

Edexcel English Literature Part 2: Exploring Prose

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STUDENT BOOK

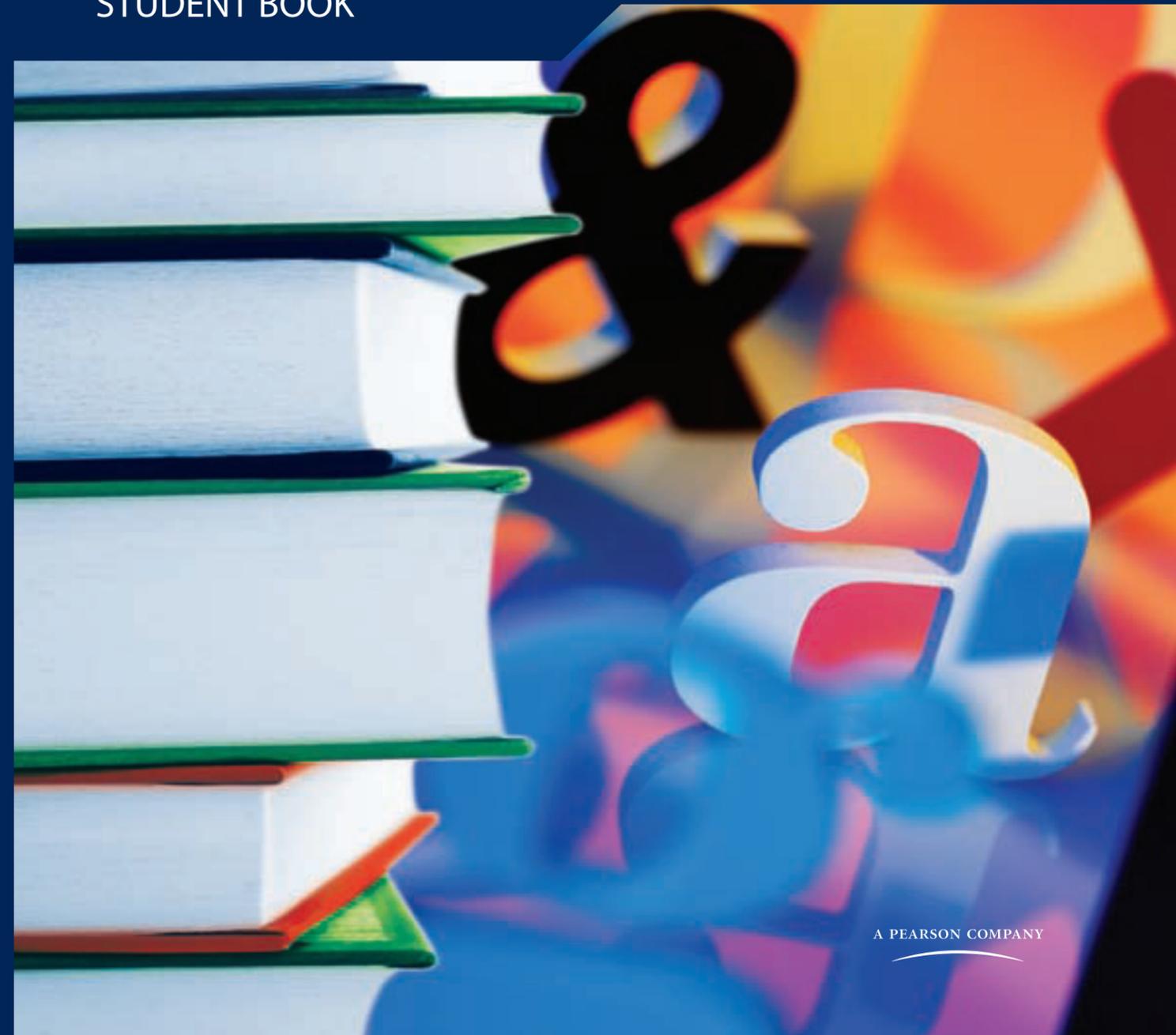
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Part 2: Exploring Prose

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Part 2 Exploring prose

This part of the book helps you develop your skills in reading and analysing prose

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1 Introduction: what is a narrative?

The following sections develop your understanding of the main features of **narrative** and the techniques that writers of narratives use to tell their stories.

We hear and tell **stories** all the time, in all aspects of our lives, from dreams and jokes to anecdotes and novels. Stories help us to see and interpret the world.

In everyday use, the two terms 'story' and 'narrative' are usually used interchangeably, but some critics define them slightly differently. They say that:

- a story is what happens and who it happens to (plot and character)
- a narrative is the story plus the *telling* of it – all the things that go into bringing the story to life for a listener or reader.

Studying narrative means studying not only what happens and to whom, but also all the ways in which the teller (in **this case** the writer rather than a speaker) creates the story and the reader responds to it.

The critic Roland Barthes has said:

... narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting ... stained-glass windows, cinema, comics, news items, conversation. Moreover, under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative.

Key terms

narrative
story

Activity 1

- 1 Write down four or five examples of stories you have read, heard or watched over the past 24 hours.
- 2 Annotate each of your examples with anything you can say about how it was told, by whom and in what context.
- 3 Share your list with someone else and compare your findings about the range of stories you come across or tell in a typical day, and the ways they are told.

Activity 2

- 1 What makes a narrative a narrative? Here are four short texts. For each one decide:

- a whether you think it is or is not part of a narrative
- b what it is about the extract that helped you to decide.

Text A:

Earl Ober was between jobs as a salesman. But Doreen his wife, had gone to work nights as a waitress at a twenty-four-hour coffee shop at the edge of town. One night, when he was drinking, Earl decided to stop by the coffee shop and have something to eat.

Text B:

And so I'm like, 'How could you do that to him?' and she's like, 'Well he did the same to me, so he deserved everything he got,' and I'm like, 'Well no wonder he decided to leave you.' And we haven't talked to each other since.

Text C:

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall,
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall,
All the king's horses and all the king's men
Couldn't put Humpty together again.

Text D:

I wouldn't go today if I were you. The sales are on,
there'll be masses of people and the car parks'll be full. I'd
leave it till a bit later in the week when it's less crowded.
I'm sure there'll still be some good bargains.

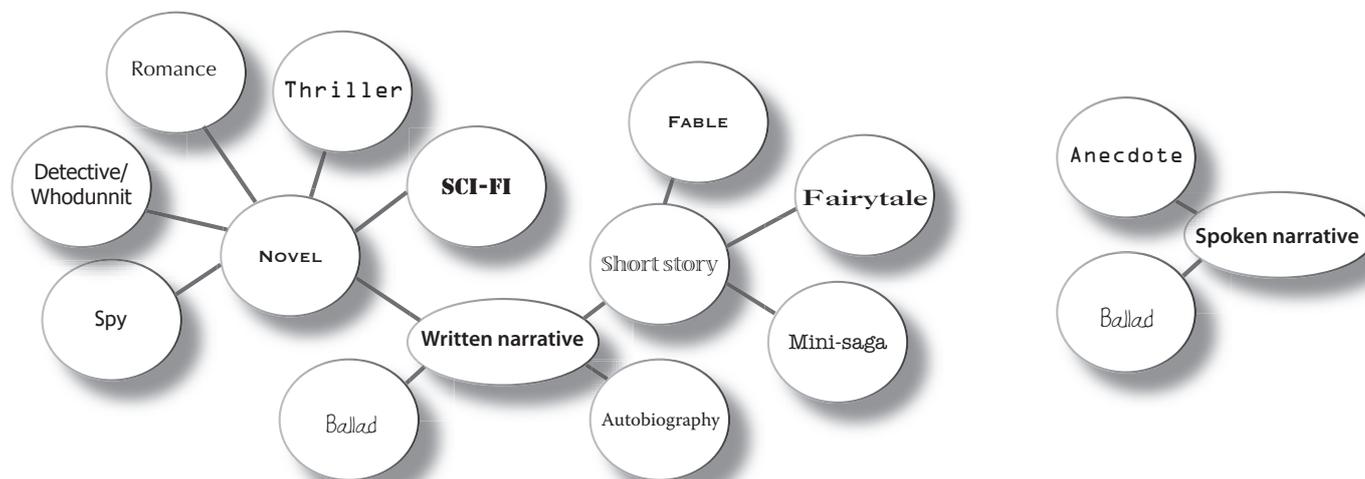
- 2 Using the texts above to help you, talk about which of the following ingredients you think are essential in a narrative (E); which are sometimes found in narratives, but are not essential (S); and which are never found in a narrative (N). Against each ingredient, put a label (E), (S) or (N).
- a a teller
 - b more than one event
 - c one thing leading to another (cause and effect)
 - d a moral or message
 - e people
 - f things taking place in time (a sense of time passing)
 - g description of places
 - h everything is told in the past tense
 - i events are seen through one person's eyes
 - j a beginning, a middle and an end
- 3 Is there any other ingredient, not on the list, which you think can also be essential or typical of a narrative? If so, add it to the list and mark it with E or S.
- 4 Come back to this list after working on narratives for a while to see if your views have changed at all.

Take it further

Choose three or four tiny fragments of your own from fiction or non-fiction texts. Do any of your non-fiction examples show narrative features? What does this tell you about how non-fiction writers can use narrative techniques to engage the reader? Present your examples to other people in your class, describing and analysing the features of narrative that you have identified.

