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LITERATURE
FOR
SENIOR STUDENTS

6th edition

STUDY DESIGN 2023

—

Robert Beardwood

LITERATURE *Literature*

FOR

SENIOR STUDENTS

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Literature for Senior Students 6th edition / Robert Beardwood

Contents

Introduction

Literature for Senior Students focuses on building the skills and knowledge essential to literary analysis. It is in two parts.

Section A: The literature handbook provides a detailed overview of literature and literary techniques. The time line serves as a starting point for grasping the historical breadth of the subject, from ancient Greece and Rome up to the present day. The following sections cover the main literary forms and genres, explaining the key features and conventions and showing how to analyse their use in a wide range of texts. There is also an overview of literary criticism and theory, which explains the main theoretical approaches used to interpret literary texts and provides strategies for using these approaches in your own analytical writing.

Section B: Studying literature provides explanations, examples and activities to develop the skills of literary analysis. It covers a number of ways of responding to literary texts: a close reading of one or more passages; a comparison of a print text with its performance or adaptation in another medium; a creative response to a text; and an interpretation that is informed by a supplementary text.

This sixth edition of *Literature for Senior Students* is based on the VCE Literature Study Design 2023–2027. Texts used for sample responses in Chapters 6–9 are drawn from the 2023 Literature Text List published by the VCAA. These complete responses are on *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (adaptation); *Berlin* (creative); *The Fire Next Time* and *Dracula* (developing interpretations); and *Alias Grace, Smart Ovens for Lonely People* and Emily Dickinson's poetry (passage analysis). In addition, sample responses on a wide range of texts (not necessarily on the current VCE Literature Text List) can be accessed online. Scan the QR codes (or click on the weblinks if you are using the digital version of this book) on the following pages: 113, 135, 172, 201, 212, 216 and 220.
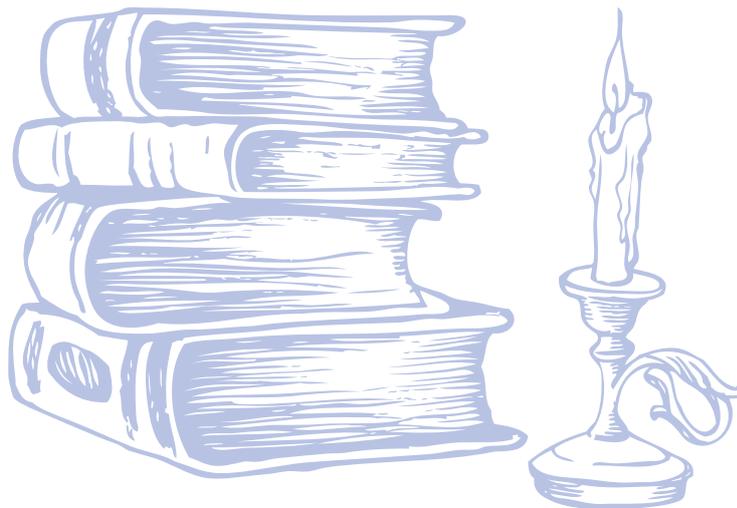
VCE Literature course overview*

	Area of Study 1:	Area of Study 2:
Unit 1	**Reading practices** Respond to a range of texts through close analysis.	**Exploration of literary movements and genres** Explore conventions common to a selected movement or genre, and engage with the ideas, concerns and representations from at least one complete text alongside multiple samples of other texts considered characteristic of the selected movement or genre.
Unit 2	**Voices of Country** Explore and reflect on the voices, perspectives and knowledge in the texts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors and creators.	**The text in its context** Analyse and respond to the representation of a specific time period and/or culture explored in a text and reflect or comment on the ideas and concerns of individuals and groups in that context.
Unit 3	**Adaptations and transformations** Analyse aspects of a text, drawing on close analysis of textual detail, and then discuss the extent to which meaning changes when that text is adapted to a different form. Assessment tasks: › A written interpretation of a text, supported by close textual analysis, using a key passage (20 marks) › An analysis of how textual form influences meaning, e.g. compare a print text with the text's adaptation into another form, or compare a dramatised version of a scene or scenes with the original text (30 marks).	**Developing interpretations** Develop interpretations of a set text informed by the ideas, views and values of the set text and a supplementary reading. Assessment task: › Part A: An initial interpretation of the text's views and values within its historical, social and cultural context › Part B: A written response that compares/interweaves and analyses an initial interpretation with a subsequent interpretation, using a key moment from the text. Part A and Part B can be done separately, or in a single piece of writing (50 marks).
Unit 4	**Creative responses to texts** Respond creatively to a text and comment critically on both the original text and the creative response. Assessment tasks: › A creative response to a text (40 marks) › A close analysis of a key passage from the text, which includes reflections on connections between the creative response and the original text (20 marks).	**Close analysis of texts** Analyse literary forms, features and language to present a coherent view of a whole text. Assessment task: › A close analysis of a text, supported by an examination of textual details, based on a selection of passages (40 marks).

SECTION

A

The literature handbook

This comprehensive reference section gives you all the essential tools for understanding and writing about literature. It contains:

- an overview and time line of the Western literary tradition
- the main forms and genres of literary texts
- definitions of features and conventions such as structure, narrative point of view, characterisation, tone, style, setting, stage directions, imagery, rhythm and rhyme
- explanations of the main literary theories and how they are used to analyse and interpret a literary text
- numerous examples drawn from a wide range of texts.

OVERVIEW OF WESTERN LITERATURE

Literature has been part of human culture for a very long time: people have always told stories and passed them on from generation to generation as a way of making sense of life and of enhancing its beauty and significance. At first these stories were oral, remembered and recited by particular individuals – the epic narrative poems usually attributed to Homer, *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad*, from around the 8th century BC (nearly 3000 years ago), were initially in this form, before they were written down for preservation. Later epics from ancient Rome – Virgil's *Aeneid* (written in about 29–19 BC) is the best known – were written down in the act of composition, and from around the 13th century onwards this became the main way in which literary texts were created. Many works from the late medieval and Renaissance periods – such as Dante's *Divine Comedy* (around 1308–21) and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (late 1300s) – remain central texts in the literary canon today.

An ancient theatre near the Acropolis in Athens, Greece. Wirestock Creators / Shutterstock

The analysis, discussion and criticism of literature are as old as literary texts themselves. The literary culture of ancient Greece gave rise not only to the great tragic dramas of Sophocles and Euripides (such as *Oedipus Rex* and *Medea*), but also to the earliest works of literary criticism. Of these, Aristotle's *Poetics*, written in the 4th century BC, has had a profound and lasting influence. In this work, Aristotle defines the main forms of writing of his time and also indicates the criteria for distinguishing good writing from bad, using a wide range of Greek poetry and drama to illustrate his points. These features of literary criticism – of classifying, evaluating and interpreting literary texts – are still central to its methodology today.

The Radcliffe Camera, part of the Bodleian Library, and All Souls College at the University of Oxford. Skowronek / Shutterstock

From the time the first universities were established in the late Middle Ages (the universities of Oxford and Cambridge were established in the 12th and 13th centuries), the literature of ancient Greece and Rome formed the basis of academic literary studies. These works were studied in their original languages: Ancient Greek or Latin. It was only with the rise of the British public school system in the 19th century that the study of English literature became a central part of the high-school curriculum, and indeed English only became an important discipline in English universities in the early decades of the 20th century. Nevertheless, English literature has been discussed and debated for hundreds of years, in books, magazines and newspapers, classrooms and lecture theatres, and now – in the 21st century – on radio, television and the internet.

HISTORICAL TIME LINE

When		Who	Literary forms	Events and social movements
1000 BC / 450 AD — Ancient Greek and Roman civilisations	Poetry	Homer (Greek), *The Odyssey*, *The Iliad* Virgil (Roman), *The Aeneid*	**Epic poetry:** a long narrative poem about a hero; initially read aloud	The Greek civilisation 800–300 BC: a collection of city-states linked by a common language and artistic heritage Roman Empire roughly 300 BC until 400s AD
	Drama	Sophocles (Greek), *Oedipus Rex*, *Antigone* Euripides (Greek), *Medea*, *Women of Troy*	**Drama:** Greek tragedy and comedy established the basic forms for these genres	
450 AD / 1550 — Middle Ages / Medieval period		*Beowulf* (anon.), written in Old English possibly during the 8th century Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*: sequence of narrative poems, written in Middle English in the late 14th century Thomas Wyatt, poetry, especially love poetry, including sonnets	**Poetry:** narrative poetry and lyrics **Drama:** mystery plays and morality plays demonstrated Christian stories and virtues	Norman conquest of England 1066 Printing with movable metal type used in Europe from 1450s Columbus landed in the Bahamas ('discovering' America) 1492 Henry VIII established the Church of England in 1534
1550 / 1603 — Elizabethan period	Poetry	Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene* William Shakespeare, sequence of 154 sonnets John Donne	**Sonnets** (14 lines, usually about love) often written in sequences (known as 'cycles') and distributed in court circles	Queen Elizabeth I reigned 1558–1603 Consolidation of the (Protestant) Church of England English military and trade strength increased
	Drama	Christopher Marlowe, *Tamberlaine*, *Dr Faustus* William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*	**Tragedy** and **comedy** were developed to a high level of complexity and popularity, particularly by Shakespeare	Defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588 displayed English naval strength Cultural activity flourished
1603 / 1700 — Jacobean period / Restoration		Shakespeare, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, *The Tempest* Ben Jonson, *Volpone* John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi* John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (epic narrative poem)	**Drama:** Jacobean tragedy in early 1600s Restoration comedy – the 'comedy of manners' – in late 1600s	James I reigned 1603–25 English Civil War 1642–51 Theatres closed 1642–60 Charles I beheaded 1649 Restoration of the monarchy 1660
1700 — 18th century		Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe* Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels* Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones* Samuel Johnson, *Rasselas* Alexander Pope, poetry and translations Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*	**Novels:** the first English novels were published **Poetry:** the Augustan poets (e.g. Pope) emphasised form, restraint, elegance First major English dictionary (1755) written by Samuel Johnson	American Declaration of Independence 4 July 1776 French Revolution 1789 overthrew the monarchy/aristocracy First Fleet arrived at Botany Bay 1788, beginning the colonisation of Australia

When		Who	Literary forms	Events and social movements
late 1700s / **Romanticism / Regency period**	Poetry	William Wordsworth Samuel Taylor Coleridge Lord (George) Byron Percy Bysshe Shelley John Keats William Blake	Forms such as the ode and the lyric Emphasis on the expression of feeling and an appreciation of beauty, especially of nature Rejection of urban, industrialised society	Regency period 1811–20 The Industrial Revolution led to population movements from the country to the city Slavery abolished in the British Empire 1834 Rise in nationalism across Europe
	Novels	Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice*, *Emma*, *Sense and Sensibility* Sir Walter Scott, *Rob Roy*, *Ivanhoe*	*Frankenstein* reflects the concerns of romanticism: love of nature, scepticism towards science and technology Austen's novels reflect middle- and upper-middle-class lives and concerns Scott established the historical novel	In Australia: colonies of Tasmania (1856) and South Australia (1836) established; Port Phillip District (1836) later became Victoria (1851) Convict transportation to NSW ceased 1842; to Tasmania ceased 1853
1837 / **Victorian period**	Novels	Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*, *David Copperfield* Elizabeth Gaskell, *Cranford*, *North and South* Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* George Eliot, *Middlemarch* Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* Leo Tolstoy (Russia), *Anna Karenina* Henry James (US/UK), *Portrait of a Lady*	More critical than previously of social aspects, e.g. › poverty and exploitation of working classes › restrictions on women's lives Publication in serial and multi-volume formats led to wide readerships Later novelists in this period (Hardy, James) anticipated modernism	Queen Victoria reigned 1837–1901 Great Exhibition 1851 held in London at Crystal Palace: each nation displayed machines and inventions Mass production replaced 'cottage' industries Common land broken up into privately owned blocks Education became universally available and compulsory in England and Wales after the 1870 Education Act American Civil War 1861–65; slavery abolished 1865 In Australia: › Marcus Clarke published *His Natural Life* in serial form 1870–72
	Poetry	Robert Browning Elizabeth Barrett Browning Alfred, Lord Tennyson Christina Rossetti Emily Dickinson (US)	Dramatic monologue developed by Browning and Tennyson Formal structures, rhyming and conventional rhythms remained important	› Heidelberg School of landscape painters in 1880s and 1890s, inc. Tom Roberts and Arthur Streeton, established a distinctly Australian style of art
	Drama	Henrik Ibsen (Norway), *A Doll's House*, *Hedda Gabler* Anton Chekhov (Russia), *Three Sisters*, *The Cherry Orchard, Uncle Vanya* Oscar Wilde, *The Importance of Being Earnest*	More naturalistic forms were developed by Ibsen and Chekhov to represent ordinary people and situations Wilde perfected the 'comedy of manners'	› Henry Lawson and Barbara Baynton published stories in late 1890s and early 1900s › Poetry by Lawson and 'Banjo' Paterson celebrated the bush lifestyle
1900				

20th century		Who	Literary forms	Events and social movements
Modernism	Novels	Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* James Joyce (Ireland), *Ulysses* F Scott Fitzgerald (US), *The Great Gatsby* DH Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* Gertrude Stein (US), *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* Marcel Proust (France), *In Search of Lost Time*	Much experimentation with form and a breaking down of older ideas and conventions WWI had a major impact on writers, undermining confidence in authority figures and in traditional social structures and institutions **Novels** used 'stream of consciousness', unreliable narrators; addressed 'taboo' subjects such as sexuality **Poetry** used free verse (no systematic rhyming or rhythmic scheme) **Drama** broke down conventions for representing people in a realistic fashion	World War I 1914–18 Spanish Civil War 1936–39 World War II 1939–45 Suffragettes campaigned for women to have the right to vote: › achieved in Australia in 1902 › achieved in England for women over 30 in 1918 Expressionism: artistic movement; advocated the strong expression of emotion in distorted or grotesque forms Surrealism: artistic movement; combined objects in unlikely ways and contexts
	Poetry	TS Eliot (US/UK), *The Waste Land* WB Yeats (Ireland) WH Auden (UK/US) Amy Lowell (US)		
	Drama	Luigi Pirandello (Italy), *Six Characters in Search of an Author* Bertolt Brecht (Germany), *Mother Courage*, *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*		
around 1950 Postmodernism	Novels and short stories	Vladimir Nabokov (Russia/US), *Lolita* Kurt Vonnegut (US), *Slaughterhouse-Five* Doris Lessing, *The Golden Notebook* Gabriel García Márquez (Colombia), *One Hundred Years of Solitude* Jorge Luis Borges (Argentina), *Ficciones* Italo Calvino (Italy), *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*	Continued experimentation with form, often in a more playful way than in modernist writing **Novels:** use of multiple narrators, fragmented forms, ambiguity and lack of closure **Poetry:** much experimentation with form, style and content, including: › free verse › playful arrangement of words (and sometimes punctuation) on the page › informal and colloquial speech patterns › allusions to popular culture › anti-conservative and overtly political content **Drama:** Beckett and absurdist theatre abandoned traditional plot and character conventions More interest in working-class identities and concerns Use of everyday speech in dialogue	Vietnam War 1959–75 Cold War from 1945: massive build-up of nuclear weapons by US and USSR followed by the collapse of the USSR in 1991 Electronic media (radio, television) became much more prominent compared to print media Internet developed during the 1970s with rapid expansion throughout 1990s In Australia: › immigration from Europe (esp. in 1950s and 1960s) and Southeast Asia (esp. in 1970s) › Whitlam government (1972–75) improved women's rights; recognised Aboriginal land rights; funded the arts and education (removed university tuition fees) › Australia Council for the Arts founded in 1967; Australian Film Commission in 1975
	Poetry	'Beat' poets (US): Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac Frank O'Hara (US) Carol Ann Duffy Jennifer Maiden (Australia) John Forbes (Australia)		
	Drama	Arthur Miller (US), *Death of a Salesman*, *The Crucible* Samuel Beckett (Ireland), *Waiting for Godot*, *Endgame* Eugène Ionesco (Romania/France), *Rhinoceros* Caryl Churchill, *Serious Money*		

literary movements (side tab)

20th century	Who	Literary forms	Events and social movements
literary movements — Postcolonialism	Salman Rushdie (India/UK/US), *Midnight's Children*, *The Satanic Verses* Chinua Achebe (Nigeria), *Things Fall Apart* Arundhati Roi (India), *The God of Small Things* Toni Morrison (US), *Beloved* Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Australia), *We Are Going* (poetry) Mudrooroo (Australia), *Wild Cat Falling* Sally Morgan (Australia), *My Place* (autobiography) Jack Davis (Australia), *No Sugar* (drama)	Writers from colonies or former colonies of European nations became more prominent, often strongly critical of colonial powers and their exploitation of indigenous peoples Salman Rushdie coined the expression 'The empire writes back' The English language became an instrument for 'writing back' (expressing the experiences of the dispossessed in the language of the coloniser)	Australian colonies federated in 1901; Aboriginal people counted in census from 1967 India independent of British rule from 1947 Indonesia independent of Dutch rule from 1945 Vietnam independent of French rule from 1954 East Timor independent of Indonesian rule from 2002
Feminism / second-wave feminism	Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (nonfiction) Simone de Beauvoir (France), *The Second Sex* (nonfiction) Sylvia Plath (US/UK), *Ariel* (poetry) Betty Friedan (US), *The Feminine Mystique* (nonfiction) Germaine Greer (Australia/UK), *The Female Eunuch* (nonfiction) Margaret Atwood (Canada), *The Handmaid's Tale* Helen Garner (Australia), *Monkey Grip*	Writing by women became increasingly prominent post-WWII Experimentation with narrative point of view and style to develop a feminist or feminine writing style Feminist writers used nonfiction as well as novels, poetry and drama Feminist concerns also entered into literary texts without being obviously politicised	Following WWII, women increasingly moved into professions traditionally dominated by men, e.g. medicine, law, politics Women gained more control over reproduction through: › introduction of the birth control pill (early 1960s) › liberalisation of abortion laws (from 1967 in UK)
Other fiction (popular, mainstream)	JRR Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* Frederick Forsyth, *The Day of the Jackal* Thomas Harris (US), *The Silence of the Lambs* Stephen King (US), *The Shining* John Grisham (US), *The Firm* Patricia Cornwell (US), *Body of Evidence* Colleen McCullough (Australia), *The Thorn Birds* Tim Winton (Australia), *Cloudstreet* Bryce Courtenay (South Africa/Australia), *The Power of One*, *The Potato Factory*	**Novels**: traditional forms continued to be used, generally receiving wider readerships than experimental forms **Poetry** became less widely read and known **Drama:** mainstream forms continued within national dramatic traditions, e.g. in the US (Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller); Australia (David Williamson, Hannie Rayson) The musical became the dominant form of theatre, e.g. Rodgers and Hammerstein (*Oklahoma!*, *The Sound of Music*); Andrew Lloyd Webber (*Cats*, *The Phantom of the Opera*)	Hollywood cinema globally dominant in terms of distribution Indian film industry became the largest in the world In Australia: › Australian literature began to be recognised in universities from the 1960s › Patrick White won the 1973 Nobel Prize in Literature › rise of Australian film industry in 1970s, including early films directed by Peter Weir (*Picnic at Hanging Rock*), Fred Schepisi (*The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*), Bruce Beresford (*Breaker Morant*) and Gillian Armstrong (*My Brilliant Career*)

21st century	Who	Literary forms	Events and social movements
Novels: popular and literary	JK Rowling, the *Harry Potter* series Stephanie Meyer (US), the *Twilight* novels Dan Brown (US), *The Da Vinci Code* Stieg Larsson (Sweden), the *Millennium* trilogy Suzanne Collins, the *Hunger Games* trilogy Jonathan Franzen (US), *The Corrections* Hilary Mantel, *Wolf Hall, Bring Up the Bodies* Peter Carey (Australia/US), *True History of the Kelly Gang* Kate Grenville (Australia), the *Secret River* trilogy Richard Flanagan (Australia), *The Narrow Road to the Deep North* Alexis Wright (Australia), *Carpentaria* Tara June Winch (Australia), *The Yield*	Breakdown of clear distinctions between literary and other genres of writing Many crossovers into film Film still a dominant form but DVDs and online streaming services provide alternatives to cinemas Increasing interest in nonfiction Growth of online publishing and blogs Development of multimodal texts, including graphic novels and digital books	India and China became global powers with huge labour forces; India moved to the forefront of the IT industry Terrorists flew hijacked planes into the World Trade Centre, New York in 2001; start of the 'war on terror' US invaded Iraq in 2003 with the UK and Australia as allies Climate change began to be recognised as a major global challenge Global financial crisis (GFC) of 2007–8 caused a severe financial downturn The Arab Spring beginning in 2010 led to popular uprisings and overthrow of dictatorships in Libya, Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen Me Too global protest movement (from 2017) against sexual harassment and assault, particularly in the workplace, through the use of the hashtag #MeToo on social media Many Western countries legalised same-sex marriage, beginning with the Netherlands in 2001, and including Australia (2017)

The Lello Bookstore in Porto, Portugal. anahtiris / Shutterstock

CLASSIFYING LITERATURE

Given the long history of both literature and literary criticism, it makes sense that the whole field of literary texts is organised and subdivided into a number of well-defined forms and genres. Forms of texts include novels, short stories, poems, plays, biographies, memoirs, films and television shows; the form of a text greatly influences the kind of experience we will have when we read or view it. Each form can be further subdivided into a number of genres – for example, the novel has subgroups of literary classics, science fiction, historical novels and so on. Each of these genres has its own particular set of conventions that determine how a text generates meaning and is understood by its readers or audiences. (Note that some books use the term 'genre' to mean the different forms of texts, and 'subgenre' for different types of novels, plays and films.)

The main forms and genres of texts are listed in the tables on pages 10–12.

Conventions

> **Conventions** are the ways in which each form:
> - tells a story
> - represents individuals (their thoughts, feelings and actions) and the societies they belong to
> - entices the reader or audience into the 'world' of the text.
>
> These conventions help us to know what to expect when we read a print text, go to the theatre or watch a film.

Conventions and reading

When we read a novel, we know to begin at the start of the narrative and we expect to be drawn into an imaginary world of characters, objects, places and incidents that will be continuously sustained until the end of the book. A collection of poems, stories or essays, on the other hand, does not have this continuity; in this sense, a novel has more in common with a feature film than it does with a collection of shorter works.

Reading a play is different again: we realise that the words on the page are meant for performance. We know that for a full theatrical experience, the techniques of the actors (gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice) as well as the props, costumes, settings, sounds and lighting are all needed. Many, though not all, of these features are indicated in the stage directions in the print text.

Forms and genres

The features, conventions and main forms and genres of texts are summarised in the following table.

Form: Novel – a long work of fiction (usually 200 pages or more)
Writer: Novelist

Main conventions	Key features	Main genres or forms	Key terms
› The narrative is divided into chapters and usually has a clear beginning, middle and end. › The main characters are well developed, and interact in complex and changing ways. › Minor characters have special functions even if they are not well rounded; they can be stereotypes or sketches but nevertheless cast light on main characters and concerns. › The narrative includes some depiction of the characters' social, cultural and material context, the qualities of the broader society and prevailing issues of the time.	› The characters typically include a protagonist, major characters and minor characters. › The narrative voice is usually third person or first person. › The narrative development leads to a climax (or sometimes an anticlimax). › Symbols/images give a sense of time and place, and also of the novel's broader concerns.	› literary fiction › historical fiction › crime fiction › romance › science fiction › Gothic › horror › thriller › fantasy › dystopian fiction	› character › dialogue › narrative voice › narrator › narrative structure › plot › chapters › setting › climax › denouement › resolution

Form: Short story – a short work of fiction (generally up to 50 pages); usually published in a literary magazine or in a book-length collection of short stories
Writer: Short-story writer

Main conventions	Key features	Main genres or forms	Key terms
› A short story typically focuses on a specific situation and short period of time. › It can focus on one aspect of a character. › A short story can end with a swift resolution of tension, or with a moment of uncertainty about the future.	› A short story generally only develops one or two characters in detail, and has a single main setting. › Language choices are highly significant due to the short story's condensed, concentrated form.	› Short-story collections can consist of works by one author or by multiple authors. › They can be based on genre (e.g. mystery stories) or on a central theme or setting.	› character › narrative voice › narrator › setting › climax › resolution

Form: Drama or play – a story enacted on a stage for an audience; usually a work of the imagination but can be based on fact

Writer: Dramatist or playwright

Main conventions	Key features	Main genres or forms	Key terms
› The terms 'print text' (or 'script') and 'performance text' are often used to distinguish between the written and enacted forms of a play. › A play is composed of acts and scenes; shorter plays may only have scenes. › In 20th- and 21st-century drama, characters usually talk in naturalistic fashion (appropriate to their class or the historical period). › In Shakespearean drama, most lines are written as poetry (in blank verse). › The play's ending usually resolves dramatic tension.	› The play script contains the characters' dialogue and the stage directions. › The characters are performed by actors. › Settings are created through the use of props, sets, lighting and sound, including background music. › Actors enhance and supplement the meaning of their lines with gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice, movements across the stage etc.	› tragedy › comedy › many variations of the above, e.g. 'revenge tragedy', 'comedy of manners'	› acts and scenes › performance › dialogue › stage directions › set › character › cast › director › lighting › costumes › sound effects › aside › soliloquy › monologue

Form: Poem – a stylised work, focusing on language and imagery; usually short, though epic poems are as long as novels

Writer: Poet

Main conventions	Key features	Main genres or forms	Key terms
› The 'narrator' of a poem is usually referred to as the speaker or persona. › Poems have less character and narrative development than prose fiction and drama. › Poetry has a strong focus on language patterns (e.g. rhythm, rhyme), connotations and figurative language (e.g. metaphors, symbols).	› Line lengths are determined by the poet rather than by the width of the page. › Poetry makes frequent use of imagery. › Rhyme and rhythm schemes (or their absence) are important to the poem's meaning. › The sound of words is often important to their sense. › A poem can focus on a single moment (e.g. an image, feeling, sensation, mood).	› epic › dramatic monologue › lyric › sonnet › ode › ballad › haiku › elegy › free verse › blank verse	› stanza › couplet › quatrain › rhyme › rhythm › metre › imagery › metaphor › simile › assonance › alliteration › personification

Form: Essay – a short piece of prose writing (1000 to 5000 words) exploring and expressing the writer's view on a topic

Writer: Essayist

Main conventions	Key features	Main genres or forms	Key terms
› Essayists give a truthful account of their viewpoint. › Statements of fact are accurate, supported by evidence and logic.	› The language style is usually formal and complex. › Opinions and judgements are expressed in a rational, reasoned manner.	› argumentative › expository › reflective	› introduction › conclusion › thesis › argument

→ **Form:** Biography, autobiography, memoir – the story of part or all of a real person's life

Writer: Biographer for biography, otherwise writer or author

Main conventions	Key features	Main genres or forms	Key terms
› Real people and places are described: these forms are nonfiction – that is, based on the lives and memories of real people. › The narrative is predominantly chronological, though flashbacks and flashforwards (prolepsis) can be used.	› One person's life is at the centre of the narrative. › A first-person narrator is used for autobiography/memoir. › A third-person narrator is used for biography.	› biography › autobiography › memoir	› narrative voice › narrator › setting › subject (the person whose life is being described) › life writing

Form: Film – a story told through moving images on a screen accompanied by a soundtrack

Creators of films: Filmmakers, including the director (roughly the 'author equivalent'), producers, cinematographer, editor and scriptwriter

Main conventions	Key features	Main genres or forms	Key terms
› The mise en scène is used to create a believable 'world' for the characters. › The music soundtrack helps to convey the social and cultural context, and to create mood, suspense etc. › Feature films typically run for around two hours. › Film usually has a strong narrative drive, especially in Hollywood cinema. › Art-house cinema is less narrative-driven and less concerned with creating the illusion of realism.	› The characters are performed by actors. › The narrative is constructed by a combination of visuals and sound. › Shots are edited together to tell a story. › The director and cinematographer will vary the camera angles, distances and movements. › The filming of actors and physical sets can be supplemented or replaced by the use of computer-generated imagery.	› western › science fiction › horror › thriller › film noir › romantic comedy › documentary (nonfiction) › art-house › Hollywood › Bollywood	› mise en scène › cinematography › shot › scene › edit, editing › framing › screenplay › soundtrack › director › producer › filmmakers › actors

Form: Television series – a story told through moving images and sound, broadcast for home viewing

Creators: Director, roughly the 'author equivalent'; the cinematographer, editor and scriptwriters/storyboard developers – often a team of writers – also have creative input

Main conventions	Key features	Main genres or forms	Key terms
› In a miniseries, the overall narrative is divided into sections. › Each episode ends at a point of tension and anticipation so viewers watch the next one. › Miniseries with historical settings aim for a high degree of realism. › Adaptations of novels are often very faithful to the original (more so than film adaptations).	› As for film. › The narrative is more episodic than a feature film due to the need to begin and end episodes at particular times. › The total length of the series can allow for more backstory, contextual detail and character development than in a feature film.	› sitcom (situation comedy) › soap opera › drama › miniseries › documentary (nonfiction) › adaptations of historical novels (costume drama)	as for film, plus: › episode › season

Other ways of classifying texts

Two other important ways of classifying and grouping literary works are according to:

- the historical periods in which they were written
- the distinction between literary and popular fiction.

Historical periods

Literary works can be studied by considering the historical period in which they were written and published and/or performed. (See the historical time line for English literature on pages 4–8.)

Elizabethan (late 1500s–1603) plays	Victorian (1837–1901) novels
› *The Spanish Tragedy* by Thomas Kyd	› *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë
› *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare	› *David Copperfield* by Charles Dickens
› *Dr Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe	› *Middlemarch* by George Eliot
Jacobean (early 1600s) plays	**Modernist (early 1900s) novels**
› *Volpone* by Ben Jonson	› *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad
› *The Duchess of Malfi* by John Webster	› *Mrs Dalloway* by Virginia Woolf
› *The Broken Heart* by John Ford	› *Ulysses* by James Joyce

Literary and popular fiction

The historical examples above can all be considered 'literary' works; some are also regarded as 'classics'. They contrast with popular fiction, in which features and conventions are handled differently. Here is a very broad comparison followed by some qualities of the genres within each.

Literary fiction …	Popular fiction …
› can have a strong plot but this feature is not necessarily dominant	› develops the plot with a strong sense of narrative forward movement
› requires concentrated, sustained attention when reading	› requires a less concentrated type of reading than literary fiction
› explores the nuances and complexities of language and human experience.	› has a stronger focus on events and action and less detailed descriptions of thoughts and feelings.

Victorian novels …	Crime fiction …
▸ follow the fortunes of a main character ▸ construct a strong narrative with detailed descriptions of settings and social circumstances ▸ end with a strong resolution ▸ consider and often question moral and social issues ▸ draw complex characters in depth.	▸ focuses on the solving of a crime ▸ quickly generates narrative tension ▸ resolves tension with a well-defined ending ▸ usually makes clear distinctions between right and wrong, or good and evil ▸ often draws its characters in a simplistic, even clichéd, fashion.

Modernist novels …	Science fiction …
▸ create a subjective view of reality, often through an unreliable narrator ▸ focus on the nature of human consciousness ▸ portray the alienation of individuals from one another.	▸ has a strong narrative drive ▸ uses a futuristic setting in order to reflect on contemporary issues ▸ often draws on scientific knowledge and concepts.

Comedy and tragedy

The different features and conventions of genres are crucial to the ways in which texts can create and communicate meaning. The drama genres of comedy and tragedy provide a strong example: they convey contrasting views of the world and of human action.

Comedy …	Tragedy …
▸ ends with a happy ending (such as a marriage) ▸ suggests problems and conflicts can be overcome peacefully ▸ conveys a generally positive or optimistic view of society.	▸ ends with death or the destruction of relationships ▸ exposes human weaknesses and flaws ▸ makes some criticism of either individual human behaviour or social structures and conventions.

Subverting conventions

Conventions are not binding rules that writers break at their peril; rather, they are more like a template or frame that the writer manipulates to their own ends. Writers can, and often do, choose to place pressure on the conventions of a form – perhaps because those conventions convey a particular, privileged view of the world that the writer wishes to challenge; or perhaps the writer finds those conventions too well-worn and in need of a fresh approach.

> **Subverting conventions** means that the reader's expectations are not entirely met. This can generate a range of effects, including humour, surprise and pathos. A writer might subvert conventions in order to critique social codes and protocols, or to prompt readers to re-evaluate their own assumptions.

The conventions relevant to a form still apply to a text that subverts those conventions. In fact, because these conventions *do* apply, the reader's expectations are alive and can be manipulated by the writer.

Italo Calvino's postmodern novel *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* (first published in Italian, 1979) **plays with the reader's expectations of the novel form** from beginning to end. The opening sentence establishes the tone: 'You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino's new novel, *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*.'

It becomes clear that this opening chapter is merely a kind of preamble to the real beginning of the novel; but then the next chapter starts with the unexpected phrase: 'The novel begins …', subverting the convention that novels don't talk about themselves in the third person. Later, the reader discovers that every second chapter begins an entirely new narrative, **defeating the reader's expectation of narrative continuity and plot development**.

Throughout the novel, Calvino sustains jokes about similarities between the desire for reading pleasure and the desire for sexual pleasure, and about the role of narrative gaps and interruptions in both provoking and frustrating desire, with great ingenuity and wit.

At times, conventions are challenged by a group of writers or by social and historical circumstances in such a way that the form is changed; indeed, all literary forms have evolved with time, reflecting changes in the societies that produced them. To some extent, then, all conventions are historically specific.

The 19th century was marked by great technological progress and also by strong movements for social progress; the 19th-century realist novel **aimed to create an accurate depiction of the times from the perspective of an omniscient narrator**, a guarantor of certainty and objectivity even in a changing world.

In contrast, the early years of the 20th century were marked by the devastation of WWI and new scientific theories such as relativity (there are no privileged observers in the universe) and quantum physics (there is an inherent amount of uncertainty in every measurement). Novelists of this period (such as James Joyce and Virginia Woolf) brought the **narrative viewpoint into much closer alignment with the perspectives of their characters**. This generated a more subjective (and sometimes unreliable) view of the world, thus reflecting the widespread sense of alienation and the loss of traditional certainties at this time.

NOVELS AND SHORT STORIES

Overview

Features	Techniques	Details
Plot	Events are placed in a particular order.	› Chronological narration p.17 › Moving backwards and forwards in time p.17 › Interweaving two or more narrative threads p.18 › Use of memory p.18 › Foreshadowing p.18
Structure	A narrative is built from shorter sections, which mark shifts in time, place and sometimes narrative perspective. Tension rises and falls throughout.	› Chapters and sections p.19 › Narrative structure: crisis point, turning point, climax, denouement, resolution p.19
Narrative viewpoint	The narrator is created to tell the story.	› Third-person omniscient p.20 › Third-person limited p.22 › First person p.23 › Multiple perspectives p.24
Characters and characterisation	A cast of major and minor characters have different functions and roles. Characters are created and developed through what they think, say and do.	› Main characters/protagonist p.24 › Minor characters and character functions p.25 › Importance of minor characters p.25 › Techniques used to create characters p.25 › How readers are positioned to respond to characters p.26 › How characters represent viewpoints p.26 › How characters in short stories differ from those in novels p.27
Setting	Settings are created through descriptive language and imagery.	› Physical settings p.28 › How characters relate to settings p.28 › Psychological and symbolic aspects of settings p.28
Language, tone and style	Different kinds of language create different moods, characters and contexts.	› Formal language p.29 › Informal language p.30 › Irony p.30
Imagery	Images are created by descriptions of settings and characters, and through figurative language.	› Importance of imagery p.32 › Examples of imagery p.32

Narrative techniques: constructing the plot

> **The plot** arranges the story events into an order that generates interest, surprise, suspense and so on. The plot consists of a sequence of events that are causally related; that is, there is a cause-and-effect relationship linking together all the events in a novel or story.

Chronological narration

Many novels and stories are narrated in chronological order – the order in which events in the novel are related to the reader is the same as the order in which they occur in the 'world' of the characters. This is typical of most 19th-century fiction, such as the novels of Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Emily and Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot.

Moving backwards and forwards in time

To heighten the reader's interest and sense of involvement in the story, novelists frequently move the narrative backwards and forwards in time. This means that:

- events are related out of order

- the reader does not initially receive all of the information necessary for comprehending why the characters think and act in certain ways.

Moving between the narrative present (the 'now' of the story, the time in which most of the action takes place) and either the past or the future allows the writer to achieve various effects.

- Moving backwards in time can cast light on the reasons for a character's physical or emotional states.

- Moving forwards in time – which is relatively uncommon in narrative fiction – can show the effects of a character's actions on others or on their own prospects.

Margaret Atwood **moves between past and present** in her 1996 novel *Alias Grace,* which is based on a true story. Her primary narrator is Grace Marks, a Canadian woman who was convicted of murder in 1843 at the age of sixteen and imprisoned for life. Atwood imaginatively constructs Grace's voice as she recounts her life story to a young doctor, Simon Jordan, who is seeking the truth about her past. Grace describes her encounters with Simon mostly in the present tense – 'Dr. Jordan sits across from me. He smells of shaving soap …' – but then uses the past tense to give an account of her earlier life, from her early childhood up to the time of her trial.

Shifting between Grace's present and her past, Atwood **creates suspense by gradually approaching the time of the murders, and also develops Grace's character by revealing her perceptive and compassionate qualities**. The reader's sympathy for Grace is built through the detailed account of her hardships and challenges over a nearly fifty-year period, as Atwood creates a portrait both of a complex individual and of mid-19th-century Canadian society.

Interweaving narrative threads

A novelist can combine two or more interrelated narrative threads that are set in different times or places.

- Alternating between these stories allows the novelist to use each to cast light on the other while holding back key information or delaying plot development.

- The point or points at which these narrative threads intersect allow for key revelations or conflicts to be played out.

The use of memory

The author can move the narrative back in time through a character's memory of events.

> The narrative present in Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *The Remains of the Day* (1989) is 1956, when the narrator, Stevens, embarks on a road trip in the West Country of south-west England. However, the real substance of the narrative lies in Stevens' recollections of events that occurred in the 1920s and 1930s, when he served as butler to Lord Darlington. Accounts of the present or recent past, such as 'I have finally arrived at Little Compton', are invariably succeeded by a shift further back in time, signalled by phrases such as, 'One memory in particular has preoccupied me all morning'. The reader is led to view Lord Darlington's attempts to foster friendly relations with German leaders in the years between the wars through Stevens' **sympathetic and sometimes nostalgic account** of his employer's noble character and motives, but their view is also coloured by knowledge of the Nazis' duplicity and ruthless quest for power.

Foreshadowing

Foreshadowing is the use of a statement or image that anticipates an event occurring later in the narrative.

- This invests the narrative with a strong and unified internal structure.

- Foreshadowing reminds the reader that the narrative is constructed, rather than simply a documentary record of events – even though events and characters may be depicted in an extremely realistic and 'lifelike' fashion.

> *Northanger Abbey*'s Catherine Morland has a romantic view of marriage, in contrast to the more practical view taken by her friend Isabella Thorpe, who sees an advantageous marriage as the best way to improve her financial and social position. Catherine's declaration that 'to marry for money I think the wickedest thing in existence' **foreshadows the difference in values that will ultimately dissolve the friendship between the pair**. While Catherine lives by the principles she espouses, Isabella attempts to do exactly that which Catherine condemns when she breaks off her engagement to James Morland to pursue the affluent Captain Tilney.

Structure

> The **structure** of a novel or story means the way in which the whole narrative is built out of smaller units or sections.

Chapters and sections

Chapters are the most common units of narrative content within a novel. They are sometimes grouped together in 'books' or 'volumes' to indicate larger subsections of the narrative. Shorter novels of around a hundred pages, known as novellas – such as Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis* (1915) or Helen Garner's *The Children's Bach* (1984) – often just use an icon like a diamond or asterisk to indicate breaks.

Chapter breaks can denote a break in time, the beginning of a new phase in the life of the protagonist, or a switch to another narrative thread.

Narrative shape

Structure also refers to the overall shape of the narrative. Does the narrative proceed in a mostly chronological fashion, building in tension and developing towards a climax? This is often referred to as a *linear narrative*.

Or does it begin in the middle or even near the end of the story? This is one form of *nonlinear narrative*: after an introductory section, it shifts back in time and moves forwards chronologically. Other nonlinear narratives can be much more fragmentary and episodic; they resist linear development and the subsequent resolution of tension, preferring to represent life as characterised by ebbs and flows, cycles and repetitions.

Key terms for narrative structure

- **Crisis point** – a point at which a significant conflict occurs or challenge is faced; a main character must make a choice or decision.

- **Turning point** – a major change in direction, carrying the narrative towards its climax; or a point after which there is a subtle but significant shift in the options available to characters.

- **Climax** – the point at which tension is at its greatest; a point of crisis; usually towards the end of the narrative.

- **Denouement** – a French word meaning 'unknotting'; the events immediately following the climax, untangling narrative threads and allowing conflicts and uncertainties to be resolved.

- **Resolution** – follows the denouement; relaxes narrative tension; produces a sense of closure and finality.

Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) has several early turning points as Jane experiences many challenges. A key **turning point** occurs when Jane is hired as governess at Thornfield; another occurs when Rochester admits his love for her and they become engaged.

A **crisis point** occurs when Mason and his lawyer interrupt – and prevent – the wedding between Jane and Rochester, exposing the secret of Rochester's marriage to Bertha. Jane feels her very identity has been taken from her: 'where was the Jane Eyre of yesterday? – where was her life? – where were her prospects?'

On fleeing Thornfield, Jane is taken in by Diana and Mary Rivers, and their brother St John. A further **turning point** occurs when St John discovers Jane's real identity (she had previously given a false name) and reveals that she has inherited a fortune. At the novel's **climax** Jane almost agrees to marry St John under the sustained pressure of his repeated requests – when she hears Rochester's voice calling her name, prompting her to break away from St John and return to her room.

On the following morning Jane sets out to find Rochester, and in the novel's **denouement** she learns of the burning down of Thornfield, the death of Bertha and Rochester's blindness. The **resolution** of *Jane Eyre* occurs when Jane and Rochester are finally reconciled and married; Rochester even regains some sight in one eye, a sign of his redemption and the resolution of conflict and tension within the narrative.

Narrative viewpoint

In most novels and short stories, the narrative viewpoint is one of the following:

- third-person omniscient
- third-person limited
- first person.

Note that:

- authors can use multiple narrators or narrative voices within the one text
- shifting the narrative viewpoint creates contrasting perspectives
- occasionally, authors write in the second person ('you'), directly addressing the reader
- the narrator or narrative voice in a novel or story is just as much a construct as the characters – it is simply a device used by the author to tell a story and convey a particular view of the world.

Third-person omniscient narration

An **omniscient narrator** knows everything about the characters and everything that happens in the world of the text: omniscient means 'all-knowing'. Such a narrator is able to take the reader into the consciousness – the private thoughts and feelings – of any of the characters.

- Access to such complete knowledge gives the narrative voice a reassuring quality.

- An omniscient narrative perspective allows the text to construct the illusion that universal, absolute knowledge of human affairs is obtainable.

- There is a crucial distinction between *knowing* everything and *telling* everything: even omniscient narrators withhold information (thus generating suspense, concern, anticipation, pathos, humour and so on).

Omniscient narrators can shift perspective

An omniscient narrator usually shifts the narrative perspective between a 'wide angle' or 'long shot' view of events and 'close-up' shots depicting the individual viewpoints of characters.

In Jane Austen's novels (written in the early 1800s) the **omniscient narrators** create vivid, compelling portraits of the characters and frequently explicitly invite the reader to share the narrator's perspective on them. For example, *Northanger Abbey* is narrated primarily by a **third-person omniscient narrator**, who establishes an intimate and confiding relationship from the opening sentence: 'No one who had seen Catherine Morland in her infancy, would have supposed her born to be a heroine'. The frequently sardonic narrative voice and direct references to the reader ('for the reader's more certain information', 'that the reader may be able to judge') **create a distance between the reader and the protagonist** and position the reader to share the narrator's knowing yet fond attitude towards Catherine.

However, at times the narrative perspective shifts to a **third-person limited view, allowing the reader greater access to Catherine's thoughts and feelings** as, for example, when Chapter 2 concludes with her feeling 'perfectly satisfied with her share of public attention'. The reader is thus positioned to view the society of Bath through Catherine's eyes, and to share in and sympathise with her reflections on the people she meets there.

Sometimes, too, the narrator offers **explicit commentary on general aspects of the middle-class English society** of the time, such as the defence of novels at the end of Chapter 3. Here, the narrator uses the first-person ('I will not adopt', 'I cannot approve') to express disagreement with the idea, common among educated middle-class people of the time, that novels were frivolous or 'insipid'.

Use of the first-person by an omniscient narrator

The first-person 'I' is sometimes used by an omniscient narrator.

- This narrator figure is not a character within the text, but presents the viewpoint of an external observer who stands apart from it, 'god-like'.

- An omniscient narrator using 'I' is entirely different from the 'I' of a first-person narrative, in which the narrator is frequently the central character or protagonist.

Omniscient narrators referring to themselves as 'I' achieve two contrasting effects.

- The first effect is to draw the reader into the action, encouraging a stronger sense of involvement and identification with the characters.

- The second, simultaneous effect is to remind the reader that they are responding to the author's use of language and to a fictional, constructed world; this effect subtly distances the reader from the world of the text.

> Austen deploys this narrative strategy in *Sense and Sensibility* (first published 1811) when she states: 'I come now to the relation of a misfortune, which about this time befell Mrs. John Dashwood'. Here, the use of the first-person 'I' facilitates the narrator's **adoption of a more formal register** – as if something quite serious and weighty is about to occur. This is in fact a **source of humour**, since only Fanny Dashwood would regard having to send her carriage for her sisters-in-law as a genuine 'misfortune'.

Third-person limited narration

> A **third-person limited** narrative point of view presents characters and circumstances as they are experienced and perceived by a particular character.

As the discussion of *Northanger Abbey* on the previous page shows, this technique is often used as part of a third-person omniscient narrative. However, using the third-person limited perspective predominantly or exclusively achieves a quite different effect. Because it relates the narrative from the viewpoint of a particular character, it limits our knowledge of events and the other characters to what that character sees and to their perceptions of others.

- This narrative voice suggests that it is possible to know and represent the mind of an individual. That is, it implies that our psychological states are relatively ordered and coherent, and that there are explanations for the fluctuations in our emotional states.

- It also reflects the view – which is perhaps the author's view of human experience – that each person is fundamentally constrained in what they can know about other people.

- Third-person limited narration presents a fundamentally *subjective* view of the world, as opposed to the *objective* view presented by an omniscient narrator.

> Virginia Woolf uses third-person limited narration in *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) to convey Clarissa's distinctive way of apprehending her world, as well as the powerful influence of memory on her thoughts.
>
> When Clarissa leaves her house at the beginning of the novel she is immediately immersed not just in the London streetscape, but in her memories of the country house where she grew up:

> What a lark! What a plunge! For so it had 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 …

These sentences convey the continual flow of thoughts, images and impressions, **as if the reader is inside Clarissa's mind, rather than viewing her from an external perspective**. (This technique is often referred to as representing a 'stream of consciousness'.) The third-person limited perspective also enables the narrative to seamlessly follow Clarissa's thoughts and memories as they move in and out of different periods of her life.

At other times, the **narrative viewpoint shifts between two or more characters**, highlighting their contrasting perspectives and sometimes their flawed understanding of one another. When Elizabeth and Miss Kilman visit Clarissa, Elizabeth's idea that 'Miss Kilman and her mother hated each other' is followed closely by Miss Kilman's thoughts about Clarissa ('Fool! Simpleton! You who have known neither sorrow nor pleasure'), then Clarissa's thoughts about Miss Kilman ('This a Christian – this woman! This woman had taken her daughter from her!') and so on.

In such a text there is **no single external, objective view** of the characters; the novelist uses third-person limited narration, rather than an omniscient perspective, to create a portrait of a complex and often contradictory world in which there are no absolute truths.

First-person narration

> A **first-person narrative** presents the world of the text exclusively from one character's perspective. The narrator/character uses the first-person pronoun 'I' to refer to themselves; the author is thus able to create an extremely intimate and complex portrait of this character, but is constrained by only being able to present information that the narrator/character would possess.

This narrative technique inhabits the mind of a single character, giving an extremely subjective view of the world. This reflects the belief that knowledge is inherently limited and dependent on context.

Unreliable first-person narrators present a view that might not be absolutely correct because:

- they could be repressing knowledge of traumatic or criminal events
- they may be affected by their own biases and prejudices
- they may simply not have access to all the facts.

Nick Carraway in F Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (first published 1926) is a classic example of an **unreliable narrator**. When Nick states that Gatsby's heart 'was in a constant, turbulent riot' and that 'grotesque and fantastic conceits haunted him in his bed at night', **the reader cannot take these to be absolute truths**. Rather, they are Nick's speculations about Gatsby's private thoughts and feelings, rendered in Nick's own overblown, poetic style: it is impossible to separate out the 'truth' of Gatsby's emotional life from Nick's emotional investment in Gatsby's circumstances.

Multiple narrative perspectives

Multiple narrators or narrative viewpoints allow the author to shift the reader's perspective on the characters and events, perhaps forcing the reader to re-evaluate their attitudes towards certain characters or situations.

The use of multiple narrative voices in *Dracula* (1897) enables Bram Stoker to present **contrasting perspectives on events that defy rational understanding**. Dr John Seward's diary shows the sceptical, evidence-based approach to problem-solving typical of the scientific mindset, but which when faced with the paranormal is revealed to be lacking.

The voices of the male characters dominate, but **Mina Murray's voice is also significant** as she displays the resourcefulness and intelligence of a 'New Woman' while also demonstrating her unflinching devotion to her husband. The presence of Mina and her friend Lucy Westenra in the narrative bring into the foreground questions of gender roles and identities, which might otherwise be overshadowed by the supernatural nature of the vampire.

Characters and character roles

The success of prose fiction depends largely on how compellingly its characters are drawn. The characters in a novel (and, to a lesser extent, a short story) may be developed with widely varying degrees of complexity, from the briefly sketched, possibly stereotypical minor characters through to the multifaceted main characters. Remember, though, that all types of characters are important to the overall impact and meaning of the narrative.

Main characters/protagonist

The **protagonist** is the central character in the narrative; the events of a novel or short story are presented predominantly from the protagonist's perspective.

In a novel there is sufficient scope for at least one character to be represented as a complex, three-dimensional subject with whom the reader can identify and about whom the reader has a degree of concern and sympathy.

There is also scope for the protagonist, or for several of the major characters, to change in response to their circumstances and experiences.

Minor characters and character functions

Each character has a function or role within the narrative, and it is crucial to consider minor characters in this light, since their psychological depth and complexity is usually slight – which could lead to their real importance being underestimated.

In most narratives there are characters that have one main function, for example:

- foil
- helper
- messenger
- confidante
- antagonist or villain (who can also be a main character).

Importance of minor characters

The role of minor characters within a narrative is not to represent the complex nuances of being human; rather, it is to perform a function that reflects an aspect of interactions and exchanges in human society.

The role of the bystander, for instance, often provides particular information about the more significant characters. They can offer a world view or perspective that the central characters cannot give time to while they focus on their own individual concerns. A protagonist or other major character might have important aspects of their personality revealed through minor characters such as the bystander, who tends to be more compact and stereotypical than main characters.

Characterisation

Characterisation refers to the ways in which a writer creates and represents their characters.

Remember that characters are *constructs*, not real people, no matter how realistically or convincingly they are depicted.

Techniques used to create characters

The author can use the following textual elements to create a character:

- the character's thoughts
- what the character says (or doesn't say)
- how the character talks – their speech patterns, use of language, tone of voice

Mr Collins was not a sensible man, and the deficiency of nature had been but little assisted by education or society ...

- what others say about that character
- the character's appearance, mannerisms, clothes, house and other aspects of their environment
- the character's actions – especially their interactions with others
- specific imagery to denote the character's inner life and to reveal or suggest the character's attitudes and opinions
- the character's name, which can suggest aspects of their personality, social status, views and values.

Reader responses to characters

Characters interact in ways that are *dynamic* (changing, evolving) and *dramatic* (involving tension and harmony, conflict and resolution). This means that our responses to characters throughout a novel will constantly shift and develop.

Some characters are drawn sympathetically, eliciting the reader's affection and concern; others are depicted more critically, provoking the reader's feelings of anger, horror, fear or disgust. The most celebrated characters in literature are usually a mix of many human qualities, flaws as well as virtues. The novelist's skill often lies in making an unsympathetic character seem interesting and worthy of the reader's interest and sympathy, or in taking a very likable character and teasing out their flaws and contradictions.

Complex renditions of individuals suggest that it is unwise to categorise people by such clear-cut terms as 'good' or 'bad'; instead, they encourage compassion, understanding and sympathy in our relations with others. Of course, the way the writer views the characters may not be the same as the ways in which readers view the characters, especially hundreds of years after the text was written.

Irrespective of how much or how little you identify with characters, remember that they are always deployed by the writer to create both the specifics of the plot and the text's wider meaning.

Use of characters to represent viewpoints

Characters can represent viewpoints on social or philosophical issues through their:

- statements about those issues
- adherence to a belief system
- life choices.

This means that the author can convey a viewpoint on an issue through characterisation.

> In general, Jane Austen's depictions of characters who are concerned mostly with accumulating personal wealth or elevating their social status – such as Isabella and John Thorpe in *Northanger Abbey*, Sir Walter and Elizabeth Elliot in *Persuasion*, Mrs Elton in *Emma*, Fanny Dashwood in *Sense and Sensibility* and Mr Collins in *Pride and Prejudice* – are unsympathetic: Austen **encourages us to laugh at these characters** and thus to **reject the values they stand for**.

Short-story characters

In a short story, character development is constrained by the length of the text; the character must be created much more economically than in a novel.

- A short story often focuses on a particular incident or situation in a character's life, perhaps a crisis point that crystallises aspects of their broader life experience or personality.

