

Mall Girl Meets the Shadow Vandal: Elements of a Story

Introduction

Stories are made up of common elements (though not everyone agrees on how many or what they are). Understanding story elements can help you become a better writer and a more perceptive reader. In this guide, we will explore six story elements as they relate to *Mall Girl Meets the Shadow Vandal*:

1. Setting
2. Exposition
3. Plot
4. Figurative language
5. Characters
6. Theme

Lesson 1: Setting

The setting is simply *when* and *where* the story takes place. Examples of settings:

- 1840s, a town along the Mississippi River - *Tom Sawyer*, by Mark Twain
- Present day, southern Florida - *Merci Suárez Changes Gears*, by Meg Medina
- A long time ago in a universe far, far away - the movie *Star Wars*, Episode IV: A New Hope

Watch this video about setting: <https://www.youtubekids.com/watch?v=30CPmgVQNks>

Identify the setting (time and place) from three of your favorite books, movies, or TV shows:

1. **Book, movie, or TV show:** _____

Setting: _____

2. **Book, movie, or TV show:** _____

Setting: _____

3. **Book, movie, or TV show:** _____

Setting: _____

Activity: Either write an essay based on the following questions or discuss them in a group.

- How important is the setting in *Mall Girl Meets the Shadow Vandal*?
- Do you think the story would be as interesting if the events took place in an ordinary neighborhood instead of in a shopping mall?
- How would the story be different if the vandalism attacks took place at Chloe's school?
- How might Chloe be different if she had grown up in a different setting?

Lesson 2: Exposition

Exposition is background information about **settings** (for examples, descriptions of a house or a town), **characters** (their names, what they look like, who their friends are, etc.), **past events** (what happened and how it affected the characters), and other parts of a story. Exposition can appear anywhere in the story but is often concentrated at or near the beginning to help readers make sense of the plot.

Exposition can be presented in several ways, including through the characters' thoughts, the narrator's descriptions, dialogue among the characters, or even letters, journals, or newspaper articles woven into the story. Here are some examples of exposition:

- **Main character's thoughts:** We'd started off squealing at each other from playpens on our front porches. Then we'd graduated to the sandboxes and swing sets in our back yards. Living so close, we'd found it too convenient not to be best friends.
- **Narrator's description:** The mansion was surrounded by two acres of rocky yard, and behind the back yard were endless miles of woods.
- **Dialogue:** "Remember your sixth-grade promotion? After the ceremony, Mom and Dad and I were standing at the refreshment table with Mrs. Patterson. You and Lexie came over. Mrs. Patterson congratulated you both on getting promoted, and you hugged her. But did you hug your own mother? No. She was hurt; I could tell."
- **Newspaper article:** "Police are searching for a fifteen-year-old girl who went missing after leaving her home on Monday evening..."

Fairytales often begin with exposition. Can you identify the following fairytale, based on the exposition in the "Once upon a time" sentence?

- "Once upon a time, there was a kind and beautiful girl who lived with her evil stepmother and two stepsisters."
- Fairytale: _____

Look for examples of exposition in *Mall Girl Meets the Shadow Vandal*. What did you learn about Chloe, her mom, their house, and past events in their lives? Hint: Chapters 2 and 6 are good places to start.

Lesson 3: Plot

Good stories have a beginning, a middle, and an end:

- Beginning: Introduces the characters and sets the scene.
- Middle: Introduces a complication (known as **conflict**) and describes how it is overcome.
- Ending: Resolves each character’s story and gives a sense of closure.

The **plot** consists of everything that happens from the beginning of the story to the end. It can be broken down into the following elements:

- Introduction/exposition
- Conflict
- Rising action
- Climax
- Falling action
- Resolution

Watch the following videos to learn more about plot elements:

<https://www.youtubekids.com/watch?v=Zr1xLtSMMLo>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NpWHZJZQDSE>

Think about a book you’ve read recently or a movie you’ve seen. (You can use *Mall Girl Meets the Shadow Vandal* if you’ve finished reading the book.) Summarize what happens in the different parts of the story.

Book or movie title: _____

Introduction/exposition: _____

Conflict: _____

Rising action: _____

Climax: _____

Falling action: _____

Resolution: _____

Lesson 4: Figurative language

Literal language is language that means exactly what it says. **Figurative language** is language that goes beyond the actual meaning of words.

- **Literal language:** I was cold.
- **Figurative language:** My fingers felt like ice cubes.

Figurative language allows authors to express ideas in colorful ways. It comes in several varieties:

Personification – a type of figurative language that gives an object or animal qualities or abilities that only humans can have, such as emotions, sensations, speech, or movement.

- **Example:** The winter wind nipped at Lily with its sharp teeth.
- **Write a sentence that includes personification.** _____

Onomatopoeia – A word that makes the sound of the thing it describes; for instance, a **hissing** snake.

- **Other examples:** boom, honk, pop, crack, screech, splash, buzz.
- **Can you think of other onomatopoeias? List them here.** _____

Hyperbole – An exaggeration that is used to make a point. Watch this video about hyperbole:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kuzWLDWm6Zs>

- **Example:** When Charlie burst out of the closet, I jumped fifty feet in the air.
- **Write a sentence that includes a hyperbole.** _____

Oxymoron – Language that uses two opposite ideas to create an interesting description.

