

# Rutgers Learning Centers

At Camden Campus

## READING: ELEMENTS OF A STORY

When reading fiction, being able to identify elements of the story will help you get meaning and understanding from the work. Use the following guidelines to identify the elements of a story:

### Layers of Meaning

- Layers of action and meaning build upon each other to develop the central story conflict.

### Structure

- Consists of two parts: plot and tension, which bring unity and coherence to all elements of the story.

#### **Plot**

narrative

surface level

orders incidents

#### **Tension**

incidents

underlying

create emotions

—>

### Character

- Brings the story to life by coping with human problems and circumstances.
- Can transport the reader into a world that is far from normal experience, as in science fiction.
- Character's actions reveal the action of the story.

### Place

- Can be the setting, location, objects in a place or from a place, or what is occurring in a place.

### Point of View

- Expresses the author's position and sets rules for narrator's knowledge of characters and events.

### Time

- Can be arranged chronologically, or as references to the past, such as flashbacks.
- Can be psychologically ordered, meaning that time can stand still or move very rapidly.
- Creates suspense for the reader, moves the character along, and links the action at all levels of the story with the central story tension.

### Mood

- Is created with words, rhythms, sounds, and images that intensify the reader's perceptions and show the author's attitudes and feelings about the subject.
- Establishes the emotions of the story and pulls the reader into the text by stimulating imagination.

### Symbols

- Influence story characters and actions; they also intensify mood, tension, and resolution.
- Influence the reader's interpretations; for example, when a vulture appears, the reader interprets that the bird symbolizes approaching death for the character.

### Extended Metaphor

- Pulls elements together to create abstract meaning and unity and lets reader suspend reason and belief.

-from *Grand Conversations: Literature Groups in Action*, Peterson and Eeds, Scholastic Inc., New York, NY, 1990.

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