

# OPENING LINES



Get started in literature studies

**TECHNIQUES, THEMES, AND TERMS  
TO GET BOOK SMART**

**BY JAMIE WILLS**

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# | I | First Person Narration

## What Is It?

First person narration is the using of the self ('I') as the storyteller.

## Why Use It?

Better describe feelings and thoughts, as these seem to actually come from the narrator's own mind.

More authentic and personal, especially for non-fiction, autobiography and poetry.

Focus on one character's perspective and feelings.

Reader feels like they live the events through the narrator.

# Examples

The stranger looked at me, his eyes with a sudden intent, and his face taking on an expression that I neither understood nor found pleasant.

"Now we begin."

It was at this moment that I knew what had I failed to see before. Oh, I had been so foolish, and so enamoured with his bravado, that I had ignored the one danger: his purpose. I was to be the guinea pig, the test subject, and I had walked willingly into it! I looked around for a door, or any type of exit, but found only locks and the knowledge that my sole escape was to fight. Without checking my bravery, my upbringing, or my lifelong reticence to engage in violence of any nature, I ran at him with arms outstretched.

Woodham Road has always held a special place in my heart. It was here that, during my childhood, I played games with those who would become friends for years to come. Later, during my teenage pains, it was also the space where I hid when escaping my parents and the pressure cooker of home. At the end of the street, outside the post office, is where I had my first kiss. Being back there now, walking between the buildings that were much the same but noticing the small changes that had occurred in a few corners, I felt a sort of longing for those days lost to the past. I am not a person who usually embraces nostalgia, but there was something odd about this road that felt like I was spying on a person I knew, a stranger lost in history that I barely accepted was actually me.

## TASK 1

**Write a paragraph using the first person. It can be fiction or non-fiction, but should include thoughts and actions.**



# *I am Malala*

by Malala Yousafzai with Christina Lamb

## Excerpt from Chapter 20:

The air smelt of diesel, bread and kebab mixed with the stink from the stream where people still dumped their rubbish and were never going to stop despite all of the campaigning by my father and his friends. But we were used to it. Besides, soon the winter would be here, bringing the snow, which would cleanse and quieten everything.

The bus turned right off the main road at the army checkpoint. On a kiosk was a poster of crazy-eyed men with beards and caps or turbans under big letters saying WANTED TERRORISTS. The picture at the top of a man with a black turban and beard was Fazlullah. More than three years had passed since the military operation to drive the Taliban out of Swat had begun. We were grateful to the army but couldn't understand why they were still everywhere, in machine-gun nests on roofs and manning checkpoints. Even to enter our valley people needed official permission.

The road up the small hill is usually busy as it is a short cut but that day it was strangely quiet. 'Where are all the people?' I asked Moniba. All the girls were singing and chatting and our voices bounced around inside the bus.

Around that time my mother was probably just going through the doorway into our school for her first lesson since she had left school at age six.

I didn't see the two young men step out into the road and bring the van to a sudden halt. I didn't get a chance to answer their question, 'Who is Malala?' or I would have explained to them why they should let us girls go to school as well as their own sisters and daughters.

The last thing I remember is that I was thinking about the revision I needed to do for the next day. The sounds in my head were not the crack, crack, crack of three bullets, but the chop, chop, drip, drip, drip of the man severing heads of chickens, and them dropping into the dirty street, one by one.

# Discussion

## Skimming, Scanning and Basic Comprehension

1. What event is the passage describing?
2. What is the name of the most wanted terrorist?
3. What is Malala's mother doing on this day?

## Identifying Techniques

4. Scan the passage and highlight the cases in which the writers use the first person.
5. Although the passage is in the first person, other characters appear in the story. How many other people can you see mentioned in the given passage?
6. Why do you think Malala's story is told in the first person? What would be different if it was told in the third person (using 'he', 'she', 'it', 'Malala' etc)?

## Text Analysis

7. What words or phrases are used to try to create a picture of the streets Malala lived on? What sights, smells and sounds are described?
8. How does the second paragraph contrast with the first. What information is included in the second paragraph that helps you understand more about Malala's hometown?
9. A contrast exists between the joy of the schoolgirls and the violence around them. What words or phrases depict joy? Which ones hint at violence?
10. Compare the first paragraph and the final paragraph. Both describe the street, but the tone has changed. What is the difference in tone?
11. The last paragraph uses onomatopoeia adjectives in groups of three (crack, crack, crack; chop, chop, chop; etc.). Why? Does this affect the writing?

## Provoking Opinion

12. What other autobiographies have you read? Did you find them enjoyable? Informative? Exciting? Underwhelming? How do you think Malala's autobiography would compare to them?
13. Do you believe that Malala Yousafzai could be considered a normal person in extraordinary circumstances; an inspiration; a hero; or something else? Why?
14. If you were to write your own autobiography, how would you map it out? Which events would you include, and how would you order it?

