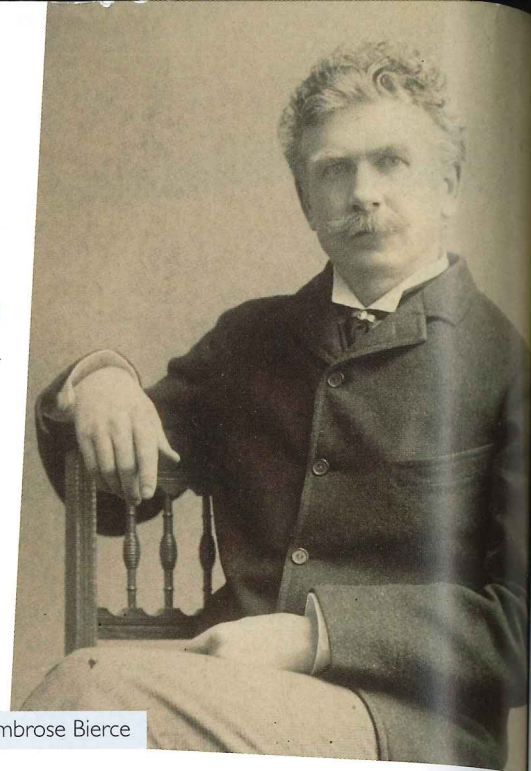


# Focus on novels

**A**mbrose Bierce, a nineteenth-century US satirist, short-story writer and journalist, described the novel as 'a short story padded'. He might have been poking fun at the novel but there's some truth to what he says. Novels have many of the same conventions and features as short stories, only on a larger and more developed scale.



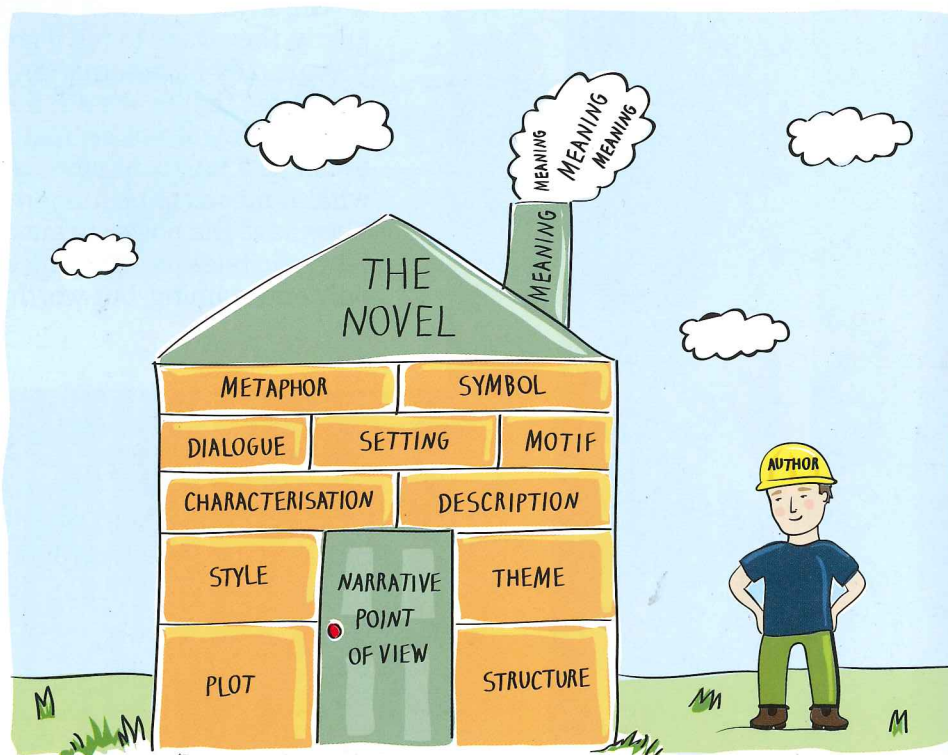
Ambrose Bierce

Avid readers often claim that the thing they love most about reading is that they can lose themselves in the story, escaping their own lives for a while. The ability to get lost in a novel is what makes reading such a magical experience. You know that authors are the magicians who create this magic, but do you know how they do it?

When we read, we often get the impression that the author has cleverly managed to capture reality, sucking it out of the world around them and trapping it in the pages of their novel. But in order to study a novel effectively, we need to think a little differently about it. We need to understand that a novel is something that is carefully and deliberately constructed—using characters and plot and language and so on—to give readers an artificial reality that they can get lost in.

## How are novels constructed?

When exploring how novels are constructed, it is useful to think of them as houses that have been carefully assembled, brick by brick, in order to create a meaningful story. In this analogy, the author becomes the builder of the novel and if you were to represent this idea graphically, it might look something like this ...

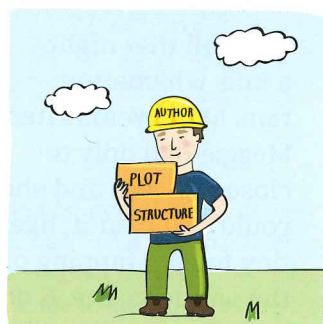


### ? DID YOU KNOW...

Ernest Hemingway stood up while he wrote, Truman Capote wrote only on yellow paper and Roald Dahl wrote his novels in a writing hut in his orchard.

