



Emphasis on Elements of Fiction For Better Reading Comprehension

Curriculum Unit 83.03.07
by Josephine F. Ablamsky

Many stories assigned to students in reading classes are short fiction stories. In order for the students to achieve a better understanding of and subsequently a more satisfying reaction to their readings, I want to make them more aware of the technical aspects of short story construction, and the author's delicate interweaving of these aspects so that the ultimate result is quality short story fiction.

In *The Scope of Fiction*, by Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, the authors write ". . . before extensive reading can be profitable, the student must have some practice in intensive reading." It also includes ". . . the student may best come to understand a piece of fiction by understanding the functions of the various elements which go to make up fiction and by understanding their relationship to each other in the whole construct."

I'm in basic agreement with the above and do think the students will increase their reading comprehension if they understand better more of the elements utilized and the role of each element in a story. Though students are being informed about plot, setting, and characters in lessons presently, I contend that they need to be made more familiar with other elements of fiction tone, mood, point of view, theme and to recognize that from their unification, coherence and quality fiction is achieved.

The workbooks presently utilized in the classrooms may have reference to the other story elements, however they are interspersed in the curriculum, hence they are taught and then absorbed by the students as disparate factors when, in fact, they are essential in one single story to act as connectives and to contribute to the unity and cohesiveness of the total writing.

This curriculum unit will reflect a Gestaltic psychological framework, which suggests that learning should be by related wholes rather than fragmentary parts. ¹ Therefore, I have incorporated and integrated the greater body of story elements in one comprehensive teaching unit, the goal being to have the students achieve a much broader understanding of what they read and to nurture their reading.

This unit is designed to be taught within a period of three weeks. At the outset, particular vocabulary words will be defined. The teacher will also elaborate on this vocabulary so as to develop further the students' understanding. Additional information expanding on this aspect of the unit will be incorporated in a lesson plan to follow.

The students will then go on to reading a story; the teacher will guide the students to examples of the

particular story elements. Simultaneously, the teacher will elaborate on the author's diction or method of presentation of the particular story elements. When that has been completed, the class will be assigned a second story for similar analysis. Additional information expanding on these aspects of the unit will be incorporated in lesson plans to follow.

With the added insight gleaned from the first lessons, the students' ability to select those passages that are reflective of particular elements should be more acute for the second story assignment. And, though the students have achieved keenness in their perceptions, the teacher must continue to act as a guide so that the students receive appropriate reinforcement when making their identifications and interpretations.

Within the three-week time frame a comprehensive exploration of the components necessary for quality short story fiction will have been taught. Students may be able to perceive that the way the author arranges the elements of his story is an art. In addition, the students' new awareness can alert them to independently search out these factors in their future readings. Their reading skills may ultimately be so honed that they will want to expand their independent reading to include a wider range of topics, from adventure, romance, sports, to history, science, and philosophy.

This unit is being constructed for the 7th and 8th grade remedial and developmental reading classes. I will select two stories from the commonly used middle school reading book, *Crosswinds Two*, and analyze the stories explaining how the author portrays and arranges the elements in his story.

My objectives for this unit include:

- 1) Students will become aware of the elements necessary for constructing a short story
 - 2) Students will be able to define each element
 - 3) Students will develop the ability to independently identify examples of these elements in their future readings
 - 4) Teachers will have a model lesson to teach and to use as an example for future lessons.
- In order to reinforce the understanding of the material and to determine if the students are understanding it well, the following methods of evaluation may be used:
- 1) Vocabulary tests
 - 2) Write a paragraph (or story) stressing the mood of suspense (or sorrow, joy, fear)
 - 3) Write a paragraph (or story) using the first person point of view (or omniscient, objective)
 - 4) Write a paragraph (or story) focusing on the characterization of a performer
 - 5) Write a paragraph (or story) illustrating the conflict patterns
 - 6) Assign specific stories from the text and ask students to select passages representative of particular story elements.

Topics referred to in the evaluation are expounded on in the lesson plans to follow. I have tried to write up the lesson plans so that they can be of immediate use to the teacher.

Lesson Plan I will include the name of the story elements, pertinent vocabulary related to the story elements, and detailed descriptions of the story elements as a resource for the teacher. As often introduced first in a reading lesson, the unit and Lesson Plan I will begin with the introduction of new words, words that require defining so that the students can better understand the accompanying lengthier teacher's descriptions.

