

## HOW TO READ A FICTIONAL NARRATIVE

In order to understand and be affected by a story, you should -

Answer the following questions about character:

- Who is the protagonist?
- What is his/her situation? (who, what, where, when and why?)
- Is the protagonist's main struggle external or internal?
- What are all the obstacles in the protagonist's way?
- What are the protagonist's personality traits?
  - Proclivities (talents and tendencies)
  - Idiosyncrasies (unusual quirks)
  - Habits or addictions (smoking, drinking, gambling, sex, etc...)
  - Wounds
  - Values
  - Desires
- What are the personality traits of the other characters, and how do they play out in contrast?
- What are the protagonist's physical traits?
  - Age
  - Gender
  - Race
  - Size
  - Gait – fast, slow, quirky?
  - Manner of speech –
    - Diction
    - Syntax
    - Meter (rhythm)
    - Tone (attitude)
    - Favorite catchphrase
- What are the physical traits of the other characters, beginning with the antagonist?
- How do the traits of the characters affect their choices and hence the plot?
- What would you do differently if you were in the protagonist's shoes?
- Would you rather be in the protagonist's or the antagonist's shoes?

Answer the following questions about plot:

- Where does the set-up end and the rising action begin?
- Is there dramatic irony? (when the audience knows something the characters don't know)
- Is there situational irony? (when one of the characters takes a surprising turn, for example, when he/she becomes something he/she said or thought he/she would never become)
- What and where are all the surprising plot twists and turns?
- What is the climax of the story?
- How would you rewrite the resolution/denouement?

Answer the following questions about setting:

- When and where does this story take place?
- Why do you think the author choose this particular setting?

- How does the setting affect the characters?
- How does the setting affect the plot?
- What would the story be like if it were in another setting?
- How different is this place from where you have been in your lifetime?

Answer the following questions about point of view:

- What is the point of view?
  - First person "I"
  - Second person "You" (rare)
  - Third person objective (no thoughts, only words and actions)
  - Third person limited (the protagonist's thoughts, but no one else's)
  - Third person omniscient (thoughts and feelings of all the characters as though the narrator were a god-like creature who could see inside the minds and hearts of everyone)
- Does the point of view switch, and, if so, why?
- How does the point of view affect the story?
- How would the story be different if it were written from a different point of view?
- Re-write the first or last paragraph to find out.

Answer the following questions about details and imagery:

- How descriptive is the author?
- Does the author use lots of figurative language?
- Does the author paint a vivid picture in your mind, or do you have to do a lot of filling in the blanks?
- Are there symbols or recurring motifs that conjure particular images in your mind?

Answer the following questions about syntax:

- How are the author's sentences?
  - Long and labyrinthine?
  - Short and brusque?
- Are the words in an "unusual" order, and, if so, why?
- How does the author's syntax affect your sensibilities?
  - Do you like the sound of the words?
  - Do you feel intimidated by the length of the sentences?

Answer the following questions about diction:

- Does the author use academic words that you have to look up in a dictionary?
- Does the author use a non-standard vernacular?
- Does the author make up his/her own words?
- How do the words make you feel?

Answer the following questions about tone:

- What is the author's attitude toward the subject matter, the characters, the story or the reader?
  - Sarcastic
  - Frustrated
  - Apathetic
  - Hopeful

- Other
- Which words and sentences in particular work to create that tone?
  - List the denotations and connotations of those words and sentences.
  - Rewrite the text in order to proffer a different tone.

Answer the following questions about theme:

- What is the author's main message (in one sentence)? In other words, what lesson are you the reader meant to learn? This is often the lesson the protagonist learns.
- What are the sub-themes or additional messages or lessons?

Answer the following questions about historical context:

- When in history was this story written, and how is that significant?
- Is the setting (time and place) of authorship different from the setting of the story?
- Would this story be written now, and, if so, how might it be different?
- Why did the author write this story, i.e., what is the author's purpose?

Answer the following questions about how the story relates to your life:

- Do you have anything in common with the protagonist?
- Do you have anything in common with the antagonist?
- Which character(s) are you most like?
- Have you experienced any situations like those mentioned in the story?
- If you were ever in a similar situation to any of the characters in the story, did you behave in much the same way, or did you make different choices and hence experience a different outcome?
- The story has a message, or central theme, which is a lesson. Have you learned this lesson before?
- Does this story make you want to change, in any way, the way you live your life?

Answer the following questions about how the story relates to another text you have read or to a movie:

- Does this text remind you of another text, and, if so, how?
- Does this text remind you of a movie, and, if so, how?

Answer the following questions about how the story relates to the world:

- Are there any crises or conflicts in the world that this story reminds you of?
- Does this story want to make you affect social change in any way?

Write down at least ten newly learned vocabulary words and their definitions.

Draw a picture of the most memorable part of the story.

Draw a storyboard of the entire narrative.

Write one of the scenes in screenplay format.

Write a song to be sung by one or more of the characters.

Divine other creative tasks that help you learn from and enjoy the text.