# Unit 6: Discovering the World, Analyzing Ourselves

## Overview

What was it like to live in the time of King Henry VIII? What was it like when a man stood on the moon for the first time? Might a 16-year old living in 16th century China have the same reaction to his or her first love as you might today? Of course, none of us can answer these questions firsthand. But we *can* experience the answers through our imaginations as we read literature.

*What was it like to live in the time of King Henry VIII?*

Literature is writing that has lasting value. It is characterized by language that is elastic and powerful. Writers of great literature can stretch their words into dramatic plays that keep us on the edge of our chairs. They can also squeeze words into poetic snapshots that cause us to see, touch, and hear beautiful moments in life. Writers and the literature they create have the power to capture the emotions that come with being human. They bring us triumph, passion, or loneliness. When we read literature we know that we are not alone. We realize that across history others have shared our experiences and emotions.

Reading literature also allows us to learn the power of a single word. Learning to understand why a poet chose a particular set of words helps you read better. Mastering the art of seeing the information contained in a dramatic character's dialogue does as well. The skills you perfect in becoming a good reader serve you well in all areas of life. Becoming a good reader of literature is a no-lose investment of your time.

Reading literature from good writers will also help you with your own writing skills. The more you read, the more exposure you have to how good writers use words. You become aware of how these artists use words so well, you see, feel, and hear exactly what they intended. This is a worthwhile lesson for all writers. Even if you never expect to write fiction or poetry, you always hope your readers understand your meaning.
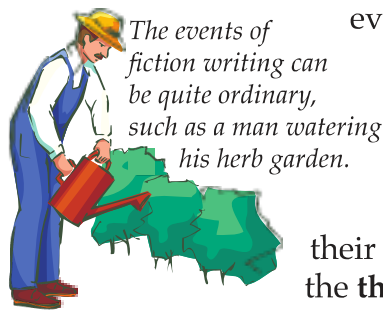
In this unit, you will learn some skills for approaching good literature, and you will practice these skills across several genres. These skills will help you critically analyze the literature you read and understand an author's deeper meaning. This deeper understanding will open new doors of enjoyment and comprehension of everything you read.

You will also learn some strategies for writing about literature. In upper level classes, you are often asked to respond to and analyze the words you are reading. The skills presented will give you some ideas of beginning such pieces of writing.

# Fiction and Nonfiction: The Imagined and the Real

**Fiction** is writing based on imagination, whereas **nonfiction** presents the actions and ideas of real people or events. Both are considered **literature** and have lasting value. A work of *fiction* may take many different **forms**. It can be a **short story**, a **novel**, or a **tall tale**. Regardless of its form, a work of fiction tells a story that is largely created by the writer's imagination. Sometimes the

*Fiction is writing based on imagination.*

*The events of fiction writing can be quite ordinary, such as a man watering his herb garden.*

events can be dramatic, such as a woman entering a burning building to save an elderly neighbor. Sometimes, the events can be quite ordinary, such as a man watering his herb garden. We tend to think of the purpose of fiction as entertainment. However, many writers use their talents to convey their personal beliefs through the **themes** of their words.
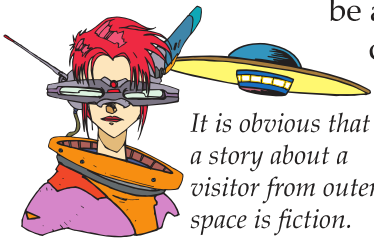
Like a work of fiction, a work of *nonfiction* may take many different forms. We usually read nonfiction in order to be informed. However, many pieces of nonfiction are highly entertaining as well. It can be a **biography**, **autobiography**, **essay**, cookbook, newspaper article, or a true-to-life adventure story. Diaries, essays, speeches, newspaper and magazine articles, cookbooks, and instructional books are also examples of nonfiction **genres**. A category of literary work is called a *genre*. Sometimes, these works are lengthy, like a novel. Other times, they are very brief, as are many magazine or newspaper articles. Unlike a work of fiction, these examples are based on factual information, real people, and real events. Writers of nonfiction do not create the stories; they research situations and include actual facts. In addition, some **poetry** that pays tribute to real people or commemorates real events is nonfiction as are some **dramas**, including television documentaries.

*We usually read nonfiction in order to be informed.*

**Sometimes it is easy to tell the difference between fiction and nonfiction.** It is obvious that a story about a visitor from outer space or a mutant lizard is fiction. We know it is unrealistic to think that such a tale could be a retelling of factual, real-life events. It is also obvious that a story written by a famous person about her own life is probably *nonfiction* or *not false*. We know that the famous person probably wrote about events that actually happened to her. Basing a story on factual events makes it nonfiction.

*It is obvious that a story about a visitor from outer space is fiction.*

Other times it is more difficult to distinguish between fiction and nonfiction. All writing is to some degree inspired by real experiences and requires imagination. How, then, do we know which is real and which is made-up? Culture and history can be reflected in works of both fiction and nonfiction. There are many books featuring events such as the Revolutionary War, the sinking of the *Titanic*, and the string o robberies by Bonnie and Clyde. Are these books fiction or nonfiction? To answer these questions, it is helpful to consider the author's purpose in writing the literary work. Usually, the main purpose of nonfiction is to inform, educate, or persuade using factual information. The main purpose of fiction, however, is to entertain.

|  | Fiction | Nonfiction |
|---|---|---|
| **Types** | short stories, novels, tall tales, some poetry, comic books, some dramas | true-life adventure stories, essays, biographies, autobiographies, cookbooks, magazine, and newspaper articles |
| **Based On** | imagination | real people or factual, real-life events |
| **Main Purpose** | to entertain | to inform, educate, or persuade using factual information |

## History and Culture in Literature: Events and Values
### Depicted in Stories and Reflected through Writers

When we read a variety of literary works, we "widen our horizon." This means that we begin to see that history and culture influence all people. You probably have students in classes with you or neighbors who come from different countries or cultures. You yourself might be from another culture or country. When you get to know people from other cultures or countries, you may compare how you celebrate holidays, how different foods are prepared, and what special observan□ were celebrated in former homelands. Through our reading, we can also envision other cultures, and we can compare those different cultures with our own.

*Through our reading, we can envision other cultures, and we can compare those different cultures with our own.*

World-famous writers are honored with the Nobel Prize for literature as they bring people and their cultures to life through the written word. Some past winners include names you may recognize: Americans Ernest Hemingway, Saul Bellow, and Toni Morrison; Colombian Gabriel Garcia Marquez; West Indian Derek Walcott; Nigerian Wole Soyinka; and Mexican Octavio Paz. Many more writers have been honored for helping us understand our struggles as human beings.

One characteristic our American culture seems to value is competition, and □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ sports, such as baseball, are important to our culture. Everybody can choose to participate, either as a fan or a player on a local team. Young and old, people can share their favorite stories about their favorite team or player. Writers can do the same.

Many books have been written about the game itself. In addition, you will find many biographies about baseball heroes. Historical or factual information about baseball is also available in almanacs, encyclopedias, and ball cards, which are valuable from a collector's point of view!

**History and culture can also provide the background for historical novels.**
For example, a novelist can tell us stories about baseball players, their families, and their teams. The writer might use the names of real players, or quote sportscasters like Red Barber, but then make up the stories about the other characters in the novel, thus writing historical fiction.

Another novelist may relate a tale about how one girl wanted to become a baseball player. The writer might tell how the girl passed herself off as a male and managed to fool everyone, hitting and running well for her team. In the final chapter, the writer may tell of the girl's disguise being discovered, how she is kicked off the team, but how, in her continued desire to play, she begins an all-girls' league. Although this story may be based on some historical facts, the story itself is purely fiction.

Historical fiction provides information about cultures and people, even through fictional stories about baseball players. For example, the writer may describe what people wore, how they traveled, and if money turned "rags to riches" players into happy or unhappy people. Writers of historical fiction still address these very issues about teams and their players. From the Greek Olympic Games to now, we can read the following writers' themes in their works.

- the purity of the game itself

- a love of competition

- the beginning of competitive sports for women

- racial and gender injustice

- stereotypical personalities in sports

- individual courage

- backgrounds of players

- the good or evil of wealth

## Common Literary Elements: The Parts That Make Literature Go

Everybody knows that cars have wheels and most use gasoline for power. Everybody also knows that bread has some type of flour as its main ingredient. Even literature has certain common ingredients that make the story, poem, or drama interesting to read. These common ingredients are called **literary elements**. But some cars are powered by electricity, not gasoline; and some breads are made from whole wheat flour instead of white. In the same way do some literary forms differ from others by using different elements. Not all of these elements appear in every *genre*. Knowing the terms used to talk about *literary elements* will help you as you study the forms of genre in the rest of this unit. You are already familiar with some of the terms used.

