

Longer Fiction or Drama II

AP English Literature and Composition

What Textual Details Reveal About a Character

Unit 6 is the second longer-fiction-or-drama unit and it adds the two most sophisticated tools in the course: **narrator reliability** and the **symbol**.

Different character, narrator, or speaker perspectives often reveal different information and develop different interpretations of the same events.

In a long work with several perspectives, the discrepancies between them are not a problem to reconcile. They are the text's method.

The Function of Contrasting Characters

Foil characters 陪衬人物 serve to **illuminate, through contrast, the traits, attributes, or values** of another character.

A foil is not an antagonist. A foil may be an ally, a sibling, a friend - what makes them a foil is that they are similar enough for the difference to be visible. The useful question is always: *what does this character have that the protagonist lacks, and what does the text do with that gap?*

Choices, Actions, and Speech Reveal Complexity

- **Inconsistencies between the private thoughts of characters and their actual behaviour reveal tensions** 内心与行为之间的张力.
- A character's **competing, conflicting, or inconsistent choices contribute to complexity** 复杂性.

This is where AP Literature parts company with simpler reading. Inconsistency is not a flaw in a character; it is the evidence that the character has an interior. A character who always acts on what they think is a position, not a person.

How Plot Orders Events

Some narrative structures **interrupt the chronology** of a plot: **flashback** 倒叙, **foreshadowing** 伏笔, and **in medias res** 从中间开始.

The Function of a Sequence of Events

Those interrupting structures **affect the reader's experience** of the narrative - what is known when, and therefore what is felt when.

The analytical move is always to ask **what the reader knows at that moment**. Foreshadowing gives the reader knowledge the characters lack, which converts suspense into dread. A flashback withholds until a later point, so the earlier scenes are read twice - once in ignorance and once in retrospect.

The Function of Contrasts Within a Text

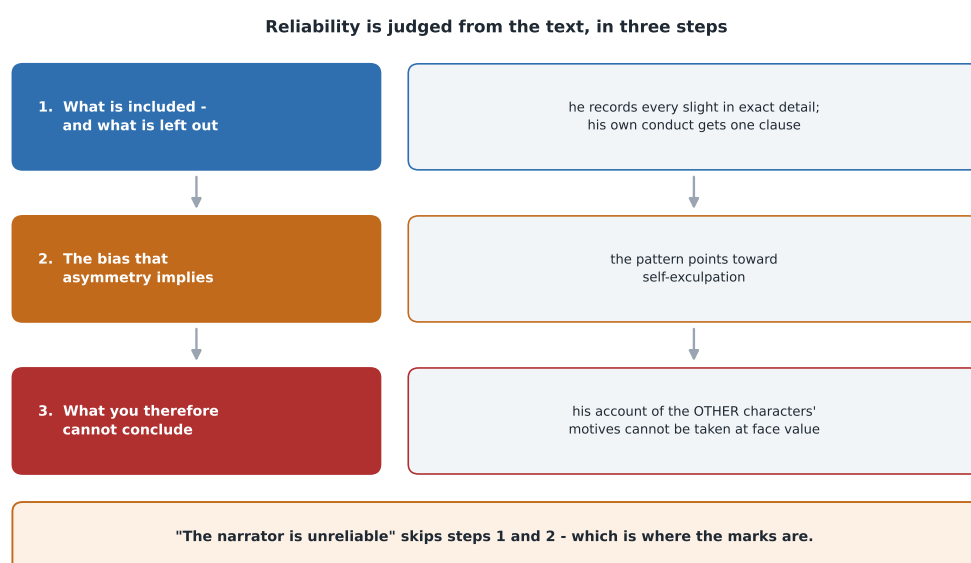
Contrasts often represent contradictions or inconsistencies that introduce nuance, ambiguity, or contradictory interpretations 矛盾的阐释.

Note the last phrase. The CED explicitly permits a text to support more than one reading. An essay that acknowledges a competing interpretation and shows why its own is better is doing exactly what the sophistication point rewards.

Details, Diction, and Syntax Reveal Perspective

- A narrator's or speaker's **tone toward events or characters influences readers' interpretations**.
- The **syntactical arrangement** of phrases and clauses can **emphasise details or ideas**.
- **Information included and not included conveys the perspective** 包含与略去的信息 of characters and narrators.
- A narrator's perspective **may influence the details and the amount of detail in a text**.

How a Narrator's Reliability Affects a Narrative



*Bias is inferred from what is included and omitted. Detected bias reduces reliability.
Reduced reliability changes what you can conclude about motive*

- **Readers can infer narrators' biases** by noting **which details they choose to include** and which they omit.
- **Readers who detect bias in a narrator may find that narrator less reliable** 不可靠.
- **The reliability of a narrator may influence a reader's understanding of a character's motives.**

The CED gives this as a chain, and reproducing the chain is what makes an answer analytical rather than impressionistic. You do not assert that a narrator is unreliable; you show the pattern of inclusion and omission, name the bias it implies, and then say what that bias prevents you from concluding.

The Function of a Symbol

- When a **material object** comes to represent an idea or concept, it becomes a **symbol** 象征.
- When a **character** comes to represent an idea, that character becomes **symbolic**.
- A symbol is an object that **represents a meaning**, so it is said to be symbolic or representative of that meaning.
- **Certain symbols are so common and recurrent** that readers bring associations to them before reading.

The last point is a warning. A conventional symbol arrives with meanings attached, and the text may be using them, refusing them, or inverting them. Check what the text does before importing the convention.

Developing a Literary Thesis, Commentary, and Evidence

Unchanged from Units 3-5: an **interpretation** requiring textual defence; a **line of reasoning** of claims communicated through **commentary**; evidence used **strategically, effective** with commentary, **sufficient** in quantity and quality, developed **recursively**.

Control Over the Elements of Composition

- Writers convey ideas through the **strategic selection and placement of phrases and clauses**.
- Writers use **words that enhance the clear communication of an interpretation**.
- **Punctuation conveys relationships** between parts of a sentence.

Worked example (a real AP exam task). A Question 3 literary-argument prompt asks how an unreliable narrator contributes to an interpretation of a work as a whole. A weak answer asserts: *"The narrator is unreliable because he lies."* A scoring answer runs the CED's chain: *"The narrator records every slight he received in exact detail and summarises his own conduct in a clause - 'there was an argument, and I left'. The*

asymmetry of detail implies a bias toward self-exculpation, which means his account of the other characters' motives cannot be taken at face value. The novel therefore asks the reader to reconstruct a story the narrator is committed to not telling, and its subject is less the events than his need to arrange them." Inclusion and omission, the bias inferred, and what that bias prevents.

Exam tips

- Discrepancies between perspectives are **the method**, not a problem to reconcile.
- A **foil** is similar enough for the difference to show. Ask what they have that the protagonist lacks.
- **Inconsistency is evidence of an interior.** A perfectly consistent character is a position, not a person.
- For any structural interruption, ask **what the reader knows at that moment.** That is the effect.
- Reliability is a **chain**: inclusion and omission, then bias, then what you cannot conclude. Show all three.
- With a **conventional symbol**, check whether the text uses, refuses, or inverts the association before importing it.