

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.**
- A character's **competing, conflicting, or inconsistent choices contribute to complexity.**

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.

SAYS ONE THING, DOES ANOTHER
— and the gap is not explained away

WANTS TWO INCOMPATIBLE THINGS — and cannot give up either

PAYS A COST for the choice,
and the text lets you see it

CHANGES THEIR MIND —
and the reader is shown why

Each of these is **quotable**. "The character is complex" asserts what these four demonstrate, and the rubric marks the demonstration

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.

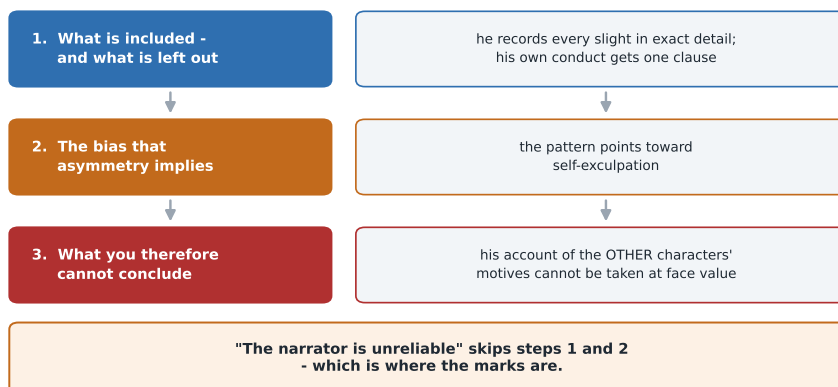
The Function of a Sequence of Events

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.

How a Narrator's Reliability Affects a Narrative

Reliability is judged from the text, in three steps



*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.
- 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 DEVICE	WHAT IT DOES TO ORDER	WHAT THE READER DOES
FLASHBACK	an earlier event arrives late	re-reads what they already know in its light
FORESHADOWING	a later event is signalled early	watches for it, and reads the interval as delay
IN MEDIAS RES	the beginning is withheld	assembles the cause while following the effect
A WITHHELD FACT	one thing is kept back to the end	revalues every scene it was absent from

Answer in the **third** column. A sequence question is about what a reader knows and when, not about the order of events

The Function of Contrasts Within a Text

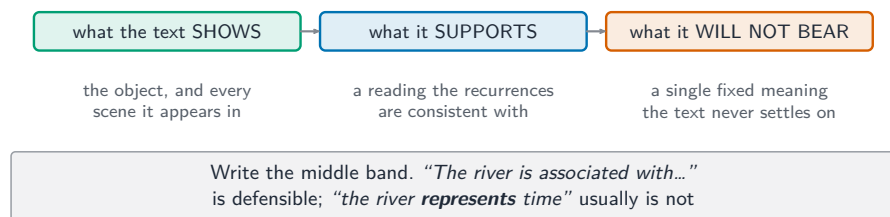
Contrasts often represent contradictions or inconsistencies that introduce nuance, ambiguity, or contradictory interpretations.

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** of characters and narrators.
- A narrator's perspective **may influence the details and the amount of detail** in a text.

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.