

## Prose fiction keywords

**Antagonist:** The opponent or enemy of the main character (the protagonist).

**Character:** Characters in stories cause things to happen and they respond to what happens. In short stories the focus is on a limited number of characters: one or two main characters that are important for the action, and a small number of minor characters who may reflect or contrast aspects of the main characters. Main characters are usually round characters, they change through the story and cannot be summed up in few words; minor characters tend to be flat, they don't change and may sometimes be identified as types.

**Coherence:** Coherence is the term used to describe how the words in a text are combined to create meaning. The vocabulary (lexis) of a text forms patterns that hold the text together. The meaning of a text is reflected in its semantic fields: clusters of words that are likely to appear in the same contexts.

**Cohesion:** Cohesion can be defined as the links that hold a text together; grammar and particular word classes establish such links. For example, conjunctions link together sentences and paragraphs, pronouns refer to people or things mentioned earlier in the text. Repetition of words and phrases also creates cohesion.

**Connotation and Denotation:** Denotation is the meaning of a word as it is defined in a dictionary. Connotations are the associations, emotions and attitudes that the word suggests. Connotations usually add a positive or negative value to the word. *The word 'professional' has connotations of skill and excellence (ALD).*

**Dialect:** A variety of (usually) spoken language that is different from standard English with distinctive grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation; used by people with a common regional background (regional dialect) or a shared social background (sociolect).

**Dialogue:** Language interaction (conversation) between two or more characters.

A narrator may present the speech of characters as quotation with an explanatory clause, this is called direct speech: *She whispered, "We can't stay here."* The narrator may leave out the explanatory clause, this is called free direct speech: *"We can't stay here."*

When the narrator uses indirect speech, he reports what is said; therefore this is also called reported speech; the exact words spoken are not quoted, but filtered by the narrator's voice: *She whispered that they couldn't stay there.* If there is no reporting clause, it is called free indirect speech: *They couldn't stay there.*

**Ellipsis:** A break in the continuity of time: The plot leaves out a space of time and jumps to a later point in the *story*.

**Ideolect:** Language as it is used by a particular individual, often used as a means of characterization.

**In medias res:** ('In the middle of things') If a story starts in *medias res*, it means that the narrator has organized the plot so that we are not given the events in chronological order, but he starts telling us about a critical point in the middle of the action; later in the story he may give us the events that went before. Starting a story 'in *medias res*' means that we have not been introduced to the setting or the characters or the context of events.

**Interior monologue:** The thoughts of a character presented by the narrator, either directly as a quotation (using the words of the character in inverted commas), or indirectly as reported by the narrator. See also dialogue.

**Intertextuality:** A connection between texts that a writer establishes deliberately by borrowing from or alluding to other texts.

**Lexis:** Vocabulary.

**Metafiction:** Fiction that draws attention the fact that it is invented. The reader is reminded that the world described exists only in the words in which it is constructed. Such texts are self-

reflexive and self-conscious: they comment on their own activities.

**Metaphor:** A type of figurative language where something is spoken of as if it were something else: *Louise was a nightmare; The crowd exploded when Rooney scored.*

**Milieu:** See setting.

**Narrative 1:** A story told by a narrator.

**Narrative 2:** The narrator's description or account of events and characters in which the action may happen in more than one place and possibly with breaks in the continuity of time. See also Scene.

**Narrative voice:** The voice of the narrator, the voice that tells us the story.

**Narrator:** The narrator is the link between the story and the reader, the narrative voice that guides the reader through the story.

The first person narrator is a character that takes part in the story; the first person narrator has no direct access to the thoughts and feelings of the other characters, and he can only see things from his own point of view.

The third person narrator is placed outside the world of the action. The omniscient third person narrator is able to see inside the minds of the characters and tell us how they feel and think. But very often the third person narrator uses a limited point of view, focusing only on one character in this way.

The third person narrator may place the point of view with one of the characters so that the action appears to be seen by this character. In this way the narrator may become more or less invisible.

Sometimes the third person narrator may use combined points of view, his own as well as one of the characters'.

**Narration:** What the narrator does, the telling of a story.

**Parable:** A short narrative that teaches a moral or spiritual lesson, especially one of those told by Jesus as recorded in the Bible. It often involves a character facing a moral dilemma, or making a questionable decision and then suffering the consequences of that choice.

**Pause:** Story time comes to a standstill while narrative time continues; this is the case when the narrator describes a character or comments on the action.

**Personification:** A type of figurative language where something that is not human is described as if it were: *The duck doesn't trust the old man; the long arm of the law; Justice is blind; flowers dancing in the breeze.*

**Plot and story:** The plot is the order in which the narrator has chosen to tell the events of a story, the order in which events appear in the book. *Story* is the chronological order in which those events would have happened.

**Point of view:** See narrator.

**Protagonist:** The hero or main character of a story.

**Register:** Language that is adjusted to a particular situation, for example using formal language writing to an institution, or using informal spoken language with your friends. The type of relationship between the speaker (sender) and the person spoken to (receiver) can usually be seen in the register used.

