

Why can
narrative texts be
INTERPRETED
in so many
ways?



Metaphor

INTERPRETATION

Allusion

Allegory

Context

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Symbolism

Literacy Language Literature

- 2.1 Why can *multimodal narratives* be interpreted in so many ways? XX
- 2.2 Why can *written narratives* be interpreted in so many ways? XX
- 2.3 How can we use language to *shape the views of others*? XX
- 2.4 Why do we understand the *same narrative texts differently*? XX
-  big ideas: Assessment tasks XX

Text list

In this Part you will read or view and discuss extracts from:

WRITTEN

Australian texts

- Steven Amsterdam 'Things I just didn't see coming' *The Age* (news article)
- Alice Pung *Unpolished Gem* (autobiography)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander texts

- Jane Harrison *Stolen* (play)

World texts

- John Boyne *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (novel)
- Robert Frost 'Mending Wall' (poem)
- William Golding *Lord of the Flies* (novel)
- George Orwell *Animal Farm* (novel)

MULTIMODAL

Australian texts

- Kriv Stenders (director) *Red Dog* (film)
- Summer Heights High* (television program)

World texts

- Samuel Taylor Coleridge, with illustrations by Gustave Doré '*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*' (illustrated poem)
- Samuel Taylor Coleridge, with illustrations by Hunt Emerson '*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*' (illustrated poem)
- Art Spiegelman *Maus* (memoir/graphic novel)
- Steven Spielberg (director) *Schindler's List* (film)



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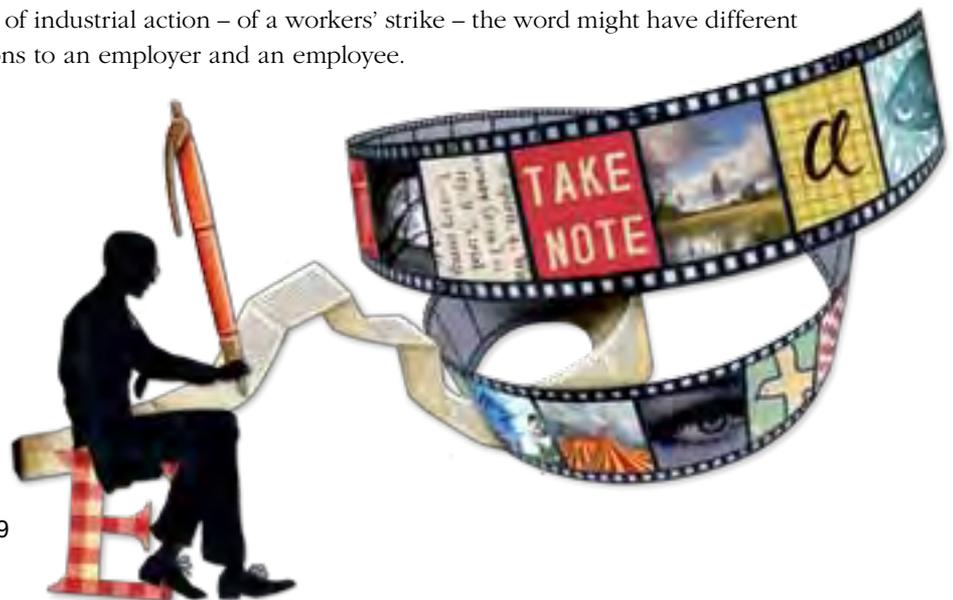
2.1 Why can *multimodal narratives* be interpreted in so many ways?

To revise the meaning of 'multimodal', go to page XX.

Narrative texts don't have just one meaning. When we read or view any narrative text – and certainly multimodal narratives – we have to remember that words and images have a range of associations. While we can't make words and images mean whatever we like, the meanings of words and images are not fixed; and the way we interpret them will vary and will shape the way we understand narrative texts.

To revise the meaning of 'connotation', go to page XX.

Words and images have a range of associations – they call to mind experiences, events, memories, or even other texts. The word 'strike', for example, means to hit, but it also has other meanings: to strike someone's name from a list means to cross it out. 'Strike' can also refer to the withdrawal of labour, and when there is discussion of industrial action – of a workers' strike – the word might have different connotations to an employer and an employee.



To revise figurative language,
go to page XX

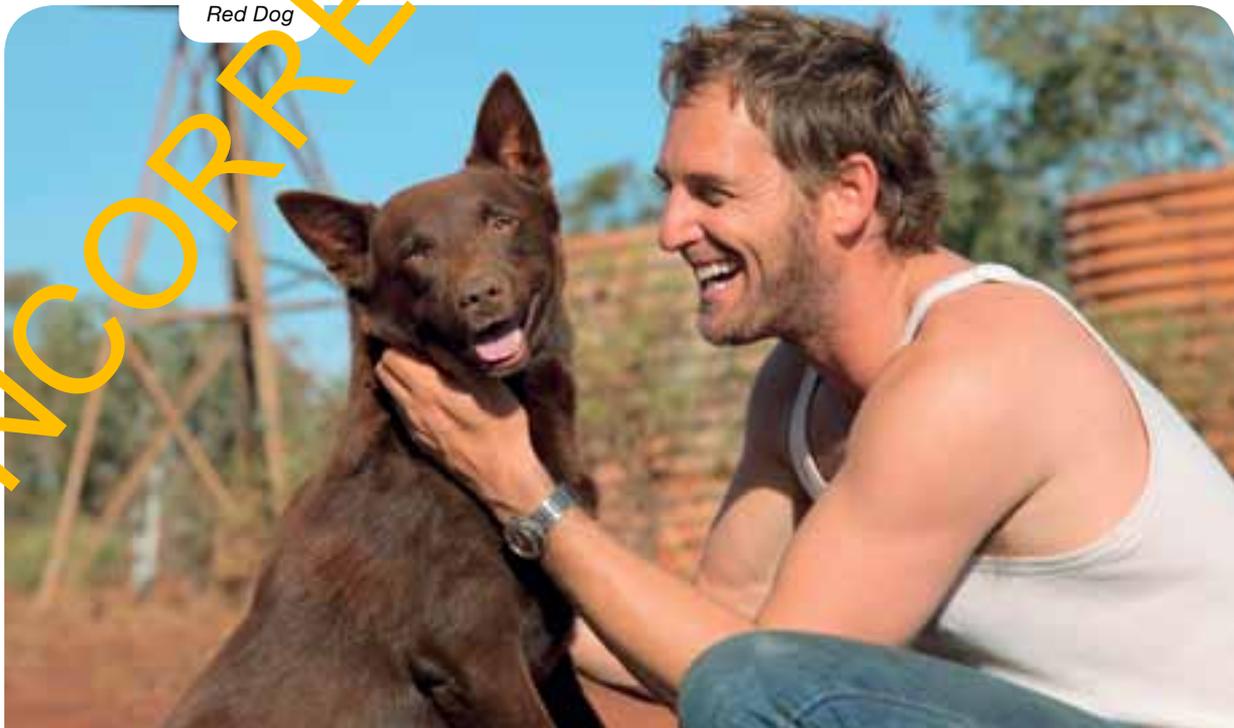
We can also use words, images and phrases figuratively – that is, we can use them in ways that differ from their everyday usage. One effect of using figurative language is that when an author creates a text, they can't control the way we interpret it. Our own personal experiences and understandings will shape the way we interpret things, so different readers will often produce different interpretations of the same narrative text. When this happens, it is an important reminder that we all have different experiences and that we all see things in different ways.

We could almost view the different meanings within a text as being like a spider's web – that many meanings stem from one central idea, but remain connected to that initial interpretation. Our experiences and our way of viewing the world will play a role in determining the meaning we take away from the text.



In this section, we will look at a range of multimodal texts to explore how visual symbols help to create a range of meanings in narrative texts. To begin with, look at the film still below from the 2011 film *Red Dog*, directed by Kriv Stenders. The film is based on the true story of a kelpie who travelled around Western Australia, being looked after by various members of different communities over a period of many years.

Red Dog



Symbolism

Over to you

Discuss the following with a partner:

- What does the kelpie symbolise or represent to you?
- Do you think people who are unfamiliar with Australian culture would make the same associations when they look at kelpie? Why or why not?

How can we use visual symbols to create a range of meanings in multimodal narratives?

When we read written texts, we interpret them in a variety of ways through the associations we make with certain words or phrases. Visual and multimodal texts create a range of meanings in much the same way. Just as we look at the way a word might function as a metaphor, we can look at visual texts to interpret first the literal meaning, and then the symbolic meaning they represent.

