

FOCUS ON CHARACTER AND PLOT

For the majority of readers, learning about other people, their problems, and interests, forms the most interesting aspect of literature. In any case, it is important that you know something about characterization since even the plot of most literary works may be viewed as a function of character in that the character either determines the events or is shaped by them.

FOCUS ON PLOT

As a literary term, plot refers to the plan of action in which the characters of a written selection are involved.

Parts of a Plot

The major parts of a plot consist of:

- Introduction - The first incident which is intended to arouse the reader's curiosity and urge him to read further.
- Rising Action or Complication of Incidents - The series of incidents which happen after the introduction and which attempt to get the reader involved in the action.
- Climax - The high point of the story in which suspense by some action or conflicts are resolved.
- Denouement - The final unraveling of the action; an explanation for what has occurred or an indication of what happens to the characters after the climax. A plot does not always use a denouement especially those literary works with surprise endings.

Methods of Developing Plot

- Straightforward – Introduction of conflict, steps in the rising action, climax, denouement.
- Flashback – Story may begin in the present time but switch to the past to acquaint the reader with what has happened to that point.
- Stream of Consciousness – Story line may switch from past, to present, to future depending upon the associations and fantasies of the characters or the author.
- Dialogue – A story may consist entirely of people speaking with no description of actions. Readers must imagine what is happening.

FOCUS ON CHARACTER

As a literary term, "Character" may refer to either a particular person or to the thoughts and actions of a particular person. In other words, character may be on the inside as well as on the outside. For young children stereotyped characters are satisfactory – (beautiful princesses, wicked wizards, etc.) but as we grow older, we begin to demand that the author make his characters more realistic so that we can believe in them. If he does this, we begin to see that men are not usually all evil or all good, all right or all wrong, but may possess degrees of each of these qualities.

Literary Forms and Characterization

We cannot expect the same degree of characterization in all forms of literature since their lengths and purposes are so varied.

Short Story

The most successful short story writers pay careful attention to their selection of characters and events because their space is quite limited. The cast of characters is usually limited to three or four and the action may centre around a single incident in their lives. The short length of the story allows some insight into personality but not enough to make accurate long-term predictions about the people involved.

- **Poetry**

Poetry generally leaves a good deal more to the imagination than do other types of literature, but what little the poet does say may have universal significance. That is, his characters may represent man as a whole.

- **Novel**

Length distinguishes a novel from a short story and because the novelist is not restrained by time or space, he can write in a much more detailed manner. He may introduce many characters and reveal their personalities as completely as he deems necessary.

- **Character Analysis**

In real life we judge a person's qualities from our own contact with him, but a literary character's qualities must be interpreted through what the author has written about him. There may be more than one acceptable interpretation, but the reader has a responsibility not to over-interpret by implying things which the author has not even suggested.

Ways In Which Authors May Reveal Character

- Description
 - Description of clothing
 - Description of physical features
 - Description of setting and environment
- Dialogue
 - What the character says
 - How other people talk to him/her
 - What other people say about him/her
- Thoughts
 - Relating the character's thoughts
 - Stream of Consciousness – may indicate the mental state of the character.
- Actions
 - Showing the character's actions
 - Showing how he reacts to others
 - Showing how other people react because of him/her
- Special Techniques
 - Juxtaposition – the careful placement of words to reveal motivation or hypocrisy
 - Speaking Names – may reflect the qualities of their owners (Dean Drone) or, for humorous effect, may be directly opposite to his/her personality (Miss Murdstone).

Many authors use a combination of these methods and by comparing and contrasting them, the reader may develop a more complete interpretation of character.