A Short Story Study Guide

Setting: The background against which the action takes place. Setting includes:

1. Geographical location – Maple Ridge, Canada, The North Pole
2. Social Setting – this includes occupations and beliefs of the characters concerned (family life, jail, etc.)
3. Time – century, year, season, time of day
4. Mood or Atmosphere – the emotional colouring of the story (ex. Haunting, dad, lonely, spooky, peaceful)

Plot: Plot is the order or relationship of events in the story. The plot action of the story builds up to a climax and then falls to a conclusion or resolution of the conflict. The plot can be understood as including the following elements:

a) Introduction – catches the reader’s interest and introduces the setting and the characters
b) Inciting Incident – the conflict is introduced / something happens to incite the conflict
c) Rising Action – the conflict develops or becomes increasingly complicated
d) Climax – the turning point of the action where the conflict may be resolved
e) Falling Action – the “let down” or decline of events that lead to the conclusion
f) Conclusion – explains what happens in the end. It is relatively short

Point of View: The vantage point from which the story is told which can be from the person who tells the story, or through whose eyes the events are “seen” (First person = “I”, Third person = he, she, it they)

1. First person: This point of view occurs when one of the characters tells the story from his/her perspective. The pronoun “I” is used. Ex: “I walked slowly, wishing I could turn and run.”
2. Omniscient: This point of view allows the narrator to relate the thoughts and feelings of all the characters in the story.
3. Limited Omniscient: This point of view allows the narrator to relate the thoughts and feelings of only one character in the story.
4. Objective: In this point of view, the author becomes a roaming video camera that can record only what is seen and hear. He/she cannot enter into the characters mind. (Characters’ thoughts and feelings are not known.)

Theme: All works have a theme. The theme is the central idea of the story, usually implied rather than directly stated. Theme is the author’s message to the reader.

Character: When describing a character remember to include the following aspects of character:

1. Physical attributes (what they look like)
2. Personality traits (are they strong, weak, messy, clumsy, easy-going, friendly)
3. Behaviors (how they behave toward others and themselves)
4. Mental/Emotional Characteristics (how does the character think/feel)

The Protagonist is the main character in the story
The Antagonist competes against or is in opposition to the protagonist
Character Types

1. **Round character**: a well-developed character. He/she is complex and three-dimensional.
2. **Flat character**: has only one dimension (the reader sees only one side of this character’s personality). The reader does not learn very much about the character and often these characters are stereotypes.
3. **Static character**: does not undergo any significant changes throughout the story. The opinions, beliefs, attitudes, actions or behaviors of a static character remain much the same throughout.
4. **Dynamic or Developing character**: undergoes a permanent change resulting from the conflict he/she is involved in. The change can be for better or worse.

**Conflict**: is the heart of the plot. Without the tension provided by the conflict, you would not have a story. The conflict is the struggle between opposing characters or forces, usually the protagonist vs. someone or something else. The four main conflicts are:

1. **Character vs. Character** – when two characters are in conflict with one another. The conflict may be physical, emotional, or psychological. Ex: two women are in love with the same man.
2. **Character vs. Self** – when the character experiences an internal emotional conflict, such as trying to make a decision or trying to make sense of some event.
3. **Character vs. Society** – the character may be in conflict with society; for example, an environmentalist fights to preserve a wilderness area that most residents of the area would like to see developed.
4. **Character vs. Nature/the Environment** - when the character struggles against natural forces – a hurricane, a snow storm, a flood.

**Foreshadowing**: This is when the author presents the reader with a “sign” or “hint” of what is to happen later in the story. Foreshadowing prepares the reader for the climax, the resolution and for any possible changes in the character.

**Symbolism**: The use of symbols to express ideas, giving symbolic meanings or significance to objects, events or relationships. Ex: a green light means cross the street.

**Irony**: Irony is the discrepancy between appearance/expectation and reality/result.