

Glossary of Fiction Terms: English 11

allusion

A brief, direct, or indirect reference to a person, place, or event from history, literature, or mythology that the author hopes or assumes the reader will recognize. Most allusions expand on or develop a significant idea, impression, or mood in the story.

antagonist

The antagonist is the major character or force that opposes the *protagonist*.

antecedent action

'Antecedent' means 'going before,' so antecedent action is the significant action that takes place before the story begins.

anticlimax

An anticlimax is a sudden shift from a relatively serious or elevated mood to one more comic or trivial.

antihero

An antihero is a protagonist who has none of the qualities normally expected of a hero. The term also refers to a humorous take-off on the traditional hero.

atmosphere (or mood)

The atmosphere or mood is the prevailing feeling created by the story. Atmosphere usually sets up expectations in the reader about the outcome of an episode or plot. It is created by descriptive diction, imagery, and sometimes dialogue. Some critics may distinguish between the two terms by referring to the 'atmosphere of a story' and the 'mood created in the reader.'

character

The term refers to both a fictional person in a story and the moral, dispositional, and behavioural qualities of that fiction person. The qualities of a character are generally revealed through dialogue, action, and description. Characters themselves may be classified as *flat* or *round*, *stereotyped* or *realistic*, *static* or *dynamic*. Each classification is described below. See also *foil*.

- A limited, usually minor character with only one apparent quality is a *flat* character. A *round* character is a realistic character with several dimensions
- A *realistic* character is multidimensional and clearly has complex relationships and motivations; a *stereotyped* character is totally predictable, one dimensional, and recognizable to the reader as of a type.

A *dynamic* character, often the protagonist, is a character who undergoes a significant, lasting change, usually in outlook on life. A *static* character, on the other hand, is one who does not change over the course of the story.

characterization

Characterization is the process through which the author reveals to the reader the qualities of a character. In short stories, the author will reveal the character directly (through author comments) and/or indirectly (through the character's speech, thoughts, action, or through how others respond to the character).

character sketch

A character sketch is a short description and analysis of a character's moral, dispositional, and behavioural qualities, including adjectives, specific examples, and quotations from the story.

climax

The climax is the highest point of emotional intensity in a story. It is the major crisis in the story and usually marks the turning point in the protagonist's fortunes (ie, the point of no return).

complicating incident

The event that initiates a conflict is the complicating incident.

conflict

This term refers to the struggle between opposing characters or forces (eg the protagonist(s) and someone or something else). Additional conflicts, in which the protagonist is not involved, may also be found in a short story. Conflict drives the plot forward. Either internal or external conflict can be the main conflict of a story and therefore the primary driver of the plot:

- **Internal Conflict:** Conflict is inside a character in a short story/ novel as an internal struggle.
- **External Conflict:** Conflict is outside a character in a short story/ novel.. External conflict is best described as the adversities faced by the character during the plot. There are four different categories of external conflict:
 - Person versus person
 - Person versus self
 - Person versus environment
 - Person versus the supernatural/machine

contrast (and juxtaposition)

Contrast refers to a difference between two things being compared. Contrast may involve characters, situations, settings, moods, or point of view. Contrast is used to clarify meaning, purpose, or character, or to heighten certain moods. *Juxtapositions* are contrasts in which positioning is important; for example, two contrasting characters may be placed side by side in a story.

crisis

A crisis is a moment of intense conflict. The major crisis of the story is called the *climax*.

dénouement (or resolution)

Dénouement is the French word for 'unknotting' and refers to the 'unknotting' or resolution of the plot or conflict. The dénouement follows the *climax* and constitutes part or all of the *falling action*.

Deus ex machina

Translated from Latin as 'God from a machine,' *deus ex machina* is the sudden and unexpected appearance of a person or thing that provides a contrived solution to an apparently insoluble difficulty.

dialect

Dialect is a manner of speaking or variation on a language peculiar to an individual, a people, a social or economic class, or a geographic region. A dialect differs from the standard language.

dialogue

Dialogue any conversation between two or more characters in a story constitutes a dialogue

diction

Diction is the vocabulary used by a writer. For each story, the writer chooses and arranges word appropriate to the purpose, subject, story type, characters, and style.

