

## **Aspects of Narrative: Definitions and Key Terminology**

**Anti-Hero** – *protagonist characterised by his or her weaknesses or failings rather than admirable qualities; sometimes behaves in ways which should appal us yet still engages our sympathy*

**Characterisation** – *the techniques the writer uses to construct a fictional character eg. What they say, how they speak, what they do, attitudes they express, description by the narrator, voices of other characters*

**Chronological and Narrative time** – *The order in which events take place, with one thing following another. Narrative time may follow chronological time. An author may choose to manipulate time by telling the story in a different order from which the events happened eg flashbacks, compressing time, leaping events*

**Closure** – *The closing of the narrative in which all the loose ends are tied up and questions answered. Some modern, experimental narratives seek to deny the reader closure – or the expected closure. Some narratives look ahead to a sequel.*

**Cohesion** – *Techniques used to draw the narrative together. May be achieved through events, characters or language. Related to the structure of the novel.*

**Conventions** – *The typical features and characteristics of a particular text type or genre*

**Denouement** – *Literally the 'unknotting', in which events are explained. A particularly important feature of genres such as the detective novel.*

**Dialogue** – *constructed conversations in written texts*

**Direct Address** – *Some texts address the reader directly. This can have the effect of drawing up into the text, making up feel we know the narrator and are being told the story personally. It can also have the effect of positioning the reader alongside the narrator and his or her values – a position we may want to question or challenge*

**Direct Speech** – *Speech that is given in the words of the speaker rather than reported indirectly in the narrative voice.*

**Dominant or preferred reading** – *This is the reading which seems most obvious – it is the commonsense reading encouraged by the text. As readers we may decide to challenge or resist this dominant reading and the values it assumes.*

**Embedded narratives** – *stories contained within the main narrative. These could include a story told orally by a character, a diary or letter, a complete narrative.*

**Experimental Voice** – *Reminds the reader that what they are reading is fiction, dispelling any illusion that the characters are real people etc*

**Epistolary narrative** – *A novel written in letters*

**Figurative Language** – *Any language that goes beyond the literal, including simile, metaphor, symbol*

**Flashback** – *Reference to an event that occurred at an earlier point in the story*

**Focaliser** – *The character from whose point of view the action is seen*

**Flat Characters** – *play a more minor role in the narrative, are less developed (perhaps even stereotyped and clichéd) behaving in predictable ways. They may be used by the writer to fulfil a particular function in the novel, for example: illustrate a theme, move the plot forward*

**Foreshadowing** – *Anticipating events yet to occur. This may be done explicitly where the narrator suggests 'if only they'd known' for example, or may be very subtle through the word choices, imagery and so on.*

**Frame story/framing devices** – *surrounds and accounts for the main narrative, for example the finding of a narrative or how the narrator came to learn the story*

**Free direct speech** – *Speech given in the words of the character but without attributing speech tags eg*

- *Good day*
- *Good day to you too*

**Free indirect Speech** – *Third person narration in which a character's thoughts and feelings seem to be directly expressed, freely taking on the views and often the language of that character. Narratives often slide between conventional third person narration and this style, moving from a more detached voice to one that is more intimately connected to one character or another*

**Genre** – *Kind or type of literary text. Used both to refer to overarching genres such as poem, novel, drama and to sub-genres such as detective story, romance, thriller*

**Implied reader/listener** – *The implied reader is related to but is not the same as the real reader of the text. The implied reader is constructed or anticipated by the text to respond in a particular way. The real reader is encouraged to adopt this role but may choose to question or challenge it*

**Irony** – *use of a word, phrase or paragraph turned from its usual meaning to a contradictory or opposing one, usually to satiric effect*

**Inadequate narrator** – *narrator who doesn't seem to understand as much about what's happening as the reader*

**Interior monologue** – *first person, as though the narrator is verbalising their thoughts as they occur*

**Intrusive narrator** – *A narrator who is telling the story in the third person, intervenes in the narrative with a comment in first person*

