

MILES FRANKLIN  LITERARY AWARD

STUDYING THE AUSTRALIAN NOVEL IN SENIOR ENGLISH COURSES

**A resource developed for the
Miles Franklin Trust Literary Award by**

English Teachers' Association NSW



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READING AUSTRALIA



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BACKGROUND

The Miles Franklin Literary Award is recognised as Australia's most prestigious literary Award. It was set up by Australia author Miles Franklin to support authors and promote Australian literature.

Miles Franklin (1879-1954) was born at her grandmother's home in Talbingo, New South Wales. She was the eldest of seven children and she spent the first years of her life at Brindabella Station.

Miles is best known for her novel *My Brilliant Career*, completed before the age of 20 and published in 1901. Eight years passed before her second novel was during her life, and after, a total of 19 books have been published.

The Trust Company is the proud Trustee of the Award, which was first awarded in 1957 to Patrick White for his novel *Voss*

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INTRODUCTION

This resource has been developed to assist teachers to support students in understanding the nature and elements of the realist novel. It does so through

- examining elements of the novel form
- illustrating these elements through the close study of Andrew McGahan's *The White Earth*
- reinforcing understanding of each element of the novel by comparing how it is featured in another text.

The focus is on Australian award winning texts, particularly those that have won or been listed for the Miles Franklin Literary Award. The resource contains

- a general understanding of novel study
- a study of Australian literature focusing on the question: 'What is Australian Literature?'
- approaches to the close study of the example text, Andrew McGahan's *The White Earth*
- comparisons of novelistic elements of *The White Earth* with other award-winning Australian texts

The materials in the resource are aimed at students in years 10 to 12 and have been developed to address the content of the senior courses of the Australian Curriculum.

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

This resource may be used as

- a close study of *The White Earth*
- a wide reading program with *The White Earth* as a model to explore each element of novel study, reinforced with a comparison text to highlight that aspect
- a wide reading program with a core question such as
 - What is a novel?
 - What is Australian literature?
- an auxiliary to any close textual study to move students beyond elements of that text to understanding how those elements operate in the novel form.
- a support document for creative writing using *The White Earth* and the other texts as examples of good writing

Assessment

It is suggested that teachers look at the tasks that appear at the end of the unit before beginning. The assessment tasks developed for this novel study can be adjusted and alternatives have been suggested so teachers may choose what suits the context of their program and their class. There has been scaffolding provided so that students are well prepared for their task.

THE READING PROCESS

READING

The statistics

According to the PISA survey of 15 year olds love of reading is a strong indicator of achievement in students¹. The Australian Bureau of Statistics study into reading habits of Australians records that in 2006 reading was the favourite activity of about 61 per cent of Australians aged 15 years and over. In 2009, 72% of children aged 5-4 years reported reading for pleasure outside of school hours during the last two school weeks prior to interview by the bureau.²

...what I enjoy in a narrative is not directly its content or even its structure, but rather the abrasions I impose upon the fine surface: I read on, I skip, I look up, I dip in again. Which has nothing to do with the deep laceration the text of bliss inflicts upon language itself, and not upon the simple temporality of its reading.

Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure Of The Text*³

For discussion:

Barthes tells us that content, structure, language, and the time taken to read are influenced by the way we read; in other words the final effect comes from us as readers and not the book itself.

Think about his words and then about your own reading practices. How do you read a book? Do you read, skip, look up, dip? Think of verbs that describe the reading process for you. Share this in groups or with the class.

The Novel

“...the book creates meaning, the meaning creates life.”

Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*⁴

In many ways the novel is the focus of English classes, creating a space for discussion on moral and ethical issues around a character, situation and context. It is because of our love of the novel and the imaginative experiences we have had that many of us become English teachers but reading a novel is not an instinctive process. It requires entry into “interpretive communities” of readers (Stanley Fish), who read the novel in a particular way. As teachers we need to initiate our students into these patterns of reading. Fish sees reading as an exchange or contract between the reader and the writer:

*As the reader passes through the various perspectives offered by the text, and relates the different views and patterns to one another he sets the work in motion, and so sets himself in motion, too.*⁵

The reader therefore brings ideas to the novel and in turn negotiates with the ideas encountered in the novel. Fish also reminds us:

¹ Marion Meiers Reading for pleasure and literacy achievement, ACER <http://research.acer.edu.au/resdev/vol12/iss12/5>

² Reading, Australian Bureau of Statistics, http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/resources/reports_and_publications/artforms/literature/reading

³ Barthes, R. *The Pleasure of the Text*, translated by R. Muller, p 11-12 <http://emberilmu.files.wordpress.com/2011/08/roland-barthes-the-pleasure-of-the-text.pdf>

⁴ ibid. P. 13 <http://emberilmu.files.wordpress.com/2011/08/roland-barthes-the-pleasure-of-the-text.pdf>

⁵ Fish, Stanley, "Interpreting the Variorum" Leitch, V (General Editor) in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, 2001 W.W. Norton & Co New York p. 1674

*As a rule there are four main perspectives in narration: those of the narrator, the characters, the plot and the ... reader.*⁶

As we work between the four perspectives we become part of the ideas of the text. The reading process becomes the creation of the act of empathy and an inquiry into the moral values of the novel. Modern philosophers such as Martha Nussbaum claim that it is in the literary that empathy takes place. She says:

*The adventure of the reader... like the adventure of the intelligent characters... involves valuable aspects of human moral experience.*⁷

This is what we want to achieve in our classes but the texts are long and need some negotiation to take students to their destination and while we do this we don't want to lose the pleasure of the text.

Student Activity:

Ask students to write a statement on what they

- enjoy **about** reading (not what kind of books they like) and
- what might hinder their enjoyment.

In considering these ideas, such stimulus questions as

- How closely do you identify with the characters and the action? Do you ever feel you are participating in the text and so are living another life?
- Have you ever gained insights into yourself from texts you have read? Have any of these insights been so profound that they have changed the way you think about yourself and the world?
- Do you enjoy – or find interesting – texts that insist on an intellectual rather than emotional response from the reader through their choice of language or unusual structure?
- How often do you reread sections of texts? What do you hope to gain by doing so?

Pin these statements on a board and discuss them from time to time, as a class or in small groups, during the reading of the novel.

At the end of the unit, students write a reflection on

- what they have learned about their approach to reading and
- how they might increase their reading pleasure.

THE AUSTRALIAN NOVEL: A NATIONAL LITERATURE

HOW DO WE DEFINE THE AUSTRALIAN NOVEL?

What does it mean to have a national literature?

Miles Franklin, an Australian author of the early twentieth century left a bequest to the nation to establish the Miles Franklin Literary Award. In her will she directed that every year a prize is awarded *to the novel of the year of the highest literary merit which must present Australian*

⁶ Fish, *ibid*, p. 1677

⁷ Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays in Philosophy and Literature*, 1990, p 143

Life in any of its phases. She believed that "Without an indigenous literature, people can remain alien in their own soil."

This however raises questions:

- What is an Australian novel?
- Does it have to be set in Australia?
- Does it have to be written by an Australian born citizen?
- Why do we need Australian novels?
- In what ways does the Australian novel affect us?

The whole idea of having a national literature has raised a great deal of debate. Before starting on a course of Australian literature it is a good idea to define what is meant by a national literature and why it is important. How does the national align itself against the international? How can we maintain the boundaries of a national literature given wider global influences? Can we say that there has been no influence outside of the country in which the book was written? Does an Australian novel have to be set in Australia?

Professor Dixon writes that:

*... while Australian literature itself is now and always has been influenced by international contexts, the study of Australian literature, especially by Australians, has tended to take a national perspective only. ... The nation remains one of our most important imagined communities, but for writers and readers alike it is wide open to a series of influences from other kinds of imagined communities that are both smaller and larger than the nation itself, from the local or sub-national to the transnational.*⁸

Consider: How does Professor Dixon's statement affect the interpretation of Miles Franklin's bequest?

Student Activities:

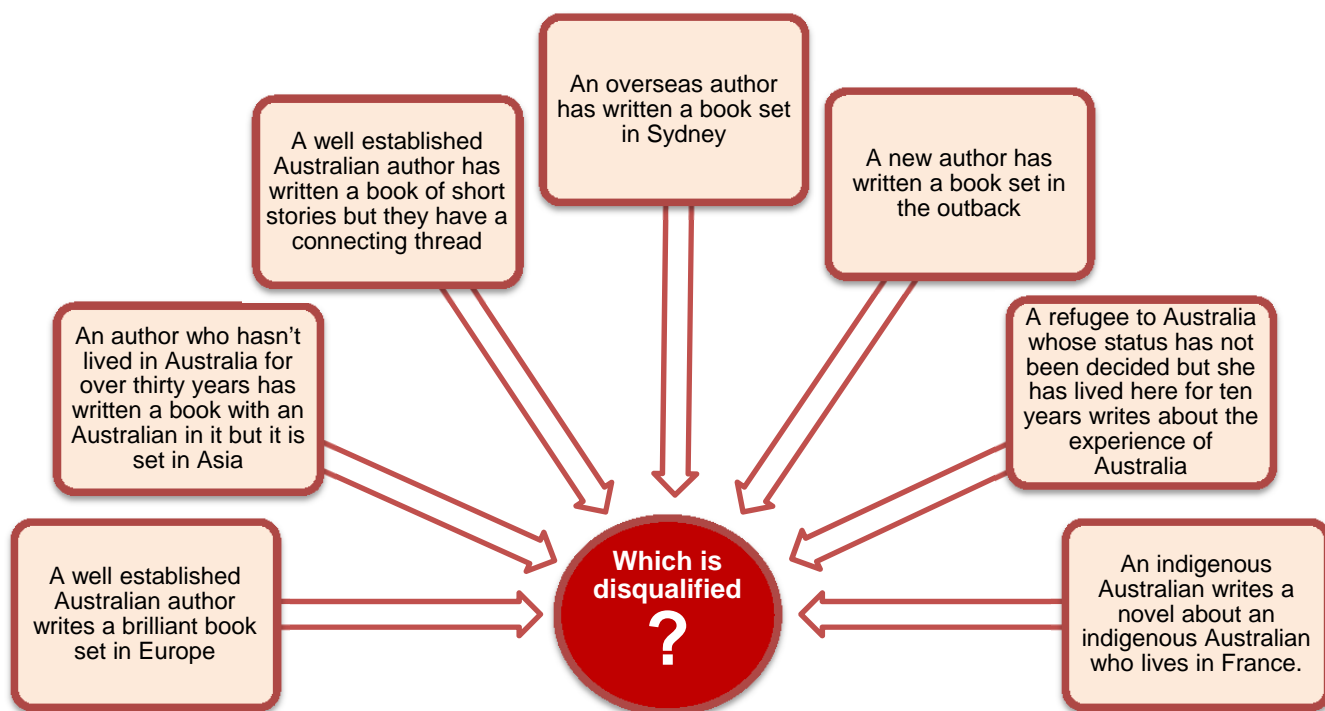
1. What is Australian Literature?

- Research the topic of Australian literature and to find their own definition
- Explain what Miles Franklin might have meant by: "Without an indigenous literature, people can remain alien in their own soil."

1. How do you define an Australian novel? Work in pairs and then share your responses with the class.

2. Imagine you are the judges of the Miles Franklin Award. You have to check that books fit into the definition of Australian novel. Which books by the following authors should be disqualified?

⁸ Robert Dixon, "Australian Literature and the World Republic of Letters", *Metaphor*, Issue 1 2013



Take a poll of the answers – discuss any contentious ideas.

What is the 'great Australian novel'?

In your class, form seven groups and

- Go to the Miles Franklin website <http://www.milesfranklin.com.au/> to conduct research about winners of the prize, each group taking about one decade. List the authors and the titles that have won each year and by looking up a synopsis of the novel complete the table below.

Year	Author and Book title	Setting	Themes
2010-now			
2000-2009			
1990 -1999			
1980-1989			
1970-1979			
1961-1969			
1957-1960			

- Analyse your findings to consider whether
 - a pattern emerges in the settings or the ideas that the writers write about
 - whether we can draw any conclusions about the great Australian novel from the list.

Present your findings to the class

- Based on the presentations you have seen, complete this table to see if the interpretation of the great Australian novel changes each decade.
- Can you suggest what contextual factors that may have affected any changes?

Decade	Settings	Themes	What pattern is discerned about each decade?

Conclusion: Return to your definition of the Australian novel and change it if you need to.

What is the Australian canon?

Read the extracts from the article by Robert Dixon⁹, Professor of Australian Literature (University of Sydney). And then answer the questions that follow.

“Australian Literature and the National Curriculum” *Metaphor*, 2009 issue 3

In this brief paper I want to argue for the inclusion of classic works of Australian literature in a national curriculum. But I also want to suggest that canonical works are more complex objects than has sometimes been assumed in recent public debates. The canonical Australian works I know are ‘Australian’ enough, but they are also ambivalent and even conflicted about the nation and nationalism.

...

[A] series of recent debates ... have returned us to a number of fundamental issues. Do schools and universities have a responsibility to teach Australian literature? If they do, what is the relationship between Australian literature and the idea of the nation? Is the compulsory teaching of Australian literature a form of cultural nationalism? Should the study of Australian literature be nation building or should it be engaged in critique? Can it do both?

*It is certainly true that early attempts to promote Australian literature were bound up with cultural nationalism. In the 1920s, Nettie and Vance Palmer, for example, worried that Australians were being overwhelmed by British and American culture. They wanted to see a distinctive Australian identity and believed this would be expressed in literature, especially the novel. Looking back to Federation, Nettie Palmer wrote in *Modern Australian Literature* (1924), ‘Perhaps the chief possession of Australia writers in the year 1901 was this consciousness of nationhood. ... What [Australia] was to mean ... lay in the hands of her writers, above all, to discover’.*

*But the connection between literature and national consciousness is never straightforward. Two of the canonical writers of this period, Henry Lawson and A.B. ‘Banjo’ Paterson, expressed quite different attitudes to the idea of Australia: put simply, Lawson’s view was dark and pessimistic; Paterson’s romantic and full of hope, and they argued these different points of view in their famous debate in the *Sydney Bulletin*.*

*The tendency for classic Australian works to be critical of Australian society continued throughout the twentieth century. Katharine Susannah Prichard’s *Coonardoo*, which has been widely taught in schools, caused a scandal when it was published in 1928 because it depicts sexual relations between white pastoralists and aboriginal women. Xavier Herbert’s*

⁹ Dixon R (2009) “Australian Literature and the National Curriculum ” *Metaphor*, 2009 issue 3

novel *Capricornia* (1936) describes the arrival of Europeans on the continent as 'The Coming of the Dingoes', and its central metaphor for white Australia is a locomotive driven by a drunken engine driver. Judith Wright's landmark collection of poems, *The Moving Image* (1946), contains in about equal measure poems that celebrate the pioneer legend and poems that condemn the pioneers for their destruction of aboriginal society and the environment. As early as 1961, Patrick White's novel *Riders in the Chariot* has ordinary suburban Australians persecuting Jewish European migrants.

Not only are canonical writers often critical of the nation, but the canon as it developed was internally conflicted. There has always been debate about what kinds of writers should be included in the canon and which excluded from it, and the process of canon formation thrives on disagreement. When we teach classic texts, we also teach the history of canon formation, which is a history of contested values. Put simply, the twentieth-century canon comprised authors who could broadly be described as 'national' writers, like Lawson and Paterson, and others who were 'international' or 'cosmopolitan' writers, who looked overseas for their inspiration, who travelled extensively abroad and sometimes became expatriates. The three leading international writers who are integral to the Australian canon are Henry Handel Richardson, Christina Stead and Patrick White. They lived abroad, published abroad, absorbed international styles and developed international reputations. The trend continues today: Peter Carey has lived in New York since 1989 and is now a US citizen.

Right through the twentieth century, cultural nationalist critics had difficulty in coming to terms with cosmopolitan writers. The first comprehensive history of Australian literature was published by H.M. Green in 1961. He said of one of Stead's novels, 'it does not really concern us, for its author left Australia ten years ago and settled abroad, and the book is cosmopolitan in tone and subject'. In her version of the canon in *Laughter Not For a Cage* (1956), Miles Franklin distinguished between writers who are rooted in their native soil, who write from 'authentic' Australian experience, and 'cosmopolitan', 'expatriate-minded' writers who have lost touch with their own culture. Her canon includes Henry Lawson, Joseph Furphy and herself; it works to exclude Richardson and Stead. Franklin's cultural nationalist values are reflected today in the Miles Franklin Literary Award, which, is given to 'the novel of the year which is of the highest literary merit and which must present Australian life in any of its phases'.

The canon, then, is not set in stone. It is not so much a thing as a process, a series of on-going arguments that reflect different views about what it means to be an Australian writer. Most recently it has opened spectacularly to include Indigenous writers like Kim Scott and Alexis Wright. And the classic texts of Australian literature do not have a simple relationship to the nation. When taught, they are volatile, highly unpredictable works of art that generate a range of views on issues such as the way women and migrants are treated in Australia, and white Australia's treatment of Aboriginal people and the environment. So this is an argument for the teaching of the canon, but also for a more complex understanding of what the canon is than we have seen in recent public discussion. It is important to teach the canon: a) because of the richness of its individual works and b) because the history of debates around the canon itself provides a rich social history of Australia.

