

How to respond to a novel



Use this guide sheet to help you develop your own personal response to any novel.



Understanding

- Context
 - When was the novel written?
 - Where is it set?
 - What do you know about society at the time it was written?
 - What kind of culture is presented?
 - Who were the intended readers? What were they like? How would they have reacted to the novel? Is this different to how a modern reader would react?
 - Who is the writer? What do you know about them? Why did they write this novel?
- What is the novel about?
 - Where is it set? Time, place, era.
 - Why is the setting important?
 - What happens?
 - What is the main plot? Is there a subplot?
 - How does the novel begin and end?
 - What are the **themes**?
 - How does the action progress and develop?
 - What is the chronology of events? Why in this order? What is the effect?
 - What is the main conflict? How do you know? What kinds of conflict are evident? Where do they come from?
 - What is the climax? Where is it? Why here?
- What is the genre?
 - Is this a mystery, dystopia, coming of age novel? How do you know?
 - To what extent is this genre adhered to?
 - Is there a subgenre?
- Characters
 - Who are the characters? What are their roles?
 - Who is the protagonist? Who is the antagonist?
 - Are they believable? Are they stereotypes?
 - Are they flat or round characters?
 - Are they static or dynamic?
 - How do they act / speak? Why? What does this reveal about them?
 - Do they act differently than they feel/think?
 - What do they look like? What are their characteristics? What does this reveal about them?
 - How are they introduced? Why? What does this reveal about them?
 - How do other characters feel about them?
 - What do they add to the novel?
 - How do they change or develop? Why?
 - How do they interact with others? What kind of relationships do they have? What does this reveal about them?
 - What do they represent? How do you know?
 - How do they link to the themes?
- What can you say about narrative style?
 - What is the narrative viewpoint – why? 1st person? Unreliable? 3rd person omniscient? 3rd person limited?
 - How are events organised? Chronologically? Flashbacks? Different perspectives?
 - What can you say about the writer's style?
 - What tense is used?
- What methods are used by the writer?
 - Symbolism and motifs
 - Language
 - Structure
 - Imagery
 - Shifts in tone
 - Circular structure
 - What is the effect of each? Why have they been used? What do they tell us about the writer's style?
- What is the **message**?
 - What are the '**big ideas**' that are presented?
 - What does the writer want you to understand?
 - Is their message still relevant today?
 - Why did they write the novel?
 - What are their concerns/ideas?
 - Is there a moral/religious/philosophical lesson?
 - Is this a universal message? A personal message? A societal message?
 - Why does the writer want to leave you with this message?
 - Are they highlighting, critiquing, emphasising, revealing, challenging etc.



What are 'big ideas'?

These are the bigger issues that are being presented in the novel. These can be *social, political, environmental, moral, existential or religious*. These are often ideas that go beyond what is merely written on the page e.g. a novel about a family may actually be about wider societal issues. Try and think about what is being suggested in the novel and see if you can spot any *wider issues* that the writer may be alluding to.

How to respond to a novel: methods



Analysing: consider the methods used and analyse their effect The methods are like the writer's toolbox.

You will need to be able to identify the methods used by the writer and comment on their effect. You should not merely technique spot, but should instead consider why these methods have been used, how they reinforce the message and what effect they have on the reader.

❑ Language

- What kinds of words have been used?
- Try and identify word classes. What are the connotations of these words? Why have they been used? What do they suggest about the characters/action/relationships? How do these words enhance a technique or vice versa?
- Has imagery been used? Why? What does it reveal? How does it enhance the meaning?

❑ Devices and methods

- Identify the different devices and methods used.
- Why have they been used? What is the effect?
- How do they reinforce the message/meaning?
- How do they help to create a tone/mood?
- How can you interpret meaning?
- What do these methods reveal about character/action/events/setting/ relationships?
- How do the methods reflect the themes?



❑ Structure and Form

- What can you say about the structure of the novel?
- Is there a frame?
- How do events develop and progress? Is this linear or non-linear? Are there any gaps?
- How are characters introduced? When? Why at this point? How do they develop throughout the novel?
- How do characters interact with and speak to each other?
- Does the tone change or is it consistent?
- Is there a shift in the direction of the action? At what point?
- Is there a shift in time?
- Are there any contradictions?
- How does the novel begin and end? What is the narrative hook?
- How do chapters begin and end?
- Where are the key events? How are they linked?
- Where is the climax? How does the writer prepare the reader for this?
- Is there a resolution? Where is this? What does it add to the novel? How is the reader supposed to feel?
- Is anything repeated? When? How? Why? What does this represent? How does this move the action forward and link events or characters?
- Are there any patterns?



