

**Standards Focus: Elements of Fiction***Literary Terms to Know*

In the study of literature, it is important to remember that a story consists of several elements: plot, characters, setting, point of view, conflict, symbol, and theme. In the realm of fiction, the author can place an emphasis on any one or more of these elements, or conversely, de-emphasize any one or more of these elements. For example, one cannot analyze a story looking only at setting, but some authors may want the reader to focus on the plot, so the setting of the story may not be a major focus. It is important when analyzing a piece of literature that you look at all of the elements and how they work *together* to create an entire story.

- ❖ **Plot** - the related series of events that make up a story
  - Exposition - the beginning of a story in which the main characters, conflicts, and setting are introduced
  - Rising action - the action that takes place before the climax; the plot becomes more complicated, leading to the climax
  - Climax - the turning point of the story; emotional high point for the protagonist
  - Falling action - the action that takes place after the climax, leading to the resolution
  - Resolution - the end of a story; problems are solved, and the characters' futures are foreshadowed
- ❖ **Conflict** - the struggle(s) between opposing forces, usually characters
  - Internal conflict - a character's struggle with himself or his conscience
  - External conflict - a character's struggle with an outside force, such as another character, nature, or his environment
- ❖ **Characters** - the individuals involved (either directly or indirectly) in the action of the story
  - Protagonist - the central character in a story; struggles against the antagonist
  - Antagonist - the conflicting force against the protagonist; can be another character, a force of nature, or the protagonist struggling against himself
- ❖ **Setting** - the time and place, or where and when, the action occurs
  - Physical - the physical environment in which a story takes place; this includes the social and political environment, as well as the atmosphere
  - Chronological - the time in which a story takes place (includes the era, season, date, time of day, etc.)
- ❖ **Point of View** - the perspective from which a story is told
  - Narrator - the "voice" that tells a story; may or may not reflect the opinions and attitudes of the author himself
  - First person - a narrator who uses the first-person pronouns (I, me, my, myself, etc.) when telling the story; focuses on the thoughts, feelings, and opinions of a particular character
  - Third person limited - a narrator who uses the third-person perspective with the third person pronouns (he, she, it, they, etc.); observes the action as an outside observer, revealing the thoughts, feelings, and opinions of *only one* character
  - Third person omniscient - like third-person limited, the third-person omniscient narrator uses the third-person perspective with the third person pronouns (he, she, it, they, etc.), this type of narrator observes the action as an outside observer, however, revealing the thoughts, feelings, and opinions of *several* characters
- ❖ **Theme** - the main idea behind a literary work; the message in the story