

## Lecture 3: Elements of the novel

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**Tips:** Active engagement with literature:

- Keep a notebook and a dictionary close to you, and mark words or expressions you don't understand. Check in dictionary.
- Take notes on the characters you read about and try to understand them. Ask yourself if you would do the same thing if you were placed in their situations. As you read think about the theme of each story.
- Read more than once.

**Reading levels:**

- Literal level: you can determine the characters and plot at this level.
- Inferential Level: using analytical skills to pick out the author's implied message which is the theme/s of the story.
- Critical level: combine the work of the first two levels. Evaluating the author's work and style, detecting figurative language.

**Word meaning:** literal/denotative: dictionary meaning.

Figurative/connotative: meaning indicates what the words suggest in terms of emotional or pictorial content.

**Questions to ask about characters:**

- How do I feel about the characters? How is the author making me feel this way?
  - What is the author revealing about the character's values and attitudes towards life and other characters?
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### 1- PLOT:

Plot is one of the most basic elements in any story, whether a short story, novel, or even a film.

The plot is a sequence of events that center on some type of a conflict. The **conflict** is some tension between the protagonist and someone or something else. It is an Encounter of two opposing forces.

**- Types of conflict:**

**1- External:**

**Person against person:** the protagonist experiences conflict with the antagonist.

**Person against Society**

**Person against nature:** protagonist experiences a conflict with the environment – that is with some outside force.

- **Internal: Person against himself:** (psychological conflict) protagonist experiences a conflict with some aspect of himself/herself.

A story can contain elements of all three types of conflict, but there is usually one central conflict that provides the theme of the story.

Each advancement in the plot serves to move the conflict further and eventually carry it to some sort of conclusion. The will of the protagonist moves the story. He or she wants something, struggles for something, and at the end of the story, wins, loses, or ends back where he or she started.

## Plot Structure:

The basic plot structure includes exposition, rising action, the climax, falling action, and the resolution.

1. **The Exposition:** The first part of the story is called “exposition”. It is the story’s introduction. It establishes the setting, gives any necessary history of events that happened before the story opens, and introduces the characters. This important background information helps readers understand the situation or context of the story.  
Often during the exposition (and rising action), authors use *foreshadowing* to hint or suggest to the reader what’s ahead for the conflict and characters. **For Example: an old character believes in ghost stories, alert readers will take this as a hint for what’s going to happen.**
2. **The Rising action:** works from the information in the exposition to develop to develop the conflict in a series of complications faced by the main characters. It’s composed of events that build one to the other (in order to reach the climax). The rising action makes up the lengthiest portion of the story.
3. **The Climax:** is the place in a story when the rising action reaches its highest point. The route to the climax is like a roller coaster working its way up the rise of its track, building tension until that breath of a moment before the plummeting fall. The climax is the point at which the action is most intense and the reader’s interest is at its peak. It determines the outcome of the action. The climax usually occurs when the character faces the ultimate, key decision in trying to resolve the central conflict of the story.
4. **The Falling action:** reflects the results of the protagonist’s decision or action at the climax. Usually it’s comprised only of a few events. Thus it represents a much shorter amount of space than the rising action. Sometimes the falling action and the resolution are the same.
5. **The Resolution:** is a bit like a conclusion of the story. The loose ends of the climax are tied up (unless the author wishes to cause the reader to ponder a question to underscore his or her theme).

## 2- The Characters:

### A- Major Characters:

**1. Protagonist/s:** the character or the main or central characters that the story revolves on.

**N.B.** A protagonist is the subject of a story. A hero is a human being of extraordinary qualities.

A protagonist can be a hero, certainly, but isn't always. Quite often in manuscripts the protagonist is an ordinary person.

**2. Antagonist:** The **antagonist** is the opposing force in a story. It could be a human enemy, or it could be non-human, like an animal or something less tangible, like fear. The antagonist plays an important role in story development. Think about a favorite movie you like to watch. If there is conflict in a story or movie, it's because there is some sort of antagonist. The protagonist in the story is seeking resolution; the antagonist resists such resolution, but all good stories need antagonists.

