



The Elements of Fiction and Drama

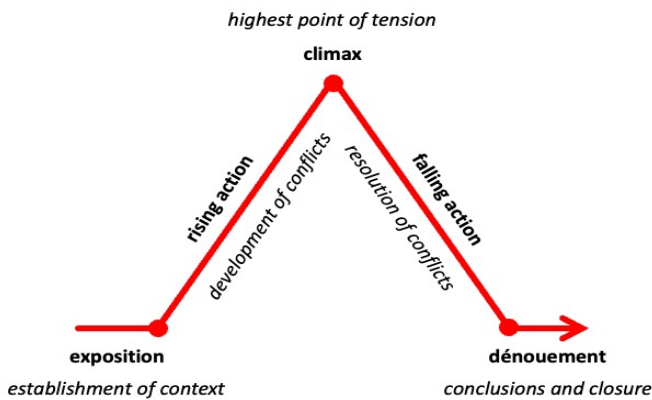
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The Elements of Fiction are **plot**, **conflict**, **character**, **setting**, **viewpoint**, **language**, and **tone**. The Elements of Drama are the same as the Elements of Fiction, with the addition of **mode**. Literary critics analyze fictional and dramatic works with the Elements of Fiction and the Elements of Drama to reveal the **themes** of those works.

Plot

“The pattern of events and situations in a narrative or dramatic work, as selected and arranged both to emphasize relationships—usually of cause and effect—between incidents and to elicit a particular kind of interest in the reader or audience” (Baldick 280)

Freytag’s Pyramid



- **exposition:** the establishment of the context and the introduction of the main conflict in a literary work
- **rising action:** the development of the conflict and the central characters in a literary work
- **climax:** the highest point of tension or drama, or the most important turning point in a literary work
- **falling action:** the resolution of the conflict in a literary work
- **dénouement:** the conclusion of the events in a literary work

Conflict

“The tension in a situation between characters, or the actual opposition of characters” or forces (e.g., “society,” “environment,” etc.) in a literary work (Cuddon 152)

Conflict Types

- **external:** occurs between two (or more) characters or forces in a literary work
- **internal:** occurs between one character and themselves, within their own mind

Conflict Modes

- **ostensible:** a literal, surface conflict
- **actual:** what that literal, surface conflict represents or symbolizes on a deeper level

Character

“A personage [or entity] in a narrative or dramatic work.... The representation of persons [or entities] in narrative and dramatic works” (Baldick 56)

Character Types

- **primary:** the main, or most important, characters in a literary work
- **secondary:** the supporting, or less important, characters in a literary work.
- **protagonist:** the hero or the main character
- **antagonist:** the character who opposes the protagonist

Character Qualities

- **round:** characters who seem three-dimensional or well-developed
- **flat:** characters who seem two-dimensional or less well-developed
- **static:** characters who remain unchanged over the course of a work
- **dynamic:** characters who undergo change over the course of a work

Characterization

- **direct:** when an author explicitly describes a character through narrative description
- **indirect:** when an author implicitly shows a character through actions, dialogue, or thought processes

Setting

When and where a literary work takes place; the time and place of the events in a literary work

Setting Types

- **specified:** the author provides full information about the setting of a literary work
- **general:** the author provides some information about the setting of a literary work
- **unspecified:** the author provides no information about the setting of a literary work

Setting Qualities

- **dynamic:** settings that change over the course of a work
- **static:** settings that stay the same over the course of a work

Viewpoint

“The position or vantage-point from which the events of a story seem to be observed and presented to [the reader]” (Baldick 283)

Viewpoint Types

- **first-person:** the narrator’s identity is known, and they refer to themselves in the first person (“I”). Such narrators are sometimes referred to as *character narrators* because they are often characters in the story, participating in the action of the story. They are often *subjective*, revealing their thoughts and feelings about the events in the story
- **second-person:** the narrator refers to themselves in the second person (“You”), but they are rare because of the inherent difficulty in using the second-person pronoun for an extended period of time in a narrative
- **third-person:** the identity of the narrator is sometimes not known, they refer to all characters in the third person (“he,” “she,” etc.), but they generally make no reference to themselves. They are often *objective*, remaining outside and detached from the events in the story.

Third-Person Viewpoint Types

- **omniscient:** gives access to the thoughts and feelings of all the characters in a literary work
- **limited-omniscient:** gives access to the thoughts and feelings of only one (or sometimes two) characters in a literary work
- **dramatic-objective:** gives access to the thoughts and feelings of none of the characters in a literary work, instead simply describing their outward actions and recounting the outward words

Language

Any of the *syntactical* (sentence-level concerns) and *semantic* (word-level concerns) structures and devices authors use to emphasize their themes

Syntactical Concerns

- **sentence length:** long, medium, or short
- **sentence structure:** periodic, loose, or balanced
- **sentence type:** declarative, imperative, interrogative, or exclamatory

Semantic Concerns

- **diction:** the author’s choice of words
- **imagery:** the representation of objects, actions, feelings, thoughts, ideas, states of mind, and any sensory or extra-sensory experience
- **symbolism:** the use of an object (usually concrete) to “stand in” for something else (usually abstract)
- **irony:** an awareness of a discrepancy between appearance and reality
- **figures of speech:** the use of rhetorical figures or tropes

Tone

“A ... term usually designating the mood ... of a work ... [or] to the author’s attitude to the reader (e.g., formal, intimate, pompous) or to the subject matter (e.g., ironic, light, solemn, satiric, sentimental)” (Baldick 360)

Tone is often described using *adjectives* (i.e., words that describe or modify nouns), and can refer to the narrator’s *voice, personality, attitude, emotion, and/or moral outlook*

Mode

A categorization of a play by its *subgenre*, often revealed in aspects of the play’s performance about which audiences have conventional expectations (words, music, costumes, lighting, *mise en scène*, etc.)

Theme

“A salient abstract idea that emerges from a literary work’s treatment of its subject matter.... While the subject of a work is described concretely in terms of its action ... its theme or themes will be described in more abstract terms.... The theme of a work may be announced explicitly, but more often it emerges indirectly” (Baldick 358)

Works Cited

- Baldick, Chris. *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. 4th ed., Oxford UP, 2015.
- Chalykoff, Lisa, et al., eds. *The Broadview Introduction to Literature: Short Fiction*. 2nd ed, Broadview, 2018.
- Cuddon, J.A. *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. 4th ed., Penguin, 2014.