

Handout 1: Key terms and questions for writing about novels

For all categories: Are these characteristics typical for this genre and period?
What effect do the writer's choice have?

| Characters and characterisation: how characters are created | Language |
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| <p>X principally characterises through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • direct definition, thoughts/speech, name, actions, human & physical environment, physical appearance • round/flat (fullness) • Open/closed (change/capacity to change) • telling/showing • constellation of characters (doubles?) • do characters have recognisably different voices? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short, simple versus long, complex sentences (what makes them long? Profusion of adjectives or adverbs? Relative clauses?) • Monosyllabic, polysyllabic words? • Paragraph length? • Overall style: poetic, elevated, colloquial, formal, neutral, archaic • Use of specialist vocabulary from a specific field? • Use of imagery (simile, metaphor, personification) • Proportion of dialogue to narrative • Sound effects: alliteration, onomatopoeia, assonance, rhyme • Senses: taste, touch, sight, sound, smell. How dominant? • Repetition, of words with heightened meaning? • Punctuation & graphic elements (use of brackets for asides, use of italics or capitals) • Are ideas and words concrete or abstract? • Exclamations? Questions? Detail? Hyperbole? |
| Narration: how events are related | Setting: where and when the novel is set |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1st, (2nd), 3rd person narrator, multiple narrators • Omniscient? Degree of insight into some/all characters? How close is the narrator's point of view to a character's? • Intrusive/unreliable narrator • Direct address to readers • Irony • Reader directed to take the same view of the narrator, or not? • Does the narrator talk explicitly about the process of writing, the idea of fiction (metafiction)? • Does the narrator make references to other writers? • Narrative voice | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Described in realistic terms or merely sketched in? • A dominant element in the novel contributing to mood and atmosphere? • Multiple or single? • How much space is given to an hour/a day/a year? • Where do characters spend their time? What effect does this have? |
| Plot: the events in the order that the reader learns about them | Structure: how it's put together |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Simple/complex, several sub-plots? • Suspense, how created? Delaying strategies? Foreshadowing? • Order in which events are presented – is information deliberately withheld? • Turning points? • How are events resolved? • Plot based on: journey, development of character, society, mystery? • Chronological • Retrospective • Beginnings & endings (happy?), overall shape? • Moral message? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parts • Chapters: of equal length? Which longer? Why? Impact? • One climax? Several? • Use of epigraphs, poetry, songs etc? • Use of prefaces & epilogues • How does one chapter end and the next begin? • Chronological or non-chronological • Flashbacks • Fractured |
| Themes: subjects the writer's interested in | Presentation of emotion |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do they become apparent: plot, title, speeches? • Amount of space given to particular topics? • Writer's worldview? • How are common themes, like love, treated? • Use of symbols? • Humour? How created? • How are women presented? • How are relations between the sexes presented? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Which emotions dominate? • Named? • Linked to physical description? |