

STUDYING
NARRATIVE

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

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NOTES ON THE TEXT

Narrative prose texts referred to or featured in the publication

Pride and Prejudice (1813)	29, 44-46, 60, 77, 86, 97, 122, 126-128
Wuthering Heights (1847)	36, 60, 68-69, 73, 81, 123, 129-131
Jane Eyre (1847)	31, 61, 81, 99-100, 132-133
Hard Times (1854)	93
David Copperfield (1850)	58
Great Expectations (1861)	33, 60, 71, 84, 92
Tess of the D'Urbervilles (1891)	28, 60, 134-135
Dubliners (1914)	61, 136-137
The Age of Innocence (1920)	34, 76
The Great Gatsby (1925)	29, 48, 61, 80, 94-95, 123, 138-140
A Handful of Dust (1934)	33, 141
Brighton Rock (1938)	78
The Big Sleep (1939)	33, 41, 60
The Catcher in the Rye (1945)	58
In Cold Blood (1965)	42, 56-57, 60
Wide Sargasso Sea (1966)	41, 83, 142-143
The French Lieutenant's Woman (1969)	61, 96, 97, 101, 144
The Bloody Chamber (1979)	31
The Color Purple (1982)	145-146
The Wasp Factory (1984)	92
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Restoration (1989)	61, 101
Cloudstreet (1991)	60, 79
Regeneration (1991)	74-75
Wise Children (1991)	61, 84, 92, 102, 148-149
Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha (1993)	30, 73
Birdsong (1993)	32, 89, 150-151
Enduring Love (1997)	42, 61, 80, 102, 152-153
The God of Small Things (1997)	61, 78, 81, 154
Close Range (1999)	83
Spies (2002)	55
The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time (2003)	27, 28, 61, 155-156
Vernon God Little	60, 72
Small Island (2004)	42, 157
The Kite Runner (2005)	61, 77, 89, 158-159
Digging to America (2006)	34, 60, 160

USING THE RESOURCES (PAGES 8-23)

The resources at the start of the publication are intended as a support to teachers and could be used throughout the study of a narrative text or texts. The agendas may be best held over till students feel a little familiar with their text and aspects of narrative. They could be used as a revision tool, or an aide-memoire for teachers. The cards on aspects of narrative could be narrowed down for early work or to focus on a particular aspect such as narrative voice or structure. They could also be used for revision games later on. The cards should be photocopied back to back. Ensure that terms and definitions match up before making multiple copies.

CHAPTERS ON ASPECTS OF NARRATIVE

The bulk of the publication provides activities to support the teaching of individual texts by developing an understanding of key aspects of narrative. Ideas are introduced, definitions are provided and critical and creative activities are used to reinforce understanding, before they are applied to the texts students are studying themselves.

Aspects of narrative are taught through extracts from texts often studied at advanced level, with activities encouraging students to apply what they have learned to their own set text. The extracts provide a rich literary context for studying individual texts in detail.

Short extracts from critical material by David Lodge, John Mullan, Montgomery et al etc is integrated into the study material. Critical material on individual texts features at the end of the publication.

CREATIVE AND CRITICAL APPROACHES

While the material uses active critical approaches that are tried-and-tested, there is also a strong emphasis on using creative writing as a means of developing critical understanding.

Introducing Narrative (page 24)

Resources for page 24 of this publication are available to download as a colour pdf file from the English and Media Centre website (www.englishandmedia.co.uk). Click on the 'Publications' tab at the top of the Home page, then choose 'Studying Narrative' from the A-Z list.

