

SECTION

3

PROSE APPRECIATION



PROSE

Knowing Your Narrative Elements

INTRODUCTION

This section aims to further strengthen your understanding of the basic appreciation of prose fiction. It will centre on the analysis of works of fictional literature through the process of interpreting, classifying and making judgments about a text. The main focus of this section shall be on context, setting, plot types and conflict. This section has the overall goal of equipping you with the necessary skills of prose appreciation using the elements of plot, setting and conflict. It is hoped that appreciating prose narrative of writers will help you develop the ability to create your own narratives as the surest way of making meaningful connections between literature, life and texts.

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

- Establish the relationship between context and setting.
- Examine different types of plot devices using level appropriate texts.
- Analyse the relationship between/among plot, subplot and conflict.

Key Ideas

- Setting is a subset of context. Context comes in the form of Authorial, Historical and Literary contexts.
- Plot is the sequence of events in a story. It is an element that helps to arrange what happens in a story. The plot in fiction could be Linear, Episodic, Parallel or Flashback.
- Red Herring is a piece of false information used by the writer to mislead the reader about what is going on in the plot.

Relationship Between Context and Setting

Activity 3.1

From your reading of **Section Two**, explain the prose elements, context, setting, and plot in your own words. Write your response in the box below.

You have done well by refreshing your memory on context, setting and plot. Now let us explore these elements further.

Context

You can think of context as all the information you need to know to truly understand something. For example, when you watch a movie from the very start, you begin to learn about the names of the characters, where the movie is set and what the plot line is. Context in literature, therefore, involves the broader issues that surround the setting and influence the narrative. Here are some of the major types of context.

Types of Context

1. **Authorial context:** The writer's own life history experiences such as successes, failures and general circumstances which influenced the writing. For example, Elma Shaw's own trauma and painful encounter with the Liberian Civil War become the background information that inspires her to write *Redemption Road*.
2. **Historical context:** This is either influenced by history or just a reflection of the society in which it was written to address social issues to bring about change. For example in *Redemption Road* by Elma Shaw, the war in Liberia from 1989 to 2003 forms the historical background. This context influences the characters' lives, their struggles, and their interactions.
3. **Literary context:** This comes when a text fits into a broad category of literature e.g.: Feminism (the idea that women must have equality with men). Both Elma Shaw and Pede Hollist are believers in the idea that women must have equal opportunities with men and therefore write about the painful experiences of females.
4. **Cultural context:** This has to do with the social norms, beliefs, and practices of the time and place. For example, in *So the Path Does not Die* by Pede Hollis, the cultural setting is seen in the traditional beliefs of the people of Sierra Leone.
5. **Social context:** This involves how personality differences and relationships within the society are seen in the story. For example, in *Redemption Road* by Elma Shaw, the social setting is seen in the relationship among people affected by war.

Activity 3.2

Observe the picture below, carefully. From your observation of the picture, explain setting in your own words.



Setting

Setting in literature refers to the time, place and circumstances within which the story occurs. Setting can be seen from different aspects, including physical, temporal, social, and emotional.

Types of setting

1. **Physical Setting:** physical setting refers to the physical environment seen in the story. That is, the various places the story happened. The physical environment could be a country, a city, a community, or a home.
2. **Social Setting:** Social setting involves the behaviour of a particular society such as tradition, culture, way of feeding, language, which affect the action of the story.
3. **Psychological Setting:** Psychological setting deals with the thinking of the society from where the story was written and how that affect the characters.

Different Types of Plot Using Level Appropriate Texts

Plot Types and Plot Devices

Plot is a literary element that involves the arrangement of the events in a story in sequence. In a story, the plot presents the actions, happenings, events and marks turning point, which creates a conflict, which needs to be resolved at the end of the story.

Plot devices are techniques used by the author to move the plot forward. Plot device could come in the form of something tangible (material which can be seen, touched or felt) such as a character or something intangible (an immaterial entity which cannot be seen, touched or felt) such as a situation or a change in the actions and events of the story.