- A novel typically suggests that people can change and develop over an extended period – perhaps several years or even decades – whereas short stories often suggest that life is episodic and fragmented, and that in fact life lacks any clear sense of a beginning, middle and end.

Many of Elizabeth Tan's short stories in *Smart Ovens for Lonely People* (2020) cover brief periods of time and have little or no character development. Instead, her **focus is on a scene or a feeling, and on providing insight into what might otherwise be regarded as an ordinary, insignificant moment**. The title of 'A Girl Is Sitting on a Unicorn in the Middle of a Shopping Centre' sums up much of what 'happens' in the story, but the story's poetic intensity comes from its depiction of commercial excess juxtaposed with the surreal yet meaningful connection between the girl and the unicorn:

> She is sad that the unicorn is sad and together they sit in the square of light and give each other the best of their attention.

In contrast, the shopping centre is saturated with celebrity culture (a poster of model Miranda Kerr 'smiling indulgently' dominates the scene) and the commercialisation of every aspect of existence. The only real connection appears to be between the girl and the unicorn, who imagine 'the end of time' as an end to meaningless sights and sounds. The recurring phrase, 'It's Monday and …', however, suggests that humanity is trapped within an eternally recurring present, and the story ends with a sense of yearning but without resolution.

Setting

The **setting** of a text is the time and place in which the events of a story occur.

A novel can be set in many locations and over a long time frame, possibly many decades. In contrast, short stories are more compact, focusing on one or two settings and a shorter time frame – perhaps only a day.

The description of a setting can create a physical sense of place; it can also convey information about the psychological states of characters.

Novels and short stories

Physical settings

The physical setting – the place or places represented in a text – is much more than a backdrop or background to the action. Many of a text's main ideas, images and values are developed in relation to the setting.

Descriptions of landscapes are always important; they are 'loaded' with key images and symbols, which in turn have positive or negative associations.

Settings are often contrasted in order to develop a central tension or difference in the text. Typical contrasts include:

- city and country
- indoors and outdoors
- inland and coast.

Characters and settings

How comfortable or uncomfortable a character feels in particular settings conveys information about that character; in literary fiction, readers are often encouraged to sympathise with characters who care for and find pleasure in the natural world.

> In Tomasi di Lampedusa's *The Leopard* (first published in Italian in 1958) the **natural world forms a constant and reassuring backdrop to the tumultuous social and political changes** of Sicily in the 1860s. The Prince, Don Fabrizio, bracing against change to the long-established feudal order, seeks the freedom and spaciousness of nature whenever possible: as a (largely unsuccessful) hunter during the day, and as an astronomer at night. Early in the novel he looks out from his observatory over the countryside:
>
> > Under the leaven of the strong sun everything seemed weightless; the sea in the background was a dash of pure colour, the mountains which had seemed so alarmingly full of hidden men during the night now looked like masses of vapour on the point of dissolving … the crude brash sun, the drugging sun, which annulled every will, kept all things in servile immobility, cradled in violence and arbitrary dreams.
>
> The Prince's longing for stasis and permanence, for things to remain as they are, is implicitly conveyed by this description. There is a wider view conveyed here, too: that the political upheavals caused by Garibaldi's forces and the push towards Italian unification are merely temporary when seen against the forces of nature and the larger universe.

Psychological and symbolic aspects of settings

Settings can function as:

- psychological projections of a character's mental state
- symbolic representations of a character's or society's situation.

When the setting has these functions, the author is less concerned with the physical reality of the setting than with the correlation between qualities of the setting and aspects of a character or the plot.

> The title of Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* (1854) reflects the novel's central concern with the differences between its two primary settings and, in particular, **with the ways in which both places are, to a significant extent, *imagined* places**. The reader views the pastoral south and the industrial north through the eyes of protagonist Margaret Hale, whose perceptions of both places change significantly as the novel progresses.
>
> Initially Margaret is dismayed to be leaving her 'beloved' Helstone for Milton. The 'deep lead-coloured cloud hanging over the horizon' that she notices on her approach to the town reflects her apprehension about the move; the 'smell of smoke' in the air and the 'long, straight, hopeless streets' seem to confirm her worst prejudices about that 'wild and bleak country' for which she feels, before having ever laid eyes on the place, 'almost a detestation'.
>
> The inhabitants, too, at first strike her disagreeably, with their 'slovenly looseness' of dress. But, as she comes to know some of them more intimately – initially, in particular, Bessy Higgins – she finds the 'crowded narrow streets' to gain genuine interest for her. As she grows increasingly engaged in industrial relations at the mill, the northern town comes to seem lively and burgeoning, rather than grubby and dispiriting. Correspondingly, she ultimately comes to recognise that Helstone is not the idyll she imagined she had left behind. The hints in the early chapters that the perfection of the place was largely illusory – reflected, for instance, in the title of Chapter 2, 'Roses and Thorns' – are realised when Margaret returns to Helstone and finds it 'so full of associations with former days', and her former home the parsonage so altered, that she elects to remain in the industrial town that she had once feared and hated but has come to feel genuine affection for.

Language, tone and style

Authors of literary fiction usually write in a formal language style. However, fiction written since 1950 has made much greater use of informal and colloquial levels of language than the literature of earlier periods.

Formal language

> **Formal language** means the use of correct, complex sentences; a generally serious tone; and a wide-ranging, sophisticated vocabulary. In other words, the style is more ornate and the tone more serious than that in which most people speak or think.

Consider this example of a single sentence from the opening of Henry James' *The Turn of the Screw*:

> *The case, I may mention, was that of an apparition in just such an old house as had gathered us for the occasion – an appearance, of a dreadful kind, to a little boy sleeping in the room with his mother and waking her up in the terror of it; waking her not to dissipate his dread and soothe him to sleep again, but to encounter also, herself, before she had succeeded in doing so, the same sight that had shaken him.*

- Note the range of punctuation, the convoluted style and the serious tone used by James.

- The use of a formal style for literary fiction throughout the 19th century suggested that the educated classes have the best knowledge and understanding of human behaviour, while lower social classes are invested with much less complexity and interest in this form of writing.

Informal language

During the 20th century, novelists and short-story writers deployed a wider range of styles in order to give voice to a greater variety of human experience.

> **Informal language** means the use of words, phrases and punctuation appropriate in everyday contexts and situations. It is more relaxed than formal language and closer to how people usually speak.
>
> **Colloquial expressions** are used in conversational speech; they change with time, social class and nationality. The use of colloquialisms is a key element of the **vernacular**, which is the everyday language used in a particular place and time.

Writers use colloquialisms and the vernacular in prose fiction, especially in dialogue, to create a strong sense of social, historical and cultural context. This has been particularly so in English-speaking countries other than England, where the development of a distinctive national literature has often reflected national or even local patterns of speech.

Irony

> **Irony** means that the intended meaning of the words is different from the literal meaning of the words. It is an extremely important aspect of tone in literary fiction.

Irony can be produced in different ways, and can achieve various effects.

- It allows the writer/narrator to convey information to the reader that also carries an opinion about certain characters. Often this generates a mocking or 'knowing' tone, linking writer and reader in a privileged view of the characters and events.

- Irony can also elicit the reader's sympathy for characters. In this case, irony is generated not so much by the real meaning being the opposite of the literal meaning, but through drawing attention to the absurdities of human behaviour in an understated, detached fashion.

Jane Austen often uses **irony in order to question or critique the attitudes and behaviours of certain characters**. In *Northanger Abbey*, for example, the narrative voice is often arch or satirical when referring to Isabella Thorpe, who is depicted as shallow and self-centred. The gap between Catherine's innocent and generous view of her friend that persists for much of the novel and the narrator's assessment of her character is evident, for example, in the descriptions of Catherine's 'astonishment' at Isabella's dancing with Captain Tilney and her feeling 'amazed that Isabella could endure' the Captain's subsequent attentions.

Though the narration is third-person omniscient, here the narrative perspective is that of Catherine and reflects her naivety and her tendency to believe the best of those she cares for. Thus, there is considerable irony in the report of Catherine's reaction to the flirtation between Captain Tilney and Isabella – 'How strange that she should not perceive this admiration!' – as the reader understands that Isabella is quite aware of Captain Tilney's feelings and in fact reciprocates his affection. When Catherine desires to 'put [Isabella] on her guard', it is a testament to her good nature that she believes her friend unaware of the impression she is creating, since the narrator's description of Isabella's 'eyes … continually bent towards one door or the other', her looking 'well pleased' at the Captain's arrival, and her 'half-whisper' to him make it plain that Isabella needs no such warning, nor would be likely to heed it.

Situational or dramatic irony is another important form of irony. This is generated when the reader and one or more characters know something that some other characters do not. The effect is a heightening of dramatic tension, as the reader anticipates the moment at which all is revealed to the characters. This technique is more commonly deployed in drama than in narrative fiction (see page 46).

Imagery

Imagery refers to two kinds of language use:

- descriptions of the sights, sounds, smells, tastes and tactile qualities of the world of the text
- figurative language (e.g. metaphor) that draws connections between objects, feelings and concepts.

Unpacking the meaning of images in novels and stories is one of the most interesting and rewarding aspects of literary analysis, since it casts light on both the writer's craft and the way in which the broader meaning of the text is conveyed.

Important functions of imagery are:

- helping to evoke a sense of time and place

- contributing to characterisation – images associated with a character suggest aspects of their personality, life experience, beliefs and attitudes

- helping to link different parts of the narrative, generating unity and coherence

- pointing to larger themes, allowing the particular incidents and personalities depicted to be seen in terms of more abstract, possibly universal, concerns

- helping to convey the text's views and values.

Christina Stead uses imagery throughout *The Man Who Loved Children* (1940) to help **capture the rich variety of her characters' emotions and desires**. A key **source of this imagery is the natural world**, which often reflects both the ramshackle nature of the characters' lives and the possibility of beauty and freedom. Twelve-year-old Louisa (or Louie) has fraught relationships with both her father, Sam, and her stepmother, Henny, and increasingly longs to escape from the Pollit household. In an early scene she is sent to cook porridge and unexpectedly finds a moment of respite:

> … her book for which she had an unconquerable passion, the same *Legend of Roncesvalles* which she was now reading for the third time, was open on the washtub beside the stove. It was a glorious hot morning; the birds were now in the full middle of their music. The shadows were diluted light; the air was hot and moist; sweet air from flowers and humus and pines drifted in.

Characteristically for Louisa, escape means losing herself in a book, even while the promise of the outside – the wider world, to which she flees at the novel's end – 'drifted in'. A later image for Louisa also invokes the natural world, and draws on a fairytale, to signal her longing to escape and establish an independent identity:

> Louie knew she was the ugly duckling. But when a swan she would never come sailing back into their village pond …

When Louisa finally leaves home 'she was screened by the trees and bushes of the avenue', as if the natural world conspires with her to conceal her departure. Now free, she 'felt light as a dolphin undulating through the waves', ready to take her own place in the world.

DRAMA

Overview

Features	Techniques	Details
Narrative	The narrative is shaped by the requirements of performance rather than those of a print text; it is aimed at an audience rather than a reader.	› Print text and performance text p.34 › Dialogue p.34 › Character movements p.34 › Soliloquies p.35 › Asides p.36
Structure	Acts and scenes divide the action, and mark shifts in time and place. Narrative shape allows tension to build then relax.	› Acts and scenes: definition p.36 › How to refer to acts and scenes p.36 › Tragedy and comedy p.37 › Forms of plays: problem areas p.37
Characterisation	The playwright combines dialogue and performance aspects such as body movement and vocal tone. How characters look, talk and move is determined by actors and the director as well as the playwright.	› Acting style p.38 › Visual elements p.38 › Character groupings p.38
Stage directions and performance aspects	Stage directions describe aspects of stage sets, props and sounds, as well as characters' appearance, delivery and movement.	› Importance of stage directions p.39 › Props and sets p.39 › Costumes and characters' physical appearance p.40 › Stage positions and movements p.41 › The director's role p.42 › Lighting p.42 › Sound effects p.43 › Music p.43
Language	The characters' dialogue conveys their personalities, furthers the plot and explores wider ideas and concerns.	› Layers of meaning p.44 › Use of everyday speech p.44 › Imagery p.45
Dramatic irony	The characters are shown to have limited knowledge or are unable to say what they know.	› Definition p.46 › Examples p.46

Drama

Narrative technique

Drama shares a great deal with narrative fiction, including many of the features of characterisation and narrative structure already discussed.

Like prose fiction, a play tells a story about imaginary characters and events, usually developing to a major point of crisis followed by a denouement and resolution of conflicts and tensions.

However, because plays are written in order to be performed, there are some important differences in structure and narrative technique between these two narrative forms.

Print text and performance text

In a sense, the print text is only a 'partial' text which requires a performance in order to be fully realised. Performance elements that are crucial to the meaning of the text include:

- props and sets
- sound and lighting
- the positions and movements of characters on the stage
- the manner in which lines are delivered
- costumes and make-up.

◀ **See 'Stage directions and performance aspects' (pages 39–43) for further discussion of these elements.** ▶

Dialogue

Much more depends on what the characters say in a play than in works of fiction. In drama, there is usually no narrative voice that describes people and places, provides a unifying, explanatory perspective, or takes the audience directly into the minds of characters. The audience looks at a character in much the same way as other characters do – without the special insights provided by a narrator.

Character movements

In the theatre, the audience is fixed in position throughout the play. This is a significant difference from novel or film. The novelist can constantly change the reader's perspective on the action by shifting the narrative point of view; the filmmaker does this by changing camera positions and angles. The playwright, however, depends on manipulating the characters' movements to achieve similar effects by:

- shifting characters between the front and rear of the stage to focus on certain characters at different times
- using characters' entries and exits on and off the stage in order to represent various relationships or to 'forward action offstage'
- using special techniques such as soliloquies and asides to bring a character's thoughts to the fore.

Soliloquies

> A **soliloquy** is a speech in which a character directly informs the audience of their innermost thoughts and feelings. Usually the character is alone on the stage, and it is understood that no other character hears what is said.

The use of soliloquies brings the audience into a special relationship with that character, placing them in a position similar to that created by a first-person narrator in a novel.

The overall effect, though, is closer to that of an omniscient point of view. Special insights into one character's mind are interspersed with ensemble scenes showing characters in various situations and groups, as well as with soliloquies and asides (see below) from other characters. The audience thus knows everything, or a great deal, about the major characters while the characters themselves only know a limited amount – at least until the end of the play.

A soliloquy is usually a significant speech: Hamlet's famous 'To be or not to be' soliloquy is thirty-four lines in length, for instance. Such speeches temporarily hold up the action to focus the audience's attention on the character's state of mind rather than on the unfolding of events.

For much of *Othello*, Iago is the only character to speak in soliloquies, **highlighting the gulf between his malevolence and the tragic innocence of the characters against whom he plots, and placing the audience in the position of unwilling accomplice to his misdeeds**. But while Iago in his soliloquies is frank about his evil intentions, he is an unreliable guide to his own motivations. Soliloquies are generally assumed to reveal the truth about a character's thoughts but Iago's dishonesty extends even to his words when unobserved. In offering a variety of reasons for his behaviour, but no single strong and convincing one, **Iago's soliloquies exhibit what Coleridge described as 'the motive-hunting of motiveless malignity'**.

Simon Russell Beale as Iago in a 1997 National Theatre production of *Othello* in London.
Donald Cooper / Alamy Stock Photo

Drama

Asides

In an **aside**, the character speaks directly and briefly to the audience – in a few lines at most – without the other characters leaving the stage. The theatrical conventions are that:

> ❯ other characters do not hear what is said

> ❯ asides are indicated in a stage direction so that the actor knows to address the audience.

An aside achieves a similar, though briefer, effect to that of a soliloquy. The audience learns the character's true intentions – which might well be contrary to those indicated in their speeches to other characters – but the narrative is kept moving forwards.

In Act 2, scene 1 of *Othello*, Iago observes Cassio taking Desdemona by the hand and, in an **aside**, outlines his plan to 'ensnare' Cassio by convincing Othello that Cassio is having an affair with Desdemona. Cassio is 'a proper man' and Desdemona 'the sweetest innocent'; the honesty and loyalty of both ensures their **obliviousness to Iago's machinations, as they are to the aside**. That Iago claims the virtue of honesty for himself in his second aside in this scene suggests that, even when he is ostensibly speaking plainly, his word cannot be wholly relied on.

Structure

Acts and scenes

Plays are almost always divided into acts and scenes. Acts are groups of scenes that share a physical setting or are close together in their temporal settings; that is, events within an act happen roughly during the same time period. However, there can be a significant gap in time between acts; for example, sixteen years pass between the end of Act 3 and the start of Act 4 in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*.

- Shakespeare's plays have five acts, each with several scenes.
- Chekhov's major dramatic works have four acts but no internal divisions into scenes.
- In the 20th century, continued experimentation with form led to a loosening of conventional structures, and one-act plays have become relatively common.

How to refer to acts and scenes

When referring to a play comprising acts and scenes, it is usual to give the number of the act first, then the number of the scene within that act. If there are many such references, an abbreviated form can be used.

- The modern convention uses modern (Arabic) numerals for both acts and scenes, e.g. Act 1, scene 3 is expressed as 1.3.

- Older conventions use large roman numerals for acts and either normal numbers for scenes, e.g. I.3, or small roman numerals, e.g. I.iii.

Narrative shape: tragedy and comedy

The key terms climax, denouement and resolution (see page 19) also apply to drama.

However, in drama there are two main 'shapes' to the narrative structure based on classical Greek and Shakespearean drama: tragedy and comedy. These two forms still exert a very strong influence on the writing and performing of plays, although there have been many variations in their basic shapes.

Tragedy	Comedy
- The tragic hero is at first successful and acclaimed. - The hero errs due to a flaw in his or her character; the action rises to a point of crisis (the climax). - The hero falls from grace and ultimately dies, along with those to whom they have been close. This results in a sense of catharsis or resolution.	- A problem is presented within an otherwise harmonious atmosphere. - Misunderstandings or conflicts lead to separation and anxiety. - Finally the confusion is ended and relationships are restored – usually in the form of a marriage or double marriage.

In a comedy, the overall pattern is essentially the reverse of that for a tragedy: a comedy can be seen schematically as a fall, then a rise; whereas a tragedy comprises a rise, then a fall.

Forms of plays

Plays written from the late 19th century onwards can be difficult to definitively categorise as either tragedy or comedy.

For example, Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and *Hedda Gabler* may be seen as tragedies, although both feature a middle-class woman as the central character – far removed from the kings and princes of Shakespearean tragedy. Moreover, rather than being the victims of a 'fatal flaw' within their characters, these women are just as convincingly seen as victims of an overly constrictive patriarchal society.

Similarly, although Chekhov labelled some of his late plays 'comedies' and others 'dramas', the two types are not as clearly demarcated as in Shakespeare's work. *The Cherry Orchard*, for instance, is subtitled 'A Comedy in Four Acts', but rather than ending with a marriage or other celebration, the play closes with the disappointment of an expected marriage proposal that fails to eventuate, an apparent death, and the poignant sound of an axe striking a tree.

Drama

Characterisation

Characters in drama are constructed using much the same techniques as are used in narrative fiction (see pages 25–6), with one major exception: there is no narrative voice to provide the reader or audience with additional information.

Consequently, dialogue is a much more important element of characterisation in drama than in narrative fiction. However, in performance, actors can further enhance the meaning and impact of the written words.

See the section on language (pages 44–5) for more on the importance of dialogue to characterisation in a play.

Acting style

An actor's interpretation of a character is expressed through acting techniques that supplement and clarify the meanings of their lines. These techniques include:

- the ways in which a character speaks – the actor's use of tone, volume, pitch and pace
- the ways in which a character stands, sits and moves around the stage
- facial expressions and hand gestures (and whether these are seen or unseen by other characters)
- how the character relates to other characters, e.g. by
  - → standing close to or distant from them
  - → looking dominant or appearing submissive
  - → touching, caressing, striking etc.

Although some aspects of acting style are indicated by stage directions, most are left to the director and actors to 'flesh out'; they will vary from one production to the next and might well vary from performance to performance. This is just one important way in which the performance of a play can be a very different text from the print version.

Visual elements

In addition to these elements of the actor's performance, other visual elements that convey information about characters are lighting, sound, costumes, make-up and props. The last three are especially important for locating characters in terms of their context, class, values and self-concept.

Character groupings

Changing the groups of characters onstage at any one time is an important technique of characterisation in a play. Such changes and movements are clearly indicated in the script. This technique allows the playwright to bring different aspects of characters' personalities to the fore, showing:

- how their behaviour alters according to who else is present onstage
- how they respond to changed circumstances.

In the second scene of *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare brings together the main characters Leontes, Hermione and Polixenes; their conversation gives rise to Leontes' feelings of jealousy and betrayal, which triggers the fracturing of his family and friendships and the play's action. These three characters are not reunited until the final scene of the play, when they are joined by Florizel and Perdita – whose presence is the cue for Hermione to come back to life. **These character groupings thus frame the play**, with the presence of the young couple signalling hope for the future and balancing, to some degree, the tragic events of the play's early scenes.

Stage directions and performance aspects

Stage directions are critical to understanding a play when reading the print text, and to realising the play as a performance text.

> **Stage directions** are conventionally italicised in the print text. They include information of three main kinds:
> - details of the physical layout and appearance of the stage, e.g. props, settings and lighting
> - descriptions of sound effects and music
> - aspects of the presentation and performances of the characters, e.g. physical appearance; movements on and off the stage; gestures and tone of voice at key moments.

The staging of a play has a very significant effect on how meaning is constructed for the audience. In most plays written before 1800 there are relatively few stage directions, so many features of the text that directly affect its meaning are ultimately in the hands of the director.

Props and sets

> **Props** and **sets** include all the objects placed on the stage, pictures on walls and backdrops (which can incorporate doors and windows).

Sets can be rich and detailed, perhaps reflecting an affluent household or a vibrant, dynamic society; or they can be minimal, a scenario that invites the audience to see whatever items are present as symbolic, signifying larger forces or contexts.

Drama

In Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion* (first performed 1914), **the sets reflect the social class and material comfort** of Henry Higgins (Acts 2 and 4) and his mother (Acts 3 and 5). The detailed stage directions indicate the importance of the furnishings and props, particularly the apparatus used by Higgins in his phonetics teaching and research: '*a phonograph, a laryngoscope, a row of tiny organ pipes with a bellows … several tuning forks of different sizes, a life-size image of half a human head*'. Near this equipment in Higgins' 'laboratory' is a fireplace and '*a comfortable leather-covered easy-chair*'; on the other side of the room is a grand piano on which sits a '*dessert dish heaped with fruit and sweets*'. The room thus strongly communicates its owner's interests and tastes, indicating that he is used to being in control and to having whatever he wants.

In contrast, some playwrights **prefer to give little information about sets**. In this way, they **place a strong focus on the characters' relationships and dilemmas**. For example, stage directions in Andrew Bovell's *Speaking in Tongues* (first performed 1996) indicate that the first scene takes place in '*Two bars*' then '*Two rooms. Cheap. Spartan. Faded.*' Although the director and set designer can make the stage as empty or as crowded as they wish, the implication is that the sets will have minimal furnishings.

Costumes and the characters' physical appearance

Specifications of costumes and the general appearance (approximate age and physical demeanour) of characters are much more likely to be included in drama written since the 19th century.

Costumes and personal accessories such as jewellery, watches, canes and handbags all suggest aspects of a character's personality. These qualities might not be otherwise immediately apparent, or they may be repressed in their conversations, lying 'beneath the surface' of their words.

These aspects of character can be further highlighted by make-up and lighting, according to how the director and actors seek to interpret and realise the characters.

In Shakespearean and classical Greek theatre, such directions are minimal or absent. The David Grene translation of Euripides' *Hippolytus*, for instance, only **indicates basic character movements**, such as '*Hippolytus lays a garland on the status of Artermis*'. Moreover, such directions are added by editors and translators; there are no stage directions in the original manuscripts of Greek tragedies.

The original versions of Shakespeare's plays contain **very few stage directions**. The First Folio version of *Othello*, for instance, begins with '*Enter Rodorigo, and Iago*'; modern editors can add additional directions to clarify character movements, but rarely specify costumes or appearances.

Tennessee Williams wrote **detailed and often lengthy stage directions**, giving directors and actors a great deal of information about characters' appearances. In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (first performed 1955), Maggie is described as '*a pretty young woman, with anxious lines in her face*'; her husband, Brick, is '*still slim and firm as a boy … the fading, still warm light from the gallery treats him gently*'. Although Williams does not describe costumes in detail, he regularly refers to Brick's crutch ('*He drops his crutch*', '*She has thrust the crutch at him*'), emphasising Brick's damaged state as well as his refusal to accept support from others.

Stage positions and movements

Character movements and positions are usually only given at key points in the narrative; such directions ensure that the characters' words and their relationships with others are clearly conveyed to the audience.

Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (first published and performed 1879) closes with a long exchange between Nora and Helmer. Their **positions change several times as they renegotiate their marriage**: at one point Helmer is '*holding her back*' as she struggles to leave, but mostly they remain apart. When Nora finally confronts Helmer with her new understanding of their relationship she is '*sit[ting] down at one side of the table*' with Helmer sitting opposite, a sign that they are now talking as equals.

Helmer '*leap[s] to his feet*' when Nora says she will leave him, suggesting he will try once again to control her; when she does leave, though, he '*sink[s] down on a chair by the door*', reflecting his loss of power and authority.

Plays written in the 20th and 21st centuries use more frequent and specific stage directions, including detailed information about how the lines should be spoken, gestures and facial expressions.

Stage directions in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* often **point to emotions and inner conflicts that the characters struggle to put into words or are trying to repress.** In the opening scene, Maggie attempts to gain Brick's attention and affection; her lighthearted banter is counterpointed by her body language, such as '*a suddenly gay, charming smile which fades as she notices that he is not looking at her*'. At other times, Williams indicates that such emotions should be conveyed by Maggie's tone of voice, such as her responding '*intensely, fearfully*' to one of Brick's probing questions.

Paul Newman as Brick and Elizabeth Taylor as Maggie in the 1958 film of Williams' play.
Allstar Picture Library Ltd / Alamy Stock Photo

Drama

The director's role

Where stage directions are absent, the director and actors must decide how the characters should move and be positioned in order to best convey the meaning and significance of the play's actions and language.

Normally, such decisions merely complement or emphasise what is already apparent from the dialogue. Sometimes, though, the characters' movements and expressions are crucial to the meaning of a scene, yet are not indicated in the print text.

> In Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* (first performed 1604), Isabella says very little in the final scene of the play, in particular not expressing her view on her impending marriage to Duke Vincentio. This means that the **text of the play does not let the reader know** whether she is grateful for or resentful of the Duke's presumption that she will agree to his proposal, which is all the more surprising since for the entire play Isabella has declared her intention to remain a virgin and become a nun.
>
> Any production of the play must make an interpretive decision as to how to represent Isabella's response to the Duke's proposal. In this way, the meaning of the text is largely determined: Isabella will be shown either as independent, rebellious and resentful of male power; or as meek and subservient in accepting her fate.

Lighting

Lighting has several very important functions in the theatre.

- It can draw the audience's attention to a character or group of characters.
- It helps to create a mood or ambience (e.g. soft and intimate, or harsh and alienating).
- Lights going out and then coming back up indicate a transition from one scene to the next, and therefore signal a shift in location and/or time.

Lighting can also have a symbolic function, especially when the source of the light is one of the props.

> In Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, the **contrast between light and dark** is central both to the staging of the play and to **depicting 'right' and 'wrong' codes of conduct**.
>
> In Act 2, when Dr Rank arrives to see Nora, Ibsen's stage direction indicates that '*it begins to grow dark*'. Eventually, in darkness, Rank confesses his love for Nora; she, however, is shocked and asks her maid to 'bring the lamp', asking Rank: 'Aren't you ashamed of yourself, now that the lamp's come in?'. Here, the light represents the harsh reality of social expectations and proprieties, and the way in which they must be maintained at the expense of genuine feeling.
>
> By the end of the play, though, Nora has rejected the hypocrisy inherent in these values. Her final confrontation with Helmer takes place not in darkness, but in the light cast by the table lamp – she is no longer prepared to live with the darkness of deception and pretence, preferring instead the 'light' of emotional honesty and truth.

Sound effects

Sound effects can heighten the sense of realism at dramatic moments. They also add to the play's construction of the illusion that the characters inhabit not merely the stage, but a larger 'world'.

The gunshots at the end of the third act of Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* (first performed 1899) **help to bring the play to a climax**, although it is a climax that does not lead to the household's tension and conflict being resolved. Vanya, furious at the prospect of losing his home, attempts to shoot Serebryakov, but misses. Other sound effects include the everyday sounds of the estate, such as harness bells on the horses and the watchman knocking in the garden. The 'scenes from country life' of the play's subtitle are thus brought to life, and Vanya's failed attempt to find a release for his anger and frustration ends in the gun being thrown harmlessly on the floor.

Music

Music can be part of a play's action – as when a character sings or plays a piano – or it can be background or 'incidental' music. In either case, it can:

- create a mood
- help establish the historical period
- reinforce aspects of the characters' class or cultural context
- enhance characterisation by showing an aspect of the character that they cannot or do not express in words.

The exact nature or title of the music is rarely indicated in stage directions; this allows the director a degree of freedom in constructing the meaning of the performance for the audience.

In *A Streetcar Named Desire* (first performed 1947), Tennessee Williams uses **music to establish a sense of time and place, to create a mood and to convey information** about the characters. Music for the Varsouviana (a polka-like dance) is heard on several occasions, in each case **reflecting Blanche's memories and emotions**. Blanche and her husband, Allan Gray, were dancing the Varsouviana on the night of his death, and the music is first heard when Blanche describes her marriage and its tragic ending to Mitch. Whenever the music is heard subsequently (as in Scene 9) it signals to the audience that these memories, and the associated feelings of loss and dread, are dominating her mind. Finally, when the Doctor and Nurse arrive to take Blanche to a mental institution, the music is heard '*filtered into a weird distortion*'. The Varsouviana thus comes to symbolise the hold the past has on Blanche, tracking her slow but inexorable decline into madness.

Language

When reading the print text of a play, the language of the characters – rather than their appearance or movements – is foremost in the reader's mind. Even in a performance, when sounds and visuals are more prominent, the language used by the characters is usually the main medium by which meaning is communicated to the audience.

This is further enhanced – in a way that is very difficult to convey in print – by the volume, pitch, accent and tone of the actor's voice, and by how quickly or slowly, fluently or hesitantly, they deliver their lines. As previously discussed, some playwrights seek to control these aspects of performance through detailed stage directions.

Simon Russell Beale as Uncle Vanya in a 2002 production of Chekhov's play. Donald Cooper / Alamy Stock Photo

Layers of meaning

Because there is no narrative voice in drama, the language used by the characters must fulfil several functions:

- develop characterisation
- move the plot forward
- convey intimacy, distance, tension etc. in relationships
- express the main ideas and concepts circulating in the play
- contain the main images that link various characters and parts of the play together in a coherent whole.

Clearly, although the characters' language in a play often appears realistic and natural, it is invariably multi-layered, and often as condensed and evocative as poetry.

Everyday speech

Compared to literary fiction, the language of many plays is much closer to the language of ordinary people. While classical Greek and Shakespearean drama use very stylised and poetic forms of language, most drama written since the late 19th century aims for greater realism, and has increasingly adopted the style and tone of everyday speech.

Of course, the way in which characters speak varies according to their context – the time and place in which they 'live'. Moreover, differences between national theatrical traditions are often very marked.

American playwrights in the mid-20th century began using the **language of ordinary everyday speech to represent specific social and cultural contexts and to establish a distinct national theatrical tradition**. Plays such as *A View from the Bridge* (Miller) and *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Williams) portray working-class lives in creating modern forms of tragedy, and their characters' speech patterns and idioms are central to their work.

Similarly, plays such as Ray Lawler's *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* (1955) reacted against the dominant English presence in Australian theatre. Slang and colloquial expressions such as 'by crikey' and 'how's yerself' establish a **strong sense of place and time**, with the playwright modifying spelling and punctuation in order to reflect variations from standard English.

In Shaw's *Pygmalion* the interest in reproducing a particular dialect of spoken English – Cockney – is taken a step further, to the point where the written dialogue can be difficult to read:

> The Flower Girl: Theres menners f' yer! Tə-oo banches o voylets trod into the mad.

Although Shaw quickly abandons the phonetic representation of Eliza's speech, his depiction and exploration of language differences is **central to his critique of the British class system** as well as to his play's wit and humour.

Imagery

As in novels and short stories, patterns of imagery are used in drama to convey the dominant ideas and to generate a sense of coherence and unity. Recurrent words and images in the language of the characters – such as frequent references to time in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* – often foreground the playwright's main concerns.

Imagery 'colours' the language used by a character, and can therefore cast them, or the attitudes and beliefs they hold, in a positive or negative light. It can also suggest a complexity to a character's situation that leads the audience to view them more sympathetically.

The many **images of blood** in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (first performed 1605) operate on a number of levels, from signalling Macbeth's state of mind at various points in the play to reflecting Scotland's unnatural state of violence and bloodshed.

These images include Macbeth's early vision of a bloody dagger, and his later sense of being 'in blood / Stepped in so far that, should I wade no more, / Returning were as tedious as go o'er'.

Such images **convey Macbeth's psychological state**, yet they do not unambiguously condemn him. He is immersed in the blood of others as a direct result of his own actions; in this he is the stereotypical dictator, ruthlessly abusing his power for self-preservation. However, he is able to reflect on his situation and express it in powerful, evocative images. It is this fusion of poetic self-awareness and sheer brutality that makes his character not simply repellent, but also complex and compelling.

Drama

Dramatic irony

> **Dramatic irony** occurs when the audience and perhaps one or more characters possess knowledge that the other characters do not have. This enables the playwright to enhance the dramatic effect of certain key moments and scenes and thus engage the audience more directly in the unfolding action.

This narrative technique shows characters at their most vulnerable; the audience can see how limited the characters' knowledge of the world is, and how feeble their attempts at comprehending and controlling their circumstances really are.

The effect of dramatic irony can be either tragic or comic, depending on the nature of the misunderstanding and the degree of sympathy elicited by the characters.

In *Othello*, the fact that Iago's scheming is revealed largely through his soliloquies and asides creates **dramatic irony**, as the audience is aware of his real intentions, while the other characters are not. Moreover, Iago's assessment of his own motives and character cannot be taken at face value, as demonstrated by his ironic descriptions of himself as 'honest', as well as by the fact that he invokes several different motives for deceiving Othello.

While dramatic irony is often used to comic effect, in *Othello* it **increases narrative tension and develops the theme of the conflict between illusion and reality**. For example, in Act 3, scene 4, when Desdemona entreats Othello to restore Cassio to his position and praises him as a 'sufficient man', the audience's awareness of the way in which Othello will misinterpret her request heightens their apprehension as well as their horror at seeing Iago's plan achieving his evil purpose.

For much of *Hamlet*, the audience knows that Hamlet is only pretending to be mad, while the other characters struggle to understand his behaviour. At times this **use of dramatic irony produces a comic effect**, such as when Hamlet banters with the earnest Polonius in Act 2, scene 2: Polonius thinks Hamlet is 'far gone', perhaps out of love for Ophelia; the audience, though, can see how easily Hamlet manipulates the thoughts of the older man. In this way the audience is encouraged to laugh at Polonius, although his observation that Hamlet's madness has some 'method in't' suggests he is a little shrewder than he sometimes appears.

A more complex and moving scene occurs when Polonius and Claudius arrange for Ophelia to meet with Hamlet while they eavesdrop on the conversation (in Act 3, scene 1). Even though we know that Hamlet is maintaining his 'antic disposition', it is extremely difficult to discern Hamlet's true motives or feelings in this scene. In this case, **dramatic irony creates tension and sadness** as we gain a heightened sense of Hamlet's isolation and vulnerability. Ophelia's despairing cry, 'O, what a noble mind is here o'erthrown', sums up our sense that Hamlet's loss of reason and purpose is no longer entirely feigned.

★ What a piece of work is a man! How noble in reason, how infinite in faculties, in form and moving how express and admirable … ★

POETRY

Overview

Poetry

★ Busy old fool, unruly sun, / Why dost thou thus, / Through windows, and through curtains call on us? ➤

Features and conventions of poetry

Poetry is the most stylised and abstract of literary forms. Although narratives, characters and settings can be included, they are not essential to poetry; in many poems, time and place remain ill-defined, and characters are rarely fleshed out or developed. Because of the condensed and often abstract quality of poetry, the meaning of many poems is not immediately apparent, and developing the skills to interpret and analyse poetry takes time.

- The focus of poetry is on language: its many complexities and nuances of meaning; its sound as well as its sense; and the patterns words can form on the printed page.
- Poetry condenses meaning into the most compact, rich and suggestive form possible.
- Many poems seek to capture or evoke a mood or image.
- When a poem does tell a story, its tendency is invariably to extrapolate from the details of the plot to a larger statement about human experience.

Many technical features are used by poets to construct meaning and to generate effects. The points below summarise the main features and conventions of poetry; these are more fully explained on the following pages.

- Line lengths are determined by the poet, not by the width of the page.
- Lines are grouped together to form stanzas, whose lengths are also determined by the poet (although some poetic forms have stanzas with fixed lengths).
- The sound of the words is as important as their literal meaning, and contributes to the overall meaning of the poem.
- The narrator of a poem is known as the speaker or persona, and should not automatically be identified as the poet.
- Rhythm and rhyme are key tools of the poet, and a specialised vocabulary is used to describe their conventional patterns.
- Images, including similes, metaphors and symbols, contribute to the wider meaning of the poem by:
  - → drawing connections between seemingly dissimilar objects or concepts
  - → leading the reader's thoughts from the particular to the abstract
  - → placing the specific details of the poem within a larger context – perhaps national or historical, or within the world of art and literature.

! It is important that you know how to identify the techniques outlined above, but in a poetry analysis you need to go beyond simply identifying techniques. Always link observations of rhythm and rhyme, and patterns of imagery and language, to the meaning of the poetry.

Line lengths

Up until around 1900, most poets adopted verse forms with regular line lengths. Irregular line lengths became much more prevalent in the 20th century as poets experimented with, and broke down, traditional forms in order to express new circumstances and attitudes.

Regular line lengths

- Regular line lengths result from a fixed number of syllables per line; the number of stressed syllables is usually constant, too (see 'Rhythm' on pages 53–5).

- Lines of equal length generate a sense of order, regularity, predictability and coherence.

Irregular line lengths

- Irregular line lengths result from the number of syllables in each line varying according to the poet's creative choices.

- When line lengths vary, the poet has much greater freedom in deciding how they will end each line.

Irregular line lengths are a feature of much **poetry written in free verse** (see page 58). They can **generate an unpredictable or improvised quality**; they can also help the poet to **convey the feel and rhythm of ordinary speech**. Consider these lines from the beginning of Oodgeroo Noonuccal's 'We are Going':

> They came in to the little town
> A semi-naked band subdued and silent,
> All that remained of their tribe.
> They came here to the place of their old bora ground
> Where now the many white men hurry about like ants.

The third line is slightly shorter, giving extra emphasis to its bleak statement; the following lines are longer, generating the sense of a story being told. The narrative continues from the point of view of the members of the tribe, until the final three short lines deliver a blunt message:

> 'The bora ring is gone.
> The corroboree is gone.
> And we are going.'

How to indicate line breaks in a quotation

When integrating poetry quotations within a sentence, indicate a line break with a forward slash (solidus), with one space either side. Punctuation and capitals should be retained from the original.

Consider these lines from John Donne's 'The Sunne Rising':

> Thou sunne art halfe as happy'as wee,
> In that the world's contracted thus;
> Thine age askes ease, and since thy duties bee
> To warme the world, that's done in warming us.

You could use a quote to discuss Donne's use of direct address like this:

> The speaker addresses the sun as a contracted labourer, whose 'duties bee / To warme the world'.

Stanzas

A **stanza** is a group of lines that share an idea or set of images; stanzas are separated by a space. Stanzas in poetry are equivalent to paragraphs in prose.

In most traditional poetic forms, each stanza has the same number of lines: the number of lines determines how the stanza is named. The most common stanza lengths are:

- couplet – a two-line stanza
- tercet – a three-line stanza
- quatrain – a four-line stanza.

It is unusual for a poem to consist entirely of couplets, but rhyming couplets can be joined together to form longer stanzas. Similarly, tercets can be joined to form a six-line stanza (a sestet); quatrains can be joined to form an eight-line stanza (an octave) and so on.

Rhyme

Rhyme is produced when the last syllables of two words have matching sounds. Lines rhyme when matching syllables occur at the ends of the lines.

- Rhyme was an important aid to memory when poetry was primarily an oral (rather than a written) tradition.
- Rhyme serves to group lines together, generating cohesion and structure.
- Rhyming lines are usually successive lines or separated by one or two other lines.

Notating rhyme schemes

Patterns of rhyme are conventionally notated by using lower case letters. The first line is '*a*' and subsequent lines use successive letters of the alphabet. (These letters are sometimes italicised, as they are here, but not always.)

Where a rhyme occurs at the end of a line, the appropriate letter is repeated. Thus:

- A rhyming couplet is indicated by *aa*:

In the room the women come and <u>go</u>	*a*
Talking of Michelange<u>lo</u>.	*a*

(from TS Eliot, 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock')

- A quatrain in which the second and fourth lines rhyme but the first and third lines do not is described as *abcb*:

Break, break, break,	*a*
On thy cold gray stones, O <u>Sea</u>!	*b*
And I would that my tongue could utter	*c*
The thoughts that arise in <u>me</u>.	*b*

(from Tennyson, 'Break, Break, Break')

- The rhyme scheme of a limerick is *aabba*:

There was an old man of Calcutta,	*a*
Who coated his tonsils with butta,	*a*
Thus converting his snore	*b*
From a thunderous roar	*b*
To a soft, oleaginous mutta.	*a*

(Ogden Nash, 'Arthur')

Christina Rossetti's 'Maude Clare' consists of quatrains with an **abcb** rhyme scheme – the **traditional rhyme scheme of a ballad**. It also uses the ballad's regular rhythmic scheme, with lines of alternating iambic tetrameter and iambic trimeter (see page 54 for explanations of these terms). For example, here is the first stanza:

> Out of the church she followed them
> With a lofty step and mien:
> His bride was like a village maid,
> Maude Clare was like a queen.

The use of rhyme in the second and fourth lines of each stanza reinforces the regular rhythm, and also groups the lines together in pairs, enabling the poem's narrative to flow smoothly. The rhyming words can reinforce each other (e.g. 'mien' and 'queen'; 'pride' and 'bride'), or they can highlight the poem's underlying tension (e.g. 'tears' and 'years').

Poetry

Half rhyme and internal rhyme

Two more subtle uses of rhyme are:

- internal rhyme – which occurs when the rhyme occurs within a line rather than at line ends
- half rhyme – which occurs when the sounds are similar but not exactly matched.

Seamus Heaney often uses **half rhyme in combination with full rhyme**. This **softens the impact of the repeated sounds** (especially consonant sounds) while still **creating echoes and resonances** within the poem.

In 'Follower', a rhyming pattern that includes both half rhymes and full rhymes creates a subtle, shifting but coherent pattern of sounds that mirrors the pattern of furrows in the soil:

> My father worked with a horse-plough,
> His shoulders globed like a full sail strung
> Between the shafts and the furrow.
> The horses strained at his clicking tongue.

Each stanza contains a half rhyme (e.g. plough/furrow in the first and third lines of the first stanza) and a full rhyme (e.g. strung/tongue in the second and fourth lines). The lines that have half rhymes and full rhymes alternate in each stanza (e.g. in the second stanza the half rhyme sock/pluck occurs in the second and fourth lines), which prevents the rhyme scheme from being too obvious or predictable – just as the furrows in the soil are regular, but with the natural variations caused by the labour of man and animal.

Assonance and alliteration

Assonance and alliteration are repeated sounds that can occur anywhere within a line of a poem. To be most effective, assonance and alliteration should occur in words very close together – usually successive, or separated by only one other word.

Assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds.

Alliteration is the repetition of a consonant or vowel sound at the beginning of two or more words in a group.

Walt Whitman uses **alliteration and assonance** in 'As I Ebb'd with the Ocean of Life' to **create a sense both of the water's movement and of the ebb and flow of the poet's thoughts**. The repeated 's' sounds in the following lines clearly evoke the sound of waves on a beach:

> Chaff, straw, splinters of wood, weeds, and the sea-gluten,
> Scum, scales from shining rocks, leaves of salt-lettuce, left by the tide,
> Miles walking, the sound of breaking waves the other side of me …

Notice, too, how Whitman varies the space between these 's' sounds, as well as varying the length of phrases, creating a natural, unforced rhythm to reflect the gentle coming and going of waves.

A slightly different set of sounds is used in the third part of this poem, as the poet's thoughts turn more inward:

> You oceans both, I close with you,
> We murmur alike reproachfully rolling sands and drift,
>   knowing not why,
> These little shreds indeed standing for you and me and all.

The repeated 's' sounds are now joined by the more sonorous 'r' sounds and, especially, the **assonance** of a repeated long 'o' sound ('oceans', 'close', 'reproachfully rolling', 'knowing'). This sound contributes to **a more reflective, meditative quality** as the poet considers an analogy between the debris floating on the ocean or washed up on shores and his own place within the universe: 'I too am but a trail of drift and debris'.

Rhythm

Rhythm is an extremely important feature of poetry. The detailed attention poets give to rhythmic patterns means poetry has a very close relationship to music, which is even more evident when poetry is read aloud, as it is often intended to be.

- The rhythm of a poem is produced by its pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables. For example, in the line 'Humpty Dumpty sat on the wall', the syllables 'Hump', 'Dump', 'sat' and 'wall' are stressed or accentuated; they receive more emphasis than the other syllables, which are unstressed.

- A regular rhythm generates a sense of forward movement in the poem; it also creates a pleasing, reassuring quality, since the beat or pulse of the poem falls in a regular, predictable place.

- An irregular rhythm can convey a sense of unease or confusion, or simply mimic the rhythms of ordinary speech.

Regular rhythmic patterns

Metre is a regular pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in each line. Because of this regular pattern, each line can be broken down into a unit consisting of (usually) two or three syllables. This unit is known as a **foot**.

Metrical feet are named according to the number and sequence of stressed and unstressed syllables. The most common of these are defined in the table on the next page.

Poetry

How the metre is described	Name of the basic unit (the 'foot')	Definition	Example
iambic	iamb (pronounced 'i-am')	an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable	con**tent** (as in: 'I am feeling content with life')
trochaic	trochee (pronounced 'trokay')	a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable	**con**tent (as in: 'the content of this book includes poetry analysis')
anapaestic or anapestic	anapaest or anapest	two unstressed syllables followed by a stressed syllable	Tennes**see**; with a **leap** | and a **bound**
dactylic	dactyl	a stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables	**Ad**elaide; **Jo**sephine

The metre is named according to the *kind* of feet that each line is made up from (using terms in the left hand column above), and the *number* of feet in each line. The number is indicated by a Greek prefix (e.g. 'di-', 'tri-') in front of the word 'meter'.

Name of metre	Definition	Example of the metre	Example of poetry in this metre
dimeter	two feet per line	iambic dimeter (four syllables per line)	This like a dream Keeps other time (WH Auden, 'This Lunar Beauty')
trimeter	three feet per line	iambic trimeter (six syllables per line)	The heart asks Pleasure—first— And then—Excuse from Pain— (Emily Dickinson, 'The heart asks Pleasure—first')
tetrameter	four feet per line	anapaestic tetrameter (12 syllables per line, two unstressed followed by one stressed)	For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast, And breathed in the face of the foe as he passed; And the eyes of the sleepers waxed deadly and chill, And their hearts but once heaved, and forever grew still! (Lord Byron, 'The Destruction of Sennacherib')
pentameter	five feet per line	iambic pentameter (ten syllables per line)	My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun (William Shakespeare, Sonnet 130) I love thee to the depth and breadth and height My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight (Elizabeth Barrett Browning, *Sonnets from the Portuguese* No. 43)

Note the following guidelines.

- Iambic pentameter is the most widely used of all metres; see 'Blank verse' (page 57).
- Longer lines are sometimes used, though it is rare to have more than five feet per line.
- A line with an incomplete foot is known as a catalectic line.

Varying the rhythmic pattern

Poets vary the rhythmic scheme of a poem to:

- create variety

- draw attention to the meaning of particular words and phrases

- achieve an effect in sound or rhythm that mirrors or reflects the meaning of the words.

In analysing poetry, it is often more useful and interesting to comment on where the rhyme scheme is varied than simply identify the main pattern.

Robert Browning's 'Andrea del Sarto' is written in **unrhymed iambic pentameter** (blank verse; see pages 54 and 57). The poem is a dramatic monologue, presented as part of an argument between the speaker, Andrea del Sarto 'the faultless painter', and his wife Lucrezia. Browning uses variation in the metre and punctuation to help **accentuate specific phrases and create moments of emphasis and tension**. A consistent rhythm is established in the first line with the iambic metre, 'But **do** not **let** us **quar**rel **any more**', creating a calm and even tone for his entreaty.

However, his appeal '**No**, my Lu**cre**zia' begins the second line with a stressed syllable, giving his interjection more force than the usually unstressed first syllable of a line of iambic pentameter. This creates the impression that he is speaking over her attempts to argue and gives the line a tone of steadfastness and frustration. The tone is accentuated with the division of the line into shorter phrases, punctuated to create strong pauses with a comma and semicolon.

In the second half of the line the metre could be interpreted as returning to iambic feet, establishing a calmer tone: '**bear** with **me** for **once**'. Alternatively, the line could be read as continuing to disrupt the regular iambic metre to create a more insistent tone: 'bear **with** me for **once**'.

The iambic metre resumes in lines 3 and 4, producing a calmer tone that allows del Sarto to begin explaining his thoughts:

Sit **down** and **all** shall **hap**pen **as** you **wish**.
You **turn** your **face**, but **does** it **bring** your **heart**?

The 19th-century poet Emily Dickinson also **uses occasional variations to a regular rhythmic pattern to create specific effects**. Iambic feet are common in her poetry, as in 'I heard a Fly buzz – when I died', which has alternating lines of iambic tetrameter and iambic trimeter. In 'There's a certain Slant of light', though, the mainly trochaic feet (stressed syllable followed by unstressed syllable) are used irregularly. The final foot in some lines, for instance, is incomplete, resulting in two stressed syllables in a row; and the third line – 'That oppresses, like the Heft' – begins with the unstresssed syllable 'that'. Dickinson creates a slightly jerky, unsettling rhythm that only settles in the final stanza, as it approaches the thought – and final word – of Death.

Poetry

Caesura

> A **caesura** is a pause or break in a line of poetry. It is often indicated by a comma or other punctuation mark, although it can also result from the natural rhythm of the words.

A caesura can signal a hesitation or brief rest, perhaps reflecting the meaning of the phrase, or simply regulating the pace and flow of the poem.

> In 'Nick and the Candlestick', Sylvia Plath uses **caesura to help capture the speaker's halting movements in the dark** as she checks on her young son. The first line contains two full stops, helping to establish the uncertain mood and a hesitant rhythm:
>
> > I am a miner. The light burns blue.
>
> After this the poem flows more smoothly, but regular commas and other punctuation marks interrupt the rhythm, as in:
>
> > And the fish, the fish –
> > Christ! They are panes of ice …
>
> These frequent hesitations suggest the speaker's bewildered state of mind as she grapples with the reality of her situation: partly confronting ('The pain / You wake to is not yours'), partly miraculous ('You are the baby in the barn').

Enjambment

> **Enjambment** is the running-on of lines. This disrupts the conventional expectation of a pause at the end of each line, and breaks down a strict adherence to a poetic form. It can also suggest various kinds of threshold and boundary crossings.

In the 20th century, poets used enjambment extensively, sometimes running the last line of one stanza onto the first line of the next. This was part of an ongoing exploration and subversion of traditional boundaries and divisions in poetic form.

> Sylvia Plath **regularly uses enjambment** in her poetry. One example that works closely with language to convey meaning occurs in 'Words', in which the image of flowing water is both created by the language and mimicked by the poem's layout:
>
> > The sap
> > Wells like tears, like the
> > Water striving
> > To re-establish its mirror
> > Over the rock
> >
> > That drops and turns …

Here, the continuity in the flow of the words across the gap between stanzas, from 'over the rock' to 'that drops and turns', **mimics the flow of water** over a rock, on its way to a still pool (a 'mirror' that can reflect the sky). The ebb and flow of water over and around rocks is also evoked by the alternating long and short lines. Plath thus suggests the close connections between language and the physical world, using the arrangement of words on the page as well as images of echoes and mirrors to explore these abstract but potent ideas.

Major forms of poetry

There are a number of ways of defining the form of a poem:

- a fixed pattern of rhyme, rhythm and number of lines (e.g. a sonnet has fourteen lines and a rhyme scheme)
- the nature of the content and mood (e.g. ode, elegy)
- the way in which a story is told (e.g. dramatic monologue, epic).

Note that blank verse and free verse, two important types of verse, can be used in various forms of poetry.

Blank verse

Blank verse is poetry written in unrhymed (hence 'blank') iambic pentameter.

- Most Shakespearean drama is in blank verse.
- The rhythm of blank verse is very close to that of normal speech in English.

The Romantic poets often used **blank verse**; the following example is the beginning of Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey':

> Five years have passed; five summers, with the length
> Of five long winters! and again I hear
> These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
> With a soft inland murmur. Once again
> Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs …

The (mostly) regular pattern of alternating unstressed and stressed syllables **creates a consistent rhythm**. This helps generate a suitable mood for this meditative reflection on the nature of memory.

Note, however, the emphatic tone generated by the unexpected stress on 'long' in the second line, emphasising the difficulty of enduring the winters as compared to the summers.

Poetry

But that I would not lose her sight so long; / If her eyes have not blinded thine, / Look, and tomorrow late, tell me,

Free verse

> **Free verse** is poetry in which the line lengths and patterns of rhyme and rhythm are all irregular.

