

A Guide for Analyzing Literature

Plot

- Describe the work in terms of:
 - *Exposition*: introductory background essential information
 - *Complication*: rising action creates some sort of conflict for the protagonist.
 - *Crisis*: a turning point in the action of a story that has a powerful effect on the protagonist. Opposing forces come together decisively to lead to the climax of the plot.
 - *Climax*: decisive moment in a drama, the turning point of the play to which the rising action leads. This is the crucial part of the drama, the part which determines the outcome of the conflict.
 - *Resolution*: conclusion of a plot's conflicts and complications, follows the climax in the plot.
- What is the basic problem or conflict driving the plot? Where does the turning point come? Is the conflict resolved appropriately and satisfactorily? Would you characterize the ending as happy, unhappy, or somewhere in between?
- How does the exposition introduce or foreshadow major problems or conflicts in the work?
- Does the work have any subplots? If so, how are they tied to the main plot?
- Did you find the plot predictable? Is it like those in any other stories you have read?
- Is the work told chronologically? If not, in what order is it told, and what is the effect of that order on your response to the action?

Setting

- What is the setting in time and place?
- Does the setting influence the action of the work? Does it influence your response to the work?
- Is the setting symbolic? Are time, place, and atmosphere related to theme? If the setting were changed, would your response to the story's action and meaning be significantly different?

Theme (Main Idea, Point, Moral)

- What is the point (theme, main idea, moral) of the work?
- Is the title significant? Does it help you discover a theme? Is the author hinting at the theme through the title?

- How is the theme presented? Is it explicitly stated by one or more of the characters, or is it implied in the action or through the characters? What specific passage of dialogue or action directly supports the theme?
- Can the theme be universally applied, or does the work's point apply only to the customs, manners, attitudes, and beliefs of the society for which it was written?

Characterization

- The character who chiefly engages your interest is the protagonist. The antagonist somehow is in the conflict with the protagonist. Use the words *character* and *narrator* for short stories and novels. Use the word *speaker* for poems. The narrator/speaker is NOT the same as the author!
- Who is the protagonist (main character)? The antagonist? The narrator? The speaker?
- Do you identify with the protagonist? Why? Explain what changes he/she undergoes during the course of the work.
- Who are the other major characters? What is their function? What is their link to the protagonist or antagonist or to each other?
- Do any of the characters change and develop throughout the work?
- What purposes do the minor characters serve? Do any minor characters seem especially important to the work?
- How else is a character defined (through words, actions, dress, setting, narrative point of view)?
- How does the author establish or reveal the characters' traits? Are the traits revealed by their own statements and actions and/or by the statements and actions of others? Are they directly described or indirectly presented?
- To what extent does the author depend on the readers' prior knowledge of one or more of the characters?

Tone

- The tone is the author's attitude toward the work. What is the tone?
- How does the author's use of language contribute to the tone of the work? Does it seem, for example, intense, relaxed, sentimental, nostalgic, humorous, angry, ironic, sad, or remote?.

Imagery

- Imagery is wording that involves the five senses, typically verbs or adjectives. Does any imagery from the work stick out?