Types of Plot in Fiction

Plot is one of the essential elements of fiction. Plots in fiction comes in many forms. In this section, you will be introduced to four of the types of plot commonly used in prose fiction.

1. Linear Plot

- **Definition:** The story progresses in a straightforward, chronological sequence from beginning to end. It is also called dramatic or progressive plot.
- **Characteristics:** Events are presented in the order they occur. There is a clear progression from introduction of setting, characters and conflict showing rising action, climax, falling action, to resolution.
- **Example:** An example is Lawrence Darmani's *Grief Child*

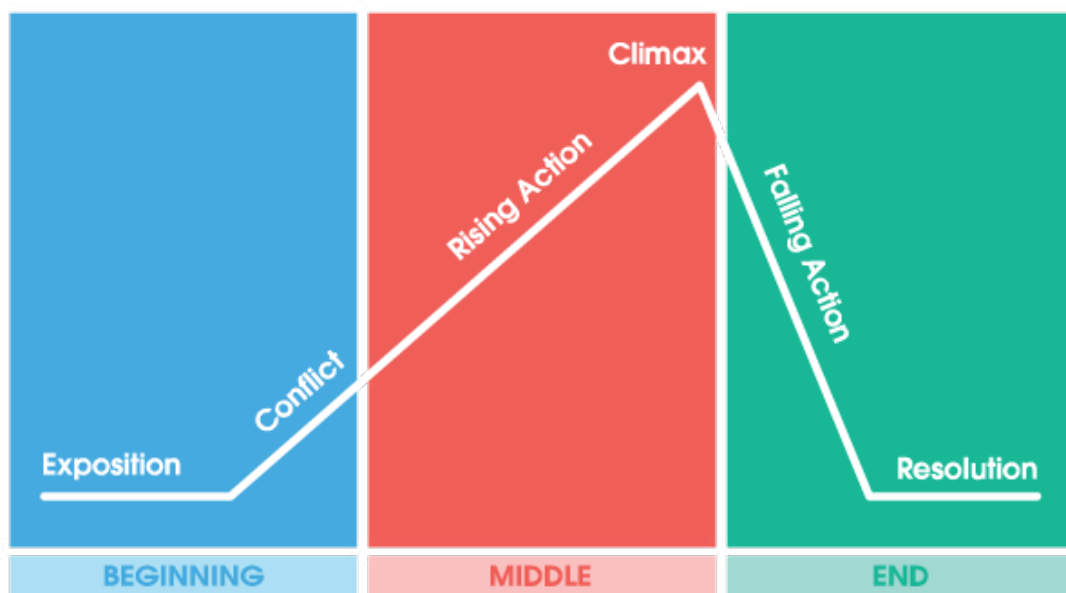


Fig 3.1: A diagram showing Linear Plot

2. Episodic Plot

- **Definition:** It is the type of plot in which the narrative is divided into separate incidents or episodes, but which is linked by a central theme, the main character or setting.
- **Characteristics:** Each episode functions as a self-contained story, but all contribute to the overall narrative arc.
- **Example:** A good example is Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*

