



What Is Short Story?

The word **fiction** is a rather general term that can be defined as a narrative told in prose. Therefore, fiction refers to different types of writing such as **folktale, myth** and **legend**, but it is most often associated with **novel** and **short story**.

In the very first paragraph of their book *Understanding Fiction*, Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren said: "As soon as the cave man had leisure to sit around the fire while darkness covered the world beyond, fiction was born. In words, he relived, shivering with fear or gloating in victory, the events of the hunt; he recounted the past history of the tribe; he narrated the deeds of heroes and men of cunning; he told the marvels; he struggled in myths to explain the world and fate; he glorified himself in daydreams converted to narrative."

By broad definition, (the short story of various kinds goes back to pre-historic times that Brooks and Warren described, but the same impulse to retell some events, real or imagined, the same passion to recount the human experience, and the same desire to express something beyond the narrated events can still be found in the written work that we read today. And we read them with just as much interest as the fireside cavemen listened to their stories, as they embody some of our basic interests, needs and desires buried deep in the human psyche.)

The short story, with "story" being defined by the word "short," is necessarily limited in length and scope. Unlike the novel, which has enough space to develop a complex plot or a number of characters, a short story usually concentrates on a single incident and portrays a single character or a few characters. This kind of focused attention to a single event and to the character development makes the short story a particularly interesting form of literature. Being short, compact and convenient to handle, the short story is endowed with the advantage of being the favorite form for classroom discussion.

An intellectually challenging short story requires close and active reading to unlock the ideas hidden behind the event. A short story, by forcing us to see things differently through the writer's sensibility, helps sharpen our awareness of the people and the world around us, and provides glimpses of insight towards a better understanding of our own experience and the experience of others. A short story does not mean the same to every reader, as the reader's own life experience plays an important part in the process of meaning production. When he is reading, he unconsciously associates memories and impressions of his past with the text and involves himself in the vital process in which meaning emerges from the experience, and thus he forms his own interpretation.

Literature learning begins with pleasure and ends in wisdom, as people say.

There are two aspects of literature teaching and learning, as a cultural product and as language art. As the former, the literary work must be interpreted with reference to things beyond the text, things historical, social, psychological, or biographical. Thus, the moral, political, and experiential dimensions of the story can be explored by linking the story within to the world without. ³¹² As the latter, the verbal skill and the stylistic devices of the author can also be appreciated. Novels and short stories are best examples of effective language application.



The Difference Between Literary and Non-literary Writings

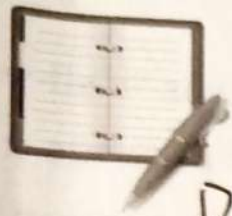
A short story is **imaginative**. That is, the writer feels no obligation to stick to facts, but can freely exercise his or her own will in selecting materials and devising ways to put them together for some particular purpose. Even when a writer recreates historical events, or recounts his unique personal experience, his writing does not need to be seen as a report of facts, because in the process of writing he has to go through a process of selection, deletion, concentration and reorganization of the factual materials to ^{Creation} present his own impression or view of that experience. ^{Purpose} Literary representation aims at achieving significance beyond the moment and at transcending the particular to reach the universal.

^{the} A good story is just "written." Its author might care the least about the rules and principles of story writing, yet there are always some conventions that the author knowingly or unknowingly follows. Over the ages, written fiction has developed into a complex art. ^(2/3) **Critics** have found some general principles and certain structural patterns, technical and **rhetorical devices** that are particular to fiction. Acquainting ourselves with these principles and features will enhance the pleasure of reading and deepen the understanding of the short story as a **genre**.

A writer of fiction is not a moralist. He is not primarily concerned with teaching, by giving an example or a lesson, but rather, he retells an event without analyzing or evaluating it, leaving the impact of that experience to the reader. By way of his

special arrangement of facts and images, he encourages readers to move beyond the factual details of an event or a character. Or, in other words, he invites the readers to “participate” in the story, to play a role, to uncover the relations between things, to bridge the gaps and to find the message that is contained in the story. Actually, readers gain their pleasure of reading in “filling in the blanks” and in discovering the meaning themselves.

Literary texts are representational rather than referential. Referential language communicates at only one level and tends to be informational. The representational language of literary texts involves the readers and engages their emotions, as well as their **cognitive faculties**. A short story does not mean the same to every reader. A short story reader is not a passive receiver of information, but should be an active participant and contributor, as his own life experience can enrich, expand and reshape the meaning of it. When one is reading, one is also involved in thinking, questioning, challenging the apparent surface details, and reevaluating one's own life experience. Also, literary works help readers use their imagination, enhance their empathy for others and develop their own creativity.



After watching the video lesson, select from the four choices below the one that best answers the question.

① What is probably NOT TRUE of Mary, the main character in "Early Autumn"?

D

- A. She misses the days of the past.
- B. She still loves Bill.
- C. She works to keep a family of three children.
- D. She is satisfied with her life and job in New York.

B

② Which of the following adjectives can probably best describe Bill's attitude?

- A. Emotional.
- B. Indifferent.
- C. Puzzled.
- D. Hopeful.

C

③ The last sentence of the story "she had forgotten ... to tell him that her youngest boy was named Bill, too" shows that _____.

- A. Mary knows she would meet Bill again someday
- B. "Bill" is a very common name
- C. Mary has been thinking about Bill and still loves him
- D. Mary is proud of her youngest son

~~C~~

D

④ Mary doesn't say anything when she gets on the bus. Why?

- A. She has nothing more to say.
- B. She is disappointed in Bill.
- C. She is too emotional to open her mouth.
- D. She knows the situation is hopeless.

Early Autumn
(from Internet)

- ① 冲动是魔鬼
- ② 女人对曾经的情比男人更难释怀
- ③ 年轻程度的导致情感的



Discussion Tips

这部分也
看看，比
较重要。

“Early Autumn” is the kind of short story which might be referred to as “a **slice of life**” form of writing. The writer “cuts” a slice or a segment of life and presents it under the microscope of the readers’ consciousness for their careful examination. Behind the seemingly ordinary conversations, which form most part of the story, is the writer’s careful selection and reorganization of the materials. The story provides no moral lesson about what is right and what is wrong, but an opportunity for the reader to relive a small episode of daily life. The reader needs to involve himself — to “fill in the gaps” and to “play a role” — to feel the emotional undercurrents beneath the calm surface of the narration. Different readers may get from the story different interpretations of the tragedy of a woman who lives in the memory of the past.

