Narrative Elements

Setting: The time and location in which a story takes place is called the setting.
   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)

Atmosphere: the atmosphere is the feeling surrounding the setting. The light, darkness, weather, natural surroundings will affect the mood or feeling in a story.

Plot: the plot is how the author arranges events to develop his basic idea: it is the sequence of events in a story or play. The plot is a planned, logical series of events having a beginning, middle, and end. There are five essential parts of plot:
   • Exposition - The beginning of the story where the characters and the setting is revealed.
   • Inciting Incident-the event that starts the rising action. The main conflict of the story is introduced.
   • Rising Action - This is where the events in the story become complicated.
   • Climax - the protagonist makes a decision or takes an action which resolves the main conflict.
   • Falling Action/Denouement – fallout from the climax or untangling of events in the story
   • Resolution - This is the final outcome.

Conflict: the conflict is essential to plot. Without conflict there is no plot. It is the opposition of forces which ties one incident to another and makes the plot move.

   There are four kinds of conflict:
   1. Man vs. Man (physical) - The leading character struggles with his physical strength against other men, forces of nature, or animals.
   2. Man vs. Circumstances (classical) - The leading character struggles against fate, or the circumstances of life facing him/her.
   3. Man vs. Society (social) - The leading character struggles against ideas, practices, or customs of other people.
   4. Man vs. Himself/Herself (psychological) - The leading character struggles with himself/herself; with his/her own soul, ideas of right or wrong, physical limitations, choices, etc.

Character: There are two meanings for the word character:
1. The person in a work of fiction.
2. The characteristics or character traits of a person. Character traits refer to personality, not physical appearance.

Persons in a work of fiction - Antagonist and Protagonist
   • Short stories use few characters. One character is clearly central to the story with all major events having some importance to this character - he/she is the PROTAGONIST. The ANTAGONIST is the character who opposes the main character.

The Characteristics of a Person
   • In order for a story to seem real to the reader its characters must seem real. The author may reveal a character in several ways:
     1. his/her physical appearance (direct characterization)
     2. what he/she says, thinks, feels and dreams (direct characterization)
     3. what he/she does or does not do (direct characterization)
     4. what others say about him/her and how others react to him/her (indirect characterization)
Point of view: Point of view, or pov. is defined as the perspective from which the story is told.

The person telling the story is the narrator.

1. First Person - The story is told by the protagonist (using pronouns I, me, we, etc). The reader sees the story through this person's eyes as he/she experiences it and only knows what he/she knows or feels.

2. Third person omniscient- The author can narrate the story using more than one point of view. He can move from character to character revealing the thinking of each.

3. Third person limited: the person telling the story is not part of the action. "He" or "she" presents the protagonist's perspective from "outside" the narrative.

Other Notes about Character:
- Flat characters are not well-developed. The reader knows very little.
- Round characters are very well-developed. The reader knows many character traits.
- Static characters do not change throughout the plot of the story.
- Dynamic characters do change throughout the plot of the story, usually driven by the conflict-resolution.

Theme: The theme in a piece of fiction is its controlling idea or its central insight. It is the author's underlying meaning or main idea that he is trying to convey.

Some examples:
- Things are not always as they appear to be.
- Love cannot exist without trust
- Loss can teach important lessons

Keep in mind… You may see topics or big ideas referred to as theme. For the purpose of this and all future English courses, theme truly refers to a thematic statement similar to the ones you see above.