2 Different types of narrative: genre

A **genre** is a type of writing. Within the big genre that we call narrative, there are sub-sets such as the novel or the short story, which are also called genres. Within these sub-sets, there are further kinds of writing that, perhaps unhelpfully, are also called genres (eg horror or romance) and even within these, there are further divisions. For instance, there are several different genres of detective fiction (country house, hard-boiled and so on). Below is a chart showing just some of the sub-genres within the big genre of narrative.



What makes a genre?

Each genre has its own **conventions**, in other words typical features. Each **sub-genre** has its own conventions too. A reader either knows in advance what genre they are reading or listening to, or works this out while reading, by recognising the conventions. A reader has expectations about what the narrative in a particular genre will be like. The writer can choose to:

- fulfil these expectations
- extend these expectations by developing and changing the conventions
- challenge these expectations by rejecting the conventions
- mix up genre conventions and **generic features**, in a playful or experimental way.

Key terms

genre
conventions
sub-genre
generic features

Activity 3

- 1 Read these two lists of generic features and see if you can match each one to a genre.

A

- a very short story
- generalised characters or types, often without a name (eg a young girl, an old man, an animal)
- generalised, often rural setting (eg an unnamed village, a forest)
- language that is not everyday, but has a more 'noble' flavour
- a strong metaphorical element
- ends with a strong moral, often made absolutely explicit in the last sentence (eg 'And so ...')

B

- a woman is in search of love
- a possible object of her desire appears (not always obviously suitable)
- an obstacle is placed in the way (misunderstandings, a competitor or another problem)
- the obstacle persists and becomes more complicated
- it looks as if it is all going to end badly
- finally the obstacle is overcome

- 2 From your own knowledge, make a list of the conventions of one of the other written genres in the diagram above. (Depending on the genre, you could use your knowledge of film to help you, since some of the generic features are the same in books and films of the same genre.)
- 3 Share ideas with other students looking at the same genre and debate the conventions. Create a final, clear list of what you consider to be the most important conventions of that genre.

Identifying genres

Activity 4

The text on page 7 follows many of the conventions of its genre.

- 1 Read the text and identify the genre.
- 2 Explore what made you come to your decision by talking about the features you
- 3 Compare your decisions with those of other students.

Below the grill there was an iron knocker. I hammered on it.

Nothing happened. I pushed the bell at the side of the door and heard it ring inside not very far off and waited and nothing happened. I worked on the knocker again. Still nothing. I went back up the walk and along to the garage and lifted the door far enough to see the car with white side-walled tyres was inside. I went back to the front door.

A neat black Cadillac coupé came out of the garage across the way, backed, turned and came along past Lavery's house, slowed, and a thin man in dark glasses looked at me sharply, as if I hadn't any business to be there. I gave him my steely glare and he went on his way.

I went down Lavery's walk again and did some more hammering on his knocker. This time I got results. The judas window opened and I was looking at a handsome bright-eyed number through the bars of the grill.

'You make a hell of a lot of noise,' a voice said.

'Mr Lavery?'

He said he was Mr Lavery and what about it. I poked a card through the grill. A large brown hand took the card. The bright brown eyes came back and the voice said: 'So sorry. Not needing any detectives today please.'

'I'm working for Derace Kingsley.'

'The hell with both of you,' he said, and banged the judas window.

I leaned on the bell beside the door and got a cigarette out with my free hand and had just struck the match on the woodwork beside the door when it was yanked open and a big guy in bathing trunks, beach sandals and a white terrycloth bathing robe started to come out at me.

I took my thumb off the bell and grinned at him.

'What's the matter?' I asked him. 'Scared?'

'Ring that bell again,' he said, 'and I'll throw you clear across the street.'

Take it further

Choose one genre of narrative that interests you. Find three or four examples of texts in that genre. (Some bookshops or libraries organise their books in terms of genre.) Read just the opening pages of each one and note down how your expectations of the genre are fulfilled, extended or challenged. You could do this individually or as a small group activity and present your findings to the rest of the class.

Preparing for the exam

Can you define the genre of your texts? Does the writer of your text draw on a range of genres, use generic conventions, challenge them or deliberately play with your expectations? Does your reading of **both** texts make you think about the genre of **each** text in a new way?

3 Exploring narrative openings

The beginning of a novel can be a vital way of setting up aspects of what is to follow, such as what the narrative is about, who the characters are, where the story is set and who is telling the story. It is the way that writers hook their readers and draw them into the world of their novel. The writer sets up a kind of 'contract' with the reader about what to expect – 'if you come on this reading journey with me you're going to have this kind or that kind of experience'. Narratives in a genre such as thriller, romance or detective fiction, often make the reader aware particularly clearly, right from the start, what type of story or genre they are reading.

Activity 5

- 1 Explore the five openings from novels on page 8. They are written in very different styles and told in a range of different ways. Fill in a copy of the chart below using a star-rating system to show your first responses (* = not really, ** = quite a lot, *** = very much).

	A	B	C	D	E
The opening focuses on the setting.					
We get a strong sense of what the characters are like.					
The narrator tells you a lot about him or herself.					
You're dropped right into the middle of the story.					
The opening makes us aware of the genre of the novel.					
The opening makes you want to read on.					

Text A: From *Restless* by William Boyd

When I was a child and was being fractious and contrary and generally behaving badly, my mother used to rebuke me by saying: ‘One day someone will come and kill me and then you’ll be sorry’; or, ‘They’ll appear out of the blue and whisk me away – how would you like that?’ or, ‘You’ll wake up one morning and I’ll be gone. Disappeared. You wait and see.’

Text B: From *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy

May in Ayemenem is a hot, brooding month. The days are long and humid. The river shrinks and black crows gorge on bright mangoes in still, dustgreen trees. Red bananas ripen. Jackfruits burst. Dissolute bluebottles hum vacuously in the fruity air. Then they stun themselves against clear windowpanes and die, fatly baffled in the sun.

The nights are clear but suffused with sloth and sullen expectation.

But by early June the south-west monsoon breaks and there are three months of wind and water with short spells of sharp, glittering sunshine that thrilled children snatch to play with. The countryside turns an immodest green. Boundaries blur as tapioca fences take root and bloom.

Text C: From *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy

When he woke in the woods in the dark and the cold of the night he’d reach out to touch the child sleeping beside him. Nights dark beyond darkness and the days more grey each one than what had gone before. Like the onset of some cold glaucoma dimming away the world. His hand rose and fell softly with each precious breath. He pushed away the plastic tarpaulin and raised himself in the stinking robes and blankets and looked toward the east for any light but there was none.

Text D: From *Housekeeping* by Marilynne Robinson

My name is Ruth. I grew up with my younger sister, Lucille, under the care of my grandmother, Mrs. Sylvia Foster, and when she died, of her sisters-in-law, Misses Lily and Nona Foster, and when they fled, of her daughter, Mrs. Sylvia Fisher. Through all these generations of elders we lived in one house, my grandmother’s house, built for her by her husband, Edmund Foster, an employee of the railroad, who escaped this world years before I entered it. It was he who put us down in this unlikely place.

Text E: From *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* by John Le Carré

The American handed Leamas another cup of coffee and said, ‘Why don’t you go back to sleep? We can ring you if he shows up.’

Leamas said nothing, just stared through the window of the checkpoint, along the empty street.

‘You can’t wait for ever, sir. Maybe he’ll come some other time. We can have the polizei contact the Agency: you can be back here in twenty minutes.’

‘No,’ said Leamas, ‘it’s nearly dark now.’

‘But you can’t wait for ever; he’s nine hours over schedule.’

‘If you want to go, go. You’ve been very good,’ Leamas added. ‘I’ll tell Kramer you’ve been damn’ good.’

‘But how long will you wait?’

‘Until he comes.’

Preparing for the exam

Explore the openings of your texts, using what you have learned to analyse the writers’ intentions, the techniques used and the impact on the reader. You could do this before reading your **second** text, so that right from the start you’re thinking about it in relation to your **first** text.

Developing your analysis further

Activity 6

The writer Blake Morrison has tried to analyse novel openings by categorising them in different ways. Here is a summary of his categories:

- the plunge – launching you right into the middle
 - the shocker – a big surprise or outrageous idea
 - the intriguing narrator – you want to know more about the person (or animal) telling the story
 - the epigram – a neat little phrase summing up an idea that will be important in the book
 - the promise – telling the reader what they will be getting
 - the omen – a warning of bad things to come
 - the particulars – pinning down all the details, as if for a news report
 - the self-referral – the narrator introduces him/herself.
- 1 Look at the five novel openings on page 8 again and decide which of Morrison's categories (if any) best fits each opening. You can choose more than one category, if that seems appropriate, or add a category of your own, if you prefer.
 - 2 Choose the opening you like best. Write a short statement about the opening in which you explain:
 - how it grabs you as a reader
 - what it focuses on (characters, setting, introducing the narrator or anything else)
 - what sort of 'contract' you think it is setting up with the reader (eg 'it is saying if you read on you will find a novel that is ...').
 - 3 Using what you have learned, write one or two openings of your own, experimenting with different ways into a narrative. You could use a myth or legend or a film you have seen recently to provide you with the storyline itself, to allow you to concentrate on the *way* you tell it.
 - 4 Read one of your openings to other people in the class, explaining what you were trying to do.

