Elements of Fiction 12IB
Street Shine 15-16

THIS HANDOUT IS LIKE THE FOOL-PROOF GUIDE, BUT FOR FICTION. KEEP IT! MOST OF WHAT WE READ TOGETHER THIS YEAR WILL BE FICTION. WE WILL USE IT AGAIN AND AGAIN. :)

"Fiction is the truth inside the lie." --Stephen King

What is fiction?

"Fiction" is defined as any imaginative re-creation of life in prose narrative form. All fiction is a falsehood of sorts because it relates events that never actually happened to people (characters) who never existed, at least not in the manner portrayed in the stories. However, fiction writers aim at creating "legitimate untruths,"since they seek to demonstrate meaningful insights into the human condition. Therefore, fiction is "untrue"in the absolute sense, but true in the universal sense.

What are the Elements of Fiction that can aid us in building a literary analysis of what we read in class?

1. Narrator / Narrative Voice

Guiding Question: Who is telling the story?

Narrative Point of View is the perspective from which the events in the story are observed and recounted.
To determine the point of view, identify who is telling the story, that is, the viewer through whose eyes the readers see the action (the narrator).

Consider these aspects:

A. **Pronoun p-o-v**: First (I, We)/Second (You)/Third Person narrator (He, She, It, They]

B. **Narrator's degree of Omniscience** [Full, Limited, Partial, None]

C. **Narrator's degree of Objectivity** [Complete, None, Some (Editorial?), Ironic]

D. **Narrator's "Un/Reliability"**

Note: Whether the voice of an unidentified, anonymous speaker or that of an observer/character in thestory, the narrator is never the author [never], not even if the character has the same name as the author. As with "real" life, one should always "consider the source" of a report and/or evaluation concerning events and/or people. Therefore, "know" who is telling the story, measure the omniscient details (if any), note how objectively the report (story) is related, and determine how reliable the person/voice (narrator) may be. For example, does
s/he have anything to gain from misrepresenting the "facts"?

In other words – types of Narrative Voice:

A. Omniscient - a story told in the third person; the narrator's knowledge, control, and prerogatives are unlimited, allowing "authorial" subjectivity.

B. Limited Omniscient - a story told in the third person in which the narrative voice is associated with a major or minor character who is not able to "see/know" all, may only be able to relate the thoughts of one or some characters but not others, may not know what happened "off stage" or in the past.

C. First Person - the story is told from the first person "I" personal point-of-view, usually that of the main
character.

> **Interior Monologue** – first-person, train of thought "overheard" by the reader (NOT spoken out loud as is a monologue), or sometimes "overheard" and reported by an omniscient narrator; other times it occurs as stream of consciousness ("The Jilting of Granny Weatherall").

> **Subjective Narration -** first person, narrator seems unreliable, tries to get readers to share his/her side or to assume values or views not usually presumed by the reader.

> **Detached Autobiography -** first person, reliable narrator that guides the reader. Narrator is main character, often reflecting on a past "self" – sometimes an adult recounting an event from childhood.When it is the latter, it is important to notice "how" the adult voice affects the child's story.

> **Memoir or Observer Narration -** first person, narrator is observer rather than main participant; narrator can be confidant(e), eyewitness or "chorus" (provides offstage or background information). This narrator can be reliable or unreliable.

D. Objective or Dramatic - the opposite of the omniscient; displays an objectivity; compared to a roving camera with sound. Very little of the past or the future is given; the story is set in the present. It has the most speed and the most action; it relies heavily on external action and dialogue, and it offers no opportunities for interpretation by the narrator.

E. Framed Narrative – some narratives, particularly collections of narratives, involve a frame narrative that explains the genesis of, and/or gives a perspective on, the main narrative or narratives that follow, e.g., Chaucer's Canterbury Tales; Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley's Frankenstein; and Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness. Some stories have multiple narrative frames that draw the reader away from the initial, outer setting (and the "reality" of the story) through a narrative maze to the core events that are far/deeply removed from the first narrative encounter, e.g., Henry James's short story "The Turn of the Screw."

2. **Setting**

Guiding Questions:Where, When, and (under) What Circumstances? What Cultural Content (if any)? These are all the place/where & time/when & reason(s)/why the action/events occur.

