Essential Elements of Narrative: plot, setting, character, theme

- relatively brief narrative in prose presenting one or more characters in some struggle/conflict which has a definite outcome : Short Fiction

- characterized by compression: unity of action in which one story is related, unity of time in which the story takes place, unity of place – story takes place in one setting

A. Plot: sequence of events

1. Introduction: characters, setting, action

2. Inciting incident/Trigger: conflict begins – external/internal, characterized primarily as emotional, intellectual, moral or physical, types: p vs p…

3. Rising action: development of conflict

4. Climax: resolution of conflict

5. Conclusion/denouement: falling action, “wrapping up”

Plot types:

Horizontal: (see above)

Vertical: in which the action consists of “slices” of interior monologues, impressions, recollections/memories, glimpse into future

Stream of Consciousness: jumping freely from past to future to present, associations

Convergent: story follows four/five different characters’ lives until they “converge” at a shared point

B. Setting:

- traditionally refers to the “when” and “where”

- often closely related to characterization in that characters will behave in a way that is consistent with their “setting”

- believability and “local colour” provided through specific details which depict setting

- closely connected with atmosphere

C. Character:

- protagonist and antagonist

- types of characters: flat, round/complex, static, dynamic, stereotype, stock, foil (opposite)

- understanding characters: values? feelings? goals? problems? decisions?

- direct presentation (what author/narrator “tells” us), indirect presentation (gather impressions re: character – shown how the character behaves, what the char. does, what others say about char.)

D. Theme:

definition: the underlying idea in the story; illustrates some truth about life in general

1. explicit: the author or a character states the theme in the story

2. implied: the reader must infer the theme

Principles of stating theme:

1. Theme statement is a complete sentence (with a subject and predicate); (theme topic: could be a single word or a phrase – but, in order to develop this into a theme statement, you need to consider what “about” this topic the writer wants us to understand)

2. Theme may be expressed in more than one way.

3. Theme is a generalization about life/an aspect of humanity (therefore, in the statement of theme, do not use characters’ names…. save that for the evidence…)

4. But, theme must not be too broad a generalization – must be supported and justified by the story.

5. As the central and unifying concept of the story, the theme must account for all relevant details, cannot be contradicted by any detail – must be supported by story

6. The theme must not be reduced to a cliché, a trite statement, or a moral “should/should not” statement

Hints/Tips to finding theme:

1. title of the story

2. how has the main character changed? what has he or she learnt?

3. explore the nature of the central conflict and its outcome

4. important images or symbols in the story (irony, setting, character, allusion, point of view….)

5. general observations made by the author, narrator, or characters in the story