**Creative Writing 20: Introduction to Fiction**

In this unit we will be experimenting with a variety of different types of fiction genres (see the various genres pictured left). When crafting our stories we will pay special attention to the elements of fiction: *characters*, *plot, setting, theme, point of view, tone, style, dialogue, description, and conflict.* Revision is an important part of the writing process – we will be sharing our writings with each other and giving one another feedback so that we can improve and polish our pieces.

Throughout this unit students will regularly hand in their notebooks for assessment and feedback, so it is important that everyone complete their assigned writings promptly. We will have regular coffee houses to share our works. In addition, students are expected to hand in \_\_\_\_ polished, typed, pieces of writing (see rubric) that will be assessed under the “polished pieces” of writing category.

**Instructions for the Fiction Module**

1. Read over this handout and familiarize yourself with the types of genres and review the elements of fiction.

2. We will be doing class writing exercises daily in our notebooks. Be sure to properly LABEL and DATE all of your writings in the CORRECT ORDER that we complete them in (an ongoing list will be updated to [www.msgerrard.weebly.com](http://www.msgerrard.weebly.com) password: wolverine). If you miss a day, update your notebook so that you leave space to complete missed writings.

**Elements of Fiction**

**TIER 1:** The TOP 3 elements of fiction are: character, plot, and setting, as these three answer the questions of *who*[character], *what*& *how* [plot], and *where*& *when*[setting]. Character motivation and/or theme can be called upon to answer the *why*question.

**1.  CHARACTER**

There are two meanings for the word character:   
1) The person in a work of fiction.   
2) The characteristics of a person.

***Persons in a work of fiction*** -***Antagonist and Protagonist***

* One character is clearly central to a story with all major events having some connection to this character
* She/he is the PROTAGONIST
* The character in opposition to the main character is called the ANTAGONIST

***The Characteristics of a Person***  
In order for a story to seem real to the reader, its characters must seem real.  Characterization is the information the author gives the reader about the characters themselves.  The author may reveal a character in several ways:   
a)  his/her physical appearance   
b)  what he/she says, thinks, feels and dreams   
c)  what he/she does or does not do   
d)  what others say about him/her and how others react to him/her

Characters are convincing if they are:  consistent, motivated and life-like (resemble real people)

***Characters are...***   
1.  **Individual** - round, many sided and complex personalities.   
2.  **Developing** - dynamic, many sided personalities that change (for better or worse) by the end of the story.   
3.  **Static** – Stereotypes; they have one or two characteristics that never change and are often over-emphasized.

**2.  PLOT**

A plot is a causal sequence of events, the "why" for the things that happen in the story.  The plot draws the reader into the characters’ lives and helps the reader understand the choices that the characters make.

A plot's structure is the way in which the story elements are arranged. Writers vary structure depending on the needs of the story.  For example, in a mystery, the author will withhold plot exposition until later in the story.

**What Goes into a Plot?**

Narrative tradition calls for developing stories with particular pieces -plot elements - in place.

* 1. **Exposition:** The background information. The reader is often told where and when the story occurs; introduces the character(s).
  2. **Complication:** The problem, issue, or complication within the short story. What the climax will lead up to.
  3. **Rising Action:** The part of the story that develops the problem, or conflict, though a series of events that build interest and/or suspense.
  4. **Climax:** The point in the story where the conflict is at its peak, when the conflict has reached its crisis and one of the two forces “wins”.
  5. **Resolution:** The conclusion of the story, the unfolding of the theme, the “happy ending”, the tying together; what occurs in the resolution depends on the kind of story and the author’s purpose.

It's not always a straight line from the beginning to the end of story.  Sometimes, there is a shifting of time and this is the way we learn what happened and why; it keeps us interested in the story.  But, good stories always have all the plot elements in them.

**3. SETTING**

Writers describe the world they know.  Sights, sounds, colors and textures are all vividly painted in words as an artist paints images on canvas.  A writer imagines a story to be happening in a place that is rooted in his or her mind.  The location of a story's actions, along with the time in which it occurs, is the setting.

Setting is created by language.  How many or how few details we learn is up to the author.  Many authors leave a lot of these details up to the reader's imagination.

Some or all of these aspects of setting should be considered when examining a story:

a)  **place** - geographical location.  Where is the action of the story taking place?   
b)  **time** - When is the story taking place? (historical period, time of day, year, etc.)   
c)  **weather conditions** - Is it rainy, sunny, stormy, etc?   
d)  **social conditions** - What is the daily life of the characters like? Does the story contain local colour (writing that focuses on the speech, dress, mannerisms, customs, etc. of a particular place)?   
e)  **mood or atmosphere** - What feeling is created at the beginning of the story?  Is it bright and cheerful or dark and frightening?

**TIER 2:** A story will probably have a **theme**, but it doesn’t require one to make it a story. (You could argue it needs one to make a *good*story, but a story can stand without an apparent theme.) **Point of view** is obviously important since every story has one. **Style**—what the author brings to a story—and **tone**—the story’s own personality—are both important for fiction. They’re so important that a change in either can steer a story on a different course than first intended.