Genre (page 49)

The fragments on page 53 are taken from the following novels: 1: *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*; 2: *The Big Sleep*; 3: *Frankenstein*; 4: *Enduring Love*; 5: *The Bloody Chamber*; 6: *Wuthering Heights*; 7: *The French Lieutenant's Woman*; 8: *Jane Eyre*; 9: *Birdsong*; 10: *Pride and Prejudice*; 11: *The God of Small Things*; 12: *The Handmaid's Tale*

BIBLIOGRAPHY

In working on *Studying Narrative*, we have found the following publications particularly interesting and illuminating:

H. Porter Abbott: *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (CUP, 2002)

Peter Childs: *Reading Fictions* (Palgrave, 2001)

Robert Eaglestone: *Doing English* (Routledge, 2nd ed. 2002)

ed. David Herman: *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative* (CUP, 2007)

David Lodge: *The Art of Fiction* (Penguin, 1992)

Montgomery, Durant, Fabb et al: *Ways of Reading* (Routledge, 1992)

John Mullan: *How Novels Work* (OUP, 2006)

James Wood: *How Fiction Works* (Jonathan Cape, 2008)

The following critical series on individual texts have also proved useful starting points:

Cambridge Introductions; Cambridge Companions; Continuum Contemporaries; Continuum Reader's Guides; Routledge Guides to Literature: The Complete Critical Guide to...; Routledge Guides to Literature: Sourcebook Series; Palgrave Macmillan New Casebook Series; Palgrave Macmillan's Series A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism; Vintage Living Texts; York Notes Advanced.

The Guardian and *New York Times* websites have also proved a rich source of critical material on 20th and 21st-century texts.

GENRE

INTRODUCING GENRE

1. Read what Robert Eaglestone and John Mullan have to say below about genre, focusing on:
 - anything which helps you define what genre is
 - anything which tells you about the role genre plays in the narrative.

Share your discoveries in class discussion.

CRITICAL EXTRACT 1

'Genre' is a word for types of writing; it is also therefore a word for habits of reading. Though novelists might like to cheat expectations, they need readers to have expectations that can be cheated.

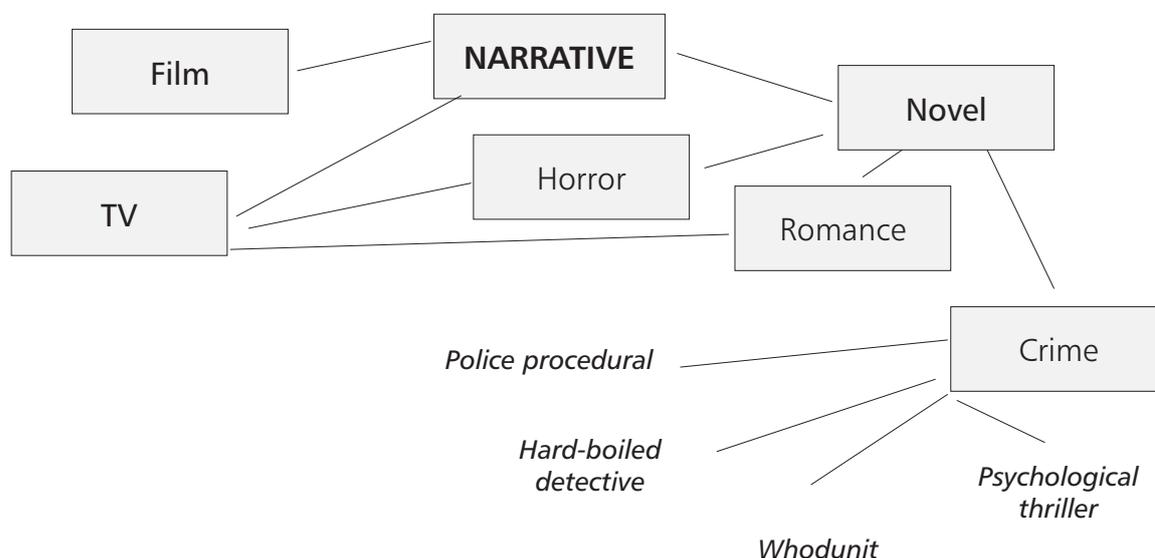
John Mullan: How Novels Work

CRITICAL EXTRACT 2

('genre' means 'kind' or 'type' of literary texts) ... These days we have many genres of literary text, normally divided not by form but by content. In any bookshop there are shelves for all sorts of novel genres: thrillers, romances, science fiction, fantasy. These definitions can be even more detailed – a genre of novels set in universities (the 'campus novel'), thrillers where the lead character is a forensic scientist, perhaps ... Each genre has its own *generic conventions*, parts of plot or style that are special to that genre. These occur both in the content (you expect a murder in a whodunit, or a marriage at the end of a comic play) and in the style (for example, a spare, terse style in a hard-boiled detective story). Occasionally texts mix up or blur these conventions for effect.

