

Short Fiction III

AP English Literature and Composition

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.

- 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**.

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.

A change with no source is assertion; a change with no consequence in the plot is decoration

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.

Nuances in Characters' Relationships

- A group or force can function as a character.
- 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.

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.

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

A shift is shown by **the same thing measured twice**. Two quotations of the same kind, far apart, are worth more than any adjective

The Function of Setting in a Narrative

- 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.

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

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.

How Plot Orders Events

Pacing 节奏 is the **manipulation of time in a text**, and several factors contribute to it - the length given to an event, the compression of long periods, the interruption of chronology.

The Function of a Sequence of Events

Narrative pacing may evoke an emotional reaction in readers by the order in which information is revealed.

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.

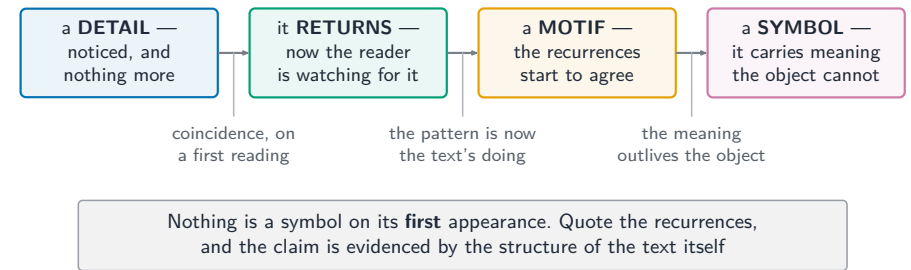
How a Narrator's Reliability Affects a Narrative

Some narrators or speakers may provide details and information that others do not or cannot provide.

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.

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.



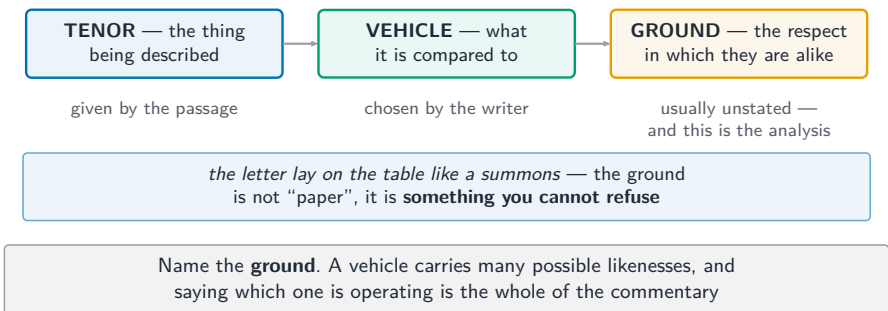
The Function of an Image or Imagery

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

A motif differs from a symbol in that it need not stand for one thing. 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.

The Function of a Simile

The function of a simile relies on the selection of the objects being compared as well as the traits transferred. Both halves are choices, and both can be analysed.



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** - describing a person as mechanical, as weather, as an animal.

This is worth watching for, because it usually indicates a judgement. A character described in the vocabulary of machinery has been characterised, and by someone.

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** - 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 (a real AP exam task). A prose fiction prompt asks how the author’s use of pacing conveys the significance of an event. A weak answer: *“The story slows down at the important part.”* A scoring answer measures and interprets: *“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 then denied any account of whether it was right, so the story’s subject becomes the irreversibility of the choice rather than its consequences.”* Pacing measured, and its effect on what the reader is allowed to know.

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.