

Textual Analysis

PROSE: INTRODUCTION

What is Textual Analysis?

- Developing textual analysis skills involve asking yourself:
 1. What is this text about?
 2. What effects does it have on me?
 3. How have these effects been achieved?
- In other words, you are being tested on your understanding, evaluation and analysis.

Understanding

- Of course you have to understand what the passage is talking about in plain terms. Who is the character, how is he feeling, where is he, what does he do, etc...
- However, re-telling the story in your textual analysis example is going to be a bit boring.
- What is really being assessed is your understanding of the **themes** or issues of the text.

Puzzle

Some people say that in literature there are only three real themes – birth, death and marriage. Discuss what you think might be meant by this.

Theme

- Theme can be thought of as the 'central concerns of the text'.
- Theme is created by **character**, **setting** and **style**. It doesn't just happen. It is constructed!
- Themes can be as broad as 'Love' or 'Ambition' or 'Class Conflict' – but in analysing a text, it is your job to work out what the writer's 'slice of life' provokes us to think about love, ambition or class conflict. We as readers are invited to **draw our own conclusions** on the basis of our observations.
- Love can be a powerfully destructive force (*Romeo & Juliet*)
- Ambition corrupts good men (*Breaking Bad*)
- Class dissatisfaction can cause loss of identity (*Gatsby*)

Identifying Theme

- While reading a synopsis of a text, you can deduce some of the main themes in a very basic way from what happens.
- While you are reading your dissertation texts, it is advisable to be considering (and noting down) what themes you THINK are emerging and keep a coded key in your notes.
 - You might highlight your text in different colours for references to different themes or use those wee sticky coloured tabs.
 - You might have 3 or 4 different notes sheets each with a different theme at the top, then record page numbers and beginning and end of related quotation.
 - You could do as above but on a computer – remember to back up!
 - I'm sure there are other ways...

Themes

- Read the plot summaries of the various texts.
- Discuss and note what themes emerge and what evidence helps justify your suggestion.

Text	Themes	Evidence
'Great Expectations'		

- 15 minutes

Themes: 'Death of a Spinster'

What themes did you spot while reading?

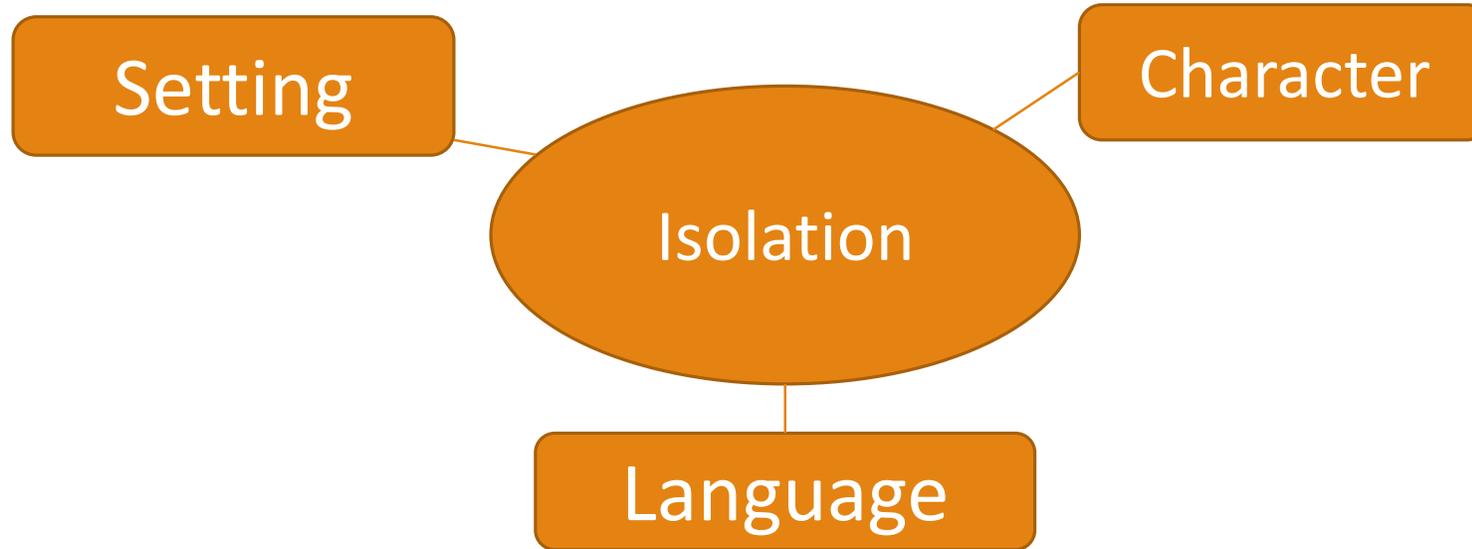
- Control/routine (vs. Chaos)
- Sexual desire (female identity?)
- Loneliness
- Fear of risks
- Poverty?

Prepare to share

Choose a theme and analyse how it is presented. Select quotations and decide which technique the writer is employing to highlight theme: character, setting, language (word choice, imagery, sentence structure, other language technique)
QUOTE and COMMENT.

Cultural setting – appears to work in an office
“She typed letters and dispensed stationery and dealt with problems that didn’t really matter.”
Suggests mundane atmosphere at workplace.
Perhaps aware of her own irrelevance.

“The make-up she applied was a suggestion of who she might be.” Character has the capacity to make herself more attractive but fears doing so as make-up would suggest femininity and perhaps a sexual identity. Therefore she deliberately ‘hides’ herself and doesn’t want to stand out.
Self-isolation.