Robert Eaglestone: Doing English

2. As a class add to the narrative mind-map that has been started below by brainstorming all the different genres and sub-genres you can think of. The crime strand has been filled in to show you the sort of thing you might do.



What is it that distinguishes different genres?

You are going to explore genre in more detail by creating 'recipe' cards for some of the main narrative genres. To do this you will need to photocopy and cut up the 'Features and Conventions of Different Genres' on pages 51-52.

3. In pairs, read through the features and conventions, deciding which genre each one belongs to. (You may decide that some conventions belong to more than one genre.)
4. Once you have placed each convention or feature, create 'recipes' (a list of features and conventions) for the different genres below.
 - Adventure
 - Mystery
 - Detective
 - Fantasy
 - War
 - Romance
 - Family Saga
 - Thriller
 - Novel of Ideas
 - Science Fiction
 - Gothic Horror
 - Coming-of-Age
5. Join up with another pair and compare your genre recipes. Make any changes you decide are needed and together add any other conventions or features you think make the genre distinctive. You should think about:
 - typical events/action
 - plot
 - characters
 - themes
 - structure
 - voice and point of view
 - language/prose style.

FEATURES AND CONVENTIONS OF DIFFERENT GENRES

Ghosts

Red herrings and false leads

Plot-led, clear structure

Everything cleared up at the dénouement

Strange events revealed to have ordinary explanations

Often told in the first person

Ambiguity about which characters are good and bad

Back stories used to uncover truths

Focus on a single point of view

Clear-cut good and bad characters

Use of frame story

Violent and melancholic heroes

Story focused through the eyes of the detective

Charts process of growing up and discovery

Problems to be overcome – emotional, material, family relationships

Tells the stories of an extended family

Invented worlds

Focus on emotion

Hero rather than heroine

Mysterious characters

The supernatural

Focus on the details of everyday life

Takes place over several generations

Character rather than plot driven

Reflective	Family relationships and conflict	Cursed families or individuals
Obstacles in the way of passion	Discovery of self and others	Reflects critically on contemporary society
Discursive passages	Personal challenges to overcome	Sub-plots may use features of romance
Happy ending	May follow the narrative structure of a journey or quest narrative	Revenge
Breaking of taboos	May use medium of diary/letters to tell story	Clear hero and anti-hero
Close focus on hero and heroine	A heroine who needs rescuing	Retrospective narrative
Sinister settings such as a castle or ruin, with underground passages, labyrinths, dungeons	Shifting focus	Often less focus on the inner life of a hero
Lots of events and action	Gaps in the narrative	Male-dominated

WHAT'S THE GENRE?

1. Working in pairs, take it in turns to see if you can identify the genre that each of the following textual fragments belongs to. Some of them may be easier to categorise than others. (See page 7 for the texts from which the fragments are taken.)

1 Anyone interested in playing for their house teams should contact ...

2 Neither of the two people in the room paid any attention to the way I came in, although only one of them was dead.

3 I took refuge in the courtyard belonging to the house which I inhabited; where I remained during the rest of the night, walking up and down in the greatest agitation; listening attentively, catching and fearing each sound.

4 The deal he had brokered might be slipping away. 'Look, Joe has to be discreet.'

5 When she heard that freezing howl of a wolf; she dropped her gifts.

6 An awful Sunday! ... I wish my father were back again.

7 Charles and Ernestina did not live happily ever after; but they lived together ...

8 Hitherto I have recorded in detail the events of my insignificant existence.

9 The men in front were invisible beneath the bulk of their clothes and the quantities of kit they carrying.

10 Mrs Long says Netherfield is taken by a young man of large fortune from the north of England.

11 But by early June, the south-west monsoon breaks and there are three months of wind and water with short spells of sharp, glittering sunshine ...