*Everybody knows that cars have wheels and most use gasoline for power.*
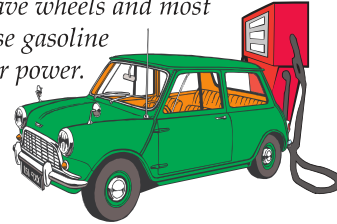
## Elements of Fiction

### Setting

The **setting** is the when and where (the time and place) of the story. In some stories, one or both elements of *setting* are unimportant. This is true of fables, stories that have messages relevant across time and place. However, in many stories, setting is very important to making the events in the story believable.

The setting provides location and background for the **characters** and **plot**. Often, the setting will include the historical period, the geographic area, the landscape, the season, the weather, and the culture in which the action takes place. In many instances, the setting creates a feeling or **mood**. This *mood* can influence the reader's interpretation of the story.

Descriptive details often enhance the atmosphere of the story. A vivid description of the setting can cause a feeling of expectancy or add to a story's suspense. Look at the following "scene setting" sentences.

> I had always hated January. Everything was cold and dead and ugly and a whole year stretched out before Christmas came again. My birthday wasn't for six months and the only thing we could look forward to was at

least another month of frost and cold wind. The only holiday came the first part of the month and that was no big deal. Just a pot of black-eyed peas and hog jowl and Mama telling everybody it was bad luck to wash or sew on New Year's Day.

- The setting here describes a cold and dreary January—not a happy time for the narrator.

- The descriptive details—the description of food eaten on New Year's Day and the superstitious warnings cue us to place and time. It suggests a country setting in the South, probably some time in the past. In modern times, more people are better educated and do not hold so closely to superstitions.

# Plot

You might think of the *plot* as the skeleton, or outline, of a literary work. It is the sequence of events that move the story along from beginning to end. From start to finish, the events of the story are related to one another. One event leads logically to another. The author has one or more reasons for presenting pieces of the plot in his or her pattern. Each event may provide background information; to show or tell something about a character; or to develop or resolve a problem.

In addition, the plot also shows us why things occur in the story. The British author, E. M. Forster, said that if someone told you the king died and then the queen died, they would be only telling you of two events that happened and be describing only half the plot. However, if they told you that the king died and then the queen died of *grief*, they would be describing the whole plot. In other words, the plot includes the cause (the king's death) and its effect (the queens's death).

The plot of many works of literature follows a structure or order.

**The Beginning:** Most beginnings give us information. We are made aware of who the main characters are, where and when the story takes place, and any other information we need to make sense of what is to follow. This is called the **exposition**. Usually, the plot begins with an *exposition* that introduces the setting, characters, and the basic situation. The exposition or beginning also accomplishes something very essential to the story—it suggests that something will happen to upset the presented situation. For example, the beginning of *Jack and the Beanstalk* suggests that a young boy will not just simply follow his mother's instructions to sell the family cow. We are told that Jack is imaginative and a bit lazy. He will probably attempt to find some adventure and perhaps avoid the long walk into the market place to sell the cow.

**In the Middle:** The middle of a literary work is usually the longest and most intense part. In the middle, **conflict**, or struggle between opposing forces (often between characters), upsets the picture presented at the beginning in the exposition. Conflict can be **internal conflict** or **external conflict**. The **rising action**, consists of all the events before or *preceding* the *climax*. The action builds up as problems or situations develop. Our interest increases. The plot's conflict then continues to build and increase to the point of **suspense** or the reader's highest interest—the **climax**. The climax is the turning point of the story. It begins to reveal how the conflict or problem will be solved.

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**The story of Belinda illustrates the introduction of** *conflict*. The exposition tells us that she left home on a beautiful sunny day to catch the public bus for school. On the bus, Belinda sat next to Missy. Thus in the exposition, we are given the setting of the story and the characters involved.
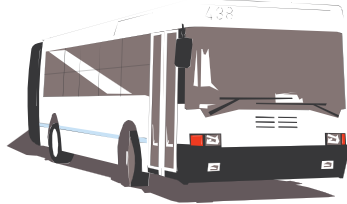


*Belinda left home on a beautiful sunny day to catch the public bus for school.*

However, this story is complicated when the writer introduces conflict. Missy asked Belinda if she would like to skip school for a day of goofing off at the mall. Thus conflict puts Belinda into a dilemma. Should she go to school and risk Missy's disapproval? Should she cut her class and risk getting into trouble with her teachers and parents? Belinda knows the consequences of each action, and she thinks about these as the bus approaches school. Finally, the bus arrives, and Belinda must decide. This moment of decision is called the *climax* of the story. At this point, Belinda makes the decision with which she must live. She chooses to skip class with Missy.

**The End:** The end of a story is also called its **resolution**. The conflict is resolved, or decided. The ending often also shows the effects of the *resolution*. After deciding to skip class, Belinda faces all the effects of her decision. She has failed a quiz and lost her purse at the mall. In addition, the attendance office called to report Belinda's absence to her parents. This resulted in two weeks of restriction for Belinda. Belinda must also deal with her regret at having little will power to resist peer pressure from Missy. She is also upset that she has disappointed her parents.

Each story is told differently. No two plots are developed in the same way. However, most works of fiction contain the following.

- **Exposition:** This gets us ready for the story. In the exposition, we learn the setting—the when and where the story takes place. We are also introduced to the characters in the story. Sometimes we are given background that is important for our understanding of the story. For example, we might understand Belinda's giving in to Missy if the writer had told us that Missy was a very popular girl. Belinda was new to the high school and wanted desperately to fit in. Many readers would understand Belinda's feelings.

**Also in the exposition, we see the conflict begin. In most works** of fiction, the exposition offers the same information found in a well-written essay. The readers are given answers to the following questions. Who does what with whom? Where is it done? Why is it done?

- **Complications:** As the story continues, unexpected events often happens and the conflict grows more intense. These complications are often called the *rising action* of the story. For example, when Missy suggests skipping class, she points out that several other friends will be there. One is Mitchell, a boy Belinda has a crush on. However, Belinda remembers the quiz she studied for the night before. She also knows her parents are very firm about school attendance and will punish her if they find out. Usually, readers can sympathize with a character such as Belinda. Because of this, they worry about the decision she will make.

- **Climax:** This is the point of no return. An action or decision occurs that changes the lives of the characters in some way. This action or decision points to the story's end. The action usually ends the conflict. Sometimes the ending is happy, and sometimes it is just the opposite.
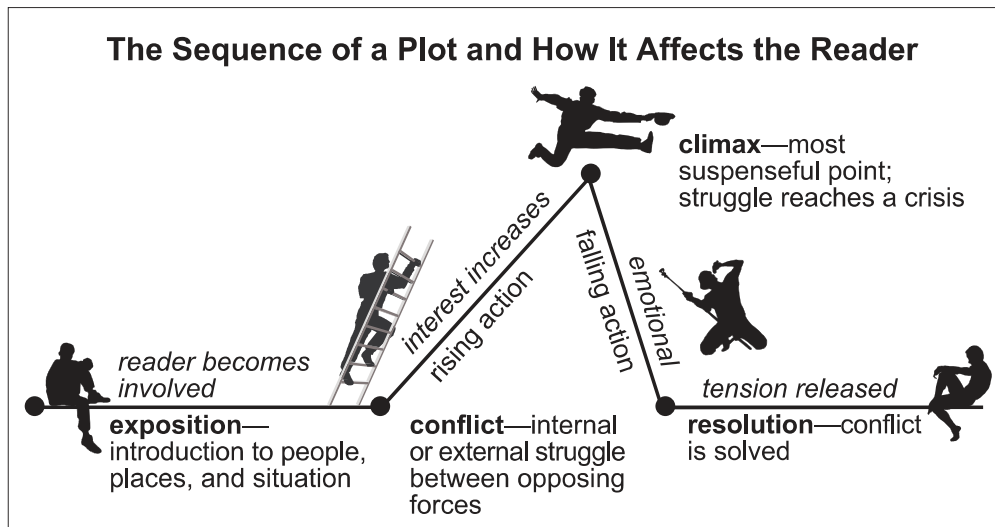
  After the conflict is solved, the writer reduces the emotional involvement of the reader. This portion is called the **falling action**. *Falling action* consists of all the events that *follow* the climax. It readies the reader for the end of the story—brings us back to reality.

  The ending of Belinda's story is not happy, but it is not tragic. However, several things happen that Belinda cannot undo. Her grade suffers, she is without her favorite purse and lunch money for the rest of the week, and she must work to regain her parents' trust.

- **Resolution:** This ends the story. Remaining questions are answered here. Often, we learn the characters' fates. We also see characters grow or learn from making the decisions they made. It is in the resolution that we see the consequences of the character's decisions and actions.

**As Belinda's story comes to an end, she is filled with regret.** However, she has learned the pitfalls of giving in to peer pressure. Mitchell did *not* ask her out. Missy did *not* become a close friend. Belinda resolves to be stronger in the future.

The following diagram shows how the sequence of a plot works together and affects the reader.