**4. THEME**

What exactly is this elusive thing called theme?

The theme of a fable is its moral.  The theme of a parable is its teaching.  The theme of a piece of fiction is its view about life and how people behave.

In fiction, the theme is not intended to teach or preach.  In fact, it is not presented directly at all.  You extract it from the characters, action and setting that make up the story.  In other words, you must figure out the theme yourself.

The writer's task is to communicate on a common ground with the reader.  Although the particulars of your experience may be different from the details of the story, the general underlying truths behind the story may be just the connection that both you and the writer are seeking.

**Here are some ways to uncover the theme in a story**:

* Check out the title.  Sometimes it tells you a lot about the theme.
* Notice repeating patterns and symbols.  Sometimes these lead you to the theme.
* What allusions are made throughout the story?
* What are the details and particulars in the story?  What greater meaning may they have?

Remember that theme, plot and structure are inseparable, all helping to inform and reflect back on each other.  Also, be aware that a theme we determine from a story never completely explains the story.  It is simply one of the elements that make up the whole.

**5.  POINT OF VIEW**

Remember, someone is always between the reader and the action of the story.  That someone is telling the story from his or her own point of view.  This angle of vision, the point of view from which the people, events and details of a story are viewed, is important to consider when reading a story.

**Types of Point of View:**

***Objective Point of View***  
With the objective point of view, the writer tells what happens without stating more than can be inferred from the story's action and dialogue.  The narrator never discloses anything about what the characters think or feel, remaining a detached observer.

***Third Person Point of View***  
Here the narrator does not participate in the action of the story as one of the characters, but lets us know exactly how the characters feel. We learn about the characters through this outside voice.

***First Person Point of View***In the first person point of view, the narrator does participate in the action of the story.  When reading stories in the first person, we need to realize that what the narrator is recounting might not be the objective truth.  We should question the trustworthiness of the accounting.

***Omniscient and Limited Omniscient Points of View***  
A narrator who knows everything about all the characters is all knowing, or omniscient.

A narrator whose knowledge is limited to one character, either major or minor, has a limited omniscient point of view.

**6.  TONE**

In [literature](http://www.blurtit.com/q304642.html), tone is the emotional colouring or the emotional meaning of the work and provides an extremely important contribution to the full meaning.  In spoken language, it is indicated by the inflection of the speaker's voice. The emotional meaning of a statement may vary widely according to the tone of voice with which it is uttered; the tone may be ecstatic, incredulous, despairing, resigned, etc.   
  
In poetry, we cannot really understand a poem unless we have accurately sensed whether the attitude it manifests is playful or solemn, mocking or reverent, calm or excited.  In spoken language, the speaker's voice can guide us to the tone.  But, the correct determination of tone in literature is a much more delicate matter.  Elements of tone include diction, or word choice; syntax, the grammatical arrangement of words in a text for effect; imagery, or vivid appeals to the senses; details, facts that are included or omitted.  According to Harry Shaw (*Dictionary of Literary Terms*), tone can be determined by three points:  
  
1.  An author's attitude or focus point toward his/her subject.  In this concern, the tone can be realistic, somber, depressing, romantic, adventurous, etc.  
2.  The devices used to create the mood and atmosphere of a [literary work](http://www.blurtit.com/q304642.html).  In this sense, the tone consists of alliteration, assonance, consonance, diction, imagery, metre, theme, symbolism, irony, etc.  
3.  The musical quality in language.  Here, the tone depends upon the sounds of words, their arrangement and their sequence.

**7. STYLE** (also known as VOICE)

Style is the way a writer chooses words (diction), arranges them in sentences and longer units of discourse (syntax) and exploits their significance. Style is the verbal identity of a writer, as unmistakable as his or her face or voice. Reflecting their individuality, writers’ styles convey their unique ways of seeing the world.

**TIER 3:  Dialogue** and **description** are what writers use to address the five W’s, to show character, plot, and setting. **Conflict** can share the third tier with dialogue and description, but its focus and impact is different, as it can be felt more than seen. Conflict drives the story. It is an instigators to plot events. Without conflict, a story is flat.

**8. DIALOGUE** - is your characters' conversation presented directly on the page. If I tell you that Marcia asked John out, that's not dialogue. Dialogue is when I show it to you in Marcia's exact words. Example: "Want to go to a movie?" Marcia asked John.

*How to write dialogue that expresses your character’s voice*

I bet if you hung around on a random street corner and asked ten different passers-by how to get to the airport, they'd all give you different answers.  
  
Okay, maybe if you're lucky, they'd suggest similar routes. But they'd all use different words to say it. Even the, "Uh, don't know," answers would likely come out differently. *"I'm sorry, I really couldn't say."  
"No friggin idea."  
"Get a map, man."*

**9. DESCRIPTION**

One of the main reasons that your characters, places, and situations seem three-dimensional and real is description. Whether you state what your character is wearing or only that she has a perpetually arched eyebrow, your use of descritpino helps to define how the reader perceives each moment in your story.

