



Tutorial Letter 501/0/2020

Foundations in English Literary Studies ENG1501

Year module

Department of English Studies

This tutorial letter contains important information
about your module.

BARCODE

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Introduction

Dear student

Welcome to *Foundations in English Literary Studies*! We hope you will enjoy reading and working through this module as much as we enjoyed writing it. Below is an easy-to-use guide to help you familiarise yourself with how this module works.

How does ENG1501 work?
At the end of the year, you will have read and studied these primary texts:
<i>Small Things</i> (a novel) by Nthikeng Mohlele that you need to purchase or borrow
A selection of poems available as eReserves on the Library website
A selection of short stories available as eReserves on the Library website
We will send you a series of Tutorial Letters:
Tutorial Letter 101: General module information PLUS the three assignments that you submit during the year
Tutorial Letter 501 (this one): Your core tuition material that introduces you to the concepts and develops the skills you require to complete this module successfully This tutorial letter contains activities designed to assist you in understanding the material. Complete these in an activity journal (any writing book). This will become a valuable resource in studying for the examination at the end of the year Important concepts are placed in bold and summarised in a Toolkit which appears at the back Click on <u>underlined</u> words (in blue) to access web definitions or video clips in the electronic version
Tutorial Letter 102: Contains additional exercises and support not discussed in Tutorial Letter 501. Your e-tutor will work with you through this guide (visit your e-tutor site on myUnisa every week!)
To guide you on this journey you have access to:
myUnisa: online platform that provides general information and Frequently Asked Questions. We will inform you of any upcoming livestream broadcasts here
Your e-tutor (via myUnisa): she or he will function as the bridge between you and the lecturers, and will work with you through Tutorial Letter 102
Your lecturers: contact us at ENG1501@unisa.ac.za

Unit 1: Orientation

A guide to this unit

In this unit, you will:

- think about what classifies as literature
- familiarise yourself with ways of approaching the study of literature
- think about the reasons we study literature
- be exposed to ways of writing about literature.

What is literature?

The term 'literature' most often refers to language that is written down. However, not everything that is written down is called literature (Ryan & Ryan, n.d.). For example, a novel or a poem would usually be considered literature, but a shopping list would not. Terry Eagleton (1996: 9-10) suggests that literature can be defined as 'a highly valued kind of writing' or as written works that 'belong[] to the *type* of writing which [people] generally value'. It should be noted, however, that what is considered valuable can change over time, and so, what is considered literature can change over time (Eagleton, 1996: 9-10).

In this module, we look at written works, or texts, that are usually classified as literature, such as poems, short stories, and novels. Poetry, short stories, and novels are three different genres or categories of literature. The following units of this tutorial letter teach you more about each of these genres in detail.

How do we study literature?

The aim of this module is to develop your critical reading and thinking skills through an engagement with literary texts. When we talk about critical reading or thinking, we do not necessarily mean criticising or finding fault with what we read. What we are referring to is a way of informed reading and thinking that involves asking questions in order to gain a deeper understanding of the text. Critical readers and thinkers ask questions as they read texts, such as: Whose point of view is represented in this text? Whose point of view has been excluded? What are the values that the text upholds? Is the text trying to persuade the reader of something or to evoke certain feelings in the reader?

In order to answer these questions, we need to look at how a text uses language to convey its ideas or to create certain effects. This involves looking at different aspects of the language used in the text. We could look at [diction](#) (or word choices) and ask ourselves questions such as: What are the [denotation](#) (dictionary meanings) and [connotation](#) (associations) of a specific word? And, how does the choice of a specific word contribute to the overall meaning of the text? We could also look for literary devices in texts, such as metaphors and alliteration, and think about how they create certain effects. Additionally, we could identify certain [themes](#) or topics that are explored in a text, and look at how each theme is explored (or at what the text is saying about each theme). The rest of this tutorial letter teaches you more about diction, literary devices, and themes.

The next section explores some sample texts in order to put our critical reading and critical thinking skills into practice. First, we look at two extracts from newspaper articles, and then move on to studying a poem.

Activity

The two newspaper articles discussed below were published in December 2015 and January 2016. These articles were written in response to protests that had taken place at the University of Cape Town (UCT), and a petition at Oriel College, Oxford University, calling for the removal of statues of Cecil John Rhodes. Read the extracts before considering the activities that follow:

Please go to this [website](#) to access the first article. The article is also available as an eReserve on the library website.

You should focus especially on two sections of this article. The first one starts with 'Opponents of the campaign ...' and ends with '...holds much weight'; the second one starts with 'Engaging critically with history...' and ends with '...a result of colonial plundering' (Foster, 2015).

Please also read the paragraphs reproduced below from the second article:

Rhodes Must Not Fall

Oxford's sensitive students demand a statue's removal. Time to stand firm.

While American universities caved to demands for 'safe spaces', Oxford University issued an ultimatum demanding intellectual freedom. Chancellor Chris Patten this month told students to open themselves to challenging ideas or 'think about being educated elsewhere'. [...] Mr. Patten was answering demands that the university expunge its history with Cecil Rhodes, including removing a statue of its imperialist graduate and benefactor.

Mr. Patten told the BBC [that] 'One of the points of a university, which is not to tolerate intolerance—to engage in free inquiry and debate—is being denied. People have to face up to facts in history which they don't like and talk about them and debate them'. [...] The 'Rhodes Must Fall' movement wants to eliminate memories of a man the students say offends them. (Crovitz, 2016)

Now that we have read the two extracts, let us ask critical questions in order to gain a deeper understanding of each extract. Answer the following questions in your activity journal:

- Whose perspective is represented in each extract?
- What beliefs or values does each extract uphold?
- What is each extract trying to persuade us of?
- How does each extract use language to persuade the reader of certain ideas?

Your response to the four questions above may be slightly different to the discussion provided here. You may have emphasised different aspects of the extracts or focused on different word choices. It is important to understand that there is no 'one right answer' when it comes to writing about literature and that there can be multiple valid interpretations of the same text. However, in order to provide a valid response, your answer will have to use evidence from the text – that is taken in context – as well as logical reasoning to support your argument. This is discussed in more detail in the section 'How do we write about literature?'.

The example below shows how you could have responded to the questions.

In the first article, the author wants to oppose arguments made by opponents of the 'Rhodes Must Fall' campaign and correct misperceptions about the student protestors. While the article provides the author's perspective on the 'Rhodes Must Fall' campaign, the author identifies with the perspective of the student protestors.

How do we know this? Let us start by looking at the headline of the article. Notice that the first part of the headline uses the slogan 'Rhodes must fall' (Foster, 2015). This suggests that the

article supports the views of the students who have called for the removal of the statues. The next part of the headline reads 'and please don't call the students who are protesting against his presence "coddled"' (Foster, 2015). This indicates that the article will attempt to correct what it sees as incorrect perceptions about these students.

Notice how the article uses language to create a clear divide between the student protestors and the opponents of the campaign. The first paragraph that you were asked to focus on starts with 'Opponents of the ['Rhodes Must Fall'] campaign take one of two lines' (Foster, 2015). The author does not identify with this group of opponents. Instead, she merely outlines the main arguments that this group has levelled against the 'Rhodes Must Fall' campaign. At the end of the paragraph, the author explains that she does not think that the opponents' arguments hold 'much weight' (Foster, 2015). The article further encourages the reader to view the opponents of the campaign as the outsiders when she chooses the word 'those' to describe them in 'Those decrying the campaign refuse to fully acknowledge [...]' (Foster, 2015).

When we compare the language used to discuss opponents of the campaign to the phrasing used to discuss the views of the students, it becomes clear that the author identifies with the views of the students. She says, 'Engaging critically with history is precisely what the ['Rhodes must fall'] campaigners are undertaking' (Foster, 2015). While the author's language creates distance between herself and opponents of the campaign, this is not the case when the author writes about the students. If the author wanted to create more distance between herself and the views of the students, she could have said 'Students involved in the "Rhodes must fall" campaign argue that engaging critically with history is what they are undertaking'. Instead, the author writes as if she understands the student campaigners and the intentions behind the campaign.

You should also notice that the author uses language with positive connotations when she describes the students as '[e]ngaging critically with history' (Foster, 2015). The words '[e]ngaging critically' suggest that there is logic and method behind the students' thinking. The author uses contrasting words to describe the opponents of the campaign, such as 'refuse to acknowledge' and 'temerity' (Foster, 2015). These words have connotations of stubbornness, presumptuousness and illogical thinking, which serves to paint the opponents in a more negative light.

Overall, the article uses language to attempt to persuade the reader to identify and side with the students rather than opponents of the campaign.

The second article represents a different point of view. Here the views of Mr Patten, who is against the removal of Rhodes' statue, are described, and the article aims to persuade the reader to agree with the views of Mr Patten.

How do we know this? Let us start, again, by looking at the headline of the article. The first part of the headline, 'Rhodes must not fall' (Crovitz, 2016), suggests that the article will be opposing the view that Rhodes' statue should be removed. The next part of the headline is particularly interesting in terms of diction. It describes the students campaigning for the statue's removal as 'sensitive students' (Crovitz, 2016). This is quite different from how the students are described in the first article. In the first article, the students are described as critical thinkers. Here it is suggested that the students might be over-sensitive or overly emotional. The words 'Time to stand firm' (Crovitz, 2016) speak directly to the reader and attempt to indicate to the reader that the correct response to the situation would be to refuse the students' demands. This is one of the beliefs that the article upholds.

The extract makes us aware of Mr Patten's views on the topic by providing us with direct quotations. The quotations make it clear that Mr Patten sees the students' demand for the removal of the statue as an attempt to silence a part of history. Mr Patten believes that instead '[p]eople need to face up to facts in history which they don't like and talk about them and debate them' (Crovit, 2016). Mr Patten further believes that the demand to remove the statue goes against one of the university's aims, which is to encourage 'free inquiry and debate' (Crovit, 2016).

The article tries to persuade readers that Mr Patten's views are the correct ones on this issue. The first sentence of the extract states that '[w]hile American universities cave to demands for "safe spaces," Oxford University issued an ultimatum demanding intellectual freedom' (Crovit, 2016). The diction or word choices in this sentence ascribe positive associations to Oxford University's stance and negative associations to the approach of American universities. American universities are described as 'caving' or 'giving in'. The word 'cave', as used in this extract, has connotations of weakness. On the other hand, Oxford University is associated with strength and intellectual rigour with words such as 'ultimatum', 'demanding', and 'intellectual freedom'.

The article also uses language to paint Mr Patten in a more positive light than the students. While the article shows that Mr Patten's refusal to remove the statue is his way of making a stand for intellectual freedom, the students are described as wanting 'to eliminate memories of a man [they] say offends them' (Crovit, 2016). In this way, Mr Patten's views are associated with logic and reason, while the students' views are linked to emotion and a desire to hide away from the truth.

The analysis of these two articles should help you to understand how to ask critical questions as you read texts and to better understand how language is used to create meaning. In this module, you do not study newspaper articles but poems, short stories, and a novel. However, you can ask the same kinds of questions when you read texts from these genres.

Activity

One of your prescribed poems, 'Bring the statues back' by Ingrid de Kok on page 93 in *Voices of this Land* (available as an eReserve on the library website), also deals with the theme of the removal of statues.

Start by reading the poem carefully. Look up unfamiliar words in a dictionary and try to find more information about HF Verwoerd online or at your local library to understand the historical significance of this figure better. Then, summarise each stanza in your own words and write your summary in your activity journal.

Ask yourself, what beliefs or values does the poem uphold? You can break this question down into three parts. Write down the answers to these questions in your activity journal:

- What is the poem's stance on Verwoerd and on apartheid?
- What does the poem say about Verwoerd's statue and others like it?
- Why does it say this?

Now answer the following questions in your activity journal:

- Whose views are represented?
- Is the poem trying to persuade the reader of something?
- How does the poem use language to convey its ideas or to persuade the reader?

Below are examples of possible answers to these questions. Every student will have a slightly different response. This is acceptable as long as you are able to support your answer with evidence from the text and logical argumentation.

When we read a poem, the first thing that we should do is to make sure that we understand the basic meaning of each stanza. A good way to start is to rewrite every stanza of the poem in your own words.

A **stanza** is a part of a poem, much like a paragraph is a part of a longer piece of writing. A stanza is a group of lines that usually form a unit of meaning.

For example:

Stanza 1: Certain place names in South Africa have changed. These places used to have names associated with apartheid. Some statues of apartheid leaders – ‘chiselled leaders of the past’ (line 3) – have been removed. This means that the poem must be talking about a time after apartheid.

Stanza 2: A memory of Verwoerd’s statue – ‘apartheid’s architect’ (line 7) – being removed by a crane is described.

Stanza 3: Verwoerd’s statue was moved to a garage in Bloemfontein, where it was stored with other statues of apartheid figures.

Stanza 4: The speaker reflects on how easy it was to remove the statue, or how simple it seemed to be to remove a negative memory, such as the memory of the founder of apartheid.

Stanza 5: The speaker says that we should not lose the memory of a policeman with a ‘moustache like a dog on a leash’ otherwise we will begin to believe that the Dutch Reformed ‘church spires were darning needles’ (line 20). (This is a bit complicated. We know that the police force and the Dutch Reformed Church played important roles in enforcing and upholding apartheid in society. It seems that the speaker does not want us to forget about this.)

Did you know?

The Dutch Reformed Church supported the National Party’s apartheid policies until 1986 when they denounced their earlier attempts to find theological justifications for apartheid (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2019).

Stanza 6: The speaker lists more things that we should not forget, such as ‘suburban gates’ with ‘dogs barking’ (line 21). (This is probably a reference to white people’s homes, as many white people lived separately in suburban areas during apartheid. Black people were restricted from being in those areas unless they had a pass. The gates and barking dogs highlight this and emphasise the separation between races created and enforced by apartheid.)

This stanza also states that we should not forget the ‘duplicity of post-office and liquor store’ (line 22). (This probably refers to discriminatory apartheid laws, for example: the Separate Amenities Act of 1953 caused public facilities, such as beaches, cemeteries, buses and post offices, to be racially segregated [SAHO, 2011], and it was illegal for black people to purchase wine, spirits or bottled beer until 1962 [Nugent, 2015]).

Stanza 7: The last stanza concludes that the statues of Verwoerd and other apartheid figures should be returned to public display.

Consider what beliefs or values the poem upholds. Can you see that the poem takes a negative position towards Verwoerd and towards apartheid? The speaker uses the words ‘sheer delight’ (line 5) in stanza two to describe the emotion experienced at the sight of Verwoerd’s statue – ‘apartheid’s architect’ (line 7) – dangling unceremoniously in the air as it is removed by a crane.

Likewise, in stanza four, removing the memory of Verwoerd is compared to erasing a 'crooked line' (line 15). The word 'crooked' links Verwoerd and his legacy with connotations of wrongness or wickedness. The last stanza contains a third example: Verwoerd's statue on public display is compared to a 'blister on the lips' (line 26). Here, Verwoerd's statue – which serves as a reminder of apartheid – is compared to something painful and unsightly.

In spite of the poem's negative views of Verwoerd and apartheid, the poem's stance on Verwoerd's statue and the statues of other apartheid figures is that they should be put back on display. This can be seen in the poem's title 'Bring the statues back' as well as in the last stanza, where the speaker says 'Let's put Verwoerd back / on a public corner [...]' (lines 25-26). The speaker also says that we should 'direct traffic' (line 28) through the legs of Verwoerd's statue and 'the legs of his cronies of steel and stone' (lines 28-29). This indicates that the speaker wants not only Verwoerd's statue but also the statues of other figures like him to be integrated back into our daily lives. The speaker wants us to have to drive through the legs of these statues, which suggests it is important for the speaker that we are not able to avoid these statues. Consider how large these statues would have to be for cars to be able to drive through their legs!

Why does the speaker want these statues to be put back on display? Lines 23-24 suggest that the speaker is worried that we will lose our memory of the evils of apartheid if we remove the statues that remind us of apartheid. The speaker highlights social ills that we should not forget about, such as how the police force and Church were involved in upholding apartheid (lines 17-20), and how black people were discriminated against as a result of apartheid laws (lines 21-22). The speaker calls for Verwoerd to be returned to a public corner, so that he can function 'like a blister on the lips' (line 26). With this comparison, the speaker suggests that, although the memories of apartheid are painful and uncomfortable to deal with, it is important for us to be exposed to these memories and not be able to avoid them. Perhaps the speaker feels that acknowledging the cruelty of what happened during apartheid will help us to avoid making similar mistakes in the future.

Now, let us answer the questions: Whose views are represented? Is the poem trying to persuade the reader of something? How does the poem use language to convey its ideas or to persuade the reader?

1. Whose views are represented?

Can you see that the poem does not identify with a group whose views are being represented? Instead, the poem seems to represent the view of a single speaker who is a South African and is talking to fellow South Africans about a shared history. The speaker appeals to a shared history when she asks the reader not to forget about certain aspects of apartheid. It is also clear that she addresses a South African audience in her call to reinstate the statues of apartheid figures that have been removed from public display in South Africa.

2. Is the poem trying to persuade the reader of something?

The poem tries to persuade the reader that it is important to maintain an understanding of what happened during apartheid and that we should not try to eliminate all reminders of South Africa's apartheid history. It is possible that the poem has especially a white audience in mind, as it would be easier for a white South African to forget about the ills of apartheid than for a black South African, who may have experienced apartheid directly and may still be experiencing the after-effects of apartheid.

3. How does the poem use language to convey its ideas or to persuade the reader?

The poem does this by speaking directly to the reader, using phrases like 'let's not lose that' (line 19), 'let's not forget' (line 21) and '[I]et's put Verwoerd back' (line 25). The repetition of the

word 'let's' (the contraction for 'let us') asks the reader to participate in this action and emphasises a sense of community and responsibility towards the South African nation. This is an example of how the poem uses language to attempt to persuade the reader.

Unit 2 discusses poetic devices in more detail and develops your ability to analyse how language creates certain effects in texts. After you have read the discussion of poetic devices in Unit 2, return to this poem in order to analyse how the imagery and poetic devices support its meaning.

Why do we study literature?

Short stories and novels tell stories and it is through stories that human beings try to make sense of the world. By studying stories, we look at how people attempt to understand and explain things in their environments and in the world. Although poems do not always tell a story, they still express someone's ideas or feelings. In addition, all forms of literature can serve as a mode of cultural communication, storing the cultural histories of peoples and languages, sharing them with those who come after and with those from other backgrounds.

Reading and studying literature can expose us to contexts and cultures that are different from our own and to other ways of thinking. This can help us to empathise with people who are different from ourselves and enable us to think more critically about our own contexts, beliefs, and values. Finally, literary texts are also works of art and so are worthy of our attention and study. Through language, they offer ways of engaging with the expression of stories, thoughts, emotions and ideas in beautiful ways, enabling us to think anew about aspects of society, ourselves and others.

Reading texts with these ideas in mind equips us with critical reading and critical thinking skills. These skills are valuable in many workplace contexts, and they are abilities that are valuable to society. The ability to think critically, by asking systematic questions in order to gain a deeper understanding, will enhance your problem-solving skills in the workplace. Critical reading allows you to gain a deeper understanding of how language is used to create meaning, evoke feelings, and persuade readers of certain arguments. This will enhance your ability to communicate effectively in writing, a skill which is highly valued in the workplace.

This module also aims to develop students who are empathetic people and socially responsible citizens. Reading literature can help us to understand people who come from different contexts than ourselves, which can help us to become aware of our personal biases and to become more considerate of others. Henry Giroux points out that it is important for a country's citizens to have the ability to think critically. He states that:

Democracy cannot work if citizens are not autonomous, self-judging, curious, reflective, and independent – qualities which are indispensable for students if they are going to make vital judgements and choices about participating in and shaping decisions that affect everyday life, institutional reform, and governmental policy. (Giroux & Sardoč, 2018)

We hope to enable you to make informed decisions by helping you to understand the [subtext](#) (or unspoken messages) in texts that you are exposed to on a daily basis, such as newspaper articles, political speeches, and advertisements.

How do we write about literature?

When we ask you to write about literature, we often ask that you provide your opinion about a specific issue. For example, you could be given a quotation that provides somebody else's opinion about a text and could be asked to discuss the extent to which you agree or disagree with the quotation.

When we ask for your opinion in this module, it is different from when a friend asks for your informal opinion on something. For example, when a friend asks you, 'What do you think of this jacket?' your friend probably expects you to answer based on your first impulse and your personal preferences. Your friend will probably not expect you to substantiate (or support) your answer by providing evidence or presenting logical arguments.

However, when we ask for your opinion on a text, we expect you to follow a certain set of conventions (or rules):

- Your answer should engage with all aspects of the question;
- Your answer should be structured in a specific way;
- You must substantiate your opinion (or argument) by referring to textual evidence; and
- You must use a certain set of tools in order to comment on the text.

The first three of the above-mentioned points are discussed in this unit of the tutorial letter. The tools that you use to conduct your analysis of texts are discussed in the three study units to follow.

Engaging with the question

When asked to write a paragraph or essay on a specific topic, we expect you to cover all aspects of the question. The best way to make sure that you do this is to start by underlining or **highlighting** the keywords or important words in the question. As you write your answer, make sure that your answer addresses each of the keywords in the question. For example:

Ask yourself, what beliefs or values does the poem uphold? You can break this question down into three parts. Write down the answers to these questions in your activity journal:

- What is the poem's stance on Verwoerd and on apartheid?
- What does the poem say about Verwoerd's statue and others like it?
- Why does it say this?

By underlining the keywords, you will see that this question asks one broad question and then three sub-questions that relate to the main question. The main question asks you to comment on the 'beliefs' and 'values' that the poem upholds. The first sub-question asks about the poem's stance on two issues: 'Verwoerd' and 'apartheid'. The second question asks about the poem's stance on one issue: 'Verwoerd's statue and others like it'. The last question is related to the previous question. It asks you to explain the reasoning that can be found in the poem to support its stance on the statues of apartheid figures. It is important for you to unpack your questions in this way in order to make sure that you answer all aspects of each question. Remember that in order to answer these questions, you would have to look at the poem closely to find textual evidence to support your arguments.

Structuring your answer

The sentence

For assignments and during the examination, you should be able to write an essay on the prescribed novel, *Small Things*, which will be discussed in Unit 4. An academic essay has a specific structure that you will need to follow. However, before we discuss the structure of an essay, you need to understand how to structure sentences and paragraphs, as these are the building blocks that make up an essay. Unit 2, which focuses on poetry, requires you to answer questions in sentences and short paragraphs.

A sentence is a basic unit of language that expresses meaning. If you read a single sentence from a paragraph aloud, it should make sense on its own (SkillsYouNeed, 2011-2019). A full or complete sentence contains a [subject](#) (a noun performing an action) as well as a main [verb](#) (the action the subject is doing), and sometimes there is an [object](#), (the noun which receives the action). If a sentence does not contain a verb then it is called a phrase. You are expected to use full sentences when you answer questions in this module.

Here are two examples of complete sentences:

S V
The ship sank.

S V O
The boy kicked the ball.

