

- Why can't all characters be round and dynamic? Engage students in a discussion on characters. Explore why many stories feature some characters that are round and dynamic and other characters that are static and flat. Is there a benefit to having some characters that are static and flat? Why not devote more effort to developing those characters? Select a flat and static character from a novel that is well-known by all students and challenge them to get creative and write a character sketch that portrays the character in a multi-dimensional way. Students can share their work and will enjoy hearing different takes on the same character.
- In small groups, have students select a type of conflict (e.g., character vs. character, character vs. self) and generate a list of related novels and short stories. Students can post their lists around the room for all to see. As a class, study these lists with the following questions in mind: Are there any works of fiction that feature more than one type of conflict? Do any themes seem to resonate with certain conflicts?
- Introduce students to an O. Henry short story, such as "The Gift of the Magi" or "The Ransom of Red Chief." As students read, ask them to think about how the plot unfolds and the conflict is resolved. Poll the class when they are done reading to determine who was surprised by the ending. Introduce students to the concept of situational irony. Discuss how this influences the plot and how it can be depicted in a traditional plot diagram. As an extension, students can model the style of O. Henry and write their own short story containing situational irony.
- Not all works of fiction fit the traditional plot structure, which consists of an upward slope, a peak and then a downward slope. In some instances, authors experimenting with plot may eliminate some of the traditional plot components in order to focus on another element, such as character, or they may opt to rearrange the structure so that, for example, the climax occurs first and it is followed the rising action. Discuss with students why an author may choose to experiment in these ways and then generate a list of fiction works with interesting plot structures. Have each student select a text from the list and design a plot diagram of their own that effectively expresses how the events of the story unfold. Students can share their plot diagrams and explain their rationale for their design.

Suggested Resources

Periodically, Internet and print resources are updated on our web site at www.LibraryVideo.com.

- www.bibliomania.com/0/5/frameset.html
Bibliomania presents a comprehensive listing of short stories, including those of O. Henry, Mark Twain and Anton Chekhov.

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- www.readwritethink.org/student_mat/index.asp
The Student Materials Index of ReadWriteThink presents a variety of engaging interactive tools that can students can use in their study of literature. There are animated plot diagrams and much more!
- www.emints.org/ethemes/resources/S00001277.shtml
This online thematic unit can be adapted to many different grade levels and explores the theme of friendship in literature.
- Roser, Nancy L., Miriam G. Martinez, Junko Yukota and Sharon O'Neal. *What A Character!: Character Study as a Guide to Literary Meaning Making in Grades K-8*. International Reading Association, Newark, DE; 2005.

Novels and Short Stories Featured in Elements of Fiction

- Avi. *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*. New York: Orchard, 1990.
- Baum, L. Frank. *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. New York: Signet Classics, 2006.
- Connell, Richard. *The Most Dangerous Game* in *Introduction to the Short Story*, ed. Crosby E. Redman (New York: McCormick-Mathers, 1965), 18-44.
- Sachar, Louis. *Holes*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1998.
- Speare, Elizabeth George. *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958.
- Taylor, Mildred D. *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*. New York: Dial Books, 1976.

TEACHER'S GUIDE

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TITLES IN THIS SERIES

- ANALYZING & APPRECIATING POETRY
- ANALYZING FICTION
- ANALYZING NONFICTION
- ELEMENTS OF FICTION
- GENRES OF FICTION

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ELEMENTS OF FICTION

Grades 5-9

At the middle school level, students have already been introduced to some basic elements and characteristics of literature. They have been called upon to organize and communicate their understanding of what they read as well as express their own opinions. *Literature for Students* reinforces these skills and challenges students to approach them with a more critical eye. This series journeys through fiction, nonfiction and poetry and explores important elements and characteristics of each. By examining interesting excerpts by a diverse group of authors and sharing one-on-one moments with the hosts as they reflect on their own interests and experiences with literature, students will be challenged to analyze how language is used, how ideas are organized and the many ways in which people connect with and appreciate these different forms of literature.



Program Summary

Fiction, whether it is a short story or novel, consists of several key elements — setting, character, plot and theme. All of the details — the location, the personalities of the characters, the order in which events occur and the conflicts that arise — blend together to bring the author's vision to life.

In fiction, setting refers to the place and time in which a story occurs. Place can refer to a geographic region, an area of a town or even a specific building. Time can refer to the historical period, time of year, day of the week or even time of the day. Setting helps to establish a story's boundaries. It influences what the characters know and do. Additionally, setting can contribute to the mood of a story. This can be established through the language and style of descriptions in the text. Setting and mood can also change over the course of a book.

Characters are essential elements that help to breathe life into a story. It is helpful to know what types of characters there are and to think about why an author chose to develop certain characters in certain ways. The protagonist is the central, focal figure in a work of fiction. It is this character that readers often identify with and cheer on as he/she struggles against antagonizing forces. A story's protagonist and other lead characters are typically round and dynamic in that they are fully developed and change as a result of their experience. Other characters might be less developed in that they are static and flat. Characterization is the way in which an author reveals the personality of a character. This can be done directly or indirectly.