My teaching format includes (1) DEFINITIONS and also (2) DESCRIPTIONS. I recommend that you write the story element name and its DEFINITION on the chalkboard for the students to copy for their reference. I would also encourage you to have the students take notes when you are describing the story element. Feel free to read the DESCRIPTION directly from my lesson plan.

LESSON PLAN I

A. PLOT

1. DEFINITIONS -

PLOT what happens, the series of events in a story, has a beginning, middle and an end

CONFLICT a clash of opposing forces (to be further described)

EXPOSITION story gets under way, the beginning, setting and major characters are usually presented

DENOUEMENT (da-noo-man') story is "wrapped up," the ending, questions are answered.

2. DESCRIPTION

The PLOT, or "what happens" in a story, must evolve or develop. A writer will build a story up around some kind of a CONFLICT. There are three patterns of CONFLICTS generally used.

One pattern is referred to as man versus himself. In this writing pattern the character suffers from internal stress. By internal stress I mean self-doubts, anxieties, indecision a story character can be haunted by something from the past (Will his family discover that he committed a crime years ago?) should he remain on his job which is emotionally unrewarding yet promises continuing excellent wages? Perhaps the author depicts a character to be so ambitious that the inner forces driving him also make him mean, even cruel to the family he loves. His family turns against him and he cannot understand it. The driven, ambitious man remains continuously bewildered by his family's progressively hostile attitude towards him. Those are some examples of inner CONFLICT of the man versus himself pattern that is used to develop PLOT in a story.

A second pattern is that called man versus man, or men. This is not an internal, inside the mind, struggle of a character but an external struggle. Examples are: one against a single person or a group, football teams competing against each other, two political parties in opposition of each other, or two nations entering into a war against each other.

The third pattern is that of man versus environment. Some examples of this: a man tries to survive in a jungle, a person has committed an offense against society so must go to jail, and a nation fighting a drought, desperately trying to save its farm products.

As an aid to the reader, to recognize CONFLICT, find the main problem facing the central character. Another factor, a short story can evolve from a single CONFLICT or around more than one.

The EXPOSITION of a story is usually at the beginning of a story. This consists of introducing the reader to the major characters and the setting of the story.

When the story is reaching its ending, or DENOUEMENT, the resolution to the CONFLICT is made, the story is tied up or brought to its conclusion. Perhaps we should say that an answer to the CONFLICT has been reached. The answer provided by the author may not satisfy all the characters in the story nor satisfy the reader, however, some kind of resolution or decision has been attained.

B. SETTING

1. DEFINITION

SETTING tells when, where, the time and place.

2. DESCRIPTION

Why is SETTING NECESSARY? Why is it important for an author to refer to a place and a time that a story occurs? Why is SETTING vital to fiction? There are several reasons.

One reason is that the characters and events in the story are made real if they are “placed.” There is no drifting in time or in space. This gives the story credibility or makes it believable. The story performers have “roots.”

The SETTING also establishes a mood. If the author writes about the dark, gloomy house he not only tells you where the event is occurring, but he generates a feeling of somberness and even dread in the reader. This is the purpose the author wants to achieve. The writer uses SETTING to generate a particular mood or atmosphere in the reader’s mind.

SETTING provides a source of CONFLICT, and we’ve already learned that CONFLICT is essential in establishing a PLOT. As an example, when a major story character struggles to climb to the very top of a mountain that men has never climbed before, the CONFLICT pattern is man versus environment. Additionally contained therein is the SETTING, the mountain top of a particular mountain range and an extremely cold climate.

SETTING can also develop characterization, or an image of a personality, in a story. When an author writes that a man is sitting quietly, rocking to and fro in the rocking chair, the grandfather’s clock ticking beside him; the author is reflecting the fictional person’s age, and his inactivity in a quiet, still room. The furniture could be significant of a past era, or period of time.

Sometimes the clues are too few and, therefore, the SETTING is vague or not too clear; a passage referring to a powdered wig map suggest the 18th century, after five years of bitter hostility offers only a time span, frost on the windowpane suggest a cold climate area, and a television set thrusts you into the general present time.

