Short Story Terms

Structure:

1. **Introduction** - serves to introduce the following
   - the main characters
   - the plot
   - the setting (time and place)
   - the mood (the feeling of the story)
   - what the conflict in the story will be.
   - Foreshadowing - The author may foreshadow, or give hints, about what will happen later in the story.

2. **Inciting or complicating incident** - the point in the story where the conflict is first introduced.

3. **Rising action** - series of events that increase the tension leading up to the climax.

4. **Climax** - events in the story come to the highest point of tension and the reader finds out the result of the conflict.

5. **Conclusion (or denouement)** - loose ends of the story are tied up, more details given; reader learns what might happen next to the main characters.

Short Story Terms:

**Plot** - the sequence of events or incidents of which the story is composed.

**Setting** - where and when the story takes place (includes atmosphere)

**Conflict** - a clash of actions, ideas, desires or wills. Every story has conflict. There are 4 main types, organized into 2 groups.

- **Internal** - a character must struggle against himself or herself. The conflict is inside the character.
  
  Human against herself/himself - conflict with some element in her/his own nature; may be physical, mental, emotional, or moral. This is usually called a dilemma. The character must decide what to do, but the decision is not easy.

- **External**

  Human vs. Human - one character has a direct conflict with another. A common example is the good guy against the bad guy, although this is certainly not always the case.

  Human vs. Environment - The character struggles against the situation he or she is in. This can take many forms, including society, nature, or an organization, such as government. In this type of conflict, "environment" is any place the character is within, which challenges the character somehow.

  Human vs. The Unknown - The unknown includes God, gods, religion, fate, ghosts, the supernatural, luck, destiny, or anything else that is beyond the control of human beings. In this case, the character might question why God or gods allow the character to suffer or succeed. The character might be in a conflict with a ghost for some reason, or simply have bad luck. In this case, the character rarely wins, but the way in which the character tries to survive is important to showing the quality of the character.

**Character**

- **Protagonist** - the central character, who can be a nice person or an awful one, or somewhere in between. The reader identifies and usually sympathizes with the protagonist.

- **Antagonist** - The characters working against the protagonist. The protagonist can be his/her own antagonist in the case of internal conflict. Groups of people and organizations can also be antagonists, but you should not confuse an antagonist with part of a general conflict in the story.

We learn about characters in several different ways:
- by what the author says
- by what the character says, thinks, and does
- what others characters say about a character
Character Types:

**Flat or Round:** A flat character is known by one or two traits. A round character is complex and many-sided. We learn much about what he/she thinks, feels, and wants.

**Unique or Stock:** A stock character is a stereotyped character (a mad scientist, the absent-minded professor, the cruel mother-in-law). It is a common type of character. We can often predict what the character will simply be the type of character. For instance, we can predict that a mad scientist will be evil and driven towards doing something terrible. A unique character is any character that is not one of these types. Unique characters are not predictable in this way. They face unique situations and conflicts.

**Static vs. Dynamic:** A static character remains the same from the beginning of the plot to the end. His or her opinions and behaviour do not change. The character learns nothing from the story's events. A dynamic (developing) character undergoes permanent change. This change must be within the possibilities of the character, sufficiently motivated, and allowed sufficient time for change. The character learns something from the story, and is different at the end.

**Theme:** an explanation of what we learn and see from the story. It is the author's message about one of the topics presented in the story. It usually reveals something about human nature or why characters do what they do. Any statement that reduces a theme to some familiar saying or cliché should be avoided. Do not use "You can't judge a book by its cover," or "Fish and guests smell in three days," and so on.

**Points Of View**

- **Omniscient** - a story told by the author. The author may describe the thoughts of any or all of the characters. The author does not need to reveal the thoughts or feelings of all characters in order to have Omniscient point of view. If the author reveals the feelings or thoughts of two or more, it is Omniscient.

- **First Person** - the author identifies with a major or minor character, or disappears inside a character; the story is told using the first person "I".

- **Third Person** - like a roving camera or a fly on the wall where events are recorded without judgment or comment. The author does not show the feelings or thoughts of characters. The reader must judge these things her/himself. The author uses, "he" or "she".

**Symbol** - a literary symbol means more than what it is. It has layers of meanings. For example, doves can represent peace; night may represent death. Whereas an image has one meaning, a symbol has many. Names are used as symbols. Objects are used as symbols. Actions are used as symbols.

**Irony** - irony is used to suggest the difference between appearance and reality, between expectation and fulfillment. Irony is the opposite of what is expected. There are two main types of irony:

- **Verbal irony** - the opposite is said from what is intended.
- **Dramatic irony** - when the reader knows something the characters do not.

**Suspense** - the feeling of excitement and curiosity that keeps the reader turning the pages. What is going to happen next? What choice is the main character going to make? How will the conflict be resolved? How will the story end?

**Mood or Atmosphere** - the feeling of the reader as he/she tells the story. Sometimes the setting helps to create the mood; for example, if the story takes place in a cemetery, it will become suspenseful (tense).

**Foreshadowing** - a statement or action which indicates what is to come

**Contrast** - a device by which one element (idea or object) is thrown into opposition to another for the sake of emphasis or clarity. The effect of the device is to make both contrasted ideas clearer than either would have been if described by itself.