**Iterative imagery** – *repeated imagery (see also motif)*

**Lexis** – *vocabulary or word choices. The narrative voice may use one kind of lexis while characters may use another*

**Metanarrative/experimental approaches** – *the metanarrative draws attention to its fictional and constructed status, preventing the reader from suspending disbelief and entering the fictional world*

**Motif** – *A recurring word, phrase, image, object or idea running throughout the text. Motifs, each of which stands for a complex range of feelings, associations and values, are part of the structure of the novel, providing continuity and coherence.*

**Monologue** – *A substantial stretch of scripted speech by a single speaker*

**Multiple voices** – *more than one narrative voice used in a single text. Can be first or third person or a mixture of the two*

**Narrative** – *The way in which a series of events – the story – is mediated and told (which may not be in the same order as the events took place)*

**Narrative gaps** – *Things that are left out of the narrative. These gaps may be filled by the reader*

**Narrative voice** – *The voice in which the narrative is told, may be first or third person.*

**Narrator** – *The narrator is a creation of the author used to tell the story. The narrator may directly address the reader, be a participant in the story, be a detached observer, be ‘transparent’, appearing to speak with the voice of the author*

**Omniscient narrator** – *A narrator who is assumed to know everything connected with the story narrated*

**Parallel narratives** – *Narratives in a single text separated by time. The stories may be linked by place, a character or an object. Part of the reading pleasure is in discovering how the parallel narratives relate to, or illuminate each other*

**Patterns and Repetitions** – *anything from a repeated word or image to a repeated event, used to draw attention to an aspect of the narrative and give it additional significance*

**Plot** – *The story told so that cause and effect is clear – the causal chain that connects the characters and events*

**Prose style** – *The special qualities of the writer's prose, such as sentence length, choice of lexis, characteristic sentence structures*

**Protagonist** – *The main character. A less value-laden term than 'hero'*

**Realism** – *A narrative which attempts to create a realistic world, operating by the same rules as the reader's world. Although just as constructed as an experimental novel, a realist novel does not draw attention to its fictional status*

**Reported Speech** – *Speech that is incorporated into the narrative voice and reported indirectly eg she said that she was feeling sleepy*

**Resistant Readings** – *A resistant reading refuses or challenges the dominant reading assumed by the text. To read in a resistant way, the reader will often be looking at issues of class, race, gender, exploring which characters are marginalised, what assumptions the text makes and the values the reader is expected to share to make sense of the text*

**Rites of passage novel – or BILDUNGSROMAN** – *a novel about growing up – in age or maturity!*

**Round characters** – *those characters who are most significant to the narrative and have therefore been developed most fully by the writer. Often feel more believable*

**Second Person address** – *a narrative voice that directly addresses the reader as 'you'. Rare for a whole text to do this.*

**Setting** – *Where the events of the narrative take place. May be imbued with additional symbolic significance (which may be generic – the haunted house for example)*

**Story** – *the events in the order in which they occurred without any indication of cause and effect*

**Stream of Consciousness** – *a narrative style that imitates the qualities of thoughts and feelings making the reader feel as if they're inside someone's head. The grammar and structure suggest the random and fragmentary nature of thought. In the third person it's an extreme version of free indirect style. In the first person it's an extreme version of interior monologue*

**Structure (eg linear, episodic, circular, parallel)** – *the overall shape of the novel and the way the author has put together the story he or she is telling. Involves decisions about openings and endings; the division of the story into chapters or sections; handling of time; use of frame stories*

**Symbol** – *an image or object that stands for a bigger abstract idea, belief or feeling. Unlike a motif, can be used on a single occasion and never mentioned again*

**Tense** – *most narratives are told in the past tense, although writers may make use of present and future tense to create particular effects*

**Theme** – *an idea, concept or issue – it is what we as readers interpret the story as being about.*

**Third person omniscient narrator** – *A narrator who is assumed to know everything connected with the story narrated. Refers to the characters as 'he' or 'she'. Often popularly assumed to be the author*

**Unreliable narrator** – *A narrator who cannot be trusted to give a version of events that is to be believed or is perhaps self-deceiving*