Free verse became widely used in the 20th century when poets experimented with form by breaking down traditional structures such as regular stanzas and rhyme schemes. There were strong precedents for the use of free verse in the work of 19th-century poets, such as that of the American poet Walt Whitman.

> TS Eliot used **free verse** in his depiction of the alienating and dehumanising qualities of modern life (in the early 1900s). Eliot rejected traditional forms and regular patterns of rhyme and rhythm to **reflect a sense that the former sources and structures of meaning could no longer convey the uncertainties of the time**.
>
> A famous example occurs at the opening of 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock':
>
> > Let us go then, you and I,
> > When the evening is spread out against the sky
> > Like a patient etherised upon a table …
>
> The regular alternation of stressed and unstressed syllables in the first line is immediately disrupted by the longer second line, in which stressed syllables are separated by two or three unstressed syllables (mimicking the meaning of the phrase 'spread out').
>
> The strong sense of purpose established by the first line is thus immediately negated not only by the images of inertness and diffuseness, but also by the irregular rhythms and line lengths of the stanza.

Note that writing in free verse does not mean that rhyme is never used, but that it is used irregularly, and with a particular purpose rather than as an automatic consequence of the form. Free verse can mean much more than the use of irregular line lengths; it allows the poet to experiment with every aspect of language, including:

- the placement of words on the page
- the unconventional use of punctuation – for example, omitting punctuation entirely.

Lyric

> The **lyric** is the most common poetic form. It was originally accompanied by music, and the term retains this meaning (as in 'song lyric'). A lyric poem:
> - is relatively short
> - is in the voice of a single 'character', known as the speaker
> - uses a personal tone that conveys the speaker's private thoughts and feelings
> - often focuses on a moment, mood or image.

There are many forms or structures in which a lyric can be written: a series of quatrains is the most common. In Renaissance Italy and Elizabethan England the most popular form of lyric was the sonnet, which usually focused on the subject of romantic love (see below). Lyrics can also be religious or mystical in nature.

Sonnet

A **sonnet** is a fourteen-line poem usually written in iambic pentameter, and typically in one of a few established rhyme schemes.

Sonnets are conventionally about love, but can also be religious – Donne's *Holy Sonnets* are famous examples – or, more recently, about everyday experience.

The main sonnet forms are defined in the following table. Although apparently quite strict, the sonnet form has proved to be flexible enough for considerable variation and experiment.

Type of sonnet	Rhyme scheme	Structure
Petrarchan named after the Renaissance Italian poet Petrarch	*abbaabba cdecde* or *abbaabba cdcdcd*	› The first eight lines are the octave; the last six lines are the sestet. › The octave develops the main idea or problem; the sestet provides a response or resolution.
Shakespearean (sometimes known as 'English') named after Shakespeare, who used this form throughout his cycle of 154 sonnets	*abab cdcd efef gg*	› The three quatrains develop different aspects of the main idea. › The final rhyming couplet resolves the argument.
Spenserian named after the Elizabethan English poet Edmund Spenser	*abab bcbc cdcd ee*	› The three linked quatrains develop the main idea. › The final rhyming couplet generates a sense of closure and resolution.

Although Shakespeare is extremely consistent in his use of the rhyme scheme *abab cdcd efef gg* throughout his **154 sonnets**, there are some exceptions. One of these is Sonnet 126, the last of the group of sonnets addressed to a young man. Not only is the rhyme scheme different – rhyming couplets are used throughout – but the final two lines are missing.

The effect of this structure is to **give the poem a slightly abrupt feel, consistent with the poet's warning about Time**. The first eight lines (the octave) express admiration for the young man's apparent control over Time's passing, with his youthful beauty being preserved by Nature. The final four lines, though, suggest that he cannot remain Nature's darling forever, and eventually she (Nature) will have to release him. This quatrain, two lines shorter than the usual sestet, thus appropriately delivers a blunt, emphatic message about the inevitability of physical decline and Time's ultimate mastery over our lives.

Poetry

In the 19th century, **Romantic poets** such as John Keats (e.g. 'Bright Star') **continued to use the sonnet form, as did poets in the Victorian period**. Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* – including 'How do I love thee?' – is a famous sonnet cycle about love. Christina Rossetti also used the sonnet form, often to express feelings of loss or unhappiness.

Poets in the 20th century **used the sonnet form quite flexibly, not always adhering to fixed schemes of rhythm or rhyme**, and exploring a wide range of subjects, though the length of fourteen lines is a constant feature. Seamus Heaney, for example, uses the sonnet to reflect on the history of relations between England and Ireland in 'Requiem for the Croppies' and 'Act of Union'.

Contemporary Australian poet Petra White uses the sonnet form in 'By This Hand', mixing a vernacular style ('let's bung it here, line ten') with a more formal register ('never say love is mortal') to present a view of love that is both new and familiar. The theme of love is also present in Carol Ann Duffy's sonnet 'Anne Hathaway', in which the speaker is Shakespeare's wife, reflecting on her marriage to the playwright. Her language is rich in imagery and allusion, and iambic pentameter is used fairly consistently, but there is no strict rhyme scheme or clear division into quatrains. This looser structure suggests a woman who resists conventional expectations, and perhaps also her rejection of the conventional narrative that the marriage between Shakespeare and Anne Hathaway lacked passion.

Ode

The **ode** is another type of lyric poem, often written in the form of an address. It has:

> a ceremonial, stately quality
> a complex stanza form.

Odes can be broadly divided into two main kinds: those for a public occasion, and those for private reflection.

John Keats' 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' is an **ode of the private kind**, in five ten-line stanzas that follow the rhyme scheme *abab cdedce* (or with a variation of this rhyme sequence in the sestet).

The speaker admires the urn's beauty, which transcends the passage of time; the two lovers depicted on its surface 'cannot fade'. Yet, nor can the 'Bold Lover' ever succeed in kissing his beloved.

Thus, the poem is a tribute to the beauty and permanence of art, while also acknowledging what art fails to capture – the vitality and sensuousness of life.

Dramatic monologue

A **dramatic monologue** contrasts with a lyric: it is a longer poem in which the speaker is more strongly characterised and developed.

› The 'dramatic' quality of the poem comes from a situation described by the speaker.

› There is more of a storytelling aspect to a dramatic monologue than in a lyric.

The (English) Victorian poets Alfred, Lord Tennyson and Robert Browning wrote several **dramatic monologues**; 'Ulysses' (Tennyson) and 'My Last Duchess' (Browning) are examples.

Epic

The **epic** is the longest and most narrative-driven form of poetry. Its subject is usually on a grand scale, encompassing events of a momentous nature and/or occurring over a number of years.

John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667) is the **most famous epic poem written in English**. It describes the original sin of Adam and Eve and their banishment from the garden of Eden; each of its twelve 'books' is several hundred lines in length.

A much older epic poem is *Beowulf*, written between the 8th and 11th centuries in Old English, an early form of the English language. It has been translated into modern English a number of times: one of the more recent translations is by the Irish poet Seamus Heaney (published in 1999).

Imagery: simile, metaphor and symbol

Because of poetry's close focus on language, the multiple meanings and suggestions of words are more fundamental to the overall sense of a poem than they are in any other literary form.

• Carefully consider the connotations of words alongside their literal meanings.

• Analyse the significance and impact of the images in a poem as closely as you would study the narrative or characters of a novel.

Poetry

Simile

> A **simile** compares two different things using 'like' or 'as'.
> - The comparison draws the reader's attention to a particular quality of the first item.
> - It connects the first item with other things or ideas that have similar images associated with them.

In Carol Ann Duffy's 'Mrs Midas', the speaker uses a **simile** to describe her husband – the King Midas of Greek mythology – turning a pear to gold:

> And then he plucked
>
> A pear from a branch – we grew Fondante d'Automne –
>
> and it sat in his hand like a light bulb. On.

The glow of the golden pear and the reference to a specific pear variety **suggest lives of pleasure and comfort, as well as Mrs Midas' initial astonishment at her husband's unusual gift**. Initially the images continue to be unthreatening: 'He sat in that chair like a king on a burnished throne.' Soon, though, reality sets in, and the figurative language gives way to short, sharp, literal descriptions: 'I locked the cat in the cellar. I moved the phone.' The tranquil domesticity of the poem's opening thus transforms into fear, then bitterness and regret as the irreversible consequences of Midas' greed and 'pure selfishness' destroy both their lives.

Metaphor

> A **metaphor** describes one thing as if it is another thing.
> - Metaphors are extremely effective in making us look at the world of familiar objects and experiences in unexpected and revealing ways.
> - Another way of thinking about a metaphor is as a statement of equivalence between two different things, e.g. 'the camel **is** the ship of the desert'.

- A metaphor can state the equivalence between two things explicitly, using a form of the verb 'to be' (e.g. 'is', 'are').

In 'Sailing to Byzantium', Yeats uses a **metaphor to create an image of the physical decline that accompanies old age**:

> An aged man is but a paltry thing,
>
> A tattered coat upon a stick ...

The vitality of the man has gone, leaving just the outer layer of a 'tattered coat' and an inner, skeleton-like 'stick' that evokes the imminence of death.

- Alternatively, poets often use adjectives and verbs to establish a parity between two unlike objects or concepts.

The famous image of a falcon and its falconer begins Yeats' 'The Second Coming', and initiates a series of **related metaphorical images**:

> Turning and turning in the widening gyre
> The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
> Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
> Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
> The blood-dimmed tide is loosed …

The broken bond between the bird and its keeper, and the 'widening' circles in which it flies, signal other kinds of breakdown in Western society and culture. Written and published shortly after WWI, 'The Second Coming' creates a **network of images of chaos and fragmentation** through verbs and verb phrases such as 'cannot hear', 'cannot hold', 'fall apart' and 'loosed', and the adjective 'blood-dimmed' with its clear reference to the recent conflict.

Personification occurs when a metaphor attributes human qualities to non-human objects, creatures or concepts. In this way, the poet breaks down familiar categories and definitions, suggesting surprising connections between the human and the non-human.

Emily Dickinson personifies death in 'Because I could not stop for Death' to convey a calm acceptance of mortality. The poem represents death not as a cruel force that will take the speaker from those she loves, but as a charming gentleman who takes the speaker for a carriage ride to her grave. The **personification of death thus enables Dickinson to portray the transition from life to death as natural,** and the afterlife as simply another aspect of existence.

A **conceit** is a metaphor that relates very different types of things in a way that is unexpected and witty.

> ❯ It is usually associated with the metaphysical poets of the early 1600s, of whom John Donne (1572–1631) is the most celebrated and best known.

> ❯ A **metaphysical conceit** typically combines an image from the cosmic or spiritual realm with an everyday object or concept.

Poetry

In Donne's 'A Valediction: forbidding mourning', the lovers' relationship is compared to a compass. These two entities are utterly dissimilar, and the **conceit invests the intangible bond between people with the characteristics of a mundane physical object:**

> If [our two soules] be two, they are two so
> As stiffe twin compasses are two,
> Thy soule the fixed foot, makes no show
> To move, but doth, if the'other do.

Donne develops an elaborate scheme by which the two compass points signify the lovers, with the woman at the (still) centre and the man at the (mobile) circumference. The lovers are united – even while they are separated – by the bond between them, which is represented by the joined arms of the instrument.

Symbol

A **symbol** is an object that 'stands in' for another, larger thing; the symbolic object is part of or associated with the larger entity, but also represents it.

Common examples of symbols include:

- the cross as a symbol for the Christian church
- the throne and crown as symbols for the monarchy
- a dove as a symbol for peace
- the colour white symbolising purity
- a red rose as a symbol for love.

While certain objects have well-known symbolic meanings such as those listed above, these familiar associations do not always apply; it depends on the context. For example, a description of a country garden that includes several species of roses might not be intended to invoke the symbolic meaning of roses.

A particular object can have more than one symbolic meaning. For example, a cross might symbolise death rather than the Christian faith, especially if accompanied by a wreath of flowers. A red rose might signify passion or lust rather than a more romantic conception of love. Again, the context in which the symbol appears is crucial in delimiting or clarifying meaning.
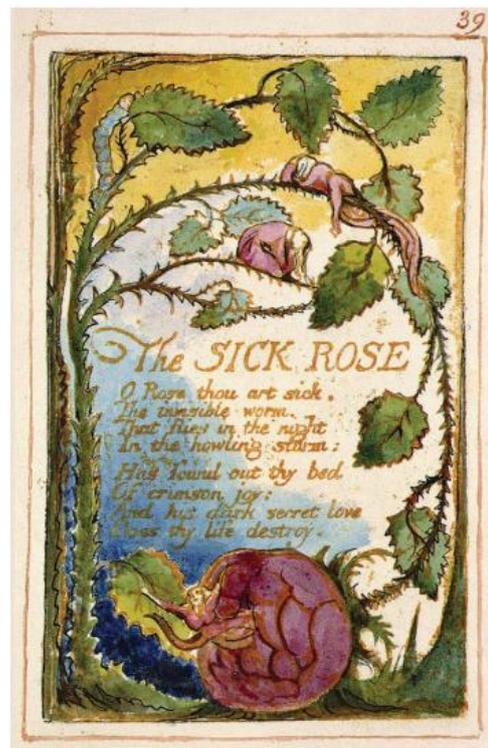
William Blake's illustration of a red rose accompanying his poem 'The Sick Rose' uses this familiar symbol in an unexpected way. Wikimedia Commons

TS Eliot's poetry is rich in **symbols drawn from myth and literature**. In *The Waste Land* the central figure of the Fisher King is a symbolic figure drawn from Arthurian legend, in which he guards the Holy Grail. The Fisher King is injured, and his lands are a barren wasteland; he is able only to sit and fish in the river. In Eliot's famously ambiguous poem, the precise symbolic meanings of the Fisher King and the wasteland are left largely for the reader to interpret. However, one common way of reading the impotence of the king and the sterility of his lands is as symbolic of the loss of meaning in modern life and the decline of Western culture, which appears throughout the poem in a highly fragmented state.

The **ideas of death and rebirth are symbolised** through other figures in the poem, both literary and mythological. One is the 'drowned Phoenician sailor', an image of a fertility god who was thrown into the sea each year, symbolising the death of summer and therefore the possibility of rebirth in the following spring. The sailor in turn is linked to the shipwrecked characters in Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* through the quotation from Ariel's song: 'Those are pearls that were his eyes'. The figure of the Hanged Man in the Tarot cards is another who symbolises a death that precedes a rebirth.

The figure of Tiresias is a unifying one in *The Waste Land*. In Greek myth, Tiresias lived as both man and woman; he was blinded, yet gained the power of prophecy. Tiresias symbolises an understanding of human experience that goes beyond everyday phenomena to universal truths – an understanding that *The Waste Land* suggests may be both profoundly desirable yet ultimately unobtainable.

In the poetry of WB Yeats, the tower is a recurring image with multiple meanings. On a literal level it refers to the tower owned by Yeats, an 11th-century Norman tower; **on a symbolic level, the tower represents Ireland** – an ancient country haunted by its violent history.

The sequence of poems 'Meditations in Time of Civil War' enacts a journey from the base to the top of this tower. This movement symbolises the poet's personal quest and also Ireland's troubled history, from the colonial English estates of 'Ancestral Houses' and the 'acre of stony ground' at the tower's base, to the vision of an uncertain Irish future from 'the tower top'.

Poetry

FILM

Overview

Features	Techniques	Details

Visual elements	Characters and events are represented through film's visual language, rather than only through words.	› Mise en scène p.67
		  • setting
		  • lighting
		  • costumes
		  • acting style
		› Cinematography p.68
		› Editing p.68

Sound	Sound enhances or clarifies the meaning of words and images; it helps realise the 'world' of the film.	› Sound effects p.68 › Music soundtrack p.69

Narrative structure	The attributes and situations of characters are combined to elicit particular responses from the audience.	› Classical Hollywood narrative structure p.69
		  • protagonist
		  • goal
		  • obstacles and conflict
		  • change
		  • resolution
		› Resisting the conventions of the classical Hollywood narrative p.69

Narrative point of view	Sound and cinematography combine to create the narrative point of view, which positions the audience to see the characters and their world from a particular perspective.	› Narrative voice-over p.70 › Camera distance p.71 › Point-of-view shots p.71

Film as part of literary studies

Although films have not traditionally been included in literary studies, they are now widely accepted as part of English studies in universities and schools. There are many intersections between the audiovisual form of film and the traditionally print-based forms of literature. For example, novels, short stories, plays and feature films all tell stories using settings and characters; they also employ images and symbols that give the stories wider relevance and significance. Moreover, many films are adaptations of novels, short stories and plays.

There are also significant differences between film and these other narrative forms. Novels, short stories and plays depend, above all, on words to construct and convey meaning; film, on the other hand, relies chiefly on a different kind of language, the language of moving images.

Visual elements

Film constructs meaning primarily through its sequence of images. There are many distinctive elements of this language, as well as conventions that determine how they are combined to achieve particular effects.

Mise en scène is a French term meaning 'staging an action'; it refers to all the visual elements within the frame at a given point. These include:

- **setting** – which can be on-location or a studio setting; in either case, films can represent a wide range of settings in a very realistic way

- **lighting** – which can vary in direction, colour, texture and intensity, in order to achieve various effects consistent with the film's genre

- **costumes** – incorporating clothes, make-up and personal props, all of which contribute to characterisation

- **acting style** – the way in which the actors talk and move; their mannerisms, posture, tone of voice, facial expressions and so on.

The mise en scène in this film still from the 2017 miniseries adaptation of Margaret Atwood's novel *Alias Grace* creates a sense of time and place as well as of the central character's situation. Pictorial Press Ltd / Alamy Stock Photo

Film

> **Cinematography** involves all aspects of the use of the camera to film the action.

The following are the main elements of cinematography.

- **Focus** – this can draw the audience's attention to particular characters, or place equal emphasis on characters and their setting.
- **Camera distance** – close-up, medium shot, long shot etc.
  - → Changing the camera distance is one of the most important ways in which filmmakers can represent the constantly shifting perspective of an omniscient narrator.
  - → Different camera distances allow the filmmakers to represent both the larger context of characters and the smallest details of their physical interactions and reactions.
- **Camera angle** – low or high angles put the audience in the position of looking up at, or down on, characters and objects.
- **Camera movement** – panning, tilting and tracking.
  - → Moving the camera allows the film to show more of the setting.
  - → Camera movements are used to represent the changing position and viewpoint of a character.

> **Editing** is the process of determining the length and sequence of shots in a film. It also involves deciding which shots will be included, and which will be excluded from the finished film.

Editing makes an important contribution to the meaning and impact of a film.

- Tension and excitement can be generated by brief shots and frequent cuts.
- A more reflective and slower-paced film would use longer shots.
- Editing helps to create not just the film's narrative, but the style and 'feel' of a film, which are crucial to the ways in which the audience experiences and reacts to the film's events.

Sound

A film's soundtrack includes all the sounds made in the world of the film (diegetic sound). These include:

- the characters' dialogue
- the sounds made by the characters' actions, such as their footsteps
- the noises of their environment, such as the sounds of traffic, machinery, other people who form part of a crowd or workplace scene, electronic media, birds and animals.

Sound effects and realistic settings help to create a detailed and fully realised world.

Another crucial aspect of a film's sound is its music soundtrack.

- Music contributes significantly to the mood of a scene, and of the film as a whole.
- The film's historical and cultural setting can be partly established by the type of music used on the soundtrack.
- Music can contribute to the film's narrative by:
  → foreshadowing the nature of events (good or bad) that are about to happen, building suspense or anticipation
  → accompanying a character and implying their role in the narrative (such as hero or villain).
- The music soundtrack is important in appealing to the film's target audience.

Narrative structure

The narrative structure of a film can be analysed in much the same way as that of a novel or short story. However, there is a particular structure adopted by many Hollywood films, including films from the past as well as contemporary releases.

> The **classical Hollywood narrative structure** includes and defines the conventions that most Hollywood films follow. It has the following main elements.
> - The main character is known as the **protagonist**; their actions drive the narrative forwards.
> - The protagonist is motivated by their desire to achieve a **goal**.
> - One or more **obstacles** stand in the way of the protagonist achieving their goal; these obstacles create **conflict**.
> - The protagonist must **change** in some way in order to overcome the obstacles.
> - In the film's **resolution**, the protagonist either achieves their goal or fails to achieve it; the questions and tensions generated by the conflict are answered and resolved.

Resisting the conventions of Hollywood cinema

Of course, many novels could be analysed in terms of the classical Hollywood narrative structure: they also feature protagonists, conflicts and resolutions. However, literary fiction is generally much less narrative-driven than Hollywood cinema. The smooth plot development from conflict to change to resolution will rarely be as evident in a novel by, say, Jane Austen or F Scott Fitzgerald as it is in a Steven Spielberg blockbuster.

This narrative structure does not apply to every film. Many films – especially art-house films – deliberately resist the conventions of the classical Hollywood narrative.

Film

- There might not be an obvious central character – the film could explore several interlinking relationships rather than one or two main figures.

- The protagonist might not have a clear goal that they seek to achieve.

- The film's ending might be open-ended or ambiguous rather than generating a strong sense of closure and finality.

> **!** **Knowing the main elements of the classical Hollywood narrative structure will help you to discuss not only the films that use it, but also those that resist or subvert its conventions – since you will be able to identify the elements that are altered or left out.**

Point of view

Just as narrative fiction has conventions for representing different points of view – such as first-person and third-person narrative voices, and quotation marks for direct speech – so too does film.

The main techniques involve a combination of sound and visual language to give the audience a multifaceted view of the world of the film. This usually incorporates:

- the perspective of an omniscient observer – the audience is able to see the broad picture, including the characters' larger context (e.g. a city), and to move freely in and out of various locations

- the perspective of an invisible observer – viewers are able to see and hear everything that is taking place within a location as if they were present (a 'fly on the wall')

- the perspective of a character – the audience experiences events from that character's point of view and knows what they are thinking and feeling.

Some of the main elements of sound and vision that can produce these narrative viewpoints are discussed below.

Narrative voice-over

> A **narrative voice-over** tells the audience directly about events being depicted by the film. It functions as an equivalent to a first-person narrative voice in narrative fiction, although in a film the audience is usually able to observe the action from a more detached, external perspective than the inherently subjective viewpoint of a first-person narrator in a novel or short story.

- A voice-over gives the audience access to information that is not known by all the characters; this heightens viewers' awareness of what is at stake and quickly draws them into the world of the film.

- The narrator is usually the film's protagonist; this provides greater insight into the protagonist's attitudes, feelings and motivations.

- When the narrator is also a character in the film, the audience is encouraged to see the events of the film from that character's perspective.

Camera distance and point of view

How close or distant the camera is from a character influences whether the audience sees and hears the events of the film from that character's point of view, or from a more external perspective.

- Close-up shots show a character's face in fine detail; in this way, aspects of their facial expression (especially their eyes and mouth) can be focused on, giving the audience more insight into that character's private thoughts and feelings than the other characters have.

- Medium shots, long shots and wide-angle shots show the broader context inhabited by the characters; these function as equivalents of the omniscient perspective in a novel or short story.

The many medium shots of Stevens (Anthony Hopkins) in the 1993 film adaptation of Kazuo Ishiguro's novel *The Remains of the Day* reflect the centrality of Stevens' point of view to the film's presentation of events and characters. Pictorial Press Ltd / Alamy Stock Photo

Point-of-view shots

Films can also achieve the effect of a first-person or third-person limited narrative perspective through point-of-view shots. This means that the audience sees and hears what a character sees and hears.

- When the editor links together different point-of-view shots showing the viewpoints of two characters, the viewer continually alternates between the perspectives of those characters; this is analogous to the effect of a third-person narrative in a novel that shifts between the characters' perspectives.

- Taken to its extreme, this technique gives viewers the impression that they are looking through a character's eyes – as if they are inside that character's head. This is known as a **subjective view**.

LITERARY CRITICISM AND THEORY

Overview

Perspective	Details
Humanism	› Definition p.73
	› What does a humanist reading look at? p.74
	› Example p.74
Practical criticism and New Criticism	› Definition p.74
	› Example p.75
Leavis and the moral tradition	› Explanation p.75
Later theoretical approaches	› The implied reader and resistant readings p.76
Feminism	› Definition p.77
	› What does a feminist reading look at? p.77
	› Example p.77
Marxism	› Definition p.78
	› What does a Marxist reading look at? p.78
	› Example p.79
Structuralism	› Definition p.79
	› Binary oppositions p.80
	› What does a structuralist reading look at? p.80
	› Example p.81
	› The 'death of the author' p.81
Postmodernism	› Definition p.82
	› Postmodernism versus modernism p.82
	› What does a postmodern reading look at? p.82
	› Example p.83
	› Poststructuralism and deconstruction p.83
Postcolonialism	› Definition p.84
	› What does a postcolonial reading look at? p.85
	› Example p.85
Psychoanalytic readings	› Definition p.85
	› What does a psychoanalytic reading look at? p.86
	› Example p.86
Queer readings	› Definition p.87
	› What does a queer reading look at? p.87
	› Example p.87

Historical background

Literary criticism has a very long history. Aristotle's *Poetics*, which discusses tragic drama and epic poetry, dates from the 4th century BC. Aristotle describes tragedy as:

> a representation of an action that is worth serious attention … in language enriched by a variety of artistic devices … by means of pity and fear bringing about the purgation [or catharsis] of such emotions. (*Classical Literary Criticism*, trans. TS Dorsch, pp.38–9)

Even more than 2000 years ago, Aristotle identified the worthiness of literature, and the importance of language being used in particular, 'enriched' ways, as central concerns of literary criticism.

In classical Rome, too, writers not only produced literature but commented on it. *On the Sublime* by the Greek writer Longinus (written in about the 1st century AD) identifies the qualities of superior writing, pointing to its emotional impact just as Aristotle does:

> the true sublime uplifts our souls; we are filled with a proud exaltation and a sense of vaulting joy … (*Classical Literary Criticism*, p.107)

Interestingly, Longinus also identifies the ability of a work to stand the test of time as a sign of its quality:

> a piece is truly great only if it can stand up to repeated examination … sublimity in all its truth and beauty exists in such works as please all men at all times. (*Classical Literary Criticism*, p.107)

The idea that a 'truly great' literary work has a transcendent and universal quality became a central tenet of literary criticism, particularly in its humanist tradition. It also became one of the most contested aspects of literary criticism, with the rise of literary theory in the 1960s.

Humanism

> **Humanism** refers to the belief that human nature and ideas are central to our understanding of the universe. Although the term was not established in philosophical thought until the 19th century, the word **humanist** has been used since the Renaissance. It entails both a belief in human benevolence and an interest in studying human thought and works.

A humanist approach sees literary works as sources of insight about what it means to be human, and seeks to develop a better understanding of humanity through the study of literature. An underlying assumption in humanist criticism is that there is such a thing as 'human nature', and that it is independent of time, place and context.

In other words, a humanist critic believes that characters in an ancient Greek tragedy, a Shakespearean play, a novel by Jane Austen and a contemporary Australian poem all share certain basic attributes, and that these attributes are what makes them human beings.

Literary criticism and theory

Therefore, when a humanist critic looks at characters in these texts, they are not *primarily* looking for insights into, for instance, what it means to be a foreign-born female in pre-classical Greece, a medieval European monarch, an unmarried woman in 18th-century rural England, or a 21st-century Australian poet. Rather, they are assuming that all of these diverse individuals have something in common as human beings, which goes beyond the differences in their historical contexts and personal circumstances.

What does a humanist reading look at?

Due to this focus on human nature, a humanist approach is often very dependent on character analysis. It analyses characters as though they were real people, with complex needs and desires that may not be immediately apparent on the surface, but which can be revealed through close analysis of their words and actions.

Questions that could be asked by a humanist critic include:

- What are a character's real motivations for their behaviour?

- Do these motivations change over the course of the text? If so, why?

- What are the key values that underlie the characters' behaviour?

- Do these values lead to actions that result in happiness or in misery?

- Should we, as readers, imitate a character's behaviour in our own lives? What would be the consequences of doing so?

A humanist reading looks closely at the beliefs and values that prompt characters' choices, and at the consequences of these choices, in order to reveal universal lessons about the human situation. These lessons have broader relevance beyond the world of the text, and thus enable the reader to grow in their understanding of themselves and the world around them.

A **humanist reading** of *Othello* sees the protagonist's downfall as resulting from his intense jealousy, and from the vengeful manipulations of Iago. As in other Shakespearean tragedies, the hero is faced with challenging circumstances, but it is a human weakness or flaw within him that leads to tragedy. The **experiences of love, jealousy, hatred and revenge are universal**, and the lesson that we should love both 'well' and 'wisely' remains as relevant today as ever.

Practical criticism and New Criticism

Practical criticism was developed by Cambridge academic IA Richards in the 1920s, when English literature was establishing itself as an important university discipline. The focus of practical criticism was a close and sensitive reading of the text; in fact, Richards gave his students texts – often poetry – for analysis without telling them anything about the identity of the author or about the time and place in which the texts were written.

This approach to analysing literary texts was taken up by a group of American academics in the 1930s, who established the movement known as New Criticism. Like Richards, the New Critics also argued that texts should be studied independently of their authors and their socio-historical contexts.

> **New Criticism** makes the following main assumptions:
>
> ▸ The text is a complex, independent entity.
>
> ▸ The text is a coherent, organic whole, in which form and content are harmoniously integrated.
>
> ▸ Analysis requires very close attention to textual detail, especially in relation to the use of language.
>
> ▸ Literary techniques, such as metaphor, simile, symbol, the use of irony, and complex schemes governing rhyme and rhythm in poetry, call for special attention and understanding.

For the New Critics, poetry was the literary form par excellence. A **New Critical reading** of Wordsworth's 'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud' would **emphasise its unity of form and content**: the structure of the poem – regular six-line stanzas rhyming *ababcc* in iambic tetrameter – reflects the cosmic order depicted by the poem. It might also point out how the **figure of the dance underpins and unifies the poetic vision** of a cosmos in which the 'sprightly dance' of the daffodils, the 'sparkling waves' and 'stars that shine / And twinkle' are harmoniously bound together.

Leavis and the moral tradition

Frank Raymond Leavis taught English literature at Cambridge University from 1927 to 1964 and was possibly the most influential literary critic of the 20th century. Along with his wife, Queenie (QD), with whom he often worked, Leavis was critical of popular culture and advocated the reading of 'great' literature since, in his view, this made its readers into better people – hence the idea of a 'moral tradition' of literary criticism. This elitism has earned Leavis the strong criticism of later generations of critics.

Much of Leavis' work as a critic can be seen as a kind of evaluation of English literature, sorting texts into a hierarchy of a few great and a larger number of good but lesser works. For Leavis, great literature transcends the time and place of its creation: it will always be great. The idea of the literary canon is central to Leavis' work. For example, consider these remarks:

> *… far from all of the names in the literary histories really belong to the realm of significant creative achievement … it is well to start by distinguishing the few really great – the major novelists who count in the same way as the major poets – in the sense that they not only change the possibilities of art for practitioners and readers, but that they are significant in terms of the human awareness they promote; awareness of the possibilities of life.* (*The Great Tradition*, p.2)

These days we are more sceptical of claims about the universal value or quality of artistic works, as we acknowledge the importance of people's contexts and backgrounds in shaping their views on what is valuable or worthy. We also accept that such judgements can and do change over time.

Literary criticism and theory

Later theoretical approaches

Later theoretical perspectives moved away from the main assumptions of Leavis and New Criticism by:

- placing less emphasis on the unity and 'wholeness' of the text

- placing greater emphasis on the context of the text's production and on the relationship between the text and its author

- acknowledging that a text can mean different things to different readers.

The last point above is probably the most significant. From around 1950, there was a shift from seeing the text as a static object with a meaning that is fixed for all time and for all readers, to seeing the text as more fluid, with meanings that shift with time and with the reader's perspective.

The implied reader and resistant readings

The conventional method of 'close reading' tends to involve reading along with a text, figuring out what the text is trying to say and the ways in which it says it. But such readings do not attempt to challenge that meaning, or to reject the ways the text makes that meaning seem convincing or true. This form of close reading involves describing the kinds of responses the text is 'asking for' and the ways in which the text elicits (causes) those responses through features such as narrative voice, plot, characterisation and imagery. In other words, the critic adopts the perspective of the **implied reader** of the text.

In contrast, reading strategies developed in the second half of the 20th century – such as feminist and postmodern readings – *place pressure* on texts and *resist* adopting the position of the implied reader. Rather than going along with what the text seems to want the reader to think and feel, these strategies read 'against the grain'.

- They look for what narratives leave out as much as what they include.

- They look at the climaxes and endings of narratives to see how conflicts are resolved, often questioning whether a 'happy' ending is really a positive one or, conversely, a 'tragic' ending is entirely unhappy.

- They place the text within its context of production and examine the degree to which it reproduces, questions or critiques social conventions and dominant ideologies.

- They look closely at characterisation, especially of minor characters, and are alert to the perspectives of the marginalised, the oppressed and the silenced.

The following pages consider several of the most important theoretical approaches to literary criticism.

Feminism

Feminism is a broad social, cultural and political movement that advocates for the rights of women. It argues that patriarchal social structures and institutions have oppressed women, and that social, economic and legal changes are needed to redress inequality.

What does a feminist reading look at?

A feminist reading draws attention to a text's representation of gender and of the roles – both domestic and social – played by men and women. It might ask some or all of the following questions.

- Are men represented as naturally dominant and active?

- Are women portrayed as independent and powerful, or as submissive and passive?

- Does the text question traditional gender roles and social structures?

- Do the female characters accept or resist their traditional places within the family and society (including the workforce)?

- Does the text give voice predominantly to the experiences of men and effectively silence the voices of women?

An important fact usually considered in a feminist reading is whether the text's author is male or female. This is because one of the main aims of feminism is to support women's involvement in professional and creative activities. Many literary critics – both men and women – see literature as being dominated by writing by men, and work to promote writing by women as being of equal quality, value and interest.

A feminist reading can make us question our own assumptions about gender when reading a text. Consider the following questions.

- When a novel or short story has an omniscient narrator, do you tend to read as if the narrative voice is male? Is this necessarily the case?

- Do you think of the narrator's gender as being the same as that of the author?

- If you read a male-authored text as if the narrator is female rather than male, what difference would that make to your interpretation of the text's meaning?

In general, a feminist reading places pressure on any representation of society that sees men as occupying the central, dominant roles *and* that does not suggest this situation should be changed.

Literary criticism and theory

A **feminist reading** of Sylvia Plath's poetry might explore the degree to which the poems **critique the limited roles available to women in the 1950s**. It could also compare Plath's work with poetry written by a male poet of that time, perhaps showing how Plath gives greater value to personal and domestic spheres while avoiding sentimentality or romanticism.

The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.

Marxism

Marxism is based on the political and social theories of Karl Marx (1818–83). Marx criticised capitalism as a means of organising the human and material resources of a society, since it is based on the exploitation of the working class and the inability of working people to determine the conditions of their existence. **Marxist literary criticism** draws on these ideas in analysing how material conditions and class relations are represented in texts.

Marx thought that any analysis of society should focus on the working men and women who form its vast majority. The minority – those who form the ruling and upper classes of society – might well live satisfying lives, but under capitalism the lives of the (working-class) majority would always be deprived of meaning and fulfilment. For Marx, the resulting tensions between the classes would inevitably lead to conflict and, ultimately, revolution.

What does a Marxist reading look at?

A Marxist reading of a literary text does not necessarily look for signs of revolution, but it does examine representations of social classes and of the inequities in wealth and opportunity within modern societies.

A straightforward Marxist perspective would analyse the text for signs that it is consistent with a capitalist world view – for which the text would be criticised. A text that focuses on the lives of the wealthy, without any recognition of the labour of working people that supports such lifestyles, would have its biases and blind spots clearly pointed out by a Marxist critic.

For example, Shakespearean drama focuses on the concerns of the aristocracy. The tragedies are primarily stories about kings, princes and other noblemen; in this genre, it is not possible for a blacksmith, say, to be a tragic figure. So, a Marxist approach to Shakespearean tragedy might place pressure on the genre by showing how it marginalises or 'writes out' the experiences of less privileged social groups.

Alternatively, a Marxist reading would look for signs that the text recognises and condemns the exploitation of working-class people: such a text would be viewed positively in a Marxist interpretation.

A Marxist reading of a text would ask questions such as the following.

- How does poverty limit what a character is capable of achieving in life?
- To what extent is the character able to change or control the material circumstances of their life?
- Does the character care more about material possessions than about their relationships with other people?
- Does a character have to compromise their ethical values to achieve a comfortable standard of living?
- Does the text have a nostalgic, unrealistic take on poverty? Does it romanticise poverty or does it present poverty in a gritty, realist fashion?

> A **Marxist reading** of the Victorian novelists Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Gaskell would draw attention to their **representations of working-class lives** in the English society of their time.
>
> The reading could *endorse* these writers by showing their portrayals to be sympathetic to the plight of the working class.
>
> Alternatively, the reading could *critique* these writers by suggesting that their attitudes are romantic and condescending, and that their real sympathies always lie with the middle classes.

Of course, societies and capitalism have changed since Marx published his theories in the 19th century. Distinctions between 'workers' and 'capitalists', and definitions of social class, are much less clear-cut in early-21st-century first-world countries. However, Marxist criticism still considers the social and economic conditions of people's lives to be the primary determinants of their wellbeing.

Structuralism

> **Structuralism** seeks to understand elements of human culture and behaviour by looking at the wider system or structure to which those elements belong.
>
> In literary criticism, a **structuralist reading** looks at how the elements of a text work together to create meaning, and how that text fits within the broader structure of a genre or of literary texts as a whole.

Structuralism was a major area of European thought and enquiry in the 20th century. It began with work by Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), who considered language as a system of signs. For Saussure, language has meaning not because words refer to real 'things' in the world, but because of the relationships between the signs that make up language.

Each sign has two parts:

- the **signifier** (the written word or its sound)
- the **signified** (the concept referred to by the word).

The signifier is arbitrary, as is the relationship between signifier and signified; there is no inherent or natural connection between the letters c-a-t and the furry four-legged animal. We have to learn what these connections are, in the same way as we learn the meaning of any system of signs (such as road signs). Seeing language as a set of arbitrary signs, rather than as a set of words that refer to things in the real world, places a lot more focus on the words themselves, and unsettles our sense of a world that can be known objectively and universally.

Literary criticism and theory

Binary oppositions

Binary oppositions are central to structuralist approaches to language and literary criticism. Saussure's work showed that what enables people to make sense of a language, or any other system of signs, is the set of differences between terms. In this view of language, we understand 'black' because it is opposed to 'white'; we understand 'up' because it is the opposite of 'down'. In a literary text there might be many such binary oppositions that help to organise and structure the world of the text. Think of terms such as light and darkness; good and evil; truth and falsehood. These differences or oppositions work *within* the text, and sometimes *intertextually*, rather than as the means by which the text refers to the 'real' world.

Often the binary oppositions within a text will align in ways that seem familiar and natural, but are really just a product of their long use in literary and mythological traditions. Consider these pairings:

light	darkness
good	evil
truth	falsehood
knowledge	ignorance
presence	absence
civilised	uncivilised

We often speak, for instance, of the 'light of truth', or the 'darkness of evil'. These ideas don't have an actual existence in the world; they are ways of using language that are learned, and that create a sense of order and stability.

What does a structuralist reading look at?

A structuralist reading looks at the internal elements of a text and how they work together. This extends well beyond elements such as chapters or scenes and looks at how differences and contrasts in the language and images are working to create meaning. Like the approach of practical criticism, structuralist readings tend to remove the text from the external world, looking *within* the text – and other texts – for meaning.

A structuralist reading might ask questions such as the following.

- Are there recurring words or images with opposing meanings (such as the terms in the two columns above)?

- Are characters 'coded' using any of these recurring words or images (for example, by being associated with darkness)?

- Are opposing terms aligned in any way that influences our views of characters or events?

- Are there any key elements of form or genre that help to create meaning?

- Are there intertextual elements such as allusions or mythological references that link the text to a wider body of work?

A **structuralist reading** of Joseph Conrad's novella *Heart of Darkness* would note the **many references to darkness and light**, and analyse how the text aligns these with other qualities and ideas. Marlow's story begins as the sun sets over the River Thames with the unnerving words: 'And this also … has been one of the dark places of the earth'. The journey he relates can be seen as moving from the 'light' of Europe (civilised, knowledgeable) into the 'darkness' of Africa (primitive, unknowable), then back to London. However, Marlow's descriptions of London and Brussels are also characterised by darkness, suggesting the ideals of civilisation are under threat.

The 'death of the author'

An important essay that is often taken to signal the break between structuralism and poststructuralism is Roland Barthes' 'The Death of the Author'. Barthes was an important French theorist and critic whose early work applied structuralist ideas and the theory of signs (semiotics) not just to literary texts but to everyday life and popular culture. However, in 'The Death of the Author', first published in 1957 and widely reprinted, Barthes examines the inherent ambiguities of any written text, and of literary texts in particular.

If structuralism leads us to see the meaning of a text as resulting from its system of signs, codes and conventions, which in turn are drawn from the wider body of literature and other forms of writing, then its meaning can no longer be fixed or unique. For Barthes, a text is 'a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture'. Moreover, the author can no longer be seen as the single point of origin of the text or of its meaning:

> … a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author. (Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', trans. S Heath)

With this shift to a recognition of multiple meanings, and to locating meaning(s) in the act of reading rather than in the author's intention, Barthes effectively moved literary criticism from structuralism to poststructuralism (see page 83).

In the 1940s and 1950s, visual artists were moving away from traditional approaches to representation and embracing greater abstraction. This detail is from Jackson Pollock's 1954 painting *White Light*. M.Flynn / Alamy Stock Photo

Literary criticism and theory

Postmodernism

> **Postmodernism** can refer to two broad concepts and bodies of work:
> › the nature of Western culture since (roughly) 1950
> › a set of theoretical and critical viewpoints used in analysing cultural forms (such as literary texts).

Postmodernism versus modernism

As the term suggests, postmodernism refers to what has happened since modernism, a term that is usually taken to apply to the literature and art of the first half of the 20th century. Note, though, that postmodern features do occur in texts written before 1950; and many texts written since 1950 are more modernist than postmodernist in style.

> **Modernist works** are characterised by a sense of alienation; a longing for the return of social order and traditional sources of meaning; and experimentation with form in order to represent the breakdown of familiar structures (social, familial, religious etc.).
>
> **Postmodern texts**, in contrast, are more innovative, expansive and often playful.
> › The loss of previously accepted 'truths' and the overthrow of traditional hierarchies and moral 'certainties' is regarded as potentially liberating.
> › There is a sceptical view about the real motives of those in positions of power.
> › Places, objects and cultures can be juxtaposed in unexpected ways.
> › Multiple perspectives, ambiguity and open-endedness are preferred to closure and a single, fixed meaning.

What does a postmodern reading look at?

Postmodernism is sometimes criticised for being excessively relativist – that is, for arguing that there is no *absolute* standard by which truth and values can be judged. Although this is a general feature of postmodernism, it is important to recognise that postmodern criticism is not anarchic or apolitical. Indeed, the critique of traditional power structures, accepted truths and prevailing prejudices is extremely healthy and useful in any society.

Postmodern criticism entails a rigorous examination of conventional ideas about what constitutes 'truth' or 'the best': such ideas are often found to depend on the attitudes and vested interests of certain social groups. This doesn't mean that postmodernism abandons the idea of truth; but it does mean acknowledging that different groups have different truths, and respecting these differences – since there is, after all, no escaping difference in the modern world.

Postmodern criticism looks for:

- ways in which a text is fragmented and episodic, rather than unified and continuous
- representations that acknowledge contrasting perspectives and diverse experiences
- gaps and silences – what a text avoids saying in order to mean what it intends to mean.

> **Postmodern readings** of Shakespeare have drawn attention to the ways in which the plays **foreground the ambiguous and playful qualities of language**. At times it can seem that the real subject of the plays is not human nature, but the simultaneous power and 'slipperiness' of language. A postmodern reading of *King Lear*, for instance, could focus on the riddles in which the Fool speaks (e.g. in Act 1, scene 4), showing how **words can have multiple and deceptive meanings rather than a single, fixed and unambiguous message**. Words can be a mere 'nothing' – 'like the breath of an unfee'd lawyer', as the Fool puts it – yet they can also have the capacity to strip a king of all his earthly power. Such paradoxes (especially concerning the nature of language) lie at the centre of much postmodern criticism.

Poststructuralism and deconstruction

The terms postmodernism and poststructuralism have very similar meanings and are nearly interchangeable. However, poststructuralism has a more specific meaning in relation to the pressure it places on structuralism. As the discussion of structuralism indicates, the neat division of terms and ideas into pairs of binary opposites (page 80) suggests an ordered and stable world view, with little room for ambiguity or double meanings. Also, where binary opposites are used in a text, one term in each pair is usually regarded as preferable to, or privileged over, the other. Light is privileged over darkness; truth is privileged over falsehood, and so on. This is known as a hierarchy of terms.

In a **deconstructive reading**, the binary oppositions and the hierarchy of terms are shown to be unstable. Such a reading might find, for example, that in some places the text values darkness over light, or that truth is aligned with darkness. It might also show that 'truth' in the text is only a partial truth, as it relies on alternative truths being silenced or rejected.

> In Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, **a deconstructive reading places pressure on the 'surface' meaning of the text** by inverting the expected hierarchy of light/darkness, truth/falseness. On the surface, the novella seems to be rejecting darkness and its associated qualities (the primitive, the unknowable) in favour of what is known and civilised. Kurtz's final words, 'The horror! The horror!', encapsulate the civilised world's abhorrence for a world in which refinement and self-control are lacking.
>
> However, an alternative reading sees the **darkness as an intense source of fascination**. Remote from Europe's strict social conventions, Kurtz has indulged his 'monstrous passions'; his soul 'knew no restraint, no faith, and no fear'. In contrast, the world of Europe appears repressed and lifeless, embodied in Kurtz's ghost-like beloved: 'all in black, with a pale head, floating towards me in the dusk'. In this reading, truth is contained in the primitive darkness, a darkness by which Europe is simultaneously repulsed and enthralled.

Literary criticism and theory

Postcolonialism

Colonialism refers to a nation's establishment of a colony or colonies in another country that has less developed technologies but abundant resources such as minerals, land and/or labour.

Postcolonialism refers to a movement in politics or culture that critiques colonialism, either in general or in relation to a specific colony.

During the period from the 1400s until the end of World War II, several western European nations – including Britain, France, Belgium, Germany, Spain, Portugal and the Netherlands – established colonies throughout Africa, the Americas, Asia and the Pacific islands. Power was exerted by physical force; indigenous populations were used as cheap labour or, in the case of many settler colonies (such as Australia), forced from their lands by a combination of violence and introduced diseases.

Not all empires were equally strong throughout this period. British colonies were established from the early 1600s in the Caribbean and then in North America. During the 19th century the British Empire grew increasingly extensive and powerful, reaching its height in the early 20th century. Colonial encounters and endeavours are often referred to in English literature: Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (around 1611) and Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) are two important early examples. The end of the period of European colonialism is often taken as coinciding with the independence of India in 1947. However, many colonies experienced protracted violent conflicts during the following decades as they sought independence, and even following independence from colonial rule.

Postcolonial literature refers to texts produced by writers who live in former colonies of European powers. These texts often question the use of power to exploit indigenous populations as sources of cheap or unpaid labour, or to obtain valuable resources (such as gold, ivory and diamonds) for minimal cost. They also assert the fundamental rights and distinctive identities and cultures of indigenous people, who have been marginalised and oppressed by colonial powers. Key postcolonial texts include Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (1981).

Postcolonial criticism refers to the process of analysing texts that represent colonialism, and looking closely at the relationships between race, power, language and identity in those texts. It often promotes texts that present the perspectives of colonised peoples, and it can be highly critical of canonical texts that downplay the destructive effects of colonialism.

What does a postcolonial reading look at?

The postcolonial critique of mainstream literary texts does not usually take the form of an outright rejection of the worth of those texts. However, it draws the reader's attention to a text's gaps and silences with regard to indigenous or enslaved people. A postcolonial reading might ask questions such as:

- How are people of colour represented? Is their perspective shown? Are they given a voice? Do they have control over their lives?

- How are those who are white and powerful depicted – positively or negatively?

- How is language used to portray the relationships between power and identity? Is an indigenous language used, or is the language of the colonising power used?

> Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* can appear **problematic when read from a postcolonial perspective**, since it reproduces colonial stereotypes of black African people as primitive, mysterious and incapable of becoming 'civilised'. Most famously, Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe criticised the novel as being racist since its representations of black Africans deny them any humanity. However, it is also possible to read *Heart of Darkness* as questioning the wisdom and judgement of those invading the territories and exploiting the labour of others: that is, as offering a *critique* of colonialism, although from a white rather than a black point of view.

Psychoanalytic readings

> **Psychoanalytic readings** look closely at psychological elements, such as anxiety, repression and desire. They also look for repetitions, gaps and silences, which reflect the workings of the unconscious. These elements can be evident in the behaviour of characters, or in the structure of the text as a whole.

Psychoanalysis was developed in the early 1900s by Viennese doctor Sigmund Freud, in the process of treating patients with a variety of mental disorders. Although Freud's work has been controversial, he developed a number of concepts that remain common in popular understandings of human psychology, and that underpin the application of psychoanalysis to literary criticism. Some of these concepts are outlined below.

- The mind consists of the **id**, the **ego** and the **superego**. The id corresponds to the unconscious and operates according to the pleasure principle (seeking to experience pleasure and avoid pain). The superego corresponds to our understanding of morality and social conventions. The ego is the self, and balances the conflicting demands of the id (what we *want* to do) and the superego (what we know we *should* do).

- **Repression** is a process involving the transfer of ideas and feelings from the conscious mind to the unconscious. They might be memories of unpleasant experiences, or they might be desires that for social reasons are unable to be fulfilled. Repressed feelings and thoughts can re-enter consciousness at certain times, or create effects such as hysteria.

Literary criticism and theory

- **Dreams** can reveal repressed thoughts and feelings by symbolically fulfilling desires. Freud sought to understand a patient's dreams in order to gain an insight into their unconscious; *The Interpretation of Dreams* is probably his most famous book.

- The **talking cure** played a central part in Freud's psychoanalytic treatments; it involved patients talking about their experiences and feelings directly to the analyst. In this way, Freud sought to bring repressed thoughts to the surface, thus relieving the 'pressure' caused by repression and curing the neurological symptoms it was causing.

- The **Oedipus complex** in Freudian theory is a key part of a child's psychosexual development. It is named after the Greek mythological figure Oedipus, who unknowingly murdered his father and married his mother (most famously depicted in Sophocles' play from the 5th century BC, *Oedipus Rex*). According to Freud, the child's sexual desire for the parent of the opposite sex is universal, and the resolution of this through identification with the parent of the same sex is what leads to a gendered and, ultimately, adult identity.

What does a psychoanalytic reading look at?

A great deal of psychoanalytic criticism goes well beyond the scope of this book, often refining Freud's ideas and combining them with complex theories of language and subjectivity. However, in relatively simple terms, a psychoanalytic approach to literary criticism would ask questions such as the following.

- Are there gaps, silences or omissions in the text – things that a main character doesn't wish to talk about, or perhaps that the author does not want to introduce into the text? Identifying these can lead to interesting perspectives on what is really happening.

- Are important dreams described in the text? An author may use dreams to suggest a character's secret wishes and repressed feelings. As dreams are often symbolic rather than literal, an author can use dream sequences and images to hint at what is actually occurring in the character's life.

- Is there a strong mother–son or father–daughter bond? Is there a difficult father–son relationship, whereby the son resists the father's authority and sees the father as a threat? This might give scope to think about the characters in terms of Freud's ideas concerning a child's growth to maturity, especially as a gendered subject.

Probably the best-known **psychoanalytic reading** of a literary text is Freud's own interpretation of *Hamlet* in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Freud saw Hamlet's procrastination as resulting from an **Oedipal desire for his mother**; full of guilt, Hamlet is unable to kill Claudius, who has done what Hamlet (unconsciously) wishes he had done – murdered his father and slept with his mother.

Whatever your view of Hamlet, the lack of a clear, compelling reason for his procrastination is certainly a gap or silence in the text – precisely the kind of textual feature that the ideas of psychoanalysis can illuminate.

Queer readings

> **Queer theory** challenges conventional notions of gendered and sexual identity that have historically been taken as 'normal' and therefore 'right'. It analyses the ways in which 'normal' behaviours and identities are socially constructed and enforced, and argues that identity is both diverse and fluid.

Queer theory draws heavily on poststructuralist ideas about human identity, which is seen to be made up of multiple 'selves' that are constructed through social interaction. It challenges the idea of a fixed, essential gender identity, as well as the ways in which individuals whose identity doesn't accord with ideas of what is 'normal' are regarded as 'deviant' and then marginalised or discriminated against.

What does a queer reading look at?

A queer reading looks for signs of the diversity and fluidity of human identity, even in texts that, on the surface, might appear conventional. A queer reading would argue that the questioning of what is considered normal has always existed in texts, but has often been overlooked. It would ask questions such as the following.

- Do some characters refuse to fall neatly into simple male/female categories, or to conform to conventional gender roles?

- Does the text suggest that, for some, gender or sexuality might be fluid and changeable, rather than fixed?

- To what extent does the text's conclusion resolve the unsettling of conventional roles and identities?

> A **queer reading** of Jeanette Winterson's *The Passion* sees it as questioning not only conventional narratives of history, but also conventional understandings of gender identity. Villanelle has **both male and female qualities**; she identifies as female but her feet are webbed, normally an attribute of male children of the boatmen. She dresses as a young man and questions whether this is merely a disguise or an expression of something more innate: 'what was myself? Was this breeches and boots self any less real than my garters?' She also resists the expectations of heterosexuality and, while she has had both male and female lovers, it is a woman to whom she loses her heart.
>
> Henri, although male, rejects the violent, misogynistic qualities of the other soldiers. His relationship with Villanelle might look, at least for a time, like a conventional heterosexual one, but she describes her love for him as being 'in a brotherly incestuous way', and his experience of disappointment in love in this relationship mirrors that of his earlier passion for Napoleon.