For example, if we look at the image below, we can interpret both its literal and its symbolic meaning. At a literal level, we can see a hat with a pin on it. Looking at it symbolically, we might associate this style of hat – known as the slouch hat – with World War I or ANZAC Day. For some, it might represent Australian identity and generate patriotic feelings, as the digger is often thought to embody the Australian spirit, and certainly the hat is used by the organisers of many ANZAC Day events as a symbol of courage. However, we need to remember that images will provoke different reactions in different people depending on their experiences, views and values. For some, it might symbolise war and death, and generate negative feelings.

To revise metaphors, go to page XX.



Language focus

A **digger** is a colloquial term for a soldier from Australia or New Zealand. The term originated during World War I.

To revise colloquial language, go to page XX.



Over to you

- 1 Look at the images below.
 - a What do they literally mean?
 - b What deeper – or symbolic – meaning or meanings do they create?
 - c Would all readers have the same reaction to these symbols? Why or why not?



- 2 Draw or source online an image that you feel has a range of meanings. Annotate the image, showing its literal and symbolic meanings.

When we view or read visual or multimodal texts, we can interpret a range of meanings in much the same way as we can when we look at the slouch hat. Such interpretation is often more complex in a longer text, however, as we have to understand the symbolic meaning of a visual element within the context of the text as a whole.

Let's look at several multimodal texts – a graphic novel, an illustrated poem and a film – where creators use visual symbols to generate a range of meanings.

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How and why can we use visual symbols in graphic novels?



Language focus

A **memoir** is a historical account, usually written from personal experience.

Maus, a graphic novel by Art Spiegelman, is the story of Spiegelman's father Vladek – a Polish-Jewish refugee who spent time in a concentration camp during World War II. The text is a **memoir**, and it blends biography and autobiography, because the role of narrator is shared by Vladek and Spiegelman. Spiegelman's text was very innovative when it was published, in that it explored very distressing subject matter using a comic style at a time when graphic novels were not readily accepted as potentially literary texts.

Symbolism



Language focus

Anti-semitic is a term used to describe hostility to or prejudice against Jewish people.

Even looking at the cover, we can begin to interpret meaning through visual symbols. To start with, the title is written in a red, graffiti-style font. We often associate the colour red with blood, and in this case, it could represent the 'spilling of blood' that occurred during the Holocaust. Similarly, the graffiti might remind us of **anti-semitic** slogans that were found graffitied on Jewish shops and establishments during the War. The swastika – the symbol of the German Nazi party – occupies a central place on the cover, highlighting the Nazis' role in the bloodshed. The mice are standing close together, in an embrace, showing perhaps that they are afraid, or that they are united.

One of the most interesting and often-discussed features of this text is the choice Spiegelman has made to portray people as animals. The Germans are presented as cats, the Jewish people as mice and the Poles as pigs. Spiegelman also portrays a French prisoner as a frog.



<insert AW 0208, 1/4 p (L), no caption>

The decision to represent Jewish people as mice is a particularly interesting one in view of a 1940 Nazi propaganda film made in 1940 called *The Eternal Jew*, where Jewish people are described as vermin and it is suggested that they spread disease like rats. This film, which is extremely anti-semitic, is rarely shown in its entirety.

Over to you

Discuss the following with a partner:

- a Why do you think Art Spiegelman was chosen to represent his characters as animals?
- b Do you think his choice to depict Jewish people as mice is intended to create the same meaning as was intended by the creators of *The Eternal Jew*?
- c Who do you think we are positioned to see as the more powerful characters and why?
- d Who do you think we are supposed to sympathise with and why?



Language focus

Inhumanity is extremely cruel and brutal behaviour.

Spiegelman's choice to portray characters as animals could be seen as symbolising the inhumanity of the Holocaust and the concentration camps. By not presenting the characters as human, he is perhaps suggesting that this period was a time when people behaved without much humanity; or that victims had to resort to animal instincts in order to survive the ordeals of the Holocaust. This may be one of the reasons why Spiegelman innovated in this way: his decision to use a comic style to explore the experience of the Holocaust allowed him to create a range of meanings through presenting characters as animals, whereas a more conventional memoir would not lend itself so readily to such a treatment.

We can also try read the text more closely by looking at the different animals presented and what they could symbolise. Consider what we know about the relationship between cats and mice: cats chase mice and often kill them. They are more powerful than mice: a mouse doesn't stand much of a chance against a cat. Then we can apply this understanding to our reading of the text: perhaps Spiegelman is positioning us to see the Germans – the cats – as predators, and the Jewish people – the mice – as victims.





Language focus

We describe something as **enduring** if it is continuing, or lasts a long time.

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Maus also reveals how prisoners, when they arrived at the concentration camps, were tattooed with a number. On a literal level, the number becomes a way of keeping track of the prisoners. On a symbolic level, however, the tattoo has added meaning. We know that a tattoo is permanent; therefore we can read a tattoo as a sign that the traumatic effects of the Holocaust – like a tattoo – can't be easily removed. In fact, Spiegelman positions scenes from the concentration camps alongside scenes that show his father's inability to function in a normal way at home, as a way of explaining his father's behaviour, thus reinforcing the enduring effects of trauma such as this. We can also think of the meaning created by the numbers: in being classified by number rather than by name, the individuality of those in the camps – and, to an extent, their humanity – is taken away.

Vladek's number, however, comes to symbolise something different to him: life. In one scene, a Catholic priest looks at Vladek's tattoo and sees that the digits in the number – 175113 – add up to 18. The priest tells him that this is a good sign because 18 means 'chai', the Hebrew number of life. Vladek explains the significance of this for him, recalling that the priest's words 'put another life in [him]'. He says:

and whenever it was very bad I looked and said: 'Yes. The priest was right! It totals eighteen' (p. 188).

<insert AW 0207, ¼ p (L), no caption>



Language focus

Numerology is the study of the significance of numbers.

To revise the meaning of 'position', go to page XX.

This incident is a reminder that symbols mean different things to different people. In this case, the priest's belief in numerology, shaped his own view of the tattoo, and while Vladek did not initially interpret the tattoo in the same way, he came to see it as a symbol of life, and it gave him more hope that he would be able to survive. In this way, the reader is positioned to think differently about the tattoo: its permanence remains obvious, but it can be seen as something that helped rather than hindered Vladek through his ordeal.

Over to you

Use the internet to source a visual symbol that you think could be interpreted differently by different people. Write about the different reactions it could provoke giving reasons for these reactions.

How and why can we use visual symbols in illustrated poems?

In recent years, we have seen the rise of graphic novel adaptations of popular written narratives. For example, there are graphic novel versions of many Shakespearean plays and other classic texts, such as F Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*.

Romeo and Juliet is one of the many Shakespearean plays that have been adapted as graphic novel. This modern text version is discussed in Part 3.



When graphic novelists or illustrators adapt an existing text, they use visual symbols to create a range of meanings. An example of this can be seen in an illustrated version of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's famous poem, 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'. Written in 1797–98, this is Coleridge's longest poem, and is made up of 625 lines, divided into seven parts. In 1989, Hunt Emerson, a graphic novelist, used the full text of Coleridge's poem to create an innovative illustrated poem in the style of a graphic novel.

Below is a summary of the first section of 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner':

An old mariner (sailor) stops a man on his way to a wedding to tell him a story about an event that had happened at sea, where a storm plagued the ship he was aboard and forced it into icy waters.

When an albatross appeared out of the fog, the ice suddenly cracked and a wind propelled the ship out of the frozen waters, so the bird was seen as a good omen. However, the mariner shot the bird with a crossbow and the crew turned on him for killing the bird 'that made the breeze to blow'. The ship stopped moving and the men grew sick and desperate for water. The crew blamed the mariner for their troubles and made him wear the dead albatross around his neck. The albatross is therefore seen as a symbol of the mariner's one big mistake, and wearing it around his neck is a reminder of how we might feel burdened by guilt or wrongdoing.

When the mariner is able to pray, and ask for forgiveness, the albatross drops 'like lead' from around his neck into the sea. Thus the poem uses religious symbolism: the weight of the albatross suggests that sailors will be plagued by their wrongdoing until they are able to ask for forgiveness.

To revise personification, go to page XX.

Emerson's illustrations take many of the exaggerated features that we have come to expect from graphic novels. The panel below, for example, illustrates Coleridge's personification of the storm, where the description 'and now the storm blast came and he was tyrannous and strong' implies that the storm is so powerful that it has human qualities. Emerson has symbolised the power of the storm visually – turning it into a menacing, somewhat mythical figure, with human characteristics. The expression on the figure's face reflects a determination to push the ship as far as he can.