...

We have a responsibility as custodians of the discipline [of Australian Literature] and its canons to instil both a capacity for critical thinking and an appreciation of literature. This is not to say that the Australian canon should be taught uncritically or unhistorically, but it must be introduced to new generations of readers.

Questions

- Using the information from the article construct a timeline of important moments in Australian literature and novels that were important.
- Which other novels can you add to the timeline?

- What is the main idea in this article about Australian literature? Create a mindmap which expresses the relationships between the main idea and supporting arguments.

WHAT ARE THE FEATURES OF AUSTRALIAN WRITING?

Stage 1: Brainstorming

Requirements: Butcher paper – felt pens and groups of students

- Brainstorm what you think are the features of Australian writing
- Hang your butcher papers' around the classroom like a gallery
- Look at what everyone has written
- Come together as a class and refine what you have written.

Stage 2: Research and refining your response

Watch the following YouTube videos and refine your brainstorm

- Nicholas Jose: on Australian literature
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X9tl8CtBdSw>
- Robert Dixon: The Australian canon
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jkApu6HuTRM>
- Sophie Cunningham and Joseph Gelfer discuss Australian Literature
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kesUMdfjc1Y>

Stage 3: Testing your ideas

- Go back to your earlier activity and look at the Miles Franklin list – do these books fit into your ideas?
- Can we draw any new conclusions about what makes an Australian novel?

Student activity: Websites on Australian Literature

Students work in groups and go to the following websites and explore what each has to follow. Report back to the group about how each website can be used to help with a study of Australian literature.

- Teaching Australian Literature: <http://teaching.austlit.edu.au/>
- Aust Lit: The Australian Literature resource: <http://www.austlit.edu.au/>
- Miles Franklin website: <http://www.milesfranklin.com.au/>
- Australian Poetry <http://www.poetrylibrary.edu.au/>

Activity: Writing an Australian novel

If you wanted to write the great Australian novel what would you include? Fill in this chart as if it is an outline of your great Australian novel. Make this as extreme as you can think of.

My great Australian novel outline

The setting for my novel would be:	
The characters of my novel would be:	
Here is an example of the type of words I would use:	
My complication that initiates the plot would be:	
The plot would be about:	
The theme would be about:	
The kinds of objects I would include would be:	
My audience would be:	

Present your ideas to the class. You should all then take a vote on which was the best “Australian” novel outline and justify your answer.

Reflection

- Have these activities on the great Australian novel made you think differently about what is Australian?
- What insight have you gained into the idea of an Australian novel?

NOVEL STUDY

Novels are an imaginative realisation of the world, with people represented through characters carrying out daily actions in different places. Many novels are a source of entertainment but novels that stand out are those that make us think about the world we live in, It is through novels that we can engage with ideas and sensitivities. Important events can be addressed in an imaginative world that asks people to reconsider their views and to act with empathy to create a moral universe.

Novel study involves many elements. All these elements come together to create meaning. While it is easy to start with all the elements separately ultimately you are looking for the patterns that reinforce the ideas of the text

- Context
- Plot
- Structure
- Characterisation
- Setting
- Narration
- Themes – attitudes and Values
- Style

CONTEXT

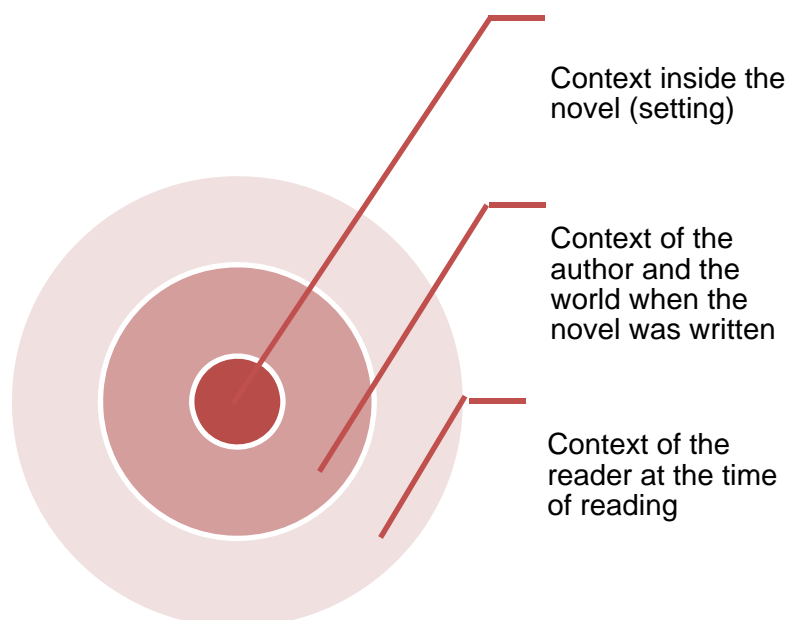
HOW IT WORKS

The Australian Curriculum defines context as:

The environment in which a text is responded to or created. Context can include the general social, historical and cultural conditions in which a text is responded to and created (the context of culture) or the specific features of its immediate environment (context of situation). The term is also used to refer to the wording surrounding an unfamiliar word that a reader or listener uses to understand its meaning.¹⁰

Context is a multilayered set of influences. The Australian Curriculum definition makes clear that context is about the world of the author (when the text was created) and the world of the reader (when and the circumstances in which the text is responded to). Context is also used to refer to the context of the characters in the novel – when and where the book is set – which helps define the cultural understandings we need to have to appreciate its meaning. The context of the author (historical, social and cultural context) provides insight into what influenced him or her at the time of writing. It also refers to the context of the reader, and the context of reading the novel (context of situation). Questions such as what beliefs and understandings about the world the reader brings to the novel or whether the novel is being read for pleasure or for an exam influence how the text is read at a particular time. So all of these contexts come together to affect the meaning of the text

Every novel takes on the ideas of the world in which it was created and, through the characters and storyline, provides a text that reinforces or challenges accepted views. The context or setting IN the novel is chosen because it has some significance to the ideas being explored. The context of the reader can be very different from reader to reader but it is important in creating meaning. The diagram below illustrates how context can work in a novel.



¹⁰ English Glossary, December 2012, ACARA
<http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Static/docs/senior%20secondary/English%20Glossary.pdf>

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: THE WHITE EARTH

To understand the novel *The White Earth*, we need to consider the historical context of the book. It was published in 2004 but set in 1992. It is set in rural southern Queensland in the year of the Mabo decision that declared the historical excuse of Australia being Terra Nullius (an empty land ready for settlement) was legally deemed to be unacceptable. There were calls for Reconciliation, and calls for an acknowledgement of the past suffering of Australia's first people. The novel comes at a time of heightened feelings, preceding the Kevin Rudd apology to the Stolen Generations in 2008. It is also a time of the formation of the exclusionist One Nation Party, in a rural Queensland setting not far from the setting of the novel. By setting his book in the same region as the One Nation Party and also embedding a colonial history through the saga of the White family and the history of Kuran House, McGahan has shown how this exclusionist view of Australia is part of a longer colonial legacy that has to be broken.

Flora MacDonald, from the ACT Branch of Australians for Reconciliation, writes:

...we need to include Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders in our communities so that we can all learn from one another and develop a real awareness, understanding, appreciation and respect for the culture and history of Indigenous Australia...Its basis is the inclusion of the Indigenous peoples of Australia, not their exclusion. And that is healing for all of us.

<http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/reconciliation>

If we consider this call for “appreciation” “respect” and especially “healing” we see the novel as providing more than just a criticism of past actions: it joins other calls for reconciliation and is therefore an important political text.

In the present 21st century context, post Kevin Rudd's apology and outward acceptance of reconciliation, readers cannot appreciate the intensity of emotions around this issue and the fear of contestation of land ownership at the time of the novel. McGahan, himself, grew up in rural Queensland and he therefore was conscious of the anxieties of the farmers about land which he places into a bigger human perspective about the atrocities of the past, acknowledging the rights of the indigenous people. He remembers the landscape of his childhood and comments on influences on his novel in this interview:

The White Earth it just drifted along out of lots of ideas. I'd been researching the Darling Downs for my own personal interest, the history of it, black and white. It was - when I first thought of this it was the mid 90's, it was the time of Pauline Hansen, the rise of Pauline Hansen. It was the time of the Wik decision. Native title had come in 93, Wik was in 96. And there were all sorts of fears and panic flying around Western Queensland about what, what's it going to mean to our properties and all that sort of stuff. There were these little right wing groups coming out of the woodwork, militias and things. There were rumours of the Klu Klux Klan having meetings in the Darling Downs - which I don't think was true but it's a great image so I added it to the book.

All this sort of stuff was just swirling around and then there was this great big house there to use as a focus of it all, this ruinous old house that I'd imagined it as. And so the story was there.¹¹

¹¹ Condon, Matthew, Interviewer (2005) 'In conversation with Andrew McGahan', Word'sWorth.. English Teachers' Association Queensland.

Student Activity

Before reading

Students should conduct research into

- the concept of Terra Nullius
- The Mabo Decision
- Squatters
- Perpetual leases of land
- Explorers of Queensland

While reading

Students should have headings:

- Terra Nullius, Mabo, squatters, indigenous people, explorers
- They can collect notes under these headings (or they can use different colour post-its for each topic)

Post reading

- Students should then sum up how McGahan is using this historical context in his book to develop his ideas

LITERARY CONTEXT: THE WHITE EARTH

Genre

Each type or genre of novel (including gothic, mystery, romance, science fiction, adventure, fantasy and others) has its own set of conventions by which we recognise what kind of story we can expect. These conventions apply to the setting, the characters, the storyline, the vocabulary and sentence style and the ideas being conveyed. In contrast to strongly conventional genre novels, classic texts are often distinguished from popular culture because they do not follow accepted patterns of writing but at the time they are written, challenge the form.

At this point, teachers may want to revise the idea of genre with their students through the following activity.

Student Activity

Work in groups to complete this table

Genre	Typical characters	Typical settings	Typical plot	Typical ideas	Example
Action					
Science fiction					
Romance					
Mystery					
Gothic					
Coming of age					
Hero's quest					
Fantasy					
Western					

In groups, students can share ideas on the following questions.

- What genres do you prefer to read?

- Why?

The Realist Novel

Novels act as if they are a reality but this reality is a construct. The realist novel aims to show life as it is, emphasising the ordinary over the heroic. It focuses on individuals, generally in the middle classes and their struggle with everyday life. It purports to offer a window onto real life but we all know that were this the case, the effect would be banal and incoherent as real life tends to be. Realism therefore disguises its own artifice - the steady significance of events and conversations, coherent characters, sympathetic settings and satisfying resolutions - to construct a representation of the world as it is. The codes used in realist fiction are so deeply ingrained in the reader that we lose ourselves in this created world and at times forget that it is a fabrication.

The White Earth, though clearly a realist novel has strains of other genres frequently seen in Australian literature.

The first Australian novel printed and published in mainland Australia was *The Guardian: a tale* by Anna Maria Bunn was published in Sydney in 1838. It is a Gothic romance written by a woman.¹² Other early books set in Australia – many of them non-fiction – were published in England. Australia's first well-known writer is Marcus Clarke with his book *For the Term of his Natural Life* regarded as an Australian classic. *The Guardian* falls into the popular culture genre of Gothic while the novel *For the Term of his Natural Life* is a historical novel, based on the purported reality of the convict days. Interestingly, *The White Earth* crosses the two genres, locating itself in a history of Australia and therefore acting as a historical novel but also creating what Gerry Turcotte calls an "Australian Gothic" which he connects to the colonial experience:

This sense of spiritual malaise is often communicated through the Gothic mode, that is, through a literary form which emphasises the horror, uncertainty and desperation of the human experience, often representing the solitariness of that experience through characters trapped in a hostile environment, or pursued by an unspecified or unidentifiable danger.

From its inception the Gothic has dealt with fears and themes which are endemic in the colonial experience: isolation, entrapment, fear of pursuit and fear of the unknown. And for each, the possibility of transformation, of surviving the dislocation, acts as a driving hope. If the Gothic is itself a hybrid form — a mode delineated by borrowings and confluences, by fragmentation and incompleteness, by a rejection of set values and yet a dependence on establishment — then it is ideal to speak the colonial condition.

For many the very landscape of Australia was Gothic.¹³

In *The White Earth* we see a hybrid genre, at times moving beyond the confines of historical and Gothic writing to employ realist elements and even magic realism in the dream sequences. It is a historical saga following a family's attempts to create a dynasty of land ownership.

Student Activity: Genres

1. Australian Gothic

Read about the Australian Gothic in Gerry Turcotte's article which can be found online (Turcotte (1998). "Australian Gothic" (PDF, 12 pages). *Faculty of Arts—Papers*. University of Wollongong. Retrieved 9 January 2008.)

¹² Turcotte, Gerry (1998). "Australian Gothic" (PDF, 12 pages). *Faculty of Arts—Papers*. University of Wollongong. Retrieved 9 January 2008.

¹³ Turcotte, Gerry (1998). "Australian Gothic" (PDF, 12 pages). *Faculty of Arts—Papers*. University of Wollongong. Retrieved 9 January 2008.

Turcotte is drawing a connection between colonialism and the Gothic. Trace his argument and list the evidence.
Do you agree with his thesis?

- Here is a list of the features of the Gothic. Add any others that Turcotte mentions. Find examples as you read the book and complete the table. You may want to separate into groups and trace the references pertaining to one Gothic feature and report back to the class on how that element is developed.

Features	Examples	Effect
Setting:		
A ruin		
Secret passageways		
Characters:		
A suspicious person		
A mad or manipulative person who loses contact with reality		
A hero who struggles to find the truth		
Ghosts from the past		
Events		
An unresolved and bloody past		
Themes:		
Fear and the dark side		
The struggle between good and evil		
Truth in dreams		

3. The historical novel

Find examples of historical events in the novel. What message do you think McGahan is conveying with each event?

Historical Event	Example	Message

4. Magic Realism

Look up definitions of magic realism and determine whether you feel this genre is relevant to the text

COMPARISON TEXT: EUCALYPTUS

Eucalyptus by Murray Bail received the Miles Franklin Award in 1999.

Activity: Exploring genre through reviews

Purpose of task:

In 2012 *Eucalyptus* was voted as number 15 in the *First Tuesday Book Club's* list of top 50 Australian Books¹⁴ to read. It's set in Australia and Murray Bail has chosen a very different genre for this novel. This activity will use reviews from many different sources to

- identify the features of the genre that reviewers have noted and
- model ways of writing reviews by comparing the stylistic features of the reviews

But first: Student activity

Pre-reading:

When you read the sentence below what kind of text do you think it might appear in? Justify your response by explaining which words led to your choice.

We could begin with desertorum, common name Hooked Mallee. Its leaf tapers into a slender hook, and is normally found in semi-arid parts of the interior.

Now look at the next paragraph. List all the scientific words and phrases. Which words and phrases don't seem to fit into a scientific text?

But desertorum (to begin with) is only one of several hundred eucalypts; there is no precise number. And anyway the very word, desert-or-um, harks back to a stale version of the national landscape and from there in a more or less straight line onto the national character, all those linings of the soul and the larynx, which have their origins in the bush, so it is said, the poetic virtues (can you believe it?) of being belted about by droughts, bushfires, smelly sheep and so on; and let's not forget the isolation, the exhausted shapeless women, the crude language, the always wide horizon, and the flies.

Does the next paragraph offer more clarity about the genre? Why / why not?

It is these circumstances which have been responsible for all those extremely dry (dun-coloured--can we say that?) hard-luck stories which have been told around fires and on the page. All that was once upon a time, interesting for a while, but largely irrelevant here.

¹⁴ ABC'S First Tuesday Book Club Top 50 Australian Books: <http://writereaderly.wordpress.com/about/first-tuesday-top-50/>

Besides, there is something unattractive, unhealthy even, about Eucalyptus desertorum. It's more like a bush than a tree; has hardly a trunk at all: just several stems sprouting at ground level, stunted and itchy-looking.

Here are the next few paragraphs. Underline the features of scientific writing. Highlight the terms that don't fit in and then consider the questions below.

- Where does the story actually start?
- What kind of story do the opening 'story' words remind us of?
- Use the left hand space to make comments on the way the text proceeds.
- Why does the author use "we"?
- What is the purpose of the intrusive narrator?
- Note the way the opening wanders through different times and stories. Why is the story so meandering?

We might as well turn to the rarely sighted Eucalyptus pulverulenta, which has an energetic name and curious heart-shaped leaves, and is found only on two narrow ledges of the Blue Mountains. What about diversifolia or transcontinentalis? At least they imply breadth and richness of purpose. Same too with E. globulus, normally employed as a windbreak. A solitary specimen could be seen from Holland's front verandah at two o'clock, a filigree pin greyish-green stuck stylishly in a woman's felt hat, giving stability to the bleached and swaying vista.

