Elements of Stories
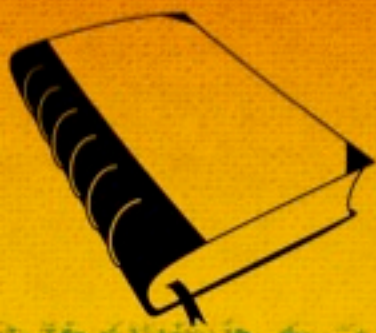## And Storytelling
By Mark Koester (mwkteacher@gmail.com)

Ernest Hemingway: Short Story

For Sale: Baby's shoes, never worn.

Stories

- There are many kinds of stories.

- Stories are generally divided into two categories: fiction (imaginary stories) and non-fiction (real stories).

- Fiction includes fantasy, science-fiction ("sci-fi"), fairy tales, detective stories, etc.

- Non-fiction includes historical, biographical, contemporary, sociological, theoretical, etc.

Elements of a Story

- There are several elements to narrative stories (=stories with events in time):
  - Setting
  - Characters or Character
  - Plot
  - Conflict
  - Point of View
  - Theme

Setting: Where and When?

- Character and Characters: Who and What are they like?In English, there are two means to the word "character." The first meaning is simply the person or persons in a story (the characters). The other mean of "character" stands for the characteristics of a person--his or her morals, beliefs, feelings, etc. There are generally two kinds of persons in a story: the Antagonist ("the bad guy" or villain) and the Protagonist ("the good guy" or hero).

Setting

- The setting is the time and the location in which a story takes place. While in some stories the setting is not so important, in most stories the setting is one of the most important parts of a story since it is the backdrop or background when and where the events take place.

  - 1. place - geographical location
  - 2. time - when is the story taking place? (time of day, year, historical period, etc.)
  - 3. weather conditions
  - 4. social conditions ~ daily life of characters
  - 5. mood or atmosphere ~ what is the feeling at the beginning, middle and end of the story?
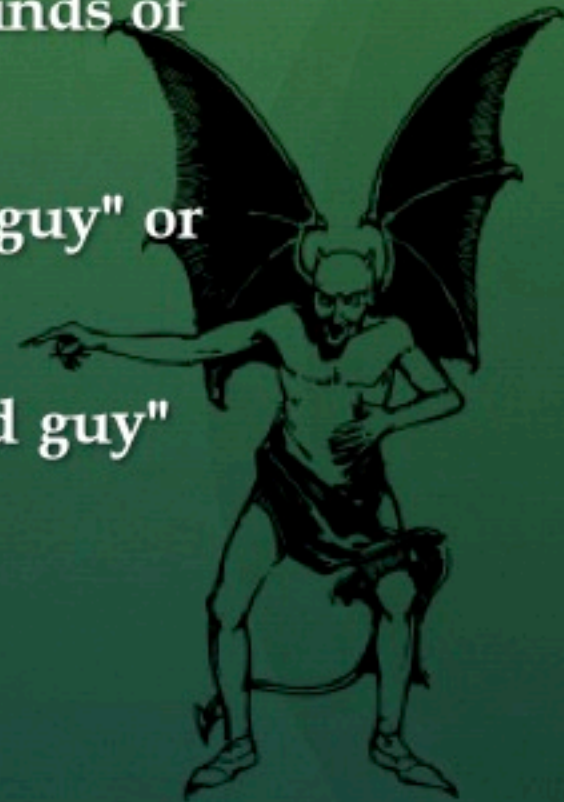
Characters and Character

- Character and Characters: Who and What are they like?

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Characters and Character

- There are generally two kinds of persons in a story:

- The Antagonist ("the bad guy" or villain)

- The Protagonist ("the good guy" or hero).

Characteristics of a Person

- In order for a story to feel real or seem believable, characters must have real characteristics--real information about their lives including:
  - their origin,
  - their appearance,
  - the way they think, talk, feel and even dream,
  - the things he or she does and doesn't do,
  - and what others say about him or she and their reactions to other people's opinions.

Characters

- For characters to be believable or convincing (=seem real), characters should be consistent, motivated, and life-like.

- There are three kinds of characters in a story:
    - 1. Individual
    - 2. Developing
    - 3. Static or Stereotypical

Plot

- Plot is the arrangement or order of events to fit the theme or idea that the authors wants use to have as reader. Plot is the sequence of events in a story. There is a beginning, middle, and end

Elements of Plot

- a.) Beginning or Introduction: This is where we meet the characters and learn about the setting.

- b.) Rising Action: This is where the events in the story get developed and become increasingly more complicated as we learn about the what the conflict is.

- c.) Climax: This is the pinnacle or highest point of the story when protagonist must meet with the conflict. This is the moment of the story when the reader asks, What is going to happen next? and will the conflict be resolved or not?

- d.) Falling Action: The events and activities begin to be resolved.

- e) Resolution - This is the final outcome of the events in the story.

Conflict

- Conflict is an essential part of plot. Without conflict, there would be no plot and, essentially, no story.

- The conflict is the opposition and struggle between two groups or forces. Some stories may have one or multiple conflicts.

Two Types of Conflict

- There are basically two types of conflict:

- 1.) External: a struggle between one's self and a force outside

- 2.) Internal: a struggle within one's self (for example, a struggle to make a decision, overcome pain, grief, difficulty, change oneself)

Four Relationships of Conflict

- While the exact specifics of conflicts vary from story to story, there are some common types or themes of conflict:

- 1.) Man vs. Man: The protagonist or leading character struggles against other men, forces of nature, or animals using his or her strength and intelligence

- 2.) Man vs. Circumstances: The protagonist must fight against fate or destiny or the current situation facing him or her.

- 3.) Man vs. Society: The protagonist or hero struggles against parts of his or her society including against society's ideas, practices or customs.

- 4.) Man vs. Himself/Herself (psychological): The leading character struggles with himself/herself; with his/her own soul, ideas of right or wrong, physical limitations, choices, etc.

Point of View

- This is the perspective from which we see the story through: First-person, Third-person, etc.

Theme / Message

- The theme in a story is its central idea of meaning. It is the deeper meaning that the writer wants us to "get" from the story. This is the phrase we often use to describe to someone what a movie or book is about.

- Here are some sample themes:
  - things are not always as they appear to be
  - Love is blind
  - Believe in yourself
  - People are afraid of change
  - Don't judge a book by its cover

Brainstorming Activity

Task #1: Setting

- Make two lists: one for various places for stories and another for different times or time frames.

Brainstorming Activity

Task #2: Characters

- Make two more lists: one for various heroes and protagonists of stories and another for different antagonists and villains.

Brainstorming Activity

Task #3: Conflicts

- Make a long list about all the things people might get in conflict about (business deal) or fight about (love, money) or struggle against (nature, earthquake), etc.

Brainstorming Activity

Task #4: Resolution

- Make a short list about how most stories end.

Write a Story

- Over the next two or three classes, we are going to work on writing a narrative story in small groups (2-3 or so pages).

- Drafts and outlines will be put on our class website (sorry still under development!) in order to create, follow and edit the development, changes and final version of your stories.

- I will be able to give you comments about your stories too and you can also see your classmates' work.

- I will send an email to each group with instructions and a login and password.

Write a Story

- I will provide an example of what to do online.

- With your group, you now have a list of various elements of a story: setting, characters, conflict, resolution, etc.

- Your job now is to choose the basic information about your story: characters, setting, etc.

- Before next class (or shortly after next class), you should have posted on the website: (1.) an outline of the plot, (2. & 3.) a paragraph about each main character, (4.) a paragraph about the conflict and overall situation.