Note: If this information is withheld by the narrator, critical thinkers must consider the narrative

motivation for the omission and the effects (on purpose or by "accident") of this lack of information.

A. Where (place): The "physical" environment where the story takes place (the description of this environment may suggest its importance to other aspects of the fiction such as theme and "message."

Special features of some settings include:

1. Local Color: The use of regional details to add interest and (sometimes) meaning to the story. Use of Local Color may include description of a specific locale, a manner of dress, customs, speech patterns (dialect or accent), and slang expressions. Critical thinkers will determine if these details are
just a decorative motif or if these details reflect or enhance a theme, add to the meaning, or serve as a key to some aspect of the narrative or characters.

2**. Regionalism (Regional Literature):** When the description of a region becomes an intrinsic and necessary part of the work, the relationship of the region to the action is characteristic of Regional Literature. Examples of Regional Literature include Thomas Hardy's "Wessex" novels such as Return of the Native and The Mayor of Casterbirdge.

B. When (time): Time includes all of its dimensions.* What was going on at that time? What, if any, importance has the period and/or time-span of events with regard to the themes, motifs, characterizations, atmosphere, tone, etc.?

1. *What is the period (century, decade, year) during which the action occurs?
2. *Over how many hours, days, weeks, months, years, decades, etc. does the action take place?
3. The effects of the setting may include a particular atmosphere, insight to the characters and/or their motivations, and a key or connection to or reflection of other aspects of the story.

3. Plot and Plot Structure

Guiding Questions: What happens in the story? What is the design (structure) " – time "line" – of the narrative? The plot is the series of events and actions that occur in a story. The structure of the plot is the method or sequence in which incidents in a narrative are organized/presented to the audience/readers.

A. Conflict (in the sense of "friction" or "battle" but not military/war) in fiction is the opposition of forces or characters; this "friction" usually fuels the action.
Complication or "Exciting" Force is what fuels the rising action and may incite later events. Longer works may have several "complications."
1. Man versus Man / the Individual versus another Individual
2. Human versus Nature / the Individual versus the Physical World
3. Human versus Society / the Individual versus the Civilization or "Order"
4. Human versus Herself/Himself // The Individual versus the Self (human nature)
B. Order – Narrative events may be related in different orders: for example, Chronological/Linear (natural order); in media res (in the middle of things); or begin in the present and return to the past …

C. Divisions of the Plot include:
1. Exposition and/or Rising Action: how readers learn details previous to the story's

beginning, and then continues toward the climax of the story

2. Diversion: any episode prior to the climax that does not contribute directly to the rising action or add to the suspense (example: comic relief in tragedy).

3. Climax: the moment in the story at which a crisis reaches its highest intensity and its potential resolution, the turning point

4. Dénouement ("unknotting") or Falling Action

D. Flashback: a scene inserted into a film, novel, story, or play to show events that occurred at an earlier time; this technique is used to complement the events in the "present" of the story.

E. Foreshadowing: a literary device in which the outcome of the struggle or conflict is anticipated or hinted at by such elements as speeches or actions of characters or by symbols in the story.

F. Resolution: Type of Conclusion/Ending

1. Happy ending – everything ends well and all is resolved.

2. Tragic or Unhappy ending – many events in life do not end pleasantly, so literary fiction that emulates life is more apt to have an unhappy conclusion, forcing the reader to contemplate the complexities of life.

3. Open-ended/Lack of Resolution/Partial Resolution/Indeterminate – no definitive ending or resolution occurs, leaving the reader to ponder the issued raised by the story

G. Suspense (What is going to happen next?): Critical investigation will ask the more important question "Why?" rather than "What?" Suspense is most often produced either by mystery or by dilemma.

H. Artistic Unity is essential to a good, effective, successful story. Nothing in the story is irrelevant, superfluous; that is, the story contains no detail or element that does not contribute to the meaning. Nothing occurs that "flies in the face" of the "reality" of the story and/or the characters. The work should have a sense of "natural inevitability" with its specific set of characters and the initial or core situation.

I. Deus ex Machina (literally, God from the Machine): Plot device in which someone or something appears "out of the blue" to help a character to overcome a seemingly insoluble difficulty.