Each and every eucalypt is interesting for its own reasons. Some eucalypts imply a distinctly feminine world (Yellow Jacket, Rose-of-the-West, Weeping Gum). E. maidenii has given photogenic shade to the Hollywood stars. Jarrah is the timber everyone professes to love. Eucalyptus camaldulensis? We call it River Red Gum. Too masculine, too overbearingly masculine; covered in grandfatherly warts and carbuncles, as well. As for the Ghost Gum (E. papuana), there are those who maintain with a lump in their throats it is the most beautiful tree on earth, which would explain why it's been done to death on our nation's calendars, postage stamps and tea towels. Holland had one marking the north-eastern corner, towards town, waving its white arms in the dark, a surveyor's peg gone mad.

We could go on forever holding up favourites or returning to botanical names which possess almost the right resonance or offer some sort of summary, if such a thing were possible, or which are hopelessly wide of the mark but catch the eye for their sheer linguistic strangeness--platypodos; whereas all that's needed, aside from a beginning itself, is a eucalypt independent of, yet one which... it doesn't really matter.

Once upon a time there was a man--what's wrong with that? Not the most original way to begin, but certainly tried and proven over time, which suggests something of value, some deep impulse beginning to be answered, a range of possibilities about to be set down.

There was once a man on a property outside a one-horse town, in New South Wales, who couldn't come to a decision about his daughter. He then made an unexpected decision. Incredible! For a while people talked and dreamed about little else until they realised it was entirely in keeping with him; they shouldn't have been surprised. To this day it's still talked about, its effects still felt in the town and surrounding districts.

His name was Holland. With his one and only daughter Holland lived on a property bordered along one side by a khaki river.

It was west of Sydney, over the ranges and into the sun--about four hours in a Japanese car.

All around, the earth had a geological camel-look: slowly rearing brown, calloused and blotched with shadows, which appeared to sway in the heat, and an overwhelming air of patience.

Some people say they remember the day he arrived.

It was stinking hot, a scorcher. He stepped off the train alone, not accompanied by a woman, not then. Without pausing in the town, not even for a glass of water, he went out to his newly acquired property, a deceased estate, and began going over it on foot.

With each step the landscape unfolded and named itself. The man's voice could be heard singing out-of-tune songs. It all belonged to him.

There were dams the colour of milky tea, corrugated sheds at the trapezoid tilt, yards of split timber, rust. And solitary fat eucalypts lorded it over hot paddocks, trunks glowing like aluminium at dusk.

A thin man and his three sons had been the original settlers. A local dirt road is named after them. In the beginning they slept in their clothes, a kelpie or wheat bags for warmth, no time for the complications of women--hairy men with pinched faces. They never married. They were secretive. In business they liked to keep their real intentions hidden. They lived in order to acquire, to add, to amass. At every opportunity they kept adding, a paddock here and there, in all directions, acres and acres, going into hock to do it, even poxy land around the other side of the hill, sloping and perpetually drenched in shadow and infected with the burr, until the original plot on stony ground had completely disappeared into a long undulating spread, the shape of a wishbone or a broken pelvis.

These four men had gone mad with ringbarking. Steel traps, fire, and all types of poisons and chains were also used. On the curvaceous back paddocks great gums slowly bleached and curled against the curve as trimmings of fingernails. Here and there bare straight trunks lay scattered and angled like a catastrophe of derailed carriages. By then the men had already turned their backs and moved onto the next rectangle to be cleared.¹⁵

...

Reading reviews

Background:

Contemporary book reviews are accessible in many different ways: through the newspapers, through television shows, through the internet, through publishers, through competitions.

Activity 1: Discussing genre in reviews

- List the different ways and places you go to find out about books.
- Choose 3 reviews that appear in the annotated bibliography below
- Genre: List the comments in the review on the genre – what are the characteristics of the genre that are mentioned?

Activity 2: Analysing an extract

- Read the first chapter of *Eucalyptus* marking the features that have been discussed in the reviews.
- Why has the author moved between scientific to fairy story genres? How effective is this for a modern audience? What comment might this be making about the modern world?
- The tree has been called 'the national hero' by Martin in her article.¹⁶ What do you think this might mean and how does it work in the opening?
- What kind of male / female relationships do you see in fairy stories? What kind of male / female relationships do you see in this chapter?
- If this is a romance that follows fairy story models then what do you think the ending

¹⁵ More of Chapter One can be found on line: <http://www.nytimes.com/books/first/b/bail-eucalyptus.html>

¹⁶ Martin, S, 2006 "The Wood from the trees: Taxonomy and the Eucalypt as the new national hero in recent Australian Writing", JASAL , pages 81-94 <https://www.nla.gov.au/openpublish/index.php/jasal/article/viewFile/35/44>

will be? If the novelist decides to adopt a feminist view then how might this change the ending?

Activity 3: Categorising the genre

1. Books are often categorized as belonging to particular genres because they follow the conventions associated with the genre but this book, like many others, often breaks the rules, moving from one genre to another and between different times. This is a feature of postmodern texts which may seem to be fragmented or rambling, sometimes retrospective, playing games with genres, making the statement that they are not to be controlled by categories.

Read about postmodern literature and then launch an argument, using evidence from the novel to defend the case that this novel is an example of postmodern literature postmodern text.

Activity 4: Writing an online review

Join the *goodreads* online book club discussion on *Eucalyptus*. Read the comments and the star ratings from customers and add your own discussion and star rating at <http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/319480.Eucalyptus>.

Activity 5: Essay

Write a comparison of the genres of the two texts *The White Earth* and *Eucalyptus*, using the following statement:

The White Earth and *Eucalyptus* may both be set in the outback and be regarded as Australian texts but they demonstrate just how diverse Australian novels can be in their genre.

Discuss this statement focusing on the opening s of the two books.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Possible reviews that can be used:

Academic article:

Martin, S, 2006 'The Wood from the trees: Taxonomy and the Eucalypt as the new national hero in recent Australian Writing', *JASAL*, pages 81-94
<https://www.nla.gov.au/openpublish/index.php/jasal/article/viewFile/35/44> This article offers a comparison to other novels and deals with the metaphorical level offered by the novel's focus on trees. Read from page 86

Judges report:

Miles Franklin Judges report : http://www.milesfranklin.com.au/pastwinners/year_1999

Blogs:

Lit Lovers: <http://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/13-fiction/301-eucalyptus-bail?showall=1>

Maggie Alderson's Reading List, 2010 (with comments)

<http://maggiealderson.blogspot.com.au/2010/09/eucalyptus-by-murray-bail.html>

This blog has a few interesting elements in it: it gives a very personal account and then offers a grading for Reading satisfaction, with recommendations. The comments that follow are also interesting. Students could add their own comment on *Eucalyptus* to the blog or they might apply this blog format to another Miles Franklin book they are reading – for example, *The White Earth* – or the most recent shortlisted books.

Scribeswindow, "What I've been reading lately", 2005,

<http://scribeswindow.blogspot.com.au/2005/08/what-ive-been-reading-lately.html> This blog

offers and excellent example of a personal essay focusing on the genre. The essay uses evidence from the text and other sources to argue a case about the genre. The text of the introduction appears here and can be used to initiate students' own writing.

Murray Bail's novel *Eucalyptus* successfully intertwines traditional fairy tale and traditional romance conventions. This essay will explore each of these conventions, arguing that the use of landscape is part of romance writing. It will look at typical Australian literary stereotypes of landscape and how Bail does not conform to this. This essay will also show that Murray Bail does not challenge sexist fairy tale-like depictions of women. Rather, he perpetuates the traditional feminine presence with both these conventions in his fiction.

Amazon Customer reviews:

Lima, M. 2004, **Interesting Allegory About Individuality, VINE VOICE** on December 11, 2004 <http://www.amazon.com/review/R10SYBL5YMUUGA>

Online book club

Good reads <http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/319480.Eucalyptus>
Read the comments and the star ratings from customers

Newspaper:

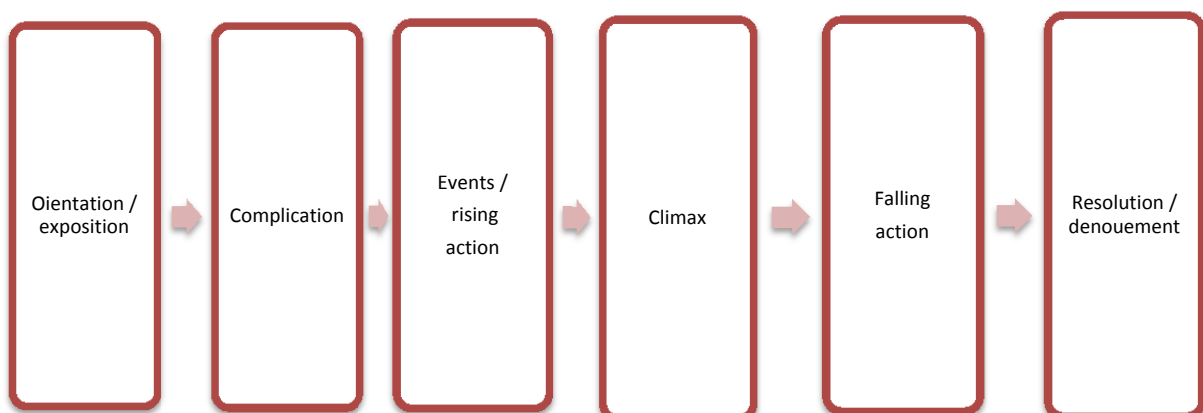
'Enchanted Forest', *New York Times on the Web*
<http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/10/04/reviews/981004.04upchurt.html>

PLOT

HOW IT WORKS

Plots are the essence of the novel providing a beginning, middle and end that help us to follow the story. Plots unfold the events in a way that creates a structure for the story. This may be starting at the beginning, or starting in the middle or end. The story can be revealed in many different ways.

The action in the plot has to have a reason – a motivation – to drive the events forward. The events have to be linked in some way so the reader can follow the story. A good plot leaves the reader satisfied that the ends are tied.



Orientation: this is the beginning which 'orients' (introduces) the reader to the story – gives some clue as to the type of story or the characters or setting. It is sometimes called a 'hook' as it draws the reader in.

Complication: something goes wrong- a problem is introduced which needs to be solved. There is usually only one complication in a short story but a novel may involve repeated complications and solutions.

Events: through a series of events the complication is solved. This can be also referred to as rising action as the tension rises to the climax

Climax: there is a high point of tension when an important understanding or emotional moment is revealed. Sometimes this can be 'cathartic' – so terrible that it requires an outpouring of emotions before resolution can be achieved.

Resolution / denouement: things are solved and ends are tied up so that the reader feels a sense of closure

Plots can follow different patterns. They can be **linear (chronological)** following the events in the order they come in time or **nonlinear** using such devices as flashback to take us into the past to fill in the **backstory** or reveal another element.

In a novel the story is also usually divided into chapters. Sometimes these are named; if they are named then think about what they mean. The book might also be divided into parts: you need to consider why this is so. Why has the author separated or put together particular parts of the story?

Student Activity

1. Find definitions of the following types of plots and plot words:
 - Multiple plots
 - Sub plots
 - Parallel plots
 - Circular plots
 - Flashback
 - *in medias res*
2. There may be more than one complication, climax, rising and falling action sequence in an extended novel; for example, in *The White Earth* the opening complication of the father dying and Will's being homeless is settled quickly by moving to the uncle's house but then more complications follow. Try to select what you think is the most significant complication, climax and resolution in the novel:

Complication:

Climax:

Resolution:

THE WHITE EARTH: MAPPING THE STORY

A perennial problem for teachers is how to ensure that students actually read a novel, let alone comprehend its ideas and significance. Certainly English classes would be far more interesting were students to arrive having read the text, so avoiding the tedium of doggedly ploughing through it.

One way of scaffolding the reading of a novel is through the 'instant book'¹⁷.

Method:

1. Divide the book into as many sections as the number of students in your class.
2. Allocate a section to each student, giving earlier sections those that find reading more difficult and the later sections to your more enthusiastic readers.
3. Ask students to
 - a. Prepare a short chapter summary (1 – 2 minutes) to be delivered in class
 - b. Note references to aspects of the novel identified for discussion

Give them plenty of notice with regular reminders!

The idea is that each student contribute to a summary of the book to run over one lesson. By the end of the lesson all students should have a sense of the direction of the novel and each student will be the class expert on one of its sections. This means that as issues arise in discussions, details of the novel can easily be found.

Below is a section of a spread sheet of an 'instant book' on *The White Earth* with its

- plot outline
- focaliser identified
- half-way points marked to begin structural work
- key ideas mapped ready for discussion.

Note: Another way of organising is to use colour-coded post-its for different ideas. Students can use *The White Earth* instant book that is attached to create their post-its.

Once this groundwork is done, there are many activities that can follow.

- Images (photographs/ paintings etc) may be attached to the chapters to get a sense of the patterning of imagery through the novel
- Points of high tension leading to the climax can be mapped
- Movement between the different times (William's present story to John's story set in the past) can also be mapped. Students can suggest why the author chooses this way of telling the story.

These foundation activities enable students to answer the question:

How does McGahan structure the novel and what is the effect of telling the story in this way?

¹⁷ Ken Watson (2004), "Instant Book" in Sawyer W and Gold E. (eds) *Reviewing English in the 21st Century*.p.299

A	S	T	U	V	W	X	Y	Z	AA	AB	AC	AD
The White Earth: Map		John			John			John			John	
	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28
Precis	John believes Native Title will threaten his property rights. Says Will needs to earn Kuran. Will steals upstairs keys.	1941-2 Sees Kuran neglected. Resolves to take it. Takes Harriet at the waterhole	Explores upstairs. Finds John sleeps in Eliz room - red room / uniform/ has/ pistol. Explorer boot/ Mrs G. finds him & slaps him	John not annoyed. Tells about explorer/ hat = his father's police hat. John wears it all the time. Ear begins to hurt again.	1943 Harriet pregnant. Father angry - does not want her to marry John. Dies in fire. J&H inherit some money to buy a wheat farm	Ear a problem. Sees program re Mabo and another point of view. Goes to camp ground - special place	1st meeting of League. Discussion - extreme interpretation of Act. Devolves into armed militia. John losing control.	1950s boom. John not doing well. Dudley ill and they take him in. D v. fond of Ruth. Leaves his farm to John & Harriet.	The rally. Ear smells. Walzing Matilda. M16 amiable crowd → gang. John's disapproval.	Crowd becomes angry, racist. John objects. Will sees man on fire. Recognition by John. KKK. Will passes out.	John's dream. Dud rapes Ruth. J&H feel guilty because 'betrayed' Dudley. Sends Ruth away. Takes in Dudley - hopes to inherit.	John heart attack expected to die. Drought. Desert winds. Mother looks after J. Mrs G calls Ruth.
Gothic elements/ decay/ rotting				Mrs G. - dead man buried under house. Police cap.					Rotting smell - elusive but undeniable.	the sickness in his head had spread across the gathering.		
Supernatural						mysterious light				A man on fire'		W believes burning man a 'warning'.
Dream								Dud. 'haunted ... by his own memories.' J's dreams begin.			a hand reaching out wreathed in fire'	
Aboriginal	John's views re politics and history of Native Title.			Kirchmeyer killed by Aboriginals - now long gone.		Camp ground previously a bora ring?				This is my property now.' 'This is not about Aborigines... I will not have racist talk here'.		
Possession / ownership	Fears he will lose his land with Native Title	At waterhole with Harriet. - at this "instant ... he took possession" of Kuran.				Knowledge is ownership		Dud wills his farm to J&H.. John manages it 'for Ruth'.			H sees J's main concern is for 'property and money and a crumbling old homestead	

COMPARISON TEXT: QUESTIONS OF TRAVEL

Questions Of Travel by Michelle de Kretser was the Miles Franklin Award winning book in 2013. This incident in the novel could work as a complete short story. It has a complication, a climax and a resolution of sorts.

- Locate the elements of plot in the extract and, working in groups, map out a possible storyline to follow.
- Why doesn't it *sound* like a short story?
- What changes would have to be made to alter this to a short story?

When Laura was two, the twins decided to kill her. They were eight when she was born. Twenty-three months later, their mother died. Their father's aunt Hester, spry and recently back in Sydney after half a lifetime in London, came to look after the children until a suitable arrangement could be made. She stayed until Laura left school.

Look at it from the boys' point of view: their sister arrived, they stood by their mother's chair and watched an alien, encircled by her arms, fasten itself to her nipple. Their mother didn't die at once but she was never well again. Breast cancer. They were clever children, they made the connection. In their tent under the jacaranda, they put together a plan.

Once or twice a year, as long as she lived, Laura Fraser had the water dream. There was silky blue all around her, pale blue overhead; she glided through silence blotched with gold. Separate things ran together and were one thing. She was held and set free. It was the most wonderful dream. But on waking, Laura was always a little sad, too, prey to the sense of something ending before its time.

She had no recollection of how it had gone on that Saturday morning in 1966, her brothers out in the street with bat and ball, and Hester, who had switched off her radio just in time, summoned by a splash. No one could say how the safety catch on the swimming-pool gate had come undone; the twins, questioned, had blank, golden faces. Next door's retriever was finally deemed responsible, since a culprit, however improbable, had to be found.

