

## Short Story: Types

Short story is one of the minor forms of literature. The meaning of short story is implied in its name only. Short story is very brief in size or length and has a story. It may be defined as a prose narrative, “requiring from an half hour to one hour for its perusal”. It can be read at single sitting. Any subjects, from earth to heaven can be fit for short story. So, H. E. Beats aptly thinks, “Short story can be anything the author decides it shall be”.

A short story typically takes the form of a brief fictional work, usually written in prose. **Anecdotes, fables, fairy tales, and parables** are all examples of the oral storytelling tradition that helped to shape the short story. In fact, '**Aesop's Fables**,' first collected in the 4th century B.C., may have been the first anthology of short stories in Western literature. These early forms were orally transmitted from generation to generation. Some of the earliest stories are found in the Vedas and Upanishads , in the Old Testament. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* though written in verse are told by travelling pilgrims. Some of the earliest forms were the tales of adventure, based on the great deeds of popular heroes.

The modern short story was originated in the second quarter of Nineteenth century in America. Edger Allen Poe is generally considered as the father of short story. His *An M. S. Found in a Bottle* earned wide reputation. Soon, it became very popular form in Europe through successful efforts of great writers like Maupassant, Balzac, Chekov, Tolstoy, etc. The short story is recently developed form in English literature. It has made considerable development in Twentieth Century. In England, this form was made popular by Doyle, Kipling, Wells, Maugham, etc.

### Types of Short Story:

The stories primarily consist of brief accounts of the incidents and events, taken place in the life of characters. In olden days and later on in medieval period, stories were presented in oral form and got transmitted from one generation to another. The literary roots of the short story can be found in oral story telling tradition such as anecdotes, fables, fairy-tales, folk-tales, legends and parables.

### Anecdote:

Anecdote is the oldest form of short story. It is defined as “short amusing story about real incident or person.” It is a narrative story with a point. The word anecdote is derived from Greek word *anekdota* which means ‘unpublished’; from an-+ ekdotos an- means un- and ekdotos means published; *anekdota* means unpublished items. Later on the term anecdota was applied for short tales that focused on the author's point.

Anecdote is defined as a short and interesting story, or an amusing event, often proposed to support or demonstrate some point, and to make the audience laugh. Anecdotes can include an extensive range of tales and stories. In fact, it is a short description or an account of any event that makes the readers laugh or brood over the topic presented for the purpose.

Anecdotes and humorous pieces are not only jokes, but exquisite literary devices as well. Their primary purpose is to stir up laughter, to disclose a truth in a general way, or to describe a feature of a character in such a way that it becomes humorous, and at the same time gives us a better understanding of the character. Authors may use anecdotes to illustrate their own theme or impart wisdom or humour to the audience.

Anecdotes may be real or 'imaginary', primarily meant for the amusement of listeners. However, it is presented as the recounting of real incidents taken place in real settings in the lives of real persons. Sometimes it will be unelaborated narration of a single incident.

An example anecdote about Ralph Waldo Emerson is:

"In [Ralph Waldo] Emerson's later years his memory began increasingly to fail. He used to refer to it as his 'naughty memory' when it let him down. He would forget the names of things, and have to refer to them in a circumlocutory way, saying, for instance, 'the implement that cultivates the soil' for plow. Worse, he could not remember people's names. At Longfellow's funeral, he remarked to a friend, 'That gentleman has a sweet, beautiful soul, but I have entirely forgotten his name.' Perhaps most touching was his term for umbrella--'the thing that strangers take away.'"

(Reported in Clifton Fadiman, ed., *The Little, Brown Book of Anecdotes*, 1985)

### Legend:

A **legend** is a semi-true **story**, which has been passed on from person-to-person and has important meaning or symbolism for the culture in which it originates. Legend is an old story from ancient times about people and events that may or may not be true. It is a narrative story dealing with famous or notorious persons or events. It sometimes describes someone who is very well-known and admired usually because of ability in particular area. So legend is considered the story about an admirable person. King Arthur was central figure in the legends making up matter of England. In medieval period large number of stories were created on this legendary figure.

The Grimm Brothers define a legend as folk tale historically grounded. Oxford Dictionary defines legend as a traditional story sometimes popularly regarded as historical but not authenticated. According to the Royal Spanish Academy Dictionary, Legend is a story based on real characters or events but magnified by fantasy or admiration. The admired person from society is considered as legend.