<insert AW 0213, 1/3 p (L), no caption>

Over to you

In one sentence, personify one of the natural elements: fire, earth, wind or water. Then create a visual representation of this, imitating the style of Hunt Emerson.

At times, Emerson's illustrations are somewhat bizarre and comical. For instance, look at the panel, which illustrates Coleridge's description of the ice, that came floating by':



In this panel, readers have to work out what the ice-creams represent. The ice-creams are oversized and look out of place, but the reader can use their knowledge of the nature of ice-creams – that they are cold! – to work out that they are supposed to represent icebergs in the sea.

Over to you

- 1 When the poem was first published in 1798, do you think that Samuel Taylor Coleridge would have imagined someone illustrating his poem in such a way? What does this tell us about the way that language changes over time?
 - a What does the visual language add to the poem in this instance?
- 3 Do you think that comical illustrations such as the one above detract from the seriousness of Coleridge's original text? Explain your answer.

Sometimes, however, illustrators choose more conventional representations of the written text they are adapting or illustrating. Let's explore another version of 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' – one that was published in 1876 and illustrated by Gustav Doré – to see the effects of such illustrations.



The Albatross represents the Mariner's guilt.

While the Doré's images closely mirror the written text, they still add to the reader's experience. He uses visual symbols to create a range of meanings, many of which are also suggested by the written text. For example, look at this image, which shows the albatross hanging from the mariner's neck. At a literal level, the bird is simply a dead albatross. But at a symbolic level, the bird represents the mariner's wrongdoing (because he killed the albatross). The size of the bird, and the way the mariner is positioned over the water almost suggests that the bird is going to drag him down into the water. The bird looks heavy, as though the mariner is being weighed down by his guilt.

Over to you

- 1 In addition to the albatross, which visual features contribute to the mood of this image, and how?
- 2 Create your own symbol to represent guilt. Your image could, for example, suggest that a character is feeling burdened by guilt.
- 3 What do you think the poem is suggesting about the importance of acknowledging our wrongdoing?

Now look at this image titled 'I had done a hellish thing'. The title of the illustration is taken from a line in the poem where the mariner reflects on his wrongdoing.



UNCORRECTED PAGE PROOFS

At a symbolic level, readers who are familiar with Christian imagery will recognise the similarities to images of Jesus on the cross. Christians believe that, in sacrificing Himself on the cross, Jesus – who was without sin – took on the sins of the world. This allowed for anyone who repented to be forgiven for their sins. Thus, the visual text here functions as an allusion.

To revise allusions, go to page XX.

Allusions can be made to historical events or figures, or other texts: in this case, the image is an allusion to the Bible. This visual allusion invites us to understand the significance of the mariner's actions without spelling it out for us. The image, in combination with the reference to the 'hellish' thing he has done, invites readers to see the death of the albatross as a symbol of wrongdoing more generally.

Over to you

- 1 Compare and contrast the illustrations of Gustav Doré and Hunt Emerson, using the following questions as a guide:
 - What general mood or feeling is created by each illustrator's work?
 - How does this mood or feeling affect the way we read the poem?
 - Which style do you find helps readers understand the poem best and why?
- 2 Discuss the following statement with your partner: 'Illustrations deprive us of the opportunity to use our imagination.'
- 3 Choose another serious poem and create a multimodal adaptation of one stanza where you visually represent something in a comical way, like Emerson has done. (You will develop this stanza in Assessment 1 on page XX.)

How and why can we use visual symbols in films?

Filmmakers also use symbols to create a range of meanings and we can see an example of this in the 1993 film *Schindler's List*, directed by Steven Spielberg, which is set during World War II. The film is based on the novel *Schindler's Ark*, written by Australian author Thomas Keneally, which is itself based on the true story of a German business man named Oskar Schindler. Schindler employed many Jewish people to work in his factories during the War in an attempt to make greater profits because Jewish people were used as a form of cheap labour. However, as the terrible fate of Jewish people during the Holocaust became evident, Schindler's focus shifted from profit to humanitarianism and he was credited with saving the lives of over 1000 Jews.

In both the novel and the film, Schindler has a profound moment of realisation when he sees a little girl wearing a red coat. The film uses visual symbolism to show the significance of the girl – while the film is shot almost entirely in black and white, the girl's coat is red.

Language focus

Humanitarianism is the concept of prioritising human welfare over other things.



The little girl in the red coat

As it is the only element of colour in the scene, our eyes are immediately drawn to the little girl in the red coat. The colour red might create associations with blood or death, as it did in when I looked at the cover of *Maus* (see page XX); so the image of blood – in combination with the innocence suggested by the age of the girl – is a reminder of the atrocities committed during the Holocaust, and also of the destruction of the world's innocence that is associated with this period. The fact that the girl stands out so clearly could also be interpreted as a criticism of people, or nations, who didn't act to stop the atrocities being committed.

Over to you

- a What other associations could be created by the colour red, apart from blood and death?
 - b Do you think any of these other associations could be applicable to the little girl in the red coat in *Schindler's List*? Explain your answer.
- 2 Create an image, primarily in black and white, where you use one coloured object to add meaning. Then explain your image to a partner, discussing what you were trying to achieve in making that particular object colourful, and why you chose that particular colour.

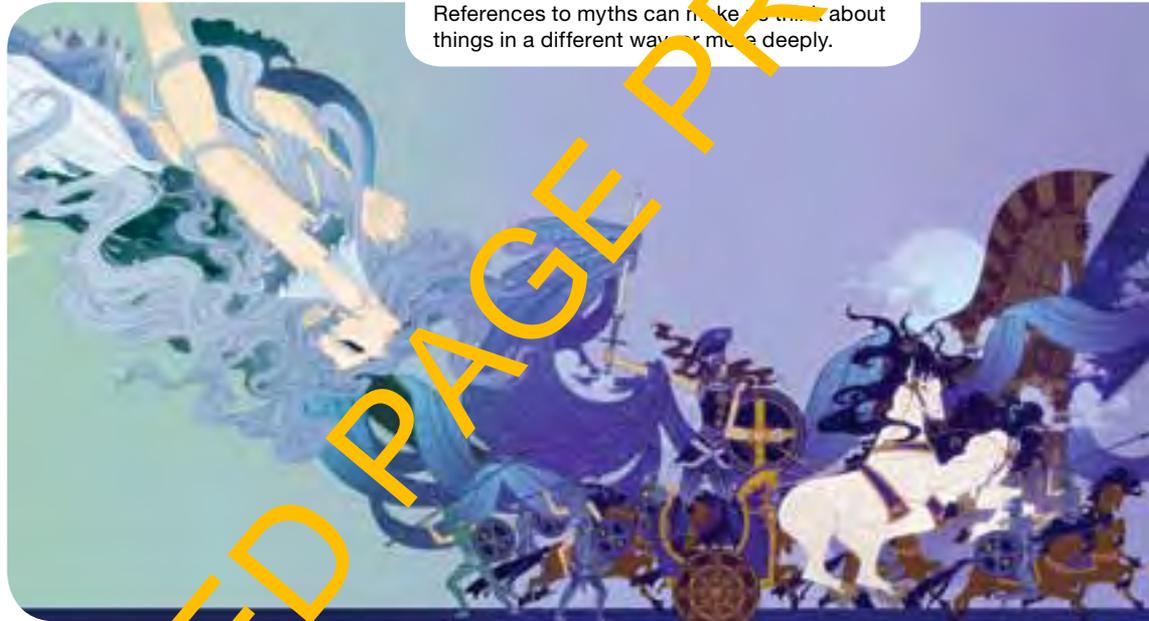
How can we draw on myths to create meaning in multimodal narratives?

Language focus

Myths are stories handed down from generation to generation over the centuries that seek to answer questions about how something came to be as it is, eg where does fire come from? Or why is there day and night? Myths often tell stories of supernatural beings or gods with special powers.

We have seen how visual symbols invite us to interpret narrative texts in complex ways. Narratives also sometimes make visual references to myths that work in the same way – to make us think about things in a different way, or more deeply.

References to myths can make us think about things in a different way, or more deeply.



For example, the Nike logo, known as the 'swoosh' symbol, makes us think of the brand. But the name of the brand also draws on Greek mythology: Nike was the Greek goddess of victory. Thus, when we look at the 'swoosh', we are positioned to think about victory.

The Nike swoosh

Nike, goddess of Victory



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ny ways? 71

To revise allusions, go to page XX.

The series of *Harry Potter* novels also make allusions to myths in order to convey meaning, and the film adaptations of these novels use visual language to represent the written language used by writer, JK Rowling. Consider this image of Harry Potter, showing his scar.

