Textbook: *Backpack Literature & Portable Literature*

Short Story*:* a fictional prose tale of no specified length, but too short to be published as a volume on its own. A short story will normally concentrate on a single event with only one or two characters, more economically than a novel's sustained exploration of social background. There are similar fictional forms of greater antiquity—fables, folktales, and parables—but the short story as we know it flourished in the magazines of the 19th and early 20th centuries, especially in the USA, which has a particularly strong tradition.

Edgar Allan Poe, in his essay "The Philosophy of Composition," said that **a short story should be read in one sitting, anywhere from a half hour to two hours**. In contemporary fiction, a short story can range from 1,000 to 20,000 words.

Characteristics of short stories:

- All short stories compress ideas into a small package and , to varying degrees.
- Some short-stories are conventional (that they include recognizable characters and have an identifiable beginning , middle, and end).
- Others are experimental, perhaps lacking a definite setting or a clear plot.
- Robert Shapard and James Thomas defined short stories as "Highly compressed, highly charged, insidious, protean, sudden, alarming, tantalizing"; they can "confer form on small corners of chaos, can do in a page what a novel does in tow hundred."

1. **Plot:** is shaped by causal connections—historical, social, and personal—by the interaction between characters, and by the juxtaposition of events. The plot that unfolds is complex: one character directs the events and determines their order while the other character is drawn into the action against their will. The elements that enrich the plot are the unexpected events, conflict, suspense, flashbacks, and foreshadowing.

   Conflict: readers' interest and involvement are heightened by a story's conflict, the struggle between opposing forces that emerges as the action develops. This conflict is a clash between the protagonist, a story principal character, and the antagonist, someone or something presented in opposition to the protagonist. Sometimes the antagonist is a villain; more often, it is a character who represents a conflicting point of view or advocates a course of action different from the one the protagonist follows. Sometimes the antagonist is not a character at all but a situation (for instance a war or poverty) or an event (for example, a natural disaster, such as a flood or a storm) that challenges the protagonist. In some stories, the protagonist may struggle against a supernatural force, or a conflict may occur withing a character's mind. It may, for example, be a struggle between two moral choices, such as whether to stay at home and care for an aging parent or to leave and make a new life.

   The Stages of Plot:

Exposition: the writer presents the basic information readers need to understand the events that follow. Typically, the exposition sets the story in motion: it establishes the scene, introduces the major characters, and perhaps suggests the major events or conflicts to come.

Climax: as the story progresses, the story's conflict unfolds through a series of complications that eventually lead readers to the story's **climax**. As it develops, the story may include several crises. A **crisis** is a peak in the story's action, a moment of considerable tension or importance. The **climax** is the point of greatest tension or importance, the scene that presents a story's decisive action or event.

Resolution or denouement (French for "untying of the knot): this is the final stage of plot. Resolution draws the action to a close and accounts for all remaining loose ends. Sometimes this resolution is achieved with the help of a *deus ex machina* (Latin for "god from a machine"), an intervention of some force or agent previously extraneous to the story—for example, the sudden arrival of a long-lost relative or a fortuitous inheritance, the discovery of a character's true identity, or a surprise last-minute rescue. Usually, however, the resolution is more plausible: all the events lead logically and convincingly (though not necessarily predictably) to the resolution. Sometimes the ending of a story is indefinite—that is, readers are not quite sure what the protagonist will do or what will happen next. This kind of resolution, although it may leave some readers feeling cheated, has its advantages: it mirrors the complexity of life, where closure rarely occurs, and it can keep readers involved in the story as they try to understand the significance of its ending or to decide how conflicts should have been resolved.

Order of Sequence: a writer may introduce a story's events in strict chronological order, presenting each event in the sequence in which it actually takes place. More often, however, especially in relatively modern fiction, writers do not introduce events chronologically. Instead, they present incidents out of expected order, or in no apparent order. For example, a write may choose to begin *in medias res* (Latin for "in the midst of things"), starting with a key event and later going back in time to explain events that preceded it, as Tillie Olsen does in "I Stand Here Ironing". Or, a writer decide to begin a work of fiction at the end and then move back to reconstruct events that led up to the final outcome, as William Faulkner does in "A Rose for Emily". Many sequences are possible as the writer manipulates events to create interest, suspense, confusion, shock, or some other effect.