Video Lesson (Part Four)



Please scan the QR code on the left for the video lesson of this part.

Little Test for Comprehension



After watching the video lesson, select from the four choices below the one that best answers the question.

① When we say that the first paragraph foreshadows the body of the short story, we

mean that it _____.

- A. prepares the reader for the later event
- B. casts a dark shadow over the story
- C. shapes the structure of the story development
- D. gives a signal that something great is to occur

② All the following statements give proper summaries of some aspect of the short story “Early Autumn” except one. Which is the EXCEPTION?

- A. It is minimalistic in style.
- B. It has some poetic quality.
- C. It resorts to “slice of life” method of presentation.

D. It is a good lesson for young people.

③ Which one of the four statements about a "detached narrator" is NOT TRUE?

A. He withdraws from the story emotionally.

B

B. He holds an opinion different from the main character.

C. He only records and describes.

D. He refuses to make any comments.

A

④ The title of the short story "Early Autumn" may give a hint to the reader that _____.

A. there is an emotionally bitter and long winter awaiting Mary

~~B~~ it is still the bright time of one's life, like early autumn

~~C~~ both Mary and Bill are now middle-aged people

D. the love between them is not as "hot" as summer days

① The attitude from Mary ^{towards} Bill is still emotional and in the words like Mary always stand the topic, and talk about n



The Author, the Narrator and the Reader

The **author** is the one who *writes* the story, but he is not the one who *tells* it, nor is he the one who is understood by the reader. In most cases we do not know the real author — the “author” that we know from reading his or her works is an image created in our minds through reading. (This image, formed by the ideas, beliefs or attitudes we find in a literary work, is theoretically called the **implied author**.) The implied author

is inferred and assembled by the reader from the written text and therefore he is the hypothetical figure of the author emerging from certain narrative fiction.

The image presented to the reader might not be consistent with the real person all the time. In his book *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* Rimmon-Kenan says: "An author may embody in a work ideas, beliefs, emotions other than or even quite opposed to those he has in real life; he may also embody different ideas, beliefs and emotions in different works. Thus while the flesh-and-blood author is subject to the vicissitudes (变幻无常) of real life, the implied author of a particular work is conceived as a stable entity, ideally consistent with itself within the work."

Likewise, the **implied reader** is different from the actual **readers** that we are. The famous literary critic Wolfgang Iser makes a clear distinction between the two: "This implied reader is to be distinguished from actual readers, who may be unable or unwilling to occupy the position of the implied reader: thus most religious poetry presupposes a god-fearing implied reader, but many actual readers today are atheists." In order to achieve desired effect of the writing, every writer of fiction, knowingly or unknowingly, aims at a certain group of readers, or the implied readers, to whom the work is addressed.

△ We might not be aware of this, but the reader — the real reader — plays a very important role in the whole process. The meaning of a particular work comes alive only in the imagination of an individual reader. Fictional writing is a special kind of writing that is always indirect, telling a story rather than telling the meaning. Thus the reader is given the job to work with the author to discover or construct meaning. In fact, almost every short story has somewhat different meanings to different readers.

Every story is told, or narrated, by someone, and the narrator of a short story is of primary importance. The narrator determines the story's **point of view** and the implications of this are far-reaching. For example, the husband, the wife, the 12-year-old daughter, the mother-in-law or the neighbor, each can give a different story with different attitudes about a broken marriage, depending on who tells it. Thus, the perspective from which a story is told determines what details are to be included in the story and how they are to be arranged and presented.

The narrator is not the same as the author — even when an author uses “I” as the narrative voice. In many short stories, the authors prefer to use **naïve narrators** to tell the story. Let's assume that the author is highly intelligent, sophisticated and often well-educated, yet he or she could still choose a poorly educated, or a child, or somebody who has only a shallow understanding, or one who is muddle-headed, to tell the story. Sometimes, an author will employ an **unreliable narrator**, one who will not tell the truth, or the whole truth. The narrator could be biased so the facts might be partially selected or unfairly judged. Such bias and partiality of the unreliable narrator need to be put right by the reader in the process of reading.

A gap is thus created between the author's buried meaning and the narrator's superficial understanding, or between what is implied and what is stated. The story thus leaves more room for exploration, becomes more interesting and involves the reader more deeply to excavate the meaning that the naïve narrator fails to reach and the unreliable narrator avoids or distorts. This narrative method brings together the narrator and the reader's different levels of approaches to the same subject matter, and the existence of the gap between the two levels provides more possibilities of interpretation and thus enriches the meaning of the short story.

- A. The narrator is a character who tells the author's story.
- B. The narrator shares the author's viewpoint.
- C. The author and the narrator are actually the same person.
- D. The author is not the same as the narrator.

B ② Which one of the following statements describes an "implied author"?

- A. The implied author is the story writer.
- B. The implied author is an image the reader gets from the written work.
- C. The implied author is the real author's "another self."
- D. The implied author is an alternative term for "narrator."

B ③ When we talk about the "implied reader," we mean _____.

- A. the reading public
- B. the targeted group of readers
- C. the readers of the same language
- D. the properly educated readers

D ④ Which is a more acceptable statement about a short story?

- ~~A.~~ A short story has the same meaning for all readers.
- ~~B.~~ The correct interpretation can be found only by close reading.
- C. In a story, the author is the giver of meaning, and the reader is a receiver.
- D. When a writer writes a short story, he usually has the implied reader in mind.



After watching the video lesson, select from the four choices below the one that best answers the question.

① In a short story the role of the narrator is of vital importance because _____.

- A. he represents the author
- B. he chooses materials to form a story
- C. he determines the story's point of view
- D. he is the focus of a short story

② Which statement about the "naïve narrator" is NOT generally accepted?

