

What to look for in a text: 10 story-telling devices



1. **Narrative perspectives** — Who talks and why? Whose perspective and how does it reflect the author's views and values? Third person (reliable/unreliable narrator; omniscient/limited); first person (interior monologues and stream-of-consciousness techniques); multiple or embedded narrators: authors often include newspaper articles, diary entries, letters and quasi-interview reports to introduce different perspectives.
2. **Setting (“world of the text”)** — the physical; historical; social; cultural and political background is critical to the author's themes and message. How do the various settings reflect aspects of character and the problems they face? How does the “world of the text” influence the characters' choices and dilemmas? Particular settings may have symbolic meanings, which enable an author to add depth and complexity to their themes and characters.
3. **Characterisation** — rounded/unrounded; character pairs, triples and foils: protagonists and antagonists. Which characters represent, and which challenge, the status quo? What decisions and choices do they make and why? Analyse the tension between the main characters. How does it drive the plot? How does their confrontation reveal important thematic concerns?
4. **Dialogue** — In analysing characters, their mindset and their attitudes, think about their conversations, tone, body language and mannerisms. How do they talk? How do they interact with others? How do their conversations reveal or conceal their attitudes? How do they enhance or resolve tension?
5. **Foreshadowing techniques** — authors often include events or objects that foreshadow or anticipate subsequent actions. Foreshadowing techniques abound at the beginning of a text setting up comparisons with later events or symbols/objects. Trace the similarities and differences.
6. **Similarities and differences: comparisons, analogies and juxtapositions** — examine the similarities and differences between characters, events and experiences. Authors often include a series of parallel events; characters may become mirror images of each other, or a character may undergo significant changes leading to a “before” and an “after” self.
7. **Writing style and “voice”: grammatical patterning devices** — An author's writing “style” refers to their distinctive “voice” which includes sentence styles and grammatical patterning devices. An author may use both standard and non-standard grammar. Tripling is the use of three similar words, phrases, or clauses for dramatic effect. Juxtaposition involves the placing side by side of words, ideas and images while negative constructions and antithesis emphasise contrasts.
8. **Figures of speech and poetic devices** — Authors use a range of figures of speech and numerous poetic devices to add colour and personality to their writing. Similes, metaphors, imagery and personification as well as rhyming devices such as alliteration, assonance and sibilance help to provide an entertaining narrative; such devices are an inherent element of the author's style and their narrative “voice”.
9. **Recurring symbols and extended metaphors** — Authors often use an image or (an extended) metaphor as a structuring device. It sets up a significant comparison, usually at the beginning of the text, and this is used as a “framework” or “lens” through which a character's views, behaviour and attitudes are viewed, compared and contrasted. As the layers of meaning multiply, an extended metaphor adds complexity. Also look for recurring symbols, such as clothes, birds, guns, eye-glasses and the weather, which shed light on main themes.
10. **Allusions and intertextual references (background context):** An allusion is a reference to people, places, events, poems, books, art and myths that the audience is supposed to recognise. It is often a kind of appeal to a reader to share some experience with the writer based on a body of common knowledge. An allusion may be woven throughout a text enriching its meanings through association.

Your paragraph: a logical thread and story-telling devices



**Simon warns the boys to beware of the “darkness within”.
What does he mean? (*Lord of the Flies* by William Golding)**

Topic Sentence:
link to the topic

Elaborate: broad focus (Golding’s purpose)

Evidence (1)
Recurring symbols;
personification

A narrower focus

Evidence (2)
initial depiction of Jack Merridew and quotes

Evidence (3)
Foreshadowing devices

Imagery and antithesis

(darkness and the light/reason)

Link to Golding’s views and topic

Simon cautions the boys against seeing the “darkness” as an external “beast” or threat rather than a consequence of their own savage impulses. As a moral sage, he reflects Golding’s message that if we do not protect our civilising veneer, we have nothing to safeguard us from the brutality that tears communities apart. This “darkness within” is personified by the “thick forest” which increasingly becomes synonymous with the powerful presence of Jack Merridew – a confident leader who abuses the trust of his choir boys. The two parallel lines of boys appear as a hazy “creature” — “something dark” — that is “fumbling along” the beach. Emerging from the “diamond haze”, Jack “vaulted onto the platform” and peered into “what to him was almost complete darkness”. His inability to see clearly becomes a sign of his dark impulses. Likewise, Jack’s cap with the “golden” badge gives him an aura of difference which distinguishes him from the other boys; it foreshadows his transformation from an innocent school boy into a narcissistic godlike figure. After the initial meeting, Jack penetrates the “thick forest, plonking with weary feet on a track”; he becomes enthralled by his first encounter with the screaming, screeching pig – a sign of his primal instincts and his thirst for blood. The “curtain of creepers”, which is so dense that the pig can only be heard, not seen, becomes a metaphor of the “darkness within” that sets Jack apart from the forces of reason – Piggy, Simon and Ralph. The “downward stroke” of the knife during the hunt becomes a recurring symbol of the thin, invisible line that separates the civilised and disciplined choir boy from the tyrannical master who uses fear as a weapon of control.

Using story-telling (narrative) devices:

- ◆ Place the device in a narrative context and analyse its significance. How does it reflect the author’s intentions?
- ◆ Refer to *Analyse. Don’t Summarise! The Language of Analysis*
This workbook consists of sentence models that help you analyse the significance of narrative devices and their link to the author’s views.
- ◆ See “The language of symbols”, pp. 45-49.
- ◆ See “Imagery”, p. 50 and “Rhyming words”, p. 54.
- ◆ See “The language of comparison”, pp. 36 - 39
- ◆ See “Allusions and intertextual references”, p 53

