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## Preparing for STAAR

### Lesson 1: Elements of Fiction

There are five main elements people refer to when they discuss fiction. **Setting** is the time and place in which the events of a literary work occur. **Plot** is the sequence of events in a story. **Characters** are the people, animals, or beings in a work. The **theme** is the main idea or message a literary work conveys. **Point of view** is the relationship of the narrator or storyteller to the story. (See Lessons 2 and 3 for more on point of view.) Another aspect of fiction is **conflict**, which is the struggle between opposing forces in the plot of a story. This struggle can occur between a character and an outside force, such as another character, society, nature, or fate. It can also take place within a character who is faced with conflicted feelings or indecision about how to act.

**DIRECTIONS:** *Read the following passage. As you read, try to identify the different elements of fiction. Then answer the questions on the next page.*

- 1 From a young age, Shandot Beto was known throughout Jupiter as an artist of great talent. Art was his life and he lived only to create.
- 2 When he was just past middle age and still at the height of his artistic powers, a military coup occurred on the planet. The new emperor soon proved himself to be a ruthless dictator. He had plans to take over the entire galaxy by the year 4025.
- 3 As part of his vision for Jupiter, the emperor tore down hundreds of structures and had them rebuilt at great expense to celebrate himself. These palaces were to be filled with beautiful frescoes and murals. The emperor invited three of the greatest artists on the planet to discuss the planned artwork with him. He would then choose the artists and the plans he liked best.
- 4 Of course, Beto was one of the invited artists. He hated the new emperor and all that he represented. But the buildings were to be beautiful and extraordinary. Beto struggled with his conscience but, in the end, he submitted a proposal and was selected to paint the palaces. Beto soothed his qualms with the thought that, after all, he was an artist. What were interplanetary politics to him? When both he and this dictator were dead and gone, Beto's art in these magnificent structures would remain, exquisite and immortal.
- 5 He began work on the frescoes immediately. His brain teemed with ideas and he threw himself into the work. But every day, the emperor or one of his people was there, watching Beto work and redirecting him. "Not like that," they would say. "Like this."
- 6 When Beto complained of the interference, the emperor's eyes narrowed. "You work for me," he reminded the artist. "You paint what I want."
- 7 Slowly, Beto's vision for the frescoes and murals began to be corrupted. He was unable to proceed as he wished. The emperor and his courtiers had no artistic talent but he could not ignore their demands. In the end, the frescoes were lackluster and lifeless, the murals uninspired.
- 8 The emperor, however, was smug with delight. He thought the art was glorious, and he congratulated Beto. From that time on, Beto became the emperor's pet artist, painting slick court portraits and other works as required by the emperor.
- 9 In galactic year 6012, when the emperor and the artist were long dead, Beto's early artwork was discovered and revered, though the man himself was always spoken of as one who had willingly collaborated with a tyrant.
- 10 His later works were found to have no merit at all.



## Lesson 2: Point of View I

**Point of view** refers to the narrator's perspective. When a story is written from the **first person point of view**, the narrator is a character in the story who tells the story using the pronoun *I*. With **second-person point of view**, the narrator uses the pronoun *you* to address the reader directly. With **third-person point of view**, the narrator is an outsider to the story who reports the events of the story to the reader. The narrator refers to the characters either by name or by the pronouns *he* and *she*.

**DIRECTIONS:** Read the two versions of the same scene. Then answer the questions that follow.

### Passage 1

- 1 We drove up the driveway and the car ground to a halt. Dad said, "So here it is. Our new house."
- 2 I didn't say anything. I just stared and hoped that he could read my face. It was a flat, squat house with dingy gray walls. Everything about it was ugly. Its windows were gray, with slatted shades, and its door had a cheap plastic welcome mat. It didn't even have a proper lawn, just some patchy grass and a few scraggly dandelions. I couldn't imagine ever calling this place home.
- 3 "So, what do you think?" said Dad. "Not bad, huh? There's lots of space, that's for sure. You'll have your own bedroom this time."
- 4 I just shrugged. I refused to give him the pleasure of eye contact. This time, I resolved, I wouldn't get my hopes up.

### Passage 2

- 1 When the Saclaloses arrived at the new house, it was late afternoon. They'd been driving for five hours, and they were all hot and sticky. When the car crunched to a stop, they just sat there, drowsy and disoriented.
- 2 "So here it is," said Peter Saclalos, slapping his hands to his legs. "Our new house."
- 3 Silence. Amy wearily peeled the stereo headset off her ears and looked around. "No point in getting excited," she whispered to herself. They'd moved five times in the past two years. She hated moving, but complaining got her nowhere. She sighed, her face a mask of boredom.
- 4 John got out of the car first. His face was blank. He felt sick to his stomach.
- 5 "So, what do you think?" asked Mr. Saclalos. "Not bad, huh? There's lots of space, that's for sure. You'll have your own bedroom this time."
- 6 John just shrugged and looked away.



### Lesson 3: Point of View II

In a story with **third-person omniscient**, or all-knowing, point of view, the narrator stands outside the story and comments on the action. A third-person omniscient narrator knows everything about the characters and the events of the story, and may reveal details that the characters themselves don't know.

**DIRECTIONS:** Read this version of the story about the Saclaloses' new house. Then answer the questions on the following page.

- 1 The Saclaloses arrived at their new house by late afternoon. Amy and John were hot and sticky from the five-hour drive. They knew that they would hate this new house the moment their father told them he bought it. *It's going to be ugly*, Amy had thought during the drive, *but anything is better than that tiny, one-bedroom apartment back in Charlotte.*
- 2 It wasn't that they were spoiled or ungrateful. Amy and John were simply frustrated at all the changes that had ensued since their parents' divorce. They had already moved five times in two years.
- 3 Mr. Saclalos wanted what was best for his children. He knew that they were weary of moving, and all he wanted was to settle down. He was sure this house would signify a fresh start. But how could he convey his hope to Amy and John? "So here it is. Our new house," he said with a big smile.
- 4 John stared grimly at the shabby house. He noticed the peeling paint, the cheap doormat. His eyes caught sight of a piece of plastic sticking out from the dirt. It was a child's truck. Somehow, the sight of this truck made him terribly sad. He felt overwhelmed by a sense of loss.
- 5 "You'll have your own bedroom this time," Mr. Saclalos said hopefully. But John just stared at the new house with tired eyes. Mr. Saclalos looked at Amy. The expression on her face mirrored John's frustration. She had already decided that she would not be happy here, and she wondered how long they would stay.
- 6 Warily, the family unpacked their bags and stepped inside. The rooms felt bleak and empty. Amy and John walked around silently, opening windows, trying to hide their disappointment. They felt, deep in their hearts, that this house would never feel like home.
- 7 With time, their feelings would change. With time, the kitchen would fill the house with comforting smells, and the backyard would blossom with flowers, and each room would be full of memories. The Saclaloses would stay in this house for twenty years, longer than they had ever stayed in any house before. But that would all come later. For now, they had only to take their first steps toward the door.

