

Novella and Novelette

Curriculum: ADVANCED

Created by: Dar Bagby

Definition: (see individual definitions for each below)

Goals: 1) Be able to describe the novella and novelette
2) Be aware of how they have changed throughout history

Tools: a copy of the HANDOUTS (#1 and #2) for each ADVANCED enthusiast

Ice Breaker: Distribute HANDOUT #1 and have the enthusiasts decide which example they would choose in each scenario. Discuss them, emphasizing that choices are necessary in writing, just as they are in other situations.

Lesson

Distribute HANDOUT #2 and ask the enthusiasts to follow along as you discuss the topics. Encourage them to take notes on the HANDOUT page.

Novella

Definition: (Italian, feminine form of *novello*, “new”) a written, fictional, prose narrative, normally longer and more complex than a short story but shorter than a novel; comprised of approximately 20,000 to 50,000 words.

The origin of the novella took place in the early Renaissance in Italy and France. In the late eighteenth/early nineteenth centuries it became fashioned into legitimate literature governed by precepts and rules. It was generally limited to a single event, situation, or conflict, usually based on realism with a logical ending.

In today’s literary world, it features fewer conflicts than a novel, but they tend to be more complicated than those found in short stories. They are most often written without chapter divisions, though they do generally contain sections (divided by white space). The subplots found in short stories and novels are lacking in a novella, as are multiple points of view. Instead, they usually center around personal and emotional development of the characters.

In “The New Yorker” on October 29, 2012, in an article titled “Some Notes on the Novella,” Ian McEwen made the following comments:

“Let’s take, as an arbitrary measure, something that is between twenty and forty thousand words, long enough for a reader to inhabit a world or a consciousness and be kept there, short enough to be read in a sitting or two and for the whole structure to be held in mind at first encounter—the architecture of the novella is one of its immediate pleasures. How often one reads a contemporary full-length novel and thinks quietly, mutinously, that it would have worked out better at half or a third the length. I suspect that many novelists clock up sixty thousand words after a year’s work and believe (wearily, perhaps) that they are only half way there. They are slaves to the giant, instead of masters of the form.”

“To sit with a novella is analogous to watching a play or a longish movie.”

“The analogy with film or theatre is a reminder that there is an element of performance in the novella. We are more strongly aware of the curtain and the stage, of the author as illusionist. The smoke and mirrors, rabbits and hats are more self-consciously applied than in the full-length novel.”

Examples of novellas

Animal Farm, George Orwell

Billy Budd, Sailor, Herman Melville

Breakfast at Tiffany’s, Truman Capote

The Call of the Wild, Jack London

Candide, Voltaire

A Christmas Carol, Charles Dickens

The Little Prince, Antoine de Saint-Exupery

Of Mice and Men, John Steinbeck

The Old Man and the Sea, Ernest Hemingway

The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Robert Louis Stevenson

The Time Machine, H.G. Wells

Novelette

Definition: a narrative work of prose fiction, longer than a short story but shorter than a novella, approximately 7500 to 20,000 words.

Its origin stems from that of the novella, but at first it was considered to be sentimental and trivial, often regarded as something only women who were unsatisfied with their private lives would care to read. It has evolved into a story that contains all of the things found in a novel, only shorter. Its reputation has improved, and today it is found in nearly every genre with exceptional popularity in fantasy (especially dark fantasy), sci-fi, romance, and horror.

Critics used to label novelettes as vulgar and primitive, even remarking that they badly influenced literary style, and originally their critiques may have been well founded. In today’s novelettes, however, we find quite acceptable material in the form of brief adventures, scary stories, thrillers, and romance. They are “mini novels,” taking their readers on a short trek instead of a novel-length journey, perfect for both readers and writers who do not have the luxury of spending the time necessary to complete an entire novel. Some writers turn out romance novels between other longer books in order to satisfy their readers’ appetites for certain characters.

In the past novelettes were expected to present a love triangle, predictability, and ALWAYS a happy ending. They were expected to restore people's faith in love and leave readers with a feeling of security in an otherwise rebellious world. But society has become more sophisticated, so these novelette requirements have gone by the wayside. Because of the available access to what is happening worldwide (not just in the local neighborhood) through today's media, a happy ending is no longer necessary. A writer can now decide how to end it, even leading to everyone's death!

The days of writing novelettes with poor language and no style are also gone. They now contain solid construction, valid stories and plots, and they follow the rules of good writing. They simply contain a less complex plot that fits the smaller length without forfeiting quality. The main focus is on writing a well-put-together story that readers will love.

Available awards for novellas and novelettes

- Nebula Award for Best Novelette (sci-fi or fantasy), Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America (7500-17,499 words)
- Nebula Award for Best Novella (sci-fi or fantasy), Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America (17,500-39,999 words)
- Hugo Award for Best Novelette (sci-fi or fantasy), World Science Fiction Society (7500-17,500 words)
- Hugo Award for Best Novella (sci-fi or fantasy), World Science Fiction Society (20,000-40,000 words)
- RITA Award for Best Novella (romance), Romance Writers of America (20,000-40,000 words)
- British Fantasy Award for Novella (fantasy), British Fantasy Society (15,000-40,000 words)
- Paris Literary Prize (literary fiction), Shakespeare and Company (17,000-35,000 words)
- Black Orchid Novella Award (mystery), Nero Wolfe Society (15,000-20,000 words)
- Shirley Jackson Award for Best Novelette (psychological suspense, horror, or dark fantasy; 7500-17,499 words)
- Shirley Jackson Award for Best Novella (psychological suspense, horror, or dark fantasy; 17,500-39,999 words)

Activity: Ask the enthusiasts which of the examples of novellas (listed above and on HANDOUT #1) they are most familiar with. Have them compare the underlined portions of the second paragraph in the Novella lesson with the plot and story in the one they have chosen, then discuss whether that story meets the criteria.

- Discussion:**
- 1) Will you be able to fit your idea for a novella or novelette into the size limitations required?
 - 2) How can you cut out or add material in order to make the plot fit?

Novella and Novelette

Handout #1: ADVANCED

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After reading the scenario, decide which example you would choose. There are no right or wrong answers. You are simply practicing how to make your own choice based on the circumstances.

1. Your English professor held you up after class to talk to you about a special project he would like you to tackle. This cut into your lunch break, so you only have twenty minutes to grab something to eat on the fly before getting to your next class—halfway across campus—on time. Which would you choose and why?



2. You have won the grand prize in a contest you entered and now you have your choice of one of these. Which would you choose and why?



3. You just moved to a new apartment where you are allowed to have pets. Which would you choose and why?



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Novella and Novelette

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