- A. A naïve narrator creates a special literary effect.
- B. A naïve narrator usually supplies reliable details.
- C. A naïve narrator ^{never} does not have a full understanding of the story.
- D. A naïve narrator distorts the meaning of the story.

③ The unreliable narrator is different from the naïve narrator in that _____.

- A. he is confused about the event that he tells
- B. he is often biased or deceitful
- C. he is usually a vicious character
- D. he has a tendency to tell lies

④ The short story "A Piece of Yellow Soap" is told by _____.

- A. a naïve narrator
- B. an unreliable narrator
- C. an omniscient narrator
- D. an objective narrator



Character and Characterization

A **character**, by its original definition, refers to a person who typifies some definite quality. That was indeed the implication in early literature, but the more

Recent fiction tends to avoid stereotypes, so the term more generally just refers to a person in a creative writing. The main character was formerly referred to as **hero** or **heroine**, but a more neutral term **protagonist** has taken their place in a literary work, because, more often than not, the main character in more recent fiction is not the heroic type, but is rather an **anti-hero**, one who is ill equipped to cope with the situation. On the opposite end stands the **antagonist**, the major character in a narrative or drama that works against the protagonist.

A **foil** is a supporting character that is used to enhance the main character through contrast. For example, one clear illustration of a foil is Cinderella's stepsisters, as their mean, nasty, self-centered nature contrasts and also highlights the grace and beauty of Cinderella.

Fictional characters can be classified into two categories, the **round character** and the **flat character**, or the dynamic character and the static character. The round character is often complex, having sometimes contradictory traits and internal conflicts that we find in real people. He grows and undergoes some kind of change in the course of the story development as he reacts to events and to other characters.


Miss Brill in Unit Three is a round character.

A flat character reveals only one or two personality traits in a story and the unchanging trait or traits can be easily described in a brief summary, so often this kind of character is instantly recognizable to most readers. A flat character remains the same throughout a story and the events in the story do not alter a flat character's outlook, personality, motivation, perception or habits. When you read Unit Eleven "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty," you may find its protagonist a typical flat character and an anti-hero.

Characterization, the process of creating imaginary characters, is a crucial part of making a story compelling. Authors achieve this by providing details that ^{important} make characters individual and particular. Good characterization gives readers a strong sense of characters' personalities and complexities and it makes characters vivid, alive and believable. There are two fundamental methods of characterization in fiction, the direct method and the indirect method. These two methods can be summarized as "telling" and "showing."

Characterization can be direct, as when an author "tells" readers what a character is like by description and commentary, for example "Beth is lazy and

muddy-headed." In indirect characterization, the author shows what a character is like by portraying his actions, speech, or thoughts, expecting the reader to form an opinion of the person through the character's action, dialogue, or mannerism. What a man does reveals what a man is. So the indirect characterization leaves the reader a job to observe the character and to find out what he is by making judgment from what he does. The revelation of a character's mind, the inner life of thoughts and emotions, especially in the form of stream of consciousness (意识流), is also a way of indirect characterization.



After watching the video lesson, select from the four choices below the one that best answers the question.

① Which of the following examples about hero or anti-hero is NOT TRUE?

- C
- A. Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, a character capable of heroic deeds, is properly called a hero.
 - B. Ah Q in Lu Xun's "The True Story of Ah Q" is an anti-hero.
 - C. The subtitle of *Vanity Fair* "A Novel Without a Hero" indicates that there is no main character in the story.
 - D. In the 20th-century literature, most protagonists are likely to be anti-heroes.

B

② Which of the following statements about character types is NOT TRUE?

- A. A round character grows and changes in a story.
- B. A round character is often constructed around one quality.
- C. A flat character is called two-dimensional character.
- D. A flat character remains the same in a story and is recognized easily.

~~A~~
A

③ Which statement about the "foil" as a literary term is NOT TRUE?

- A. A foil could either be a main or a minor character.
- ~~B~~ B. A foil often functions as a contrast or comparison to a more important figure.
- C. A foil highlights certain qualities of another character.
- D. Dr. Watson is a foil to Sherlock Holmes.

~~D~~ ④ Which of the following quotations is "showing" instead of "telling"?

A. "Early Autumn": "Unconsciously, she lifted her face as though wanting a kiss, but he held out his hand."

B. "The Washwoman": "But this washwoman, small and thin as she was, possessed a strength that came from generations of peasant ancestors."

C. "Araby": "He had been a very charitable priest; in his will he had left all his money to institutions."

D. "The Lady, or the Tiger?": "He was a man of exuberant fancy, and, withal, of an authority so irresistible that, at his will, he turned his varied fancies into facts."



The Setting and the Theme

2022.11.1 讲此篇。

The **setting** of a piece of literature generally means the time and locale in which the story takes place, including the historical period, the immediate surroundings and the social circumstances. Therefore, setting falls into 3 categories: **the historical setting** refers to the approximate period of time during which a story takes place;

地点：现场

大概

the geographical setting refers to the actual location in which a story takes place — including the physical features of a locale which help create a story's atmosphere; the social setting refers to the social conventions and the general environment by which characters may be constrained. Settings can be real or fictional, or a combination of both real and fictional elements. Most pieces of literature include more than one setting, as the narrative progresses from place to place, shifts in time periods, or moves in different social or cultural environments.

2 Setting is an extremely important aspect of almost every piece of fiction. It can act almost as a nonhuman character, affecting the characters in many different ways. Setting establishes the context of a story and sometimes the plot line of a story is so tied to its setting that it becomes the central factor in the meaning of a work. For example, Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter* would be quite meaningless if it were separated from the time, place and social atmosphere of the puritan colony (清教殖民地). When the setting dominates, or when a piece of fiction is written largely to present the manners and customs of a locality, the writing is described as belonging to the **local color** writing or **regionalism**.

3 The **theme** in a story is its underlying message, or the central topic explored in a literary text. In other words, it is the "big idea" or the "main idea" the author tries to convey in a particular piece of writing. Themes are generally universal in nature, and related to the conditions of being human. The theme in a work of literature thus transcends barriers of time, nation, and culture, as it concerns itself with the basic human experience and makes a story meaningful to people of any age, race or language. It is seldom stated explicitly, but instead is expressed through the characters' actions, words, and thoughts.

