## Common Features of Texts

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LITERARY TEXTS

In this chapter you will study and discuss:

- Harper Lee’s novel To Kill a Mockingbird
- Charles Dickens’s novel Bleak House
- Jane Austen’s novel Pride and Prejudice
- Marcus Zusak’s novel The Book Thief
- Peter Carey’s short story ‘Conversations with Unicorns’
- Tim O’Brien’s short story ‘The Man at the Well’
- plays by William Shakespeare, Brian Friel and David Mamet
- the films Memento, Much Ado about Nothing, Spiderman, The King’s Speech, Bran Nue Dae and The Notebook

Novels and short stories allow us to escape to other worlds and to live (for a short while) other lives. Fictional narratives sit at the heart of the study of English. The imaginative representation of other people in other places and other times is part of a long tradition that began in oral storytelling. From oral storytelling, drama and epic verse developed, and eventually these evolved into the two most popular forms of fiction today: novels and short stories.

**NOVELS**

The English word novel comes from the Middle French word ‘novel’, meaning new or fresh. A novel, then, is just a ‘new story’.

During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the word ‘history’ was commonly used for long prose fiction—what we would today call a ‘novel’.

The type of literary text you will most commonly read and study is the novel. Novels form the backbone of many English courses as they show literary texts at their, arguably, most developed.

So, what exactly is a novel? A novel is an extended, imaginative narrative written in prose. A novel must tell a story (its plot) involving imagined people (its characters). Some people also believe that a novel should explore broad ideas (themes) and communicate a message about these ideas.

Whatever its formal definition, a good novel is unbeatable for getting readers lost in a story and deeply involved with characters’ lives and loves.

The novel became the pre-eminent form of fiction during the eighteenth century, when it supplanted verse narratives, allegories and traditional romances. Rather than focusing on the deeds of heroes, knights, kings and the wealthy, eighteenth-century novels increasingly presented the lives of ordinary people. The use of an omniscient third-person narrator came into vogue during the nineteenth century, and it remains popular to this day.
Many scholars suggest that Samuel Richardson’s Pamela, published in 1740, was the first fully realised novel. Richardson’s epistolary novel was, however, preceded by Daniel Defoe’s better-known Robinson Crusoe (1719) and Moll Flanders (1722), which are also considered early examples of novels. All three novels present characters involved in the events of a plot, but Pamela’s characters are more psychologically developed and believable.

We have, then, a definition of novels as fictitious narratives that are written in prose and portray the lives of characters. This is close to Sir Walter Scott’s definition from the early nineteenth century of the novel as ‘a fictitious narrative, differing from the Romance, because the events are accommodated to the ordinary train of human events and the modern state of society.’

These definitions of novels are still broad, and we see this broadness reflected in the huge variety of novels. To sort out this variety, we think of novels as belonging to a particular genre. Crime novels, for example, are a different genre from fantasy novels, which are a different genre again from romance novels.

Narrative Voice

The story or stories presented in a novel must be told by someone, a narrator. Many novels use the same narrator throughout; others will retell events from more than one narrator’s point of view. When you read a novel, you must pay attention to the narrative voice telling the story, especially the narrator’s involvement in and knowledge of events and characters.

The two most common narrative voices are the third-person omniscient narrator and the first-person narrator.

Of course, there are other distinctions between types of narrative voice, but these are the first ones to consider.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NOT INVOLVED IN THE NARRATIVE</th>
<th>INVOLVED IN THE NARRATIVE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>FULL KNOWLEDGE OF CHARACTERS AND EVENTS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omniscient third-person narrator</td>
<td>This type of narrator is a removed observer who is able to see all of the events. An omniscient narrator is even able to detect characters’ thoughts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>LIMITED KNOWLEDGE OF CHARACTERS AND EVENTS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited third-person narrator</td>
<td>Less common than a third-person omniscient narrator, this type of narrator neither exists in the same world as the characters nor has full knowledge of their thoughts.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Limited first-person narrator

A standard type of narrative voice, this type of narrator tells the story they are or were involved in, as they see it.

The choice of narrative voice affects the feel of a novel. In some novels, having a first-person narrator is crucial to the novel’s style and the author’s purpose. Consider, for example, the first-person voice of Holden Caulfield in J D Salinger’s The Catcher in the Rye. Using Holden as the first-person narrator allows Salinger to show the effects of Holden’s upbringing and the origins of his puzzlement about the world.

Or consider Scout Finch from Harper Lee’s To Kill a Mockingbird. From the very first page, the reader is drawn into her recollections of the formative period of her childhood:

I maintain that the Ewells started it all, but Jem, who was four years my senior, said it started long before that.

Using a third-person narrator allows authors to reveal, as far as they choose, what characters are thinking and feeling. The third-person narrator of Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice, for example, usually presents Elizabeth Bennet’s point of view but at key moments, such as after Darcy’s first proposal, allows the reader insights into the thoughts of other characters.

His complexion became pale with anger, and the disturbance of his mind was visible in every feature. He was struggling for the appearance of composure, and would not open his lips, till he believed himself to have attained it.

The narrator shifts from observing Darcy’s face and its expression, and inferring from these his feelings, to presenting certain knowledge about his thoughts. These insights about his thoughts could only be guessed at by a first-person narrator.

The table below, identify the narrative voice (or voices) of one or more of the novels you are studying this year. Give an example that demonstrates the narrative voice of each novel.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NOVEL</th>
<th>NARRATIVE VOICE</th>
<th>EXAMPLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>David Malouf, Ransom</td>
<td>third-person omniscient narrator</td>
<td>Priam comes to attention. He knows from long experience what is expected of him. The narrator can see inside Priam’s head and tell what he knows.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Using the table below, identify the narrative voice (or voices) of one or more of the novels you are studying this year. Give an example that demonstrates the narrative voice of each novel.

2. a. Select a passage from one of the novels you are studying, and rewrite it from a different point of view.

2. b. As a class, discuss what information would be lost if the whole novel were written in this new voice.

2. c. Write a paragraph analysing how the change in narrator would affect the novel.

2. 3. With a partner, discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each type of narrative voice.
1. A narrator can perform many functions. Which type of narrator would best perform each of these functions?
   a. withholding information
   b. keeping mystery
   c. foreshadowing the conclusion
   d. accessing characters’ thoughts
   e. providing information about a character’s history

2. With a partner, and then as a whole class, discuss why each type of narrator is better suited to certain functions.

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**PLOT AND NARRATIVE**

For a novel to be called a novel, things must happen; events must unfold to form the novel’s plot. The events of a good novel are carefully crafted and presented in a considered order.

Novels are often broadly divided into five sections: orientation, complication, rising action, climax, and resolution. These sections are more or less present in most novels (although not always in this order).

In a **linear narrative** (or chronological narrative), events are presented in the order in which they chronologically occur. A linear narrative is the simplest and most common narrative structure. Mark Haddon’s *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, for example, uses a linear narrative structure, which is particularly appropriate given the narrator Christopher’s logical and meticulous character.

Often, however, an author will choose to present the events of a novel in a different order from the order in which they occur. For example, Tim Winton’s *Cloudstreet* begins where it ends, with the drowning of Fish Lamb. This type of narrative structure, in which the end is presented at the beginning and is then followed by the bulk of the narrative in chronological order, is called a **circular narrative**.

Authors can also choose to present two or more parallel narratives in the one novel. Such parallel narratives often converge at the end. Michael Cunningham’s *The Hours*, for example, presents three distinct but connected stories of three generations of women affected by the Virginia Woolf novel *Mrs Dalloway*. Woolf, writing the novel in 1923, Mrs Brown, a housewife in 1949, and Clarissa Vaughan, who is planning a party for her dying literary friend in 1995.

Another common narrative structure is to tell the same story, or parts of it, from different characters’ points of view.