Literary criticism
and theory

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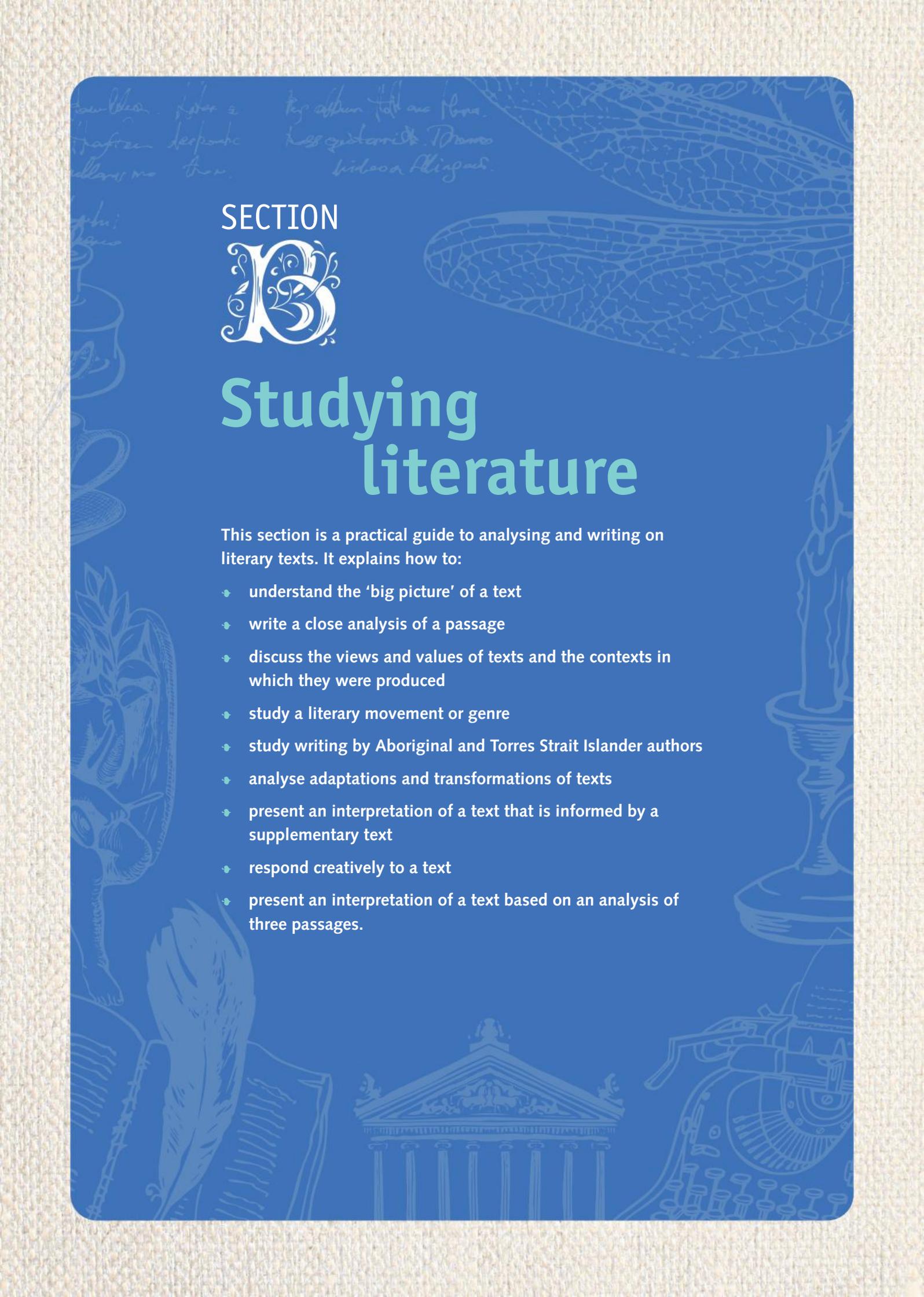
Studying literature

This section is a practical guide to analysing and writing on literary texts. It explains how to:

- understand the 'big picture' of a text
- write a close analysis of a passage
- discuss the views and values of texts and the contexts in which they were produced
- study a literary movement or genre
- study writing by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors
- analyse adaptations and transformations of texts
- present an interpretation of a text that is informed by a supplementary text
- respond creatively to a text
- present an interpretation of a text based on an analysis of three passages.

READING:
THE BIG PICTURE

This chapter shows you how to read for the 'big picture' – the kind of reading and note-taking you do when you first begin studying a text. It also shows how to move from this broad view of a text into a 'close-up' view, ready for close analysis with a secure grasp of the main concerns and overall shape of the text (or collection of texts). It explains:

- strategies for capturing information concisely
- how to apply and use the information in Section A – the reference section – to make up summary sheets
- how to move from the big-picture view towards a close reading and a more detailed understanding through the selection of key passages from a text.

Three steps for reading

Use this three-step process to work from an initial reading to more in-depth, analytical readings of a text.

Step 1: Read for pleasure

Reading for pleasure is the ideal initial approach, even when you know you will have to study a text closely and write about it for assessment purposes. Aim to read and enjoy: this is why the author has created the text in the first place.

For a narrative (novels, drama, biography/memoir): focus on one or two main characters.

- Think of the characters as being on a journey. What are the main things that happen to them? Is the journey more psychological than physical?
- Compare the characters at the beginning and end of the narrative. How do they change? Are their main attitudes challenged?
- Where is the narrative's climax? This will draw together the main characters and ideas, bringing them more sharply into focus.

For a collection of short stories: focus on the situations of the main characters.

- Look at how the main character in each story relates to family or friends and to places where they live and work. What is the main feeling or mood the author creates around each character? Recurring situations and moods point to the 'big picture' of the collection.
- Think of the individual stories as pieces in a jigsaw. How do they connect with each other? How does each form a unique yet vital part of the whole?

For a collection of poems: look for words and images that are used in several, if not all, of the poems.

- Look for sets of words with similar meanings: these draw your attention to the central ideas.

- Read the poems aloud and listen for repeated sounds and rhythmic patterns; listen for the musical qualities of the poetry.

- Images in poetry are like the brushstrokes and colours in a painting: they don't necessarily 'tell a story', but they create a mood or a picture. Which words and images has the poet chosen to generate these emotional and conceptual 'landscapes'?

Step 2: Read for the main ideas

Identify all of the key features of the text and think about their effects. This gives you a good initial grasp of the text – a set of ideas and terms that enable you to talk about the text and to organise all your subsequent observations and analysis.

- It is a good idea to use different highlighters in these early stages of reading, e.g. green for a main character, yellow for plot features, blue for key images.

- Ideally you would do this during a second thorough reading, when you would also write notes in the margins of your text.

- Alternatively, after you have read the entire book and have a sense of its 'big picture', systematically go through the text before you have forgotten its details and note all the aspects identified by the summary sheets later in this chapter (pages 92–5).

Step 3: Read for close analysis

The two steps outlined above provide an excellent basis for the next stage of studying literature – close analysis of the features of a text.

- Close analysis allows you to move from the big picture into the fine detail of a text, in order to understand how language and literary techniques work to create meaning.

- A good way to start thinking about close analysis is to select key passages. The reasons why certain passages are particularly important and therefore worth close scrutiny are discussed in the section 'Towards close analysis' at the end of this chapter (page 100).

- The skills and strategies of close analysis are considered in detail in Chapter 2.

How to write up and use summary sheets

These sheets are designed to be used with the relevant specific section (novels and short stories, drama, poetry) of Section A: The literature handbook.

- For each text you are studying, you will need to identify the specific conventions and features relevant to its form and genre.

- Set up the summary sheet headings on your computer or in your workbook. The former is easier as it enables you to expand notes as you work through the text. In your workbook, however, you can simply allow a page or two for each main section to start with – narrative techniques, characterisation etc. – and add in pages as you progress through the text.

- Consult the appropriate part of Section A for the form of your text. Note that not everything in each part will be relevant to your text.

- Work through the material in the order given on the summary sheets OR work through in an order that suits you, maybe starting with a familiar area such as characters, then tackling other areas as you wish.

- You may need to study some sections quite carefully to understand any unfamiliar literary techniques, e.g. poetic techniques.

- Aim to describe any effects that result from a particular technique, e.g. 'the first-person narrator makes it impossible to judge whether character A is in fact guilty or innocent'.

- Use colour in your notes as this assists learning and also makes it easier to locate particular sections.

- For models, see the examples of completed summary sheet sections (pages 96–9).

I made sure I got there early and sat down to sharpen the quills.
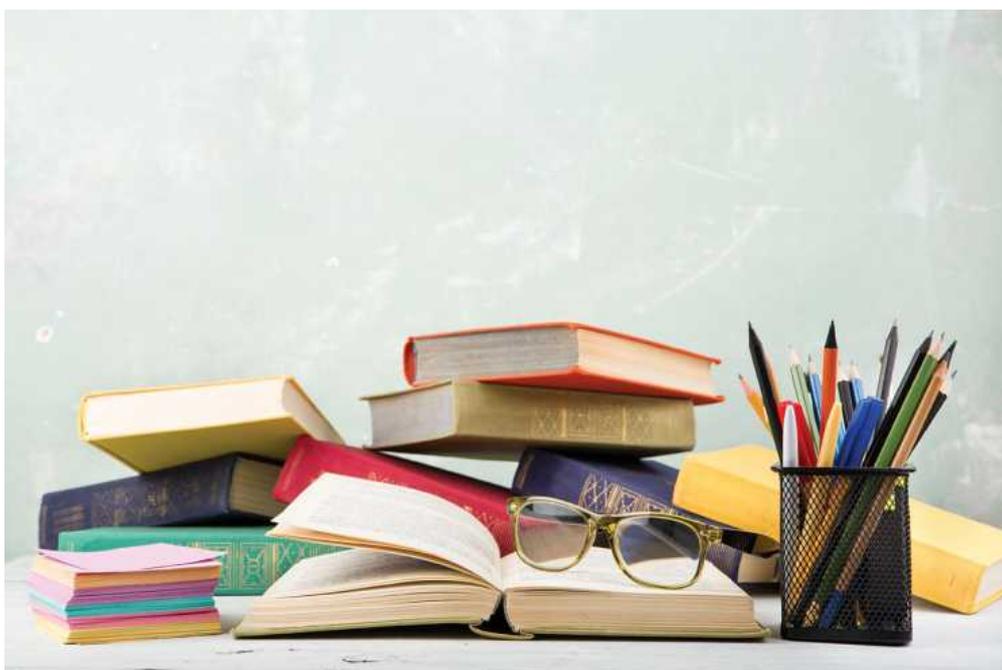
Summary Sheet 1 – Novels

See the 'Novels and short stories' overview (page 16) for page references. Adapt as necessary for a nonfiction narrative such as memoir or biography.

SUMMARY SHEET FOR A NOVEL

Title: _____

Novelist: _____

Genre: _____

Narrative structure (e.g. chronological, interwoven narratives):

_____

- Construct a time line of key events
- Draw a graph of dramatic tension

Narrative viewpoint: _____

Setting: _____

Characters:

- Name the protagonist; give five key words describing them and five key quotes from the text
- Name the minor characters; give two to four key words describing each minor character and significant quotes from the text

Character map: summarise the characters' identities and relationships

- Put the protagonist or main characters in the centre
- Place the minor characters around the outside
- Draw arrows to connect the characters and show their relationships

Language and imagery:

_____

Major concerns – ideas and issues: _____

Values:

- Identify values
- Identify characters aligned with these values

Multiple readings – summarise alternative viewpoints you have read or developed:

_____

Summary Sheet 2 – Short stories

See the 'Novels and short stories' overview (page 16) for page references.

Title: _____

Author: _____

Genre: _____

Narrative structure: are the stories linked or placed in a particular order?

_____

• Draw a graph of dramatic tension in three key stories

Narrative viewpoint – indicate for each story:

_____

Common settings: _____

Characters:

• Name the central character in each story; for each central character, give two key words describing them and a key quote

• Name a minor character in each story and describe their function or role in the story; give a key quote for each minor character

• Identify recurring character types and/or aspects of relationships

Character maps: draw for three key stories

Language and imagery – identify patterns in the collection as a whole:

_____

Major concerns – recurring ideas and issues:

_____

Values:

• Identify values

• Identify characters or character types aligned with these values

Multiple readings – summarise alternative viewpoints you have read or developed:

_____

Summary Sheet 3 – Drama

See the 'Drama' overview (page 33) for page references.

Title: _____

Playwright: _____

Genre (e.g. comedy, tragedy, neither, elements of both):

_____

Narrative structure – identify the points of crisis, the climax and the resolution:

_____

- Draw a graph of dramatic tension in the play

Characters:

- Name the protagonist or two central characters; give five key words and five key quotes for each
- Name the minor characters; give two to four key words and a key quote for each

Character map: summarise the characters' identities and relationships

- Put the protagonist or main characters in the centre
- Place the minor characters around the outside
- Draw arrows to connect the characters and show their relationships

Setting: _____

Features of props and sets: _____

Language and imagery: _____

Major concerns – ideas and issues: _____

Values:

- Identify values
- Identify characters aligned with these values

Multiple readings – summarise alternative viewpoints you have read or developed:

_____

Summary Sheet 4 – Poetry

See the 'Poetry' overview (page 47) for page references.

SUMMARY SHEET FOR A SELECTION OF POEMS

Title of the collection: _____

Poet: _____

Main form of poems: _____

For selected individual poems, note the following:

- Title of poem
- Form of poem

Speaker:

- For each poem, give two key words describing the qualities of the speaker
- Give two key words describing the feeling or mood conveyed by each speaker

Rhyme and rhythm – identify regular patterns of rhythm and/or rhyme and the poems in which they are used:

_____

Language and imagery – find examples and explain the effects of the following:

- Assonance
- Alliteration
- Simile

- Metaphor
- Personification
- Symbol

Recurring images – identify any images that appear in several poems:

_____

Recurring settings (e.g. domestic, interior, landscapes):

_____

Major concerns – ideas and issues: _____

Values:

- Identify values
- Identify speakers or images aligned with these values

Multiple readings – summarise alternative viewpoints you have read or developed:

_____

Examples of worked summary sheet sections

Read the following four pages carefully as they provide worked examples of how to complete particular sections of the summary sheets for different forms of literature.

Example 1: Narrative structure – a novel

Here is an example of how you would write on the narrative structure of a novel using Summary Sheet 1 (page 92).

Title: *Remains of the Day* (first published by Faber and Faber in 1989)

Novelist: Kazuo Ishiguro

Main narrative technique: first-person narration

- Creates the character of Stevens, the narrator, who is the butler at Darlington Hall in England.

- Portrays the views and values of Stevens through his direct observations and comments, as well as the views and values of Miss Kenton, Lord Darlington and a number of minor characters through their dialogue and actions.

- Subtly and indirectly comments on the attitudes of the English aristocracy in the years leading up to World War II.

Narrative structure: nonlinear

- The narrative interweaves Stevens' account of a short road trip in 1956 with his recollections of people and events in the 1920s and 1930s. Each chapter relates the events of a day, or half a day, in Stevens' road trip, as well as episodes from the earlier period.

Time line of key events

- The main events described in the narrative date from 1922, when Miss Kenton arrives at Darlington Hall, until the late 1930s; Stevens' road trip to the West Country takes place in 1956. The following time line places the key events in chronological order.

| Stevens employs Miss Kenton as housekeeper, and his father as under-butler, at Darlington Hall in 1922. | In March 1923, influential English and European figures gather at Darlington Hall; Stevens' father becomes unwell, then dies on the final night of the conference. | In the early 1930s, Lord Darlington is influenced by anti-Semitic ideas and asks Stevens to dismiss two Jewish housemaids; Miss Kenton threatens to resign. | In the late 1930s, the British Prime Minister and the German Ambassador meet in secret at Darlington Hall; Miss Kenton accepts Mr Benn's proposal of marriage and gives notice. | In 1956, Stevens receives a letter from Mrs Benn suggesting that her marriage has ended; he travels to Cornwall, hopeful of persuading her to return to Darlington Hall as housekeeper. | Stevens and Mrs Benn meet and talk; she has decided to remain with her husband and near her daughter; Stevens reflects on his return to Darlington Hall. |

Example 2: Narrative structure and plot – drama

Here is an example of how you could identify the points of crisis and resolution in a text as recommended in Summary Sheet 3 (page 94).

Title: *The Winter's Tale* (The New Cambridge Shakespeare, 2007)

Playwright: William Shakespeare

Narrative structure: points of crisis, climax and resolution

- Crisis point 1: After Leontes becomes convinced that his friend Polixenes and his wife Hermione are having an affair, he tells Camillo, one of the Sicilian Lords, to kill Polixenes, and sends Hermione to prison.

- Crisis point 2: Paulina takes Perdita to Leontes, convinced that he will soften when he sees the baby; however, Leontes is enraged since he thinks Polixenes is Perdita's father. Leontes orders Antigonus to abandon Perdita in a remote place.

- Crisis point 3: The prince, Mamillius, dies; at the news of his death, Hermione faints, and Paulina reports Hermione's death shortly after.

- Crisis point 4: Sixteen years later, Perdita, raised as a shepherdess, and Florizel, the Prince of Bohemia (disguised as a shepherd), plan to marry, but the ceremony is interrupted when Polixenes puts aside his disguise and rebukes the two young lovers.

- Climax: Leontes, Polixenes, Perdita, Florizel, Camillo and Paulina all go to view the statue of Hermione, which miraculously comes to life.

- Resolution: Hermione and Perdita are reunited and Leontes declares that Camillo and Paulina, as well as Florizel and Perdita, will be married.

Plot of dramatic tension in *The Winter's Tale*
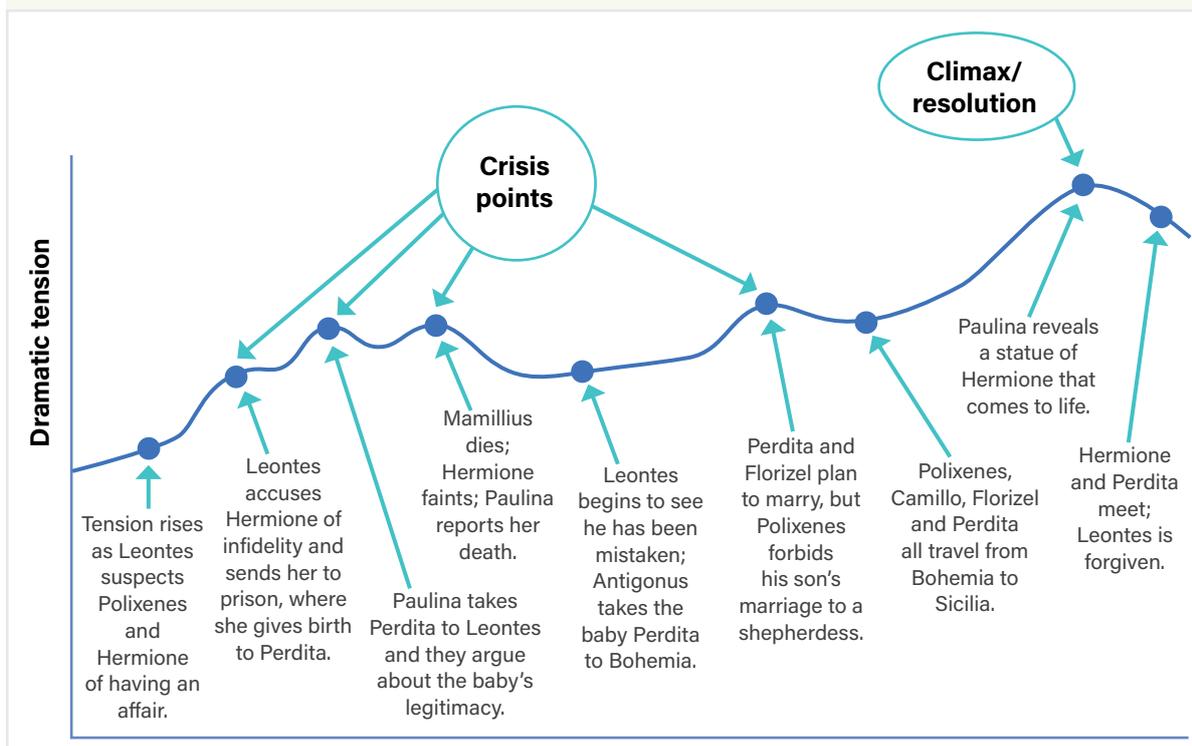
Example 3: Characters – drama

This example shows how you would complete the section on characters in Summary Sheet 3 (page 94), again using *The Winter's Tale*.

Main character 1: Leontes

- **Key words:** jealous; impulsive; remorseful
- **Key quotes:**
  - » 'How blest am I / In my just censure, in my true opinion!' (2.1.36–7)
  - » 'I have too much believed mine own suspicion.' (3.2.148)
  - » [to Paulina] 'Go on, go on. / Thou canst not speak too much; I have deserved / All tongues to talk their bitt'rest.' (3.2.211–13)
  - » 'I am ashamed. Does not the stone rebuke me / For being more stone than it?' (5.3.37–8)

Main character 2: Hermione

- **Key words:** loyal; charming; noble
- **Key quotes:**
  - » [to Leontes] 'How will this grieve you, / When you shall come to clearer knowledge, that / You thus have published me?' (2.1.96–8)
  - » 'I doubt not, then, but innocence shall make / False accusation blush, and tyranny / Tremble at patience.' (3.2.28–30)

Other characters: key words and quotes

Polixenes: truthful; steadfast

- 'What we changed / Was innocence for innocence. We knew not / The doctrine of ill-doing, nor dreamed / That any did.' (1.2.67–70)
- 'This jealousy / Is for a precious creature.' (1.2.446–7)
- 'Dear my brother, / Let him that was the cause of this have power / To take off so much grief from you as he / Will piece up in himself.' (5.3.53–6)

Paulina: loyal; devoted; resourceful

- 'The silence often of pure innocence / Persuades when speaking fails.' (2.2.40-1)
- ''Tis time: descend; be stone no more; approach; / Strike all that look upon with marvel.' (5.3.99–100)

Antigonus: loyal, dutiful

- 'For every inch of woman in the world, / Ay, every dram of woman's flesh is false / If she be.' (2.1.137–9)
- 'I'll pawn the little blood which I have left / To save the innocent – anything possible.' (2.3.165–6)

Example 4: Character map – drama

Below is an example of a character map for *The Winter's Tale*.
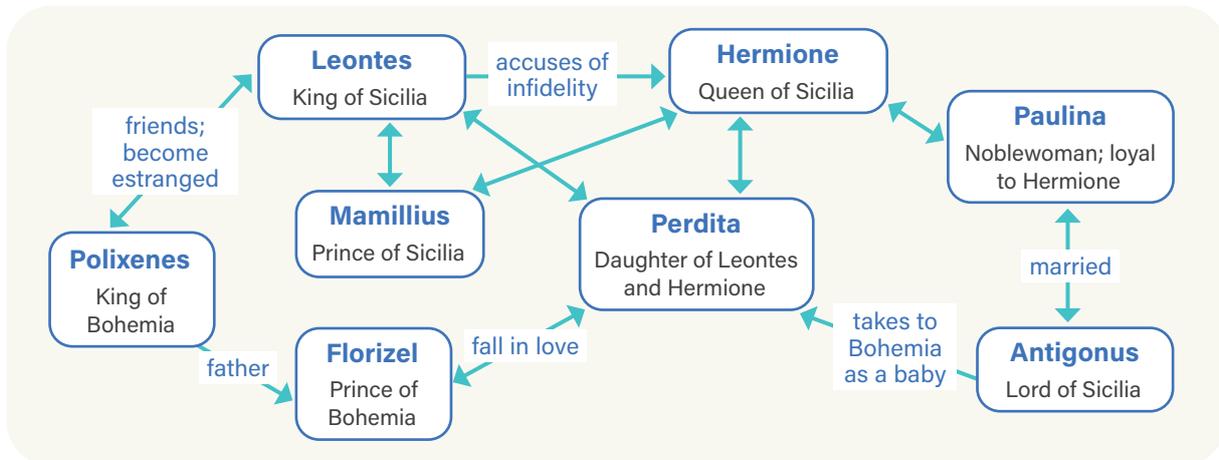
Example 5: language and imagery – poetry

This example shows how you could complete the language and imagery section in Summary Sheet 4 for poetry (page 95). A table is a useful way to organise examples and their effects.

Title of the collection: *Poems Selected by Seamus Heaney* (Faber and Faber, 2004)

Poet: WB Yeats

Technique	Example	Effect
Alliteration	'The <u>be</u>ll-<u>be</u>at of their wings above my head' ('The Wild Swans at Coole')	The repeated 'b' sounds help to convey the steady movement and rhythmic sound of the swans' wings.
Assonance	'Two h<u>ea</u>vy tr<u>e</u>stles, and a board / Where Sato's gift, a changeless sword, / By pen and paper lies' ('Meditations in Time of Civil War')	The repetition of the 'e' sound emphasises the weight and solidity of the poet's table.
Metaphor	'Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world, / The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere / The ceremony of innocence is drowned' ('The Second Coming')	The water metaphor adds to the poem's depiction of structures fragmenting in the modern world. The idea of a tide suggests an implacable force, while 'blood' and 'drowned' reference the loss of life caused by WWI.
Personification	'O what if levelled lawns and gravelled ways / Where slippered Contemplation finds his ease / And Childhood a delight for every sense' ('Meditations in Time of Civil War')	The personification of contemplation and childhood highlights the idyllic surroundings of the lawns and gardens around Yeats' tower, giving them a timeless quality.
Symbol	'And therefore I have sailed the seas and come / To the holy city of Byzantium.' ('Sailing to Byzantium')	In Yeats' poetry, the ancient city of Byzantium symbolises a perfect state of human society, especially with regard to culture.

Towards close analysis: selecting key passages

Close analysis focuses on a section of a text – perhaps a few hundred words – in order to investigate how the author uses language and literary techniques to create meaning for the reader or audience. This does not mean that the big picture is lost from view; rather, it is a study of how the smallest details of a text are produced and combined in order to generate that cumulative effect we think of as the big picture.

Not all passages will be equally useful or productive for a close analysis. Some passages, though, have a special importance in the overall scheme of a text – and this is also true for a collection of stories or poems. Passages can have extra importance because:

- they are the beginning or ending of a narrative
- they contain a turning point, crisis point or climax of a narrative
- they introduce significant characters, images or settings that recur and resonate throughout the text
- they show central characters in a new or interesting light, exposing their true motives or perhaps revealing their inner doubts and capacity for reflection.

A poem or story can also have central importance for the collection as a whole because:

- it is the title poem or story
- it has a particular association with the author's life
- it encapsulates a number of dominant concerns of the writer's work.

Select passages and discuss their importance

Once you have a grasp of the 'big picture' of the text you are studying, begin to move towards a closer analysis. Do this exercise in groups – the exchange of opinions and ideas is extremely helpful in shaping your own views.

- Identify which passages or scenes are particularly important. Use the above points as a guide: look at beginnings, endings, crisis points, introductions of central characters.
- Look at the importance of any passage in terms of how the writer uses the following features:

  › characters
  › narrative structure
  › images and symbols

  › narrative voice
  › tone and style
  › setting and context.

CLOSE

ANALYSIS

The close analysis – or close reading – of texts is at the heart of literary criticism, and it underlies all of the subsequent chapters of this book. Many different branches of literary criticism have evolved during the last century, especially since the different forms of literary theory were developed in the 1960s and 1970s (poststructuralism, New Historicism, postcolonialism and so on). What links these branches is that they can all be drawn on by a critic to create a close reading of a text, and to make a coherent and distinct interpretation of that text.

Moreover, while it is possible to talk broadly about novels, poems and plays as part of a society's wider culture, about authors as celebrity figures or about publishing as an element of global communications networks, none of these discussions are central to literary studies. Even though they have fascinating and often important intersections with it, they omit the key feature and attribute of the formal study of literature: the close analysis of literary texts as the starting point for all other discussions and arguments.

Strategies for doing close analysis

This chapter shows you how to analyse a key passage from a text, relating features of the passage to an interpretation of the text as a whole.

Close analysis: reading and writing

There are two main aspects to close analysis, both equally important.

- **Close reading** means focusing on a passage in order to gain a more complex and in-depth understanding of the text.

- **Writing a close analysis** means writing about a section of the text in detail. This is the best way of providing supporting evidence for an interpretation of the text's wider meaning; it is often required in assessment and examination situations, and is a key component of scholarly articles on literary texts.

! **Writing a close analysis of a passage is a basic skill in literary studies – it is also one of the most challenging. The earlier you start to practise, the more confident and accomplished you will become in all aspects of this subject.**

Every time I come upon one of these clumps of meaning I must go on digging around

Class discussion

Class discussion will help you to develop the skills of close reading – it will show you how to identify and 'unpack' all the elements that deserve comment in an analysis. There are many ways in which you could look closely at passages from a text, in small groups or as a whole class. For example, you could:

- study and discuss the opening passages of a text to see how narrative voice, characters, settings, ideas and values are established
- compare the beginning and end of a text to identify all the changes that occur
- study and discuss key scenes or passages in terms of character development, narrative importance, the views and values they present, or the use of language and special literary techniques.

Why do close analysis?

Close analysis:

- helps you to **understand** a text – how it is constructed by the author and how all the constituent elements contribute to its meaning
- helps you to **write** confidently and analytically about a text by generating rich ideas for discussion and argument.

Writing a close analysis

Writing on one or more selected passages from the text could be done in several different ways. You could:

- analyse the features of a single passage, showing its significance within the text as a whole (an example is given at the end of this chapter, on pages 113–15)
- analyse passages in a compare/contrast fashion
- combine a close reading of two or three passages with a consideration of the wider text, including its underlying views and values. This will give you the most sophisticated and compelling close analysis.

‹ **For explanations and examples of how texts present views and values, see Chapter 3.** ›

KEY KNOWLEDGE / KEY SKILLS

What you need to know	What you need to be able to do
› How language affects the reader's response to the text.	› Show the effects of particular elements of language use in close analysis.
› How key passages have particular importance to the meaning of the text as a whole.	› Explain the significance of key moments in a text to its overall structure and meaning.
› How different features of the text such as characterisation, setting, tone and style are connected to each other and to the text's meaning.	› Analyse the features of a text and make connections between them as part of an interpretation.
› How to develop an interpretation of a text.	› Present an interpretation using close reference to the text and a logically developed argument.

Essential elements of close analysis

There are four main areas to focus on when preparing to write a close analysis of a passage or passages. These are:

- effects and nuances of language use

- significance of the key passage/s

- connections between features of the text

- key elements for writing a close analysis.

While we have given language a separate category in the activity table on pages 105–6, you will find that language elements feature strongly in all areas of close analysis.

Important features of the activity table

- The first column, headed 'Identify important elements', sets out what to look for in each of the four main areas.

- The second column, 'Explain the effects of elements', gives examples of the important elements and explains some of their effects, drawing on the passage from *The Great Gatsby* on page 104.

Study these examples closely; even though they will not necessarily be taken from a text you are studying, they show how to develop the skills of close analysis by finding examples and explaining their effects.

Understanding the elements of close analysis

This activity shows you:

- what to identify or cover in each of the four areas of close analysis
- how to explain the effects of important elements in a text.

This activity can be done in groups or individually.

1 Read the passage on the next page from *The Great Gatsby* by F Scott Fitzgerald.

2 Read the activity in column 1 of the table on pages 105–6: 'Identify important elements'. Look for some examples of your own from the given passage.

3 Read the effects described in column 2 of the table. Now explain the effects of some of the elements you have found by using the explanations in column 2 as a model.

Passage from *The Great Gatsby*

This passage is referred to in the Activity table: Elements of close analysis, on the next page.

About half-way between West Egg and New York the motor road hastily joins the railroad and runs beside it for a quarter of a mile, so as to shrink away from a certain desolate area of land. This is a valley of ashes – a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and, finally, with a transcendent effort, of ash-grey men, who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air. Occasionally a line of grey cars crawls along an invisible track, gives out a ghastly creak, and comes to rest, and immediately the ash-grey men swarm up with leaden spades and stir up an impenetrable cloud, which screens their obscure operations from your sight.

But above the grey land and the spasms of bleak dust which drift endlessly over it, you perceive, after a moment, the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg. The eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg are blue and gigantic – their retinas are one yard high. They look out of no face, but, instead, from a pair of enormous yellow spectacles which pass over a non-existent nose. Evidently some wild wag of an oculist set them there to fatten his practice in the borough of Queens, and then sank down himself into eternal blindness, or forgot them and moved away. But his eyes, dimmed a little by many paintless days, under sun and rain, brood on over the solemn dumping ground.

The valley of ashes is bounded on one side by a small foul river, and, when the drawbridge is up to let barges through, the passengers on waiting trains can stare at the dismal scene for as long as half an hour. There is always a halt there of at least a minute, and it was because of this that I first met Tom Buchanan's mistress.

The fact that he had one was insisted upon wherever he was known. His acquaintances resented the fact that he turned up in popular cafés with her and, leaving her at a table, sauntered about, chatting with whomsoever he knew. Though I was curious to see her, I had no desire to meet her – but I did. I went up to New York with Tom on the train one afternoon, and when we stopped by the ashheaps he jumped to his feet and, taking hold of my elbow, literally forced me from the car.

'We're getting off,' he insisted. 'I want you to meet my girl.'

I think he'd tanked up a good deal at luncheon, and his determination to have my company bordered on violence. The supercilious assumption was that on Sunday afternoon I had nothing better to do.
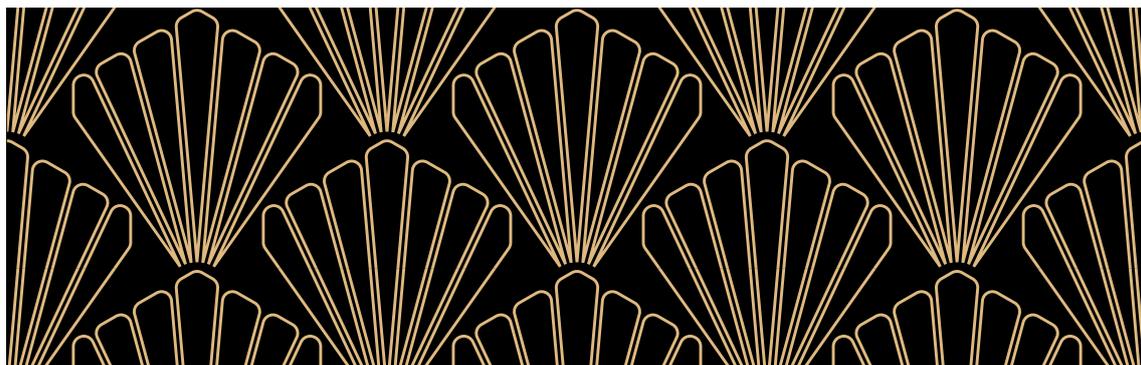
Activity table: Elements of close analysis

Identify important elements	Explain the effects of elements
Effects and nuances of language › Note any word choices that strike you as unusual.	› In the phrase '**grotesque gardens**', the alliteration (repetition of 'g') emphasises the juxtaposition of unlike terms, reinforcing the sense that nature is corrupted and inverted in this landscape. › '**Powdery air**': how can air be 'powdery'? This word choice makes the air seem almost solid, rather than clear. It suggests pollution, and an unnatural merging of the 'crumbling' men with their environment.
› Look for the connotations of words, and how these affect our view of characters, events, settings etc.	› The adjective '**ash-grey**' describes the men's lack of colour, but also carries the connotation of lifelessness – indicating that these workers are lacking in vitality and vigour.
› What is the significance of recurring images? › Are they symbols (images that stand for a larger entity)?	› **Recurring images of eyes** suggest that the text is exploring different ways of seeing things. › Images of eyes and references to seeing emphasise the subjective nature of 'reality'. › **The 'enormous yellow spectacles'** of T. J. Eckleburg substitute for the face; they are symbolic of the loss of human individuality in this society and the excessive value it places on the commodity.
› What kind of tone does the author use in the narrative voice? › What kind of tone is used by the characters in their dialogue?	› Tone is an important aspect of language use that has a direct impact on meaning. › **Nick's sarcastic tone** when discussing Tom, generated through derogatory terms such as 'tanked up' and 'supercilious', conveys his lack of respect and affection for this character.
Significance of the passage › What is the context of the passage? › Look for beginnings, turning points, crisis points, resolutions. › Relate the context of the passage to characterisation, narrative development, central ideas and concerns.	› **Beginnings** establish characters, settings, ideas. › The passage from *Gatsby* **introduces a significant setting**, including the powerful image of Eckleburg, and reveals a repugnant side to Tom's character. › **Turning points** can reveal changed attitudes or circumstances. › **Crisis points** often take the form of an unexpected challenge that usually causes changes in attitudes, circumstances, expectations. › **Crisis points and the climax** can test a character and reveal strengths and weaknesses, as well as attitudes and beliefs. › **Resolutions** can contain solutions to a problem, reinforcing values, questioning behaviour, and revealing 'true' character.
› Look for important insights into characters' motivations, values, goals.	› A **conversation between two characters** who trust each other can reveal their real hopes and feelings. › A **lengthy description of a landscape or interior setting** will be rich in images and information about social and cultural context.
› Look for typical aspects of the writer's style, such as the use of recurring images and words; use of structure in poetry; use of dialogue in drama; use of narrative voice in narrative fiction.	› **Images of eyes recur** in *Gatsby*, as does the image of T. J. Eckleburg. › Following Myrtle's death, Wilson says 'God sees everything' while looking at the billboard; it is as if this society has replaced God with an image from an advertisement.

I read and reread, each time seeking the confirmation of a new discovery among the folds of the sentences. ★

Identify important elements	Explain the effects of elements
Connections between features of a text	
› Explain links between the *way* the text is written and *what* is being said.	› The **long, meandering second sentence** in the passage from *Gatsby* **reflects** the monotony of the landscape and the merging of life and death, human and non-human.
	› The **many commas** in the first two sentences make the prose **mimic** the slow, uncertain movements of the men and the train.
› How does structure affect the reader's experience?	› The **order of events in the plot** might not be chronological; this can produce suspense, interest, surprise etc.
› How is characterisation related to views and values?	› **Whether characters are 'punished' or 'rewarded'** reflects the text's position on the views and values associated with these characters, or on the society depicted.
	› Tom's drunkenness and infidelity reflect his selfishness and lack of compassion for others, yet he survives with his marriage and wealth intact (link to plot); this suggests a lack of moral values and justice in the society.
› How does imagery convey central preoccupations and ideas?	› **Images associated with death** ('ashes', 'ash-grey men') indicate the workers' lack of vitality and individuality (link to views and values) and foreshadow Myrtle's death (link to plot).
› How does the narrative voice position the reader?	› The **narrative voice** can encourage the reader to be sympathetic or unsympathetic towards characters.
	› **Nick's narrative** in *Gatsby* elicits sympathy for Gatsby, but not for Tom (link with character).
› How does the narrative create the mood or feeling of a passage?	› The mood could be reflective, sad, tense, exuberant, playful etc.
	› Adjectives such as 'desolate', 'ghastly', 'solemn' and 'dismal' generate a serious, foreboding tone, foreshadowing the fatal accident later in the narrative (link to plot).
Key elements for writing a close analysis	
› Don't describe; analyse!	› **A sentence that is too descriptive** is: 'The passage gives an account of the gloomy landscape near Wilson's garage and the important picture of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg.'
	› **A more analytical sentence** is: 'Fitzgerald's depiction of the ugly, dehumanised quality of American society is encapsulated in this landscape of ashes and the disembodied, faceless image of T. J. Eckleburg's eyes and spectacles.'
› Use evidence from the text to support your statements about the text.	› **Make detailed, specific references to the text; avoid general, sweeping statements** such as '*Gatsby* portrays the dark side of the American dream'.
› Always explain the significance (and, if necessary, the meaning) of the quotes you use.	› **Avoid long quotes** and don't use a quote as an entire sentence, e.g. 'Nick makes plain his dislike of Tom's sordid private life. "I had no desire to meet her – but I did."'
	› Instead, integrate the quote within your discussion, like this: 'Nick's dislike of Tom's sordid private life is conveyed by his assertion that he "had no desire to meet" Tom's mistress.'
› Use a serious and formal tone – avoid being too conversational.	› **Use a wide vocabulary** and make precise, effective word choices.
	› **Don't use expressions such as** 'in my opinion' and 'it is my belief that'.

Creating your table of the elements of close analysis

In this activity you will identify and apply the essential elements of close analysis to a passage from the text you are studying. You will need a passage of about 450–500 words in length. This can be one you select or that your teacher chooses.

Create a table similar to the one on pages 105–6. Change the heading for column 1 to 'Examples of important elements'. The column 2 heading will be 'Effects of important elements'. Make sure you cover the four areas:

- effects and nuances of language
- significance of the passage
- connections between features of the text
- key elements for writing a close analysis.

Word bank for describing how language works

This word bank contains useful terms for you to use in analysing passages. Make sure you know the meaning of each word and how to use it.

Describing what the author is doing / the effect this generates				
evokes	creates	suggests	implies	reflects
explores	contrasts	illustrates	endorses	reinforces
condones	elicits	questions	challenges	condemns
subverts	conveys	intensifies	undermines	affirms

Sample sentence starters

› The writer evokes our sympathy for this character by having him unjustly accused of …

› In this passage our first impressions of the character are challenged because her private reflections on the issue illustrate …

Describing the author's techniques and strategies				
narrative voice	imagery	symbolism	characterisation	tone
irony	satire	juxtaposition	counterpoint	mood
atmosphere	tension	conflict	dichotomy	binary oppositions

Sample sentence starters

› The juxtaposition of images of grand buildings with images of decay suggests the impermanence of …

› The conflict between parent and child reflects the fundamental dichotomy between …

› The binary opposition between light and dark runs through the play's patterns of imagery and moral concerns …

Describing character				
powerful	aggressive	insecure	manipulative	jealous
envious	extroverted	introverted	reflective	shallow
self-seeking	vain	obedient	rebellious	submissive
obsequious	facetious	loyal	devoted	subversive

Sample sentence starters

› The <u>loyal</u> friend elicits our sympathy and admiration throughout; in contrast, her <u>vain</u>, <u>self-seeking</u> colleague …

› The shy, <u>introverted</u> clerk is initially a figure of pity, but his <u>obsequious</u> fawning to his superiors gradually suggests that …

› The simmering tension between the <u>rebellious</u> freedom-fighters and the nation's <u>powerful</u> governors finally breaks into open conflict when …

Expand your own word bank

This activity is designed to heighten your awareness of the ways authors consciously use words to create particular effects and responses. It will also expand your vocabulary for analysing how a writer uses language to construct meanings and present characters.

1   Create four complete sentences using words from each of the three sections of the word bank above (that is, twelve sentences). Use the examples as a guide.

2   Form pairs or groups to compare and discuss your examples.

How to read a passage closely

The following key questions will help you to gather and organise information as you read carefully through a selected passage. Use the 'what? where? how? why?' questions to move from what is obvious about the passage to more complex ideas and analytical responses.

Ask yourself: What? Where? How? Why?

Use these analytical questions as you write and think about your response.

- **What** is the nature of the events taking place?

- **Where** is the text set?

- **How** is language used? Look at how our attention is drawn to **features of the language** such as tone, sentence structure and particular choices of words and images, and how these impact on the reader. There are two parts to answering the how question:

  → **identify** the features used (how has the writer written?), then

  → **explain how** the features generate particular effects.

- **Why** questions are the most important ones to ask. They get you to look beyond the obvious or literal meaning into the deeper workings of a text – the aim of close analysis. Here are two examples of effective 'why' questions:

→ **Why does the writer place a particular event** at a certain point in the narrative?

→ **Why is one word used rather than another?** Try substituting synonyms to understand the power of certain words. Does the writer want us to think about characters or views and values in a particular way?

Ask yourself: 'Why has this passage been selected?'

- What are some of the main concerns of the wider text and where are they revealed in this passage?

- Can you make useful links with other parts of the text?

- What does the passage reveal about the text's presentation of views and values?

Identify the context of the passage

Briefly contextualise the passage; that is, provide answers to these questions.

- If the passage is from a memoir, a work of narrative fiction, a play or a narrative poem, is there a significant event or idea that 'happens' before, or occurs after, this passage?

- What dramatic impact is created by the following or foreshadowing of a significant narrative detail?

Look closely at characterisation

Consider the presentation of the characters in the passage.

- What is revealed about them through dialogue, reflection or authorial comment?

- Is the source of this information reliable?

- What do characters' silences, gestures or glances reveal?

- How and why do characters develop (or not develop) from one passage to the next?

- When you're working with dialogue, consider:

  → Is one character's voice dominant over another's?

  → What is revealed about relationships between characters by the way they talk to each other?

  → Is this consistent with what we know about the characters in the wider text?

Why is the setting important?

A passage will usually have a single setting (time and place) in which the action takes place.

- How does the setting contribute to your understanding of the passage?

- Are particular settings closely linked to certain characters?

- What do settings reveal about characters?

- In a play, what do the stage directions tell you about the setting?

What are the special features of language use?

Comment on language and imagery, including:

- metaphor, simile, personification, symbol
- dialogue, conversation, inner reflection
- sentence structure
- **alliteration** and **assonance**
- irony (verbal, dramatic) – see pages 30–1 and page 46 for explanations and examples
- **allusions** (classical, biblical, historical, literary etc.)
- sensory imagery (things that are seen, heard, felt, smelled or tasted).

Alliteration: repetition of consonant sounds;
Assonance: repetition of vowel sounds; see page 52

Specific questions for poetry

If you're working with poetry, pay careful attention to the structure of the poem (see pages 47–65).

- How are stanzas organised?
- If there are no stanzas, why not?
- Where are the line breaks and stanza breaks – and why do they end where they do?
- Comment on **enjambment** and **caesura**.
- Why is punctuation used (or not used)?
- Comment on rhythm (or the lack of it) and connect it to the poem's meaning and/or mood.

Enjambment: the running-on of lines;
Caesura: a break or pause in the natural rhythm of a line, possibly indicated by a comma or semicolon; see page 56

How to write a close analysis: a three-step process

Follow this three-step process for developing a close analysis of a passage.

- **Read the passage carefully and make annotations** identifying features of the text such as language use, characterisation, setting and imagery; link these to key ideas.
- **Order the material** so there is a logical sequence of ideas in your close analysis – move from specific features of the text to its broader ideas, views and values.
- **Write the analysis**.

Step 1: Reading closely and making annotations

Use highlighters or coloured pens to mark up the passage, using different colours for different features of the writing:

→ one colour for characterisation
→ a different colour for setting
→ another colour for aspects of language (e.g. tone, style, unusual word choices)
→ another for key images.

Sample annotated sentences

Here are four sentences from the *Great Gatsby* passage on page 104. We have used the following code to identify different features of the writing:

characterisation   setting   language use   images

Sentence 1

setting: in between suburb and city → **idea** of a 'no-man's-land' or wasteland – the counterpoint to the life of pleasure and endless consumption represented by West Egg and New York

About half-way between West Egg and New York the motor road hastily joins the railroad and runs beside it for a quarter of a mile, so as to shrink away from a certain desolate area of land.

image: 'shrink away' personifies the road; suggests not wanting to see the waste and dirt → **idea** of not wanting to see reality

language: 'desolate' establishes the tone of the passage

Sentence 2

language: 'gigantic' emphasises the unnaturalness of the image; the sign dominates the landscape – just as industrialisation has devastated the natural environment in the valley of ashes

The eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg are blue and gigantic – their retinas are one yard high.

language: 'blue' contrasts with the grey of the landscape; the only bright colour is provided by this artificial object, symbolic of the false promise of the commodity

image: eyes link with other references to looking without responding or being moved → **idea** of fragmentation (eyes without a face)

Sentence 3

setting: the river is polluted → **idea** that human processes destroy the natural environment

'stare' links with **image** of eyes → **idea** of looking without responding or being moved

The valley of ashes is bounded on one side by a small foul river, and, when the drawbridge is up to let barges through, the passengers on waiting trains can stare at the dismal scene for as long as half an hour.

setting: repeats earlier phrase 'valley of ashes'; this place is barren and lifeless → **idea** of the wasteland

language: 'dismal' reflects psychological state of human observers as well as the setting

Sentence 4

characterisation: Tom's behaviour not approved of by others; he is uncaring towards Myrtle, establishing that the affair is not motivated by love

His acquaintances resented the fact that he turned up in popular cafés with her and, leaving her at a table, sauntered about, chatting with whomsoever he knew.

characterisation: Tom's actions are not genuine, but a kind of performance; his naivety is conveyed through his ignorance of what others really think of him

language: 'sauntered' and 'whomsoever' convey Tom's indifference to the identities of his peers

Step 2: Ordering the material

Once you have annotated the passage, look for ways to organise and order your observations and comments. Aim to link specific features to the text's broader concerns – the values and viewpoints it presents and examines. The table below shows three ways of doing this.

Ways to order comments	Example using the passage
Start with language use ↓ show how language is the key to understanding characters and ideas ↓ discuss key images ↓ examine views and values	› Focus on the language choices: 'desolate', 'ghastly', 'dismal'. › The idea of a wasteland: it is not just physical but also emotional. › The characters lack emotional strength and seek short-term pleasures. › This presents a view of affluent American society as selfish and destructive, lacking values of emotional commitment and concern for others.
Start with a central image ↓ show how the image encapsulates one or more ideas ↓ explain how ideas are explored through characters, settings ↓ examine views and values	› The 'eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg' are disconnected from a human face. › This suggests the idea of social fragmentation and alienation: people are reduced to fragments and do not have meaningful relationships. › Tom's attempt to lead a glamorous social life is vain and shallow; he has no genuine human bonds. › The passage presents a view of social ease and sophistication as little more than an attempt to disguise the real ugliness of modernity.
Start with a character ↓ show how the passage places that character in a context ↓ consider how ideas are introduced and developed ↓ examine views and values	› Tom's mistress lives in the valley of ashes: this setting exposes the sordid reality at the core of their relationship. › The workers are 'ash-grey', as if they are more dead than alive. › In this context, rather than in his own home, Tom can also be seen to be living without real feeling or sense of purpose. › The wasteland is symbolic of the broader society. › This presents the view that materialistic society might have an attractive veneer (for some people and places) but its focus on production (for the workers) and consumption (for the wealthy) robs people of sources of meaning and fulfilment in life.

Each of these starting points could also be developed differently by:

- focusing on other aspects of language, imagery and character
- making alternative connections between language, imagery, setting, characters and ideas
- interpreting these features and expressing ideas and views in different ways.

! **There is no one right way to produce a close analysis; the aim is to express *your* viewpoint by making logical connections between features of the text and clearly basing each of your points on evidence from the passage.**

Step 3: Writing the analysis

Use the following checklist to ensure that you include the essential elements of any close analysis of a passage. Then read through the sample close analysis to see how these elements can be combined in a fluent, coherent piece of writing.

Scan the code or click **here** for a sample close analysis of a passage from Robert Drewe's memoir *The Shark Net*.

Checklist

Any close analysis should include:

- ☑ detailed reference to the passage being considered
- ☑ some short direct quotes, integrated smoothly into your sentences
- ☑ discussion of how the writer uses language and features such as characterisation, narrative point of view and imagery
- ☑ analytical comments about the ideas, views and values being explored through the language of the passage
- ☑ some references to the wider text
- ☑ well-ordered and logically developed discussion of the passage.

Sample close analysis of *The Great Gatsby*

The following sample close analysis follows the first of the three approaches suggested in the table on page 112 – beginning with language use, then moving on to a central idea (the wasteland), characterisation (Tom Buchanan) and imagery (the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg).

Brief contextualisation of the passage, indicating its significance within the narrative.

Although it appears at the start of only the second chapter of *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald's compelling account of the bleak 'valley of ashes' casts a pall over the entire novel. The valley is completely leached of colour, and any life within it is oppressed to a death-like state. The use of a series of adjectives such as 'desolate', 'ghastly' and 'dismal' conveys the grim appearance of the landscape and generates a distinctive, haunting mood. The 'ash-grey men' who work here are so lacking in vitality that their physical being appears to be disintegrating, 'crumbling' into the thick air. It is a landscape of the living dead, where all of nature – plants, people, air and water – is smothered and suffused with industrial waste. There is no hope or joy here, only perpetual drudgery and a sense of resignation to one's fate.

What Fitzgerald paints here is a portrait of a society that has all of its surface beauty and excitement stripped away. Just as the landscape is 'half-way between West Egg and New York', this scene is located between accounts of the Buchanans' glamorous, luxurious lifestyle in their East Egg mansion, and of Tom and Myrtle's decadent cocktail party in a New York apartment. The wasteland of the valley of ashes

One- or two-word quotations are integrated smoothly into the discussion.

Moves from language to wider meaning of the setting – the **idea** of the valley of ashes as a wasteland.

Language: explains how setting and mood are generated through choice of adjectives.

Introduces names of characters, setting up the analysis for a discussion of characterisation; shows relevant knowledge of the wider text.

Idea of wasteland broadened to identify its wider significance: emotional not just physical.

Characterisation of Tom: the focus moves back into close analysis of the passage, continuing the idea of an emotional wasteland.

Moves from the characterisation of Tom to the text's view of the society as a whole.

Moves from the image into the concluding paragraph by making a views and values comment.

is the negative side (and logical consequence) of such conspicuous consumption, just as the lifestyles of the wealthy depend on the manual labour of the working classes. It is also a space that precludes any kind of pleasure in life, and the adjectives 'bleak' and 'desolate' seem to apply as much to the psychological states of those who work here, or who wait and 'stare at the dismal scene', as to the physical attributes of the landscape.

It is, then, entirely understandable that those with money and social status take every opportunity to avoid being confronted with the reality of the wasteland – to distract and amuse themselves with the gleaming surfaces and pleasant sensations of the city and affluent suburbs. Tom Buchanan indulges himself with a mistress and frequent appearances in 'popular cafés' where he mixes with and seeks the approval of others in his social class. Yet the disdainful tone of Nick's narrative voice suggests that Tom is vain rather than genuinely sociable, and that his pursuit of pleasure is quite free from ethical concerns (such as for the feelings of others). The superficial nature of Tom's affection for Myrtle is suggested by his casual tendency to '[leave] her at a table' when they go out; he appears less attracted to Myrtle as an individual than to the promise of novelty and convenience that she represents. In this she is much like any other commodity that Tom might buy or trade – a symbol not of human passion but of the reduction of people to objects in a materialistic and consumption-orientated society.