# Plot and structure

The plot of a novel refers to what happens in the story, or the series of events that make up the story. You might know it as the storyline. Many novels contain a main plot, as well as one or more smaller plots, called subplots.



When you look at the order in which the events of the plot have been told, or narrated, you are examining the structure of the novel. People often tell each other stories by starting at the beginning, with the first thing that happened, and then filling

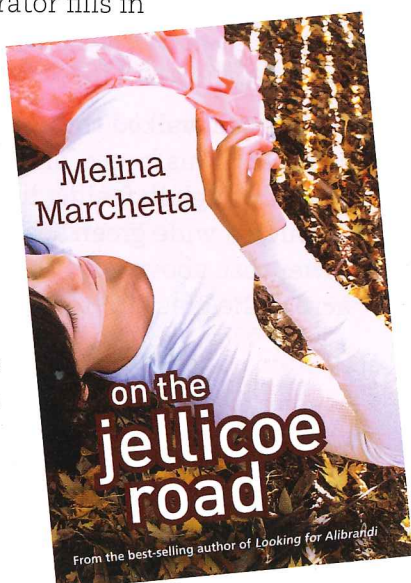
in the other events chronologically until they get to the end. However, an author will often narrate the events of a story out of order to create a particular effect. For example, they may want to increase the tension or suspense, or to involve the

## ? DID YOU KNOW...

The King of Hearts, when giving advice about reading to the White Rabbit in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, said, 'Begin at the beginning, and go on till you come to the end; then stop.'

reader in solving a mystery. A common structural device used by authors when they want to vary the structure of a narrative is the flashback. A flashback occurs when there is a pause in the action of the story while a character remembers something from their past, or the narrator fills in some background information.

The blurb of a novel, usually found on the back cover, often contains a summary of the plot. The following extract is the blurb from the novel *On the Jellicoe Road* by Melina Marchetta.



## ON THE JELlicOE ROAD

By Melina Marchetta

Taylor is leader of the boarders at the Jellicoe School. She has to keep the upper hand in the territory wars and deal with Jonah Griggs—the enigmatic leader of the cadets, and someone she thought she would never see again.

And now Hannah, the person Taylor had come to rely on, has disappeared. Taylor's only clue is a manuscript about five kids who lived in Jellicoe eighteen years ago. She needs to find out more, but this means confronting her own story, making sense of her strange, recurring dream, and finding her mother—who abandoned her on the Jellicoe Road.

Source: Melina Marchetta, *On the Jellicoe Road*, Penguin, 2006

Marchetta's novel has an interesting structure. The events of Taylor's story, which form the main plot, are narrated chronologically but passages from the manuscript Taylor finds are scattered throughout the novel. Marchetta does this so that the reader is able to gradually solve the unfolding mystery along with the main character.

## Narrative point of view

Narrative point of view refers to who is telling the story (the narrator). This is an important decision for authors as it is the narrator who will guide the reader through the story and it is from their perspective that the events of the story will be seen. Just as the front door leads people into a house, the narrator leads the reader through the story.

An author has three different narrative points of view to choose from: first person, second person and third person.



- 1 The first person point of view occurs when a character tells their own story. A story told in the first person uses the pronouns 'I', 'me' and 'mine'.

First person narration allows the reader to hear the character's innermost thoughts and feelings so the reader gets to know this character well.

The following extract is from *On the Jellicoe Road* and is written in the first person.

I'm dreaming of the boy in the tree and at the exact moment I'm about to hear the answer that I've been waiting for, the flashlights yank me out of what could have been one of those perfect moments of clarity people talk about for the rest of their lives. If I was prone to dramatics, I could imagine my sighs would have been heard from the boundaries of the school to the town down below.

- 2 The use of the second person point of view is less common. It involves the use of the pronoun 'you' and has the effect of making the reader feel as though they are a character in the story. For example:

You walk along the beach, the hot sand tickling the soles of your feet. You scan the towels and umbrellas, searching for your friends and wishing the summer would last forever.

- 3 The third person point of view occurs when a narrator tells the story. Third person narration uses the pronouns 'he', 'she' and 'they'. There are two types of third person narration.

- An omniscient, or all-seeing, third person narrator is able to see the entire story from any or all of the characters' perspectives. It's useful to think of an omniscient third person narrator as floating above the events of the story, observing and reporting everything they can see and hear.
- A limited third person narrator tells the story but from only one character's perspective. It is useful to think of a limited third person narrator as walking closely behind the character, peering over their shoulder to observe the events of the story.

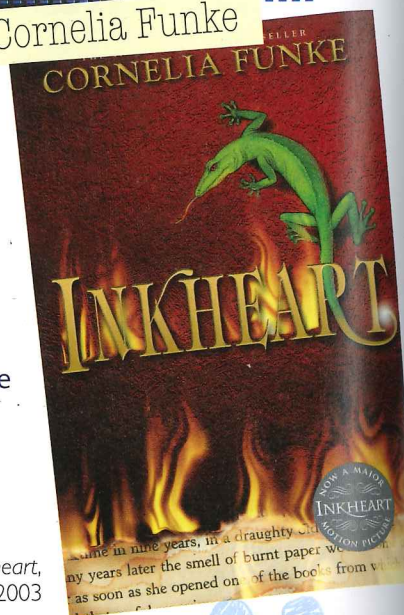
The following extract from *Inkheart* by Cornelia Funke is written in the third person.

