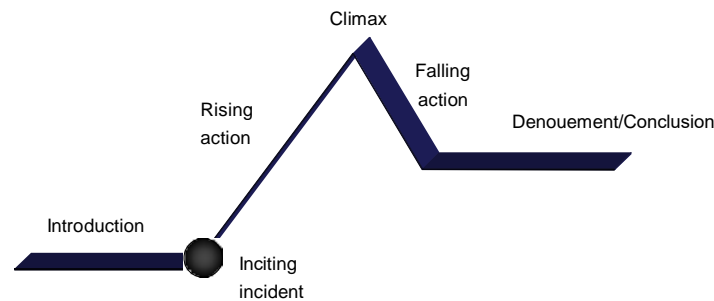
## Short Story Elements

### A. Plot:

The events of the story or the series of actions that make up the story are referred to as the plot. Basically, the plot is what happens in the story. Traditionally, it is divided into five parts.

1. **Introduction:** The reader meets the characters and discovers the setting. Reader interest is aroused here. The conflict that drives the story's action is discovered at the end of the introduction, with the **inciting incident**.
2. **Rising action:** Builds up the story (the longest part)— a series of steps that lead to the climax. You get more information about conflict and character here.
3. **Climax:** Here, the reader finds out what happens to the conflict, or how the conflict might be resolved. The story may not yet be finished, but the reader now has a good understanding of what way it is going to go.
4. **Falling action:** The plot begins to wrap up in this section of the story, which is usually brief.
5. **Denouement/Conclusion/Resolution:** This part follows quickly after the climax and provides the last pieces of information for the reader. "Denouement" is French for "unknotting"; you may therefore think of denouement as the "unknotting" or "untangling" of the plot. Other words for denouement are conclusion or resolution (think about it as the resolution of the climax). However, not all conclusions provide resolution.

**Plot Diagram:** Also known as Freytag's Pyramid, the story diagram or plot diagram, was invented in 1864 by Gustav Freytag to visually represent the five plot parts and their relationship with one another. Modern stories may or may not tidily fit Freytag's Pyramid.



## B. Character

- **Protagonist:** The main character in the story. The protagonist is usually, but not always, a “good guy.”
- **Antagonist:** The force against the protagonist. The antagonist is usually another character, but not always, especially if the conflict is “person against self.” The antagonist is usually described as “the bad guy”, although that description doesn't work if the conflict is person against self or person against environment.
- **Flat:** This is a minor character with one or maybe two sides to the personality. These characters might not seem very realistic or life-like because so little is known about them.
- **Round:** These characters are believable and complex with several sides to their personality. They are lifelike and behave like real people would, if real people were in those same situations.
- **Dynamic:** Also known as a kinetic character, a dynamic character changes in some important way because of plot events. For example: a cruel old man might see the error of his ways and become generous and kind, or a gentle girl becomes vicious and angry because her parents divorce.

- **Static:** These characters are the opposite of dynamic characters. These characters don't change through the course of the story. They have the same personality throughout.
- **Stereotypical:** Also known as **stock**, these characters are ones that are easily recognized as "types". It wouldn't matter in which story they appear, they are always the same. For example, the old witch-like woman, the geeky scientist, the airhead, and the dumb jock characters are all stereotypical, or stock, characters.

**Characterization:** The author may choose any of six ways to reveal a character to the reader. The reader must therefore be prepared to watch for "clues" about each character in these same six ways:

1. physical appearance
2. things the character says
3. things the character does (actions)
4. things the character thinks
5. things other characters say about the character
6. author information

**How authors reveal character:** To make a character seem real, an author provides details that make characters individual and particular. They can do this two ways:

- **direct presentation** - the author tells the reader directly what the character's appearance, manner, and personality is like.
  - Bill was short and fat, and his bald spot was widening with every passing year.
  - "Jane is a cruel person," he said.
  - I looked in the mirror and saw how dark the circles under my green eyes had become.
- **indirect presentation** - a character's personality is revealed by his/her actions, dialogue and interaction with other characters
  - Bill sighed as he looked at the offer of a gym membership. He really should join. But just thinking about it made beads of sweat collect at the top of his bald spot.
  - As Jane walked past the box labeled 'Free Puppies' she furtively glanced around her, then gave the box a swift kick.
  - I yawned, trying to keep my eyes open in the meeting. I reached for my coffee cup and was disappointed to realize it was empty.

**C. Setting:** The author may choose to state the setting clearly or leave it to the reader to infer from textual clues (such as weather). There are two parts to a complete setting:

- **Emotional Setting:** Mood or atmosphere
- **Physical Setting:** Time and place

## Short Story Devices and Features

**A. Theme:** The message of the story stated in one or two complete sentences. When a person describes a story's theme, the person is describing what can be learned about life and/or people from the story. Theme is so important that it is often described as the fourth element of the short story.

**B. Conflict:** Conflict drives the plot forward. The reader discovers the conflict by the end of the introduction with the **inciting incident**, which is an event that demonstrates the conflict to the reader and begins the rising action. There are three different types of conflict:

- person versus person
- person versus self
- person versus environment

**C. Point of View:** The writer selects the point of view from which to tell the story that best suits his/her intentions as a writer

- **First person:** "I" is the central character and tells his or her own story. "I walked to my car, humming to myself."
- **Second person:** The story is told about "you." "You could see the anger in her eyes."
- **Third person:** The story is told using "he" or "she." (For example: Barbara heard a noise behind her. She walked quickly to the car.) Third person (s/he) includes three points of view: omniscient, limited omniscient, and objective.

**D. Flashback:** When a character thinks back to an event that occurred before the story began. Sometimes flashbacks are written as separate "interrupter" sections within a novel or short story.

**E. Foreshadowing:** A hint of events to come.

**F. Suspense:** Anxiety or apprehension resulting from an uncertain, undecided, or mysterious situation. Suspense is how the writer creates excited anticipation of an approaching climax in the reader.

**Style:** writers use many, many different techniques to attract reader interest and attention or to accomplish literary purpose in short stories, novels, poems and plays. Three such techniques are:

- **Irony:** When there is a surprising gap between what might be expected and what actually occurs.
- **Satire:** Style of writing that has the goal of mocking or scorning either an individual, an institution, or society as a whole.
- **Symbolism:** A symbol has two levels of meaning: a literal level and a figurative level. Objects, characters, events and settings can all be symbolic in that they represent something else beyond themselves. E.g. the dove is literally a bird, but has become a universal symbol of peace.

## Novels

Many of the terms associated with short stories are also used in novels, particularly setting, characterization, plot, and theme. The difference between a novel and a short story is in the length and complexity of the narrative. Novels are longer and more complex than short stories; therefore, they take several sittings to read in their entirety.

Novels, like short stories, can be written in different style categories, or genres. A few of the different sub-genres include romance, science fiction, fantasy, or contemporary (there are others beyond these few).