* Specific and significant detail is the key to good description
* Use all five sense to enrich your descriptive powers
* Describe people, settings, and things in the right progressions
* When describing people’s actions, do not divorce body from mind
* Use figurative language appropriately

**10.  CONFLICT**

Conflict is the essence of fiction.  It creates plot.  The conflicts we encounter can usually be identified as one of four kinds.

Human versus Human  
Conflict that pits one person against another.

Human versus Nature  
This involves a run-in with the forces of nature.  On the one hand, it expresses the insignificance of a single human life in the cosmic scheme of things.  On the other hand, it tests the limits of a person’s strength and will to live.

Human versus Society  
The values and customs by which everyone else lives are being challenged.  The character may come to an untimely end as a result of his or her own convictions.  The character may, on the other hand, bring others around to a sympathetic point of view, or it may be decided that society was right after all.

Human versus Self  
Internal conflict.  Not all conflict involves other people.  Sometimes people are their own worst enemies.  An internal conflict is a good test of a character’s values.  Does he/she give in to temptation or rise above it?  Does he/she demand the most from him/herself or settle for something less?  Does he/she even bother to struggle?  The internal conflicts of a character and how they are resolved are good clues to the character’s inner strength.

Often, more than one kind of conflict is taking place at the same time. In every case, however, the existence of conflict enhances the reader’s understanding of a character and creates the suspense and interest that make you want to continue reading.

**Common terms in fiction:**

1. **Atmosphere:** A cloud of feelings with which you envelop your story (i.e., falling leaves and rain used to create an atmosphere of sadness).
2. **Foreshadowing:** clues in the writing that lead the reader to predict what will happen later in the story.
3. **Suspense:** the author intentionally leaves information out, or doesn’t answer questions to prompt the reader to wonder, often anxiously, about what will happen next. Suspense is the quality of “being on the edge of our seat” as we read to see what will happen next.
4. **Flashback:** a strategy of plot sequencing where the author takes the reader back to events that occurred before the present time in the story.
5. **Symbol/Symbolism:** a symbol is a person, place, thing or idea that stands for something else. Water can symbolize purity. Light (as in sun light) often is used to symbolize knowledge or truth.

**Revision Questions by Dave Hood**

**(**[**https://davehood59.wordpress.com/2011/09/26/how-should-you-revise-a-short-story/**](https://davehood59.wordpress.com/2011/09/26/how-should-you-revise-a-short-story/)**)**

Here are some of the things you need to consider when revising the elements of fiction:

**Setting and Time**

* Is the setting realistic and believable?
* Does setting provide a backdrop to the story?
* Does the setting create a mood or atmosphere?
* Is the setting a motive for the character to take some course of action?
* Do you show and not tell the reader?

**Plot/Plot Structure**

* Does your story have an inciting incident?
* Does central character face setbacks/obstacles as he/she attempts to achieve a particular goal?
* Does the story include a climax or turning point?
* Do you resolve the story by answering the conflict?

**Character and Characterization**

* Does the character have desire to reach some goal?
* Does your story include flat and round characters?
* Have you employed action, dialogue, description of appearance to develop your central character?

**Point of View**

* Is your story told from a consistent point of view?
* What point of view are you using? First-person POV? Second-person POV? Third-person POV?

**Vivid Description**

* Do you show and not tell?
* Do you use sensory details to show what happens?
* Do you use specific details to who what happens?
* Do you use figurative language as a form of description?

**Figurative Language**

* Does the story include similes?
* Does the story include metaphors?
* Do you use allusion?
* Do you use personification?
* Do you use symbolism?

**Dialogue**

* Do you include dialogue in scenes?
* Does the dialogue reveal conflict, move the plot forward, reveal character?
* Do you include quotation marks and dialogue tags dialogue?
* Does the dialogue sound realistic?

**Theme**

* Does your story have a theme?
* Does each element of fiction contribute to the meaning?
* Do the symbols help to develop the theme?
* Is the theme revealed in the conflict?
* Is the theme revealed in the consequences of the story?
* What is the meaning of the story?

**Voice**

* Do you tell the story with a particular voice?
* Does the story have a consistent voice?
* Does the diction support the voice?

**Showing and Telling**

* Does your story include narrative summary?
* Does your story use scenes to show how important events, such as setbacks, conflict, and the climax unfold?

**Micro Revision**

In the micro revision, you correct the following:

* Grammar
* Spelling
* Punctuation
* Writing style, such as diction and syntax

Other sources used to create this handout:

<http://hrsbstaff.ednet.ns.ca/ldownie/Eng%2011%20seven_key_elements_of_literature.htm>

<http://theeditorsblog.net/2011/02/03/the-elements-of-fiction-the-basics-beyond/>