

6.8 How a narrator’s reliability affects a narrative

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____ **Total: 13 marks**

KEY WORDS narrator reliability 可靠性

Objective

Build the skills to judge **narrator reliability** 可靠性.

You must be able to:

- state how readers can infer a narrator’s biases
- state the consequence of detecting bias
- state what reliability influences
- distinguish an unreliable narrator from a lying one

1 Worked examples

Study these first. Each one shows the method for a task used later.

■ Inferring bias

Readers can infer narrators’ biases by noting which details they choose to include in a narrative and which they choose to omit.

■ The consequence

Readers who detect bias in a narrator may find that narrator less reliable. “May” — detecting bias is a reason for caution, not an automatic verdict.

■ What it influences

The reliability of a narrator may influence a reader’s understanding of a character’s motives. An unreliable account of why someone acted is the commonest consequence.

■ Unreliable and lying

An unreliable narrator need not lie. They may be mistaken, self-deceived, too young to understand, or reporting honestly from a limited position. The analysis should say which.

2 Practice

2.1 State how readers can infer a narrator’s biases. [2]

2.2 State what reliability influences. [2]

2.3 Unreliable is not the same as lying.

(a) Name three other possibilities. [3]

(b) State the force of “may find that narrator less reliable”. [1]

3 Exam-style questions

3.1 Bias is inferred from which details a narrator includes and [1]

- **A** which they omit
- **B** how long the book is
- **C** the publisher
- **D** the date

3.2 Reliability may influence a reader’s understanding of a character’s [1]

- **A** motives
- **B** name
- **C** age
- **D** height

3.3 A child narrator reports events she does not understand.

(a) State whether she is lying. [1]

(b) Explain how an analysis should describe her. [2]

Solutions

2.1 by noting which details they choose to include and which they choose to omit.

2.2 a reader's understanding of a character's motives.

2.3 (a) mistaken; self-deceived; too young to understand; reporting honestly from a limited position. (b) detecting bias is a reason for caution rather than an automatic verdict.

3.1 A. what they omit.

3.2 A. motives.

3.3 (a) no. (b) as an unreliable narrator whose limitation is comprehension rather than honesty, so the reader reconstructs what she reports without understanding.