The subjects of the sentences have been indicated with an 'S', verbs with a 'V' and objects with an 'O'. In Modern English, the subject usually comes first in a sentence, then the verb, and then the object. If you have trouble structuring your sentences correctly, try to keep your sentences short, and make only one point per sentence (SkillsYouNeed, 2011-2019). Remember to use a capital letter at the start of your sentence and to end your sentence with a full stop.

The paragraph

A paragraph is a section of an essay or text that contains one set of related ideas. Paragraphs are usually separated through the use of line spaces (as is the case in this tutorial letter), or by indenting the first line of a new paragraph, as is the case in the prescribed short stories and novel. A paragraph should always contain a [topic sentence](#), and all of the sentences in the paragraph should link with the topic sentence.

A topic sentence is often the first sentence of the paragraph, but it could be one of the other sentences too. The topic sentence contains the main topic of the paragraph. It tells the reader what the main point of the paragraph is. The rest of the sentences in your paragraph should link to the topic sentence because all of the sentences in a paragraph should relate to the same topic. If a sentence does not have a link to your topic sentence, you have moved on to a new topic and you should move that information into a new paragraph. Consider the paragraph below:

The article tries to persuade readers that Mr Patten's views are the correct ones on this issue. The first sentence of the extract states that '[w]hile American universities cave to demands for 'safe spaces', Oxford University issued an ultimatum demanding intellectual freedom' (Crovitz, 2016). The diction or word choices in this sentence ascribe positive associations to Oxford University's stance and negative associations to the approach of American universities. American universities are described as

‘caving’ or ‘giving in’. The word ‘cave’, as used in this extract, has connotations of weakness. On the other hand, Oxford University is associated with strength and intellectual rigour with words such as ‘ultimatum’, ‘demanding’, and ‘intellectual freedom’.

Notice that the paragraph makes one main point: that the article attempts to persuade the reader to side with the views of Mr Patten. This main point is stated in the first sentence of the paragraph, so the first sentence is the topic sentence. The rest of the sentences explain *how* the article uses language to persuade the reader of this, so all of the other sentences relate to the topic sentence.

The essay

An essay consists of main points and sub-points in the same way as a paragraph. Each paragraph should make one main point, and each main point should contribute to the overarching argument of the essay. An essay should contain three parts: an introduction, a body, and a conclusion.

- The introduction of the essay is the first paragraph (or first few paragraphs) of your essay. Your introduction should do two things: it should introduce your reader to the essay topic, and it should provide your reader with an idea of how the rest of the essay – or argument – will be structured.
- The body forms the longest part of an essay. It contains the paragraphs that come after your introduction and before your conclusion. The body of your essay should be used to develop your argument and it should be made up of paragraphs. Each paragraph must make one main point and your paragraphs should link logically to one another in order to build up an overarching (or larger) argument. You should also explain clearly how the information in each of your paragraphs links to your essay question.
- The conclusion of an essay can be found in the last paragraph (or last few paragraphs) of an essay. Your conclusion should summarise the main points that you have made in the body of your essay. Your conclusion should not introduce any new ideas as its purpose is to summarise what has already been discussed.

Unit 4 contains a detailed example of how to write an essay. Be sure to study this carefully, as you will be expected to write an essay in your assignment on *Small Things* as well as in the examination.

Substantiating your opinion

Sentences in a paragraph and paragraphs in an essay should also link logically to each other in order to form an [argument](#). An argument is a discussion that explains your ideas systematically and that provides evidence and logical reasoning to support or justify your interpretation of a text. You should use **‘signpost’ words and phrases**, such as ‘similarly’, ‘however’, ‘additionally’, and ‘for instance’, to indicate how the ideas in your sentences and paragraphs are linked. This makes it easier for your reader to follow your argument.

‘Signpost’ words and phrases indicate how two ideas are related. They can be used to introduce a similar idea (‘in the same way’), a contrasting idea (‘on the other hand’), or an example (‘for instance’). In addition, they can show that one idea is the logical conclusion of another (‘therefore’), or indicate the order of ideas (‘lastly’). They are called ‘signposts’ because they provide the reader with the directions they need to follow your argument. (UEA, n.d)

When we make arguments about literature, the evidence that we use to support our arguments is textual evidence. **Textual evidence** can be described as information from the text which is used within context in order to support an argument. Textual evidence can take the form of quotations from a text or references to specific events in the text. We also need to provide a **logical discussion** or step-by-step explanation in order to make clear *how* the quotation or event in the text supports our argument.

Remember that there is no 'one right answer' when it comes to literary analysis. Different students will have different interpretations of texts and will use different sections of texts to support their arguments. This is acceptable as long as you are able to support your argument both with textual evidence (that has not been taken out of context) and with logical reasoning.

Activity

Look at the example paragraph and answer the questions that follow in your activity journal:

Consider what beliefs or values the poem upholds. Can you see that the poem takes a negative position towards Verwoerd and towards apartheid? The speaker uses the words 'sheer delight' (line 5) in stanza two to describe the emotion experienced at the sight of Verwoerd's statue – 'apartheid's architect' (line 7) – dangling unceremoniously in the air as it is removed by a crane. Likewise, in stanza four, removing the memory of Verwoerd is compared to erasing a 'crooked line' (line 15). The word 'crooked' links Verwoerd and his legacy with connotations of wrongness or wickedness. The last stanza contains a third example: Verwoerd's statue on public display is compared to a 'blister on the lips' (line 26). Here, Verwoerd's statue – which serves as a reminder of apartheid – is compared to something painful and unsightly.

- Identify the topic sentence of the paragraph
- How are the other the sentences in the paragraph linked to the topic sentence?
- What is the argument that the paragraph makes?
- How does the paragraph support its argument?

The topic sentence of the paragraph in the activity above can be found in the second sentence: 'Can you see that the poem takes a negative position towards Verwoerd and towards apartheid?'. The rest of the sentences all link to this topic. The first sentence talks broadly about beliefs and values in the poem, while the second sentence – the topic sentence – identifies specific beliefs and values in the poem. The rest of the sentences explain *how* the poem uses language to convey its negative view of Verwoerd and apartheid. The paragraph makes the argument that the poem takes a negative stance towards Verwoerd and apartheid. It supports its argument by providing three examples of textual evidence to support its claim. The textual evidence takes the form of quotations from the poem and explanations of how the quotations support the argument. For example, the paragraph quotes the word 'crooked'. It then explains that the word 'crooked' has connotations of wrongness or wickedness. In this way, the paragraph makes it clear why the comparison between removing Verwoerd's memory and erasing a crooked line suggests a negative attitude in the poem towards Verwoerd and his memory.

Note that the paragraph could have referred to other examples of textual evidence to support its argument. For example, the paragraph could have pointed out that in the last stanza, other statues of apartheid figures are referred to as Verwoerd's 'cronies' (line 29). The word 'cronies' has negative connotations, as it suggests a corrupt kind of friendship where friends help each other to further their selfish interests. The fact that apartheid figures are described in this way is another indication of the poem's negative stance towards apartheid.

As you can see, there are multiple ways to support the same argument. This indicates that there cannot be only one right answer when we analyse literature. In fact, sometimes two very different arguments can offer alternative yet valid interpretations of the text.

Although there are different possible valid interpretations of a text, this does not mean that you can say absolutely anything you like about a text. Any interpretation needs to be supported by textual evidence (that is used within the proper context of the text) and with logical argumentation. For example, if someone argued that 'Bring the statues back' attempts to describe apartheid positively because it uses the words 'sheer delight' (line 5), this would be an invalid interpretation. The reason why this interpretation would be invalid is that the words 'sheer delight' have been taken out of context in this instance. The poet uses the words 'sheer delight' to describe the memory of Verwoerd's statue being removed; the words 'sheer delight' are not used to describe apartheid.

Incorporating quotations

You will have noticed that one of the ways to provide textual evidence to support an argument is to provide quotations from the text. As you will be making use of quotations regularly, it is important that you familiarise yourself with how to incorporate quotations into your writing correctly. If you look back at some of the examples discussed in this unit, you will see that quoted text needs to be placed in quotation marks.

When you quote from a poem, you should provide a line reference in brackets after your quote, for example, (line 5).

When you provide a quote from a short story or novel, you should provide the surname of the author, the year, and the page number of the quote in brackets. This is called an in-text reference. For example, when writing about *Small Things* the reference would look like this: (Mohlele, 2013: 4). When the name of the author appears in the sentence itself, only put the year and page number in the brackets. For example: In *Small Things*, Mohlele (2013: 4) shows us that ...

It is also important to note that quotes should be incorporated into grammatically correct sentences. Quotes should not stand on their own and they should not merely be tacked on to the beginning or end of sentences.

Below is an example of a correctly incorporated quotation from the poem:

A third example is found in the last stanza where Verwoerd's statue on public display is compared to a 'blister on the lips' (line 26).

The quote has been placed in quotation marks, an in-text line reference is provided at the end of the quote, and the quote forms part of a grammatically correct sentence.

Here is an example of a correctly incorporated quotation from one of the newspaper articles discussed earlier in this unit:

The words 'Time to stand firm' (Crovitz, 2016) speak directly to the reader and attempt to indicate to the reader that the correct response to the situation would be to refuse the students' demands.

This is an example of an incorrectly incorporated quotation from the poem:

'[B]lister on the lips' (line 26), Verwoerd's statue on public display is compared to something painful and unsightly

Can you see that the quotation has been tacked on to the beginning of the sentence? It has not been incorporated into the flow of the sentence.

Here is another example of an incorrectly incorporated quotation:

The author speaks directly to the reader 'Time to stand firm' (Crovitz, 2016) and attempts to indicate to the reader that the correct response to the situation would be to refuse the students' demands.

Notice how the quote breaks up the flow of the sentence. This is incorrect.

Sometimes you will need to change a quotation slightly in order to incorporate it into a grammatically correct sentence or to clarify something within the quote. For example, at the end of the poem, the speaker says that we should 'direct traffic through [the Verwoerd statue's] legs' (line 28). Note that the actual phrasing of this line reads 'direct traffic through his legs' but, because we want it to be clear that the pronoun 'his' is a reference to Verwoerd's statue, we added the section in square brackets. When you make changes to a quotation for the purposes of grammatical coherence or clarity, you should put the changes that you have made in square brackets in order to indicate to your reader that you have altered the quotation. Note that you should never use square brackets to change the basic meaning of a quotation, as this will mean that you are misrepresenting your source.

All sources that you have cited – or quoted from – in your answers should also be listed in a bibliography at the end of your assignment. Your prescribed texts are listed in the bibliography at the end of this tutorial letter under the heading 'Sources consulted/ Additional reading'.

Using secondary sources in your assignments

Up to this point, we have only discussed how to cite primary sources in your answers. 'Primary sources' refer to the texts under study, such as poems, short stories, and novels. However, at times, you may want to use other people's ideas about these literary texts in your assignments. When you use other people's ideas about literary texts, you are making use of secondary sources. These sources can take the form of books, journal articles, and internet sites.

Note that we do not expect you to make use of secondary sources at first year level. In fact, we encourage you to rely on your own observations, made by studying the language in your prescribed texts closely. However, it can be helpful to find out what other people have observed about a text. When you use other people's ideas in your assignments, you need to know how to give credit to your sources.

Warning!

Using ideas and facts from other people, books or web pages without saying where they come from is stealing those ideas and facts. It is called plagiarism and it is a serious crime. Your lecturers will take marks off for any words or ideas that appear in your essay without proper referencing. For a quick overview of what exactly plagiarism is, watch this short [video clip](#).

Using direct quotations from secondary sources

When you quote directly from a secondary source, you should place the quote in quotation marks, and you should provide an in-text reference at the end of the sentence. Your in-text reference should provide the surname of the author, the date of the publication, and the page number where the quote can be found. Here is an example:

Literature can be defined as 'a highly valued kind of writing' or as written works that 'belong[] to the *type* of writing which [people] generally value' (Eagleton, 1996: 9-10).

Alternatively, you can incorporate the author's name into your sentence, in which case only the date and page number should be placed in brackets:

Eagleton (1996: 9-10) suggests that literature can be defined as 'a highly valued kind of writing' or as written works that 'belong[] to the *type* of writing which [people] generally value'.

When you deal with websites, there are no page numbers, so you only need to put the surname of the author (or the name of the organisational author) and the date in brackets, e.g.:

The article states that 'Oxford University [has] issued an ultimatum demanding intellectual freedom' (Croovitz, 2016).

Warning!

It is acceptable for you to quote from secondary sources in your assignments as long as you acknowledge your sources correctly. However, your entire essay *may not* consist of quotations from secondary sources. The largest part of your assignment should be written in your own words. This is how you show your reader that you understand the text.

Paraphrasing secondary sources

Paraphrasing is a very useful skill that you need to develop. It involves explaining somebody else's idea in your words. Note that when you paraphrase, you are still using somebody else's idea, so you still need to acknowledge the source of the idea by providing an in-text reference.

Let us paraphrase the sentence that quotes Eagleton:

Eagleton (1996: 9-10) suggests that there are certain types of writing that society tends to value, and that literature falls under this kind of writing.

Compare this paraphrase to the sentence that directly quotes Eagleton. Can you see that we are using different words in a different order to Eagleton? However, the meaning of the sentence is still the same.

Important!

A proper paraphrase should rewrite an idea in completely different words. It is not enough to change one or two words in the original sentence. When you paraphrase ideas from secondary sources in your assignments, it shows your marker that you understand the ideas and can explain them in your own words. This is why we prefer that you paraphrase secondary sources rather than relying on many direct quotations. You must still provide proper references when using paraphrases.

Keep in mind that, overall, we want you to provide your own interpretation of each text. This means that you should rely more heavily on your own close reading of a text in your assignments than on what others have said about it. Unit 2 discusses this in more detail.

The bibliography

The last thing to take note of is that all of the sources that you use in your assignment should be listed in a bibliography at the end of your assignment. Have a look at the bibliography at the end of this tutorial letter under the heading 'Sources consulted/ Additional reading'. In this module, we use a specific style of referencing known as the Harvard Method. There are different conventions for listing different kinds of texts in a bibliography. See Tutorial Letter 102 for a detailed breakdown of how to reference websites, books, and journal articles in your bibliography.

We hope that this orientation unit has given you a good overall sense of how to analyse literature and how to write about literature. In the next three units, you will read content that engages specifically with poetry, short stories, and a novel.

Unit 2: Poetry

A guide to this unit

In this unit, you will:

- be exposed to the formal characteristics that distinguish the poetry genre
- read and analyse a number of poems written in English
- develop the skills required to read, analyse, and appreciate any poem on your own
- become familiar with a variety of literary elements such as 'diction', 'form', 'rhythm and rhyme', 'imagery', and 'meaning'.

What is a poem?

A poem is a piece of writing in which words are arranged in a certain way to express a specific idea. A poem is usually much shorter than a novel or a play. Sometimes poems can seem challenging because they are bound by rules and use language in a way that differs from every day speech. The more you are exposed to poetry, the easier it becomes to identify these rules and patterns, and the easier it is to read and understand poems.

This [illustrated video](#) introduces you to some of the many forms poetry can take.

Although there are many types of poems, what they have in common is their ability to communicate meaning creatively through the use of language. This is done in a number of different ways. In this study unit, we explore the ways in which poems communicate their meaning to us. We consider their form, how they use words, and decipher what they mean.

To help you better understand a poem, it is important to be familiar with the tools that poets use to create them. These tools are also known as poetic devices.

Poetic devices

A list of all the poetic devices that you need to know in order to complete this module successfully appears in the Toolkit at the back of this tutorial letter. If you are unsure of what a term means when you come across it, please consult the Toolkit at the back of this tutorial letter to help you.

Let us have a quick look at some of the most important devices that poets use to create poems. We will look at these literary elements under the categories of 'Diction', 'Form', 'Rhythm and Rhyme', 'Imagery', and 'Meaning'. Understanding these tools will not only help you better understand poetry, but it may even inspire you to write your own! Writing can be a wonderful way to interpret the world around you.

Diction

Broadly speaking, diction refers to the choice or the use of words in a piece of writing. The exact words that a poet chooses when writing a poem can have a big impact on its meaning. A particular word can make the meaning more specific, it can create a certain style, and it can even influence the pace and rhythm of a poem.

Diction also plays an important role because of denotation and connotation.

Denotation refers to the dictionary definition of a word. It is easy to remember, because both **denotation** and **dictionary** begin with the letter 'd'! Denotation is the standard definition. For example, according to the dictionary, a cloud is a visible water mass high above the ground.

Connotation is also related to the meaning of a word, but it is specifically about what we associate with a certain word. For this reason, connotations can sometimes differ from person to person. However, they will not usually be vastly different, because of the way language is structured. For example, when we hear the word 'cloud' we might think of a storm cloud or a rain cloud, and that could bring either positive or negative associations. But when we hear the word 'cloud' we do not usually associate it with cars, for example, or experiments, or money.

Poets choose words with certain denotations and connotations in mind when writing a poem. We may not be able to know what the poet's own intention or association with a word was, but we can deduce a kind of intended meaning by thinking about what could possibly be associated with certain words and by looking at the poem as a whole in order to understand the context in which a word occurs.

Consider the poem 'Whales' by Kelwyn Sole on page 469 of *The New Century of South African Poetry* (available as an eReserve on the library website).

The first line of this poem uses an unfamiliar word in relation to whales: '[lugubriousness](#)'. Lugubrious has a similar meaning to words like sad, gloomy, or mournful. These are also some of the connotations of the word. The first line reads like an incomplete sentence – 'Their lugubriousness' – which makes you ask: what about it? What about their sadness? Now you have to read the rest of the poem to find out what the speaker wants to tell you about this aspect of whales.

What is the effect of using the word 'lugubriousness' instead of sadness? First of all, lugubriousness is a much longer word, so it influences the pace and rhythm of the poem. The long word slows down the pace of the poem:

lu – gu – bri – ous – ness = 5 beats

sad – ness = 2 beats

Secondly, the word is more descriptive and specific than the word 'sadness'. It means looking or sounding sad or gloomy, not necessarily *being* sad or gloomy, but *looking* or *sounding as if* you are. Can you see how the denotation of this word helps us to gain a deeper understanding of why this word was chosen? Think about what whales look and sound like. Have you ever heard a whale call? It is perhaps one of the saddest sounds on earth. It does not necessarily mean whales are sad, but they can sound or look sad to us. Blue whales, for example, almost look as if their mouths are in an upside down smile permanently. Using 'lugubriousness' instead of 'sadness' paints a much more vivid picture of the whales.

The first stanza of this poem consists merely of this one line, these two words: 'Their lugubriousness'. The poet highlights the importance of this feature of whales by using stanza breaks in this manner. It emphasises that this aspect of whales is important for understanding the rest of the poem. If you continue to read the poem, you may find more unfamiliar or strange words, for example: '[daintiness](#)' (line 2), '[infinity](#)' (line 3), '[hermeneutic](#)' (line 6), '[fetid](#)' (line 8), '[scuttles](#)' (line 9), '[ponderous](#)' (line 14).

Find the denotations of all the words you may be unfamiliar with in the poem. Once you have done this, try to think what their possible connotations may be. Write your answers in your activity journal.

Some of these words may have been chosen for their exact descriptive qualities or to serve a particular purpose. For example, 'daintiness' (line 2), means small or delicate beauty, yet this contrasts with the phrase 'huge bellies' (line 2). How can something be huge and delicate at the same time? The choice of words here performs a certain function and in this case it is to emphasise an apparent contradiction.

This is an example of an **oxymoron** – a figure of speech that uses words together that seem to contradict one another. Every day examples include 'same difference', 'original copy', 'act naturally', and 'bittersweet'. Can you think of other examples?

The 'daintiness of huge bellies' (line 2) may be a reference to the ribbed texture of a blue whale's underside. The speaker could be highlighting that although whales are huge, they have delicate looking patterns on their skin.

Other words contribute to the overall tone of the poem, such as 'hermeneutic' (line 6). Simply put, 'hermeneutic' means interpretative or explanatory. How can shores be 'hermeneutic'? Shores or beaches cannot literally perform interpretations, but when you think about it, in a way they do perform the function of interpretation – they 'analyse' the things that are washed to shore, spreading them out on the sand. This includes the wildlife such as fish, birds, and other sea creatures, but also the things that do not belong in the ocean, such as plastic pollution. In the case of this poem, a whale has beached on the shore. The shore will need to 'interpret' or take it apart as it decays.

Personification is the figure of speech that attributes a living quality to an inanimate object. It is easy to remember: Person – ification: giving the qualities of a person to something that cannot perform those functions. Personification can refer to giving animal qualities to an inanimate object too, so it is important to remember that it is about giving living qualities to something that is not alive. In the poem 'Whales', the beach cannot literally interpret or analyse something because this is a human function. This is an example of personification where the beach is given a human quality.

Not only has the poet chosen specific words for their exactness in meaning, but also to create a specific mood in the poem.

Mood refers to the atmosphere of a poem or a piece of writing. If you look closely at the poet's choice of words, you can see what kind of atmosphere or feeling she or he wants to convey in her or his work.

In 'Whales' a sombre mood is created from the very first line. The word 'lugubriousness' is emphasised by the use of stanza breaks, and this long word also slows down the pace of the opening line, contributing the heavy mood. The poet initially uses words to describe the whales that have connotations of sadness, death and decay ('lugubriousness', 'hung', 'beached', 'boomed', 'fetid'). The poet later describes the whales with words associated with happiness, life and joy ('clown faces', 'dance', 'ease', 'grace'). The contrast is that when the speaker talks about the beached whales, the mood is gloomy, while when he speaks about the whales in the depths of the ocean, it is clear that they are happy where they have no contact with humans.

Note that the word 'laughter' (line 4) also appears in the first few lines of the poem. However, this word does not create a positive mood at this point in the poem. This is because the poet follows the description of a whale's belly with the word 'beached' (line 5). Thus, the poem highlights that this 'laughter' or joy has been put to an end because the whale has died.

Remember that it is possible for you to have a somewhat different interpretation of the poem to the interpretation provided in this tutorial letter. However, your interpretation must always look at individual words or sentences in the context of the text as a whole. If we argued that the word 'laughter' creates a joyful mood in the first half of the poem, this would be an incorrect reading of the poem, as the word 'laughter' must be looked at in the context of the rest of the poem.

Once you have established the mood of the poem, you should also consider the tone of the poem.

Tone refers to the speaker's attitude toward the specific subject that the poem is about. For example, the tone can be light-hearted or serious, in awe, compassionate, angry, or mournful. When we consider tone, we think about how the speaker or writer feels about the thing that they are talking about. This is closely linked to the poet's choice of words. Tone and mood are also related to each other, but tone refers to the attitude of the speaker while mood refers to the atmosphere of the poem.

It seems that the speaker of this poem takes the matter of the beached whales very seriously. This serious tone is highlighted by the sombre mood in the first half of the poem, where the speaker discusses the topic of beached whales. The speaker also brings to our attention the state of our beaches, emphasising human pollution with words such as 'condoms and crumpled valentines' (line 7). The fact that the speaker talks about beached whales and polluted beaches together suggests that he sees these two issues as related.

Did you know?