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1. Working with a partner, list one example of each of the following types of narrative structure from the novels you are familiar with. If you have any gaps in your list, join with another pair and swap examples.
   a. chronological narrative
   b. chronological narrative with flashbacks
   c. circular narrative
   d. parallel narratives that converge
   e. same events from different characters’ points of view
   f. reverse chronological narrative

2. As a class, discuss the author’s reasons for choosing the narrative structure of each of the novels you listed above. What does the narrative structure add to the novel?

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Almost every novel will contain, as well as the main plot, one or more subplots. A subplot is a secondary story that is told alongside, and usually connected to, the main plot. Subplots add variety, allow the reader time away from the main narrative, and can be used to provide additional examples of the author’s main themes. In Geraldine Brooks’s novel *Year of Wonders*, the central plot about Anna Frith’s intellectual and spiritual growth is supported by the subplot about the poor treatment of Mem and Anys Gowdie.

An important part of the analysis of any novel is an assessment of why an author has ordered their text in the way that they have. An author’s choice to move events earlier or later in a narrative, to begin at the end, or to present multiple versions of the same events all serve a purpose. The author deliberately manipulates the narrative structure to control what the reader knows, and when.

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1. As a class, discuss the purpose of the narrative structure of the novel you most recently studied. Why has the author organised the events in this way?

2. Write a paragraph in which you analyse the connection between the novel’s narrative structure and its narrative voice. How are the two connected? Why?
Characters

Characters are at the heart of every good novel. Avid readers will recognise the feeling of wanting something good (or bad) to happen to a character; they will develop feelings of friendship, empathy or even dislike towards characters.

Novels usually tell the story of an ordinary, or at least believable, main character. The main character, also known as the protagonist, will usually be introduced by the author at a relatively early point in the narrative.

Authors characterise, or build a picture of a character for the reader.

The author's choice of name is important; names carry many connotations and implications. Charles Dickens is well known as a user of this technique. For example, the name of Ada Clare from Dickens's *Bleak House* represents purity and simplicity, an association Dickens is keen for the reader to make.

Similarly, descriptions of physical appearance are simple and early indicators of the way in which authors want readers to understand characters. Before Ada has done or said anything, Dickens has already clearly characterised her as being caring and good through the physical description he gives of her:

*I saw in the young lady, with the fire shining upon her, such a beautiful girl! With such rich golden hair, such soft blue eyes, and such a bright, innocent, trusting face!*

**Definition**

The main character of a novel is the **protagonist**. The word protagonist comes from the Greek prefix ‘pro–’ which means ‘first’, and ‘agonistes’, which means ‘actor’.

**Your Turn**

1. For each of the Dickensian characters below, work with a partner and describe the type of person each name suggests. Is each character a good person or not? (They are usually only one or the other in Dickens!) Compare your thoughts with the rest of class.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME CONNOTATIONS OF NAME</th>
<th>GOOD OR BAD?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ebenezer Scrooge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Christmas Carol</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr M’Choakumchild</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hard Times</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney Carton</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>A Tale of Two Cities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Choose three characters from a novel you are currently studying. For each, find the place in the novel where he or she is first introduced and described to readers, and use the information to complete the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NAME</th>
<th>INITIAL DESCRIPTIONS</th>
<th>CONNOTATIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ada Clare cares for Richard in Dickens's <em>Bleak House</em>.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of course, characters are not merely characterised at the point in the novel where readers first meet them. Characterisation develops over the course of a novel. Indeed, one of the characteristics of a novel is the development of its characters over time. The way in which a character develops can also be used by an author to endorse or critique particular beliefs or behaviour.

Consider the dramatic change in Elizabeth Bennet in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice*. Austen is able to deliver a warning against judging others too quickly by allowing Elizabeth’s opinion of Mr Darcy to develop and change during the novel. That both Darcy and Elizabeth come to be ashamed of their earlier actions makes them believable as characters—we all make mistakes and come to regret them. It carries Austen’s suggestion that people can grow and improve.
In this extract from late in Pride and Prejudice, Elizabeth and Darcy reflect on their respective changes and previous behaviour. Here we see how dialogue can be an effective way for authors to show what characters are like and how they change.

‘We will not quarrel for the greater share of blame annexed to that evening,’ said Elizabeth. ‘The conduct of neither, if strictly examined, will be irreproachable; but since then, we have both, I hope, improved in civility.’

‘I cannot be so easily reconciled to myself. The recollection of what I then said, of my conduct, my manners, my expressions during the whole of it, is now, and has been many months, inexpressibly painful to me. Your reproof, so well applied, I shall never forget: “had you behaved in a more gentleman like manner.” Those were your words. You know not, you can scarcely conceive, how they have tortured me,—though it was some time, I confess, before I was reasonable enough to allow their justice.’

‘I was certainly very far from expecting them to make so strong an impression. I had not the smallest idea of their being ever felt in such a way.’

‘I can easily believe it. You thought me then devoid of every proper feeling. I am sure you did. The turn of your countenance I shall never forget, as you said that I could not have addressed you in any possible way, that would induce you to accept me.’

‘Oh! do not repeat what I then said. These recollections will not do at all. I assure you, that I have long been most heartily ashamed of it.’

1 Highlight the phrases in the extract from Pride and Prejudice that show the changes in Elizabeth’s and Darcy’s characters.

2 Write a paragraph analysing how Austen’s use of dialogue (as opposed to other techniques, such as describing Elizabeth’s thoughts) is important in showing the extent of the character changes.

3 Discuss, for Pride and Prejudice or a text your class has studied, what the author is suggesting by the characters’ development. In what way do the characters change? How is the character development important to the plot? What would be lost if the characters remained the same?

1 a As a class, discuss the main themes of the novel you are currently studying. For each theme, find a reference from the text—an event, quotation or character—that proves the connection between the theme and the novel.

   b List other novels and films that also explore the same themes as your novel.

   c Write a short paragraph that compares how the same theme is explored in two texts. Do the authors or film-makers communicate similar messages about the theme?

2 Create a table like the one below, and use it to list the themes and messages of the novel you are currently studying.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NOVEL</th>
<th>THEME</th>
<th>MESSAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mark Haddon, The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time</td>
<td>The consequences of dishonesty and deception</td>
<td>That the difficulties of telling the truth are often less than the consequences of lying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The causes and effects of infidelity</td>
<td>That children suffer when a marriage ends through infidelity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A novel’s themes and messages are presented not only in what happens and to who, but in the language the author uses to describe these things. To fully understand a text, readers need to consider a text’s style as well as its content. A novel’s style is the combination of tone, language register, sentence structure and imagery, and it is dictated by the novel’s audience and purpose.
Authors commonly use figurative language, and the most common forms of figurative language are similes and metaphors.

A simile describes something by saying it is like something else. A metaphor describes something by saying it is something else. For example, when Markus Zusak, in his novel *The Book Thief*, writes, 'Those houses were almost like lepers. At the very least, they were infected sores on the injured German terrain,' he uses both a simile (the first sentence), and a metaphor (the second sentence). The strength of a simile or metaphor lies not in the fact that it is a comparative description, but in the nature of the thing that the subject is compared with. The word 'lepers' carries negative connotations about sickness and about social exclusion.

**Definition**

The language register of a text is its linguistic complexity. A text with a high language register uses complex and specific words, and requires a knowledge of the topic and well-developed reading skills.

1. In the novel you are currently studying, find four similes or metaphors.

2. For each, write a sentence that explains the implied meaning suggested by the figurative language.

3. Choose one of the four similes or metaphors and write a more detailed analysis. By using this particular descriptive comparison, what connections does the author want the reader to make?

