Literary Elements

Anecdote

A little story (within a story), usually intended to make a point (or sometimes to entertain).

Authors include *anecdotes* to help the reader better understand the story or to make the story more entertaining.

Example:

> To convince people to vote for her, the candidate for president told an *anecdote* about how she bravely faced an emergency.

Explanation:

- The point of this anecdote about _____ is _____ .
  What does it reveal? Why is it included in the story?

Conflict

A problem that a character must face.

There are two types of conflict:

1. **External Conflict** – A character struggles against another person or some outside force.

   Examples: He ran away from the bullies in the alley.
   She climbed all the way up the mountain.

   Explanation:
   - [character's name] *struggles against* _____ because _____ .
     (*argues with / fights / threatens / is hurt by / might be hurt by*)
     What is the danger? Why does the character face this challenge?

2. **Internal Conflict** – A character struggles within his or her mind. The character must make a choice, or the character struggles against his or her own thoughts, beliefs, desires, fears, etc.

   Examples: He worried about the grade he earned on the unit test.
   She wanted to be the best athlete at the school.

   Explanation:
   - [character's name] *struggles against* _____ because _____ .
     (*worries about / is afraid of / hopes / thinks / believes*)
     What is the risk? What could go wrong?
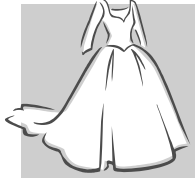
Characterization

Character traits are shown to the reader in one of four ways:

1. A description of the character's **physical appearance**.

   Example: The boy had blonde hair and blue eyes.

   Explanation:
   - The reader can tell what the boy looks like.

2. What the character thinks, says, or does. The character's **actions**.

   Example: In the morning, *I'm still sleepy*, she thought and went back to bed.

   Explanation:
   - The reader can tell [character's name] is _____ (*trait*) because he/she _____.
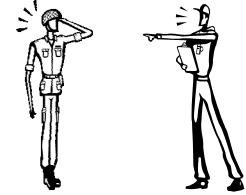   *What does the character think, do, or say?*

3. What other characters think about a character, say to a character, or do to a character. How other characters **treat** a character.

   Example: The team fell silent when he entered the gym.

   Explanation:
   - The reader can tell [character's name] is _____ (*trait*) because _____ .
   How do the other characters treat this character?

4. Direct comments about a character made by the **narrator**.

   Example: She was a wise woman, so everyone went to her for advice.

   Explanation:
   - The reader can tell [character's name] is _____ (*trait*) because the narrator says _____ .
   What does the narrator say about the character?

Diction

The writer's choice of words, purposely selected to create a certain tone, message, or effect.

This is related to the writing trait of Word Choice.

Compare these sentences:

The *old* police officer kept the crowd safe.

The *experienced* police officer kept the crowd safe.

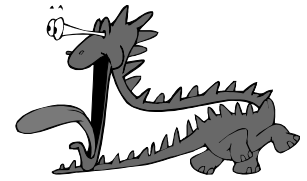*How does the meaning of the sentence change?*

Irony

When a character (or the reader) expects one thing to happen, but something entirely different happens. Often it is the opposite of what is expected.

Example:

> When a child is kidnapped, the reader expects that the child would be frightened, but the boy in "The Ransom of Red Chief" enjoys it instead.

Explanation:

- The reader expected _____, but it turns out _____ .
- [Character's name] expected _____, but it turns out _____ .

Mood   ☺ ☺ ☹

The way the author tries to make the reader feel during a story.

As you read stories, you may feel suspense, excitement, or laugh. The mood of the stories would be called suspenseful, exciting, or funny. *Mood* is created by details, including imagery and dialogue. It is often affected by *tone*.

When you read a story, ask yourself, "How does this make me feel?"

Some Mood Words:

eerie	funny	peaceful	tense
gloomy	intense	suspenseful	triumphant

Explanation:

- The mood of the story is _____ (*mood word*) because _____ .
  How do the words, details, events, etc. create the mood?

Other ways to explain:

- The mood of the story is _____ (*mood word*) when _____ (*What's going on?*) because _____ .
- The reader can infer the mood of the story
  is _____ (*mood word*) because _____ .

Symbolism

A person, place, or object that stands for something other than itself.

Example:

> A flag can symbolize a state or country.
>
> ☺ is the symbol for happiness.

Explanation:

- _____ stands for _____ because _____ .
  What is the connection between the symbol and what it stands for?

Tone

Expresses the writer's attitude.

This term is related to tone of voice when speaking. Someone can talk to you with a disappointed or sarcastic tone. A speech or story can be written with a *tone*, too.

An author needs to include the writing trait of Voice in a story to help the reader "hear" the *tone. Tone* often reflects the author's purpose. If the author's purpose is to inform, then the *tone* may be serious. If it is to entertain, then the *tone* may be lighter and playful.

Some Tone Words:

eerie	funny	peaceful	tense
gloomy	intense	suspenseful	triumphant

Theme

The main message of a story. This message says something about life.

Usually, themes cannot be found "right there" in the story. Instead, the reader must figure out (infer) the theme from one or more of the following:

- the title
- phrases about big ideas (like courage or freedom)
- the way characters change and the lessons they learn

Ask yourself, "What does this story say about life?"

Examples:

> If as a son knows his father can do something, he knows he can, too.
>
> Things don't always turn out the way you expect.
>
> Be careful what you wish for.