

### Genre Focus Lesson

#### I. Objectives

- To read to enjoy short stories
- To predict what will happen in a short story
- To identify and understand a short story's setting, characters, point of view, theme, and plot
- To respond and connect to a short story

#### II. Motivating Options

***Predicting and Previewing*** Before students begin to read a short story, encourage them to look carefully at the title and preview the story. Ask them to make a prediction about the story. As they read, they can think about the clues the author gives, and they can use what they already know about similar people or situations to predict what will happen. These questions can help them make predictions:

- What hints does the title provide about the story?
- What will the characters probably do next?
- What plot event is likely to happen next?
- What theme does the author seem to be addressing?

During reading, students can confirm or revise their predictions.

#### III. Teaching Strategies

Explain that when they read a short story, students will need to understand the following aspects of the work: *literary elements*, *vocabulary*, and *author's craft*.

Genre Focus Lesson, *cont.*

## A. Analyzing

1. **Literary Elements** In many short stories, students will find that one or more of the elements – setting, characters, point of view, theme, or plot – will stand out. The same is often true of a movie or television show. Encourage students to give examples of stories, shows, or films that made a strong impression because of one or more of the following elements.

a. **Setting** Point out that in some stories, the setting is no more than the background to the story's events, but in other stories, it is vitally important. It can affect characters' behavior and plot events. It can work to create a particular atmosphere or mood for a story.

Encourage students to describe the setting of a story they found particularly memorable. Have them give details of time, place, customs, and beliefs that made the setting effective and describe the atmosphere that the setting created.

b. **Characters** Explain that characters are made individual by the traits an author chooses to give them. The traits an author emphasizes help to determine how the characters will act and react.

Have students think of someone in their own lives who would make an intriguing character for a short story. Encourage them to write down the traits that make that person an interesting individual.

c. **Point of View** Explain that in a story with an omniscient third-person point of view, the narrator can describe the thoughts and feelings of all the characters. With a limited third-person point of view, however, the narrator describes only the thoughts and feelings of a single character. In a story with a first-person point of view, the narrator gives readers an immediate, first-hand version of events. However, the narrator provides only his or her own interpretation of the events.

Genre Focus Lesson, *cont.*

Ask two volunteers to describe an incident or event that both witnessed. Encourage the class to notice how the two versions of the event differ because they are told through two different points of view.

- d. **Theme** Explain that a story's theme is often an important idea about life. If the theme is not stated directly, it can be implied through details of setting, character changes brought about by plot events, point of view, and even the story's title.

On the chalkboard or overhead, list several well-known stories, plays, or movies. Ask students to identify the theme of each.

- e. **Plot** Point out to students that plots can contain two types of conflict: *external conflict*, or that between two people or a person and a force of nature; and *internal conflict*, or that between opposing feelings or ideas within a character. Many plots include both kinds of conflict.

Ask students to identify an external conflict in a book or story they have read. Have them describe how the conflict helped move the plot along.

2. **Vocabulary** As students read short stories, encourage them to keep an ongoing list of unfamiliar words. They should try to define each word in context as they come to it. If they cannot define it, they should look up the word and enter the word and its definition in a log. Students can exchange their logs with a partner and check each other's definitions.
3. **Author's Craft** Point out that though all short stories contain the same literary elements, the way the author uses the elements makes each story unique. As they read, students should notice how the author combines the short story elements. They should consider the author's purpose in writing, and they should think about the theme, or message, the author wants to impart to readers.

Genre Focus Lesson, *cont.*

**B. Questioning** Ask students to answer these questions about the story.

- What was the theme of the story? How does it apply to my life?
- What purpose did the author have in writing the story?
- What kind of enjoyment did I gain from the story? Was it the enjoyment of suspense, of comedy, of moving characterization, or of dramatic or surprising plot events?
- Who else might enjoy the story? Why?

**C. Responding**

**Literature Groups** After reading the short story, have students work in groups to discuss their reactions to and opinions of the work. Encourage them to support their statements with examples from the story. (For more suggestions on using Literature Groups, see *Literature Groups Sourcebook: Strategies and Activities*.)

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