SECTION

2

PROSE

PROSE

Knowing Your Narrative Elements

INTRODUCTION

Prose comes as a major genre of literature. At Junior High School, you read some short stories and novels from your literature set book, The Cockcrow. You read *Debbi, Sandy and Pepe*; *Tell My Son to Hold on to His Gun*; *Oliver Twist*; *The Girl Who Can* and so on. In this section, you are going to learn about fictional prose forms such as short stories and novels. The focus will be on plot, setting, characters and themes concerning specific texts. As you go through the section on various key narrative elements, you will be encouraged to develop a love for reading for pleasure while appreciating the authors' craft, gaining skills in writing your narrative works and ultimately creating meaningful connections between literature in general, specific texts and life.

At the end of this section, you should be able to:

- Discuss short stories and novels of varied styles for pleasure.
- Make distinctions amongst a range of prose fiction texts.
- Use the knowledge gained to examine how an author creates plot and setting.
- Examine characters and themes, and how they reflect contexts and society.
- Discuss how the elements of language and style enhance meaning and fictional texts.

Key Ideas

- One purpose of reading is reading for pleasure. Novels and short stories help in reading for pleasure.
- Contexts in literature are the information the writer provides that helps the reader to make meaning out of texts. Contexts include social, emotional and geographical.
- Prose is a means by which a writer delivers a story with characters, setting, conflict and plot while prose fiction is a form of writing from a writer's imagination.
- Prose fiction comes in many forms such as epistolary and historical novels.
- Setting, plot, theme, and characters are elements of prose.

Short Stories and Novels of Varied Styles for Pleasure

Purpose of reading

Activity 2.1

Observe the picture below. From the picture, what is your understanding of reading for pleasure?
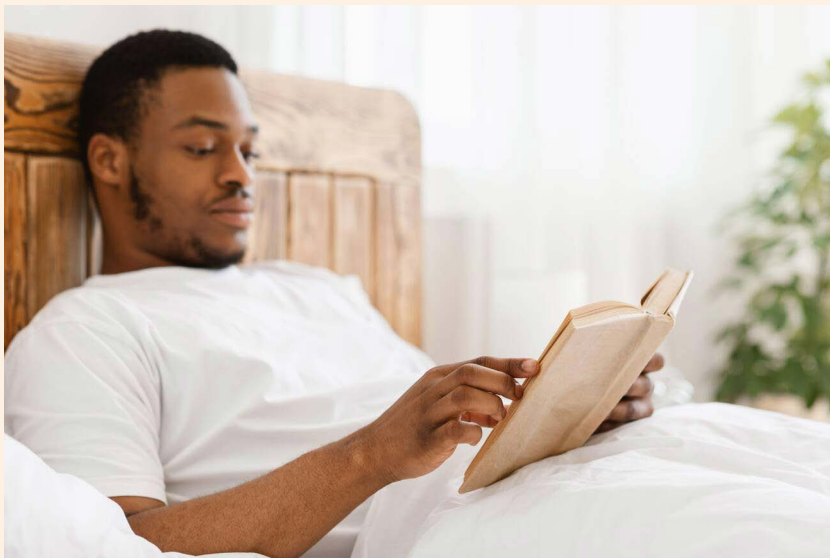
Reading for Pleasure

Reading for pleasure is the kind of reading where readers read at their own free will and independently to gain satisfaction rather than for academic or professional purposes. It allows all of us to experience other worlds and roles in our imagination. This type of reading is driven by personal interest and intrinsic motivation.

Activity 2.2

Identify three things that will guide you towards reading for pleasure. Write your response in the box below.

Strategies for Reading for Pleasure

Here are some practical steps to help you develop the habit of reading for pleasure.