Harry Potter's 'lightning bolt' scar



Harry's scar is in the shape of a lightning bolt. In Greek mythology, Zeus, the king of gods, is often depicted carrying a lightning bolt. Thus, when we look at Harry's scar, we might be prompted to think of Zeus – perhaps this is alluding to how powerful a wizard Harry will become.

Over to you

Discuss the following with a partner:

- What does lightning symbolise to you?
- If a reader was not familiar with Greek mythology, would the fact that the scar is in the shape of a lightning bolt mean anything to them? Explain your answer.
- What do your answers to (a) and (b) tell you about the ways visual symbols can be interpreted?

To revise the meaning of 'positioned', go to page X.

Language focus

To be **immortal** is to live forever; thus, the noun **immortality** represents the concept of everlasting life.

Allies are people who cooperate with or help us in a particular activity. The term is often used to describe countries on the same 'side' in a war.

Similarly, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* – the title of the fifth book and film in the series – also makes an allusion to Greek mythology. The phoenix is a mythical bird that was said to have been consumed by fire, only to then rise from its own ashes. It symbolises **immortality**, resilience, and the ability to overcome adversity. Thus we are positioned to think about who in the texts can be thought of as being like the phoenix. Once we realise Harry's **allies** are part of the Order of the Phoenix (a group of sorcerers dedicated to fighting the evil Lord Voldemort), we are positioned to see them as people who can overcome difficulties and rise up, just as strong as before.



<insert AW 0211, ¼ p (P), no caption>

The illustration on the cover of *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* reflects the allusion to Greek mythology.



To revise euphemisms, go to page XX.

To find out more about the cultural context, go to page XX.

Over to you

The *Harry Potter* series contains many more links to myths. Use the internet to research some of these allusions and explain the way they create different meanings for readers.

How, why and when can we create new visual symbols?

While many visual symbols, such as the Christian image of the crucifixion or the Australian slouch hat (see page XX), have had enduring – although sometimes changing – significance over time, this is not to say that all visual symbols rely on historical understanding. We create new visual symbols all the time.

For example, look at the image that appeared on the ABC News website following the death of Apple co-founder Steve Jobs in October 2011. The image itself doesn't give us much explicit information about what happened; instead, it relies on us understanding the symbolism of the apple – as Jobs was the co-founder of Apple Inc, the apple represents him. The simple word 'bye' is almost a euphemism to suggest that Jobs has died. If we 'say goodbye' to someone, we don't necessarily mean it literally; it can be a softer way of saying that someone has died.

Understanding this image requires a familiarity with the Apple company and logo, which – in our cultural context, with the popularity of Apple products such as the iPhone – many people will have. The apple, however, can be interpreted in other ways – for instance, in biblical terms, it is 'the forbidden fruit', representing temptation or sin.

So, this example shows us not only how new visual symbols can be created, but also how we can create different meanings from the same visual symbol, depending on the context.

Whether we are creating, reading or viewing multimodal narratives, we need to remember that different readers will interpret them in different ways because we have all had different experiences and will therefore make different associations when presented with such texts.

Over to you

Choose a significant news event that has occurred in the last few years and create a new visual symbol to represent this event. Write an explanation of the event and the ways in which your symbol represents it.



The apple as 'forbidden fruit'



2.2 Why can written narratives be interpreted in so many ways?

Just as we have seen with multimodal texts, authors of written narratives also create a range of meanings for readers to interpret. Unlike creators of multimodal narratives, however, authors of written narratives do not use visual symbols; instead, they use language features to create a picture with words. For example, in the classic children's story *The Wizard of Oz*, we can imagine Dorothy literally walking along a yellow brick road, but we can also interpret the road as a metaphor for the spiritual, emotional and intellectual journey that Dorothy goes on in the story – to grow as a person and reach new understandings.

How can we use language to explore relationships?

In this section, we will explore how writers use language features such as symbols, metaphors, allegory, and even the sounds of particular words to create narrative texts that we can interpret in a range of ways.

Authors of many different types of written narratives use similar devices to create a range of meanings. If, for example, we were to look at novels that don't initially appear to have much in common – such as a science fiction novel, a romance and a work of historical fiction – we could see that the writers may in fact have used many of the same devices. Each of these texts might include features such as symbols, allegory or metaphor that help to create a range of meanings. Because of this, the more we read – no matter what type of text we enjoy reading – the better we become at interpreting different meanings in narrative texts.

Not only do writers use language features to create a range of meanings in narrative texts, but they also often use these features to explore similar themes. For example, in the three text types mentioned above, it wouldn't be uncommon to find writers dealing with the theme of relationships, because a lot of the drama created in narrative texts occurs through the way characters interact with each other or with their environment. We will be looking at poems, novels and a play whose creators have all explored relationships, and we will see that although each text is different, the authors use many of the same devices to do so.

Often, writers use examples of figurative language such as symbols and metaphors because these allow them to show us – rather than tell us – what they want us to understand about people and the way they interact. If all written narratives simply told us everything we needed to know, then reading would probably not be so rewarding or enjoyable. Instead, by interpreting figurative language, the reader is able to bring their own understandings to their interpretation of a narrative text. This is why different texts mean different things to different people – and why no two people readers will have exactly the same response.

To revise figurative language,
go to page XX.





Symbolism

To revise symbolism, go to page XX.



Over to you

Choose a written narrative text you have read that explores the theme of relationships:

- a What aspect of relationships does it explore?
- b How is the author positioning the reader to see this aspect of relationships?

Symbols

Just as we have seen with visual symbols, creators of written narratives also make use of symbolism to create a range of meanings. In the previous chapter, we looked at visual symbols that were used in two different versions of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'. The written text of the poem also makes use of symbols – Coleridge uses written symbols to explore the mariner's guilt and also his relationship with the other sailors on the boat.

The following stanza uses a comparison to make it clear what the albatross symbolises. The comparison, however, relies on readers understanding the symbolism of the cross:

Ah! Well a-day! what evil looks
 Had I from old and young!
 Instead of the cross, the Albatross
 About my neck was hung.

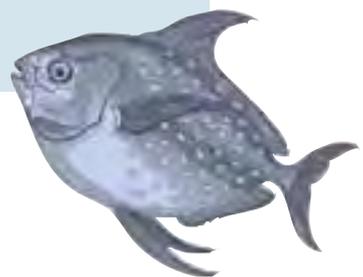
To revise allusions, go to page XX.

If we understand the biblical allusion – that the cross serves as a reminder of Christian sin – then the comparison here can be seen to symbolise the wrongdoing of the mariner in killing the albatross.

Over to you

- 1 What do you think is meant by the expression 'well a-day'? If you were writing this poem now, what do you think an equivalent expression would be?
- 2 What effect is created by the punctuation in the first two lines?
- 3 What difference would it make to the rhythm of the poem if the last two lines read:

Instead of the cross, about my neck
 the Albatross was hung.



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- 3 With a partner, discuss the following:
 - a What do you think it would be like to have a huge dead bird hanging around your neck?
 - b How does this image suggest the mariner feels?
 - c How is this description different from Coleridge simply telling us how the mariner feels?
 - d How do you think having to visibly display evidence of our wrongdoing would affect our relationship with those around us?
- 4 Look at Doré's illustration on page XX that shows the albatross hanging from the Mariner's neck. Compare the way Coleridge's words and Doré's illustration help us to understand how the mariner is feeling.

Even netspeak comes in different forms in different countries.

<insert AW 0133, 1/4 – 1/3 page (L)>

Novelists also make frequent use of symbolism, and William Golding's classic novel *Lord of the Flies* is an example of a novel that uses symbols to explore human relationships. In this text, a group of boys become stranded on an island after their plane crash-lands. Much of the novel explores the relationships between the boys – there are no surviving adults, so the boys have to find a way of managing on their own. They have difficulties working out who should be in charge, fighting over different courses of action they might take and arguing without really listening to each other.

The boys put in place a system to ensure everyone has a right to speak and be heard using a conch, which is a type of shell. The rule is that whoever is holding the conch is the only one who is allowed to speak. Thus, the conch becomes a symbol of order and democracy. It is a recognition that when there are many people with competing interests, systems need to be put in place to maintain harmonious relationships.



this image appears to have the nutcracker watermark on it?

UNCORRECTED PAGE PROOFS

When disorder begins to take over, Piggy, a character in the novel, tries to use the conch to stop the chaos. Other boys throw stones at him and the excerpt below shows the result:



To revise foreshadowing, go to page XX.