## INKHEART

By Cornelia Funke

Rain fell that night, a fine, whispering rain. Many years later, Meggie had only to close her eyes and she could still hear it, like tiny fingers tapping on the windowpane. A dog barked somewhere in the darkness, and however often she tossed and turned Meggie couldn't get to sleep.

Source: Cornelia Funke, *Inkheart*, The Chicken House, 2003



## Breakaway tasks

### Remembering

- 1 List the three main types of narrative point of view an author can choose from.
- 2 What is a common structural device used by authors?

### Understanding

- 3 Explain, in your own words, the differences between the various narrative points of view.

### Applying

- 4 The following extract is the opening paragraph to a novel called *Darius Bell and the Glitter Pool* by Odo Hirsch. It is written in the third person. Rewrite this paragraph, changing it to the first person point of view.

Darius Bell walked through the grass. It swished at his knees, and Darius smiled as he went through it, feeling like a pirate ploughing through a wide green sea. Behind him the clock tower rose above the house, and its shadow fell across the grass in front of him.

Source: Odo Hirsch, *Darius Bell and the Glitter Pool*, Allen & Unwin, 2009



Remember that **first person** point of view uses the pronouns 'I', 'me' and 'mine'.

## Analysing

- 5 One of the advantages of the first person point of view is that it allows the reader to hear what the character is thinking and feeling. Read the extract from *On the Jellicoe Road* again. What is the character thinking and feeling at this moment? Support your answer with quotes from the extract.
- 6 In the extract from *Inkheart*, locate two examples of personification; that is, where an inanimate object is given human characteristics. (Hint: one of them is a simile.) Why do you think the author chose this device? Have a go at writing a paragraph that includes an example of personification.
- 7 In the *Darius Bell and the Glitter Pool* extract above, what is the effect of the simile? How does it add meaning to the piece?



A **simile** is a phrase that describes something by comparing two different things, and usually contains 'like' or 'as ... as'.

- 8 Why has the author of *Darius Bell and the Glitter Pool* chosen the verb 'rose' in this paragraph? What could you change it to that would give a different effect?

## Evaluating

- 9 The advantages of each of the narrative points of view have been explained to you. What do you think might be the disadvantages or limitations of each?

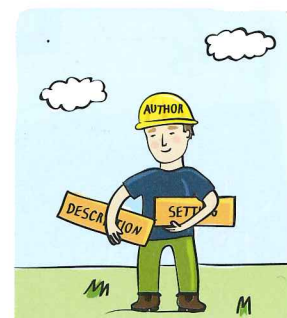
## Creating

- 10 Choose an event that happened to you some time over the past week.
  - a Write a short paragraph describing what happened, as you might for a journal entry.
  - b Imagine that this event happened to a character in a story. Imagine that you are an omniscient third person narrator, floating above and watching this event. Describe this event from a third person point of view.
  - c Note the differences between your two paragraphs. Which paragraph do you think is more effective and engaging to read? Explain why.

# Setting and description

The events of every novel occur in a particular place and at a particular time. This is what is referred to as the setting of the novel. Authors frequently use vivid description to convey the setting to readers so that they can imagine it for themselves. As well as providing a backdrop for the plot, the setting also tells readers a lot about the atmosphere of the story.

The following two extracts come from two very different novels and describe two very different settings. As you read, note the differences between them and think about the sort of stories that might occur in these settings.

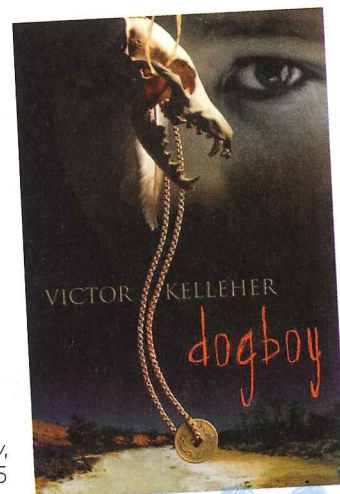


## DOGBOY

By Victor Kelleher

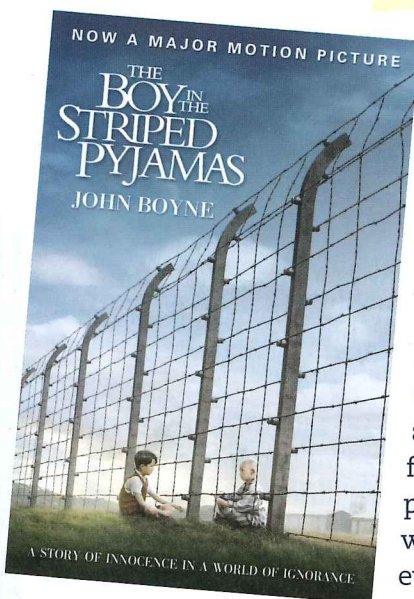
Bethel itself—perched above the riverbank and bounded on the landward side by a protective wall—consisted of a modest cluster of earth-and-reed huts. Although not much to look at, it was in fact more ancient than the great city of Delta, far downstream. Founded by a group of pioneer farmers, in the half-forgotten era of abundant rain, it owed its continued existence, in these less fortunate times, to the ruggedness of its people. And also to their faith in the eternal Spirit of the mountains, to whom they appealed whenever their crops failed and the parched land turned to stone. He, the Great Father, would always sustain them in the end, of that they were convinced.

