Story Elements in Literature

A) ***Plot***: In short, the events that happen during a story.

The Plot can be broken down into four sections (also known as *climactic order)*:

1) Introduction: the section of the plot where the *characters* and *setting* are established.
   * the elements of the *conflict* are generally established in the introduction as well. *Exposition* occurs here.
2) Rising Action: the main body of the plot. The conflict is explored in more depth and the characters are developed more fully.

3) Climax: the most intense part of the narrative. All action in the story usually leads up to this point.

4) Dénouement: the conclusion of the story. All (or most) of the loose ends are wrapped up. Also known as: *falling action* or *resolution*.

➢ **Additional plot devices**:

   * Foreshadowing: when the author hints of actions that will occur later in the story.

   * Flashback: when the author presents scenes that have occurred chronologically *before* the beginning of the story.
   * Exposition: writing or speech that explains or informs. Usually, the first part of the story where characters, setting, and the basic situation are established.

B) **Conflict**: the obstacles in the story to be overcome.
   There are several different types of conflict:

1) Internal: when a character struggles with his/her own emotions or sense of right and wrong.

   * *man vs. himself*

2) External: when a character is threatened by some character or force outside of themselves.

   * *man vs. man*
   * *man vs. nature/environment*
   * *man vs. the unknown*
   * *man vs. the supernatural*

Additional conflict terms:

Protagonist: the *hero* of the story. Usually the main character, usually sympathetic. Must overcome the *conflict* in the story.

Antagonist: responsible for creating the *conflict*. Acts in opposition to the protagonist. Usually unsympathetic. May be human or a non-human creature. May even be a non-human force, such as the weather.

C) **Characterization**: refers to the author's presentation and development of a *character*. One must ask two questions of characters in literature.

1) *Is the character **flat** or **round**?*

- Flat character: the character has only one or two identifiable personality traits and is easily recognizable as a stereotype. Also known as a *stock character*.

- Round character: the character has many personality traits and seems more like a real person.

2) *Is the character **static** or **dynamic**?*

- Static Character: a character that remains the same throughout the story.

- Dynamic Character: a character that changes during the course of the story.

➤ Additional character terms:

- Stereotype/Stock character: a character that possesses expected traits of a group rather than being an individual. An example is the stereotype of the rugged cowboy.

- Direct Presentation: the character is described by the author, the narrator or the other characters. We are *told directly* what the character looks and acts like.

- Indirect Presentation: a character's traits are revealed through actions and speech. We are *shown indirectly* what a character is like by the way he/she acts.

- Motivation: the forces that compel the characters to act as they do.

- Foil: This is when a character is portrayed as opposite of another character in a particular way. By putting the two characters next to each other, the different characteristic is emphasized.

D) **Setting**: establishes the following:

- the physical world depicted in the story (time and place)

- the social environment of the characters (customs, moral values, etc.)

E) **Point of View**: the perspective from which the story is told. There are several different types:

1) <u>First Person</u>: The story is told in the voice of one of the characters in the story using "I." *This character is directly involved in the action of the story*.

2) <u>Third Person</u>: The storyteller is not directly involved in the action of the story. Divided into three different types:

   - <u>Omniscient</u>: The author tells the story. The reader can enter the thoughts of all the characters and see all the action in the story.

   - <u>Limited Omniscient</u>: The author tells the story. The reader can enter the thoughts and follow the actions of only one character.

   - <u>Objective</u>: The author tells the story. The reader can enter no one's thoughts. Much like a straight news report.

F) **Theme**: the central idea or purpose in a literary work; the insight that the author wants to pass along to the reader.

- makes some comment on the human condition

- common themes are the nature of humanity, the nature of society, man's relationship with the world around him

- a theme must apply the reader as much as the characters in the story

- the reader may disagree with the author's viewpoint expressed in the theme

G) **Moral**: the "lesson" of the story.

- The author implies a judgment on the actions of the characters in the story.

- Differs from *theme* in that the moral implies that the actions of the characters are either good or bad, while a theme makes no judgment but simply shows us how we are as human beings.

H) **Tone**: the writer's attitude toward the reader and toward the subject. The tone may be formal or informal, friendly or distant, personal or impersonal.

- Humour: The quality that makes something laughable or amusing.

- Sarcasm: witty language used to convey insults or scorn.

- Irony: literary technique that that involves surprising, interesting, or amusing contradictions (opposites).

I) **Mood/Atmosphere**: the feeling created in the reader by the literary work.
This is usually created by the writer's choice of words, by the events in the work, and by the physical setting.
The author's tone also plays a large part in setting the mood.

- Suspense: the feeling of growing curiosity and anxious uncertainty about the outcome of events in a narrative.

- See also Humour.

J) **Genres**: a way of dividing literary works into categories. Some common genres of fiction are science fiction, historical drama, and romance. Some specific genre terms are:
- Satire: a type of comedy that ridicules or criticizes the faults of individuals or groups. Can be gentle and amusing or bitter and angry.
-

K) **Miscellaneous Terms**:

- Dialogue: a conversation between characters. Punctuated using quotation marks.

- Narrative: another word for a story.

- Narration: An outside voice or character within the work tells the story.