

Some Useful Terms for Thinking about Craft

Beginnings

- Establish expectations about the direction of the piece
- Build the initial contract with the reader, a contract which will be fulfilled by the end of the piece
- Connect with how the piece will end

Form/Structure/Shape

- Can take many forms—but is always about meaning, and furthers the story
- Satisfies the reader's desire for pattern, symmetry, and closure

Point of View (POV)

- Can be detached or intimate, unbiased or opinionated
- Is the point or spot on which the narrator is standing in the text—in place as well as time

Conflict

- Helps generate and sustain tension
- Can be within a character or outside a character
- Can be seen as the question that propels a piece forward

Detail

- Draws on all five senses
- Should be selective and representative
- Should be in service to the story
- Is often filtered through a narrator's POV

Description

- Is integral to a narrative, not incidental to it
- Is brought to life through active verbs
- Often uses sensory details

Showing (scene, setting, description, dialog)

- Imparts a sense of immediacy
- Makes use of descriptive detail, dialog, and/or action
- Doesn't tell the reader that it's cold outside, but has the character put on a coat
- Doesn't tell the reader that something shocking has happened, but shows a character going silent, or crying out, or swearing, etc.

Telling (summary, exposition, commentary, interpretation)

- Is enhanced by sensory details, active verbs, fresh language, dialog, figurative language, and the rhythms of well-framed sentences and paragraphs
- Benefits from some withholding—so the reader has to interpret some of the telling
- Works well when it moves in and out of showing
- Allows the narrator to “wheel and dive” across ideas thematic to the piece

Setting

- Supports the unfolding action
- Provides a physical reality
- Provides information and evokes emotion
- Is intimately related to plot and theme

Character

- Can be revealed through actions, speech, appearance, and thoughts
- Can be illuminated by a character’s actions
- Can be revealed through comments by the narrator
- Is often cumulative

Dialog

- Furthers the narrative and advances plot, character, and/or theme
- Reveals character through diction and speech rhythms
- Is typically shorter than “real” conversation, with fewer “ums” and “ahs”

Epiphany

- Is the discovery of some truth at the heart of the narrative
- May come to the character, the reader, or both
- May not necessarily be an “ah-hah” moment; can be gradual, tenuous, and incomplete

Ending

- Should be earned, so it keeps the contract made or implied at the beginning
- Is effective when both unexpected and yet inevitable; does not need to resolve everything