



Interpreting Fiction

When interpreting fiction, elements such as plot, setting, and characters are usually the base of any argument or observation for a paper. Using literary terminology is helpful, and considering how the elements work together may help to add material to the paper.

Plot

- How do events relate to one another?
- How do single events relate to the work as a whole?
- How are events arranged in time?
- What conflicts occur in the story?
- How do these conflicts advance the plot along?
- How are events juxtaposed? How does this juxtaposition affect the development?

Setting

- When and where does the action take place?
- What is the relationship between the setting and the mood?
- How does the setting create the mood of the story?
- How does the setting affect the characters?

Characters

- What conflicts exist between the protagonist(s) and the antagonist(s)?
- What traits, feelings, and values are exhibited by the characters?
- How do the characters relate to one another?
- What do the characters say?
- Are the characters fully developed, or are they stereotyped?
- How are the major characters changed by the events?

When beginning the paper, be sure to mention the name of the book or story and the author's full name. After that, the author should be referred to by last name only, and the title can be abbreviated. Employ literary terminology when possible, and be sure to include an introduction and conclusion for the piece. If research is included in the essay, remember to introduce quotes and cite all material that is incorporated into the opinions expressed.

The UWC has other handouts that may be helpful: Literary Terms, Literary Criticism, and various Writing Process Quick Reference Flyers.