Source: Victor Kelleher, *Dogboy*, Penguin, 2005



# THE BOY IN THE STRIPED PYJAMAS

By John Boyne



About twenty feet further along from the garden and the flowers and the bench with the plaque on it, everything changed. There was a huge wire fence that ran along the length of the house and turned in at the top, extending further along in either direction, further than she could possibly see. The fence was very high, higher even than the house they were standing in, and

there were huge wooden posts, like telegraph poles, dotted along it, holding it up. At the top of the fence enormous bales of barbed wire were tangled in spirals, and Gretel felt an unexpected pain inside her as she looked at the sharp spikes sticking out all the way round it.

There wasn't any grass after the fence; in fact there was no greenery anywhere to be seen in the distance. Instead the ground was made of a sand-like substance, and as far as she could make out there was nothing but low huts and large square buildings dotted around and one or two smoke stacks in the distance.

Source: John Boyne, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, Random House, 2006

## ? DID YOU KNOW...

In Kenya, the Camel Library Service brings books to about one million people in isolated villages around the city of Garissa. Since its launch in 1996, the fleet has grown from three to six camels.

### Applying

- 3 Choose either the extract from *Dogboy* or from *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* and, using clues from the description, draw that setting.

### Analysing

- 4 Based on the description of the setting for *Dogboy*, what sort of story do you think you would find in the novel? Support your answer with evidence from the extract.
- 5 Good description requires the effective use of adjectives. Make a list of all the adjectives you can find in the extract from *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*.



An **adjective** is a describing word. Adjectives describe nouns. For example:

The girl was *tall* and *thin* and she walked down the *crowded* street with a *cheerful* grin on her face.

- 6 In the extract from *Dogboy*, explain the author's choice of the following words: 'perched', 'protective', 'cluster'.

### Evaluating

- 7 If you were planning a holiday and you had to choose between the setting described in *Dogboy* and the one in *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, which would you choose and why?

### Creating

- 8 a Choose a character from List A and a situation from List B from the table on the next page.
- b Choose a setting for your character and their situation that would enhance the reader's understanding of what the character is experiencing.
- c Write a descriptive paragraph that locates your character in your chosen setting.
- d Explain why you chose that particular setting.

## Breakaway tasks

### Remembering

- 1 What is meant by the setting of a story?

### Understanding

- 2 How can the setting add to the meaning of a novel? Give an example from the extracts provided, or from a novel you've read recently, to support your answer.

Source: Markus Zusak, *Fighting Ruben Wolfe*, Scholastic, 2000

everything.  
'You? No way. There's a slight gap in his words. And that's your problem. You care about  
'Am I like that too?'  
world can rot;

the world means nothing to me. The rest of the Steve and Sarah. And maybe Miffy. The rest of care about in this life are me, you, Mum, Dad, at the ceiling. 'See Cameron. The only things I bit. I cared about Sarah.' I sense him staring I'd beat him and I didn't care about him one 'Because ...' He thinks for a moment. 'I knew

'Why not?'

Rube: 'A little, but not really.'

'Did it feel good to smash that guy?'

I think a question and speak it. Finally.

I stop, and breathe.

'Yes, I'm sure.'

disgrace, ay. Are you sure it's not y'socks?'

'Bloody hell! What is that smell? It's a

'It's—'

'Yeah. They can't pay, em too good.'

kitchen. About the bills and all that.'

'Mum and Dad. They're talkin' again in the

'Who?'

'Can't y'hear 'em?'

'What is it this time?'

'Yeah, you're right. I'm glad I did. You deserve it.'

'No you're not.'

'Sorry.'

'You just woke me, you bastard.'

'Hey Rube.'

By Markus Zusak

## FIGHTING RUBEN WOLFE

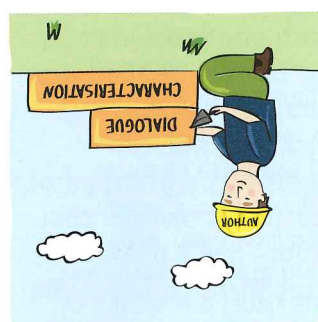


|                   |                                                                |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| List A: character | Rodney, a grumpy old man                                       |
|                   | Ellen, an elite athlete                                        |
|                   | Charlie, a wealthy real estate agent                           |
|                   | Maria, a middle-aged cat breeder                               |
|                   | Kim, a very shy little primary school boy                      |
|                   | Mia, a beautiful but nasty teenager                            |
| List B: situation | Desperately searching for something precious that they've lost |
|                   | Feeling really lonely                                          |
|                   | Dreaming of a holiday                                          |
|                   | Plotting revenge                                               |
|                   | Feeling perfectly content                                      |
|                   | Anxiously waiting for news                                     |

# Characterisation and dialogue

You are probably used to listing the names of the characters in novels and describing what those characters look like, how they behave, what sort of people they are and so on, but you might not yet have thought about how the author created the characters to be just like that. The process by which an author creates a character is called characterisation. The author does this by carefully attending to:

- a character's dialogue (the things they say)
- descriptions of the character and their activities
- the ways in which other characters respond to them.