It can be presented in a concrete fashion such as on the 5th of July in Cincinnati, Ohio, at the height of the noon-hour rush at Dell and Main Streets, or it can be presented with descriptive details the sun beating down mercilessly, plants and flowers sadly sagging, roaming dogs' tongues hanging listlessly at the sides of their mouths; the drying village was in a deep state of lethargy (state of unconsciousness).

Frequently you, the reader, have to draw conclusions from the details and suggestions given in the story.

Let's review the four major roles that SETTING plays: (1) it makes a story credible or believable (2) it aids in establishing a mood or an atmosphere in the reader (3) it develops a source of CONFLICT, and (4) it develops the characterization of a performer in a story; the image of a personality is projected.

C. CHARACTERS

1. DEFINITIONS -

CHARACTERS who, the fictional persons

CHARACTERIZATION the creation of lifelike people in fiction

2. DESCRIPTION

An author reveals his CHARACTERS in several ways. He can have a character speak and this dialogue will reveal the character's personality. The reader heeds what the character says, and the reader will make inferences and judgments based on this dialogue. "I don't care if you are ill. You said you'd have it completed by today. I don't want to hear any excuses. You're lazy and an incompetent!" A reader of that dialogue would be apt to conclude that the character is impatient, intolerant, and lacking in understanding.

Another important way an author develops CHARACTERIZATION is by describing how the character acts in different situations. Everything the person does is a clue to his personality. If a character is depicted as heaping her clothes on a chair, letting some fall on the floor and rarely bothering to ever hang them up, she would be perceived as a careless, sloppy person. If story performers are depicted as civic minded giving their hearts and home to the needy, then readers would perceive them to be compassionate, supportive people. Everything a fictional person does or the way he behaves will be clues to his personality.

CHARACTERIZATION is also revealed by the author commenting directly; he will come right out and tell you that the fictional person is a grasping, greedy person. The reader does not have to search out for clues; the author will include a sentence, or sentences, that clearly states the character traits of a performer in the story.

Other performers in a story can converse about a character which will give insight into that character's personality. And, a description of a character's appearance can also offer clues.

Often a writer will include a little of all of these techniques dialogue, describing action or behavior, direct commenting and appearance description in his effort to make the character believable to his readers.

The author wants the CHARACTERS to make a certain kind of impression on the reader so the author will be very selective in his choice of words. He influences your judgment about the character based on the description presented. Even if you do not have a favorable impression about a character in a story, so long as you are kept interested in the CHARACTER the author has succeeded in keeping you reading, in making you want to know what has happened.

There is no PLOT or any life in a story without CHARACTERS. They move the story onward. We can identify with them, we can learn to care about them, we can learn from them, and we can escape from our ordinary lives with them. A skillful writer will characterize his performers in a story in such a way that they can become real people to the readers.

D. MOOD

1. DEFINITION

MOOD the emotional charge or feeling that the reader internalizes as a result of reading a story

2. DESCRIPTION

The story elements previously referred to, PLOT, SETTING, and CHARACTERS all contribute to the production of the MOOD of the story.

A lesser known element, it might also be called atmosphere, the world in which the CHARACTERS move. The air, which may be calm, sinister, oppressive, or joyous, that is breathed by the reader as he enters into the world of the short story is another way to describe MOOD. ²

The author's choice of descriptive words is a major factor in producing a particular MOOD in the reader. If the author writes of the dark, cold winds and shadows in the night, he can elicit in the reader a MOOD of fear or, at least, apprehension. If Mrs. Stevens is described as hurriedly dropping batter into the pan, spinning and pushing the pan roughly into the oven, batter spilling over, and letting the oven door slam shut, the reader can infer a MOOD of haste and maybe confusion. If, on the other hand Mrs. Stevens carefully measured the spoons of batter, gingerly carried the pan to the oven and delicately closed the door afterward, the reader is made to sense calm in the proceedings. The descriptive diction contributes much to developing the MOOD.

The SETTING, locale and time, such as a hospital in Milan, Italy, during World War II often contributes to the MOOD of a story an impression of human suffering.

PLOT, also, is a factor in creating the MOOD of a story. A story that may include a romance (happy MOOD), then a tragic accident (sad MOOD), and finally the DENOUEMENT which leaves the reader with hope for the crippled sweetheart and a return to a modified normal life, completes on a happy note (uplifted MOOD).