4 All works of literature contain some sort of theme, and often, a piece of writing will have more than one theme. It is also possible and common that different readers may find different themes in the same work. Readers' life experiences and inclinations differ, and, therefore, they may "see" different meanings in the same verbal picture. Understanding a story's theme is critical to reading a short story. Usually the theme of a work of literature can be summarized in one word or a few words, such as "love" or "betrayal" or "loss of innocence." Thus, we can perhaps find the theme of love and regret in "Early Autumn," of poverty and deprivation in "A Piece of Yellow Soap," and of loneliness in "Miss Brill."

After watching the video lesson, select from the four choices below the one that best answers the question.

① Which of the following could NOT be one of the dimensions of setting: _____.

A. the locale

B. the story line

C. the social circumstances

D. the historical time

② The term "setting" and "background" are both translated into Chinese as "背景".

Which is a more proper definition about "setting"?

A. It refers to the setup of the structure of a story.

B. It is the same as the background of the story.

C. It can help create the mood of the story.

D. It introduces the theme of the story.

③ Which of the following is probably the best description of the term "Theme"?

A. It refers to what the story is about.

B. It is the general idea underlying the story.

C. It is the clearly stated meaning of the story.

D. It is the moral lesson conveyed by the story.

④ Which statement about "theme" as a literary term is true?

A. The theme is the same as the subject.

B. One short story may have more than one theme.

C. Theme is the narrator's message.

D. It is the climax of the story development.



11.15 24EX

The word "**story**" as a literary term means a series of events recorded in their chronological order. This is the way things happen. But a short story is more than a mere recording of things. A writer will have to go through a process of selection and re-organization of the materials to form a pattern that is more than mere sequence

of events, and that contains the author's opinions and is meaningful to the reader. So **plot** means how the story is presented by deliberately re-arranging the chosen materials to reveal their dramatic, thematic, and emotional significance.

There is no plot without **causality**. That is to say, the written piece that we call fiction is a structured pattern in which facts, characters and events are put in a special way to relate to one another through cause and effect. This is done through **plotting**, the manipulation of the materials by the writer so that meaning will stand out. Thus, plotting is the process of converting story into plot, of changing chronological arrangement of incidents into a causal arrangement.

The traditional plot develops through a series of conflicts, following a pattern of exposition, complication, climax, falling action and resolution. Of course, not all stories follow the traditional plot pattern. Traditional narratives are usually more tightly plotted, with everything happening for a reason or a purpose, with one event being the cause or the consequence of another, and with an ending that brings every plot-line satisfactorily together.

Many modern and postmodern writers (see examples of Unit 11 and Unit 12) deliberately avoid cause-effect relations as they believe that well-plotted texts fail to render reality of life accurately. Instead, they place fragments side by side rather than follow **linear development** of events, making their works loosely plotted, or episodic. In some stories nothing is ever resolved at the end. This kind of non-solution is called an open ending. In an **open ending**, readers are not told what the protagonist will do or what will happen next. This uncertainty, on one hand, mirrors the complexity of life in which neat resolution rarely occurs; on the other hand, it leaves more room for readers' imagination.

A short story may have more than one **plot-lines**. In Sarah Orne Jewett's "A White Heron," there is the main plot line of Sylvia's protection of the bird, and there is another of her mental growth. Not all the plots in one piece of literary writing are of the same importance and usually there is a main plot line and one or a few **subplots**.



After watching the video lesson, select from the four choices below the one that best answers the question.

① Which of the following statements about “story” as a literary term is NOT TRUE?

B

- A. ✓ The story is a narration in the temporal order of what happens.
- B. The story emphasizes the reorganization of a series of events.
- C. Time sequence characterizes a story.
- D. A story provides an answer to “What then?”

② Which of the following statements about “plot” as a literary term is NOT TRUE?

B

- A. The plot is the plan or patterning of events in a narrative.
- B. The plot is a narrative of events arranged in time sequence.
- C. The plot emphasizes the relationship of cause and effect.
- D. The plot provides an answer to “Why so”?

③ Which of the following statements about “conflict” as a literary term is NOT TRUE?

C

- A. Conflict is the clash between opposing forces, or between the protagonist and antagonist, or between different points of view, or between two moral choices.
- B. There are two kinds of conflicts: external and internal.
- C. The internal conflict reflects political and cultural contradictions.
- D. External conflicts can be reflection of internal conflicts.

④ Which of the following statements about traditional plot pattern is NOT TRUE?

~~B~~

- A. In a story’s exposition, the basic information is introduced to readers.
- B. The heightening process leads quickly to the key event.
- C. The conflicts lead to the climax, the decisive action or event in the story.
- D. The falling action contains less intense events that lead to the resolution of the conflict.

~~B~~



After watching the video lesson, select from the four choices below the one that best answers the question.

① What is probably UNTRUE of Sylvia and her life?

- B
- A. She is nine years old.
 - B. She is born in the woods.
 - C. She enjoys her life with Mrs. Tilley in a secluded farm.
 - D. Mistress Moolly is the girl's loyal companion.

C ② Which of the following statements does NOT give a correct description of the man in the short story?

- A. The man is a handsome young ornithologist (鸟类学家).
- B. The man carries a gun and a heavy sack full of dead birds.
- C. Throughout the story, the man appears to be assertive, aggressive, and arrogant.
- D. The man is eager to collect a white heron.

B ③ When we say that the whistle creates the "suspense", we mean that it _____.

- A. creates the atmosphere of insecurity and uncertainty
- B. arouses the reader's curiosity for the later event
- C. predicts the ways in which the characters might settle the conflict
- D. gives a signal that a surprise ending will follow

something she needs. Jewett focuses on the girl's deep inward love of the nature, its unspoiled surroundings and nature's inhabitants. This love is spontaneous rather than rational, and finally prevails over the human possessive impulses.

Video Lesson (Part Four)



Please scan the QR code on the left for the video lesson of this part.

Little Test for Comprehension



After watching the video lesson, select from the four choices below the one that best answers the question.

