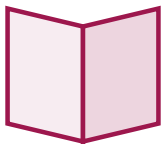


Short Fiction II

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

1

What Textual Details Reveal About a Character

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** 能动性 and through **nuanced descriptions**.
- **Characters' choices – in speech, action, and inaction – reveal what they value** 揭示其所看重之物.

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.

2

The Function of Contrasting Characters

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** 主人公; the **antagonist** 对立者 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

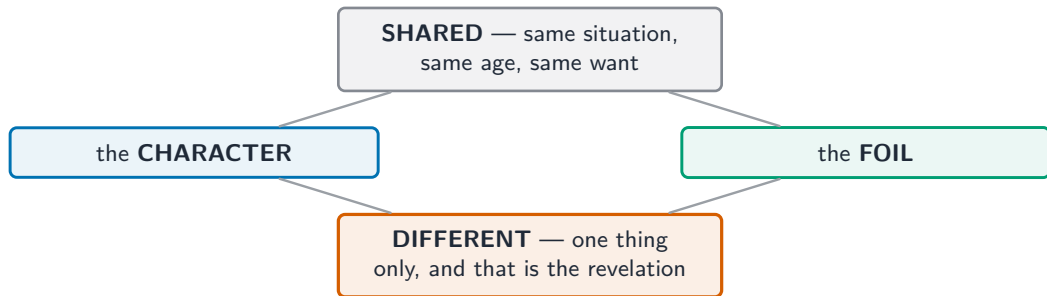
A hostile place makes an antagonist of the world itself, and can stand in for the pressure a character is under.

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

3

Nuances in Characters' Relationships

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.

4

The Function of Setting in a Narrative

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** 价值体系

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 recounting childhood forty years on knows what the child did not

coherence 连贯性

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

5

The Relationship Between Character and Setting

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.

6

How Plot Orders Events

How Plot Orders Events

Some patterns in dramatic situations are so common that they are considered **archetypes** 原型, 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.

7

The Function of Contrasts Within a Text

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.

8

Identifying the Narrator or Speaker

Identifying the Narrator or Speaker

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

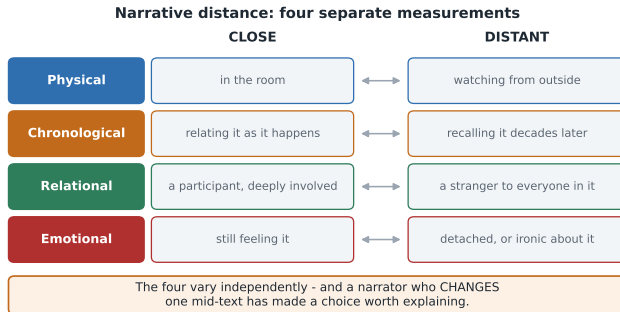
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The Function of Point of View

Four distances between narrator and events

- **Narrative distance** 叙述距离 refers to the **physical distance, chronological distance, relationships, or emotional distance** between the narrator and the events or characters.
- **Stream of consciousness** 意识流 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



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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10 Details, Diction, and Syntax Reveal Perspective

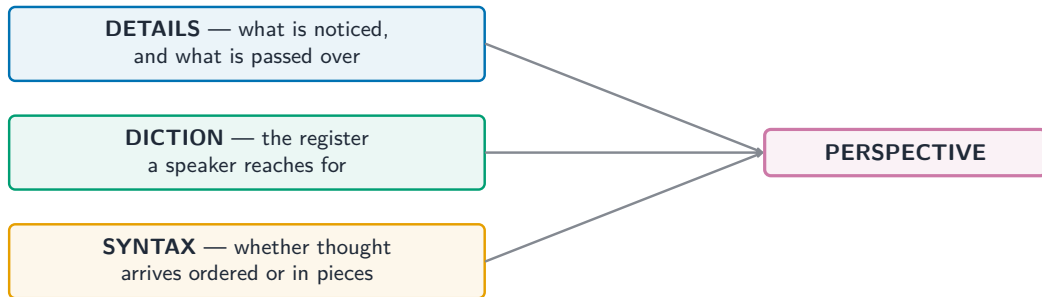
Details, Diction, and Syntax Reveal Perspective

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

11 Developing a Literary Thesis Statement

Developing a Literary Thesis Statement

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

12 Developing Commentary

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** 主题句 to state a claim and explain the reasoning.

13 Selecting Relevant and Sufficient Evidence

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.

14 Control Over the Elements of Composition

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.

15 **Recap**

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