Thematic Conclusions

- How can we **expand** the main themes in order to **draw conclusions** about them.
- E.g. **Love** (in Romeo and Juliet) *becomes* **Love can be a powerfully destructive force.**
- E.g. **Isolation** *becomes...*

- **Try to come up with some suggestions for your chosen theme. 5 mins.**

Writing

- Randomly select **THREE** main themes.
- It's up to you if you use **one**, **two** or all **three**.
- Your task is to PLAN a short story, considering how you could use **character** and **setting** and **plot** (or narrative voice, symbolism and language) to create theme.
- Therefore, you will have to **design a character** and **back story**, consider the **physical and cultural setting** and **plan events**.
- Share ideas with class.

All roads lead to...

Character

Setting



Style

Plot

Character: What's in a name?

- A simple way of establishing character is by choosing an appropriate name.
- Sandy Stranger (The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie)
- Inspector Rebus (Ian Rankin novels)
- Joy (The Trick is to Keep Breathing)
- Lennie Small (Of Mice and Men)

Character Names

1. Gabriel Oak (*Far From the Madding Crowd* by Thomas Hardy)
2. Mr Smallweed (*Bleak House* by Dickens)
3. Frank Cauldhame (*The Wasp Factory* by Iain Banks)
4. Holly Golightly (*Breakfast at Tiffany's* by Truman Capote)
5. Scout Finch (*To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee)

Character Building

- Background/history
- Family
- Looks
- Personality
- Personal Values
- Relationships with others
- Quirks/idiosyncrasies
- Name!

Many authors begin novels and stories by designing a character first. But of course, the character and theme must be linked! The character must show your theme!



Theme & Character

- Choose two or three themes from the selection.
- You may choose to use only one.
- Design a character – may use images for inspiration
- Then plan a story, considering character, setting and plot – and how they could show your **theme**.

Character

- Think about your favourite character from film, TV or fiction.
- Write down what their character traits are, their relationships with others and how they respond to events.
- Share with your buddies.

- Come up with a criteria of what you think makes a good/engaging character.

Setting

- “Description of setting is SOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO boring! Just get on with the story!!!!”
- Why do writers describe setting? Why is it actually important?
- What different aspects of setting can be described?

Narrative Point of View

By '**point of view**' we generally mean two somewhat different things:

- 1) the relation of the narrator to the action of the story — whether the narrator is, for instance, a character in the story, or a voice outside of the story;
- 2) the relation of the narrator to the issues and the characters that the story involves — whether the narrator is sympathetic, whether she agrees, supports or opposes a particular cultural practice or the values of the time/characters.

Students should be cautious in assuming that the narrator's viewpoint correlates to that of the author.

Types of narrative

- **First person narrator** – story told from one person's point of view – a character within the story. Not always reliable.
- **Omniscient narrator** – a narrator who is 'god-like' and can provide insight into the thoughts of all characters. The reader can be put in the position of irony where they know more than the characters do about their fate OR a position of suspense where the reader is equally ignorant of the characters' fates.
- **Stream of consciousness** - When the story is told entirely as the internal processes of one or more characters' minds.
- **Free indirect discourse** – third person narration that slips in and out of various characters' minds in such a way that it almost becomes first person.
- *The muddy streets were gay. He strode homeward, conscious of an invisible grace pervading and making light his limbs. In spite of all he had done it. He had confessed and God had pardoned him. His soul was made fair and holy once more, holy and happy. It would be beautiful to die if God so willed. It was beautiful to live in grace a life of peace and virtue and forbearance with others.*

James Joyce's 'Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man'

Consideration

- Who is telling the story?
- Is there an omniscient narrator or a persona?
- At what point in the sequence of events is the story being told?
- Are things happening now or is there retrospective narration?
- Is the narrator simply narrating, or is he/she trying to influence the opinion of the reader? What is their interest, sympathy, attitude to events or other characters?
- Are you aware of any particular tone? How is this established?
- Any clues given about events that are to unfold later in the story?
- What insights are there into the character or themes of the novel?

Textual Analysis

- Setting is particularly important in texts which are set in realities different from our own.
- Read the opening of Brave New World and try the textual analysis questions.
 - Word Choice
 - Imagery
 - Sentence Structure
 - Other Techniques
 - Tone

Setting – boring! Just get on

- Historical – time period
- Cultural – the values of a particular time and place
- Physical -

'Death of a Spinster'

- Read this short story.
- In a pair/ small group try to work out what the main themes are and your evidence. Highlighters available.
- Then go on to categorise how the theme has been shown – through characterisation, setting, style (language features) or structure (overall structure of writing).
- Simply label your quotations as character, setting, style or structure
- Guess if you aren't sure. Can be multiple answers.

Question

Discuss the effectiveness of some of the principal means by which William McIllvanney presents his character's experiences.

Creative Writing

- To get better at writing you must **read widely** AND **write frequently**.
- Most writers write **on a daily basis**.
- Most writers keep **a notebook** for their ideas and thoughts, or even just interesting words that they come across... anything that stimulates their imagination.
- If you want to become a good writer (in general) or for the purpose of AH English, then you should **do the same!**

Writing Prompts

- Writing regularly can be challenging as you might think that you have nothing to write about.
- The best place to start is often YOURSELF.
- Write the entry for your Wikipedia page in 20 years' time.
- Write a list of 'I am (a)...' statements in a restricted time. Keep writing, even if you aren't making any sense. Can you turn it into something? A poem? A reflection?
- Make lists of important experiences in your life – times you have been happiest, saddest, most isolated, most anxious... First experience of death, first experience of birth (not your own!)
- Write about your childhood – something that you wanted but never got, a relationship that was important to you, a toy that you became obsessed with or loved.