

Fiction is narrative writing that springs from a writer's imagination, though it may be based on actual events and real people. Although one purpose of fiction is to entertain, it can also provide important insights into human nature. The two major types of fiction are **short stories**, brief works that can usually be read in a sitting, and **novels**, longer and generally more complex narratives. Both short stories and novels share the elements of **plot**, **character**, **setting**, **theme**, and **point of view**. Use the following passages from Saki's "The Interlopers" to learn more about the elements of fiction.

Plot

The word **plot** refers to the chain of related events that take place in a story. In most plots, events are set in motion by **conflicts**—struggles between or within characters. Most plots include the following stages:

Element	Definition
exposition	provides needed background information
rising action	the part of the plot in which the conflict intensifies
climax	the turning point of the action, when the reader's interest is at its highest point
falling action or dénouement	the action after the climax, in which the conflict is often resolved

YOUR TURN What conflict is introduced in the passage at the right?

Character

Characters are the individuals, real or imaginary, who take part in the action of stories. The characters who are at the center of a story's action are called **main characters**; less important ones are **minor characters**.

Characters that grow or change as the plot unfolds are called **dynamic characters**, while **static characters** remain unchanged. The development of characters in fiction is known as **characterization**. There are four basic methods of characterization: physical description; a character's own speech, thoughts, feelings, and actions; the speech, thoughts, feelings, and actions of other characters; and a narrator's comments.

YOUR TURN In this passage, what techniques of characterization has Saki used?

PLOT

A famous lawsuit, in the days of his grandfather, had wrested it [a woodland] from the illegal possession of a neighboring family of petty landowners; the dispossessed party had never acquiesced in the judgment of the Courts, and a long series of poaching affrays and similar scandals had embittered the relationships between the families for three generations.

CHARACTER

Each had a rifle in his hand, each had hate in his heart and murder uppermost in his mind. The chance had come to give full play to the passions of a lifetime. But a man who has been brought up under the code of a restraining civilization cannot easily nerve himself to shoot down his neighbor in cold blood.