

FOR THE
IB DIPLOMA

English Language & Literature

Lindsay Tandy
Joseph Koszary
Alice Gibbons
Series Editor: Carrie Henly

SAMPLE CHAPTER

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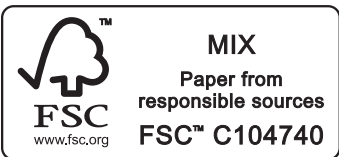
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1

Readers, writers and texts

This section focuses on the close reading of a wide range of literary works and non-literary texts and examines them from the perspective of the **immanent**. This means we will be exploring each text as an independent entity, without overly concerning ourselves with the time or place within which the text was produced or their relationship to other texts. Because we will be studying texts in isolation, this means we will be focusing primarily on how a text has been constructed by a writer and how a reader may interpret the text. We will be holding a magnifying glass up to each text in our attempt to identify and analyse the wide range of features each writer uses. This close reading of each text should then help us in our interpretation of each text's meaning. However, be aware that we may not come up with a definitive interpretation of the text or even the same interpretation as the writer intended. Because each reader is different with his or her own unique experiences, interests, values and beliefs it is likely that each reader may have a slightly different interpretation to a single text. This is fine, as long as we are able to explain our own interpretation based on evidence from the text – based on what is there. You will find in this chapter some detailed analyses of texts and you will also be expected to write your own in-depth analyses. It is through analysis that you are able to show your understanding of how a writer has consciously constructed a text but also show your understanding of a text's ideas and how it affects you as the reader.

You will be aware that there are a wide range of texts so before we start, let's define 'text' and explore some of the differences and similarities between the huge array of texts you are about to start exploring in this coursebook and in your language and literature classes.

Literary works vs non-literary texts

The English Language and Literature IB Diploma guide identifies a text as being either a literary work or a non-literary text, and over the duration of your language and literature course you will be studying an equal measure of both. The language part of the course refers to your study of non-literary texts – the wide range of text types that are non-fiction; and the literature part of the course refers to your study of literary works – the wide range of texts that are fiction.

For the purposes of this course, there are three forms of literary works:

- **prose fiction**
- **poetry**
- **drama.**

Although some graphic novels (such as Marjane Satrapi's autobiographical graphic novel, *Persepolis*, or Art Spiegelman's biographical graphic novel, *Maus*) can be characterized as non-fiction, in this course we characterize all graphic novels – including autobiographical and biographical graphic novels – as literature. Although some non-fiction (such as memoirs like George Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London*) can be characterized as literary, in this course we characterize all non-fiction texts – including literary memoirs – as non-literary text types.

Texts that are characterized as non-literary text types are wide and varied. The list below includes some non-literary text types that the IB Language and Literature course identifies – but this list is not exhaustive.

■ Table 1.1.1

Non-literary text types		
advertisement	autobiography	biography
brochure/leaflet	cartoon	diary
encyclopaedia entry	essay	infographic
letter (formal & informal)	magazine article	memoir
parody	pastiche	photographs
set of instructions	speech	travel writing

(adapted from the *Language A: Language and Literature guide*, 21–22)

We will be exploring a wide range of literary works as well as non-literary text types in this section (and throughout the coursebook) and you will also be studying a wide range of both language and literature texts in class.

The nature of a text

Although there are some fundamental differences between a text that is considered a literary work and one that is a non-literary text, the essential nature of a text remains the same: to communicate with the reader. Chimombo and Roseberry define a text in the following way:

*First consider **discourse** and what it is. Discourse is a process resulting in a communicative act. The communicative act itself takes the form of a **text**. A text is commonly thought of as consisting of written or printed words on a page; but a text may also consist of sign language or spoken words, or it may comprise only the thoughts of a writer, or speaker, on the one hand or a reader or listener, on the other. In addition to words, a text may consist of other symbols, sounds, gestures, or silences, in any combination that is intended to communicate information such as ideas, emotional states, and attitudes. It may fail to communicate, but if the intention to communicate is clearly there, it must be regarded as a text.*

In this section, then, we will be closely exploring the plethora of ways a writer attempts to communicate with the reader. We will be exploring how discourse does not necessarily have to be written language, but it could also be visual language or even language that uses neither words nor visuals, but is more symbolic in nature. As well as the marks on the page, the way a writer has structured his or her text will also be explored, including how a writer may exploit the sounds and rhythms of a text’s words, how a writer may manipulate the shape of his or her text and how they may decide to organize the text’s written and visual language on the page to heighten the text’s meaning.