Just as the gleaming surfaces of civilisation are stripped away in this passage to reveal 'the grey land' that lies beneath, the protective layers of family and home are removed from Tom to show his duplicitous and largely amoral nature. The social class to which Tom belongs may not inhabit a physical wasteland, but in a moral and emotional sense the lives of those from East or West Egg are as barren, squalid and monotonous as those of the 'ash-grey men'. This link between the wasteland and the metropolis is crystallised in the image on an advertising billboard of a pair of 'blue and gigantic' eyes and a corresponding pair of 'enormous yellow spectacles'. The unnaturalness of the image – conveyed by the use of adjectives emphasising the extreme size, and the lack of a nose or other typical facial features – corresponds to the unnaturalness of the whole society. The human face has been fragmented in this image, leaving only the components relevant to the marketplace; traditionally so strongly linked to notions of human identity and expressiveness, the human face here is transformed into the definitive symbol of a *de*humanised society.

The 'eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg' are a sign both of what this society does best – the production of images, of fantasies – and of what it most lacks: a substantial, meaningful reality behind the appearance of success and glamour. Once the veneer of wealth and material privilege is stripped away, what is left is the reality of the wasteland, a life and a world lacking in meaning or purpose. It might seem that such a world

Continued attention to language used in the passage supports the interpretation.

Links Tom's relationship with Myrtle (characterisation of Tom) to one of the text's broader concerns.

Uses this social perspective to move back into the passage in order to focus on the central image.

Links language use to views and values.

Analyses the image in order to offer an interpretation of its meaning.

exists only in this 'desolate area' between the suburbs and the city; yet the wasteland in *The Great Gatsby* has a wider resonance, a relevance not just to the physical qualities of human life but to its emotional and moral content. A valley of ashes; a polluted river; an advertisement; a tawdry affair: these are the things, Fitzgerald suggests, that truly reflect the qualities and the values of American society. Everything else – the cocktails, the bright lights, the smart clothes and expensive furnishings – is a facade, a diversion, a reason to avert one's gaze, however pointlessly or fleetingly, from the 'solemn dumping ground' of life.

Assessor comments

Structure and cohesion

- The close analysis is structured to give a coherent and logical flow of ideas.

- The last sentence of each paragraph is linked to the first sentence of the next through a common word or idea – e.g. the contrast between joy and despair links the first and second paragraphs; the word 'image' and associated meanings link the second-last and last paragraphs.

- Paragraphs begin with a strong statement indicating the main idea to be explored and developed.

- Where a paragraph begins with a general statement (e.g. first body paragraph: 'What Fitzgerald paints here …'), the second sentence immediately refers to textual material from the passage in order to support the opening assertion ('the landscape is "half-way between West Egg and New York"').

Interpretation and expression

- The analysis explains why the passage is significant within the text as a whole.

- It provides a rigorous, thorough discussion of key elements and features of the passage, linking them to an overall interpretation.

- The interpretation of the text (as a critique of materialism and the values it promotes in society) is sustained and developed throughout.

- The selection and use of textual material supports the interpretation, showing perceptiveness and understanding.

- Quotations are correctly incorporated into sentences.

- The analysis gives close attention to the ways in which the author's use of language creates in the reader's mind a particular viewpoint and attitude towards the characters and their social contexts.

- The ideas are well-ordered, which ensures that the analysis develops logically and coherently.

- The writing is sophisticated and expressive.

VIEWS, VALUES AND CONTEXTS

Every text draws on the ideas and attitudes of the time and place in which it was written and in which it is set. However, it may have many ways of treating these ideas and attitudes – perhaps agreeing with some and being critical of others, or possibly avoiding them altogether. For instance, many literary texts place a high value on family unity and a stable social order, reflected in the fact that texts usually conclude with resolutions to tensions and conflicts. This is not to say that literature never argues for social change – indeed, it often suggests that there are substantial imbalances in the distribution of wealth and opportunities in society. On the whole, though, literary texts suggest that change should be progressive and democratic, not enforced by violence or by a totalitarian state.

In other words, texts don't simply explore ideas; they seek to make readers think about ideas in specific ways. The ways in which readers feel about certain characters, and react emotionally to events and situations, are central to a text's presentation of attitudes and ideas. Why does the writer seek such effects? What techniques do they use in order to achieve them? How do our responses to texts relate to the ideas and attitudes that texts endorse or, alternatively, condemn? And to what extent are our responses shaped by our own contexts and therefore different from the responses a writer might originally have intended? These are the questions at the centre of this study of views, values and contexts.

Strategies for studying views, values and contexts

This chapter shows you how to identify and analyse the views, values and contexts of a text in terms of the ideas, attitudes and beliefs that the text presents. In studying views, values and contexts, you should consider these main areas:

- the author's context
- the context of the text (the time and place in which it was written and first published, and/or in which it is set)
- your context (you need to be aware as a reader of your own attitudes and values)
- the techniques and features used by the writer to construct the text so that the reader responds to it in a particular way
- the ideas explored in the text and the writer's apparent attitude towards them.

	What you need to know	What you need to be able to do
KEY KNOWLEDGE / KEY SKILLS	› How contexts – historical, social and cultural – affect how texts are written and understood.	› Identify the ways in which the text reflects the context in which it was created.
	› How a text examines, endorses or critiques the behaviour of individuals or the underlying structures of society.	› Analyse how a text endorses, challenges or leaves unquestioned various ideas and concerns.
	› How the construction of a text affects our interpretation of its meaning.	› Explain how a writer uses characterisation, setting, form, narrative, style and tone to convey attitudes and explore ideas.
	› How our own beliefs and values affect our understanding of texts.	› Use detailed evidence from the text to justify your discussion of the text's views and values.

Essential terms for views, values and contexts

The tables on the following pages provide definitions and explanations of the key terms in the study of views, values and contexts. The sample sentences show how to incorporate these key terms into your analytical writing.

The activities following each table will develop your understanding of and ability to write about views, values and contexts. Each set of activities could be done individually, in small groups or in whole class discussion.

Views and values

The views and values presented in a text are the attitudes, beliefs and ideas of the people and societies depicted. They refer both to the views and values of particular characters and to the views and values endorsed or critiqued by the text as a whole. The writer's own views and values are also often expressed through their work, just as readers bring underlying attitudes and beliefs to their interpretation of texts.

Hence, the activities begin by asking you to think about your own views and values, which are the product of your family, life experiences and the society in which you live, and then move on to consider how views and values are represented in texts.

Views	Examples
Attitudes to issues or ideas; sometimes means 'opinions'.	› That families are the basic units in society.
A way of considering something – such as 'a long-term view'; 'an objective view'; 'a biased view'.	› That society unequally distributes wealth and power.
Can be favourable, unfavourable or relatively neutral – a judgement is implied.	› That cultural differences enrich a society.
Sample sentences about views in texts	

'The writer's view of their society is complex, but ultimately critical.'

'The views of the female characters in this text are given much less consideration than those of their male counterparts.'

'The text supports the view that it is better to understand differences between people than to try to make everyone think in the same way.'

Identify views

This activity increases your understanding of your own personal views, and asks you to identify some views expressed in a text.

1   State at least three views that you hold at the moment. Try to list views that are important to you.

2   Identify the views expressed in a text you are studying.

3   Are these views endorsed, challenged or left unquestioned in the text? Use textual evidence to support your statements.

4   Write one or two sentences about views expressed in your text, using the sample sentences in the table on the previous page as a model.

Values	Examples
Principles; core beliefs that people live by. Qualities or attributes of human behaviour and society that we regard as having intrinsic worth.	› Values are by definition positive, e.g. honesty; loyalty; respect; equality of opportunity; education; freedom of expression; religious freedom. › Negative behaviour that we do not value, such as cruelty, crime or selfishness, often helps us to work out what we do value.

Sample sentences about values in texts

'The author endorses traditional family values: obedience to one's parents; care and compassion for one's children.'

'The writer critiques the values of white people who were complicit with the dispossession of First Nations Australians.'

'Remaining true to her core values, the protagonist refuses to share the prejudiced views of her family and friends.'

Identify values

This activity shows you how to understand personal values and identify some values expressed in a text. This could be a group activity.

1   What values do you endorse or accept?

2   List at least five qualities or principles you value.

3   Compare your list with someone else's. What does this comparison show you about your values?

4   What attitudes and types of behaviour do you resent or challenge?

5   Identify the values that the writer endorses, challenges or leaves unquestioned in a text you are studying.

6   Summarise the key values explored in your text, using the sample sentences in the table above as a model.

Beliefs	Examples
Firm opinions held by a person; not objective facts but nevertheless held to be true.	› A religious conviction, e.g. belief in a god. › A belief that people are fundamentally good. › A belief that our personalities are shaped by experience, not determined by genes.

Sample sentences about beliefs in texts

'The novel shows how people who have many different beliefs can learn to accept one another as human beings.'

'Among the many beliefs critiqued in this text are those of the Enlightenment as well as those of the superstitious Middle Ages.'

'The play explores, without completely rejecting, the belief that kings rule by divine right; in today's world such a belief is incongruous.'

Identifying beliefs

In this activity you will reflect on your own personal beliefs and identify some beliefs expressed in a text. This could be a group activity.

1　List at least three beliefs that you hold strongly, with at least one reason for each. What do these reveal about your values?

2　In a text you are studying, which moments and situations endorse your beliefs?

3　Which moments in the text challenge or contradict your beliefs?

4　Which moments in the text cause you to reflect on and question your beliefs?

5　What are the differences between the position the text invites you to adopt and the position that you actually take? To what extent do these result from differences between the writer's context and your own?

6　Write several sentences about beliefs expressed in your text and your response to the text's presentation of them. Use the sample sentences in the table above as a model.

Social conventions

Social conventions are a link between views and values on the one hand, and social contexts on the other. Because they underpin our everyday lives, social conventions offer an immediate and concrete way of looking at the views and values of a society. They are an outward manifestation of our own – or our society's – underlying beliefs and core values.

Social conventions	Examples
Social conventions and customs help to hold a society together. These are unstated yet widely accepted understandings that regulate behaviour, appearances and social interactions. They are often referred to as the glue of society because they give a social group a sense of identity and belonging based on a shared sense of the 'right thing' to do. Social conventions can be challenged by minority groups. Writers can use their literary work to challenge or question commonly accepted practices.	› Living in nuclear family groups organised in particular ways (e.g. parents responsible for their children's upbringing, behaviour and education) – as opposed to extended families or kinship groups. › Knowing which clothes are appropriate for different times and places. › Being courteous and polite to others, whether friends or strangers. › Caring for the vulnerable. › Being quiet in libraries, churches, cemeteries etc.

Sample sentences about social conventions in texts

'The writer places pressure on the constrictive social conventions that prevented women from working after they were married.'

'The novelist creates a fascinating and compelling picture of the social conventions in early-20th-century Australian society.'

'The characters act in unquestioning accordance with the social conventions of their time; the ironic tone of the narrator encourages the reader to see these conventions in a more sceptical light.'

Identify social conventions

This activity develops your understanding of social conventions and your ability to analyse their representation in a text. This could be a group activity.

1   Which social conventions influence your own behaviour; your hopes for the future; and your relationships?

2   How do the characters in the text you are studying act in accordance with social conventions? Look, for example, at dialogue, letter-writing, dress codes, work patterns and gender roles.

3   Are any of the characters frustrated by social conventions?

4   Does the text suggest that some social conventions are unnecessarily limiting? Explain with examples.

5   Write a paragraph about some of the social conventions depicted in your text and what they reveal about the characters' views and values. Use the sample sentences in the table above as a model.

Contexts

Context is a broad term that refers to the society and environments (both built and natural) that an individual inhabits. The following sections consider three main kinds of context in detail: social, historical and cultural. To begin with, we consider some of the important distinctions between the contexts that shape a text's creation and reception. That is, there are contexts for:

- the text's characters and events
- the writer's life and work, and the text's publication or first performances
- the reader or audience and their interpretation of the text.

Contexts represented in a text

Just as we are products of the societies into which we are born and in which we live, characters in novels, plays, films and biographies are represented as products of their societies. However, this does not mean that they always adopt or agree with the conventions and dominant attitudes of their society.

A text's representation of its physical setting is closely linked to the portrayal of characters and their social and cultural contexts. For instance, in the example from *The Leopard* on page 28, Tomasi di Lampedusa is not so much interested in producing an accurate description of the Sicilian landscape as in conveying the close bond the Prince feels with the natural world. He also seeks to portray a whole way of life that had existed for centuries, in which the relationships between communities, their cultural practices, their belief systems and the natural world were extremely close and interconnected.

The author's context

Texts are not simply products of an author's imagination and creativity. Texts and authors are produced by a network of ideas, social circumstances and material conditions that are current in a particular place and time. This is often referred to as the **context of production**.

The author's context might be close to the social and cultural milieu represented in the text; or it might – as in historical fiction or science fiction – be completely different.

The reader's context

A reader has their own context that significantly influences how they read, understand and respond to a text. The reader's context is also known as the **context of reception**.

The context of a reader can be very different from the context in which a text was initially written and received – especially when a period of several hundred years has elapsed between the text's initial publication and a contemporary reading of that text.

Furthermore, readers might occupy very different social and cultural contexts as a result of living in different parts of the world or belonging to different cultural or ethnic groups. This can have a strong bearing on how they interpret a text: questions of which characters are sympathetic or unsympathetic, or whether the tone is humorous or serious, might be answered quite differently by readers whose contexts vary significantly.

! **Our own contexts will inevitably affect how we view the characters, situations and events portrayed by the author. Although it is impossible to remove such effects from our reading, we should always try to be aware of how they impact on our interpretation of a text.**

Social contexts

The social context of a text means the features of society that impact on the text's meaning. A text's characters, author and audience all have a social context that shapes their behaviour, beliefs and values.

Social contexts	Examples and aspects
The type of society and the features that characterise it. Each society has its own conventions and customs that change over time but which, like beliefs, are generally accepted as 'right'.	› Class structure – how clearly class boundaries are defined in the society and how easy or difficult it is to move between classes. › Work types and opportunities. › Gender roles – in the home, in the workplace and in other social settings.
Sample sentences about social contexts in texts	

'The social context of the novel is limited to the insular lives of the middle classes; the thoughts and feelings of their servants are never contemplated.'

'The characters are products entirely of their social contexts – unable to reflect critically on their circumstances or embrace change.'

'The poet's social context clearly informs her poetic concerns: women's rights are acknowledged, yet domestic interests remain very much in the foreground.'

Identify social contexts

These questions develop your understanding of social contexts and the role they play in a text you are studying. This could be a group activity.

1 What features can you identify in your own social context? Do your classmates all share the same social context?

2 Compare the conventions, customs and class structure in your text with those of your own social context. Note the differences and give some reasons for these.

3 How do the characters in your text reflect their social class? Can they move with ease from one class to another? Look at their financial situation, gender roles, level of material comfort, education and work opportunities.

4 Do the characters accept the conventions and customs of their social contexts? Give examples.

5 Write a short paragraph about the presentation of social contexts in your text. Use the sample sentences in the table above as a model.

Historical contexts

It is impossible to disentangle social contexts from historical contexts. Every society changes with time; its underlying conventions and protocols are inevitably historically specific.

Historical contexts come to the fore when significant changes have occurred between the writing of the text and its contemporary reading. In these cases, it is important for audiences to understand the historical context in which the work was produced, in order for it not to be assessed solely in terms of their own preoccupations and concerns.

Historical contexts also need to be considered when a text is set in an earlier period than that in which it was written. Historical fiction views the past through the lens of the present; the author imaginatively revisits the past, but their own context is inevitably part of the work just as much as the historical context represented in it.

Historical contexts	Examples and aspects
Those aspects of society and politics that belong to a particular period of history (e.g. the Renaissance, Victorian England, colonial Australia).	› Major political events and leaders. › Wars. › Scientific advances. › Technological developments. › Relevant laws and customs.

Sample sentences about historical contexts in texts

'The play's 19th-century context is evident in its depiction of relationships and gender roles, which are presented as conventional yet in need of modernising.'

'The novelist's historical context – at the end of the 20th century – has clearly influenced her depiction of WWI soldiers experiencing post-traumatic stress disorder.'

'Although we may judge the characters harshly from our present-day standpoint, it is important to take into account the historical context in which they are located.'

Identify historical contexts

This activity will enhance your understanding of the historical context represented in a text you are studying. This could be a group activity.

1 Identify the historical context represented in the text.

2 What are the main aspects of this historical context that differ from your own? Look, for example, at transport, modes of communication, dress, family relationships and customs, political factors such as who is in power and the type of government, and major historical events.

3 Make a list of the vocabulary used in the text that is characteristic of this historical period.

4 Write a short paragraph on the historical context of your text. Incorporate the vocabulary from the previous question and use the sample sentences in the table above as a model.

Cultural contexts

'Culture' is a particularly slippery term to define; its meaning has changed significantly in the last 200 years, and it has more than one meaning. In some uses, culture has an elitist connotation: it includes 'high art' (e.g. literary classics) but excludes 'popular culture' (e.g. comic strips). However, the term 'culture' is now often used in a broader and more inclusive way; we would usually think of films, television shows, social media, video games and the internet as forming part of our culture, too.

Cultural contexts	Examples and aspects
Ways of living built up by a group of people. Artistic endeavours including music, literature, theatre, painting and sculpture. A state of civilisation such as ancient Greek culture.	› Aspects of identity related to culture or ethnicity. › Aspects of identity related to religion (e.g. days and nature of worship). › Everyday culture, including things like food, clothing, entertainment and ways of communicating.

Sample sentences on cultural contexts in texts

'This novel about racial conflict will be meaningful to readers in London, Darwin, Mumbai and Johannesburg – but their diverse cultural contexts mean they will respond to it in quite different ways.'

'The poet captures and distils evocative moments in the lives of Indian labourers and mystics, suggesting universal concerns that transcend cultural differences.'

'The characters' fondness for high cultural forms such as listening to opera, attending exhibition openings and drinking champagne reflects their lives of privilege and comfort.'

'The play clearly signposts the cultural contexts it draws from through its meticulous descriptions of props and set designs.'

Identify cultural contexts

This activity will help you to understand cultural contexts and to identify some cultural contexts represented in a text. This could be a group activity.

1 What features can you identify in your own cultural context? Do all members of your class share the same cultural context?

2 How do the characters in the text you are studying reflect their cultural context? How does their cultural context determine or shape their identity?

3 Is religion an important feature of the characters' cultural contexts? Give examples.

4 What cultural activities do the characters pursue? (For example, music, art, sport, reading.)

5 How are race and ethnicity represented? For instance, does the text address issues relating to racial prejudice or discrimination?

6 Write a short paragraph on one of the cultural contexts depicted in your text, using the sample sentences in the table above as a model.

Writers' and readers' contexts

These questions highlight the ways in which writers and readers bring their own ideas and contexts to any given text. Writers may be aware of how this happens, though not always; readers are often unaware of how their attitudes and beliefs inform their reactions to a text. Use the questions below to explore how these two contexts shape the meanings of a text.

1 **The writer's context**

   › Research the writer's context. Where and when did they live? What were the main ideas in their writing?

   › Look for background material such as interviews with the writer, as well as reviews and critiques of the text. These may add to your understanding of the writer's influences and motivations.

2 **The reader's context**

   › Think about your own context as the reader or audience.

   › What elements of the text do you recognise as being part of your own context? What aspects can you identify with?

   › What seems strange and unfamiliar in the text you are studying?

   › Are there any ideas or attitudes that the text presents as desirable or positive but you would question or reject?

   › To what extent do your answers to the previous questions result from you and the writer having different historical, social and/or cultural contexts? Explain your answer.

Features of the text that convey views and values

! **Being able to connect the writer's techniques and use of language with the text's wider meaning is an important part of closely analysing views and values in a text. These guidelines and the accompanying activities show you how to make those connections.**

The following sections will help you to see how features of a text contribute to its presentation of views and values. It would be useful to work in groups so that different views and interpretations can be shared and discussed. Select the features most suited to your form of text. For instance, novels and plays will obviously involve work on characters and narrative, which will be less relevant to poetry.

Characterisation and characters

Characters' views and values are revealed through characterisation – that is, the strategies the writer uses to create a character. These strategies can include:

- authorial comments

- what the character says and the way in which they say it

- what others say or think about them

- what the character does

- how their personalities and attitudes are revealed in their relationships

- how the character's attitudes and beliefs are challenged by others.

For example, a character might express strong views on their society's rules about the inheritance of property; or a character might be critical of the society's marriage conventions. In another text, a character could reveal their views through their behaviour, such as helping someone who is excluded from or persecuted by society. These actions may evoke anger and criticism from others, and in this way also show the values of other characters.

A depiction of family conflict may present two strongly opposing positions in such a way that it is difficult to say who is right and who is wrong. In this case the writer may have set up the scenario to make readers examine certain views and values expressed through the characters. With close analysis of such a text, you may detect the author's position on the issue behind the conflict.

Complex or contradictory views and values

It is likely that characters in literary texts will be depicted as having complex or contradictory views and values. This may be evident in their attitudes to important issues; for example, they may have reservations about family loyalty if it involves compromising their principles (such as honesty or justice). Or a character may be drawn to a person who challenges their basic belief system and exposes its shortcomings.

Some characters can act in a way that is inconsistent with their actual views and values, as a result of social pressures to conform. Another character might be driven by emotions that are stronger than their beliefs. They might, for instance, be led to act in a way that they know is wrong by intense feelings of envy or an irresistible desire for revenge.

Identify the views and values of characters

This activity shows you how to identify the views and values that characters are aligned with in your text. You will also gather evidence from the text and begin to write about views and values.

Consider the following characters: the protagonist; the antagonist (the character who opposes the protagonist); and one or two minor characters.

1 Identify the views and values of the above characters. Note that some characters' views and values will change as they develop or as their circumstances alter throughout a narrative. Make sure you identify these changes if they occur.

2 Carefully note how these views and values are presented with reference to the characterisation strategies above.

3 Use this information to write a succinct paragraph on how views and values are aligned with characters in the text.

Identify complex views and values

In this activity, you will identify and analyse complex or contradictory views and values of some characters in your text.

1 Identify what is complex or contradictory about a character's views and values.

2 Why do they not see issues in simple black-and-white terms? Consider such factors as whether they have reservations about other characters, they are experiencing a conflict with no clear resolution, or changes are occurring over which they have no control.

3 Is there a gap between a character's outward appearance and their inner reality? How does their behaviour reveal the tensions between different attitudes and beliefs?

4 Is there a character who allows desire to override their conscience? What values are compromised? How is the reader positioned to judge the character?

5 Does the text ultimately suggest that there are certain views and values that are acceptable or unacceptable? For example, does it suggest that killing others is never justified (an *absolute* position); or that it is justified in some circumstances (a *relative* moral position)?

Reader responses to characters

Characters are drawn so that readers respond to them in particular ways. For example, if a character is portrayed sympathetically, we are more likely to agree with, or *endorse*, the values that character upholds. On the other hand, if a character is presented unsympathetically then we are likely to reject their attitudes and beliefs.

It is also possible for readers to respond in a way that is ambivalent or uncertain, especially in the case of complex major characters. This is because most literary texts avoid taking an overly simplistic, judgemental stance on the views and values they present.

Despite Othello's cruel treatment of Desdemona, he retains some audience sympathy. Maximum Film / Alamy Stock Photo

Identify how readers respond to characters

This activity shows you how to analyse the link between your response to characters and the views and values held by those characters.

1 Which characters are sympathetically portrayed? For instance:

› Do the characters endorse widely held values – concern for others, justice, loyalty etc.?

› Are they thoughtful and moderate, not prone to extremes of emotion or action?

2 How does the text support or endorse particular beliefs, ideas and values through the sympathetic portrayal of such characters? To what extent is your response to those beliefs, ideas and values consistent with the text's endorsement of them?

3 Which characters are negatively portrayed? For instance:

› Do they behave selfishly and/or have little respect for others?

› Do they display excessive anger or act with unjustifiable violence?

4 How does the text use such characters to challenge or question views and values? To what extent is your response to those views and values consistent with the text's critique of them?

5 Identify any characters about whom you feel ambivalent or uncertain, and explain why you feel this way.

6 How does your ambivalence or uncertainty affect your sense of whether certain views and values are being endorsed or critiqued? Does it suggest that the author wants us to decide for ourselves, or that perhaps there are no clear-cut answers to these issues?

Narrative voice and language use

Narrative voice refers to the type of narrator (first-person, third-person etc.) and the way in which events and situations are conveyed to the reader. Aspects of this voice – its tone and style and the particular word choices for descriptions of characters and objects – are crucial to the text's presentation of views, values and contexts. For example:

- irony or sarcasm invites the reader to regard characters in a critical light

- images closely associated with a character can influence how positively or negatively that character is viewed by the reader

- a first-person narrator positions the reader to view the characters' attitudes and beliefs from the narrator's perspective.

With regard to the last point, note that some first-person narrators are unreliable, and the text will not necessarily endorse their views and values. Indeed, the narrator's opinions may

be undermined by the events of the narrative. Such a narrative may leave us undecided as to which values are inherently better than others – the author might use this technique to depict a society in which traditional values are breaking down, or one that has no widely shared set of morals or ethical standards.

How narrative voice conveys views and values

This activity shows you how to analyse the links between narrative voice, language use and the text's presentation of views and values.

1   Look for the use of adjectives and adverbs with positive or negative meanings. Which characters or objects are these words associated with?

2   How does this use of language affect your response to the views and values associated with particular characters or objects?

3   Look for words and images associated with certain characters. Do these images have positive or negative associations?

4   How do these images reinforce the values aligned with these characters?

5   If the narrative voice is first person, are the views and values of the narrator also those of the text as a whole?

6   Is an unreliable narrator used? If so, to what extent does your text lead you to question the views and values of this narrator?

7   If the narrative voice is third person, does this voice clearly present the text's views and values, or is the reader left to infer these from the characters and events? To what extent do the narrator's tone and style shape the reader's responses to the views and values being presented?

Images and symbols

A text can use objects such as a house, a car, a gun or clothes as signifiers or symbols of wider social forces and issues. In this way they, too, can be tied to views and values.

- An extravagant mansion could be juxtaposed with a humble cottage in order to critique the gap between the rich and the poor.

- A gun might be associated with several characters who have a range of attitudes towards violence. In this case, the gun will be seen from different viewpoints – depending on whether it is linked to a character opposed to violence and wary of the gun's potential for destruction, or to a character who ruthlessly seeks power through violent means.

- The associations of an image might change throughout a text. For example, a white flower might initially signify love or innocence, but become a symbol of waste or neglect as it fades and dies. This could be part of the author's exploration of change or imperfection in life, a view that unfolds gradually in the text rather than being clearly established at the outset.

How images and symbols convey views and values

This activity shows you how to identify and analyse how a text uses images and symbols to present views and values.

1   Identify a significant object that embodies a central issue or concern in the text.

2   Is this object consistently associated with one set of views and values or a mixture?

3   How is the object used to develop the text's exploration of an idea or concern?

4   How does the language used to describe this object position you to think about the meanings related to it?

5   Write a paragraph showing how the text uses one of these important images or symbols to present particular views and values.

Settings and contexts

The setting of a text comprises the place or places, and also the time period or periods, in which the action is located. Settings reflect attributes of the wider society in which the characters live, and thus of the views and values that are widely accepted in that society. This can be shown in numerous ways. For example, a character's degree of comfort or discomfort in their setting can indicate their level of contentment or frustration within that society. This in turn could show whether they are aligned with or resistant to the values and conventions of their society.

Settings also cue the reader into the wider picture of the text. They convey aspects of the society and also of the historical period that can be used to reflect on overarching issues. For example, a text that shows a period of peace followed by war may invite reflection on larger questions such as social justice, the nature of political power, individual responsibility, and even more philosophical matters such as the impermanence of the material world and whether or not there is a spiritual dimension to life. This would be done through the impact of changing settings and circumstances on characters' lives and attitudes.

How settings and contexts convey views and values

This activity begins your analysis of how settings are used to present a broader context for the text's treatment of views and values.

1   What is the text's main physical setting?

2   Which time period or periods are used?

3   What does the setting reveal about the social and cultural contexts of the characters?

4   How does the text invest these settings with negative or positive associations? Give examples.

Outdoor and indoor settings

The text can represent outdoor settings positively to suggest a love of freedom or appreciation of the natural world. This could also imply a rejection of the artificial or constraining qualities of 'society' and 'civilisation'.

Conversely, indoor settings could be positively depicted to convey family unity or a sense of safety and security. Or a character who prefers the indoors might find pleasure in the arts, such as music, painting and literature, reflecting their refined tastes and manners.

Compare outdoor and indoor settings

These questions alert you to the contrast between outdoor and indoor settings in a text, and how these can be linked with viewpoints and attitudes.

1   Is one type of setting represented more positively than the other in the text you are studying? What views and values are supported or challenged in this way?

2   Are certain attitudes and lifestyle choices associated with indoor or outdoor settings? Does the text ask us to approve or disapprove of these choices?

3   Does the text draw attention to the limitations, as well as the positive aspects, of the ideas associated with different settings? How does this lead to a more complex or ambiguous presentation of views and values?

City and country settings

Much literary fiction and poetry favours rural over urban settings, perhaps by idealising country lifestyles and romanticising rural landscapes. On the other hand, rural life can also be associated with ignorance, parochialism and a lack of sophistication, while cities can be represented as places of high culture, refined thinking, wit and openness to new ideas.

Compare city and country settings

These questions address the way in which the text contrasts urban and rural settings, in order to explore views and values associated with these different social and cultural contexts.

1   Are pastoral settings represented in a positive or a negative way in your text? What viewpoints are related to this representation of country life? Are they linked to particular sets of values?

2   Does the text present urban settings in a positive or negative way (for example, exciting/dynamic, or threatening/unattractive)? What views and values are associated with city lifestyles and environments? How does the text's representation of urban settings shape your response to these views and values?

In poverty you can get at the real heart of people as you can never do if rich.

Wealth and poverty

A writer might represent the wealthiest characters in a negative light, suggesting that virtue and happiness do not depend on – or, perhaps, are compromised by – financial success. On the other hand, an author such as Charles Dickens might idealise poverty through the depiction of innocence and goodness in characters who live in impoverished circumstances. Dickens also often attributes values such as honesty more readily to the poor than to the wealthy, who in turn are more frequently represented as deceptive and hypocritical.

Some texts present a more generous view of the wealthy, through characters who recognise that their affluence is a privilege that comes with responsibilities. This acceptance can lead them to act with care and compassion for members of their communities who have fewer material resources.

Compare representations of wealthy and impoverished groups

These questions address the way in which a text depicts wealth and poverty in a society, in order to explore views and values associated with these different social and cultural contexts.

1   Are wealthy characters represented in a positive or negative way in your text? What values are associated with characters who are obviously wealthy?

2   Are characters who are poor represented in a positive or negative way? What values are associated with these characters?

3   How does the text represent material possessions (including houses, household furnishings, clothes and accessories)? Are they presented as having an intrinsic value or beauty? Are they linked with admirable characters and attitudes that are otherwise endorsed by the text?

4   Does the text present a critique of materialism? If so, how? For example, does it emphasise the excessive, decadent nature of its characters' lifestyles through the lavish nature of their possessions?

5   Does the text take a pragmatic approach, suggesting that material comfort is not an end in itself but is nevertheless necessary for happiness (e.g. Jane Austen's novels)?

6   Is there a wide gap between rich and poor in the text? Is there an underlying ideological position that informs this representation? For example, the text could present the inequitable distribution of wealth as a social injustice that justifies rebellion or revolution.

Structure

The sequence of scenes and events in a narrative, and the way in which tension builds to a climax and resolution, significantly influence how we feel about the ideas and attitudes considered by the text. That is, narrative structure has an important role in positioning the reader to respond in certain ways and to endorse or reject the values aligned with the various characters.

For example, a scene that depicts a self-absorbed recluse could be followed by a shift backwards in time showing events in that character's past. These events may partially explain the reasons for the recluse's behaviour, making us much more sympathetic towards them. The resolution of narrative tension can then clinch the text's position on the surrounding issues. The ending of the narrative could, for instance, show that character being accepted by the community – conveying a positive view of people who can overcome the difficulties of their past – or, alternatively, portray the character's lonely death, presenting a view of society as alienating and indifferent to suffering.

Different narrative threads and sequences

Interlocking tensions and relationships between two or more stories or plot lines are played out through character interactions, plot developments, patterns of imagery and recurring situations. Thus a compare/contrast presentation of views and values can be achieved by the use of subplots and parallel stories.

The order in which events are narrated also encourages a comparison of scenes that can be placed next to one another in the narrative, even when the events may occur at quite different times in the world of the text. This careful arrangement and placement of scenes invites us to see a situation or character first from one viewpoint, and then from another – and our responses will change, and be shaped, as a result.

How narrative structure affects responses to views and values

This activity allows you to consider the role of narrative structure in a text's presentation of different viewpoints and values.

1   Is there a subplot or parallel story in your text that shows contrasting views and values, allowing the reader to make a comparison? Identify the views and values and explain how the comparison works to position your own response to these ideas and concerns.

2   How does the writer use these different narrative threads to explore positive and negative aspects of views and values? Do they make your sympathies and viewpoints more clear-cut? Or do they draw out the underlying complexities?

3   Are events narrated 'out of order'? How does this affect your attitudes towards and feelings about characters, and hence the views and values with which they are aligned?

I leave it to be settled by whomsoever it may concern,

Beginnings, climaxes and endings

The way in which a narrative begins, develops to a climax and then ends is crucial to its negotiation of contrasting viewpoints and attitudes.

- The **opening** of a text can establish and foreshadow its central views and values.

- The **climax** in dramatic tension brings the strengths or flaws in attitudes and behaviours to the fore – inviting the reader or audience to make a judgement about them before it is clear how the tension will be resolved. The climax can also 'test' characters' commitment to their viewpoints.

- The fate of characters in the text's **resolution** can indicate the text's stance on the views and values aligned with each character.

One way of thinking about the resolution is as the means by which a text 'punishes' or 'rewards' a character for their values and viewpoints.

- A character could be 'punished' (by being unhappy, losing love or dying) to convey the text's condemnation of their views and values, or to show that the views and values of those responsible for this 'punishment' are negative and harmful.

- A character could be 'rewarded' (with happiness or success) to reflect the text's endorsement of their views and values.

- A more complex version of the above scenario is when all characters can be seen to suffer loss; in this case the writer may be offering a critique of a society that lacks justice or compassion.

How beginnings, climaxes and endings present views and values

These questions lead you through three key points of the narrative to consider how the text establishes, tests and finally affirms or rejects views and values.

1 What views and values are immediately apparent in the opening scenes or section of your text?

2 What role does the text's climax play in bringing together conflicting forces (and the attitudes and beliefs they represent)?

3 How are characters' commitment to their beliefs tested in the climax?

4 Does the text you are studying 'punish' or 'reward' characters in the resolution? Give examples.

5 Is this effectively a judgement for or against the views and values the characters stand for? Or is it a statement about the nature of the society in which they live?

6 Do the characters in your text all experience some form of loss by the end of the narrative? If so, what is the effect of this?

How to write about views and values

This section shows how to move from the analysis of a text's views and values to writing about them. It is important not just to identify views and values, but also to take the next step and show whether they are *critiqued*, *endorsed*, *challenged* or *left unquestioned*.

Scan the code or click **here** for a sample views and values essay on the poetry of Christina Rossetti.

Critique

A text provides a critique of a view, value or belief by examining it critically.

- Various aspects are considered, positive as well as negative, although the negative aspects dominate.

- A critique can be wide-ranging in scope, e.g. a critique of the British colonisation of Australia, or a critique of materialism in modern societies.

Endorse

When a text takes a positive stance in relation to a view or value, it can be said to endorse that view or value.

- The qualities endorsed by the text will often be embodied in one or more characters who are represented sympathetically. In poetry, ideas endorsed by the poet are more likely to be associated with *images* that have positive associations.

- The qualities endorsed will usually be contrasted with views or values that have opposing effects. For example, the value of loyalty could be endorsed by showing the destructive consequences of betrayal, or the value of generosity could be illustrated through characters who are greedy and selfish.

! **The views and values endorsed by a text are not necessarily also endorsed by the society depicted in the text, or by the society in which the text is published – hence the controversial reception of many literary texts.**

Challenge

A text challenges views and values when it reveals their shortcomings and limitations: in other words, their negative impacts on people.

- The text could challenge the attitudes and beliefs of certain aberrant characters, or of society as a whole.

- Views and values can be challenged by a narrative in which their harmful effects become increasingly evident and conflict becomes more intense.

- Even when a text challenges views and values, it is likely to include a degree of complexity in its treatment of these ideas. It may, for example, show why a character takes up criminal activity by depicting their troubled childhood – thereby demonstrating compassion and understanding, but not actually legitimating such behaviour.

Leave unquestioned

No text can explicitly acknowledge and explore every point of view on all aspects of society and human behaviour. In other words, there will always be gaps, silences and omissions.

- Views and values can be left unquestioned when a character who might present a challenging point of view is marginalised or silent in the text.

- Leaving views and values unquestioned might be a reflection of the writer's bias – that is, not prejudice as such, but simply the characteristic attitudes and conventions of their own historical, social and cultural contexts.

- Identifying views and values that are left unquestioned can illuminate aspects of the text's construction; complicating details and alternative perspectives might be omitted in order to create a clear and more compelling narrative.

Views and values word bank

The word bank below contains many words that allow you to discuss the various positions that a text can take in its presentation of views and values. This enables you to develop a wide vocabulary that you can use with confidence and accuracy.

VIEWS AND VALUES WORD BANK

Words to indicate the writer is in favour of a view or value			
supports	endorses	legitimates	argues for
validates	condones	authorises	advocates
affirms	approves	upholds	sanctions

Sample sentence starters

'The text <u>validates</u> the protagonist's violent rebellion through its depiction of a bloody and oppressive regime …'

'The writer <u>affirms</u> the need for a balance between reason and emotion by showing the unhappy consequences of …'

Words to indicate the writer is opposed to a view or value			
challenges	critiques	condemns	exposes
questions	criticises	undermines	contests
queries	argues against	subverts	places pressure on

Sample sentence starters

'It is through the author's affectionate portraits of eccentric individuals that the text <u>undermines</u> social pressures to …'

'The narrative <u>critiques</u> the notion that society offers equal opportunity for all by showing …'

Words to indicate the writer is adopting a neutral position			
examines	explores	scrutinises	investigates
contemplates	surveys	considers	reflects on

Sample sentence starters

'The playwright resists making firm judgements; rather, she <u>explores</u> the many complexities and nuances of the issue …'

'In a sustained meditation on the nature of grace, the novelist <u>contemplates</u> the most ordinary moments of life …'

Expand your own word bank

In this activity you will practise using vocabulary from the word bank on the previous page in relation to a text you are studying. This will increase your familiarity with a wider range of terms and with the type of writing needed for analytical work on views and values. Use the sample sentence starters in the word bank as a model for your own writing.

1 Choose four words from each of the three categories in the word bank. Check in a dictionary if you are unsure of a word's precise meaning.

2 Use each of these words in a sentence about the text you are studying (twelve sentences in all). Refer to different features of the text (characters, setting, structure, narrative voice etc.) as much as possible.

Sarah Gadon as Grace Marks in the Netflix television adaptation of *Alias Grace*. Both the novel and its adaptation show in detail the social and cultural contexts that shape Grace's life; they also, through Grace's experiences and her narrative viewpoint, subtly place pressure on many of the attitudes and conventions she encounters.
Pictorial Press Ltd / Alamy Stock Photo

LITERARY MOVEMENTS AND GENRES

Literary texts never exist in isolation. As Chapter 3 shows, texts are products of historical, social and cultural contexts; the ideas, views and values they present reflect those of the societies in which they are produced. In addition, texts usually fit into a particular literary movement and a particular genre; they share features and conventions with a group of other texts, and authors make use of existing forms and contemporary ideas about the nature and scope of literature.

Of course, rules are made to be broken, and the history of literature is also a history of testing boundaries, defying conventions and breaking the mould. Placing a literary work in the context of a movement or genre reveals both the degree to which it conforms to existing patterns, and the extent to which its creator has shaped something new and original.

Strategies for studying literary movements and genres

This chapter outlines some of the central concepts for the study of a literary movement or genre. Unlike some of your other textual studies – which focus on the individual text, while genre and context are in the background – in this area of study the literary movement or genre is at the centre of the analysis. You will gain a strong understanding of the features and conventions of a movement or genre, and then locate your texts within that tradition.

To demonstrate possible approaches to the study of a literary movement or genre, this chapter includes four case studies. Two are of movements (Romanticism and modernism) and two are of genres (the bildungsroman and science fiction).

KEY KNOWLEDGE / KEY SKILLS	What you need to know	What you need to be able to do
	› The conventions of a movement or genre, including language, settings, narrative structures and characterisation.	› Explore the use of conventions in one complete text and samples of other texts that are typical of a movement or genre.
	› How the conventions of a movement or genre contribute to meaning.	› Comment on how the conventions of a movement or genre contribute to meaning.
	› The ideas and concerns embedded in texts that are typical of a movement or genre.	› Analyse and reflect on ideas and concerns raised by texts that are typical of a movement or genre.

Essential terms for movements and genres

Movement

A literary movement is formed when authors at a particular time share an approach to literature and a set of values and ideals, particularly those related to aesthetics (the idea of beauty). Often these writers are reacting to the literature of the preceding period, as they seek to 'make it new'. A movement usually begins at a local level but often spreads to become national or international. Some movements have a manifesto in which a writer or group of writers will set out the aims and ideology of the movement.

Genre

A genre is a group of texts that share a set of conventions and features. These can relate to language and stylistic features (e.g. the tough, unsentimental style of hardboiled detective fiction) and/or to subject matter (e.g. crime fiction centres on a crime). Genres evolve with time but their essential conventions persist, creating a continuous tradition that can span hundreds of years.

Convention

A convention is an established, accepted way in which language, settings, characterisation, structure and other textual elements are used to create a text. Some conventions are straightforward, such as the use of quotation marks to indicate dialogue; others are more abstract and can be specific to a literary movement or genre. For instance, typical conventions of a Western include a 'Wild West' setting, conflict between a sheriff and one or more outlaws, and an ending that restores law and order through physical violence. A convention of romance fiction is that the lovers overcome obstacles and the narrative ends happily.

The conventions of a movement or genre set up audience expectations; the text's creator can choose to meet those expectations, partly meet them or even subvert them. An author can also challenge the meanings and ideologies embedded in a genre, by manipulating or rejecting particular conventions.

Hybrid

A hybrid genre is a fusion of two or more existing genres. Features and conventions from each genre are combined to create new forms. For instance, a dystopian narrative might use elements of the science-fiction genre (such as advanced surveillance technologies); a science-fiction narrative might use elements of the Western (frontier violence, an outlaw or rebel and a law-enforcer who attempts to achieve peace and justice).

Vocabulary for discussing texts in relation to genres and movements

When you are discussing and analysing a text in relation to the movement or genre it belongs to, you can use the following terms to locate it within that movement or genre, and to compare it with other texts.

Conforms	Uses existing conventions without changing or challenging them.
Extends	Uses existing conventions but creates new possibilities.
Contests	Questions existing conventions by exposing flaws, biases or omissions.
Resists	Avoids using particular conventions.
Subverts	Undermines existing conventions by creating new conventions with the opposite effect or meaning.

Features and examples of literary movements

Movements in literature are created by individuals, but they are also products of historical, social and cultural contexts. In other words, they are historically specific. Because they are 'of a time', movements in the arts tend to permeate multiple art forms, so literary movements often have parallels in other fields, such as painting and music. These art forms can influence one another, with developments or innovations in one triggering creative responses elsewhere. Movements are heavily influenced by events in the wider society, such as political and social change, war, scientific discoveries and technological developments, all of which can be represented or commented on in works of art. Literary movements reflect their time, and in turn have an influence on society, helping to shape opinions and attitudes.

Some examples of literary movements are:

- Elizabethan literature (poetry and drama)
- Jacobean drama
- realism
- Romanticism
- modernism
- postmodernism.

Case study 1: Romanticism

While the 18th century is known as the Age of Enlightenment – a time when reason and science were embraced as the way to achieve knowledge and a better life – towards the end of the century passions and rebellions came to the fore. The French Revolution, which began in 1789, led to the overthrow of the monarchy and introduced democratic ideals. Lasting roughly from 1790 until 1830, the Romantic movement in the arts placed more value on feeling than on reason. Industrialisation and the demand for factory labour in the cities led to a gradual loss of population and traditional ways of life in rural areas, which the Romantics saw as leading to a loss of meaning and community. The value of liberty had been an important element of the Enlightenment, but perhaps more as an ideal than as a reality for the majority of the population. The Romantics, consistent with the aims of the French Revolution, placed more emphasis on the liberty of ordinary people than on the rights of the aristocracy.

Turner's *Snow Storm: Hannibal and his Army Crossing the Alps* (1812) shows natural forces dominating humanity.
The Yorck Project / Wikimedia Commons

The Romantic movement influenced all the arts. Landscape painters such as John Constable, William Turner and Eugène Delacroix went beyond realistic depictions of nature to express powerful feelings in their work. In music, the 18th-century restraint and elegance of Beethoven's early works gave way in the 19th century to the passionate music of his later symphonies, sonatas and string quartets.

In literature, the Romantic movement was most evident in poetry. The publication of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 is often taken to mark the beginning of English Romantic literature. (The second edition in 1800 included a preface in which Wordsworth outlined some of the views and values central to his poetry.) Other important Romantic poets include John Keats, Lord Byron and Percy Shelley.

Romantic ideals were not always as evident in the fiction of the day. Jane Austen's novels were published at this time but they show few of the traits of Romanticism. Austen's rare depictions of nature tend to be of highly cultivated landscapes, such as the grounds of Pemberley in *Pride and Prejudice*. Gothic fiction also developed during this period and shared some features with Romantic poetry: ruined buildings, supernatural elements, claustrophobic settings, and an overall feeling of the past haunting the present. Whereas the Romantic movement is historically specific, Gothic fiction became a genre that continued to evolve over time.

Features of Romanticism

Romantic literature places feeling at the centre of human existence. Some other typical features include the following.

- Nature is regarded as a source of beauty and power; it is often presented as a greater force than human endeavours and more lasting than built environments or structures. For example, Percy Shelley's poem 'Ozymandias' (1818) describes a giant statue of a ruler, which lies ruined in the desert, with the inscription, 'Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair':

> Round the decay
> Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
> The lone and level sands stretch far away.

- Representations of nature often invoke the concept of the sublime, in which perceptions of nature generate overwhelming emotions, including fear, terror and awe. The sublime conveys the seeming insignificance of humanity in the face of the immensity and grandeur of nature. Shelley's poem 'Mont Blanc' provides an example of these perceptions, and the self-reflection they inspire:

> Thus thou, Ravine of Arve – dark, deep Ravine –
> Thou many-colour'd, many-voiced vale,
> Over whose pines, and crags, and caverns sail
> Fast cloud-shadows and sunbeams: awful scene,
> Where Power in likeness of the Arve comes down
> From the ice-gulfs that gird his secret throne
>
> […]
>
> Dizzy Ravine! and when I gaze on thee
> I seem as in a trance sublime and strange
> To muse on my own separate fantasy,
> My own, my human mind …

- Romantic literature reacted against the ideals of reason and scientific knowledge, sometimes questioning the very idea of 'progress', especially in relation to science and technology. The Creature in Mary Shelley's novel *Frankenstein* is the product of scientific discoveries, the latest technology and Frankenstein's unfettered pursuit of knowledge, but the results are catastrophic as the Creature destroys its creator's family and any possibility of happiness.

- The Romantics saw childhood as a precious state of innocence and of uncorrupted perception. Wordsworth captured this ideal state of childhood purity in 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality':

> And not in utter nakedness,
> But trailing clouds of glory do we come
> From God, who is our home:
> Heaven lies about us in our infancy!

‘ For all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings … ’

Wordsworth,
Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*,
2nd edn

- Industrialisation and urbanisation were regarded as destructive forces. In Blake's poem 'The Chimney Sweeper' (from *Songs of Experience*) the subject is a victim of child labour, forced to give up a life of freedom 'upon the heath' to clean chimneys in 'clothes of death':

> A little black thing among the snow:
> Crying weep, weep, in notes of woe!
> Where are thy father & mother? say?
> They are both gone up to the church
>   to pray.
>
> Because I was happy upon the heath,
> And smil'd among the winters snow:
> They clothed me in the clothes of death,
> And taught me to sing the notes of woe.

Blake's 'The Chimney Sweeper'. Google Art Project / Wikimedia Commons

Examples of Romantic poetry

The following table lists some examples of influential Romantic poetry and the years of first publication.

Poet	Examples
William Blake	*Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (1794)
	The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (1790–93)
William Wordsworth	'Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey' (1798)
	'The Ruined Cottage' (1800)
	'I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud' (1807)
	'Ode: Intimations of Immortality' (1807)
	The Prelude (1850) (A long poem that Wordsworth worked on for much of his life, published in its final version in fourteen books shortly after his death.)
Samuel Taylor Coleridge	'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' (1798)
	'Kubla Khan' (1816)
Walter Scott	*Marmion* (1808)
Percy Bysshe Shelley	'Mont Blanc' (1816)
	'Ozymandias' (1818)
Lord Byron (George Gordon Byron)	'The Destruction of Sennacherib' (1815)
	Don Juan (1819–24) (An epic narrative poem, published in sixteen cantos or sections, with the seventeenth canto unfinished at the time of Byron's death, around 16 000 lines in total.)
John Keats	'Bright Star' (1819)
	'Ode on a Grecian Urn' (1819)
	'To Autumn' (1819)

Case study 2: modernism

The modernist movement in the arts occurred roughly between 1890 and 1930. It was an aesthetic movement influenced by innovators in other fields, such as philosophy (e.g. Friedrich Nietzsche) and psychology (e.g. Sigmund Freud). In physics, Albert Einstein's theory of relativity showed that there can be no truly objective observers, while Werner Heisenberg's uncertainty principle showed there were fundamental limits to how precisely we can measure the universe. World events, especially WWI, disrupted traditions and called longstanding beliefs and assumptions into question.

Modernism shaped a number of art forms in the early 20th century, including the visual arts and music, in addition to literature. It had several sub-movements, some of which had manifestos outlining their goals and ideals.

Pablo Picasso's painting *Three Women* (1921) is an example of cubism, part of the modernist movement in the visual arts. The Yorck Project / Wikimedia Commons

- The **imagist** movement in poetry focused on creating a clear image or images, along with economical language.

- **Dadaism, a movement in literature and the visual arts,** used random processes and combined elements from different sources to create unexpected effects and perspectives.

- **Surrealism** was influenced by dadaism and also involved unexpected, even jarring combinations of words and images. The analysis of dreams by Freud led to the idea that psychological truths are often repressed, but can be revealed in dreams. Surrealists created a dreamlike sense of unreality in order to reveal a deeper psychological reality. The rejection of reason and the embrace of 'unreality' in order to reveal deeper truths is integral to much modernist art and thought.

Features of modernism

As writers responded to a rapidly changing world, they sought new forms and news ways of using language to express ideas and perceptions. In novels, the *stream of consciousness* technique enabled authors to portray the flow of thoughts through a character's mind, as opposed to representing an objective reality. Some other typical features of modernist literature include the following.

- Writers broke down traditional structures and forms. For example, they might omit some conventional elements of narrative structure such as a climax and resolution, use sentence fragments or extremely long sentences, or discard punctuation. Many of Katherine Mansfield's short stories lack a clear resolution, for instance; and James Joyce used a dash at the beginning of a paragraph to show dialogue, omitting quotation marks.

- Unreliable narrators and/or multiple narrative perspectives were used to explore the subjective nature of experience. F Scott Fitzgerald's Nick Carraway is an unreliable narrator in *The Great Gatsby*, while Virginia Woolf's narrative perspective constantly shifts in novels such as *To the Lighthouse* and *The Waves*.

- Writers subverted conventions to lead audiences to think about issues and ideas in new ways. For example, characters are searching for the author who created them in Luigi Pirandello's play, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*.

- Elements of non-Western traditions were used to create new forms of expression and to question existing ideas in Western literature. For example, imagist poetry was influenced by Japanese poetry, while TS Eliot alluded to Hindu and Buddhist traditions in *The Waste Land*.

- Some writers looked to past works to re-shape Western traditions. For example, in *Ulysses*, James Joyce drew on the epic form of Homer's narrative poem *The Odyssey* but condensed the mythic scope of Ulysses' ten-year journey home from the Trojan War down to a single ordinary day in Dublin, 16 June 1904.

> 'History is a nightmare from which I am trying to awake.'
>
> *Ulysses*

Examples of modernist texts

The following table lists some influential examples of modernist works.

Form	Examples
Novels	Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (1899)
	Henry James, *The Golden Bowl* (1904)
	James Joyce, *Ulysses* (1922)
	Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (1925)
	F Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (1925)
	Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood* (1936)
Short stories	James Joyce, 'The Dead' (1914)
	Katherine Mansfield, 'Bliss' (1918), 'The Garden Party' (1922)
Plays	George Bernard Shaw, *Heartbreak House* (1917)
	Luigi Pirandello, *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921)
	Bertolt Brecht, *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1939)
Poetry	Marianne Moore, 'Poetry' (1919)
	TS Eliot, 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' (1915), *The Waste Land* (1922)
	WH Auden, 'Musée des Beaux Arts' (1938)

Explore a literary movement

If you are studying a literary movement, apply these questions to that movement. (If you are studying a literary genre, see page 151 for a similar activity.)

1   When did this literary movement occur?

2   In which country or countries did writers make important contributions to this movement?

3   What were some important influences on this movement? These could include scientific discoveries, advances in other fields, world events and social changes.