Key terms

narrator
prologue
framing device
narrative voice

Take it further

- Find one other example of a novel opening that you think is particularly effective and quite different to the ones you have looked at so far. Share it with the rest of the class and explain how and why you think it works particularly well.
- Think about the effects of other strategies for starting a novel, such as epigrams (short quotations at the start), **prologues** (introductory passages) or **framing devices** (putting the main narrative inside another 'framing' one). Frames often introduce a character who will narrate the main story, giving the circumstances of how they first heard the story).
- Compare endings as well. You could create your own categories for types of endings, along the same lines as Blake Morrison's list. Perhaps your starting point could be to brainstorm the endings of books or films that you have particularly liked, which you then try to categorise.

4 Modes of telling: narrative voice and point of view

At GCSE you may well have come across the terms 'first', 'second' and 'third person **narrative voice**', to describe the way a novel or short story is told. At **this** level, you need to look at this in a more detailed way, exploring the subtleties of how writers use narrative voice.

Finding out more

Some descriptions of different kinds of narrative voice are given on page 10. Don't worry about absorbing all the information at this stage. The activity that follows will allow you to make use of, and become familiar with, these ideas.

Key terms

first person narrative
unreliable narrator
stream of consciousness
third person narrative
omniscient third person narrator
point of view
over-the-shoulder narration
free indirect style
tag
second person narrative

First person narrative

Narratives told in the first person are written in the voice of a character in the narrative, as if they are saying, 'This happened to me. I am telling you this story.'

First person narrators can be very different, from the narrator who introduces themselves at the beginning as the person telling a story in which they are not involved and then almost disappears from view, to the narrator whose life is at the heart of the story.

Some first person narrators are described as **unreliable narrators**, because the writer deliberately introduces an element of doubt as to the trustworthiness of their account of things. This makes the act of reading the story more complex, as the reader is not only following the twists and turns of the plot and getting to grips with themes and characters, but is also having to question the narrator and their judgement on everything that is presented.

Stream of consciousness is a form of first person narration, where the writer, through the narrator, tries to suggest the spontaneous outpouring of thoughts and feelings. It is as if the reader has direct access to the inner workings of the narrator's mind. Occasionally a 'stream of consciousness' style can also be used in a third person narrative voice.

Third person narrative

Third person narrators are not characters in the story. A **third person narrative** says, 'He did this' or 'She went there.' Conventionally, third person narration is thought to be more distanced and neutral than first person narration, but in fact there are different kinds of third person voice, as summarised below.

The **omniscient third person narrator** is a god-like, all-knowing narrator, who does not draw attention to him or herself and is able to tell you the thoughts and feelings of all of the characters, although often the story focuses on the **point of view** of just one or two characters. This is sometimes described as **over-the-shoulder narration** (see the comments on point of view, page 12). Omniscient third person narration is often regarded by readers as the author's voice, although as a student of literature you should try to keep the two separate in your discussion of the text. In some such narratives, the author's voice seems to be more explicit and obvious than in others.

In **free indirect style** the third person narrative voice shifts into something more like the thoughts and feelings of a character, expressed directly. It can be identified partly by a difference in the use of **tags** (how writers introduce or follow up direct speech, indicating who said it), for example: "'Why didn't she accept the flowers?'" thought James, feeling rebuffed by her rejection', in free indirect style might simply say: 'Why didn't she accept the flowers? This was clearly a rebuff'. The difference in the second example is that James's feelings are presented without the distancing of the narrator telling us that these are James's thoughts rather than the narrator's account of it.

Free indirect style is especially clear where the reader knows that what is being said definitely is *not* what the third person narrator believes. In the example above, the narrator may have already made it clear to the reader that the girl suffers from a severe allergy to pollen, in which case the reader knows that James's feelings of rejection are not shared by the narrator. Many third person narratives slip in and out of the more detached style and free indirect style.

Second person narrative

Second person narrative is a form of narration where the reader is addressed as 'you'. It is quite rare for narratives to use it at all, but extremely rare to find it is used for a whole book, as it is really hard to maintain and equally hard to read.

Activity 7



- 1 Below is a well-known 'story'. Read the five re-tellings of it that follow. Read each one aloud to get a sense of the voice in which the story is told.
- 2 Using the information on narrative voice, discuss which kind of narrative voice would best describe each re-telling. (You may find that it is not always clear-cut and you should debate the reasons for choosing one or other description.)
- 3 Think of another nursery rhyme, fairytale or traditional story (eg Jack and Jill, Cinderella, Anansi). Write a short section of the story, just a paragraph or so, choosing what kind of narrative voice you're going to use.
- 4 As a class, read aloud your writing to see if other people can identify the story and the kind of narrative voice you chose to use.

Hey diddle diddle,
The cat and the fiddle,
The cow jumped over the moon.
The little dog laughed to see such fun
And the dish ran away with the spoon.

Re-telling A

5 It's been crazy around here all week - everything's topsy turvy. And just when I thought things were settling down, Magsy takes it into her head that she wants to be a musician, the silly old cow from the upper field decides she's had enough of grass and fields and wants to be a high jump champion and Fido forgets his bark and gets a fit of the giggles. So me and the dish decide that enough's enough. We team up together, pack our bags and off we go to make a new life for ourselves somewhere a bit more chilled out, where we can raise a whole family of crockery and cutlery in peace and quiet!

Re-telling C

5 The cow was bored. Why was it always the same? Munch grass all day, swish off the flies with your tail, squeel about in a muddy field, plod home to the dairy. Life wasn't much fun, not if you were Daisy of Dunberry Farm. Not even a nice bit of romance to spice things up. Just a lonely return to the barn and the endless dark night on her own. She had had enough. And seeing those lucky birds flying up and free in the trees she decided to make her break for freedom. Why not give it a try? And that moon looked so very inviting.

Re-telling E

5 You may not believe me. That's up to you. But I definitely saw a pure white cow jumping over the moon, that's one hundred percent certain. I hadn't been drinking that night, I can assure you. The cat can vouch for me, and the dog as well. I'll kick him good and hard if he doesn't! Ok, perhaps I had a little drink but there certainly were strange goings on. It wasn't me imagining it. That stupid mutt really was playing the fiddle, the cow was up there frolicking in the sky and the silly cat was sat there laughing her head off. That much I can promise was true.

Re-telling B

The Car padded quietly towards the drawing room and slunk in. There sitting on a chair was the precious wooden instrument belonging to her mistress. With one spring she was up on the upholstered seat. She snuggled up into its soft curves. Light was fading fast. Blinking, she let her green eyes focus on the window and on the outline of the crescent moon. The cow was out again tonight, leaping skywards, while the farmer absent-mindedly cleaned out the shed. In the distance she heard the sound of laughter, the hoarse barking cackle of the farmer's dog. And from the kitchen came the clatter of cutlery, as her mistress washed up after dinner, searching for that last spoon and the little dish that always seemed to go astray.

Re-telling D

5 Dark sky and a cold chill in the air, my fur damp through and no dinner. No dinner! They forgot my dinner! With all that fuss over a stupid cow and a silly old spoon they didn't put out my dinner. I went to the kitchen at the usual time but the dish wasn't there. And now I'm hungry. How dare they forget me like that? I think I'll go and sharpen my claws on their stupid old fiddle. A few good scratches and bit of a kick. That'll teach them a lesson! They won't forget my dinner again in a hurry.

Preparing for the exam

The examiners will be looking for a more precise comment than just first, second or third person. They will also want you to talk about the *effect* of the choices made by the writer.

Point of view

Point of view is closely linked to, but *not the same as*, narrative voice. It is about 'whose eyes events are seen through.' For example, you could have a third person narrative voice where the events of the novel are mainly seen through the eyes of one particular character. The person whose point of view dominates is sometimes called the **focaliser**. The events of the narrative are focalised through that character.

Even in a first person narrative, writers can introduce other points of view through devices like:

- letters
- chapters written in another voice
- whole sections written in different voices
- a narrative introduced by someone who first tells their own story (a frame)
- documents before or after the main narrative, such as prologues, appendices or **epilogues**.

These devices can help to overcome the limitations of first person narratives, in only offering a single perspective.

Activity 8

Look back at the re-tellings of 'Hey diddle diddle' on page 11, as well as your own telling of a nursery rhyme. Decide from whose point of view each one is told. Is the point of view always the same as that of the narrator?

Activity 9

1 Read the four extracts from novels below.

Text A: From *Captain Corelli's Mandolin* by Louis de Bernières

That evening the captain noticed an exquisitely embroidered waistcoat hanging over the back of a chair in the kitchen. He picked it up and held it against the light; the velvet was richly scarlet, and the satin lining was sewn in with tiny conscientious threads that looked as though they could only have been done by the fingers of a diminutive sylph.
5 In gold and yellow thread he saw languid flowers, soaring eagles, and leaping fish. He ran his finger over the embroidery and felt the density of the designs. He closed his eyes and realised that each figure recapitulated in relief the curves of the creature it portrayed.
Pelagia came in and caught him. She felt a rush of embarrassment, perhaps because she did not want him to know why she had made the article, perhaps because she
10 had been rendered ashamed of its imperfections. He opened his eyes and held out the waistcoat to her. 'This is so beautiful,' he said...

Text B: From *Mrs Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf

Mrs Dalloway said she would buy the flowers herself.

For Lucy had her work cut out for her. The doors would be taken off their hinges; Rumpelmayer's men were coming. And then, thought Clarissa Dalloway, what a morning – fresh as if issued to children on a beach.

