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## **Basic elements of a short story**

### 1) Plot

It is the plan, design, scheme or pattern of events in a play, poem or work of fiction; and, of further, the organization of incident and character in such a way as to induce curiosity and suspense in the spectator or reader. The story can be made interesting –

- by giving it a sense of movement
- by involving the reader and
- by building up suspense.

In the space/time continuum of plot the continual question operates in three tenses: Why did that happen? Why is this happening? What is going to happen next and why (To which may be added :is anything going to happen?)

Following are the elements of plot-

- i) Initial situation - the beginning. It is the first incident that makes the story move.
- ii) Conflict or Problem- goal which the main character of the story has to achieve.
- iii) Complication - obstacles which the main character has to overcome.
- iv) Climax- highest point of interest of the story.
- v) Denouement or Resolution- the end of the story. What happens to the character after overcoming all obstacles/failing to achieve the desired result and reaching / not reaching the goal.

## 2) Atmosphere

The mood and feeling or the overall effect of a creative work of literature. It enables a writer to establish lifelikeness and win the reader's willingness to accept the world created by the storyteller. The atmosphere of a story performs the following functions-

- binds the story together,
- sets the time-frame - past, present or future,
- creates the mood in the reader,
- establishes the locale and
- lends an air of lifelikeness or authenticity to the story.

Thus, atmosphere helps the writer in creating the texture of his imagined world with its characters, locale and environment.

Atmosphere can be created through dialogue, detailed description of setting and objects, through economical touches in which the tale and the setting blend, or through piling up of details. While a particular kind of atmosphere can be created just by a touch, the same effect can also be produced by piling up of detail. For example Anita Desai's story 'Scholar and Gypsy' which deals with an American sociologist David and his wife Pat, who allows the Indian heat to beat her. The glazed eyes and the drooping head tell us in the first two sentences how she feels. Bombay takes over from here - coconut shells, betel-stained walls, fish and lepers' stumps. She finds the people 'so large and vital and forceful in their brilliant clothes and with their metallic voices and their eyes flashed over like barber's shears, cutting and exposing.....' that she feels crushed rather than revived.

## 3) Character

The person portrayed in a narrative or dramatic work. A character is presumably an 'imagined person' who inhabits a story (exceptions could have animals or inanimate objects like the wind as inhabitants).

There is not enough room in the short story for an elaborate portrayal of character, yet character is one of its most important elements. Even with the constraints of space, the short story does have ample scope for developing a character.

E. M. Forster suggested two ways of building character: a writer may sculpt a round character or sketch a flat character. The former is made up of many personality traits and tends to be complex and both more life-like and believable, while the latter consists of only a few personality traits and tends to be less believable. Flat characters tend to remain the same throughout the story. Round characters usually develop or change. Usually, major characters are round and minor characters are flat.

Characters may at times be symbolic, for example Ralph in the novel *Lord of the Flies* symbolically represents civilisation and democracy. Characters can also be historical or biographical (modeled on real people)

There are certain factors that one has to keep in mind while choosing characters for a short story:

- a) in a character-dominated story, the choice of character is more important than plot/structure.
- b) there should be clarity of visualization in depicting character.
- c) the characters must be familiar to the writer and the reader.

#### 4) Narration

Narration in the short story is different from that in the novel mainly because of the difference in the length. The one who tells the story to the reader is called the narrator.

Stories may be narrated in the first person 'I' and usually the 'I' is a major or minor character in the story. For example, Truman Capote's *Breakfast at Tiffany's* where an unnamed character tells the story of Holly Golightly, who he used to know some fifteen years ago. The first person is not omniscient or omnipresent.

Stories may also be told in the third person. This is the most commonly used narrative mode in literature. The third person narrator is free to describe not only the external happenings that each character is involved with but also what happens in the mind of each as the narrator is all-knowing or omniscient.

The important characteristics of narration in the short story are compression and brevity.