4. Complete the table below by noting as many common literary symbols as you can and what they represent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SYMBOL</th>
<th>TRADITIONAL MEANING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keys</td>
<td>Access to a new stage or information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Train</td>
<td>A development, particularly in a character</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fog</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sword</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crossroads</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**The Book Thief, by Markus Zusak**

Papa sat with me tonight. He brought the accordion down and sat close to where Max used to sit. I often look at his fingers and face when he plays. The accordion breathes. There are lines on his cheeks. They look drawn on, and for some reason, when I see them, I want to cry. It is not for any sadness or pride. I just like the way they move and change. Sometimes I think my Papa is an accordion. When he looks at me and smiles and breathes, I hear the notes.
**Short Stories**

Short stories share the elements of a novel but, given their length, have some characteristics that are slightly different. The term ‘short story’ has come to mean a work of prose narrative fiction that is shorter than a novella, but a precise definition is difficult (and perhaps unnecessary). Some believe that the key criterion is a word count of fewer than 10,000 words; others, fewer than 7,500. Still others believe that a short story must have a limited number of characters, a single setting and only one plotline.

In his essay ‘The Philosophy of Composition’, American short-story writer and poet Edgar Allan Poe wrote that ‘if any literary work is too long to be read at one sitting, we must be content to dispense with the immensely important effect derivable from unity of impression’. This idea was originally applied only to poems but has since been interpreted as also relevant to short stories. Poe argues that a piece of short literature must be read at one sitting, otherwise ‘the affairs of the world interfere’ and it is less effective. This is a useful definition.

The basic building blocks of a novel’s narrative are orientation, complication, rising action, climax and resolution. While many short stories share these, many others omit one or more.

Short stories often begin in *media res*—in the middle of a story—diving right into a key point of the narrative without the usual build-up or orienting characterisation. Peter Carey’s short story ‘Conversations with Unicorns’ begins in this disorienting way.

‘Conversations with Unicorns’, by Peter Carey

The unicorns do not understand. We have had long conversations but it is difficult for them. They insist that I have come to collect the body of one of their number, but at the same time they point out that there is no body, that it was collected by another man before I arrived. They continue to insist on these points, laughing that I have come for something that is not there.

Many short stories also end without any real conclusion. Russian writer Anton Chekhov was known for his propensity to just stop a story, seemingly mid-narrative, such as in his story ‘Disturbing the Balance’. The phrase *zero ending* was coined to describe this practice.

Short stories are often published and studied as part of a collection: often a collection of stories by one author or of stories that share a theme. As you study a collection, pay attention to the stories’ similarities. An author will often deal with a consistent set of themes or construct similar characters across a number of stories. By being attuned to these similarities, as well as the features of the author’s style and language use, a careful reader can begin to understand the way in which each short story within the one collection influences the reading of all of the others.

1. On the following page is a short story by Tim O’Brien called ‘The Man at the Well’. Read the story and then list the ways in which it adheres to the conventions of a short story.

2. Consider the following words from the opening paragraph: calcified, glistening, aluminium, cauterized and burnt out. With a partner, discuss what these words tell the reader about the man’s life.

3. List the characters present in the village. Who is absent? As a class, discuss how O’Brien builds the story’s context by leaving a particular group of Vietnamese out of the story.

4. How does O’Brien establish sympathy for the old man and contempt for the blond soldier? Use quotations from the text to explain.

5. As a class, discuss the story’s conclusion. Why does the old man smile? What is O’Brien suggesting about the effects of the war on civilians in Vietnam?
"The Man at the Well", by Tim O'Brien (from If I Die in a Combat Zone)

He was just an old man, an old Vietnamese farmer. His hair was white, and he was somewhere over seventy years, stooped and hunched from work in the paddies, his spine bent into a permanent, calcified arc. He was blind. His eyes were huge and empty, glistening like aluminium under the sun, cauterized and burnt out. But the old man got around.

In March we came to his well. He stood and smiled while we used the water. He laughed when we laughed. ‘To be ingratiating he said, ‘Good water for good GIs.’ Whenever there was an occasion, he repeated the phrase.

Some children came to the well, and one of them, a little girl with black hair and hoops of steel through her ears, took the old fellow’s hand, helping him about. The kids giggled at our naked bodies. A boy took a soldier’s rifle from out of the mud and wiped it and stacked it against the tree, and the old man smiled.

Alpha Company decided to spend the day in the old man’s village. We lounged inside his hut, and when re-supply brought down cold beer and food, we ate and wasted away the day. The kids administered professional back rubs, chopping and stretching and pushing our blood. They eyed our C rations, and the old blind man helped when he could.

When the wind stopped and the flies became bothersome, we went to the well again. We showered, and the old fellow helped, dipping into the well and yanking up buckets of water and sloshing it over our heads and backs and bellies. The kids watched him wash us. The day was as hot and peaceful as a day can be.

The blind old farmer was showering one of the men. A blustery and stupid soldier, blond hair and big belly, picked up a carton of milk and from fifteen feet away hurled it, for no reason, aiming at the old man and striking him flush in the face. The carton burst, milk spraying on the old man’s temples and into his cataracts. He hunched forward, rocking precariously and searching for balance. He dropped his bucket, and his hands went to his eyes then dropped loosely to his thighs. His blind gaze fixed straight ahead, at the stupid soldier’s feet. His tongue moved a little, trying to get at the cut and tasting the blood and milk. No one moved to help. The kids were quiet. The old man’s eyes did a funny trick, almost rolling out of his head, out of sight. He was motionless, and finally he smiled. He picked up the bucket and with the ruins of goodness spread over him, perfect gore, he dunked into the well and came up with water, and he showered a soldier. The kids watched.

Poetry is wonderfully complex and one of the most rewarding types of texts to study. Unlike many other types of literary text, poems often do not have a narrative; they do not tell full stories. Rather, poems seek to create an impression: to evoke or represent an emotion.

Reading a poem well requires some effort on the part of the reader. Sometimes a poem that seems impenetrable on first reading will reveal its message with a little work. Every choice that a poet makes needs to be considered to understand a poem fully.

While poetry is wonderfully flexible, and much of the challenge and enjoyment of poetry comes from the lack of absolute rules, you should be aware of some common features of poetry. To read poetry well, it helps to understand form, voice, metre, rhyme and imagery.
Read the first two stanzas from ‘Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard’ by English poet Thomas Gray. The annotations summarise how each of the elements work to create the poem’s meaning.

‘Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard’, by Thomas Gray

The curfew tells the knell of parting day,
The lowing herd wind slowly o’er the lea,
The ploughman homeward plods his weary way,
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,
And all the air a solemn stillness holds,
Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,
And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds;

The poem abounds with images of endings: the curfew, the ploughman going home, the day’s light ‘glimmering down’. These images mirror the topic of death.

The poem’s rhyme scheme is a simple one: in each quatrain, rhyme and fourth lines rhyme. The regularity of the rhyme reinforces the calm mood of the scene and of the poem.

The poem’s form is a series of quatrains that describe a church graveyard and reflect on the people buried there. It ends on an epitaph. The form mirrors a person’s progress through the cares of life to death.

The poem’s metre is iambic pentameter. The regular metre reinforces the calm mood.

Sonnet

I worship more, but cannot love thee less.
Above all pain, yet pitying all distress;
The soul of melancholy gentleness
Cleams like a seraph from the sky descending,
To talk about poetry, you need to know the names of some of the structural elements. The most important structural terms are:

- stanza—a discrete set of lines in a poem, similar to a paragraph in prose writing
- couplet—two rhyming lines next to one another
- quatrain—a stanza consisting of four lines
- sestet—a stanza consisting of six lines
- octave—a stanza consisting of eight lines

Poems can take a number of common forms. The table opposite condenses the conventions of some common forms of poetry and gives an example of each. It should be noted, however, that many poems do not strictly conform to one of these forms, but rather exhibit their own singular patterns of rhythm, metre and rhyme.