- ① Which of the following statements about conflicts in the story is NOT TRUE?
- B**
- D**
- A. The external conflict is indicated by the opposition between the man and the bird.
 - B. The external conflict is indicated by the opposition between Sylvia and the bird.
 - C. The internal conflict inside Sylvia's mind is whether or not to tell the secret of the white heron to the man.
 - D. The internal conflict within Sylvia is a choice between life in the woods and in the city.

- D**
- ② The story reaches its climax when _____.
- A. the man describes the bird and Sylvia recognizes it
 - B. Sylvia accompanies the man on a ramble through the woods
 - C. the man offers Sylvia 10 dollars for the bird
 - D. Sylvia climbs a huge pine tree and finds the white heron nest

- C**
- ③ Which one of the following statements about the ending is NOT TRUE?
- A. Sylvia does not reveal the bird's nesting place.
 - B. Sylvia loses her only human friend.
 - C. Sylvia is completely satisfied with her decision.
 - D. Sylvia fails to claim the 10 dollars she badly needs.

- B**
- ④ Why does Sylvia decide not to share the secret of the white heron with the man?
- A. Because she realizes that the bird is an integral part of the nature, with which she shares a close bond.

- B. Because she realizes that the white heron verges on extinction and it's her responsibility to protect it.
- C. Because the man is too assertive and aggressive to be trusted.
- D. Because the man does not return her affection.



Irony: Definition and Function

Show individual personality.

The typical way a writer presents his language is his **style**, something that marks him out as different from other writers. A writer's style may be matter-of-fact or straightforward, or he may be ironic or symbolic. In this and the next unit, we shall be dealing with irony and symbol in short stories. An author of short story uses different rhetorical devices to color his writings so as to achieve a desired adaptation

of his language to his idea. Irony is one of such devices that we call figures of speech. In the simplest sense, irony means that the surface meaning and the underlying meaning of what is said are not the same. The difference between what is said or described and what it actually is creates a gap leading to a special effect through readers' awareness of the existence of such disparity (差异).


Irony generally falls into three types. Verbal irony builds on the contradiction between statement and intention; dramatic irony builds on the difference of awareness between a character and a reader/audience; situational irony builds on the disparity between the expected result and the actual result. When a narrator or character says one thing but actually means another, for example, by saying "She's such a kind woman!" while meaning that she is unkind, he is using verbal irony. Dramatic irony occurs when a narrator or character knows less than readers do, for example, the naïve narration of "A Piece of Yellow Soap" in Unit Two. Situational irony occurs when what happens is at odds with what readers are led to expect, for example, the outcome of the betting in the short story "The Taste" in "Additional Story for Reading and Discussion" in Unit Five.

Video Lesson (Part One)



Please scan the QR code on the left for the video lesson of this part.

Little Test for Comprehension

 After watching the video lesson, select from the four choices below the one that best answers the question.

① Generally speaking, irony has the following functions EXCEPT _____.

- D
- A. creating humor
 - B. adding an element of surprise to a story
 - C. developing a story's theme
 - D. complicating the plot

B ② A math teacher forgot simple addition. This is an example of _____.

- A. verbal irony
- B. situational irony
- C. dramatic irony
- D. none of the above

Historical Context and Chopin's Art of Writing

Chopin began her writing career with short stories, but she was best-known for her novel *The Awakening* published in 1899. The novel deals with controversial topics of that time, such as extramarital relations and suicide, so it was negatively received by the reading public who labeled the novel as something immoral and even perverse. Discouraged by such criticism, she returned to writing short stories. So Chopin is essentially a short story writer, and it is the short story **genre** that best suits her thematic concerns. Undaunted, she continued to explore the subject area concerning women's freedom and rights. "The Story of an Hour" is a typical example of her daring exploration of such issues. She was blamed and ignored for the reasons that later made her a forerunner of **feminist writing**. She was simply too far ahead of her time, and is now considered one of the earliest and most important feminist writers in America.

Kate Chopin's writing style is influenced by her Irish and French heritage, especially from French writer Guy de Maupassant. Maupassant has clearly left his imprint in "Chopin's **objective psychological realism**, her emphasis on character rather than plot, her striving for economy and unity, and her distinct **amorality**" (Le Marquand). Indeed, Chopin learned much from this French master, his form, style and technique of writing, but her own independent spirit, her literary individuality and originality and her unique female perspective stands out most visibly. "The Story of an Hour" is about a woman who, living her life within the constraints of marriage,

is suddenly faced with an opportunity of independent life, and an emotional choice between of loyalty to her husband and longing for freedom. Like many of her works, in this story Chopin criticizes the social oppression of women and gives them a sense of self in a male-centered world.

Little Test for Comprehension



After watching the video lesson, select from the four choices below the one that best answers the question.

① Which of the following statement is NOT TRUE about "The Story of an Hour"?

B

- A. The whole story happens in one hour.
- B. Louise Mallard's husband dies in a train accident.
- C. Louise Mallard is about to embrace her future prospect.
- D. The Mallard couple are not really in bad relationship.

② What do the views, the scents and the sounds outside the open window symbolize?

D

- A. freedom
- B. hope
- C. new life
- D. all of the above

③ The news of her husband's death suddenly awakens Mrs. Mallard to something. What probably is it?

C

- A. The fact that her husband loves her dearly.
- B. The fact that she does not love her husband.
- C. Her own value apart from being a wife to a man.
- D. Her responsibility for the family income.

A

④ Mrs. Mallard is most probably killed by _____.

C

- A. a sudden shock of extreme happiness
- B. a sense of great fear of being lonely
- C. the great depression of being a house prisoner again
- D. the sorrow caused by the death of her husband



Discussion Tips

Kate Chopin's fiction, at her time, was often negatively received, but it is now widely acclaimed for its writing quality and thematic importance, and the author is regarded as a pioneer of **feminist literature** in America. Chopin has also been recognized as one of the leading writers of her time. When "The Story of an Hour" was published in 1894, Louisiana, where Chopin lived, had a different legal system from the rest of the United States. The **civil code** of Louisiana disallowed married women to have control over their property, and men were the only ones allowed to request a divorce. These laws were kept in force until 1980.