The rock struck Piggy a glancing blow from chin to knee; the conch exploded into a thousand white fragments and ceased to exist. (p. 222)

Piggy's name is also symbolic. On the island, the boys hunt and kill wild pigs; being likened to the pigs through his name foreshadows that Piggy will himself be 'hunted' and killed, much like the wild pigs.

<insert AW of running, scared pig from Part opener, 1/4 page or bigger>

Over to you

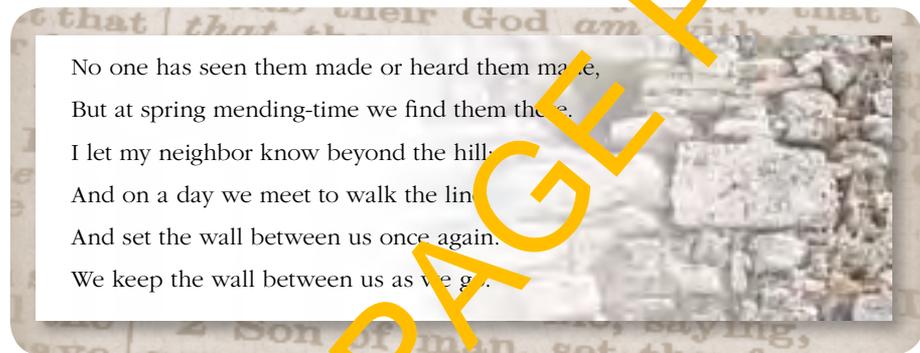
- 1 In groups, discuss the following:
 - a What do you think William Golding is suggesting when the conch is smashed?
 - b What do you think Golding is suggesting by the fact that the conch is smashed when some boys are deliberately throwing rocks at another boy?
- 2 Think of something in your own life – at home, school or within the wider community – that symbolises order and democracy to you. Write a short paragraph in which you suggest that disorder and chaos are about to take over.

To revise metaphors and extended metaphors, go to pages XX and XX.

Metaphors

Metaphors often help us understand particular ideas by making comparisons with things we know about. A particular view of relationships, for example, can be presented through the metaphor a writer chooses to use to describe an aspect of a relationship.

Robert Frost's poem 'Mending Wall' uses an extended metaphor to explore the relationship between two neighbours. In this poem, a stone wall divides the narrator's property from that of his neighbour, and the two neighbours meet at 'spring mending-time' to restore the wall. The extract below describes the gaps in the wall that the two neighbours meet to mend:



The narrator sees no reason for the wall to exist as both he and his neighbour grow trees – neither property has animals that need to be contained. The neighbour, however, believes that 'Good fences make good neighbors'.

Over to you

Discuss the following with a partner:

- what do you think the wall represents?
 - Think of fences around properties near where you live.
 - What sort of fence looks friendly and inviting?
 - What sort of fence suggests the people living inside don't want to be disturbed?
- What do you think is meant by the comment that 'good fences make good neighbors'?
- Do you agree with the idea that 'good fences make good neighbors'?

On a literal level, the wall divides the two properties; but it also creates a metaphorical barrier between them. The narrator's desire to eradicate the wall suggests a desire to 'break down the barriers'. The neighbour's response, however, reflects his desire to maintain the distance between them. Their disagreement over what to do with the wall might be viewed by some people as a reminder that we all have different boundaries and that some people are more open than others.

Language focus
Eradicate is a verb that means to destroy completely, or put an end to something.



Language focus

The term **Stolen Generations** refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were forcibly taken away from their families, on government orders, so they could be brought up 'white'. This practice was reflected in various official government policies from the 1870s to 1973.

Over to you

- 1 a What is suggested by the metaphor that someone has 'built a brick wall' around themselves?
- b In what way does this metaphor relate to the poem?
- 2 Create your own metaphor to describe someone who finds it difficult to open up to people.

An extended metaphor is also used in the play *Stolen*, by Jane Harrison, which explores the experiences of five different characters who were all members of the Stolen Generations. All were all forcibly removed from their families and end up in a children's home.

The play's set design is quite minimal, which reflects the emptiness of the characters' lives, and the main prop used is a iron bed for each of the characters. Jimmy, one of the main characters, has a bed that is set slightly differently from those of the other characters. The notes on setting in the play tell us that:

his bed is turned around so that it faces the audience. At times the bars on the bed remind us of the bars of a prison cell ...

caption to follow



Over to you

Discuss the following with a partner:

- a What does your bed represent to you?
- b Does Jimmy's bed sound like it would represent the same things to him?
- c How does the set design position the audience to feel about Jimmy?

UNCORRECTED PAGE PROOFS

<insert iron bed AW from Part opener, ¼ page> I don't know what this is???

The bed can be read as a metaphor for the plight of the Stolen Generations. A bed can represent a place of comfort and security, but Jimmy's bed seems to imprison him. This represents the contradiction evident in the government policies relating to the Stolen Generations – children were removed from their families 'for their own good', yet the policies did a great deal of damage to the very people they were supposed to be protecting. The relationships between children and their parents were severed and, in many cases, never restored. The iron bed serves as a metaphor that reminds audiences for the duration of the play of the suffering of the members of the Stolen Generation. The playwright's decision to show this, rather than tell us directly, leaves the audience to make this connection.

<insert Indigenous child AW from Part opener, ¼ page> I don't know what this is either???

Over to you

Think of another place that we would typically think of as being a place of comfort or security. Now, describe this place in a way that symbolises that it is actually uncomfortable, or unsafe.



Allegory

An **allegory** is a work that can be interpreted as a complete text, but that also contains another meaning, or story, that isn't literally discussed.

Another way in which writers of narrative texts can create a range of meanings is through the use of **allegory**. One of the most famous allegorical novels is George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, a text that, when it is read literally, is about a group of farm animals who revolt and drive Mr Jones the farmer off the farm. The text deals with the way that the relationships between the animals change as some become more powerful than others:

The animals take control of the farm and develop the principles of 'animalism', which govern the way they live. The principles are based on the idea that all animals are equal. Slowly, however, the pigs begin to take more and more power, which corrupts them, and they become just like the humans they drove off the farm. The principles of animalism are betrayed, and the animals that survive end up just as unhappy, if not more so, than they were prior to the revolution.

Over to you

- 1 Why do you think George Orwell chose to make the corrupt characters pigs? What does this suggest about the way pigs are viewed?
- 2 If you had to choose one animal to present as being very kind-hearted, which animal would you choose and why? Compare your choice and your reasons with those of a partner.

Allegory

UNCORRECTED PAGE PROOFES



Taken literally, *Animal Farm* is an entertaining and self-contained story – you don't need to understand the allegory to enjoy reading the novel. However, Orwell took a keen interest in politics and wrote a lot of his most popular works around the time of World War II, when lots of major political changes were happening in the world. The novel reflects the events of the Russian Revolution before the War. The leaders of the revolution believed that the workers were being taken advantage of by the middle classes, so they rose up in order to create a more equal society. Through his allegory, Orwell suggests that while the principles of the revolution have merit, human beings are inherently power hungry and easy to corrupt.

The main villain in the novel is the pig Napoleon, who represents Joseph Stalin, a key figure in this period of history. One of the features of the text that suggests this link is Napoleon's use of the young puppies he trains to serve as his protectors:



Language focus

KGB were the initials given to the secret police force which was totally loyal to Stalin and used force to ensure people supported him.

it was noticed that they wagged their tails to him in the same way as the other dogs had been used to do to Mr Jones (p. 36)

This comparison between the dogs' response to Napoleon and the other dogs' response to the farmer suggests that Napoleon will become just as much of an enemy of the animals as Mr Jones himself once was.

Eventually, the dogs grow into cruel and violent servants to Napoleon:

In these days Napoleon rarely appeared in public, but spent all his time in the farmhouse, which was guarded at each door by fierce-looking dogs. When he did emerge, it was in a ceremonial manner, with an escort of six dogs who closely surrounded him and growled if anyone came too near. (p. 50)

Napoleon's use of the dogs can be compared with Stalin's use of the KGB.

<insert fierce dog AW from Part opener, ¼ p> I can't find a dog in the opener?????

