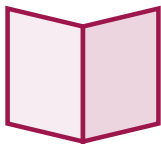


Short Fiction II

AP English Literature ■ Unit 4

AP English Literature



What we will cover

- 1 What Textual Details Reveal About a Character
- 2 The Function of Contrasting Characters
- 3 Nuances in Characters' Relationships
- 4 The Function of Setting in a Narrative
- 5 The Relationship Between Character and Setting
- 6 How Plot Orders Events



What Textual Details Reveal About a Character

Unit 4 returns to short fiction with a much larger toolkit. Its two most valuable additions are **narrative distance** and the idea that **choices reveal values**.

- The significance of characters is often revealed through their **agency** and through **nuanced descriptions**.
- **Characters' choices – in speech, action, and inaction – reveal what they value .**

What Textual Details Reveal About a Character, continued

That second statement is the most practical sentence in the whole course for essay-writing.

Whenever you need a claim about a character, look at a choice and ask what it must be true for that choice to have made sense to them.



The Function of Contrasting Characters

The word *may* is doing careful work. An antagonist is not necessarily a villain; the strongest antagonists hold a value the reader can also recognise as good, which is why the conflict is a conflict rather than a rout.

- The main character is the **protagonist** ; the **antagonist** opposes them.
- Protagonists and antagonists may represent contrasting values.

What a setting is doing

Mood and atmosphere

A setting may help establish the mood and atmosphere – the feeling a reader carries into what happens there.

Character

A setting can reveal the character who lives in it, or resists it – the room described through the eyes that see it.

Conflict

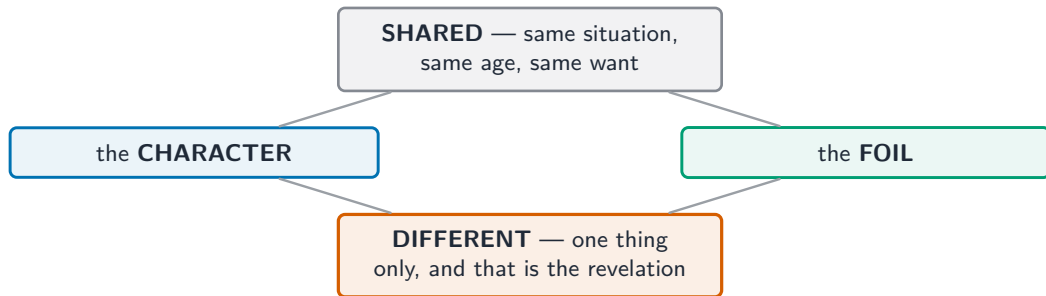
A hostile place makes an antagonist of the world itself, and can stand in for the pressure a character is under.

Change

When the setting shifts, ask whether the character has – and whether the text means the two to be read together.

Setting is a *choice*, not a backdrop. The question is always: what does the story gain by happening *here*?

A foil needs the shared half



The contrast reveals nothing without the **shared** half. Name what the two have in common first, or the difference is just two descriptions



Nuances in Characters' Relationships

This is Unit 3's definition applied to relationships.

Two characters in a long-running disagreement usually disagree about something prior to the argument they are having.



The Function of Setting in a Narrative

Mood is the reader's feeling; atmosphere is the quality the text creates around events.

Both are produced by selection – which details of a place the text mentions, and which it does not.

Setting, value systems, and narrative distance

conflict among characters often arises from tensions generated by their different **value systems**

character and setting the environment a character inhabits provides information about that character

a setting may establish the **mood and atmosphere** as well as the place

narrative distance how far the narrating voice stands from the experiencing self

why it matters the **most powerful and least-used** tool in this course – a narrator re-counting childhood forty years on knows what the child did not

coherence occurs at several levels – within a sentence, between sentences, across the essay

When a narrator and their younger self are both present, the *gap* between them is usually the text's subject. Name the distance and the reading follows.

Setting does four jobs

CONTEXT — it tells you what is normal here, so a departure can register

MIRROR — it carries the feeling the character will not state

CONSTRAINT — it limits what this character is able to do

ANTAGONIST — it is the thing being struggled against

The bottom row does **plot** work. A setting that constrains or opposes is not scenery, and saying so is a claim rather than a description



The Relationship Between Character and Setting

This is a second route into character that avoids the trap of psychologising.

A room described through its neglect, its order, or its borrowed furniture tells you about the person who lives there, and it is textual evidence rather than speculation.



How Plot Orders Events

Some patterns in dramatic situations are so common that they are considered **archetypes**, and these archetypes carry associations readers bring with them.

Use archetypes carefully: recognising one is a starting point, and the interesting analysis is almost always where a text **departs** from the pattern it invoked.



The Function of Contrasts Within a Text

- The differences highlighted by a **contrast emphasise particular traits or characteristics** in the things contrasted.
- **Contrasts often represent conflicts in values** related to character, narrator, or speaker perspectives.



Identifying the Narrator or Speaker

That distinction – recalling versus relating as they occur – is the first axis of narrative distance below.