Flashback: writers who wish to depart from strict chronological order can use *flashback* and *foreshadowing*. A **Flashback** moves out of sequence to examine an event or situation that occurred before the time in which the story's action takes place. A character can remember an earlier event, or a story's narrator can re-create an earlier situation. In Edger Allen Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado", the entire story is told as a flashback. Flashbacks are valuable because they can substitute for or supplement formal exposition by presenting background readers need to understand a story's events. One disadvantage of flashbacks is that if they

interrupt the natural flow of events, they may bee intrusive or distracting. Such distractions, however, can be an advantage if the writer wished to reveal events gradually and subtly or to obscure causal links.

Foreshadowing: is the introduction early in a story of comments, situations, events, characters, or objects that hint at things to come. Typically, a seemingly simple element—a chance remark, a natural occurrence, a trivial event—is eventually revealed to have great significance. For example, a dark cloud passing across the sky during a wedding can foreshadow future problems for the marriage. Foreshadowing allows a writer to hint provocatively at what is to come so that readers only gradually become aware of a particular detail's role in a story. Thus, foreshadowing helps readers sense what will occur and grow increasingly involved as they see the likelihood (or even the inevitability) of a particular outcome.

In addition to using conventional techniques like flashbacks and foreshadowing, writers may experiment with sequence by substantially tampering with—or even dispensing with—chronological order. (An example is the scrambled chronology of "A Rose for Emily.") in such instances, the experimental form enhances interest and encourages readers to become involved with the story as they work to untangle or reorder the events and determine their logical and causal connections.

Setting (Elements of Setting, Historical Fiction, Regionalism, and Naturalism) PP 101-103

2. **Setting (PL):** The setting of a work of fiction establishes its historical, geographical, and physical context. *Where* a work is set—on a tropical island, in a dungeon, at a crowded party, in the woods—influences our reactions to the story's events and characters. *When* a work takes place—during the French Revolution, during the Vietnam War, today, or in the future—is equally important. Setting, however, is more than just the approximate time and place in which a work is set; setting also encompasses a wide variety of other elements.

Historical Setting: A particular historical period, and the events and customs associated with it, can be important to your understanding of a story; therefore, some knowledge of the period in which a story is set may be useful (or even essential) for readers. The historical setting establishes a story's social, cultural, economic, and political environment. Knowing, for instance, that Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" was written in the late nineteenth century, when doctors treated women as delicate and dependent creatures. helps to explain the narrator's emotional state. Likewise, it may important to know that a story is set during a particularly volatile (or static) political era, during a time of permissive (or repressive) attitudes toward sex, during the war, or during a period of economic prosperity or recession. Any one of these factors may help to explain why events occur as well as why characters act (and react) as they doe. Historical events or cultural norms may, for instance, limit or expand a character's options, and our

knowledge of history may reveal to us a character's incompatibility with his or her milieu.

Knowing the approximate year or historical period during which a story takes place can help readers to better understand characters and events. This knowledge can explain forces that act on characters and account for their behavior, clarify circumstances that influence the story's action, and justify a writer's use of plot devices that might otherwise seem improbable. Thus, stories set before the development of modern transportation and communication networks may hinge on plot devices readers would not accept in a modern story.

Geographical Setting: In addition to knowing *when* a work takes place, readers need to know *where* it takes place. Knowing whether a story is set in the United States, in Europe, or in a developing nation can help to explain anything from why language and customs are unfamiliar to us to why characters act in ways we find surprising or hold beliefs that are alien to us. Even in stories set in the United States, regional differences may account for differences in plot development, and characters' motivation. For example, knowing that William Faulkner's "A Rose for Emily" is set in the post-Civil War America South helps to explain why the townspeople are so chivalrously protective of Miss Emily.

