

Important Fiction Terms

Please try to deploy these terms when writing about novels and short stories.

Story: a description of a set of events. Some events might be fully narrated and others might be inferred. Sometimes our inference about story events turns out to be incorrect (because of the plot's structure) and the ending of a short story or novel may cause us to reevaluate what we assume has happened.

Plot: While the **story** includes all of the events we are told about and the events we readers infer in chronological order, the plot includes only what we are told and the order in which we are told it. Choosing to omit or delay a crucial event in a story is one way that writers shape narrative. The shape a writer chooses is called a plot's **structure**. The shape can resemble a straight line forward or backward, or a zigzag back and forth in time, or anything else you can imagine.

Setting: the when and where – provides the atmosphere and context of a story

Character: every story must include at least one character. Can be human or an animated/personified nonhuman. Sometimes you can't be sure if a character is human or not.

- **Minor characters** are usually undeveloped in comparison to...
- **Principal characters**

Narration: the telling of the story through a particular point of view. Types:

- **First-person:** usually identified with the pronoun "I"
 - When the story is narrated in the first person, especially when the narrator is character in the story, you may have reason to mistrust or doubt the narrator's objectivity.
 - **Partially unreliable narrators** seem a little misleading
 - **Wholly unreliable narrators** are clearly not objectively telling the story
- **Second-person:** the narrator addresses the reader directly as "you"
- **Third-person:** different degrees of "inside knowledge" are referred to as range of narration
 - **Third-person omniscient** (or all-knowing) narrators stand outside the story world and observe actions of characters.
 - **Third-person limited** narrators have selective omniscience, meaning that they focus on one character, setting, time, etc.
 - **Free indirect discourse** means that a third-person narrator seems to be inside one or more characters' heads; the narrator reproduces inner thoughts and perceptions primarily as narration rather than through dialogue.
 - When this happens, the narration is called **internal monologue**
 - When the monologue seems to be imitating unformed, natural cognition, it can be called **stream-of-consciousness**

Imagery: a vivid, visual form of description

Symbolism: the use of an image whose meaning has become fixed, either through convention or repeated use in a story (i.e. a rose symbolizes love, to point we could call it a **cliché**)

Diction: word choice, phrasing, formality or informality of style

Tone: an author's attitude toward the subject matter; what emotions (or lack of emotions) come through in the way a story is told (examples of tone: flat, matter-of-fact, exuberant, remorseful, editorial, angry, anticipatory, bitter, hopeless, foreboding, etc.)