5 What a lark! What a plunge! For so it has always seemed to her when, with a little squeak of the hinges, which she could hear now, she had burst open the French windows and plunged at Bourton into the open air. How fresh, how calm, stiller than this of course, the air was in the early morning; like the flap of a wave; the kiss of a wave, chill and sharp and yet (for a girl of eighteen as she then was) solemn, feeling as she did, standing there at the open window, that something awful was about to happen; looking at the flowers, at the trees with the smoke winding off them and the rooks rising, falling; standing and looking until Peter Walsh
10 said, 'Musing among the vegetables?' – was that it? – 'I prefer men to cauliflowers' – was that it? He must have said it at breakfast one morning when she had gone out on to the terrace – Peter Walsh. He would be back from India one of these days, June or July, she forgot which, for his letters were awfully dull; it was his sayings one remembered; his eyes, his pocket-knife, his smile, his grumpiness and, when millions of things had utterly vanished – how strange it was! – a few sayings like this about cabbages.

Text C: From *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time* by Mark Haddon

I think I would make a very good astronaut.

To be a good astronaut you have to be intelligent and I'm intelligent. You also have to understand how machines work and I'm good at understanding how machines work. You also have to be someone who would like being on their own in a tiny spacecraft thousands and thousands of miles away from the surface of the earth and not panic or get claustrophobia or homesick or insane. And I like really little spaces, so long as there is no one else in them with me. Sometimes when I want to be on my own I get into the airing cupboard in the bathroom and slide in beside the boiler and pull the door closed behind me and sit there and think for hours and it makes me feel calm.

So I would have to be an astronaut on my own, or have my own part of the spacecraft which no one else could come into.

And also there are no yellow things or brown things in a spacecraft so that would be OK, too.

And I would have to talk to other people from Mission Control, but we would do that through a radio link-up and a TV monitor so they wouldn't be like real people who are strangers, but it would be like playing a computer game.

Also I wouldn't be homesick at all because I'd be surrounded by lots of things I like, which are machines and computers and outer space.

Text D: From *The Sea* by John Banville

Bun, I began to see, was far more sly and astute than I would at first have given her credit for. One is inclined to imagine that people who are fat must also be stupid. This fat person, however, had taken the measure of me, and, I was convinced, saw me clearly for what I was, in all my essentials. And what was it that she saw? In my life it never troubled me to be kept by a rich, or richish, wife. I was born to be a dilettante, all that was lacking was the means, until I met Anna. Nor am I concerned particularly about the provenance of Anna's money, which was first Charlie Weiss's and is now mine, or how much or what kind of heavy machinery Charlie had to buy and sell in the making of it. What is money, after all? Almost nothing, when one has a sufficiency of it. So why was I squirming like this under Bun's veiled but knowing, irresistible scrutiny?

But come now, Max, come now. I will not deny it. I was always ashamed of my origins, and even still it requires only an arch glance or a condescending word from the likes of Bun to set me quivering inwardly in indignation and hot resentment. From the start I was bent on bettering myself.

- 2 Use what you have learned to identify broadly what kind of narrative voice is used (first, second, third, omniscient, free indirect style and so on).
- 3 Explore each voice in more detail. For instance, is it the voice of a detached observer, is it intimate and close up, does it sound like the voice of the character speaking to the reader, perhaps using second person address, or does it sound like the thoughts of the character pouring out?
- 4 Use the list of prompts below to help you explore how the writer has created this voice:
 - sentence length and structure
 - what kinds of words are chosen (lexis)
 - formality or informality
 - how structured or unstructured it seems as a whole.
- 5 Now think about point of view. Is it clear whose point of view you are given? Is there a single point of view? Does there ever seem to be a gap between the narrator's point of view and that of the writer?
- 6 Finally, think about the effect on you as a reader, choosing some examples to show the effect.

Key terms

focaliser
epilogue

Activity 10

This activity in creative writing will take your thinking further.

- 1 Individually, pick one of the extracts from Activity 9 and rewrite the first four or five sentences using a different kind of narrative voice, to see what difference this makes.
- 2 Read your changed versions aloud and talk about the impact of the changes. Talk about what this adds to your understanding of the voice and point of view in the original.

Activity 11

- 1 Read the commentary on Extract D below. Share what you notice about what has been included. Annotate a copy of the commentary to show:
 - which features of narrative voice and point of view the writer of the commentary has identified
 - whether and where the writer has explored the effect of these features or merely noticed them
 - how well the writer has used evidence from the text
 - anything extra that you think would be worth saying, or that you disagree with.
- 2 Write a commentary of your own on the use of narrative voice in one of the other extracts on pages 12–13.
- 3 Swap commentaries with other people in the class who have chosen the same extract to see how they have approached it.

Extract D commentary

This is a first person narrative, in which the narrator remembers events in his life and reflects on his own behaviour, explaining to himself (and the reader) his motivation and trying to justify his actions. Aspects of the language give the flavour of him talking to himself (for example occasional informal expressions such as 'rich, or richish') but it is organised thoughts rather than stream of consciousness. The repeated questions, addressed to himself suggest thoughts, for instance, 'And what was it that she saw?' 'But come now, Max, come now' is speech-like and suggests inner conflict as he tries to be honest with himself. Generally the lexis is formal and precise - the writer uses words such as 'astute', 'essentials', 'dilettante', 'provenance', 'indignation' and so on, which suggest to the reader a particular kind of man, well-educated and used to reflection. However, this is strongly contrasted with his crude description of Bun as 'This fat person'. There is a bluntness about this that perhaps makes us wonder about the narrator. It creates a gap between what the reader (and perhaps the author?) thinks and the narrator's own view of himself. Although the point of view is the narrator's, we don't always share it.

By the end of the extract the narrator seems to have come full circle. From feeling hostility towards Bun and resisting her view of him, he ends up admitting to himself that he was always 'bent on bettering myself.'

Preparing for the exam

Open your text at a random page. See what you can say about the use of narrative voice on that page, using everything you have learned in this section. Present your findings to the rest of the group, either as an oral presentation or as a written presentation for display on the wall.

5 Dialogue and voices

Narrative voice is the voice chosen to tell the story. Within most narratives there is also a range of other voices, usually presented to the reader through **dialogue**. The narrative voice (or occasionally voices) and the voices of characters in dialogue are often given their own unique styles of speech. The way someone speaks is used to reveal their character to us.

Writers can use a range of techniques to convey individual voices:

- the rhythm of their speech
- the level or degree of **formality** or **informality**
- repeated expressions and favourite phrases
- individual or unusual ways of speaking
- the length of their **utterances**
- their use of **Standard English, dialect, Received Pronunciation** or another accent
- signals of politeness or impoliteness (eg commands, abruptness and so on)
- indications of tone (eg using italics to show emphasis, dashes or exclamation marks)
- the use of tags (the way their speech is described by the writer in introducing their speech directly, eg 'she said, languorously' or 'he barked in his usual stentorian tone of voice')
- the way the speech is laid out on the page.

Key terms

dialogue
formality/informality
utterance
Standard English
dialect
Received Pronunciation

Activity 12

In this activity you will be writing a very short dialogue for three characters, to explore how writers can use dialogue to develop their characters. Below are eight thumbnail sketches for characters, which are deliberately exaggerated to allow you to quickly give an impression of what they are like through their speech.

- 1 Choose three characters from the thumbnails and write one or two lines of dialogue for each one, deciding how you are going to introduce their words as well as what they say. Try to give a flavour of each character in their speech. Don't use their names to give away who they are!

Here is one example to get you started. Which character do you think it is?

His voice trembled slightly. 'Er...I'm so...so very sorry but would you mind telling me where I'm supposed to be?'

- 2 Read your bits of dialogue out to a partner and see if they can guess who they are from the dialogue and/or the way you have introduced them.

Colonel Blinkhorn

An English army man in his 80s, who now lives alone in a large house with his housekeeper.

Salima Ahmed

A young wannabe actress, with attitude, who is determined to make it whatever it takes.

Ivan Markovic

A rich Russian businessman living in London, who has decided to bid to take over a Premiership football team.

Lorna Lewis

A dinner lady, who runs the canteen at a primary school and likes to rule the roost.

Emma Macdonald

A housewife, living in Glasgow, who works hard at bringing up her three lively daughters.

Timmy Dodds

A cheeky 15-year-old boy, who is frequently in trouble with his teachers.

Michael Maloney

A timid young man, who has just started his first job working in an office, alongside a boisterous group of other workers.

Davina Lloyd-Smith

A young woman in her 20s, brought up in a stately home in Kent, who enjoys partying with the sons and daughters of lords and dukes.

Analysing dialogue in a novel extract

Activity 13

- 1 Read the extract below from *Small Island* by Andrea Levy, which has been partially annotated to show how the author has conveyed the voices.
- 2 Add to the annotations, using the bullet points on page 15 to help you explore the techniques and their effects.

The writer signals Celia's shock with her use of an adjective, 'confused' and a precise verb 'squeaked'.

Sentence grammar indicates an Afro-Caribbean speaker.

The length of this utterance suggests that the speaker is controlling the conversation and enjoying that control.