Marine biologists believe that the chemicals that pollute the ocean are among the possible reasons why whales beach themselves (Whale Facts, 2019).

The speaker highlights the idea that we need to think about how our activities affect our oceans with his choice of words and serious tone. The speaker is clearly not happy about the fate of the whales and he calls for us to think about the seriousness of the matter.

Activity

You ask your friend: 'Do you like reading poetry?'

They reply: 'Yeah, I love it, it's so easy to learn, so many new words that I don't understand.'

What tone does the response convey? Is your friend being serious or sarcastic? How do you know this?

Form

Form refers to the various shapes that poems can take. You may know some examples of classic forms – odes, sonnets, couplets – and there are also contemporary forms, such as free verse.

Poets sometimes use form to write as part of a certain tradition. They may also want to use a particular rhyme scheme or pattern. Contemporary poetry sometimes rejects classic forms.

An example of a classic form that you may already know is the sonnet. Sonnets have been written since the fourteenth century and have at least two distinct shapes: the Italian or Petrarchan sonnet, and the English or Shakespearean sonnet. Both sonnets have fourteen lines, but they have different rhyme schemes and structures. We discuss rhyme in more detail in the next section, but we introduce you to the basics of rhyme scheme in this section.

A **sonnet** is a type of poem that consists of fourteen lines and follows a particular rhyme scheme. Petrarchan sonnets have the following rhyming pattern: abba, abba, cdecde or cdcdcd. Shakespearean sonnets follow a different rhyming pattern: abab, cdcd, efef, gg.

The Petrarchan sonnet can be divided into two parts: the first eight lines form the octave, and the final six lines form the sestet. The sestet is usually a response to the octave in the form of an answer, a counterargument, or another type of response. There is thus a distinct break in thought between the first eight lines (octave) of the poem and the last six (sestet). The Petrarchan sonnet also follows a strict rhyme scheme: abba, abba, cdecde or cdcdcd.

Did you know?

abba, abba, cdecde/cdcdcd ... What do these letters mean?

They simply suggest a rhyme pattern. Words that rhyme are words that end with the same sound, for example 'surround' and 'found'. The letter 'a' is used for the sound of the last word of the first line.

The letter 'b' is used for the sound of the last word of the second line if this word does not rhyme with the last word of the first line. This is the case with a Petrarchan sonnet.

In a Petrarchan sonnet, the last word of the third line rhymes with the last word of the second line, so the letter 'b' is used again. The last word of the fourth line rhymes with the last word of the first line, so the letter 'a' is repeated. To avoid confusion, we use letters as shorthand to represent rhyming patterns in poems.

The Shakespearean sonnet consists of three quatrains (four lines each) and a rhyming couplet (two lines). The rhyme scheme is also different: abab, cdcd, efef, gg. That means line 1 rhymes with line 3, line 2 with line 4, line 5 and 7, 6 and 8, and so forth, with the final two lines that rhyme with each other.

A **couplet** is a stanza that consists of two consecutive lines of poetry that rhyme. It is popular in Shakespearean sonnets.

The final two lines usually play an important role in terms of the meaning of a Shakespearean sonnet. These lines can contain the poem's conclusion, or even take the poem in a different direction.

Have a look at the poem 'The Cape of Storms' by Thomas Pringle on page 3 in *Voices of this Land* (available as an eReserve on the library website).

Activity

Before you continue to read this section, try to identify what type of poem 'The Cape of Storms' is. Give a reason for your answer.

'The Cape of Storms' has fourteen lines and follows the following rhyme scheme:
Lines 1-4 – abba

Lines 5-8 – abba
Lines 9-14 – cdcdcd

Based on this information we can assume that it is a Petrarchan sonnet, because the form follows the rules of this kind of poem. The word 'dark' (line 1) rhymes with 'bark' (line 4), as well as 'mark' (line 5) and 'stark' (line 8).

Activity

Try to identify the other rhyming words at the end of each line of the poem.

This poem uses some [archaic](#) (old-fashioned) words that we no longer use in spoken English today. One such a word is 'thy' (lines 2 and 3). This used to be the intimate form of the word 'your'. 'You' and 'your' were used in formal contexts – that is why people referred to a king as 'Your Majesty' – but nowadays we use 'you' and 'your' in both formal and informal contexts.

Activity

Notice that the word 'thy' is used to refer to the Cape of Storms. Which poetic device does 'the choice of words' to refer to the Cape in the first quatrain remind you of?

The poem addresses the 'Cape of Storms'. Note that this phrase refers to Cape Town as it was known when the Portuguese explorer, Bartholomeus Dias, arrived at the shores of South Africa. The first four lines tell us a bit more about the Cape of Storms and hints to why it may have been known by that name.

Activity

Think about the diction in lines 5 to 8 of this poem. How does it contribute to the description of the place? What does it tell you about the 'Cape of Storms'?

The speaker suggests that the Cape is not a happy place. He notices 'with grief' (line 5) the 'servile and the slave' (line 6). This information tells us more about why the Cape is a 'cheerless' (line 2) place to the speaker. This is a place of 'sorrow' and 'oppression' (line 8), where slavery is practiced.

The **speaker** is the person who is speaking in the poem. The speaker is not necessarily the poet! The poet is the person who writes the poem, the person who chooses specific words and creates specific lines. But the words spoken and the meaning and ideas that these words represent belong to the speaker.

Think about it: If you are a young woman writing a poem from the point of view of an aging grandfather and you use the word 'I' in your poem, you do not want your readers to think that you are the grandfather! You are the poet, the grandfather is the speaker in the poem.

However, we see a change in the speaker's attitude towards the Cape from line 9 onwards. The word 'Yet' at the beginning of this line already suggests this change. It indicates that although the Cape is a place of 'physical and moral ill' (line 9) he still feels as though 'strong links' (line 10) bind him to this place.

The fact that the speaker feels a connection to the Cape of Storms has the effect of making even its 'rocks and deserts' (line 12) dear to the speaker. Despite the horrible events that took place during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – such as [colonialism](#) and slavery – the speaker suggests that there were a few 'kind hearts' (line 13), 'loved [Kindred](#)' and '[congenial](#) Friends' (line 14) in this unruly place.

Can you see how the form of this poem is connected to its meaning? The poet describes the Cape in a negative way in the first eight lines of the poem, and then tells us another aspect of the Cape in the final sestet (6 lines). In this manner, form and meaning are closely connected. This makes the poem an example of a Petrarchan sonnet.

Now let us consider the form of a more contemporary poem: 'shak-shak' by Seithlamo Motsapi. This poem appears on page 427 of *The New Century of South African Poetry* (available as an eReserve on the library website).

When you look at the poem the first thing you will probably notice is that the form is different to what you may have expected. Most of the stanzas are only one or two lines. There is also no clear pattern in the form of the poem: the first six stanzas contain two lines, stanza seven contains one line, stanzas eight and nine two lines, stanza ten one line, and so forth. The poem also does not use a distinct rhyme scheme. We cannot predict where a change in the speaker's attitude may occur based on the form of the poem.

'shak-shak' is an example of free verse. The poem does not follow a specific rhyme scheme or format. This poem is unusual as it uses some informal symbols as part of the poem. For example, the poem begins with the ampersand sign. This sign (&) represents the word 'and'. This is not a sign that you would usually see in a poem. It creates an informal tone.

Free verse is a form of poetry that closely follows the patterns of everyday speech. It contains no clear rhyme scheme, form, or use of metre. This does not mean that some rhythmic or rhyme patterns do not emerge in free verse, but it is not as structured as some other forms of poetry. The difference between free verse and prose (like a novel) is that this style of poetry still uses rhythm and rhyme, just not in the same way as other formal types of poetry.

Apart from its lack of a clear pattern, the poem also uses enjambment throughout. The effect of this is that the poem sounds different when read aloud than you would expect when you look at it on the page. The first stanza may appear to be only two lines long, but because the second line runs over into the next, it is not read as the end of the stanza when you read it aloud.

Enjambment occurs when the syntax of a line of poetry is incomplete at the end of the line. It is also known as run-on lines, because the meaning of the line runs from the one to the next.

Do you see what we did there? This is an example of enjambment. The effect of this poetic device is that it can emphasise the word at the end of the line. It can also create tension due to the incomplete syntax. The use of enjambment contributes to the overall rhythm of the poem. Sometimes it can create a sense of urgency or excitement because it speeds up the reading of a poem. In 'shak-shak', the enjambment emphasises the excitement and vibrant atmosphere created by the carnival.

The poet uses other interesting and unusual techniques in this poem. Line 3, for example, contains two slash signs, or //. In academic writing we usually use a slash to indicate line breaks when we quote a few lines from a poem. The poet thus creates a similar effect here, suggesting that there should be another line break between 'my soul' and 'lightning speed rhythm' (line 3).

Another possible interpretation is that the slash sign can be read as the word 'or'. In a formal letter, for example, we often say: 'Dear Sir/Madam'. The poet could thus be creating a link between 'my soul' and 'lighting speed rhythm'.

If we consider the diction of the poem, just briefly, we see more unusual features. The poet uses incomplete words or words spelt incorrectly: '& so the poor wd throw pots of paint' (line 5); 'and while the electrick carnival / kicked the weals off' (lines 26-27). We can assume that 'wd' is short for 'would' based on the rest of the sentence. 'electrick' means 'electric' and 'weals' means 'wheels'. The effect of using these spellings is that the poet is trying to mimic natural speech.

Perhaps then, in a way, the poet does use form to tell us a bit about the meaning of the poem, but not in a way we may have expected. The use of informal spellings and punctuation emphasises the informal atmosphere created by the carnival. Carnivals are also associated with transgression. This aspect of carnivals could be hinted at in the contravention of formal spelling and punctuation rules.

The final stanza of this poem reads: 'HISTRYS ON DE SIDE / OF DE OPRES'. First, take note the use of capital letters here. What do they mimic? As the previous lines suggest, they mimic the 'graffiti' that is written on the speaker's 'soul' (lines 32-33). These words written in capital letters stand out from the rest of the poem because of their visual size.

Again, the poet uses a technique of shortening words or spelling them incorrectly to imitate how these words are spoken and to emphasise a sense of transgression.

These final words of the poem are an allusion to a speech made by Nelson Mandela to the African National Congress's youth league at an annual conference in 1951.

Did you know?

In his speech to the African National Congress's youth league at an annual conference in 1951, Mandela said:

'These are hopeful signs, but precisely because the African liberation movement is gaining strength the rulers will become more brutal and, in their desperation, will practice all manner of deception in order to stay on at any rate to postpone the day of final victory. But history is on the side of the oppressed.'

We see that the final lines of this poem are almost an exact quotation of this speech made by Nelson Mandela, although it is written in a way that imitates spoken language.

An **allusion** is a reference to another person, text, place, or event outside the poem or literary work. In the poem 'shak-shak' we find a version of a quotation from a speech made by Nelson Mandela. The purpose of an allusion is to enrich or enhance the poem, because it now draws the meanings and associations of the other text to the poem as well.

When you read the poem 'shak-shak' again, realising that the final words allude to a speech made by Nelson Mandela during apartheid, the poem makes sense in a different way. It adds to your interpretation as well as the overall meaning of the poem, because now you understand more about the poem's historical context.

The syntax, grammar, and punctuation you find in poems play an important role in their overall meaning. When you read a poem, you should try to read it according to the rules of grammar. In other words, if you see a comma, you should pause in your reading. If you see a full stop, you know that the sentence forms of a unit of meaning. Similarly, question and exclamation marks

also complete sentences. If you do not see any punctuation, you should not pause when reading the poem. In this way, punctuation contributes significantly to the rhythm and the rhyme of a poem.

Rhythm and rhyme

Poets use rhythm and rhyme to create sounds and to contribute to the overall meaning of the poem. To do this, they make use of sound devices. For example:

Alliteration refers to the repetition of the consonant sounds at the beginning words that appear close to each other in lines of poetry. For example, in ‘shak-shak’ the author repeats the s-sound throughout the poem, but especially in lines such as ‘already there’s a sign/ in the sky/ for those who see’ (lines 29-31). Repeating the s-sound at the beginning of the words creates rhythm in the poem.]

Assonance is the repetition of vowel sounds in words that appear close together in a poem. In ‘shak-shak’ examples include ‘& the carnival entered the last streets’ (line 1) – repetition of the a-sound, and ‘my soul // lightning speed rhythm / light moving heavy swinging hip’ (lines 3-4) – repetition of the ing-sound. Similar to alliteration, this repetition creates rhythm.]

Onomatopoeia refers to the formation of a word that sounds like the thing it describes, a word that imitates or represents the sound of what it refers to. This may sound confusing, but these words are usually easy to spot, as they often relate to water, animal, or vocal sounds, or are used to describe loud unexpected noises. For example: ‘splash’ is a word that describes the sound that water makes, and it tries to sound similar to the actual sound! Likewise ‘meow’ sounds a bit like the sound of a cat, ‘giggle’ sounds a bit like a person laughing, and ‘bang’ sounds a bit like a shot. Can you think of other examples?

In ‘shak-shak’ the poet not only tries to imitate speech by means of form and spelling, but he also attempts to imitate movement and sound with words like ‘feet/ shoo shoo shifty snap shuffle’ (lines 20-21) where the words imitate the movement of the people dancing and celebrating through the streets of the township.

In poetry we find different types of rhyme. Sometimes it is very easy to spot rhyme patterns and rhyming words, because the words appear at the end of each line of the poem, as we saw in ‘Cape of Storms’. This type of rhyme is called end rhyme.

End rhyme refers to rhyming words that appear at the end of lines. **Pair rhyme** refers to rhyming words that appear at the end of two or more *consecutive* lines. This type of rhyme uses the pattern aabb ccdd, and so forth. **Cross rhyme** refers to rhyming words that appear at the end of every other line. This type of rhyme follows the pattern abab cdcd, and so forth. Both pair rhyme and cross rhyme are types of end rhyme.

Read the extract of ‘The Author to Her Book’ by Anne Bradstreet on page 66 of *Seasons Come to Pass* below and see if you can spot the type of rhyme it uses (available as an eReserve on the library website). Do not worry about understanding all the words in the poem at this point.

Activity

Try to find the rhyme pattern in the poem ‘The Author to Her Book’ (Anne Bradstreet). Write your response in your activity journal before looking at the discussion below.

The Author to Her Book
Anne Bradstreet (1612-1672)

Thou ill-formed offspring of my feeble **brain**,
Who after birth didst by my side **remain**,
Till snatched from thence by friends, less wise than *true*,
Who thee abroad exposed to public *view*,
Made thee in rags, halting to th'press to trudge,
Where errors were not lessened (all may judge).

This kind of rhyming pattern creates rhythm in the poem. Pair rhyme can also make it easier to remember the lines, because you will know that two consecutive lines end with words that rhyme.

Other types of rhyme can be a little bit trickier to spot. Middle rhyme, or internal rhyme, refers to rhyming patterns created when two or more rhyming words appear in the same line of a poem, or across different lines. The difference between middle or internal rhyme and end rhyme is:

- Internal or middle rhyme – in the middle of lines
- End rhyme – at the end of lines, includes pair rhyme and cross rhyme

Internal rhyme or **middle rhyme** refers to rhyming patterns created when two or more rhyming words appear in the same line of a poem, or across different lines.

Half-rhyme refers to a rhyming pattern that repeats identical consonant sounds but with different vowel sounds.

Consider the poem 'are you the river or am i' by Shabbir Banoobhai on pages 226-227 in *A New Century of South African Poetry* (available as an eReserve on the library website).

The poem begins: 'are you the river or am i/ do i flow into the sea or do you flow into me' (lines 1-2). As you can see, the words 'sea' and 'me' rhyme and appear in the same line. This is an example of internal rhyme. Similarly, in the final stanza we find: 'all the silt of my journeying/ all the salt of my yearning flows into you (lines 21-22). The poet uses this technique to show how the speaker and his beloved are joined closely together. The lines in the final stanza of this poem also contain an example of half-rhyme.

Activity

Based on the definition of half-rhyme, see if you can find an example in the final stanza of 'are you the river or am i'.

Imagery

Poems often try to bring to mind an object, a 'picture', or a certain idea. Imagery in poetry refers to the idea or picture that the poem makes you imagine when you read it.

Consider the poem 'Sometimes when it rains' by Gcina Mhlophe on pages 298-299 of *The New Century of South African Poetry* (available as an eReserve on the library website).

In the first five stanzas of this poem, the speaker remembers events or experiences from her childhood. She recollects these memories 'sometimes when it rains'; the rain inspires her to think about these things. Each stanza contains a different memory. In stanza three, for example, the speaker thinks of 'goats/ Running so fast from the rain/ While sheep seemed to enjoy it' (lines 14-16). This is a very straightforward image: The speaker remembers seeing goats running away from the rain, and sheep enjoying it. The image we imagine is very closely related to what the speaker tells us. We may think of this scene as being quite peaceful and serene too, as it evokes a simple life where a child is able to live closely with animals and observe their behaviour.

At the outset, this poem seems simple and straightforward, a representation of memories of a child. The images created are given to us in easy to understand language and without using poetic devices. However, as the poem progresses and its intention becomes clear, the language used becomes more complex, and the poet begins to use poetic devices to create the images that she wants to convey. The poem builds in complexity until the final stanza.

Line 55 reads: 'hail stones biting the grass'. If we think about it, hail stones cannot literally 'bite' – this is an example of personification (giving human qualities to a non-living entity). This personification creates a vivid image in our imagination. What happens when we bite something? We break it into pieces, like when you bite and chew an apple. Think about the last time you saw a hail storm. What does hail do to plants and other things? It almost 'bites' into things!

This image is continued in the next line when the speaker says: 'I can't help thinking they look like teeth' (line 56). Here she uses a simile to compare one thing to another: the hail stones look like teeth to her. Line 57 suggests that the teeth-like hail stones make her think of 'smiling friends', smiling widely with their teeth showing.

A **simile** is a figure of speech that compares one thing to another. It is a comparison that includes the use of the words 'like' or 'as' to compare two different things. For example, '[the hail stones] look like teeth'.

Finally, she wishes that 'everyone else/ Had something to smile about' (lines 58-59). These two lines compare her smiling friends to everyone else that she mentions in the poem – the 'people who have nowhere to go' (line 32), the 'mothers/ who give birth in squatter camps' (lines 38-39), the 'illegal' job seekers' (line 43), 'life prisoners' (line 50) – and wishes that these others had something to smile about.

Sometimes poets use figurative language to say that one thing is like another, and other times they wish to say that one thing IS another. This kind of comparison is different to a simile, because instead of making you imagine similarities between things, it suggests that these things are the same. This kind of poetic device is called a metaphor.

Figurative has the opposite meaning to **literal**. Literal is the actual, exact, or correct meaning. For example, if I say the earth is round, I mean it literally – the earth is a planet with a round shape. Figurative refers to the symbolic, metaphoric, or implied meaning of a word. For example, if I say ‘money makes the world go round’ I do not mean it literally! Money does not make the planet earth orbit on its axis – angular rotation does. Rather, ‘money makes the world go round’ is an expression that is meant figuratively because money is considered important to maintain economies and because of that, some people believe that money is what keeps our world functioning.

Read ‘Poems’ by Don MacLennan on page 42 of *Voices of this Land* (available as an eReserve on the library website).

The first thing you should notice when you read this poem is that it is about poems! The first four lines provide a metaphor that tell us what poems are according to the speaker: ‘Poems are nets of thought’ (line 1).

A **metaphor** is a figure of speech that compares two unlike things *without* using the words ‘like’ or ‘as’. It is also called a direct comparison. A metaphor is a type of comparison in which you, the reader, are expected to infer or understand the connection between the two things that it compares.

This metaphor – ‘poems are nets of thought’ – tries to create an image in our minds of what a poem actually is. We can imagine what a net looks like, perhaps one used to catch a butterfly or fish. In this case the nets are made of thoughts, and what do they catch? According to the poem, these nets are ‘put out to catch/ what can be sensed only/ in a corner of the mind’ (lines 2-4). Now we see that the speaker thinks of poems like nets of thought that catch things we sense in our minds, not an ‘actual’ object.

This entire image is not meant to be taken literally; this is figurative language. A poem is not literally a net, it is literally words put together in a certain pattern. The poet uses figurative language to make us use our imagination and try to think of poetry in a different way.

Activity

Do you like this image of a poem as a net of thoughts trying to catch things that we can only experience in our minds? What are poems to you? If you wrote a poem about what a poem is, what kind of imagery would you use to describe it?

Meaning

How do poets create meaning in poems? We have already looked at a number of ways in which they do this by using poetic devices. From now on, when you read a poem you will begin to think not only about what a poem means, but also how it creates meaning.

In the section on imagery, we discussed the difference between literal and figurative meaning. Sometimes words or phrases in poems can have more than one meaning. Poets use this technique of creating double meanings in poems for a particular effect.

Irony is related to double meaning in that it also deals with two sets of meanings. However, irony occurs when there is a difference between what a situation appears to be and what it actually is. Poets often use irony to express the opposite meaning of what they say in words.

Consider the poem 'City Johannesburg' by Mongane Wally Serote on pages 240-241 of *Seasons Come to Pass* (available as an eReserve on the library website).

The speaker in the poem addresses the city of Johannesburg and says: 'This way I salute you' (line 1). What is the meaning of the word '[salute](#)'? A 'salute' is a type of greeting often used in the army. It is a gesture used to show respect.

Activity

If we read and think about the rest of the poem, do you think that the speaker means to show respect to Johannesburg with his salute in line 1? Why, or why not?

The lines following line 1 read: 'My hand pulses to my back trousers pocket/ Or into my inner jacket pocket/ For my pass, my life,/ Jo'burg City' (lines 2-5).

We can see that the speaker's rehearsed movements imitate the action of a salute (raising your hand to your forehead) but instead of literally saluting the city, he greets the city by reaching for his pass book in his back pocket or jacket pocket. During apartheid, black people in South Africa were required to carry pass books whenever they left their designated residential areas for travel or work. The intention of the pass laws was to restrict the movement of black people and to force them to live in specific areas. This law also degraded and demeaned black people, and was used as a form of oppression.

Based on this information, we can deduce or presume that the speaker does not mean it when he says he 'salutes' Johannesburg with his pass book. He does not wish to show respect to the city. Rather, he is being ironic and means to say the opposite. Being forced to show the pass book to be able to enter the city is not a sign of the city's deserved respect; it is a sign of oppression.

In this case, knowing something about the historical context of the poem helps us to understand it better.

The **historical context** refers to the social, economic, political, and religious conditions that existed during a specific time period and in a specific place. For example, if you read the poem 'City Johannesburg' for the first time and you do not know anything about apartheid laws, you would still be able to understand the poem. However, your understanding becomes greatly enhanced by knowing something about pass laws, because now you can see that the speaker means it ironically when he 'salutes' the city and you understand why.

Poets can also use symbols to convey meaning in their works. Some symbols and their meanings are widely understood, for example the heart symbol  represents love, while others may be more personal or specific.

Symbolism refers to use of symbols or symbolic images to represent something else. In the poem 'City Johannesburg', for example, the city is symbolic of the oppression of the apartheid state.