4   In which other art forms was this movement important?

5   How did the movement follow on from, and/or react against, the works of the preceding period?

6   List five key features of the movement. Find a textual example for each feature.

7   Create a list of the most important or typical literary works of this movement. (If you are studying the Romantic or modernist movement, find examples to add to the list in this chapter.)

8   Research some examples in other art forms and view or listen to them. What connections do they have with literary works that belong to this movement? How do they differ?

9   Describe how some examples of literature from later periods were influenced by this movement.

Features and examples of literary genres

Unlike literary movements, which tend to be replaced by new movements over time, genres can endure and evolve in response to changing social and cultural contexts. A genre's conventions can also be challenged and changed by creators who seek to stretch boundaries or question underlying assumptions. For example, traditionally a common feature of science fiction has been a heroic quest or voyage of discovery, but underpinning this are assumptions of the hero's entitlement and superiority that we might now question as an attempt to justify violence and dispossession. Contemporary science fiction usually shows an awareness of this, and positions audiences to question the motives of those who seek to invade or exploit others' territories. By being flexible and adapting to changing contexts, while retaining their defining features, many genres have traditions that have lasted hundreds of years.

Examples of genres include:

- detective fiction / murder mystery
- dystopian fiction
- Gothic fiction
- fantasy / speculative fiction
- magic realism
- true crime
- romance
- science fiction
- the bildungsroman
- young adult fiction.

Case study 1: the bildungsroman

The bildungsroman is a coming-of-age novel; the term comes from two German words, *bildung* meaning education or formation, and *roman* meaning novel. The genre is generally regarded as beginning in Germany with Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1795–96), and was taken up in English literature by novelists such as Charlotte Brontë (*Jane Eyre*, 1847) and Charles Dickens (*Great Expectations*, 1860–1).

In a bildungsroman the protagonist undergoes a development from innocence to experience, from youthful idealism to a more realistic, mature understanding of the world. Some novels follow the protagonist over a number of years, showing their progress from adolescence into early adulthood (an example is James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, 1916), while others, such as JD Salinger's 1951 novel *The Catcher in the Rye*, might only depict the course of a few life-changing days.

If the traditional pattern of development leads to a young man taking his place in the world, billdungsromans with female protagonists tend to question the social and cultural conventions that historically have made it difficult for women to do the same: *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Little Women* (1868–9) are classic examples.

Saoirse Ronan as Jo in *Little Women* (2019), directed by Greta Gerwig. Columbia Pictures / Album / Alamy Stock Photo

Defining characteristics and conventions

The following are some common features and conventions of the bildungsroman.

- The protagonist undertakes a journey, often a physical one which reflects and contributes to the psychological journey.

- There is a conflict between the individual and society; the youthful protagonist rebels against social expectations and conventions. The conflict may be resolved when the protagonist recognises the need to accept society's values, or there may be no resolution.

- Generational conflict can occur when parents or parental figures clash with the protagonist. If the novel focuses on the protagonist's education, the conflict may be with one or more teachers.

- Trials and temptations face the protagonist, forcing them to evaluate their priorities and develop new strengths or abilities. In some novels the protagonist becomes a writer after facing challenges and obstacles.

- The protagonist's view and understanding of their own identity evolves over the course of the narrative. Their identity can change, or they can gain a stronger sense of who they truly are.

> ❛ I am no bird; and no net ensnares me; I am a free human being, with an independent will, which I now exert to leave you. ❜
>
> *Jane Eyre*

Key texts and authors

The following is a list of examples of the bildungsroman genre. These were all originally written in English. Many films follow the bildungsroman's narrative trajectory, and there are excellent film versions of several of these novels.

Author	Novel
Charlotte Brontë	*Jane Eyre* (1847)
Charles Dickens	*Great Expectations* (1860–1)
Louisa May Alcott	*Little Women* (1868–9)
Mark Twain	*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884)
Miles Franklin	*My Brilliant Career* (1901)
James Joyce	*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916)
JD Salinger	*The Catcher in the Rye* (1951)
Harper Lee	*To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960)
Mudrooroo	*Wild Cat Falling* (1965)
SE Hinton	*The Outsiders* (1967)
Stephen King	*The Body* (1982)
Jeanette Winterson	*Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit* (1985)
Craig Silvey	*Jasper Jones* (2009)

Case study 2: science fiction

Science fiction is a genre in which a writer explores possible future worlds, with or without technological developments such as space travel or advanced AI (artificial intelligence). Although the technology itself is often a source of interest and even wonder, it is the human response to this technology that lies at the heart of the best science fiction.

The novel *Somnium* written in 1608 by German mathematician Johannes Kepler is one of the first works of science fiction; it describes a journey to the moon. In the 19th century, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) describes the creation of a living being using body parts taken from corpses. Developments in the science of electricity as well as contemporary research into the effects of electrical currents on the nervous system of animals formed part of Shelley's inspiration for the novel, and Victor Frankenstein is a model for many future versions of the scientist whose passion for knowledge and discovery leads to lasting regret. French novelist Jules Verne also drew on the science of his time to construct futuristic narratives, including *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (1864) and *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (1870), about the voyage of a battery-powered underwater ship based on an early version of the submarine.

In the early 20th century the most important writer in this genre was HG Wells, who depicted time travel, aliens and space travel in novels such as *The Time Machine* (1895) and *War of the Worlds* (1898) – elements that would become staples of science fiction. Like many science-fiction writers, Wells combined an interest in the social implications of new technologies with commentary on issues in his own society. Wells' interest in socialist ideas and his opposition to the class system were reflected, for instance, in *The Time Machine*, in which the two distinct species are extrapolations of the upper and lower classes of Victorian England. In the 1960s and 1970s, Ursula K Le Guin placed more emphasis on the 'soft' sciences of biology and anthropology, and added feminist elements to what had been a male-dominated genre.

> ❛I've seen things you people wouldn't believe. Attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion. I watched C-beams glitter in the dark near the Tannhauser gate. All those moments will be lost in time …❜
>
> *Blade Runner*

Science fiction is a flexible genre and creators have taken it in multiple directions. Some texts emphasise scientific and technological elements (also known as 'hard science fiction') while others place more emphasis on social aspects. There are many subgenres, including cyberpunk, steampunk and feminist science fiction; and elements typical of science fiction often also appear in fantasy and dystopian fiction.

Defining characteristics and conventions

The following are some common features and conventions of science fiction.

- Futuristic settings allow for the exploration of future developments in technology. Additionally, futuristic settings enable authors to extrapolate current trends and portray the likely consequences. A classic example is the depiction of perpetual acid rain and oppressive living conditions in *Blade Runner* (directed by Ridley Scott).

- New technologies that could possibly be developed, based on current scientific knowledge, are invented and described. For example, Isaac Asimov invented the 'positronic brain' as the basis for his robots and their advanced, humanlike intelligence. Other commonly featured advanced technologies include:

  → space travel (especially travel at speeds close to or faster than the speed of light)

  → time travel

  → genetic engineering, enabling the creation of clones or human-machine hybrids (often known as cyborgs, replicants or androids).

- Extraterrestrial life forms can be encountered by humans either when aliens visit earth, or when humans travel into space. They are often represented as threatening or at least as 'the Other', enabling writers to explore ideas such as colonisation and identity.

- Other worlds offer alternative landscapes, sometimes portraying an extreme version of conditions on earth. The severe cold on the planet Geth in Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* contributes to the sense of danger and mystery, as well as the planet's isolation from an interplanetary community.

- Advanced artificial intelligence, particularly in robots, androids and computers, can lead to questions about the nature of humanity.

As well as describing these features, science fiction typically explores the social and personal challenges they evoke. The setting might be far into the future and/or many light years away, but this is typically a mechanism for reflecting on aspects of humanity in the here and now.

The *Star Wars* film series combines several elements of classic science fiction narratives, including advanced technologies and space travel. Moviestore Collection Ltd / Alamy Stock Photo

Key texts and authors

The following is a list of some key texts in the science-fiction genre. Many of the novels and short stories have also been adapted for film or television.

Form	Examples
Novels	Isaac Asimov, *Foundation* series (1951–53)
	Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451* (1953)
	Frank Herbert, *Dune* (1965)
	Philip K Dick, *Do Androids Dreams of Electric Sheep?* (1968)
	Ursula K Le Guin, *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969)
	William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (1984)
	Orson Scott Card, *Ender's Game* (1985)
	Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake* (2003)
Short stories	Isaac Asimov, *I Robot* (1950)
	Philip K Dick, 'Imposter' (1953), 'The Minority Report' (1956)
	Ursula K Le Guin, *The Wind's Twelve Quarters* (1975)
Film	*Metropolis*, dir. Fritz Lang (1927)
	2001: A Space Odyssey, dir. Stanley Kubrick (1968)
	Star Wars series (1977–2019)
	Blade Runner, dir. Ridley Scott (1982)
TV series	*Doctor Who* (1963–)
	Star Trek (1966–)
	Foundation (2021–)

Explore a literary genre

If you are studying a literary genre, apply these questions to that genre.

1   What are the origins of the genre? When and where were the first works published and what were they about?

2   What were some of the significant influences on this genre? These could include scientific discoveries, world events and social changes.

3   List five key conventions of the genre. Find a textual example of each.

4   Create a list of important or typical works of this genre. (If you are studying the bildungsroman or science fiction, find examples to add to the list in this chapter.)

5   How have aspects of this genre changed over time? How has it evolved in response to changing social and cultural contexts?

6   Select three texts that belong to this genre. If possible, select texts in different forms (poetry, novel etc.). What are the similarities between them? How do they differ?

VOICES OF COUNTRY

For much of the 19th and 20th centuries, there were few published or performed works by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors and creators. Since the 1960s, though, the number and variety of texts have increased exponentially and works by First Nations* creators now include all the main literary forms: novels, short stories, memoirs, poetry and plays. Recent years have seen a number of prize-winning publications, including Tara June Winch's novel *The Yield* (winning the Miles Franklin Award in 2020) and Evelyn Araluen's poetry collection *Dropbear* (winning the Stella Prize in 2022).

This chapter contains an overview of some of the key literary texts by First Nations creators. It is always important to consider the context in which a text is published, but with texts by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander creators the historical, social and cultural contexts are particularly significant. Key events have helped to shape and change attitudes as well as laws; they include, among many important events, the Cummeragunja and Wave Hill walk-offs (in 1939 and 1966 respectively), the Aboriginal Tent Embassy (established in 1972) opposite Parliament House in Canberra, official reports such as *Bringing Them Home*, the Royal Commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody (appointed in 1987) and the National Apology to the Stolen Generations (delivered by then prime minister Kevin Rudd in 2008).

Australia's bicentenary in 1988 – marking 200 years since the arrival of the First Fleet – became a trigger for First Nations resistance and protest. (This was not the first such protest, however; the First Day of Mourning on 26 January 1938 was a protest on the 150th anniversary of the First Fleet's arrival.) The acclaimed poet Kath Walker changed her name to Oodgeroo Noonuccal in 1987, and in Sydney on 26 January 1988, 40 000 people marched in protest and to advocate for land rights. Since then, the term 'Invasion Day' has become more widely used as an alternative to 'Australia Day' and the idea of celebrating a national day on 26 January, the date of the First Fleet's arrival at Sydney Cove, continues to be debated.

There are strong elements of protest and testimony in texts by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander creators, and literary texts should be seen alongside other significant texts such as speeches, essays, songs and petitions, in which the political purpose is often more overt. For further reading, the *Macquarie Pen Anthology of Aboriginal Literature* (2008), edited by Anita Heiss and Peter Minter, is an invaluable starting point.

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*We acknowledge that all terms used to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have limitations, but we have chosen to use First Nations and do so with respect.

What you need to know	What you need to be able to do
› The significance and interconnectedness of place, culture and identity in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander texts.	› Engage with and explore Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, knowledge and storytelling.
› Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander concepts of storytelling, text and language.	› Investigate and research the voices and stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
› The impact of colonisation on and the place of reconciliation in literary representations of and by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.	› Reflect on literary representations of and by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
› Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experiences of colonisation and its ongoing consequences, and issues of reconciliation and reclamation as represented in a text.	› Comment on and understand assumptions and representations in a text(s) that comes from a colonial viewpoint.

KEY KNOWLEDGE / KEY SKILLS

Essential terms

Country

The term 'Country', with a capital C, refers to the unique relationship Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have with their land. It does not entail ownership in the Western, legalistic sense. It does involve a reciprocal relationship, whereby people have a responsibility to care for the land which in turn cares for the people by providing access to all the necessities of life. A connection to Country gives a sense of belonging to place as well as to community. Songs and ceremonies are also part of this relationship.

Colonisation

From the 1400s, several European countries sent ships to remote lands, where they proceeded to take possession of the land, create towns and cities, and exert control over the local population. In Australia the land was regarded as largely uninhabited, or terra nullius (see page 154), and large-scale migration from England, Scotland and Ireland created the colonies. The colonisers' use of firearms and poisons, introduced diseases (especially smallpox), the forced removal of people from their land and the removal of children from their families had a devastating impact on First Nations people. Nevertheless, there was widespread resistance in the form of the Frontier Wars, which began shortly after the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788 and extended well into the 20th century.

Colonisation has impacted on the health, wellbeing and standard of living of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in ways that are systemic and ongoing; racism and prejudice also remain present in Australian society. Some or all of these concerns – the persistent legacy of colonisation – feature in virtually all First Nations Australian literature.

Storytelling

Oral narratives are central to the cultures and identities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. They are closely connected to Country, and combine creation stories with the concept of relationality where all things are connected. This includes individuals' relationships with self, family, community, language, culture, ceremony, Country, and the living and non-living world. They often articulate a code of morality or ethics: in other words, a way of life. These stories have been passed down from generation to generation, sharing, preserving and growing knowledge of the land and its plants and animals as well as cultural understandings as part of the oldest continuous cultures in the world.

Language

The word 'Language', with a capital L, means any of the First Nations languages spoken by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) website states that there are over 250 First Nations languages and around 800 dialects. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, Language, culture and Country are closely connected. Australian Government policies for much of the 20th century prohibited Aboriginal people from speaking their own language, as part of an attempt to eliminate Aboriginal culture and assimilate Aboriginal people into mainstream white society. By the end of the 20th century, the land rights movement (dating from the 1960s) and new government policies under prime minister Gough Whitlam in the 1970s encouraged greater self-determination, and First Nations languages were being revived.

Native title and terra nullius

The phrase 'terra nullius' means 'land of no one', or uninhabited land belonging to no state. This concept underpinned the colonisation of Australia, since the land was acknowledged as being occupied, but not subject to any recognised sovereign power (monarch or government). As such, with the declaration of terra nullius, the British Empire was able to claim possession of the land. The failure to recognise the sovereign powers over the land was also one of the many reasons why no treaties were negotiated between First Nations peoples and the colonisers. This view of the land as unoccupied was officially rejected by the High Court of Australia in its 1992 Mabo decision, which recognised that the Australian continent and islands were subject to First Nations sovereignties and therefore the declaration of terra nullius was legally incorrect. The outcome was that First Nations peoples had ongoing rights to land and water, as the sovereign peoples of the relevant Countries. These native title rights were legally recognised in the *Native Title Act 1993*.

Reconciliation

The reconciliation movement in Australia has gathered pace and become more clearly defined in the last two decades. Its aims include acknowledging the reality of Australia's history, addressing inequality, racism and discrimination in Australian society, and strengthening relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. Recently, Acknowledgements of Country and Welcomes to Country have become embedded in many aspects of Australian society, from email signatures to major sporting, cultural and political events. At the time of writing, governments around Australia are exploring options for treaties and a permanent Voice to Parliament, signs of the continuing work towards reconciliation.

Overview of authors and texts

This section provides a survey of texts created by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers, directors and performers. It is far from comprehensive, but aims to give some historical context and to show something of the variety and richness of this tradition.

> ❛Australians want to know the truth of their history. There is a renaissance of truth telling in Australia right now. ❜
>
> Tara June Winch

Novels and short stories

Until relatively recently, there were few published novels by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors. Important black novelists in the 1960s through to the 1980s included Mudrooroo (originally published in 1965 as Colin Johnson) and Archie Weller, whose works provided anti-colonial perspectives, presented narratives of resistance to white authority and exposed histories of racism and oppression. The novels of these writers were essential to the development of a postcolonial literature in Australia, but it is important to note that neither are regarded as having First Nations ancestry.

Alexis Wright emerged as an important novelist with *Plains of Promise* in 1997, and Wright and Kim Scott receiving the Miles Franklin Award in the early 2000s gave Aboriginal fiction a prominence that matched the achievements of writers in the life writing, poetry and drama genres (see below).

The following table lists some influential novels and short-story collections by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors. It includes some important earlier examples as well as more recent texts.

Authors	Novels and short-story collections
Eric Willmot	· *Pemulway: The Rainbow Warrior* (1987)
Sam Watson	· *The Kadaitcha Sung* (1990)
Alexis Wright	· *Plains of Promise* (1997), *Carpentaria* (2006)
Melissa Lucashenko	· *Steam Pigs* (1997), *Too Much Lip* (2018)
Tony Birch	· *Father's Day* (short stories, 2009), *The White Girl* (2019)
Kim Scott	· *That Deadman Dance* (2010)
Anita Heiss	· *Tiddas* (2014)
Claire G Coleman	· *Terra Nullius* (2017)
Tara June Winch	· *The Yield* (2019)
Leah Purcell	· *The Drover's Wife: The Legend of Molly Johnson* (2019; also a play and film)
Julie Janson	*Benevolence* (2020)

Drama

Aboriginal and Torres Strait playwrights established themselves from the 1970s, and plays such as *The Cherry Picker* and *No Sugar* made First Nations theatre integral to Australian drama. Playwrights were able to translate First Nations storytelling and performance traditions into Western theatre, often with a strong political slant.

The following table lists some influential plays by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors. Years given are for first performances rather than their publication in print form.

Playwrights	Plays
Kevin Gilbert	*The Cherry Pickers* (1971)
Jack Davis	*Kullark* (1979), *No Sugar* (1985)
Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman	*The 7 Stages of Grieving* (1995)
Leah Purcell and Scott Rankin	*Box the Pony* (1997)
Jane Harrison	*Stolen* (1998), *Rainbow's End* (2005)
Meyne Wyatt	*City of Gold* (2019)

Poetry

The publication of Oodgeroo Noonuccal's *We Are Going* in 1964 placed her at the forefront of Australian poetry, and she remained an important poet as well as a mentor to younger poets in the following decades. Oodgeroo's storytelling abilities enabled her to combine politics and poetry in a way that reached a wide audience, and these qualities are also evident today in the work of younger poets such as Evelyn Araluen and Ellen van Neerven.

The following table lists some influential poetry collections by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander poets.

> ❝I never wrote poetry until I started learning my grandfather's language about six years ago. Something in my brain clicked and suddenly the grammatical and linguistic possibilities of the written word were completely blown open.❞
>
> Evelyn Araluen

Poets	Collections
Oodgeroo Noonuccal	*We Are Going* (1964)
Kevin Gilbert (editor)	*Inside Black Australia* (anthology, 1988)
Lionel Fogarty	*New and Selected Poems: Munaldjali, Mutuerjaraera* (1995)
Lisa Bellear	*Dreaming in Urban Areas* (1996)
Samuel Wagan Watson	*Smoke Encrypted Whispers* (2004)
Anita Heiss	*I'm Not Racist, But …* (2007)
Alison Whittaker	*Lemons in the Chicken Wire* (2016)
Alison Whittaker (editor)	*Fire Front: First Nations Poetry and Power Today* (2020)
Ellen van Neerven	*Throat* (2020)
Evelyn Araluen	*Dropbear* (2021)

Life writing

Sally Morgan's 1987 memoir *My Place* was one of the first works by an Aboriginal writer to reach a large mainstream readership in Australia. It established life writing as an important way in which Aboriginal authors could convey the truth about their and their families' experiences and the impact of various government policies, particularly the practice of removing children from families and the policy of assimilation. First Nations life writing has been a crucial form of testimony.

The following table lists some examples of influential life writing by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors.

Authors	Texts
Sally Morgan	*My Place* (1987)
Ruby Langford Ginibi	*Don't Take Your Love to Town* (1988)
Doris Pilkington	*Follow the Rabbit-Proof Fence* (1996)
Alexis Wright	*Tracker* (2017)
Anita Heiss (editor)	*Growing Up Aboriginal in Australia* (anthology, 2018)
Kerry Reed-Gilbert	*The Cherry-Picker's Daughter* (2019)

Film

In the last few decades, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander directors, screenwriters and actors have created a number of widely acclaimed and popular films. The television series *Redfern Now* (from 2012) and *Cleverman* (from 2016) have also presented First Nations perspectives and stories to a mainstream audience, with a greater emphasis on urban settings and concerns.

> I wanted to make a film which didn't show Aboriginal women as victims, for once, and stylistically I was trying to get away from the realist representation of Aboriginal people.
>
> Tracey Moffatt

The following table lists some influential works by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander filmmakers. For reasons of space, the list mainly comprises films with a First Nations director and at least one leading role being played by a First Nations actor.

Directors	Films
Tracey Moffatt	*beDevil* (1993)
Rachel Perkins	*Radiance* (1998), *Bran Nue Dae* (2010), *Mabo* (TV film, 2012)
Leah Purcell	*Black Chicks Talking* (documentary, 2001), *The Drover's Wife* (2021)
Ivan Sen	*Beneath Clouds* (2002), *Mystery Road* (2013), *Goldstone* (2016)
Beck Cole and Rachel Perkins	*First Australians* (TV documentary series, 2008)
Warwick Thornton	*Samson and Delilah* (2009), *Sweet Country* (2017)
Wayne Blair	*The Sapphires* (2012) (based on a play by Tony Briggs), *Top End Wedding* (2019)
Catriona McKenzie	*Satellite Boy* (2012)
Daniel Gordon (non-Indigenous)	*The Australian Dream* (2019) (documentary written by Stan Grant)

ADAPTATIONS AND TRANSFORMATIONS

Literary texts are often adapted and transformed. Even the performance of a play can be seen as a transformation – as a translation of the printed word into living speech and action. These days, many people have their first encounter with mainstream literary texts through an adaptation to a film or television series – perhaps seeing the Netflix film version of Jane Austen's *Persuasion*, or Baz Luhrmann's film adaptation of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, without ever having read the novel or seen the play performed on stage.

However, the adapted or transformed version of a text is not quite the same as the original, and the meaning of the text is inevitably (if only slightly) altered. For instance, a Hollywood film adaptation of a literary classic could give greater attention to a central character or romantic relationship; or the staging of a play might make a character who has only a few lines of dialogue far more significant through their prominent position on the stage or their compelling performance.

The central question is not whether one form (the print text) is better than another (the film), but *how and why meaning changes* when a text is given a different form. Even when there are no major changes to the plot or characters, we will inevitably experience and understand a text quite differently when it is adapted to another form, or when we see and hear a performance rather than read the print text. So it is critical to understand the role of *the conventions of the form* – a film, a television miniseries or a live theatrical performance – in constructing and conveying the text's meaning to its readers or audiences.

Strategies for studying adaptations and transformations

This chapter provides guidelines for analysing how the meaning of a text is changed by its adaptation or transformation. There are a number of approaches to analysing how an adaptation or transformation changes the meaning of the original text. You could:

- compare a novel with its film or television series adaptation
- compare the text of a play with its film adaptation
- compare the written text of a play with its performance in a theatre.

To gain a good understanding of how meaning changes when texts are adapted and transformed, keep in mind the following guidelines.

- Contrast the **generic conventions** of two forms of text.

- Explain the **effects** of features and conventions on readers and audiences: different features (e.g. narrative voice in a novel; camera angles in a film) have different effects, hence potentially different meanings.

- Understand the different **purposes** of the different forms and how these contrasting purposes can actually lead to different meanings.

! **Remember: the key is knowing *how* and *why* the meaning changes.**

	What you need to know	What you need to be able to do
KEY KNOWLEDGE / KEY SKILLS	› How different forms use different features, language and techniques to construct a text.	› Analyse how texts are constructed.
	› How the form of a text contributes to its meaning.	› Identify features of texts in terms of their form or genre.
	› How a text presents views and values and how these are influenced by its context.	› Explore and analyse a text's viewpoints, assumptions and values.
	› The conventions and features of different forms of text.	› Evaluate how these features are related to the text's meaning.
	› How meaning changes when the form of a text is changed.	› Compare and contrast the original text (or part of it) with its adaptation or performance.

Essential terms for adaptations and transformations

Adaptations

An adaptation of a text occurs when some or all of its characters, plot and language are transferred to another form or medium: from the medium of print to the medium of film, for example. The important point is that not only does the medium change, but so too can the 'message' or meaning. In other words, because an adaptation changes the *form* of the text, it also – even if only subtly – changes the *content*.

> The BBC versions of Shakespeare's plays are extremely faithful to the print texts. However, the use of camera positions and angles, perspective, studio lighting etc. has a significant effect on how the audience 'reads' these texts.

> Similarly, Ang Lee's 1995 film version of *Sense and Sensibility* is largely faithful to Austen's original – especially in its attempt to re-create period settings and costumes. Nevertheless, there are some significant changes, calling for an original screenplay by one of the film's lead actors, Emma Thompson.

Rewriting the text – significant changes

Some film adaptations of novels and plays also transform their content at a quite literal level. In these adaptations the screenplay, and perhaps also the plot, are significantly changed; they retain only the general outline and character types of the original.

Here are some examples of these kinds of film adaptations of literary texts.

Clueless (1995, directed by Amy Heckerling) is a film adaptation of Jane Austen's novel *Emma*, updated to 1990s Beverley Hills. The dialogue and character names are changed, but the narrative structure and main character roles are retained from the novel.

Baz Luhrmann's 1996 film adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* retains much of the dialogue of Shakespeare's play, while updating and transferring the setting to late-20th-century Verona Beach, Florida. Moreover, there are substantial cuts to the print text, leading to a much closer (and more romantic) focus on the two lead characters.

A Thousand Acres (1997, directed by Jocelyn Moorhouse) is very loosely based on *King Lear*. However, the screenplay rewrites the dialogue, plot and setting (both temporal and physical) of the play. Significantly, the film places pressure on the allocation of guilt and responsibility within the play text, so that it functions as a critique of the play as well as an adaptation of it.

The main features of print texts that can be altered in a film or television adaptation are summarised in the tables on pages 161–3 and page 165.

Transformations

Transformation is a more inclusive term than adaptation, and covers other ways in which the form of a text can be changed. These include:

- a performance of a play
- a reading of poetry.

Although these are not adaptations as such – in the sense that the playwright's intention is for the play to be performed, rather than read, and poetry is often read aloud – they nevertheless transform the way in which a print text is communicated and they greatly alter the reader's or audience's experience of that text.

Film adaptation of a novel

Study the following table for the main features that can lead to different meanings in a film or television adaptation of a novel.

‹ **For further explanation of the main features and conventions of film, see Section A, pages 66–71.** ›

Activity table: novel to film

Feature	What to look for	Examples and effects
Omissions	What has been left out?	› Scenes? Dialogue? Important objects?
	Who has been left out?	› Minor characters can be omitted to increase the focus on the main characters or the pace of the narrative.
	How have the filmmakers compensated for these losses?	› New or rewritten dialogue › More emphasis on visual details (e.g. camera positions and movements to convey a sense of landscape)
	What is the impact on the story of this set of changes?	› Are complexities of character and plot lost? › Is there more focus on the central characters and relationships? › Does a subplot or one of the viewpoints disappear?
Additions	Are there additional scenes? These could be: › entirely new scenes › scenes developed from brief references in the text, represented visually rather than through dialogue.	› Filmmakers often create a scene preceding the action to show a character's background or a setting that might be mentioned in passing in the novel. › An incident from the past – perhaps recalled by a character – might be shown in flashback.
Adapting the narrative	How does the director address the concern of language that is part of the narrative?	› Consider aspects of the narrative such as authorial comment, descriptions of setting and characters, and tone.
	How is this information conveyed?	› New dialogue › Camera positions (e.g. close-ups, long shots, high and low angles) and movements (e.g. tilts, pans, tracking shots)
	Is there a voice-over?	› How does the narrator's voice affect your response? › Does the voice-over make you feel more attached to or more detached from characters?
Characterisation	Characters in the film are portrayed through speech, action and gesture. Are these performance elements consistent with the narrative of the novel?	› A character could be stronger or weaker (emotionally and/or physically). › A character could seem more ignorant and foolish, or wiser and more astute. › The actor's appearance might not match a character's physical description in the novel.

ADAPTATION: NOVEL TO FILM/TELEVISION SERIES

the mountains which had seemed so alarmingly full of hidden men during the night now looked like masses of vapour …

ADAPTATION: NOVEL TO FILM/TELEVISION SERIES

Feature	What to look for	Examples and effects
Actions and gestures	Are all the film characters' actions, gestures or expressions in the original text?	› Facial expressions such as smiles and frowns › Hand gestures and body movements such as walking, sitting, turning – these may occur in the print text without being described in detail.
	What are possible effects of the director's decision in such cases?	› Added emphasis or a new emphasis on detail conveyed visually rather than through words › A more natural portrayal of a character
Relationships	Have the dynamics of the various relationships been maintained?	› Marriages › Parent–child and sibling relationships › Romantic liaisons › Friendships
	How does the casting of actors change your view of the characters?	› In films actors tend to be more glamorous than characters in novels. › Some characters could appear more attractive than expected, perhaps shifting audience sympathies.
Key moments	Is there a moment in the film which struck you as a definite deviation from your reading?	› Look for moments of conflict and confrontation; turning points; resolutions.
	How did you react?	› Surprised? Annoyed? Amused?
	Why might the director have chosen to portray this moment in this way?	› To place pressure on the text's depiction of characters › To allow for a less controversial scene › To make a neat resolution possible
	Is it a legitimate change in terms of film?	› Does the change make sense in terms of the conventions of film, e.g. keeping the narrative moving through images rather than words?
Setting	How closely does the setting reflect the description in the novel?	› Look for the filmmakers' use of: • authentic historical settings (e.g. for adaptations of Austen) • the proportion of indoor and outdoor settings • studio settings or on-location settings.
	Is it set in a place which helps evoke the storytelling or challenges your reading of the text?	› Are you drawn into the world of the characters? › Does the setting give you a clearer idea of the historical period or the characters' backgrounds?
	Has the setting been updated and/or relocated?	› Updating the setting can make the story more obviously relevant for today's audiences. › This can also entail the dialogue being rewritten to reflect contemporary ways of talking and interacting.
Music	How is music used to evoke particular responses?	› Is music used to establish historical time, generate a mood or create suspense? › Is it used as a link with a modern audience?

Feature	What to look for	Examples and effects
Imagery	Is recurring visual imagery used?	› Does this convey the original writer's main ideas? › Does a recurring image link with a character?
Special features of television adaptations	How has the director divided the story into episodes?	› Are the breaks 'natural' or imposed by the director? › Do breaks coincide with moments of heightened tension due to uncertainty, conflict or danger?
	How has the story been adapted to allow for breaks between episodes?	› Increasing dramatic tension near the end of an episode › Changing the sequence of events
	How are the camera, lighting and colour used?	› Are there numerous close-ups and shot/reverse shots because of the smaller screen? Does this give more emphasis to the importance of some characters than you imagined in the print text? › Lighting is often used to give television drama series a very naturalistic look. › Is the colour often vivid? Are subtle and soft colours used? When? Why?

ADAPTATION: NOVEL TO FILM/TELEVISION SERIES

Analyse a film adaptation

In this activity you will consider the changes that have occurred in a film or television adaptation of a novel.

1   Form groups and use the table above as the basis for a discussion of the features relevant to the adaptation you are studying.

2   Create a similar table for your adaptation as the basis for further analysis.

3   Select one of the following aspects, to focus on specific ways in which meaning is changed in the adaptation process:

›   the representation of a central character in both novel and film texts

›   a key scene or group of scenes (e.g. the opening; the climax; the resolution) in both novel and film

›   the use of film language (mise en scène, cinematography, editing, music soundtrack etc.) to convey the narrative point of view of the novel

›   a change in the ending.

4   Present to the class a summary of the main changes and their effects.

Effects of some typical changes in film adaptations

What effects does a film adaptation have on your experience of the text? Some effects of two typical changes are considered below.

Omission of minor characters

Minor characters can be omitted or combined in a film adaptation in order to focus attention on the central character/s. This can simply result from the limited available time in a feature film (usually less than two hours) – some of the novel's action must be cut in order to create a screenplay of the appropriate length. The following are some of the possible effects.

- A central romance becomes more important, at the expense of other concerns.
- The film becomes more a character study of an individual than an examination of their wider social context and background.
- Alternative viewpoints presented in the novel are absent in the film, leading to a simpler depiction of attitudes and values.

Change in ending

Films can change the ending of novels or stories to generate a stronger sense of closure. In particular, a convention of Hollywood films is that they tend to have happy or positive endings, so it is possible that a film adaptation will change the bleak ending of a novel.

- The film could present a positive statement regarding the resolution or outcome, whereas the novel might have an uncertain ending that suggests that there are no easy solutions to problems.
- A novel might end with a death or other loss in order to present a critique of society; changing the ending to a positive one creates a more affirmative view of society.
- A film might end in a way that reinforces the noble or heroic qualities of the protagonist; the novel, on the other hand, might present a more complex view of the protagonist and thus end by showing their flaws and vulnerability.

Sample assessment tasks

Respond to one of the topics below to discuss the extent to which meaning changes when a novel is adapted to a film. You can focus on a key scene in your response.

1. Describe the literary techniques used by the novelist to create one or two of the main characters. Compare and contrast these with the use of film elements to create the same characters in the film adaptation. To what extent does the use of film elements lead to a change in meaning?

2. 'The style of the film – its mise en scène, cinematography, music and editing – is central to the way it tells its story. In the novel, the narrative voice plays the central role.' Discuss your responses to the two texts.

3. Compare the ways in which the novel and its film adaptation present the characters' historical, social and/or cultural contexts. To what extent do these contexts enable the texts' creators to present different ideas and values?

Film adaptation of a play

Study the following table for the main features that can lead to changes and points of difference when a play is adapted to film. In addition, most of the features and questions from the previous table for a film adaptation of a novel are also relevant (see pages 161–3).

Activity table: play to film

Feature	What to look for	Examples and effects
Setting	Does the film use a more naturalistic setting than is possible in a theatrical performance of the play?	› Films can use a greater range of locations, including outdoor locations and authentic historical settings. › Interior settings can be more fully and elaborately furnished in film; a film can easily move from room to room to create a more fluid movement, or to show someone in another room; it can also show many rooms whereas a set will mostly remain unchanged for an act or scene.
	Does this make the characters more believable or realistic?	› Seeing characters in a realistically portrayed context can make them seem less distant and stylised.
	Props	› Props specified by stage directions will usually be supplemented by many others in the film version.
	Costumes – usually only briefly indicated (if at all) in stage directions, with few changes	› Costumes might be simple or ornate; authentic to the play's historical period or updated. › They can incorporate symbolic elements (e.g. use of colour, jewellery or accessories).
Performance	Casting	› Are the actors' physical appearances consistent with the stage directions and the characters' roles in the play? › Does the celebrity status of some actors detract from the realistic or convincing quality of their performance?
	Acting techniques	› Listen for tone of voice and how quickly the actors deliver their lines – rapidly, or at a more measured pace. › Gestures and facial expressions are used to enhance the meanings of lines or to respond to the lines of other characters.
Film language	Character movements and groupings	› The director controls character movements and groupings, and how these are framed and tracked by the camera.
	Close-ups and medium close-ups of one character	› The camera can focus on a single character, making their speeches and responses seem more significant.
	Point-of-view shots and audience perspective	› The camera introduces a point of view through the cinematographer's use of camera angles, positions and movements. › Editing can cause rapid shifts in audience perspective (through shot/reverse shots, crosscutting etc.) quite different from shifts envisaged by the playwright.

ADAPTATION: PLAY TO FILM

Effects of key film features on adaptations

The features in the table on the previous page all have important effects on an audience's understanding of a film's meaning. Here we consider the effects of three of those features in more detail.

Film language

Camera angles and positions lead the audience to look at characters and situations in a particular way, suggesting a point of view on the characters' feelings and relationships.

- The frequent use of close-ups of certain characters can encourage audience identification with and sympathy for those characters; those shown mostly in medium shots are generally viewed less sympathetically.

- The camera can show characters and objects as just one of the characters would see them: this is known as a point-of-view shot, and gives central importance to that character's situation and viewpoint.

- The frame of the camera (and cinema or television screen) usually includes only part of the set. This means that not all characters in the scene are within the frame at any one time, and not all of the setting is shown. The effect is that certain characters and relationships are foregrounded, even though the dialogue and action affect all those present in the scene.

Settings

The settings in a film adaptation of a play are able to be much more detailed and realistic than is possible on a stage or is indicated in stage directions.

- The audience can be quickly drawn into the world of the film, almost as participants rather than spectators – whereas the play may provide a more detached perspective.

- The setting could be used to highlight a particular interpretation of a character's words: for instance, Hamlet's 'To be or not to be' soliloquy could be read as a suicide speech if the character is filmed on the top of a cliff; or as a meditation on the meaning of existence if Hamlet is in a hall of mirrors (as in Kenneth Branagh's 1996 film version of *Hamlet*).

- The film's greater sense of naturalism can tie the action to a particular time and place, making the abstract or symbolic aspects of the play less apparent.

Changing the historical setting

Film adaptations of plays sometimes update the setting while retaining the original dialogue (though usually with some cuts).

- This can draw attention to the play's relevance to contemporary audiences.

- The fact that the historical setting can change without the dialogue needing to be rewritten suggests that the play's concerns are universal.

- The updated setting allows the filmmakers to give the play a 'fresh look' – which can be useful and interesting for well-worn classics such as *Romeo and Juliet*.

Compare play script and film

Write notes on these features of the play script:	Write notes on these features of the film version:
› context and settings	› context and settings (studio or on-location?)
› characterisation (speech and movement through dialogue and stage directions)	› characterisation through acting and filmic elements
› main ideas and concerns	› the use of visual and aural imagery to create meaning
› dramatic devices (e.g. dramatic irony)	› point of view as created by the camera (shot distances and angles, camera positions and movements, mise en scène)
› tone and style	
› structure	
› point of view	

Sample assessment tasks

Respond to one of the topics below to discuss the extent to which meaning changes when a play is adapted to a film. You can focus on a key scene in your response.

1. How do the play script and the film use the devices and conventions of each form to present one or two main characters? To what extent does the film add to, or vary, the information contained in the stage directions? You may like to refer to setting, lighting, costumes, cinematography, dialogue, character groupings and acting style.

2. Compare and contrast how the play script and the film version position the audience to view the characters' historical, social and cultural contexts. Is the setting essentially the same or has it been changed? Does the film's more fully realised setting change your view of the world the characters inhabit?

3. Discuss the impact of any additions or omissions in the film compared to the play script. Do these change your view of the characters or present different views and values?

Rachael Blake as Jane in *Lantana*, the 2001 film adaption of Andrew Bovell's play *Speaking in Tongues*. Photo 12 / Alamy Stock Photo

And have their palates both for sweet and sour, / As husbands have. ★

Performance of a play

Study the following table for the main features that make the experience and meaning of a play's performance different from that of reading the print text.

Activity table: play to performance

	Feature	What to look for	Examples and effects
PLAY TO PERFORMANCE	**Stage directions and sets**	How closely has the director followed the stage directions? How do any changes affect the audience's understanding of the play?	› Stage layout (locations of doors, windows etc.) › Props – kind, number and arrangement › Character entries and exits › Costumes – are they authentic given the play's historical period? Do they incorporate symbolic elements (possibly suggested by colour or jewellery)?
	Staging	How do aspects of the performance *not indicated in stage directions* affect the audience's understanding of the play?	› Lighting – colour, intensity, direction, focus › Character movements around the stage and how characters are grouped on the stage › Tone of voice, delivery of lines – rapid, or more measured › Gestures, facial expressions used to enhance the meanings of lines or to respond to the lines of other characters
	Casting	Have the actors been cast with close reference to the text?	› Consider each character's age, physical appearance and role in the narrative. › Which personality or character traits gain extra emphasis as a result of casting decisions?
	Choose one scene	Focus on one scene which you believed, on reading, was especially powerful. How has the director guided the actors to deliver the lines?	› The actor's intonation, volume and speed of delivery › Facial expressions and gestures › How the actors are positioned and move in relation to one another and on the stage
		How does the performance of this scene differ from your reading?	› Is it more compelling and involving? › Does your view of the characters change? › Does the meaning or significance of the scene change in the performance?

Effects of key features of a play's performance

The features in the table above all contribute to the construction of meaning in a performance of a play, as opposed to in the print text. Now we consider the effects of two of those features in more detail. (Note that in the previous section on film adaptations of plays, the notes on changing the historical setting can also apply to performances – see page 166.)

Minimalist sets

Many plays are staged using a minimalist set – with very few props and simple backdrops.

- A minimalist set can focus the audience's attention on the characters as individuals, rather than on the characters' social and cultural contexts.

- The lack of familiar objects and surroundings can create a sense of the characters' alienation from society.

- Universal aspects of the characters' situations and dilemmas can be reinforced by simple costumes (e.g. all-white or all-black costumes to suggest the forces of good and evil).

Lighting

In the theatre, lighting functions as another layer of language, supplementing and enhancing the characters' words and actions.

- Lighting can create a mood by being bright or subdued, or through the use of coloured filters. These intensities and colours can affect the audience's response to characters and situations, and can help to shape the meaning or significance of a scene.

- Spotlights can direct the audience's attention to a particular character or isolate them from their surroundings (including other characters). This can intensify the audience's focus on the character's lines; highlight the feelings of the character; or strengthen the relationship between that character and the audience.

- Lighting can create special effects. For example, lights could be raised (brighter) on one part of the stage and lowered (dimmed) on another to bring a different backdrop or setting into view, perhaps reflecting a shift in time or location.

Michael Wahr as Tom and Grace Cummings as Charlotte in the 2021 Melbourne Theatre Company production of *Berlin*. Jeff Busby / Melbourne Theatre Company

Sample response

The following analysis of the way in which meaning is changed when a text is adapted into another form was written by a student under timed conditions. It compares Joan Lindsay's novel *Picnic at Hanging Rock* with Peter Weir's 1975 film adaptation. The analysis uses a brief passage from the novel as the basis for a wider exploration of the two texts; the passage is reproduced below.

Passage from *Picnic at Hanging Rock*

[...] The College was already, despite its brief existence, quite famed for its discipline, deportment and mastery of English literature.

Now an immense purposeful figure was swimming and billowing in grey silk taffeta on to the tiled and colonnaded verandah, like a galleon in full sail. On the gently heaving bosom, a cameo portrait of a gentleman in side whiskers, framed in garnets and gold, rose and fell in tune with the pumping of the powerful lungs encased in a fortress of steel busks and stiff grey calico. 'Good morning, girls,' boomed the gracious plummy voice, specially imported from Kensington.

'Good morning, Mrs Appleyard,' chorused the curtseying half-circle drawn up before the hall door.

'Are we all present. Mademoiselle? Good. Well, young ladies, we are indeed fortunate in the weather for our picnic to Hanging Rock. I have instructed Mademoiselle that as the day is likely to be warm, you may remove your gloves after the drag has passed through Woodend. You will partake of luncheon at the Picnic Grounds near the Rock. Once again let me remind you that the Rock itself is extremely dangerous and you are therefore forbidden to engage in any tomboy foolishness in the matter of exploration, even on the lower slopes. It is, however, a geological marvel on which you will be required to write a brief essay on Monday morning. I also wish to remind you that the vicinity is renowned for its venomous snakes and poisonous ants of various species. I think that is all. Have a pleasant day and try to behave yourselves in a manner to bring credit to the College. I shall expect you back. Miss McCraw and Mademoiselle, at about eight o'clock for a light supper.'

Analysis of the film adaptation

When Mrs Appleyard 'billow[s]' onto the verandah in front of the girls, 'like a galleon in full sail', Lindsay startles readers with the warlike imagery, framing Mrs Appleyard as a woman looking to conquer. Her yearning for domination manifests in the environment of the college, which consists of non-native plants such as hydrangeas, and likening her to a galleon evokes a warship used in early colonisation efforts. The depersonalisation of the girls as the 'chorus[ing] ... curtseying half-circle' emphasises Mrs Appleyard's

> Begins with textual detail, integrating short quotes smoothly into the discussion.

> Moves from textual detail to thematic concerns; establishes power as a focus of the reading.

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power over them, mirroring the insignificance of the girls as 'four pairs of eyes' against the grandeur of the rock. Weir transforms this scene into an over-the-shoulder shot of Mrs Appleyard, who is on an elevated surface, forcing viewers to look down on the schoolgirls. An extreme low-angle shot of the rock looming forebodingly from behind the girls when they arrive at the picnic spot dwarfs Mrs Appleyard, removing the power she previously had in the over-the-shoulder shot. Unlike Lindsay, who sets up an opposition between Mrs Appleyard and the rock, Weir drains Mrs Appleyard of her power from the novel, thus overwhelming readers with the animosity of the rock.

Mrs Appleyard's 'powerful lungs' being 'encased in a fortress of steel busks and stiff grey calico' warns readers that her power derives from her orthodox femininity, with the corset being a symbol of the powerful repression of women in a patriarchal society. Lindsay manipulating a conflict between Mrs Appleyard and the natural world reveals that the 'discipline' and 'deportment' of the young girls is unnatural. Unlike Lindsay, Weir is not interested in exploring the voices of female authority within patriarchy. In a medium shot, the viewer is positioned to voyeuristically watch Mrs Appleyard in a private moment of her brushing her hair in a nightgown, distorting her to seem more vulnerable. Moreover, her nightgown is white, mirroring the outfits of the schoolgirls in the picnic, making her appear more virginal and pure and, as a result, infantilising her. This shot also parallels an earlier shot of Miranda looking into the mirror and brushing her hair, foreshadowing Mrs Appleyard's demise. In addition, being seen without her corset – which she draws her power from – diminishes her sense of authority among the girls.

Mrs Appleyard's 'gracious plummy voice' being 'imported from Kensington' implies that the accent is foreign to her own mouth, and that she was not born with it. Using an accent from Kensington – a relatively wealthy area in England – reveals her lavish aspirations; hence, Lindsay suggests that those who indulge in colonisation and conquering are fraudulent, as they only '[look] the part'. The college's 'brief existence' harshly contrasts with the rock's 'prehistoric architecture' that has lasted 'millions of years', suggesting the immense power of the natural landscape compared to the repression of colonisation. The caryatids being 'as firm of bust as Madam herself' is ironic, as the entire school is eventually consumed in a wildfire, symbolic of the fragility of the imposed ideals of civilisation. In the end, Mrs Appleyard – the emblem of colonised Australia – is entranced by the rock and jumps, only to be 'impaled'. This military terminology invites readers to recall the warlike metaphors from the passage, signalling that the landscape has triumphed over colonised Australia. Weir omits the demolishing of the college and Mrs Appleyard's impaling, exposing that he does not want to portray a power greater than patriarchy. In a scene where Mademoiselle and Mrs Appleyard have dinner, Mrs Appleyard is wearing a low-cut dress that shows off her arms, contrasting with her previous modest outfits. Having her reveal more skin of her own volition, rather than her being overpowered

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Uses metalanguage relevant to film to analyse the adaptation, and explains the effect of particular shots.

Contrasts the novel and its film adaptation and explains the significance of differences.

Analyses language use in the novel, exploring a symbol in relation to another aspect of power – patriarchal power, in this case.

Moves from the language of the print text to the visual language of film.

Draws attention to the importance of costume in the visual medium of film.

Sustains the focus on power, especially in relation to colonisation, identifying the author's implied view and supporting this interpretation with an apt quote.

Carefully considers imagery from other parts of the novel, extending the military analogy to the colonial project as well as the landscape's resistance.

Notes a significant difference between the adaptation and the original text.

by the rock, gives her more agency for her own demise, characterising Mrs Appleyard as a weak-willed person. The lack of lighting combined with the British mise en scène illuminates the limits of colonial Australia. Since the candles barely give off any light, Mrs Appleyard is shrouded in darkness, revealing to viewers that the rock has almost finished destroying her. Weir consistently diminishes Mrs Appleyard's power to suggest the horrific power of the landscape to ruin the lives of women, while Lindsay paints a bloody war zone between civilisation and the natural world as a place where colonised society will inevitably meet its downfall.

Refers to specific features of the film and explains their symbolic meaning, continuing to develop the argument about power and colonisation.

Concludes with a general statement summing up the discussion and reinforcing the distinction made between the novel and the film adaptation in terms of the representation of power.

Assessor comments

The discussion regularly compares and contrasts the novel and the film adaptation, explaining key differences in terms of the features of each form. Metalanguage ('imagery', 'symbolic', 'low-angle shot' etc.) is used effectively to identify language and stylistic features, and the discussion always proceeds to consider the effects of these features and the meanings they convey to the audience. The interpretation sustains its focus on power and consistently highlights the ways in which Weir's film subtly divests Mrs Appleyard of power, in contrast to the novel in which Mrs Appleyard is more closely aligned with the (questionable) authority of colonial Australia. The writing is fluent and expressive, with verbs such as 'mirroring', 'infantilising' and 'shrouded' enhancing the precision and insightfulness of the analysis.

Scan the code or click **here** for sample adaptations responses on Tennessee Williams' *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and Miles Franklin's *My Brilliant Career*.

A scene from Peter Weir's 1975 film adaptation of Joan Lindsay's novel *Picnic at Hanging Rock*.
RGR Collection / Alamy Stock Photo

DEVELOPING
INTERPRETATIONS

There is no single, definitively 'correct' reading of a text. Your own interpretation of a text will evolve as you re-read the text, reflect on its meanings, do further reading and absorb ideas from those around you and from the wider society. Furthermore, your interpretation of a text will always differ in some way from those of other readers.

Part of the reason for this is that no two readers bring exactly the same background and contexts to the experiences of reading and analysis: our life histories, educational backgrounds, sense of identity and ideological beliefs all vary, perhaps only slightly or perhaps radically. All these factors influence not merely how we respond when reading a text, but how we approach its analysis – the features we choose to focus on, the vocabulary we use, the degree to which we agree with or seek to place pressure on the views and values presented by the text.

Moreover, the field of literary criticism is constantly evolving, even when it concerns texts that were written hundreds of years ago, about which millions of words have been written. This has been particularly the case in the last few decades, when new literary theories have been developed and have themselves evolved in response to changing social and cultural contexts. Your reading of criticism and theory will inevitably shape, and sometime significantly alter, the ways in which you interpret texts. Changing social and cultural contexts also affect an individual's reading of texts, as attitudes and values shift in response to contemporary events and issues.

Strategies for developing interpretations

The task for Unit 3, Outcome 2 in VCE Literature is divided into two parts: Part A and Part B.

- Part A of the task is an interpretation of a text that analyses its presentation of ideas, views and values. This initial interpretation might be based on your close reading of a passage; alternatively, or additionally, you might respond to a question or statement about the text's views and values.

- The next stage is to read a supplementary text. (Of course, as part of your study of the text you might read a number of supplementary – or secondary – texts, but for this task you only need to focus on one.) Careful consideration of this supplementary text will lead you to interpret the set text in new ways.

- Part B is a second interpretation of the text that is informed by the supplementary text, and therefore differs from your initial interpretation. This interpretation will be based on your close reading of a key moment or passage from the text.

KEY KNOWLEDGE / KEY SKILLS

What you need to know	What you need to be able to do
› The historical, social and cultural context in which the text is written and/or set.	› Explore the historical, social and cultural context of a text.
› The ideas, views and values being presented and explored by a text.	› Discuss and analyse the ideas, views and values, and the ways in which they are presented.
› How the text's creator has used form, structure and language to make meaning.	› Refer closely to textual features and incorporate these into your analysis.
› The features and conventions of presenting an interpretation of a text.	› Present an interpretation of a text drawn from a discussion of its views and values, and develop a second interpretation that is informed by a supplementary text.

Essential terms for developing interpretations

Reading

A reading of a text is an interpretation of the text's meaning, supported by close analysis of textual features, structure and language. It can be, but does not need to be, informed by a particular theoretical framework: for instance, a feminist reading or a Marxist reading.

Literary criticism

A piece of literary criticism is usually an essay or article published in an academic journal, and will include references to other works as well as a highly analytical approach to the text it is focused on. It can involve an element of evaluation, but, unlike a review, the emphasis is not on whether or not the text is an effective or accomplished piece of writing. Rather, the critic will present an interpretation of the text's meaning and place the text in a context – possibly the sociohistorical context in which it was produced, the genre to which it belongs, or a more theoretical context.

Literary theory

Much contemporary literary criticism draws on a particular theory or school of thought. A number of these theories are not originally or only about literature but apply to many aspects of society and culture: feminism, Marxism and psychoanalysis are three examples. They are 'theoretical' in the sense that they have explicit underlying assumptions and a set of ideas and vocabulary that can be 'applied' to a reading of a text.

You can use a theoretical perspective to read or interpret a text; you will also see theory being used in the pieces of criticism you read. A detailed overview of some of the main literary theories is on pages 72–87.

Vocabulary for relating the supplementary text to the set text

Whether your supplementary text is an analytical piece that refers closely to your set text, or a more general piece of writing that outlines a theoretical approach, as you read it you will be thinking about how your supplementary text relates to, and makes you think about, the primary text. The following terms describe three main ways in which the supplementary text might relate to the text you are analysing.

Enriches	Adds depth and interest to; reveals additional insights.
Challenges	Asks questions about; draws attention to aspects that might have gone unnoticed.
Contests	Criticises, condemns or rejects some aspects; offers an opposing view.

You might not use these particular terms in your analysis, but the way in which the supplementary text shapes your second reading of the text should be clear, and it is likely to fall into one of these three broad categories.

Developing an initial interpretation

Your initial interpretation will analyse the ways in which the text presents ideas, views and values, and is focused on the text itself. It may involve close reading of one or more passages; it may also be prompted by a topic or statement.

