Building Blocks of Narrative

1. **Scenes and Places**

This is where the action is set. It has greater significance than just being a place where the action is set. These places can vary in size: they can be rooms, houses, gardens, streets, towns. In “The Great Gatsby”, think about the significance of East Egg, West Egg, New York, The Valley of Ahes, the Buchanan’s household, Nick’s house, Gatsby’s mansion and George’s garage. Think why has Gatsby used these particular settings in certain chapters? What is their significance? In his use of scenes and places, authors are taking advantage of the possibilities of creating meanings.

1. **Time and Sequence**

The order in which events are shown is a key part of how narrative works. Time in the real world is represented by clocks which tick over at the same regular rate, time in stories is manipulated so that some points in time go slowly, others accelerate and others are missed out altogether. Think about the way time is shown in “The Great Gatsby”. Think about the way Nick moves from the present to the past. Think about what his narrative focuses on in terms of Gatsby and Daisy and their past. Why does he focus on those particular incidents? What significance do they have in the story?

**Time can work in at least two ways:**

1. The time covered by the events within the story (AO2)
2. The broader time which surrounds the story, the time in which the story is set (AO4)
3. **Characters**

Refers not to the people in the story but their character traits and how they are revealed: this is known as characterisation. Think about Gatsby, Daisy, Jordan, Tom, George, Myrtle and even Nick himself. Remember, characters are tools within a story which enable the author to get across certain points/messages. Always question the importance of a character, the type of character they are and why they have been presented the way they have in the novel. Remember, a character is not a real person; they are used by the author to serve a particular purpose.

Names of characters are important. They have not been randomly chosen but have been invented by the author. This offers the author a chance to signal to the reader what sort of person the character is. Names can carry a great deal of significance, in the process saving the author a lot of time and work. It is possible to find something significant in even the most ordinary of names – the ordinariness itself sometimes carrying significance. Think about Daisy’s name, Jay Gatsby and how he changed it from James Gatz.

As well as a fictional name symbolising a great deal about a fictional person, appearance can also symbolise a lot. What they look like, how they dress, their physical gestures and so on can give the reader insight into the characters. Think about the kind of clothes Gatsby wears, how Myrtle is described and the how Daisy is always dressed in white.

What characters have to say is also of importance. Authors can signal aspects of character by giving their creations distinctive mannerisms. These can be used to represent the class of a character. Think about how Gatsby’s speech is described as being “absurd”, how Tom and Daisy speak and even how Meyer Wolfsheim speaks.

1. **Voices in the story**

One way in which we get information in a story is through what we are “told” by characters involved. Voices in stories can help to establish character traits and so are part of characterisation, but they also enable authors to give information.

**Types of speech that you could focus on are:**

* **Direct speech** – the actual words spoken by a character in a narrative
* **Attributed** – describes direct speech that is identified (i.e. the reader is told who is speaking)
* **Free** – describes thought or speech that is not attributed (i.e. the reader is not told specifically who is speaking or thinking)
* **Indirect speech** – speech that is reported by the narrator, giving a version of the words spoken rather than the words themselves

**Thought in novels:**

One of the distinctive features of the novel form is that it can give us the detailed thoughts of characters as the story progresses. The fact that the novel as a form allows thought to be given makes it interestingly different from real life. Novelists make full use of thoughts to give their characters distinctive voices and character traits.

1. **Point of view**

The term point of view is used to help with the idea that a story is told from a certain standpoint or perspective. Just as the voices in the text are created voices, so are narrative voices.

If you are at a football match, and you stand behind the goal, that is your point of viewing the game. If you are on the side of the pitch, that is a different point of view, as is the view from the other end of the ground. It can be easily argued that where you stand affects how you see the game. It depends upon your position, your standpoint.

Think how the above may link to “The Great Gatsby”.

1. **Destination**

For the narrative to have a purpose it must have a destination. The whole process is designed to make readers think, to make them respond to what has been said, to make them see the point or points. You have been taken on a journey in the story, when you have reached the end, you have reached the destination. When reaching the destination you should consider what we have ultimately found out about the text, what interpretations can be made from what we have seen and what is the destination?