The antagonist is in direct conflict with the main character in a story, or the protagonist. The protagonist usually undergoes some significant internal change in a story, but not always. However, because the protagonist has been in conflict with the antagonist, his or her character grows. Without antagonists, stories would definitely be less interesting.

**Example :**

let's take a look at *The Old Man and the Sea*

In fact, the antagonist is a group of sharks. In Hemingway's novel *The Old Man and the Sea*, we see Santiago, a very old, poor fisherman battling the largest marlin he's ever caught. For some days, the marlin drags Santiago around the ocean, but Santiago never relents. At first glance, it seems that the marlin is the antagonist, but Santiago feels kinship with this great fish. In some ways, the marlin represents Santiago and his struggles.

## B- Secondary Characters:

**1. Supporting characters:** supporting characters are essential to the plot. They play a direct role in the plot and have a heavy impact on the storyline.

As the saying goes, no man is an island. We all need people in our lives; friends, family, mentors, teachers and even rivals and enemies to help us grow. Your main character needs the same thing!

Supporting characters are just as crucial to your story as your main character. They are the ones that add depth to your story and pique the reader's interest as they come along and contribute to or enhance to the main character's experiences. Using our example of Goldilocks and the Three Bears, you can tell the story of Goldilocks would not be nearly as interesting without the bears!

They may offer help, support and encouragement to your main character, challenge them in some way, get them into trouble, help them to learn lessons and see different points of view.

**2. Minor Characters:** Minor characters exist primarily for the purpose of making the story more interesting and relatable because a world without people seems flat and hollow. The story could still be told without them.

## Types of characters based on personality:

**1. The Round character:** round characters are like real-life people. They have quirks and oddities, and we feel like we know them in real life.

Like real people, they have depth in feelings and passions. For instance, in the movie "Shrek," the main character says "*Ogres are like onions*," which means that, what appears to them is not the only truth. Rather, there is something more inside them. Similarly, a round character has many layers of personality. Writers define a round character fully, both physically and mentally. It is the character with whom the audience can sympathize, associate with, or relate to, as he seems a character they might have seen in their real lives.

Round characters are major characters in a story, who encounter contradictory situations, and undergo transformation during this phase. Therefore, these characters do not remain the same throughout the narrative, making their traits difficult to identify from beginning until the end.

These characters are more realistic, their personalities somewhat inconsistent.

They are fully developed and show complex traits, like real people.

Round characters are also known as "main characters," or "major characters," because they are suitable to surprise the readers in a very convincing manner.

Major characters must be round characters to be believable.

**2. Stock/flat characters:** they have only one or two traits. They have become so stereotyped in fiction that all readers recognize them right away. Eg. The wicked witch, the evil step-mother, the crazy scientist, etc.

The role of flat characters is to support the main character.

They do not go through a substantial growth or transformation in the course of the narrative.

They have recognizable characteristics that make them appear stereotypical.

They are often referred to as one- or two-dimensional characters, usually having one perspective or point of view about life, things, or events.

3. **Static characters:** A static character is one that does not undergo inner changes, or undergoes a little change. It is a character that does not develop or grow, such as Sherlock Holmes and James Bond.

In fact, this character does not develop the inner understanding to know how his environment is affecting him, or he does not understand that his actions have positive or negative impacts on others. The personality of this character remains the same at the end of the story as it appeared in the beginning. All his actions stay true and unchanged to his personality in-between the scenes.

- *Difference Between Static and Flat Characters*

Static characters should not be confused or mixed up with flat, one-dimensional characters. Though neither changes as the story progresses, if a character remains unchanged, it does not mean that he is one-dimensional like a flat character. A static character can be perfectly interesting, like Sherlock Holmes, who is completely ingenious, eccentric, and sometimes jerky. He never changes, but the audience still loves him. Thus, a static character could be the protagonist too, and a flat character, on the other hand, only plays a side role in the story.