Remember to consider the effect on the reader. How is this achieved? Why?



Literary Devices and Methods

Foreshadowing	Irony	Juxtaposition	Flashback
Allusion	Imagery	Structure	Repetition
Symbol	Colloquial language and dialect	Syntax	Oxymoron
Motif	Sentence types	Figurative language	Paradox
Foil	Use of punctuation	Hyperbole	Pathetic fallacy

Using 'what, how, why' to develop your response

What – this indicates when you are providing a personal response (What do you see? What is presented? What do you learn?)



How – this often refers to method and techniques (How is this shown?)

Why – this often refers to writer's intention or message (Why has this been used? Why are you being shown this? Why is it presented in this way?)

What

- o What do you see?
- o What do you think?
- o What is your impression?
- o What is your view?
- o What do you learn?
- o What do you understand?
- o What is being presented?
- o What is the writer showing you?
- o What can you say about character/action/themes/relationships/events?



How

- o How do you know this?
- o How is it shown to you?
- o How is it presented?
- o How are you affected?



Why

- o Why does the writer do this?
- o Why does the writer present it in this way?
- o Why does the writer want you to feel this way?
- o Why has this word / technique been used?



How to turn this into a written response:

Use the phrases on the next page to help you build your response

WHAT: Writer's name + adverb + analytical verb + your idea

In '1984', Orwell accurately presents the idea that complete totalitarianism can be a dangerous threat to individuality.

HOW 1: Embed quotation

HOW 2: Method + analysis + interpretation of meaning + connective to double up analysis

WHY: Non-definitive statement + Writer's name + critical verb + interpretation (context / reader)

Developing your analysis: guiding questions

Points – Development and analysis	Development by linking – take ideas further																												
<p>What kind of mood/tone/atmosphere is created? How? Why?</p> <p>What do you learn about the characters/action/relationships/themes? How are these presented? Why?</p> <p>What ideas are expressed/presented? How? Why?</p> <p>What is the intended effect of...? How is this achieved?</p> <p>What technique/method has been used?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why has it been used? • What is the effect? • How does it reinforce the message? • How does it reinforce your point? • How does it reinforce or reflect the themes? • Can you <u>double up</u> on the techniques used? • What is the effect? • Why was it chosen? <p>What kind of language has been used? Diction/word choice/imagery?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the connotations? • How does it affect the reader? • Why has it been used? Why this particular word? • Where is it? Why? • How does it reinforce the message/writer's intention? • How does it reinforce your point? <p>How is the reader supposed to feel/react? How do you know?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shocked - Fearful - Disturbed - Forces - Compelled - Enables - Engaged - Encourages - Guilty 	<p>Link to context as a way of developing interpretation of meaning:</p> <p>What do you know about the time period? What do you know about the writer? Why was the novel written? Issues that the writer is commenting on.</p> <p>Link to the genre:</p> <p>What is the genre? What do you know about the features of this genre? To what extent does the novel adhere to the features of the genre? Why?</p> <p>Link to writer's intention:</p> <p>What is their message? How does your example show this? What do they want you to understand? How do you know? What do they want you to do? How do you know?</p> <p>KEY PHRASES:</p> <p>Analytical and critical verbs - the writer...</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>Critiques</td> <td>Suggests</td> <td>Explores</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Highlights</td> <td>Implies</td> <td>Questions</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Subverts</td> <td>Reinforces</td> <td>Considers</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Presents</td> <td>Shows</td> <td>Examines</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Emphasises</td> <td>Portrays</td> <td>Reveals</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Warns</td> <td>Challenges</td> <td></td> </tr> </table> <p>Opinion adverbs:</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>Cleverly</td> <td>Vividly</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Accurately</td> <td>Surprisingly</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Creatively</td> <td>Clearly</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Ambitiously</td> <td>Deliberately</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Importantly</td> <td>Notably</td> </tr> </table> <p>Non-definitive phrases for interpretation:</p> <p>It could be argued It is possible that It may Perhaps It seems that This might suggest</p>	Critiques	Suggests	Explores	Highlights	Implies	Questions	Subverts	Reinforces	Considers	Presents	Shows	Examines	Emphasises	Portrays	Reveals	Warns	Challenges		Cleverly	Vividly	Accurately	Surprisingly	Creatively	Clearly	Ambitiously	Deliberately	Importantly	Notably
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