5 'Well, hello again,' this man said – not to Celia but to me.
Celia, confused, almost squeaked, 'You have met before?'
I heard a plain voice – no lilting baritone – when the man said, 'This is the woman who likes to put pawpaw on her foot.'
5 I protested, 'I do not. I accidentally step in the fruit,' while Celia's eyes were fixed on me for an explanation.
But this man just kept on jabbering. 'You step in it? Let me tell you, Celia, about this woman. But wait, this woman is not the friend you tell me of?'
10 Celia, nodding, tried to say, 'We teach at the same – ' before this man was off again.
'Celia has told me of her good friend and it is you. Cha, man!' He sucked his teeth, shaking his head. 'You. So you remember me?'
I made no reply, which did not discourage him.
15 'Celia, let me tell you how I meet this woman. It was the day Busta speaking – by the corporation office. You know Busta? Bustemate? Everybody know Busta. So Busta speaking. Suddenly one quarrel break out. Everything that could be pick up is flying through the air. Boy, the confusion, everyone running this way and that. And there in the middle of the mighty battle is this young woman looking like she strolling to church in her best hat. So I rescue her.'
'He rescued you?' Celia asked.
20 'You did what to me?' I shouted to this man. 'I did not need rescuing.'
'Oh. As I recall the situation something was about to bounce off your pretty head and knock you flat.'
'He rescued you?' Celia said once more.
'Yes, I rescue her. But the look on her face made me worry she gone turn round and
25 bite me.'
'And what about the pawpaw?' Celia wanted to know.
'Celia, I am glad you ask about the pawpaw – because I am sure your friend here does not tell you she likes to wear it on her foot.'
We waited quietly for this man to stop laughing at his joke.

Activity 14

- 1 Read the following short extract from *Trainspotting* by Irvine Welsh, in which the use of dialogue is particularly interesting.
- 2 Remind yourself of the bullet points on techniques, on page 15, and then read the extract again, annotating a copy of it with your thoughts about the voice and how it has been evoked.
- 3 Write one or two paragraphs exploring how the writer uses dialogue in this extract and its impact on you as a reader.

Shite. Geoff was coming over to talk to her. She had once pointed him out to Shona, who said that he looked like Marti from Wet Wet Wet. Nina hated both Marti and the Wets, and, anyway, thought that Geoff was nothing like him.

– Awright, Nina?

– Aye. It's a shame about Uncle Andy.

– Aye, Whit kin ye say? Geoff shrugged his shoulders. He was twenty-one and Nina thought that was ancient.

– Soo when dae ye finish the school? he asked her.

– Next year. Ah wanted tae go now but ma Ma hassled us tae stey.

– Takin O Grades?

– Aye.

– Which yins?

– English, Maths, Arithmetic, Art, Accounts, Physics, Modern Studies.

– Gaunnae pass them?

– Aye. It's no that hard. Cept Maths.

– Then whit?

– Git a job. Or git oan a scheme.

– No gaunnae stey oan n take Highers?

– Naw.

– Ye should. You could go tae University.

– Whit fir?

Geoff had to think for a while. He had recently graduated with a degree in English Literature and was on the dole. So were most of his fellow graduates. – It's a good social life, he said.

Take it further

Wider reading will develop your understanding of the way writers create distinctive narrative voices and voices in dialogue. Texts with specially interesting narrative voices include: *The Hours*, Michael Cunningham; *English Passengers*, Matthew Kneale; *Vernon God Little*, D.B.C. Pierre; *Cloud Atlas*, David Mitchell. These narratives use dialogue particularly interestingly: *Cold Comfort Farm*, Stella Gibbons; *Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha*, Roddy Doyle; *Trainspotting*, Irvine Welsh.

Preparing for the exam

Compare the way the writers of your **two** texts handle dialogue by choosing two short extracts, one from each text, and applying what you have learned. Share your findings and see whether you can make any general statements about the way each writer handles dialogue and the use made of it in the novels as a whole.

6 Narrative structure

Narrative and chronological time

If you unravel the plot of a novel, you can work out the sequence of what happens in **chronological time** – in other words, first this happens, then this, then this. The order in which the story unfolds for the reader (**narrative time**) can differ from chronological time.

Activity 15

- 1 Look at this short example of the chronology of a story.

Chronological time

- Jack had been selected for his local football team, for the first time.
- The game started. At first he felt nervous and did not play his best.
- Just before half time he scored a goal.
- During the break an opposing player muttered a threat in his ear.
- In the second half he scored again.
- A few minutes later, the opposing player fouled him viciously.
- In falling, Jack tore a ligament in his knee.
- He was taken off to hospital.

In telling the story of the football game, a writer may well choose not to follow chronological time exactly. For instance:

Narrative time

- The story starts with Jack in hospital, looking back bitterly on events that afternoon.
- It moves to the opening of the game, his nerves and failure to score.
- It flashes back to his selection for the team and his feelings that he must do himself justice.
- It returns to the game itself and his first goal.
- It follows chronological sequence with the whispered threat during the half-time break and the second half goal.
- It returns to the present with him in the hospital.
- It ends with the scene where the boy fouls him.

- 2 Write your own five to eight sentence 'bare bones' sequence of events for a story, in chronological order.
- 3 Then decide on a different narrative sequence, using **flashbacks** or other ways of using time.
- 4 Talk about why you think a writer might choose to use narrative time in each of the following ways:
 - a starting with the ending, rather than the beginning of the story
 - b using repeated jumps in time, such as flashbacks or **flash forwards**
 - c setting different parts of the story in different time periods
 - d telling the entire story in reverse, from end to beginning.

Key terms

chronological time
narrative time
flashback
flash forward

Exploring shifts in narrative time in a text

Activity 16

- 1 Read the extract below from *Wise Children* by Angela Carter.
- 2 What are your first reactions to it? What effects do you think the writer is trying to achieve?

She fixed Tristram with a suspicious eye, for he was no kin of hers, while the picture settled down on a flight of neon steps in a burst of canned applause as he came bounding down with his red hair slicked back, his top-of-the-milk-coloured ruffled linen Georgio Armani whistle and flute, Tristram Hazard, weak but charming, game-show presenter and television personality, last gasp of the imperial Hazard dynasty that bestrode the British theatre like a colossus for a century and a half. Tristram, youngest son of the great Melchior Hazard, 'prince of players'; grandson of those tragic giants of the Victorian stage, Ranulph and Estella 'A star danced' Hazard. Lo, how the mighty have fallen.

'Hi, there! I'm Tristram!'

The camera closes in as he sings out, 'Hi, there, lolly lovers! I'm Tristram Hazard and I've come to bring you ...' Now he throws back his head, showing off his throat, he's got a real old-fashioned, full-bodied, Ivory Novello-type throat, he throws his head back and cries out in the voice of an ecstatic: 'LASHINGS OF LOLLY! LASHINGS OF LOLLY!'

The show begins.

Freeze frame.

Let us pause awhile in the unfolding story of Tristram and Tiffany so that I can fill you in on the background. High time! you must be saying. Just who is this Melchior Hazard and his clan, his wives, his children, his hangers-on? It is in order to provide some of the answers to those questions that I, Dora Chance, in the course of assembling notes towards my own autobiography, have inadvertently become the chronicler of all the Hazards ...

- 3 Think of six adjectives to describe the writing, then compare your ideas with those of others.
- 4 Look more closely at the way the writer is using narrative time. How does she make us aware of the transitions? Why do you think she makes the shift and why do you think she chooses to draw attention to it in the way that she does?
- 5 Choose two of the following statements about the extract that you feel most in agreement with or find most interesting. Find a piece of evidence from the extract to support each of your chosen statements.
 - a The writer is playing with the reader, giving titbits of information and then backtracking so that she fills us in with the 'history' once the reader has become interested to know more.
 - b The jump back to a previous time is confusing and part of the writer's deliberate creation of a sense of chaos.
 - c The jumps in time echo the narrator's jumbled process of putting together her own autobiography.
 - d The writer uses film techniques to play with time in the narrative.
 - e The use of time is closely connected to the character of the narrator and the narrative voice.
 - f The use of time makes the text uncomfortable and difficult for a reader.
- 6 Use the statements and evidence to write a paragraph on how Angela Carter makes use of shifts in time in the extract.

Preparing for the exam

You might want to track key chronological events and plot them against narrative time (in other words the order in which they are told). You could do this as a chart, where the first column is chronological and the second is narrative time, with arrows from one to the other.

Big structures: the whole text

The use of narrative time is just one element of the way novels are structured. The writer has a number of options available when choosing the overall structure of a narrative. Here are some of the kinds of structural devices that novelists have used:

- a **frame story**, where a narrative is embedded in another narrative. The frame story is often the story of how the main narrative came to be told. Other framing devices are prologues, epilogues, additional documents, appendices or other additions to the main narrative
- an **episodic structure**, where the narrative moves from one episode to the next, without always having a direct connection between the two. Fictional autobiographies, rites of passage novels or journeys are well suited to this structure
- **parallel or connected narratives**, where several different characters or groups of characters are followed alternately. In linked narratives, they come together at key moments
- a structure of one story told through **linked parts**, for instance, three tellings of the same story in different voices
- a deliberate **anti-structure** approach, in which the story emerges from the seemingly incoherent thoughts of a narrator, apparently without an overall plan or coherent shape
- a **generic structure**, such as that of the thriller or detective story, where the genre itself determines the conventional pattern of how events unfold. In the detective genre, for example, the structure is often based on a death followed by an unravelling of clues to how and why it happened. Other generic structures might be the fairytale, romance or horror story.

Preparing for the exam

While you are reading your texts, think about which narrative structures each writer is using and what effect this has. You could start doing this by comparing the opening chapters of your texts, to see what you can discover about the unfolding structure.

