

Original Short Story - Complete Grading Criteria

An “A” story will demonstrate these traits:

Focus & Organization

1. Focus on a **protagonist** and on this person’s **central conflict** (whether *internal*, *external*, or *both*).
2. Use effective **pacing** to keep the reader engaged, to make smooth shifts in time and place, and to focus on key events and interactions (while summarizing or skimming the *less important* events).
3. Use a consistent **point of view** to present characters and events.

Development & Elaboration

4. Narrate a **coherent sequence of events** that develops the protagonist’s central conflict.
5. Use **precise words**, **sensory details**, and **dialogue** (and possibly *interior monologue*) to convey a vivid picture of the *characters*, *key events*, and *settings*.
6. Provide an effective **conclusion** that follows from the story’s events and resolves its central conflict.
7. Communicate a theme about **an issue of importance**, such as relationships, growing-up, morality, injustice, human nature, survival, friendship, self-knowledge, compassion, or love. (Don’t treat any characters like objects.) A story’s **theme** can be brought to life through any combination of these techniques:
 - **A Significant Statement** — A line of dialogue spoken by a character or an observation made by the narrator can communicate theme clearly.
 - **Protagonist’s Traits, Learning, and Growth** – The main character’s thoughts and actions should reveal his or her important traits. Theme can emerge from the protagonist’s key traits and the conflicts he or she faces. It can also emerge from what the main character learns, or how the main character grows or changes.
 - **Conflict and Plot** - A story revolves around a main *conflict* that is central to its theme. What conflicts do the characters face, and how are the conflicts resolved? Is the conflict’s resolution portrayed *positively* or *negatively*?
 - **Title** - The title may reflect a story’s *subject* or *significant idea*. It may refer to a significant detail or symbol in the story, it may express multiple meanings, and it may also emphasize key ideas in the story.
 - **Setting** - Setting can convey theme because of *what it means to the characters and readers*. How does the setting affect the characters and the plot? What conflict or ideas might it represent that are related to theme?
 - **Foil Characters** – To communicate theme, writers often use a minor character as a foil to emphasize the significant traits of a main character. (Both Dallas Winston and Johnny Cade are foils for Ponyboy.)
 - **Motif and Symbolism** – A motif is a pattern created in a story by the repetition of an image, word, action, or idea that points to some sort of meaning. A symbol is an image, word, object, action, or anything else in a story that not only plays a literal role in the story, but that also suggests a larger idea or meaning. (For example, Slim’s puppies and Candy’s dog can be considered important symbols in *Of Mice and Men*.)
 - **Irony** – Irony is an intentional discrepancy between *appearance and reality*, between *expectation and outcome*, or between what the author *seems* to be saying and what the author actually *is* saying. When an author uses irony, there is something significant that readers should recognize and understand but that one or more characters fail to recognize and understand. (It is **ironic** that Johnny writes to Ponyboy, “There’s still lots of good in the world. Tell Dally. I don’t think he knows” because Dally already gave up on life and got himself killed before Ponyboy read Johnny’s letter.)
 - **Allusion** – An allusion is a reference to a story, poem, song, book, myth, or person that suggests a key idea or theme. (In *The Outsiders*, the reference to Robert Frost’s “Nothing Gold Can Stay” is an allusion.)

Language & Mechanics

8. Include **precise words** and phrases, **specific details**, and **sensory language**.
9. Use **quotation marks**, **paragraph-breaks**, and **punctuation** correctly, as well as correct grammar, mechanics, and spelling.