### The Sequence of a Plot and How It Affects the Reader



climax—most
suspenseful point;
struggle reaches a crisis

interest increases
rising action

falling action

emotional

reader becomes
involved

tension released

exposition—
introduction to people,
places, and situation

conflict—internal
or external struggle
between opposing
forces

resolution—conflict
is solved

A *character* is a person or creature in a literary work. *Main characters* are the most prominent. Usually, the story revolves around a *central* main character and those individuals most important to him (also considered main characters). *Minor characters* are usually included in works of fiction. These characters are less important to the story.

Characters can be developed in two ways within a work of fiction.

**Direct characterization** is when the author *tells* you what you should think of the character. Writers can *directly characterize* a person in two ways. First, they can provide narration that reveals character. For example, when the narrator tells us directly, "Tommy Jones was the type of young man every mother would want for a son," we are pretty much aware of Tommy's qualities.

**Indirect characterization** comes through more subtle means. Here, writers *show* readers what a character is like. Writers usually employ five ways of *indirect characterization*.

1. **Appearance**—this is a natural place for a writer to begin giving hints about a character. Look, for example, at the following description a young wife offers about her husband's grandmother.

   > Lucindy's white hair stood out against the blackness of the hall beside her. It was pulled back from her face with her turtle shell combs, and twisted up on top of her head. I always thought it looked a little bit like a crown.

   

   *Lucindy's white hair stood out against the blackness of the hall beside her.*

   > She wore long sleeves and her black cotton stockings. Lucindy dressed like that even in the middle of August, during the hottest part of dog days, and I'd never even seen her break a sweat.

   This description lets us know quite a bit about Lucindy. We see her as almost queenly, somewhat elegant. It is also obvious that the speaker admires Lucindy a great deal.

2. **Dialogue**—we can learn even more about this family from hearing them speak and have conversations with each other.

Darcy, the **narrator**, or speaker in the story, is about to have a baby. Her father-in-law responds to the news:

> "So it looks like we'll have us a baby here real soon. That's fine…just fine…it's been too long since there's been a baby in the house."

His words show the father-in-law is kind and gentle. He is also looking forward to being a grandfather for the first time.

3. **Private thoughts**—When the *narrator* (the "I" telling the story) is the main character, his or her thoughts are especially important. Taking readers inside a character's mind allows us to see from behind that person's eyes.

In the above story, Darcy is in her garden, gathering vegetables for lunch. The writer allows us to share her thoughts.

> The morning dew was still heavy in the garden, and the smell of tomato vines was everywhere. The peas were filling out real good. I sat down in the dirt and scooted along from vine to vine, filling up a galvanized water bucket as I went. The dirt was cool and fine feeling. I ran it through my hands a few times, liking its rich, deep smell. I liked being there, liked the dirt under my toes and in my fingers.
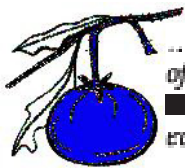
*…the smell of tomato vines was everywhere.*

*The peas were filling out real good.*

We learn that Darcy loves growing things in the garden. Her language—incorrect grammar ("The peas were filling out real good") and reference to a galvanized water bucket—show she is not highly educated. However, the information also lets us know she is very knowledgeable about gardening.

4. **Actions**—we learn much about characters based on what they do, just like we learn about people in real life.

Darcy's baby has just been born and the doctor has left. Lucindy has taken the baby girl out to her father.
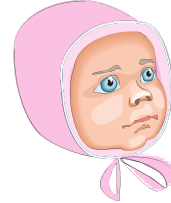
> Lucindy came back to me, then. She bathed me and helped me into a clean gown. She fastened my hair back up and put sweet-smelling sheets on the bed….Lucindy tucked me back in bed and found some quilts to cover me with—I was still shaking pretty hard….

Wouldn't we all like to have a Lucindy to take care of us when we are in need of attention?

5. **Effects character's actions have on others**—real insight into a character comes as readers see how their actions and words affect others. We look especially at how characters we trust and like respond to others.

Lucindy has arthritis and has trouble moving about on cold mornings. Darcy comments on how "spritely" Lucindy is moving on this particular morning. Lucindy responds:

> "It's warm this morning. Springtime always brings me a little extra pep in my step. A little sassafras bark today. A little sassafras tea would be good for both of us."

> "Hmmm." I was rolling biscuits and putting them into a black tin baker. I hated the taste of sassafras tea, but always drank it when Lucindy gave it to me. It seemed to settle my stomach in the first few months, and was good now for heartburn. I did what Lucindy said. She was always right.

*"A little sassafras tea would be good for both of us."*

We have, at this point, come to like and trust Darcy's judgement. The fact that she has such unquestioned faith in Lucindy makes us trust Lucindy as well. She appears to have a great deal of knowledge about folk medicines.

**Protagonist**—The *protagonist* is the most important or leading character in a work. When we refer to a character as a hero or heroine, we are usually referring to the protagonist. Readers usually hope things will turn out well for the protagonist.

**Antagonist**—If the protagonist is in direct conflict with another character, this other character is the *antagonist*. If an antagonist is especially evil, he or she is called a villain. Some stories center around internal conflicts rather than outward conflicts. For example, a character who must decide between two career choices is experiencing internal conflict. Such a story does not have an antagonist.
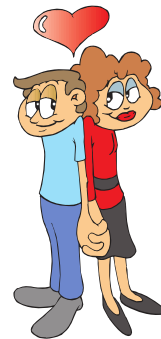
# Theme

The *theme* is the message or central idea that the writer hopes to convey in a literary work. The theme is usually the *opinion* held by the writer about the subject or topic and often contains a *universal message* or *general statement about life*—death, love, nature, or human tendencies.

Often, the theme conveys a "lesson" the writer hopes readers will understand after reading. This lesson may be "don't be greedy," "war is bad," or "always tell the truth." *All elements of fiction*—setting, plot, characterization—contribute to the theme. Seldom is the theme of a work stated directly, although it is developed throughout the story. Readers often see different, although related, themes in a single work. For example, in "Prince Wicked and the Grateful Animals," most readers will relate the theme to being grateful, kind, or generous. Many will also see a statement about no wicked deed going unpunished.

Certain themes are *universal. They can be true at any time and in any place*. Some examples of universal themes include the following.

- love conquers all

- hatred is destructive

- good triumphs over evil

*love conquers all*

How many fables, fairy or folk tales, myths, or short stories have you read that teaches one of these themes?

Sometimes, writers will *reverse* the messages of universal themes. For example, a story might point out that evil *can* conquer good. Often, when writers offer stories showing the *opposite* of what readers hope and believe, the writers do this for a reason. Usually, it is to warn or teach. For example, a writer may warn that *unless* human beings are watchful and brave enough to prevent it, evil will indeed be the conqueror. It is very common for writers to use theme to communicate a message. However, the reader must often interpret how the theme communicates this.

An old saying tells us, "there is nothing new under the sun." To a certain extent this is true of themes in literature. The oldest of myths and the most recent short stories and movie plots tend to touch on the same ideas about human behavior. These universal themes offer insights into not only love, but into other common emotions and behavior. These include grief, hope, happiness, death, courage, isolation, loneliness, tolerance, power, and cruelty.

Universal Themes

You might think that retelling the same story would get old, even boring. However, this is not the case. In the hands of a good writer, a recurring theme can be presented in a fresh new way that will capture readers' hearts and minds. After all, how many stories about first love have you read or seen on television or in movies? More than likely, a great deal. And, more than likely, you were intrigued by most of them. We often find ourselves smiling or grimacing as gifted writers touch on the very em □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ □ ds has given us a way to understand that the human heart is the same, no matter how long ago or far away the person lived.

A light work, meant only for entertainment, may not have a theme. However, usually, funny stories will hint at a statement about human behavior. As you progress into more sophisticated pieces of literature, the themes often become more difficult to find. Authors frequently give hints through characterization and *diction* (word choice) about what they want to say about their themes. In this case, the theme is **implied**, rather than *explicitly stated*. *Implied* themes are usually revealed gradually, as the story unfolds.

## Putting It All Together

More than likely, most of you have been part of some sort of team. Perhaps you participate in athletics. Maybe you are part of a musical ensemble of some sort, or you have cooperated with others in order to do a job. If so, you know that team members are individual people. They have their strengths that help accomplish wins on the playing field, successful performances, or well-done projects. However, each of these individuals is different. When working as a team, however, these people work toward a single goal.

*The elements of fiction work as a team—working toward a single goal—for an ending.*

The *elements of fiction* are also a team. Each *element* has distinct features and provides different information for the reader. However, they all work together, just as any team for an ending, overall effect. Usually, good readers, without even knowing it, read with this end result in mind. They evaluate *setting*, *plot*, and *characterization* as they read, noting how these elements contribute to theme.