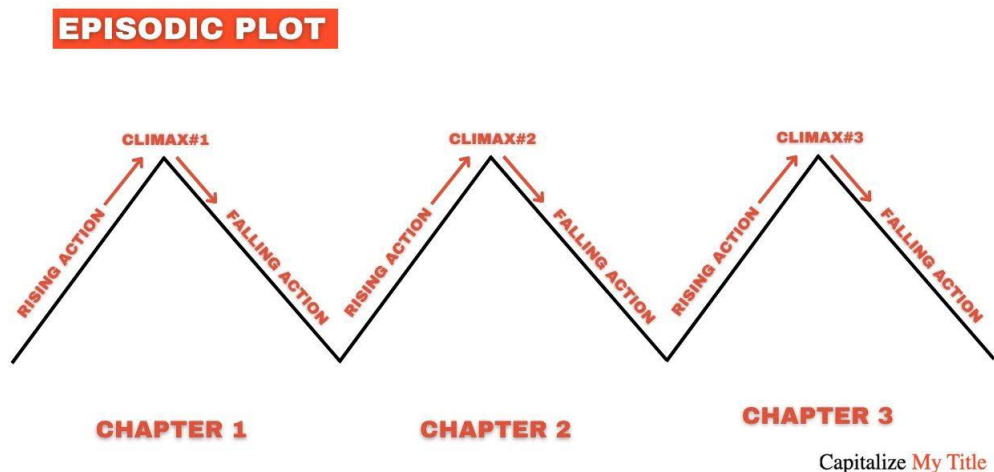


Fig 3.2:. A diagram showing Episodic Plot

3. Parallel Plot

- **Definition:** It is a type of plot which denotes a story structure in which the writer includes two or more separate narratives linked by a common character, event, or theme.
- **Characteristics:** Multiple protagonists or sets of events are developed in tandem, providing different perspectives on a central theme or issue.
- **Example:** A good example is Adichie’s *The Thing Around Your Neck*

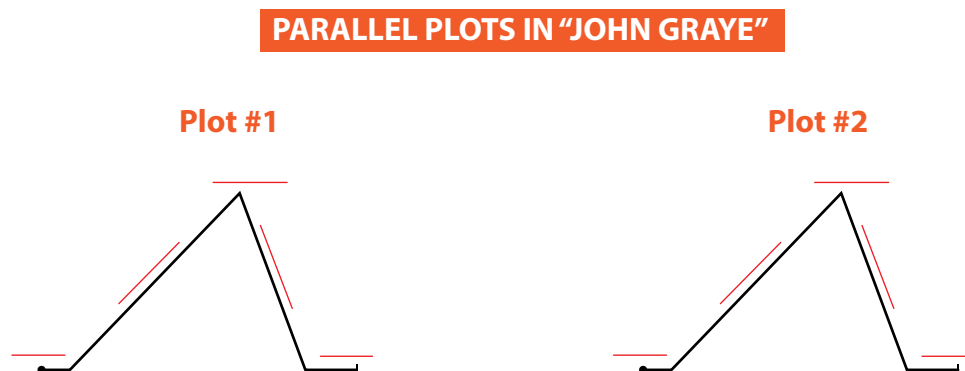


Fig 3.3: A diagram showing Parallel Plot

4. Flashback Plot

- **Definition:** The narrative includes scenes or sequences that take the story back in time from the current point.
- **Characteristics:** Flashbacks provide background information, context, or insight into a character's past. They disrupt the chronological flow of the narrative.
- **Example:** *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee includes flashbacks to Scout's childhood to provide context for the events of the story.

Plot Devices

1. **Foreshadowing:** Foreshadowing is a plot device used to give an advance hint of what is to come later in the story. This can be done through dialogue, events, or the setting, and it helps build anticipation in the reader.
2. **Red Herring:** A red herring is a misleading clue or piece of information meant to distract readers from the actual plot or to mislead them into thinking a different outcome will occur.
3. **Flashback: Definition:** A flashback is a scene set in a time earlier than the main story. It provides background information on characters, events, or settings that are critical to the current narrative.
4. **Plot Twist: Definition:** A plot twist is an unexpected development in a story that changes the direction or outcome of the plot. It is designed to surprise the reader and often challenges their assumptions.
5. **Deus Ex Machina:** *Deus ex machina* refers to a plot device where a seemingly unsolvable problem is suddenly resolved by an unexpected and unlikely occurrence, often involving a new character, object, or event. *Deus ex machine* is a Latin phrase which means, "God in the machine or God out of an engine".

Activity 3.3

1. Create a short story of about two pages using a linear plot.
2. Read Peter Paul Adolinama's short story, *Ripples*, from the Cockcrow and describe three plot elements that are used.

Relationship Between Plot, Subplots and Conflict

In the writing or reading a story, plot is the literary element that provides the structure of the story. It reveals the actions, events, characters and conflicts in the story and helps to resolve the conflict. A typical plot diagram is shown below.