dilemma

A dilemma is a situation in which a character must make a choice between two undesirable or equally destructive alternatives. Posing a dilemma is one method an author can use to generate conflict and suspense in a story.

epiphany

Epiphany refers to a moment of significant realization and insight experienced by the protagonist, often at the end of the story.

escapist fiction

This refers to stories written solely to entertain readers, thus helping readers to escape the daily cares and problems of reality. Escapist fiction has lively melodramatic plots and stereotyped or flat characters, and it requires limited involvement on the part of the reader.

exposition

Exposition is the background information provided by the author to further the development of plot, conflict, setting, or character.

falling action

The falling action section immediately follows the *climax* and lasts until the end of the story. See also *plot* and *Freytag's* pyramid.

fantasy

A fantasy is a highly exaggerated or improbable story. As a rule, fantasy has fantastic events, characters, and/or settings not found in real life.

fiction

fiction is any narrative that is imagined or invented.

flashback

A flashback is a sudden switch in the plot from the present to the past. This device may be used to illustrate an important point or to aid in characterization.

foil

A foil is a character whose behaviour, attitudes, and/or opinions contrasts with those of the protagonist. The contrast of the foil helps the reader to understand between the character and motivation of the protagonist.

foreshadowing

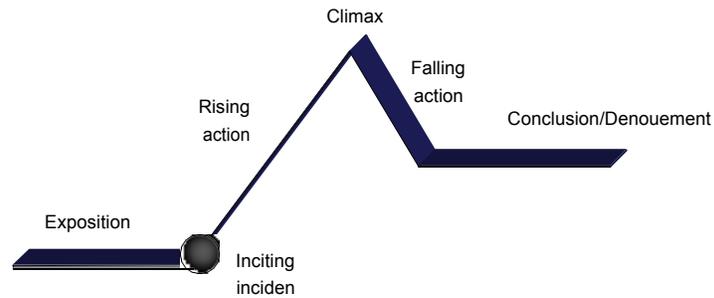
This is a device that hints at or warns of events to happen later in the story. Foreshadowing prepares the reader for the climax, the *dénouement*, or any changes in the protagonist.

form

In literature, form generally means 'type.' It can refer to the more fundamental genres of literary works (poem, novel, short story, essay) or to the way those stories are told (myth, fairy tale, parable). In poetry especially, the term is used to describe even smaller divisions within the poetic form (elegy, epic poem, sonnet) but this is true of fiction as well (fan fiction, mystery).

Freytag's Pyramid (plot diagram)

Also known as a plot diagram, Freytag's pyramid was invented in 1864 by Gustav Freytag to represent the five plot parts and their relationship with one another. Modern stories may or may not tidily fit Freytag's Pyramid. See *plot* for definitions of the parts of the pyramid.



hero

This is a protagonist of a story who possesses heroic qualities, such as courage, virtue, such as honesty. The term 'hero' is not interchangeable with the more general term protagonist.

images (and imagery)

Images are concrete details and figures of speech that help the reader form vivid impressions of the subject and the writing; images usually appeal to any of the five senses. Imagery refers to the pattern on images in a single piece of writing.

indeterminate ending

A story ending in which there is no clear outcome, result, or resolved conflict.

in media res

In media res is a Latin term that refers to readers joining a story 'in the middle of things.'

interpretive fiction

This term refers to stories that have meaningful, usually realistic plots, conflicts, settings, and characters. Interpretive fiction is usually serious in tone and designed to be interpreted. It is instructive, unlike escapist fiction, which is designed chiefly for entertainment.

irony

Irony involves contrast between two elements and, as a literary device, provides depth of meaning and impact. When irony is used, meanings tend to become revealed or contradictory, an effect that we call 'ironic.' There are three common types of irony:

- *Verbal irony* occurs when what a character says contrasts with what the character also or actually means.
- *Dramatic irony* occurs when what a character says or believes contrasts with what the reader or other characters know to be true.
- *Situation irony* occurs when what finally takes place is different from what was expected or seemed appropriate.

metaphor

Metaphor makes an implied comparison between two things that are unrelated but that share common characteristics.

mood See **atmosphere**.

moral

The stated or implied lesson of a story is called the moral. Viewed in isolation, a moral is relatively unimportant part of a story and should not be confused with theme, a far more significant element of fiction.

motivation (and goal)

Motivation is both what causes a character's actions *and* the character's aim or goal in taking that action. The character's temperament and circumstances determine motivation. The pursuit of a goal by the protagonist results in the story's conflict.