To the unfolding of these events, the boys brought the quizzical detachment of a general outmanoeuvred in a skirmish. It was always instructive to see how things went. They were only children, ingenious and limited. They had no real appreciation of consequences or the relative weight of decisions. If Laura had owned a kitten, they might have drowned that instead.

The pool was filled in. For that, too, the twins blamed their sister. Their mother had taught them to swim in that pool. They could remember water beaded on her arms, the scuttle of light over turquoise tiles.¹⁸

COMPARISON TEXT: SIXTY LIGHTS

The section below is the opening of the novel, *Sixty Lights* which was shortlisted for the Miles Franklin Award in 2005.

Understanding plot orientation

Consider how the introduction below orients the reader.

- What are we to expect in this plot?
- Who do you think will be key characters?
- What do you think will happen?

A voice in the dark: "Lucy?"

¹⁸ de Kretser, Michelle (2012) *Questions of Travel*. Allen & Unwin

It was a humid-sounding whisper. She wanted this, this muffled gentleness, swathed in sheets scented and moistened by the heated conjoining of n bodies. The tropic of the bed. This condensation of herself in the folds of a marriage. The late night air was completely still. Insects struck at the mosquito net, which fell, silver and conical, like a bridal garment around them. Lucy watched a pale moth sail slowly towards her face, land on the net, deposit its powder, and lift unevenly away. It was like a tiny baby hand in the darkness.

This is what she had seen, earlier that day: An Indian man had been climbing the bamboo scaffolding of one of the high colonial buildings, with a large mirror bound to his body by a piece of cloth. His white dhoti was flapping and his orange turban was atilt, and he hauled himself with confidence from level to precarious level – altogether a fellow who knew what he was doing – when some particular gust or alarum that carried the dimension of fate caused him to misjudge his footing and fall through the air. Because he could not release the mirror, but clutched at it as though it was a magic carpet, he landed in the midst of its utter shattering, and was speared through the chest. The quantity of blood was astounding. It spurted everywhere. But what Lucy noticed most – when she rushed to offer assistance along with everyone else – was that the mirror continued its shiny business: its jagged shapes still held the world it existed in, and bits and pieces of sliced India still glanced on its surface. Tiny shocked faces lined along the spear, compressed there, contained, assembled as if for a lens. She simply could not help herself: she thought of a photograph.

And only later, in deep night, did Lucy rise in the distress. She found herself bolt upright, staring at the darkness, and seeing before her this man who was horribly killed. He had died quickly, she supposed, because his black eyes were fixed open and his mouth was mutely agape, but there he was, halted in time. She saw the elements only now: the shade of the tamarind tree into which he fell, the lifting of startled crows in a flapping explosion, a woman who stood with her blue sari spattered bright red, the children who hurried forward to gather fragments of mirror, Bashanti her servant, weeping into her dupatta. The community of accident. The gory congregation. Two men appeared with sackcloth to carry away the body in a sling. Lucy remembered stepping backwards when she realized that blood was soaking her satin-covered boots, and seeing her own miniaturized face retreat and disappear. In bed the man beside her turned over, half-awake. His dark humped shape set the mosquito net aquiver.

“Lucy?” he enquired again.

He sounded almost loving.

She will remember this utterance of her name when she meets her death – in a few years’ time, at the age of twenty-two. It will signify the gentleness that briefly existed between them. For now, however, she senses the baby story within her, aroused by night terror and her pounding pulse, and feels entirely alone. She is stranded in this anachronistic moment that greets her with the blinding flash of a burnt magnesium ribbon.¹⁹

Student Activity: Tracing an argument about a text

Rearrange sentences: The following sentences refer directly to the extract above and come from the opening paragraph of an article about *Sixty Lights*. Rearrange the sentences into the correct order and explain what words indicated the position of the sentence in the paragraph.

So these few lines set up what is to follow: a sensual and sensuous novel in which birth, life and death, the past, present and the future, are closely linked through the character of Lucy.

The real beginning, however, is quite different – a disembodied voice calls in the dark.

¹⁹ Jones, Gail (2005) *Sixty Lights*, Random House

The sense of sound penetrates the vastness of the darkness as the story comes to life and moves on to the sense of touch: the humidity, the muffled gentleness, swathed in sheets with bodies conjoined in the “tropic of the bed”.

For a book which is about the visual, this beginning provides a stark contrast. The initial darkness acts metaphorically to imply the absence of life and the grief that becomes a recurring motif in the book.

Many reviews on *Sixty Lights* talk about the beginning as being the memory of the episode of the Indian man being impaled by shards of glass mirror.

Only then does the first visual image occur: of insects on the mosquito net “silver and conical” (a proleptic moment in that it anticipates the photographic process and the co-working of the photograph and memory) waving like a “tiny baby hand” in the darkness – suggesting the beginning of life and also the interplay of past, present and future in one moment.²⁰

Supporting evidence.

Any discussion on a novel has to include evidence to support statements.

Jones’ opening chapter “takes its place in the interstices of the past, present and future”²¹ in a few ways. It is set in the Victorian past, Lucy remembers a recent past event and the verbs are in the past (‘wanted’, ‘had been climbing’, ‘was flapping’, ‘landed’). The future is, however, also present in the verbs that follow (‘will signify’), in the impending birth of the baby and her sense of what is to come. All this is simultaneous with her present, echoed in present verbs (‘senses’, ‘feels’, ‘is stranded’). The final words of this opening further confirm the co-existence of these three times.

She will remember this utterance of her name when she meets her own death – in a few years time at twenty-two... For now she senses the baby story within her... She is stranded in this anachronistic moment she can tell no-one about, this moment that greets her with the blinding flash of a burnt magnesium ribbon.

This conjunction of different times is evident here in the future tense (‘will remember’), the present adverb (‘now’) and the past memory (of the Indian man). Convergences like this one take place throughout the book. Something will trigger a memory of things past or of things to come, the verb tenses will co-exist to reflect this union of different times and Lucy acts as a conduit between the different times.²²

How does the paragraph above use evidence to support statements- Break down the discussion into the table below.

Statement	Elaboration	Evidence

Task:

Take the opening of the novel you are studying in class and write an analytical paragraph that uses evidence to support the statement that:

The introduction of any novel sets up the plot and ideas that will follow.

²⁰ Dixon, Mel (2009) ‘Sixty Lights: Exploring Ideas’, *Metaphor*, Issue 2, pp 37-41

²¹ Edouardo Cadava (1998) *Words of Light*, Princeton University Press, Preface.

²² Dixon, Mel (2009) *ibid.*

CHARACTER

This section of the unit assists students in understanding the nature of characterisation and how it operates in novels. They will be achieving this through the following content.

HOW IT WORKS

In their study of fiction, students have come to understand that characterisation can be approached in various ways and with differing effects. They know that characters can

- imitate real people by reflecting their traits
- function as plot devices
- represent values and attitudes and
- blend all of the above.

These ideas are expanded below and lie behind the student activities that follow.

Character as person

Our understanding of character in a novel tends to conform to that of the realist novel; characters are portrayed as real people, appearing to have psychological depth and even “lives” beyond the words of the text. The writer achieves this by adhering to conventions that align with our understanding of a real but ordered world in which characters are consistent, coherent and believably human. They do not behave in ways that are wildly incomprehensible; we understand why they do what they do and think what they think because their actions and thoughts grow out of the conditions portrayed in their world. In these instances a character is a construct of traits; the more traits a character has, the more solid or ‘rounded’ the character appears. It is the complexity and coherence of traits that make the character more ‘realistic’. In 19th century novels, characters tended to be constructed as unified, so making them more knowable. Fiction, in its attempt to represent a comprehensible version of reality, actually becomes a distortion of the real as it attempts to distil the essence of the real.

Characters in a novel may be fully realised and stable or even static but main characters are often portrayed as changing and developing. This development, often personal growth, must be believable in that it should be:

- possible for the character,
- sufficiently explained by circumstances, and
- over enough time to be convincing.

This may require selection of incidents to accommodate long periods rather than the classical unities of time, place and action of drama.

In 20th century novels this sense of development often gives way to one of a permanent state of flux and can go as far as being fractured and inconsistent, reflecting modern and postmodern notions of fragmented subjectivity. In fact, Jonathan Culler says that according to structuralist theories, “the notion of character... is a myth.”²³

Many writers strive to create characters that resemble real people; we can identify them as people and we can empathise with them because they seem human. A writer can create a character in a story directly, by telling us what that character is like, or indirectly by showing what the character is like through

- actions and habits
- speech and thoughts
- appearance and setting.

23 Culler, Jonathan (1975), *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics, and the Study of Literature*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul p.230

Character as function

Students may be familiar with structuralist ideas about character through the hero's journey²⁴. In this view of narrative, character is seen as purely functional, a performer of actions. The term used for character is actor or actant and the character is there simply to drive the plot forward. Actors are not imitations of people; they have no psychological depth but are products of the events and images of the story and of the discourse that carries it. There is no necessity for a character to have human qualities and many action movies can be seen as examples of this position.

Character as code

Characters may also exist to illustrate the theme of a story and its values. This draws on archetypes, stereotypes and could see characters as representative of class, gender or race or of attitudes and values.

In this case, characterisation tends to blend the mimetic and ideological as the author draws the reader into the story to identify with particular characters and take up a position in relation to attitudes, values and ideas.

CHARACTERISATION: THE WHITE EARTH

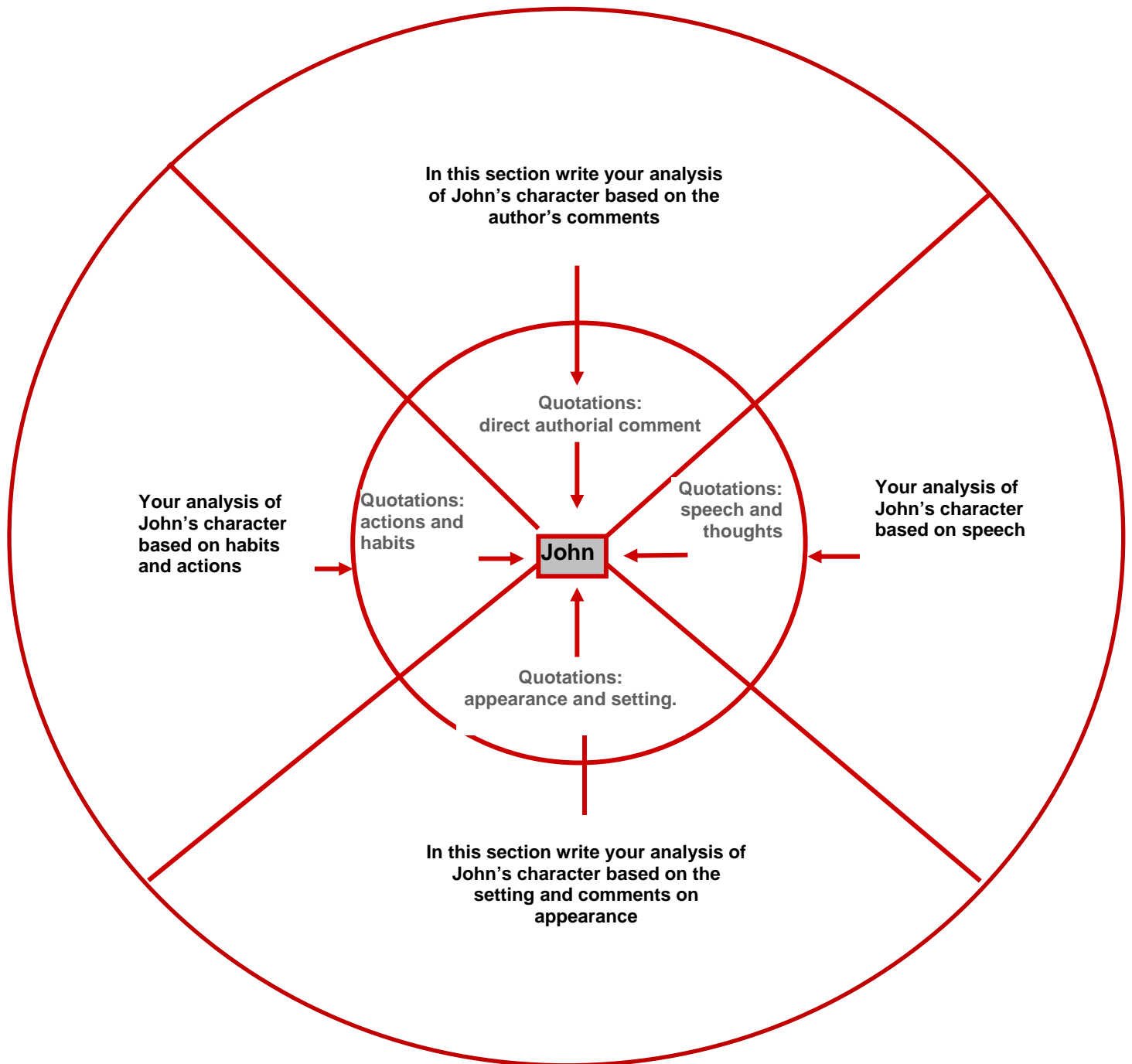
Character as person

There is no avoiding trawling through the text for evidence of character traits. This could most easily be done using the instant book summary and drawing on the knowledge of the class chapter experts. A character wheel similar to the one below can be used to organise the information gathered providing a representation of a unified character. Students need to be made aware that the convention of a unified character is a feature specifically of the realist novel.

When character wheels for John and for Will have been completed, students should consider:

- what we see of the inner life of the character
- how complex the character is and
- whether and how far there is character development.

²⁴ Campbell, Joseph I (1949) *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Pantheon Books



Understanding character: Close reading

One of the results of good characterisation is the relationship that is formed between the reader and the character. The author writes in a way that sets up the pathway the character will follow; we are invited to like or dislike the character. Look at how Andrew McGahan builds the following description of Veronica, Will's mother to guide our attitude to her.

William's mother, meanwhile, had not received the grace of an early death and a martyrdom to fire, but his feelings about her had always been more complex. She was hard to love that her husband –

Topic sentence:
complex emotions

Comparison to father
introduced by dash

physically harder, too a thin woman of angles and bones, with long wispy brown hair. If at his father's core there was a crucial weakness, a life of plans but never fulfilled, then at his mother's core William sensed something fractured and brittle. It was never spoken about, but he was aware from a young age that she was delicate, in a special way. Headaches plagued her, and much of the time she was listless and exhausted. At other times she was wildly short-tempered, screaming weakly at William if he annoyed her, and stinging him with slaps. Afterwards she would lock herself in the main bedroom and weep. She took many pills and frequently visited the doctor. On several occasions she had disappeared for up to a week. Resting, William's father would say, at a place where people went when they needed time away by themselves.

which acts as a separation from him

Her physical appearance suggests she is hard emotionally

More comparison to father's 'core'

Her 'delicacy' and erratic reactions

But when William played with other children he could see that their mothers were different. They bustled with energy, they were friendly and welcoming, they helped their children with homework, they volunteered to serve on school committees and in the canteen, they had sandwiched waiting whenever William arrived. His mother did none of these things – she was always too tired, or her head hurt, or she was hidden in her room and William was forbidden to make a sound. It made him feel secretly ashamed of her, and he felt guilty about the shame. He knew that at least part of her behaviour was explained by the simple fact that life was or difficult for them than for other families. Their farm was not prosperous, their car was not as new, their house was not as nice, and while these things did not seem to bother his father, they made his mother unhappy.

Comparison to 'normal' mothers listing their activities introduced by the comparative conjunction "but"

**Short sentence contrasts his mother to other mothers followed by a dash her exclusion from the world of mothers
William's feelings of 'shame' and 'guilt'**

Reasons listed through negative comparison "not as"

Chapter 1

- The interesting feature of this passage is the use of comparison to initiate discussion about the mother. List all the phrases that introduce comparison. Why does McGahan introduce the mother in this way?
- Do you like William's mother? What words or descriptions make you feel this way? Does the author prepare us for a positive or negative ending for Veronica?
- Why does McGahan justify her behaviour at the end?
- In this passage we learn as much about William as his mother. How does the author help us to see from William's perspective?

- If you have finished the novel then consider the passage in the light of the ending. How does the initial characterisation introduce the strands of the plot, the theme and the events that follow? Compare the last line of the novel “Then she returned to the chair, and the long vigil of the night” with this passage.

Student Activity

Find another passage introducing a character and annotate it in the way shown above. You can work in groups on different characters and report back to the class, noting the way the language works to create the character.

Student activity: Character as function

Characters in stories are more than imagined individuals peopling the world of a novel; they also have a role in moving the story forward or creating complications that intensify interest. One of the most widely understood schemas for defining some of these functions is the hero’s journey.

1. View the YouTube clip: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SB_Q1gFsvlw and list the stages of the hero’s journey in the table below.