J. Motifs: recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and to inform the majorthemes of the story

Plot Elements in other words:

Fiction writers can employ any one of countless structural elements to enhance the design of a story's plot; those used most often include the following five:

The Hook: How much time do you give a story to capture your undivided attention? A chapter? A page? A paragraph? How long will it take you to capture your readers' attention? The hook is what gets people interested in what you have to say. Hooks are well-placed at the beginning but can be found elsewhere in the plotting as well.

Back-story: There is more to every story than what we actually read. The characters each

have a past and there are usually important events that have taken place prior to the story itself, and sometimes the past will drive the action in the present. This is back-story, also known as what-happened-before-this-story-tookplace.

Sub-plots: A story within a story… Sub-plots are the little things going on in the background that often make the main plot more interesting by giving the reader more to think about. These little events are especially effective when they tie in seamlessly with the main plot.

Conflict: Some plot elements are optional. Conflict is not. Without conflict, there is no purpose. Characters want something they do not have, or they are looking for ways to change their current reality, or they must overcome challenges of some kind, however great or minute. Were someone to write a story without
conflict and the product would be a character sketch or a character study.
Climax: Like conflict, climax is an essential part of storytelling. The climax normally occurs right before the dénouement or final resolution of the main conflict in the plot. At this peak in a story's plot, the interest of readers is most piqued so that they race through the falling action to discover the conclusion.

4. Character/Characterization:

Character is the mental, emotional, and social qualities to distinguish one entity from another (people, animals, spirits, automatons, pieces of furniture, and other animated objects).

Character development is the change that a character undergoes from the beginning of a story to the end. The importance of a character to the story determines how fully the character is developed.

Characterization = process by which fictional characters are presented/developed

A. Methods of Characterization ["Show and Tell"; or Telling versus Showing],

   1. Expository/Direct Presentation: described and/or "explained" by the narrator
   2. Dramatic/Indirect Presentation: actions "show" the kind of person the character is
        a. His/Her own actions, behavior, speech, and recorded thoughts and/or
        b. Qualities are apparent by what other characters say about him/her

B. Types of Characters
   1. Flat: a one-dimensional character, typically not central to the story

   2. Two-dimensional characters may be used as vessels to carry out the plot

   3. Round: a complex, fully-developed character, usually prone to change
   4. Static: these can be either round or flat characters, but they do not change during the story. Folktales, fairytales, and other types use static and flat characters whose actions are predictable, so the reader is free to concentrate on the action and theme as each moves toward an often times universal
   discovery.
   5. Dynamic: a developing character, usually at the center of the action, who changes or grows to a new awareness of life (the human condition)
   6. Stock: "borrowed" personage or archetype (ex. Western hero in white hat; old, longed-nosed, straggly-haired hag as evil witch). Closely related to stereotype. …

7. Stereotype: a character so little individualized as to show only qualities of an occupation, or national,ethnic, or other group to which s/he belongs (ex Irishman, Sicilian, soldier, nerd, dumb blonde, obnoxious brat, silly teenager)
8. Universal: characters with problems and traits common to all humanity
9. Individual: a more eccentric and unusual representation of character

C. Function of Character

1. Protagonist: the principle figure in the story
2. Antagonist: the character with whom the protagonist is engaged in a struggle.
Note: a conflicting agency not embodied in an actual character is called an antagonistic force as is the weather in Tales of the Yukon or the sea in stories like "The Open Boat"
3. Confidant: the character in whom another character (usually the protagonist) confides, much like Watson is confidante to Sherlock and Tonto is confidante to the Lone Ranger.
4. Foil: a secondary character serving as a backdrop (mirror) for a more important character. Typically,the foil is rather ordinary and static so that the unusual qualities of the primary character will be morestriking in contrast. Often this same character is both confidant and foil.

Anthropomorphic characterization is the characterization of animals, inanimate objects, or naturalphenomena as people. Skilled authors can use this to create fantasy even from stuffed toys (Winnie-the-Pooh). The characterizing of inanimate objects from tiny soldiers to trees and so on has many effects in
stories – however, sometimes a bird is just a bird, a cigar is just a smoke, and water is simply water.Animal characters personified create particular effects, especially when the animal characters contain connotative metaphoric connects to human traits, i.e., fox = sly, weasel = duplicity, swan = elegance.

5. Atmosphere (Mood)

Atmosphere (Mood) is the dominant emotion/feeling that pervades a story.
It is less physical and more symbolic, associative, and suggestive than setting, but often akin to the setting.