12 The two young Guardians salute us, raising three fingers to the rims of their berets.

GENRE CARD GAME – CREATIVE WRITING ACTIVITY

1. As a class, choose a short passage from one of the narratives you have been studying.
2. Individually, choose one of the genre types from the list on page 50.
3. Re-write your extract in the genre you have been given, following the rules listed in your 'genre recipe'. Although you can make any alterations you want to the style of the original, the order or way in which it is told, your re-written version should stick to the same plot details.
4. Take it in turns to read out your re-written passage and try to identify the genre in each case.

AFTER READING YOUR SET TEXT

Shelving your set text

The critic and academic Robert Eaglestone points out that many bookshops are organised, at least in part, by genre, with whole sections for thrillers, horror, mysteries (which might be further divided into more specialist sub-genres), romances and so on.

1. As a class, choose one of the narratives you are studying and, in pairs, decide where you would shelve it in a bookshop. Be prepared to defend your decision and to challenge the decisions of your fellow students – there may be some disagreement!
2. Write a blurb for your set text which emphasises the genre which you chose to shelve it under.

In the following extract from *A History of Reading*, the academic Albert Manguel points out that the meaning of a text can alter according to the genre under which it is categorised. He uses Jonathan Swift's eighteenth-century narrative *Gulliver's Travels* as his example:

CRITICAL EXTRACT

Filed under Fiction, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* is a humorous novel of adventure; under Sociology, a satirical study of England in the 18th century; under Children's Literature, an entertaining fable about dwarfs and giants and talking horses; under Fantasy, a precursor of science fiction; under Travel, an imaginary voyage; under Classics, a part of the Western literary canon.

Albert Manguel: A History of Reading

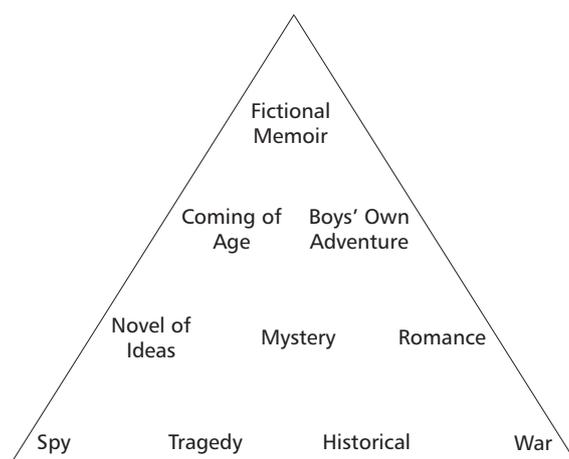
3. Compare your genre blurbs and talk about what each one emphasises or foregrounds about your narrative. What is left out in each case? What does it suggest about the ways in which writers (and readers) use genre?

A genre pyramid

Some writers who choose not to follow the recipe for a particular genre nevertheless draw on different generic conventions, playing on and challenging a reader's expectations of what the narrative will be like.

1. As a class, see if you can construct a 'genre pyramid' for one of your set texts, to show the different genres the author is drawing on, beginning with what you think is the main genre at the top of your pyramid. The example below shows you how you might construct a genre pyramid for Michael Frayn's novel *Spies*.

Spies draws on the features and conventions of the following genres: Boys' Own Adventure; War; Fictional Memoir; Spy; Romance; Coming-of-Age; Novel of Ideas; Historical; Tragedy and Mystery



WHY DO WRITERS DRAW ON THE CONVENTIONS OF PARTICULAR GENRES?

- to set up expectations in a reader's mind about the type of story this is
- to create a particular fictional world, set perhaps in a particular historical period or in a future society
- to break the rules, undermine or challenge expectations, whether of plot, structure, character, language (for example a murder mystery novel in which the identity of the murderer is known from the very beginning)
- to use the rules of one genre to tell a very different story (perhaps by telling a coming-of-age story backwards as though it were a mystery)
- to draw on more than one genre (perhaps unsettling the reader who is uncertain what sort of novel they are reading) or weave together several sub-plots which seem to belong to different genres
- to draw attention to the events of a particular passage or chapter
- to draw on conventions of a particular genre to amuse or entertain the knowledgeable reader
- to introduce another text type into a novel (for example a letter or document)
- to bring in another perspective on events or to reveal something about a character's view of events