Stages of the Journey	Will’s Journey

2. In pairs consider how Will’s journey to understanding can be seen as a conventional hero’s journey.
3. To what extent do the other characters fulfil functions in this schema? Consider
 - John
 - William’s father

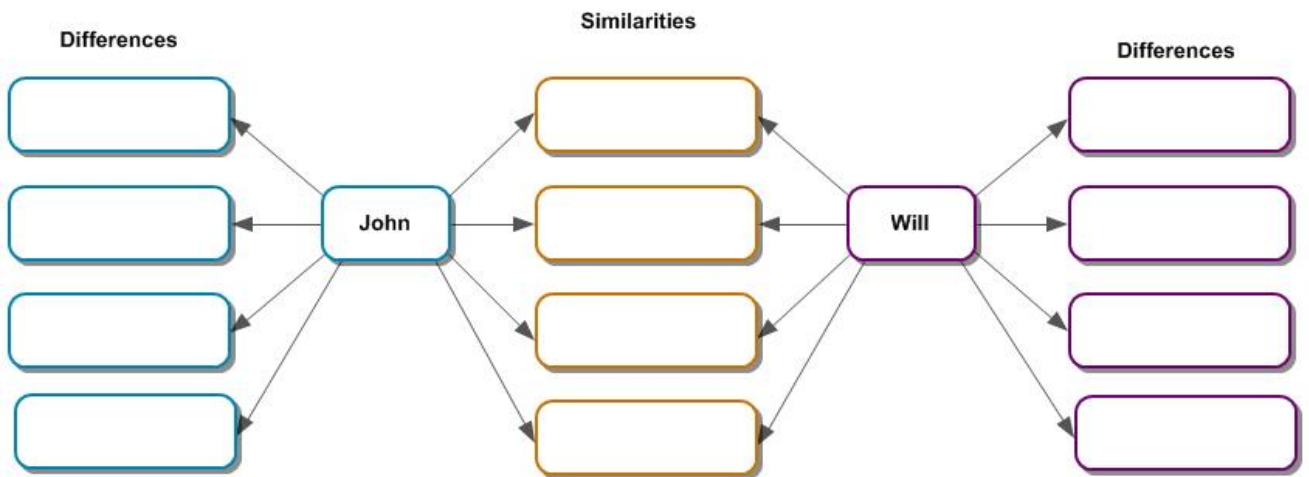
- Veronica
- Mrs Griffiths
- Ruth.

Student activity: Character as code

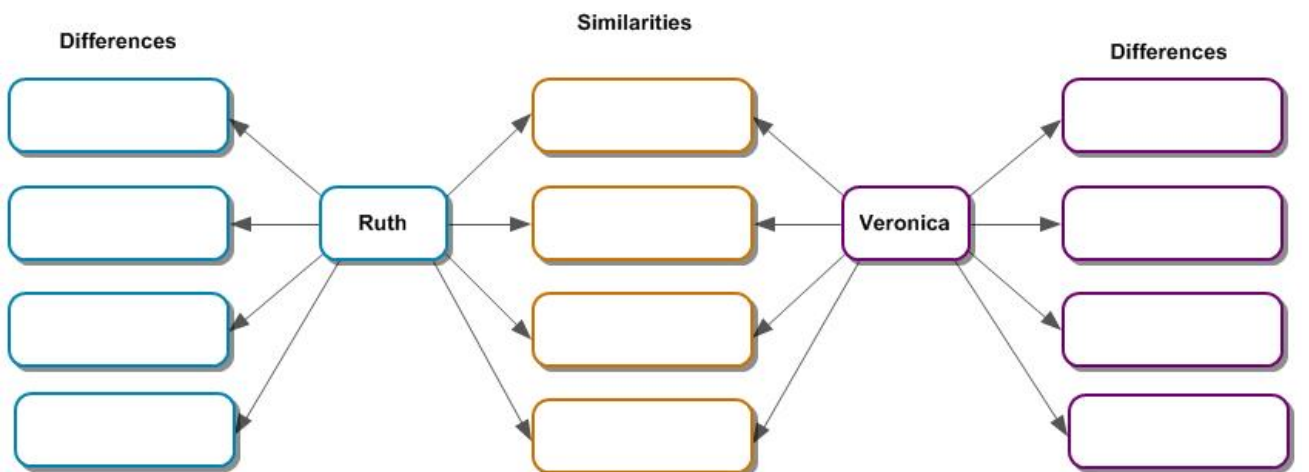
In stories, characters often represent more than themselves. They are used as vehicles for exploring attitudes, values and ideas and in this way illustrate themes and ideological positions. One way of achieving this is through setting up parallel and contrasting characters to highlight themes developed through the text.

1. In small groups draw up a comparison / contrast table like the ones below. Share your findings with the rest of the class to arrive at generally agreed statements.

**Compare and Contrast
John and Will**



**Compare and Contrast
Ruth Veronica**



2. Using the details of your comparisons and contrasts choose one of the following points to consider. How do
 - the differences in motivation and behaviour of the characters
 - their place in the structure of the novel and
 - their function in the development of the narrative
 suggest that these characters represent ideas and influences reflecting Australian attitudes life and society in the late 20th century?
3. As specialists on the point you have researched and discussed with your group you will each need to prepare a presentation to convey your information and ideas to other groups in the class?
4. Using the jigsaw technique²⁵ form new groups made up of students who have specialised in the other points in the question and present your information.

COMPARISON TEXT: ALL THAT I AM

All that I am by Anna Funder was winner of the 2012 Miles Franklin Award. Character often emerges in the spoken exchanges in the novel. This extract from early in the novel is clearly from the point of view of Doctor Becker, an older woman who is narrating the incident.

Read the text and add these annotations in the left hand column to correspond with the relevant sections.

Annotations:

- Medical jargon contrasted with metaphor to show the different understandings of each character.
- Insistence on title asserting equality
- Facial gestures used to cover up feelings
- Rhetorical question implying fear
- Distracted by painting showing the character trying to avoid the ‘truth’
- Comment on health system shows a mistrust of public health
- City described as organ of body

‘I’m afraid, Mrs Becker, the news is not altogether comforting’.

I am in a posh private clinic in Bondi Junction with harbour views. Professor Melnikoff has silver hair and half-glasses, a sky-blue silk tie, and long hands clasped together on his desk. His thumbs play drily with one another. I wonder whether this man has been trained to deal with the people around the body part of interest to him, in this case, my brain. Probably not. Melnikoff, in his quietness, has the manner of one who appreciates having a large white nuclear tomb between him and another person.

And he has seen inside my mind; he is preparing to tell me the creeping betrayals of it. Last week they loaded me into the MRI machine, horizontal in one of those verdammten gowns that do not close at the back: designed to remind one of the fragility of human dignity, to ensure obedience to instruction, and as a guarantee against last-minute flight. Loud ticking noises as the rays penetrated my skull. I left my wig on.

“It’s Doctor Becker actually,” I say. Outside of the school age, I never used to insist on that title. But I have found, with increasing age that humility suits me less. Ten years ago I decided I didn’t like being treated like an old woman, so I resumed full and fierce use of the honorific. And comfort, after all, is not what I’m here for. I want the news.

²⁵ MyRead, Strategies for teaching reading in the middle years.
<http://www.myread.org/organisation.htm#jigsaw>

Melnikoff smiles and gets up and places the transparencies of my brain, black-and-white photo-slices of me, under clips on a lightboard. I notice a real Miró – not a print – on his wall. They socialised the health system here long ago, and he can still afford that? There was nothing to be afraid of, then, was there?

“Well, Dr Becker,” he says, “these bluish areas denote the beginnings of plaquing.”

“I am a doctor of letters,” I say. “In English. If you don’t mind.”

“You’re not doing too badly. For your age.”

I make my face as blank as I can manage. A neurologist should know, at the very least, that age does not make one grateful for small mercies. I feel sane enough – young enough – to experience loss as loss. Then again, nothing and no one has been able to kill me yet.

Melnikoff returns my gaze mildly, his fingertips together. He has a soft unhurriedness in his dealings with me. Perhaps he likes me? The thought comes as a small shock.

“It’s the beginning of deficit accumulation – aphasia, short-term memory loss, perhaps damage to some aspects of spatial awareness, to judge from the location of the plaquing.” He points to soupy areas at the upper front part of my brain. “Possible some effect on your sight, but let’s hope not at this stage.”

On his desk sits a wheel calendar, an object from an era in which the days flipped over one another without end. Behind him the harbour shifts and sparkles, the great green lung of this city.

“Actually Professor, I am remembering more, not less.”

He removes his half-glasses. His eyes are small and watery, the irises seeming not to sit flush with the whites. He is older than I thought. “You are?”²⁶

Drawing conclusions about character

1. Circle all the relevant answers: From this passage we can draw the conclusion that Dr Becker is:
Frightened; intelligent; observant; proud; critical; powerless; introspective; charming; defensive; impetuous; rude; insistent.
2. Take every description you chose in the first question and find a quote that supports your decision about the type of character she is.
3. How would people normally act in this scenario of doctor/patient dialogue? What kind of power relationships do we normally see in a doctor/patient consultation? Does this consultation follow the normal pattern or not? Give reasons for your answer.
4. What is the effect of the inclusion of comment on the ‘wheel calendar’?
5. The professor can only be seen through Dr Becker’s eyes. List the actions of the Professor. What do these actions show about him and what do they show about Dr Becker who has noted the actions?

Synthesising task:

How does interpretation of character differ when dealing with different modes of narration?
How we make judgements about character based the words of

- an omniscient narrator
- a focalising character
- a first person narrator?

You should consider issues of reliability and whether we may be positioned to make critical readings.

²⁶ Funder, Anna (2011) *All that I am* Hamish Hamilton

THEME AND VALUES

HOW IT WORKS

Themes grow out of the ideas that run through a text. These ideas reflect attitudes and values in society. They offer guidance on the way we should lead our lives. Themes go beyond individual characters, conveying a general message that is applicable to all people.

To find the theme you need to think about the text and ask:

- What is happening in the text?
- Which characters are being presented as important?
- What are the important characters thinking?
- How can I apply the ideas of the characters to real life?
- What values is the text promoting through its language?

Themes are not topics. They need to be expressed as a statement that makes clear what is being valued. There may be a number of themes emerging from any one text, some major, others minor. Each theme must be supported by evidence from the text.

A theme, therefore, is a **generalisation** about life that we draw from the text. It is a statement about the nature of people and the world we live in. Through the plight of the character, and by considering what the character represents, we learn what should be valued.

THEME: THE WHITE EARTH

What we value, however, is influenced by our context. Our attitude to the landholders may have been different in 1998 when some readers may have suffered the same uncertainties that John did about ownership. Perhaps we can appreciate more clearly that the revelation of the crimes of the past revealed in *The White Earth* becomes a bigger story of the struggle of the indigenous people.

Activity:

Having considered theme against context, express the following topics as a theme which clearly reveals the values of the text. In other words, what theme is developed around each topic?

- The past
- History
- The land
- Family
- Prejudice
- Inheritance

Given your own context, post-Mabo and post the Rudd Apology, how does this change the way you perceive the text's meaning?

Tracing a theme: Connection to the land

The House (always capitalised) and the land are central to this novel, creating strong emotions and leading to unforgiveable violent acts. The author usually unpacks and layers the message deliberately and in a controlled way. Often the messages may be antithetical to each other, reflecting the different perspectives that the reader has to negotiate before reaching the "truth". The values of the text are focused on the protagonist but the protagonist needs to go on a journey of learning before realising the truth.

If you trace the views on the land in the book you see the different perspectives that are attached to each character but you also see that William has to learn about what he believes in. He listens to many people and struggles to make his own meaning.



How does the idea of land affect different characters and their lives?

Collect quotations from different parts of the book and consider who said these and why. Then think about how you would phrase this understanding as a single statement that conveys the meaning of the novel.

Here are some statements about the land that you can consider:

Chapter 18

It was as if the land was speaking to him directly; pulsing up through the stone at his feet. He *belonged* here. Not in the mountains or on the plains or in the towns, but here, on this one piece of country. It was the focus around which he had always circled. And look how it had suffered in his absence. As he suffered himself, incomplete, and doomed to be so, unless he returned. And in that moment, he knew. It was no pleasant fantasy or hope, it was utter conviction, an acceptance of truth – no matter how long he took, he would get the station back.

Chapter 22

There are folk out there who believe that the Aborigines are the only ones who understand the land, that only the blacks have some magical connection that whites can never have, that we're just stumbling around here without any idea...But that's not true... this land talks to me." It doesn't care what colour I am

Knowledge, William decided, that was the issue. Knowledge was the essence of ownership. The black men, it seemed had held the knowledge when they owned the land. His uncle held it now, And when William had the knowledge when he knew everything about the station there was to know, he too would be ready to own it in his turn.

Chapter 26

The Aborigines are gone. And that's the point. This is my property now... Australia – every square inch of it – is our sacred site"

Chapter 36

The country will speak to you too, if you listen. The blacks say it flows into you through your feet, and they're right. But it's not an Aboriginal thing. It's not a white thing either. It's a human thing. Not everyone has it. But I do, And you have it too.

COMPARISON TEXT: THIS LAND IS MINE/ THIS LAND IS ME

Land is central to conflict in other Australian texts. The song “This land is mine / This land is me”²⁷ (Kev Carmody / Paul Kelly) <http://aso.gov.au/titles/features/one-night-moon/clip2/#> in the film *One Night the Moon* captures a moment of conflict between a settler and an Aboriginal tracker. The settler’s daughter has gone missing and rather than relinquish his authority to the tracker or even admit to the tracker’s skills, the settler sets off with his men to find the daughter.

1. Use the table below to map out the way the rising tension is captured in sound, camera and editing.
2. Look now at the language differences.
 - This land is mine – this land is me – What kind of relationship does each speaker evoke through the personal pronoun?
 - Who is the “they” that each singer refers to in the song?
 - What other differences do you see in the way each person connects with the land?

Class activity: Contesting sides.

Both the novel and the film exemplify the theme of connection to the land in powerful ways.

Ask students which they believe to be the more powerful and to vote with their feet by crossing to the ‘video’ or the ‘novel’ side of the room.

Individual students argue their side’s case point by point and turn by turn supporting their statements with evidence from each text including the advantages of each form and medium.

The aim is to have students on the other side cross the floor through the strength of their argument. The brevity of each student’s point is an encouragement for the more reluctant public speakers to contribute.

²⁷ Carmody, Kev and Kelly, Paul (2001) “This land is mine / This land is me” <http://aso.gov.au/titles/features/one-night-moon/clip2/#>

Sound	Camera and editing	FATHER (white settler)	ALBERT (Aboriginal tracker)	Camera and editing	Sound
		<p>This land is mine All the way to the old fence line Every break of day I'm working hard just to make it pay This land is mine Yeah I signed on the dotted line Camp fires on the creek bank Bank breathing down my neck They won't take it away They won't take it away They won't take it away from me</p>	<p>This land is me Rock, water, animal, tree They are my song My being's here where I belong This land owns me From generations past to infinity We're all but woman and man You only fear what you don't understand</p>		
		<p>This land is mine</p>	<p>This land is me</p>		
		<p>This land is mine</p>	<p>This land owns me</p>		
		<p>They won't take it away They won't take it away from me</p>	<p>They won't take it away They won't take it away from me</p>		

COMPARISON TEXT: THAT DEADMAN DANCE

While themes come from bringing together the separate elements of the novel to see what message is conveyed, there are often critical moments in the novel when the theme is declared by the characters or the narrator.

Here is an extract from *That Deadman Dance*, by Kim Scott²⁸, winner of the Miles Franklin Award in 2011. Read the following speech by the protagonist Bobby. It comes at the end of the book when he is facing judgement by a court. Consider what message we can draw from his words:

Be sincere, Bobby told himself. Speak straight like a spear.

He began. My friends, you here are all my friends, blackfellas and whitefellas. I hear people saying, but we are not just our colour. His eyes rested on Binyan, moved on to Christine, moved on ... Years from now, our grannies' grannies will be old people and our same spirit in them still, but maybe they won't look like us or know about us ... I'm guilty of taking food from you but that's not stealing and I did no wrong. I can't be sorry I share and look after families and friends and many of you sitting her today. In my language there is no need to say please and thank you. My old uncle knows this language I am speaking now, but he keeps his tongue away and says it is not worth the sound of it. He would not understand the spirit of the word on paper, only in their sound.

We all different from when we babies, you and me too. I change, doesn't mean I forget about all my people and their ways. But some people come to live here, and wanna stay like they never moved away from their own place. Sometimes I dress like you people, but who here I ever see naked like my people?

One time, with Mr Cross, he share his food and his beds with us, because he say he our guest. But not now, so we gotta do it ourselves. One time we share kangaroo wallaby tammar quokka yongart wetj woylie boodi wetj koording kamak kaip ... Too many. But not now like that, and sheep and bullock everywhere and too many strangers wanna take things for themselves and leave nothing. Wales nearly gone now, and the men that kill them they gone away, too, and now we can't even walk up river away from the sea in cold rainy time. Gotta walk around fences and guns, and sheep and bullock get the goodest water. They messing up the water, cutting the earth. What, we can't kill and eat them? And now we strangers to our special places.

Ngalaak waam. Naatjil? Why?

...

These shoes ... Djena bwok warra booja kenning. These shoes might stop me feel the dirt I tread.