Characters must have sufficient and plausible motivation in order for a reader to find the story effective.

narrative

Narrative is another word for 'story.'

narrator

The narrator is the storyteller.

plot

The story line or organization of events or episodes within a story is called the plot. A conventional plot has rising action, a climax, and falling action. See also *Freytag's pyramid*. Traditionally, a plot is divided into five parts.

1. **Exposition:** 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 exposition, 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.

point of view

The point of view is the perspective from which a story is seen or told. Point of view establishes the relationships among author, reader, and characters. The following are the types of points of view:

- *First person narrative* features a character telling the story directly to the reader in the first person. This point of view tells us what the character thinks and feels from a vantage point ‘inside’ the story, from one character’s perspective
- *Limited omniscient* or *third person narrative* occurs when a story is told from ‘outside’ of the characters, but from the perspective of one character. Characters are referred to in the third person and the narrator is limited to knowing the thoughts and feelings of only that one character
- *Omniscient narrative* tells the story with knowledge of the thoughts and feelings of more than one or all of the characters.
- In *objective narrative* the narrator has no special knowledge and the story is factually presented in an unemotional way.
- *Second person narrative* tells the story in an address to the reader. It is the most uncommonly used point of view.

prose

Ordinary language or literary expression not marked by obvious rhythm or rhyme is called prose.

protagonist

The protagonist is the main character of a story from whose viewpoint the story is presented. While some protagonists may be heroes or antiheroes, the term is broader and does not depend on moral judgement of the characters’ actions.

regionalism

Regionalism refers to the detail in a story that is specific to a geographic region or environment. Regionalism develops setting and atmosphere; increases reader interest; adds to authenticity; and includes descriptions of locale, dress, and customs, as well as dialect and ways of thinking and feeling that are characteristic of

people in that setting. Regionalism refers to stories in which setting is of significance to the text and necessary to its purpose.

rising action

Rising action in a story consists of the incidents that precede the climax. During this stage of the story, background information is given, characters and conflicts are introduced, and suspense is built. There may even be a moment of crisis. Typically, the rising action is often longer than the falling action of a story. See also *plot* and *Freytag's pyramid*.

romance

Romances are stories that contain one or more of the following characteristics: fantasy, improbability, extravagance, naiveté, love, adventure, and myth.

satire

Satire is the use of irony to ridicule an idea, a person, or a thing, often with the aim of provoking change. Satire usually targets human foibles or vices.

science fiction

Science fiction is writing that speculates about the effects of technology or science on the future of human beings. While the purpose of some science fiction is purely escapist entertainment, science fiction can be written for a range of serious purposes, too.

setting

The setting is the time and place of a story. While in some stories, setting may only minimally affect the plot, conflict, characters, and theme, in others it can be of great significance and be the main fictional element.

short story

A short story is a brief fictional prose narrative, having one character, a single plot, limited setting, and one main effect.

stereotype

A stereotype is any fixed pattern of plot or character. Stereotypical plots usually fall into the realm of escapist fiction. Stereotyped characters are familiar figures in fiction.

stream of consciousness

Stream of consciousness is a modern narrative technique that attempts to depict the uninterrupted flow of feelings and random thoughts of a character's mind. The author includes details relevant to plot, character, and theme in the apparently natural flow of thoughts and feelings.

style

Style is the individual manner of an author's expression. In fiction, style is usually determined by such grammatical and sensory aspects such as diction, grammar, and images.

symbol

A symbol is something that stands for or represents something else. Characters, objects, events, and settings can all be symbolic.

theme

The theme is the central idea of the story, usually implied rather than directly stated. It is a story's observation about life or human nature, and should not be confused with the moral.

tone

Tone is the attitude of the author towards the subject or the reader and is conveyed through diction and/or approach to the theme. Tone can be serious, sarcastic, formal, informal, sad, and so on.

universality

Universality is the quality of a story that gives it relevance beyond the narrow confines of its particular characters, subject, or setting. Stories that have universality reveal human nature or common truths of life experience.

verisimilitude

Verisimilitude is a lifelike quality possessed by a story as revealed through plot, setting, conflict, and characterization.

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