

Module: English Literature First Year

Lesson One: Fictional Prose

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Introduction:

There are three types of literary texts: **Fiction/Prose, Drama** and **Poetry**.

1) What is fiction?

Fiction or fictional prose is a narrative type of literature that is primarily based on imaginary events, characters and setting. The main purpose of fiction is to entertain the reader. It also often aims to tell certain truths and deliver hidden messages about a given subject such as society, political issues, the position of women etc.

2) What is non-fiction?

Non-fiction on the other hand is based on facts and real events.

There are two types of Fictional Prose: these are **Short Story** and **Novel**.

I. What is a short story:

It is a brief or a short form of narrative prose. A short story can be read in a single sitting and it involves fewer characters and one plot.

II. What is a novel?

A novel is a long form of fictional prose. It narrates individual experiences of characters, creating conflicts and showing how these characters tackle complex events and the world they live in.

III. How is a short story different from a novel ?

One major difference between a novel and a short story is that a short story is concise, it focuses on one main event or incident, has fewer characters and can be read in one single sitting. A novel, on the other hand, is long in form, has many characters and often explores many events or plots.

IV. Literary elements.

Short stories and novels share some basic literary elements such as **setting, plot, conflict, characters** and **point of view**.

1. **Setting:**

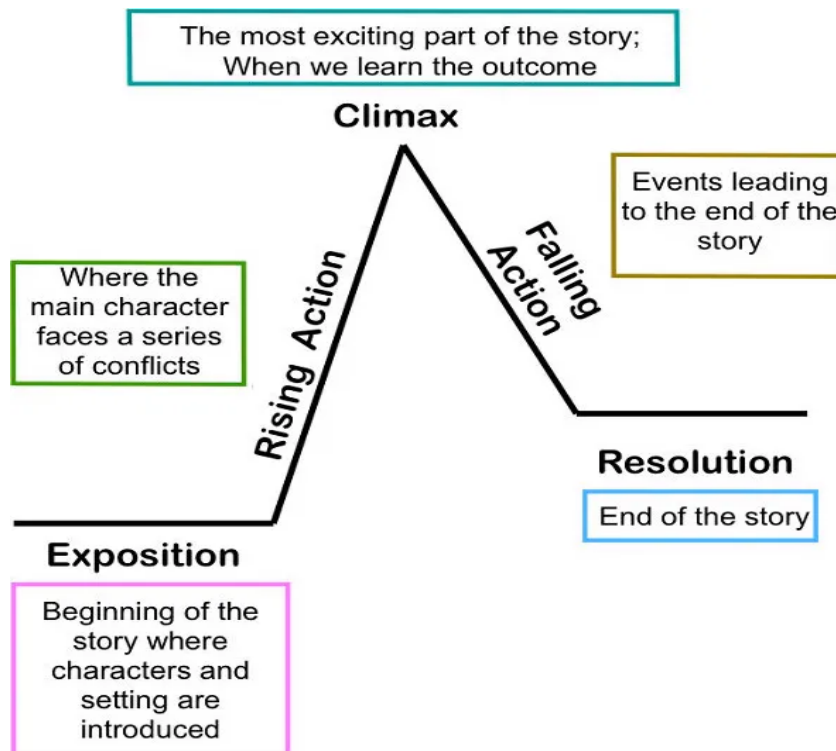
The setting of a piece of literature is the time and place in which the story takes place. For example, the events of the famous novel *Jane Eyre* (1847) by Charlotte Bronte is 19th century, Northern England. The time is the 19th century and the place is Northern England. Weather conditions can also be considered as a part of a setting for example, stormy weather, rainy or sunny weather.

2. **Plot:**

The plot is the sequence of events that make up a story. It is simply what happens in the story. It has a beginning, middle and end. There are five essential parts of a plot:

Introduction	the beginning of the story where the characters and setting are revealed.
Rising Action	this is the stage where the events in the story become complicated and the conflict of the story is revealed.
Climax:	This is the highest point of tension in a storyline. It is often depicted by a confrontation between the protagonist and antagonist.
Falling Action	at this stage, the events and complications begin to resolve themselves.