The author seeks to affect the reader's heart and to stimulate the reader's intellect, so he describes incidents in certain ways. He thereby creates the effect he has wished for, the reader internalizes the MOOD.

E. TONE

1. DEFINITION

TONE the attitude of the author toward his subject matter as the reader infers it

2. DESCRIPTION

Another way of explaining TONE is to say that it is how the author feels about the ideas he presents in the story. His style of writing carries a TONE to the reader. Some words that are descriptive of TONE include: comic, tragic, ironical (saying one thing but meaning another), cold, witty, pathetic, sentimental, disillusioned,

idealistic, satirical (ridiculing), and reportorial.

If you fail to detect the writer's TONE, you may not understand his meaning. Often individual words and phrases are critical to the effect. What he chooses to emphasize or point out in fiction and his direct comments all help to reveal the author's TONE.

"Insane consideration of atomic warfare" and "impending annihilation of the human race" are words that explicitly reveal the author's attitude. If "Joe decided to become a boxer not realizing that boxing is a cruel sport" is written, the author is revealing his attitude toward that sport. If the author stresses that a character in his story is a fine, upstanding citizen, he wants the reader to think of this character as a fine person. The author wants you to share these feelings, he wants you to like or dislike with him.

This does not mean that the reader must accept what the author feels. Knowing that the author is trying to make you feel his ideas or thoughts, the reader should not be unduly influenced and should make his own independent judgments.

The reader must realize that the author's TONE does infiltrate the writing. By understanding this, the reader can form his own opinions and make rational judgments.

F. POINT OF VIEW

1. DEFINITION

POINT OF VIEW the perspective, or angle, from which the fiction is related

2. DESCRIPTION

A story is told or recorded by someone from a POINT OF VIEW. Since the artistic unity of a piece of fiction may depend to a great degree on this facet of telling a story, deciding what POINT OF VIEW to use is one of the first and most important considerations a writer must face. What you see in fiction and how you understand it depends upon POINT OF VIEW which controls quality and amount of information the reader will receive.

The personal, first person POINT OF VIEW is projected when the story is unfolded by a major character or even a minor character. The character tells the story as he or she experiences it. The pronoun "I" is used throughout. (I had just gotten married and was looking for a house. I saw her eyes open wide. He was sure of himself, but I was not so sure of myself.)

The objective POINT OF VIEW is used when an author tells us what the character does and says but not what he thinks. The author narrates the events in such a way that the reader sees and hears characters in action but does not enter the minds of any of them nor read any emotions into their actions. (Will looked at his aunt. She turned away.) The author or narrator merely records the events like a camera taking pictures.

The omniscient (knowing all) POINT OF VIEW is revealed from the perspective of a narrator that is outside of the story, not a character in the story. But, this narrator enters the character's mind as an observer of the inner person. The omniscient narrator knows everything the character is doing, seeing and feeling. (Jones was inwardly angry but gave no sign). Smith continued chatting, but he sensed Jones' anger.) (John was lonely but didn't realize that Mary was lonely too.) If the omniscient narrator enters the mind of only one character throughout the entire story then it is referred to as the partially omniscient POINT OF VIEW.

Writers can shift POINTS OF VIEW within the story. The reader then visualizes and internalizes the story from different POINTS OF VIEW also.

G. THEME

1. DEFINITION

THEME the meaning, the significance of the fiction, a statement about life in general

2. DESCRIPTION

If all of the elements of fiction have worked well together, there should be a resulting THEME. The THEME grows out of the subject of the story and is the author's statement about life. The THEME should stimulate the reader's intellect. All of the elements contribute to the "point" of the story. It is not to be confused with the subject of the story. If you look at the problems the characters confront, if any discoveries are being made, the tone of the story, the kind of world that is being presented the answers to these will direct you toward the THEME of the story.

Though a story will not begin with a THEME, one is found and it gives direction to the story. It is not a moral telling people what to do. It is a statement about life in general or about human beings in general. The reader can disagree with the author's THEME, but the reader should be able to at least recognize it.

The THEME has to be abstracted by the reader from the fusion of PLOT, SETTING, CHARACTERS and TONE.

In *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, by Robert L. Stevenson, a man is transformed into a monster. The THEME suggested by the author is that human beings have dual personalities, both good and bad. In *Charlotte's Web*, by E. B. White, the author can be suggesting an acceptance of death, life cycles continue on.