History is full of legends that have entertained the people for ages. Legends hail from different cultures around the world. Some are still held as strong beliefs. The most popular legends are Lady Godiva, Robinhood, King Arthur, The Fountain of Youth, Bloody Mary. Though, traditionally told as true stories, legends often consist supernatural elements. There are two types of legends- Folk legends and Urban legends. The popular legends serve as a literary text.

Legend is a popular narration of fantastic events which are generally transmitted by tradition from generation to generation. As they are orally transmitted, the legends are modified in the course of time. There are a number of legends, popular among people-The legend of Phoenix who rises from his ashes. The legend of Alexander was used in all poetry. In medieval period the legend of King Arthur served as source of number of romances.

There are different categories of legends and famous legendary figures belonging

to them:

1. Children legends: Santa Claus, The mouse Perez
2. Urban legends: Walt Disney, The Alien Rosewell

3. Religious legends: Joan of Arc, Stories about saints and sinners.
4. Legend of Terror: The headless horseman, their miracles, the witches of Salem.
5. Universal legends: Robin hood, King Arthur.

### **Characteristics of Legend:**

1. **Characters:** Characters in legend are limited to small cast. They may be inanimate objects, Gods, or Superhumans. The Gods are super heroes who may appear in human form but maintain immortality and supernatural abilities.
2. **Setting:** Legend generally takes place in the past and the setting is somehow relevant to the culture from which it derives.
3. **Plot:** Plot is a systematic arrangement of events and incidents. The plot of legend includes lots of actions, suspense, and conflict. The characters of legend often encounter calamities and struggle hard with their fate to overcome. Legend offers a moral lesson for life.
4. **Point of View:** Legends are written from third person point of view. The culture, values and beliefs of the society are reflected in the legend. The principal character in the legend can overcome any obstacles to reach his destination.

### **Fable:**

Fable is a short story in which animals or objects speak and is often used to teach moral or religious lesson. In fables animals, plants, inanimate objects or forces of nature are employed as characters. The purpose of fable is to teach lesson about human weaknesses.

In Cambridge Dictionary fable is defined as: Fable is a short story that tells moral truth often using animals as characters. Oxford dictionary also defines, Fable is a traditional short story that teaches moral lesson especially one with animals as characters.

The word fable is derived from the Latin word 'fibula' which means 'a story' and a derivative of the word 'fari' which means 'to speak'. As a literary device fable can be defined as "a brief story with moral lesson". It is generally considered that Aesop, Greek fabulist is the real originator of the fable form. He created fables for the purpose of entertainment but later on became the means of teaching moral lessons. So Aesop's fables were considered the first 'Morality Tales' and they were orally transmitted. These fables have long been used to teach children moral lessons. In India also fables were emerged in the name of Panchatantra and Jataka Tales.

### **Characteristics of Fables:**

They are fiction in the sense that they did not really happen.

They are meant to entertain.

They are poetic, with double or allegorical significance.

They are moral tales, usually with animal characters.

Fables are short, and they usually have no more than two or three characters

The salient features of fables are: 1. Fables provide moral teaching. 2. Animals are used as main characters. 3. Fables personify objects and forces of nature.

The most well-known example of a fable would be any of the many told in *Aesop's Fables*. One of the best is "The Ant and the Grasshopper".

### **Parable:**

A **parable** is a succinct, didactic story, in prose or verse that illustrates one or more instructive lessons or principles. It differs from a fable. The fables employ animals, plants, inanimate objects, or forces of nature as characters, whereas parables have human characters. A parable is a type of analogy. The parable - a short narrative uses metaphor and symbolism to illustrate a moral point. It is a short fictitious story that illustrates a moral attitude or a religious principle

The Oxford Dictionary defines Parable as “a short story that teaches moral or spiritual lessons, especially one of those told by Jesus as recorded in the Bible.” Parable is one of the many literary forms in the Bible but is especially seen in Gospels of The New Testament. It is considered as a short story and is different from metaphorical statement.

The word Parable is derived from Greek word ‘Parabole’ which means “a throwing beside”. The root meaning of the word Parable means ‘placing side by side’ for the sake of comparison. The Gospel writer identifies a narrative with spiritual meaning by calling as Parables. Jesus gives an example from everyday life to convey the spiritual truth. Parable is one of the Jesus’ favourite devices to preach the masses. Parables of Jesus are recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke.