1. *Identify Your Interests*: Explore different genres and subjects to find what excites you. This could be fiction, non-fiction, fantasy, mystery, romance, science fiction, biographies, or any other area of interest.
2. *Create a Reading Environment:* Set up a comfortable, quiet space for reading. This could be a cosy chair, a spot in your garden, or a corner of your home where you can relax without distractions.
3. *Set Aside Time for Reading:* Dedicate a specific time each day or week for reading. It could be before bed, during your commute, or any other time that fits into your schedule.
4. *Visit Libraries and Bookstores:* Regularly visit libraries and bookstores to browse and borrow books. This will give you access to a wide variety of reading materials and keep you engaged and excited about finding new books.
5. *Join a Book Club or Reading Group:* Joining a book club or reading group can provide social interaction and motivation. Discussing books with others can enhance your reading experience and introduce you to new books and perspectives.
6. *Use Technology:* E-readers and audiobooks can make reading more accessible, especially if you have a busy lifestyle. You can read on the go or listen to books during commutes, workouts, or household chores.

Purposes of Reading

1. We read to gain information. Reading helps in acquiring knowledge and information about various subjects and topics.
2. We read to help us understand instructions. Reading is essential for following instructions, whether in manuals, recipes, guidelines, or directions.
3. We read to learn. Reading facilitates learning new skills, concepts, and ideas.
4. We read to enable to us solve problems. Reading can aid in problem-solving by providing solutions, strategies, and different perspectives.
5. We read for pleasure. Reading is done for enjoyment, entertainment, and relaxation.
6. We read to acquire vocabulary. Regular reading exposes individuals to new words and phrases, enhancing their vocabulary.
7. We read to stimulate our imagination. Reading fiction and stories helps in stimulating a reader's imagination and creativity.
8. We read to enhance our focus and concentration. Engaging in reading can improve one's ability to concentrate and focus on tasks.
9. Reading diverse stories and characters can enhance empathy and understanding by exposing readers to different cultures, experiences, and viewpoints.
10. Reading for pleasure keeps the mind engaged and can help improve memory and critical thinking skills.

Context and Reading for Pleasure

Activity 2.3

Observe the picture below carefully. From the picture, what is your understanding of context in literature?

Context in literature refers to information the author provides that helps the reader to take meaning out of a text. This can be for example, social, psychological, or emotional and so on.

Some features of Literary Works that make them interesting to read

The features of literary works that make them interesting to read can vary widely depending on personal preferences, but several common elements tend to engage and captivate readers. Here are some key features:

1.   The title of the text. Examples: Aminata Sow Fall's *Beggars Strike,* Ngugi and Mari's *I Will Marry When I want*

2.   The design of cover of the text. Examples: George Owell's *Animal Farm*

3.   How interesting the blurb is. Examples: Yaw Asare's *Ananse in the Land of Idiots,* Ola Rotimi's *The Gods are not to Blame*

4.   The use of suspense. Examples: Ama Ata Aidoo's, *The Dilemma of a Ghost,* Bessie Head's *Maru*

5.   The use of comic scenes and comic characters. Examples: Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again,* Yaw Asare's *Ananse in the Land of Idiots*

6.   When the subject matter is about a national or social issue. Example, *Famished Road* by Ben Okiri which discusses the Abiku syndrome, Wole Soyinka's, *The Trial of Brother Jero*

7.   The language of the text. Examples: Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Amma Darko's *Faceless*

Distinction Amongst a Variety of Prose Fiction Texts

Activity 2.4

Many consider prose and prose fiction to be the same literary concepts. In a sentence, show clearly the distinction between prose and prose fiction. Write your response in the box below.

Prose and Prose Fiction

Prose is how a writer has selected to fulfil his / her basic promise to a reader to deliver a story with characters, setting, conflict and a plot. The purpose of prose in writing is to convey a message, inform and educate society, explore a new idea or tell a story. Others include persuading, entertaining, satirising or criticising the reader or imitating or criticising a society.

Prose fiction is a form of writing that is written from the author's imagination. It is a made-up story and generally has little or no direct fact based on reality. It can be written in a natural flow of regular speech. It is normally in a narrative form written in chapters and paragraphs.