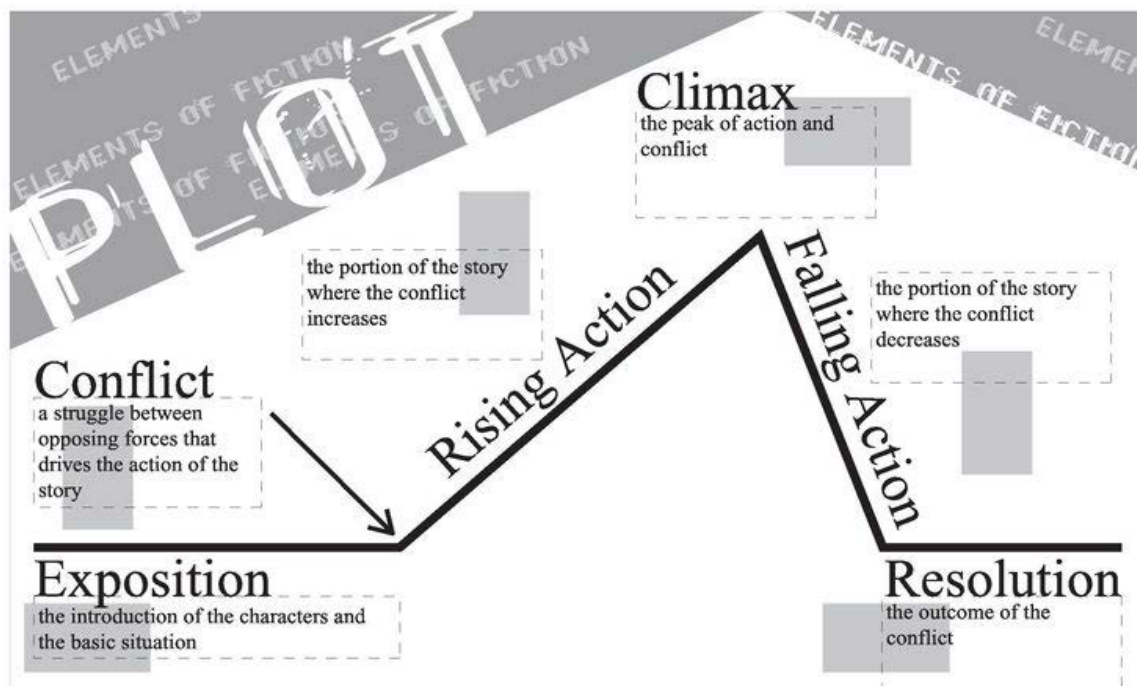


Fig 3.4: A plot diagram

Conflict is the dramatic struggle between two opposing forces that drives the action of the story.

Subplot is a minor story or digression within a main story or main plot. It can be about the main characters or other characters whose narrative interaction influences the development of the plot.

Relationship Between/Among Plot, Subplots and Conflict

1. Plot reveals conflict
2. Subplot is a subset of the main plot.
3. Without conflict, there is generally no plot.
4. Conflict is developed through subplots.
5. Plot depends on subplots to be complete.

We have come to the end of this section. I believe strongly that this section has helped increase your understanding of the basic concepts of prose appreciation. The section focused on the relationship between and amongst prose fiction elements such as context, setting, plot types and conflict.

Extended Reading

Grief Child – Lawrence Darmani

Money Galore by Amu Djoletto

Reference

Kachele, E. (2019, June 8). *Definitions of Literature*. Kachele Online. Retrieved February,26,2024
[Definitions of Literature \(kacheleonline.co.tz\)](http://kacheleonline.co.tz)

Review Questions

1. Read the first chapter of *Redemption Road* and identify at least ten (10) words or phrases that highlight the setting and context.
2. State and explain any three (3) types of plot.
3. Read Elma Shaw's *Redemption Road* and identify the main plot which revolves around the protagonist and his/her conflict.

Answers to Review Questions

Refer to the *main text* for answers to *Question 2*

Acknowledgements



Ghana Education Service (GES)



List of Contributors

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