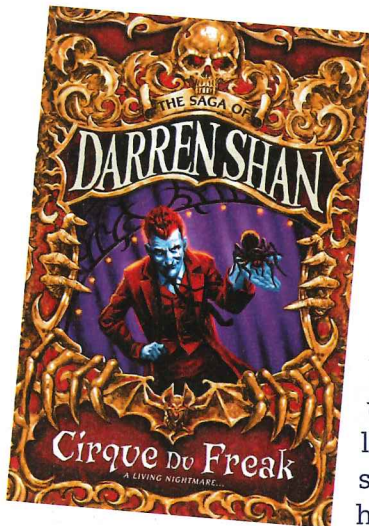
The following extract comes from *Fighting Ruben Wolfe* by Markus Zusak. It contains dialogue between two teenage brothers, Rube and Cameron, who live in urban New South Wales. They get involved in a local competitive boxing circuit to try to earn some money to help their family. While you're reading, try to imagine what these two boys might be like.



In this extract from *Cirque du Freak* by Darren Shan, the main character, Darren, goes to a bizarre freak show where he describes the following character.

## CIRQUE DU FREAK

By Darren Shan



The lights went down low and a creepy-looking man walked onto the stage. He was tall and thin, with very white skin and only a small crop of orange hair on the top of his head. He had a large scar running down his left cheek. It reached to his lips and made it look like his mouth was stretching up the side of his face.

He was dressed in dark-red clothes and carried a small wooden cage, which he put on a table. When he was set, he turned and faced us. He bowed and smiled, like a crazy clown in a horror movie I once saw! Then he started to explain about the act.

Source: Darren Shan, *Cirque du Freak*, HarperCollins, 2000

## Analysing

- 4 Which words or phrases from the dialogue from *Fighting Ruben Wolfe* tell you that you are hearing the conversation of two teenage boys? Explain your choices.
- 5 Which words and phrases create the sinister tone of the description of the freak show performer in the extract from *Cirque du Freak*?

## Evaluating

- 6 Which of the two extracts is more effective in helping you get to know the characters? Explain your choice.

## Creating

- 7 Close your eyes and imagine a character. Take a good look at their appearance and watch how they behave in your mind. Visualise them as they walk home, talk to friends and family and spend some time engaged with their favourite hobby. Make sure you know your character really well before you open your eyes and complete the following activities.
  - a Write a descriptive paragraph that effectively describes how your character looks.
  - b Write another paragraph that explains your character's favourite hobby and what they think about their hobby.
  - c Write the dialogue for a conversation that your character has with a family member as soon as they arrive home.
  - d Combine your three pieces of writing with an illustration of your character and create a poster to display in your classroom.

## Breakaway tasks

### Remembering

- 1 Define the term 'characterisation'.

### Understanding

- 2 What tools does an author have to help them to create characters?

### Applying

- 3 With a partner, perform the dialogue from *Fighting Ruben Wolfe*. Try to capture the personalities of the two boys in your performance.

## Style

Authors need to make all sorts of decisions about language as they write: the sorts of words they will use, the tone they will create, whether to write long or short sentences or a mixture of the two, whether to write lots of description or focus mainly on action, and so on. All of these decisions about language contribute to the style of writing.



... and perhaps I should be afraid of you, because if it's true as they say, and "a little knowledge is dangerous", then I suppose that you must be absolutely lethal ...'

Source: Michael Gerard Bauer, *Don't Call Me Ishmael*, Scholastic, 2006

The next extract comes from *How I Live Now*

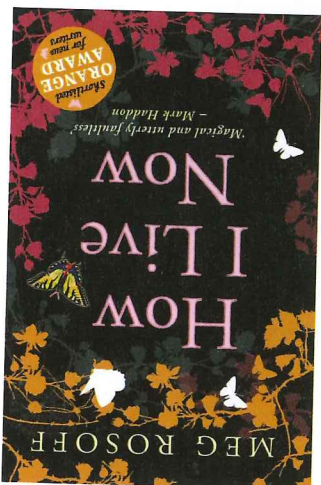
by Meg Rosoff. This is a much more serious novel about a group of children and their struggle to stay together and survive when a world war breaks out. The story is narrated in the first person from Daisy's point of view. Note that the author uses capital letters to emphasise certain words, and long

rambling sentences that give readers the impression that they are listening in on her thoughts.