Types of Prose Fiction

1. **Epistolary:** This refers to the type of fiction that is written in the form of letters or other documents. It is a novel that is written through the exchange of letters. It is a major type of fiction that predates many of the other types of prose fiction. Usually, it is a long letter that describes the message of the writer from the beginning till the end. A good example of an epistolary novel is Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*. In Ba's novel, the main character, Ramatoulaye writes a long letter to her friend Aissatou.
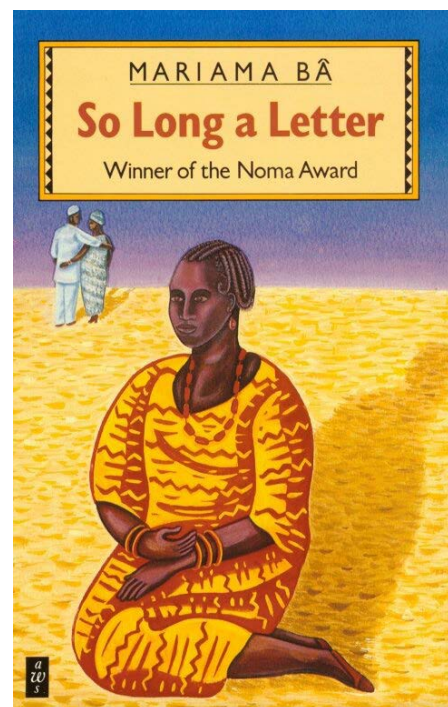
Fig.2.1. An example of an epistolary novel

2.   **Picaresque**: It is a novel that presents the adventures of an individual, often a rascal and usually arranged as a journey taken in different location. In African literature, a good example is *The Forest of Thousand Daemons* by D.O. Fagunwa. In the forest of Thousand Demons, the protagonist goes through different journeys of life in different locations.

3.   **Historical Novel**: It is a novel which takes its setting and the main characters and events, either true or imaginary, from history. In Historical novels, writers create a perfect picture of a historical situation and its impacts on either the characters, their family or society. An example is Chinelo Okparanta's *Under the Udala Tree* which talks about Ijeoma, the protagonist's struggle during the Nigerian civil war.

Fig.2.2. Example of a historical novel

4.   **Gothic novel** - A style of writing that is characterised by elements of fear, horror, death and gloom as well as nature, individuality and very high emotion/tension. An example is *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley: it tells the story of the main character Victor Frankenstein who creates a monster to become like God only for the monster to torment him and his family.
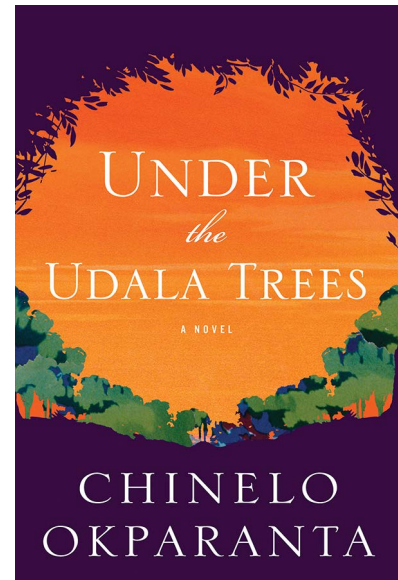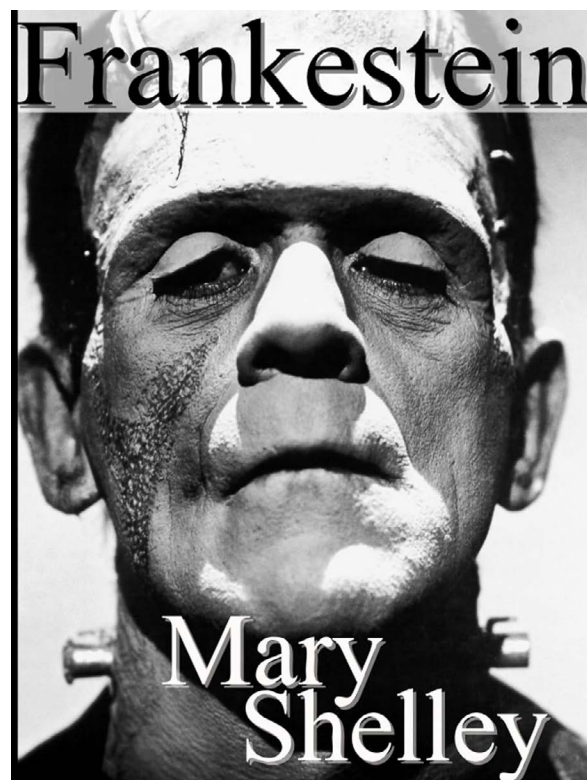
Fig 2.3. An example of a gothic novel

