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]