## Analyzing Setting

The setting of a story involves time and place. Sometimes, we are told when and where the story happens, but at other times we are only given clues. For example, when do most fairy tales take place? Once upon a time. We know this is sometime in the past. Where do many of them take place? In a land far, far away. If you are familiar with the *Star Wars* movies, you are given a similar setting. The events took place long ago in a galaxy far, far away. These clues allow our imaginations a great deal of freedom.
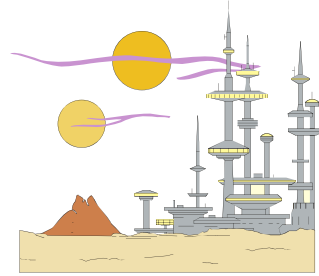
*The events took place long ago in a galaxy far, far away.*

Many stories are more realistic. They tell us more specifically when and where they happen. If they are not specific, they give specific hints.

For example, let's examine the King Arthur legends. We know where they took place: in England. However, we are not exactly sure when. Many scholars think the Arthur legends came from a 5th century Celtic chief. Many of the traditions come from the 11th and 12th century. We know this because we know history. The people in the tales do what people did at that time. We analyze the hints given in the story.

The *setting* of a story is often *very important*. Sometimes, *when* a story takes place affects *what* happens. Sometimes *where* a story takes place does the same. For example, a story is set in 2002. The main character has an attack of appendicitis. This is no big deal. Medical science should be able to take care of this. However, what if the man is stranded on a desert island? Chances are, he will die. Setting plays an important role in what happens.

Other elements of the setting are often important to the story.

## Analyzing Plot

A short story writer tells us many things, all of which we need to know. We need to know certain things about the characters and their lives. We also need to know why events in the story happen. This information is called *exposition*. Once readers have been given important exposition—the introduction to the people, places, and situation important to the plot, writers then relate the events in the *plot*.

Sometimes it is hard to keep up with the events in the plot.

Therefore, it is helpful to decide the kind of information you are given.

Is it exposition?

- If it tells you about the characters, it is exposition.

- If it tells you about the setting, it is exposition.

**Hint:** words like **always** **sometimes** and **never** usually signal exposition.
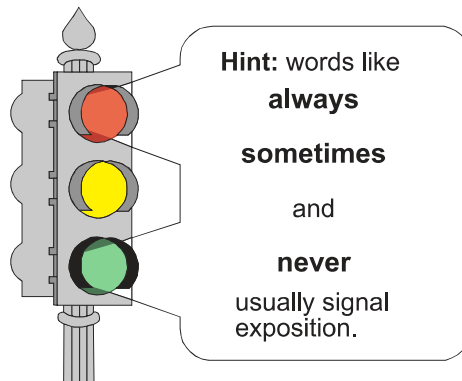
Is it an event in the plot?

- If it moves the story along, it is an event in the plot.

## Analyzing Conflict

Most of us dream about a life without *conflict*. Wouldn't it be great to be successful in everything you do? To like and be liked by everyone you meet? To have a happily-ever-after story unfold for you on a daily basis? Living such an existence would, indeed, be wonderful.

However, if you were to set such a perfect, non-conflicted life into a story, your readers would be bored beyond belief. No one wants to read about a perfect person living a perfect life. Readers want complications; they want to see people overcoming obstacles. In short, readers want to see conflict in the stories they read.

In classic folktales and stories, conflict is easy to identify. It is between a *protagonist* and an *antagonist*. For example, Jack, of beanstalk fame, is in conflict with the giant. Cinderella is in conflict with her cruel family. Both of these conflicts are *external*, easy to find and easy to resolve.

The conflict in "Lucille's Black Sheep" is not so easy to identify and even more difficult to resolve. We must look at actions and hints more closely than in the above-mentioned fairy tales. Unlike in fairy tales, the characters in "Lucille's Black Sheep" aren't all perfect nor all evil. Every character in the story has likable and admirable qualities.

However, each of the characters is, in some way, *deceptive*—a quality we don't normally think of as admirable. We also learn that Aunt Lucille has been burdened with a number of people she would label as *black sheep*— people who cause shame and pain to her good reputation. Finally, there is Aunt Lucille herself. There is more going on with her than *meets the eye*.

The story's major conflict is not, however, between Lucille and her "black sheep." In order to figure out what it is, you will need to look carefully at all the characters' *actions*, *interactions*, and *thoughts*. The following worksheet can be helpful in doing this. The first question has been done for you.

## Analyzing the Story's Climax

We usually expect a story's *climax* to be obvious. For example, what is the climax of "The Three Little Pigs"? Of course, it is when the wolf falls into the pot of boiling water. At this point, he cannot turn back and he will eat no more pigs. The surviving little pig will be safe. Up until this moment, the ending could have been different. We tend to think of the climax as the "aha!" of the story. We expect it to be a moment of great *drama*. Maybe someone dies. Perhaps the hero declares his love for the heroine. Sometimes, we even see the universe saved from forces of evil.

*The climax of "The Three Little Pigs" is when the wolf falls into the pot of boiling water.*

Most stories are not this dramatic. The climax of most serious short stories is more realistic and involves a moment of decision or revelation.

Looking at the main character can help as you work to determine conflict. When you first meet this person, what is he or she like? How is he or she different at the story's end? This difference can be great or small.

Something within the story caused this difference. Usually, the moment this happened is the climax. This moment can be an action, a memory, or a realization. Once this moment happens, the character has changed forever. The situation in the story has also changed.

## Analyzing Theme

Earlier in this unit, you were given some suggestions for finding the *theme* of a piece of short fiction. You also practiced finding the theme of a folktale and a myth. Remember: the theme of any piece of literature points toward a lesson one or more of the characters comes to realize. In expressing a theme, the writer is attempting to tell you something about life or human nature. Perhaps the message is about good and evil or about the importance of making your own decisions. It is not unusual for readers to find more than one theme in a story.

A good story lends itself to many themes. However, they are usually related. The following can help you find a story's theme.

- Review the procedure for finding the story's climax.

  1. What happened to the main character?

  2. Did he or she change during the story?

  3. Did he or she learn anything about life? About himself or herself? About other people?

- Look for the following—often these suggest the story's theme.

  1. Are there answers to questions?

  2. Are there sudden realizations?

  3. Is there advice from trusted minor characters?

- Review the story's title.

## Novel: Fully Developed Characters Amidst a Host of Conflicts

Like short stories, novels are works of fiction. However, a novel is much longer than a short story. Because of its extended length, the novel develops and explores in more depth and detail all of the elements found in a short story. Most novels have a central plot, with subplots extending out from it. These subplots often have a beginning, middle, and an end, just like the central plot. Most novels have several conflicts going on during the course of the story rather than one predominant one, as in most short stories.

The chart below shows the differences between a novel and a short story.

### The Differences between a Short Story and a Novel

|  | Short Story | Novel |
|---|---|---|
| **Conflict** | one major conflict | more than one conflict |
| **Plot** | centers around one plot | centers around one major plot, but several subplots interweave throughout the novel |
| **Characterization** | develops one major character in a limited way | fully develops more than one character |
| **Theme** | usually contains one theme | often contains more than one theme |
| **Setting** | uses a few limited settings | uses many settings that are fully developed |

## Strategies to Use with Reading a Novel

You can usually read a short story in one sitting. However, this is not true of most novels. Most often you will need to read a novel over several days' time. Other times you will read portions of the novel together in class and also be asked to read portions of it on your own.

*You can usually read a short story in one sitting.*

It is important that you develop ways of interacting with the novel that will help you retain information from day to day. Leaving a record of your thoughts and realizations is important as well. This will give you a way to review the previous days' reading before continuing forward.

The following pages will have practices and pages with a number of strategies that will help you master each novel your teacher assigns to you.

## Sticky-Note Dialogue

As you read, keep a pad of sticky notes with you. As you read, do the following:

Whenever you read something you don't understand, mark it with a sticky note. Write a question mark on the sticky note. For example, you began reading "Lucille's Black Sheep." As you read the opening you were struck by the description of Reba sitting on the tailgate watching the "yellow clay road." You remember doing that yourself—even though your mother told you not to! You think the description is really vivid, and think "Wow!" You would need to mark the passage as follows:

> I sat on the tailgate of the old Ford watching the yellow clay road as it rolled beneath my feet. We weren't going fast and it was a good thing because Raymond didn't drive very good. He swerved off to the right, almost slipping down inside the deep, ragged gully[1]. I grabbed for the side of the truck body and looked around.

**!**
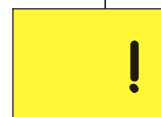
As you continue, you are confused by the expression "chasing rabbits in the ditch." You will need to ask your teacher about this the next day. You need to mark the passage as follows:

> Inside the truck, Aunt Lucille nearly bounced off her seat. I could just see her double chins quivering, almost hear her fussing at Raymond. "Son—if you don't stop chasing rabbits in the ditch, I'll make you stop this truck. You sure better straighten up. Corner Creek is up ahead. I'm beginning to wonder if we'll make it across the bridge alive or not."

**?**
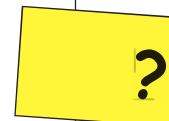
A bit further on, you find the reference to the Asiatic flu. You read the footnote at the bottom of the page about the epidemic and how many people died as a result. Since few people die of influenza today, you were surprised. You learned something you did not know. Therefore, you would mark this passage with a sticky note containing a star or an asterisk in the following way.