5. **Science fiction (Sci-fi)** - A genre of fiction that has content based in science but is imaginary. It is creative and based on science that relates to both present and future events. A good example is *Who Fears Death* by Nnedi Okafor. *Who Fears Death* details mystery, death and scientific investigations.

6. **Realism in fiction** - Generally a contemporary view of what 'real life' reveals, while the characters are not identifiable as real people. An example is George Orwell's *1984.* In the novel of mass corruption, Orwell's creation of the Ministry of Truth, Ministry of Love, Ministry of Plenty and Ministry of Peace which are unreal ministries, create realism in the fiction.
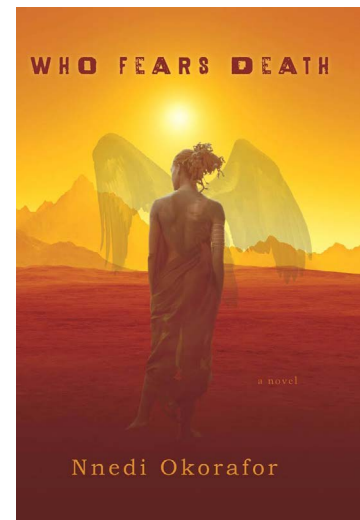
Fig 2.4. An example of a science fiction novel

Activity 2.5

Read Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's short, *Zikora*. Determine the type of prose fiction it is and write a page essay on three things that made your reading of the short story interesting.