The whole story happens in one hour. Louise Mallard has learned about the death of her husband from a train crash. She is sad and despaired; but very soon she sees the prospect of her future and is ready to embrace it. She sees freedom as much more important than personal liberty and material security, and as a matter of spiritual liberation and deliverance of soul. However, her husband, presumed "dead," shows up and she dies from this sudden shock. Different types of irony are used by Chopin to make the story interesting and thought-provoking.

Video Lesson (Part Four)



Please scan the QR code on the left for the video lesson of this part.

Little Test for Comprehension



After watching the video lesson, select from the four choices below the one that best answers the question.

- ① Which of the following statements is NOT relevant to the themes of "The Story of an Hour"?
- A. Man's selfishness breeds a system of unfairness.
 - B. Independence was a forbidden pleasure for women.
 - C. Marriage was an oppressive institution for women in the 19th century.
 - D. A woman who endures the yoke of marriage still has secret desire for freedom.

D ② Mrs. Mallard's reaction to her husband's death is an example of _____.

A. verbal irony

B. dramatic irony

C. situational irony

D. both dramatic and situational irony

A ③ The fact that Mrs. Mallard still feels joyous at the news of her husband's death is situational irony because _____.

A. her desire for freedom exceeds her love for her husband, something that goes against the norms of society at that time

B. the voices within her, as a subservient wife and as an independent woman, are in conflict

C. she does not really love her husband although she is loved by her husband

D. the reader's expectation conflicts with the writer's intention

D ④ The doctor's claim that Mrs. Mallard dies of joy is an example of dramatic irony because _____.

A. the readers don't know the real cause

B. the doctor and all of the other characters in the story know the real cause

C. both the readers and the characters in the story know the real cause

D. the readers know the real cause



Symbol in Literary Works

A **symbol** is a person or an object that, in addition to its **literal meaning**, suggests something more abstract or complex. As a literary device, it contains at least one more layer of meaning concealed behind an explicit expression. The symbolic meaning may be widely shared, or may be specific to the author. For example a red

many meanings.

rose is a **conventional symbol** of love. The girl in “Araby” (Unit 7) is the author’s unique use of symbol, a **private symbol** of beauty and idealism. Symbols help create meaning in a story and expand possibilities of interpretation. A symbol does not always have a fixed meaning. The meaning of a symbol in a short story can vary depending on who reads it. It also depends on the context in which it is used. For example, a “chain” may stand for “strong relationship” or “imprisonment” in different contexts.

We use the term **symbolism** to mean a system of symbols or symbolic representations, or the use of symbols to signify ideas and qualities by giving them symbolic meanings. Symbolism, often in capital letter, also refers to the art movement of the later 19th century that sought to express mystical or abstract ideas through the symbolic use of **images**. Many authors rely on symbolism to set a specific mood or emotion within a piece of literature.

When we read the very first sentence in “A Piece of Yellow Soap” (Unit Two): “She is dead now, that woman who used to hold a great piece of yellow washing soap in her hand,” the soap immediately catches the reader’s eye. By its repeated occurrence in the story whenever the woman appears, we know it is a symbol — a private symbol. The new meaning of the piece of yellow soap, other than its literal meaning of some cleaning substance, stands out and cries for attention. The reader is to determine its symbolic meaning in the given context. Once the symbolic meaning is located, it leads to deeper thematic significance.

Video Lesson (Part One)



Please scan the QR code on the left for the video lesson of this part.

Little Test for Comprehension



After watching the video lesson, select from the four choices below the one that best answers the question.

- ① Which of the following statements about “metaphor” and “symbol” is NOT TRUE?
A. Metaphor always establishes a one-to-one correspondence.

B. Metaphor is an implicit form of comparisons between two things.

C. Symbol is arbitrary.

D. A symbol always has many meanings.

C ② Symbol functions well in a literary work because it could _____.

A. add humor

B. give twists and turns to the story

C. add depth and subtlety to meanings

D. create a mysterious atmosphere

D ③ The followings are all “conventional symbols” except one. Which is the EXCEPTION?

A. Lily.

B. The skull-and-crossbones.

C. The grim reaper.

D. The white heron in Jewett’s story.

D ④ The followings are all “private symbols” except one. Which is the EXCEPTION?

A. The soap in “A Piece of Yellow Soap.”

B. Nathaniel Hawthorne’s letter “A” in *The Scarlet Letter*.

C. The fur piece in “Miss Brill.”

D. The tree, rain and birds in “The Story of an Hour.”



After watching the video lesson, select from the four choices below the one that best answers the question.

① Which adjective is NOT a proper description of the style of the short story "Araby"?

~~D~~ A. Dreamlike.

B. Poetic.

C Matter-of-fact.

D. Sentimental.

C ② Which adjective is NOT a proper description of the life in North Richmond Street?

A. Unpleasant.

B. Grim.

C. Unconventional.

D. Stultifying.

D ③ Which is probably true about Mangan's sister?

A. She is a young girl of rare beauty.

B. She has all the elegance because of her family and religious background.

C. She is angel-like both in appearance and in nature.

D. She is an ordinary girl but the narrator places his romantic fantasies on her.

~~D~~ ④ What do you think the theme of the story is?

A. Real beauty is illusory and unattainable.

B. Growing up leads to loss of youthful idealism.

C. True love cannot survive in the cruel world.

D. Disillusion always accompanies romantic impulses.

Special Terms

sexual awareness 性意识

romantic idealization 浪漫的理想化

illumination 启迪

enlightenment 开悟

vanity fair 名利场



Discussion Tips

As the story opens, the first-person narrator leads the reader through a tour of North Richmond Street, to view the drab life of the inhabitants and to feel the hidden hostility. For the narrator however, this drabness is colored for a time by the childish imagination of a life of beauty and romance embodied by Mangan's sister. The story is about an adolescent love, which is usually not taken seriously. The boy narrator has some glimpses of a girl in the neighborhood, fantasizes about her, and hopes to bring her a present from the bazaar. On the brink of **sexual awareness** and hungry for experience different from the bleakness of his day-to-day life, the boy nourishes this **romantic idealization** of the girl. In association with the girl and his "noble mission," the Araby also becomes lustrous in his imagination. But the indifference of the adult world, the frustrating journey and the depressive atmosphere of the market with flirting young men and women quickly and ultimately crush his youthful fantasy and lead him to experience an epiphany, a sudden realization or a moment of insight.