## HOW I LIVE NOW

By Meg Rosoff

Osbert slid off like a sorry snake and I figured that was the end of it until about five minutes later when some guy who said he was Left Tennant something or other came out and was Awfully Apologetic in an awfully unapologetic way and the gist of it was we were out of here clear that the army was not in any mood to hang around watching some Female American National have a tantrum at this Vital Juncture in History so I took Piper and we went upstairs and packed all the stuff we could think of for a week including some books in case we got stuck with a bunch of local hillbillies, and all I could do was stare at Edmond and Isaac and even Osbert and try to keep from crying and then Edmond kissed me and said Take Jet in a way that no one else except maybe Isaac could hear and I said back I'll find you and he nodded as if to say Likewise.



Source: Meg Rosoff, *How I Live Now*, Penguin, 2004

The following extract comes from *Don't Call Me Ishmael* by Michael Gerard Bauer. The novel has a fun, tongue-in-cheek style. In this particular extract, new boy James Scobie is taking on the school bully, Barry Bagsley, much to the admiration and astonishment of the rest of the class. As you read, think about which particular words and phrases are helping to create the humorous style of the novel.

## DON'T CALL ME ISHMAEL!

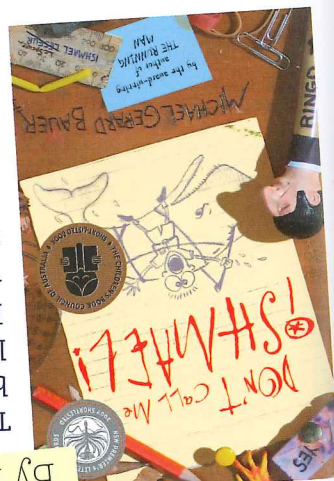
By Michael Gerard Bauer

There was a battle going on before our eyes, but it wasn't like the Western shootout I had imagined earlier—this was more like a boxing match. In the black corner was Barry 'The Annihilator' Bagsley wielding the haymakers that had left all his previous opponents bruised and bloodied and ducking for cover. In the white corner was James 'No Fear' Scobie letting the big punches whoosh past his face before moving on to prod and jab. Of course I didn't believe for a second that James Scobie could actually knock Barry Bagsley out, but he was landing some scoring punches and a room full of learned judges were marking them all down. At this point, Barry Bagsley's patience (if there even was such a thing) had become as thin as the hair on my great-uncle Darryl's head. (Which was pretty thin considering that whatever hair he had was forced to stretch from just above his left ear, right across his bare spotty scalp to the other side of his head.) ...

'Mate, if I wanted to, I could snap you in half like a pretzel. So if you're not afraid like you say, you should be.'

Whoosh! Another Bagsley haymaker sailed past James Scobie's nose.

'Look,' said James Scobie with a little impatience of his own, 'I'm sure you are very tough and brave—after all, you have to look at yourself in the mirror every day ...'



## Breakaway tasks

### Remembering

- 1 Define the term 'style' as it applies to novels.

### Understanding

- 2 Explain in your own words how the style of a novel is created.

### Applying

- 3 Reflect on some novels and stories you've read recently. Choose two that you think had very different styles. Present your two choices to the class, explaining how and why the two styles are different. Read a short extract from each to support your presentation.

### Analysing

- 4 The extract from *Don't Call Me Ishmael!* has a humorous style. Explain how characterisation and language have been used to create humour. Use quotes from the extract to support your answer.
- 5 The extract from *How I Live Now* contains only two sentences. Explain how these long sentences give us the impression that we are listening to the narrator's thoughts.

### Evaluating

- 6 Of the two extracts, which style do you find the most engaging? Explain your choice.

### Creating

- 7 Choose one of the extracts and continue the story by adding the next paragraph. You will need to imitate the author's style so that your paragraph follows on seamlessly.

### DID YOU KNOW...

If you suffer from hipomonsteresquipedalophobia you are afraid of long words! A hyperpolysyllabicesquipedaliast is someone who takes pride in using really long words. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the longest word in the English language is *pneumonoultramicroscopicsilicovolcanokoniosis*.

## Motifs, metaphors and symbols

To help readers understand ideas or to present ideas in more engaging ways, authors often use motifs, metaphors and symbols.

*Helicopter Man* by Elizabeth Fensham is about a father and son who are on the run from all sorts of dangers, which come mainly in the form of helicopters. Whenever a helicopter comes near, they hide in fear. In this way, helicopters form a recurring motif in this novel.



In fiction, a **motif** is a central theme or topic that recurs throughout the novel, forming a pattern. For example, a recurring motif of the sea may be used to explore the emotional turmoil and struggle of the main protagonist.

### HELICOPTER MAN

By Elizabeth Fensham

#### Tuesday May 9th, Heritage Hotel

Didn't make it to the fish and chip shop yesterday.

Helicopters.

Today another helicopter. Snooping round the hills. Sometimes diving along a gully. Like a hawk after a sparrow is the way Dad puts it. When they are close, Dad freaks.

Source: Elizabeth Fensham, *Helicopter Man*, Bloomsbury, 2005



breathed?  
She could not doubt it. Squatting beside him, she eased the feather from his grasp and looped it onto the same string that held the pebble.

Seeing the feather clutched in his tiny fist, Magda felt her heart lurch in wonder. Was this yet another sign, like the pebble and the flame-shaped scar? Proof that he was a child not just of fire and water, but also of the sky—of the air she

By Victor Kelleher

# DOGBOY

A **symbol** is something that represents something else. In fiction, symbols are often objects that are used to represent ideas or concepts.



about him.