He stepped lightly out of the shoes ... Booja djena baranginy. Sand can hold my feet instead.

²⁸ Scott, Kim (2012) *That Deadman Dance* Bloomsbury Publishing

The three texts in this section are contemporary and all deal with attitudes to the land but from different perspectives:

- *The White Earth* written by a white man, Andrew McGahan
- *That Deadman Dance* written by Kim Scott, an indigenous writer, using the voice of an indigenous person and
- *This Land is Mine* a collaboration between a white man and an Aboriginal highlighting the difference in the two attitudes.

Consider the three texts and using the Venn diagram below map out the differences and similarities on such issues as

- when the texts are set
- who is speaking and
- the role of voice and silence in the communication of the theme.



Synthesising ask:

Develop these points of comparison to write a paragraph explaining how theme is a vehicle for conveying values.

NARRATION

This section of the unit assists students in understanding narration and how it operates in novels. They will be achieving this through the following content.

HOW IT WORKS

Narration is the act of telling the story and so is a key aspect of the discourse of the narrative. It is the narration of a story that has the greatest influence on meaning as it determines the interpretation of events and characters, so preparing the groundwork for a reader's response to them.

There are many ways to tell a story and to identify the narrative voice; students can consider questions about narration using the follow guidelines

1. Narrative position
 - outside the story
 - Is the narrator an apparently objective, 'transparent' voice telling the story, seeming to have no particular characteristics or interests?
 - Is the narrator more intrusive, making overt comments about the story and projecting a presence and a personality?
 - Does the narrator tell the story through the eyes of a particular character? If so, are the ways of thinking and speaking of the focaliser realistically conveyed?
 - Does the narrator address the reader or viewer directly?
 - Does the narrator draw attention to and reflect on the story telling process?
 - inside the story as a participant
 - Is the narrator a character in the story – the protagonist, antagonist or a minor character?
 - Is the narrator telling the story retrospectively or as it is happening at the time of telling?
 - attitude to the story
 - Does the narrator share the values implied by the story?
 - How emotionally involved/disinterested is the narrator in the characters and the outcome of the story?
2. Number of narrators
 - If there is more than one narrator, how does one story relate to the others?
 - Is there one narrator with several focaliser characters through whose consciousness the story is told?
3. Reliability of the narrator
 - Is the narrator omniscient or only aware of some of the facts of the story?
 - Is the narrator too naive to fully understand the implications of the story he or she is telling?
 - Has the narrator chosen to keep some important information from the reader?

NARRATIVE VOICE: THE WHITE EARTH

In pairs apply the questions above to *The White Earth* and using your answers as guidelines, write a short paragraph describing how the narrative voice tells the story.

Go back to your instant book summary of the novel and consider:

- how the interplay of William and John as focalisers promotes sympathy for each of these characters
- why Andrew McGahan tells less of the story from John's perspective after Ruth leaves and 'Will's illness began to consume him'. (Ch 35)

COMPARISON TEXT: THE TRUE HISTORY OF THE KELLY GANG

Read the following extract from *The True History of The Kelly Gang* (shortlisted for the Miles Franklin Award in 2001) by Peter Carey and consider what is gained and what is lost in using a first person narrator. The questions below the extract will provide some guidance.

Extract

I lost my own father at 12 yr. of age and know what it is to be raised on lies and silences my dear daughter you are presently too young to understand a word I write but this history is for you and will contain no single lie may I burn in Hell if I speak false.

God willing I shall live to see you read these words to witness your astonishment and see your dark eyes widen and your jaw drop when you finally comprehend the injustice we poor Irish suffered in this present age. How queer and foreign it must seem to you and all the coarse words and cruelty which I now relate are far away in ancient time.

Your grandfather were a quiet and secret man he had been ripped from his home in Tipperary and transported to the prisons of Van Diemen's Land I do not know what was done to him he never spoke of it. When they had finished with their tortures they set him free and he crossed the sea to the colony of Victoria. He were by this time 30 yr. of age red headed and freckled with his eyes always slitted against the sun. My da had sworn an oath to evermore avoid the attentions of the law so when he saw the streets of Melbourne was crawling with policemen worse than flies he walked 28 mi. to the township of Donnybrook and then or soon thereafter he seen my mother. Ellen Quinn were 18 yr. old she were dark haired and slender the prettiest figure on a horse he ever saw but your grandma was like a snare laid out by God for Red Kelly. She were a Quinn and the police would never leave the Quinns alone.

MY first memory is of Mother breaking eggs into a bowl and crying that Jimmy Quinn my 15 yr. old uncle were arrested by the traps. I don't know where my daddy were that day nor my older sister Annie. I were 3 yr. old. While my mother cried I scraped the sweet yellow batter onto a spoon and ate it the roof were leaking above the camp oven each drop hissing as it hit.

My mother tipped the cake onto the muslin cloth and knotted it.

Your Aunt Maggie were a baby so my mother wrapped her also then she carried both cake and baby out into the rain. I had no choice but follow up the hill how could I forget them puddles the colour of mustard the rain like needles in my eyes.

We arrived at the Beveridge Police Camp drenched to the bone and doubtless stank of poverty a strong odour about us like wet dogs and for this or other reasons we was excluded from the Sergeant's room. I remember sitting with my

chillblained hands wedged beneath the door I could feel the lovely warmth of the fire on my fingertips. Yet when we was finally permitted entry all my attention were taken not by the blazing fire but by a huge red jowled creature the Englishman who sat behind the desk. I knew not his name only that he were the most powerful man I ever saw and he might destroy my mother if he so desired.

Approach says he as if he was an altar.

My mother approached and I hurried beside her. She told the Englishman she had baked a cake for his prisoner Quinn and would be most obliged to deliver it because her husband were absent and she had butter to churn and pigs to feed.

No cake shall go to the prisoner said the trap I could smell his foreign spicy smell he had a handlebar moustache and his scalp were shining through his hair.

Said he No cake shall go to the prisoner without me inspecting it 1st and he waved his big soft white hand thus indicating my mother should place her basket on his desk. He untied the muslin his fingernails so clean they looked like they was washed in lye and to this day I can see them livid instruments as they broke my mother's cake apart.

Tis not poverty I hate the most nor the eternal groveling but the insults which grow on it which not even leeches can cure.

I will lay a quid that you have already been told the story of how your grandma won her case in court against Bill Frost and then led wild gallops up and down the main street of Benalla. You will know she were never a coward but on this occasion she understood she must hold her tongue and so she wrapped the warm crumbs in the cloth and walked out into the rain. I cried out to her but she did not hear so I followed her skirts across the muddy yard. At 1st I thought it an outhouse on whose door I found her hammering it come as a shock to realise my young uncle were locked inside. For the great offence of duffing a bullock with cancer of the eye he were interred in this earth floored slab hut which could not have measured more than 6 ft. x 6 ft. and here my mother were forced to kneel in the mud and push the broken cake under the door the gap v. narrow perhaps 2 in. not sufficient for the purpose.

She cried God help us Jimmy what did we ever do to them that they should torture us like this?

My mother never wept but weep she did and I rushed and clung to her and kissed her but still she could not feel that I were there. Tears poured down her handsome face as she forced the muddy mess of cake and muslin underneath the door.²⁹

- What are some of the obvious archaic language features and why are they used?
- What features of narrative voice do you note in this extract?
- How do these features of narrative voice help create a sense of authenticity?

Extension:

- Read the Jerilderie letter written by Ned Kelly himself <http://www.nma.gov.au/interactives/jerilderie/home.html> and compare the style and voice that emerges with that of Peter Carey's fictional creation.
- In many ways this was a brave move by Carey to remain true to the language of Ned Kelly. How do you think modern audiences would react to reading a text with this narrative voice?

²⁹ Carey, Peter (2000) *The True History of the Kelly Gang*, University of Queensland Press

Comparison with *The White Earth*

- Read Chapter 45 of *The White Earth* and compare the narrative voice – look closely at language features to see how the voice is created differently.

COMPARISON TEXT: CAFÉ SCHEHERAZADE

In *Café Scheherazade*, a novel by Arnold Zable the narrator, Martin sits in the backroom of Café Scheherazade in Melbourne and listens to the proprietors and some of their regular clientele tell their own stories of how they survived the Holocaust.



<http://www.abc.net.au/local/videos/2008/09/09/2359913.htm>

Extract:

The de facto Jewish Parliament assembled on the pavement outside Scheherazade, as it does every Sunday morning. In pairs, in groups of four or more, they lean on posts, against the parked cars, or prop themselves by the cafe door...

Listen to them argue. Idle by for an hour or two. Observe the hands and the arms. See them make circles and arcs. Theirs is a parliament of self-anointed ministers and speechwriters. There are many problems to be solved...

Amidst this babble can be heard the voice of Laizer Bialer: "So, you think you can save the world, you hero in underpants. So you think you know it all, you no-good bastard, you clever little philosopher, you fool."

Yet when we sit alone, at a table inside the café, on this Sunday morning in late spring, the aggressive banter gives way to a haunting intensity. It can be seen in the eyes, They turn inwards, away from me. Lazier loses all sense of his surroundings; and, without warning, he has glided into another world.

It can come upon him anytime, anywhere. He may be walking on the beach, on his daily stroll, aware of the traffic whispering on the foreshore, the waves nibbling at his feet. But Laizer is moving in his parallel universe; standing waist-deep in water beneath the arctic wilderness, or lying on his back, on the boards of a cattle truck, his body registering every bump and jolt.

Or he is being led along a dark passageway, handcuffed, driven by prison guards to a door. The same door night after night. The guards hurl him inside, and he is standing in front of an interrogatory whose face is barely visible behind a single globe.

The globe moves back and forth, back and forth. Laizer is mesmerised by the saying light; his interrogator is demanding: 'Confess! Admit that you are a foreign imperialist! An enemy alien. A spy!' The lamp is swinging back and forth and all Laizer can see is the glaring light, and all he can hear is the monotonous drip of a tap, an endless dripping, an endless swinging back and forth.

Again the waves are swirling about his feet; Laizer is back on the cusp of the bay. He makes his way along the well-worn route. Crossing the Esplanade to Shakespeare Grove. Turns right into Acland Street. Rejoins the 'parliament', the bustling crowds, the arguments which rage on the narrow footpath; and he enters Scheherazade, eager to see a familiar face, to find a table surrounded by friends, even if they are a bunch of no-good bastards!

This morning, however, we are seated alone, as prearranged, so that Laizer can recount his tale. 'I cannot see and continuity in my journey' he murmurs. 'Only broken lines.'

Laizer tells his story in fragments, and in the telling he moves from anxiety to light-heartedness, from obsession to banter, from one city to another. It is left to me to reconstruct the map and the chronology. A scribe, a no-good scribbler, I cannot turn back. What had begun as a simple newspaper story has exploded beyond my grasp. I listen. And I record. Driven by the knowledge that the old men are moving on, nearing the ends of their tumultuous lives; driven by a sense that it would be a tragic betrayal if their stories disappeared without trace.³⁰

Student activity:

- Use different colours to highlight the sections of the extract with
 - Laizer as focaliser
 - Laizer's direct speech
 - Laizer's free indirect speech.

How does the use of these different ways of telling his story bring Laizer to life in our imaginations?

- The narrator, Martin, is a character in this novel. How does this affect our reception of the story as compared to the device of the external narrator used in *The White Earth*?

Synthesising task:

- Using any incident from your own experience as the basis for a story, write it from two different narrative positions, one inside and one outside the story. Share the story with a partner asking them to comment on how the meaning of the story changes with the change in narrative voice.

SETTING

HOW IT WORKS

At the simplest level setting is about the time and place that the story is set in. We can ask where and when a book is set but what we really need to ask is why the book is set in a particular place and time. This is because it is essential that the setting supports the ideas of the novel and provides a place for the characters to interact.

Context is often necessary for understanding this equation. The time an author chooses to set the novel is critical as that time may have particular relevance to the ideas but the context of the author is also a significant factor in his or her selection of the time and place. One of the best known examples of this comes from the American playwright Arthur Miller whose play *The Crucible* was set in 17th Century Salem, a place where witch trials were being conducted, but Miller's message was about his own context of the anti-communist

³⁰ Zable, Arnold (2003) *Café Scheherazade*, Penguin Books

McCarthy trials. His political message was more powerful by linking it to a historical event that was well known as unacceptable.

SETTING: THE WHITE EARTH

The novel *The White Earth* has a few layers of time. The context of the author is 2004 a time where reconciliation was being sought. The time in the book is 1992 a time of the Mabo decision that stimulated anxiety and dissent among many rural people, but embedded in the fabric of this story we see another time – that of the indigenous people from the past and how that place was the site of violent death. The violence and secrecy of the past reflects critically on the actions of the John and his friends in asserting their ‘rights’ of land ownership.

However, beyond this time of violence, there is yet another time that is implied – the time of Indigenous ownership of the land, previous to colonial rule. The earth that is central to the novel evokes strong emotions and stimulates conflict. The title of the book is quite specific about place acknowledging that there is a dominant group that sees this as a “white” earth (belonging both to the White family and to the colonising race seen as white) but it is only one way of seeing the land, against the less proprietorial and more spiritual connection made between aboriginal people and the earth.

The Mabo decision was a landmark decision that legally acknowledged the strength of the relationship of the Aborigines to their land and opened avenues for land claims under certain conditions. Setting in this novel therefore represents more than just a place as a background for the story. Place and sense of belonging to place are central to understanding the book. Setting is integral to the understanding of the novel’s meaning. It incites emotions and leads to actions that become part of the texture of the novel.

Setting can also act as a metaphor. For example in ‘The Fall of the House of Usher’ by Edgar Allan Poe, the house is a symbol of crumbling aristocracy. In Tim Winton’s novel *Cloudstreet* the house filled with ghosts represents the past. In Peter Carey’s *Oscar and Lucinda* the glass cathedral represents an impossible hope.

The setting can have the force of a character in the way that its very presence motivates other characters to act and react.

Time and setting in *The White Earth*

Using the novel, *The White Earth*, Find a description of the land from each of these times. Copy the quote into the space given

1992	
John's youth	
colonial times	
pre-colonial times	

Look closely at the wording of the description from each time.

- Has it changed or has it stayed the same?
- What is this saying about the land and the way it was seen at each stage?

Characters and setting in the White Earth

Student activity

Find quotations from the text that show the feelings of each character to the setting, Kuran. You may find that their emotions change over time so enter any changes as well.



John

Will

Veronica

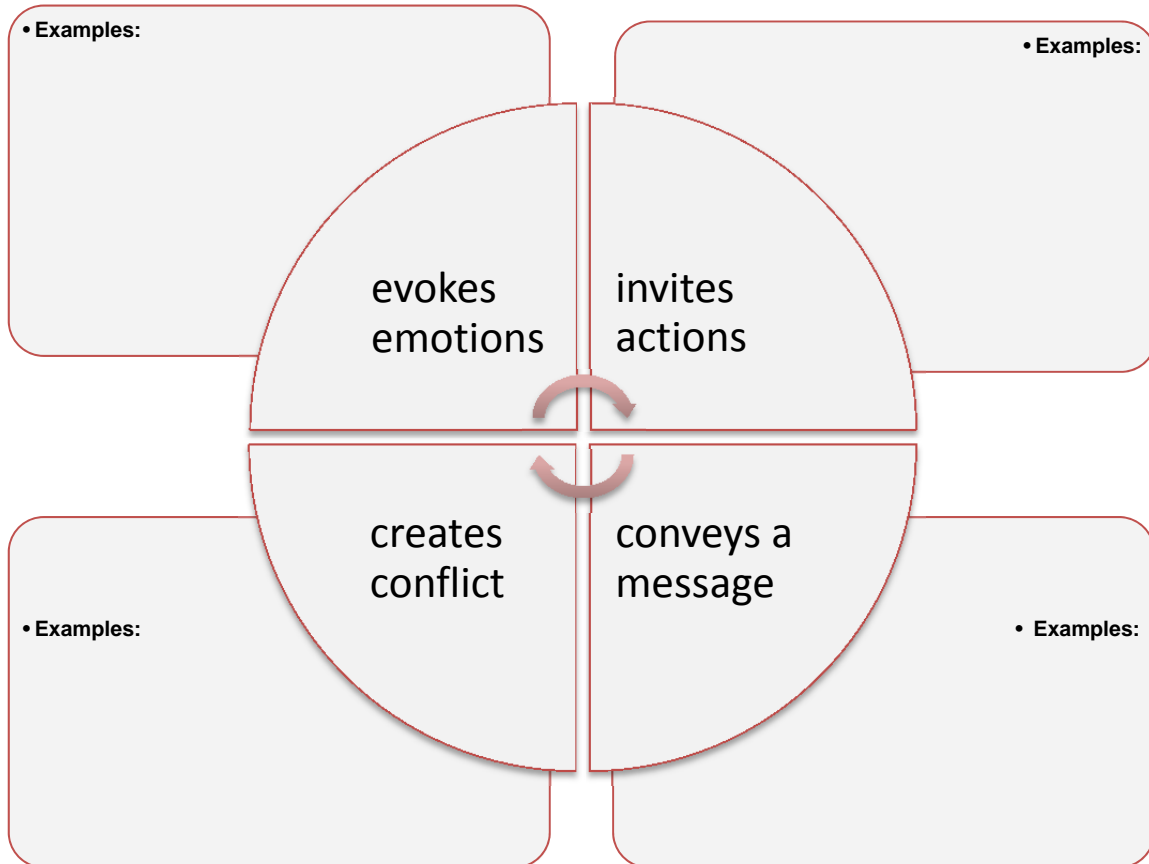
Ruth

- What kinds of feelings do the land and the house create in individuals? (try to develop your vocabulary here)
- Characters' reactions to the setting show something about the characters. What is revealed about the individual characters in the way each responds to the setting?