Sonnet

Thy cheek is pale with thought, but not from woe,
And yet so lovely, that if mirth could flush
Its rose of whiteness with the brightest blush,
My heart would wish away that ruder glow:
And dazzle not thy deep-blue eyes—but, oh!
While gazing on them sterner eyes will gush,
And into mine my mother’s weakness rush,
Soft as the last drops round heaven’s airy bow.

Thy cheek is pale with thought.

Sonnet to Genevra’, by George Gordon Byron, Lord Byron

Thy cheek is pale with thought, but not from woe,
And yet so lovely, that if mirth could flush
Its rose of whiteness with the brightest blush,
My heart would wish away that ruder glow:
And dazzle not thy deep-blue eyes—but, oh!
While gazing on them sterner eyes will gush,
And into mine my mother’s weakness rush,
Soft as the last drops round heaven’s airy bow.

Thy cheek is pale with thought, but not from woe,
And yet so lovely, that if mirth could flush
Its rose of whiteness with the brightest blush,
My heart would wish away that ruder glow:
And dazzle not thy deep-blue eyes—but, oh!
While gazing on them sterner eyes will gush,
And into mine my mother’s weakness rush,
Soft as the last drops round heaven’s airy bow.
PART TWO: COMMON FEATURES OF TEXTS

CHAPTER 3: LITERARY TEXTS

UNIT 3.2: POETRY

'Ballad'

'The Dean of Faculty', by Robert Burns

Dire was the hate at old Harlaw,
That Scot to Scot did carry;
And dire the discord Langside saw
For beauteous, hapless Mary:
But Scot with Scot ne'er met so hot,
Or were more in fury seen, Sir,
Than 'twixt Hal and Bob for the famous job
Who should be the Faculty's Dean, Sir.

'Epigram'

Samuel Taylor Coleridge

What is an epigram? A dwarfish whole,
Its body brevity, and wit its soul.

'Haiku'

Leonard Moore

red dust—
a little boy sprints the bases
between innings
new century—
the neighbour’s rusty car
still on blocks

'Elegy'

'Elegy for Jane (My Student, Thrown by a Horse)', by Theodore Roethke

I remember the neckcurls, limp and damp as tendrils;
And her quick look, a sidelong pickerel smile;
And how, once startled into talk, the light syllables leaped for her,
And she balanced in the delight of her thought,
A wren, happy tail into the wind,
Her song trembling the twigs and small branches.
The shade sang with her;
The leaves, their whispers turned to kissing;
And the mould sang in the bleached valleys under the rose.

'Free verse'

'The River-Merchant’s Wife: A Letter', by Ezra Pound

While my hair was still cut straight across my forehead
I played about the front gate, pulling flowers.
You came by on bamboo stilts, playing horse,
You walked about my seat, playing with blue plums.
And we went on living in the village of Chokan:
Two small people, without dislike or suspicion.

A full analysis of any poem requires you to consider its form. Because poems are condensed, a poet will often use the organisation of the words on the page as a means of reinforcing what the words and images suggest. The regular metre and rhyme of John Donne’s A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning, for example, not only create a pleasant, even rhythm, but also reflect the speaker’s argument that he will remain constant to the listener, his lover.

Using an online database of poetry, or a printed poetry collection, find another famous example of each of the common forms mentioned above: sonnet, ballad, epigram, haiku, elegy and free verse.

1 Choose one the forms given in the table on page 79 and use it to write a poem about a subject of your choosing.

2 Read Robert Frost’s ‘On a Tree Fallen Across the Road’ on page 82. With a partner, and then as a whole class, discuss how the form of this poem mirrors its content.
'On a Tree Fallen Across the Road (To Hear Us Talk)', by Robert Frost

The tree the tempest with a crash of wood
Throws down in front of us is not to bar
Our passage to our journey’s end for good,
But just to ask us who we think we are
Insisting always on our own way so.
She likes to halt us in our runner tracks,
And make us get down in a foot of snow
Debating what to do without an axe.
And yet she knows obstruction is in vain:
We will not be put off the final goal
We have it hidden in us to attain,
Not though we have to seize earth by the pole
And, tired of aimless circling in place,
Steer straight off after something into space.

'An Irish Airman Foresees His Death', by William Butler Yeats

I know that I shall meet my fate
Somewhere among the clouds above;
Those that I fight I do not hate,
Those that I guard I do not love;
My county is Kiltartan Cross,
My countrymen Kiltartan’s poor,
No likely end could bring them loss
Or leave them happier than before.
Nor law, nor duty bade me fight,
Nor public men, nor cheering crowds,
A lonely impulse of delight
Drove to this tumult in the clouds;
I balanced all, brought all to mind,
The years to come seemed waste of breath,
A waste of breath the years behind
In balance with this life, this death.

Rhyme

Rhyme is often considered the key element of poetry, and it is true that many poems do use rhyme in some way. Rhyme is a natural way of making a pattern with language; however, it is not a necessary feature of poetry—many poems do not rhyme at all. A poet can use rhyme to emphasise a particular word or sound, to make a poem read fluently or disjointedly, or to end with a bang.

The way in which a poem’s rhyme is organised is called its rhyme scheme. Rhyme scheme is annotated by assigning letters to the final sound in a line, giving a new letter for each new sound.

The rhyme scheme of the first stanza of ‘My Papa’s Waltz’ by Theodore Roethke is a b a b.

The whiskey on your breath a
Could make a small boy dizzy; b
But I hung on like death: a
Such waltzing was not easy b
(‘My Papa’s Waltz’, by Theodore Roethke)

VOICE

Poetic voice is determined by the speaker or narrator of the poem: the voice that is expressing the thoughts, feelings or impressions created through the poem’s words. Poetry is most often written from a first-person viewpoint—particularly if the poem is a personal meditation—or a third-person viewpoint. Readers of poetry, however, need to be wary of assuming that the first-person poetic voice is the same as the poet’s voice. Just as the first-person narrator of a novel should not be assumed to be the author, neither should a first-person poetic voice be automatically considered the poet’s. You need to consider the purpose that might lie behind a poet’s choice of poetic viewpoint and voice.

Read ‘An Irish Airman Foresees His Death’ by William Butler Yeats on the next page, paying particular attention to the poetic voice. Do some research into the poet’s life. Discuss the questions below with a partner, and then with your whole class.

1. Was Yeats an airman?
2. What purpose does the first-person viewpoint serve in this poem? Does it distance or engage the reader?
3. What would be lost if it were instead written from a third-person perspective?
PART TWO: COMMON FEATURES OF TEXTS

CHAPTER 3: LITERARY TEXTS
UNIT 3.2: POETRY

METRE

The metre of a poem is simply its rhythm, as created by stressed and unstressed syllables in a line. When we speak, we create a natural rhythm. A good poet will harness and direct that rhythm to emphasise words or sounds that help to convey and reinforce a poem’s message. Reading a poem aloud is crucial to obtain a sense of its metre and of how the metre contributes to the poem’s meaning.

Metre is marked using a system of scansion, which is a way of annotating emphasis. The most common metre is duple metre, which closely mirrors everyday speech. Duple metre consists of pairs of syllables: one stressed and one unstressed. The two types of duple metre are iambic and trochaic. In addition, two types of metre are made up of patterns of three syllables: anapaestic and dactylic metre.

