

Literature – a very brief introduction

Literature can be divided into three main **categories**: **drama**, **poetry** and **narrative prose**. These can in turn be subdivided into various **genres**, including:

- Drama: **tragedy**, **comedy**
- Poetry, **sonnet**, **epic poetry**, **ballad**
- Narrative prose: **short story**, **novel**, **biography**, **autobiography**

Many great works of literature share the same universal themes: **love**, **death**, **ambition**, **revenge**, **faith**, **fate**, **hatred** and **deceit**, to name but a few.

What are the **ingredients** of a good novel?

An **imaginative plot**: the **sequence of events** must be interesting although it does not have to be **chronological** (the **novelist** might decide to include **flashbacks** or **anticipation**). **Suspense** or a **twist** can create **tension**.

A well-chosen **setting**: the **action** must be **set** in a time and place of interest to the reader. This will in turn help to create a **fitting atmosphere**.

Believable characters: the characters should be **round** (not **flat**) and have clearly defined **personalities** and reasons for what they say and do. This can either be done through **direct characterisation**, that is the readers can be told what a character is like, or through **indirect characterisation**, which means that the readers have to find out what a character is like by considering his or her actions, thoughts and **emotions**. The reader should be able to **identify with** some of the characters.

A strong opening; the first sentence should immediately **hold** the reader's **attention**, e.g.

“The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there.”

The Go-Between, L. P. Hartley.

Appropriate stylistic devices: these will make the novel more enjoyable. The novelist can **employ satire**, **irony**, **understatement**, etc. to make the novel more interesting.

The many faces of the **novel**
(from Italian *novella*, “tale, piece of news”)

There are many different types of novel, which include:

detective novel	In this type of novel, an unknown person commits a crime and the question of the criminal’s identity is solved by a detective after a process of investigation and deduction .	<i>Murder on the Orient Express</i> , Agatha Christie (1934)
epistolary novel	A novel in which the story is told through letters written by the characters.	<i>Pamela</i> , Samuel Richardson (1740)
Gothic novel	A type of horror novel popular in the late 18 th and early 19 th centuries. Key elements include suspense, mystery , the fantastic and the supernatural .	<i>The Mysteries of Udolpho</i> , Ann Radcliffe (1794)
historical novel	A novel which is set in the past and often depicts not only fictional but also historical people and events.	<i>A Tale of Two Cities</i> , Charles Dickens (1859)
science fiction novel	A novel set in the future which assumes imaginary technological or scientific advances.	<i>The Time Machine</i> , H. G. Wells (1895)
thriller	Thrillers have an exciting plot, usually involving crime or espionage.	<i>The Talented Mr Ripley</i> , Patricia Highsmith (1955)

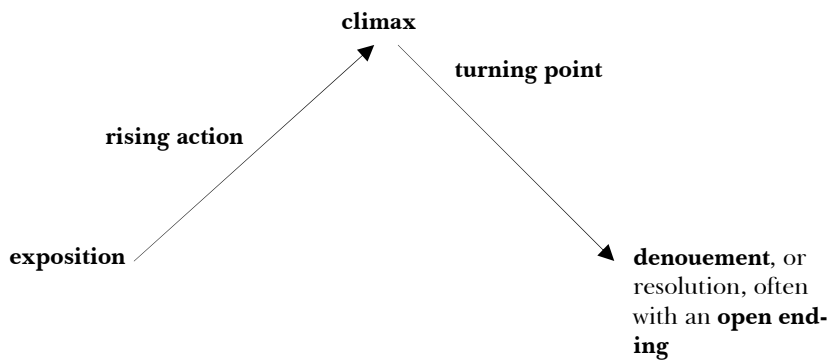
The Short Story

Like the novel, the short story is an example of **prose fiction**. Its **precursors** include **fairy tales**, **myths**, **legends**, **fables**, **parables** and **anecdotes**. The **genre** was created by Edgar Allen Poe in the Nineteenth Century. He described it as “a short **prose narrative requiring** from a half-hour to one or two in its **perusal**.”

Short stories have some **features in common** with the novel, including **plot**, **characterisation** and **narrative point of view**, although they are less **complex**.