Using Knowledge Gained to Examine How Work Reveals Plot and Setting

Plot and Setting in Prose Fiction

Prose has some components that drive its development. Examples of these components include plot and setting.
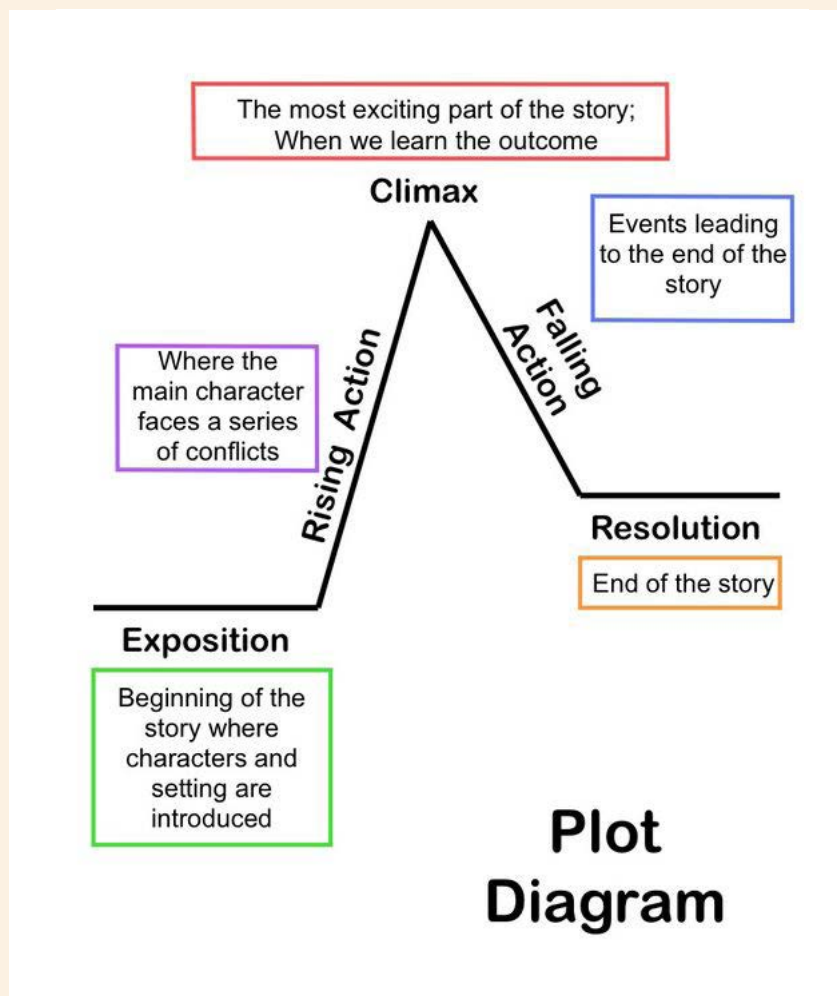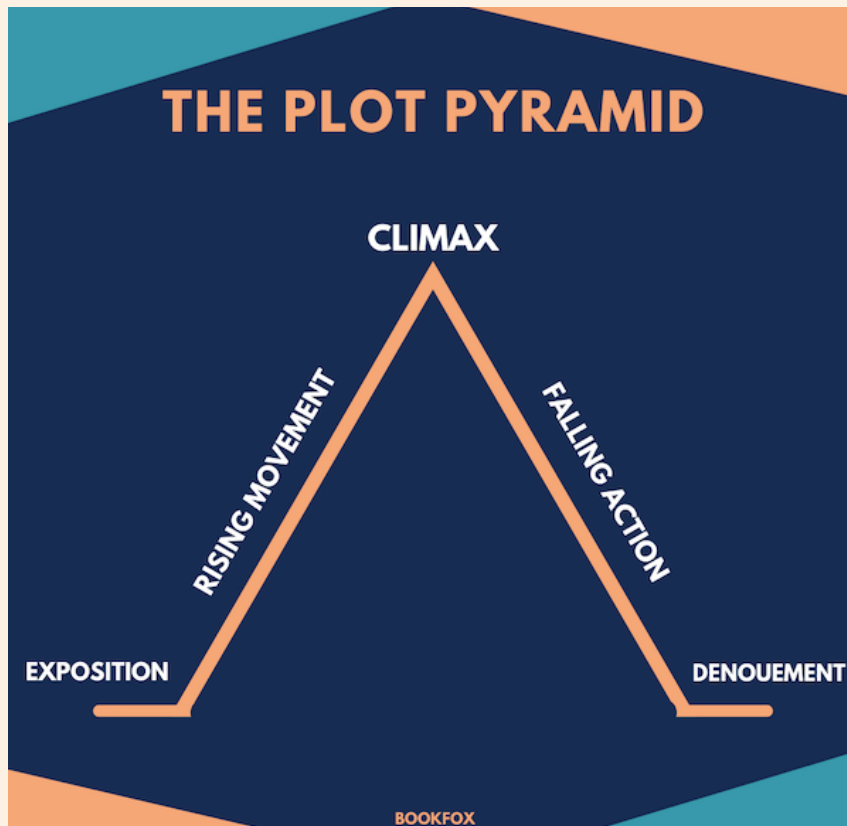
Plot is the sequence of events in the story.

Setting provides the time, place, culture, historical, geographical and occupational background of the story.

Activity 2.6

Observe the pictures below and write your understanding of the setting and plot.