Although the majority of literary works rely on the written word to communicate meaning, works such as graphic novels use illustrations as well as or instead of the written word to communicate, while poetry relies on the shape of the poem as well as the written word to communicate. Chapter 1.3 explores these literary works in more detail. In contrast, users of social media communicate meaning through an increasingly wide range of symbols such as emojis, emoticons and hashtags and Chapters 1.3 and 1.4 explore this evolving form of non-traditional language in the construction of both literary works and non-literary texts. Of course, a wide range of non-literary texts do not simply rely on the written word to communicate meaning: photojournalism, cartoon strips, advertisements, newspaper articles, magazine front covers and infographics are just a few examples that rely on photographic or other illustrative images to a lesser or greater degree. Chapters 1.5 and 1.6 in particular explore some of these stylistic choices writers employ.

Now that we understand the nature of a text we can start to distinguish between the nature of a non-literary text and the nature of a literary work. We have just seen what connects all texts, but we also need to be aware that there are some fundamental differences between a language and a literature text.

The nature of the non-literary text

A non-literary text is first and foremost 'non-fiction'. Non-fiction means it is an account of the truth and deals with facts and information that can be substantiated. It is based in the real world and is about real-life experiences. This does not mean all non-literary texts are objective, though – an encyclopaedia entry, a recipe from a cookery book or a set of instructions on how to change a bicycle tyre are likely to be objective, whereas an advertisement, a newspaper editorial or a politician's speech are likely to be subjective. A text's purpose is what will usually denote how objective or subjective a text is.

ACTIVITY 1

Here are six different text types with different purposes. Order them from 1 to 6 in terms of which you would expect to be the most objective (neutral, unbiased, impartial) to the most subjective (personal, biased, partial). When you have ordered the texts, compare your responses to those at the end of the book.

■ Table 1.1.2

Text type	Purpose	1 = extremely objective 6 = extremely subjective
Newspaper article	to report	
Restaurant review	to review	
Letter of application to university or for a job	to demonstrate your interest in and suitability for the course or job	
Propaganda poster	to persuade	
Set of safety regulations on an aeroplane	to inform	
Advice column in a magazine	to advise	

You may have found this activity problematic and your answers may have differed from the ones suggested at the back of the book. This is quite usual. Until we closely read a text, we cannot always make assumptions about the objectivity of the writer. This, then, is one of the reasons why we need to hold a magnifying glass up to a text in order to deconstruct or unpick how the text has been put together and why. Being non-fiction and, therefore, about the real world in which we live, texts have the potential to shape and change public opinion about real-life issues. It is important, then, to understand to what degree we may be being manipulated by a writer's personal views and to what degree we are being given a more objective viewpoint. Of course sometimes a text's purpose and meaning is obvious – this is what **explicit** means when we study texts. But sometimes, a text's purpose and meaning may be hidden and we have to work harder at unpicking a text to find this hidden meaning – this is what **implicit** means when we study texts. In order to access the higher levels in this course, you will need to be able to show an understanding of a text's implicit meaning as well as explicit meaning.

The nature of the literary work

Unlike non-literary texts, literary works are 'fiction'. Fiction is something that is imaginary and invented by the writer. Although a literary work may be based on personal experience or real-life events, the writer changes aspects of it to make it fiction. Prose fiction is always fiction, drama is usually (almost always) fiction and while we do not classify poetry as fiction or non-fiction, its form of meter, rhyme and stanzas make it a symbolic rather than a literal representation of the truth.