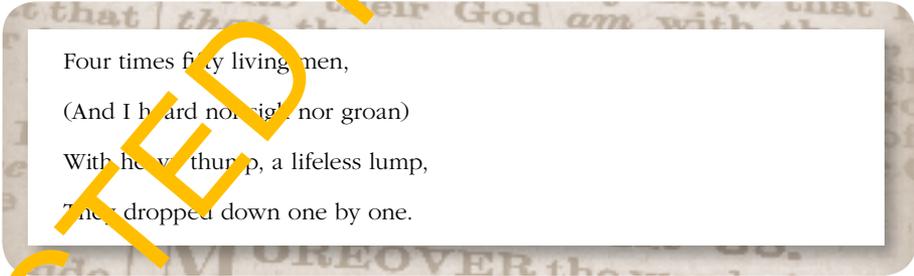
UNCORRECTED PROOFS

Over to you

- 1 The dogs in *Animal Farm* are presented as cruel and violent. Discuss the following with a partner:
 - a Is this the way dogs are usually depicted?
 - b How does this representation differ from representations of dogs in other texts, for example *Red Dog* (see page XX) or *Maus* (see page XX, where the Americans are depicted as dogs)?
 - c What do these differences suggest about the variety of meanings that can be created using the same symbol, in this case dogs?
- 2 Choose an animal you feel can represent different qualities. Write two brief descriptions of this animal, aiming to present it in different ways.

Sounds of words

Writers can also position us to interpret a text in a particular way simply through the sounds of particular words and phrases they choose to include. The associations we make with sounds might shape the way we interpret particular aspects of the text. An example of this can be seen in the following stanza, taken from Samuel Coleridge's 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'. This poem is a ballad, meaning it is designed to be spoken, and for this reason the sounds of words are particularly significant:



Four times fifty living men,
(And I heard nor sigh nor groan)
With heavy thump, a lifeless lump,
They dropped down one by one.

Over to you

- 1 With a partner, read the stanza aloud and answer the following questions:
 - a Which words do you naturally emphasise with your voice?
 - b Can you see any relationship between the sounds of the words and what is happening in the poem?
- 2 Create and perform your own spoken ballad, or rap, that explores the theme of guilt – where someone has done something they regret. Before you perform it, underline the words you will emphasise.

To revise onomatopoeia, go to page XX.

The stanza above describes the deaths of the men on the ship, and sounds of particular words help to create the mood. Onomatopoeia has been used in describing the ‘thump’ of bodies falling to the ground. In addition, the use of internal rhyme – where ‘thump’ is then rhymed with ‘lump’ in the same line – helps to create a sense of repetition, as though body after body is falling. While this is made clear by the final line of the stanza, the sounds of these words creates a sense of lifelessness and despair. This positions us to understand how the mariner feels as everyone around him dies. The writer has created sounds that work with words to shape our response.

How do new symbols and metaphors evolve to represent new ways of seeing the world?

We create new symbols and metaphors all the time, and often they represent our way of viewing the world. Just as we saw when looking at visual symbols that the apple has changed in meaning over time (see page XX), we find that written words and expressions take on added meaning over time, and across cultures. To look at how this happens, let's take a text that was written relatively recently and explore the way writers from our own context create new metaphors and symbols to explore the theme of relationships – a theme that has been dealt with by many writers over the centuries.

Unpolished Gem, written by Alice Pung and published in 2006, shares Pung's experiences growing up in the Melbourne suburb of Footscray with her Chinese-Cambodian family. Much of her tale centres on what it was like to be part of a mix of cultures and the impact this had on her relationships. Her use of language reflects this; for example, she gives a description of:

[the] 'banana children' – yellow on the outside but believed they could be completely white inside. (p. 214)

To find out more about the cultural context, go to page XX.

The description requires readers to understand what the colours represent for Pung – yellow represents her Asian background and white represents Anglo-Saxon culture. The metaphor of the banana helps readers understand what it might feel like to be caught between two cultures. The image, however, requires some understanding of contemporary Asian-Australian culture and might not carry as much meaning for people outside our cultural context.



The text also relies on our knowledge of local brand names to create meaning. At one point, Pung describes how she used to make her own clothes, and:

hand-embroider the accursed Sportsgirl logo, with all its curves and flourishes, onto [her] self-designed creations. (p. 93)

This example relies on us understanding the symbolism of the Sportsgirl logo in order to appreciate the meaning of this act. For Pung, embroidering the logo on her clothes was like putting on a membership badge – as a teenage girl in the 1990s, it asserted her membership of ‘mainstream’ Australian culture.

Both of the examples above demonstrate that new metaphors and symbols emerge all the time, and are influenced by the way we see the world and the cultural contexts in which we exist. So, even though many narrative texts explore the theme of relationships, we can still use language in innovative ways to describe the different ways in which people relate to one another.

Over to you

- 1 Think about something you do to assert your membership of a particular group. Write a brief passage in which you use symbolism to show readers how you belong.
- 2 Consider your relationship with others in your family and create a metaphor that shows the ‘role’ you play within your family.



belonging

<insert AW 0233, 1/3 page, ch opener.
This is the cover of a book, but we don't
want the book's title or author in this
AW. Crop from just above girl's eyes to
halfway down her lollipop>

not supplied as yet

2.3 How can we use language to shape the views of others?

In the previous two chapters, we have explored how multimodal and written narrative do not have just one meaning. Our words and phrases have a range of associations. They can mean different things to different people at different times, and authors are sometimes surprised by – and may agree or disagree with – the ways others interpret their texts.

When we create narrative texts, however, we still make choices that shape how our audience responds. We want them to see our narrator, our characters and the themes we explore in a particular way. Our language choices can be powerful in influencing, or shaping, how our readers respond. If we were to tell our readers what to think about a character, for example, they might object – nobody really likes being told to adopt a particular point of view. However, when we use language in a subtle way, even though we cannot control how it will be interpreted, we are able to influence or direct the views of our readers, often without them realising it.

In this chapter, we will draw on three narratives – George Orwell's *Animal Farm* and Alice Pung's *Unpolished Gem* and William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* – to explore some of the ways their authors use language to shape the way we respond to their stories.



How can we use language to shape how others respond to our narratives?

In narrative texts, the writer's language choices reflect the way their characters see the world. The characters' views and values will shape not only the subject matter, but also how the subject matter is conveyed. We can infer what a particular character or narrator values from looking at the range of meanings created by the language they use. As readers, we may or may not share the views and values of the characters. Nevertheless, because the language choices made by creators of narrative texts reflect the way their characters view the world, we may be influenced by these choices.

Vocabulary

Sometimes, the way we are influenced is very subtle – we can see that a point of view has been implied simply through vocabulary choice. In some cases, it could be as simple as the use of an adjective that reflects a particular way of seeing the world. If we don't stop to reflect on the meaning created, or to challenge that particular view, we can be positioned to accept it as truth. For example, in the extract below from Alice Pung's *Unpolished Gem*, Pung describes her mother's tenacity as a salesperson in their shop:

To revise the meaning of position, go to page XX.



Language focus

To have **tenacity** is to be unwilling to give up.

My mother was bent on not letting customers walk out of the store ... Sometimes she even *dragged* the Asian customers back into the shop. To ordinary Australians that would be harassment, but to Southeast Asians it was a convincing sale, it meant that the seller wanted your business so much they were willing to chase you down the street to give you a good deal... (p. 205)

In this extract, the term 'ordinary' is used to differentiate between Southeast Asian Australians and 'other' Australians. This implies a point of view – that there is a 'normal' Australian and that Southeast Asian Australians are excluded from this group. It suggests that Pung, herself, doesn't feel part of 'ordinary' Australian culture.

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Over to you

- 1 **a** Think of an adjective to replace the word 'ordinary' in the above extract.
b How does this change the point of view implied in Alice Pung's text?
- 2 **a** Give a description of your view of an 'ordinary' Australian teenager.
b Compare your description with others in your class.
c Now, in pairs, consider the following questions:
 - Are your responses similar?
 - What does this suggest?
 - If you compared your responses with students in high schools in different parts of Australia, would everyone give the same description? Give reasons for your response.

Metaphors

Writers often use metaphors to shape the way we understand narrative texts. For example, a narrator – or a character in a narrative text – might use a metaphor to describe love. If they describe love as 'a battle', this presents a very different view of it than if they had described it as 'an illness'. In the first case, the metaphor makes us think of two opposing forces in combat. It implies that love can be very difficult, tiring, and perhaps even destroy us at times. The second metaphor – describing love as an illness – suggests that love can make us sick; that it can render someone incapable of functioning at a normal level. Illnesses generally get worse too, so it might start having only a small impact and gradually spread.

Both metaphors suggest the power of love, but they also reflect different views of what love is and what it can do to us.

<Leave ¼ p blank here for filler art (prob from R&J part opener)>

As readers, when we come across metaphors like this in a text, we might not even really stop to think about the image that is created through the metaphor, and yet subtly we are positioned to see love in a certain light.

