

The ways that meanings are shaped in prose texts

explore how writers use narrative structure, time and place, characterisation and point of view to shape meaning in their prose narratives.

Comments on the ways in which meanings are shaped must be more than mere feature-spotting; they need to be relevantly integrated into students' arguments and discussions and grounded in understanding of the whole text. Strong essay responses often demonstrate perceptive and assured overview as well as provide analysis of detail.

Explore how the events in a story are organised.

Exploration of different possible narrative structures might include:

- simple chronology, framed narratives, use of flashbacks, cyclical structure, shifts in time and place, use of multiple narrators,
- foreshadowing, analeptic/proleptic narrative, stream of consciousness
- episodic novel, epistolary structure, autobiographical or diary form
- organisation by volumes, chapters, sections.

Also consider:

- how authors privilege certain events by their position in the narrative
- the privileged position of beginnings and endings in terms of narrative structure and their importance in introducing and concluding key aspects of setting, character, themes and context
- development of an incident, an idea or the story, suspense, tension
- contrast, twist, shift in tone, climax, anti-climax.

Time and place

Consider the importance of the time in which the story is set to the detail of the narrative; how the narrative is structured around time; how the author creates meaning through the locations used in the narrative such as:

- ways of using time and sequence to add complexity to a narrative (e.g. use of flashback, different narrators for different time periods)
- ways of describing settings through specific authorial methods
- how choice of place(s) can symbolise aspects of characters and relationships.

Characterisation

Consider the range of strategies used by authors and readers to create and develop characters such as:

- how characters are presented: physical appearance; their actions and motives; what they say and think; how they interact with others; what others say and think about them; any direct or implicit revelation of author's/narrator's attitude to them
- how realistic or unrealistic the presentation of character is
- the effect of 'gaps' in the reader's knowledge of a character
- the focus given to different characters at particular points in the novel
- use of symbolism
- caricature
- empathy or lack of towards a character
- conflict associated with a character
- pathos associated with a character
- characters as a vehicle for the author's views, through direct or indirect speech.

Point of view

consider the perspectives (often shifting), through which the narrative is presented and the methods used by the author to present those perspectives such as:

- different types of narration e.g. first person, second person, third person; third person narrative that privileges the perspective of a given character; third person narrative with character as the centre of consciousness; singular or multiple narrators
- events seen from different points of view (e.g. physical, ideological, perceptual); points of view which are privileged, those which are marginalised, those which create narrative gaps
- categories of speech and thought (e.g. direct, indirect and narrator's representation of speech/thought acts); the ambiguity created where indirect/free indirect speech/thought is not attributed to a particular character; patterns of or changes in a character's speech/thought across or at certain points of the novel
- reliable and unreliable narrators: self-reflexive narrator; the narrator who draws attention to the novel's artifice; intrusive narrator; omniscient narrator; narrative intrusion; subjective and objective narrators.