- iambic
  two syllables: an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable
  \[/ \]  
  “I all alone beweep my outcast state,”
  (‘Sonnet 29’, by William Shakespeare)

- trochaic
  two syllables: a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable
  \[/ \]  
  ‘Tell me not, in mournful numbers,’
  (‘A Psalm of Life’, by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow)

- anapaestic
  three syllables: two unstressed syllables followed by one stressed syllable
  \[/ \]  
  ‘And the sound of a voice that is still!’
  (‘Break, Break, Break’, by Alfred, Lord Tennyson)

- dactylic
  three syllables: one stressed syllable followed by two unstressed syllables
  \[/ \]  
  ‘Just for a handful of silver he left us,’
  (‘The Lost Leader’, by Robert Browning)

Definition

Scansion is the analysis of a poem’s metre to identify its component feet. Stressed syllables, unstressed syllables and pauses are marked using symbols. In this book we use a forward slash known as a macron (\/) to mark a stressed syllable and a breve (˘) for an unstressed syllable.

‘Rose Pogonias’, by Robert Frost

A saturated meadow,
Sun-shaped and jewel-small,
A circle scarcely wider
Than the trees around were tall;
Where winds were quite excluded,
And the air was stifling sweet
With the breath of many flowers,—
A temple of the heat.

STANDARD
Poets choose words with particular sounds to reinforce the literal and figurative imagery. When reading a poem, pay attention to the way it sounds: not only its rhyme and metre, but also the nature and feel of the sounds. For example, read the following line aloud:

My body’s a sack of bones, broken within,  
(‘Elegy: His Picture’, by John Donne)

This line is a good example of **alliteration**: the consonant sounds ‘b’ and ‘k’ are repeated. Importantly, the alliteration is made up of hard sounds, so when read aloud the line uncomfortably sounds like bones breaking.

In addition to alliteration, poets use other sound techniques such as **assonance** and **onomatopoeia**.

Always consider the way in which the sound of words is used to support the meaning or message of the poem. These techniques are not merely a clever trick of poetry!

### Definition

**Alliteration** is the repetition of consonant sounds, often at the beginning of words or in the stressed syllables. **Assonance** is the repetition of vowel sounds, such as the ‘i’ sound in the words ‘pie’ and ‘bike’. **Onomatopoeia** is the use of words that sound like the things they represent, such as ‘boom’, ‘pop’ or ‘squelch’.

### Analysing the Whole Poem

The challenge of analysing poetry is that you need to consider everything covered in this unit, as well as the poem’s subject and content, and how they work together to create the meaning or message of the poem. An adept poetry analyst needs to consider together the tone, form, voice, metre, rhyme, imagery and subject.

**‘The Flower Boat’, by Robert Frost**

The fisherman’s swapping a yarn for a yarn  
Under the hand of the village barber,  
And here in the angle of house and barn  
His deep-sea dory has found a harbour.

At anchor she rides the sunny sod  
As full to the gunnel of flowers growing  
As ever she turned her home with cod  
From George’s bank when winds were blowing.

And I judge from that Elysian freight  
That all they ask is rougher weather,  
And dory and master will sail by fate  
To seek for the Happy Isles together.

### YOUR TURN

Read Robert Frost’s ‘The Flower Boat’ on page 86, and complete the following tasks.

1. Summarise the subject of the poem. What is it about? What is being observed?

2. Describe the tone and mood of the poem. Is it restful or active? Calm or animated?

3. With a partner, discuss the poetic voice of ‘The Flower Boat’. Who is speaking? Is the speaker connected to or disconnected from the scene? How does the poetic voice help to create the feeling of observing a scene?

4. Write a short paragraph identifying the rhyme scheme of the poem. Analyse how the rhyme scheme supports the tone and is appropriate for the subject.

5. Highlight the parts of the poem that create images for the reader. In what way are the images of sailing both literal and metaphorical?
When Macbeth says the following lines in the fifth act of William Shakespeare’s tragedy, he draws a parallel between human life and its presentation on the stage:

Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more

(Macbeth, William Shakespeare, V.v.23–5)

In this passage, Shakespeare comments on the transience of life and on the human propensity for acting and falsity. Presenting human problems and traits in performances of imagined narratives is part of a long tradition of live storytelling.

Plays, as we understand them today, developed in ancient Greece in the works of playwrights such as Sophocles, Aristophanes, Euripides and Aeschylus. The period around the fifth century BCE is often called the ‘golden age’ of Greek theatre.

It was from Greek theatre that plays, particularly tragedies, developed. Tragic plays are believed to have originated in dithyrambs—choral hymns, usually sung to the god Dionysus. Over time, the leader of the chorus stepped out into increasingly long sections of monologue and, with the addition of a second actor, dialogue. As the length and importance of the sections of dialogue and action increased, and the chorus’s sung hymns decreased, plays were born.

Plays retained their religious and moral character through the Middle Ages, when biblical theatre and morality plays used allegory to teach audiences how to lead a moral life and achieve Christian redemption. The best surviving example of such works is the play Everyman.

The rule of Elizabeth I, between 1558 and 1603, saw a surge in popular theatre and the ascendance of William Shakespeare as England’s pre-eminent playwright. Shakespeare wrote thirty-seven plays that still exist today and perhaps others that have disappeared.

A debate still rages about whether Shakespeare actually wrote all of the great plays that are attributed to him. Some argue that Shakespeare, simply an actor from Stratford-upon-Avon who was educated at a local school, had neither the education nor the intelligence to write plays such as Hamlet or Richard III, let alone the ability to read their source material in the original Greek, Latin and French.

A sixteenth-century edition of Everyman featured this engraving.

Go online to research and gain an overview of the Shakespearean authorship debate.

Record the evidence for and against the alternative authors of Shakespeare’s plays: Christopher Marlowe, Edward de Vere, Francis Bacon and Sir Walter Raleigh.

Working in small groups, discuss and evaluate the arguments for and against each alternative author. Are they plausible? Who do you consider the most likely candidate for authorship? Report your group’s findings back to the class.

Watch Mike Rubbo’s documentary Much Ado about Something, which argues that Shakespeare’s works were written by an exiled Christopher Marlowe after he had faked his own death, or watch the 2011 film Anonymous, directed by Roland Emmerich, which aims to advance the theory that it was in fact Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, who penned Shakespeare’s plays.

Conduct a class debate on the following topic: Shakespeare did not write Shakespeare.
NARRATIVE VOICE AND PERFORMANCE

The characteristic that most distinguishes plays from other literary forms is that they are written to be performed. Modern plays are generally staged in theatres, on stages with sets that re-create the play’s location, and with actors who play out the action and deliver the dialogue.

An interesting consequence of the staging of plays is what happens to narrative voice. While the audience is able to see what the characters are like and the play is about through the characters, their dialogue and their actions, there is, usually, no narrator to guide us. Without a narrator to help the audience, playwrights need to make careful choices to convey information about the characters and story.

Consider how, in the extract from *The Freedom of the City* below, playwright Brian Friel uses the technique of having a character speak directly to the audience. This technique is known as ‘breaking the fourth wall’, as it crosses the imaginary fourth wall of a stage set that separates the players from the audience—the division between the imagined world and the real world.

Friel uses the stage directions to characterise Dr Dodds; the stage directions perform the role of narrative voice. One of the few advantages of reading a play instead of watching a performance is that the stage directions are given in full. Ideally, you will both read and watch the plays you study.

**Definition**

When characters in a play (or novel) speak directly to the audience (or reader), sometimes they display an awareness that they are part of a fictional world. This technique is known as metareference.

*The Freedom of the City*, by Brian Friel

(While the meeting is going on offstage, DR DODDS enters left and addresses the audience. An elderly American professor with an informal manner.)

DODDS: Good evening. My name is Philip Alexander Dodds. I’m a sociologist and my field of study is inherited poverty or the culture of poverty or more accurately the subculture of poverty. And since I’ll be using these terms off and on, let me explain what I mean by them. I’m talking about those people who are at the very bottom of the socio-economic scale and more specifically about their distinctive way of life—a way of life which is common to ghetto or slum communities all over the Western world and which is transmitted from generation to generation.