In the following extract from *Unpolished Gem*, Pung uses a metaphor to describe the pressure put on children by their parents:

It doesn't matter that these children will grow up among other playmates whose parents will push them so high that their heads spin with vertigo. Day-vid the heart-surgeon by day and hobby concert violinist by night; and young Lin-dah with the lovely brick-veneer double-storey dwelling and a dental clinic above her parents' jewellery store. (p. 15)

Over to you

- What metaphor does Alice Pung use to describe the pressure suffered by children who are pushed by their parents? How does this metaphor position us to view the parents and the children in this situation?
 - Create another metaphor that offers a more positive view of parents who want their children to succeed.
- Come up with two of your own metaphors to describe an emotion, such as anger, jealousy or excitement. In each case, try to present a different view of the feeling you are trying to describe.

Allusions

To revise allusions, go to page XX.

Allusions are devices used to bring something to mind without actually referencing it directly. Allusions to other texts, myths or even historical events can influence the way we view characters and events in narrative texts; but we might read a text and be completely unaware of the allusion being made, in which case we could miss what the author is trying to say. When we do understand the allusion, however, we achieve a richer understanding of the text.

Sometimes, creators of narrative texts give characters names that allude to particular figures in history or in other well-known texts. When this happens, readers might be influenced to view a character in a particular light, without even realising it.

In George Orwell's *Animal Farm*, many of the animals on the farm represent particular figures in the Russian Revolution. However, we can also look at the allusions Orwell makes to other historical figures and events. For example, it is significant that he names one of the pigs Napoleon. Although this pig represents Joseph Stalin, when we are first introduced to him we might be reminded of Napoleon Bonaparte, who was a key figure in the French Revolution (1789–99). Napoleon Bonaparte was seen as a symbol of political and military power, but critics would suggest that he abused his power, and was responsible for the deaths of many people and much economic loss.



Napoleon and Napoleon



Language focus

A **tyrant** is a person who exercises power in a cruel or unreasonable way.

We describe terms as **synonymous** when they mean the same thing.

Readers who are familiar with Napoleon Bonaparte will be influenced by Orwell's choice of name for this pig in the text. We are positioned to view the pig as something of a **tyrant**, even before we really know very much about him. For those readers who are not familiar with Napoleon Bonaparte and his role in history however, the reverse could happen: once we read *Animal Farm*, we might be positioned to view Napoleon Bonaparte in a highly critical manner because he has been linked with the actions of the pig in the novel.

Similarly, the title of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* positions the reader to view the events of the novel in a certain light. 'Lord of the flies' is a literal translation of 'Beelzebub', prince of the demons, in the New Testament of the Bible. The name is often thought to be **synonymous** with the Devil. In the novel, the boys give the name 'Lord of the Flies' to a pig's head that has been cut off and impaled on a stick, and leave it as an offering to 'The Beast' that they fear on the island. The pig's head becomes a symbol of their savagery. Because the boys themselves create the Lord of the Flies, we are positioned to feel as though the evil is part of them. Golding suggests through the allusion to Beelzebub that human beings all have the capacity for evil, and we are positioned to share this view.



Lord of the Flies

Over to you

- 1 Source a different narrative text that makes allusions to other texts or historical figures or events, and explain how the allusion influences the way you interpret the text.
- 2 Imagine you are going to write a short story about your family. Rename everyone in your family, making allusions through their names to either historical figures or characters from other texts. Explain your choices to a partner, discussing the way you hoped to influence your readers to view your family members. (You will use these names in a written text in Assessment 5 on page 93.)

The examples explored in this chapter remind us that when we read narrative texts, the author's language choices will have an impact on the way we view the text and its characters. This reading also then has the power to influence the way we see the world.

<insert AW 0238, 1/3 page, ch opener>
image to come

2.4 Why do we understand the same narrative texts differently?

As we have seen in previous chapters, we create new metaphors and symbols all the time, and when we do they often reflect a particular way of seeing the world. As well as affecting the way we create narrative texts, the way we view the world will also influence the way we understand texts. Because we all see things differently, we often understand the same language in different ways.

In some cases, the fact that we understand the same language differently can cause problems – we might encounter misunderstandings as a result. In other ways though, it is exciting to think that our languages are still evolving and that we can play a part in shaping the way that language is used and understood.

Regardless of whether we think it is exciting or problematic, it is important to look at instances where the same language is understood differently. In this chapter, we will draw on novels, a television series and a graphic novel to examine how our context informs the way we understand narratives.

How does our context inform the way we understand narratives?

How we understand narrative texts is, like language generally, inherently linked to our context. Our context refers to our environment – the historical, social and cultural conditions in which we live and in which we use and respond to language. This means that, as these contexts change, the language we use in narratives – and the way we understand language – also changes over time, or across different social groups or cultures. So, a teenager living in Sydney now might interpret a particular symbol differently from a teenager living in Sydney 30 years ago, or a century ago. Similarly, the same word might be understood very differently by people from different parts of the world.

Let's explore some examples of language that can be interpreted in different ways, depending on our historical, social and cultural context.

Historical context

When we talk about the influence of our historical context, we are really looking at the way the time or era in which we live shapes the way we see and understand things. To look at the way historical context informs our understanding of language, we can take a narrative created decades ago and analyse the way it uses language.

William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* was first published in 1954 and is still widely read today. While the meaning of the text has by no means changed entirely, there are examples of words used in the text that we can interpret in ways the author might not have intended. This is because these words have taken on added or different meanings over time.

Look at this extract that gives a description of the character of Simon:

He was a small, skinny boy, his chin pointed, and his eyes so bright they had deceived Ralph into thinking him delightfully gay and wicked. (p. 70)

Leave $\frac{1}{4}$ or $\frac{1}{3}$ page blank at the bottom of this recto page for filler art

The description uses the adjectives 'gay' and 'wicked' to describe the impression Ralph gets of Simon. At the time Golding was writing, the term 'gay', in its common use, would describe someone who was cheerful and carefree; while 'wicked' would describe someone who was evil, morally wrong or playfully mischievous. Today, however, the adjective 'gay' is used more frequently to refer to homosexuality although a more recent shift in the use of the word has seen young people in particular use it to describe something that they think is stupid or 'uncool'. This has led to campaigns such as 'Think Before You Speak', which was developed in the USA to encourage young people to think about the impact of using such language, regardless of whether or not it is intended to offend gay people. The fact that campaigns like this exist show not only how language has evolved over time, but also how we can play a part in influencing the way it is used.

Similarly, while we might still describe someone as 'wicked' if they were being badly behaved, the term has come to mean 'cool' or 'excellent' in informal – and particularly spoken – English. In certain social contexts, again informally, it can also be used in place of the adverb 'very' for example someone might be described as a 'wicked fast runner'.

Over to you

In pairs, discuss the following.

- a How do you interpret the description of Simon above?
- b Is this the only way to interpret it? Explain your answer.
- c Think of another word that has changed in meaning over time and discuss how and why you think this has happened.

Social context

As well as our place in time affecting the way we use and understand language, our social context can have an impact on this too. The Australian comedian, actor and writer Chris Lilley is someone with an evident interest in how our social context shapes the way we use and thus understand language. This interest is reflected in the way he depicts people from different social groups in his television programs.

One of Lilley's most popular series, *Summer Heights High*, looks at the way young people use language. Lilley plays each of the main characters and uses their language as one of the key factors that makes them different from his other characters. In addition, as this is satire, they are supposed to be exaggerated versions of the people they represent.

Language focus

Social context refers to the way we organise ourselves as a society and the values that influence how we do things.

To revise satire, go to page XX.



One of the main characters, Ja'mie, is a self-described 'private school girl' who attends the public school Summer Heights High as part of a student exchange program. She describes her friends' reaction to her decision to change schools:

My friends think I'm an idiot. They're like, 'why would you go to Summer Heights High? It's like the boganest school in the world!' It's such a random thing for me to do, but I'm always doing things that like push outside the boundaries. D'you know what I mean?

When commenting on the differences between private and public schools, Ja'mie notes that:

It's so kind of like not shady

and:

Public schools are so random.



Over to you

Discuss the following with a partner:

- a Which words and expressions in the above extracts stand out to you as being indicative of Ja'mie's social context?
- b Imagine these words were being spoken by an adult, such as a parent or your teacher. How would they sound using language like this? Why?
- c Look at Ja'mie's use of the word 'random'. What does this word mean to Ja'mie and her friends? How might someone from outside their social context be confused by what she is saying?

Similarly, Summer Heights High student Jonah describes one of the teachers in a way that could be misunderstood by people from outside his social context:

Miss Palmer's all right. She's one of the maddest teachers in the whole school. She's better than any other teacher here.