Little Test for Comprehension



After watching the video lesson, select from the four choices below the one that best answers the question.

① Which of the following statements about the symbolism of darkness is NOT TRUE?

- A. The boy's world is dark, blind and bleak.
- B. The boy is blind in love.
- C. Darkness is symbolic of the boy's ignorance and failure.
- D. Darkness symbolizes the mysterious attraction of Mangan's sister.

② Why does the boy want to go to the bazaar, or the "Araby," so desperately?

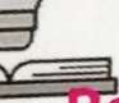
- A. He wants to find some romantic fulfillment.
- B. He wants to see exotic and exciting things.
- C. He wants to have some new experience.
- D. He wants to "do something" for the girl.

③ The boy comes to epiphany when _____.

- A. he hears the conversation between the shop-girl and two young men
- B. he hears the clink of coins in his pocket
- C. he gets on the deserted and delayed train
- D. all the lights are turned off in the hall

④ Which of the following statements about the symbolism of Araby is NOT TRUE?

- A. At the beginning, Araby stands for something exotic and magical.
- B. At the beginning, Araby represents a romantic escape from the confinement.
- C. Araby turns out to be simply a "vanity fair." *judge people by appearance*
- D. Araby in the end symbolizes the unfulfilled youthful dreams.



Romantic Fiction

Romanticism is a complex artistic, literary, and intellectual movement that began toward the end of the 18th century in West Europe. It is embodied most strongly in literature, but extends to visual arts, music and architecture. Very different historical contexts gave rise to **Romantic Movement** in English and American literatures.

In Britain, the Romantic Movement developed with the industrial revolution and the rapid advance in science. The social changes led to a negation of the belief that literature of the **Classical Period**, that is, the Greek and Roman literatures represented the highest achievement and what contemporary writers could do was to follow the principles, or at most, to adapt the skills.

Romanticism, with its emphasis on imagination and emotion, is in part an escape from the modern realities by turning inward. It glorifies the common man, advocates spirit free from traditional and religious restraints, and regards nature as a model for harmony in society, as healing power and as a refuge from the artificial constructs of civilization. Romanticists generally emphasize the importance of heart over head, that is, imagination and emotion over logic and reason. The emphasis on writer's expression differentiates Romanticism from other schools of writing, such as Realism and Naturalism which stress faithful **reflection** of reality.

In America, Romanticism overlapped with the rise of **Transcendentalism** which took faith in inherent goodness of people, emphasized subjective intuition (主体的直觉) over objective empiricism (经验), and believed that individuals were capable of generating completely original insights. American Romanticism developed with a growing awareness of national identity, with a literature of fervent landscape descriptions, and mythicized frontier people of the first half of the 19th century.

Despite the general usage of the term, a precise characterization and specific definition of Romanticism has been the subject of debate in the fields of literary history. But for the sake of a basic understanding, the following list can serve as a brief summary of its characteristics. A Romantic writer generally —

- ① regards literary work mainly as an expression of its author's feelings and attitudes;
- ② puts emphasis on imagination, emotion and introspection (内省);
- ③ elevates sensibility and spontaneity over logic and reason;
- ④ believes in the healing power of nature;
- ⑤ shows an inclination towards things exotic, mythic and primitive.



After watching the video lesson, select from the four choices below the one that best answers the question.

① Which of the following statements is NOT TRUE?

- D
- A. Romanticism is a term often used to describe the literary movement that took place in Europe and America approximately from the late 18th century to the mid 19th century.
 - B. Romanticism tends to see the individual at the very center of all life and experience.
 - C. In Romantic theory, art is valuable not so much as a mirror of the outside world, but as a source of illumination of the world within.
 - D. Romanticism is related to things romantic, such as love.

② Romantic literature has all the following features except one. Which is the EXCEPTION?

- C
- A. It is more interested in individual emotions.
 - B. It often celebrates nature as having healing power.
 - C. It aims at rational and objective representation.
 - D. It prefers things natural, primitive and spontaneous.

③ Which of the following statements is NOT TRUE?

- A
- A. A romantic writer regards the Greek and Roman classics as examples of perfection.
 - B. A romantic writer puts emphasis on imagination, emotion and introspection.
 - C. A romantic writer elevates sensibility and spontaneity over logic and reason.
 - D. A romantic writer regards himself as the center of experience.

④ Which statement about American Romanticism is NOT TRUE?

- D
- A. Literary romanticism came to America half a century later than Europe.
 - B. American romanticism resorts heavily to landscape descriptions and mythical frontier characters.
 - C. American romanticism emphasizes individual freedom over the restraints of tradition.
 - D. American romanticism finds its philosophical support in Transcendentalism.

(C) Romanticism



Naturalistic Fiction

Naturalism refers to a type of writing that attempts to apply scientific principles of objectivity to its study of human beings. As a literary movement, it was most active in the late 19th and early 20th century in France, America and England. The theory of Naturalism affirms that all beings and events in the universe are natural and

therefore can be fully understood by the methods of scientific investigation. French writer Emile Zola, the leading Naturalist, said that the ideal of a Naturalist was the selection of truthful instances to be placed in the "laboratory conditions" of fiction, where the hypotheses of the theories about the nature and operation of the forces that worked on human beings could be put to the test.

In an important sense, Naturalism was writers' response to the revolution in thought that modern science had produced. For example, Charles Darwin's **theory of evolution** provided an entirely new explanation of the origin of human beings, not as special creation by God, but as the result of evolution, gradual changes from lower species of animals to today's form. This theory told Naturalistic writers that man's existence was shaped by heredity and environment, over which he had little control. Therefore, Naturalists are pessimistic, regarding human beings as passive victims of biological nature and the natural or social environment.

instinct 本能
If instinct from within and natural and social forces from without play the determining role, then there is not much place for morality. Therefore Naturalists are often **amoral** — that is, neither being moral nor immoral, but showing no concern about whether certain behavior is morally right or wrong — in their attitude. Some people regard Naturalism as an outgrowth of Realism. Indeed, there are things in common in the two schools of fiction. Naturalism emphasizes the more brutal aspects of existence, and can be regarded, in a way, as a harsher version of realism. It is not the way of presentation but the ideas behind the story, the attitude of **determinism**, that is the major difference. Though influential for a period of time, Naturalism was however short-lived, as writers found themselves quite unable to represent the complexity of human life "scientifically" in literature.