The size of the town or city in which a story takes place may also be important. In a small town, for example, character's problems are more likely to be subject to intense scrutiny by other characters, as they are in stories of small-town life such as "A Rose for Emily". In a large city, characters may be more likely to be isolated and anonymous. Like "Miss Bill".

Of course, a story may not have a recognizable geographical setting: its location may not be specified, or it may be set in a fantasy world. Choosing unusual settings may free writers from the constraints placed on them by familiar environments, thus allowing them to experiment with situations and characters, unaffected by readers' expectations or associations with familiar settings.

Physical Setting: Physical setting can influence a story's mood as well as its development. For example, *time of day* can be important. The gruesome murder described in Edgar Allan Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado" takes place in an appropriate setting: not just underground but in the darkness of night. Many stories, of course, move through several time periods as the action unfolds, and changes in time any also be important. For instance, the approach of evening (or of dawn) can signal the end of a crisis in the plot. Whether a story is set primarily *indoors* or *out-of-doors* may also be significant: character may be physically constrained by a closed-in setting or liberated by an expansive landscape. Some interior settings may be psychologically limiting. For instance, the narrator in "The Yellow Wallpaper" feels suffocated by her room, whose ugly wallpaper comes to haunt her. In many of Poe's stories, the central character is trapped, physically or psychologically, in a confined, suffocating space. In other stories, an

interior setting may have a symbolic function. For example, in "A Rose for Emily," the house is for Miss Emily a symbol of the South's past glory as well as refuge, a fortress, and a hiding place. Similarly, a building or house may represent society, with its rules, norms, and limitations, as in John Updike's "A&P", where the supermarket establishes social as well as physical limits.

Weather can be another important aspect of setting. A storm can threaten a character's life or just make the character—and readers—*think* danger is present, distracting us from other more subtle threats. Extreme weather conditions can make characters act irrationally or uncharacteristically, as in Kate Chopin's "The Storm," where a storm provides the story's complication and sets in motion the characters' action. In numerous stories set in hostile landscapes, where extremes of heat and cold influence the action, weather may serve as a test for character, as it does in Jack London's "To Build a Fire," in which the main character struggles unsuccessfully against the brutally cold, hostile environment of the Yukon.

The various physical attributes of setting combine to create a story's **atmosphere or mood.** In the "Cask of Amontillado," for example, several factors work together to create the story's eerie, intense atmosphere: it is nighttime; it is the hectic carnival season, and the catacombs are dark, damp, and filled with the bones of the narrator's ancestors. Sometimes the mood or atmosphere that is created helps to convey a story's central theme—as the ironic contrast between the pleasant atmosphere and the shocking events that unfold to communicate the theme. A story's atmosphere may also be linked to a character's mental state, perhaps reflecting his or her mood. For example, darkness and isolation can reflect a character's depression, whereas an idyllic, peaceful atmosphere can express a character's joy. And of course, a story's atmosphere can also *influence* the character's state of mind, causing them to react one way in a crowed, hectic city but to react very differently in a peaceful rural atmosphere.

3. **Point of View**

First-Person Narrators: the narrator is a character who uses the **first person (*I*** or sometimes ***we*)** to tell the story. Often the narrator is a **major character**. Sometimes a first-person narrator tells a story that is primarily about someone else. Such a narrator may be a **minor character** who plays a relatively small part in the story or simply an **observer** who reports events experienced or related by others ("A Rose for Emily").
Writers gain a number of advantages when they use first-person narrators. First, they are able to present incidents convincingly. The first-person narrator also simplifies a writer's task of selecting details. Only the events and details that the narrator could actually have observed or experienced can be introduced into the story.
Another major advantage of first-person narrators is that their restricted view can create **irony**.