In addition to discussing the text's ideas, views and values, the interpretation should locate these within the historical, social and cultural context in which the text was created and/or set. It is possible that the text will endorse certain views and values, raise questions around some and condemn or reject others. There might be some viewpoints that are marginalised or silenced by the text – these are also worth exploring in your interpretation.

If you are given a topic, the first step in developing your response is to establish your position on the topic. You might agree completely, partly agree, or disagree completely. Whatever your position, you will need to keep the key terms in the topic at the centre of your interpretation. Your response will probably take the form of an essay with an introduction, body paragraphs and conclusion, in which you present your position then build an argument for it, supported by close analysis of the text.

If you are given a passage on which to base your interpretation, your response might not need to have a conventional essay structure. You could take one of the following approaches:

- work systematically through the passage from start to finish
- begin by unpacking some language features (e.g. imagery, word choices) and work towards the wider ideas
- identify three or four key ideas in the passage and devote each paragraph to analysing how language is used to present one of these ideas
- focus each paragraph on a different character or group of characters, showing how characters are being used to present ideas, views and values.

Whichever approach you use, remember to work closely with the language of the passage and refer regularly to the ideas, views and values being presented and explored by the text.

◄ **See Chapter 2: 'Close analysis' and Chapter 3: 'Views, values and contexts'.** ►

Analysing a supplementary text

Your second interpretation of the text follows the reading of additional or supplementary material. This material might be:

- a scholarly work (or similar) that presents an analysis of the text
- an explanation of a theoretical framework that contains ideas relevant to the text.

Your understanding of this supplementary text will shape your interpretation of the set text, so it is worth spending some time looking at the supplementary material in detail.

If your supplementary text is an article or essay on the text, create a table based on the following to summarise your ideas about the article and how it influences your reading of the text.

Summarise the interpretation offered in the article.	
What features of the text does the article focus on? (These could be characters, language, structure, values, underlying assumptions etc.)	
Has the article used a literary theory or perspective to interpret the text? If yes, which theory has been used?	
In what ways does the article enrich, challenge or contest the ideas, views and values of the text?	
To what extent do you agree with the interpretation presented by the article?	
To what extent do you disagree with the interpretation?	
How has the article influenced or changed your understanding of the text?	

If your supplementary text explains or outlines a literary theory but does not refer directly to your text, use the following table to organise your thoughts about the supplementary text.

Summarise the theory as concisely as you can.	
What are some of the key concepts and terms associated with this theory?	
What aspects of your text are most obviously relevant to this theory?	
Does the theory lead you to an enriched understanding of the text? Or does it lead you to question or contest its ideas, views and values?	

Developing a second interpretation

Your second interpretation will be based on a key moment or passage from the text, and will offer new insights or understandings compared to your first interpretation. These will be prompted by the supplementary text – either by its specific observations about the text or by its language, ideas and assumptions.

Since the second interpretation is based on the close analysis of a passage, you might structure your response in the same way you usually structure a passage analysis (see page 175 and Chapter 2 for suggestions). However, if you begin with a few sentences that outline important ideas from your supplementary text, this will introduce the language you will use and the argument you will develop in your interpretation. These initial sentences could either explicitly refer to and quote from the supplementary text, or summarise its ideas and assumptions. See the two sample responses later in this chapter (pages 178–89) for examples of ways to do this.

You will need to differentiate your two interpretations of the text, so look for ways that you can use the supplementary text to introduce different ideas or arguments. Remember the terms 'enrich', 'challenge' and 'contest' (see page 175) – these signal three approaches to developing a different reading of the text. In other words:

- you can *enrich* your first reading with additional details and insights

- you can *challenge* or question aspects of your first reading, examining assumptions and suggesting alternative interpretations

- you can *contest* your first reading by presenting counterarguments and developing a new interpretation that opposes the first one.

In the sample responses on the following pages, sample response 1 takes the first of these approaches, while sample response 2 takes the third approach.

In your second interpretation you can refer back to your first reading by using sentence structures such as those below.

While in the previous reading ... in this reading ...

This view of ... stands in contrast to the earlier view of ...

Reading the text from the perspective of ... leads to a different understanding of ...

A reading of the text informed by ... produces an alternative view of ...

From a/an ... perspective, the text can be read as implying ..., in contrast to the earlier reading which ...

Considering the interpretation offered by/in <name of critic or article> leads to an enriched understanding of / a challenging of / a critique of ...

As <name of critic or article> suggests, the text presents a view of ... as ..., whereas the initial interpretation saw the text as presenting ...

Sample responses

The two sample responses in this section demonstrate different approaches to the task of developing two interpretations of a text.

In the first sample response, a selected passage is used as the basis for two readings of James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*.

- There are two separate analyses of this passage.
- The second reading is informed by an understanding of New Historicism; an explication of this literary theory is included before the second reading.

In the second sample response, a topic and a selected passage provide the focus for two readings of Bram Stoker's *Dracula*.

- The second reading is informed by a scholarly article, which presents a feminist interpretation of the novel.
- This response is a single extended piece of writing.

Sample response 1: using an explication of a literary theory

This response to James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time* is based on a passage from the text, from 'You must consider what happens to this citizen' (p.52) to 'And this is not the happiest way to feel toward one's countrymen' (p.53). (Page numbers refer to the 2017 Penguin Classics edition.)

After Part A there is an explanation of New Historicism, which informs Part B of the response.

James Baldwin photographed in 1963, the year in which *The Fire Next Time* was published.
Everett Collection Inc / Alamy Stock Photo

Part A

At the start of the passage, Baldwin draws his reader into the world of Black (male) experience in 1960s America, during the civil rights movement. We are invited to walk with a Black returned serviceman 'in his shoes' to live 'in his skin', and to see the world Baldwin carefully constructs 'with his eyes'. This gently phrased but unrelenting demand allows no escape for readers from the vivid inequities which Baldwin patiently and painstakingly relates. The bitter routine of racism is brought to life as, with Baldwin's serviceman, we see the humiliations of prejudice endured first by himself, then by his wife and then by his son. This notional family, with its echoes of Christianity's holy family, brings social injustice into the heart of the American home, evoking the American dream and placing the failures of racism in the context of American cultural aspiration and hope. The contrast Baldwin draws between 'the richest and freest country in the world' and the manifest discrimination of such racist practices as 'segregated buses' and 'signs that say "White" and "Coloured"' is striking and forces a recognition of the invidious inconsistencies caused by prejudice, which are shown to limit the positive development of American society. Particularly given its original publication in *The New Yorker*, Baldwin's keenly focused exposure of the hypocrisy of American society in its treatment of its Black population is chilling. In contrast with his often hyper-formality, Baldwin consistently uses second person in his reconstruction of the story of the serviceman, which serves to implicate the white liberal reader more firmly in the mistreatment of Black people, and which also emphasises the urgency of the need for social change.

The anecdote that immediately follows the story of the hypothetical serviceman reinforces Baldwin's implied call for action by reiterating the accusation of 'spineless[ness]' in white America. Without breaking his paragraph, Baldwin rolls his argument from the despairing incredulity of the putative returned soldier to a lived experience shared by himself and 'two Negro acquaintances'. This involves an immediate shift in location and in tone; the reader is transported without warning from an unspecified location, anywhere in the United States, neither 'North' nor 'South', to 'Chicago's O'Hare Airport', and the argument changes from a depersonalised demonstration of the need for empathy to a highly personal expression of barely contained individual rage. When Baldwin comments on the effort involved in resisting 'strangl[ing]' the racist bartender, the personal affront of prejudice becomes unavoidable, the physical closeness between the races, as one mistreats the other, is highlighted and 'the vast amount of patience' Baldwin calls upon in combatting such behaviour is shown to be superhuman. The rhetorical shift disorients the reader, caught off-guard in the moment, just as Baldwin and his friends are caught off-guard in the bar; confused and unsteady we lurch from an academic discussion of unjust social mores to become witnesses to a petty act of prejudice that makes real the pervasiveness of racism in America.

Begins with close reference to the passage.

Signals the main concerns of the passage.

Considers the original context for publication and a language feature (pronoun use) that has a particular impact on the likely main audience.

Continues the close reading of the passage by working through it and discussing the views and values being presented and examined.

We are trapped, transfixed by a moment of banal and tedious horror, from which Baldwin eventually rescues us; his weary 'Well, we were served, finally, of course' releases the tension of the scene by reassuring readers that justice will prevail, both in the bar and more widely in 1960s America, but the cost of victory is high. Rather than ending on this moment of triumph with three friends toasting their literal and moral victory, the rest of the sketch turns the spotlight more securely on white America, not the overtly racist white America represented by the bartender, but the passive crowd in the bar, none of whom 'had done anything to help us'. Baldwin targets the white liberal readership of *The New Yorker* as he describes his distaste for a sympathiser, who only speaks after the altercation has passed. At the end of the essay Baldwin explicitly calls upon 'relatively conscious whites' to take up their role in healing America; in the passage he condemns white political passivity, and warns that failure to act will not be mitigated by untimely expressions of mere theoretical support. Baldwin's anger, in the passage, is balanced with his unwavering belief in ultimate victory based on the self-evident rightness of his cause. With 'patience … great insistence and some luck' justice and the Scotch are served. Baldwin writes for an America that can cast aside racial prejudice to achieve its better self but his requirements are stringent: Black America must resist hate and white America must embrace meaningful action.

Continues to explore the role of the original publication context and how Baldwin has shaped the text for his intended audience.

Provides a clear statement of the author's views being presented in the passage.

Assessor comments on Part A

The response engages with specific details of the passage, noting the rhetorical construction of Baldwin's argument, and responding to the weight of the emotive figurative language he uses. The analysis of the contrast between the wealth of America and its racist practices demonstrates understanding of Baldwin's style and the structural observation about the argument also shows careful close reading of the passage.

Reference to the American dream and to the original publication of the essay in *The New Yorker* indicates an awareness of the cultural context of the essay, and engages with Baldwin's political views and cultural values in his call for social change.

New Historicism – an exploratory note

A New Historicist interpretation involves the close study of a text within the framework of the particular social context surrounding its production and reception. More than simply recognising the text as an expression of an author's views and values, a New Historicist reading considers the ways in which a text reflects and shapes its specific sociohistorical moment. For a New Historicist, a text is an artefact of history, and recognising and exploring its references through the lens of its context will help to illuminate features of the text, as readers seek to understand the ways in which the text is in dialogue with the events of its specific era.

While any analysis of a text involves some understanding of its context, a New Historicist interpretation explores the ways in which a text can be understood as reacting and responding to contemporary events, and also the ways in which the text shapes those events and our

understanding of them. So, for a New Historicist, the connotations and implications of a text can be usefully explored by reference to the other texts that surround it and by understanding elements of the author's biography. This should not involve readers in a futile effort to uncover the 'original truth' of a text, but rather lead them to recognise how a text might be understood as commentary on the immediate events and circumstances that gave rise to it. Recognising that a text is created at a particular time, within a particular social milieu and for a particular purpose or purposes can allow a more nuanced engagement with textual detail. In other words, summoning the world of the text as it is manifested through the text can shed light on possible meanings and readings. Moreover, some understanding of the textual or literary environment of the text's production is also useful for a New Historicist interpretation inasmuch as it provides further insight into the potential significance of stylistic and structural features of a text.

Significantly, while a New Historicist interpretation might provide insight into particular meanings of textual details, such analysis cannot be considered definitive, because a New Historicist recognises that readers themselves exist within their own sociohistorical context and any interpretation of a text, much like the text itself, is the product of a particular time and place. Because readers cannot step outside their own context, their interpretations are necessarily limited by the social forces that act on them, and which they react to. Fundamentally, a New Historicist recognises the power and effect of historical context on both the text and the reader, and seeks to negotiate with these contexts as they make meaning.

In the context of the study of Literature, it is important to remain focused on the text when producing a New Historicist interpretation; historical details are only relevant if they serve to strengthen understanding of the text itself. The features of the text must always drive an interpretation, so any reference to historical context must be located firmly in the particulars of an analytical observation about the text.

Part B

A New Historicist interpretation of the passage places the anecdote in the bar in the wider social context of the Greensboro sit-ins, a political movement that gained significant public attention in 1960, during which time students sought to force the desegregation of Woolworths' lunch-counters in Greensboro, North Carolina. When the bartender 'refused to serve' Baldwin and his friends, his action mirrors those of more committed separatist racists and thus the argument Baldwin makes in aligning petty acts of racism with broader systemic prejudice is reinforced. Further, when the bystander 'asked if we were students', Baldwin tacitly acknowledges the brave actions of the Greensboro Four tertiary students from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical College, while also demonstrating the wider support, within the Black community, for direct political action. In *I Am Not Your Negro*, Baldwin comments that he was propelled home to Harlem from France by a photograph of Dorothy Counts walking into a recently desegregated school by herself; he reflects sadly that 'some one of us should have been there with her', and in the passage from *The Fire Next Time,* the 'extremely noisy' protest at the bar acts as an endorsement of all such youth action.

Uses the passage details as the basis for the response while relating those details more strongly to contemporary events than is the case in Part A.

The bartender's inability to 'distinguish between a Negro boy of twenty and a Negro "boy" of thirty-seven' also evokes the offensive historical infantilisation of Black men as 'boys'. Baldwin's rage at being characterised as a 'boy' reflects the use of this word as a controlling pejorative throughout the history of Blackness in America. As part of the process of depriving them of the rights and status of adulthood, Black men were called 'boys' and Baldwin's reaction in the bar indicates his resistance to such dehumanising and disempowering practices. Juxtaposed against this infantilisation of Black masculinity is the differentiation between '"White Ladies" and "Coloured *Women*"' which Baldwin rails against earlier in the passage. By drawing attention to the difference in denotation, Baldwin invites consideration of the contrast in connotation between Black and white femininity. The contrast in status between women and ladies naturalises the service of one group to the other, and suggests that Black women can never rise to a social position of elegance and leisure. Whilst a feminist sensibility resists the passivity implied by 'ladies', Baldwin's observation of these different descriptions of femaleness serves his broader argument about the dehumanising power and history of language.

By the end of the passage, one of Baldwin's companions is revealed to be a Korean War veteran, linking the experience in the bar securely to the story of the imagined serviceman which precedes it. As war begins for America in Vietnam, Baldwin's exploration of the experience of Black soldiers makes his 1962 essay timely and relevant. Baldwin uses the contrast between the deployment of African American soldiers in the desegregated armed forces, and their treatment in highly segregated 1960s America, to highlight the egregious hypocrisies of his society, which allows young Black soldiers to die for their country, but will not serve them Scotch at an airport bar. The admonition of the veteran to the white bystander that 'the fight we have been having in the bar had been his fight, too' is severe: Baldwin's repetition of 'fight', appearing as it does in the voice of a soldier, functions as a condemnation of the lack of fight in the conscienceless young man who has no response to the accusation of cowardice other than to turn and walk away.

While the two essays that make up *The Fire Next Time* cannot be understood outside the parameters of the civil rights movement, because the essays are both elements of this movement and reportage of it, so the interpretation of the essays in the context of specific elements of Black history enhances understanding of Baldwin's text. Baldwin writes out of Black America 'in the middle of the twentieth century', so interpretation of his text is strengthened through careful consideration of the world which he celebrates and the culture that shapes both this author and his writing.

Connects another element of the passage to its historical and cultural context, showing how the language of the passage arises directly from this context and enriching the interpretation.

Sustains the focus on the passage / key moment in the text, as required by the task.

Introduces another aspect of the historical context relevant to Baldwin's text.

Identifies the way in which the secondary text (the explication of New Historicism) leads to an enriched interpretation.

Assessor comments on Part B

In Part B the response takes on a broader focus by introducing a New Historicist interpretation of the text, recognising the passage, and the essays, in the context of specific events relevant to Black history. The exploration of the scene in the bar as mirroring the Greensboro sit-ins and the consideration of the historical significance of calling Black men 'boys' develops and enhances the interpretation of the passage, recognising specific details of the sociohistorical dialogue that Baldwin engages with through his writing.

Consistent reference to particular dates and historical events, such as the Vietnam War and the desegregation of schools, locates the passage more securely in the world of 1962 America, and allows more nuanced insight into the social commentary Baldwin offers, and the layers of his argument.

The response continues to engage with specific features of Baldwin's prose style and the structure of his argument; the understanding of these details is enhanced by a New Historicist sensibility, which recognises complexity in the connoted implications of Baldwin's writing choices.

Sample response 2: using a scholarly article

This essay on Bram Stoker's 1897 novel *Dracula* responds to a topic and includes close analysis of a passage, from 'We turned the handle as he spoke, but the door did not yield' (p.300) to 'Van Helsing stepped forward and drew the coverlet gently over her body, whilst Art, after looking at her face for an instant despairingly, ran out of the room' (p.301). (The edition of *Dracula* referred to in this section is the 2003 Penguin Classics edition.)

The second part of the response is informed by the article '*Dracula*: Stoker's Response to the New Woman' by Carol A Senf, an excerpt from which is included on pages 185–6. The response refers directly to this article.

Winona Ryder as Mina in the 1992 film *Bram Stoker's Dracula* directed by Francis Ford Coppola.
AJ Pics / Alamy Stock Photo

Task

'*Dracula* explores the threat of the outsider.'

Discuss this statement with close reference to the selected passage and the article '*Dracula*: Stoker's Response to the New Woman'.

Passage from the text

We turned the handle as he spoke, but the door did not yield. We threw ourselves against it; with a crash it burst open, and we almost fell headlong into the room. The Professor did actually fall, and I saw across him as he gathered himself up from hands and knees. What I saw appalled me. I felt my hair rise like bristles on the back of my neck, and my heart seemed to stand still.

The moonlight was so bright that through the thick yellow blind the room was light enough to see. On the bed beside the window lay Jonathan Harker, his face flushed and breathing heavily as though in a stupor. Kneeling on the near edge of the bed facing outwards was the white-clad figure of his wife. By her side stood a tall, thin man, clad in black. His face was turned from us, but the instant we saw we all recognized the Count – in every way, even to the scar on his forehead. With his left hand he held both Mrs Harker's hands, keeping them away with her arms at full tension. His right hand gripped her by the back of the neck, forcing her face down on his bosom. Her white nightdress was smeared with blood, and a thin stream trickled down the man's bare breast which was shown by his torn-open dress. The attitude of the two had a terrible resemblance to a child forcing a kitten's nose into a saucer of milk to compel it to drink. As we burst into the room, the Count turned his face, and the hellish look that I had heard described seemed to leap into it. His eyes flamed red with devilish passion; the great nostrils of the white aquiline nose opened wide and quivered at the edge; and the white sharp teeth, behind the full lips of the blood-dripping mouth, clamped together like those of a wild beast. With a wrench, which threw his victim back upon the bed as though hurled from a height, he turned and sprang at us. But by this time the Professor had gained his feet, and was holding towards him the envelope which contained the Sacred Wafer. The Count suddenly stopped, just as poor Lucy had done outside the tomb, and cowered back. Further and further back he cowered, as we, lifting our crucifixes, advanced. The moonlight suddenly failed, as a great black cloud sailed across the sky; and when the gaslight sprang up under Quincey's match, we saw nothing but a faint vapour. This, as we looked, trailed under the door, which with the recoil from its bursting open, had swung back to its old position. Van Helsing, Art, and I moved forward to Mrs Harker, who by this time had drawn her breath and with it had given a scream so wild, so ear-piercing, so despairing that it seems to me now that it will ring in my ears till my dying day. For a few seconds she lay in her helpless attitude and disarray. Her face was ghastly, with a pallor which was accentuated by the blood which smeared her lips and cheeks and chin; from her throat trickled a thin stream of blood. Her eyes were mad with terror. Then she put before her face her poor crushed hands, which bore on their whiteness the red mark of the Count's terrible grip, and from behind them came a low desolate wail which made the terrible scream seem only the quick expression of an endless grief. Van Helsing stepped forward and drew the coverlet gently over her body, whilst Art, after looking at her face for an instant despairingly, ran out of the room.

Excerpt from the article

[…]

While the first half of the novel concludes with the destruction of a character [Lucy] who illustrates the aggression and sensuality of the New Woman, the second half centers on a woman who combines the independence and intelligence often associated with the New Woman with traditional femininity – Mina Harker [often referred to in the novel as Mrs Harker]. Stoker introduces Mina in the series of letters which she and Lucy exchange. The two have been friends since childhood, but their letters reveal profound differences in the two adult women. Lucy is a perpetual child, pampered by everyone around her. Her letters reveal a concern with social events and the rather thoughtless pursuit of her own pleasure. Mina, on the other hand, has had to take care of herself. At the beginning of the novel, she is an assistant schoolmistress, a productive and conscious member of her society; and the intelligence and capacity for independent action and judgment which appear in these initial letters remain the predominant elements in her character throughout the novel.

By providing Mina with a responsible profession and a means of economic independence, Stoker reveals that she is a modern woman, the product of intense struggles that took place during the nineteenth century – in short, the kind of woman who could not have existed much before the period in which Stoker wrote. That she is *not* a New Woman can be seen in her criticism of the New Woman writers, her choice of profession – the New Woman writers favored such nontraditional professions as medicine, nursing and business for their heroines – her decision to marry and her subsequent relationship with her husband, her desire to nurture and protect children, and – most clearly – her response to Dracula himself. Although Mina resembles the New Woman before her marriage, she adopts a very traditional role afterwards. She learns shorthand and train schedules so she can help Jonathan in his work, but she generally chooses to remain supportively in the background except when he asks her for assistance. Of course, as she admits, she has prepared herself for this traditional role: 'You can't go on for some years teaching etiquette and decorum to other girls without the pedantry of it biting into yourself a bit' (p.183).

In addition to adhering to the traditional view that wives should defer to their husbands, Mina also believes in woman's traditional role as a mother. While both Lucy and the vampire-women prey on children, Mina believes motherhood is an important social responsibility. In fact she becomes a mother-figure to all the other characters in the novel:

> I felt an infinite pity for him, and opened my arms unthinkingly. With a sob he laid his head on my shoulder, and cried like a wearied child, whilst he shook with emotion.

> We women have something of the mother in us that makes us rise above smaller matters when the mother-spirit is invoked; I felt this big, sorrowing man's head resting on me, as though it were that of the baby that some day may lie on my bosom, and I stroked his hair as though he were my own child. (p.245)

[…]

By emphasising Mina's intelligence, her ability to function on her own, and her economic independence before marriage, Stoker stresses certain aspects of the New Woman; but by negating her sexuality, having her adopt a more traditional feminine role, and by showing her decision to abide by the group's will instead of making an individual decision, he also reveals that she is not a New Woman. It is Van Helsing who, after his first meeting with Mina, best captures the essence of her character and of Stoker's ideal heroine: 'She is one of God's women […] So true, so sweet, so noble, so little an egoist – and that, let me tell you, is much in this age, so sceptical and selfish' (p.201).

Source: Carol A Senf, '*Dracula*: Stoker's Response to the New Woman', *Victorian Studies*, vol. 26, no. 1 (Autumn 1984), pp.33–49, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3827492 (Note that the original page references in this article have been amended to match the pagination in the 2003 Penguin Classics edition of *Dracula*.)

The response

Although the Count is described in the early chapters of *Dracula*, it is not until Chapter 21, when Van Helsing and his helpers break in to disturb the attack on Mina, that the full horror of the Count's strange, alien being is exposed. His 'eyes flamed red', his 'great nostrils … opened wide and quivered' and his 'white sharp teeth … clamped together like those of a wild beast'. These physical qualities mark him as closer to a wild animal than a man; the evil danger he represents is symbolised by his black attire as well as the alarming red 'devilish passion' of his eyes and the blood dripping from his mouth. He is the classic enemy alien, an outsider who invades not just another country but the bedroom of a married couple. At this point, the journey from the Count's castle in the wilds of Transylvania into the heart of civilised England is complete, and Stoker's interest in the threat posed by the outsider comes sharply into focus.

> Begins with details from the passage.

> Clearly relates the discussion to the given topic.

A series of oppositions runs through this passage, all reinforcing the challenge posed by the enmity and power of the Count to the earnest but terrified Englishmen, aided by the Dutchman Van Helsing. The contrast between black (the Count) and white (his victim, Mina), for example, is paralleled by the contrast between the bright moonlight and the 'great black cloud' that suddenly obscures the moonlight as the Count escapes. Similarly, the 'faint vapour' into which the Count transforms, and which 'trailed under the door', contrasts with the corporeality of Van Helsing and his team who must break open the door, clumsily spilling 'almost … headlong' into the room.

The Count's threat exists on multiple levels, and by no means ends with the threat he poses to Mina's life. There is the sanctity of her marriage – represented by the bed on which Mina and Jonathan lie – as well as the

Count's status as a loner, subject to no rule or authority and challenging the bonds of friendship and loyalty established by Van Helsing, Seward, Art, Quincy, Mina and Jonathan. There is the corrupted purity of Mina, represented by her white nightdress that is now 'smeared with blood', and the inversion of her role as potential mother, signified by her being forced to feed from the Count's 'bare breast'. Only the spiritual force of Christian faith, embodied in the crucifixes and the Sacred Wafer, compels him to retreat – yet another sign of the threat he poses, that of the sceptic, the infidel.

In late-19th-century England, religion remained a binding and widely shared set of beliefs and practices, but its authority was being challenged by advances in science, such as Darwin's theory of evolution, which threatened to displace the creation story of Genesis. The nonconformist churches, such as the Methodist and Presbyterian Churches, challenged the establishment Church of England and the Catholic Church. In Victorian England there was also a strong interest in spiritualism and the occult, and particularly in the possibility of communing with the dead; the Count is a visitor not simply from a remote country, but from a godless place beyond life itself. His 'hellish look' and 'devilish passion' reflect the Draculas' alliance with the Devil (Van Helsing earlier refers to their 'dealings with the Evil One', p.256). Thus, when Van Helsing advances with the Sacred Wafer 'the Count suddenly stopped ... and cowered back', signalling that the outsider can indeed be repelled by Christian faith backed by the trappings of the Church, and thus that Christianity remains essential to the integrity of the nation. In the Christian faith, the body dies but the spirit lives on; the vampire signifies the inverse, the survival of the body at the expense of the spirit. The victory of vampirism would spell the end of religious belief, of English piety at the hands of the foreigner's sensuality and brutality.

If the Count dominates this reading of the passage, just as the apparent threat the outsider poses to social, domestic and religious order dominates the novel as a whole, then this comes at the cost of marginalising the other central figure in the scene – that of Mina Harker. Numerous critics have argued that, while the Count is the most obvious threatening force in the novel, anxieties about sexuality and, in particular, female sexuality, are equally prominent. In the article '*Dracula*: Stoker's Response to the New Woman', critic Carol A Senf places Lucy and Mina at the centre of her reading of the novel, rather than at the margins, which is where the preceding analysis places them. For Senf, Mina is 'the kind of woman who could not have existed much before the period in which Stoker wrote'. She shares attributes with the New Woman, an idealised female figure of the period who tested and transgressed the limits of conventional women's roles and identities through increased independence, and access to education and employment. In her journal, Mina refers to the New Woman directly in a way that is part admiring and part disparaging of women's greater agency and assertiveness: 'I suppose the New Woman won't condescend in future to

— Comments on an aspect of context relevant to the discussion of views and values.

— Transitions to the second reading.

— Refers to the first reading and notes how the supplementary text invites a different perspective.

and begin to crawl down the castle wall over that dreadful abyss, face down, with his cloak spreading out around him like great wings. ★

accept; she will do the proposing herself' (p.100). She thus places herself at a distance from this feminist role model, and Senf concurs: 'Although Mina resembles the New Woman before her marriage, she adopts a very traditional role afterwards'. She is thus presented by the text as a kind of preferred or acceptable version of the New Woman: capable, resilient, intelligent, but also restrained and modest, focusing her energies on supporting male endeavours. In other words, Mina represents the ideal wife and mother. In *Dracula*, though, such a figure is extraordinarily rare – in fact, unique. Mina is its only instance, and her vulnerability lies at the heart of the text. The danger to society, in a reading informed by Senf's approach, comes less from the Count than from Mina, who is herself now in the process of becoming a vampire. Like Lucy before her, she would attack the innocent, defy containment and become sexually assertive. The three women Jonathan encounters at Dracula's castle embody the Victorian fear of what the New Woman might really become – the antithesis of the maternal and the submissive:

> *The fair girl went on her knees, and bent over me, fairly gloating. There was a deliberate voluptuousness which was both thrilling and repulsive, and as she arched her neck she actually licked her lips ... (p.45)*

Such a scene is not repeated, but it has echoes in the 'bloodstained, voluptuous mouth' and 'carnal and unspiritual appearance' of Lucy as she lies in her coffin (p.228); and then in Mina's own face being smeared with the Count's blood as well as her later admission that she 'did not want to hinder him', even when 'the blood began to spurt out' and he 'pressed [her] mouth to the wound' (pp.306–7). These barely disguised visions of unrestrained sexuality are what, in the end, Van Helsing and his assistants really wish to eliminate. It is not, ultimately, the threat of the outsider, but the threat of the women *within* society who defy male expectations and constraints, that the novel paranoically suggests is the greatest danger to civilised society.

   After the Count's attack, Mina lies pale and exhausted in a 'helpless attitude and disarray'. The Count, seen in the earlier reading as the hostile, beast-like outsider, might alternatively be seen as an erotically charged figure of desire: he is tall, lean, strong, virile, authoritative, irresistible. He is not so much a threat as a projection of what the English male wants to become. Mina, on the other hand, is an object of pity, with a 'ghastly face' and 'poor crushed hands'. She now needs the (several) men around her to restore her to health and beauty, and to enable her to fulfil her maternal destiny (as she does at the novel's end). In other words, the episode related by the passage locates Mina in just the position her society needs her to occupy – lacking agency or autonomy, needing the protection of sturdy Englishmen and capable, in turn, of assisting the men in their quest. From a reading position in the 21st century, such a representation of the intelligent, practical and resourceful woman being turned into the helpless female

Indicates how the supplementary text informs the second interpretation.

Refers to the initial reading and notes a difference in this second reading.

Considers an implication of the historical, social and cultural context in which the novel is being read.

victim appears less like a concern for women's safety and wellbeing than a reactionary protest at women's gaining greater control over their lives. What is feared in *Dracula* is not, in the end, the Count, but the woman who escapes her place at the centre of the domestic sphere.

As Senf suggests, the novel eliminates Lucy, who demonstrates the 'aggression and sensuality' – the transgressive potential – of the New Woman; it also preserves Mina, who rejects these qualities. The Count promises Mina that the men 'shall minister to your needs' (p.307) but what makes Mina so precious to her society, and her survival so crucial to the novel, is the fulfilment she achieves in ministering to the needs of the men around her.

Assessor comments on sample response 2

The response is a single coherent piece of writing that analyses the selected passage in detail, but is divided clearly into two sections to complete the two parts of the task. The first part of the response addresses the topic as it examines elements of the Count's characterisation and the ways in which the passage constructs the Count as a threatening outsider figure. The analysis pays close attention to specific word choices that mark the Count as both dangerous and starkly contrasted to the other characters, and an awareness of the text's historical, social and cultural context informs the discussion of the outsider and the nature of the threats he poses.

The second part of the response refers explicitly to the supplementary text, the scholarly article by Carol A Senf, and quotes briefly from it in order to set up the second reading of the novel. The focus of the discussion shifts from the Count to Mina, making a clear distinction between the two readings, and phrases such as 'the preceding analysis' and 'in the earlier reading' are used to compare the readings. The interpretation is clearly informed by Senf's article, as shown by the direct quotes as well as the discussion of Mina in relation to the idea of the New Woman. The selected passage remains central to the analysis, but some references to the wider text place the passage, and in particular its depiction of Mina, in the context of the novel's broader representations of women. (For clarity, quotations from parts of the text outside of the selected passage are accompanied by page numbers.) This leads to a more critical analysis of the views and values presented by the text, emphasised by the phrase 'reactionary protest at women's gaining greater control over their lives'. This interpretation stands in disagreement with the topic, but engagement with the topic is nevertheless sustained through the continued discussion of the Count, still considered as an outsider figure but no longer as the primary threat. This more critical view of *Dracula* is located in the present-day reading context, showing an awareness of the ways in which values and perspectives change with time.

CREATIVE RESPONSES TO TEXTS

Although literary studies is predominantly analytical, the study of texts in schools often includes a creative component. This allows students a rare opportunity to express themselves more freely and originally than in a formal essay, and also recognises that creative writing can be as effective a basis for studying and writing on texts as analytical study and writing. Moreover, creative writing is now an accepted academic discipline.

Writing creatively in response to a text is not simply a matter of reflecting on one's feelings about reading a particular book, or writing a completely original piece that merely borrows some character or place names from another text. Rather, the focus is on understanding, then replicating (and perhaps subtly modifying) the author's techniques of constructing a text and communicating ideas.

In this sense, there is a strong analytical component underpinning the creative process. An important related point is that authors don't simply 'make it up': they research their content and carefully plan their writing, choosing certain conventions and features by which to tell a story, represent characters, and engage readers and audiences in their believable, yet constructed, 'world'. By seeking to gain some mastery of these conventions and features, you will gain a fascinating and informative insight into the author's own creative processes, and into the techniques and devices by which texts construct meaning.

Strategies for responding creatively

For VCE Literature, the creative response task is in two parts.

- Part 1 involves writing an original, imaginative piece, based closely on a text set for study.

- Part 2 involves writing a close analysis of a key passage from the text, which includes discussion of connections between the creative response and the original text.

! **All preparation for a creative response involves close analysis of a text you are studying. Further, writing in the style of the original, developing a character or writing from a different point of view all build your understanding of how texts are constructed from an 'inside' perspective.**

Ways to respond

There are many possible approaches to creating an imaginative work based on an existing text. For instance, you could:

- produce an original piece of writing, using the style and setting of the text you are studying

- produce a new piece of writing that could be added to the text (an additional chapter, scene, poem, series of letters etc.)

- rewrite part of the text by changing its setting or adapting it to a different form

- rewrite a section of the text by using a different narrative point of view (such as another character's perspective).

More examples of how you could respond to particular forms of texts are given in the table on page 196.

How to write creatively

To produce an effective creative response to a text, keep in mind the following suggestions and guidelines.

- **Capture the author's style of writing.** Look for:
  - → the use of irony and/or humour
  - → descriptions of landscapes or detailed interior settings
  - → sentence length and style.

- **Develop a new scene that involves an existing character.** Keep the new material consistent with what is known about the character, as well as giving extra insight into the character's motivations, feelings and actions.

- **Find gaps in the text** and create a new perspective.

- **Choose a character who does not have a central role or narrative viewpoint** in the text you are studying. Writing from this character's perspective is a good way to generate an original piece which is also consistent with the original text.

KEY KNOWLEDGE / KEY SKILLS

What you need to know	What you need to be able to do
› The point of view, context and form of the text.	› Show your awareness of the point of view, context and form of the text in your own creative piece.
› How the text presents its main ideas.	› Demonstrate your understanding of the ideas presented by a text.
› How the author uses features such as characters, situations, setting, narrative voice, form, tone, style and imagery.	› Identify and incorporate into your own writing features of a text such as characterisation, situations, setting, narrative voice, tone, style and imagery.
› How to write a close analysis of a key passage in a text.	› Analyse a key passage and reflect on connections between the passage and your creative response.

Essential terms for creative responses

When writing and reflecting on your creative response, you will need to be very aware of the elements that the writer has used to construct the text.

This means understanding features such as setting and characterisation, as well as more abstract aspects of the text such as the views and values it presents and the ideas circulating within it.

Some of the features you will look to incorporate in your own writing are summarised in the following table. Answer these questions for the text you are studying: they will help you identify the specific qualities of the text – and hence, of your response.

Feature	What to look for: activities and questions
Form	› How does the form create meaning? › Is genre relevant? › Could you adapt part of the text to a different form? What would stay the same? What would you change?
Narrative voice / point of view	› How is point of view created? › Whose point of view is the reader offered? › Does the point of view shift? If so, what is the effect of this? › What would be the effect of changing the narrative voice to another perspective or character?
Structure	› How does the text begin and end? › How are characters and conflicts introduced? › How is the setting established? › What complications ensue? Do these lead to a crisis? › Is anything resolved by the end? › Is there scope for writing a prologue or epilogue?

Feature	What to look for: activities and questions
Characterisation	› Is there a protagonist?
	› Is there an antagonist?
	› How do the characters speak – formally, with a wide vocabulary; or in everyday, informal language?
	› Do the characters express themselves freely and openly, or are they secretive?
	› Do the characters express themselves differently in different company?
	› What are the characters' main actions?
	› How do the characters relate to each other? Are their relationships close or distant? Friendly or adversarial?
	› Are the characters' clothes or physical appearance of special interest?
	› What do other characters say about a character? Have we learned anything about them before we meet them?
Tone and style	› Are sentences long and complex, or simple and straightforward?
	› Are there many images, symbols or metaphors? How do these relate to ideas, views and values?
	› Are the tone and style of the language associated with a particular social class?
	› How formal or informal is the language?
	› Does the writer use irony? If so, what is its effect (e.g. humour, pathos, dramatic tension, social satire, social criticism)?
Setting	› What are the main settings (e.g. indoors or outdoors; historical or contemporary; city or country)?
	› Are the characters comfortable or uncomfortable in their settings?
	› Do the settings reflect wider social or material circumstances (e.g. social power and privilege; lack of opportunity; feelings of entrapment)?
	› How might you represent the characters and/or conflicts in a different setting?
Context	› In what context was the text first produced and read?
	› What were the main social issues of this time? How are these issues different from those of your own time?
	› Will your creative response reflect your contemporary context?
Views and values	› What are the main ideas in the text?
	› Are there tensions between opposing ideas or impulses (e.g. good/bad; reason/emotion; freedom/duty; desire/restraint)?
	› Does the author endorse, challenge or question values or attitudes?
	› Do you agree with the author's stance on these values or attitudes?
	› If you disagree with some aspects of the author's apparent viewpoint, can you incorporate this in your response by resisting some features of the original?

plunging, the rod bending alive, out of the danger of the weeds into the open river ... He rushed,

Preparing to write

The following activities enable you to develop your awareness and understanding of the author's strategies and craft. This section also covers some generic approaches to producing creative responses to texts.

Building your skills

These three activities are creative and fundamental to your understanding of the text; they will also help you to refine your writing skills.

This activity develops your ability to write in the author's style.

1   Write a passage in the author's style – for example:

› describe the room you are in

› describe a person you know

› give an account of your day.

2   Read the passage aloud (either to a group or the whole class). Can your audience identify which features of the author's style you have used?

This activity shows you how to write in the protagonist's voice.

1   Annotate a passage or two, noting phrasing, vocabulary and favourite expressions the protagonist uses.

2   Create a dictionary of words and phrases for the character.

3   Write a piece of dialogue or prose to insert in the original text. Read it aloud, asking someone for feedback. Have you created a seamless, credible voice for the character?

4   Use what you have learned to create convincing voices for the characters in your creative response.

This activity involves annotating a passage from your text in order to become more aware of the writer's processes and techniques. It will give you a good sense of the features to include in your own creative response.

1   Copy out a passage from the text you are studying.

2   Annotate the passage, making notes on the author's use of language; techniques of characterisation; narrative point of view; key images and symbols; and settings.

Preparation strategy

The following preparation strategy outlines a two-step process based on a template for preparing a creative response on a text. This template can be downloaded and used as the basis for your notes; it will help you organise your ideas and formulate an approach to your creative writing.

Scan the code or click **here** for a two-page template you can use to plan your creative response.

Step 1: Analysing the original text

You will need to make notes on the text's main concerns and on aspects of the text's construction. Note these elements:

- title, author, form (e.g. novel, play, poem, memoir or short story)
- the main ideas and the text's points of view on these
- context
- literary features: setting, narrative voice, characterisation, imagery and use of language (e.g. typical sentence structure and length; word choices; tone and style).

Keep these aspects in mind as you work on your creative response. You will address some of these features specifically in your passage analysis, as you reflect on connections between your creative response and the original text.

Step 2: Developing your creative response

- Establish and identify the kind of creative piece you will write:
  - → an original composition, similar in style/concerns
  - → an insert
  - → a recasting of setting or a change in the point of view.
- Identify the form you will write in (e.g. short story, series of letters, epilogue, prologue, film script, play script).
- Show that you are aware of the ways in which your work adopts or resists features of the original.
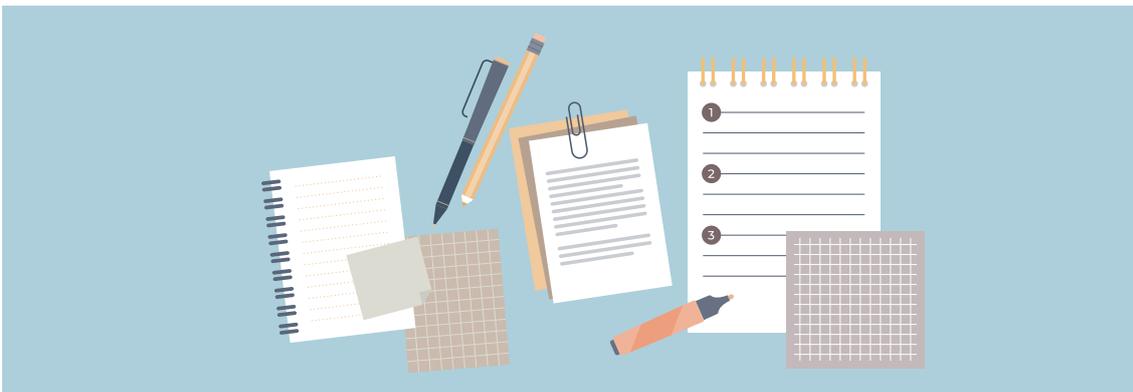
Approaches for different genres

The following table outlines some suggested approaches to a creative response for various forms of texts.

Genre	Ideas for creative responses
Short stories	› Write a story of your own on a similar theme.
	› Write an original story, to be included in the collection of stories you are studying.
	› Adapt a story for film.
	› Rewrite a story, or part of it, from another character's point of view.
	Activities for short stories:
	› Read your story aloud.
	› Listen to someone else read it.
	› Make a list of words and phrases the author uses.
	› Rewrite a section in another setting or style, or from another point of view.
Novels	› Insert a new chapter/section.
	› Write a prologue or epilogue.
	› Rewrite a section from the point of view of another character.
	› Rewrite a section as a play script or film script (e.g. the title sequence and opening scene for a film, derived from the opening chapter; or the third act of a three-act play, derived from the novel's denouement).
Plays	› Script a prologue or epilogue.
	› Insert a monologue that reveals a minor or major character's thoughts to the audience at a critical point in the plot.
	› Adapt part of the play for film or television.
	› Write a set of background notes for a play on a similar theme and/or in a similar style, then script part of it.
Other literature	› Explore part of the text from another person's point of view. For example, if your text is a memoir, you could write a collection of journal entries by a person depicted in the memoir, showing their response to the author's version of their part in the story.
	› Write an original piece matching the style and context of the original (e.g. a short memoir or reflective piece).
Poetry	› Write a poem of your own, or a collection of poems, in the style of the poet you are studying.
	› Rewrite a poem in another form, such as a short story.

Sample creative response

The following creative response is an epilogue to Joanna Murray-Smith's play *Berlin* (2nd edition, 2022). It is followed by a close analysis of a passage from the play that also comments on connections between the creative response and this passage, and the play as a whole.

Epilogue

On the blacked-out stage, a spotlight reveals CHARLOTTE, *stepping
back from the window and crossing to stage left. On the other side
of the stage, a spotlight shines on* TOM. CHARLOTTE *and* TOM *face
away from each other, indicating the physical and emotional chasm
separating them.*

CHARLOTTE: [*feeling both guilt and relief, cradling the statue of Aphrodite in her
hands*] You know, Tom, deep down, I didn't trust you, right from the start
– you were a just a little too ... [*searches for the right word*] ... *gescheit*.
And as for your pretentious spiel about the wine, you didn't even pick it as
Australian; I should have known you were a total f***ing fraud. I let myself
be seduced by my need to be liked ... to be wanted. And you wanted me, a
German, whose murdering Nazi ancestors cast a black shadow over Germany
and Germans. We are, apparently, never to be forgiven! Was it only ever
revenge f***ing, Tom? And what about you? What makes you so morally
superior?

    Beat.

It was chaos here after the war. My great-grandfather was a good man
– a decent man. He saved precious works of art from Nazi thugs – not
just because he wanted them for himself, although he couldn't resist the
Constable. He sold other things cheaply to people who'd appreciate their
beauty and artistry. One day, my grandfather took me into his study and
showed me the painting and the statue. He said one day they'd be mine to
treasure and pass down to my children. He trusted me and I betrayed him.

TOM: [*handing the painting to his brother, who stands in the shadows on stage
right*] When I walked out with the painting, I heard her calling me from the
window. Part of me desperately wanted to go and give it back to her. She's
like no one I've ever met; she's sassy, beautiful, clever – yes, I know she's
German and I'm Jewish ... but I couldn't let her think I used her for sex and
just wanted the painting. Okay, I wanted the sex *and* the painting but now
I know it's her I want ... much more than the painting. I'm in love with her.
I was some random stranger who needed somewhere to stay and she rescued
me. She told me she had a brother who ran onto the road and was killed by
a car when he was four. She was looking after him and she's been blaming
herself ever since. It's pretty much how I feel about Adam being killed
because he sat in the wrong seat. We kind of bonded.

    Beat.

Now I think it was his fate: wrong place, wrong time. Maybe it's my fate to
be here now because I'm a Jew looking for some kind of moral justice for
my murdered family. It's weird, isn't it? I was going to be a lawyer, fighting
for social justice, and then, one night, I'm on the other side of the world

having sex with a beautiful woman I met in a bar and planning to walk off with a priceless painting from nineteenth-century England. F***ing unbelievable!

CHARLOTTE: [*turns around and looks at the blank space on the wall where the Constable used to be; it is illuminated by a spotlight; her voice is bitter*] Well, Tom, you got what you came for. What a gullible idiot I was.

> *She picks up a book from the table and reads aloud the poem 'Put Out My Eyes' by Rilke, about the way the senses still perceive something that's missing or someone who's not there anymore, amplifying feelings of grief or loss. Is she thinking of the painting or of Tom?*
> *Lights flicker and swirl across the stage while the Ramones' song 'I Wanna Be Your Boyfriend' are faintly heard. Its lyrics resonate eerily with Tom's tracking down of Charlotte to claim the painting and his unexpected attraction to her intelligence and sexual allure.*

TOM: [*walks to the front of the stage and looks out into the audience*] Do you think anyone can ever really move on from tragedy? Charlotte was haunted by the death of her brother and tormented – like a lot of German people – by the stigma of the Holocaust. Next to that, our own little tragedies seem insignificant: my mate was killed and I wasn't, because he sat in the wrong seat … I'm still ashamed of the relief I felt. I came home from Berlin with the Constable and a massively guilty conscience for how I treated Charlotte.

> *Beat.*

We donated the Constable to the local Holocaust Centre. There's a plaque on it with the names of our relatives who died at Bergen-Belsen. In a sense, the painting's a bit like one of those memory sites in Berlin. A couple of months ago, I went back to Berlin. As part of my job as curator of the Jewish Museum, I was gathering data from the *Stolpersteine* about the people who'd been taken away and shoved into ovens. I'm walking past a bookshop in Friedrichstadt and a book in the window catches my eye; it's a poetry collection. On the cover is a photo of a beautiful woman wearing a black bowler hat: it's Charlotte.

CHARLOTTE: [*notices* TOM] I'm in the bookshop reorganising the window display and there you suddenly are, Tom, looking through the window at my book. I pretend I haven't seen you. I turn and walk towards the back of the shop and slip into the storeroom. I think about the Aphrodite and how much it meant to my great-grandfather. He'd be glad I kept it. The guy behind the counter says you came into the shop and told him you knew me. He says you bought a copy of my book. What you might find interesting is a poem called 'Aphrodite' – it's about poetic justice.

> *Lights out – silence and darkness.*

Passage analysis

When writing an analysis of a passage that is to include your reflections on connections between the creative response and the original text, you could either integrate discussion of the connections with the analysis, or discuss the connections separately.

The following analysis is based on a passage at the end of *Berlin*, from page 45, 'CHARLOTTE: [*distraught*] You need to be a real …' to page 47, '*A shaken, ambivalent* TOM *walks towards the door, carrying the painting, looks at her, then leaves, closing the door behind him*.' The analysis initially focuses on the passage, then discusses some of the connections with the creative response on the previous pages.

After Tom's admission that he came to Berlin intending to reclaim the Constable, Charlotte bitterly denounces his deceit, alleging that his 'glib comments' about his religious faith are merely part of his 'flirtation routine'. This makes him not only duplicitous but also a sexual predator, whose male gaze categorises and objectifies Charlotte, initially regarding her merely as a means to an end. Charlotte's moral outrage, indicated by her repetition of 'you' or 'you're' at the start of each of the first five sentences of this speech, evokes the judgemental tone of a courtroom as she denounces Tom for 'claiming' the experiences of Holocaust victims for himself and turning Auschwitz 'into a spectacle'. As an embodiment of a vibrant 21st-century Berlin, Charlotte seeks liberation from the shadow of the Holocaust; she accuses Tom of 'refusing to let go' and of 'forcing those people to die over and over again'. This highlights the tension between holding grimly onto the past and embracing the possibilities of the present moment. The protagonists' diametrically opposed attitudes highlight other sets of seemingly irreconcilable binary oppositions: German and Jew; past and present; life and death; trust and betrayal. In the playing out of these tensions by characters who fall passionately in love, Murray-Smith positions audiences to hope that reconciliation is possible in a world where the line between retribution and justice is often blurred.

Another factor Murray-Smith considers is the role of fate in determining individuals' destinies. Although Adam's fate resulted partly from his choice of seat in the car, the Holocaust victims' fate was largely determined by political forces beyond their control. On the other hand, as Tom points out, even though he tells Charlotte, 'you're the sum total of what came before you', fate might offer a chance to 'start again'. Moreover, the notion of fate seems to problematise the concept of individual responsibility for one's actions. In considering their options and obligations at this dramatic moment in the play, Tom and Charlotte visualise the dismal future awaiting the other if they refuse to 'go with the present'. Tom sees Charlotte, at sixty, 'in a park' with a grandchild because she refuses to take the 'one chance' to avert the inevitable disappointment of an unfulfilled life. Charlotte's imagining of Tom at sixty is of his living alone in a bedsit, surrounded by 'piles of hoarded newspapers', never having had children because he didn't know how to 'let life happen'. Her sudden reference to the painting and to justice is a sharp reminder of decisions they both need to make about the future.

In responding creatively to *Berlin*, I extended the action of the play by writing an epilogue. Because the play is so fast-paced and tightly scripted, the addition of an extra scene within the time frame of the play seemed inappropriate. In making a strong connection with the play I have explored the issues Murray-Smith raises, including justice, retribution, family, memory, guilt and moral responsibility. I also emulated the following aspects of her style.

Dialogue throughout the play often features rapid verbal sparring. In the play's dramatic climax (situated in the passage), Tom and Charlotte's rapid-fire dialogue keeps the audience in suspense. In the epilogue, reflecting the passage of time, I replaced this with introspective monologues in which the characters reflect on their choices.

Detailed stage directions often reveal the characters' emotional states, and those in the selected passage also describe the characters' actions in the closing moments of the play. Similarly, I used stage directions in the epilogue to convey feelings and explore tensions.

Lighting effects have particular significance in the play. Darkness might imply sorrow, anger, confusion, despair and other negative emotions, some of which Tom and Charlotte would experience in the blackout at the end of the play. The stark brightness of the spotlighting in the epilogue might imply the characters' realisation that Tom has got what he came for and their relationship is over. The question remains, however, whether he would have come back when she calls to him through the window and, if he did, what might happen. In the epilogue, both actors remain on the stage after the blackout. This suggests that, although Tom has physically left the apartment, he is still emotionally entangled with Charlotte.

The blackout at the end of the play emphasises the impossibility of any satisfactory resolution of the complicated issues and moral dilemmas that Murray-Smith explores. The passage briefly allows for the possibility of a 'happy ending' when Tom kisses Charlotte and her response is '*just as passionate*', providing audiences who have become emotionally invested in the love story with a ray of hope that the characters will resolve their differences. However, the blackout and Charlotte's unanswered calls mean the play ends with a delicate balance between hope and doubt. As in the play, the epilogue ends with a blackout and with the tension between Charlotte and Tom unresolved, leaving the audience (literally and metaphorically) in the dark as well.

The play's <u>language</u> features the frequent use of the 'f-word', including at the start of the selected passage, so it is necessarily included in a creative reimagining of the text. Once considered taboo, it is now increasingly in common use. Its meanings in the play are various. As a way of describing sex, it is bluntly straightforward. As a synonym for dealing dishonestly with people (as Tom does with Charlotte) he might be 'f***ing' with her, and as a reference to the way each character feels at the end of the play, 'f***ed up' might be an accurate description. Indeed, the word, quite aptly, encompasses sex, deception and a state of distress.

The haunting <u>imagery</u> of the *Stolpersteine* is strongly present in the text. On page 12, Charlotte relates the story of Esther Rosen, a Jewish woman who died in Auschwitz in 1942, and whose memory is preserved in a *Stolperstein* outside her house. In the passage Charlotte refers to Tom as 'my *stolpersteine*'. In the epilogue, Tom is seeking out *Stolpersteine* as a way of connecting Holocaust victims with their descendants, reinforcing the importance to both characters of reconciling the past with the present and the future.

Scan the code or click **here** for creative responses to the short-story collection *Foreign Soil* by Maxine Beneba Clarke, Peter Carey's *Collected Stories*, Anna Funder's *Stasiland*, and Jane Austen's novels *Emma*, *Persuasion* and *Sense and Sensibility*.

PASSAGE ANALYSIS

Analysing one or more passages from a text is one of the most open-ended assessment tasks you are likely to face. There is no essay topic or question to respond to; you are simply given the passage or passages and asked to use these as the basis for your interpretation of a text.

Passage analysis draws together all the skills you develop in your study of literature and literary analysis. You will combine a very close study of textual features with a discussion of the text's wider meanings and the views and values it presents. In particular, you will show **how language works to create meaning in a literary text**.