This concludes the first lesson plan wherein students have been introduced to the story elements. Now that they have been noted, explained and studied dependent upon the teacher's method of reinforcement you may proceed with the analysis of the first story from the textbook.

LESSON PLAN II

How best to read the story will probably rest upon the students' reading abilities. You may elect to read the entire story to the students directing them to follow along, or you may assign the story to the students as a silent reading assignment, or you may call upon students to read the story orally.

Upon completion of the reading, you and the students will examine it to find the author's method of representing the short story elements.

In my plan to follow I note the story element, page referents where applicable, and those words, phrases or sentences from the story that contribute directly to the depiction of the story element. All of the examples I have pointed out do not necessarily have to be brought into the discussion. You may also find other examples that are just as suitable to refer to.

STORY TITLE "There's a Woollybear in the Bathroom", by Hilda Stahl, Pages 119 125, *Crosswinds Two*

(When Rudy's father remarries, Rudy must learn to share him not only with his new step-mother but a new half brother as well. And his new half-brother loves what Rudy hates bugs!)

A. PLOT

EXPOSITION Page 119 introduces the reader to the narrator of the story, Rudy. It also introduces Rudy's dad, step-mother Clair, and half-brother Jason. Though EXPOSITION contains the SETTING, that will be described in detail following the PLOT.

The CONFLICT pattern indicates man versus men as Rudy has difficulty in accepting his new step-mother's and half-brother's presence. It also can include the man versus environment CONFLICT, the social and psychological problems that arise from remarriages affecting not only the adults but their children also.

The PLOT develops within a one day period. By bedtime Rudy realizes that the adjustment he has to make to his new family is as difficult to them as it is to him. Realizing that he and Jason are in the "same boat," Rudy learns to appreciate the innocent happiness little Jason derives from bug collecting.

DENOUEMENT The conclusion infers that Rudy will develop more warmth towards his new half-brother, there will be an emotional bond between them and their summer together will be an enjoyable one.

B. SETTING -

"There's a Woollybear in the Bathroom"

Page 119 When my parents got divorced, I went to live with my dad. But after a year of living with just him, Dad got married again. . . . He's going to spend the summer with us. (The story is taking place in the summer in Rudy's father's house. Illustrations in the text indicate the story is taking place in the present time.)

C. CHARACTERS

Rudy (primary), his dad, new stepmother Clair and new half-brother Jason

CHARACTERIZATION of Rudy revealed by author's use of *dialogue* : P. 120 "I'll make it!" I snapped. (hostility) P. 121 "Your face is a mess!" (hostility) P. 123 "I don't like bugs," . . . "No' Get away from me, will you?" (anger, rejection towards Jason)

CHARACTERIZATION of Rudy by describing *actions* : P. 120 I made two sandwiches and sat down with Jason. I didn't think he'd want to eat alone.(indicates empathy for Jason) P. 121 Why would anyone be afraid of Dad? He's great. I hurried into the hall to greet him, . . . (a loving son) P. 125 I bent down and put my arms around him and gave him a hug. (affectionate to Jason)

CHARACTERIZATION of Rudy by *writing* it out: P. 119 I don't really need a mother . . . (independent) P. 120 Weren't little kids supposed to be full of life and be laughing all the time? (sensitive to Jason) P. 121 I wet a paper towel and rubbed Jason's face clean. (a sense of responsibility to Jason) P. 123 Suddenly a warm, happy feeling spread over me (happy) P. 124 I put on a fake grin, knowing that I wanted him to hang on to his happiness and not lose it because of me. (love for his father) P. 125 I was sorry I took that away from him (sensitive towards Jason's feeling).

The author has characterized Rudy to be an independent seventeen year old who is very sensitive to the needs of his family. He is assertive yet kind and tolerant.

CHARACTERIZATION of *Jason* revealed by author's use of *dialogue* : P. 119 "Do you like bugs?", P. 123 "Will you hold my beetle?" (childish interests)

CHARACTERIZATION of Jason by describing his *actions* : P. 120 Jason managed to smear grape jelly and peanut butter across his cheeks. P. 121 It made me angry to see the tears in his eyes. (youthfulness) P. 121 Jason had his head buried against Clair, and she looked kind of worried. P. 124 Then Jason walked in very slowly . . . (bewildered, fearful, lacking self-confidence)

CHARACTERIZATION of Jason by *writing it out* : P. 121 Re was scared ! P. 123 For a while there in the park, he managed to act like a typical little kid . . . his face excited and flushed. P. 124 . . . his eyes large and scared. P. 125 Then he kissed me on the cheek . . . (becoming affectionate)

Jason's character is that of a typical five or six year old bewildered by the changing adult figures in his life. Though frightened and not very self-assured at this time, he has bursts of blissful childish joy.

