

Longer Fiction or Drama III

AP English Literature and Composition

Characters Who Change or Remain Unchanged

Unit 9 is the final unit, and its subject is **how texts end** - and what an ending lets a reader conclude about the whole work.

- **Minor characters often remain unchanged** because the narrative does not focus on them; they may serve other functions.
- **Readers' interpretations are often affected by a character changing - or not - and by the nature of that change.**

The second is the interpretive move the whole course has been building toward. Whether a character changes is not a fact to report; it is the ground on which a reading of the work stands.

Choices, Actions, and Speech Reveal Complexity

- **A character's responses to the resolution of the narrative** - in words or in actions - are revealing.
- **Inconsistencies and unexpected developments in a character affect readers' interpretations.**

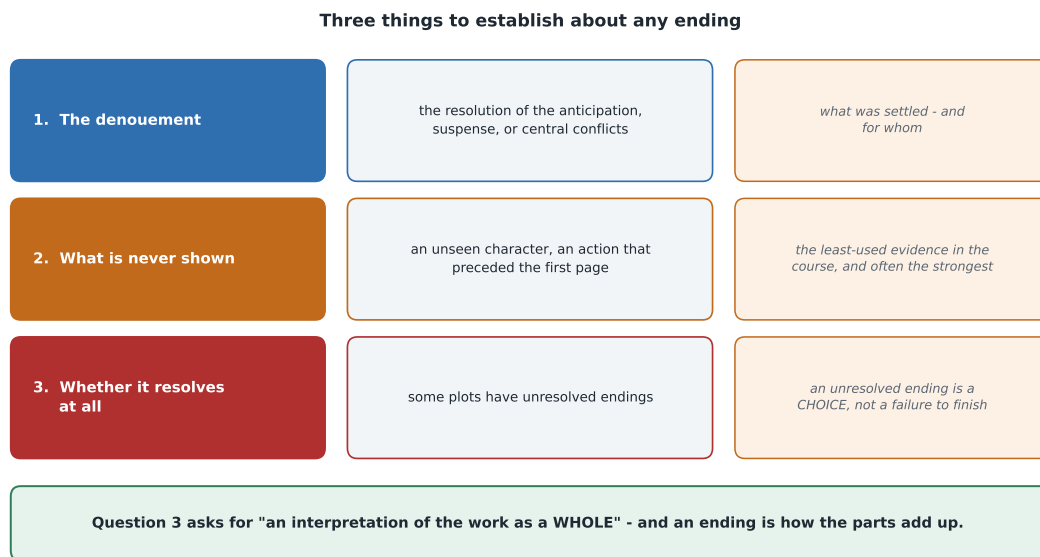
How a character behaves *after* the crisis is resolved is often the most compressed evidence in a text, and it is almost always overlooked, because by then the reader is finishing.

Significant Events in a Plot

- **Significant events often illustrate competing value systems** related to a conflict in the text.
- **Events collide and accumulate to create anticipation and suspense** 期待与悬念.

Note *accumulate*. Suspense is not produced by a single event but by a series that narrows what can still happen.

The Function of Conflict in a Text



What was resolved, what was never shown, and whether the text resolves at all

- The resolution of the anticipation, suspense, or central conflicts of a plot may be called the **denouement** 结局.
- **Sometimes things not actually shown** in a narrative - an **unseen character**, a **preceding action** - **affect the interpretation** of what is shown.
- **Although most plots end in resolution, some have unresolved endings** 开放式结局, and those affect interpretation too.

The middle point is the least used and often the most powerful. What a text keeps offstage - a death that happened before the first page, a character who is discussed and never appears - shapes everything the reader is shown, and is textual evidence like any other.

Details, Diction, and Syntax Reveal Perspective

- **Multiple, and even contrasting, perspectives can occur within a single text** and contribute to its complexity.
- **A narrator or speaker may change over the course of a text** as a result of actions and interactions.
- **Changes and inconsistencies in a narrator's or speaker's perspective may contribute to irony** or to a reader's judgement of reliability.

A narrator who changes is doubly analysable: as a character who developed, and as a lens that altered. When the lens changes, everything seen through it before is retrospectively re-lit.

Developing a Literary Thesis Statement

Unchanged: an **interpretation** requiring textual defence, which **may** preview the line of reasoning. At this stage, the thesis you are aiming for is one that could not be written before reading the whole work - a claim about how the parts add up.

Developing Commentary

- A **line of reasoning** is the sequence of claims defending the thesis, communicated through **commentary**.
- **More sophisticated literary arguments explain the significance or relevance of an interpretation.**

For the Question 3 literary argument in particular, the phrase in the prompt is almost always *"an interpretation of the work as a whole"*. That phrase is a requirement: your claim must be about the whole, and the passage or character you analyse must be shown to bear on it.

Selecting Relevant and Sufficient Evidence

Evidence used **strategically**; **effective** with commentary; **sufficient** in quantity and quality; and interpretation developed **recursively**, revised when the evidence does not support it.

Worked example (a real AP exam question). A Question 3 prompt asks you to select a work in which a character's response to the resolution contributes to an interpretation of the work as a whole. A weak answer describes the ending. A scoring answer uses the unresolved ending and the offstage: *"The novel refuses a denouement: the trial's verdict is never given, and the brother whose death set the plot in motion never appears. What we are shown instead is the protagonist returning to work the following Monday. Because the text withholds both the verdict and the origin, that ordinary Monday becomes the only available measure of what has happened - and the interpretation the novel supports is that the loss was never going to be settled by an outcome, only absorbed."* An unresolved ending, an offstage cause, and a claim about the whole.

Exam tips

- Whether a character changes is **the ground of a reading**, not a fact to report.
- **How a character behaves after the crisis** is compressed evidence, and almost always overlooked.
- Suspense **accumulates**. It comes from a series that narrows what can still happen, not from one event.
- **What is never shown** - an unseen character, a prior action - is textual evidence. Use it.
- An **unresolved ending** is a choice with meaning, not a failure to finish.

- Question 3 asks for "**the work as a whole**". That is a requirement, and it is where most answers fall short.