Another common feature of a literary work is its purpose. Writers of literature use their imagination to entertain the reader. We are entertained two-fold: emotionally and also intellectually. Writers of literary works attempt to transport us, the reader, into a different reality, time or place, populated by fictional characters or magical creatures, who are undertaking journeys or facing experiences that may be either similar or very different to our own. In order to appreciate these fictional realities, we need to believe in them while we are reading prose or poetry or watching drama. When English Romantic poet, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, explained the original intention behind *Lyrical Ballads, with a Few Other Poems*, a poetry anthology he co-wrote with William Wordsworth in 1799 which is now considered the seminal text that kick-started the English Romantic period, he coined the phrase ‘willing suspension of disbelief’ to describe this leap of faith a reader needs to take if a literary text is to be successful.

In this idea originated the plan of the ‘Lyrical Ballads’; in which it was agreed, that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic, yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith.

(Coleridge, Chapter XIV)

No matter how imaginative the work is or how removed from reality it is, the reader needs to believe in the work’s reality when reading it. One of the tools a writer of fiction uses to help us suspend our disbelief is language and as students of language and literature you will be investigating the ways writers use language to appeal to the reader and encourage a ‘willing suspension of disbelief’.

Unlike non-literary texts which consist of a very wide range of text types, there are only three literary forms that you will be exploring on this course: prose fiction, poetry and drama. However, within each literary form, there is a range of different genre. For example, science fiction, historical fiction, social satire, magical realism and gothic fiction are all types of prose fiction; tragedy, comedy and history are three different types of drama (Shakespeare’s plays in particular are usually categorized into one of these three genres); and lyric, narrative and dramatic are three different types of poetry. We will be exploring the wide range of genres throughout this first section.

The toolbox of a writer

Because writers of fiction are not bound by facts or keeping within the narrow parameters of what actually happened, this means that writers of literature can use their imagination and be creative in their construction of these literary works. The way a writer of literary works is creative is first and foremost through the language he or she uses to construct a text. A literary writer’s toolbox, then, is full of literary features that are constructed primarily through language. Some of these literary features include the skilful use of:

- language and diction (words and phrases)
- literary devices – including, metaphors, similes, personification, imagery
- phonological devices – the sounds and rhythms of words and phrases, including alliteration, assonance, sibilance, onomatopoeia, rhyme
- structural and stylistic devices – the order of the words in a text and/or in a sentence and the type of words used.

We will be exploring all of these literary features throughout this coursebook and examining how these features affect a text’s meaning and a reader’s interpretation of a text’s ideas.

Although non-literary texts may not use such a wide array of specifically *literary* features, a writer of a non-literary text nevertheless uses a wide range of *non-literary* features that are equally important in communicating meaning. Some of these non-literary features may include:

- photographic or illustrative images
- the use of colour

- organizational features in terms of how written text and visual images have been organized on the page
- typographical features (size and type of font)
- other symbols including arrows, numbers and boxes as well as online features such as hyperlinks, emojis and emoticons.

In a similar way to our exploration of literary works, we will also be exploring the wide range of non-literary features throughout this coursebook and examining how they are used to affect a text's meaning and a reader's interpretation of a text's ideas.

Just as there is a range of different literary genres, as you can see from Table 1.1.2, there are also numerous non-literary text types and each text type has its own set of conventions. Throughout this coursebook, we will be identifying and exploring the conventions of different text types and the *Key features* boxes that are included within many chapters are a good resource to refer to as you begin to familiarize yourself with a wide range of text types. We will also be using the acronym **C-GAP** when exploring non-literary texts. This stands for **C**ontext, **G**enre, **A**udience and **P**urpose and is another way into understanding the holistic nature of a given text type.