---

1. **Referring to the extract on the previous page, what does the description ‘an elderly American professor with an informal manner’ imply about Dr Dodds’s character?**

2. **Why do you think Friel has made Dr Dodds elderly? What effect does this have on the way the audience perceives him?**

3. **Identify and highlight the words in Dodds’s speech that are negative about the poor or the places in which they live.**

4. **Do some research about Friel’s play *The Freedom of the City*. Summarise its plot, characters and style.**

   **As a class, answer the following questions.**

   **a** What real-life event does the play refer to?

   **b** What might be a reason for Friel’s decision to make Dr Dodds American?

   **c** How might British, particularly Northern Irish, audiences respond to the play?

---

Another common way in which playwrights provide insight into their characters or interject their own voice into a play is through asides. An aside provides access to a character’s thoughts in a way otherwise impossible in a play. An aside can be delivered directly to the audience—where a character breaks the fourth wall—or as a private verbal musing. The key feature is that no other characters are able to hear what is delivered as an aside, preserving the audience’s privileged access to the thoughts.

In the extract on the following page from *Macbeth*, Shakespeare has Macbeth speak three asides to illuminate his thoughts. The notes accompanying the extract explain some of the ways in which Shakespeare’s asides are important to understanding the play.

---

Defining Terms:

- **Narrative voice**: The characteristic that most distinguishes plays from other literary forms is that they are written to be performed.
- **Performance**: Modern plays are generally staged in theatres, on stages with sets that re-create the play’s location, and with actors who play out the action and deliver the dialogue.
- **Narrative voice**: An interesting consequence of the staging of plays is what happens to narrative voice.
- **Breaking the fourth wall**: The technique of having a character speak directly to the audience is known as ‘breaking the fourth wall’.
- **Metareference**: When characters in a play (or novel) speak directly to the audience (or reader), sometimes they display an awareness that they are part of a fictional world.

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**The Freedom of the City**, by Brian Friel

(While the meeting is going on offstage, DR DODDS enters left and addresses the audience. An elderly American professor with an informal manner.)

DODDS: Good evening. My name is Philip Alexander Dodds. I’m a sociologist and my field of study is inherited poverty or the culture of poverty or more accurately the subculture of poverty. And since I’ll be using these terms off and on, let me explain what I mean by them. I’m talking about those people who are at the very bottom of the socio-economic scale and more specifically about their distinctive way of life—a way of life which is common to ghetto or slum communities all over the Western world and which is transmitted from generation to generation.
The extract from Macbeth and complete the following tasks.

1. Write three thoughts that Macbeth delivers through asides in this extract.

2. Discuss other techniques Shakespeare could have used to convey these thoughts to the audience. Was the choice to use asides a good one? Why?

3. Rewrite the extract using direct speech instead of asides to convey Macbeth’s thoughts. With a partner, discuss whether this is an effective strategy.

4. Macbeth seems to be torn between two thoughts. What are they?

5. Reread Macbeth’s second speech from ‘cannot be ill’. With a partner, discuss the section’s tone and grammar. How would you describe the passage? What do the sentence types, sentence structures and adjectives suggest about Macbeth’s state of mind?

6. Macbeth’s last two asides show a more resolute attitude. What does he decide? How is this decision metaphorically explained by Banquo’s lines, ‘Like our strange garments, cleave not to their mould / But with the aid of use’?
PART TWO: COMMON FEATURES OF TEXTS

CHAPTER 3: LITERARY TEXTS

UNIT 3.3: PLAYS

7 Write a paragraph analysing the importance and use of asides in the extract. Use quotations from the extract to support your analysis.

8 The paragraph below, from a student essay on William Shakespeare’s Macbeth, contains some strong elements—such as integrated quotations and solid arguments. However, it is not carefully developed and is, at times, poorly expressed, particularly in its use of verbs.

a For each of the text-response essay tips below, find an example in the text where the advice has been ignored. Imagine that you are the teacher, and annotate the extract to identify the errors, explaining why they weaken the essay.

b Rewrite the paragraph, following the advice of the tips to communicate the same ideas more effectively.

‘Macbeth must accept responsibility for the outcome of events depicted in the play.’

Discuss

However, ultimately only Macbeth himself can be considered ‘responsible’ for these deaths, as he is a brave and intelligent man capable of making his own decisions. When Macbeth says that King Duncan is ‘here in double trust’, as a guest in Macbeth’s castle, he acknowledges his dual responsibility to the king: as both subject and host. The irony is that if Duncan hadn’t invited himself to Macbeth’s castle, the murder mightn’t have happened. Not long after Duncan says ‘This castle hath a pleasant seat’, he was murdered. That was also ironic and shows Shakespeare’s clever control of the narrative development. Macbeth was destroyed by guilt after the murder, which means we felt some sympathy for him, but he did the ‘bloody business’ himself so doesn’t deserve to be let off.

Tips for using verbs in text-response essays

1 Maintain a formal voice, and avoid colloquial verbs and verb phrases (such as ‘stuffed up’).
2 Write verbs in full and avoid using contractions (such as ‘didn’t’ and ‘don’t’).
3 Choose strong, interesting and appropriate verbs.
4 Write using the present tense throughout your essay.
5 Write using the active voice wherever possible.
Read the extract from David Mamet's Glengarry Glen Ross (on page 95), paying particular attention to the way in which Mamet characterises the real estate agent, Ricky Roma.

1 What is the persuasive purpose of each of the quotations from Roma below?
   a 'I'll tell you what it is, and I know that that's why you married her. One of the reasons is prudence.'
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________

   b 'Because there's something about your acreage I want you to know. I can't talk about it now. I really shouldn't. And, in fact, by law, I ... The man next to you, he bought his lot at forty-two, he phoned to say that he'd already had an offer ...'
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________

   c 'Of course you have three days.'
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________

2 a With a partner, discuss the characters Roma and Lingk and then write down three adjectives each to describe Roma and Lingk.
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________

   b Choose one of the adjectives for each character and match it with a line from the extract that demonstrates this quality.
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________

The casting of the actors who will perform each character in a play is very important. A play’s audience will react differently to different actors playing the same role, even if they are played in a similar way. Directors and casting directors think very carefully about how the physical appearance of a character will influence audience response.

1 Which two modern actors would you cast as Roma and Lingk in Glengarry Glen Ross? Find a picture of each actor, and write a justification of your choices.

2 Look at the images of the two actors cast to play Shakespeare’s Richard III: Ian McKellen and Ewan Leslie.
   a What are the physical differences between Ewen Leslie and Ian McKellen as they are presented here?
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________

   b Which Richard is the more authoritative? Which is the more underhand? What about charming or ruthless? Why?
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________

   c As a class, list three adjectives to describe each Richard.
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________
   ____________________________  ____________________________  ____________________________

   d If you are familiar with the play, discuss which actor is the better casting choice for Richard.

3 In the play you are currently studying, select two short extracts that effectively characterise each of the three most important characters. Highlight the parts of each extract that tell the audience something about the character. Look for a balance of dialogue, action, gesture and costume.
STRUCTURE AND NARRATIVE

Plays share the narrative elements of other fiction texts: orientation, complication, rising action, climax and resolution.

Like many novels, many plays follow a linear narrative and present events in the chronological order in which they occur. Of course, plays can also be non-linear—jumping around in time or circling back to the start.

Brian Friel’s The Freedom of the City, for example, has a circular narrative and also presents two narratives that are separated in time. Friel uses the character Dr Dodds as a pseudo-narrator, and as a way of moving between Michael, Lily and Skinner in the mayor’s office and the later inquiry into their shooting.

Plays, however, have a unique structural element: they are usually divided into acts and scenes.

Many modern playwrights use two acts, with an interval breaking the performance. The first act conventionally ends on a note of suspense; this creates tension about what is to come in the second act (and gives the audience a reason to come back after interval). Plays before the twentieth century generally had more than two acts—Shakespeare’s plays all have five acts.