Responding to text: complete the diagram

In the empty boxes add examples of the ways setting in *The White Earth* acts to:

- Evoke emotions
- Invite actions
- Convey a message
- Create conflict



Close reading of text

There are two main settings: the house and the waterhole, representing connection to the land and to the past. In both there is also a sense of the spiritual, emphasized by the presence of ghosts.

Read the following extracts and complete the questions that follow.

First impressions are always important. This extract is from William's perspective as he first sees the house.

Setting Extract 1: Kuran House (Chapter 2)

<p>Which words convey an ominous sense of foreboding?</p>	<p><i>Familiar landmarks slid by ... nearby rose mounds of earth ... like ancient tombs. William's father had told him they were merely the remains of an abandoned drainage scheme. But they were still ominous shapes under the grey sky, sentinels beyond which everything was strange. ...</i></p>	<p>Transition</p>
<p>Explain how the architecture creates an effect on William.</p>	<p><i>A homestead, his mother had told him, and William had not really known what it might mean. Gazing at it now, his first amazed thought was of palaces and manors in somewhere like England, the stately homes of princes and dukes. Even in that initial moment he understood that the House wasn't quite on that scale, but still it was easily the biggest home William had ever seen, built all of sandstone, two tall storeys high, with a roof of grey slate. Wide terraces wrapped around both upper and lower levels. A circular driveway with a fountain in the centre led up to the front steps. A cascade of them, climbing in turn to the porch and the double front doors that looked ten feet high. From there the House stretched out until it met two perpendicular wings that projected forward from either side, framing the driveway and the fountain. William stared up at the carved stone. Was his uncle rich?</i></p>	<p>The vision</p>
<p>This is a very visual scene and takes us like a camera in a film through elements of the building. Draw the scene that is described and compare your drawing to others'.</p>	<p><i>But then he was really looking, and the truth sank in. It was the roof he noticed first – the line of it sagged towards the middle, and dozens of tiles were cracked or sliding out of place. The gutters hung loose from the eaves, and below them, the high walls were draped in sullen vines and ivy. The upper verandah was ruinous, and within the shadow of the awning William could glimpse second storey windows that were shuttered or smashed. The lower terrace was littered with junk – boxes, drums, a roll of wire, a dismantled bicycle – and the steps were cracked and sunken. Splashes of white paint stained the sandstone walls, and some of the ground-floor windows had plywood partitions instead of glass. In another window an air-conditioner had been jammed, its grille streaked with rust. One of the front doors hung off its hinges, half open, and nearby sat a single metal chair, with some dirty plates and a coffee cup beside it, items that looked as if they might have been there for years.</i></p>	<p>The reality</p>
<p>List all the adjectives and descriptive phrases that are used. List the verbs.</p>	<p><i>William's mother was gazing through the windscreen, her hands tight on the wheel, a glint of dismay in her eyes. William looked at the house again, noting yet more signs of neglect. The fountain was full of grass, the driveway was deeply rutted with tyre tracks, and the garden was a wilderness of weeds.</i></p>	<p>Disappointment</p>
<p>Consider if these have negative or positive connotations.</p>	<p><i>"It's all right," she said, voice quavering. "It's all right. " She had papered on a smile.</i></p>	<p>Resignation</p>
<p>Which words tell us William's mothers' feelings?</p>		

Creative writing operates like analytical writing in paragraph formation. A good topic sentence can lead the ideas of the paragraph and progress the plot.

- List all the topic sentences. What does each suggest will be discussed in the paragraph? Check the paragraph to see how the topic sentence fulfils its promise. Each description builds on the one before and creates an effect.

Setting Extract 2: The Waterhole (Chapter 11)

The student broke in again. "So what about those bunya pines? You got any theories?"

William's uncle regarded him blankly. "Theories about what?"

"You know, the scars. On the big old trees, the ones that are a hundred and fifty, two hundred years old. Some people say they were made by the Aborigines with stone axes, cutting footholds into the trunks so they could climb up to get the nuts

....

How about any other old stories? You know, stuff you might have heard from your grandfather about the early days. Strange happenings in the mountains, people stumbling into hidden gullies, that sort of thing."

The old man shook his head.

...

"It's there in the oral sources though," the student insisted. "There was supposed to be a sizeable pool on this side., a waterhole that you could rely on, even in droughts. It was pretty important in cultural terms

...

Tribes from all over southeast Queensland gathered here when the bunya nuts ripened, so the mountains feature in the tales of quite a few different tribal groups. All gone now, but I've talked to a few old men and women in places like Cherbourg, and they remember a thing or two."

...

"Let's go." William's uncle said coldly.

...

The creek came winding down from his left, its bed rocky between the low banks, the water the merest trickle. On reaching the shelf it spread into a small pool that was maybe a foot deep, before spilling through a worn lip in the stone. William stared over the lip in amazement. For the water fell in a sudden drop, a dozen feet perhaps, into a miracle. Nestled in the dry hillside, hidden by trees and high rocky banks, was a waterhole. It was long and wide and, judging by the darkness of the water, deep. The stone bench had been set right on the brink of the shelf, and William crouched there, gazing down. Around the edges of the pool he could see rocks that lay just below the surface, and the ghostly limbs of trees that had fallen in from above. At the far end, he could tell that the pool became shallow again, before ebbing over another lip of stone, and winding away along the creek bed once more. But in the middle, and directly below him where the water dripped over the shelf, the depths were pitch black and the bottom was invisible.

His uncle was standing beside him, staring down at the pool, some unreadable emotion in his eyes. William looked at him in questioning confusion.

"Well", the old man said, "you wanted somewhere to swim."

- Complete this paragraph using this topic sentence and gathering evidence from the extract on the pool:
The first description of the pool, coming after John's denial of its existence, is particularly unsettling and creates a sense of mystery.
- This chapter is an example of 'show not tell'. 'Show not tell' is a writing method that acknowledges that an author can convey a lot more than what is said and the reader infers more than is read. It is achieved in two ways: authors may

- use description of places, weather, objects, etc, to create feelings and mood or
 - juxtapose one thing/question/event against the other and let us draw links.
- Explain the way this is working in this extract.

Student Activity: Creative writing

Students should describe a beautiful Australian setting over three paragraphs
Use these topic sentences to start each paragraph to build the setting:

- For a time he lifted his gaze from himself and regarded the world afresh.
- And more than anything else it was a world of noises
- It was a world of secrets too.

Students can share their settings. Then go back to the novel to Chapter 12 to see how McGahan uses these topic sentences to describe the setting.

Or

Students can use this image and write as if they are first seeing the house in the photo.



<http://www.bonzle.com/c/a?a=pic&fn=gpek1d9&s=3>

This is a photograph of Jimbour Station property, one of the largest properties taken up in the 1840s, and the house on which McGahan based his description of Kuran.

Image sourced from Picture Queensland, State Library of Queensland
This image is free of copyright restrictions.

COMPARISON TEXT: THE ANCESTOR GAME

*The Ancestor Game*³¹ (Miles Franklin award winner 1993) by Alex Miller traverses three continents: Australia, Europe and Asia. Rather than placing itself in Australia the book suggests the diversity of experiences that make up Australia. Setting is therefore quite varied as the book travels with the characters between countries.

Consider the extracts that appear below and answer the following questions:

- What does each scene suggest about place, people and their way of life?
- How does each passage about setting connect to ancestors?
- Reconsider all the extract with the following quote in mind. How do the different descriptions of settings illustrate the comment?

He understood that the essence of freedom is in dislocation from one's origins, that freedom is to be judged for oneself and not for one's tribe. He understood that freedom is identity for the individual. p.227

England:

My gaze roved appreciatively over her lovely English furniture and the porcelain in its cabinets, pieces she'd collected with care over the years, and I saw how deeply she belonged to this place, how buttressed against dislodgement she had grown in my absence, a successful cultural graft drawing her sustenance with assurance from the rootstock of her adopted country. P.4-5

Australia:

We'd been transported to a temperate hemisphere and might have been driving now along a crowded boulevard on a showery spring evening in Paris. The existence a little to our north of Nolan's fiery desert had been forgotten by us once again, and we'd returned to pretending we lived in a Europe of the South Pacific. The hot wind and the burning grass had alarmed us, forcing the truth in us, but only for a moment.

In High Street, Persian carpets hung out on the footpath, and displayed in the lighted shop windows were Italian shoes and French perfumes and German motor cars. In every other shop there were antiques from a Europe whose style we wished to emulate, a Europe that had ceased to exist long ago. Antiques and paintings. And numerous chinoiseries. An abundance of them. It was all there, glowing; everything we could possibly need and much we might never need. Kang pushed open the door and I followed him inside. It was a glass door swung upon substantial bronze hinges with, just below eye level, the single word, cursive and gilded, LINDNER. From outside it was not possible to see inside, as there were heavy curtains across the door and the window. You either knew what LINDNER implied or you didn't know. P35-36

Feng, China

She was facing the long rear wall of Huang's house. The doorway before her was the second entrance. It was the doorway through which she had told her father she would return, as if she were returning from an excursion to the temple at Lin Yin. The door was scarcely more than two metres high and a little over a metre wide. She wondered now at her insistence on reentering her home, indeed her father's home, by this means. It was a servant's entrance, or a child's entrance. Only now did she observe the method of its constriction, though she had known it all her life. It was made of adzed planks set within a heavy, rectangular frame, and towards the top in the centre there was a little trap through which the gatekeeper might safely observe visitors, Why the constriction of the door should be significant she could not imagine. It was the peculiar, detailed way she was seeing things. She thought of it as a Shanghai way of seeing things, and she resented discovering it in herself. A strangers' way of seeing. The door had once been a bright vermilion, but had faded to an autumnal sepia. Above it, providing an area of shade around its base, there was a tiled roof with upturned eaves... Now standing here in the hot sun on the roadway she thought, I am no longer the child; today I am the woman carrying the child.

³¹ Miller, Alex (1992) *The Ancestor Game*, Penguin Books.

...
When she was very young, between lessons with her father, she had often come to sit on the bales of rice straw at the window of the storehouse that overlooked the courtyard of the little red doorway. From under the dark, sheltering eaves she had watched the rain falling onto the grey stones of the yard and had pursued her solitary enchantments. And through the rain, always the little doorway in the wall, the doorway to the other world, to the lake and to the mountains and to the temples hidden in the forest. Shanghai had not existed for her then. Page 71-72

Synthesising task:

*Location pertains to feeling; feeling profoundly pertains to – place... Every story would be another story, and unrecognizable as art, if it took up its characters and plot and happened somewhere else.*³²

Eudora Welty

*He (sic) must shape simultaneously (in an expanding creative moment) his characters, plot, and setting, each inextricably connected to the others; he must make his whole world in a single, coherent gesture, as a potter makes a pot...*³³

John Gardner

- These quotations maintain that setting is integral to the meaning of a story. Use them as a basis for a class discussion in which you choose settings from texts you have read or viewed and consider what makes their particular setting fundamental to the story's meaning.
- Write a narrative where setting is integral to the meaning of the story.

ELEMENTS OF STYLE

HOW IT WORKS

We often have a favourite writer whose work becomes familiar and creates pleasure. That pleasure is embedded in the author's writing style. We like the stories but we also, sometimes without realising, like the way these stories are written. It may be that the language is simple and conveys details; it may be that the language engages you through its complexity; it may be that the voice of the characters resonates with something you believe or that the book manages to take you to other places.

Every writer has a style that identifies him or her. This is achieved through all the elements of the novel negotiated through language. The selected language creates an effect which influences the reader. Often this is referred to by students as "techniques" but it goes a lot further than techniques.

In order to understand the style of an author it is necessary to look at:

- Point of view or focaliser – through whose eyes do we see the story? Does the story move positions?
- Sentence structure – are the sentences complex, compound or simple? Why is one style preferred over another?
- Vocabulary – are the words complex or simple? Do they change for different characters? Does the author use jargon in some places? Why?

³² Welty, Eudora "Place in Fiction," COLLECTED ESSAYS
<http://nbu.bg/webs/amb/american/5/welty/place.htm>

³³ Gardner, John The Art of Fiction: Notes on Craft for Young Writers
<http://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/1391543-the-art-of-fiction>

- Use of dialogue – when is dialogue used and by whom? Why is it used? When there is reported speech, consider why this is happening and how it progresses the story
- Type of language: formal / informal; simple / complex; subjective / objective; metaphorical / literal
- Punctuation – is there any interesting punctuation? Some authors like to use capitalization to make a word appear significant. Perhaps there are exclamation marks, ellipsis, commas, lack of punctuated dialogue. Consider the effect of these choices.
- Verbs – is the story told in the present or past tense? Why? Look at a section and identify the types of verbs being used. What kinds of actions are being described? Does the author prefer the present continuous tense (-ing) or a simple tense? What is the effect of each?
- Nouns and adjectives – are the objects important? How are they described?
- Symbols, motifs and metaphors – these are all slightly different. A metaphor may be repeated and therefore becomes a sustained metaphor which needs to be interpreted. A motif and symbol are not the same as metaphors – a motif is a recurring element in the novel: it may be a particular structure or a strain of imagery or some use of language. Its repetition highlights a symbolic significance, standing for an idea or a feeling and creating mood. A symbol may not be repeated but is linked to a character or idea, standing for something more.

ASPECTS OF STYLE: THE WHITE EARTH

Motif

A significant feature of McGahan’s work is the use of motifs to represent the ideas of the text. Motifs can link sections of a text creating a sense of structure, they can connect characters with other characters or characters with places and events. They convey important symbolic meaning in the text.

Students can work in groups each tracing one of the following and then report back to the class on their findings. They can share and complete their tables.

	Hat	Man on fire	Ear ache	Ghosts	Dreams
Quotations: how is the motif described in different parts of the text?					
Where do these references occur?					
Conclusions: What is the significance of this motif in developing the ideas?					

- Write an explanation of why motifs are important in novels and how they function (using examples from this novel)

Student Activity: Close reading

In the passage below we see the coming together of a few strands of the book: the ear, the history, fire and the House. This passage comes late in the novel.

- How do all the elements come together to capture the sense of confusion and despair?
- Think of the importance of beginning with the throbbing ear.
- How do we know that William is still not fully aware of the issues?

His ear throbbed and the sun hurt his eyes. He lifted his gaze and stared out over the plains. Everywhere he looked there was haze and smoke, vague shifting shapes that could have been anything. Towns that became farms that became empty grassland set on fire. Nothing was solid, not the land, and even less so its history. He had been told so many stories – but which ones was he to believe? He had seen none of these events with his own eyes, walked none of the world with his own feet,

He retreated to the safety of the House.

(Chapter 35)

Other types of texts as devices

Authors often employ different texts within their writing as devices to carry out a lot of functions. For example if the writer is using first person narration the inclusion of an email from another character or a letter might help. If the author starts the story near the end then a diary might be the way to fill in the background. If the author wants to give historical credibility to the story than an extract from a history book might be added in. If the author wants to give a real life context then a newspaper report might be embedded. This is a technique that can be seen from writers as far back as Jane Austen who used letters in her novels or conversations to give us other points of view.

Adding other types of texts can:

- Introduce a new perspective
- Verify a point of view
- Change character interactions
- Share and give insight into another character's ideas
- Progress the plot and fill in details
- Give authenticity

Readers read different texts in different ways, bringing different expectations to the text; for example, we expect a newspaper to be objective and contain truth, we expect a poem to be very personal, we expect a list to be practical, we expect Facebook to be a personal message. When we read a novel which has different texts in it, we treat these different texts in different ways, bringing our expectations of that type of text to bear and drawing additional meaning.

From your general reading, list the kinds of texts that could be added into a novel and suggest how these affect the reader. The first has been done as a sample.

Type of Text	Effect
Newspaper	Provides a media view of the event. Can give authenticity and credibility or may offer a sensationalised or distorted view.

McGahan includes other types of texts into his novel for various reasons. In chapters 16, 17 and the epilogue, for example, he has newspaper articles, an events flyer, a television news report and a manifesto.

- Can you find any other types of text in the novel?
- Where does each new text appear?
- What information does each text yield?
- Does it change the way characters interact? Explain your response.
- Does it serve to progress the plot? How?
- Does it offer alternative perspectives? In what way?

Gaps and silences

Gaps and silences are forms of 'incompleteness' in texts. This incompleteness is not always intentional and can arise from the author's own cultural and historical context.

Gaps are places in the text where readers are invited to make connections by drawing on their 'common sense' understandings of the world.