The function of the static character is not less than the hero with whom he is often found at every critical juncture in the narrative. It happens that, whenever the protagonist is in some quandary, the static character is there to help him out. It is because the main character or the protagonist cannot get there on his own. He needs other characters to serve some purpose to add to the plot or help outright. This is the static character who helps the protagonist and also serves as a foil to a character. Moreover, the foil helps reveal the differences between the two characters.

**Examples:** Draco Malfoy in Harry Potter.

4. **Dynamic characters:** Like a round character, a dynamic character also undergoes changes throughout the narrative, due to conflicts he encounters on his journey. A dynamic character faces trials and tribulations, and takes time to learn from his encounters, his experiences, and his mistakes, as well as from other characters. Sometimes a character learns a lesson, and gains maturity, such as Prince Hal in Shakespeare's Henry IV.

Some characters discover mistakes in their points of view, and others discover important aspects of their own personalities, such as Neville Longbottom did in Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone. All of these changes make a character dynamic, but they are implied changes, not stated outright.

- *Difference between Dynamic and Round Character*

Though dynamic and round characters both undergo character development, there is a slight difference between them. The traits of a dynamic character are not described outright. Rather, his traits are referred to as they change over time. On the other hand, a round character's traits are complex, and described by the author. Round characters are dynamic as well, such as Hamlet.

**Example #1: Harry, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (By J. K. Rowling)**

The most important conflict in this novel is the inner conflict of Harry Potter, which makes him a dynamic character. Harry perceives that he shares some abilities similar to Tom Riddle, who becomes the evil Lord Voldemort, and this makes him worry that he might also turn out to be an evil character.

Dumbledore mentions Harry's presence in Gryffindor House, and Tom Riddle's in Slytherin House. Harry, in a defeated tone, says, "It only puts me in Gryffindor" because Harry did not want to go in Slytherin. Beaming again, Dumbledore says, "exactly ... Which makes you very different from Tom Riddle. It is our choices, Harry ... far more than our abilities." Harry learns this lesson about the importance of the choices one makes. It resolves his inner conflict, making him a good example of a dynamic character.

- *Function of Dynamic Character*

A dynamic character plays an important role in a narrative. Often it is the main character of the story, which helps to build a compelling and convincing story. By going through an important transition, having a coming-of-age experience, pulling through trials, gaining maturity, feeling a change of the heart, and developing likable qualities, a dynamic character shows he has made a full transformation. All these changes bring a flavor to the story line and an element of surprise to the readers.

### 3- Characterization:

Characterization is a literary device that is used step-by-step in literature to highlight and explain the details about a character in a story. It is in the initial stage in which the writer introduces the character with noticeable emergence. After introducing the character, the writer often talks about his behavior; then, as the story progresses, the thought-processes of the character.

The next stage involves the character expressing his opinions and ideas, and getting into conversations with the rest of the characters. The final part shows how others in the story respond to the character's personality.

Characterization as a literary tool was coined in the mid 15th century. Aristotle in his Poetics argued that "tragedy is a representation, not of men, but of action and life." Thus the assertion of the dominance of plot over characters, termed "plot-driven narrative," is unmistakable. This point of view was later abandoned by many because, in the 19th century, the dominance of character over plot became clear through petty bourgeois novels.

#### Types of Characterization

An author can use two approaches to deliver information about a character and build an image of it. These two types of characterization include:

##### **1. Direct or explicit characterization**

This kind of characterization takes a direct approach towards building the character. It uses another character, narrator, or the protagonist himself to tell the readers or audience about the subject.

##### **2. Indirect or implicit characterization**

This is a more subtle way of introducing the character to the audience. The audience has to deduce for themselves the characteristics of the character by observing his/her thought process, behavior, speech, way of talking, appearance, and manner of communication with other characters, as well as by discerning the response of other characters.