Each act is divided into scenes, which are noted in the script. New scenes often bring a change of setting, but they can also be used to shift times, to give audiences a chance to digest what they have seen, or, at a practical level, to allow the sets to be changed or the actors to change costumes.

1. Draw a diagram outlining the acts and scenes of the play you are currently studying.
2. With a partner, discuss the purpose of the act and scene divisions falling where they do in the play you are currently studying. Why has the playwright chosen to stop each scene and act where they have?

ANALYSING THE WHOLE PLAY

To fully understand a playwright’s message, you need to consider all of the elements working together in the play—not only the narrative voice, characterisation and structure that are particular to plays, but also the other, more general, elements and conventions of fiction. Think particularly about the themes that are raised and the type of language that is used.

1. a. List the key elements in the play you are currently studying in a table, like the one below for Macbeth. Add as much detail as you can.
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ELEMENT</th>
<th>MACBETH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narrative voice</td>
<td>Asides are used extensively to convey characters’ thoughts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characterisation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Macbeth—unsure, ambitious, regretful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Lady Macbeth—highly ambitious and unscrupulous, detests weakness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Duncan—embodiment of kingly virtue, trusting and faithful</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Malcolm—aware, vengeful, patient</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrative structure</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Five acts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Witches’ prophesies used to foreshadow Duncan’s murder and Macbeth’s ascension to the throne</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Mostly blank verse, some prose</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Clothing is symbolic throughout</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Images of light and dark</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Motifs of illness, the supernatural, masks and deception, and blood</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Themes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The corrupting nature of ambition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Revenge and regret</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The justifications of revenge</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The battle between good and evil</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The influence of fate and the place of free will</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Supernatural influence in the world</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

   b. Underline one of the elements you have listed, and then draw an arrow to another element to which it is connected. Write a few sentences explaining how the two elements are linked. Repeat this for another four elements.

   c. Turn your table into a chart or diagram that represents how the various elements support one another.

   d. Choose and highlight what you consider to be the three most important elements in your table. Write a paragraph on each of the three, analysing their importance in the play.

2. Read (or reread) Macbeth, The Freedom of the City or a different play altogether, and answer the general activities in this unit, referring to that play.
Who doesn’t like to escape into the imaginative world of a great film? To be lost for a couple of hours in another’s life? Studying narrative film is a particularly enjoyable part of the study of English. It allows you to watch movies at school! That in itself should recommend the study of narrative films.

Of course, a study of film offers much more than that. Films are multimodal texts—they contain language that is read and heard, and convey meaning through how they look, sound and feel. All of this is in addition to what happens in the narrative and how the characters develop. Films require language all of their own to describe these multimodal attributes, and you will hear and use terms such as editing, diegetic sound, mise en scène and design aesthetic.

Studying narrative film requires you to think about the film-making process, particularly the collaborative nature of film-making. Whereas a novel is written by an author working in relative isolation, a film is the product of a group effort. The director is responsible for the major stylistic and structural choices, but an astute viewer will also consider the place and influence of the screenwriter, producer, cinematographer, set designer, costume designer and editor—among others.

Understanding the elements of narrative film and film-making will help you to better understand and enjoy the great films you watch.

Structure

As you watch a film, think about not only the events that are presented but also their order. A film-maker controls what information is presented to the viewer and when. An intelligent viewer will pay attention to a film’s structure and consider its purpose when interpreting the film’s meaning.

Increasingly, modern film-makers experiment with the structure of their films. Just as an author can in a novel, a film-maker can choose to present the elements of the narrative out of their chronological order.

A famous example is the reverse narrative used by director Christopher Nolan in his 2000 film Memento. The central character, Leonard Shelby (played by Guy Pearce), tries to discover the identity of his wife’s murderer but is obstructed by his inability to create any new memories after her death. He begins each day remembering nothing since the murder; he has to keep track of his progress using Polaroid photographs, notes and tattoos. By presenting this narrative in reverse chronological order, Nolan cleverly re-creates Leonard’s disorientation for the audience.

Just as Leonard starts each day with no memory of what immediate preceded it, so too does the viewer.

When looking at any technique or element in film (or any narrative text), consider not only what it is but also why it has been used. Always ask yourself what the film-maker is trying to communicate through the use of this technique.
1. Make a chart or timeline outlining the narrative progression of the film you are currently studying. Choose eight main points to chart the progression.

2. a. With a partner, discuss the narrative structure of the film you are currently studying. In what order are the events presented? Is anything left out? Why do you think the director and screenwriter have chosen to present the narrative in the way they have?

   b. Working on your own, use your discussion as the basis of a paragraph that analyses the narrative structure of the film. Provide examples from the film to support your argument.

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   The language of film

   While many of the literary terms you are familiar with also apply to narrative film, film has a language all of its own. Understanding the terms in this section and the techniques or features they describe will help you to understand and analyse narrative film more effectively. Perhaps most importantly, it will increase your enjoyment of film.

   Camera use

   Directors use different camera shots for different purposes. The relative positioning of camera and subject allows the director to control what the audience sees and how they see it.

   The three basic elements of camera use are:
   - distance
   - angle
   - movement.

   The most commonly used camera shots are combinations of these three elements. A close-up, for example, typically uses a short distance from camera to subject, a flat angle and little movement. An overhead shot is typically mid to long distance, above the subject and either stationary or zooming out or in, in a linear motion. An overhead shot is often used to establish a setting early on in a film.

   Just three basic elements—it sounds terribly simple, but skilful directors and camera operators can use cameras to great effect. For example, how a camera is used can alter the emotional response of viewers watching a scene.

   A close-up shot from the film The King's Speech allows director Tom Hooper to show George VI's focus and pensiveness.

   A stationary overhead shot of Laurence Fishburne as Morpheus in The Matrix shows the height of the building he is falling from, and induces a feeling of dizziness in the viewer.
1 Complete the table below by explaining the effect of commonly used camera angles and shots. Then describe an example of each—or find a film still—from a film you have studied recently. The first one is done for you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF SHOT</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>EFFECT</th>
<th>EXAMPLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Medium shot</td>
<td>A mid-distance shot, usually of one or more characters, often from the waist up.</td>
<td>Shows some detail of the subject but remains relatively neutral. Keeps the focus on the dialogue or action.</td>
<td>Shot of Mark Zuckerberg in a dressing gown in David Fincher’s The Social Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-distance shot</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Low-angle shot</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-angle shot</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Point-of-view shot</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Tracking shot</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Panning shot</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

2 Search online for the final scene in Kenneth Branagh’s film version of Shakespeare’s Much Ado about Nothing. It begins after Keanu Reeves’ character, Don John, is taken away by the guards. Watch the scene and pay particular attention to the tracking and panning of the camera.

a How does the use of the camera change once Don John is taken away by the guards?
b How might viewers feel as they are swept along with the dancing party?
c In what ways do the music and the camera complement one another?
d Write a short piece describing the motion of the camera across the scene. Use the terms panning, tracking, close-up, low-angle and aerial shot.
e Write a short review of this part of the film. How effective do you think the final scene is?

Mise en scène

Mise en scène is the term used to describe the composition of elements within each frame. Directors make careful decisions about what to include (and what not to include) in each shot and how to frame these elements. How a director chooses to place and portray the subjects in a frame, and what else is included in the shot, contributes to how a viewer ‘reads’ the scene. In the film still on this page from Spiderman, Spiderman and Mary Jane are framed closely; the shot excludes the rest of the scene as the rest of the world would feel excluded for them. The rain darkens Mary Jane’s hair and Spiderman’s costume, which heightens the contrast with their lighter faces, drawing the viewer’s attention in to the kiss. The balance (the same amount of each character is shown) and inversion of the characters suggests that they are complementary.