> Nobody else seemed to pay too much attention to Uncle Foy's spells, but I worried a lot. Him and Aunt Lucille were the only folks I had. My mama— Aunt Lucille's baby sister—died with Asiatic flu [4] the year I was born.
>
> [4] *Asiatic flu*—in 1957, this strain of influenza killed 170,000 people worldwide

**\***

When you discuss the novel next day in class, you will be able to ask your questions and comment in the passages that taught you something or that you thought were really interesting.

On your sticky notes, mark the passages with notations to mean as follows:

! For a passage you found really neat: a Wow!

? For a passage that provides information you want to know more about.

\* For a passage that teaches you something you didn't know before.

## Poetry: Learning the Power of Words

It is important to remember that *poetry* is a form of literature and it is written in order to communicate with the reader. As with short stories and novels, there is a speaker or *narrator* in each poem. Sometimes the speaker in the poem can be identified, and sometimes the speaker is anonymous. There is also an intended **audience**. Like the speaker, the *audience* can be clearly identified or anonymous. There is, however, always a message. All of the elements of the poem work together to communicate this message. Following are an explanation of important elements poets use in order to communicate with their readers.

**Form:** *Form* is the way a piece of writing is organized or structured. It is the way a poem looks. All poetry is written in lines, but sometimes these lines are sentences. Other times they are not. Sometimes the lines are divided into groups, which are called **stanzas**. Sometimes the form helps you understand the meaning.

Look at the following nursery **rhyme**, with which you are probably familiar. As you read it, note that it is divided into *stanzas*. What does each stanza relate to you? Is there some organizational plan to the stanzas?

### The Queen of Hearts

The Queen of Hearts,
She made some tarts,
All on a summer's day.

The Knave of Hearts,
He stole those tarts,
And took them clean away.

The King of Hearts
Called for the tarts,
And beat the Knave full sore.

The Knave of Hearts
Brought back the tarts,
And vowed he'd steal no more.

This simple poem tells a story. Each stanza presents an episode in the story.

- Stanza 1—we learn that the Queen of Hearts baked tarts.

- Stanza 2—presents a complication—the tarts are stolen by the Knave.

- Stanza 3—we find the thief is caught and punished by the King.

- Stanza 4—the knave seems to have learned his lesson about stealing, since he returns the tarts and promises never to steal again.

As you read the poem, you understood quickly in what *pattern* the stanzas were arranged—in *time order* or *chronologically*. This helped you organize the information as you read it.

**Sound:** Poems are meant to be read aloud. Poets keep this in mind. They choose words carefully. These words create sounds the poets want readers to hear. Certain letters, usually those you make with the front of your tongue, sound light. These are letters like "L," "T," "S," and "P." These letters, along with others, create light sounds and usually speed up your *pace* or **tempo** as you read.

Other words, those you say in the back of your throat, make heavy sounds. These include the letters "G," "H," "K," and "D." Often, poets use these heavy letters to slow down the pace or *tempo* of your reading. Often, poets use the sounds of the words to make sound contribute to meaning. Look, for example, at the nursery rhyme, "This Is the Way the Ladies Ride."

Read aloud the first stanza below of "This Is the Way the Ladies Ride."

> This is the way the ladies ride,
>
> Tri, tre, tre, tree,
>
> Tri, tre, tre, tree!
>
> This is the way the ladies ride,
>
> Tri, tre, tre, tre, tri-tre-tre-tree!

If you listen carefully, the sound of the poetry tells you the following.

- Ladies ride slowly.

- The ladies are not too big. The horse is not too big. The sound is delicate. The letters that make the sound are light. They are said with the front of your tongue.

Read aloud the second stanza below.

> This is the way the gentlemen ride,
>
> Gallop-a-trot,
>
> Gallop-a-trot!
>
> This is the way the gentlemen ride,
>
> Gallop-a-gallop-a-trot!

The sound of the poem tells you the following.

- The gentlemen ride faster than the ladies. The **rhythm** of the words is faster than above.

- The horses are a little heavier than the ladies' horses. The letters that make the sounds are heavier.
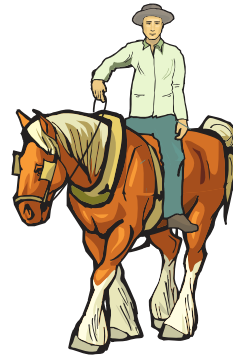
This is the way the farmers ride,

Hobbledy-hoy,

Hobbledy-hoy!

This is the way the farmers ride,

Hobbledy-hobbledy-hoy!

The sound of the poem tells you the following.

- The horses probably sway from side to side. The rhythm of the words is slow. The words sound like they are swaying.

- The horses are probably big and heavy.

- The horses are probably carrying heavy loads. The letters that make the sounds are heavy. They are said in the back of your throat.

Three other ways poets create sounds are with **rhyme**, **repetition**, and **rhythm**, each are described below.

1. **Rhyme:** Words that *end with the same sound* are said to *rhyme*. Poems use rhyme differently. Look, for example, at these lines from two popular nursery rhymes.

Little Boy Blue, come blow your **horn**.
The sheep's in the meadow, the cow's in the **corn**.

Rhyming words follow each other

To market, to market
    To buy a fat **pig**.
Home again, home again,
    Jiggety-**jig**.

Rhyming words are on every other line

Not every poem will rhyme. Many modern poems are unrhymed.

2. **Repetition:** *Repetition* is the use of words or phrases *more than once.* Poets often *repeat* words, or sounds and even whole lines. They do this to *stress* an idea or feeling. "To Market, To Market" repeats the opening line by using it to open each stanza. Why do you think the poet did this?

3. **Rhythm:** *Rhythm* is the same thing as *beat.* You can hear this best in songs. You can hear it well in "To Market, To Market" as well. If you read the poem aloud, you can hear some syllables are *stressed.* You also hear that some are *unstressed.* Try keeping time with your hands. You will find yourself beating a steady rhythm.

For example, read the following aloud. As you do, clap your hands each time you hear a stressed syllable or a beat.

### To Market, To Market

To market, to market,
To buy a fat pig,
Home again, home again,
Jiggety-jig.
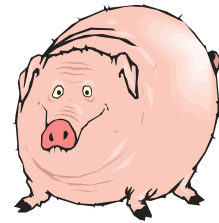
To market, to market,
To buy a fat hog,
Home again, home again,
Jiggety-jog.

To market, to market
To buy a plum bun,
Home again, home again,
Market is done.

The rhythm of this poem is very pronounced. As you read, you can hear the rocking motion of the cart in which the speaker is riding. Also, the rhythm is very *jaunty* and happy sounding. This helps you understand that going to market was an enjoyable occasion. In this way, the *sound* of the poem helps you understand meaning.

Not every poem will have rhythm. Some poems sound like people speaking. These are called *free verse*. However, these poems have been written to convey meaning through the *sound of the words chosen* and *the voice of the speaker*.

Look, for example, at the following poem. A mother is combing her daughter's hair. Read the poem aloud. Listen to the *sound of the words* as they *create the mother's voice*. What do you *learn* about the mother?

**My Daughter's Hair**

My daughter's hair
Was tangled and snarled
From last night's sleep.
And I brushed
The snags gently,
Holding each strand,
Pulling and tugging
The ends.
Trying not to hurt.
She winced,
Raising her shoulders
In self-defense.
I bit my lip,
Concentrating.
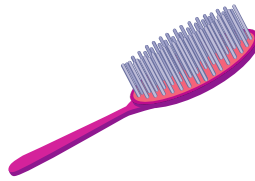
This poem recreates a simple moment between mother and child. However, the voice the poet's words create help you understand the mother's feelings toward her child. She brushes "gently"—a soft sounding word that helps us understand the mother's tenderness toward her child. What other words contribute to this "voice."

**D** ☐ *Diction*, very simply put, is the *writer's choice of words*. As the above discussion tells you, word choice is critical to a writer's ability to create poetry. Using the right words, a poet creates sensory experiences that readers see, hear, taste, smell, and feel.

**Imagery:** An *image* is a sensory experience created by a writer's diction. The words chosen *appeal to your five senses*, reminding you of familiar smells, tastes, sights, or textures. They make the poem live inside of you.

Look again at the above poem about a mother combing her daughter's hair. What images do you *see*? Which ones do you *feel*?

**Figurative Language:** Words and phrases that help you see things in different ways are called *figures of speech*. Poets use figures of speech a great deal to help you see something special or feel a particular way. Three of these figures of speech are *simile*, *metaphor*, and *personification* and are discussed below.

> **Simile:** A *simile* compares two different or unlike things using the word *like* or *as* in the comparison. *Example*: "My love is *like* a red, red rose."



*"My love is like a red, red rose."*

> **Metaphor:** A *metaphor* says one thing *is* another thing or compares two different or unlike things *without* using the word *like* or *as* in the comparison. *Example*: "The school was a *beehive* of activity." "When I was trapped in my house, my telephone was my *umbilical cord* to the world." As you can see, metaphors exaggerate to make a point. Schools are not beehives but they can seem almost as busy—especially just before the bell rings! Similarly, a telephone does not provide one with nourishment, as an umbilical cord does for a baby. However, a telephone will provide access to a kind of nourishment, such as friendship and conversation.