The diagram below summarises the five parts of the plot.



Conflict:

The third literary device of a novel or short story is conflict. Of course, a conflict is an essential part of a story and without a conflict there is no plot. A Conflict can be any sort of opposition that faces the protagonist. As such, this conflict can be either external or internal.

- a) **External Conflict:** is a conflict between the protagonist and something external.
 - **Protagonist against external entity:** the protagonist can get into a conflict with a human being, an animal, a monster etc.
 - **Protagonist against fate:** the protagonist can get into a conflict with destiny or circumstances of life facing him or her.
 - **Protagonist against Society:** the protagonist can struggle against their society's values, practices or ideas
 - **Protagonist against nature:** protagonist struggles against natural forces such as natural disasters.
- b) **Internal Conflict:** an internal conflict is a struggle within one's self. The protagonist struggles against himself or herself, against their ideas, their regrets, sorrows, beliefs etc.

1. Characters:

There are different types of characters in literature and different ways in which they are portrayed:

Protagonist (hero/heroine):	this the main character of the story with whom we usually identify.
Antagonist (villain):	the character that actively opposes the protagonist and creates problems for them.
Foil character:	this is the character that presents opposite traits to the protagonist. This is usually a supporting character that is used to make the main character stand out.

Characters are portrayed in different ways; we can have flat characters and round characters.

Flat characters/Static characters	this kind of character is a static character that has no depth and no complex emotions. They experience no change in their personality. For example: in William Shakespeare's play <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> (1597), Juliet's mother is a flat character.
Round character/Dynamic character	this is a major character in the story who often undergoes transformation throughout the story. Elizabeth Bennett in Jane Austen's <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> (1813) is an example of a round character.

Narrator and Point of View:

The **narrator** is the person who tells the story

Point of view is the perspective from which the story is told.

Types of narrators/Point of View:

- **First Person narrator/Point of View:** here, the story is told by the protagonist or other characters using the pronouns “I”, “me”, “we” and “us”. In other words, the story is told from the narrator’s perspective.
- **Third person narrators/points of view:** here; the writer tells the story in third person using pronouns like “they”, “she”, “he”, “it”, etc. Below are types of third person narrator/Point of view.

Omniscient:	an omniscient narrator has full knowledge of the events of a story and has free access to the thoughts, motives of various characters.
Limited narrator	this is another kind of third person narrator. Here the writer sticks to only one character. This means that the events are told from the point of view of a single character. Also, the narrator does not know everything about the story or the other characters and this leaves the reader in suspense.
Objective:	the story is told in third person. Here, the narrator remains neutral and presents the story with an observational tone. This means that the narrator only tells us what they see. They cannot enter the minds of other characters.

6) Characterization: Characterization refers to the manner in which the writer presents or describes the characters’ personality. For example, J.D. Salinger in *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951) characterizes Holden as a dynamic character. The story’s ending shows that Holden has started to realize that he cannot freeze time and must deal with his grief.

7) Foreshadowing: this element is used by the writer to give a hint at what is to come in the narrative of the story through presenting a particular scene or image earlier in the narrative.

8) Symbolism: this refers to when an object, an idea or a person represents something beyond their actual meaning in the story. For example, in his play *Macbeth* (1623), William Shakespeare uses blood both real and imagined as a symbol of guilt both of Macbeth and lady Macbeth. Another symbol used in the play is a raven, which usually represents ill fortune.

9) Allegory: refers to a work in which almost all of the characters are intended as symbols. One of the best examples of Allegory can be found in the famous work of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945). *Animal Farm* is a story about farm animals that rebel against their farmer. The underlying story, however, concerns the writer's disillusionment in the corruption of governments. The dogs for example are used as symbols to show how governments use military force to intimidate society.