CHARACTERIZATION of *Dad* from *dialogue* : P. 121 "I brought you a present, Jason," said Dad. P.122 "I'm glad you're spending the summer with us, Jason. I want you to have a good time. (generous, kind, warm, friendly) P. 124 "Rudy, Rudy. I don't like to see you hurting so much." (loving, sensitive to others)

CHARACTERIZATION of Dad from his *actions* : P. 119 . . . Dad got married again. (normal heterosexual) P. 121 Dad was smiling. (happy) P. 124 I could see the relief in his eyes before he left my room. (concerned parent)

CHARACTERIZATION of Dad by *writing it* : P. 121 Why would anyone be afraid of Dad? He's great. P. 124 Dad looked so hurt that I couldn't look at him.

Dad is a loving, kind, and supportive figure. Re wants very much to achieve a successful start in his new marriage.

CHARACTERIZATION of *Clair* from *dialogue* : P. 121 "Jason, say hello to your new daddy." (courteous)

CHARACTERIZATION of Clair from her *actions* : P. 120 . . . while Clair just beamed with pleasure, as if it was a great thing to like bugs. . . . She bent down and kissed Jason's thin little cheek. (loving)

CHARACTERIZATION of Clair by *writing it directly* : P. 119 Clair's only 25 years old!

The author characterizes Clair as a young mother concerned about her young son yet as equally concerned that a healthy, respectful relationship develop between him and her new husband.

D. MOOD

"There's a Woollybear in the Bathroom"

P. 119 Clair's only 25 years old' P. 121 "Can't you use a paper napkin properly?" I snapped. P. 123 Suddenly, a warm happy feeling spread over me. P. 125 I smiled. I was going to do my best to make Jason happy. I had a feeling that would make me happy, too.

The author's diction, or word choice, and dialogue contribute to the MOODS of wonderment, resentment, and finally, contentment.

The PLOT of the story indicates that difficulties may erupt and some tensions prevail. By the conclusion, or

DENOUEMENT, Rudy and Jason will become friends and a calm settles over their home.

E. TONE

“There’s a Woollybear in the Bathroom”

The author’s subject matter, divorce and remarriage, reflects an attitude of understanding of this social phenomenon in society. As Hilda Stahl writes of the difficulties effecting the family, she is also helping young readers identify with the problems. The TONE is not that divorce and remarriage are positive societal factors, but that they do exist and in her story, at least, the conclusion ends on an optimistic note.

F. POINT OF VIEW

The personal, first person point of view is used throughout the story. The primary character, Rudy, is relating the events and recording what he sees. P. 121 The door slammed, and I knew Dad was home. I caught a look at Jason’s face. He was scared! . . . I knew when Dad and Clair walked into the kitchen, but I didn’t turn around. P. 123 Then Clair called out that they were ready and waiting. . . . I waited for Jason to run to me, his face flushed and excited. He didn’t look like the same boy.

G. THEME

“There’s a Woolly Bear in the Bathroom”

The point of this story can be that whenever there are major changes in one’s life personal adjustments have to be made also. Rudy did not really want to share his father, but, eventually, knew he would have to.

Another THEME could be that even though conditions do appear adverse, with serious effort the adversity can be turned into something positive. Rudy finally realized that Jason and he could become good friends, that they both had been equally hurt by their respective parent’s divorces. At 17, Rudy was realizing the comfort and satisfaction in becoming Jason’s big brother.

This concludes the first story analysis. You will find other examples, I’m sure, of illustrating the various story elements. The response of your students should determine the amount of details required. As added reinforcement, the following lesson plan will analyze a second story in the *Crosswinds Two* text.

LESSON PLAN III

STORY TITLE “Grounded” by Jane Sprague, Pages 215 225, *Crosswinds Two*

(Denny’s friends have a curfew. They must be at home at a certain time. Denny wanders the streets by himself feeling lost and lonely. His mother works hard and has little time for him. His summer is passing by rather unhappily for him, but then a stepfather enters his life.)

