Five Elements of Fiction: Plot, Setting, Character, Point of View, Theme

I. **Plot** — How the author arranges events to develop the basic idea; it is the sequence of events in a story or play. The plot is a planned, logical series of events having a beginning, middle, and end. The short story usually has one plot so it can be read in one sitting. There are five essential parts of plot:

1. **Exposition (introduction)** — Beginning of the story; characters, background, and setting revealed.
2. **Rising Action** — Events in the story become complicated; the conflict is revealed. These are events between the introduction and climax.
    - **Conflict** — Essential to plot, opposition ties incidents together and moves the plot. Not merely limited to arguments, conflict can be any fOfI1)of struggle the main character faces. Within a short story, there may be only one central struggle, or there may be many minor obstacles within a dominant struggle. There are two types of conflict:
        o **Internal** — Struggle within one's self.
            - **Character vs. Self** — Struggles with own soul, physical limitations, choices, etc.
        o **External** — Struggle with a force outside one's self.
            - **Character vs. Character** — Struggles against other people.
            - **Character vs. Nature** — Struggles against animals, weather, environment, etc.
            - **Character vs. Society** — Struggles against ideas, practices, or customs of others.
3. **Climax** — Turning point of the story. Readers wonders what will happen next; will the conflict be resolved or not? Consider the climax as a three-fold phenomenon:
    - Main character receives new information.
    - Main character accepts this information (realizes it but does not necessarily agree with it).
    - Main character acts on this information (makes a choice that will determine whether or not objective is met).
4. **Falling action** — Resolution begins; events and complications start to fall into place. These are the events between climax and denouement.
5. **Resolution (Conclusion)** — Final outcome of events in the story.

II. **Setting** - Time and location that a story takes place. For some stories, the setting is very important; while for others, it is not. When examining how setting contributes to a story, there are multiple aspects to consider:

1. **Place** — Geographical location; where is the action of the story taking place?

2. **Time** — Historical period, time of day, year, etc; when is the story taking place?
3. **Weather conditions** — Is it rainy, sunny, stormy, etc.?
4. **Social conditions** — What is the daily life of the character's like? Does the story contain local colour (writing that focuses on the speech, dress, mannerisms, customs, etc. of a particular place)?
5. **Mood or atmosphere** — What feeling is created at the beginning of the story? Cheerful or eerie?

III. Character — There are two meanings for "character": 1) a person in a fictional story; or 2) qualities of a person.

1. People in a work of fiction can be a(n):
   - **Protagonist** — Clear center of story; all major events are important to this character.
   - **Antagonist** — Opposition or "enemy" of main character.
2. Characteristics of a character can be revealed through:
   - his/her physical appearance
   - what he/she says, thinks, feels, dreams and what he/she does or does not do
   - what others say about him/her and how others react to him/her
3. Characters can be ...
   - **Round** — Fully developed personalities that are affected by the story's events; they can learn, grow, or deteriorate by the end of the story. Characters are most convincing when they resemble real people by being consistent, motivated, and life-like.
   - **Flat** — One-dimensional character
   - **Dynamic** — Character who does go through change and "grows" during a story
   - **Static** — Character does not go through a change.

IV. Point of View — The angle from which the story is told. There are several variations of POV:

1. **First Person** — Story told by the protagonist or a character who interacts closely with the protagonist or other characters; speaker uses the pronouns "I", "me", "we". Readers experiences the story through this person's eyes and only knows what he/she knows and feels.
2. **Second Person** — Story told by a narrator who addresses the reader or some other assumed "you"; speaker uses pronouns "you", "your", and "yours". Ex: *You wake up to discover that you have been robbed of all of your worldly possessions.*
3. **Third Person** — Story told by a narrator who sees all of the action; speaker uses the pronouns "he", "she", "it", "they", "his", "hers", "its", and "theirs". This person may be a character in the story. There are several types of third person POV:

- **Limited** — Probably the easiest POV for a beginning writer to use, "limited" POV funnels all action through the eyes of a single character; readers only see what the narrator sees.
- **Omniscient** — God-like, the narrator knows and sees everything, and can move from one character's mind to another. Authors can be omniscient narrators by moving from character to character, event to event, and introducing information at their discretion. There are two main types of omniscient POV:

4. **Innocent Eye/Naive Narrator** — Story told through child's eyes; narrator's judgment is different from that of an adult.
5. **Stream of Consciousness** — Story told so readers solely experience a character's thoughts and reactions.

V. Theme — Central message, "moral of the story," and underlying meaning of a fictional piece; may be the author's thoughts on the topic or view of human nature.

1. Story's title usually emphasizes what the author. is saying.
2. Various figures of speech (symbolism, allusion, simile, metaphor, hyperbole, or irony) may be utilized to highlight the theme.
3. Examples of common themes occurring in literature, on television, and in film are:
   - Things are not always as they appear to be.
   - Love is blind.
   - Believe in yourself.
   - People are afraid of change.
   - Don't judge a book by its cover.

CLIMAX

PLOT

Title: _____

Author: _____

RISING ACTION

(List examples that create complications or suspense)

FALLING ACTION

CONFLICT

RESOLUTION

EXPOSITION

Setting:

Situation/Climate:

Characters:

PROTAGONIST VS. ANTAGONIST

_____vs._____

THEME:

Plot Structure Diagram

Name: _____

Date: _____

Period: _____

TURNING POINT ⑤
(The main event between the protagonist and the antagonist
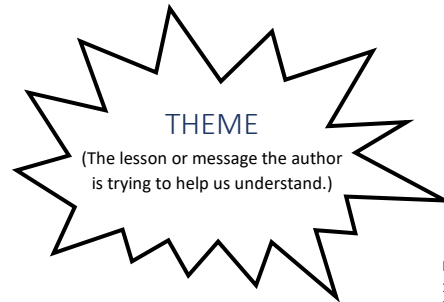or the moment which the reader has been waiting.)

_____

_____

RISING ACTION ⑥
(The major events that lead to the turning point.)

FALLING ACTION ⑦
(The major events that lead to the resolution.)

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

CHARACTERS* ①

Protagonist and Main Character(s)

Antagonist

TITLE

_____

AUTHOR

_____

GENRE

_____

SETTING* ②

Time

Place

CONFLICT* ③
(What's the problem between the protagonist
and the antagonist.)

_____

_____

_____

RESOLUTION ④
(How was the conflict solved?)

_____

_____

_____

THEME
(The lesson or message the author
is trying to help us understand.)

_____

_____

*Characters, Setting, Conflict, and Mood (how the
story makes you feel) combine to create the
EXPOSITION which helps you "get into" the story,
novel or movie from the very beginning.

How To Figure Out the Theme
1. Actively read the text.
2. Fill out the Plot Structure Diagram (follow the circled numbers)
3. Examine the conflict, resolution, and turning points.
4. Ask yourself, "What is the lesson the protagonist learned?"
5. Reword #4 so that it can apply to anyone who reads the story.