The perspective shot from Tom Hooper’s The King’s Speech directs the viewer’s attention to speech pathologist Lionel Logue’s focus on King George VI as he delivers a speech. The king is speaking; that the king and the microphone appear in the foreground suggests that his speech is the central action of the scene. Logue—despite being in the background—is in focus, which directs attention to his face and encourages the viewer to feel the same encouragement that he feels. Logue’s reaction is what is important in this shot.

CASTING AND COSTUME

Film-makers have additional tools for characterisation: the physical traits of the actors they cast and the costumes the actors wear. Viewers will react to characters before they have said or done anything because of the way that they look. The costumes designed by costume designers often play on the assumptions we all make about how people dress and what this says about them. Casting and costumes can be used stereotypically (think of the cowboy-movie cliché of black hats for bad guys, and white hats for good guys), but used well they can be a powerful way of building characters.
1 a With a partner, talk about the two characters pictured above. What do their costumes and body language suggest about them?  

b List three adjectives that could be used to describe each character.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHARACTER</th>
<th>WHAT THE COSTUME SAYS ABOUT THE CHARACTER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proper dress suggests responsibility and adherence to rules. The buttoned-up shirt and high jacket suggest a conservative, private nature. The hat suggests old-fashioned values.</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

2 a Look at the characters below from the five different films (can you name them?), and note the connotations that are associated with the way they are dressed. The first one has been started for you.

b Choosing two of the characters pictured, discuss with a partner what the costume designer wants the viewer to think about or associate with the character because of the way they are dressed.

c What do you know about the actors Johnny Depp and Orson Welles, who were chosen to play the characters Captain Jack Sparrow in the Pirates of the Caribbean films, and Charles Foster Kane in Citizen Kane? Choose one of these characters and write a short paragraph discussing how the character would be viewed differently if they were played by another famous actor.

3 Write a paragraph analysing the purpose of the costumes of one of the characters in the film you are currently studying.

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**SAMPLE**
PART TWO: COMMON FEATURES OF TEXTS

CHAPTER 3: LITERARY TEXTS

UNIT 3.4: NARRATIVE FILMS

1 For each of the three film stills below: a) write three adjectives describing the design of each film; and b) what connotations are suggested by each design style? What associations do you make with the colours, props and settings?

- **Sofia Coppola’s Marie Antoinette**
  a) Adjectives: __________________
  b) __________________
  __________________
  __________________
  __________________
  __________________

- **Rachel Perkins’s One Night the Moon**
  a) Adjectives: __________________
  b) __________________
  __________________
  __________________
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  __________________

- **Catherine Hardwicke’s Red Riding Hood**
  a) Adjectives: __________________
  b) __________________
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A film’s design is enhanced by the way it is lit. The choices made by the lighting director colour the way in which audiences interpret a film. The darkness of the still pictured on page 108 from Rachel Perkins’s One Night the Moon suggests the sadness to come; conversely, the bright, natural lighting of the still from Sofia Coppola’s Marie Antoinette mirrors the light, pastel colours of the props and costumes, and the lightness of the mood at that stage of the film.

2 The promotional materials for films are created with careful consideration of the film’s design. Write a paragraph about the design of the poster for Rachel Perkins’s 2009 film Bran Nue Dae: What does it suggest to the viewer about the film? Think about mood, colour, costume and the cast’s body language.

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A colour filter, or colour gel, is a type of film that is put over a light to change its colour. Filters and gels are used to alter the colour of a subject or scene.

1 a As a class, identify the main colour palette of the film you are currently studying and discuss how the colour palette was created. Is it mostly through the use of props, costumes and settings, or through the use of colour filters?

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b What is the purpose of the film’s colour palette? How does it reinforce the mood or action?

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C Write a short paragraph describing what would happen if the colour palette were changed.

SAMPLE
One of the most emotionally powerful elements of a successful film is sound. It is also one of the ‘modes’ that makes film multimodal.

You need to understand and consider two categories of sound: diegetic and non-diegetic. **Diegetic sound** is all of the sounds that would naturally come from the events portrayed on screen, such as the sound of characters speaking, or a character’s footsteps as he runs.

**Non-diegetic sound** is additional sound that is added to the film and that would not be part of the events on screen. Non-diegetic sound is a common way in which directors manipulate the emotions of the viewer. Think of the heart-rending sound of string instruments playing in the background of a death scene, or a swelling score as the main characters finally kiss in the rain. Of course, these are cinematic clichés, but they are still commonly applied.

Diegetic sound is generally used more subtly than an overlaid soundtrack, but it is still carefully manipulated to guide viewers in particular directions. Much of what is presented as diegetic sound in a film is actually carefully recorded by foley artists and added after shooting. Take, for example, the use of diegetic sound to build tension in the famous shower scene from Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho*.

Because even the sounds that seem natural in a film are painstakingly manipulated, it is important not to overlook them. When analysing a film’s sound, consider both the diegetic sound, and how it is manipulated and presented, as well as the soundtrack, or non-diegetic sound.

Consider the place of diegetic sound in musical films. In musicals, such as Rachel Perkins’s film version of the stage musical *Bran Nue Dae*, characters appear to break into spontaneous song, but we know that the music is carefully recorded and added afterwards.

**Definition**

**Diegetic sound** is part of the narrative. The characters and the audience can hear diegetic sound.

**Non-diegetic sound** is sound that is overlaid onto the narrative, such as a musical soundtrack. Characters are not able to hear non-diegetic sound.

The 2004 film *The Notebook* is frequently referred to as the biggest tear-jerker of all time.

1. Go online and search for the scene from which this still is taken, where the two main characters, Noah and Allie, go rowing on a lake.

2. Make notes about the sound throughout the scene. What diegetic sounds and non-diegetic sounds are used?

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3. How is sound used in the rowing scene to change the emotional tone, particularly from when the rain begins to fall? What words might you use to describe this shift?

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4. As a class, discuss the use of non-diegetic music in the scene. Does it work? Is it appropriate for the scene? Is it over the top? How does it resonate with you?
Editoring is the process of deciding what to exclude. You will have heard the phrase ‘ended up on the cutting-room floor’. This comes from a time when films were edited by actually cutting the film strip to remove the unwanted parts, and sticking the film strip back together. A film’s editor and director decide where each shot should end, how much of each shot to leave in, and how much to exclude. They decide which ‘take’ of a scene to keep and include in the final film, and they often leave out entire scenes that have been filmed.

1 a Find a scene in the film you are currently studying, or in one you have recently seen, that shows a long period without dialogue or action (before or after the dialogue or action). What type of music is in the scene? At what stage of the narrative is the scene? What is the purpose of the scene?

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b Why do you think the editor and director left such a pause? What evidence from the scene supports your idea?

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1 c Present your chosen scene to the class, stating why the scene was edited in such a way. Write your notes below.

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2 Robert Altman’s 1992 film The Player uses the unusual technique of referring to its own editing. In its famously long, unedited opening scene, Altman has the character Walt talk about how modern movies are all ‘cut, cut, cut, cut’ and refer to the famously long, unedited opening scene of Orson Welles’s 1958 film Touch of Evil.

a Find the opening scenes of The Player and Touch of Evil online and watch them. What are the similarities between the editing and camera use in each scene? What are the differences?

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b What is the purpose of using such an unedited scene in Touch of Evil? What feeling does it create in the viewer?

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b How would the opening scene of The Player be different if it were edited into a series of shorter shots? What would be lost?

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2 a Make notes about the editing of the film you are currently studying. Do the shots generally linger on the subject, or move on quickly? How does the editing affect the mood and tone of the film?

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b Choose one scene from the film that you think could have been better edited. Write a persuasive letter to the film’s director outlining your position.