

Short Fiction III
AP English Literature ■ Unit 7

AP English Literature

Short Fiction III

What we will cover

1

Characters Who Change or Remain Unchanged

2

Nuances in Characters' Relationships

3

The Function of Setting in a Narrative

4

The Relationship Between Character and Setting

5

How Plot Orders Events

6

The Function of a Sequence of Events

1

Characters Who Change or Remain Unchanged

Short Fiction III

Characters Who Change or Remain Unchanged

Where a change comes from, and how fast it arrives

■ Often the change in a character emerges directly from a conflict of values represented in the narrative.

■ Changes in a character's circumstances may lead to changes in that character.

■ Characters can change gradually, but they can also change suddenly 骤然.

■ An epiphany 顿悟 may affect the plot by causing a character to act on a sudden realisation.

Short Fiction III

Characters Who Change or Remain Unchanged

Where a change comes from, and how fast it arrives, in detail

Two independent questions about any change in a character

GRADUAL

SUDDEN

from a CONFLICT OF VALUES

a value is slowly displaced by a competing one (the reader watches the balance tip)

an EPIPHANY: the conflict resolves in one moment, examinable only if the character ACTS on it

from CHANGED CIRCUMSTANCES

new circumstances erode an old position (the reader watches adaptation)

a shock in circumstances forces an immediate change (watch whether the change survives the shock)

A change with no SOURCE is assertion. A change with no CONSEQUENCE in the plot is decoration.

An epiphany 顿悟 may affect the plot by causing a character to act on a sudden realisation.

Short Fiction III

Characters Who Change or Remain Unchanged

Characters Who Change or Remain Unchanged

Unit 7 is the last short-fiction unit, and it sharpens two things: how change happens in a character, and pacing as a deliberate manipulation of time.

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■ Changes in a character's circumstances may lead to changes in that character.

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Characters Who Change or Remain Unchanged, continued

The two axes are independent, which is what makes them useful.

A change caused by a conflict of values can arrive gradually or in an instant, and an epiphany is only examinable when the character **acts** on it – a realisation that changes nothing has not affected the plot.

2

Nuances in Characters' Relationships

Nuances in Characters' Relationships

The group-as-character idea is worth taking literally. A town, a family, an institution can hold values, exert pressure, and oppose a protagonist exactly as an individual antagonist would, and reading it that way often unlocks a story with no obvious opponent.

- **A group or force can function as a character** 群体作为人物.
- Readers should examine **how a character interacts with other characters**.
- **The relationship between a character and a group – including their inclusion in or exclusion from it – is significant.**

Measuring the same thing twice

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Measuring the same thing twice, in detail

WHAT TO WATCH	EARLY IN THE TEXT	LATER
who speaks first	one of them always begins	the initiative has moved, or nobody begins
how they are addressed	a name, a title, an endearment	the same person, named differently
what is said aloud	the disagreement is spoken	it is understood and not mentioned
physical distance	where each is placed in a room	the same room, arranged differently

Readers should examine **how a character interacts with other characters**.

3

The Function of Setting in a Narrative

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Two settings placed against each other are rarely just two places. They usually carry the competing value systems the plot is testing.

- When a setting changes, it may suggest other movements, changes, or shifts in the narrative.
- Settings may be contrasted to establish a conflict of values or ideas associated with them.

4

The Relationship Between Character and Setting

The Relationship Between Character and Setting

- The way characters interact with their surroundings provides insights about them.
- The way characters behave in or describe their surroundings reveals an attitude toward those surroundings.

5

How Plot Orders Events

6

The Function of a Sequence of Events

The Function of a Sequence of Events

Pacing is measurable and therefore very usable as evidence.

Count the pages a text gives to an afternoon and to the following decade, and the disproportion is a claim about what mattered.

Pacing is the manipulation of time

Definition	Pacing 节奏 is the manipulation of time in a text – not simply how fast the story feels.
Length given	How many pages an event receives. Four pages for one conversation is an argument about its importance.
Compression	Long stretches summarised in a clause: years can pass in half a sentence.
Interruption	Flashback, digression and withheld information break chronology and delay what the reader is allowed to know.

Measure pacing before interpreting it: name the disproportion first, then say what it does to the reader.