In the following extract from *Dogboy*, the second we've seen in this module, a strange, wild boy has come to live in a small village. He is cared for by a servant, Magda, who believes he is a child of nature and so makes him a necklace with a river pebble, a feather and a bear claw. The necklace becomes a symbol of the boy's past and the villagers' beliefs

Source: Nick Earls and Rebecca Sparrow, *Joel and Cat Set the Story Straight*, Penguin, 2007

Elizabeth brushes her hair again.  
Cat: When I read it this morning I was incensed.  
I still can't believe he turned Elizabeth into a man.  
But I suppose it is kinda funny. And I guess I did  
kill off his character and cut off his tongue ...

Then nothing happens for a very long time.

Elizabeth brushes her hair.

novel in that if we had the time.

genius. About a hair brusher. There'd be a whole

Joel: So glad we're writing a story about a

style crap.

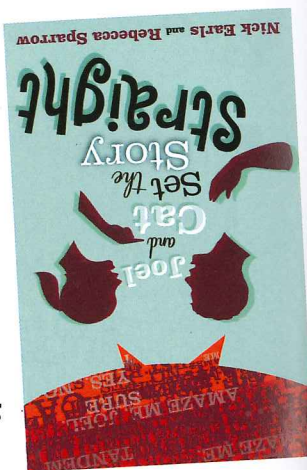
with complete and utter boy's-own-adventure-

Cat: Joel has responded to my opening paragraph

By Nick Earls and Rebecca Sparrow

# JOEL AND CAT SET THE STORY STRAIGHT

We are used to thinking of metaphors as phrases that describe someone or something as if they were something else. For example 'The girl was a snake and simply couldn't be trusted.' In novels, however, we can also find metaphors on a much bigger scale than this specific example. It is this kind of metaphor that we are interested in here.



A metaphor may be used to describe someone or something as if it were something else. It may also be used to describe how one theme or aspect of a story represents another through ways in which those themes or aspects are similar. This helps deepen our understanding of what is going on in the piece of writing.

on in the piece of writing.

Some novels are useful for more than just reading. In 2003, 2500 000 old copies of Mills & Boon novels were pulped and used in the top layer of the M6 motorway in Britain. They were chosen for their super-absorbency and to strengthen the tarmac and create a long-lasting soundproof layer.

DID YOU KNOW...

## 2 DID YOU KNOW...

The world's most famous literary prize is the Nobel Prize for Literature, named after Alfred Nobel, who was a brilliant scientist, literary intellectual and philanthropist. The other Nobel Prize categories are chemistry, physics, medicine or physiology, and peace. An associated prize is the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences.

## Breakaway tasks

### Remembering

- 1 Why do authors use motifs, metaphors and symbols in their writing?

### Understanding

- 2 In the extract from *Helicopter Man* by Elizabeth Fensham on the previous two pages, why wasn't the son able to go to the fish and chip shop?

### Applying

- 3 If you were to create a necklace of your own, like the one in the *Dogboy* extract on the previous page, which three objects would you use? Explain the symbolic significance of each.

### Analysing

- 4 Why is the helicopter motif effective in creating a sense of danger in the extract from *Helicopter Man*?
- 5 At what point do we know that Cat's feelings towards Joel are beginning to change in the extract from *Joel and Cat Set the Story Straight* on the previous page?
- 6 There are three objects on the necklace that Magda makes for the boy in the extract from *Dogboy* on the previous page. How are these three objects symbolic of earth, air and water?
- 7 What is the effect on you as a reader of Kheller's choice of the word 'lurch' in the *Dogboy* extract?
- 8 What other word could Kheller have used in place of the word 'eased' to indicate Magda's action? What effect does his choice of 'eased' have on your understanding of her action?

### Evaluating

- 9 Which of the following words do you think would best describe the story that Joel and Cat are likely to end up with? Explain your answer.
- cohesive
  - bizarre
  - hilarious
  - informative

### Creating

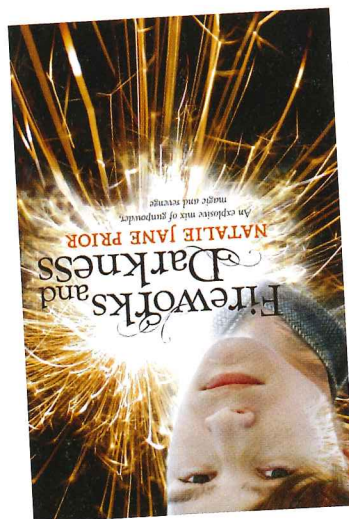
- 10 Write a paragraph that you might find in a short story or novel, describing a character and an object that is of symbolic significance to that character. Before you write your paragraph, plan it by answering the following questions.
- Who is your character? What are they like? How do they live?
  - What is the most important thing in your character's life? (This might be a person, a place, a memory, a hobby...)
  - What object best symbolises this important thing in your character's life?
  - How can you show that this object is significant? (Is it on a necklace like *Dogboy's*? Does the character hold it often, or carry it around with them? Is it the only unusual object in an otherwise normal room? There are limitless possibilities, so let your imagination run wild!)