Over to you

- 1 What does Jonah mean by the term 'maddest'? How else could this adjective be interpreted? In what way could his description confuse someone from outside his social context?
- 2 With a partner, think of three different social contexts and, for each, come up with a list of **figures of speech** you would expect to hear from people within this context. Share your list with another pair, and have them guess what sort of person is speaking and in what context, giving reasons for their response.

A **figure of speech** refers to the use of a word or phrase in a way that diverges from its normal or literal meaning.

The phrase to 'walk in someone else's shoes' is a figure of speech because we aren't literally going to put on someone's shoes and walk in them. Instead, we are going to share their journey in our imagination.



Language focus

The **cultural context** refers to the circumstances in which the culture of a particular nation, people or group exists. **Culture** means their customs, behaviours and the ways they express their ideas and values. Literature, film, music, art and comedy are all expressions of a society's culture, or aspects of its culture.

Cultural context

The way we interpret visual language is also often determined by our contexts. For example, we can see the effect our **cultural context** has on our interpretation of visual language by looking at the symbols of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (which are placed on medical vehicles and personnel to protect them from military attack in battle).

The red cross was the original symbol of the Movement. However, because a cross carries connotations of Christianity, many Muslim countries choose to use a red crescent instead. In 2007, a third symbol was added – a red crystal – to allow countries with a mixed population to use a symbol that does not carry the same religious connotations.

<insert AW 0221, 1/8 p (skinny landscape)>

Over to you

Look at the three symbols of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and answer the following:

- a What does each make you think of?
- b What does the inclusion of the Red Crescent as a symbol tell us about the importance of religion in many cultural contexts?

<insert Nazi flag from Part opener AW in margin next to para below>

We can frequently see a similar concept illustrated in narrative texts, many of which show how visual symbols can carry different meanings to people from different cultural contexts. For example, the cover of Art Spiegelman's graphic novel, *Maus* (see page XX) features a swastika. In Chapter 2.2, we saw that *Maus* deals with the Holocaust; therefore, when we look at the cover of the novel, we would probably associate the swastika with Nazi Germany and the atrocities that were committed during World War II. To many people, it is a symbol of evil. However, the symbol has in fact been around for thousands of years, and the name comes from the Sanskrit word 'svastika' which loosely translates as 'wellbeing'. It is associated with Hinduism and carries connotations of good luck, and is also used in Buddhism to represent good fortune. Thus, although Spiegelman uses the swastika to represent the Nazi party, it carries different meanings across different cultural contexts.

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Bruno and Shmuel represent innocence.

John Boyne's novel *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* also makes reference to visual symbols associated with the Holocaust and allows readers to use their own understanding of this period of history to interpret the symbols. In this text, Bruno, a young German boy, and Shmuel, a Polish boy living inside a concentration camp, develop a friendship through the wire fence that separates them. The two boys represent innocence, in that they are naïve to what is going on around them. They discuss people and events without really understanding their significance. The extract below shows the two boys discussing the Jewish Star of David and the swastika, without naming them, or knowing what they represent:

'And then one day things started to change,' [Shmuel] continued 'I came home from school and my mother was making armbands for us from a special cloth and drawing a star on each one. Like this.' Using his finger he drew a design in the dusty ground beneath him.

<insert AW 0228, centred, very small>

'And every time we left the house, she told us we had to wear one of these armbands.'

'My father wears one too,' said Bruno. 'On his uniform. It's very nice. It's bright red with a black-and-white design on it.' Using his finger he drew another design in the dusty ground on his side of the fence.

<insert AW 0229, centred, very small>

(pp. 126–7)

Over to you

Research the Star of David on the internet and answer the following.

- a What does it represent to Jewish people?
- b How was it used by the Nazi party?
- c Do you think this usage changes the meaning of the symbol? Why or why not?

Thus, we can see that our contexts – historical, social and/or cultural – will influence the way we understand both written and visual language. This is important to remember as readers, so we can be aware that the same language can mean different things to different people. As creators of narrative texts too, we need to be open to the idea that readers will bring their own understandings to our work, and therefore that our language might not always be interpreted as we intended.



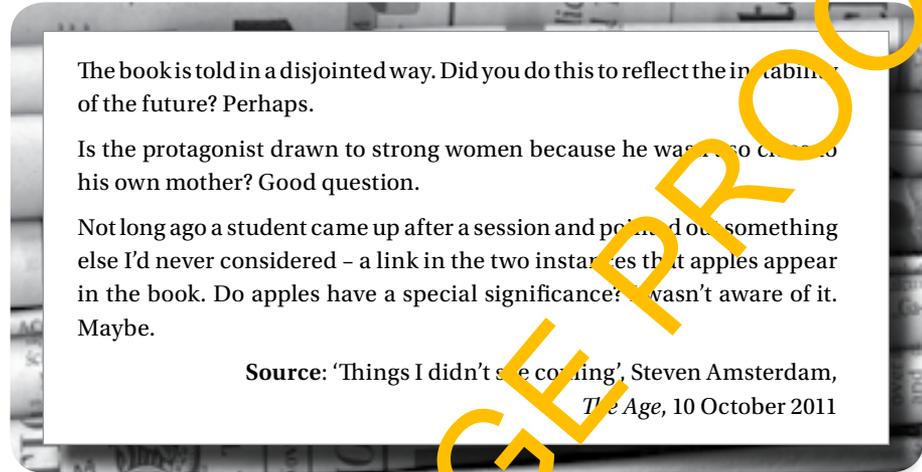
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Are some interpretations better than others?

To revise the meaning or 'position', go to page XX.

Although authors will use language to position readers to see things in particular ways, they don't set out to develop texts where only one reading (that they 'intended') is possible. However, no author can be aware of *all* the ways others may interpret their texts, especially over time; indeed, many authors have expressed surprise at the things others see in their texts.

In an article in *The Age*, first-time novelist Steven Amsterdam described the experience of having his work studied by Year 12 students. He admits that he saw essay questions in a study guide on his text that he didn't know the answer to, and describes the reactions of some students to his novel:



Amsterdam's reflections illustrate how we can interpret meanings that weren't necessarily intended by the author, and how readers can create meaning as much as writers themselves.

However, while readers may not all have the same response to a text, they do need to base their response on the text itself. It's unlikely, for example, that anyone would agree with the suggestion that *Harry Potter* stories are about the triumph of evil over good, or that *Animal Farm* is really about celebrity culture. Therefore, we can provide our own interpretations of narrative texts, but we must ensure that those interpretations are able to be supported by evidence from the text.

Harry Potter: the triumph of evil over good?

<insert AW 6 12 / page or bigger> This is 6 12 but its not Harry Potter - is this correct??



big ideas



For suggestions on how to plan, draft, edit and proofread your texts, refer to 'How can I improve my writing?' on page XX.

Why can narrative texts be INTERPRETED in so many ways?

2.1 Why can multimodal narratives be interpreted in so many ways?

create and speak

- 1 Create a full illustrated version of the poem you chose for Activity 3 on page XX. Ensure that your visual text uses some of the devices you studied in this chapter – such as allusions, symbolism and personification – to create a range of meanings.
- 2 In groups, choose one part of 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' to present as a multimodal text. Use sounds and images that add meaning to the written text. Then deliver your presentation to the class.

2.2 Why can written narratives be interpreted in so many ways?

write, create and speak

- 3 Create a short story that uses an object to symbolise a concept, such as order, democracy, love or power. Show:
 - the characters all covering the object
 - the object becoming important (in terms of what it symbolises)
 - the object being destroyed
 - the consequences of this destruction.
- 4 Prepare a oral presentation, with PowerPoint images, that shows how relationships are explored in other texts you have read. Try to find examples where, as in *Unpolished Gem*, a character feels caught between different groups (such as family and school friends).

2.3 How do we use language to shape the views of others?

write

- 5 Look at the list of names you created for your family members for Activity 2 on page XX. Thinking about the sorts of 'roles' these names suggest your family members play, write a short recount of a recent family event in which you make allusions to other texts or historical events in order to influence your readers' views of your family.

2.4 Why do we understand the same narrative texts differently?

write, listen and speak

- 6 Working in groups:
 - choose one of the texts we have explored in this Part
 - select a particular social, historical or cultural context, and
 - develop a written interpretation of the text based on your chosen context.Compare your interpretation with those of other groups in your class.
- 7 Use the internet to find a speech (or a transcript of a speech) given by an adult in a formal context, for example one delivered by the Prime Minister. Change the language so that the message is the same, but the speech now includes figures of speech and words used by young people. Deliver the speech to your classmates.