Plot refers to the arrangement, or sequence of events within a story. Driving the events of every story — from fairy tale to epic — is some sort of conflict that the protagonist must resolve or overcome. There are several different types of conflict. In each one, the protagonist is pitted against some form of opposition. This can be another character, a force of nature, the greater society or even the protagonist's own self. Interestingly, many stories contain multiple conflicts. A plot diagram is one way in which a reader can visualize the movement of events within a work of fiction. From the exposition to the story's rising action, we meet the characters and become wrapped up in the conflict as events unfold and build. The climax occurs with the conflict peaks and then falls, leading to the resolution of the conflict and the conclusion of the story. Keep in mind, though, that not all tales follow this careful sequencing of events. A story's action may rise and fall many times with lots of twists and turns. Some conflicts may be left unresolved or result in an unexpected twist.

In fiction, there is usually a common thread of meaning that weaves through the other elements of a story and gives them greater substance. That thread is the theme — the idea or ideas that hold a story together. Popular fiction themes include good versus evil, struggling to fit in and surviving in the wilderness. And just as some works of fiction contain multiple conflicts, authors may also thread their stories with multiple themes.

Vocabulary

setting — The time and place in which a story takes place.

mood — The atmosphere or feeling of a literary work. The setting can contribute to establishing the mood of a story.

characters — The individuals whose thoughts and actions make up a story. The actions of the characters make up the events of the story.

protagonist — The central, focal figure in a work of fiction.

antagonist — A character or force that works against the protagonist, creating obstacles. A story can have more than one antagonist.

round characters — Characters that are fully developed with both positive qualities and flaws. Most protagonists are round characters.

dynamic characters — Characters that undergo change over the course of a story as a result of their experience. Most protagonists are dynamic.

static characters — Characters that do not undergo any change from the story's inception to its conclusion.

flat characters — Characters that are stereotypical and one-dimensional. They are simple with limited personality traits.

characterization — Methods used by an author to develop a character. Characterization can be direct in that the author clearly states what the characters look like, say and do. With indirect characterization, the author reveals a character by showing something about him or her.

plot — The arrangement, or sequence, of events within a story.

conflict — An obstacle, struggle or controversy that the protagonist must resolve to overcome.

character vs. character — A conflict in which the protagonist has a problem with another character.

character vs. nature — A conflict in which the protagonist must struggle against a harsh environment or natural disaster.

character vs. society — A conflict in which the protagonist faces a problem with a part or the whole of society (e.g., government, tradition, laws).

character vs. self — A conflict in which the protagonist is at odds with an internal problem, such as fear, shyness or guilt.

character vs. fate — A conflict in which the protagonist struggles with a force that seems beyond the character's control.

subplot — A second story within the main plot of a story.

exposition — In fiction, the plot normally begins with exposition. Characters are introduced and background information is provided to better understand the events of the story.

foreshadowing — The use of clues early in a story to give hints about events that will happen later.

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rising action — A series of events and conflict involving the story's characters that leads to the climax.

climax — The turning point of a story. It is when the conflict is most intense, either internally or in action.

falling action — Also referred to as denouement, it is the action that follows the climax and leads to the resolution.

resolution — The conclusion of the story. It is when the conflict is finally resolved.

situational irony — An unexpected twist in the resolution of a story. The story concludes in a way opposite from what the reader may expect.

theme — The idea or ideas that weave the characters, setting and events together.

Pre-viewing Discussion

- “You can't judge a book by its cover.” Discuss the meaning of the well-known phrase and its relevance to literature and to life in general. Invite students to share experiences in which a book surprised them and describe how reading a book allowed them to expand or revise their predictions about the story.
- Review the basic elements of character, setting and plot by asking students to redesign the covers of their favorite fiction novels. Instruct them to include depictions of the setting, key characters and important parts of the plot in their illustrations. Students can share the details of their colorful book covers with the class.

Follow-up Discussion & Activities

- Examine the ways in which setting influences a story. Have students rewrite a favorite short story, but instead of simply retelling it, ask them to change the story's setting first. For example, how might a story set in Europe during the Middle Ages change so that it can be retold in a setting that is 200 years in the future? Discuss the details that would have to be manipulated so that the story's events unfold effectively in this new setting.
- Use a Venn diagram to compare and contrast well-known fictional characters. In addition to their basic traits, consider their flaws and the ways in which these characters may have changed over the course of the story. As an extension, students can visit readwritethink.org/materials/trading_cards/ to create character trading cards.
- Have students draw their take on a favorite scene from a work of fiction. As they do this, instruct them to consider the author's details about the setting and how it made them feel. Place the characters in the scene as well. Ask them to think about their reaction to this scene and with whom they related. Is this reflected in their drawing? If it is, then in what way is this depicted? If not, then how could they show this in their work?

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