## 2 DID YOU KNOW...

In 1889, the editor of the *San Francisco Examiner* sent a rejection letter to Rudyard Kipling that said the following: 'I'm sorry Mr Kipling, but you just don't know how to use the English language. This isn't a kindergarten for amateur writers.' Eight years later, Kipling was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Oops!

# Themes

As you discovered in the chapter overview, authors generally have two motivations when they write fiction novels. Firstly, they want to tell a great story and secondly, they usually have something to say about what it means to be human and to live a human life. The ideas about life and humanity that authors explore in their stories are called the themes of a novel.



In *Fireworks and Darkness*, the author, Natalie Jane Prior, explores the theme of choices and of responsibility for those choices. In this extract, Simeon is explaining the consequences of his magical choices to his son, Casimir.



The world's biggest library is the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, United States of America. It contains 28 million books and has 532 miles of shelving. If you were driving a car at 112 kilometres an hour, it would take you just under six hours to drive past them all.

**DID YOU KNOW...**

## FIREWORKS AND DARKNESS

By Natalie Jane Prior

'Think of it Cas. That is the sort of power a

magician wields. He creates nothing. He merely

manipulates what is already in existence,

balancing spell against spell, setting up ripples

of disturbance, destroying to build anew in his

own image. Let me tell you exactly what that

means. It means that when you fell from the

machine last night and I caught you, somewhere

in the world, a boy your own age had to die.

I don't know who he was, or where he lived,

but his death was necessary to balance out the

power I used to pervert the laws of nature and

save you. I killed him, and his death will remain

on my conscience, but men like Circastes have

no conscience. They are trained to believe that

all things and people are expendable to their

purposes. I, too, once thought like that. That is

why I gave up magic. That is why I know what

Circastes does is wrong.'

Casimir said nothing. He was still standing

behind the shop counter and Simeon was

blocking his way out, but he suddenly found

he recoiled as if he had been struck.

'No! Don't!'

'Casimir, listen—'

'No!'

'Listen to me! This is important. Do you think

I haven't spent the whole day chasing this round

inside my head, wondering what to say? You're

upset, Cas, but I have lived with this for twenty

years—twenty years trying to be sure in my

heart what is right and what is wrong.'

'How can you say that? How can you talk

about what's right and wrong when you've just

told me you killed someone?'

'Yes. I killed someone, but I did it to save you.'

Source: Natalie Jane Prior, *Fireworks and Darkness*, HarperCollins, 2002

Fighting Ruben Wolfe explores the themes of growing up and discovering identity. In this extract, the second in this module, Cameron is reflecting on the changes he has noticed in his brother Ruben since he started competitive boxing.

## FIGHTING RUBEN WOLFE

by Markus Zusak

I notice a deliberate change in my brother. He's harder. He has a switch, and once a fight comes

near, he flicks it and he is no longer my brother Rube. He's a machine. He's a Steve, but different. More violent. Steve's a winner because he's always been a winner. Rube's a winner because he wants to beat the loser out of himself. Steve knows he's a winner, but I think Rube's

still trying to prove it to himself. He's fiercer, more fiery, ready to beat all loss from his vision.

He's Fighting Ruben Wolfe.

Or is he actually fighting Ruben Wolfe?

Inside him.

Proving himself.

To himself.

I don't know.

Source: Markus Zusak, *Fighting Ruben Wolfe*, Scholastic, 2000

## Breakaway tasks

### Remembering

- 1 What happens when Casimir falls from the machine, in the extract from *Fireworks and Darkness*?
- 2 What change does Cameron notice in his brother, in the extract from *Fighting Ruben Wolfe*?

### Understanding

- 3 Why does Simeon give up magic in the extract from *Fireworks and Darkness*?

- 4 Why is Ruben such a determined fighter in the extract from *Fighting Ruben Wolfe*?

### Applying

- 5 What is the most difficult choice you have ever had to make? Explain why it was so difficult.

### Analysing

- 6 The theme of the extract from *Fireworks and Darkness* is making choices and taking responsibility for them. The following three statements about this theme can be understood from a close reading of the extract. Copy each statement down and then explain how the author has conveyed the message. The first one has been done for you.
  - Every choice has a consequence.  
Prior uses the dialogue between Simeon and Casimir to convey the idea that every choice has a consequence. Simeon explains how magic works by telling Casimir that every spell a magician casts has a consequence somewhere for someone, to maintain a balance in the laws of nature. From this we understand that the same rule applies to the choices we make.
  - Not taking responsibility for the choices you make is wrong.
  - Sometimes a person has to make a difficult decision.
- 7 How can boxing be read as a metaphor for growing up and discovering your identity?

### Evaluating

- 8 Do you think Simeon is justified in his choice to save Casimir in the extract from *Fireworks and Darkness*? Explain your answer.

### Creating

- 9 'Novels are worthy of study as there is a lot we can learn from them.'  
Using evidence from the extracts or from novels you have studied in class to support your ideas, write a three-paragraph argument in response to this statement.

### DID YOU KNOW...

All the novels mentioned in this chapter make excellent reading for young people. Happy reading!