

Unit 1: Short Stories and Poetry

Short stories are much the same as full length ones; they have all the same elements and characteristics, just power packed into a small space. They're concentrated! And they make a quick way to learn a lot about literature quickly. All literary works will have some simple basic elements: plot, characters, setting, and point of view. We will look in detail at one of these each week, but every day keep in mind that all are present. You have noticed and paid attention to them for years already but maybe didn't always focus on specific points.

Poetry is much the same as short stories: a concentrated effort to tell the reader something. But poetry is even more concentrated, and it is told in a metered, measured pattern of rhymes or other literary devices to give a flow and rhythm to the piece. Poetry is fun to read aloud and can often be set to music. It still has all the major elements of literature: plot, characters, setting, and point of view. However, some elements may not be very well developed and may be a bit harder to recognize.

Each day as you read through this unit, I want you to take notes on what you read and answer the following questions.

- **Who** was involved?
- **What** happened?
- **When** did it happen?
- **Where** did it happen?
- **Why** did it happen?
- **How** did it happen? (if applicable)

Week 1: Plot

When we read literary works, they almost all have a few key elements in common. Over the next few weeks, you will get familiar with the main ones as you read and analyze a variety of short stories, focusing on specific elements as you go. This week you are going to start at the basis of a story: the plot.

The plot is the foundation of a novel or story around which the characters and settings are built. It is used to guide the story along, keeping it on track. The plot follows a general plan consisting of five main steps: introduction, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution. It serves to focus the reader's attention on the characters and their roles, drawing you into the story and leading you to read on to find out what happens next. Understanding the plot of a story allows the reader to understand fully the purpose of the story—the message the author is conveying.

In the Bible, we are given a perfect example of what the plot does in the first part of Genesis, the creation! It starts by introducing the main character, God, and then walks you through the creation week, culminating with the creation of man and pronouncing it all “very good” before winding down to the seventh day of rest.

The plot is basically the *what* and *how* of the story.

Week 1: Day 1 – “The Little Match Girl”

Read “The Little Match Girl,” a heart-wrenching moral tale that highlights an era that has passed by outward appearances, but the same sins of that time persist under new names today. It was published by Danish author Hans Christian Andersen, a prolific writer of plays, travelogues, novels, and poems. He is best remembered for his fairy tales. Andersen's popularity is not limited to children; his stories express themes that transcend age and nationality.

<https://americanliterature.com/author/hans-christian-andersen/short-story/the-little-match-girl>

Remember to answer the following questions about the reading:

- **Who** was involved?
- **What** happened?
- **When** did it happen?
- **Where** did it happen?
- **Why** did it happen?
- **How** did it happen? (if applicable)

Week 1: Day 2 – “The Selfish Giant”

“The Selfish Giant” is a beautiful tale by another American author, Oscar Wilde. It was first published in 1888 as part of Wilde’s collection of children’s stories entitled *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*.

<https://americanliterature.com/author/oscar-wilde/short-story/the-selfish-giant>

The plot of this story is rich and colorful with a strong moral lesson to impart. As you read, you will run across stories where some of the points seem to run together; they happen so fast—if you blink you might miss them, but they do happen.

Remember to answer the following questions about the reading:

- **Who** was involved?
- **What** happened?
- **When** did it happen?
- **Where** did it happen?
- **Why** did it happen?
- **How** did it happen? (if applicable)

Week 1: Day 3 – “An Angel in Disguise”

Our next story for this week is a heart-warming story that really pulls together all the elements of character in literature you have learned this week: “An Angel in Disguise” by T.S. Arthur, written in 1851.

<https://americanliterature.com/author/ts-arthur/short-story/an-angel-in-disguise>

Remember to answer the following questions about the reading:

- **Who** was involved?
- **What** happened?
- **When** did it happen?
- **Where** did it happen?
- **Why** did it happen?
- **How** did it happen? (if applicable)

Week 1: Day 4 – “The Messenger”

The story you will read today is “The Messenger” by Mary Raymond Shipman Andrews, an American writer from Lexington, Kentucky. She is best known for a widely read short story about U.S. President Abraham Lincoln, “The Perfect Tribute.” Her writings often reflect her strong faith in Jesus, her Savior.

<https://nmi.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/1297.pdf>

Remember to answer the following questions about the reading:

- **Who** was involved?
- **What** happened?
- **When** did it happen?
- **Where** did it happen?
- **Why** did it happen?
- **How** did it happen? (if applicable)

Week 1: Day 5 – “American, Sir!”

On Day 5 each week you will write a review of a reading assignment of the week explaining why you liked it; include some key points about the plot but don’t give away too much—you don’t want it to be a “spoiler” review! We will do this each week through the short stories’ unit then at the end of each unit as a fun way to sum up what you’ve learned. Save them in a notebook or binder and at the end of the course, you will give them to your parents as a review of this course.

In this second story by Mary Raymond Shipman Andrews, “American, Sir!”, the social aspects of the setting are quite striking and poignant. This is a great historical short story that imparts a good deal of wisdom and moral character to the reader.

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/20831/20831-h/20831-h.htm#III>

Remember to answer the following questions about the reading assignment:

- **Who** was involved?
- **What** happened?
- **When** did it happen?
- **Where** did it happen?
- **Why** did it happen?
- **How** did it happen? (if applicable)