THE PLOT PYRAMID

CLIMAX

RISING MOVEMENT

FALLING ACTION

EXPOSITION

DENOUEMENT

BOOKFOX

The most exciting part of the story;
When we learn the outcome

Climax

Events leading
to the end of the
story

Where the
main character
faces a series
of conflicts

Rising Action

Falling
Action

Resolution

End of the story

Exposition

Beginning of the
story where
characters and
setting are
introduced

Plot
Diagram

Plot writing sequence

1. Identify who the focus of the story is —the **main character.**
2. Identify the situation at the start of the story.
3. What your character wants—**motivation**.
4. What disturbs the status quo — **conflict**.
5. What happens next—**development**.
6. How things came to the peak—**climax**.
7. How things resolve — **resolution.**

Things to consider when looking out for a setting

1. Look out for physical environments such as **country, region, city, town, village** and **community**.
2. Look out for the time of year such as **market days, rainy season, and drought**.
3. Look out for times of the day such as **morning, afternoon, night, office hours, close of day** and so on.
4. Look out for the **political, cultural, economic, social** and **family influences.**
5. Look out for **emotional** and **psychological** states of mind such as departure from the family home, at a marriage or funeral, and so on.

Activity 2.7

Write a page essay on the plot sequence and setting of one of the following novels.
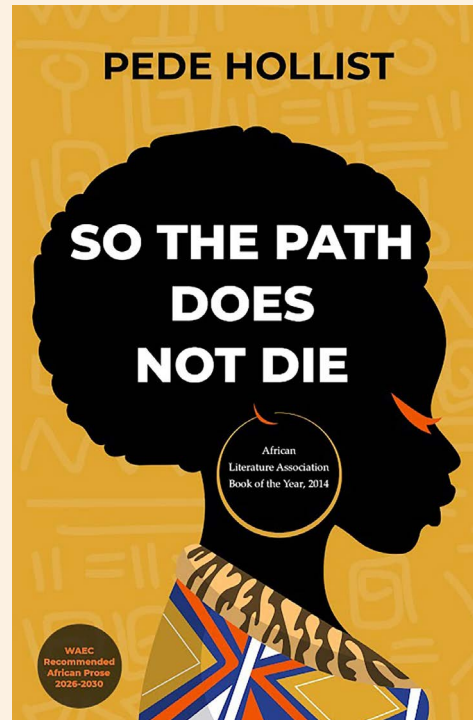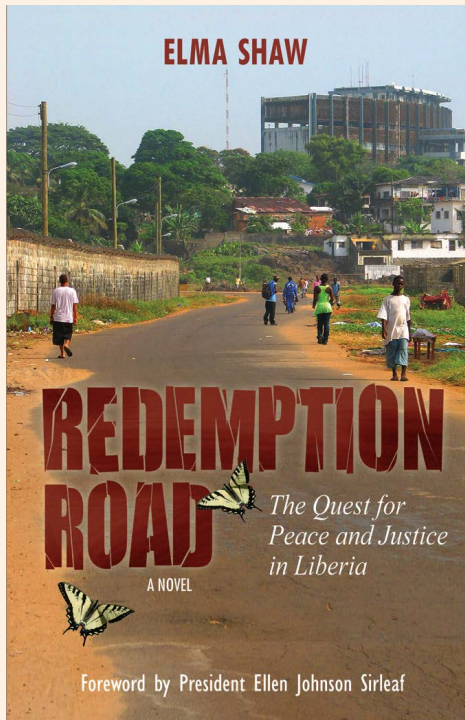
Character and Themes, How They Reflect Context and Society

Characters and themes are two of the important components of prose fiction or novels. They play an important role in understanding the meaning of the text. Novels are written about societies and characters are inhabitants of the society. Therefore, society and her people influence a writer's creation of characters and themes.

Activity 2.8

From your reading of section 1, write your response for what character and theme as literary elements of prose are in the box below.

Characters and Themes

Themes as central ideas are the reflection of what happens in the society. For example, themes such as love, hatred, determination, hard work, jealousy and the rest are the products of human existence.

Characters are, therefore, used to model the happenings or the hidden aspects in society. For example, in Pede Hollist's *So the Path Does Not Die*, Faniba is used as a character to reflect how some cultures treat women through long-held traditions and cultural practices.

