

7.7 How a narrator's reliability affects a narrative

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Total: 12 marks

Objective

Build the skills to handle **multiple narrators** 多重叙述者.

You must be able to:

- state what some narrators can provide that others cannot
- state what multiple narrators may provide
- explain what a reader does with contradictory accounts
- distinguish contradiction from difference of emphasis

1 Worked examples

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

■ Different capacities

Some narrators or speakers may provide details and information that others do not or cannot provide. "Do not" and "cannot" are different: one is a choice, the other a limit.

■ Contradiction

Multiple narrators or speakers may provide contradictory information in a text. The CED states it plainly and does not tell you how to resolve it.

■ What to do

Treat both accounts as evidence about their narrators. Then ask whether the text gives any means of deciding between them; if it does not, the contradiction itself is the subject.

■ Contradiction and emphasis

Two accounts that differ in what they emphasise are not contradictory. Reserve the word for accounts that cannot both be true, because that is a much stronger finding.

2 Practice

2.1 State the difference between "do not" and "cannot" provide. [2]

2.2 State what a reader does with contradictory accounts. [2]

2.3 Contradiction is a strong word.

(a) Distinguish it from difference of emphasis. [2]

(b) State what to do when the text offers no way to decide. [1]

3 Exam-style questions

3.1 "Cannot provide" indicates [1]

- **A** a limit
- **B** a choice
- **C** a lie
- **D** an omission by the author

3.2 Two accounts that differ in emphasis are [1]

- **A** not necessarily contradictory
- **B** always contradictory
- **C** identical
- **D** unreliable

3.3 Two narrators give incompatible accounts of one night.

(a) State what each account is evidence about. [1]

(b) Explain the next analytical step.

[2]

4 Go further

- work through the **7.7 How a narrator's reliability affects a narrative** lesson on the **Learn** page;
- read the **Short Fiction III** section of the AP English Literature handout on the **Know** page.

Solutions

2.1 "do not" is a choice not to provide; "cannot" is a limit on what the narrator has access to.

2.2 treat both as evidence about their narrators, then ask whether the text supplies a means of deciding between them.

2.3 (a) contradictory accounts cannot both be true; differing emphasis can be two true accounts of one event. (b) treat the contradiction itself as the subject.

3.1 A. a limit.

3.2 A. not necessarily.

3.3 (a) about the narrator who gives it. (b) look for anything in the text that would decide between them, and if there is nothing, analyse what the text gains by leaving it undecided.