Many short stories have the following **characteristics**:

- one **subject** or **theme**
- one **setting** (time and place of action)
- a limited number of **characters** and events
- the following structure



However, not all short stories follow this **pattern**. Writers today often **experiment** with the form. They sometimes **concentrate** on a “slice of life”, showing how the **protagonist reacts** to a particular event or situation, or show how a character **undergoes a change**, e.g. in stories of **initiation** (mainly **dealing with** young people). Short stories might end with an **unexpected twist**.

Who tells the story?

The **author** decides on the **narrative perspective**: the **narrator** tells the story but is not necessarily **identical with** the author. The narrator might be a character in the novel or short story who tells the readers how he or she feels and thinks. This kind of **first-person narrator** has a limited **point of view**, as only his or her view of the events is presented (that is from the “I” perspective). A **third-person narrator** can be **omniscient**, that is have an unlimited point of view. This **enables** him or her to direct the readers’ feelings and reactions. A selective third-person narrator presents the story through the eyes of one of the characters. An unobtrusive narrator describes the action but not the characters’ thoughts. Sometimes authors use a mixture of different **narrative techniques**.

William Shakespeare – a man of many talents

The playwright

Many people consider Shakespeare to be the greatest **dramatist** of all time. Thirty-seven of his **plays survive** and are still extremely popular because of their **timeless themes**, their **fascinating characters** and **eloquent language**. They have **five acts** which are divided into different **scenes**.

Shakespeare used language very **creatively**. The plays are written in **prose** and **blank verse**, a verse form with no **rhyme**. He used many **linguistic devices**, including:

- **plays on words (puns)**, in which a word often has two meanings, e.g. in *Romeo and Juliet* when Mercutio is dying, he says “Ask for me tomorrow and you shall find me a grave man.”
- **repetition for dramatic effect**
- **figurative language**, such as **metaphor**, **similes** and **personification**
- **rhetorical devices** such as **hyperbole** or **antithesis**
- **dramatic irony**, when the **audience** knows something that a character on the **stage** does not know, e.g. in *Romeo and Juliet*, the preparations for Juliet’s wedding are being made, although she is lying dead in her room.

The poet

Shakespeare’s most famous **poems** are his 154 **sonnets**, 14-**line** love poems using **metre** of **iambic pentameter** (except number 126), which is closest to the **rhythm** of natural **speech**. Each sonnet is **divided into** three **quatrains** (a **stanza** of four lines) followed by a rhyming couplet and ten syllables per line. The **rhyme scheme** is: abab cdcd efef gg.

The sonnets **explore the themes** of love, beauty, **mortality** and the effect of time. Shakespeare used a lot of natural **imagery** to describe the cycle of the seasons, thus **symbolising** the passing of time. Although many of the sonnets are very **lyrical** and contain **stylistic devices** such as **alliteration** and **assonance**, others use much simpler language. The first 126 sonnets follow the writer’s **affection** for a young man and the following twenty-four are **addressed** to “a dark lady”. Number 18 opens with the famous lines, “Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?”

Shakespeare also wrote a few longer poems, including two **narrative poems** and an **allegorical** one.

Sonnet 18

Shall I compare thee to a Summer’s day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,
And Summer’s lease hath all too short a date:

Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And oft’ is his gold complexion dimm’d;
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance or nature’s changing course untrimm’d:

But thy eternal Summer shall not fade
Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest;
Nor shall Death brag thou wanderest in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou growest:

So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

Vergleich ich dich mit einem Sommertag?
Du hast mehr Mass und grössre Lieblichkeit.
Die Maienknospe, die verzärtelt lag,
Schlägt rauer Wind; kurz währt des Sommers Zeit.

Des Himmels Auge brennt manchmal zu heiss,
Sein goldnes Antlitz, oft trübt sich’s für lang,
Und alles Schöne gibt die Schönheit preis,
Sei’s Zufall, sei’s des Wandels kruder gang.

Doch nie soll deines Sommers Pracht ermatten,
Nie soll zerschleissen deiner Schönheit Kleid,
Nie Tod sich brüsten, dass in seinem Schatten
Du gehst: Im Vers zwingst du die Sterblichkeit.

Solang ein Mensch noch atmet, Augen sehn,
Solang dies steht, solang wirst du bestehn.