Major Forms of Characters

1. *Protagonist:* The main character from whose perspective the story is often seen and whom the readers are most invested in. The protagonist is the lead character whom much of the actions of the story revolves around. For example, in Pede Hollist's *So the Path Does Not Die*, Faniba is the protagonist or main character from whose perspective much of the story is seen.

2. *Antagonist:* The character or a group of characters that oppose(s) the main character. The antagonist is the character or characters who prevents the protagonist from playing his or her role effectively in the story. For instance, in Elma Shaw's *Redemption Road*, Commander Cobra or Moses Varney is the antagonist of the novel.

3. *Hero/Heroine:* A story's main character who often has to overcome conflicts and trials. Hero is a male main character who often has to overcome severe conflicts and trials. On the other hand, a Heroine is a female main character who has to overcome trials and conflict in order to achieve her aim or her role. In Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird,* Atticus Finch who defends Tom Robinson's rape case despite all the conflict surrounding it is a good example of a hero.

4. *Tragic Hero:* A type of character with many heroic virtues but also a tragic flaw. In Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Tom Robinson, accused of rape can be seen as the tragic hero.

5. *Foil:* An opposing character or characters whose actions and attitudes generally highlight the main qualities of the protagonist. In *To Kill a Mockingbird,* Lee uses Bob Ewell and Atticus as foil characters on courage and cowardice.

6. *Rounded Character:* A type of character that exhibits development or change in behaviour as the plot unfolds as a feature of his or her complex and multi-sided nature. Simply put, characters who remain relatively unchanged throughout the story. In Things Fall Apart, Nwoye is a dynamic or round character who goes through major changes in the texts.

7. *Flat or one-dimensional Character:* A type of character that does not change too much from the start of the narrative to its end. Okonkwo in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is a good example.

Activity 2.9

Read the first chapter of either *Redemption Road* or *So the Path Does Not Die* and comment on why you think characters are important.

Importance of Character in the Story

1.   Characters help to development the plot. Through characters, the sequence of events in the texts are revealed.
2.   Characters help to develop themes. Through characters, the main or central ideas in the text like love, jealousy, patriotism, corruption, war, migration are seen.
3.   Characters bring out mood. Through characters the feelings of readers and other characters are developed.
4.   Characters help to bring out the setting of the text. From characters, place, time, culture, historical, geographical and occupational backgrounds are revealed.
5.   Characters help to develop other characters. Through the changes in the roles, beliefs and actions of the major characters, certain minor characters are developed.

How Elements of Language and Style Enhance Meaning in Fictional Texts

Activity 2.10

From your reading of Literature from Junior High School, what do you consider as style? Write your response in the box below.

You have done well. Now read on to refresh your memory on style.

Style

In literature, style refers to how an author uses language to communicate his/her ideas by creating a unique voice and tone. It includes elements such as **word choice**, **sentence structure**, and **figurative language**, among others. It is the element that describes how

authors use words, sentence structure and literary language to create mood, imagery and meaning. Style comes with many elements. Below are some of the key ones.

1. *Diction*: It is the choice of words a writer uses to communicate an idea, a point of view or to tell a story. The diction of a writer could be simple or complex. Elma Shaw's *Redemption Road* is written with fairly simple diction.

2. *Sentence Structure*: It is how the basic grammatical elements are employed in writing to enhance meaning. Sentence structures used by prose writers could be simple, compound, complex or compound-complex.

3. *Tone:* It involves a writer or character's feelings, opinions and stance through her/his choice of words. Consider perhaps Abena's point of view in *'The Kaya Girl'* by Mamle Wolo, or 'Nelly' Dean's tone in Emily Bronte's *'Wuthering Heights'*.

4. *Point of view*: It is the angle from which a story is narrated or told. Point of view includes **first person point of view**, **second person point of view** (a rarely used device), **third person point of view** and **omniscient narrator point of view**.