Parable has the following features:

1. It is easy to recite.
2. It has everyday common circumstance.
3. It teaches religious lesson.
4. It has surprising end.
5. It uses metaphors.

There are three types of parables- didactic, evangelical and prophetic.

### **Fairy Tales:**

Fairy tales have been around for thousands of years, beginning with oral traditions. These fictional stories come from all cultures and many have their own versions of well-known tales in the English world.

Fairy tale, derived from folk-tale is a form of short oral narratives, known to folklorists and is orally passed down generation to generation. It deals with marvellous stories which are always set in the magical world. The magical creatures such as witches, mermaids, elves, dwarves, fairies, nymphs, giants, goblins, dragons etc. play important roles in the development of the wonder tales.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the fairy tale form gained its name as a self-conscious literary form at the hands of French writers. The fairy tales were originally known as ‘Contes des fees’ in French and were translated into English as fairy tales. It was Madame d’ Aulnoy who invented the term *conte de fees* or fairy tale in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. But Charles Perrault was the first great fairy tale author, writing in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. His romantic tales - Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, and Beauty and Beast earned wide popularity.

In Germany the famous book of Grimm Brothers ‘Household Tales’ known as Grimms fairy tale, appeared in 1812. These German tales inspired Hans Christian Anderson whose Emperor’s New Clothes and The Snow Queen became very popular. In England this fairy tale form was popularized by George McDonald and later by Oscar Wilde.

Fairy-tale is a sub-class of folk-tale. But many writers turned these oral fairy tales into literary fairy-tales. The stories from Panchatantra were written from oral resources. The stories of Grimm Brother have been brought into written form. Hence the oral and literary fairy tales freely exchanged plots, motifs and elements with one another. There are common characteristics of fairy tales:

- Set in the past
- Use some form or variation of "Once upon a time"
- Fantasy or make-believe elements
- Enchanted setting - can include forests, castles, water or kingdoms
- Clearly defined good and evil characters
- Magical elements
- Characters take on unusual forms (giants, witches, dwarfs, talking animals)
- Groups of three (objects, people or events)
- Clearly defined problem, climax and resolution
- Most often they have a happy ending
- Teach a lesson that is important to the culture it came from

Most importantly, fairy tales do not have to include a fairy!

In short, fairy tale is an imaginative story or piece of literature told in a variety of media. These are the stories based on magic and fantastical settings, plots, and characters and happy endings. A quality fairy tale tells a compelling story with a timeless theme. It can be characterized by the story elements (Characters, plot, setting, theme, style, tone, and point of view).

In addition to the above five types of short story, there are a few other types of short story. They are as follows:

### ***Drabble***

A drabble is an exceptionally short piece of fiction, usually of exactly 100 words in length – not including the title. The purpose of a drabble is extreme brevity and to test an author's skill at expressing himself/herself meaningfully and interestingly in a very confined space.

A drabble example, by the lovely Matty, is available over at Sugar and Blood: [Light as a Feather](#).

### ***Feghoot***

A feghoot is an interesting short story type also known as a story pun or a poetic story joke. It is a humorous piece ending in an atrocious pun. It can be very short, only long enough to sufficiently illustrate the context of the piece enough to lead up to the pun.

A good example is: [The Buck of the Draw](#).

### ***Flash Fiction***

Flash fiction refers to an extremely short piece of literature. It has no widely accepted length, but has a debated cap of between 300 and 1000 words.

Flash Fiction Online has a small section of fantasy and one of them is: [One Last Night at the Carnival Before the Stars Go Out](#).

### ***Frame Story***

A frame story is also known as a frame tale or a nested narrative. It is a literary technique of placing a story within a story, for the purpose of introducing or setting the stage for a main narrative or a series of short stories.

A few good example of a frame story would be a flashback within a larger piece or a quest within a larger game environment.

### ***Mini-saga***

A mini-saga is a short story told in exactly 50 words. It is a test in brevity – about saying a lot with a little.

### ***Story Sequence***

A story sequence, also called a short story cycle or a composite novel, is a group of short stories that work together to form a longer piece, while still functioning as complete short stories on their own.

Examples of Story Sequence are Isaac Asimov – the Foundation books and I, Robot, etc. in particular. They are not a novel in the traditional sense, but instead a collection of short stories in chronological order that both tell small stories and one larger one.