Four distances between narrator and events

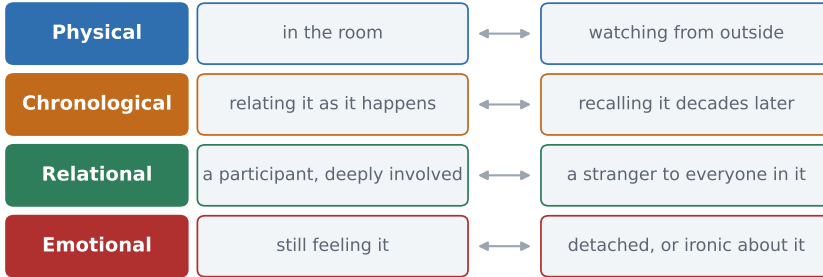
- **Narrative distance** refers to the **physical distance, chronological distance, relationships, or emotional distance** between the narrator and the events or characters.
- **Stream of consciousness** is narration in which a character's thoughts are related through a continuous flow, often with little conventional ordering.

Four distances between narrator and events, in detail

Narrative distance: four separate measurements

CLOSE

DISTANT



The four vary independently - and a narrator who **CHANGES** one mid-text has made a choice worth explaining.

A narrator's position is not one fact but four, and any of them can be the analysis

The Function of Point of View

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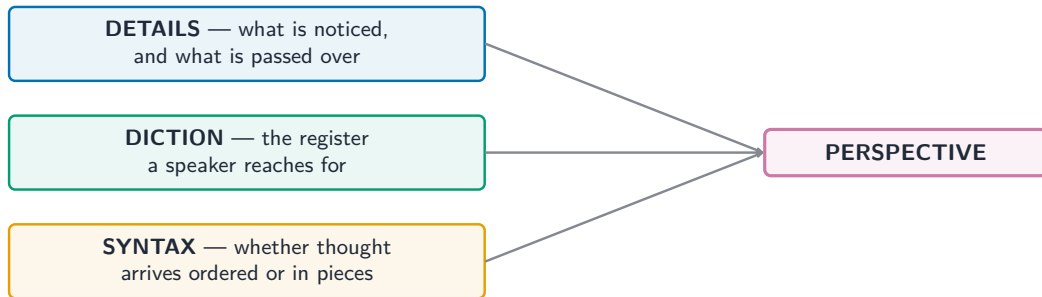
Details, Diction, and Syntax Reveal Perspective

Narrators' and characters' **backgrounds and perspectives** shape the **tone** they convey.

Descriptive words
not only qualify what they describe but **convey a perspective** toward it.

The attitude of a narrator or speaker toward an idea, character, or situation emerges from these choices.

Perspective, from three observables



What is **not** noticed is evidence too. A narrator who never describes a face has told you something about the narrator



Developing a Literary Thesis Statement

Unchanged: a thesis **expresses an interpretation** and requires textual defence; it **may** preview the line of reasoning.



Developing Commentary

- A **line of reasoning** is the logical sequence of claims defending the thesis, communicated through **commentary**.
- **Body paragraphs develop the reasoning and justify claims** using evidence.
- Effective paragraphs are **cohesive** and often use **topic sentences** to state a claim and explain the reasoning.



Selecting Relevant and Sufficient Evidence

Same four points as Unit 3: evidence used **strategically**; **effective** when commentary explains the relationship; **sufficient** in quantity and quality; and interpretation as a **recursive** process.

Worked example – narrative distance

A prose fiction prompt asks how narrative choices convey the narrator's attitude to a remembered event.

- **Weak:** *"The narrator is nostalgic and uses descriptive language."*
- **Scoring:** *"The narrator relates a single afternoon from a distance of decades, and the distance is doing the work: he describes his own excitement in the third person – 'the boy ran' – before returning to 'I' for the disappointment."*

Distance, its *variation*, and the attitude that variation produces. Choosing where to close the gap is the choice being analysed.



Exam tips

- **Choices reveal values.** Ask what must have been true for the choice to make sense to that character.
- An **antagonist is not a villain.** The strongest hold a value the reader can also recognise as good.
- **The environment tells you about the character** – and it is textual evidence, not speculation.
- Archetypes are a **starting point.** The analysis is where the text departs from the pattern.
- **Narrative distance** has four kinds – physical, chronological, relational, emotional. It is the most underused tool here.
- A narrator who **closes or opens the distance** mid-text has made a choice. Say what it produces.



Unit 4 – key takeaways

1

Choices

reveal values – what must have been true

2

Antagonist

not a villain; may hold a recognisable good

3

Environment

tells you about the character – textual evidence

4

Distance

physical, chronological, relational, emotional

Check yourself

- 1 What do choices reveal?
- 2 Is an antagonist a villain?
- 3 The environment is what kind of evidence?
- 4 Name four kinds of narrative distance.

Answers: values ▪ no ▪ textual, not speculation ▪ physical, chronological, relational, emotional