

Fiction: Reading and Study Guide

PRACTICE: Combining the Elements of Fiction

David Updike: "Summer"

Study "Summer" in light of your assigned element. Examine the way your element functions in the story. Use the following questions as a guide to generate discussion.

Plot	Does "Summer" have a clear beginning, middle, and end? Is the plot straightforward? Fragmentary? What is the conflict in the story?
Character	How realistic are the story's characters? Which are dynamic, and which, static? With which character(s) do you identify most? Why? What information does Updike provide about the characters and what does he leave out? What effect do these choices have on the reader?
Setting	Describe the setting. What details does Updike use to convey the tone of the setting? How important is the setting to the narrative as a whole?
Point of View	How would we read this story if it were told from Sandra's point of view? What information would an omniscient third-person narrator reveal that we do not receive here? Would the story differ significantly if Homer were the actual narrator?
Symbolism	Explain how Updike manipulates the story's major symbols: summer, heat, the characters' names, and Sherlock Holmes. What other symbols can you identify? How important are those symbols to your reading of the story?
Theme	What is the story's theme? Is it stated explicitly or implicitly?
Style, Tone, and Irony	Identify the tone. Is it nostalgic? ironic? objective? A combination? Cite textual examples.

General Questions :

1. What is gained by studying this story in light of more than one element?
2. How do the elements work together to create the total effect of the story (and what is that effect)?
3. It's unusual to have all the elements equally important in a story. Are they here?
4. If you were to include this story in one of the earlier chapters of the textbook, which one would you choose? Why?

Story Questions :

1. Homer admits that “to touch her, or kiss her, seemed suddenly incongruous, absurd, contrary to something he could not put his finger on”; “he realized he had never been able to imagine the moment he distantly longed for.”

What is Homer’s motivation here? Why doesn’t he kiss Sandra? Why doesn’t he need to demonstrate his affection for her in some tangible way? What is there in the story that indicates that longing itself is enough?

2. What is the connection between his distanced affection for Sandra and his interest in the girl in the canoe who waves to them at the end of the summer?
3. He tells us, “there was something in the way that she raised her arm which, when added to the distant impression of her fullness, beauty, youth, filled him with longing as their boat moved inexorably past, slapping the waves, and she disappeared behind a crop of trees” (p. 15) Is this in some sense a metaphor for the ending of his pursuit of Sandra as the summer comes to a close?