A. PLOT

EXPOSITION Page 215 introduces the reader to the protagonist, or major character, Denny and his baseball playing friends, Bink, Denny, Carl, and Hector. The SETTING will be described following the PLOT.

The time period of the story includes late spring, summer and early fall. Denny tries to ridicule his ballplaying friends by calling them babies when they won't stay out late with him in the ball park. Their families insist that they be home at a certain time.

The CONFLICT patterns incorporated in the story are man versus man and man versus environment. Denny feels lost and lonely, rejected by his buddies. Though his mother leaves him loving notes, he feels she is indifferent to his needs. He is angry that she has to work and cannot give him more time.

He is also a "victim" of a single-parent home, an increasingly common social condition in American society today. He is drifting because he is not from a complete family unit, none particularly cares about what is happening to him.

DENOUEMENT When his mother remarries, Denny expects his step-father to be indifferent to him. However, Tim is quite concerned about Denny's welfare and insists that Denny no longer go out every night of the week. Denny is happy to be "grounded," that there is a family at home concerned about his activities and whereabouts.

B. SETTING

"Grounded"

P. 215 . . . high above the ball park diamond . . . "Saturday night, and you want to go home before it's even dark?" The story begins in a park. P. 216 . . . and started for home, through the warm spring night. P. 221 Even though this was a city with a warm fall . . . Phrases indicate the story setting is a city and the time span from spring to early fall.

C. CHARACTERS

Denny (primary), Bink, Carl, Hector, Mom and Tim Moore

CHARACTERIZATION of Denny revealed by author's use of *dialogue* : P. 224 "Gosh, no, I'm not busy. I've never been to the stadium." (receptive, willing to cooperate)

CHARACTERIZATION of Denny from his *actions* : P. 216 Denny turned to Bink, his last hope. (sense of desperation) P. 218 He slammed the refrigerator door so hard, it came open again. (angry)

CHARACTERIZATION of Denny by *writing it* : P. 217 He wished his mother had left the outside light on for him. (yearning, unfulfilled need) P. 219 Didn't she really care what time he came home? (sense of rejection) P. 220 All through the long summer, Denny spent a lot of time feeling bored.

The author characterizes Denny as a confused, lonely teenager surrounded by friends who are accountable to their parents.

CHARACTERIZATION of *Mom* from *dialogue* : P. 218 "Where are you going, Denny?" . . . "Well, you be home no later than nine, now. Remember." (parental concern)

CHARACTERIZATION of *Mom* by *actions or behavior* : P. 218 I'll be home late.XXX. Mom. (note writer)

P. 220 His mother worked all day and then went out with Mr. Moore two or three times a week. (hardworking, has a private life)

CHARACTERIZATION of Mom by *writing it directly* : P. 219 But his mother had gone to bed and left him a note. (tired, communicative by notes) P. 220 Of course she cares. She just has a lot on her mind. (loving but lacks time to show it) P. 223 Your mother worries about you when you're out. (concerned parent)

Mom loves her only son, but as a single parent she lacks the necessary emotional and physical stamina to relate to him. Her household chores, job, and budding romance have diminished her parenting strengths and she inadvertently allows Denny excessive freedom.

CHARACTERIZATION of Tim from *dialogue*: P. 223 " . . . I don't want to make you mad at me if I don't have to, but I do want us to be a family from now on. (loving, responsible)

CHARACTERIZATION of Tim from *actions or behavior* : P. 221 Tim stood there in the doorway of the living room (strong) P. 223 Denny felt a little scared, but all his stepfather did was sit on the couch across from Denny. (imposing but gentle figure)

CHARACTERIZATION of Tim by *writing it*: P. 223 "So, from now on we're going to work together. . . . That is if you're not too busy to go. (cooperative, considerate)

Tim is a secure, stable man who knows how to assume responsibility. He is firm but not strict with Denny and is establishing good communication with him.

D. MOOD

"Grounded"

P. 217 After his buddies have left him, Denny goes home dejectedly. A MOOD of loneliness prevails. P. 218 Denny is hostile to his mother; the slamming of the door displays this. P. 221 The sentence, "They wouldn't know the difference anyway," reflects an indifferent MOOD. P. 2224 Denny is in a happy MOOD when relating that he's going to the big-league game with his "old man."