Pacing, reliability, and how a simile works

pacing 节奏	the manipulation of time in a text
what contributes to it	the length given to an event, summary against scene, and the space between events
why it matters	narrative pacing may evoke an emotional reaction through the order in which information is revealed
reliability	some narrators provide details and information that others do not or cannot provide
a simile's function	relies on the objects chosen as much as on the traits transferred between them
the analysis	name the ground – the shared quality – and then what else the comparison drags in with it

"The author uses a simile" is spotting. Saying *which traits transfer, and which do not*, is the commentary that earns the mark.

7

How a Narrator's Reliability Affects a Narrative

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Compare narrators where a text offers more than one.

What one can say and another cannot is the clearest possible evidence of how the text is constructed.

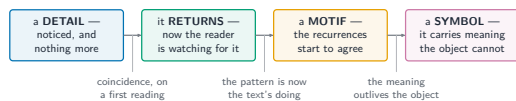
8

The Function of a Symbol

The Function of a Symbol

- A **setting** may become **symbolic** when it is associated with abstractions – emotions, ideas, times of life.
- Over time, some settings have **developed associations** so strong that they almost universally symbolise something.

Repetition builds a symbol



Nothing is a symbol on its **first** appearance. Quote the recurrences, and the claim is evidenced by the structure of the text itself

9 The Function of an Image or Imagery

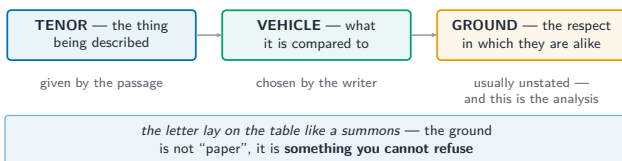
The Function of an Image or Imagery

A **motif** 母题 is a **unified pattern of recurring objects or images** used to emphasise a significant idea.

It accumulates: each recurrence adds to what the pattern means, which is why noting the *first* and *last* appearance is usually more productive than listing them all.

10 The Function of a Simile

Name the ground



Name the **ground**. A vehicle carries many possible likenesses, and saying which one is operating is the whole of the commentary

11 The Function of Personification

The Function of Personification

The CED adds the reverse move here:
assigning the qualities of a nonhuman object, entity, or idea to a person or character 反向拟人 – describing a person as mechanical, as weather, as an animal.

A character described in the vocabulary of machinery has been characterised, and by someone.

12

Developing a Literary Thesis, Commentary, and Evidence

Developing a Literary Thesis, Commentary, and Evidence

- Unchanged: a thesis expresses an **interpretation** requiring textual defence.
- New: **more sophisticated literary arguments may explain the significance or relevance of an interpretation** 阐释的意义 – why this reading matters, not only that it is supportable. This is the sophistication point stated directly.
- New: **textual evidence may require revision to an interpretation** if the evidence does not support it.

Worked example – writing about pacing

A prose fiction prompt asks how the author's use of pacing conveys the significance of an event.

- **Weak:** “The story slows down at the important part.”
- **Scoring:** “The story gives four pages to a conversation lasting minutes and a single sentence to the three years that follow. The disproportion refuses the reader the consolation of aftermath: we are held in the moment of the decision and denied any account of whether it was right, so the story's subject becomes the irreversibility of the choice.”

Pacing **measured**, then interpreted – and the interpretation says what the reader is *denied*, which is where significance usually lives.

Exam tips

- A change needs a **source** (a conflict of values, or changed circumstances) and a **consequence** in the plot.
- An **epiphany** is examinable when the character **acts** on it. A realisation that changes nothing is decoration.
- **A group can function as a character.** Try it on any story with no obvious antagonist.
- **Two contrasted settings** usually carry the competing values the plot is testing.
- **Pacing is measurable.** Count what gets space and what gets a clause; the disproportion is a claim.
- For a **motif**, compare the **first** and **last** appearance rather than listing every one.

13

Recap

Unit 7 – key takeaways

1 Change

needs a source and a consequence
in the plot

2 Epiphany

examinable when the character
acts on it

3 Group

can function as a character

4 Pacing

count what gets space;
disproportion is a claim

Check yourself

- 1 A change needs what two things?
- 2 When is an epiphany examinable?
- 3 What can a group function as?
- 4 How is pacing measurable?

Answers: source and consequence ▪ when the character acts on it ▪ a character ▪ space vs a clause