



Elements of Fiction

Important notice



At the end of this presentation, there is a link to a Microsoft Forms quiz. It is recommended that you score 80% or higher.

Please take your time viewing and studying this material before you proceed with the quiz.

Objectives

- To learn how to identify and interpret plot, setting, characters, point of view, tone, diction, style, and theme.
- To acquire the tools to critically interpret and analyze the key elements of fiction.
- To draw connections between the elements of fiction in a story.

Fiction

“Literature in the form of prose, especially novels, that describes imaginary events and people” (Oxford Dictionary).

Key Elements of Fiction

They are the components that make up a work of fiction.
When the reader is able to perceive them, they can develop
literary judgment.

Setting

“[It is] the total physical environment of the story. It is the time and circumstances that form the background of a story” (López 1).

It includes place, time, weather, political, social and/or religious climate, local or national factors. Settings may do more than create an illusion of reality; they can be symbolic or can serve metaphorically as an expression or extension of a character.

The setting also creates the **atmosphere**, the emotional effect, of a story.

Setting

When analyzing the setting of a story, ask yourself:

- Where does the story take place? Does it take place in a specific country or place?
- When does the story take place? Does it take place in the present, the past, or the future?
- What role does it play in the story?
- How does the setting affect the character and plot?

Plot

“**[T]he way in which a story’s events are arranged**” shaped by the **interaction between characters and events** (Kirszner and Mandell 39). The traditional plot structure follows the order below.

1. EXPOSITION

An introduction that gives the reader important background information.

2. RISING ACTION

When the conflict is introduced.

3. CLIMAX

The turning point of the story.

4. FALLING ACTION

When the tension subsides, and the action moves to an end.

5. RESOLUTION

The outcome of the story.



Ways to Create a Plot

Although there are various ways to do this, two of the most commonly used are:

- **Chronological Order** entails a series of interrelated events that traditionally occur from the beginning of a story to the end.
- In *In Media Res*, the story begins in the middle of the plot. This method employs flashbacks that are often used as interruptions to relate to an action that has already occurred.

Plot

When analyzing the plot of a story, ask yourself:

- What is the structure of the story?
- In what way was the plot created?
- What are the major events?
- What is the conflict of the story?

Characters

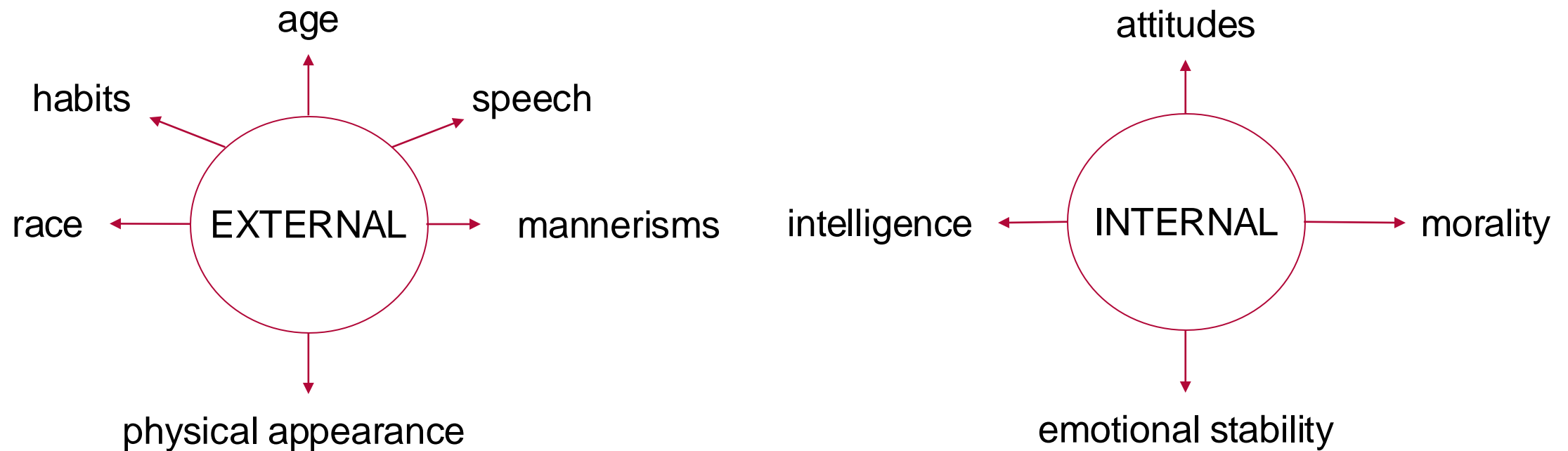
“[P]eople who carry out the action ... may refer to the person in a work of fiction or to the characteristics of a person” (López 2).

They have specific moral, psychological, and physical traits or characteristics in accordance with their role in the story. Characters can be:

- **Static** (they do not change throughout the story) or **dynamic** (they change throughout the story).
- **Flat** (they only have a few personality traits) or **round** (they have many and complex personality traits).

