

The Main Elements of a Novel

Setting

Place – This is the geographical location of the story. Since novels are lengthy, the story may move from one place to another. When asked to describe the setting, you may give the general geographical location (e.g., in a novel which takes place in numerous locations around Italy, you may mention only the country) or you may describe several specific locations.

Time - First, this refers to the period of history, if the story is set in the past. If the story could happen now or at some recent unspecified time, we say that it is "contemporary." If it is a science fiction story, it may be set in the future. When describing setting, be as specific as the author is. Novels usually span (take place over) a much longer period of time than short stories, so you may need to say that a novel's setting in time is from 1937 to 1956. When describing the setting of a portion of the novel, you may be able to specify the season, month, and even time of day.

Climate/Weather - This is an aspect of setting which is often forgotten, but it can be important to the novel. If the story begins in the midst of a hurricane, it is significant to the story.

Lifestyle/Social - This refers to the daily life of the characters. If a story takes place in a particular historical period, the lifestyle of the characters (e.g., whether they are poor farmers or residents of the court) is part of the setting.

Atmosphere - The mood or feeling of the story, the emotional quality that the story gives to the reader. This is usually evoked by the setting and, like the setting, may change throughout the novel. You may say that a novel opens with a mysterious atmosphere, a gloomy atmosphere, a light, carefree atmosphere, etc.

Characters - the people, animals, robots, etc., who take part in the action of the story.

Protagonist - the leading character, hero, or heroine of a drama or other literary work. Often this character grows or changes over the course of the novel.

Antagonist – the adversary of the protagonist of a drama or other literary work. A person who is opposed to or struggles against, or completes with the main character.

Secondary Characters – There are two types: minor and supporting. **Minor characters** are there for the purpose of making the story more interesting and relatable to the reader. **Supporting characters** are essential to the plot and play a direct role and have a heavy impact on the storyline.

Conflict - the struggle between opposing forces in the story. Conflict provides interest and suspense. There are various types of conflict, which can usually be categorized as one of the following:

Man versus man - A situation in which two characters have opposing desires or interests. This is an external conflict.

Man versus nature - In this type of conflict, a character is tormented by natural forces such as storms or animals. This is external conflict.

Man versus technology - In this type of conflict, a character is often completing with or struggling with technology or progress.

Man versus supernatural - In this type of conflict, a character is "fighting" against the supernatural. Often this type of conflict is found in science fiction novels and involves characters with powers that exceed human abilities.

Man versus himself - This conflict develops from a protagonist's inner struggles, and may depend on a character trying to decide between good and evil or overcome self-doubts. This is external or internal conflict.

Plot - The storyline; the sequence of events in a story.

5 main parts: introduction, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution or conclusion.

Theme - the central idea in the story or novel. It can usually be expressed in a short statement about human nature, life, or the universe.

The following is a summary of these major elements:

- Setting is the "**where**" and "**when**" of the story or novel.
- Characters are the "**who**."
- Conflict is the "**what**." (What is the problem?)
- Plot is the "**how**." (How is the conflict developed and resolved?)
- Theme is the "**why**." (The author's message and one of the reasons why the author wrote the story or novel.)