> **Personification:** *Personification* is an expression that gives a human characteristic or action to an object, animal, or idea. *Example*: "the sky is crying"; "the daffodils danced in the wind."

**Theme:** Poems, like short stories, contain *themes*. A poem's theme is its *message*. All of it elements help you understand a poem's message.

Finding meaning in poetry can be difficult, because students are aware that words and images are often symbolic. They stand for something beyond the obvious meaning. Because of this, too many students believe there is a magic key they have to find to unlock the precise meaning of every poem they read.

However, this is not necessarily the case. Most good poetry lends itself to more than one meaning. The important thing to remember is that these meanings come from looking at the words on the page.

Finding meaning in poetry is very similar to finding meaning in drawings and paintings. For example look at the picture below.
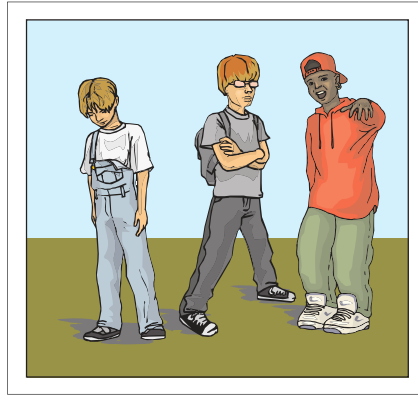


What is happening in this picture? More than likely, you could generate a number of incidents this picture represents. However, most of these scenarios will have several things in common.

- The boy on the left is, in some way, having his feelings hurt by the two boys on the right.

- The boy on the left is not happy.

- The boys on the right seem to be having fun at the other boy's expense.

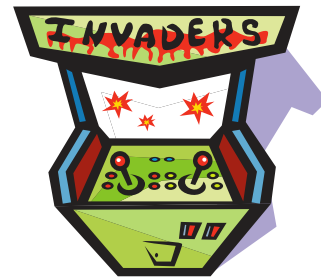What in the picture makes you lean toward these interpretations?

The words in a poem will do the same as the images and colors presented by a visual artist. They will indicate the mood of the artistic work (happy, depressed, etc.).

## Strategies for Reading Poetry: Working with the Words

You probably hear the term *interactive* every day. Perhaps you play interactive video games. Maybe some of your classes use interactive learning units. Some of you have even heard of interactive reading.



*You probably hear the term interactive every day—for example, interactive video games.*

Literally, to interact with something means you *get inside* it. Reading a poem in this way means the same. You are becoming involved with it.

The following strategies can help you do this.

- **Preview:** Look at the poem before you read. How long is it? What do the lines look like? Is it in stanzas? Are the lines sentences? Do sentences go beyond the end of a line?

- **Read Aloud:** Do this more than once. Don't stop at the end of a line. Instead, stop where punctuation tells you to. Listen to the sounds. Are letters and words heavy or light? Listen to rhythm. Is there a beat? Does it sound like anything in particular? Is it free verse? Do the words rhyme? In what pattern do they rhyme?

- **Visualize:** Let yourself see, hear, touch, taste, and smell. Reread both passages you don't understand and any you especially like. Are any of these images familiar to you?

- **Look at Each Word:** Remember that each word is important. Why did the poet choose each one? Think about its different meanings. Think about its sound. How would another word have changed the poem?

- **Search for Theme:** Try to understand the poet's message by looking at all of the elements of the poem. They will give you clues.

- **Build as You Read:** Poems should be read more than once because you will learn something new each time you read. Allow yourself do this—never refuse to change your mind.

- **Enjoy the Poem:** Poetry is about feelings, and you will often find poems discuss the same feelings you have had. Let yourself enjoy them.

## Drama: A Story Told by Actors in Action

Any piece of writing that is meant to be performed by one or more actors in front of an *audience* is classified as *drama*. We refer to these works often as **plays**, and generally, they contain the same elements that we find in both short and long works of fiction. In drama, we find characters in conflict or facing a problem. This conflict gets worse over time until it reaches a state of *crisis*. At the *point of greatest conflict* or *climax*, the main character must decide to solve the problem. The actions of this character bring about the *resolution* or *end* of the story.

There are several different types of drama. However, most high school students find themselves concentrating on three major types of drama. One type of drama is a play that can be called *serious or realistic drama*. This is referred to simply as a *drama*. A second type of drama is **tragedy**, and a third type is **comedy**.

*A second type of drama is* tragedy.

Like other forms of literature, drama also includes elements specific to that *genre* or category. The following information will help you understand these dramatic terms.

*Use the following terms and descriptions as a reference for this section.*

**Acts:** Most drama is divided into acts. An *act* is like a chapter in a novel because it divides up the play into units of action. Very short plays are often one-act plays. Shakespeare's plays, both his *comedies* and *tragedies*, are always divided into five acts.

**Scenes:** Acts are sometimes divided into scenes. A *scene* occurs in a single time and place. When the action shifts either time or place, the curtain will drop or the lights will dim in order to signal a change of scene.

**Stage Directions:** *Stage directions* are the author's instructions to the director, actors, readers, and stage crew. These instructions give instructions about how the play should be presented. Stage directions are usually printed in *italics* and are often enclosed in parentheses ( ) or brackets [ ]. Stage directions describe the following.

- the scenery or setting of a play

- the props—objects, furniture, and other property—that are used during the performance

- lighting used during the play to give special effects

- music and other sound effects to add to the overall realism and mood of the play

- costumes work by the actors that are appropriate for the play's setting and actions

- specific actions or movements for the actors

**Dialogue:** *Dialogue* is the conversation between two or more characters. The dialogue is all that the audience hears. Therefore, the dialogue must convey all of the exposition and characterization needed to understand the action of the play. While writers of novels or short stories can state all sorts of information directly, a playwright must present all information through a spectacle on a stage. Therefore dialogue is most important.

**Soliloquy:** In order to share a character's inner thoughts, playwrights often create soliloquies for their characters. A *soliloquy* is a long speech made by a character when he or she is alone on stage. In a soliloquy, a character is basically speaking his or her thoughts aloud. The character does not directly address the audience or another character. One very famous soliloquy is made by Hamlet as he contemplates committing suicide. We often refer to this as his "To be or not to be" speech.

**Monologue:** Often, one character will be given a long speech with other characters on stage. This is called a *monologue*. During a monologue, a character will often explain himself or herself to the other characters on stage. The character speaking is usually aware of others on stage at the same time. However, he or she does not recognize the audience.

**Aside:** Every so often, a playwright will have a character directly address the audience. The audience must assume that none of the characters on stage will hear this address. Often, physical action cues the use of an aside. Sometimes, a character will place his or her hand "aside" of his or her mouth to speak and lean toward the audience. Usually, the action on stage will freeze as an aside is made. Sometimes, a director will use lighting during an aside, placing a spotlight on the speaker and casting the rest of the stage in shadow.

An *aside* often comments on a character's real motivations or thoughts, helping the audience understand this individual much better than the other characters on stage do.

## Realistic Drama: The Real World on Stage

As stated earlier, drama can be divided into subgenres: the most common being realistic drama, tragedy, and comedy. Realistic dramas are concerned with the situations ordinary human beings face on a daily basis: the breakup of a marriage, loss of a job, or the death of a loved one. These plays are called realistic because of their subject matter.

Tragedies, especially classical and Shakespearean tragedies, are often concerned with characters we would consider larger than life.

The plots of tragedies tend to center around life-and-death situations and crises of international and national significance.

Another major difference between the tragedy and the serious drama is that, often, a serious drama will end happily as the characters involved learn to deal with the situations and obstacles they encounter. We sometimes find humor in these plays, just as we do in real life. The purpose of the serious play is not, however, to make us laugh. It is, as in most serious literature, to teach us some new insight about life or human nature.

*The plots of tragedies tend to center around life-and-death situations.*

The protagonist in serious drama must, at some time, gain our sympathy. This character can be unlikable at times; however, as the drama progresses, the protagonist must move the audience to care.

Sometimes, the character does not change. Instead, the audience's opinion of the character changes as we learn more about that particular person. Either way, our perception of a main character usually changes within the course of a realistic play.

## Transume: Change or Revelation of Character

Writers of realistic plays often convey their themes through this change or revelation of character. Therefore, creating a "transume"—or brief account of the changes a character goes through during a drama— is an effective way for readers to analyze the action of realistic drama. On the following page is an analysis of such a transume for the character of Mrs. Wright from the dramatic play *Trifles* by Susan Glaspell. It is interesting to note that Mrs. Wright never appears in the play, but she is still the main character. Mrs. Wright is only known through the other characters in the play.

## Transume Chart of Mrs. Wright

**Play:** *Trifles*                    **Author:** Susan Glaspell

> Note: The filled in transume chart will indicate how and why your opinion of the above character came to change.