The relationship between the writer, the reader and the text

Every text is written by a writer who has a reader in mind. This reader is the **implied reader** and they may not be you! One of the things you will be attempting to do in this section is working out who that implied reader may be and how they may be different to you. In the Introduction, the relationship between the writer, the reader and the text was explained and there was a simple but useful diagram that visually explains this relationship. The writer is attempting to communicate with the reader through the text and the reader is attempting to understand the writer's message through the text. There is obviously no direct face-to-face communication between the writer and the reader; rather, the text is the communicative act. When constructing the text, it is up to the writer to communicate his or her message in a particular way that enhances the text's meaning. Once the text has been published and is out in the world to be consumed by the public, it is then the reader's responsibility to interpret the text and construct their own message in a particular way. You may have experienced a time when you did not fully comprehend someone who was speaking to you face-to-face – a friend, a teacher or a parent, perhaps. However, in this situation you are quite clearly able to ask that person to clarify exactly what they meant and to clear up any potential misunderstandings. Just as there is the potential for two speakers to misunderstand one another at times, there is obviously a much greater potential for a reader to misunderstand a writer's intention in a text. Because a reader is often unable to ask the writer directly to clarify a particular point, the reader of a text has to work out independently what the writer meant. Sometimes a reader can do this individually, but sometimes discussing a text with other people is a really important process in trying to understand a text's meaning and be aware of alternative viewpoints. This is one of the reasons why your English language and literature classes are so important: you should take full advantage of being in a class with other people and discussing the various ways a text can be interpreted. As we have already stated, a single text may have multiple interpretations and this is fine as long as you are able to support your ideas with evidence from the text.

Remember, also, that you may never fully understand what the writer's own ideas, values or beliefs are. Writers of both fiction and non-fiction often create a **narrative persona** who may or may not represent the writer's own set of beliefs. For example, prose fiction and poetry can be written in the first person, but this does not necessarily mean that the first-person narrator of the work is the writer or indeed that the narrative persona's views and attitudes correlate with the writer's views and attitudes. Researching a writer's background, reading interviews with a writer and reading more texts by the writer may give you a fuller insight into the writer's own beliefs and values. However, you should remember that a literary work is a conscious construction and a writer's intention is for you as the reader to suspend your disbelief and just believe in the reality created, rather than necessarily getting an insight into the writer's personal

reality. Likewise with non-literary texts, a writer may have to create an **implied writer** due to being unable to share his or her real-life views with the reader as there may be other factors that restrict how a writer writes. For example, a journalist who writes for a particular newspaper may have to report in a way that reaffirms the owner's or readers', or sometimes the government's political stance rather than his or her own political stance; a journalist interviewing a celebrity for a magazine is likely to have to write a positive review to appeal to the celebrity's fans, irrespective of the writer's own personal views; a writer constructing an advertisement has a job to do – to sell a product through persuasive means, whether they believe in the product's worth or not. The skill of the writer is, of course, to make the reader believe in the reality created – all the more so as writers of non-literary texts are supposed to be reflecting the real world. This can get complicated! But this is the joy of using that magnifying glass on a text to deconstruct it and then sharing your ideas with others and listening to alternative interpretations. Just as you should never judge a book by its cover, you should never judge a text by its appearance. You need to read, analyse and discuss, and then you can start to understand and appreciate a text's meaning.

By the end of this section, you should feel more confident at closely analysing both literary and non-literary texts and at understanding how there can be multiple interpretations to any given text which may or may not reflect the writer's original intention. Many people would argue that a writer's toolkit is infinite and in this section we will be identifying and closely analysing a wide range of literary and non-literary features a writer may use in his or her attempt to heighten a text's meaning.

You will find that this section contains a lot more close analysis than the other two sections and this is because we are primarily focusing on the text itself rather than exploring external factors that may affect a text's production and reception. The six guiding concept questions that we are exploring in this section introduce you to the various ways in which we can analyse and interpret texts. The skills and approaches you learn in this section can be applied to other literary and non-literary texts that you study in the other two sections of this coursebook as well as to the range of texts you will be exploring in your language and literature lessons.