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Literary Text Structures

RL.6.5, RL.6.10



Getting the Idea

There are different kinds of literature, and each kind is organized in its own special way. A **text structure** is the way an author chooses to present information. A text's structure helps tell the setting of a story. The **setting** of a story is the time and place that a story occurs.

One kind of literature is a story or book. A **book** is a long story written in sentences and paragraphs. The text structure of a book is often organized by chapters. A **chapter** is a division of a book into logical parts. Chapters can be numbered and have names to tell what they are about. Each chapter may have a different setting or purpose within the text of the book. The chapters build on each other to help tell the story and connect with each other to help express the theme. For example, here are some chapter titles from Louisa May Alcott's book *Little Women*.

Chapter Three: The Laurence Boy

Chapter Four: Burdens

Chapter Five: Being Neighborly

Another kind of literature is poetry. **Poetry** is literature written in lines with creative language and often includes rhythm and rhyme. The structure of a poem is organized by stanza. A **stanza** is a group of lines that make up a verse, or one unit of a poem. Each stanza helps contribute to the theme of the poem.

The following are two stanzas from Lewis Carroll's "The Hunting of the Snark."

"Just the place for a Snark!" the Bellman cried,
As he landed his crew with care;
Supporting each man on the top of the tide
By a finger entwined in his hair.

"Just the place for a Snark! I have said it twice:
That alone should encourage the crew.
Just the place for a Snark! I have said it thrice:
What I tell you three times is true."

Another kind of literature is a play or drama. **Drama** is literature that is meant to be acted out. Whereas books are divided into chapters, plays are divided into scenes. A **scene** is a part of a play with a particular setting. Each scene leads to the next, and they build on each other to tell the plot just as the chapters of a book would. Each scene takes place in a different setting with a different interaction among characters. A play may have the following scenes.

Scene One: Waiting on the Front Porch

Scene Two: Opening the Special Package

Within a text's structure, an author may use literary devices to help tell the story or express ideas. A **literary device** is a technique used to produce a specific effect on a reader. Literary devices can help tell a story in an interesting way.

One kind of literary device is a flashback. A **flashback** is when there is a pause in a story to describe an earlier event. Flashbacks give the reader additional information about a story or character.

Another device is foreshadowing. **Foreshadowing** is a clue about what is going to happen later in a story. For example, a character on his way to explore a famous cave reads a newspaper article about strange events that have happened in that cave in recent months. Later in the story, the character has a scary experience in the cave. By having the character read the article earlier, the author foreshadowed what was to happen later.

Read the following paragraph and look for literary devices.

Joanne listened to the roar of the wind and the beating of the rain against the windows. The rainstorm had knocked out the power just as Joanne was about to eat dinner. The food sat on the table as Joanne stumbled around the house, lighting candles and closing windows. Last week her cousin Ben had asked her to housesit for him while he went on vacation. "It's a great country house, Joanne. Peaceful, remote, and there's a fireplace. One time the power went out, but only for a couple of hours," Ben had told her. It sounded great to her at the time, but right now Joanne wished she were back in her city apartment.

In the paragraph, the character flashes back to the time when she had looked forward to the trip. The flashback of her conversation with her cousin also foreshadowed the current situation—Ben had once mentioned that the power went out at the house. This helps to add depth to the story. It allows the reader to identify with the character's mixed feelings about the setting and the situation she is in.

Thinking It Through

Read the following passage, and then answer the question that follows.

We entered Aunt Rachel's restaurant through the back kitchen entrance because we knew exactly what she would say if she saw us come through the main door during the lunch rush. Last week she had told Heather and me that seeing noisy teenagers walk through the front door would scare away the business crowd that was searching for a quiet, adult atmosphere. It was really easy to put Aunt Rachel into a bad mood while she was serving the lunch crowd.

"Ah! My favorite niece and nephew are here," Aunt Rachel yelled from the kitchen as she saw us come through the back door. "How would you like some pizza this afternoon?" I looked at Heather and winked.



How does the flashback in paragraph 1 help to set the tone of the scene?

HINT

Think about what is being said in the flashback and how that affects the character's actions.



Coached Example

Read the passage and answer the questions.

Rick drank thirstily from his water bottle again. He could hear Liz breathing heavily behind him. He knew she was exhausted and angry about the climb. He thought of their drive up to the woods. “Don’t worry, Liz,” he’d said. “It’s an easy climb. You’ll love it.” Now Rick wished he hadn’t said that. Suddenly, a soft breeze blew through the trees, and the leaves flickered in the sunlight. A bluebird chirped with a song from its nest. Rick smiled, the pack on his back feeling lighter. Liz turned to him, also with a hopeful look on her face. “Just a little longer,” he said.



- Which line from the passage is a flashback?
 - “Rick drank thirstily from his water bottle again.”
 - “He thought of their drive up to the woods.”
 - “Now Rick wished he hadn’t said that.”
 - “Rick smiled, the pack on his back feeling lighter.”
- Based on the details at the end of the passage, what do you think the author is trying to foreshadow?
 - The trip will get harder.
 - Rick and Liz will be too tired to finish their climb.
 - The climb will become easier.
 - It will begin to rain.

HINT A flashback is a pause in a story to talk about an earlier event.

HINT Foreshadowing tells what is going to happen in a story and contributes to the theme.