

Genre Focus

The Short Story

When you talk about sports, you use sporting language. You discuss penalty shots, goaltending, touchbacks, power serves, and use other terms that relate to sports. Literature analysis has its own language, too, and learning to use it will help you see how short stories are put together and what makes them work.

A short story is a short piece of fiction containing elements described in the chart on these pages. Look at how a story you probably already know, the children's tale "Little Red Riding Hood," can be analyzed in terms of these elements.

● For more on elements of short stories, see *Literary Terms Handbook*, pp. R1–R13.

SHORT STORY ELEMENTS

MODEL: "Little Red Riding Hood"

Setting

Setting is the time and place of the story's action. Setting includes ideas, customs, values, and beliefs.

The story takes place in the woods a long time ago.

Characters

Characters are the actors in a story's plot. They can be people, animals, or whatever the writer chooses.

- The protagonist is the main character.
- The antagonist is in conflict with the main character. Not all stories have antagonists.

The characters are Little Red Riding Hood, the big bad wolf, the grandmother, and the woodsman.
protagonist: Little Red Riding Hood
antagonist: the big bad wolf

Point of View

Point of view refers to the relationship of the narrator, or storyteller, to the story.

- In first-person point of view, the narrator is a character in the story, referred to as "I."
- In third-person limited point of view, the narrator reveals the thoughts of only one character, referring to that character as "he" or "she."
- In third-person omniscient point of view, the narrator knows everything about the story's events and reveals the thoughts of all the characters.

"Little Red Riding Hood" is traditionally told from the **third-person omniscient point of view**; the narrator explains what Little Red Riding Hood is doing as well as what is happening to her and to her grandmother.

Theme

Theme is the central idea or message of a story, often a perception about life or human nature.

- Stated themes are directly presented in a story.
- Implied themes must be inferred by considering all the elements of a story and asking what message about life is conveyed.

The theme of "Little Red Riding Hood" is **implied**. While the narrator does not directly state a message, the reader can infer it: be suspicious of things (and people) that do not appear the way they should.

Plot

Plot is the sequence of events in a story. Each event causes or leads to the next. Plot is often created through conflict, a struggle between opposing forces.

- An external conflict is one between a character and an outside force, such as another character, nature, society, or fate.
- An internal conflict takes place within the mind of a character who is torn between opposing feelings or between different courses of action.

In "Little Red Riding Hood," the conflict is **external**—Little Red Riding Hood versus the big bad wolf. The events that make up the plot of "Little Red Riding Hood" are shown in the diagram below.

Most plots develop in five stages.

- Exposition introduces the story's characters, setting, and conflict.
- Rising action occurs as complications, twists, or intensifications of the conflict occur.
- Climax is the emotional high point of the story.
- Falling action is the logical result of the climax.
- Resolution presents the final outcome of the story.