Exploring the structure of a whole short narrative

Activity 17

- 1 Read the short whole narrative below, '*Interchapter VII, In Our Time*' by Ernest Hemingway, and work on a copy of it in the following ways.
 - a Underline or highlight any contrasts or oppositions.
 - b Remove the last two sentences. What difference would it make to end the story here?
 - c What difference does the very last sentence make to the story?
 - d Write one extra sentence of your own, drawing out the moral of the story more explicitly. What difference do you think it makes to add this more explicit ending?
- 2 Use the ideas raised by these tasks to help you write a short paragraph on the way Hemingway has structured this short story.

5 While the bombardment was knocking the trench to pieces at Fossalta, he lay very flat and sweated and prayed oh jesus christ get me out of here. Dear jesus please get me out. Christ please please please christ. If you'll only keep me from getting killed I'll do anything you say. I believe in you and I'll tell every one in the world that you are the only one that matters. Please please dear jesus. The shelling moved further up the line. We went to work on the trench and in the morning the sun came up and the day was hot and muggy and cheerful and quiet. The next night back in Mestre he did not tell the girl he went upstairs with at the Villa Rossa about Jesus. And he never told anybody.

Tenses

Here is an outline for a story.

A small child in a crowded shopping centre gets separated from her parents.

To turn this into a novel or short story you are faced with a number of choices, one of which is the choice of **tense**.

The tense used by the writer is what places the story in time, letting the reader know when it took place. The two main choices a writer has are to tell the story in the **past tense** as though the events are now over, or in the **present tense** as though they are still happening. Occasionally writers may slip into the **future tense** for short bursts.

Key terms

frame story
episodic structure
parallel/connected narratives
linked parts
anti-structure
generic structure
opposition
tense
past tense
present tense
future tense

Activity 18

- 1 On your own, write the first three or four sentences of the story of the child in the shopping centre, first in the present tense and then in the past tense. (Half the class should write their versions in the first person and the other half in the third person.)
- 2 In small groups (each containing at least one first and third person writer), take it in turns to read out your two versions and talk about the effects of the choice of tense. Did the use of first or third person make any difference to the effects of the tenses?
- 3 The boxes below give some reasons why writers might use different tenses. Read the information in each box and see how far it matches what you have discovered for yourselves and what else it adds.

Present tense The story is told as though the events are still happening. This might make things seem uncertain as though even the narrator does not yet know how things will end.

It can seem slightly odd (the events and the telling of them are supposedly happening at the same time).

It can create a sense of immediacy.

It is more common in first than in third person narratives. It can also be used to create a sense of timelessness, as though everything has always been this way.

Past tense

It creates the impression that the action is over and that the events or experience are being reflected on.

The narrator is imposing a pattern on events, leading the reader towards a conclusion.

While everything may seem uncertain to the reader, there is a sense that things will be resolved, although not necessarily happily.

Future tense

It tells what will happen in the future.

A novel told wholly in the future tense would be very unusual and experimental, a series of predictions or speculative imaginings, or perhaps a set of instructions.

Novelists may exploit this tense in small doses for particular effects.

A writer is not restricted to using one tense. Writers often choose to shift between past, present and future to create particular effects, as John Mullan explains here:

This making of the past present, as if re-enacting it, is a device discovered by some 19th-century novelists. Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* uses it to memorable effect. When Brontë's narrator recalls episodes of special significance she suddenly shifts into the present tense, tasting delight or pain afresh.

Some writers even include short passages without a main verb, making it unclear whether what is happening is in the past or the present. This can create a timeless feel.

Activity 19

The following extracts are taken from Hilary Mantel's autobiography, *Giving Up the Ghost*. In both she describes a childhood memory.

- 1 Read the extracts and, in pairs, identify the tenses Mantel uses.
- 2 Talk about why you think Mantel uses different tenses in each extract and, in each case, what the effect is on you as a reader.



Hilary Mantel

Preparing for the exam

Choose three short extracts, ranging across your first text, showing the writer's choice of tenses and how that affects meaning. You could go on to do the same with your second text to see whether there are any interesting points of comparison.

Extract 1

This is the first thing I remember. I am sitting up in my pram. We are outside, in the park called Bankswood. My mother walks backwards. I hold out my arms because I don't want her to go. She says she's only going to take my picture. I don't understand why she goes backwards, back and aslant, tracking to one side. The trees overhead make a noise of urgent conversation, too quick to catch; the leaves part, the sky moves, the sun peers down at me. Away and away she goes, till she comes to a halt. She raises her arm and partly hides her face. The sky and trees rush over my head. I feel dizzied. The entire world is sound, movement. She moves towards me, speaking. The memory ends.

Extract 2

When I was a child we used to play with toys called Magic Slates. There was a coloured cardboard frame, like a picture frame, which held a rectangle of carbon paper covered by a sheet of clear plastic. You had a writing implement like a short knitting needle, with which you inscribed the plastic sheet. Behind the clear panel, your secret writing appeared; then you pulled up a cardboard tab, swished up the 'slate', and the marks vanished.

The magic slate was a favourite toy of mine. I could write anything I liked, but if someone loomed into view I could disappear it in an instant. I wrote many thoughts and observations, and letters from an imaginary me to an imaginary someone. I believed I was doing it in perfect safety.

7 Symbols and motifs

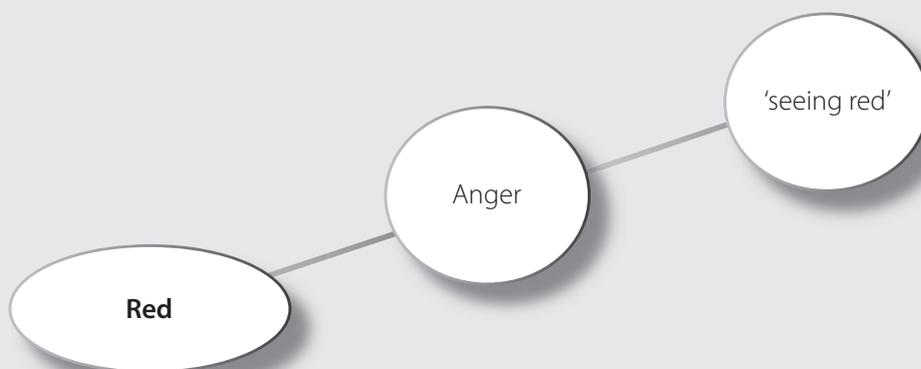
Symbols and **motifs** function in a range of ways in a narrative. They are closely related to the **themes** of the text, helping to signpost key ideas. As you read, the symbol or motif keeps gaining added meaning. They often also help to structure a narrative, providing continuity and coherence.

A symbol is something that represents another thing. For instance, white often symbolises purity, a dove is often used as a symbol for peace and a crown is the symbol of kingship. Unlike a motif, a symbol can be used on a single occasion and never mentioned again.

A motif is a recurring idea, running through a text. It might be an image or symbol that keeps cropping up, or it could be just a word, phrase or idea that keeps returning, for example, the repetition of the word 'darkness' in Joseph Conrad's novel, *Heart of Darkness*.

Activity 20

- 1 Think about the colour red. Draw a spider diagram to show phrases you have brainstormed in which red often appears. Now, in a different colour, add the **connotations** of red, in other words what red has come to represent. Use the examples below to start you off.



- 2 Create a quick thumbnail sketch of a character for whom red might be a good symbolic colour. Share your sketches with other students.
- 3 Think about one of these characters from narratives (or choose an example of your own). How has the colour red been used in relation to that character?
 - Little Red Riding Hood
 - Scarlet O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind*
 - Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*
 - The women in *The Handmaid's Tale*
 - Snow White
 - Amy Denver in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*
 - the little girl in the film *Schindler's List*.
- 4 All the characters listed above are female. Can you think of any male characters with whom red has been associated? Explore your ideas about your findings.

Preparing for the exam

While you are reading your texts, look out for any symbols and motifs, and keep track of them. After reading the novels, look back to see if you can trace the way the symbols and/or motifs develop across the novel and what use the writer makes of them to develop key themes, develop characters or structure the narrative.

Key terms

symbol
motif
theme
connotation

Exploring symbols and motifs in written narratives

Activity 21

Take it further

Use your knowledge of symbols and motifs in literary texts to explore their use in films or TV drama. For instance, you might notice the use of colour as a visual motif or the use of visual or sound symbolism in relation to different characters.

Michael Frayn's novel, *Spies* tells the story of two boys living in wartime England. There are several recurring symbols and motifs. One of these is a tunnel.

Here are some possible connotations for the tunnel:

- passing from one world to another (eg from child to adult; innocence to experience; innocence to corruption; safety to danger; urban to rural; suburban to slum)
- going from the known to the unknown
- moving from light into darkness or darkness into light (knowledge to ignorance, or vice versa)
- trial or quest
- fear
- adventure
- entrapment
- escape from the world.

Read the two short extracts from *Spies* below and talk about which connotations of the tunnel are being used and how Frayn seems to be using the tunnel symbolically. Are there any differences in its use in the two extracts?

Extract 1

Beyond the abandoned farm was a desolate no man's land half marked out as builder's lots, where colonisation approaching from the next settlement along had been halted for the Duration. Between the line of the railway and the wasteland of the lots, preserved for a few more years by the sifting tides of history, the last pocket of the rural world pursued its ancient, secret life. Each of the rare excursions we made into it was a frightening adventure, a series of ordeals to test our coming manhood.

