**Short Stories: The Basics**

**What is a short story?**

* A short story is a piece of fiction that can be read in one sitting. It is typically too short to publish on its own. They are usually anywhere between 5-60 pages.
* Like a novel, it uses character, conflict, theme, setting, and point of view/narration to create an impression on the reader. However, there isn’t as much time to develop characters.
* In a short story every word counts, so it creates restrictions for the author.

**Short Stories**

* Usually, short stories concentrate on a single major event with only one or two characters. So the plot would be streamlined.
* The rising action of the plot and climax might come to a head quite quickly; it may even occur in the last few paragraphs or the last few lines.
* **Plot:** The events in the story or the series of actions that make up the story are referred to as plot. The plot in a story usually has five elements: the exposition, the rising action, the climax, the falling action, and the resolution. This is what happens in the story.

**Plot**

* The **exposition** sets up the story by introducing the main characters, the setting, and the problem to be solved (conflict).
* The **rising action** is the main part of the story, where the problem develops.
* The **climax** is the highest point of the story where the most exciting events occur.
* The **falling action** follows the climax, and contains the events that lead to the conclusion.
* The **resolution** is the end of the story where all of the problems are solved.

**Conflict**

* Conflict is what drives the plot forward. The reader discovers the conflict by the end of the introduction with the inciting incident, an event that demonstrates the conflict to the reader and begins the rising action. There are two main types of conflict:
* **Internal Conflict:** This conflict takes place inside the character.
* **External Conflict:** This is when the conflict is outside a character and the character meets some kind of opposing force. It is obvious to all the characters in the story and the reader.
* There are several subtypes of conflict.

**Person vs. Person**

**Person vs. Nature**

**Person vs. Society**

**Person vs. Self**

**Do you know of any other types of conflict?**

**Endings**

* Denouement is French for “unknotting”, so you can think of it as the “unknotting” or “untangling of the plot. Other words for it are conclusion or resolution. Not all conclusions provide resolution.
* There are four main types of endings:
* **Expository Happy:** All loose ends are tied up and explained; the ending is happy.
* **Expository Sad:** All loose ends are tired up and explained; the ending is sad.
* **Surprise/Twist:** Something happens that the reader does not expect.
* **Unresolved/Indeterminate/Cliffhanger:** The reader is left with questions and has to, in part, supply the ending him or herself. Some loose ends are left to dangle.
* Endings can also be bad: **Anti-Climax** – A dull or disappointing ending to something after increasing excitement.

**Characterization**

* The author may choose any of six ways to reveal a character to the reader. The reader must therefore be prepared to watch for “clues” about each character in these same six ways:
  + Physical appearance
  + Things the character says
  + Things the character does (actions)
  + Things the character thinks
  + Things other characters say about the character
  + Author information

**Narration/Point of View**

* The angle from which the story is told.
  + **First Person:** One character tells the story in the first person. The reader only knows as much as the narrator. (Uses I, me)
  + **Third Person:** An outside narrator tells the story. (Uses she/he/they)
    - **Omniscient:** Reader knows all of what is done, said, felt, and thought by the characters.
    - **Limited Omniscient:** Limits the observations of thoughts and feelings to one character; the story is presented from this character’s eyes.
    - **Objective:** The author is like a movie camera that moves around freely recording objects. The author offers no comments on the characters or their actions. Readers are not told the thoughts or feelings of the characters.

**Setting**

* The setting of the story is **where** the story takes place, but it is also **when** the story takes place.
* The author may state it directly, but they may also leave it to the reader to infer from textual clues (such as the weather.)
* Another aspect of the setting is the **emotional setting**. The **mood** or the **atmosphere** is the emotional setting.

**Some Terms**

* **Tone:** the attitude of the writer towards his/her subject.
  + The tone may be comic, serious, critical, angry, etc.
* **Mood:** the feeling the reader gets from the story. It is created through images, rhyme, rhythm, and other devices.
  + Ex. The mood of *The Simpsons* is humorous, but the tone is critical.
* **Atmosphere:** refers to the feeling, emotion, or mood a writer conveys to the reader through the description of setting and objects.

**Theme**

* **Theme** is the message of the story, and is stated in one or two complete sentences.
* When a person is describing a story’s theme, the person is describing what can be learned about life and/or people from the story.

**Some Other Terms**

* **Deus ex Machina:** Latin for “God out of the machine.” This refers to any artificial device that is not a natural extension of the plot that allows for easy, and unbelievable resolution of the conflict.
* **In medias res:** Beginning in the middle of the action.
* **Flashback:** When a character thinks back to an event that occurred before the story began.
* **Foreshadowing:** A hint of events to come.