

# Interpreting Short Stories: Question List

When studying any kind of fiction, ask yourself questions about the narrative to help improve your understanding. The Short Story Question List that follows is a good place to start.

## Plot

1. What is the narrative hook that the author uses at the beginning to interest the reader in the story?
2. What happens at the **literal** level?
3. What is the central **conflict**? Is it an internal or external conflict?
4. Why does the conflict occur?
5. How does the end of the story relate to the beginning?

## Theme

1. What larger meaning is suggested by the way the conflict is resolved?
2. What does the larger meaning imply for you and me and humankind everywhere?

## Characters

1. Who are the central characters?
2. Why does each **character** act as she or he does?
3. Do any of the characters change as a result of their experiences? If so, how? If not, why not?

## Setting

1. What is the **setting** (location and time)?
2. Does the setting contribute to the conflict, **tone**, or **theme**? If so, how?

## Point of View

1. What is the **point of view** (**omniscient, limited omniscient, first person, objective**)?
2. How does the point of view affect the reader's understanding of the events or theme?

## Tone

1. What is the author's **tone**, or the attitude toward the subject matter?
2. How does the tone affect the reader's understanding of, and attitude towards, the events or theme?

## Style

1. How would you describe the author's **voice**?
2. Is the **diction** consistent?
3. If the diction varies, what is the effect?
4. Does the author use any particular literary techniques or devices? If so, what are they?
5. How do the literary techniques or devices used affect the reader's understanding of, and reaction to, the story?

## Symbols

1. Does the story, including the title, make use of symbols? If so, what are they?

## Influences

1. Are there any apparent personal, literary, historical, or cultural influences in the story? If so, what are they?
2. How do these influences affect the reader's understanding of, and reaction to, the story?

Asking yourself questions about these key elements will help you understand the story further—from a literary perspective. If you are not sure about what is meant by some of the terms in these questions, they will be defined in more detail in subsequent lessons.