**The Seven Key Elements of Fiction:**

**1.  CHARACTER**

There are two meanings for the word character:
1) The person in a work of fiction.
2) The characteristics of a person.

***Persons in a work of fiction*** -***Antagonist and Protagonist***

o        One character is clearly central to a story with all major events having some connection to this character;

o        She/he is the PROTAGONIST.

o        The character in opposition to the main character is called the ANTAGONIST.

***The Characteristics of a Person***
In order for a story to seem real to the reader, its characters must seem real.  Characterization is the information the author gives the reader about the characters themselves.  The author may reveal a character in several ways:
a)  his/her physical appearance
b)  what he/she says, thinks, feels and dreams
c)  what he/she does or does not do
d)  what others say about him/her and how others react to him/her

Characters are convincing if they are:  consistent, motivated and life-like (resemble real people)

***Characters are...***
1.  **Individual** - round, many sided and complex personalities.
2.  **Developing** - dynamic, many sided personalities that change (for better or worse) by the end of the story.
3.  **Static** – Stereotypes; they have one or two characteristics that never change and are often over-emphasized.

**2.  THEME**

What exactly is this elusive thing called theme?

The theme of a fable is its moral.  The theme of a parable is its teaching.  The theme of a piece of fiction is its view about life and how people behave.

In fiction, the theme is not intended to teach or preach.  In fact, it is not presented directly at all.  You extract it from the characters, action and setting that make up the story.  In other words, you must figure out the theme yourself.

The writer's task is to communicate on a common ground with the reader.  Although the particulars of your experience may be different from the details of the story, the general underlying truths behind the story may be just the connection that both you and the writer are seeking.

**Here are some ways to uncover the theme in a story**:

o        Check out the title.  Sometimes it tells you a lot about the theme.

o        Notice repeating patterns and symbols.  Sometimes these lead you to the theme.

o        What allusions are made throughout the story?

o        What are the details and particulars in the story?  What greater meaning may they have?

Remember that theme, plot and structure are inseparable, all helping to inform and reflect back on each other.  Also, be aware that a theme we determine from a story never completely explains the story.  It is simply one of the elements that make up the whole.

**3.  PLOT**

A plot is a causal sequence of events, the "why" for the things that happen in the story.  The plot draws the reader into the characters’ lives and helps the reader understand the choices that the characters make.

A plot's structure is the way in which the story elements are arranged. Writers vary structure depending on the needs of the story.  For example, in a mystery, the author will withhold plot exposition until later in the story.

**What Goes into a Plot?**

Narrative tradition calls for developing stories with particular pieces -plot elements - in place.

1. **Exposition** is the information needed to understand a story.
2. **Complication** is the catalyst that begins the major conflict.
3. **Climax** is the turning point in the story that occurs when characters try to resolve the complication.
4. **Resolution** is the set of events that bring the story to a close.

It's not always a straight line from the beginning to the end of story.  Sometimes, there is a shifting of time and this is the way we learn what happened and why; it keeps us interested in the story.  But, good stories always have all the plot elements in them.

**4.  POINT OF VIEW**

Remember, someone is always between the reader and the action of the story.  That someone is telling the story from his or her own point of view.  This angle of vision, the point of view from which the people, events and details of a story are viewed, is important to consider when reading a story.

**Types of Point of View:**

***Objective Point of View***
With the objective point of view, the writer tells what happens without stating more than can be inferred from the story's action and dialogue.  The narrator never discloses anything about what the characters think or feel, remaining a detached observer.

***Third Person Point of View***
Here the narrator does not participate in the action of the story as one of the characters, but lets us know exactly how the characters feel. We learn about the characters through this outside voice.

***First Person Point of View***In the first person point of view, the narrator does participate in the action of the story.  When reading stories in the first person, we need to realize that what the narrator is recounting might not be the objective truth.  We should question the trustworthiness of the accounting.

***Omniscient and Limited Omniscient Points of View***
A narrator who knows everything about all the characters is all knowing, or omniscient.

A narrator whose knowledge is limited to one character, either major or minor, has a limited omniscient point of view.

**5.  SETTING**

Writers describe the world they know.  Sights, sounds, colors and textures are all vividly painted in words as an artist paints images on canvas.  A writer imagines a story to be happening in a place that is rooted in his or her mind.  The location of a story's actions, along with the time in which it occurs, is the setting.

Setting is created by language.  How many or how few details we learn is up to the author.  Many authors leave a lot of these details up to the reader's imagination.

Some or all of these aspects of setting should be considered when examining a story:

a)  **place** - geographical location.  Where is the action of the story taking place?
b)  **time** - When is the story taking place? (historical period, time of day, year, etc.)
c)  **weather conditions** - Is it rainy, sunny, stormy, etc?
d)  **social conditions** - What is the daily life of the characters like? Does the story contain local colour (writing that focuses on the speech, dress, mannerisms, customs, etc. of a particular place)?
e)  **mood or atmosphere** - What feeling is created at the beginning of the story?  Is it bright and cheerful or dark and frightening?

**6.  CONFLICT**

Conflict is the essence of fiction.  It creates plot.  The conflicts we encounter can usually be identified as one of four kinds.

Human versus Human
Conflict that pits one person against another.

Human versus Nature
This involves a run-in with the forces of nature.  On the one hand, it expresses the insignificance of a single human life in the cosmic scheme of things.  On the other hand, it tests the limits of a person’s strength and will to live.

Human versus Society
The values and customs by which everyone else lives are being challenged.  The character may come to an untimely end as a result of his or her own convictions.  The character may, on the other hand, bring others around to a sympathetic point of view, or it may be decided that society was right after all.

Human versus Self
Internal conflict.  Not all conflict involves other people.  Sometimes people are their own worst enemies.  An internal conflict is a good test of a character’s values.  Does he/she give in to temptation or rise above it?  Does he/she demand the most from him/herself or settle for something less?  Does he/she even bother to struggle?  The internal conflicts of a character and how they are resolved are good clues to the character’s inner strength.

Often, more than one kind of conflict is taking place at the same time. In every case, however, the existence of conflict enhances the reader’s understanding of a character and creates the suspense and interest that make you want to continue reading.

**7.  TONE**

In [literature](http://www.blurtit.com/q304642.html), tone is the emotional colouring or the emotional meaning of the work and provides an extremely important contribution to the full meaning.  In spoken language, it is indicated by the inflection of the speaker's voice. The emotional meaning of a statement may vary widely according to the tone of voice with which it is uttered; the tone may be ecstatic, incredulous, despairing, resigned, etc.

In poetry, we cannot really understand a poem unless we have accurately sensed whether the attitude it manifests is playful or solemn, mocking or reverent, calm or excited.  In spoken language, the speaker's voice can guide us to the tone.  But, the correct determination of tone in literature is a much more delicate matter.  Elements of tone include diction, or word choice; syntax, the grammatical arrangement of words in a text for effect; imagery, or vivid appeals to the senses; details, facts that are included or omitted.  According to Harry Shaw (*Dictionary of Literary Terms*), tone can be determined by three points:

1.  An author's attitude or focus point toward his/her subject.  In this concern, the tone can be realistic, somber, depressing, romantic, adventurous, etc.
2.  The devices used to create the mood and atmosphere of a [literary work](http://www.blurtit.com/q304642.html).  In this sense, the tone consists of alliteration, assonance, consonance, diction, imagery, metre, theme, symbolism, irony, etc.
3.  The musical quality in language.  Here, the tone depends upon the sounds of words, their arrangement and their sequence.