Without any particular 'correct' answer and no real structure in the assessment task to guide you, you have to be analytical *and* creative in your response. Remember that the passages will have been chosen carefully so that they illuminate several of the text's central concerns, and there will be a number of connections between them. Your response will:

- engage closely and thoroughly with the given passages, especially with textual features such as narrative voice, setting, characterisation, word choices and imagery

- explain the significance of the passages, the connections between them and their relationship to the text as a whole

- shape this analysis into a compelling and coherent interpretation of the text.

This chapter provides you with strategies and processes for writing a passage analysis. It gives you tips for writing effectively on three passages under timed conditions, and includes three sample responses with detailed annotations and assessor comments.

Preparing for a passage analysis task

Step 1: Practise selecting passages

A very effective way to prepare for a passage analysis task is to select three appropriate passages for analysis and justify your selection. Use the following strategies to set out and annotate your selected passages.

For a novel

The diagram opposite represents an A3 page or a large sheet of butcher's paper on which you will work for this exercise. You can use this approach for all texts, with some modifications for specific forms as outlined below.

Mark or highlight characters, places, images or descriptions that establish a mood.	Write down any questions that the passage leaves you asking or wondering about.	Highlight images and phrases that evoke a mood, denote a change etc.
Place a section from the novel's opening on the first third of the page.	Place a section that marks a turning point for the protagonist or other main character in the middle third of the page.	Place a section from near the end of the novel on the final third of the page.
Highlight words, phrases, images and sentences that reveal the protagonist's thoughts or feelings.	Note what has changed and why; what options does the protagonist have now?	What, if anything, has been resolved?

For a play

- Select three key scenes that will allow you to develop a discussion of the characterisation and plot. Use these as the working script for your analysis.

- Highlight key words, phrases and stage directions. You might want to use a colour code for characters, conflicts, motifs etc.

- Note developments, turning points, suspense and resolutions (or the lack of these).

- Specify the intended effect on the audience.

- Pay close attention to descriptions of the set and other stage directions.

For short stories

- Select a passage from the title story (if there is one) of the collection. Otherwise, choose from your favourite story.

- Place this passage at the centre of an A3 page as shown in the diagram above.

- Relate the passage/story to the collection through highlighting and underlining key characters, settings and images, then place boxes with comments around the passage.

- Repeat for passages from two other stories.

- Use the similarities and differences between the stories to shape your discussion.

For poetry

- Paste a copy of your favourite poem in the centre of a page. If it is a long poem, choose your favourite, central stanzas.

- Annotate the poem by highlighting or underlining key images, words, symbols etc.

- Do the same with a second and third poem by this poet, as in the diagram above.

- Use a highlighter to make links between the poems.

- Write annotations explaining why each poem is significant in the poet's body of work.

Step 2: Practise reading and annotating passages

Carefully reading and annotating passages is excellent preparation for writing an extended analysis. See the process outlined in Chapter 2, particularly the annotations on page 111. Write detailed annotations for your practice pieces to get into the habit of teasing out the meanings and connotations of specific words and images. Note, though, that you will not have time to write detailed annotations in an assessment task under timed conditions.

Read the passages as if for the first time

In an assessment task you should spend time just reading the passages carefully. In an exam you will do this in the reading time, when you are not permitted to write. Read the passages as if you are seeing them for the first time. Look for things you have never noticed before; look for what strikes you as unusual, effective, suggestive.

- Read for basics: ask yourself, What's happening to whom? When?
- Read for comprehension: Why? How do we know?
- Read for your personal response: What do I think/feel about this?
- Reflect on how you are positioned by the writer to respond in a certain way.
- Read for analysis: How has the writer achieved these effects?
- Read for connections between the passages based on similarities, but also based on contrasts and changes.

Use a mental checklist

Look for elements of the six key areas listed below as the basis for annotating the passages – this gives you a 'game plan' to focus your reading.

- form and structure
- language use
- characterisation
- narrative voice and perspective
- setting
- views and values

Consider how these elements work *within* the passages, and also *between* the passages. Do the passages use language in contrasting ways? Are the settings different? Is an alternative perspective or another set of values presented?

Step 3: Practise writing on passages

If you are writing a passage analysis for an assessment task (including an exam) then an additional challenge is to complete your response within a set time. When you first start your practice sessions, allow yourself more time; but make sure you write several answers within the official time limit before you do the actual assessment task.

- **Read the passages carefully** without writing.
- **Annotate, highlight and plan** for about five minutes.
- **Write and revise** for most of the available time.

How to write on passages

Practise using the strategies in this section as you prepare for a passage analysis task under timed conditions. They are divided into three main areas:

- how to start
- how to develop your response
- how to finish strongly.

These strategies – with sustained practice – will enable you to become confident and proficient at writing coherent and compelling passage analyses.

How to start

Here are some approaches to writing effective openings that apply to most forms of texts. The title and character names of the text used for illustrative purposes have been modified in order to emphasise the general nature of the points.

The first approach is to leap straight in, but avoid the unsatisfactory, common start of the first example in the table below. The second example is better, as indicated in the comments.

Example	Comments
In the play _T_ _W_, written by playwright S_ S_, two brothers meet again after five years.	› Yes, we know what the name of the text is! › You're telling the story – but we've all read that. You have earned yourself no marks. › This achieves nothing, except perhaps to put the reader to sleep.
As the play progresses, the brothers who seem so different begin to merge and even swap characteristics, yet S_ offers no easy outcome for either A_ or B_.	› Recognises that there is change in the text: it is drama, dynamic. › Identifies one of the playwright's concerns – the lack of easy outcomes. Themes are commented on for later development; the text's complexity is hinted at.

If leaping in doesn't really suit you, try the following openings. You can vary them as your writing improves, but **these beginnings will make you discuss what is relevant.**

Approach	Example	Comments
Use a verb to identify what the text/writer is doing.	In _T_ _W_, S_ explores …	› Using the word 'explores' forces you to discuss and comment, and prevents storytelling.
Use a key symbol or image.	In passage one, the idea of the desert is associated with B_; he rejects the notion of the 'north'. Thus, S_ contrasts the two brothers and what they represent …	› Uses a key symbol or image as an entry point.
Select an aspect of language use and a quote.	The seeming reversal of roles implicit in A_'s claim that he is 'goin' to the desert' is ironic, as Mom surveys the desert that her sons have reduced her home to.	› Shows understanding of an aspect of language use (irony). › A quote from one of the passages leads directly to the text's major concerns.

Approach	Example	Comments
Use recurring words and/ or concepts from the text (e.g. free; desert; money; north; sleep; night/day; victims; home; family).	The home that Mom has made, her plants, the order she has imposed on disorder, is lost by passage three. She has come home to escape the north, and is confronted by her sons in deadly conflict in the ruins of her 'safe place'. Our need for comfort and beauty is both suggested in her desire to see Picasso and exposed as the delusion of the ignorant and desperate.	› Ask yourself: which words and concepts recur? Make a short list. › What are the home and the family metaphors for? You can develop these ideas. › Why 'escape the north'? The reasons for this 'escape' could be further explored in relation to freedom, home, family and so on.
Start with a quotation.	(See the example in the table below.)	› You could begin the response with a quotation from one of the passages to 'hang your hat on'. Choose one that will serve as an ideas base for your response.
Use a symbol or motif (e.g. eyes, billboard, car in *The Great Gatsby*).	The image of eyes symbolises the idea of looking without seeing the underlying emptiness of a life centred on money and consumption, a problem that afflicts all the central characters of the novel.	› Do the passages contain a symbol or motif that is powerful in its operation in the text? › Avoid using the word 'theme' in your opening – resist making generalisations and focus on the specifics of the passages.

See how these four different openings can lead to four different, but equally valid, responses.

Sample opening	Suggestions for further development
'This is worse than being homeless.' As Mom surveys the wreckage of her house, she puts into words one of S_'s major concerns in *T_ W_* – the need for a 'place', a home. Yet, posed against this yearning is the desire to be 'a free agent'. The dichotomy between these two impulses is seen in the two brothers, and the extent to which the dilemma is insoluble is demonstrated by their paralysed 'squaring off' as the play ends …	› The use of a quotation from a passage instantly identifies the approach through the key word 'homeless'. › The house is linked to the idea of belonging which can be further discussed, and clearly derives directly from the passage. › A dichotomy (or binary opposition) is identified: the need for home versus desire for freedom. This could lead to a discussion of dramatic tension in the play, changes that occur and what they represent.
As darkness falls at the end of passage three, the desperation described by Mom is evinced in the stasis, the bleak emptiness suggested by the 'brothers … caught in a vast, desert-like landscape'. The silence further enforces the hopelessness of the 'stand-off', perhaps illustrating through A_ and B_'s predicament the loss of the American Dream, and of all that is invested in that concept.	› Metaphorical significance of the darkness could be spelled out and developed. › Each sentence relates character to the larger concepts of darkness/emptiness/silence, indicating symbolic dimensions to characters and the physical landscape – these could be explored further. › 'Loss of the American Dream' sets up the response for a discussion of views and values within the play while using material from the passage as the starting point.

Sample opening	Suggestions for further development
The idea of 'the divided self' is explored by S_ as the two brothers compete in a deadly contest; yet neither security and respectability nor untrammelled freedom offer a sense of self and fulfilment to A_ and B_. As A_ increasingly adopts B_'s speech patterns and, unlike B_, preys on his neighbours, the wasteland that they make of Mom's house suggests the horror and emptiness of contemporary American life.	› Indicates the approach and interpretation. › Shows engagement with *how* S_ conveys his concerns. › Includes implicit links with and development of passages. › The end of the paragraph indicates the metaphorical significance of the family within the play – as a microcosm of America.
The presence and contrasting responses to life represented by the Old Man and Mom pervade the play, but ultimately S_ suggests that …	› Shows an appreciation of the playwright as the creative artist behind the work, and of the play as construct rather than 'reality'.

How to develop your response

Once you have begun with an effective introduction, the challenge is to sustain and develop the main ideas.

- Aim to give each body paragraph a topic sentence or a 'mini-contention'.

- Remember to relate the specific detail of the passages to the text's wider concerns – the views and values it promotes or questions.

- Develop an overall argument or viewpoint. This gives your response coherence (that is, continuity + unity) and ensures you do not lapse into plot description or paraphrase. It is also a crucial aspect of presenting an interpretation.

- Work closely with material from the passages (at least two of the three) to support your interpretation throughout.

Making the response coherent

A unifying argument or point of view on the text will give you a central strand running through your response that you can relate all your individual points to. Your response will then develop logically.

The argument can be implicit rather than explicit; it should underpin your selection of textual evidence and give you a clear point to make each time you refer to the text. This is necessary because you need to present an interpretation – *your* view of what the text means, of its broader view of society and human nature.

Avoid a simple declaration of your interpretation or argument, especially at the start of your discussion. Statements like '*Hamlet* shows that outward appearances cannot be trusted' are too reductive to use as central arguments. Sticking to a statement such as this reduces all textual evidence to one thought, making it very hard to unpack all the complexities of the material you select from the passages.

Aim for a **natural progression of ideas** – begin with something specific from one of the passages and then link it to the other passages and the text's wider views and values.

Work with a **cluster of core terms and ideas** that you set up in your introduction; this allows you to be flexible as you work with different elements and features of the text.

Specific ways to give your discussion coherence

Focus on a central idea or tension (e.g. between appearance and reality; reason and passion) and trace its development through the different:

- characters and relationships
- parts of the narrative (beginning, middle, end)
- images and aspects of language use, such as tone and style.

Adopt a clear point of view on the significance of the passage you are discussing. For instance:

- The passage establishes the contrasting values and world views represented by two central characters.
- The passage exposes and critiques the attitudes of a certain social group.
- The passage resolves narrative tensions but leaves many questions unanswered, prompting the reader to contemplate their own ethical choices and standards.

For **collections of short stories**, work with a character trait present in two or three passages as well as other selected stories, and show its various social and cultural implications, such as:

- feelings of anxiety and inadequacy
- difficulty in sustaining relationships
- experiences of being an outsider.

For **collections of poetry**, take up a poetic technique identified in your introduction and explore its effects and meanings in other poems, such as:

- use of personification to describe landscapes
- use of metaphysical conceit
- use of free verse to convey a sense of alienation or the breakdown of social structures.

How to finish strongly

An effective conclusion does not need to be long, but it will bring your discussion to a close and draw together different aspects of your analysis. This enhances the coherence of your writing and leaves your assessor convinced that you have a sure grasp of the material.

- Strong conclusions contain statements about the text's wider meaning, referring to the ideas it endorses or critiques, or its overall view of a society.
- Don't lapse into sweeping generalisations.
- Focus more on the text as a whole than on specific textual features.

! **Ensure that your concluding general statements are clearly justified by, and are logical extensions of, your close analysis of the passages.**

Comparing introductions and conclusions

To gain a better understanding of what makes a strong conclusion, consider the main points of difference between introductions and conclusions.

Introduction	Conclusion
› focuses on textual material	› focuses on the text's wider meaning
› introduces and explains key terms in relation to specific features of the text	› uses key terms in relation to the text's ideas, views and values
› begins the discussion with one key aspect	› draws together different parts of the discussion
› works from the particular to the general in order to open up discussion	› works with the text as a whole to bring the discussion to a close

Read the introductions and conclusions of the sample responses on the following pages for examples of how to begin and end your discussion.

- How is each essay's introduction connected to its conclusion?
- What are the main differences between the introductions and the conclusions?

Sample passage analyses

The sample responses in this section cover three forms of texts: novels, poetry and short stories. Carefully read the annotations and assessor comments, as they show you how the responses are constructed and draw attention to the features of a successful passage analysis. At the end of this chapter you will also find links to passage-analysis responses on plays.

Writing on a novel

! **A detailed analysis of passages from a novel will show the significance of language, imagery, dialogue, setting and characterisation within them, and an awareness of how each passage contributes to meaning in the novel as a whole.**

Sample response on *Alias Grace*

This response is based on three passages from Margaret Atwood's novel *Alias Grace*:

- pages 44–5, from 'I look at him, then look away. An apple, I say' to 'But if I am to listen to you, you will have to talk to me'
- pages 201–2, from 'I asked her who the man was, but she would not tell me' to 'I noticed her putting the money carefully away under the loose board, afterwards'
- pages 533–4, from 'While I am sitting out on the verandah in the afternoons, I sew away at the quilt I am making' to 'I am telling this to no one but you, as I am aware it is not the approved reading.'

(Page numbers are from the 2019 Virago Press edition.)

In passage one, Grace Marks and Simon Jordan warily scrutinise each other in their first meeting, each seeking truths and each holding back information in turn. Their exchanges are at the centre of Atwood's exploration of a world founded on appearance, reputation and status, in which concealment and pretence are not merely commonplace but essential. Grace's narrative emphasises the acts of looking, being looked at and presenting the 'right' look to the world, with the heightened state of awareness that comes from being a convicted murderer and widely regarded as insane. To preserve a shred of independence and agency, she keeps most of her thoughts to herself: 'I will not tell him that' and 'I will not oblige' signal her defiance and her reluctance to give too much away. She knows the value of giving people the answers they expect and that they judge others in superficial ways, so she puts on her 'stupid look' to keep Simon from knowing her thoughts. Yet the reader can see the liveliness of her mind from her sharp observation of Simon's 'gold watch-chain' – a sign of privilege and material comfort that suggests it is unlikely he is mad – and from her intuitive understanding that his questions about the apple are really about 'good and evil', and that these qualities are central to his interest in her.

The apple itself is a motif that is fundamentally ambiguous. Throughout *Alias Grace*, the apple's biblical associations run in tandem with more elemental ones, such as the apple pie that Grace suggests is simply something good to eat. Then there is the scene in which Mary and Grace peel apples to try to peer into the future, a scene foreshadowed in passage one when Grace recalls 'the apple peelings we threw over our shoulders': here the apple is destiny, but also something that binds Grace and Mary together in a shared moment of intimacy and hope. Relationships are fraught and trust must be earned; only Mary truly earns it from Grace, although Grace's initial response to Simon – 'I do not trust him at all' – is softened over time through the acts of speaking and listening. The implication is that trust, in a society built on appearance and reputation, is both rare and exceedingly valuable.

The line between sanity and madness is one that Grace often interrogates, just as others judge which side of the line she herself belongs on. Simon's gentle insistence that 'you're not mad, really, are you Grace?' hints at the beginnings of acceptance, just as her reply, 'No Sir I am not', made more assertive by its lack of the usual punctuation, shows her self-knowledge and resilience. Yet the novel contains many forms of madness – Grace's father's reckless and abusive ways; McDermott's murder of his employers; Simon sleeping with his married landlady. Through Grace's efforts to negotiate this madness while clinging to her own sanity, Atwood suggests that notions of madness and sanity might be more in the eye of the beholder than matters of medical or spiritual authority.

The locked door in passage one is another of the novel's motifs that signals a society of confined spaces and limited prospects, especially for women. Even Simon becomes trapped in an increasingly problematic relationship with his landlady, Rachel Humphrey, but he at least has the

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Establishes the significance of passage one.

Explains how the narrative shapes the reader's understanding of Grace's character and creates a gap between what Grace thinks and what she says.

Examines the author's use of literary device – a motif – and the complex meanings associated with it.

Considers the views and values being explored by the text.

Discusses how the passage presents the ideas of madness and sanity, then how these ideas are explored in the wider text.

Explains the effects of a particular language feature.

Considers the views and values being explored through plot and characterisation.

Examines another motif and connects it to central ideas; shifts the focus to gender roles and power relations.

resources to flee. Grace, Mary and Nancy are all trapped – by their class, their gender, and the social conventions and expectations of the time. When Mary becomes pregnant, the codes of pretence and concealment that play out as a 'riddle' in passage one are transformed in passage two into a struggle for life itself. Negatives run through the passage, like a sequence of locked doors: Mary will be 'turned away'; family might have helped but she 'had none'; there was 'no decent man'; her situation will 'soon be the end of her'. Atwood mirrors the girls' dilemma and growing alarm in the language of the passage, increasing the length and complexity of the sentences and stringing together clauses with conjunctions as Mary and Grace desperately seek a solution but are confronted with the immutable facts of biology and the unyielding prejudices of their world. Mary would 'begin to show', her reputation will be ruined and death looms as the likely outcome. For 'the man', though, deception and denial remain effective strategies: his former promise to marry Mary is replaced by accusations of unfaithfulness and assertions that he 'would deny' being the father. As Agnes says later, it is 'the Curse of Eve', but by this stage in the narrative it is clear that this curse isn't something that has come from a god or the Garden of Eden; it devolves from a society in which women are subjected to male power and desire, and have few liberties or opportunities to improve their lot. At the end of passage two, Mary carefully hides her five dollars 'under the loose board'. The money is concealed like so much else in this world, but it now represents the only slim chance she has of preserving her life.

By passage three Grace has lost Mary, but she has found some freedom, having been given a Pardon and married Jamie Walsh. Her 'sitting out on the verandah in the afternoons' and industrious quilt-making suggest both contentment and a degree of conformity with social conventions. Her thoughts, addressed to Simon, now have a fluency and honesty entirely lacking in their first encounter; they are confessional in tone and nature, but they are entirely in her head, thoughts she will tell 'no one but you' – and even Simon will never hear them. Solitude, despite her married state, remains Grace's fate; and indeed many of the novel's female characters, married or not, appear to be isolated, without close friends and confidants. Grace's independent spirit and resistance to received (especially patriarchal) ideas are evident in her reflections on the Tree of Paradise design on the quilt, which she is changing in order to 'suit my own ideas'. She prefers the single tree to the two trees in the Garden of Eden – the tree of life, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. If the 'Curse of Eve' resulted from eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge, Grace declares that life is better for being 'less bone-ignorant' – an irreverent expression that mocks biblical ideals of innocence and virtue, qualities that Grace has seldom seen in others. For Grace, a single tree combining life and knowledge is 'more the way life is', in contrast to what is 'written down by men' and invariably has 'some of the details wrong'. Truth, like sanity, is hard to pin down, but Atwood condemns those who 'don't listen to reason' or, like Mary's lover, simply use position and privilege to get away with duplicity, regardless of the cost to others.

Annotations (right margin):

Transitions smoothly from passage one to passage two.

Focuses on word choices and sentence structures, showing how they convey meaning and build tension.

Links with discussion of concealment and secrets in other parts of the response.

Shows an understanding of the context and significance of the passage.

Makes a comparison with passage one.

Makes a strong statement about the views and values presented in the text.

A convicted murderess at the age of fifteen, Grace spends a lifetime dealing with the judgements of others, trying to present an acceptable face to the world and dealing with the consequences of misrepresentations and falsehoods. Atwood portrays a world of secrets and concealment, of pretence and disguise, that forces people to guess and dissimulate simply to survive. Jeremiah embodies this world of codes and disguises, manipulating it to achieve fame and success, though at the cost of fictionalising his very identity. Grace too must seek to leave behind her past, but she rejects a life with Jeremiah. It is Simon, who had promised to 'listen to reason', who becomes her most trusted confidant, even if in the end she can only talk to him in her own mind, perpetually trapped by a society that prefers the appearance of truth to the real thing.

Uses the concluding sentences to draw together the elements of the discussion and connect the central ideas of the text.

Assessor comments

This response engages with several of the novel's central ideas, explaining how each passage presents and explores these ideas. There are several links to the wider text and each passage is clearly contextualised. The discussion moves through the passages in the order in which they appear in the novel, but by using topic sentences that identify ideas and values the analysis avoids lapsing into paraphrase. The focus on ideas also enables links to be made between the passages. There is some close analysis of language features, such as punctuation, word choices and sentence structures, and the ways in which these convey situations, emotions and contexts. The expression is lucid and clear, uses relevant metalanguage and incorporates short, well-chosen quotes to support the interpretation.

Scan the code or click **here** for sample analyses of *Northanger Abbey*, *Persuasion*, *Emma*, *Sense and Sensibility*, *Heart of Darkness* and *North and South*.

Writing on poetry

! **A perceptive response will show a strong engagement with the poetry's word choices, language features and ideas.**

Sample response on Emily Dickinson's *The Complete Poems*

The following sample response on Emily Dickinson's poetry is based on three complete poems:

- poem 441, 'This is my letter to the World'
- poem 754, 'My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun'
- poem 986, 'A narrow Fellow in the Grass'.

Through the juxtaposition between the plosive consonance of /t/ and the soft alliteration of /th/ in 'This is my letter to the World', Emily Dickinson undermines the speaker of poem 441's attempts at assertive authority with the meek humility of a plea. Dickinson further fractures the power of the speaker over themselves through their assertion that the letter contains the 'News that Nature told', no longer wholly the letter of the speaker, but rather belonging to, and originating from, nature. Having been 'told', the speaker remains more familiar with nature than the capitalised 'World', communicating with the latter through a 'letter' rather than the spoken word. In the capitalisation of 'World', 'Nature' and 'Me', Dickinson illustrates the ever-clashing forces of the speaker's life, battling for importance within the speaker's letter. Dickinson nonetheless warmly pities the speaker, and their desperate yearning for communication and connection from a world 'that never wrote to' them, through the persistence of the speaker's outreach regardless of the unreciprocated relationship of the speaker and the world. The symbolic 'letter' could also refer to the written word as a whole, with Dickinson lauding the communicative power of poetry to not only reach out into the world but to bear the 'simple News' of nature, encapsulating and translating the intricacies and beauty of the environment to the rest of the world. It may also evoke the biblical good news, the supposed word of salvation, which was carried through paper, and spread through the world.

However, Dickinson remains mournful about the speaker's disconnection from the world, and desperation for connection through the use of the ballad form and an /ABCB/ rhyme scheme. Whilst 'Me' and 'Majesty' are both capitalised and rhyme, the unstressed 'Majesty' ends the first quatrain softly, as though the speaker remains uncertain of their own power, their very ability to rhyme tainted by the stain of the speaker's insecurity and self-doubt. This same doubt is accentuated in the second quatrain, where the speaker glorifies nature, pleading with their 'countrymen' to 'judge tenderly' of the speaker on behalf of their 'love of Her.' Thus, Dickinson tethers the speaker's self-worth to that of nature, exposing their belief that they are worthless alone. Through the increase of ashes as the poem concludes, Dickinson further fractures the speaker's plea, mirroring the fragility of their own self-confidence and evoking the sound of a breaking voice, thus

Begins with textual detail, showing an understanding of the importance of sound to meaning.

Establishes authority and power as a focus of the interpretation, while the phrase 'attempts at' suggests a struggle to assert power. This sense of struggle is a thread that connects the readings of the three set poems.

Explains the importance of capitalisation in Dickinson's poetry.

Uses precise and expressive language throughout to present an interpretation of the poems and of the poet's views and values.

Shows an awareness of poetic form and language features, and explains their effects and relation to meaning.

Again notes an aspect of punctuation and explains how it is integral to the poem's meaning.

lamenting the speaker's isolation through an impassioned outcry. Regardless of the distance between the speaker and the world, the poem's unfailing commitment to the /ABCB/ rhyme scheme regardless of its faltering nature echoes the commitment of the speaker to their letter, their outreach to the world. Whilst the speaker remains isolated from human connections, with 'Hands' they 'cannot see', Dickinson nonetheless celebrates and remains hopeful of the speaker's attempts at connection, lauding them as expressions of authenticity and passion, and beautiful in themselves.

Through the extended metaphor of a 'Loaded Gun' in poem 754, Dickinson invests the life of the speaker with the directed anger and violent potential of a loaded gun, useless alone but deadly in the hands of another. As in poem 441, the relationship between the speaker of this poem and 'the Owner' robs the speaker of their independence and worth as an individual, with the individuality of 'My' and 'I' deforming into 'Our' and 'We' as the poem progresses. Having 'stood [...] in Corners', the speaker of poem 754 is also isolated from the world, pushed aside and left unnoticed, longing and waiting to be 'identified', perceived, and claimed. Rather than pleading desperately with the monumental 'World' of poem 441, the speaker of this poem instead escapes their isolation into the grasp of a codependent relationship, one so integrated that the speaker even 'speak[s] for Him'. Living to 'hunt the Doe', the female deer, the speaker is entrapped in a relationship characterised by violence, where the feminine personification of 'Nature' as 'Her' in poem 441 is stalked and killed, and the only communication with nature occurring when 'the Mountains straight reply'. Through this euphemism for the echo of a gunshot, Dickinson imbues the speaker with a delusion over communication so strong that they treat the regurgitated sounds of violence as conversational speech.

Dickinson laments the vast distance between the speaker and nature, and the deformation of communication, through the dwindling strength of the /ABCB/ rhyme found in poem 441. Whilst present in the first quatrain, the rhyme falls into the half rhyme of 'glow' and 'through' and occasionally fails to rhyme at all, with the codependent relationship between the speaker and their 'Master' draining the speaker of all the intricacies of their own self, no longer capable of remorse, sorrow or joy. Even the 'cordial light' of the speaker's 'smile' is now irrevocably tainted not by joy but the volcanic violence of 'Valley' and 'Vesuvian face.' Rather than personal happiness, the speaker feels only the visceral 'pleasure', distant from both the rational and the emotional, experiencing now only the throngs of the body. In this, Dickinson dreads both the potential loss of authenticity and individuality, but a complete disconnection between oneself and one's emotions as an escape from the pains of isolation, with the speaker's existence permanently stained by distance and imperfection. Nonetheless, in the final quatrain, the speaker manages to separate 'I' from 'Him', once again experiencing life as an individual. In this, the speaker regrets their 'power to kill/Without – the power to die', as their ability to wound, like the creation of poetry

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Sustains the interpretation which focuses on the tension between isolation and a desire for connection.

Makes a connection between the first poem analysed and the poem analysed in this paragraph, enhancing the fluency and coherence of the response.

Makes a distinction between the types of connections or relationships being sought in the two poems.

Examines the way in which the rhyme scheme and its variations reflect the content of the poetry.

Continues to relate the close analysis of textual detail to the broader views and values being presented.

or the writing of letters, exists longer than the wielder of the gun. Thus, Dickinson's metaphor could also be applied to poetry, in which the speaker, and the poem itself, exists beyond the life of the poet. Regardless, Dickinson fearfully apprehends the possibility that, out of loneliness, one may get 'carried [...] away' by a relationship with a 'Master', whether that be an individual, the act of writing or religious devotion, exposing the dangers of any obsession as perilous and damaging in one's relationship with nature, oneself, and the world.

The duality between the speaker of poem 754 and 'the Owner' is echoed in poem 986, between the speaker of the poem and a 'narrow Fellow in the Grass'. In the way it weaves through the poem through the sibilance in 'his notice sudden is' and 'spotted shaft is seen', the 'narrow Fellow' is illustrated to be a personification of a snake. The snake embodies both the sinister distance of the codependent speaker of poem 754 and the desperate longing for human connection of the speaker of poem 441. Preferring a 'Floor too cool for Corn' the snake assumes a ghostly presence through the assonance of /oo/, along with a preference for the cold and lifeless. Thus, like the distant narrator of poem 754, the snake's comfort lies in distance from humanity, and from warmth. Whilst an animal, the snake remains severed from 'Nature's People', isolated even from its own kind. Regardless, Dickinson sympathises with the snake's plight, as she pities the plight of the speaker of poem 441, with the snake occasionally 'unbraiding in the Sun' allowing itself to relax in the warm open, and 'occasionally rid[ing]' in 'the Grass', the realm of humankind and of the speaker, as though reaching out for connection.

However, the snake remains the object of fear in the eyes of the speaker due to its withdrawal from the world. The 'Boy', one familiar with 'Nature's People', is illustrated as 'Barefoot', comfortable and relaxed in his own environment, at peace with nature, himself, and the world around him, even using the second-person pronoun 'you' to refer to the reader, intimate with other people, unlike the speakers of poems 441 and 754. Through the boy, Dickinson celebrates the balanced equilibrium between oneself, nature and the world, however nonetheless fears the slithering and ever-present reminder of potential isolation, symbolised by the snake. Unable to attain human touch, like the speaker of poem 441, the snake 'wrinkled, and was gone' when the speaker went 'stooping to secure it', with the snake's flee from connection evoking fear in the speaker. In the failed interaction between the boy, an agent of the world, and the snake, the product of isolation, Dickinson grieves for the lonely life of one unsure of themselves, of nature, and of the world. Through poem 754, Dickinson dreads the alluring escape of anonymity and obsession brought on by isolation, but ultimately celebrates the continued efforts of those attempting, even in vain, to catch the attention of the world. Through the willingness of the boy to pick up the snake, to 'know' nature's people, Dickinson contends that there is a hand to hold were one to reach out for long enough, to write enough letters to the world or to walk out of corners and into the sun.

Transitions smoothly to the third poem to be analysed, linking it with the poem analysed in the previous paragraphs; the term 'duality' continues the exploration of tensions in Dickinson's poetry.

Neatly links all three poems.

Contrasts poem 986 with the other two, sustaining the focus on the sense (or absence) of distance between an individual and others.

Moves from a detail of the third poem to a broader interpretive statement encompassing not just all three poems analysed but Dickinson's poetry as a whole.

Assessor comments

This response provides a detailed analysis of three poems, carefully considering poetic features such as form, rhyme, rhythm, alliteration and metaphor and explaining the ways in which these features create meaning. The interpretations are thoughtful, nuanced and insightful. The essay makes connections between the three poems that establish both continuities and subtle differences, while also noting the complexities and tensions within each poem. The poet's views and values are evident throughout; the discussion shows an awareness of Dickinson's wider concerns, although without explicitly referring either to Dickinson's particular context or other poems. Such references would have added some depth to the discussion, which otherwise displays a sophisticated understanding of the poetry. The expressive writing throughout uses language in a precise and highly effective way.

Scan the code or click **here** for sample analyses of Sylvia Plath's *Ariel*, Petra White's *A Hunger*, Gwen Harwood's *Collected Poems*, Seamus Heaney's *Opened Ground* and Chris Wallace-Crabbe's *New and Selected Poems*.

Writing on short stories

❗ **A comprehensive response on a short-story collection will show awareness of how each passage contributes to the collection as a whole.**

Sample response on *Smart Ovens for Lonely People*

This response is based on passages from three stories in Elizabeth Tan's short-story collection *Smart Ovens for Lonely People*:

- in 'Our Sleeping Lungs Opened to the Cold', from 'The customers did not enjoy our transformations as much as we did' to 'What was it about us that they so loved to begin with?' (pp.6–7)

- in 'Yes! Yes! Yes You Are! Yes You Are!', from 'In the daytime I dream of being inside a box' to 'They scrape my womb from my body' (pp.123–4)

- in 'Shirt Dresses that Look a Little Too Much Like Shirts', from 'Everyone in the office is shell-shocked' to 'Life is our Creation' (pp.194–5).

In passage 1, the mermaids' transformation takes them far from their initial commercially driven purpose as decorative features in a restaurant aquarium. The feminine beauty traditionally associated with the mermaid mythology is casually destroyed as, having grown in agency and strength due to reductions in the sedative in the water, the mermaids pull 'hair in fistfuls from our scalps' and their scales grow 'up to our chins'. More disconcertingly, their attitudes and behaviour towards the humans turn emphatically predatory: the restaurant is as 'inconsequential as the blood of our prey', and the mermaids 'liked to lock eyes' with eating customers, 'deliberate, silent'. These descriptors liken the mermaids to powerful carnivores such as lions, while the human customers are positioned as vulnerable prey with the 'quivering pause of the fork'. Alongside this transformation from their previously unthreatening facade, the mermaids begin to paint an image of freedom and autonomy as they rebel against captivity and containment: 'if we desired sleep, we slept; if we desired privacy, we retreated', no longer adhering to the human-driven 'rhythms of the restaurant'. Tan's depiction of the mermaids' heightened power is framed through the juxtaposition of an artificial world with one of wildness and nature. The visceral language used to describe the mermaids' transformation – 'hair', 'scales', 'blood' – centres the focus on the creatures' bodies and emphasises their essential nature. This sense of the natural contrasts with the world of the restaurant – a high-end business for exceptionally wealthy customers, which created the eight mermaids and employed an aquarist to carefully maintain the synthetic environment of the tank. Opal's telling question, 'What was it about us that they so loved to begin with?' points to the crux of the matter – the mermaids were valued only in their role as ornaments in this artificial world, moulded and designed to please humans, and immediately feared and discarded once they no longer suit this superficial purpose.

Further, the mermaids' joy at their transformation suggests that their growth is more than just physical, and that they are becoming their true selves. Moving their focus away from the humans, they instead 'delighted' in each other and their becoming 'less hollow'. The idea that they are 'hollow' prior to their transformation suggests that their previous form was lacking or incomplete in some way, and that the changes – and resulting autonomy and freedom – they have experienced are crucial in enabling them to reach their potential. Here, Tan presents the mermaids' transformation as a desirable one, and she reiterates this in the short story's ending following the mermaids' escape. The descriptions of the ocean as a 'loving body', and the mermaids' elation as they 'glide and somersault and feast', suggest Tan's rejection of the limits imposed by commercialism and superficiality, and her celebration of those who can escape 'the harness of man-made meaning'.

Supports the analysis with short quotes, paying close attention to the connotations of the author's language choices.

Introduces some of the key ideas: power, the artificial, and the wild/natural.

Analyses specific word choices and explores the overall effect of the language used, explaining how key ideas are presented.

Continues the close analysis of language use to interrogate broader ideas of the text.

Includes short quotes from part of the story outside the selected passage, demonstrating familiarity with the whole story.

Tan repeats her contrast of wildness and authenticity against artifice and control in several other stories, underscoring her critique of the human compulsion to contain and control what should be wild and free. In 'Night of the Fish', the council responds to the sentient playground by tearing it down and building a picnic table over the sandpit, leading the child narrator to conclude that 'Grown-ups had a way of … flattening their fears with concrete, building something neat and pretty on top, as if life really were a picnic'. 'Yes! Yes! Yes You Are!' similarly depicts the human need to control and contain, this time through a neighbourhood of domesticated cats and their conflicting relationship with humans and their own wild natures. Passage 2, narrated by the cat protagonist O Fortuna, consists of a series of images each rhythmically introduced with 'And in this dream' to tell of the cats' subjugation by their human owners. In the passage's beginning, the subordination of domesticated cats is made uncomfortably vivid by the image of a cat carrier – 'a box inside which a cat must always kneel— crouch—make herself small' – with the cat actively forced to subordinate itself like a servant before a king. The passage then presents three images of freedom that progressively increase in intensity. O Fortuna dreams of the 'old ones', 'the ones without tags', alluding to her wilder ancestors on a ship who, although still captive, are not pets, and are free to give in to their nature as hunters, 'snatching rats and crunching them up'. The harsh sounds of the language used here, such as the 'ch' sounds in 'snatching' and 'crunching', and the 's' and 'p' sounds in 'piss', 'spit' and 'squirm', accompany the imagery to emphasise the wildness of these less domesticated cats. This section is immediately followed by an image of O Fortuna's friend Boots, who had been euthanised because of her hunting talent: 'Boots claws her way free of the grave, throws the earth and bells from her body; she makes herself large'. Free from the confining earth of the grave and the 'bell' – a symbol of domestication and a futile attempt to prevent Boots from hunting – Boots can escape and be 'large'. Here, size is metaphorically equated to power. Boots' freedom to grow large contrasts with the passage's opening image of a cat forced to 'make herself small' in a carrier, suggesting O Fortuna's yearning for a world beyond domestication, in which she and her friends are free to live and hunt as they please.

As with passage 1, the associations with nature and suggestions of a wilder, truer reality contrast with the world built by humans. This is starkly evident in the passage's ending, where images of freedom jar against a nightmarish image of sterilisation. This depiction of human power is written in specifically scientific terms, referring to medical procedures in the evocative phrases 'They inject me with darkness. They scrape my womb from my body', and the name 'whitecoats' brings to mind the clinical uniform of a vet or scientist. Unlike the mermaids in passage 1, the cats ultimately remain at the mercy of the humans and can only imagine true freedom in their dreams.

This gentle darkness, this soft temple. This loving body, unspooling from the harness of man-made meaning.

Refers to another set short story in the collection, showing knowledge of the text as a whole and explaining how themes repeat in multiple stories to indicate the author's concerns.

Focuses on the aural aspects of language, showing an understanding of the various ways in which language can be used to construct meaning.

Discusses the passages in relation to one another, enhancing the cohesiveness of the essay.

By portraying the humans' cold, scientific approach to shaping the cats' lives, Tan creates a second juxtaposition, contrasting this process-oriented, emotionless governance with the love O Fortuna feels for Boots. This points to a second concern of Tan's: the small, invisible power of interpersonal connections. The cats' unity later in the story enables O Fortuna to feel a sense of friendship and to come to terms with her grief. A similar theme can be found in the story of passage 1 where the mermaids find strength in each other, and at the story's end, 'sliding over and around each other', they escape as one. The juxtaposition is again revealed in the story 'Would You Rather', as the lives of two young girls are put to a referendum; the cold, bureaucratic imagery of 'a pencil tethered to a cardboard booth, hovering over two checkboxes' contrasts with that of the small family – 'Daughter, daughter, father: eyes closed … Hands joined'. Throughout these stories, warmth and love, like nature and wildness, are placed in opposition to emotionless controlling forces. By emphasising the strength of these emotional connections, Tan advocates for the power of love and relationships and presents them as a point of resistance within the emotionless artifice of a carefully regulated world.

In passage 3, however, the power of warmth and love are put to the test in an environment permeated with artificiality. In this passage, the presence of nature and life beyond a curated human world is noticeably absent. The ducks in the pond are in fact robots programmed to imitate birds, and the love story is humorously lacking in substance. Parodically transpiring between two companies – which are not usually considered as objects of romance – the 'love' brings each company's executives to take part in a picnic, as they go through the motions of a heavily clichéd romantic date on a 'summery Friday afternoon' with 'tea, pastries, and light music'. Reiterating the artificiality of the love story, Tan repeatedly returns her attention to the constructedness of the world. The robot ducks are admired for being 'lifelike', and the overt sense of wonder towards the end of the passage as the companies are 'surrounded by light, by newness' is followed by a telling return to corporate language: 'We implement solutions. We capitalise.' This return strikes at the true nature of the companies, presenting a critique of the corporate world, or perhaps the capitalist system itself, as cold, calculating and indifferent to human suffering. 'Love', in this world, is as artificial as the duck pond: an imitation of real emotion and, like the ducks, admired only for how closely it can resemble the real thing.

Tan's collection contrasts notions of freedom, wildness, love and authenticity with those of containment, control, artifice and exploitation. Through her stories' unconventional, sometimes absurdist premises, along with inventive narrative perspectives, Tan encourages the reader to draw connections between her fictions and the mechanisms of cruelty and control that pervade our own lives, and emphasises our capacity to resist them through interpersonal relationships and genuine connection.

Develops another main point from the analysis of the second passage.

Explores a connection with another of the set short stories.

Concludes the analysis of passage 2 with a short statement about the collection as a whole, explaining how the author's exploration of ideas conveys her point of view.

Considers how passage 3 is similar to and different from the other passages, showing a complex engagement with the passages and an interpretation of the whole text.

Discusses the way in which the story presents a view of the corporate world and capitalism.

Presents a concise summary of the main points of analysis in the concluding sentences.

Assessor comments

This response presents a fluent and sophisticated analysis of Elizabeth Tan's short stories. It works closely with the language of the selected passages and makes effective use of quotes to support the analysis. The connotations and implications of language choices are consistently unpacked and connected with Tan's broader concerns and viewpoints. While each passage is discussed in detail, connections between the passages and with other set stories in the collection are made throughout the response, showing a strong understanding of the collection and presenting an interpretation of the whole text.

The vocabulary used for the analysis shows expressive qualities in phrases such as 'humorously lacking in substance' and 'nightmarish image of sterilisation'; these phrases also convey the impact of Tan's language and stylistic choices, and the subtle way in which Tan presents a view on the characters and situations she depicts. Effective topic sentences identify central ideas as well as connections between the passages, enhancing the cohesiveness of the essay. Expressions such as 'Tan advocates for' and 'presenting a critique of' foreground the text's views and values in an interpretation that is firmly based on the three passages.

Scan the code or click **here** for sample analyses of short stories by Raymond Carver, Ceridwen Dovey, Katherine Mansfield and Annie Proulx.

Writing on drama

! **A high-level analysis of a play will show awareness of the text as a script intended to be performed. Take note of any stage directions in the passages and analyse the importance of at least some of them.**

Scan the code or click **here** for sample analyses of *Hamlet*, *Coriolanus*, *Hedda Gabler* and *Pygmalion*.

Glossary

allegory: a story that has its real meaning in a parallel, 'implied' story; individual events and characters thus have a wider significance than their literal or 'surface' meaning

alliteration: the repetition of sounds, especially consonants, at the beginnings of words; often used in poetry, e.g. 'A <u>s</u>lumber did my <u>s</u>pirit <u>s</u>eal' (Wordsworth)

allusion: a reference to another literary or artistic work

ambiguity: lack of clarity in meaning, especially between two possible meanings

ambivalence: being 'in two minds'; a state of uncertainty about whether something is right or true

anachronism: something out of date, belonging to an earlier time and out of place in its current context (anachronistic, *adj*.)

antagonist: the character who opposes the actions of the protagonist or hero

antithesis: opposite (antithetical, *adj*.)

aside: in drama, a short speech in which a character reveals their thoughts to the audience without the other characters being aware they are doing so

assonance: the repetition of vowel sounds in words close together; often used in poetry, e.g. 'In the m<u>i</u>dst of th<u>is</u> thine h<u>y</u>mn my w<u>i</u>lting eyes' (Keats)

atmosphere: a feeling or mood evoked by a text through word selection, imagery, narrative pace, setting etc.; in drama, largely generated by stage settings and lighting

ballad: a poem traditionally sung; tells a story in a direct style and in simple language

bildungsroman: a type of novel concerned with the growth and development of a young protagonist

binary opposition: two terms opposite in meaning, each defined by not being the other, e.g. black/white, present/absent, light/dark, freedom/captivity

blank verse: a form of poetry (also used in Shakespearean drama) in which lines have ten alternating unstressed and stressed syllables (i.e. iambic pentameter) and do not rhyme

caesura: a break in a line of poetry; often indicated by a comma but can be due simply to the natural rhythm of the words

caricature: an exaggerated, usually comical portrayal of a person or character type

catharsis: release of tension following the narrative crisis; crucial to the resolution of classical and Shakespearean tragedy

class: a social group sharing similar levels of wealth, education, types of jobs, cultural interests etc.

cliché: an expression that is well-worn, hackneyed, over-used, e.g. 'pretty as a picture', 'fresh as a daisy'

colloquialism: a word or phrase belonging to everyday speech

colonialism: the occupation and control of another country in order to make use of its resources (e.g. minerals, land, labour force); widely practised by European nations from the 15th century

comedy: in drama, a form that takes a relatively positive view of society and human behaviour; often humorous; typically ends with a marriage (opposite of tragedy)

conceit: a metaphor in which one thing stands for another, quite different thing; unexpected and witty

connotation: a suggested or implied meaning of a word or image

convention: a 'code' shared by writer and reader (or audience), e.g. the convention in prose of using quotation marks to denote speech

couplet: two lines of poetry that can be grouped by forming a stanza on their own or by rhyming

deconstruction: an approach to analysing or creating texts that promotes multiple meanings and subverts notions of a fixed or 'true' meaning; reveals rather than conceals the techniques of construction; often used in other creative fields, e.g. architecture, fashion, visual arts

denotation: the literal or dictionary meaning of a word

denouement: (French, 'unknotting') unravelling of tension or complications immediately following the narrative climax

discourse: form of language use particular to a social group, profession or body of knowledge, e.g. medical discourse; the discourse of literary criticism

dramatic monologue: a poem in which the speaker directly addresses an imaginary audience

elegy: a poem in which the speaker expresses a sense of loss; often laments the death of a particular person or a tragic event

empathy: a feeling of identification with another person or character; an imaginative sense of being in that person's place

enjambment: the running-on of lines in poetry

epic: a poem that tells a story on a grand scale; usually thousands of lines in length

euphemism: an expression that substitutes for a more literal word or phrase in order to soften the impact of an event or observation

farce: an exaggerated form of comedy intended to produce laughter; often uses absurd situations and/or behaviour

feminist criticism: an approach to interpreting and evaluating texts by drawing attention to how women are represented, especially in relation to the degree of power and independence women have in a text

figurative language: language that uses simile, metaphor, alliteration etc.

foreshadowing: the anticipation or prediction of an event that will occur later in a narrative

free verse: a form of poetry in which there is no regular pattern of rhythm, rhyme, line length or stanza length

genre: a category of texts that share several conventions concerning plot, narrative style, tone, characterisation, setting etc.

hyperbole: exaggeration or overstatement, usually for comic effect

ideology: a set of ideas and beliefs that underpin behaviour and attitudes; often used to refer to socially dominant and/or political beliefs

idyll: a poem that describes a rural scene in a tranquil or idealised fashion

imagery: two main kinds are (1) the use of language to represent sensory experience (sight, sound, smell, taste and touch); (2) the use of simile, metaphor, symbol etc.

intertextuality: references to other texts; often implicit, e.g. by an unacknowledged quotation or the use of a word or phrase strongly associated with another text; can also mean a theory of writing that sees all texts as interrelated through shared discourses and conventions

irony: the two main types are (1) verbal irony – where the literal meaning is the opposite of the real meaning; (2) dramatic irony – where the reader/audience and perhaps one or more characters possess knowledge that the remaining characters do not have

lyric: a relatively short poem in the voice of a single 'character' (the speaker); uses a personal tone to convey the speaker's private thoughts and feelings

Marxist criticism: an approach to interpreting and evaluating texts that focuses on representations of class and how money, goods and labour are exchanged and valued in a text; critical of capitalism; based on the ideas of Karl Marx (1818–83) and Friedrich Engels (1820–95)

metaphor: a figure of speech that describes one thing as if it is another thing, e.g. 'the black cloak of night'

metonymy: a figure of speech that refers to an object in terms of a quality or attribute of the object, e.g. referring to the sea as 'the deep'; referring to the monarchy as 'the crown'

metre: in poetry, a regular pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables with a fixed number of syllables per line

mock heroic: the use of a heroic style to describe a relatively trivial subject for comic effect; can be used to satirise the subject and/or the heroic style

modernism: an artistic and philosophical movement in the period roughly 1890–1930; characterised by disillusionment with the breakdown of traditional social forms exacerbated by WWI; writers experimented with form and style to reflect and comment on these shifts

motif: a recurring idea or image

myth: a story involving supernatural beings or gods

mythology: a body of myths, e.g. ancient Greek mythology; Celtic mythology

narrative: the story; an account of connected events

narrator: the figure who tells the story

New Criticism: a school of literary criticism developed in the 1920s promoting the unity and wholeness of literary texts; placed the emphasis on close reading of the text rather than on its author or context

ode: a lyric poem with a ceremonial, stately quality

omniscient narrator: a narrator who knows everything about the world of the text and its characters

onomatopoeia: the use of a word or phrase with a sound that imitates the sound being referred to, e.g. 'crackle', 'whizz', 'plop'

oxymoron: a figure of speech that contains a contradiction or paradox, e.g. 'I burn and freeze like ice' (Thomas Wyatt)

paradox: a statement that appears self-contradictory but contains a coherent meaning

parody: an imitation that 'sends up' the original by humorous exaggeration

pastiche: a patchwork of pieces or styles of writing

pastoral: an account of rural life, usually emphasising its charms and simplicity; often nostalgic and/or idealistic; traditionally involving the depiction of shepherds

pathos: the quality in a text or other work of art that evokes pity or sadness

patriarchy: a form of society in which property is passed down the male line and the father is regarded as the head of the family

persona: in poetry, the individual (also called the speaker) who seems to be addressing the reader

personification: figurative language that attributes human qualities to inanimate objects, e.g. 'The candle / Gulps and recovers its small altitude' (Plath)

plot: the arrangement of events in a narrative in a particular order to generate interest, suspense, tension, humour etc.

postcolonialism: a movement in literature, art and criticism following the breakdown of European empires and the gaining of independence by former colonies in the 20th century; usually critical of colonialism and writings complicit with it; gives voice to previously suppressed identities and histories

postmodernism: a movement in art and literature from around 1950 characterised by the breakdown of traditional forms, a sense of play with the possibilities of language, and an often sceptical view of power structures and social hierarchies

prose: writing in sentences that extends across the full width of a page

protagonist: the main character, whose ambitions and actions drive the narrative

psychoanalytic criticism: an approach to interpreting texts that draws on the ideas of psychoanalysis, originally developed by Sigmund Freud (1856–1939); uses Freud's theory of personality as structured by drives and repression to analyse how gaps, silences, repetitions and substitutions in texts contribute to or complicate their meaning

pun: a figure of speech that draws on two or more meanings of a word, or 'plays' on the meaning of a word by invoking a word similar in sound but different in meaning (e.g. sun/son)

reading (*noun*)**:** an interpretation of what a text means

resistant reading: an interpretation that disagrees with ('resists') the most obvious or apparently intended meaning of a text

rhetoric: the use of language to persuade

rhyme: matching vowel and consonant sounds at the ends of words, e.g. catch/match; thought/fraught

rhythm: a feeling of movement or pulse in writing produced by the combination of stressed and unstressed syllables, the length of syllables, the use of punctuation etc.

satire: the critique of an aspect of human behaviour or society; often humorous; often uses irony

semantics: the meanings of words

semiotics: the theory that language works like a system of signs or codes (semiology is the study of signs)

simile: a figure of speech in which two things are compared using 'like' or 'as', e.g. 'the night was as black as a cloak'

soliloquy: in a play, a speech given by a character who is alone onstage; the reader/audience takes the content of this speech to be truthful, even when the character deceives all other characters

sonnet: a poem with fourteen lines; usually about love; often conforms to established patterns of rhyme and metre

stanza: a group of lines in a poem, separated from other stanzas by a space

stereotype: a character that conforms to a fixed and simplistic type, e.g. 'the greedy capitalist'; 'the noble savage'

stream of consciousness: a narrative technique that represents the mind's ceaseless and often fragmented flow of thoughts

structuralism: an approach to understanding specific elements of culture (e.g. in language, anthropology, literature) by looking at their relationship to the larger structures and sign systems that determine their meaning

style: all aspects of a writer's use of language, e.g. imagery, sentence length and structure, word choice

subplot: a plot or storyline that runs parallel to the main plot, usually complementing or commenting on it in some way

subtext: a meaning that lies underneath the 'surface' of the text; implied rather than explicitly stated

symbol: an object that stands for a larger or more abstract entity; the symbolic object is part of or associated with the larger entity, e.g. scales symbolise justice

syntax: the ways in which words are combined to form phrases or sentences

text: conventionally in literary studies, a literary work that exists in print form; more recently, any cultural form that can be interpreted ('read') in different ways

theme: an idea or proposition that is explored (usually implicitly) throughout a text

tone: an aspect of language use that conveys an attitude to the subject matter, e.g. serious, humorous, sarcastic, mocking

tragedy: in drama, a form that takes a serious and often dark view of society and/or human nature; ends with death or the destruction of relationships (opposite of comedy)

unreliable narrator: a narrator who presents a view that cannot be assumed to be correct

Index of names and titles

Acknowledgements

LITERATURE
FOR
SENIOR STUDENTS
6th edition

The 6th edition of *Literature for Senior Students* is updated for the revised VCE Literature Study Design, implemented in 2023. It combines a practical approach to writing and analysis – including step-by-step processes, preparation strategies and numerous activities – with a reference section explaining essential metalanguage and literary concepts. The 6th edition contains new text examples and sample responses as well as chapters on the new Areas of Study in the VCE Literature course: 'Exploration of literary movements and genres', 'Voices of Country' and 'Developing interpretations'.

THE BOOK FEATURES:

- Comprehensive resources for understanding and writing on literature, including definitions of key literary terms and techniques; an overview of literary theory; and a glossary and historical time line for quick reference

- Guidelines, activities and models for a range of text responses, including an analysis that contrasts an initial interpretation with a second interpretation informed by a supplementary text

- Sample responses for all assessment tasks in Units 3 and 4

- Additional sample answers on a wide range of texts, accessed via QR codes and weblinks.

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