The Five Elements of a Good Story (for ages 10 & up)

This quick lesson will help you think about the five basic elements you need when you write a story—any story that has a character and a problem, like the Circle C stories.

Put On a Pair of Author Glasses

I bet you like to read. Most authors are readers. They enjoy reading a good story and they enjoy writing a good story for others to read. Take a few minutes and think about the stories you like to read. Why do you enjoy a certain story? How do you feel when it comes to an end? Do you think, “What a great story! OK, where’s the next book by this author?” or “I wish I could be the main character in this book and travel back in time.” Or do you think, “Hmmm . . . I cried at the end of chapter nine.” How did the author make me cry?

Most readers do not ask that last question about how the author was able to make you cry during the story. But if you know the “how” then you can model (i.e. “copy”) what the author has done and make your readers cry or laugh too. That is learning to read with an Author’s Eyes!

A Story Is Like a Puzzle

A story is not just one big collection of words tossed down on paper. It’s made up of smaller chunks—“elements”—just like a jigsaw puzzle. Each piece (element) is a skill you can learn a little at a time, practice, and then apply to the whole puzzle (story).

Do you like to put puzzles together? I do. Well, at least most of the time. I don’t like it when I have the puzzle nearly completed and discover that one or two of the pieces are missing. I don’t know about you, but I feel cheated when that happens, and I toss the puzzle into the recycle bin.

The Five “Puzzle Pieces” of a Story

A story is like a jigsaw puzzle. If one of the story “elements” is missing, it’s no good. The story is boring, and the reader feels cheated or disappointed with the story. Every (good) fiction story needs five essential elements (pieces):

- **CHARACTERS:** You don’t have a story if there is no main character or characters. Your reader will want to follow along on your characters’ adventures.
- **SETTING:** Your story has to take place some WHERE and some WHEN.

- **PROBLEM:** Your character needs a quest, a problem to solve, a mystery to solve, or an obstacle to overcome. **No problem = No story = Boring.**

- **PLOT:** This is just a writer’s word for “the events that happen while the character is solving his problem.” So plot and problem go hand in hand. This is where you can write all those exciting action scenes or put your character into danger. **Conflict = Exciting!**

- **SOLUTION:** You can’t just write “The End” when you get tired of writing your story. Your character must solve the original problem or at least learn how to live with it. You want your reader to say, “Ah, that was a good story.”

**Here’s How It Works: example**

**Title of book:** *Andrea Carter and the Long Ride Home*

**Main character:** Andi Carter

**Other characters:** Carter family, Rosa & her family, Felicity & her father, etc.

**Setting:** Time: 1880  
**Place:** Fresno, CA

**Story Problem:** When Andi leaves the ranch, a thief steals her horse. **Andi must find Taffy before she returns home.**

**Plot (events):** Andi works in the fields with her new friends; she finds a clue to Taffy’s whereabouts; Andi works as a servant to a rich rancher and his mean daughter; Andi gets locked in a shed; (and so on)

**Solution:** Through many hardships, Andi eventually finds Taffy and returns home.

**Your Turn**

If you can use the five elements to organize your story, you will be off to a good start! Here is a place to take some notes. Once you know where the story is going, you can fill in all the “fun” things like: dialogue, action, thoughts, conflict, and other creative elements. But the BIG FIVE are the most important.

**Title of your story: ____________________________________________________________**

**Main Characters:** __________________________________________________________

**Other Characters:** __________________________________________________________
You are ready to write your story!

**Note:** These are just hints. You can certainly write a great story without first taking notes. But this may help you have a better chance of not writing what I call the “Never-ending Story.”