

UNIVERSITY OF BISKRA
FACULTY OF LITERATURES AND FOREIGN LANGUAGES
DEVISION OF ENGLISH

Module: Literary Text

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Lesson: Point of View

Who tells the story?

The teller of a story is the *narrator*, who is not to be confused with the author.

In fiction, who tells the story and how s/he tells it are critical issues that determine the interpretation of the story. The **tone** and feel of the story, and even its meaning, can change depending on who the narrator is.

The narrator can either show or tell. In the former case, s/he has the characters speak in their own voices, without any narrative mediation. In the latter, the narrator reports the events to the reader and thereby possesses greater control over the interpretation of the story.

Is the narrator trustworthy?

The credibility of the story will depend on the (perceived) reliability of the narrator. The narrator could be either objective (detached) or subjective (biased). An objective narrator's tale is more readily believed than that of a subjective narrator.

Types of Point of View

Third Person Point of View: Here the narrator does not participate in the action of the story as one of the characters, but lets us know about the events and characters. This is an outside voice.

First Person Point of View: Here the narrator does participate in the action of the story. S/he is one of the characters in the story, an inside voice.

When reading stories in the first person, we need to realise that what the narrator is recounting might not be the objective truth. For instance, a first person narrator might try to justify her action as she wishes to present herself in a favourable light to the reader. The trustworthiness of the recounting is thus an issue.

Omniscient and Limited Omniscient Points of View: A narrator who knows everything about all the characters is all-knowing, or omniscient. A narrator whose knowledge is limited to one character, either major or minor, has a limited omniscient point of view.

Questions to ask:

- 1) How does the point of view affect your response to the story, to the characters and the theme?
- 2) Is the narrator reliable? How do you assess her reliability?
- 3) Are the plot and the point-of-view of the story linked? If so, how?