E. TONE

"Grounded"

Mom, alone, is depicted as a rather weak figure, one who is having difficulty giving proper supervision to her teenager. The author is reflecting the attitude that without parental limits, a teenager may develop emotional problems.

F. POINT OF VIEW

The objective point of view is applied primarily throughout the story. The narrator, Denny, tells the story without getting into the emotions of the characters. P. 217 When he got home, he threw the ball up for the last time. . . . Then he went to the door, fishing his key out of his pocket. P. 218 Denny turned on the oven and read the directions for the dinner. P. 219 The boys slowly gathered up their equipment and headed for home. P. 223 Then Tim moved toward Denny. P. 224 He turned off the lights and followed him.

G. THEME

Parental discipline is a sign of love. Reasonable punishment can be considered a sign of concern about another's welfare, a sign of caring.

This concludes Lesson Plan III. Most of the other stories in the *Crosswinds Two* textbook can be “dissected” similarly. I have following a worksheet that you can copy or thermafax for classroom use. There is a teacher’s bibliography for your further edification. The student’s bibliography includes a brief list of reading material that I’m hoping will whet the student’s reading appetite.

In conclusion, a skillful reader will soon learn to recognize the clever ways in which a story is created. A writer’s hand is behind the story arranging events, causing things to happen. Though a reader may not meet a character in fiction like himself, the stories can take him to different places, introduce him to different and new kinds of people, face him with problems, some like his and some not. Reading is entertaining, informative, humorous, philosophic, escapism, scientific—life!

STORY ELEMENTS WORKSHEET

(figure available in print form)

Notes

1 J. Lloyd Trump, Delmas F. Miller, *Secondary School Curriculum Improvement* (Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1973), p. 166.

2 Sylvan Barnet, Morton Berman, William Burto, *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Little, Brown and Company, 1960), p.9.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Barnet, Sylvan, et al. *A Dictionary of Literary Terms* . Boston. Little, Brown, and Company, 1960.

Covers all the historical and critical terms commonly used in the study of literature.

Boynton, Robert and Mack, Maynard. *Introduction to the Short Story* . Rochelle Park, New Jersey. Hayden Book Co., Inc., 1978.

An excellent collection of short stories and the authors’ analyses.

Brooks, Cleanth and Warren, Robert Penn. *The Scope of Fiction* . Englewood Cliffs. Prentice Hall, Inc.,

Contains comprehensive explanation of story elements. Authors’ critiques of classic short stories are illuminating.

Knott, William C., Rev. Ed. *The Craft of Fiction* . Heston, Virginia. Reston Publishing Co. 1977.

Easy to read. More of an aid to the novice writer, but Part 2 has pertinent information on short story elements.

Hills, Rust. *writing in general and the short story in particular* . New York. A Bantam Book, 1979.

A “fast read” in paperback. Helpful information concisely presented.

Trump, J. Lloyd and Miller, Delmas F. *Secondary School Curriculum Improvement* . Boston. Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1973.

College textbook. Promoting change is the underlying theme of every chapter. Guidelines are offered.

BIBLIOGRAPHY for STUDENTS

Clarke John Henrik Ed. *American Negro Short Stories* . New York. Hill and Wang, 1966.

An anthology of thirty-one stories reflecting Black experiences in the United States.

Coulos, James. *Youth and Maturity 20 Short Stories* . New York. The Macmillan Co., 1970.

Collection of stories dealing with emotional issues that are of interest to young people.

Duthie, Eric, Ed. *Tall Short Stories* . New York. Simon and Schuster, 1959.

Students can enjoy this anthology, an extension of the tall tales stories they enjoyed so much in their basal readings.

Hasinbiller, Dolly, Ed. *Crosswinds Two* . Los Angeles. Bowmar/Noble Publishers, Inc., 1979.

Classroom textbook. High interest level, contains many stories that students will consider relevant.

Sideman, Belle Becker, Ed. *The World's Best Fairy Tales* . Pleasantville, New York. The Reader's Digest Association, 1977.

My students have been enthralled. A two-volume anthology of all the fairy tales you've heard of, and some you had not. An escape to a fantasy world!!

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

©2019 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University

For terms of use visit <https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/terms>