

The Short Story - Characteristics



Definition

“a story that can be read in one sitting” (Edgar Allen Poe)

General characteristics

- **limited number of characters**, often only one main character (=protagonist) and little/no character development (cf. novels e.g. by Charles Dickens with over 20 main characters)
- **limited time span**: only a few hours, days or weeks (cf. novels that cover a whole lifetime or even several generations)
- **a single theme/plot** (cf. novels that can deal with several/many themes and can have various sub-plots)

Typical structure of the plot

- **Exposition**: introduction of main character(s) and setting (place, time, general social background), hints at theme and/or atmosphere; often no or very short exposition: story begins “in medias res”, e.g. in the middle of a dialogue
- **Rising action**: development of the conflict
- **Climax**: conflict reaches its highest point
- **[Turning point]**: a change in the conflict
- **[Falling action]**: reduction of suspense
- Ending
 - *Denouement*: conflict is resolved
 - *Open ending*: conflict is not resolved, reader wonders what might happen next
 - *Surprise ending*: reader’s expectations are not fulfilled

[these elements are not always present]