### ***Sketch Story***

A sketch story is a shorter than average piece containing little or no plot. It can be merely a description of a character or a location. Character sketches are common, and a good way to build a character that will eventually be part of a longer piece.

### ***Vignette***

A vignette is a short, impressionistic piece that focuses on a single scene, character, idea, setting, or object. There is little emphasis on adhering to conventional theatrical or literary structure, or story development. It can be a stand-alone piece or part of a larger work.

From grammar.about.com's entry for the vignette, an example vignette by E.B. White:

“The strong streak of insanity in railroads, which accounts for a child's instinctive feeling for them and for a man's unashamed devotion to them, is congenital; there seems to be no reason to fear that any disturbing improvement in the railroads' condition will set in. Lying at peace but awake in a Pullman berth all one hot night recently, we followed with dreamy satisfaction the familiar symphony of the cars—the diner departing (*furioso*) at midnight, the long, fever-laden silences between runs, the timeless gossip of rail and wheel during the runs, the crescendos and diminuendos, the piffling poop-pooing of the diesel's horn. For the most part, railroading is unchanged from our childhood. The water in which one washes one's face at morn is still without any real wetness, the little ladder leading to the upper is still the symbol of the tremendous adventure of the night, the green clothes hammock still sways with the curves, and there is still no foolproof place to store one's trousers.

“Our journey really began several days earlier, at the ticket window of a small station in the country, when the agent showed signs of cracking under the paperwork. ‘It's hard to believe,’ he said, ‘that after all these years I still got to write the word “Providence” in here

every time I make out one of these things. Now, there's no possible conceivable way you could make this journey *without* going through Providence, yet the Company wants the word written in here just the same. O.K., here she goes!' He gravely wrote 'Providence' in the proper space, and we experienced anew the reassurance that rail travel is unchanged and unchanging, and that it suits our temperament perfectly—a dash of lunacy, a sense of detachment, not much speed, and no altitude whatsoever."

(E.B. White, "Railroads." *The Second Tree From the Corner*. Harper & Row, 1954)

### Check Your Progress:

Complete the following sentences by choosing the correct alternative:

- 1) ..... is called the father of short story.  
a) Chaucer   b) Edgar Allen Poe   c) Thomas Malore
- 2) The form short-story was originated in .....  
a) America   b) England   c) Greek
- 3) King Arthur was the legendary figure of.....  
a) America   b) England   c) India
- 4) The story that is orally transmitted from generation to generation is called.....  
a) Anecdote   b) fairy tale   c) folk-tale
- 5) ..... is type of story in which animals and objects speak.  
a) fable   b) fairy-tale   c) parable

### B) Answer the following questions in word/phrase/sentence each.

- 1) Who was Aesop?
- 2) What is fable?
- 3) What is an anecdote?
- 4) What is Panchatantra?
- 5) What are the Gospels?

### Terms to Remember:

1. Gospels : four books of Bible that contain life and teaching of Jesus Christ.
2. Panchatantra: collection of Indian animal fables written in Sanskrit.
3. Phoenix: A unique bird which rises from ashes is symbol of rebirth.
4. King Arthur: a legendary British leader who defended Britain from Saxon invaders. (5<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> century)
5. Canterbury Tales: a collection of 24 stories, written by Geoferry Chaucer in 14<sup>th</sup> century.

6. Robinhood: A legendary heroic archer and swordsman, in English folktales.
7. Fabulist: The person who writes fables.
8. Aesop: a Greek fabulist and story teller.
9. Jataka Tales: the stories, related to the birth of Gautam Budha.
10. Mathew Mark, Luke: three of four writers of Gospels.
11. Setting: background place where the action of story takes place.
12. Metaphor: a thing regarded as representative or symbolic of something else.
13. Narrative: spoken accounts of story.
14. Didactic : educational, informative.
15. Emerge: arise, come into existence.
16. Medieval: of Middle Ages (from 1100 to 1485)

### Answers to Check Your Progress:

- A) I – b    II- a    III- b    IV- a    V- a
- B) I) a Greek slave.  
II) A short story in which animals speak and which teaches moral lesson.  
III) A short amusing story about real event or person.  
IV) Panchatantra is an ancient Indian collection of fables in Sanskrit.  
V) Gospels are the four books of Bible that tell about life and teachings of Jesus Christ.

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