In the poem, Johannesburg itself does not oppress the speaker, but rather what it stands for or represents, that is, the apartheid government's racist policies and the system of oppression. Johannesburg began as a settlement for gold mining and relied heavily on the labour of black people to make it successful. As mentioned before, black people were not allowed to live in Johannesburg during apartheid, only in specific segregated sections on the outskirts of the city.

We can say that in the poem, the city is a symbol of prosperity (eGoli, the place of gold) as well as oppression.

How to read a poem

Reading a poem once can be enjoyable, but reading it many times with a specific purpose or goal makes understanding and appreciating the poem much easier. Below are some useful tips to follow the first time you read a poem:

- Read the poem aloud;
- Read the punctuation marks and follow their rules: If there are no punctuation marks, keep reading. If there is a comma, pause in your reading. If there is full stop, exclamation, or question mark, read it as the end of a sentence;
- Read the sentences that form the poem, not line by line only (use the punctuation to guide you). Think of each sentence as a unit of meaning in the poem;
- Read on a literal level first to ensure that you understand the poem and all the important words before you begin to unpack it and look for other meanings;
- Read the poem again (and again and again).

There are two main ways in which to read a poem that you will read about in this unit: 'distant' reading and 'close' reading (as identified by Barry, 2013).

Distant reading

The first time you read a poem, you should try to get a sense of the overall meaning or effect that the poem tries to achieve. Even if some words or references are unclear, you will get a general sense of what the poem is about.

Step 1: Stages or phases of the poem

Poems usually contain different 'stages or phases' (Barry, 2013: 76). When you read a poem for the first time, see if you can identify a beginning phase (sort of like the 'exposition' in a novel), a middle phase that shows some kind of development, and a final phase that breaks away from the rest, or brings it all together. Once you have completed this task, write down your ideas so you can return to them as you work through the steps. It may help you to try to write some parts of the poem in your own words as part of this step. This is called paraphrasing. Paraphrasing a poem can help you to better understand it overall.

Step 2: The theme of the poem

Now read the poem again. Try to find the 'crux' of the poem, the central argument, or what it is 'about'. This is also called the theme. Try to identify the theme before you continue reading the poem again. Take notes as you go – this helps a lot to gain a good understanding of the poem!

Step 3: Patterns and repetition

Have another look, and see if you can identify some patterns in the poem that are obvious to you. Look for patterns (or repetition) in terms of the poetic devices discussed earlier in this unit – rhythm, rhyme, style, or length of lines, anything that catches your eye. Also make note of moments in the poem when these patterns are broken as this is often significant (Barry, 2013: 76).

Now that you have an overall understanding of the poem with some insight regarding what it is about, you are ready to unpack the poem in detail. This process is known as close reading.

Close reading

Close reading refers to a way of reading that considers the details of the poem very carefully. When you perform a close reading, you will analyse each word, phrase, line, unit of meaning, and punctuation mark in the poem, as well as the effect of the use of language. In this unit, we have introduced you to a number of tools that can assist you in doing a close reading. These tools are called poetic devices. You can also refer to the glossary at the back of the tutorial letter as a quick reference.

In this module, we use distant and close reading to understand and unpack poems. You begin by reading the poem from a distance, then go deeper to do a close reading, and return to read it from a distance once more to see how your understanding of the elements of the poem affect your understanding of the poem overall.

Let us look at an example of one of the poems we have already discussed in this unit and put these reading techniques to the test. Return to the poem 'Whales' by Kelwyn Sole (*The New Century of South African Poetry*, p. 469, available as an eReserve on the library website).

Distant reading

Step 1: Stages or phases of the poem

The first section or phase of the poem is quite short. We know that the poem is about whales. We also know that 'their lugubriousness' is important, because the poet dedicates an entire stanza to this one line. There is an oxymoron in stanza two that describes the whales as 'dainty' and 'huge' at the same time.

The next phase or section of the poem introduces another idea with the words 'an oil of laughter' (line 4) and the single word 'beached' (line 5). We now start to see that there is more to this description of whales than their physical appearance. Instead, the focus moves to the state of the beached whales on shores filled with litter. We start to get a sense of decay, sadness, and death.

In the final two stanzas, the whales are 'deep in the valleys of the oceans' (line 10), far away from humans ('aquamarine with distance', line 11). The description of the whales change – they have 'clown faces' (line 12) now; they 'dance' (line 13) and move with 'ease' (line 14) and 'grace' (line 15).

Step 2: The theme of the poem

The poem seems to be about the impact of humans on the environment and specifically the oceans and its animals. It is also about death and decay and in that sense, the circle of life. Whales beach themselves on the shores where they decay. Far out in the oceans, untouched by human influence, they seem happy.

Step 3: Patterns and repetition

The poem does not have a specific rhyme scheme or follow a definite style. It is an example of free verse. The poet seems to create a slow rhythm in the poem by using words with multiple syllables like 'lugubriousness', 'daintiness', 'infinity', 'hermeneutic', [aquamarine](#), and so forth. Reading these words slows down the pace of the poem.

Although the poem seems to be about whales and most of it describes their behaviour, there is a break in this pattern in line 9 where the speaker introduces himself with the words 'my desire'. This is a strange break in the description, and leaves the reader wondering what a human and his desire is doing in a scene depicting the death of a whale. Perhaps that is the point the poet

is trying to make – that humans, their desires, their ‘condoms and crumpled valentines’ (line 7) are out of place in this scene.

Close reading

Activities to help you unpack the poem

- Revise your understanding of the terms diction, form and structure, imagery, rhythm and rhyme, as well as meaning, as discussed in this unit. Write short definitions of each of these in your activity journal.
- Do you think the title of the poem is important? Why, or why not?
- Print out a copy of the poem, ‘Whales’, and circle or underline all of the poetic devices that you can find. In your activity journal, write notes about how each of the poetic devices that you have identified contributes to the meaning of the poem. This is how you should study all of your prescribed poems in preparation for the examination. Note that Tutorial Letter 102 provides you with specific questions that will guide you in your study of each poem. When you have made your notes on ‘Whales’, compare your notes to the section below.

Diction

The poet uses a number of words that are unfamiliar yet descriptive. Read through the notes on his use of diction in the earlier discussion in this unit.

Tone and mood

Earlier in this unit, we explained that the speaker’s tone is serious as he wants to convey the gravity of his message that we need to take better care of our oceans. The speaker’s tone also seems to be respectful of the massive sea creatures. He describes the whales in a way that makes them seem graceful and peaceful despite their massive size.

The mood of the poem changes as the poem progresses. At the start of the poem, the whales are described as looking or sounding mournful (‘lugubriousness’, line 1) and the scene on the beach is one of death and decay as the whales are beached on the shore. The speaker describes the horrible smell of the decaying corpse (‘fetid’, line 8) and the whale seems almost misplaced among the ‘condoms and crumpled valentines’ (line 7) of human life.

This changes in the final two stanzas. The whales, ‘deep in the valleys of the oceans/ aquamarine with distance’ (lines 10-11), far away from human interference and pollution, seem happy as they ‘dance’ (line 13) and glide through the oceans with ‘grace’ (line 15).

Form and structure

This is an example of free verse. The poem does not have a particular structure or rhyme scheme. It does not follow a specific pattern. What we can identify, however, is that the poet makes use of enjambment. If we read the poem with this in mind, it can be divided into three sentences, each containing a different description of the whales.

Who is the speaker in this poem? That remains unclear. Most of the poem is a description of whales, but in line 9 we see that ‘my desire scuttles’. Who is this person? And how does their desire fit in with the rest of the poem?

The answer remains unclear, as the poem contains too little information to help us decipher this reference. We can only speculate that perhaps this is the point that the poet is trying to make: Perhaps this out-of-place mention of a first person in the middle of the poem suggests how out-of-place humans are in the bigger picture of things. The only human references in the poem are

references to litter on the beach ('condoms and crumpled valentines') and 'desire' of someone who seems to want to get away from the smelly corpse of the whale.

Imagery

The imagery in this poem focuses on descriptions of whales in different scenarios. In the first stanza of the poem, the poet mentions 'their lugubriousness' (line 1).

In the next stanza, he uses an oxymoron to describe them as both huge and dainty. Then in stanza three, we are told that the whales are 'beached/ by waves' (lines 5-6) on shores to decay and be taken apart. The image created in our imagination is that of massive whales beached on shores filled with litter ('among condoms and crumpled valentines' line 7).

To get rid of whale carcasses, humans often use explosives. This is suggested by the word 'boomed' in line 8. The reader also gets the impression that the beached whales smell awful because the poet uses the word 'fetid' (line 8).

In the final part of the poem, the speaker describes the whales as they appear out in the ocean, untouched by human influence. Here they have 'clown faces' (line 12), they 'dance' (line 13), and they move with 'grace' (line 15). The final lines suggest that despite storms that may occur on the surface of the ocean – the place where humans can observe things – these whales continue to live playfully and gracefully.

Rhythm and rhyme

The poet creates rhythm in the poem by using words that contain multiple syllables, such as 'lugubriousness' (line 1), 'daintiness' (line 2), 'infinity' (line 3), 'hermeneutic' (line 6), 'valentines' (line 7), 'aquamarine' (line 11), 'ponderous' (line 14). These words create a slow pace when reading the poem, which contributes to the serious tone of the poem.

There are also a few examples of alliteration in the poem: 'huge' and 'hung' (lines 2-3); 'condoms' and 'crumpled' (line 7); 'dance' and 'display' (line 13); 'grace' and 'glides' (lines 15-16); 'surface' and 'storms' (line 17). The use of alliteration creates a steady pace in the poem overall.

Title of the poem

Finally, it seems important to talk about the title of the poem now that we have analysed it as a whole. In this case, the title is very important. Without it, we would not know what the poet is speaking about! Have another look at the poem and cover the title with your finger. Would you have known that the poem is about whales without the title for assistance? Perhaps, because there are some hints in the poem. However, the title plays an important function here in that it tells us what the poet describes in the poem.

Activity

Now that we have performed a structured close reading of 'Whales', perform a similar close reading of 'Bring the statues back' (page 93 of *Voices from this Land*, available as an eReserve on the library website). Use the same headings that we used in our analysis of 'Whales'.

How to write about poetry

Writing *about* poetry is not that different to writing poetry. To be able to write a poem, you need to use language in a creative and imaginative way to make your reader see or understand something in a particular way. In a sense, you manipulate language to express a thought or

idea, or to convey a certain message. When writing *about* a poem you also try to use language to express a thought or idea and to make your reader understand your viewpoint in the same way that poets use language.

The difference is, however, that writing about poetry expresses a certain argument. As we explain in Unit 1, an argument is a discussion that explains your ideas systematically and that provides evidence and logical reasoning to support or justify your ideas. When we write about poetry, we use tools, such as the poetic devices that we have discussed, to analyse and interpret texts. We have to write in a way that shows our readers that we not only understand the poem, but that we have certain ideas about it based on the evidence available in the poem itself.

In later years of your studies, you will be asked to perform a line-by-line analysis of a poem, commenting on poetic devices as they come up in the poem, and explaining how each device contributes to the meaning of the poem. At first year level, we provide you with questions that focus your attention on specific parts of the poem, and you are required to respond in a short properly structured paragraph.

Did you know?

When you write the title of a poem, you should use 'quotation marks' to indicate that it is a title. You can use either 'single' or "double" quotation marks, as long as you are consistent. For example, in this tutorial letter we prefer to use single quotation marks throughout, so you will see that titles of poems appear like this: 'Whales'. When you write about a short story, you also use quotation marks for the title of the story itself, and the title of the collection is printed in *italics*. The titles of novels or plays are also printed in italics. If you are writing an assignment by hand, you should underline the title of a short story or poetry collection, novel, or play.

Academic writing conventions

Academic writing tends to be more formal than the writing you may find in other forms of media. That is because academic writing is a form of scientific enquiry. Since you want to substantiate or support an argument with logical evidence when you write an academic essay or even a paragraph, you usually need to use an official, impersonal and unemotional tone.

As we explain in Unit 1, your opinion is very important when you perform an academic investigation of a text, but your opinion needs to be informed by facts or examples that support your ideas. In other words, you need to provide a scholarly opinion rather than an instinctive opinion. It is not enough to say simply that something is the case, you need to show your reader why you think so by means of evidence taken from the text and explaining the importance of this evidence. Examples and evidence make for a much more convincing argument in your essay; without this, you are merely expressing a personal opinion.

Think about it: If it is a hot summer's day and someone tells you that it has started to snow outside, you may not immediately believe them. If they say 'No really, I promise', you still may not believe them. But if they show you the snowflakes on their clothing, or a photograph of the snow that they have just taken, or the weather forecast on their phone, you might start to believe them. And then you might go outside and see that they were right!

In the same way, you need to provide evidence that supports your interpretation of a poem. However, interpreting literature is a little different to describing the weather. In our example above, it is either snowing or it is not – there is little space for debate once good evidence has been presented – but when it comes to literature there are often multiple possible interpretations. You have to make a case for your interpretation by paying close attention to

diction and other literary devices in the poem, and by making sure that you read each word in the context of the poem as a whole.

How to formulate an argument

To form an argument, you need to begin with an idea or an opinion. Your idea or opinion may be based on a specific word you read in the poem, or the rhythm of the poem when you read it, or even your intuition. You then need to test your idea or opinion by seeing if you can find evidence to support it.

Before you can present your argument to your reader, you need to find evidence in the text to support your argument. You need to go back to the poem and look for the particular word or phrase, or identify the rhythm, or show your reader what it is in the poem that makes you feel a certain way when you read the poem.

Here close reading is critical. By carefully considering the words in the poem and how they have been put together, you can get a better sense of how to explain to someone else why and how you formed your opinion. If you cannot find logical evidence to support an idea or opinion, you should not include the idea as part of your argument.

It can be useful to question yourself once you have written something, as if you are a critic of your own work. After you make a statement, look at what you have written and ask yourself 'why'? The motivation should be part of what you have written down, because you will not be there to explain to your lecturer why you said something in an assignment or an exam! You will need to explain your ideas carefully in your writing to ensure that your reader understands your point of view.

How to write a paragraph

To refresh your memory, refer to the section 'How do we write about literature?' in Unit 1. Focus specifically on the sections entitled 'Engaging with the question', 'The paragraph', 'The topic sentence', 'The argument', 'Incorporating quotations', and 'Using secondary sources in your assignment' before you continue to read the rest of this unit.

How to answer questions in an assignment or examination

Let us consider some examples of questions you may find in an assignment or examination paper. The questions below are based on the poem 'Whales' that we have already discussed in this unit. Try to answer them on your own first before looking at the answers that follow.

Remember to write your responses in full sentences and in properly structured paragraphs. One word answers will not be marked.

Example questions

1. Identify an oxymoron in the poem and explain its meaning.
2. Discuss the use of sound devices in the poem.
3. What does the word 'dance' (line 13) tell you about the speaker's attitude towards the whales?
4. Explain the theme of the poem. Quote from the poem to justify your answer.
5. What does the poem tell us about nature and wildlife conservation?

Suggestions and guidelines for answers

NOTE: If your answers are not written in full sentences or not supported with proof from the text, you will not receive any marks. While the explanations below make use of bullet points in order to outline the aspects of each question more clearly, your answers should be written in paragraph form and you should not make use of bullet points.

Question 1

To answer this question, it is important that you:

- Give the definition of the term: An oxymoron is a figure of speech that uses words together that seem to contradict one another.
- Give an example from the text and explain what it means: An example from the poem 'Whales' is '[t]he daintiness of huge bellies' (line 2). The word 'daintiness' means delicate or petite, while 'huge' means very big. These two words together seem to have opposite meanings. They serve to highlight the idea that the whales are graceful in spite of the fact that they are huge. Note that the word 'grace' actually appears in the poem line 15 – this can be used as additional evidence to support our interpretation of the oxymoron.

Question 2

To answer this question, you must include the following information:

- An example of a sound device from the poem and its definition: This poem uses the sound device known as alliteration. Alliteration refers to the repetition of the consonant sounds at the beginning of words that appear close to each other in lines of the poem.
- A few examples from the poem: 'huge' (line 2) and 'hung' (line 3), as well as 'condoms' (line 7) and 'crumpled' (line 7), and so forth. (You can list any relevant examples, as long as they are the examples of the correct device to show that you know what it means and that you can find it in a poem.)
- A comment on the effect of the use of sound devices: In this poem, the poet does not use a formal rhyme scheme. Instead, he uses sound devices such as this example of alliteration to create rhythm in the poem.

Question 3

When answering this question, you must first find the quoted word in the poem. Once you have found it, read the poem again, bearing in mind what the speaker's attitude may be towards the whales. The speaker seems to think that whales are happier out at sea, in the wild, untouched by human interference. The speaker describes the whales as appearing gloomy at the beginning of the poem by means of the word 'lugubriousness' (line 1), but when he uses the word 'dance' in line 13, he is trying to tell us that the whales are happy and free. There is a contrast between the beached whales at the beginning of the poem, and the graceful whales at the end. The speaker seems to admire the whales. He uses words that convey their elegant movements such as 'dance' (line 13), 'ease' (line 14) and grace (line 15). (Notice how we have quoted words from the poem here to support our interpretation.)

Question 4

In your answer, you should discuss the overall theme of the poem, what it is 'about', based on your reading and understanding of it. For example: The poem seems to be about the impact of humans on the environment and specifically the oceans and its animals. This is made clear by the mention of litter on the beach where the whales go to die. The poem is also about death and decay. Whales beach themselves on the shores where they die and decay. Far out in the oceans, untouched by human influence, they seem happy.

Question 5

To answer this question, you must engage with the ideas presented in the poem. Keep in mind that you cannot simply give an opinion without giving a reason for our answers!

For example: The poem creates a mournful mood when it discusses the beached whales and human pollution. Thus, the poem suggests that we should take better care of our oceans and it promotes the conservation of nature. The poem also emphasises the beauty and grace of the whales that are untouched by human interference. In this way, the poem seems to suggest that these creatures are wonderful and worthy of preserving.

This unit has showed you the different ways in which language is used to convey meaning in the genre of poetry. You have become familiar with the literary elements that help to express a poem's overall theme or message. You have also seen how to write about poetry using solid argumentation and the correct academic conventions. We hope that this unit has deepened your appreciation of poetry and that it inspires you to read and enjoy more poems on your own in future!

Unit 3: The short story

A guide to this unit

In this unit, you:

- be exposed to the formal characteristics that distinguish the short story genre
- read and analyse three Southern African short stories written in English
- develop the skills required to read, analyse, and appreciate any short story on your own
- become familiar with a variety of literary terms such as 'setting', 'characterisation', 'narration', 'plot', and 'theme'
- familiarise yourself with the ways in which the short story genre functions as a building block that will aid you in your study of the novel.

Activity

Answer the following questions in your activity journal:

- Did you read any short stories during your high school studies? If yes, which ones?
- Have you read any short stories since then? Why, or why not?
- In what way do you think that reading a short story is different to reading a novel?

When you read a novel, you commit to spending many hours with the imaginary world of a **text**. While this commitment offers countless rewards, many students feel intimidated by the imagined difficulty of this task. In contrast, reading a short story provides similar pleasures to reading a novel but allows you the luxury of escaping to another world for a short period.

The term '**text**' is often used as a synonym for 'literary work'.

As the name of the genre suggests, the short story is a shorter work of fiction that you can read in one sitting. This means that you could start and finish reading a short story during your commute to work, over a particularly long cup of tea or coffee, or before you go to bed. Unit 4 discusses the characteristics of a novel in much more detail. For now, the main differences between a novel and a short story are summarised in the table below. Do not worry if some of the terms used in this table are unfamiliar to you. We explore them in more detail over the course of this unit.

The novel	The short story
usually requires more time to read	can be read in one sitting
moves across a variety of spaces and times	generally takes place in one location and time
contains a larger number of characters	features a limited number of characters
is characterised by a more complex plot	zooms in on one main incident or plot point
draws together an assortment of themes	explores one overarching theme
presents 'experience'	presents 'an experience'

As you can see, novels and short stories have a lot in common. Short stories make use of many of the same literary devices required to understand longer narratives, but they do so within a more manageable space. This means that they are a useful teaching and learning tool that will

allow you to become familiar with the language of analysis before you move on to lengthier texts. Unlike poetry, short stories and novels are both written in **prose**.

Prose refers to ordinary spoken or written language, which does not make use of a set rhythm or rhyme scheme.

The short stories we examine in detail in this unit are:

- 'I will not apologise' by Maire Fisher
- 'Sethunya Likes Girls Better' by Wame Molehfe
- 'I Could Have Loved Gold' by Maureen Isaacson

The list of the remainder of the short stories to be studied in this module are available in Tutorial Letter 102, along with guided exercises to aid you in your analysis.

Activity

Write a paragraph in which you try to predict what each of these stories is about using only on their titles to guide you.

Over the course of this unit, we look at each of these stories in a lot of detail and use them to explore the following literary terms:

- Plot
- Setting
- Characterisation
- Narration
- Theme

Before we can move on to in-depth analysis, it is important that you read each of the abovementioned short stories in detail. What does 'reading in detail' mean? Firstly, it definitely means reading something more than once. Secondly, it implies engaging with more than simply what the text is 'about'. This means thinking about *how* the author conveys meaning as well as *why* this is important. While reading may seem only to involve one action, reading critically and for comprehension is a skill that you need to develop as a student of literature.

Below are some ideas on how you can improve your reading skills while you work through this unit:

- Look at the title of the short story and see if you can predict what the story will be about.
- Read the story once, from beginning to end, without worrying about elements that you may not understand. As you do so, take note of the following: Who is telling the story? Where and when does the story take place?
- Summarise what the story is about in two or three sentences, paying particular attention to the changes that occur between the beginning and the end.
- Read the story again. Pay attention to the language used by the author: Is the language easy to understand or is it more complex?
- Use a pencil to underline words you do not understand and look up the meaning of these words in a dictionary or online.
- Think about what you think the main message of the story is.

After you have familiarised yourself with each short story in this way, you are ready to begin analysing it in detail. The section that follows shows you how to do so, by looking at plot, setting, characterisation, narration and theme.

Setting

Activity

Write a paragraph in which you describe where you are right now. You may want to write about your immediate physical surroundings: What do you see around you? Are you indoors or outdoors? Are you at home or at work? You could also describe your neighbourhood, your town, or even your country. Also think about the significance of today's date: Is it an ordinary day or does it have some kind of special importance to you? What kinds of things are happening in your country at the moment that are influencing your experience of today?

An author always has to position her or his characters in a specific space and at a particular moment in time. Where and when the characters exist have an impact on the choices they make as well as on the options available to them in the story. We call this element of fiction the **setting**.

Setting refers to the general location in which a story unfolds as well as to the historical significance of when the story is set. Remember that there is a difference between when and where a story is *set* and when and where a story was *written*. For example, a Zimbabwean author writing in 2020 can choose to write a story that is set in South Africa in the 1950s. An author writing in 2020 may even choose to imagine what the world will look like in 2099.

While the biographical details of an author definitely influence the ways in which she or he sees the world, it is important that you focus on the story-world presented in her or his work. This means that you need to pay attention to what happens in the story in order to determine its setting.