# *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

by Mark Twain

## **Excerpt from Chapter 12:**

Mornings, before daylight, I slipped into corn-fields and borrowed a watermelon, or a mushmelon, or a punkin, or some new corn, or things of that kind. Pap always said it warn't no harm to borrow things, if you was meaning to pay them back, some time; but the widow said it warn't anything but a soft name for stealing, and no decent body would do it. Jim said he reckoned the widow was partly right and pap was partly right; so the best way would be for us to pick out two or three things from the list and say we wouldn't borrow them any more - then he reckoned it wouldn't be no harm to borrow the others. So we talked it over all one night, drifting along down the river, trying to make up our minds whether to drop the watermelons, or the cantelopes, or the mushmelons, or what. But towards daylight we got it all settled satisfactory, and concluded to drop crab-apples and p'simmons. We weren't feeling just right before that, but it was all comfortable now. I was glad the way it came out, too, because crab-apples ain't ever good, and the p'simmons wouldn't be ripe for two or three months yet.



# Test

1. The narrative voice of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* may be described as

- a) formal
- b) vernacular
- c) impersonal
- d) objective
- e) mature

2. The use of first person narration allows an insight into

- a) the narrator's family's opinions
- b) Jim's motivations
- c) the writer's background
- d) the politics of the time
- e) the narrator's thinking

3. In the passage, 'borrowing' can be seen as a euphemism for

- a) stealing
- b) buying
- c) choosing
- d) picking
- e) trading

4. 'So we talked it over all one night'. What was the purpose of this talk?

- a) To discuss the ethics of stealing
- b) To give moral justification to their actions
- c) To improve their friendship
- d) To consider whether their actions are legal
- e) To decide where they will go next

5. Compared to *I Am Malala*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is more:

- a) mysterious
- b) realistic
- c) serious
- d) comical
- e) logical

## TASK 2

**Construct a scene with multiple characters, but told through first person narration.**



## Know Your Book

<b>Title</b>	I Am Malala: The Story of the Girl Who Stood Up for Education and was Shot by the Taliban	<b>Published</b>	2013
		<b>Language</b>	English
		<b>Genre</b>	Non-fiction; autobiography
<b>Authors</b>	Malala Yousafzai (1997- ) Christina Lamb (1965- )		
<b>Synopsis</b>	Malala Yousafzai gives an account of her campaign for girls education in Pakistan. The campaign, assisted by her father, led to an assassination attempt by the Taliban during which a gunman shot her in the head on a bus when she was aged just 15. The incident drew increased global attention to her cause, resulting in Malala speaking at major summits and, at 17, becoming the youngest ever recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize. Her story is told to journalist Christina Lamb.		
<b>Setting</b>	Swat Valley, Pakistan	<b>Characters</b>	Malala Yousafzai; Ziauddin Yousafzai; Toor Yousafzai

<b>Title</b>	The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn	<b>Published</b>	1884
		<b>Language</b>	English
<b>Author</b>	Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens) (1835-1910)	<b>Genre</b>	Fiction; picaresque novel
<b>Plot</b>	Huckleberry Finn, a southern adolescent, takes a journey along the Mississippi river in an effort to escape his alcoholic father. He meets a runaway slave, Jim, and two conmen, The Duke and The King. Along the journey Huckleberry learns about the diverse and prejudiced lifestyles of the south. However, Jim's freedom is threatened by the conmen seeing him as a sellable commodity.		
<b>Setting</b>	Mississippi river	<b>Characters</b>	Huckleberry Finn (narrator); Jim; The Duke; The King; Tom Sawyer

## | XIII | Consonance and Assonance

### What Is It?

Consonance is the repeating of consonant sounds throughout a sentence or phrase.

Assonance is the repeating of vowel sounds throughout a sentence or phrase.

Unlike alliteration or rhyme, consonance and assonance do not have to happen at the beginning or end of a word. They can occur anywhere in a word.

It is often used in poetry, rap, and prose in which rhythm and style are important.

### Why use it?

Give writing a sense of rhythm (cadence). This is especially true when combined with rhyme, alliteration, and syllable control.

Suggest a second layer of depth and skill by showing the writing's style is as important as its content.

# Examples

The pitter-patter of rain could be heard against the window. The drops rolled down, each a relief from the stressful summer.

The text read: You're doing the right thing.  
"She believes me", he thought. "She believes me, and if she could see me at this moment she could even learn to love me." And so he placed the phone back in his pocket, the rainwater sharp against his skin, the text still fresh in his brain, and continued to plant the roses alongside Melissa's mother's grave.

## TASK 1

**Write a sentence that uses consonance, and a sentence that uses assonance.**

# *The Great Gatsby*

by F. Scott Fitzgerald

## Excerpt from Chapter 9:

Most of the big shore places were closed now and there were hardly any lights except the shadowy, moving glow of a ferryboat across the Sound. And as the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes—a fresh, green breast of the new world. Its vanished trees, the trees that had made way for Gatsby's house, had once pandered in whispers to the last and greatest of all human dreams; for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent, compelled into an æsthetic contemplation he neither understood nor desired, face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder.

And as I sat there, brooding on the old unknown world, I thought of Gatsby's wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy's dock. He had come a long way to this blue lawn and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night.

Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that's no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther. . . . And one fine morning— —

So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.



# Discussion

## Skimming, Scanning and Basic Comprehension

1. At what time of day is this passage set?
2. What feeling does the narrator think sailors would have felt when they first arrived in America?
3. Next to what type of geographic feature (e.g. mountain, lake, river, forest) do both Gatsby and Daisy live?
4. Briefly summarise what is happening in the passage.

## Identifying Techniques

5. What narrative voice is used in *The Great Gatsby*?
6. What imagery is used to describe Gatsby's dream of being with Daisy?
7. Highlight the examples of assonance in the passage. Underline the consonance.

## Text Analysis

8. What effect does stillness and darkness have on the passage? Does it have any symbolic or narrative effect?
9. Time is an important concept in this passage. How does the writer discuss it?
10. What unusual punctuation does Fitzgerald use in the third paragraph? What effect does this have?
11. What does the last line mean? Who are the metaphorical 'boats', and what is the 'current'?

## Provoking Opinion

12. The tragedy of Jay Gatsby is chasing a dream that is already behind him. Is it better to keep chasing it, or to give up and move on? Why?
13. Do you have a dream that you would chase for your entire life?
14. This section of *The Great Gatsby* is often listed as one of the best pieces of writing in the English language. Why do you think this is? What are your favourite pieces of writing (in any language)?

# *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

by James Joyce

## Excerpt from Chapter IV:

As he descended the steps the impression which effaced his troubled selfcommunion was that of a mirthless mask reflecting a sunken day from the threshold of the college. The shadow, then, of the life of the college passed gravely over his consciousness. It was a grave and ordered and passionless life that awaited him, a life without material cares. He wondered how he would pass the first night in the novitiate and with what dismay he would wake the first morning in the dormitory. The troubling odour of the long corridors of Clongowes came back to him and he heard the discreet murmur of the burning gasflames. At once from every part of his being unrest began to irradiate. A feverish quickening of his pulses followed and a din of meaningless words drove his reasoned thoughts hither and thither confusedly. His lungs dilated and sank as if he were inhaling a warm moist unsustaining air and he smelt again the warm moist air which hung in the bath in Clongowes above the sluggish turfcoloured water.



# Test

1. Which of the following is not utilised in the opening sentence of the passage?
  - a) Consonance
  - b) Assonance
  - c) Alliteration
  - d) Parallelism
  - e) Third person narration
2. The narrator's attitude to starting at a new school might be described as
  - a) nonchalant
  - b) panicked
  - c) eager
  - d) spiteful
  - e) lethargic
3. Memories of his previous school, Clongowes, are triggered by
  - a) smell
  - b) taste
  - c) sound
  - d) touch
  - e) a specific word
4. The repetition of 'warm moist air' in the final line acts to
  - a) highlight the narrator's desire to flee
  - b) emphasise a resurfacing bad memory
  - c) describe the narrator's present surroundings
  - d) suggest the present situation is different from the past
  - e) create a sense of warmth
5. Both the passages from *The Great Gatsby* and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*
  - a) use heavy religious imagery
  - b) are autobiographical
  - c) link the present to the past within a character's mind
  - d) depict an anger at society
  - e) are allegories of the modern world

## TASK 2

**Write a descriptive scene in which consonance and assonance both feature prominently.**

## Know Your Book

<b>Title</b>	The Great Gatsby	<b>Published</b>	1925
<b>Author</b>	F. Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940)	<b>Language</b>	English
		<b>Genre</b>	Fiction; novel; tragedy
<b>Plot</b>	Nick Carraway is fascinated by Jay Gatsby, a rich playboy who has moved into a grand estate next door. Over a hot summer Nick learns that Gatsby has a history with Nick's cousin, Daisy, who lives nearby - and it is a history that Jay has never managed to let go. Despite Daisy now being married to Tom, Gatsby still believes that with enough wealth and charm he can win the girl again and reclaim the past, a time when he was happy.		
<b>Setting</b>	Long Island; New York; 1922	<b>Characters</b>	Jay Gatsby; Daisy Buchanan; Nick Carraway (narrator); Tom Buchanan; Jordan Baker

<b>Title</b>	A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man	<b>Published</b>	1914-1915 (serial) 1916 (novel)
<b>Author</b>	James Joyce (1882-1941)	<b>Language</b>	English
		<b>Genre</b>	Fiction; novel; modernist; coming-of-age; Bildungsroman
<b>Plot</b>	The teenage years of Stephen Dedalus are a time of strict religious schooling and arguments with his parents. As Stephen grows, he becomes less enamoured by Ireland's religious, educational and political institutions, and begins a life of pleasure. However, he begins to doubt this life too and returns to church. Spirituality, however, he still lacks real fulfilment. Finally, deciding his calling is writing, he concludes he cannot flourish in his homeland's society.		
<b>Setting</b>	Clongowes school; Dublin; Trinity College	<b>Characters</b>	Stephen Dedalus; Emma Clery; Simon Dedalus; Mary Dedalus; Cranly