Unreliable Narrators: sometimes first-person narrators are self-serving, mistaken, confused, unstable, or even insane. These **unreliable narrators**, whether intentionally or unintentionally, misrepresent events and misdirect readers. For example in Edger Allen Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado," the narrator, Montresor, tells his story to justify a crime he committed fifty years before. Montresor's version of what happened is not accurate, and perceptive readers know it: his obvious self-deception, his sadistic manipulation of Fortunato, his detached description of the cold-blooded murder, and his lack of remorse lead readers to question his sanity and, therefore, to distrust his version of events. This distrust creates an ironic distance between readers and narrator.

The narrator of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" is also an unreliable narrator. Suffering form "nervous depression," she unintentionally distorts the facts when she says the shapes in her bedroom wallpaper are changing and moving. Moreover, she does not realize what is wrong with her or why, or how her husband's "good intentions" are hurting her. Readers, however, see the disparity between the narrator's interpretation of events and their own, and this irony enriches their understanding of the story.

Some narrators are unreliable because they are naïve. Because they are immature, sheltered, or innocent of evil, these narrators are not aware of the significance of the events they are relating. Having the benefit of experience, readers interpret events differently from the way these narrators do.

Third Person Narrators: sometimes a writer uses the **third person (*he, she, they*)** to tell the story from the point of view of a narrator who is not a character. Third-person narrators fall into three categories: omniscient, limited omniscient, and objective.

Omniscient (all knowing) Narrators: narrators are moving at will from one character's mind to another's. one advantage of omniscient narrators is that they have none of the naivete' dishonesty, gullibility, or mental instability that can characterize first-person narrators. In addition, because omniscient narrators are not characters in the story, their perception is not limited to what any one character can observe or comprehend. As a result, they can present a more inclusive view of events and characters than first-person narrators can.

Occasionally, omniscient narrators move not only in and out of the minds of the characters but also in and out of a persona (representing the voice of the author) who speaks directly to readers. This narrative technique was popular with writers during the 18ᵗʰ century, when the novel was a new literary form. It permitted writers to present themselves as masters of artifice, able to know and control all aspects of experience.

Limited Omniscient Narrators : third-person narrative can have **limited omniscience**, focusing on only what a single character experiences. In other words, nothing is revealed that the character does not see, hear, feel or think.

Objective Narrators: Third-person objective narrators, who tell a story from an objective (or dramatic) point of view, remain entirely outside the characters' mind. With objective narrators, events unfold the way they would in a play or a movie: narrators tell the story by presenting dialogue and recounting events; they do not reveal the characters' (or their own) thoughts or attitudes. Thus, they allow readers to interpret the actions of the characters without any interference. Ernes Hemingway uses the objective point of view in his short story "A Clean Well-Lighted Place". The story's narrator is distant, seemingly emotionless, and this perspective is consistent with the author's purpose: for Hemingway, the attitude of the narrator reflects the stunned, almost anesthetized condition of people in post-World War I world.

Stream of Consciousness: the continuous flow of sense-perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and memories in the human mind; or literary method of representing such a blending of mental processes in fictional characters, usually in an unpunctuated or disjointed form of "interior monologue".

4. **Character: Characterization & Character**

Characterization: The techniques a writer uses to create, reveal, or develop the characters in a narrative.

Character description: An aspect of characterization through which the author overtly relates either physical or mental traits of a character. This description is almost invariably a sign of what lurks beneath the surface of the character.

a. Direct method of characterization.
b. Indirect method of characterization.

Character development: The process by which a character is introduced, advanced, and possibly transformed in a story.

Motivation: What a character in a narrative wants; the reasons an author provides for character's actions. Motivation can be either explicit (the reasons are specifically stated in a story) or implicit (the reasons are only hinted at or partially revealed).

Flat (or static) character: A term coined by English novelist E.M. Forster to describe a character with only one outstanding trait. Flat characters are rarely the central characters in a narrative and stay the same throughout a story.

Round (or dynamic) Character: A term also coined by English novelist E. M. Forster to describe a complex character who is presented in depth in a narrative. Round characters are those who change significantly during the course of a narrative or whose full personalities are revealed gradually throughout the story.

Stock character: A common or stereotypical character. Examples of stock characters are the mad scientist, the battle-scarred veteran, and the strong but silent cowboy.