**Part 1:** In the first column, you write down what you first thought of her or perceived her to be like and in the second column what you read that made you think this.

**Part 2:** You write down the events or information that changed your opinion.

**Part 3:** In the first column, you write down what you think about the character at the end of the play and in the second column what you read that made you think this.

### PART 1

| Character as First Introduced or Perceived | What Makes Me Think This |
|---|---|
| crazy | sits in the rocking chair, pleating her apron and laughing while her husband is upstairs dead |
| guilty of murder dangerous; evil | only one there, said she saw no one else; husband strangled with a rope |
| silly | worries about her fruit preserves freezing while she's being held for murder |

### PART 2

| Forces of Change |
|---|
| 1. Mrs. Wright endured life with her stern, unsociable husband. It changed her from a cheerful girl who liked pretty clothes and loved to sing into a woman who didn't even belong to the Ladies' Aid. |
| 2. She lived on the desolate and deserted farm: worked hard as did all farm women—preserving food, baking bread, quilting. |
| 3. She never had children; very little companionship. Her neighbors were busy themselves and were never comfortable around her husband. |
| 4. Husband killed her only companion, a canary she had bought from a traveling peddler. |

### PART 3

| Characters at End of Play | What Makes Me Think This |
|---|---|
| sad, lonely | Mrs. Hale's description of John Wright; the "stillness" of the prairie homestead |
| no different from other women | interested in her fruit; had been about her regular chores; wanted her apron, even in jail |
| driven to commit murder | Mrs. Hale understands her needing the canary—"If there's been years and years of nothing, then a bird to sing to you, it would be awful—still after the bird was still." the canary killed violently: its head twisted completely around |

## Tragedy: You Know the Good Guy Loses

We use the term "tragedy" to describe events in our lives that bring sudden moments of suffering, pain, and even death. A dramatic tragedy is different. In a tragedy, we see a definite pattern of events.

- A good person, often a person of noble birth, goes from happiness to destruction. This person is called the *tragic hero*.

- This person, because he possesses a weakness or *tragic flaw*, begins the chain of events that leads to his own destruction. Sometimes this tragic hero realizes that he is responsible for his own destruction and other times he is not even aware that he has done this.

- Sometimes at the moment the character realizes he is ruined, he realizes that he has had a hand in his destruction: he gains true insight into himself and into his place in the universe.

- The tragic hero's destruction is complete: he can never recover his original state of happiness.

- In watching this good man fall, the audience is overcome with pity for him and with fear for themselves. After all, if such a good man can be destroyed, ordinary people can certainly have the same thing happen to them. This feeling of fear and pity results in the audience undergoing a *catharsis* or release of emotions. This catharsis leaves audience members feeling relieved rather than hopeless.

- The tragic hero suffers, but he does so with dignity. His tragedy shows the very best of human qualities we admire.

In addition to the terms for understanding drama, the following definitions will help you to understand tragedy.

*Use the following terms and descriptions as a reference for this section.*

**Tragic Hero:** The *tragic hero* is the protagonist of a tragedy. He must be a good man who begins the story in a state of happiness. His fall from happiness is the basis of the tragic plot.

**Reversal:** The *reversal* is the change in fortune of the tragic hero as he goes from happiness to misfortune. All tragedies contain a reversal.

**Tragic Flaw:** The *tragic flaw* is some internal weakness that the tragic hero possesses that causes his downfall. This weakness can be too much pride, ambition, passion or some other fault that will lead the character to destruction.

**Catharsis:** *Catharsis* is the audience's emotional response to tragedy. It is a release of strong emotions, usually involving pity, compassion, and fear. It isn't unlike having a good cry at a sad movie or after having a particularly bad day. You feel better afterwards—your emotions have been released or purged.

**Comic Relief:** *Comic relief* provides the moments of humor in an otherwise serious tragedy. Usually, this is in the form of physical humor, such as a person slipping on a banana peel. Juliet's nurse provided several scenes of comic relief in *Romeo and Juliet*. Classical Greek tragedies did not contain comic relief. Shakespearean tragedies always did. Modern tragedies often, but not always, contain comic relief.

## Comedy: Celebrating Life, Celebrating Laughter

A *comedy* is drama that is light and funny, and usually has a happy ending. Some comedies are romantic comedies, which depict lovers who must overcome all kinds of difficulties in order to be together. Romantic comedies often end in a huge wedding celebration that not only celebrates a new beginning but also life itself. Shakespeare originated the romantic comedy, but we see many of them today on television and in movie theaters.

Farce is drama that is funny because of ridiculous situations, unrealistic characters, and physical behaviors. Characters are often stereotypes with a single character trait exaggerated to an extreme. These characters often do bizarre things that most normal people probably wouldn't do in real life unless they were doing it as a joke. A *farce* often uses *low comedy*—humor that involves *physical action*. Low comedy is used in cartoons and movies. A character tripping over a chair, slipping on a banana peel, or throwing a pie at someone are examples of low comedy.
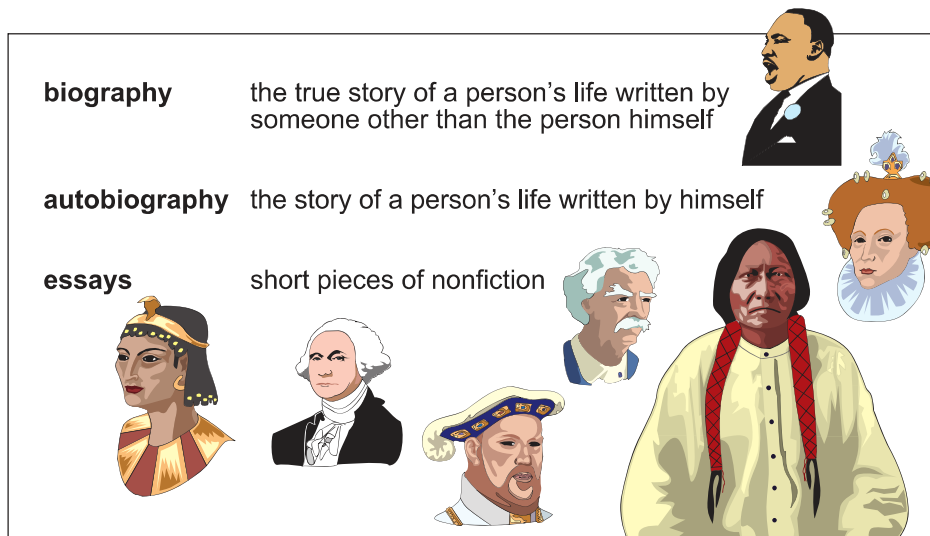
Although we go to comedies to smile and laugh, this type of drama often gives us much more. Comedies frequently show us the humor behind our daily lives. For example, a young man who is meeting his girlfriend's parents for the first time won't think it is funny if he discovers he has poppy seeds stuck in his teeth or realizes that he has on one black sock and one brown sock. If you are watching a comedy that includes a scene like this you might think it is funny because you can identify with the character but are removed from the actual situation. Being able to identify with comedic situations while not being directly involved helps us look at our human qualities and see the underlying humor.

## Nonfiction: Seeing Art in the Real World

Many people think nonfiction is *factual information* such as they find in their history and science textbooks. They are correct. These sources contain one type of nonfiction called *informative nonfiction*. Unit 2 dealt with strategies for reading informative nonfiction, which has a specific purpose. This purpose is providing you with information, such as your *textbooks* contain. You will also find informative nonfiction in *encyclopedias*, *magazines*, and *newspapers*.

A second type of nonfiction is referred to as *literary nonfiction*. This *genre*, or category of literary work, is meant to be read in the same way as fiction. Despite this, literary nonfiction is very different from fiction. Instead of reading about made-up characters, we read about real people doing things in real places. The plots of these works are *actual events* rather than imaginary ones.

Literary nonfiction includes three major types: biographies, autobiographies, and essays.

| | |
|---|---|
| **biography** | the true story of a person's life written by someone other than the person himself |
| **autobiography** | the story of a person's life written by himself |
| **essays** | short pieces of nonfiction |

## Biography and Autobiography: Life Stories about Real People

The word *biography* comes from two Greek words—*bios,* meaning "life," and *graphein*, meaning "to write." Those words are shown in the meaning of biography—the true story of a person's life written by someone other than the person himself. The person who writes the biography is called a *biographer*. It is the job of the biographer to make sure that the

**Unit 6: Literature—Discovering the World, Analyzing Ourselves**

*integrity*. To maintain integrity, biographers do not have to worship their subjects or criticize them. They simply have to make an effort to tell the truth. The biographer's objective is just not to report a life, but to make the subject's life *rewarding* and *entertaining* reading.

