



The second unit of the A Level English Literature course is all about prose – how writers present themes, ideas, feelings, characters and events in their stories.

In this part of your bridging unit we are going to focus on how the ‘novel’ gives us a unique insight into a character’s perspective.

Have you ever read a book that has made you think differently about something? Tell us all about it here!

When did it all begin?

Most critics see the genre as dating back to the early 18th Century and point to the publication of Robinson Crusoe as the starting point of the novel as a literary form. Robinson Crusoe (by Daniel Defoe) tells the story of a young man who is shipwrecked on an island off the coast of South America. This article from the British Library explores how the art form developed from the publication of Robinson Crusoe in 1719.

<https://www.bl.uk/restoration-18th-century-literature/articles/the-rise-of-the-novel>

What was so different about the novel?

What made prose fiction, or the 'novel' as it came to be known, different to other forms of story-telling was the use of the single narrator and the detailed account of their story.

How do you study a novel?

On the A Level English Literature course you will get the chance to study lots of different types of novels, including Dystopian fiction, the Gothic, Victorian novels and modern novels. However, the first point of analysis is always the same – *from whose perspective is the story being told?*

Getting started...

One of the most popular novels we look at is John Fowles' *The Collector*. Here's an extract from the start of the novel for you to have a read through. This extract is told from the perspective of a young man named Clegg.

'When she was home from her boarding-school I used to see her almost every day sometimes, because their house was right opposite the Town Hall Annexe. She and her younger sister used to go in and out a lot, often with young men, which of course I didn't like. When I had a free moment from the files and ledgers I stood by the window and used to look down over the road over the frosting and sometimes I'd see her. In the evening I marked it in my observations diary, at first with X, and then when I knew her name with M. I saw her several times outside too. I stood right behind her once in a queue at the public library down Crossfield Street. She didn't look once at me, but I watched the back of her head and her hair in a long pigtail. It was very pale, silky, like burnet cocoons. All in one pigtail coming down almost to her waist, sometimes in front, sometimes at the back. Sometimes she wore it up. Only once, before she came to be my guest here, did I have the privilege to see her with it loose, and it took my breath away it was so beautiful, like a mermaid.'

When you have read the extract a couple of times have a think about the following questions, annotate the extract and note down your thoughts. We'll talk through your ideas in class!

- What do we learn about Clegg?
- What do you think is happening?
- Are there any details that make you think something sinister is going on?
- What details might hint at (foreshadow) further events?

What else can I read?

We'd love to know what you like to read and we are also keen that you challenge yourself to read things you wouldn't normally choose – this really helps to develop your critical skills. Why not try listening to one of these podcasts for some more ideas?

The Penguin Podcast; The Waterstone's Podcast; Radio 4 Bookclub

Interested in how the novel has helped to shape history?

The BBC recently produced a series of documentary films called 'Novels That Shaped the World'.

Episode 1 'A Woman's Place' focuses on the role of women in the novel, looking at how women's rights, lives and works have been fundamental to the development of prose fiction.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m000b8mf/novels-that-shaped-our-world-series-1-1-a-womans-place>

Episode 2 'The Empire Writes Back' considers how different writers have presented changing attitudes to the British Empire and colonialism.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m000bhgt/novels-that-shaped-our-world-series-1-2-the-empire-writes-back>

Episode 3 'The Class Ceiling' looks at the context of class, considering how the poorest members of society have been presented in fiction and why class is still such an important motif.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m000bpvx/novels-that-shaped-our-world-series-1-3-the-class-ceiling>

Whatever you do this summer, make some time for reading. It will help you to develop your skills as a literary analyst and prepare you for the demands of A Level Literary study!