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**ANALYSING LITERARY TEXTS.**

**“HE DIED A HERO”, a story taken from Woman´s Own.**

This story belongs to a genre that can be found easily on any magazine rack: the real-life story.

**Narrative**: involves **how** the events and causes are shown, and the various methods used to do this showing. Exploring aspects of narrative involves looking at what the writer has chosen to include or not include, and how this choice leads the reader to certain conclusions.

a) In which way is the story shown to the reader?

b) What do we think is the overall message or moral of the story?

c) In working out how the author has told the story, we then inevitably think about why the author might have done it this way, what effects the author has possibly been aiming for, and whether you as a reader find these effects interesting and convincing.

**The building blocks of narrative**:

Scenes and places:

This refers to where the action is set, and its significance beyond just being a place where something happens.

Although “He died a hero” is set in the seaside town of Skegness, there is a wider significance to the scene. This involves the idea of the family holiday, of getting away from work- but also the hidden and sudden tragedy that can come out of any happy moment.

Time and sequence:

The order in which events are shown is a key part of how narrative works. Time in stories is manipulated by the author. In this story we move very quickly to “teatime on 19 July” before slowing down right down the tragedy unfolds.

Sequence refers to the order in which events are told. Although at a very simple level all narratives involve a movement from a beginning to an end, they are rarely told in strict sequence. So you must ask yourself: What effect does the alteration of the chronological sequence cause in the story being told for the reader? What is the author´s intention?

In our story, the first paragraph begins towards the end of the story, the third moves us back an hour. The reason for this should be obvious: if as readers we are to become interested in the story we need some action at the start.

Characters:

Character refers not just to the people in the story but, much more importantly, to their character traits and how they are revealed: this is known as “characterization”.

There are two main characters: Patricia Mangle and Steven Mangle. They are frequently referred to in terms of family relationships: husband, wife, mother. Patricia is forced to make and “agonizing decision” based on the fact that she is both wife and mother.

While Patricia tidies up. Steven is more active- they are cast in typical gendered roles. Steve is also a man with a sense of duty, who looks after all children, not just his own.

Meanwhile, there is also a cast of more minor characters: their children who are named, and the young girl who is rescued who is not named.

*Woman´s Own* is a magazine which has a certain presumed readership -women who have children. Not surprisingly in a magazine which constructs its readers as women in family relationships, this story, despite being tragic, is very positive about notions of family, duty and heroism.

Voices in the story:

One way in which we get information in a story is by what the characters involved tell us.

What characters speak directly in the story? What characters are reported in the story?

We hear directly from Patricia: “It was teatime on 19 July…”- and more indirectly from her children: “From what Mark and Laura have told me since”. Note too that although we are not given their precise words, what “eyewitnesses” have reported is also given to us. These are not the actual words they would have spoken though- they are a tidied-up version of them, a representation of what they probably said.

Points of view:

The term point of view is used to help with the idea that a story is told from a certain perspective.

A story can be told in the voice of a third person standing outside the story (a narrator who is not one of the characters) - **third-person narrative**. Another option is to tell the story through the voice of one character directly in the first person (using I)- **first-person narrative.**

Our story is an example of a third-person narrative.

Destination:

For the storytelling process to have some purpose, you need to understand that 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 the author wants to transmit**. You have been taken on a journey in the story, and when you reach the end, you have reached a destination. This is the moment to **work out what the destination, or morals,** of the story could be. (For instance: Tragedy is potentially everywhere; Love endures and alleviates at least some pain, Family ties re the strongest of all).

In working out that the story has moral messages, ideas that we are expected to believe in, we can see that the ideology of the story needs to be uncovered and explored. It is the assumptions made by the author that can often be the most interesting to find in texts: for example, in the story “He died a hero” we are expected to believe in the notion of the family, so this belief is actually never stated.

**Ideology**: the attitudes, values and assumptions that the text contains, and which readers are expected to share -although they do not actually have to. Attitudes are to do with the approach taken to the subject matter. Values are related to the beliefs expressed in the text. And assumptions are those things that are taken for granted and so do not need saying at all.