Let us turn to 'I Could Have Loved Gold' by Maureen Isaacson as an example of the above (available as an eReserve on the library website). Read the short story again, paying attention to clues that give an indication of where and when the story is set. Remember that it is not enough simply to find out *where* and *when* the story takes place. You also need to think about what this implies in relation to what the story is about and what **message** the author is trying to convey.

When we refer to a **message** that is being conveyed in a story, we do not mean this in a moral sense. In other words, the message of a story does not have to be some kind of "lesson" that we as readers should "learn" from the story. The message of a story rather refers to the deeper meaning of a story that might make us think differently about something in our world.

The second paragraph of the story already indicates that the narrative takes place in a wealthy neighbourhood in Johannesburg when the narrator refers to the 'spotless order of [their] Houghton mansion' (Isaacson, 2002: 792). Several other phrases tell us more about this mansion and the lifestyle of the family living in it: the narrator speaks of their 'many servants', their 'gold plates and vases' and 'gold-bound books' (Isaacson, 2002: 793). Here, the setting of the story tells us that the family leads a privileged life of luxury.

Further descriptions of the house, however, seem to suggest that the family is not as happy as one would expect. The narrator says that the house '[echoes](#) with a drab silence' and has an 'odourless shine' (Isaacson, 2002: 793). If something is 'drab', it is uninteresting and lacking in brightness. Furthermore, even though the surfaces of the house are polished, it does not smell of anything. This tells us that, despite the size and extravagance of the mansion, it has neither homeliness nor warmth. In this way, the setting of the story tells us more about how we should read the characters and hints at what message the author is trying to convey.

This main message becomes clearer when one considers the other space mentioned in the story: Sophiatown in Johannesburg.

Did you know?

During apartheid, Sophiatown was a vibrant, multiracial neighbourhood where artists, writers, musicians, and journalists gathered to listen to jazz and talk about politics. Hugh Masekela, one of South Africa's most famous jazz musicians, frequently visited and performed at venues in Sophiatown. (Watch Masekela perform in later years [here](#).)

In the 1950s, however, the apartheid government reclassified it as a zone designated for white people only, renaming it 'Triomf' (Afrikaans for 'triumph'). Finally, in 2006, the neighbourhood's original name was formally reinstituted. Sophiatown as an urban space also features in *Small Things*, the novel that is discussed in Unit 4.

Activity

Visit a library or use the Internet to find more information about the history of Sophiatown. Write a letter in which you tell a friend from another country the most interesting facts that you have read about this area in South Africa.



Figure 1: The Sophiatown Heritage and Cultural Centre

Image licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license.
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:DrXumasHouse.jpg>

While the action that unfolds in 'I Could Have Loved Gold' never moves beyond the confines of the Houghton mansion, the narrator's Aunt Sal tells stories of this exciting and vibrant neighbourhood whenever she visits the family. This is significant for two reasons. Firstly, it provides a clue as to when the short story is set. We know that Aunt Sal visits the neighbourhood before its destruction because near the end of the story she says that the '[shebeens](#) and the [bioscopes](#) and the dancehalls were empty' (Isaacson, 2002: 796) when she was last there. This means we can guess that the story must be set in the 1950s, as this was when Sophiatown was demolished.

Secondly, the author's use of Sophiatown as a point of reference adds to the message she wants to convey. Look at Aunt Sal's descriptions of the neighbourhood and contrast them with the narrator's descriptions of the Houghton mansion: 'Into the spotless order of our Houghton mansion, Aunt Sal would bring the smoke and jazz of the streets of Sophiatown. She vibrated with the sax of [Kippie Moeketsi](#) and the huskiness of [Dolly Rathebe](#)' (Isaacson, 2002: 792). Despite the family's extreme financial privilege, the Houghton mansion is a cold, uninviting, and lifeless space whereas Sophiatown appears to be full of energy and creativity. We return to this contrast later on in the unit, under the section on theme. For now, think about what role Aunt Sal plays in relation to each of the family members in the story.

Activity

Write a paragraph or two on the significance of setting in 'Sethunya Likes Girls Better' and 'I will not apologise!'. Remember that in some short stories the setting is described in more detail and is more significant than in others. In which of the three prescribed stories do you think the setting is most important? Motivate your answer.

Important things to remember about setting:

- Setting refers both to the general location in which the story is set as well as to the historical era in which the story takes place.
- An author's use of setting can tell you more about the characters in a story and can contribute to its main message or theme.

Characterisation

Activity

In your activity journal, write the name of a person you know well. This could be a family member, a colleague, or a friend. Write a paragraph in which you describe this person.

What kinds of words have you used in your description? You may have written about their physical appearance, discussed their personality, or explained events in their life that have contributed to how you view them. With this in mind, read the section on characterisation below.

Characters in fiction are much like the people you encounter and know in your everyday life: some are complex and others are simple, some you know very well and others you do not know at all. Like people, some characters stay the same for the duration of your knowing them while others undergo a period of growth or a change because of the circumstances in which they find themselves.

An author can choose to tell the reader more about a character directly or by describing their thoughts and actions, leaving the reader to form her or his own opinion of them. It is your job, as an attentive reader, to notice these clues in order to understand how the author intends for you to view a character.

When encountering a character in a story for the first time, you should ask yourself some of the following questions:

- Is this character the one telling the story?
- How important a role do they play in the narrative?
- Are they old or are they young?
- Are they male or are they female?
- What kinds of clothes do they wear?

- Are they educated or uneducated?
- How do they speak?
- What can you deduce about their economic status?
- What are the distinguishing features of their personality?
- How do they relate to the other characters in the story?
- Are they experiencing some kind of inner turmoil or conflict?
- Do they stay the same over the course of the story, or do they undergo change?

As you consider these questions, look for words that appear in the short story that provide evidence for your answers. You need to be able to show that you are basing your opinion of a character on information provided by the author. Try to imagine why you think the author has chosen to represent the character in a particular way. Finally, consider how the character's representation relates to the overall message of the short story. Thinking in this way is an important skill you need to develop as a student of literature as it allows you to draw logical connections between what is being said, how it is being said and, most importantly, why it is being said.

Using the above questions as a starting point, let us look at 'I will not apologise!' by Maire Fisher (available as an eReserve on the library website), and draw up a character table of Bonita:

Prompt	Response	Evidence
Is this character the one telling the story?	Yes.	She uses the word 'I'.
How important a role do they play in the narrative?	She plays a large role.	Not only does she tell the story, but she is also the one causing the action.
Are they male or are they female?	Female.	Her name is a female name and her grandmother talks about her using tampons.
Are they old or are they young?	Young, probably a teenager.	She talks about playing with her friends and doing homework for school. Her grandmother mentions that she is undergoing puberty.
What kinds of clothes do they wear?	We do not know.	This suggests that the author has not chosen this technique to tell us something about the character.
Are they educated or uneducated?	She is most probably a high school student.	She discusses completing homework assignments.
How do they speak?	She speaks in an informal register.	She uses words such as 'gross', 'chilling', and 'weird'.
What can you deduce about their economic status?	The family seems not to experience significant financial difficulties.	They can afford to support the grandmother.
What are the distinguishing features of their	She is loyal.	She defends her mother when her grandmother accuses her of having

personality?	She is stubborn.	trapped her father in marriage. She refuses to apologise.
How do they relate to the other characters in the story?	She has a good relationship with her parents. She has a bad relationship with her grandmother.	She refers to open and honest conversations she has had with them. She cannot tolerate the insensitive things her grandmother says about her mother.
Are they experiencing some kind of inner turmoil or conflict?	Yes.	She wants to be patient with her grandmother but finds it difficult to do so.
Do they stay the same over the course of the story or do they undergo change?	She changes over the course of the story.	Initially, she keeps quiet when her grandmother insults her mother, but at the end, she defends her mother.

After thinking about the character of Bonita in this way, you should have a much clearer picture of her in your mind. Remember that not all the characters in a story are described in the same amount of detail. This is because stories focus on main characters who interact with a number of minor characters. The author usually uses the main character to convey the message of the story.

Based on the analysis of Bonita's character above, what kind of message do you think the author is trying to convey? This main message is referred to as the theme of the story. We return to the idea of theme later on in this unit.

Similarly, main characters usually undergo a process of growth over the course of the story. Characters who change in this way are called 'round' characters. Very often, minor characters do not experience any change or growth and function mostly in a supportive role to the main character. We refer to this kind of character as a 'flat' character.

Activity

In your activity journal, draw up and complete a similar character table for Bonita's grandmother as well as for the characters in 'Sethunya Likes Girls Better' and 'I Could Have Loved Gold'. You will notice that the narrator in 'I Could Have Loved Gold' does not have a name. You can simply refer to her as 'the narrator'.

Remember that being able to draw up a character table is a useful way to come to a better understanding of the characters in a short story. Keep in mind, though, that you should do this as you analyse your short stories in preparation for the assignment and examination. Your assessments will not require you to draw up such tables.

Important things to remember about characterisation:

- The author can employ a variety of techniques to make a character more vivid and lifelike.

- Major characters are described in a lot of detail and are the primary focus of the story. Minor characters are not represented with as much nuance, often only occupying a supportive role in relation to the main characters.
- Round characters undergo a process of growth while flat characters do not change as the story progresses.
- Characterisation helps to convey the main message of the text.

Plot

Activity

Think about your favourite film. Write a paragraph in which you explain what happens in the film.

Look at what you have written. Did you write down every single thing that happens? Why, or why not? Read your paragraph again and think about why you chose the particular elements that you selected.

The term **plot** refers to significant events in a work of fiction as well as to the relationship between these events. In other words, the plot of a story is the cause-and-effect link that drives the action in a narrative. This is in contrast to the **story** which is the entire work as a whole and includes each event that is described.

A good **analogy** that illustrates these ideas is the following: Imagine that a friend asks you over lunch how your morning had been. You would not answer: 'I woke up. I lay in bed for five minutes. I did not eat breakfast. Then I had a quick shower. I drove to work and found that I had forgotten to prepare for an important meeting' and so on. Instead, you would say something like: 'When I got to work this morning, I realised that I had forgotten to prepare for an important meeting! I had to ask my colleague for help, but we finished the work just in time.' The first example covers your morning as a whole and contains information that is not entirely relevant to the question your friend asked. This is similar to the concept of a story. In the second example, you chose the most significant moment in your morning and explained what effect this event had on what came next. This functions in the same way as a plot in fiction.

An **analogy** is a comparison of one thing to another. It is used to either clarify or explain an unfamiliar concept or system by comparing it to a familiar concept or system. An analogy is far more complex a comparison than a metaphor or simile, and so it is different from those. The above explanation of the difference between plot and story is an example of an analogy.

In Unit 4, you read about the plot structure of novels in detail. Because short stories are so much shorter than novels, however, they may not contain or develop all of these elements in as much detail. In this section, we focus on the plot elements that are most commonly found in short stories: conflict, climax, and resolution. While a word like 'conflict' may seem like a negative word when we use it in our everyday lives, it takes on a very specific meaning when describing plot elements in fiction.

We all enjoy stories. Whether it is a book we read, or a television show or film that we watch, we want to know what is going to happen next and how a story will end. But why are we so interested in knowing what happens next? What makes it possible for a story to draw us in to want to know how it progresses? The answer to this is **tension**, which is sometimes also referred to as **conflict**. The tension in a story's plot will often be due to a character conflicting with the society he or she lives in (Byrne et al., 2013: 105). The character might feel oppressed

by, trapped in, or in conflict with certain elements of their society, and the quest to resolve this tension is what drives the plot forward. The character may also be undergoing an internal conflict where they are attempting to come to terms with a personal struggle.

The **climax** in a plot is the culmination of the conflict. This could be the point where a character has a confrontation with those with whom they had been clashing or the moment where a character is forced to make the decision with which they had been battling. Importantly, the climax is usually followed by a resolution of some kind, whether it is of a positive or a negative nature.

The **resolution** of a plot is the stage where all the loose ends are tied off. Think of the resolution as being a result of or response to what occurs during the climax. Remember that the resolution of a narrative does not mean it has a happy ending or necessarily teaches us something about right or wrong. Sometimes a story might have a resolution, but the nature of that resolution might leave us as readers curious or uncomfortable about something, leading to us think about something in a new way or think about something we have not thought before.

Sometimes, though, the tension a character experiences can also be internal, meaning that they have something unresolved within themselves, and seeking to settle this internal conflict is what advances the plot (Byrne et al. 2013: 106). Often, there will also be a link between external and internal sources of conflict. Being able to identify the source(s) of conflict in a text is important, because it helps us to understand the story and characters better.

Activity

'I will not apologise!' illustrates the ideas discussed above very clearly. Write a few sentences that outline the plot of this short story and then identify the conflict and the climax. What kind of resolution results from the climax?

While the plot of 'I will not apologise!' is simple and easy to understand, the plot of 'Sethunya Likes Girls Better' is slightly more complex. We examine the plot structure of this short story in more detail below.

Activity

Look back in your journal at the activity in which you tried to predict what each story will be about based on their titles. You may have guessed that 'Sethunya Likes Girls Better' deals with sexual orientation. The term LGBTQI+ refers to the community of people who identify as being lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, queer, or intersex. Go to the library or use the Internet to find more information on this group of people and write a paragraph that outlines your findings. This [video](#) is a good starting point for your search.

The plot structure of 'Sethunya Likes Girls Better' is more complex because the author makes use of a technique called **flashbacks**.

A **flashback** occurs when the narrator in the present time of the story thinks back and begins describing events in the past. Very often, these events provide the reader with more insight into the conflict experienced by the character in the present time of the story. This kind of plot is not chronological.

Chronology refers to the way in which we experience time in real life: time moves forwards and not backwards.

Look at the table below to see how the author makes use of flashbacks to convey the meaning of this story.

Event	Time	Significance
Sethunya describes a newspaper article she reads about a chimpanzee called Johnnie who escapes from a zoo.	While this is written in the past tense, it occurs in the present time of the story (the time in which the action occurs).	Sethunya views this chimpanzee as a symbol for the ways in which she feels trapped in her life.
From the second paragraph on page 140 to the last paragraph on page 142, she describes her wedding day as well as the traditional marriage ceremonies that took place.	This is a flashback, as the plot jumps back further into the past of the story.	Her memories here centre on Thato's family instructing her on the role of a woman in a marriage, especially the ways in which a wife should be subservient to her husband. See if you can find specific words in the story that substantiate this.
In the first paragraph on page 143, Sethunya imagines the game warden shooting Johnnie, the chimpanzee.	Here the plot moves forward, back to the present time of the story.	Think about why the author chose to sandwich Sethunya's wedding day between two descriptions of the chimpanzee: one in which he escapes and the other in which he is shot. Consider carefully about what a zoo represents: animals in captivity are trapped and robbed of their free will. Even if they are well-kept, safe, looked-after and fed, they are removed from their natural habitat. What does this tell you about how Sethunya views her marriage?
From the second paragraph on page 143 until the end of the first paragraph on page 144, Sethunya describes lying in bed with Thato while thinking about Johnnie the chimpanzee.	This event follows on from what is described above and provides us with more information on why Sethunya cannot stop thinking about Johnnie.	This section tells us more about why Sethunya feels a kinship with the chimpanzee. She says that '[s]he had prayed to feel anything other than the love of a brother for her husband, but she couldn't'. Her husband cannot understand why Johnnie's death upset her but 'she was fine with that because otherwise he was a good husband: patient and kind and generous. He made her feel safe'. Think about what we discussed above about animals kept in captivity in a zoo. How does this relate to Sethunya's description of

		her marriage?
In the second paragraph on page 144 until the end of page 145, Sethunya remembers the close friendship she had with a girl named Kgomotso, when they were both young girls. She describes kissing Kgomotso, her mother finding out and forbidding her from seeing her friend again, as well as confessing about her desire to a priest.	Here, this flashback moves further backwards in time from Sethunya's wedding day.	The reason why Sethunya feels trapped in her marriage is revealed: she is sexually attracted to women and not to men. Why do you think she married Thato despite this? Consider how her mother, the community and the priest react to her kissing Kgomotso.
The final sections of the story describe Sethunya's marriage to Thato.	This section describes the present time of the story.	Read this section carefully and consider whether Sethunya is happy in her marriage. Find sentences and phrases that support your opinion.
The last two sentences of the story refer back to its title.	This occurs in the present.	Here the author reinforces the main message or the theme of the short story. In your own words, write a paragraph in your activity journal in which you explain what this main message is.

As this table illustrates, Wame Molefhe makes use of flashbacks in 'Sethunya Likes Girls Better' to provide the reader with more insight into Sethunya's thoughts and motivations in the present time of the story. Let us consider the plot elements of this short story in relation to conflict, climax and resolution.

The conflict here takes two forms: the first is internal and the second is external. Sethunya's inner-conflict relates to her sexual attraction to women and her attempts at ignoring her sexual orientation. The external conflict informs her inner-conflict and involves the community's disapproval of her sexual desires. The community thinks that lesbian desire is shameful and Sethunya internalises this perception, despite her conflicting impulses. Does the story suggest that she experiences any conflict with Thato? He is represented as a good husband who loves and cares for his wife. Ironically, however, this only serves to make Sethunya's inner-conflict more difficult.

While this short story demonstrates various forms of conflict, it does not present a clear climax. Because of the shortness of this genre, authors of short stories very often leave it up to the reader to make connections and infer meaning. In this story, the reader is left to imagine that this moment of climax in Sethunya's life would have involved her decision of whether or not to marry Thato despite not being sexually attracted to him. Similarly, the resolution of the plot does not occur at the end of the story. Instead, the story as a whole could be read as a resolution to the climax that has occurred before the information provided by the author.

Activity

Write a paragraph in which you describe the plot of 'I Could Have Loved Gold'. Be sure to identify the conflict, the climax and the resolution. Is the plot of this story chronological? Motivate your answer.

Important things to remember about plot:

- The term story refers to all the events described across the narrative as a whole.
- The plot involves the most important events and how they relate to one another.
- In the short story genre, the most common plot elements are conflict, climax and resolution.
- Conflict (or tension) takes the form of the internal or external struggles and challenges experienced by a character.
- The climax of a plot is the culmination of the conflict and often involves the moment at which a character has to make an important decision or face the things with which they had been struggling.
- The resolution of a plot refers to the aftereffects of the climax and involves how the character comes to terms with what happened at the moment of climax.
- Plots do not always have to move forward chronologically. Authors may choose to make use of flashbacks into the past to provide the reader with more information on what occurs in the present time of the story.

Narration

In very basic terms, the narrator is the character from whose perspective the story is told. An author can choose to tell the story in a variety of ways that influence the information made available to the reader. Broadly, this means that the story can be told from within the mind of a character who is part of the action or from an external perspective where the narrator has access to the thoughts and feelings of all the characters. A narrator who tells the story but who is also part of the story is known as a **first-person narrator** while an external narrator is known as a **third-person narrator**. The narrator's use of pronouns tells us which type of **narration** is being used in the story. The table below shows the kinds of narration employed in each of the stories covered in this unit:

Title of short story	Type of narrator	How do we know this?
'I will not apologise!'	first-person	The story is told from Bonita's perspective. She uses the words 'I', 'me', 'my', and 'mine'.
'I Could Have Loved Gold'	first-person	Even though the narrator of this story is not given a name, she too uses the words 'I', 'me', 'my', and 'mine'. We can deduce that she is female because she tells us that her father stored 'gold rings and earrings' for her 'coming of age' (Isaacson, 2002: 796).
'Sethunya Likes Girls Better'	third-person	The narrator is external. We know this because of words such as 'she', 'her', 'he', and 'his'. However, the reader only has access to Sethunya's thoughts and feelings.

Activity

Think back to the last time someone told you a story about something that had happened to them. Did they tell the story in a way that made themselves look like the hero? Would you have told the story in the same way? Explain why or why not.

Narrative point of view

The way in which we understand a story changes based on whether it is told in the first-person or the third-person narrative mode. While it may seem as though a first-person narrator will be in the best position to explain her or his thoughts and feelings to the reader as he or she knows herself or himself best, he or she may choose to tell the story in a way that emphasises certain aspects or minimises others. Similarly, a third-person narrator can seem like a more neutral observer, but sometimes an author may choose to limit the perspective to this narrator's perspective alone and not provide the reader with insights into the viewpoints of any of the other characters.

Be very mindful of the fact that there is a difference between the narrator and the author of a text. Similar to the difference between the speaker and the poet that you read about in Unit 2, the narrator of a story is not necessarily the author. We should therefore never assume that the author herself or himself is telling the story. Instead, we refer to the narrator, who is *inside* the story (unlike the author, who is *outside*) and who will have a particular point of view. Below we discuss some of the characteristics of each of these narrative points of view.

First-person narration

Both 'I will not apologise!' and 'I Could Have Loved Gold' make use of the first-person narrative point of view, but do so in slightly different ways. In the first-person narrative point of view, the narrator is either a central part of the narrative or a more marginal character, observing the action from the outside and relating the events to the reader. In both of these cases, the reader has access only to what the narrator feels, thinks, and experiences. As suggested, this may result in a biased (prejudiced against something or someone) or an unreliable narrator who does not provide the reader with accurate or truthful information. An author could choose to make use of an unreliable narrator in order to convey a sense of irony that contributes to the main message or theme of the story.

'I will not apologise!'

Bonita is the first-person narrator in 'I will not apologise!'. The title of this story gives us an indication as to Bonita's involvement in the plot as it is a strong statement and suggests that she is actively participates in the way in which events unfold. This proves to be true throughout the story as she not only tells the story but is also the agent driving the narrative forward. This can be seen most clearly when she confronts her grandmother and destroys the old lady's dentures.

Furthermore, Bonita is definitely not a neutral narrator. This can be seen in the author's use of diction in describing her thoughts and feelings. For example, Bonita describes her grandmother's eyes as 'cold as iron', her mouth as 'pincer-lipped', and her words as 'poison gas' (Fisher, 2002: 83). These words all carry negative connotations and thus serve to reinforce Bonita's negative opinion of the old lady. But does this necessarily mean that she is an unreliable narrator? Complete the activity on the next page to find out.

Activity

On page 82 of the short story, Bonita informs the reader that her 'grandmother has always been horrible'. Read the story again and find words or phrases that explain whether or not Bonita's assessment of her grandmother is accurate. Write a paragraph in which you argue whether or not you consider Bonita an unreliable narrator.

'I Could Have Loved Gold'

The unnamed first-person narrator of 'I Could Have Loved Gold' is less of an active participant in the unfolding of the plot than Bonita in 'I will not apologise!'. Think back to the activity you completed on characterisation earlier on in this unit. Were you able to picture this narrator in your mind as vividly as you are able to picture Bonita? The narrator's mother, father and particularly her Aunt Sal are described in a lot more detail. Furthermore, she hardly ever provides a personal opinion on what occurs in the plot, instead simply describing the events as they happen and leaving it up to the reader to draw her or his own conclusions. This could suggest that the author is using her as a way of giving voice to the short story's main message or theme.

Activity

Read 'I Could Have Loved Gold' again and look for instances where the narrator does provide a personal opinion. Write a paragraph in which you explore whether or not this suggests to you that the narrator is biased.