And the first of the ordeals was the tunnel itself. Once again I hear our uneasy cries drowned by the huge thunder of the train passing overhead. Once again I see the circle of unwelcoming daylight at the end doubled by its reflection in the great lake that collected inside the tunnel after rain. Once again I feel the awkward twist of my body as I turn to edge sideways along the narrow causeway left at the edge of the lake, and simultaneously lean away from the glistening, dripping, wetness of the brickwork. Once again I feel the dank touch of the walls on my hair and shoulder, and brush at the foul exudations they've left. Once again I try to wipe the dark-green slime off my hands.

Extract 2

I put the cigarette into my mouth. The cork tip is moist from her lips, like the flap of her purse. Very carefully I suck in a little smoke. I feel the presence of it inside my mouth, as if it were something solid. She takes her hands away from her eyes and watches me, weeping and blinking. I hold the smoke in my mouth for a few moments, careful not to get it into my throat. It tastes of importance and of being grown up. I lift my head, as I've seen Geoff do, and blow the smoke out again. I sigh with satisfaction.

She takes the cigarette back. 'How do you do it?' she asks humbly.

'You just have to get used to it.'

She screws up her eyes and takes another little puff.

'Now blow it out,' I instruct her. She blows the smoke out, and jerks her head back to keep her eyes away from it.

She hands me the cigarette, and watches as I take another little mouthful.

'Do you feel all right?' she asks. 'It's supposed to make you feel sick.'

Do I feel all right? I feel ... *something* disturbing. I don't think it's sick. I think it's ... a kind of soaring sensation. I have a sense of freedom, as if I'm no longer bound by the rules and restrictions of childhood. I can open locked boxes and break meaningless oaths with impunity. I'm on the verge of understanding mysteries that have been closed to me. I'm emerging from the old dark world of tunnels and terrors, and coming to a broad upland where the air's bright, and remote blue horizons open all around.

8 Prose style

The style of a narrative comes partly from issues already explored but also from something more basic about the way the writer uses language. The prose style might include features such as:

- Balance of narration and dialogue
- Balance of description, exploration of thoughts and feelings and action
- Construction of sentences (eg long or short; simple, compound or complex; questions, statements, exclamations or commands)
- Use of **vocabulary** (eg poetic, colloquial, scholarly, plain, monosyllabic or polysyllabic)
- Amount of and kind of **figurative language** (eg metaphors, similes, symbols)
- Use of punctuation (eg dashes or colons, full speech **punctuation** or just dashes, use of commas)
- Length of paragraphs
- Other features unique to the voice of a writer (eg use of repetition, particular **idioms** or a rhythm that mimics the speaking voice).

Key terms

vocabulary
figurative language
punctuation
idiom

Activity 22

- 1 On your own, read the extract below from Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* and jot down a few first thoughts about your impressions of the style. This could be a list of five or six adjectives or short phrases.

He studied the sky. There were days when the ashen overcast thinned and now the standing trees along the road made the faintest of shadows over the snow. They went on. The boy wasn't doing well. He stopped and checked his feet and retied the plastic. When the snow started to melt it was going to be hard to keep their feet dry. They stopped often to rest. He'd no strength to carry the child. They sat on the pack and ate handfuls of the dirty snow. By afternoon it was beginning to melt. They passed a burned house, just the brick chimney standing in the yard. They were on the road all day, such day as there was. Such few hours. They might have covered three miles.

- 5 He thought the road would be so bad that no one would be on it but he was wrong. They camped almost in the road itself and built a great fire, dragging dead limbs out of the snow and piling them on the flames to hiss and steam. There was no help for it. The few blankets they had would not keep them warm.
- 10

- 2 Now listen to the extract being read aloud. On your own, make an instant judgement about which features of prose style you think contribute most to your first impressions, using the list in the box above.
- 3 Share your first impressions and your instant judgements to see how much agreement there is across the class.
- 4 Now look back at the list of features in the box above and work through them more systematically. Share out the features among individuals or pairs in the class, so that every individual or pair focuses on a different feature and reports back on what they notice.
- 5 As a whole class, rank order the features to identify which you think is most significant in terms of creating the style of the extract.

Creative experiments with prose style

Activity 23

One way of getting a really good feel for prose style and for the choices writers make is to rewrite a piece of prose in an entirely different style. To do it well, you need to look closely at the features in order to make changes to the style. **Parody** (copying and exaggerating a writer's style for comic effect) is one example of this. You can either imitate the style of a text you are reading or turn another piece of writing into the style of the text you are reading.

Here is an example to show you the kind of thing you might do, rewriting the opening of *Pride and Prejudice* in the style of Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*.

A man had come to the neighbourhood. Alone. He wanted a wife, or at least that's what the local people thought. The big house had been let and the woman found that interesting. She had heard all about it from her neighbour. She tried to interest her husband in the subject but he didn't seem to want to know. She kept coming back to it: the house, the man and the man's desire, his yearning for a wife. Again and again she told him. The husband grew tired of her words. She wanted him to visit the man but stubbornly he refused. He was weary and unwilling to go, out to the far side of the village, in the greyness, with the rain falling.

Key term
parody

- 1 Talk about how well this writer has parodied McCarthy's style, using all that you have discovered from the previous activity. (If you see flaws, you might like to make a few changes of your own to improve it.)
- 2 Choose a short extract from another text, perhaps one of your set texts or a text you studied for GCSE. Try rewriting it in McCarthy's style or try rewriting the extract from *The Road* in the style of one of your texts.

Writing about prose style

Activity 24

- 1 Use a chart like the one below to help you analyse the extracts on page 27. You could look at each one or share them out among the class, and then take turns to report back on your extract.

Features	Extract 1	Evidence or quote	Extract 2	Evidence or quote	Extract 3	Evidence or quote
Narrative versus dialogue						
Description, thoughts, feelings or action						
Construction and kinds of sentences						
Vocabulary						
Figurative language						
Punctuation						
Paragraphing						
Anything else						

Extract 1: From *The Shipping News* by E. Annie Proulx

A year came when this life was brought up sharply. Voices over the wire, the crump of folding steel, flame.

5 It began with his parents. First the father, diagnosed with liver cancer, a blush of wild cells diffusing. A month later a tumour fastened in the mother's brain like a burr, crowding her thoughts to one side. The father blamed the power station. Two hundred yards from their house sizzling wires, thick as eels, came down from northern towers.

10 They wheedled barbiturate prescriptions from winking doctors, stockpiled the capsules. When there were enough, the father dictated, the mother typed a suicide farewell, proclamation of individual choice and self-deliverance – sentences copied from the newsletters of The Dignified Exit Society. Named incineration and strewing as choice of disposal.

15 It was spring. Sodden ground, smell of earth. The wind beat through twigs, gave off a greenish odor like struck flints. Coltsfoot in the ditches; furious dabs of tulips stuttering in gardens. Slanting rain. Clock hands leapt to pellucid evenings. The sky riffled like cards in a chalk-white hand.

Extract 2: From *On Beauty* by Zadie Smith

Jack is a Head of Department at an American university, discussing a difficult student with his colleague, Claire.

'Jack, darling,' said Claire, shaking her head, 'you send these websites your *shopping lists* and they put them up. They'll take *anything*.'

5 Jack retrieved the printouts from Claire and slipped them back in his drawer. He had tried reason and plea and rhetoric, and now he must introduce reality into the conversation. It was time, once again, to walk round the desk, perch on the end and cross one leg over the other.

'Claire ...'

'My God, what a piece of work that girl is!'

'Claire, I really can't have you making those kind of ...'

10 'Well, she *is*.'

'That's as may be, but ...'

'Jack, are you telling me I have to have her in my class?'

'Claire, Zora Belsey is a very good student. She's an *exceptional* student, in fact. Now, she may not be Emily Dickinson ...'

15 Claire laughed. 'Jack, Zora Belsey couldn't write a poem if Emily Dickinson herself rolled out of her grave, put a gun to the girl's head and demanded one. She's simply untalented in this area. She refuses to *read poetry* – and all I get from her are pages from her journal aligned down the left-hand margin. I've got a *hundred and twenty* talented students applying for *eighteen* places.'

Extract 3: From *May Day* by F. Scott Fitzgerald

There had been a war fought and won and the great city of the conquering people was crossed with triumphal arches and vivid with thrown flowers of white, red, and rose. All through the long spring days the returning soldiers marched up the chief highway behind the strump of drums and the joyous, resonant wind of the brasses, while merchants and clerks left their bickerings and figurings and, crowding to the windows, turned their white-bunched faces gravely upon the passing battalions.

Never had there been such splendour in the great city, for the victorious war had brought plenty in its train, and the merchants had flocked thither from the South and West with their households to taste of all the luscious feasts and witness the lavish entertainments prepared – and to buy for their women furs against the next winter and bags of golden mesh and varicoloured slippers of silk and silver and rose satin and cloth of gold.

- 2 Using the notes on your chart and points raised in discussion, write three or four statements about the prose style of one of the extracts, selecting what you think is worth focusing on.
- 3 Develop your statements into a paragraph by adding one piece of evidence from the text to justify each one, followed by one further bit of analysis or exploration. For example:

In Extract X, the writer uses short sentences to create an emotionless, detached style. This is particularly noticeable in the phrase, '___'. Here his use of the word '___' and his technique of '___' contribute to a sense of '___', which has '___' effect on the reader.

Preparing for the exam

Choose a random page from your **first** or second text and analyse it, using the chart on page 26 to help you. Share your findings across the group.

Drawing on what you have discovered, write a paragraph about each feature in the chart, summarising the key features of the prose style of your text.