5. *Figurative language*: It is the use of language in a non-literal sense for emphasising and enriching the message of the writer. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*

Importance of Style

1. Style helps create mood and atmosphere. The choice of words, sentence structure, and literary devices contribute to the overall mood and atmosphere of a story.

2. Style helps in the development of characters. The way characters speak and the language used to describe them helps build their identities and personalities. Dialogue and internal monologues reveal their thoughts, emotions, and backgrounds.

3. Style can reinforce the themes of a literary work. For instance, Amu Djoleto's style of the filth at Makola helps to create and reinforces the theme of corruption in *Money Galore*

4. Style creates suspense which sustains readers' interest. A unique style and effective use of language capture the reader's interest and imagination, making the story more compelling and memorable. For example, Kaakyire Akosomo Nyantakyi's child-eye narrative style by Bob Little helps to create suspense and sustains the reader's interest in reading the whole text of *The Ancestral Sacrifice.*

5. Style reflects the historical and cultural periods of the text. The style of a literary work often reflects the period, culture, and societal norms in which it was written. For example, the flashback used in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Anowa* during Anowa's dream about the lobsters reflects the slave trade era.

So soon we have come to the end of this section. This section has introduced you to fictional prose forms such as short stories and novels. The section also touched on narrative elements such as plot, setting, characters, themes, and style. I hope that this knowledge will help you develop a love for reading for pleasure and appreciate your prescribed prose texts better.

Extended Reading

Redemption Road by Elma Shaw

So the Path Does Not Die by Pede Hollist

*Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe

So Long a Letter by Mariama Ba

References

Kachele, E. (2019, June 8). *Definitions of Literature*. Kachele Online. Retrieved February,26,2024
    Definitions of Literature (kacheleonline.co.tz)

Review Questions

1. Write a page essay on the purpose of reading.

2. What type of prose fiction is Ken Saro Wiwa's short story, *Africa Kills Her Sun?* Justify your answer.

3. Read Ken Sawo Wiwa's short story, *Africa Kills Her Sun* and complete the diagram below.
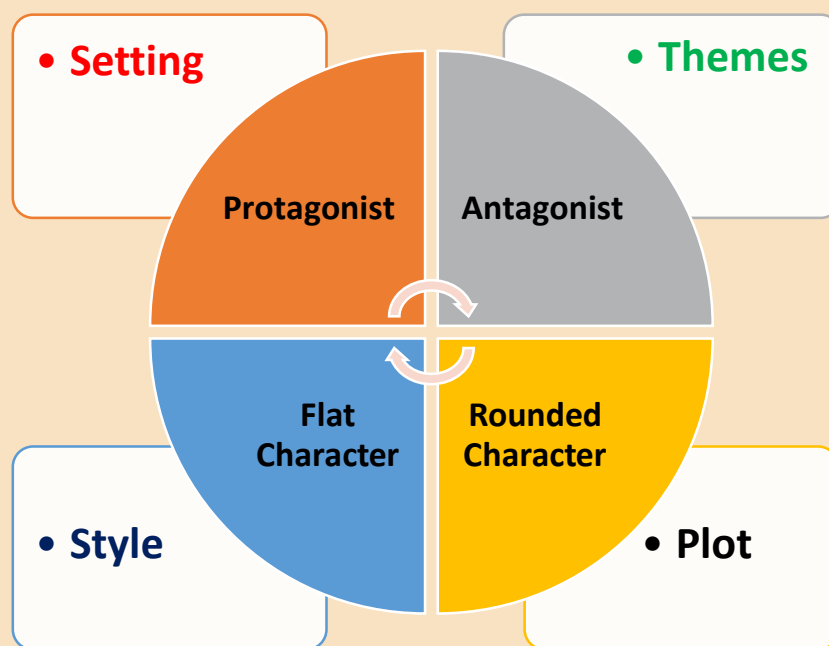
Acknowledgements

List of Contributors

Name	Institution
Robert Takyi	Tema SHS, Tema
Ivy Bessie Dente	OLA SHS, HO
Shadrack Oteng	Tarkwa DEO, Tarkwa