

## Key Standards

**R3.3** Analyze interactions between characters in a literary text and explain influence on plot.  
**R3.6** Analyze and trace an author's development of time and sequence.

**Other Standards R3.2, R3.5, R.3.9**

**F**iction is narrative writing that springs from a writer's imagination, though it may be based on actual events and real people. Although one purpose of fiction is to entertain, it can also provide important insights into human nature. The two major types of fiction are **short stories**, brief works that can usually be read in a sitting, and **novels**, longer and generally more complex narratives. Both short stories and novels share the elements of **plot**, **character**, **setting**, **theme**, and **point of view**. Use the following passages from Saki's "The Interlopers" to learn more about the elements of fiction.

## Plot

The word **plot** refers to the chain of related events that take place in a story. In most plots, events are set in motion by **conflicts**—struggles between or within characters. Most plots include the following stages:

Element	Definition
exposition	provides needed background information
rising action	the part of the plot in which the conflict intensifies
climax	the turning point of the action, when the reader's interest is at its highest point
falling action or dénouement	the action after the climax, in which the conflict is often resolved

**YOUR TURN** What conflict is introduced in the passage at the right?

## Character

**Characters** are the individuals, real or imaginary, who take part in the action of stories. The characters who are at the center of a story's action are called **main characters**; less important ones are **minor characters**.

Characters that grow or change as the plot unfolds are called **dynamic characters**, while **static characters** remain unchanged. The development of characters in fiction is known as **characterization**. There are four basic methods of characterization: physical description; a character's own speech, thoughts, feelings, and actions; the speech, thoughts, feelings, and actions of other characters; and a narrator's comments.

**YOUR TURN** In this passage, what techniques of characterization has Saki used?

### PLOT

A famous lawsuit, in the days of his grandfather, had wrested it [a woodland] from the illegal possession of a neighboring family of petty landowners; the dispossessed party had never acquiesced in the judgment of the Courts, and a long series of poaching affrays and similar scandals had embittered the relationships between the families for three generations.

### CHARACTER

Each had a rifle in his hand, each had hate in his heart and murder uppermost in his mind. The chance had come to give full play to the passions of a lifetime. But a man who has been brought up under the code of a restraining civilization cannot easily nerve himself to shoot down his neighbor in cold blood.



## Setting

The **setting** of a story is the time and place in which the events occur. The place can be real or imaginary, and the time can be a particular time of day, a season, a period of history, or even the future. Setting plays an important part in some stories, having a major effect on what happens to the characters. In other stories, the settings are only backdrops. In "The Interlopers," the setting serves as the scene of a key conflict between man and nature.

## Theme

A **theme** is a central idea or message in a work of literature. It is not the work's subject but a perception about life or human nature that the writer wants to communicate. Themes are seldom stated directly; usually they must be inferred. A theme can be revealed by the ways characters change during a story and the conflicts they experience, statements in which the narrator or a character says something important about life, or by a work's title.

**YOUR TURN** From the passage at the right, what can you infer about a possible theme of the story?

## Point of View

The term **point of view** refers to the relationship between a narrator and the events he or she describes. When a story's narrator is a character participating in the story's action, the story is said to be written from a **first-person point of view**. In a story told from a **third-person point of view**, on the other hand, a narrator outside the action describes the events and characters. This point of view can be subdivided into **third-person omniscient**, in which the narrator is "all-knowing," able to see into the minds of all the characters, and **third-person limited**, in which the narrator perceives events only as an observer or only through the eyes of one character. A narrator whose viewpoint is limited to that of a single character will describe only that character's feelings and only the events that the character witnesses.

**YOUR TURN** What clues in this passage can help you identify the point of view from which the story is told?

### THEME

*"We have quarreled like devils all our lives over this stupid strip of forest, where the trees can't even stand upright in a breath of wind. Lying here tonight, thinking, I've come to think we've been rather fools; there are better things in life than getting the better of a boundary dispute."*

### POINT OF VIEW

*Ulrich was silent for a few minutes and lay listening to the weary screeching of the wind. An idea was slowly forming and growing in his brain, an idea that gained strength every time that he looked across at the man who was fighting so grimly against pain and exhaustion.*