A. Every story has some kind of atmosphere, but in some, it may be the most important feature or, at least, a key to the main points of the story
B. Atmosphere is created by descriptive details, dialogue, narrative language, and such. For example, Poe's story, "The Cask of Amontillado," contains narrative description of entombment. The dialogue and word choice contribute to a sense of morbidity and horror.

6. Tone

While related to atmosphere, tone is distinct from it.
Tone is the narrator's attitude toward his subject and audience.

A. Narrator's tone may show, for example, admiration for the subject or a character.
B. Or the narrative tone can suggest pity or hostility; on the other hand, the narrator may be condescending or "folksy" with the audience.
C. Sometimes the narrative tone is ironic.
D. The narrative tone may be demonstrated by direct comment, by characterization, or by choice of words, symbols, or other literary devices.

7. Style

Style refers to the qualities that distinguish the works of one author from another's, including:

A. Diction: word choice: formal/informal

B. Sentence Structure (simple or complex)

C. Syntax: sentence patterns of language - grammatical and ungrammatical arrangements of words

D. Language: abstract or concrete

E. Dialogue: can be either more dialogue than description, or dialogue limited to certain characters, or simply lacking dialogue altogether

F. Imagery: sensory details such as similes, metaphors, onomatopoeia in a work includes:

    1. Visual: imagery of sight
    2. Aural: imagery of sound (e.g., soft hiss of skis)
    3. Olfactory: imagery of smell (e.g., the smell of stale beer)
    4. Tactile: imagery of touch (e.g., the feel of bare feet on a hot sidewalk)
    5. Gustatory: imagery of taste (e.g., the tart, dry taste of starchy, green bananas)

G. Allegory: a literary work in which the symbols, characters, and events come to represent, in a somewhat point-to-point fashion, a different metaphysical, political, or social situation.

H. Symbols: symbols are concrete objects/images that stand for abstract subjects. The objects and images have meanings of their own but may be ascribed subjective connotations such as heart = love, skull & crossbones = poison, color green = envy; light bulb = idea, seasons = times in a lifespan. Symbols may be either of two types:

    1. Established (General): the meaning of an established symbol is derived from outside the context of the story, from "received association," i.e., symbolism is agreed upon "universally" (artificially) by culture, religion, tribe, kinship, etc. For example, a journey = life; water = rebirth/new beginning; lion = courage

    2. Private (Personal): definable only within the context of the story in which it appears. For example, early in T. S. Eliot's long poem The Waste Land, the narrative voice issues, "Come in under the shadow of the rock." In Eliot's poem, the red rock is symbolic of the spiritual shelter of the Anglican Church, although this is not a "received" symbol traditional to any particular culture. The ability to recognize and to interpret symbols requires experience in literary readings, perception, and tact. It is easy to "run wild" with symbols - to find symbols everywhere. Sometimes a bird is just a bird, a cigar is just a smoke, and water is simply water.

    The ability to interpret symbols is essential to the full understanding and enjoyment of literature. Given below are helpful suggestions for identifying literary symbols:

        1. The story itself must furnish a clue that a detail is to be taken symbolically - symbols nearly always signal their existence by emphasis, repetition, or position.

2. The meaning of a literary symbol must be established and supported by the entire context of the story. A symbol has its meaning inside not outside a story.

3. To be considered a symbol, an item must suggest a meaning different in kind from its literal meaning.

4. A symbol has a cluster of meanings.

I. Motifs: recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the major themes (points) of the story

8. Authorial Purpose/Intent--Theme
Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work.

Guiding Questions: Why did this writer bring these characters to this place at this time? What is the point? What do readers now know, [should] understand,…?

A. Theme is the central or dominating idea(s) in a literary work, may be several, particularly in longer, complex fiction.
B. The theme must be expressible in the form of a statement - not "motherhood" but "Motherhood sometimes has more frustration than reward."
C. A theme reflects a central vision of life or a statement about the human condition/experience conveyed in a work. For examples, "Mankind exists in an indifferent world."

1. Broadly, a theme may be the view of life that pervades a story; i.e., "Man's self-importance is ridiculous in comparison with the immensity of the universe."