Take it further

Find two or three short examples of your own, where the writer's prose style is very distinctive. Share your examples as a whole group.

9 Methods of characterisation

There is no one kind of **character** or method of creating a character. Writers use a huge variety of techniques, many of which you have already learned about, such as the use of narrative voice, dialogue, symbols and so on. This section pulls together what you already know, but also adds a few more techniques and issues for you to think about.

In thinking about characters, readers and critics are most interested in:

- what kind of character it is and what makes them interesting within the narrative
- what **role** the character plays in the narrative
- how the writer has constructed the character.

Focusing on these issues allows you to comment on a writer's **characterisation** and prevents you from writing about characters as if they are real people.

Key terms

character
role
characterisation
realistic
caricature
foil
representative
stereotype

Kinds of characters

Characters in novels fall into different types. Not every character is constructed in the same way or is of equal importance. Some are more fully developed than others. Some are highly **realistic**, so that the reader begins to think about them as if they are real people. Others, such as characters in fairy tales, depend on not being entirely realistic but fitting into types, such as villains or heroes.

The kind of character often goes with the kind, or genre, of narrative. For example:

- if you are reading a fictional autobiography, you might expect the hero or heroine to be fully developed, with changing characteristics and attitudes as the novel develops
- if you are reading a short story, the characters might be quickly sketched and more one-dimensional, focusing on one or two major personality traits
- if you're reading a comic novel, the characters may be **caricatures** – exaggerated characters who are presented satirically, for your amusement.

Activity 25

Look at the kinds of characters listed below. Think of one or two characters from a novel or story you have read or from films or TV programmes that seem to you to fit each description, and fill in a copy of the chart.

Characters	Examples
A main protagonist – the central character at the heart of the story	
A realistic character	
A caricature – an exaggerated figure of fun	
A minor character – an 'extra' who only appears briefly	
A foil – a character whose key role is to reveal something about the main character	
A character who works by contrast with others who all have something in common (eg fathers, heroes, suitors, friends)	
A character who develops and changes over the course of the book or film	
A representative – a character who represents an idea (eg capitalism, repression, youth)	
A stereotype – a character who fits into a conventional character type (eg romantic heroine, villain, orphan)	

How writers construct characters

Listed below are some of the main techniques used by writers to construct characters. Many are ones you should now be familiar with.

- Naming
- Use of the narrative voice and point of view
- What the character says in dialogue and how they say it
- What other characters say about them
- Description of their physical and emotional qualities
- Their actions
- Contrast and comparison with other characters
- Use of images, symbols or motifs
- Setting or physical environment

Take it further

Choose a character from a novel you have enjoyed. Pick one short extract in which the character is strongly evoked. Identify three or four techniques used in the characterisation. Present your character, your extract and your analysis to other students in your group.

Activity 26

- 1 Read the depiction of a character below from the short story, 'Shoemaker Arnold' by Earl Lovelace.

Shoemaker Arnold

Shoemaker Arnold stood at the doorway of his little shop, hands on his hips, his body stiffened in that proprietary and undefeated stubbornness, announcing, not without some satisfaction, that if in his life he had not been triumphant, neither had the world defeated him. It would be hard, though, to imagine how he could be defeated, since he exuded such hard
5 tough unrelenting cantankerousness, gave off such a sense of readiness for confrontation, that if trouble had to pick someone to clash with, Shoemaker Arnold would not be the one. To him, the world was his shoemaker's shop. There he was master, and, anyone entering would have to surrender not
10 only to his opinion on shoes and leather and shoemaker apprentices, but to his views on politics, women, religion, flying objects, or any of the myriad subjects he decided to discourse upon, so that over the years he had arrived at a position where none of the villagers bothered to dispute him, and to any who dared maintain a view contrary to the one he was affirming, he was
15 quick to point out, 'This place is mine. Here, do as I please, I say what I want. Who don't like it, the door is open.'

- 2 Decide which of the statements below is true.
 - a The character is revealed through dialogue.
 - b The narrative voice guides the reader's view of the character.
 - c The ironic voice of the narrator raises doubts about the character.
 - d The point of view is that of the character.
 - e The point of view is external to the character.
 - f Description of the character's physical attributes plays an important part.
 - g The character's behaviour contributes strongly to our view of him.
 - h The setting is important in constructing the character.
 - i The naming of the character is significant.
- 3 Put the statements you have chosen in rank order, to show which you think is most significant. Share your ideas, justifying why and how you came to your decisions.

Preparing for the exam

Avoid writing about the characters as if they are real people. Focus on characterisation, in other words all the techniques a writer uses to create and develop characters. Step back and think about the role a character is playing in the text – what kind of character they are and what their significance is.

When exploring characters in your set texts, think about the kind of character they are, their role in the novel and the ways in which they have been constructed, using the ideas in this book to help you.

10 Presentation of themes

What is the difference between the story and the themes?

What happens in a novel (the events and the characters involved in these events) is the story. The ideas and issues explored through the telling of these events – what we interpret the story as being *about* – point us to its themes.

The writer Ian McEwan suggests that while a novelist might start off with some ideas he wants to raise through the telling of the story, it is the reader's role to recognise the underlying themes in a novel.

Themes are what readers have to address, rather than writers. You're dealing, as a writer, with generating a reality out of these scraps, and they come together in a haphazard way. And slowly over months, or a year, or two or three years, you impose a kind of order, so that you have an intact world. And then you discover that you've addressed certain matters, and that they repeat themselves throughout.

Ian McEwan, English and Media Centre interview

This is one of the ways in which different readers create different readings of a text.

Activity 27

- 1 As a class, choose three well-known drama series (for example, *The West Wing*, *The Sopranos*, *Heroes*, *Skins*, etc). For each one, write down two or three words summing up what you think it is about – that is, the themes it explores – and share these as a class.
- 2 Do some of your dramas include the same themes? If so, do they lead the viewer to different conclusions? (For example, one drama might suggest that revenge is *never* justified, while another might suggest that sometimes it might be.)

How themes are explored in narratives

Narratives often share themes. For instance, many novels could be summed up as being about family life or relationships between men and women, or inequality or growing up. What is interesting for critics and readers is the particular way the novelist explores the theme and the way in which the reader's response is shaped: *what* does the writer seem to be saying and *how*?

Themes are created and revealed through:

- what happens
- what the characters do and say
- the way in which the story is told, including repetitions, contrasts, symbols and motifs.

To identify themes and analyse the role they play in a novel, you will need to bring to bear all you have learned in the unit about narrative and the ways writers use language.

Preparing for the exam

Keep a record of themes you think are important while you are reading your texts. Remember to think about what is special about the *way* the writer has explored those themes, as well as the ideas themselves.

Activity 28

Key term

setting

- 1 Read the extract below, taken from *A Room With a View* by E.M. Forster.
- 2 In pairs, tell each other the story of what happens. (This may be very brief.)
- 3 Then share your response to the passage and your interpretation of what it is about, in other words, its *themes*. Feedback your ideas as a class.
- 4 Some of the themes a reader might recognise in this passage include: freedom, love, hope, repression, life and conventionality. Re-read the extract, choosing a short section to illustrate one or two themes that you think are particularly important.
- 5 Annotate a copy of the extract to show the techniques Forster is using to explore the themes and direct the response of the reader, using the list below. Two annotations have been given to get you started.
 - narrative voice
 - presentation of the character
 - use of oppositions (eg male versus female)
 - the use of **setting**
 - language
 - imagery.

A group of English tourists staying at a small hotel in Florence have gone on a day trip into the countryside. Lucy is travelling with her older cousin and chaperone, Miss Bartlett. Lucy has wandered off away from the main group. The man described in the extract as 'her companion' is one of the young Italian drivers whom she has asked to take her to the 'buoni uomini', the 'good men'. George is one of the other English tourists.

The contrasting of characters' responses brings out the opposition between conventionality and unconventionality, freedom and repression.

The themes of freedom and hope are explored here through the choice of lexis with 'brink' and the simile of 'like a swimmer' - suggesting launching out into the open.

At the same moment the ground gave way, and with a cry she fell out of the wood. Light and beauty enveloped her. She had fallen out onto a little open terrace, which was covered with violets from end to end.

- 5 'Courage!' cried her companion, now standing some six feet above. 'Courage and love.'
- 10 She did not answer. From her feet the ground sloped sharply into the view and violets ran down in rivulets and streams and cataracts, irrigating the hillside with blue, eddying round the tree streams, collecting into pools in the hollows, covering the grass with spots of azure foam. But never again were they in such profusion; this terrace was the well-head, the primal source whence beauty gushed out to water the earth.
- 15 Standing at its brink, like a swimmer who prepares, was the good man. But he was not the good man that she had expected, and he was alone. George had turned at the sound of her arrival. For a moment he contemplated her, as one who had fallen out of heaven. 'He saw radiant joy in her face, he saw the flowers beat against her dress in blue waves. The bushes above them closed. He stepped quickly forward and kissed her. Before she could speak, almost before she could feel, a voice called, 'Lucy! Lucy! Lucy!' The silence of life had been broken by Miss Bartlett, who stood brown against the view.

In conclusion

Throughout the 'Exploring prose' section you have explored the different choices writers make and the effects these choices can have both on the texts they create and on the readers who engage with them.

Reflect on the development of your understanding of the techniques and key genre features of prose, with a partner or your teacher. Which aspects do you feel more confident about now? Which do you feel are your current areas of strength? Which areas do you think you need further work?

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