Silences result from the fact that textual gaps enable readers to avoid questioning certain values.³⁴

For example, not all voices are present in this novel. We know of an Aboriginal presence but we don't hear them talk.

- How does McGahan ensure that the Aboriginal perspective is included?
- Is the book 'incomplete' according to Moon's definition?

Arguing a case

McGahan uses the characters in the novel to argue different positions.

Use the following extracts from the novel to answer these questions about ideas and structure of argument.

1. What is being argued and how is each person framing their argument?
2. Are the arguments objective or subjective?
3. Categorise the arguments under: historical, personal, moral, national, economic. Some arguments may fall into more than one category. You may also find that two arguments with opposite views fall under the same category
4. How do the reactions of William in some of the arguments affect the way we perceive that argument?
5. The extracts appear in their order in the novel. Comment on the movement of the argument.
6. Consider also how the extracts fit into classical ideas of rhetoric, of Ethos, Logos and Pathos³⁵

Ethos, Logos and Pathos are the means by which persuasion to a point of view on an issue can occur.

Ethos: *persuading by appealing to the readers' values*

Logos: *persuading by the means of logical reasoning*

Pathos: *persuading by appealing to the reader's emotion*

³⁴ Brian Moon, 2001, *Literary Terms: A practical Glossary* 2nd edition Chalkface Press. P.54

³⁵ ACARA, 2012, *NAPLAN 2012 Writing Guide Glossary*, http://www.nap.edu.au/verve/resources/2012_Marking_Guide
p. 86

The following table lists some features of arguments that draw on Ethos, Logos and Pathos.

Ethos	Logos	Pathos
Appeal to values	Appeal to reason	Appeal to emotion
Relationships are valued	Dispassionate language	Emphatic statements
Appeals to truth	Objective author stance	Emotive language
Duty of care	Citing of a relevant authority	Direct appeal to the reader
Creation of a just society	Objective view of opposition	Appeal to spurious authority
Community responsibility	Qualified measured statements	Disparagement of opposition

Ch 16

1. John to William:

“That’s independence for you. It means hard work and self-reliance. And that’s how Australia began. It took those men years and a lot of them died, but slowly they built their stations. Built better houses. Built stockyards and shearing sheds, brought their wives and children up from down south. It was the end of the earth, but they made it work somehow.”

2. Announcement of League’s meeting:

In the wake of the Mabo judgement, the federal government is currently drawing up plans for sweeping Native Title legislation which it plans to introduce before the end of the year. This will alienate land to the black minority, and affect us all directly!

Ch 17

3. John

“The truth is at this stage no one has a clue what native title is. That’s the problem. The government is still drafting the legislation. But all indications are that it will be terrible for people like us.

Why?

...Someone like me won’t have a say any more about what happens on my own property. It’s already pretty bad. Right now I can’t do things like clear trees or build a dam without the government wanting to know about it. Native Title would make it even harder. But that’s not all. The worst of it is that I might not own the land anymore. Not outright. Other people would come along and say they owned it as well. People who haven’t had a thing to do with the place for centuries. And I wouldn’t be able to do anything without their say-so”

Ch 22

4. TV report

“...so let me tell you about terra nullius. Part of the theory is that the Aborigines didn’t work the land, they just left it as they found it, and so therefore they had no rights of ownership. But that isn’t true. They did what they could, with very limited resources. Australia was no paradise. It didn’t have any native plants suitable for large-scale farming – no wheat or barley or cotton or any of the rest. It didn’t have the right sort of animals for domestication either, no sheep or cows. It wasn’t until Europeans brought those plants and animals that you could farm the way we do now, with paddocks and fence. In the meantime the Aborigines farmed the only way that was viable...

then the High Court led the way with the Mabo judgement. It recognised finally that terra nullius was always a lie, and now the government is responding to historical reality with Native Title legislation. This country was Aboriginal land and it was stolen from them without compensation. That was unfair. For a century and a half Aboriginal people have been herded into missions or deserts or urban ghettos and forgotten about. That’s unfair too. They’ve had no proper access to education or health services or employment – many of

them couldn't even vote till the 60's. All that's unfair, and the effects will last for generations, but Native Title is at least the first step in righting the wrong..."

This was the first time he (William) had heard anyone who seemed to think they (the new laws) were a good thing.

"... the whole point of the legislation is to protect the pastoral leases. Okay a few of them might still be open to claim, but only if there has been an ongoing Aboriginal presence on the land – and that's going to be hard to prove. And even if a claim is successful, all the lease holder will have to do is share some access with the traditional owners and consult with them about major works that might affect cultural sites on the property. It's hardly stealing farms away..."

Strange and puzzling. It didn't sound like the same law that made his uncle so angry.

Ch 23

5. The League meeting

"I've seen the maps," Terry Butterworth was declaring... "no matter who says what – half the country is open to claim. The pastoral industry, the mining industry, they'd both be paralysed.

..

"I'dbe screwed", the tour guide rasped... "Suddenly it's black land and sacred sites and whites aren't allowed in"

...

"It's a legal fiction anyway", the policeman remarked, "Either the whole country was stolen, in which case the entire continent's up for Native Title claims or none of it was. You can't just say that freehold is somehow magically immune. Even the blacks are pissed off about that. Freehold, pastoral leases – they reckon it's all theirs regardless.

William's uncle spoke. "Freehold means city properties. The government knows that if they touch the cities there'd be a revolution."

...

"This is bigger than Native Title," the policeman stated. "This is about national security. You think the Australian army could defend this country if the Japs ever come back, or if the Indonesians invaded, or the Chinese?"

Ch 34

6. Ruth to William

"A hundred and fifty years ago, the squatters came here and saw all that beautiful grass. And they thought, wow, won't this be perfect for cattle and sheep. And aren't we lucky that all this pasture is just sitting here, with no one using it. So they marched on in ... Can't really blame the Aborigines for getting a little upset, can you? All that work they'd put in, year after year – gone. No wonder they speared the odd white man."

Ch 36

7. John to William

"Only traditional owners can lodge a claim, Will. And none of them are left, not from this part of the world. They're all dead, or they were taken away long ago. ... there's only me left. I've been here all along. So I claim Native Title. I claim it for both of us."

A chill ran through William, This wasn't the solution. Something crucial was being warped here, bent into a shape it wasn't meant to be.

COMPARISON TEXT: CARPENTARIA

In this extract Alexis Wright, winner of the Miles Franklin Award in 2007 for *Carpentaria*, ignores the rules of sentence structure to recapture the story of her people. She recreates the voice of the storyteller who interacts with the listener, inviting the listener to imagine a world before the earth formed. This is written in the style of myths or legends which originated as stories that were spoken or sung and had strong visual elements to engage the imaginations of listeners.

The ancestral serpent, a creature larger than the storm clouds, came down from the stars, laden with its own creative enormity. It moved graciously – if you had been watching with the eyes of a bird hovering in the sky far above the ground. Looking down at the serpent’s wet body, glistening from the ancient sunlight, long before man was a creature who could contemplate the next moment in time. It came down those billions of years ago. To crawl on its belly, all around the wet clay soils of the Gulf of Carpentaria.

Picture the creative serpent, scoring deep into- scouring down through – the slippery underground of mud flats, leaving in its wake the thunder of tunnels collapsing to form deep sunken valleys. The sea water following in the serpent’s wake, swarming in a frenzy of tidal waves, soon changed colour from ocean blue to the yellow of mud. The water filled the swirling tracks to form the mighty bending rivers spread across the vast plains of the gulf country.

...
The inside knowledge about this river and coastal region is the Aboriginal Law handed down through the ages since time began. Otherwise who would know where to look for the hidden underwater courses in the vast flooding mud plains, full of serpents and fish in the monsoon season?³⁶

Complete this table on elements of style in Wright’s novel with quotations from the text.

Elements of Style in <i>Carpentaria</i>		
Wright employs ...	In the quotation...	To show ...
Visual imagery		
Rich, elemental language		
Harmonious sounds and rhythms		
Imperative		
Sentence fragments		
Rhetorical questions		

The style in this extract is markedly different from the language of *The White Earth*, its mythic resonances contrasting with the realistic diction and cadences in McGahan’s novel.

In Chapters 11 and 22 of *The White Earth* we hear that the Aborigines had stories about special places such as the rock pool but we get told second hand.

Imagine that you have contact with a storyteller from the area. The storyteller has all the stories of the region. Using your understanding of the language of myths gained from the Extract write the Aboriginal story of one of the places in the book *The White Earth* as a creation myth.

³⁶ Alexis Wright *Carpentaria*, Giramondo Press, 2006

Synthesising task

Style can be regarded as the way you work with the rules of writing. Will you follow the rules or break them? Read George Orwell's *Rules for writing* (there are many internet sources for this).

You can either

- agree with Orwell and explain why you agree or
- you can compose your own rules for writing
- you can write a polemic (attack) on the rules of writing.

SYNTHESISING TASKS

CREATIVE AND ANALYTICAL TASK

The brief: You are to submit two pieces of writing:

- an imaginative recreation – rewriting the essence of the novel as a short story and
- a reflection on your writing process.

The story needs to be at least 1000 words and the reflection at least 500.

You will be assessed on

- originality and creativity in the creative writing
- knowledge and understanding of the process
- expression and organisation of the two pieces of writing according to purpose and audience

Purpose: the purpose of this task is to become aware of the different set of understandings and requirements of the short story from the extended form of the novel. The reflection is designed to demonstrate the growth of this knowledge through the writing process and your ability to verbalise your thinking.

Preparation: Understanding the short story

Writing a short story is a very different process to writing a novel.

The short story

- is a condensed format which focuses on a limited number of characters
- usually has one complication and climax and
- has a very clear focus from the first line.

In order to understand the structure and organisation of the short story form read from the following short story books:

- Nam Le's *The Boat*³⁷ or
- Tim Winton's *The Turning*³⁸.

Preparation: The Reflection

A reflection needs to do more than just sum up what you have presented. You need to explain the stages of thinking – what decisions did you make and why? You may talk about the characters, the structure and the voice chosen. You should discuss the difficulties of writing in this way and what you learnt about yourself as a writer as well as the relationship between two different forms: the novel and the short story.

³⁷

Nam Le, *The Boat*, Penguin Books, 2008

³⁸ Tim Winton, *The Turning*, Picador, 2005

Process	Reflection: Stimulus questions
<p>Step One: Know the short story structure What are the features of a short story? Research these and read models to see how short stories are crafted.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What opportunities do you see in this structure? ▪ Can you identify any problems you might have at this stage?
<p>Step Two: Preparing for the short story. Revisit the novel. What is the main idea in the White Earth? Who are the main characters? Who are the minor characters? How is the story revealed?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What stood out for you after you read this novel?
<p>Step Three: Distilling the essence of the novel How can the main idea be condensed? What are the most necessary elements to retain? Which characters can we remove? How can we organise the information? What will be the kernel of the story? What will be its climax or turning point? Can the story be told using a minor character in the novel or a minor incident?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Did this process work easily for you? Why? If not, what kinds of difficulties did you encounter? Were you able to overcome these? How? ▪ Are there any issues still to be resolved?
<p>Advice: Character and narrative voice: Don't automatically assume that minor characters can be removed. Consider Mrs Griffiths who is a person who has seen the history of the region and can act as an onlooker or narrator. However, you need to ask yourself: will she convey the message on reconciliation appropriately?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What issues arose when thinking about narrative voice and the key character of your story?
<p>Structure: The novel's alternating chapters from past to present may illustrate the idea of the power of the land to influence generations but it is too long to have for this story. Where do you want to start: at the beginning? In the middle? At the end or in the future? Will one of the characters be talking from the future looking back? If you go to the future you must be able to show the change in political climate as this will affect the way the character looks back. What event will stimulate the story or memory?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Record all the decisions you make here as they will form the basis of the Reflection
<p>Step Four: Planning and writing Have an outline of your story and then start writing. Make sure you edit and revise as necessary. Use another student to comment on the story at various stages.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Think about the story. ▪ Think about the process of writing and any difficulties you encountered. ▪ Think about the relationship of short story to novel. ▪ Think about what you learnt about yourself as a writer.

SPEAKING TASK

Format: Panel presentation in front of a class

Time: 5 minutes for each speaker

Audience: Australian adult readers

Purpose: the purpose of this task is to use an authentic text to model ways of speaking publicly about books, using the knowledge and understanding embedded in the Novel study

Scenario

1. The ABC's *First Tuesday Bookclub* is running a special program run by school students to talk about one of the Miles Franklin award winners or shortlisted books.

Task: Students have to work in groups to conduct an intelligent discussion on one of the Miles Franklin award winners or shortlisted books. They should use the discussion on the *First Tuesday Book Club* as a model but they may want to develop this in a different direction.

Background

The *First Tuesday Book Club* website is a powerful way of supporting literature using multimedia tools of the 21st century. On the website are videos of programs and tabs for a book excerpt, a transcript of the talk, 'your reviews' (a section for the public to comment on the book) and an author profile. Sometimes the discussions are quite polarised showing just how diverse responses to a novel can be. The videos are usually of the panelists talking but sometimes a book trailer, a creative interpretation of the book, may be included.

Preparation

Step One: Students will watch a segment of the *First Tuesday Book Club* talking about a Miles Franklin award book (the links appear below). They will consider how each of the elements of the novel is discussed. They will also categorise judgements under positive or negative.

They can use a table to summarise comments

	Jennifer Byrne	Speaker 1	Speaker 2	Speaker 3
Author				
Context				
Genre				
Plot				
Character				
Setting				
Style				
Judgement / comment + or -				







Students will also be listening actively to the way the panel chair conducts the discussion.

- How does she introduce the novel?
- How does she position the reader?
- How does she move the conversation between speakers?
- If she interjects why does she do so?

Step Two: (Optional) Students work with de Bono's hats and develop a discussion according to their hat. You give students a hat with the question on the opposite side and they answer. They could work in white groups red groups, etc and then come together in mixed groups to share responses.

The hats can be applied to two ideas: to the way the panel works and to way the book works so that students are

- collecting information about the book and
- developing an awareness of the way panel discussions work.

	What does the hat require?	Apply the hat to the panel	Apply the hat to the novel
	information needed	Do the panelists ask for more information?	What do you think is missing from the book?
	feelings hunches	How do the panelists show their feelings?	What feeling does the book arouse?
	devil's advocate	How do the panelists express their criticism?	What doesn't work in the book
	optimism	How positive is the panel and how do members show this?	What is really good about the book?
	creativity	What are the possibilities offered by listening to the panel on the book?	What are the possibilities offered by the book?
	manage the thinking	Who's controlling the action and how is this done? How does each panelist react to the other?	How is the novelist controlling the ideas?

Step Three: students allot roles (panelist or presenter) and prepare their discussion on the novel. They may rehearse this and then present it to the class.

First Tuesday Book Club program links

Teachers should choose one of the following to watch. Only two include book trailers: the shortlisted *Past the Shallows* and winner *Breath*.

Past the Shallows (2012 shortlist) with book trailer
<http://www.abc.net.au/tv/firsttuesday/s3261543.htm#>

The Slap (2009 shortlist)
<http://www.abc.net.au/tv/firsttuesday/s2493453.htm>

Breath (2009 winner) with book trailer
<http://www.abc.net.au/tv/firsttuesday/s2235151.htm>

The Secret River (2006 shortlist)
<http://www.abc.net.au/tv/firsttuesday/s1847953.htm>

The Transit of Venus (2004 winner) – no video of panel
<http://www.abc.net.au/tv/firsttuesday/s1778979.htm>

Cloudstreet (1992 winner)
<http://www.abc.net.au/tv/firsttuesday/s2795575.htm>

The Man Who Loved Children
<http://www.abc.net.au/tv/firsttuesday/s3141570.htm>

ALTERNATIVE VERSIONS OF THE TASK

The task that appears above can be altered to suit your context. It could be made into a multimodal task, a recorded podcast or a representation (through a book trailer).

Here are some possible changes that you could implement

Mode: Multimodal or written

Task alternatives:

- A website page promoting a book including a video of a spoken presentation, a book trailer, author profile and a collection of comments on the book (like the *First Tuesday Book Club*)
- Just one part of the website: the author profile or a transcript of a possible discussion
- A radio podcast of reading and discussion (base this on *ABC Radio National Book Hour*)

Possible Scenarios:

1. The Miles Franklin Award trustees want to add a page on their website that will engage young people and allow space for an open forum on the books. This can follow the example of the *ABC First Tuesday Book Club* webpage. It can include: a videotaped book trailer, followed by a panel discussion, and material for the website including an author profile, an excerpt and a collection of reviews from other young people.
2. You are part of a forum on special program called *Spotting the GAN* about what makes the 'Great Australian Novel'. You may want to consider
 - the elements of the novel and how these come together
 - definitions of the Australian novel such as those offered by Professor Dixon, or Professor Jose and
 - the Miles Franklin Award winners and shortlisted books to illustrate your arguments.You will each present a different book but also have read the other books so that you can add informed comments as you listen to other members' points of view.
3. Students can be encouraged to look at the work they have done in this unit, review what has been learnt, determine what is the most important and then design their own task following a Project Based Learning model.

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