Characters

The author provides information about the characters through **external** and **internal** characteristics:



Characters

When analyzing the characters of a story, ask yourself:

- Who are the characters?
- What are their characteristics (external and internal)?
- How are they described?
 - Are they described through dialogue or interaction with other characters?
 - Are they described by the way they speak?
 - Are they described through their thoughts and feelings?
- Are they static or dynamic? Are they flat or round?

Author's Intentions

An important part of analyzing fiction is identifying the author's intentions. The key elements of fiction that help the reader identify them are:

- Point of view
- Tone
- Diction and style

Point of View

The **narrator** is the person who tells the story. The **point of view** is the angle from which the story is told because it is the lens through which the author chooses to tell the story. The two main categories for the point of view are:

First person point of view	Third person point of view
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The narrator speaks from a first-person perspective, "I."• Must not be confused with the author.• The reader sees the events through the eyes of the first-person.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The narrator tells the story using "he," "she," or "they."• The narrator is aware of the thoughts, feelings and motivations of the characters.

Point of View

When analyzing a work of fiction, it is important to learn about the author's life and previous literary works to better understand how they have influenced his/her stories. Ask yourself:

- When and where was the author born?
- What crucial event has the author experienced?
- What are the common themes in his/her literary works?

Tone

This element embodies the attitude of the author toward his/her subject matter.

When analyzing the tone of a story, notice the author's sentiments towards the characters, the narrator and the subject matter:

- Does the author express sympathy, hostility, admiration, or sadness toward the narrator or a specific character(s) in the story?
- How does the author feel about an idea or a concept?
Does the author express sarcasm, indifference, curiosity, excitement, fear, or any other attitude toward the subject matter?

Diction and Style

This element encapsulates the way that words are chosen and arranged in order to convey meaning. The reader also receives important information from this element through the following:

- the length and structure of the sentences.
- the use of symbolism.

A symbol is “a person, object, action, place, or event that, in addition to its literal meaning, suggests a more complex meaning or range of meanings” (Kriszner and Mandell 192).

Diction and Style (continued)

- the use of figurative language.

Examples:

Simile	Metaphor	Personification
When two unlike elements are compared, usually connected by words such as “like” or “as.”	A comparison between two things without using “like” or “as.”	Human qualities are given to inanimate things, abstractions or animals.
<u>They laughed like locusts.</u>	<u>Kisses are the flowers of affection.</u>	<u>The dog smiled as he ate the food he had been asking for all day.</u>

Diction and Style

When analyzing the diction and style of a story, ask yourself:

- What type of words (diction) does the author use?
- Is there a recurring type of sentence-structure used in the story?
- What kind of symbols are present in the story?
- What type of figurative language does the author use?

Theme

The theme is “a general idea that extends beyond the story and applies to the world outside fiction”(Kirszner and Mandel, 225). This element typically reflects the author’s thoughts and feelings about a topic. It also examines human nature.

Theme

When analyzing the theme of a story, ask yourself:

- What is the main idea or message of the story?
- How is the theme presented in the story?
- What evidence from the text can you use to support it?
- How can you express the theme of a story in one complete sentence?
- Are there any secondary themes in the story?

Exercise: Identify the Elements of Fiction

Read the micro fiction story, “Happiest Moment”, by Lydia Davis and identify the **key elements** discussed in this module.

If you ask her what is a favorite story she has written, she will hesitate for a long time and then say it may be this story that she read in a book once: an English language teacher in China asked his Chinese student to say what was the happiest moment in his life. The student hesitated for a long time. At last he smiled with embarrassment and said that his wife had once gone to Beijing and eaten duck there, and she often told him about it, and he would have to say the happiest moment of his life was her trip, and the eating of the duck.

Exercise: Identify the Elements of Fiction

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EXPOSITION

RISING ACTION

CLIMAX

FALLING ACTION

RESOLUTION

The micro fiction story follows the **traditional structure** of a plot.

The method of presentation of this micro fiction story is ***in media res*** because it is narrated using flashbacks.

Exercise: Identify the Elements of Fiction

Setting	Implicit, but one can deduce two places: 1) somewhere in the United States; 2) a classroom in China.
Characters	The woman who answers the question, the English language teacher, the Chinese student, and his wife.
Point of view	Third person point of view because the narrator tells the story using “she” and “he.”
Tone	Positive, heartwarming and nostalgic.
Diction and Style	There is no use of figurative language, but the duck is an emblematic representation of a highly-esteemed gastronomic delight in China.
Theme	The micro fiction story, “Happiest Moment,” by Lydia Davis explores the idea of finding happiness vicariously.

Works Cited

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After completing the module, click on the following link to take the quiz and send the report to your professor:

<https://forms.office.com/r/12BEMs5wED>

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