- **Example:** The **loud silence** of the empty house rang in his ears.
- **Write a sentence that includes an oxymoron.** If you need help thinking of oxymorons, check out this website: <https://www.thoughtco.com/awfully-good-examples-of-oxymorons-1691814>

Simile – a comparison that uses the words like or as.

- The child pranced around **like** a wild pony.
- He was busy **as** a bee all day.

Metaphor – a comparison that doesn't use the words like or as.

- You are my sunshine.
- His apology was music to her ears.

Similes and metaphors allow us to compare unlike things in interesting ways by finding a similarity between them.

Watch this video about similes and metaphors: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yDOf299VYdU>

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Check out this Peanuts comic about metaphors: <https://www.gocomics.com/peanuts/2021/07/28>

Read this passage from chapter two of *Mall Girl Meets the Shadow Vandal*:

- Her hair is gorgeous—thick, straight, orderly. Whereas mine is thousands of yellow wires bending in random directions, like dysfunctional bedsprings.

Do you see both a metaphor and a simile in this passage? Write them down.

Metaphor: _____

Simile: _____

Activity: Set a timer for ten minutes. Compete individually or in teams to see who can find the most similes and metaphors in *Mall Girl Meets the Shadow Vandal*. (If working alone, write down examples of similes and metaphors from *Mall Girl*.)

Rewrite the following sentences using figurative language.

1. **Original sentence:** Brianna has an unusual laugh.

Rewrite: _____

Figure of speech: _____

2. **Original Sentence:** Jacob was happy to get the lead in the school play.

Rewrite: _____

Figure of speech: _____

3. **Original sentence:** The tropical breeze felt soft on Maria’s face.

Rewrite: _____

Figure of speech: _____

4. **Original sentence:** That casserole my sister made smells terrible.

Rewrite: _____

Figure of speech: _____

Lesson 5: Characters

Characters are the people (or animals, or space aliens, or robots) who move the story along through their actions, thoughts, feelings, or dialogue. Characters are the heart and soul of a story. The best ones change and grow throughout the story and seem like real people.

Watch these videos about characters:

<https://www.youtubekids.com/watch?v=v7QuOr1PP7o>

<https://www.youtubekids.com/watch?v=tW9TG22U3Go>

Write down an adjective that describes each of several characters in *Mall Girl Meets the Shadow Vandal*. Give evidence from the story that shows those adjectives are right. The first one is done for you.

1. **Character:** *Miss Chappell* **Adjective:** *Enthusiastic*

Evidence: *Page 47: "All of Miss Chappell's talk comes out in this fast up-and-down voice, like she just won the lottery and her prize is that she gets to teach seventh-grade English."*

2. **Character:** _____ **Adjective:** _____

Evidence: _____

3. **Character:** _____ **Adjective:** _____

Evidence: _____

4. **Character:** _____ **Adjective:** _____

Evidence: _____

Watch this video about character change: <https://www.youtubekids.com/watch?v=KC6WY06twwc>

How did the following characters change from the beginning of *Mall Girl* to the end?

Chloe: _____

Chloe's mother: _____

Ash: _____

Activity: Either write an essay based on the following questions or discuss them in a group.

- If you could bring any fictional character from a book, a movie, or a TV show to life and spend a day with that person, who would it be?
- Why would you choose that character?
- Describe the character. What do you like about them? Do they remind you of anyone you know?
- How would the two of you spend the day? What would you talk about?

Lesson 6: Theme

A **theme** is a lesson the author wants you to learn from the story. The theme is never stated directly to the reader. Instead, the reader must *infer* it. Inferring simply means figuring things out for yourself, based on the information that is given. For example, if you saw your neighbor walking to his car with a suitcase, you might infer that he was going on a trip. No one would have to tell you that.

Here are some themes from classic fairytales:

- **The Three Little Pigs:** Taking the time to do something right pays off.
- **Hansel and Gretel:** Trusting strangers can be dangerous.
- **Beauty and the Beast:** True beauty is found within.

Learn more about theme in this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=suGkMpZ7K6Q>

A story can have many themes. Watch the following video to learn about the themes in Cinderella: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k8muSkXjPHE>

Mall Girl Meets the Shadow Vandal has a number of themes. Can you identify them? Below are descriptions of various parts of the story to guide you. Remember, themes must be full sentences (though they're usually short) and should apply to everyone—young or old, rich or poor, etc.

1. The Shadow Vandal is sneaky and smart as he commits his crimes, but he still gets caught in the end.

Theme: _____

2. Chloe is lonely and miserable early in the story. She is much happier at the end, when she has friends.

Theme: _____

3. Chloe isn't able to solve the mall mystery alone, but the Mystery Groupers solve it together.

Theme: _____

Did you see any other themes in *Mall Girl Meets the Shadow Vandal*? If so, list them here and identify the parts of the story they apply to.

Think of your favorite book or movie. What themes can you identify?

Book or movie: _____

Themes: _____