**Rhetoric:** The techniques and devices used to make speech and writing powerful and persuasive, for example using phrases and sentences with a similar structure (parallelism), repeating single words or phrases (repetition), using words and phrases that have opposite meanings (contrast), using exaggeration (hyperbole), or using language that is intended to rouse the emotions of the audience (emotive language). A rhetorical question is a question that does not require an answer because the answer is obvious or implied in the question itself.

**Scene:** A part of a story, play or film in which the action happens in one place and without break in the continuity of time. Story time and narrative time are roughly equal.

**Semantic field:** A cluster of words that are likely to appear in the same contexts; if for example *teacher, desk, homework, book, bell* are found in the same piece of text, they are a semantic field connected with school.

**Setting 1:** The fictional world that frames the action and the characters. If the focus is on the values and norms of the people that are supposed to live in this particular place at a particular time, we may talk about milieu or social environment.

**Setting 2:** The time and place of events and characters in a particular scene of the action.

**Simile:** A type of figurative language; a comparison using the words *as* or *like* to link the words: *a man with a jaw like a shovel*.

**Speech:** See dialogue.

**Story:** See Plot and story.

**Stretch:** The speed of the narrative slows down so that narrative time becomes longer than story time.

**Style:** When you give an overall characterization of the way a text has been written, you speak of its style. The style of a text is the combined result of the writer's use of vocabulary, syntax, figurative language, tone of voice, and the way plot, setting and characters are described.

**Subtext:** Ideas, themes or issues that are not dealt with openly in a dialogue or text, but exist below the surface meaning.

**Summary:** A (fairly) long time in the *story* is covered in a few words, that is: story time is longer than narrative time: *So they lived contentedly for the next twenty years*.

**Symbol:** A symbol is a person, an object, an event, etc. that represents a more general quality or situation or abstract idea.

**Syntax:** The way words are put together to form sentences.

**Telling and showing:** Two different ways in which the narrator can give the reader information, usually about characters. Telling means that the narrator tells us directly what characterizes a 'person' in the text; showing means that we see and hear the character in action and must draw our own conclusions about him or her. In many stories you will find a combination of the two, but modern stories tend to favour showing.

**Theme:** In non-fiction the themes of a text are the same as the topics dealt with. Fiction writers discuss and explore ideas and values by making them come alive in the universe they create, they are shown indirectly in the actions and thoughts of the characters. Conflicts in the characters' minds or between characters usually provide insight into a particular theme. It is left to the reader to bring out the themes in a text by summing up his interpretation of the world the writer has created.

## An outline of prose fiction analysis

The stories in this anthology are accompanied by a number of questions to focus your attention on various aspects of the stories.

The same type of questions can be asked when you work with other stories. The best motivation for working with a story is, of course, that somehow it fascinates or puzzles you, and you start digging into what intrigues you. However, if you can't get started, the questions below may help you on your way. Please notice that these questions are not all relevant in all stories, and stories only answer the questions you ask...

The narrator	
1st person narrator?	What role does the narrator have in the action? Major or minor character?
3rd person narrator?	How does the narrator use point of view? Omniscient? Limited omniscient? Neutral observer?
How does the narrator relate to the characters of the story?	Does he comment on characters and action, directly or indirectly?
What characterizes the attitude and tone of voice of the narrator?	Distant or involved? Neutral/sincere/humorous/ironic/emotional/angry/sad, etc.? Does the narrator use any metafictional devices?

Plot and time	
At what point in time does the narrator tell the story?	As the events unfold? After the events have happened (In retrospect)?
What is the structure of the plot?	Chronological (events told in the order they happen)? Jumps and gaps in time? In medias res opening? Flash backs? Flash forwards?
How does the narrator use time to focus on events?	The use of scenes and narrative? The use of summary, ellipsis and pause?

The setting	
Where and when does the action take place?	
Realistic or fantastic setting?	
How much and what kind of information is given about the setting?	Could the action take place in other settings?
What is the milieu like (the social setting)?	What are the norms and values of the milieu?
What does the setting tell you about the characters?	Are the characters in harmony or in conflict with the (values of the) social environment?

The characters	
How are the characters related to the plot?	Major and minor characters?
How much and what kind of information is given about the characters? Are the characters presented mainly through their thoughts or mainly through their actions?	How does the narrator use telling and showing?
Round characters and flat characters?	Which characters are dynamic? Which are static?
How do the characters relate to each other?	What conflicts are there between characters? What values and attitudes do the characters represent? How are conflicts between or inside characters solved?

Language, speech and thought	
What characterizes the language of the narrator?	Formal or informal language? Any particular use of lexis and syntax? The use of figurative language?
How does the narrator use dialogue and monologue?	
How are the thoughts of the characters conveyed?	
What characterizes the language of the characters?	Formal or informal language? The use of idiolect, dialect and sociolect? Any particular use of registers?

The theme(s)
What values and ideas are reflected in the speech, thought and action of the characters?
Does the title of the story indicate a particular theme?