Because a biography is more than a collection of facts, the biographer must carefully research the facts of the subject's life. The biographer must be able to explain the motives behind the subject's actions, the method behind his achievements, and the lessons that the subject learned from any setbacks. In researching, the biographer uses personal letters, diaries, public documents, and interviews as sources of information. In some cases, the biographer interviews the subject or people who know the subject personally. From these interviews, he may gather very brief accounts of true events that are meant to entertain or inform. These accounts are called **anecdotes**. *Anecdotes* usually reveal the character of people by giving examples of their behavior. Anecdotes add fullness and color to a biography.

*Queen Victoria*

In order to present fully the life of a person, most biographies are book-length. When the writer wishes to only present a few events that illustrate important characteristics of the subject's personality, then he writes a **biographical sketch**. The *biographical sketch* allows the writer to capture the basic quality of the person's life in a few episodes or a single important event.

*Benjamin Franklin*

Many biographies are written from what is called the **third-person point of view**. In this method, the writer is not a character in the biography and refers to the subject as "he" or "she." In other cases, the writer may be a major part of the biography, such as when a daughter writes a book about her father. In this case, the writer may tell the story through his or her own eyes, using the words "I" and "me." This is known as the **first-person point of view**.

Many biographies have been written about famous people after they have died. Some famous people hire biographers to write their stories while they are still alive. That way they know for sure that what is written is true.

The *autobiography* is different from the biography—it is the story of a person's life written by that person. The writer of an autobiography is telling the story of his or her own life. The writer recreates personal events as objectively as possible, trying to see the patterns that they form and the meaning that they hold. In writing the autobiography, the author is able to tell the most meaningful events in his or her life, and then pass along the insights gained over time. Because the writer is speaking for himself, the first person point of view is used—"I."

There are many reasons that people choose to write about themselves—no one reason is more important than others. Every writer has his own motivation for writing. However, many writers wish to share the stories of how they struggled against the odds to achieve their goals.
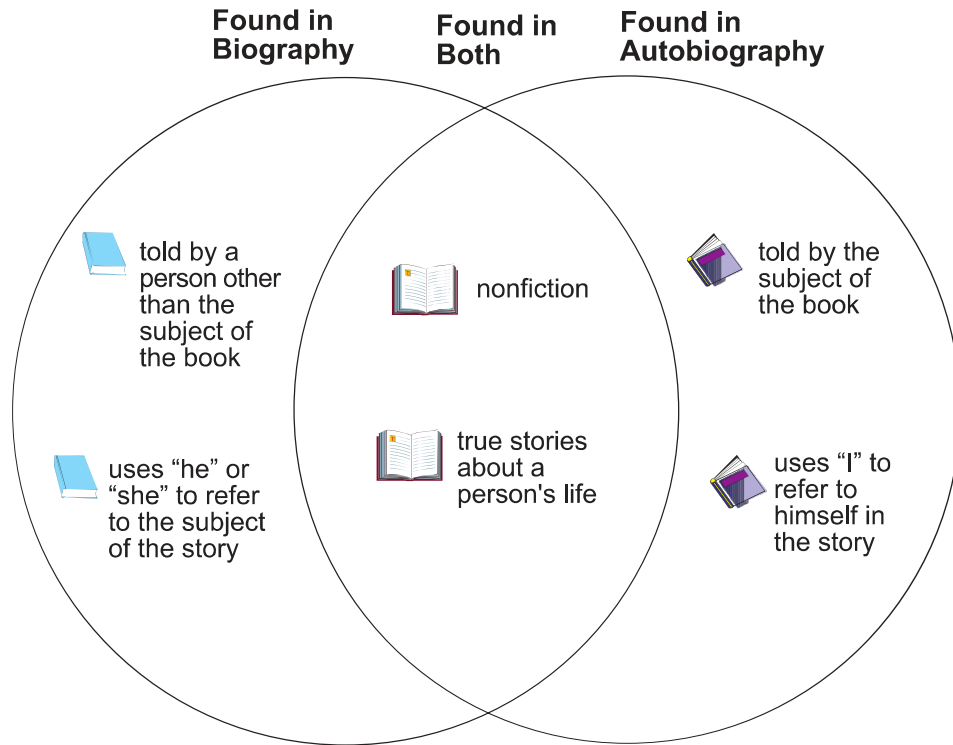
As in the biography or any other work of nonfiction, the autobiography also has a central idea. The idea may be a particular point about the subject or an insight about life in general. The writer uses various techniques such as relating facts, providing details, and giving examples to convey the central idea.

One form of autobiography is the **diary**. A *diary* is a day-by-day account of the events that occur in a person's own life. The author of a diary usually writes for personal satisfaction and better self-awareness. Thoughts of publication are not usually in the writer's mind. Some diaries, however, are written with the intention of having a wide audience eventually read it.

Along with diaries, journals and letters are examples of short autobiographical narratives. Other autobiographies are very long because they cover events over an entire lifetime.

Below is a comparison in the form of a Venn diagram between a biography and an autobiography.

**Found in Biography**     **Found in Both**     **Found in Autobiography**

told by a person other than the subject of the book

uses "he" or "she" to refer to the subject of the story

nonfiction

true stories about a person's life

told by the subject of the book

uses "I" to refer to himself in the story

## Essays: Short Pieces of Nonfiction

*Essays* are short pieces of *nonfiction*. Essay can have a variety of subjects. Usually, essays included in literary nonfiction are informal. Unit 3 offered strategies for reading and writing informal essays.

## Strategies for Reading Nonfiction Interactively: Working with the Text

As you read nonfiction interactively, the following strategies will help.

**Strategies for Reading Nonfiction Interactively**

- **Preview:** The title usually tells you many things. It often tells you the type of work. It will tell you if it is an essay or an autobiography. Often, it will tell you the subject. Look at the illustrations. When you read fiction, illustrations show ideas about the story. When you read nonfiction, they are different. Pictures are of real people. Often they are of real events. You can really see where the events took place. You can see what the characters looked like.

- **Figure Out Organization:** Are you reading a biography? An autobiography? Then it is probably in *chronological* or time order. Is it an essay? Then maybe it is arranged differently. Maybe it is in order of importance. Try to figure out the order. This can help you predict what will happen next.

- **Ask Questions:** Why? What? How? What is fact? What is opinion? See pages 106-107 in Unit 2.

- **Predict:** Stop occasionally. Try to figure out how the story will end.

- **Build as You Read:** You learn as you read. Let your mind change as you learn new facts.

- **Evaluate as You Read:** How do you feel about the characters as you learn about them? How do you feel about the story? How well has the story been told?

- **Use the Clues:** Be a detective—read for context clues. The story may have overt and implied clues. *Overt* clues will be openly stated. The clues will not be hidden or secret. *Implied* clues will be suggested. The clues will not be directly stated. Keep your eyes open and your mind ready to interpret the clues.

## Critical Analysis: Will This Story Be a Classic in the 21st Century?

Now that you are familiar with the elements of literature, you are able to decide whether or not a story is worthy of being considered literature (which has lasting value) or not. A story or book may be considered "a good read" without being classified as literature. Popular books, plays, short stories and poetry that are enjoyable may eventually be critically acclaimed as good literature. You probably evaluate movies in a similar way, without even realizing you are doing it. A good adventure movie may be fun to watch and discuss, but a profound exploration of life in a more mature way may be considered "a classic" by critics of film.

By using the elements of a story map and a few other criteria, you may develop a critical analysis of a story. The theme, the feelings coaxed out by the author, and the worldwide truth may be characteristics of literature for your criteria.

Use the following steps to help you complete a critical analysis.

**Strategies for Critical Analysis**

- **Identify the type of work.** Is it a short story, a novel, a tragedy or comedy, etc?

- **Develop a list of characteristics you will use to analyze and evaluate the item.** To analyze a poem, you would probably focus on the feeling that you got while reading the poem.

- **List the characteristics in order of importance.** Were the characters in the novel realistic? Was the plot believable? Was the theme evident to you when you finished the story?

- **Apply the criteria to the elements you are judging.** Mark the criteria to the things you are judging. Mark the appropriate column if the type of work fulfills what it should to be considered "literature."

- **Add the number of marks in each column.** Decide which of the items has the most characteristics.

- **Write a conclusion that supports your decision.**

The following Evaluation Matrix is an example of a **critical analysis** of "*Lucille's Black Sheep*" by Janice McLain.

## Evaluation Matrix

Type of Work: ___Short Story___

Title: ___"Lucille's Black Sheep"___

Author: ___Janice McLain___

**Criteria**

| | Favorable | Unfavorable | Neutral |
|---|---|---|---|
| Story's plot was believable. | ✗ | | |
| Story's characters are real people, their feelings are understandable to me. | ✗ | | |
| Story is filled with action. | | ✗ | |
| Story has a worthwhile theme. | ✗ | | |
| Story is easy to read. | ✗ | | |

**Conclusion:** The short story, "*Lucille's Black Sheep*," met my top criteria. I found the plot believable to read even though it was written about a time period before I was born and a setting I was not familiar with. I could understand the people's feelings. It did not have enough action; however, this single unfavorable characteristic did not lessen my desire to find out how the story would end. I found the theme to be worthwhile, and feel other readers will agree. I would recommend this story to others.