2. No theme is identical with a Moral. An example of a moral would be, "Honesty is the best policy." A mature piece of literature embodies a more complex theme than a mere moral. A mature work does not teach, rather it reveals (it shows rather than tells); it does not preach, but interprets. Themes, unlike morals, are not prescriptive. Themes add understanding of life and leave it to the readers to arrive at rules of behavior through the increased perception offered by the story.

3. In longer works, the central theme may be accompanied by a number of lesser, related themes, or it may contain two or more central themes. Usually, these contain insight into the human condition.

4. The means by which themes may be expressed include:
  a. Narrator may sum up the significance or meaning in a pithy paragraph.
  b. Narrator may use a wise character to voice the theme.
  c. Modern writers generally embody the theme in dramatization – the action, dialogue, or other elements.

In other words …
The theme (1) can be a revelation of human character; (2) may be stated briefly or at great length; but (3) is not the "moral" of the story.

A. A theme must be stated as a generalization about life. Names of characters or specific situations

in the plot are not to be used when stating a theme.
B. A theme must not be a generalization larger than is justified by the terms of the story.
C. A theme is the central and unifying concept of the story. It must adhere to the following requirements: 1. It must account for all the major details of the story. 2. It must not be contradicted by any detail of the story. 3. It must not rely on supposed facts - facts not actually stated or clearly implied by the story.
D. There is no single way of stating the theme of a story.
E. Any statement that reduces a theme to some familiar saying, aphorism, or cliché should be avoided.
Do not use "A stitch in time saves nine," "You can't judge a book by its cover, " "Fish and guests smell in three days," and so on.

9. Irony
Irony is a term with a range of meanings, all of them involving some sort of discrepancy or incongruity. It should not be confused with sarcasm which is simply language designed to insult or to cause emotional pain. Irony is used to suggest the difference between appearance and reality, between expectation and fulfillment, the complexity of experience, to furnish indirectly an evaluation of the author's material, and at the same time to achieve compression.

Three kinds of irony:
1. Verbal irony – what is said is actually the opposite of what is meant/intended. Verbal irony occurs when a narrator or character says one thing and means something else
2. Dramatic irony occurs when a reader perceives something that a character or narrator in a work of literature does not know. It is also the contrast between what a character or narrator says and what a reader knows to be true.
3. Situational irony is the discrepancy between appearance and reality, or between expectation and fulfillment, or between what is and what would seem appropriate.

10. Dialogue

Dialogue is the direct (quoted) "verbal" exchanges between characters. It can be used to:

   • **Break up narrative —** The writer can use dialogue to balance out the other elements of fiction such as description.
   • **Advance the plot —** What characters discuss can ultimately change the course of the story.
   • **Develop conflict —** Arguing characters create conflict; dialogue can also build tension.
   • **Present information —** Dialogue can be used as an alternative to exposition; instead of being fed dry facts, the reader will enjoy learning the background of the story.
   • **Develop character —** Dialogue can reveal the personality, age, intelligence, and experience of a character.

Some important elements to identify about dialogue include:

1. How much of the story is dialogue?

2. What can the reader determine about the characters through their diction, accent, vocabulary, references, idioms, vernacular, tone, etc.?

3. Is the dialogue necessary to the story? Does it add to or detract from the plot?

4. What, if anything, other than characterization is revealed by the dialogue?

11. Odds and Ends:

Allegory: An allegorical story has a second meaning beneath the surface, endowing a cluster of characters, objects, or events with added significance; often the pattern relates each literal item to a corresponding abstract idea or moral principal. The creation of an allegorical pattern of meaning enables an author to achieve power through economy. **Few works of literature are allegories.**

Editorializing is the narrator's commenting on the story in order to instruct the reader how to feel about or respond to a character, an event, and/or a situation in the story s/he is relating.

Fantasy: A nonrealistic story that transcends the bounds of known reality, the fantasy requires the reader's "willing suspension of belief."

Poeticizing is a narrator's use of immoderately heightened and distended language to accomplish particular effects.

Sentimentality: A cheap way of trying to create emotion with the reader, sentimentality employs stock response - an emotion that has its source outside of the story (babies, puppies, young love, patriotism…), a "sweet" view of life, and other techniques to avoid having to actually create emotion-inducing situations in the story. Instead, good writer draws forth emotion by producing a character in a situation that deserves the reader's sympathy and showing enough about the character and the situation to make either/both real and convincing.