

HANDY-DANDY GUIDE TO ANALYZING NARRATIVES (STORIES)

1. Look at the **title** of the story. (If the story is well-done, the title will be important.) Why do you think the author used this title?
2. Try to determine the **subject** or **topic** of the story. In a word or phrase, what is the story “about”? (Death? Loss? Aging? Love? Learning a hard lesson?)
3. Look at the **setting** of the story. Where and when is it set? Why are the place and time important? Look at the objects, sounds, and other details on the scene. Why are they important? Are there any objects used **symbolically** in the piece, to convey ideas?
4. Look at the **plot** structure. What happens in the story? How does the author build **suspense**? What conflicts does the author introduce before the climax? What is the **climax** of the story? What happens after the climax--how are the conflicts resolved?
5. Identify the **protagonist** (the “main character,” usually from whose point of view the story is told) and the **primary antagonist**. What is the nature of the conflict between them?
6. Identify the various **conflicts** -- **internal** and **external**. Which ones are the most important?
7. Discuss to what degree those **conflicts** are resolved. Fully? Partially? What stands in the way of resolving them completely?
8. Look at **writing style**. Does the author do anything unique? For instance, is there any intentional repetition? Unusual sentence structure? More dialogue than you’d expect? Other? Why do you think the author uses these unexpected “devices”? What do they add to the story?
9. Try to determine the **theme**. For instance, what ideas or lessons does the author convey about the subject of the story? (I.e., if the subject of the story is “love,” what idea does the author want to teach the audience about love? That it is powerful to conquer all obstacles? That it isn’t powerful enough to conquer all obstacles? That it often inflicts great pain? Etc.) What does the author want you to realize or think about as a result of reading the story? Why do you think the author wrote the story?

Communication Skills II

Assistant Professor Sherri L. VandenAkker

HANDY-DANDY GUIDE TO READING AND WRITING NARRATIVES (STORIES)

1. Look at the **title** of the story. (If the story is well-done, the title will be important.) Why do you think the author used this title?
2. Try to determine the **subject** or **topic** of the story. In a word or phrase, what is the story “about”? (Death? Loss? Aging? Love? Learning a hard lesson?)
3. Look at the **setting** of the story. Where and when is it set? Why are the place and time important? Look at the objects, sounds, and other details on the scene. Why are they important? Are there any objects used **symbolically** in the piece, to convey ideas?
4. Look at the **plot** structure. What happens in the story? How does the author build **suspense**? What conflicts does the author introduce before the climax? What is the **climax** of the story? What happens after the climax--how are the conflicts resolved?
5. Identify the **protagonist** (the “main character,” usually from whose point of view the story is told) and the **primary antagonist**. What is the nature of the conflict between them?
6. Identify the various **conflicts -- internal and external**. Which ones are the most important?
7. Discuss to what degree those **conflicts** are resolved. Fully? Partially? What stands in the way of resolving them completely?
8. Look at **writing style**. Does the author do anything unique? For instance, is there any intentional repetition? Unusual sentence structure? More dialogue than you’d expect? Other? Why do you think the author uses these unexpected “devices”? What do they add to the story?
9. Try to determine the **theme**. For instance, what ideas or lessons does the author convey about the subject of the story? (I.e., if the subject of the story is “love,” what idea does the author want to teach the audience about love? That it is powerful to conquer all obstacles? That it isn’t powerful enough to conquer all obstacles? That it often inflicts

great pain? Etc.) What does the author want you to realize or think about as a result of reading the story? Why do you think the author wrote the story?