Second-person narration

The **second-person narrator** tells the story as if it is being addressed to someone who is called by the second-person pronoun, 'you'. This you might be the narrator herself or himself, a specific character in the text or even the reader of the story. This form of narration is rare compared to first-person and third-person narratives, and so we will not linger on the second-person narrator in this course. For an example of the second-person narrator, see the short story titled 'Supermarket Soliloquy' (available as an eReserve on the library website).

Third-person narration

There are two main types of third-person narrators: omniscient narrators and narrators with a limited point of view. Omniscient narrators have access to the thoughts and feelings of all the characters in a story, as is suggested by their description as omniscient, which means all-knowing. Omniscient narrators are able to move across different spaces and times.

In contrast, stories told by narrators with a limited point of view are confined to the mind of the narrator. The reader finds out about all the characters and the events from the perspective of the narrator alone. We call this the **focalisation**. In 'Sethunya Likes Girls Better', the narrator is a third-person narrator with a limited point of view. We know this because we never experience what Sethunya's husband, mother, or other community members think; we only know what Sethunya thinks of them.

Did you know?

When we refer to focalise or focalisation we mean 'to see through the eyes of'. To remember this, think of how this word is clearly related to the word focus.

Activity

Compose two or three paragraphs in which you discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each of the types of narration discussed above. Use the prescribed short stories to provide evidence for your argument.

Important things to remember about narration:

- A narrator is the voice telling the story.
- The narrator is not the same as the author.
- First-person narrators are part of the story, to a greater or lesser extent. We can identify this type of narrator by their use of 'I', 'me', 'my', and 'mine'.
- Everything we know about the characters and events is filtered through the perception of a first-person narrator. This means that first-person narrators may be biased or unreliable.
- Second-person narrators are identified through their stories being addressed to someone who is called by the second-person pronouns, 'you' and 'yours'. The appearance of this narrator in stories is relatively rare.
- Third-person narrators are identified by their use of 'she', 'her', 'he', and 'his'.
- Omniscient third-person narrators know everything there is to know about the story-world.
- Stories told by third-person narrators with a limited point of view are confined to the thoughts, feelings and perceptions of the narrative voice.

Theme

You might remember that the theme of a poem or story is what the poem or story is about. Revise aspects of theme in Unit 2 if you feel you do not remember it clearly enough before you move on with this section. Theme is also discussed in Unit 4.

Activity

Think about a song you really love. Write down a couple of words that summarise its main meaning. Many songs cover popular topics such as love, heartbreak, friendship, or empowerment. Write down words or phrases from the song you chose to provide evidence for your description of its main meaning.

Unit 2 discusses the poem 'Whales' in which Kelwyn Sole explores the theme of the impact of humans on the environment and specifically the oceans and its animals. It is also about death and decay and in that sense, the circle of life. Remember that when we talk about the theme of a work of art, we are referring to the underlying message the author conveys through her or his work. This message is usually not explicit. As the reader, it is your job to think critically about the work in order to deduce the theme.

As with poetry, authors of short stories use a variety of techniques to develop the themes they wish to convey. These techniques include the literary elements already discussed in this unit (setting, plot, characterisation and narration) as well as choosing titles that already hint at the underlying message, and the use of imagery and symbolism. While poems and short stories often demonstrate only one theme, a novel usually contains several themes that are developed simultaneously across the body of the work. Unit 4 explains this in more detail.

Most paragraph answers and essays you write for this course involve explaining *how* a particular theme is developed in a poem, a short story or the novel. To do this, you are required to think critically about a text in order to demonstrate that you are able to:

- identify a particular literary element,

- discuss the author's use of the literary element, and
- show how the use of this element contributes to the development of the main theme or meaning.

How to write about short stories

The remainder of this unit shows you how to do discuss the literary elements we have analysed above in relation to the development of the themes in the three prescribed short stories.

The steps we follow in order to identify and discuss each story's theme are to:

- identify the keywords in the title, keeping in mind that titles can sometimes be misleading
- examine the physical and sociocultural significance of the setting
- see how the plot hints at theme (a story's climax is often most useful in this regard)
- analyse the protagonist and their interactions with other characters
- determine who is telling the story and see whether or not this has any thematic significance
- explore the importance of imagery and symbolism in the story.

Keep in mind, however, that not all of the aspects we mention above are equally applicable to every story you read. For example, an author could rely heavily on characterisation in the development of theme and may keep her or his use of imagery to a minimum.

Unit 2 explains that imagery refers to a poet's use of mental pictures to convey meaning and that a symbol is something that is used to represent something else. The author of a short story may also choose to make use of imagery and symbolism to build a story's theme. In short stories and novels, the same image or symbol can be repeated more than once over the course of the text in order to develop this theme. This is called recurring imagery and recurring symbolism.

'I will not apologise!'

Title: While the title of this story is only four words long, it conveys a lot of meaning. Before we have even begun reading the story itself, we know that it will feature a strong-willed and stubborn individual who refuses to apologise for something. The use of an exclamation mark here serves to increase the force of the statement. After having read the short story, we know that the title is spoken in Bonita's voice and that she is refusing to apologise for having broken her grandmother's dentures. We also know that she broke the dentures because she could not stand listening to the old lady insult her mother.

Setting: Consider what we know of the setting of this short story. All we know is that the action takes place in a house. We are not given much information on what it looks like and we are given no clues as to when the story takes place. This suggests that the author does not rely on setting to convey the story's meaning.

Plot: The conflict in this story results from Bonita's frustration with her grandmother. She feels that just because her grandmother is old it should not be accepted as an excuse for her rudeness and insensitivity. When the old lady says that Bonita's mother trapped her father in marriage by becoming pregnant, she retaliates by shouting at her grandmother who is so shocked that she spits out her dentures. Bonita cuts these into pieces and flushes them down the toilet, preventing her grandmother from continuing with her insults. This is the climax of the story as it is the point at which Bonita decides to stand up for herself and her mother. The story concludes with her being confined to her room until she apologises to her grandmother. The title

suggests that she will not apologise. Since the conflict and climax of the story both involve her grandmother, we can assume that the theme does too.

Characterisation: Bonita and her grandmother are the main characters. Her parents are minor characters. As we discuss above in the section on characterisation, Bonita is portrayed as stubborn, strong-willed and loyal. Her grandmother is shown to be insensitive and rude. The author uses their clashing personalities to build tension in the story. This leads to the confrontation which occurs at the story's climax. This suggests that the relationship between Bonita and her grandmother is central to understanding the story's theme.

Narration: We have established that Bonita is the first-person narrator and that this could mean that she is biased. We are not given any insight or access to the thoughts and feelings of the grandmother.

Imagery and symbolism: Maire Fisher makes extensive use of imagery and symbolism in her representation of Bonita's grandmother throughout "I will not apologise!". She uses imagery relating to poison gas to describe the words spoken by the grandmother: Bonita sees "poison words, steaming poison gas, rising mustard-yellow from her mouth". Poison gas is toxic and potentially lethal to anyone exposed to it. This implies that the old lady's words have the power to hurt or harm those around her. The grandmother's dentures play a symbolic role in the short story. Initially, they represent everything Bonita dislikes about her grandmother but when she destroys the dentures, she takes away the old woman's power to hurt her and, in doing so, empowers herself.

Theme: We could suggest that this short story deals with the theme of inter-generational conflict since all of the elements we looked at centre on this topic. Remember that a theme is not necessarily something that is set in stone: there are many different ways of phrasing the same idea. So, instead of saying that the theme is 'inter-generational conflict' we could say that the theme has to do with 'family discord' or 'tensions between grandparents and grandchildren'.

'I Could Have Loved Gold'

Title: The title suggests that the story will be told from the perspective of a first-person narrative voice. We know this because of the use of the pronoun 'I'. Aside from that, the title raises a few questions in the mind of the reader, such as: 'What happened to cause the speaker not to love gold?' Our analysis of the literary elements below should provide an answer to the question.

Setting: In the earlier section on setting, we establish that this short story is set in the 1950s and that the location of the story is a mansion in Houghton, Johannesburg. We also discussed the author's use of Sophiatown as vibrant and warm in contrast to the sterility and coldness of the family's lavish home.

Plot: The plot of this story is straightforward, as not much action actually occurs. Instead, you as the reader are left to infer (or piece together) most of the meaning. This understanding comes across through the unnamed narrator's observations of her Aunt Sal's interactions with her parents. The narrative consists of various descriptions of Aunt Sal's visits to the narrator's family home. We find out that Aunt Sal is politically aware and is sympathetic to the oppression experienced by black individuals suffering under the apartheid regime. She tells the narrator's family about her visits to Sophiatown as well as about the harsh reality experienced by black people at this time. The narrator details one occasion where her parents are hosting a fancy dinner party with important mining magnates in attendance. Aunt Sal arrives and insists on talking about the dangerous conditions under which miners are expected to work as well as the exploitation to which they are subjected. This embarrasses the narrator's father and they have a

disagreement. For a while after that, Aunt Sal only visits when the father is away. At the end of the story, the narrator hears of Sophiatown's destruction from her aunt. We are told that Aunt Sal becomes miserable and very depressed. The story concludes with Aunt Sal leaving South Africa for London. The story seems to skip forward a number of years. The narrator implies that her father dies and details the uncomfortable legacy he leaves his family.

The conflict in this story centres on the differences in political stance between Aunt Sal and the narrator's family. Aunt Sal is open-minded and wants to educate the children about the realities of the apartheid regime. In contrast, the narrator's father has built his wealth through the exploitation of black mineworkers and finds Aunt Sal's political opinions embarrassing. The climax in this story occurs during the dinner party when the father and Aunt Sal have a confrontation about the source of his wealth. The story provides an uneasy resolution: even though the fight eventually fades into the background, Aunt Sal is devastated at the destruction of Sophiatown and at the loss of her friend Albie, a man who played the piano and sang in shebeens. Both the conflict and the climax of this story have to do with political rather than personal issues. This indicates to us that the theme may have more to do with politics rather than inter-personal private matters.

Characterisation: The unnamed narrator is characterised to a far lesser extent than her parents and Aunt Sal. Even though she is the focaliser of the story (meaning the one through whose perspective we as readers see), we are not given much access into who she is as a person. We can deduce, however, that she is more in sympathy with Aunt Sal's politics than those of her parents, based on the way she talks about them. We are presented with a clear picture of Aunt Sal. A lover of art and music, she is passionate about political causes and injustices. We see this when she confronts the father about conditions in the gold mines and hostels (Isaacson, 2002: 792) and when she discusses the bad living conditions experienced by most black South Africans at the time (Isaacson, 2002: 793). In contrast to this, the mother is portrayed as a meek and silenced individual. Her eyes are described as 'dull' (Isaacson, 2002: 792), she is 'passive and inert' (Isaacson, 2002: 793), and she is lonely and unhappy. The father is a forceful individual who believes in facts rather than in Aunt Sal's fairy tales and music. Since he is a mining magnate, his wealthy lifestyle is connected to the mining of gold. As a result, he is made uncomfortable by his sister-in-law's brazen statements regarding the exploitation of black mineworkers as he has a stake in maintaining the industry which allows his comfortable way of life. This discussion of characterisation points us to the significance of the mining industry in relation to the short story's theme. The author's treatment of the different characters' opinions on the political situation shows us that the theme could very possibly be a political rather than a personal one.

Imagery and symbolism: The title already gives us a hint at what kind of imagery we can expect in the short story. Indeed, gold functions as a recurring image throughout the narrative and represents different things to each of the characters. To the father, it signifies the source of his wealth and functions as a status symbol. We see this in the statement that he 'swathed [his wife] in nine carat this and twenty-two that' (Isaacson, 2002: 792). The narrator explains that for him, gold was 'something to believe in' and that it had 'changed his life' (Isaacson, 2002: 793). He does not at all consider the human cost to the mineworkers in this process.

To Aunt Sal, in contrast, gold represents nothing but the unfair political system that allows the white minority to make their fortunes at the expense of black lives and interests. She functions as a way to highlight the harsh reality that her brother-in-law chooses to ignore. The most interesting use of imagery relating to gold, however, is revealed through the character of the mother. She does not participate directly in the exploitative practices of her husband's business and yet she still receives the economic benefits that result from this exploitation. The author

indicates this uneasy relationship through descriptions that show her mother as being weighed down and stifled by the gold: her ears are 'burnished' and her eyes are 'dull' (Isaacson, 2002: 792) with it. This description is ironic, as the word 'dull' indicates something lifeless and without brightness while gold is shiny and sparkling. The use of irony here thus suggests the sinister connotations associated with gold in the story. The narrator explains that even though her mother is always physically present, she never seems to be emotionally available: she says that it feels as though her mother had been 'alchemised into some mystical substance, and was no longer with' them (Isaacson, 2002: 793). This makes it seem as though the mother's body, personality and identity are all being converted into gold and poisoned by the contradictory meanings associated with it. It should be clear that the author uses imagery associated with gold throughout the narrative to develop ideas surrounding the problematic nature of the family's wealth.

Did you know?

The craft of alchemy was a medieval practice that attempted to find ways of changing certain substances, usually of lower value, into other substances, usually of higher value. Alchemy relied on supposed magical processes, unlike the scientific field of chemistry we know today. The use of the word 'alchemy' today invokes notions of superstition and derision. The word 'alchemise' means 'to magically transform or transmute'.

Theme: After having read 'I Could Have Loved Gold' in relation to the other literary elements we have looked at, you should begin to have a clearer understanding of what the theme of the short story could possibly be. Think back to the title and consider *why* the narrator could have loved gold but does not. On page 793, the narrator states: 'I would have loved gold if it wasn't for Aunt Sal'. We have established above that Aunt Sal functions as a means to disrupt the family's easy way of living by exposing the uncomfortable reality that their wealth is built on the misfortune and suffering of others. If it had not been for Aunt Sal, the young narrator would never have been aware of this reality. Taking the discussion above in consideration, it is possible to deduce that the short story's theme involves the ways in which a comfortable lifestyle can sometimes be bought at the price of ethical considerations.

Activity

In your activity journal, write down possible themes for 'Sethunya Likes Girls Better' and substantiate your answers by referring to the literary elements you have been exposed to in this unit.

Important things to remember about theme in short stories

- In basic terms, a theme in literature is what the text is 'about'.
- Short stories often portray one major theme while novels may develop several.
- A theme is not something that is set in stone and can be phrased in more than one way.
- The portrayal of plot, setting, characterisation and narration all contribute to our understanding of the theme.

How to answer questions in an assignment or examination

In your assignments and in the exam, you are required to answer questions based on the short stories (available as eReserves on the library website). Your answers should take the form of paragraphs of 10-15 lines. These paragraphs should be structured logically and should contain an argument that is supported by evidence from the short stories. Go back and read Unit 1 again for a reminder of 'Engaging with the question', 'The paragraph', 'The topic sentence', 'The argument', 'Incorporating quotations', and 'Using secondary sources in your assignment'.

Revisit Unit 2 for a reminder of 'Academic writing conventions' and 'How to form an argument'. The skills that you developed in these previous sections form the basis of how you should answer the questions based on the short stories.

Example questions

Your short story questions always centre on one over-arching topic that you will explore by providing answers to a series of sub-questions based on the literary elements you have been exposed to in this unit. Your answers should take the form of well-structured paragraphs that contain a topic sentence, that present an argument substantiated by evidence from the short story and respond clearly and directly to what is being asked. For example, a question based on 'Sethunya Likes Girls Better' by Wame Molehfe could look like this:

In 'Sethunya Likes Girls Better', Sethunya has made peace with her attraction to women despite her marriage to a man. Use the questions below as prompts to argue whether or not you agree with this statement. Remember to use the literary element mentioned in each question to explore the main topic.

1. Write a paragraph in which you examine what the **characterisation** of both Sethunya and Thato, her husband tells us of their relationship.
2. How does the **plot structure** of the short story contribute to our understanding of Sethunya's sexual orientation?
3. Johnny the chimpanzee functions as a **symbol** in this story. Write a paragraph in which you explore the deeper meaning of this symbol in relation to Sethunya's marriage. Your answer could also refer to imagery relating to animals kept in a zoo.

Suggestions and guidelines for answers

To answer these questions, do the following:

1. Read the main topic carefully and underline the key words.
In 'Sethunya Likes Girls Better', Sethunya has made peace with her attraction to women despite her marriage to a man. Use the questions below as prompts to argue whether or not you agree with this statement.
Based on your careful reading of this question, you now know that each of your paragraphs should make a case for whether or not Sethunya has accepted her sexual orientation.
2. Read the short story again and think carefully about whether or not you agree with the main statement. During your rereading, you could jot down evidence that substantiates your point of view.
Remember that in literary studies, we do not necessarily always think in terms of a 'right' or a 'wrong' answer. Instead, we think about answers that are well-argued with clear evidence from the text and weak answers that lack logic and substantiation.
In this case, you could argue (1) Sethunya has made peace with her sexuality (2) Sethunya has not made peace with her sexuality or (3) It is unclear whether or not Sethunya has made peace with her sexuality. You will receive marks for whichever argument you choose, as long as you provide clear evidence to substantiate it and argue your case logically.
3. Now you need to look at each of the sub-questions. Identify the literary element you are required to discuss in each. In these examples, you must analyse characterisation, plot structure and symbolism. Go back the section in this unit where these terms are discussed and remind yourself what each of these terms mean.

We now look at how you could answer each of the sub-questions:

Question 1

- Read the question carefully and ensure that you understand what it requires you to do.
 - Write a paragraph in which you examine what the characterisation of both Sethunya and Thato, her husband tells us about their relationship.
 - Now you know that you need to write a paragraph in which you discuss the information we as readers have on what each of these characters are like. Your discussion here should build towards the argument you decided upon in relation to the main topic.
- Create a mind map or table such as the one used in the section on characterisation earlier on in this unit and find evidence that supports your line of argumentation.
- Write a topic sentence that clearly outlines the argument you will be making. An example could be: In 'Sethunya Likes Girls Better', the literary element of characterisation is used to explore the ambivalence (or uncertainty) the main character feels in her marriage.
- In the rest of your paragraph you would explain how the author characterises Sethunya and Thato, and examine what their relationship tells us about Sethunya's feelings regarding her attraction to women. Quote the examples you found in the previous step in support of this argument. Remember to incorporate your quotes into full sentences.
- Write a final sentence that links your discussion back to the main topic. An example of this could be: This shows us that Sethunya still desires women, despite being in what should be a happy marriage to a kind man.

Question 2

- Read the question carefully and ensure that you understand what it requires you to do.
 - How does the plot structure of the short story contribute to our understanding of Sethunya's sexual orientation?
 - Your paragraph should thus use the literary element of plot structure to examine the main topic presented at the beginning of the question.
- Look at the plot structure of the short story and see what it tells you about Sethunya's feelings towards her sexual orientation. Jot down any thoughts you have or quotes from the short story that you could use in the construction of your argument.
- Write a topic sentence that clearly outlines the argument you will be making. An example could be: The author makes use of flashbacks to demonstrate how torn Sethunya feels between her conventional marriage and her true desires.
- In the rest of your paragraph you would examine what the flashbacks reveal to us about Sethunya's feelings. Quote the examples you found in the previous step in support of this argument. Remember to incorporate your quotes into full sentences.
- Write a final sentence that links your discussion back to the main topic. An example of this could be: The use of flashbacks thus tells us more about Sethunya's community's reaction to her sexual orientation and give us a possible reason why she chose to marry a man despite being attracted to women.

Question 3

- Read the question carefully and ensure that you understand what it requires you to do.
 - Johnny the chimpanzee functions as a symbol in this story. Write a paragraph in which you explore the deeper meaning of this symbol in relation to Sethunya's marriage. Your answer could also make reference to imagery relating to animals being kept in a zoo.
 - This question thus requires you to discuss how symbolism and imagery contribute to theme in this short story. The question gives you two hints: Johnny the chimpanzee is a symbol and the imagery relates to animals kept in captivity.

- Read the story carefully, paying particular attention to the sections that mention Johnny as well as any mention of zoos, cages, captivity or animals. Consider what each of these elements has in common with Sethunya's description of her marriage.
- Write a topic sentence that clearly outlines the argument you will be making. An example could be: The author makes use of symbolism and imagery to demonstrate the difference between freedom and the safety of captivity in the short story.
- In the rest of your paragraph you should explain the symbolism and the imagery in relation to the story's deeper meaning. Go back to Unit 2 for a reminder on how to discuss symbolism and imagery.

Write a final sentence that links your discussion back to the main topic. An example of this could be: The use of symbolism and imagery thus shows us that even though Sethunya feels safe and protected in her marriage, she still longs for the freedom to express her true identity.

This unit has introduced you to the study of the short story genre. You have seen the ways in which literary elements are used to create tension, develop mood, and convey the work's theme. You have also seen how to structure a paragraph logically in response to a question based on a short story. The following unit expands on these ideas and introduces you to the study of the novel genre, a lengthier form of prose fiction.

Unit 4: The novel

A guide to this unit

In this unit, you:

- familiarise yourself with the formal characteristics that distinguish the novel genre
- read and analyse Nthikeng Mohlele's novel, *Small Things*
- develop the skills required to read, analyse, and appreciate any novel on your own
- become familiar with how the literary terms we discuss in Unit 3, such as setting, characterisation, narration and narrative point of view, plot and theme, can be utilised to engage with a longer text like a novel
- write an essay on aspects of the novel.

In contrast to the previous units, this unit contains a large number of activities to help you develop your own interpretation of the novel through a focused close reading. These activities are designed to assist you in interpreting and understanding the novel based on the knowledge and skills that you have read about in Unit 3. Be sure to work through these activities carefully in preparation for the assignments and the examination. These activities, labelled 'unpacking the content', are crucial to your understanding of the text. Tutorial Letter 102 provides extra guidance on how to approach these activities.

What is a novel?

A definition of the novel

While the term 'novel' is used today to describe a great variety of books, the novel is generally considered to be a literary text of considerable length, written in **prose** form. In other words, a novel, like a short story, is a piece of prose. It is different from the short story, however, in that it is quite a bit longer and offers the reader a lengthier and often more complex plot, a greater number of more detailed characters, expansive settings, and sometimes even more than one narrator. Novels are often divided into shorter parts that we refer to as chapters. These begin on a new page and can be separated with numbers or symbols.

In this unit, we find out how to identify and discuss all of the elements mentioned above. This helps you become a more informed reader of fiction, making novels easier to understand and easier to write about. Most importantly, developing these skills shows you how much fun it can be to read novels!

Activity

Take some time to think about your reading history by answering the following questions in your activity journal:

- Do you think that it is important to read? Why, or why not?
- What is the title of the last novel you read and who is its author?
- What was the novel about?
- Was this novel a prescribed book at school?
- Have you ever read a novel outside of school? In other words, do you read for pleasure?
- What inspires you to read? Or, what puts you off reading?

Fiction

Small Things, the novel you are studying as part of this module, is a work of fiction. This means that it is a story (also called a narrative) that has been invented by the author and is likely not based on a series of events that really happened or on the lives of people who really lived or are

still living. It is important to know that a novel is not necessarily the story of the life of the author of the novel either. While authors might very well draw from their lived experience when imagining a fictional world filled with events and characters, we should not assume that every novel we read reflects the life of its author. Remember that while the story world in *Small Things* is recognisable to us, the story is a work of imagination and we should read it as such.

