Writing a Short Story

Find a Story Idea

A personal experience from which you learned a lesson about life
A fictional event from the history of science
A real happening that you observed or heard about

On Prenote: Short stories are works of fiction.

Character

Write a conflict and its source

Conflict is the struggle between the hero and the forces which try to stop him or her.

The Resolution

The ending of the story

The conflict builds through a series of events, culminating in the


decision and the consequences of the decision.

Characters

A young man

Theme

A sense of adventure

Supporting characters are developed in proportion to their importance.

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Elements of Literature

Putting the Scene

Setting

Why do we need a setting?

The setting is the time and place in which the story occurs. It provides the environment for the characters and events of the story. The setting helps to create the mood and atmosphere of the story.

Time of Story

The time of the story is important because it can affect the actions and decisions of the characters. For example, if the story is set in the Renaissance, the characters would have different customs and beliefs than if the story were set in the Middle Ages.

Place of Story

The place of the story is also important because it can affect the actions and decisions of the characters. For example, if the story is set in a desert, the characters would have to adapt to the harsh environment.

Setting the Scene

Practicing

How Is Setting Created?

The setting of a story can be created through the use of imagery—descriptive language that paints a picture of the setting. This can be done through the use of sensory details—sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. For example, if a character is in a dark, smoky room, the reader can imagine the smoke in their nostrils and the darkness surrounding them.

Example

The room was dark and musty, with the scent of old paint and damp earth filling my nostrils. I could hear the creaking of a door in the distance and the sound of someone's footsteps growing louder.

Reading Check

What is the setting of the following sentence?

The room was dark and musty, with the scent of old paint and damp earth filling my nostrils. I could hear the creaking of a door in the distance and the sound of someone's footsteps growing louder.

Answer

The setting is a dark, smoky room with the scent of old paint and damp earth.

Setting the Scene

Putting the Scene

Elements of Literature

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Characters

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Putting the Scene

Literal Elements
Before You Read

Dog Star

Make the Connection
Quickwrite
Have you ever had a special relationship with an animal? Why do people love their pets so much? Jot down qualities that can make an animal a best friend.

Literary Focus
Flashback: Time Past, Time Present
It's impossible to turn back time. In your imagination, though, you can easily jump from the present to the past. When this jumping back happens in a story or movie, it's called a flashback, a scene that interrupts the present action of the plot to show what took place before.

One reason writers use flashbacks is to explain what led up to the present moment in a story. Flashbacks can also show the emotional impact of memories or past events. They can help writers create suspense, surprise, or mystery as well. As you read "Dog Star," think about Arthur C. Clarke's reasons for choosing to tell his story with a flashback.

Reading Skills
Chronological Order
Most stories follow chronological order—relating a series of events in time order, from start to finish. In "Dog Star," however, the writer interrupts the present time with a long flashback. To help you organize the events of this story, consider the following questions:
- The narrative begins in the present. At what moment does the narrative shift to the past?
- At what point does the narrator return to the present?
- How much time has passed between the final events in the flashback and the present moment in the story?

Background
Astronomers study space through powerful telescopes in observatories. The narrator of this story (published in 1962) is an astronomer. His dog, Laika, is named after the first animal sent into space—in 1957 aboard Sputnik II, a Russian satellite. The Dog Star, also known as Sirius, is the brightest star in the sky, located in the constellation Canis Major.

Vocabulary Development

desolating (des′ə-lāt′ing) v. used as adj.: producing a feeling of loneliness and sadness.

astronomers (ə-strə-nə-mərs) n.: scientists who study the stars and planets.

stellar (stel′ər) adj.: of or like a star.

luminous (lōo′ma-nəs) adj.: shining; glowing.

misanthropic (mis′ən-thrāp′ik) adj.: disliking other human beings.

terrestrial (tə-rēs′trē-al) adj.: earthly; of this world.

default (dē-fōlt′) n.: failure to do something.

labyrinthine (lab′ə-rin′thi-n) adj.: like a maze; complicated.

Collection 1: Plot and Setting • Generating Research Questions