Hero: The central in a narrative. The term *hero* often implies positive moral attributes.

Antihero: A protagonist who is lacking in one or more of the conventional qualities attributed to a hero. Instead of being dignified, brave, idealistic, or purposeful, for instance, the *antihero* may be buffoonish, cowardly, self-interest, or weak.

5. **Theme:** the theme of a work of literature is its central or dominant idea. *Theme* is not the same as *plot* or *subject*, two terms with which it is sometimes confused. A summary of the plot of Tadeusz Borowski's "Silence," a story about survivors of the Holocaust, could be, "Prisoners are liberated from a concentration camo, and despite the warnings of the American officer, they kill a captured German guard." The statement "'Silence' is about freed prisoners and a guard" could define the **subject** of the story. A statement of the theme of "Silence," however, has to do more than summarize its plot or define its subject; it has to convey the values and ideas expressed by the story.

Many effective stories are complex, expressing more than one theme, and "Silence" is no exception. "Silence" could suggests that human beings have a need for vengeance. You could also say the story demonstrates that silence is sometimes the only response possible when people confront unspeakable horrors. Both theses themes—and others—are expressed in the story, yet one theme seems to dominate: the idea that under extreme conditions, the oppressed can have the same capacity for evil as their oppressors. The **Theme** should be a general idea that extends beyond the story and applies to the world outside fiction.

For example, "The Cask of Amontillado" suggests that when the desire for revenge becomes obsessive, it can deprive individuals of all that makes them human.

Granted, some short works (fairy tales or fables, for example) have themes that can only be expressed as *cliches*—overused phrases or expressions—or a morals—lessons dramatized by the work—however, short stories have themes that are more complex than cliches or moral.

Identifying Themes: every element of a story can shed light on its themes. As you analyze a short story, look for features that reveal and reinforce what you perceive to be the story's most important ideas.
- *The title can often provide insight into the theme or themes of a story*
- *Sometimes a narrator's or character's statement can reveal a theme.*
- *The arrangement of events can suggest a story's theme.*
- *A story's central conflict can offer clues to its theme.* For example, the main character in "The Yellow Wallpaper", a woman who has recently had a baby, is in conflict with the nineteenth-century society in which she lives. She is suffering from "temporary nervous depression," what doctors today recognize as postpartum depression. Following the practice of the time, her physician has ordered complete bed rest and has instructed her husband to deprive her of all mental and physical stimulation. This harsh treatment leads the narrator to lose her grasp of reality; eventually, she begins to hallucinate. The main conflict of the story is clearly between the woman and her society, controlled by men. The conflict communicates the central theme: that in

nineteenth-century America, women are controlled not just by their husbands and the male medial establishment, but also by the society men have created.

- *The point of view of a story can shed light on its theme.*
- *Quite often a story's symbols—names, places, and objects—can suggest its theme.*
- *Finally, changes in a character can shed light on the theme or themes of the story.*

6. **Style, Tone, Language and Symbol**: One of the qualities that gives a work of literature its individuality is its **style,** the way in which the writer uses language, and arranging words to say what he or she wants to say. Style encompasses elements such as word choice; syntax, sentence length and structure, and the presence, frequency, and prominence of imagery and figures of speech.

   Tone: is closely related to the style. The attitude of the narrator or author of a work toward the subject matter, characters, or audience. Word Choice and sentence structure help to create a work's tone, which may be intimate or distant, bitter or affectionate, straightforward or cautious, supportive or critical, respectful or condescending. (Tone may also be ironic).

   The Uses of Language: language offers almost limitless possibility to a writer. Creative use of language (Such as unusual word choice, word order, or sentence structure) can enrich a story and add to its overall effect. For example, the Earnest Hemingway uses short, unconnected sentence to create a flat, emotionless prose style that reveals his character's alienation and fragility as he struggles to maintain control.

   The use of lyrical, almost musical language reflects character's enchantment. The repetition and rhyme as poetic devices weave the words of the sentence into smooth, rhythmic whole.