How to read a novel

Reading, knowing and understanding the novel

In order to understand a novel properly, you must be sure that you know the important details of the text and that you can summarise these for yourself. Doing this is often what enables us to understand the setting of a novel. Keep in mind, however, that in this module, you are never assessed simply on whether you are able to remember the plot details of a text. In the assignments and examination, you are not required to simply write a **plot summary**. Instead, you will be required to analyse a particular aspect of a text. If you simply summarise the plot, you will not be answering the given question, and you will not receive any marks.

Unit 3 explains that a **plot summary** is a short version of what happens in a work of prose. It provides the most important details from the story: what happened and in what order, which characters are involved, etc. It is often simply a short retelling of the story of a novel.

Showing that you know the novel: Assessment

If showing that you can remember the story of the novel is not what you are expected to do in your assignment or in the examination, what is it that you must be able to do? Much like in the units of the tutorial letter on poetry (Unit 2) and the short story (Unit 3), what we explore here are the different parts of the novel that we as critical readers can identify. After identifying these parts of the novel, understanding how they work and why they are important, we will be able to read the text for **deeper meaning**.

When we refer to **deeper meaning**, we refer to a level of meaning in a text that is not immediately obvious when we superficially read the text. The deeper meaning refers to the **subtext** (or unspoken messages) in a text. For instance, while a text might refer to the seasons as part of its story, through closer analysis we might be able to discover that the way the seasons are depicted in the story might say something significant about the world around us, or something that we as humans share or experience in varied ways. For example, the movement of the seasons from Spring to Winter can often refer on a deeper level to the stages of human lives – how they begin, change, and ultimately end.

This is a kind of reading which is called **close reading** or **critical analysis**, which in this module will ultimately take the form of an essay.

The phrases '**close reading**' and '**critical analysis**' essentially have the same meaning. We use them as interchangeable phrases for the same concept. When we talk about close reading, we mean that we read the text deeply. When we talk about critical analysis, we do not mean that we are reading the text to find mistakes or faults, but rather that we are using a certain set of analytical skills to read the novel closely and write about it using an analytical vocabulary that is made up of literary concepts and terms.

Do not worry about the essay too much right now, though. Later in the unit, we explore what is required to write an essay on the novel. Before that, we first discuss the novel's plot and setting, followed by narrative perspective (also called point of view), characterisation, and lastly, theme.

Plot

As we explain in Unit 3, when we read or hear a story, we are usually aware of a series of events featuring certain characters. What makes a story into a plot is the way in which we experience what is an ordered or organised series of events, presented in a way to connect the different parts to each other (Abrams and Harpham, 2005: 181). In other words, we see how the author has stitched together a series of events so that they are not just randomly and arbitrarily put together but bear specific relation to each other (Kane et al., 2013: 101). Due to the complex way in which it is weaved together by the author, this structure can have a level of meaning deeper than simply the obvious events that are being narrated to us as readers. The author can achieve this in several ways, including: the handling of time in the narrative, the kind of narration employed (how the story is told and by whom), and the setting(s) in which the events take place.

While Unit 3 already introduces you to many of these concepts, in this unit we look at these concepts again, as they feature in a more complex and sustained way over the course of the novel. This is because the novel is a much longer text than any of the short stories in Unit 3. As critical readers, we must be able to identify the different parts of the narrative so that, ultimately, we can discuss how they are used to create deeper meaning.

Activity

After reading the novel, what would you say it is about? Write your response in your activity journal.

Unpacking the content – Plot

Read pages 4 to 13 of *Small Things*.

- Who narrates (tells) the story in the novel?
- Who is the main character in the story? Where is he from, and what does he do?
- Where and when does the first chapter of the novel take place?
- Which other characters are we introduced to?

Tension in the plot

Go back to Unit 3 and read the section on tension in a plot. Keeping in mind that tension and conflict drive the narrative in a story and can tell us more about a character and their motivations, complete the activity below.

Unpacking the content – Tension in the plot

Read pages 15 to 23 of *Small Things*.

- What sources of tension (both internal and external) can you identify in the main character in the first and second chapters of the novel? (For a reminder of internal and external tension, turn to Unit 3.)
- Why has the character been arrested? (Think about the context of the events in your answer.)
- Would the character's arrest qualify as internal or external conflict? Motivate your answer.

Unpacking the content – Climax and resolution of the plot

Go back to Unit 3 and read the sections on the climax and resolution of a plot. Read chapters 3-15 of *Small Things*.

- After reading a chapter, write out a brief summary of the main events that occur in that chapter.
- Think about the tensions that you identified in the first and second chapters of the novel. There is a tension between the narrator's love for Desiree and Desiree's indecision. There is also the external conflict of the narrator's arrest, which leads to internal conflict in the narrator. How are these two tensions explored in the rest of the novel?
- Is there a single climactic moment in the plot, a culmination of the tensions that are explored in the novel, or can you identify multiple climactic moments?
- Is there a resolution in the plot or a point where the main character comes to terms with what happened during the climactic moments in the plot?

Setting

The setting of a novel is not just a question of where the story takes place, but also when and in what circumstances. A lot of the information that determines the setting of a story is therefore also what provides us with the necessary context to understand the story.



Figure 2: The Nelson Mandela Bridge

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https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:South_Africa-Johannesburg-Nelson_Mandela_Bridge001.jpg

In the case of *Small Things*, we would say that the overall setting of the novel is the greater Johannesburg region. Individual scenes within the novel are more specific (such as the Nelson Mandela Bridge) but remain within the overall setting. In some ways, the Johannesburg

depicted in the novel can be viewed as two different Johannesburgs. This is because the events in the novel play out over a period of time during which Johannesburg changes significantly. Firstly, in the early section of the novel, the city being depicted is still in the apartheid-era. Then, in the middle and final parts of the novel, the city is portrayed in the period after the country's first democratic elections in 1994. This changed context provides the backdrop against which we read what occurs in the novel. Setting therefore implies a strong correlation between place and time in this novel.

Unpacking the content – Setting

Read from the last paragraph on page 10 to the end of the first paragraph on page 12 of *Small Things*.

- What do you notice about the narrator's descriptions of Sophiatown?
- Look especially at the adjectives (words that describe nouns) and consider how the description of the area creates a certain atmosphere. Briefly relate this to the setting of this part of the novel.

Now read pages 27 to the end of the first paragraph on page 29 of the novel.

- What do you notice in this section about the narrator's descriptions of the city?
- Pay attention to the adjectives and how **atmosphere** is created. Relate this to the different setting of this part of the novel.

Did you notice that the description of Sophiatown early on in the novel alludes strongly to the oppressive apartheid system? The narrator describes people in Sophiatown being frisked by policemen merely for loitering (standing or wandering around). The narrator also mentions pass books and police raids.

Sophiatown is described as a poor and dangerous neighbourhood, with 'open sewage' and 'dark alleys' (Mohlele, 2013: 10-11). The mention of constant police interference in black people's lives foreshadows the narrator's arrest in the next chapter, when he is imprisoned for writing articles against apartheid.

In the second description (pages 27 to 29), the narrator is free to wander around the city of Johannesburg. The fact that a bridge has been named after Nelson Mandela highlights the change in government that has occurred. This is why the narrator has been released from prison and is able to walk around freely in the evenings. The second description is full of references to light and opulence. The narrator mentions the 'alluring evening light', 'an array of nearby Mediterranean and African restaurants', and '[s]peeding cars' on their way 'to Soweto and other destinations' (Mohlele, 2013: 27-28).

However, there are also similarities between the earlier description of Sophiatown and the description of the area surrounding the Nelson Mandela Bridge. In both cases, an ominous atmosphere is created by the narrator's references to death, crime and poverty. The first description refers to 'souls stabbed in dark alleys' (Mohlele, 2013: 10). Although the area in the second description is well-lit, there are references to 'late-night workers running for [...] safety', a 'Dark Figure' walking towards the narrator, and 'youth dying predictable deaths' (Mohlele, 2013: 27-28). This suggests that the city is not a safe place after all.

The narrator also mentions 'beggars draped in plastic and grime', 'street sweepers in orange overalls', and 'souls [...] suckling at the city's varied breasts for survival' (Mohlele, 2013: 28). While it is clear that some people live lavish lifestyles in the city, the description highlights that there is still a strong divide between the rich and the poor in the 'new' Johannesburg. The narrator belongs to this poorer subsection of the population who have to struggle to survive.

Atmosphere is the mood that is spread throughout the whole or part of a work of literature. It can be varied, from bright and happy, to humorous, or ominous, terrifying, or disastrous (Abrams and Harpham, 2005: 15). We can identify it through many elements in the text, but it is often most apparent in the depiction of the setting and events.

The character reflected in the setting

In the exercise above, the main character experiences two very different versions of Johannesburg. Firstly, after 1994, his home in Meadowlands, Soweto, is no longer his home. Secondly, there is a new landmark in Johannesburg (the Nelson Mandela Bridge) which did not exist before he was incarcerated. These changes do not just illustrate something about South Africa and Johannesburg, however. They also reflect a change for the character: in terms of his personal circumstances, but also in terms of his views of the world around him. We see in this that characters are therefore not just developed through the things that they say, think or do, or how they are described physically. Characters can also be developed through the way in which the setting is described and how they respond to it.

Activity

In 'Unpacking the content – Setting', we look at the changing cityscape of Johannesburg from apartheid-era South Africa to democratic South Africa.

In your activity journal, write a paragraph in which you discuss how the changes in the city of Johannesburg reflect the changes that the character in the novel experiences in his own life. Remember to refer to specific descriptions in the novel, and try to link this to the changed setting (including the atmosphere) and the changed nature of the character's life.

Narrative perspective

Earlier, we note that the author of a novel should not necessarily be confused with the narrator or the main character. If the novel is not the story of its author, though, who is telling the story?

Narrative perspective (also called narrative point of view or focalisation) refers to the way a story is told (Abrams and Harpham, 2005: 240). In Unit 3, we discuss three different types of narrators. To remind you, they are:

- First-person narrator
- Second-person narrator
- Third-person narrator

Remember that each narrator's form has different effects on how we as readers experience a story.

Third-person narrators stand outside of the story and often offer the reader an omniscient (all-knowing) point of view. This means we have a broad and detailed view of events, characters' actions and even characters' thoughts and motivations. We also rely on the omniscient third-person narrator as authoritative, meaning that we trust them (Abrams and Harpham, 2005: 241; Kane et al., 2013: 132).

It is important to know that third-person narrators are not necessarily or always omniscient. An author can use a third-person narrator with a limited point of view – in other words, though the narrative takes on the third-person form and uses third person pronouns like 'he' and 'her', it is still focalised through the perspective of a single character, who does not have access to the minds of other characters like an omniscient narrator does.

The first-person narrator, on the other hand, is a character who is part of the story. The first-person narrator's perspective always has a limiting effect on what aspects of the story we as readers see and how we experience them. This is because the focalisation will, in this case, be limited to the view and experience of a single person, who, like a person in the real world, is not omniscient. The narrator as character offers a very **subjective** view of the events and characters that they tell us of.

If something is **subjective**, it means that it is based on or strongly influenced by personal feelings, opinions or tastes. Conversely, if something is objective, it is not influenced by personal feelings, opinions or tastes, and tries to present something as unbiased or factual.

Unpacking the content – Narrative perspective

Briefly revise your work on the types of narrators we discuss in Unit 3. Then answer the following questions in relation to the novel.

- What kind of narrator is employed in *Small Things*? Motivate your answer by referring to the narrator's description of his relationship with Desiree on pages 4 to 7 of the novel.
- How do you think this will influence the way we as readers need to think about what the narrator tells us?

Narrative time

When we generally tell stories to others – like when you tell a family member about something that happened to you – we tend to organise our story in a specific way, much like authors do. The way we do this is through ordering the events using time. We most often talk about a series of events in the chronological order that they happened. Often, as is the case with *Small Things*, this is also how the story in a novel unfolds. We refer to this organisation of events in time as **linear**.

As we discuss in Unit 3, if we speak of something as chronological, it means we are referring to events in the order in which they occurred. To refer to a **linear** narrative means that the narrative progresses sequentially – that events in the narrative are described in chronological order.

Small Things is not only organised linearly – in other words, each chapter follows chronologically after the one before – but it is also divided into three sections, titled 'Life', 'Nausea' and 'Echoes'. It is important to be able to remember what is told in a story so that we can better explain how the story is told, thus, it is useful to map out the events for yourself. This can help you to establish links between events in different parts of the novel that you previously did not think were linked.

Activity

Use the plot summaries that you have made for each chapter of the novel in order to create a timeline of *Small Things*. Your timeline should cover the whole novel and include all three sections as well as each of the chapters. Very briefly, outline on the timeline the most important events in the main character's life in the chapters and orders in which they happen.

Why do you think the three sections of the novel have been titled 'Life', 'Nausea' and 'Echoes'?

The handling of time

Usually when we read (and tell) a story, we make use of the past tense in our language. Consider, for instance, the way in which Bonita tells the story in 'I will not apologise!'. The whole narrative is recounted as though the events had already taken place in the past. This is the narrative form you are most likely to find in novels published in English.

The first section of *Small Things*, titled 'Life' (pages 1-23), is also told in the past tense. The opening pages depict not just something that happened in the past, but it is also told by the narrator as if he were situated in the present with us, recalling his memories from the past. In this form, the narrator can recall events with a certain clarity, much like when we look back on past events in the real world. As readers we do not experience these events with the character directly, but as memories that are presented to us.

From the second section of the novel, titled 'Nausea' (pages 27-143), and onwards up to the end of the third section and the end of the novel, titled 'Echoes' (pages 145-151), the tense of the narration changes to the present. We refer to this kind of narration as the **historical present**.

You can see the **historical present** in the tense used from page 27 onwards. For instance, the narrator says, 'I sleep in city squares, bath in public toilets'. This is different from how language was used in the first section of the novel, where the same sentence might have been rendered as 'I slept in city squares, bathed in public toilets'.

This shift to using the historical present changes the perspective of his narrative from one looking back towards an experienced past to a perspective of one who is in the events being depicted in real-time. Unlike in the first section of the novel, then, the narration in the second and third sections of the novel takes on a more immediate tone. Different to the first section of the novel, the form of narration in these latter two sections makes it feel as if the narrator is experiencing things anew and in real-time, along with us as readers, rather than telling us about finished events he has experienced from beginning to end.

Unpacking the content – Time

Write a paragraph of between 10 and 15 lines in which you compare the effects of the narrator's use of different tenses in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 of the novel. Write down anything you notice about how the respective use of the past tense and the historical present tense influences your experience of the story as a reader.

Writing about the novel: The correct tense

When you write about the novel, you should always use the present tense. For instance: 'At this point in the narrative, the main character reconnects after many years with Desiree', rather than writing 'At this point in the narrative, the main character reconnected after many years with Desiree'.

The reason for this is that when we write or talk about the novel, we should always imagine that the moment in the novel that is being written or spoken about takes place in the same present time where we as readers are. Every time you open the book and read a certain section, the same things happen. This means that the events in the world of the text are eternally present and should thus be written or spoken about from this perspective.

Character

In Unit 3, you are introduced to the notion of characters in fiction. The activities that approach specific short stories show that a single character in a story can be a very complex figure. As is the case in interactions with other human beings in real life, we can deduce certain things based on how we experience a character in a novel. Since novels are quite a bit longer than short stories, we often meet many more characters through the course of the novel's story than we would in a short story. There is also far more space in a novel for a character to develop or change.

It is important that you are able to remember the characters from the novel, including the correct spelling of their names, and also that you understand how they feature in the main narrative. In other words, you should understand the characters themselves, and you should understand them in relation to other characters and in relation to events in the novel.

The major and minor characters in the novel

Unit 3 introduces you to the notion of so-called flat and round characters. This is a useful way to categorise characters in a prose work. As a novel is a longer text than a short story, it is often helpful to not just think about characters as flat or as round, but also as major or minor characters.

The major character in a novel is the central person (also referred to as the central figure) who features most prominently in a story. This character stands in an important position in the narrative, which means the story in many ways revolves around this character, their experiences, thoughts, and actions.

Minor characters in a novel are less important than the major character(s). The importance of minor characters in the narrative can often be determined by how often they appear in the narrative, their interactions with the major character, and their role in events that impact on the major character's story. Like we should know the basic plot and setting of a novel, we should also know the characters, because unpacking the characters, their traits, motivations, and actions can help us to grasp the deeper meaning in a novel.

The main character in Small Things

Small Things features several characters. Most prominently is the main character, whose story we follow through the course of the novel. We as readers never learn the name of this character. It is therefore important that you use the phrase 'the main character' or 'the narrator' when you refer to this character in your activities, the assignment and the examination.

Unpacking the content – Character

- Besides the main character in the novel, who is also the narrator, identify the other characters that feature in *Small Things*. Write down their names and the chapter and page number where we first encounter them.
- Draw a mind-map in which you map the different characters in the novel. In the middle of your mind-map, you should place the main (major) character. Then, arrange the names of the other (minor) characters around the main character, and indicate how the different characters are linked to both the main character and to each other, if applicable. This mind-map will be useful in helping you remember all the different characters and why they are important in the story.

The intersection of character and narration

The way a character in a novel is presented is directly relevant to the kind of narration that is being employed. A first-person narrator such as the one featured in *Small Things* has a limited view of other characters, as he can only view them through his own eyes, and he does not have access to their thoughts, feelings and motivations, unless these are expressed in some discernible way by these other characters. Even then, the narrating character's view is limited, because he might be misinterpreting their actions and words. Think of this as very similar to what we as individuals experience when we interact with people around us. We can only understand other people through how we interpret their words (dialogue), the way they behave and in the things that they do (actions). If you imagine yourself to be the main character in a story you tell, you will perhaps better understand how the narrator's understanding of those around him is as limited as our understanding of the people we interact with in our daily lives.

Activity

Think of when someone says something – either to you, or to someone else in a situation where you can hear it. Is the way you understand what the other person has said necessarily exactly what that person thinks they are communicating to you? Reflect about this in your activity journal.

Unpacking the content – Character and narration

In Chapter 3, the main character is shot by someone on the Nelson Mandela Bridge. Read the **dialogue** between the main character and his attacker, as well as the description that precedes and follows it, from page 28 to the end of the second paragraph on page 31.

- Discuss what is striking about the character who is introduced to us as the Dark Figure. (Hint: Discuss how both the main character and we as readers experience the Dark Figure as he is focalised through the eyes of the narrator. Pay attention both to how he is described by the narrator and to how he speaks.)

The **dialogue** in a text refers to the conversations between two or more characters featured in the text.

Ways of seeing the main character

Most descriptions we are given of the main character in the novel are through his own perspective. This often relates to his external appearance, such as the description given on page 28, but also relates to his character traits. Put simply, we see the main character through his own eyes. At times, we as readers are given the opportunity to briefly see the main character through the eyes of other characters. We can refer to these instances as reported views of the character. In other words, it relates to how this character is described by someone else. This can reveal a lot about the main character, both in terms of his personality and appearance, which he as the narrator might be concealing from us as readers.

Unpacking the content – The main character

Read the first paragraph on page 85 (the main character's reflection on how Gabriel Sanchez views him) as well as the second paragraph on page 113 (Desiree's view of the main character, as reported by Desiree's partner, Amazu).

- Do the descriptions of the main character refer to his appearance or his character traits?
- How do you think these descriptions of the main character differ from his own conceptions of himself? Are they more positive or negative? Motivate your answer by referring to the

text. You may want to look at the narrator's reflections on pages 109 and 110, where he compares himself to Amazu.

- Does the way the main character is seen by other characters signal something important to us as readers about how we should approach the main character's descriptions of himself, other characters and events depicted in the narrative? Explain your answer. (Hint: Think about whether we can consider the main character's narration as entirely objective, and why this matters.)

Theme

Both Unit 2 and Unit 3 cover the notion of the theme in different ways. While we do not here repeat what the other units already set out, we consider the themes of *Small Things*. The novel, being a far longer text than a short story, is likely to cover a greater number of themes than the latter type of prose, as the novel can explore many themes in more depth. Depending on your own interests and your own interpretation of a novel, some themes might stand out for you, while another student might not be as aware of the same theme.

What is important about the themes in a novel is that they offer us a way of tracing ever-evolving meaning through the course of the narrative. By this we mean that a theme is an idea that the novel offers some reflection on – through the depiction of characters' experiences – and we as readers are presented with the opportunity to think about this theme to not only understand the story better, but to also perhaps reach some insight into the human condition.

Did you know?

The human condition is the series of key events and experiences throughout life which are central to human existence. This includes life stages such as birth and death, which forms the shared backdrop of human existence, but it also includes many things in between: growth and change, as well as experiencing various emotions, aspirations and conflict. Within the field of literary studies, the aforementioned is often read in texts as part of the exploration of the meaning of life, good and bad, etc.

Knowing and being able to identify the themes that feature in *Small Things* is important, but you are not assessed on simply being able to list the novel's themes and to give some examples of where they can be found in the text. What we are more interested in is how a specific theme operates within the story. In other words, we want to see that you can identify a theme and link it to characters, events, and dialogue in such a way as to show the deeper meaning of the theme and how the novel influences the way we think about it.

The themes of Small Things

We can identify several themes in *Small Things*. Here are the most prominent ones:

- Love (This theme is especially vivid in the main character's relationships with Desiree and Mercedes. The novel contains many passages where the narrator describes his feelings for one of these two women or reflects on the meaning of love. For reflections on the narrator's relationship with Desiree, see, for example, pages 5-7, the whole of chapter 5, pages 92-94, 109-110 and 149-150. For reflections on his relationship with Mercedes, see pages 67-69, 78-81, and 140-141. Also see Gabriel's reflection on love on page 71.)
- Art and its place/role in society (The word 'art' here applies in the broadest sense to include literature, music and visual arts. We often see the narrator referring to his love of literature – and poetry especially – as well as his appreciation of music. See, for example, pages 10-11, 58-60, 63-67, 98, 118-119 and 149.)
- Inequality and class (The novel depicts the hardships experienced by the main character, like when he is homeless, while also depicting those members of society who live more

affluent lives. We see this in especially the first few chapters of the novel, and later on when the main character begins working at Café Mesopotamia. See, for example, pages 27-28, 104-110, 136-137 and 140-141.)

- Friendship (This theme can be seen in the main character's relationships with Gabriel Sanchez, Benito the dog and even Amazu. For the narrator's relationship with Gabriel, see pages 53-55, 69-72, 80-81 and 84-89. For the narrator's relationship with Benito the dog, see pages 96-98, 104-110 and 130-131. For information about the narrator's relationship with Amazu, see pages 45-46, 111-126 and 135.)
- History and the Transition (of South Africa from an apartheid to democratic state). (The novel depicts a number of events that make us aware of the contrasts – and sometimes, unsettling similarities – between South Africa during apartheid and the country after the first democratic elections. Have another look at the passages listed under the category 'Inequality and class'. Pay particular attention to pages 104-105, 118, 130-131, 141 and 150, where the narrator talks about Comrade Q and Café Mesopotamia. Who is Comrade Q? What does Café Mesopotamia symbolise? What kind of social commentary is the narrator making about post-apartheid South Africa?)
- The meaning of life (This theme is more difficult to identify, but can be seen in many of the main character's musings about his life, like in the very first and very last chapters. Also see pages 27, 103-105, and 142-143. Note that this theme intersects with the themes of love, art and suffering.)