Naturalist Ideas and “The Law of Life”

Though *The Sea-Wolf*, *The Iron Heel* and *Martin Eden* are highly acclaimed novels and read extensively, it is the “**Northland Tales**” that become the **trademark** of Jack London as a writer. The novels and short stories, including “The Law of Life,” are set in the vast and cold expanse of the Arctic region, colored by his personal experience living in that region. The poverty stricken early life when he was struggling at the bottom of the urban society has also helped shape his naturalistic ideas. These ideas were strengthened by his association with socialists and his interest in Darwin and Darwinism. The setting of the frozen country is especially important, as it provides an ideal “**experimental condition**” for a Naturalist like Jack London. The isolated region, the land of ice and snow and the extreme temperature highlight the overwhelming power of natural forces and incapability of human beings. Life is portrayed according to Darwin’s principle of survival of the fittest — or sometimes, rather survival of the tribe, as evidenced in “The Law of Life.”

“The Law of Life” was first published in *McClure’s Magazine* in 1901. This short story covers the last hours of an old former Eskimo (爱斯基摩人) chief Koskoosh. His tribe needs to be constantly mobile in search of food, but now he is blind and lame and becomes the burden of the tribe. The harsh conditions of Alaska in which they live do not allow them to keep the old and sick, as the dog-sledges carry only a limited load of the most necessary things for their survival. Old Koskoosh is left with a pile of wood to keep him warm — for a short period of time — and then things are left to the care of the Nature. Please note the elements of amoralism and determinism

in the short story. The appalling tale is told in a matter-of-fact manner, allowing little room for human sentiments or moral judgment. This is not because Jack London was heartless or inhuman, but because he imagined a situation in which some of the basic ideas of Naturalism could be explored, magnified and discussed.

Little Test for Comprehension



After watching the video lesson, select from the four choices below the one that best answers the question.

- ① Which of the following statements is NOT TRUE about “The Law of Life”?
 - A. Old Koskoosh was the former chief of an Eskimo tribe.
 - B. The tribe is preparing to leave Old Koskoosh alone in the snow to die.
 - C. Before the fire expires, wolves are approaching him in a circle.
 - D. Old Koskoosh fails to understand why the tribesmen should be so cruel.
- ② What does “the law of life” in this short story imply?
 - A. Nature governs man and animals in different ways.
 - B. Every living thing must eventually die.
 - C. Man should live in tune with nature.
 - D. Nature punishes those who disregard its force.

- ③ In his recollections of the past, old Koskoosh recalls the episode of a moose being hunted by wolves. What do you think is the reason that this episode is recalled?
- A. Because it is the most exciting experience in his youth.
 - B. Because it is a reflection of his present situation.
 - C. Because it is symbolically a vital step into adulthood.
 - D. Because it is an example of collective strength.
- ④ Finally, old Koskoosh said to himself, “Was it not the law of life?” What do these words reveal to us?
- A. He believes that life is a cycle.
 - B. He finally realizes what death means.
 - C. He fails to understand his son’s decision.
 - D. He is prepared to accept the fate.

Part 4 Features of Naturalism in “The Law of Life”

Special Terms

natural force 自然力

human instinct 人的本能

survival strategy 生存策略

naturalist theme 自然主义主题

amoral attitude 超道德态度

free will 自由意志

Discussion Tips

Naturalists do not believe in the existence of a God who has made everything and controls everything, but rather they believe that only natural things and laws operate the world in which we live. So Jack London and other naturalists often emphasize **natural force** and **human instinct**, or in other words, environment and heredity. These elements play bigger part than human will and effort, and often win an upper hand. In “The Law of Life,” abandoning the aged and sick is almost a **survival strategy**, and the difference between humans and animals are minimized

as both needing to obey the law of nature, or “the law of life.” No matter how violent or uncaring the nature is, man needs to ultimately accept its superiority over an individual. If we read “To Build a Fire”, which you can find in “Additional Story for Reading and Discussion” in this Unit, we will find that both protagonists finally succumb to (屈服于) death, or to the natural law. Finally, both old Koskoosh and the nameless man on the Yukon trail accept their fates peacefully with some sort of understanding. In these stories, Jack London presents the basic ideas of Darwinism and the survival of the fittest, as he understood them.

Video Lesson (Part Four)



Please scan the QR code on the left for the video lesson of this part.

Multiple Choice Test for Comprehension



After watching the video lesson, select from the four choices below the one that best answers the question.

- ① The following statements all testify to the philosophy of Naturalism in the story except one. Which is the EXCEPTION?
 - A. Naturalists care little about moral issues in their judgment.
 - B. Man's existence is shaped by heredity and environment.
 - C. Human value can only be displayed in their fight against Nature.
 - D. There is a strong sense of determinism in the story.
- ② The Naturalist idea of “Nature is not kindly to the flesh” is shown through the following ideas EXCEPT _____.
 - A. Natural disasters cause many human sufferings.
 - B. Nature shows no mercy to anyone.
 - C. Men or beasts, they all bend to the same law of life.
 - D. Nature has no concern for individual feelings and sentiments.
- ③ In the naturalistic stories, characters _____.
 - A. are often controlled by forces of nature
 - B. fight against the law of “survival of the fittest”
 - C. are mostly well-equipped for life
 - D. are capable of enacting real changes in their lives

- ④ What is most UNLIKELY Jack London's opinion on the Indian custom of leaving the old and sick to die?
- A. The author understands that sentiments play no part in the survival struggle against harsh environment.
 - B. The author believes the custom is a living strategy of the tribesmen.
 - C. The author knows that sympathy might lead to the tribe's doom.
 - D. The author thinks that the custom is cruel and inhuman.