   Other writer may use parallelism and this style conveys methodical precision and order, reflects the compulsive personality of the character that being described.

   Formal diction: is characterized by elaborate, complex sentences, a learned vocabulary; and a serious, objective, detached tone. It does not generally include contractions, shortened word forms (like phone), regional expression, or slang, and it may substitute *one* or *we* for *I*. At its most extreme, formal language is stiff and stilted, far removed from everyday language.

   When **formal diction** is used by a narrator or by a character, it may indicate erudition, a high educational level, a superior social or professional position, or emotional detachments. When one character's language is significantly more formal than others', he or she may seem old-fashioned or stuffy; when language is inappropriately elevated or complex, it may reveal the character to be pompous or ridiculous, when a narrator's language is noticeably more formal than that of the story's characters, the narrator may seem superior or even condescending.

Informal diction: consistent with everyday speech, is characterized by slang, contractions, colloquial expressions like *you know* and *I mean*, shortened word forms, incomplete sentences, and a casual, conversional tone. A first person narrator may use an informal style, or characters may speak informally; in either case, informal style tends to narrow the distance between readers and text.

Imagery: words and phrases that describe what is seen, heard, smelled tasted, or touched—can have a significant impact in a story. A writer may use a pattern of repeated imagery to convey a particular impression about a character or situation or to communicate or reinforce a story's theme. For example, a character's newly discovered sense of freedom or sexuality can be conveyed through repeated use of words and phrases suggesting blooming and ripening.

Figures of Speech: such as simile, metaphors, and personification—can enrich a story, subtly revealing information about characters and themes. By using **metaphors** and **similes—**figures of speech that compare two dissimilar items—writers can indicate a particular attitude toward characters and events.

Personification: a figure of speech, closely related to metaphor, that endows inanimate objects or abstract ideas with life or with human characteristics—is used to expand reader's vison of the story's setting/characters/themes and sometime to give a dreamlike quality to the passage.

Allusion: references to familiar historical, cultural, literary, or biblical texts, figures, or events—may also expand readers' understanding and appreciation of a work.

7. A **Symbol:** is a person, object, action, place, or event that, in additional to its literal meaning suggest a more complex meaning or range of meanings. **Universal or archetypal symbols**, such as the Old Man, the Mother, or the Grim Reaper, are so much a part of human experience that they suggest the same thing to most people.

Conventional symbols are also likely to suggest the same thing to most people (a rose suggest love, a skull and crossbones denotes poison), provided the people share cultural and social assumptions. For this reason, conventional symbols are often used as a kind of shorthand in films and advertising, where they elicit predictable responses.

A conventional symbol, such as the stars and stripes of the American flag, can evoke powerful feelings of pride and patriotism in a group of people who share certain cultural assumptions, just as the maple leaf and the Union Jack can. Symbols used in works of literature can function in much the same way, enabling writers to convey particular emotions or messages with a high degree of predictability.

Literary Symbols: symbols that take on additional meaning in particular works. For instance, a watch or clock denotes time; as a conventional symbol, it suggests the passing of time; as literary symbol in a particular work, it might also convey anything from a

character's inability to recapture the past to the idea of time running out—or it might suggest something else.

Allegory: an allegory communicates a doctrine, message, or moral principle by making it into a narrative in which the characters personify ideas, concepts, qualities, or other abstractions. Thus an allegory is a story with two parallel and consistent levels of meaning—one literal and one figurative. The figurative level, which offers moral or political lesson, is the story's main concern.

An Allegorical figure—a character, object, place, or event in the allegory—has just one meaning within an allegorical framework, the set of ideas that conveys the allegory's message.

Myth: is a story that is central to a culture; it embodies the values on which a culture or society is built. Although many myths have to do with religion, myths are not limited to the theological. Myths explain everything from natural phenomena—such as the creation of the world—to the existence of human beings and the beginnings of agriculture. The importance of myths rests on their ability to embody a set of beliefs that unifies both individuals and the society in which they live.