Unpacking the content – Theme

Revise 'Theme' in Unit 3 and also reread the section 'How to analyse and write about short stories'. Then, read the chapters and pages of the novel that are mentioned above in relation to each of the listed themes. In your activity journal, write a few paragraphs on each of the themes.

You should consider the following questions:

- Which characters are used to explore the theme?
- How is the theme developed throughout the course of the novel?
- Is the setting of the novel significant for the development of the theme?
- Are there climactic moments in the novel that relate to the theme?
- Does the novel's title relate to any of the themes?
- Is the style of narration significant for the development of any of the themes?
- Does the novel use imagery or symbolism to explore any of the themes?
- What does the novel have to say about the theme? In other words, what underlying message does the novel convey about each theme?

How to write about a novel

Let us pause for a moment and take stock of your learning journey in this module thus far.

Unit 1 introduces you to the fundamental writing skills that form part of the inherent assessment of this module.

Unit 2 introduces you to the foundational elements of poetry. You have seen that although poetic texts are mostly shorter, they can reveal in their conciseness a surprising range and depth of meaning. To test your skills and knowledge, you were required to master a range of literary concepts and techniques so as to be able to answer a set of focused questions on any poem.

Unit 3 introduces you to the basics of prose through an exploration of the world of the short story. Here you familiarise yourself with the elements of fiction and you see how they work in a form such as the short story. Building on the short questions that relate to poetry in Unit 2, Unit 3 requires you to discuss the elements of the short story in brief, focused paragraphs, using your understanding of the elements of fiction to unpack the meaning of the stories.

In this final unit on the novel, we again consider the elements of fiction, but here we look at how the elements of fiction can function in a longer and more complex text. In keeping with the progressive gaining of skills and knowledge in this module, we now take a final step and find out how to combine what you have been exposed to up to this point to offer longer responses to questions on the novel.

Writing a critical essay on the novel

In Unit 1, you are given a breakdown of the different parts that make up an essay. This includes the notion of the topic sentence, the paragraph, and the argument. In addition, you are given a basic outline of the sections of an argumentative essay.

In an essay, we note, we expect you to do a few important things. You should, in your essay,

- engage with all aspects of the question
- structure your answer in a specific way
- substantiate your opinion (or argument) by referring to textual evidence, and
- use a certain set of tools in order to comment on the text.

To put this into the context of writing about a novel, this means:

- carefully thinking about the question – what it is asking about the novel and what you should focus on
- planning your argument in relevant parts – introduction, body, conclusion – which will together form your essay
- finding and quoting (or paraphrasing) relevant sentences, words and phrases from the novel (or the extract from the novel provided in your essay question) that support the points of your argument, and
- using the terms and concepts we cover in Unit 4 (and, where relevant, Unit 3, and to a lesser extent, Unit 2) to write about the text and its meaning, based on what the question requires.

We now look at how you can approach writing an essay on the novel. While we focus on *Small Things*, the guidance given here can help you to write a critical essay on any novel, which is a skill you will utilise often in your second- and third-year English literature modules. You will find that the logical thinking and critical engagement that you practise here will help you to think differently about other works of literature too, including poetry and short stories. Outside of this module in your everyday life, you might even be able to apply these skills to think more critically about television series and films, and many other things besides.

Do not be intimidated by the idea of writing an essay. You have come this far, and if you have been doing the activities throughout the guide and participating in your e-tutorials, you are on track!

Think about planning and writing an essay as walking down a road. Initially, the road may be dark, but by embarking on the walk using the right tools, you can light your way and reach the end of the road successfully. In addition, you will have explored the road fully, and you should therefore be able to explain to someone else what you have been learned and share with them the knowledge you have created.

Unit 1 shows that there is no ‘one right answer’ when it comes to literary analysis. You might have an interpretation (also called a reading) of a text that is different from the interpretations of other students. You might also refer to different sections of the text (through paraphrasing or quoting directly) to support your argument for your interpretation. This is perfectly acceptable. Keep in mind, however, that you must support your arguments both with textual evidence (knowledge and understanding of the text that is within the context of the text) and with logical reasoning (a step-by-step argument that shows your grasp of some aspect of the text’s deeper meaning).

The assignment and examination questions that you receive in this module can take several forms. Most often, you are presented with a short quote from the novel and are required to ‘engage critically’ with the extract. But what does this mean? Let us look at a specific example, using the points above and in Unit 1.

How to answer questions in an assignment or examination

What follows below is an example of the type of question you can expect to get in an assignment or examination as well as a discussion of the steps you should follow to answer it.

Example question

Love is an important theme in Nthikeng Mohlele’s novel, *Small Things*. To show whether this statement is true, critically analyse the following extract from the first chapter of the novel. In your essay, pay attention to how narration and characterisation are utilised to explore the theme. While your focus should be the extract, you should also refer to other relevant sections of the novel, where appropriate.

I, to this day, fall hopelessly in love whenever I see postmen carrying mailbags. My heart leaps at bright-red post boxes in pictures. They remind me of Desiree – the postmaster’s daughter. We never exchanged much, Desiree and I. I caught her roving eye on me one morning during Mass. Hearing nothing of the sermon, I saw only this eye, a beaming light bulb that warmed me from the third row, [...] from where I knelt praying, my knees molten with love. (Mohlele, 2018: 5)

Did you know?

As we discuss in Unit 3, you should underline any words or concepts with which you are not familiar and look up their meaning online or in a dictionary.

Here, for example you could find out: A [postmaster](#) is an official in charge of a post office. A [sermon](#) is a talk on a religious subject, often given during a church service by an official of the church. [Mass](#) is a particular congregated celebration in the Roman Catholic Church.

Suggestions and guidelines for answers

Step 1: What is the question asking, and what should I focus on?

The question has two main parts: firstly, what we can call the instructions, and secondly, an extract from the novel. Let us begin by focusing on the instructions, underlining keywords that will light our path as we start walking down the road of the essay.

Activity

Copy the examination question into your activity journal. Then, underline (or highlight) the keywords in the instructions. You can use the three-point guide below. Do this before you move on with this section of the tutorial letter.

- Find instruction words. This could include words like analyse, discuss, assess, examine, etc.
- Look for any words that refer to aspects of the novel (such as themes) or the elements of fiction (plot, setting, characterisation, narrative perspective/narration, etc.).
- Identify anything that gives you an indication of the parameters within which you are required to work. Must you only analyse the extract, or is there something else you should also refer to?

When you have completed the activity above, the instructions might look as follows:

Love is an important theme in Nthikeng Mohlele's novel, *Small Things*. To show whether this statement is true, critically analyse the following extract from the first chapter of the novel. In your essay, pay attention to how narration and characterisation are utilised to explore the theme. While your focus should be the extract, you should also refer to other relevant sections of the novel, where appropriate.

You can then organise the information you have underlined to better understand the question:

- Love; theme; statement is true: The question makes clear that the theme of love must be central to your discussion. It also requires you to argue whether or not the statement is true.
- Narration; characterisation; explore the theme: This shows you which specific elements of fiction in the novel you must focus on in order to discuss the theme of love.
- Extract from the first chapter of the novel: This tells you where in the novel (and therefore where in the narrative timeline) the extract appears. This should help you to remember and understand the context of the extract.
- Your focus should be the extract; you should also refer to other relevant sections of the novel: This indicates that you should focus your discussion firstly on what is contained in the extract, but where it is relevant, you should refer to other parts of the novel related to the theme of love as well.

These points will slot into different parts of your essay:

Step 2: Structuring your essay

As you know, an essay is made up of three parts: the introduction, the body, and the conclusion. In order to map out a coherent essay wherein these three sections are sufficiently linked, you need to know what goes into the different parts of the essay. While it must be clear to your reader which part of your essay is which, you should not use any headings in your essay. In other words, you will not have subheadings for the introduction, body and conclusion of your essay. You should not even have subheadings that say 'Introduction,' 'Body' or 'Conclusion'!

In an essay on a novel, you need to lead the person reading your essay down the same road you have travelled. The way down this road is lit by your argument. As such, you must introduce the reader to your argument to make them aware of where you are going (introduction), then lead them through the main section of the road, where you illustrate the main points of your argument (body), then finally, you lead the reader to the end of the essay, where you bring the different points set out together to conclude the journey (conclusion). Overall, you should attempt to show why your interpretation of the novel is a valid one. Fortunately, the question will

always give you some kind of guidance in terms of how you must present your argument, and so it essentially gives you the basic signposts for your essay.

A **signpost** is something that provides guidance or is an indicator of something important.

For example, the question indicates that you need to provide an argument that demonstrates either that love is an important theme in the novel or that it is not. In this case, it would be difficult to argue that love is not an important theme in the novel as it is a topic that keeps coming up in the novel. The question also shows you that you need to focus specifically on how narration and characterisation are used to explore the theme of love.

The introduction

Remember that an introduction is not just the first paragraph of your essay. It is so much more important than that, as it leads your reader into your essay. An introduction is your chance to contextualise the essay for readers, to state clearly what you are going to be arguing, and to give readers a sense of how you will support your argument. The best way to achieve this is to imagine that your reader does not know what the examination or assignment question is that you are responding to in your essay. They are simply reading an essay that focuses on something specific in the novel. Your introduction must make clear to the reader what it is that your essay is going to be about.

Most good introductions include the following main parts:

- Contextualisation: This is where you tell the reader of your essay what it is that you are talking about. You should (1) name the writer, (2) name the text, and (3) provide no more than two or three sentences explaining what the text is about.
- Thesis statement: Your introduction must contain a clear statement that indicates what your argument is going to be. While this may be expressed in different ways (depending on the question), the argumentative focus should always be clear to the reader. You may want to include sentences such as 'In this essay I argue that the novel ...', 'The essay will show how the theme of ...', or any other similar expression. If you are given an extract, you should also contextualise and link it to the rest of the text in your introduction. To contextualise an extract, you need to show where and how it fits into the novel and your argument. For instance, 'The main focus of my analysis will be on an extract from Chapter 1, where the narrator first falls in love with Desiree.'
- Indicate the structure: Your introduction should have a few sentences that indicate how you will be arguing your point. In other words, you should very briefly state or discuss what main ideas you will be unpacking in the subsequent paragraphs in the body of the essay. You may want to use the 'Firstly, ...', 'Secondly, ...' formulation.

Activity

In your activity journal, plan your introduction using the keywords you identified in the previous activity in conjunction with the points set out above about how to write an introduction. Do not be concerned about getting it right the first time. Play around with your introduction. You can write multiple versions, considering each time how well your introduction is working according to the guidelines above. Rewriting your introduction a few times is a good exercise that will help to improve your overall writing skills.

The body of the essay

The body of an essay is made up of a few paragraphs. The number of paragraphs you must include in the body of your essay will be determined by the required length of your essay and the number of points you need to discuss.

The first paragraph in the essay body will flow logically from the introduction. The second paragraph will follow logically from the first paragraph, and the third will follow on the second, and so on. The order of the paragraphs in the body of the essay should reflect how you set out your discussion points in the introduction. If you think about the essay as a road again, it makes sense that the paragraphs must follow on each other like this. We are not simply plopped down in a middle of a road when undertaking a journey, after all. We follow it from beginning to end, section by section. In the same way, we should walk the reader through each part of our essay as we go along.

Paragraphs in the body of the essay are ways of arranging information coherently so that they support and provide evidence for the argument that is being made. Each paragraph in the body of an essay should focus on a different aspect of the main argument or topic. Each paragraph should also have a single focus and its relevance to the argument that you are making should be very clear. Consider carefully how the question might even give you some guidance as to what needs to be discussed in the paragraphs in the body of the essay.

A paragraph in the body of an essay should be structured in such a way that the ideas develop logically and that the argument is clear throughout.

You will recall that Unit 1 explains that every paragraph should have a topic sentence. The easiest way to do this is to use the first sentence of your paragraph to indicate what that paragraph will be about. Avoid expressions such as 'This paragraph is about how the theme of love...'. You should rather write: 'The novel explores the theme of love through the relationship between the main character and Desiree.' In this way, readers of your essay will not only know that you are writing about the theme of love in this paragraph, but that you will also link it to something specific (the relationship between two characters; characterisation) here.

While the topic sentence makes a specific claim, the rest of the paragraph needs to support it. This support can take a number of forms: close reading of extracts, analysis of significant moments in the novel, or a combination of close readings and analyses.

- **Close reading of extracts:** You should be able to identify and integrate quotations into grammatically correct sentences. Remember that you always need to discuss quotations and explain how they support the argument you are making.
 - Revise the relevant section of Unit 1 to refresh your quoting skills.
 - You might want to use phrases such as 'This comment reveals how...' or 'This image is evidence of the way in which the novel...'
 - In the extract in the example question you could for instance refer to how mailbags become an image that the main character associates with love, as it reminds him of Desiree, the postmaster's daughter.
- **Analysis of significant moments in a text:** You should be able to identify important moments in the text that are relevant to the essay question and then discuss them. It is very important that you do not merely retell the story. Instead, you need to analyse the significance of particular moments or characters and show how these relate to the main topic of the question.
 - In the case of the example question, you could mention how the main character's enduring love for Desiree persists throughout the narrative, referring to particular instances in the novel where he reminds us as readers of this love.
- **Close reading of an extract and reference to relevant moments elsewhere in the novel:** This means providing a particular point of argument by referring to the extract, and then briefly linking that (where relevant) to something that appears elsewhere in the novel.

- You are asked to do this in the example question. One way in which you could do this is to link the main character's infatuated descriptions of Desiree with how he views her later in the novel.

Make sure that all the quotations and examples in the paragraph have been effectively linked to the argument that you are making. To avoid paragraphs that are unfocused and irrelevant, end your paragraph with a sentence that connects the ideas in the paragraph to the broader argument or question. For instance, 'This reveals the importance of the character's motivation in relation to the theme of love.'

Remember that you will not be expected to be able to quote from the novel (except from the given extract) if you do not have access to the novel in an assessment setting (such as the examination). In such cases, you can simply paraphrase what you remember of the text. If you have to write an assignment essay on the novel, however, you must be able to quote accurately and correctly from the novel.

Activity

Plan the body of your essay using the keywords in conjunction with the points set out above about how to write paragraphs for the essay body. Use the points below to guide you further.

- Identify how many main argumentative points you need to include and let that determine how many paragraphs you will write for the body of your essay.
- Check your work again to make sure that you signposted in your introduction what the paragraphs in the body will be about.
- Start working on your paragraphs. Remember to pay attention to the logical flow from one paragraph to the next.
- Think back to Unit 1 where we discuss words such as 'however', 'although', 'similarly' that function as useful signposts in showing the structure and flow of an argument. You should not be concerned about writing perfect paragraphs with your first attempt here. Writing and rewriting the paragraphs and finding different ways to link them to each other and to your main argument is a very good exercise.

The conclusion

As Unit 1 explains, the conclusion of an essay should be the last paragraph (or, in some cases, the last few paragraphs) of an essay. Your conclusion should sum up the main points that you have made in the body of your essay. Your conclusion should not introduce any new ideas into your essay, as the conclusion is only there to summarise what has already been discussed.

The conclusion is the last bit of the road before it comes to an end. As such, you should show your reader that you are concluding (closing) your essay. You can use phrases such as 'In conclusion...' or 'Finally...' to signal this. You should also mention the name of the author and the novel again, for instance: 'In conclusion, the theme of love in Nthikeng Mohlele's *Small Things* is explored...'

The conclusion should very briefly repeat what the main argument of your essay is and then summarise – again very briefly – how the points you discussed in the body of your essay support your main argument. For instance, you could write something like the following: 'In this essay, I showed how love is one of the main themes in the novel through an exploration of how narration and characterisation...'

Your conclusion should still be focused. Include only what you are required to by the essay question. Do not

- introduce any new and unrelated ideas in the conclusion
- morally judge the actions or words of characters, or of society in general, as this is not at all relevant
- make a value judgement about whether the novel is well written or not
- explain to the reader how much you enjoyed the text or were moved by it.

Activity

Reread your essay's introduction and body. Write a very brief conclusion according to the guidelines provided on the previous page. Remember that you should only make reference to the most important information, and you should do so in very concise terms.

Writing and rewriting your conclusion to make sure it suits your essay is very important. Once you have polished this final part of your essay, you can put the introduction, body and conclusion together. And there you go! You have written an essay on the novel!

This unit has furthered your understanding of the ideas discussed in this guide as a whole. You have seen how to read a novel using the literary terms and elements with which you have become familiar over the course of the year. You have also seen how to structure and write an essay which analyses aspects of a novel.

Conclusion

Thank you for taking the time to work through this guide to Foundations in English Literary Studies.

We trust that you found the material both intellectually stimulating and enjoyable. Moreover, we hope that you can see how the skills you developed here will benefit you in different areas of your life, whether this is in the workplace, in your ability to engage critically with information you encounter on social media or in your future studies. Being able to read with a discerning eye, think with an enquiring mind and then write with clarity, logic, and precision are skills that last a lifetime.

Your success in this module depends on your willingness to engage with the material we have developed. We encourage you to participate in your e-tutor groups, watch the livestream sessions as they are broadcast, and familiarise yourself with the material available on myUnisa.

I have finished reading the 501 – what do I do now?
In preparation for the examination at the end of the year, we recommend that you:
Read through your activity journal and complete any activities you may have missed
Read all the prescribed texts again – all the poems, short stories, and the novel
Take note of anything that you do not understand and discuss it with your e-tutor or lecturer
Work through your marked assignments and ensure that you have addressed any issues raised by the markers
Reread the feedback tutorial letters based on the assignments
Practise your essay writing skills by completing the additional activities in Tutorial Letter 102
Complete the examination preparation tutorials offered by your e-tutor on myUnisa
If you have any questions or concerns, the following platforms are available:
myUnisa: online platform that provides general information and Frequently Asked Questions. We will inform you of any upcoming livestream broadcasts here
Your e-tutor (via myUnisa): she or he will function as the bridge between you and the lecturers, and will work with you through Tutorial Letter 102
Your lecturers: contact us at ENG1501@unisa.ac.za

We wish you a smooth and successful academic journey as you move forward in your studies!

Kind regards

The ENG1501 team

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Toolkit

alliteration: repetition of consonant sounds in a poem, e.g. 'already there's a sign/ in the sky/ for those who see' ('shak-shak', lines 29-31)

allusion: a reference to another person, text, place, or event outside the poem or literary work, e.g. reference to Nelson Mandela's speech in 'shak-shak'

analogy: a story used to compare one thing to another

argument: a systematic explanation of ideas that provides evidence and logical reasoning to support an interpretation of a text

assonance: the repetition of vowel sounds in a poem, e.g. '& the carnival entered the last streets' ('shak-shak', line 1)

atmosphere: the mood that is spread throughout the whole or part of a work of literature

characterisation: the ways in which an author represents a character

chronological or chronology: referring to events in the order in which they occurred

climax: the point in a story when the conflict is at its highest intensity

close reading: paying close attention to the details of the text while reading

conflict: the struggle between a character and another character, or a character and society, in a story

connotation: the meaning we associate with a certain word, e.g. 'laughter' is associated with happiness and joy

couplet: a stanza that consists of two consecutive lines of poetry that rhyme

critical analysis: using a certain set of analytical skills to read the text closely and write about it using an analytical vocabulary of literary concepts and terms

cross rhyme: rhyming words at the end of non-consecutive lines of poetry, expressed as ababcdcd

deeper meaning: a level of meaning in a text that is not immediately obvious when we read the text superficially

denotation: the dictionary definition of a word, e.g. a book is a bound set of physical pages

dialogue: the conversations between two or more characters featured in the text

diction: word choices

end rhyme: rhyming words at the end of lines in poetry, can include pair rhyme (aabb) and cross rhyme (abab)

enjambment: run-on lines in poetry

figurative: the symbolic, metaphoric, or implied meaning, e.g. money makes the world go round means that economies maintain our day-to-day lives

first-person narrator: a narrator characterised by using 'I'

flashback: when a narrator in the present time of a story thinks back to or describes the past

focalise/focalisation: 'to see through the eyes of' (think of how this word is clearly related to the word 'focus')

free verse: a form of poetry that closely follows the patterns of everyday speech

imagery: the idea or picture that a poem makes you imagine when you read it

irony: when there is a difference between what a situation appears to be and what it actually is

literal: the actual, exact, or correct meaning

logical discussion: a step-by-step explanation that makes clear how specific information supports an argument

message: the deeper meaning of a story

metaphor: a figure of speech that compares two unlike things *without* using the words 'like' or 'as'; also called a direct comparison

mood: the atmosphere of a poem or a piece of writing

narration and narrator: the person telling the story in a work of fiction (different from the author of a story)

octave: eight lines that form a unit in a poem

ode: a classic lyric poem

onomatopoeia: the formation of a word that sounds like the thing it describes, e.g. a cat says 'meow'

oxymoron: a figure of speech that uses words together that seem to contradict one another, e.g. bittersweet/ original copy

pair rhyme: rhyming words at the end of consecutive lines of poetry, expressed as aabbccdd

paragraph: a section of an essay or text that contains one set of related ideas

personification: a figure of speech that attributes a living quality to an inanimate object

plot: significant events in a work of fiction as well as the relationship between these events

plot summary: a short version of what happens in a work of prose; provides the most important details from the story – what happens, in what order, which characters are involved, etc.

prose: ordinary written language which does not make use of a set rhythm or rhyme scheme

quatrain: a group of four lines in a poem that form a unit

resolution: the point in a story when the conflict is cleared up or resolved

second-person narrator: a narrator characterised by the use of 'you'

sentence: a basic unit of language that expresses meaning

sestet: a group of six lines in a poem that form a unit

setting: the general location in which a story unfolds as well as its historical context

simile: a figure of speech that compares one thing to another using the words 'like' or 'as'

'signpost' words and phrases: words or phrases that indicate how the ideas in sentences and paragraphs are linked

sonnet: a type of poem that consists of fourteen lines and follows a particular rhyme scheme.
Petrarchan sonnets: abba, abba, cdecde or cdcdcd;
Shakespearean sonnets: abab, cdcd, efef, gg

speaker: the person who is speaking in the poem

stanza: a group of lines in a poem that usually form a unit of meaning

story: a work of fiction as a whole, including significant and insignificant events

subtext: unspoken messages

symbol: an image used to represent something else

text: a literary work

textual evidence: information from a text which is used within context in order to support an argument

theme: what the poem or story is about; the main point

third-person narrator: a narrator characterised by the use of 'her', 'him', 'she', and 'he'

tone: the speaker's attitude toward the specific subject that the poem is about

topic sentence: a sentence in a paragraph that expresses the main topic of the paragraph