

Teaching ideas

A-level English Language and Literature 7707

Imagined worlds: Point of view

Introduction

These teaching ideas can be used with students when exploring point of view both generally and in their set novel. They allow students to think about the effects of different points of view in the presentation of narratives, and how authors can present narrators' and characters' points of view in terms of degrees of certainty, need and obligation. They encourage students to think carefully about how specific choices related to point of view help to create an 'overall' feel for a text and as such will support not only analytical work but students' own writing on A-level Paper 2 (re-creative writing).

The suggested activities are intended to span two lessons lasting one hour each.

Learning objectives

Students will:

- understand how different points of view are shown in fiction
- explore the effects of different modal patterns in their set text and other extracts
- learn how to manipulate point of view for effect in their own writing.

Prior knowledge needed

Students should have some knowledge of the following:

- narrative discourse
- basic ideas about perspective (eg 1st person versus 3rd person pronouns) and about modality
- language levels.

Lesson preparation

Teachers will need the following resources:

- photograph of 'a girl on the beach' (and other photographs to support additional exercises)
- the opening to a short narrative 'When I woke up'.

Activities

Lesson 1

- Show students the photograph of 'a girl on the beach' either as a handout or via a projector. Ask students to create a narrative from this as:
 1. the young girl recounting at the time of the photograph
 2. the young girl relating this to her own children thirty years later
 3. the girl's mother talking about her daughter to a friend
 4. someone else who was on the beach at the same time, had spoken for a few moments to the girl and her parents, and briefly mentions her in their own story about what they did on the beach.
- When students have done this, ask them to think about the specific language choices and strategies they have used to filter their narrative through a particular perspective. Encourage discussion and reflection before drawing ideas together as a group. From their discussions draw attention to (bringing in new terminology where appropriate):
 1. **the young girl at the time of the photograph:** the use of the first person pronoun; the use of the present tense; deictic expressions that point towards places and objects in her immediate location (eg 'here') and the present time frame (eg 'now'); vocabulary choices that reflect the mind of a young child
 2. **the young girl relating this to her own children thirty years later:** the use of the first person pronoun; the use of the past tense; deictic expressions that point 'backwards' (eg 'that place', 'then'); vocabulary choices that reflect an adult's mind and use an appropriate register when talking to children
 3. **the girl's mother talking about her daughter to a friend:** the use of the first and third person pronouns ('she' when referring to her daughter); deictic expressions that point backwards in time and place; vocabulary choices that reflect an adult mind and the fact that she is the girl's mother
 4. **someone else who was on the beach at the same time and had spoken briefly to the girl and her parents:** the use of the third person pronoun; deictic expressions that point backwards in time and place; vocabulary choices that reflect an adult mind and one that is not attached to the girl in any way.
- From this, students should be able to see that point of view can be:
 - related to how a narrative is *told* either in the first person (homodiegetic) or the third person (heterodiegetic)
 - related to how a narrative is presented in terms of *space and time* through the use of deixis and time frames
 - related to a particular *ideological viewpoint* or *personal stance*, such as an individual's way of seeing the world due to their belief systems, age or relationship with another person.
- Now show students the following two sentences:
 1. She looked out over the beach and across the waves.
 2. Her imagination ran wild as she considered what might lie over beach and across the waves.

Ask students to think about the difference between the two. Although they are both heterodiegetic (in the 3rd person), the second seems to be through the point of view of the young girl. Draw attention to the difference between the perception/cognition verbs 'looked out', and 'imagined' and 'considered' in terms of the latter two being more character-oriented. The difference between the two can now be explained: the first is an example of an **external heterodiegetic** narrative where the narrator holds a position outside the storyworld and an **internal heterodiegetic** narrative where the narrator's account seems to be filtered through a particular character's consciousness. You could explain that sometimes heterodiegetic narrators are referred to as **omniscient narrators** as their 'all knowing' style means that they can narrate with an 'insider' knowledge of different characters' perspectives and to some extent control the ways that readers respond to them.

- The above work can lead to a detailed study of selected extracts from the students' set novel. In particular, students could explore:
 - how particular vocabulary choices, deictic patterns around time and place and the use of the tense system position narratives from a particular point of view
 - how points of view are representations of a narrator's/character's way of seeing the fictional world, and how these differ from other ways of seeing events in the storyworld
 - the possible effects created by different types of narrative being used in sections of the novel.

Preparation for next lesson

- It would be useful for the next lesson if students revised any work they had previously done on modality (or if not yet covered) had done some preliminary reading on the topic.

Lesson 2

- Students should be reminded of some important concepts surrounding modality, for example:
 - modality is the term that covers words and expressions that show a narrator's attitude towards something
 - a very basic distinction can be made between modality that is epistemic (based on notions of belief or certainty) and deontic (based on notions of obligation and necessity)
 - modality can be expressed in modal lexical verbs (eg 'think'), modal auxiliary verbs (eg 'might'), modal adjectives (eg 'possible'), modal adverbs (eg 'possibly'), and modal tags (eg 'I guess')
- Experiment with modality and its effects by asking students to read 'When I woke up'. Get them to change the text by adding elements of modality first making the text 'epistemic' and then 'more deontic'. What differences do their additions make? How does it affect the feel of the text? How does it alter our interpretation of the narrator's state of mind?
- Now look at examples from their own texts (either narration or character dialogue) where:
 1. there is an obvious pattern of epistemic modality
 2. there is an obvious pattern of deontic modality
 3. there is no modality present so the extract is clearly unmodalised (ie the extract has a very flat, neutral feel).

Students can think about why a certain pattern exists and how it shapes our interpretation. What does it suggest about a narrator's/character's state of mind? They could also experiment by undertaking some re-writing exercises as they did with 'When I woke up'. For example, what happens when an 'epistemic' extract becomes 'deontic' or when an unmodalised extract takes on a very clear 'modal flavour'?

Further work

- Ask students to explore other texts that utilise particular perspectives in storytelling. For example, they could look at how point of view and modality are realised in texts from the *AQA Anthology: Paris* and compare these to their set novel. This would offer greater understanding of the way that point of view operates across all kinds of texts and for A-level students provide them with some starting points for possible NEA study.

Point of View



When I woke up

I was woken up by the sound of a noise. I listened carefully. I tried to work out what it was. But I couldn't. I tried to wake Frank but he was fast asleep. I sat up and decided to find out what it was. I walked downstairs and looked out of the window. The stars were shining bright in the sky and across the town. Over my shoulder, I heard someone whisper. I turned around and there he was.

(original version)

I **had to be** woken up by the sound of a noise. I **needed to** listen carefully as I **ought to** be able I could work out what it was. But I couldn't. I **needed to** wake Frank but he was fast asleep. I **made myself** sit up and decided I **had to** find out what it was. I walked downstairs and looked out of the window. The stars were shining bright in the sky and **forced** their light across the town. Over my shoulder, I heard someone whisper. I turned around and I was **obliged** to see him.

('deontic' version)

I was **perhaps** woken up by the sound of a noise. I **think** that I listened carefully. **Possibly**, I tried to work out what it was. But I couldn't. I tried to wake Frank but **it seemed** as though he was fast asleep. I sat up and decided to find out what it was, **I guess**. I walked downstairs and looked out of the window. The stars were shining bright in the sky and **maybe** across the town. Over my shoulder, I **probably** heard someone whisper. I turned around and it **appeared** that he was there.

('epistemic' version)

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