SHORT STORY UNIT

**Day 1 and 2**

Teacher presents handout on narrative mode [see next page]. Students read “Sonny’s Blues” by James Baldwin (1957) independently (27 pages)

Introductory questions to consider with the narrative mode handout:

Who is telling the story and why?

What points of view does the author provide?

Whose point of view is left out and why do we not get their point of view?

How does reality include not just the external events of the story but the internal feelings and thoughts of the characters?

How can fiction attempt to show the ways we communicate nonverbally?

How can we come to understand the point of view of another person with or without the aid of verbal expression?

**Day 3**

Teacher leads a class discussion on the following questions:

How does Sonny’s friend try to explain what happened to Sonny?

How does the narrator react to his brother’s arrest?

What does the narrator remember about growing up with his family and how does it impact his new relationship with Sonny?

How does Sonny try to express himself?

What does jazz represent in the story?

How are all the memories the narrator remembers at the end of the story connected?

What is the effect of the backstory and nonlinear narrative?

Teacher leads close reading of the last passage where Sonny plays jazz. How is the language of the passage similar to the sound of jazz music? Listen to [Charlie Parker](Students%20read%20) (“The Bird”). See document below with labeled literary techniques.

“Sonny’s Blues” timeline

- father’s brother gets run over by car – hate crime

- Sonny & father argue

- living in poverty, unsafe neighborhood

- Sonny gets high for the first time

- Sonny’s father dies (he was 15)

- Sonny’s mother dies and the narrator promises he will watch Sonny

- Sonny moves in with narrator’s then girlfriend Isabel and practices playing piano

- Sonny starts missing school to play music, argues with Isabel’s mother

- Sonny – navy; narrator – army

- Sonny and his brother get in a fight; Sonny doing drugs

- Sonny arrested

- narrator’s daughter Grace dies, Sonny and narrator exchange letters

- Sonny and brother talk

- Sonny plays jazz

**Narrative Modes**

EPISTOLARY NARRATIVE

Narrative told in the form of letters (1st person) or other documents

UNRELIABLE NARRATOR

Narrator (usually 1st person) that fabricates and misrepresents the events of the story and their own perspective and sensory perception either consciously or unconsciously

FIRST PERSON NARRATOR - protagonist, participant (character in subsidiary role), observer (character without an essential function)

NAIVE NARRATOR– knows less about the story than the reader or author

SECOND PERSON – addresses the main character in the form of a personal pronoun (usually “you”)

DIRECT INTERIOR/INTERNAL MONOLOGUE

Sometimes indicated by quotation marks, a narrative style where a character (1st person) semi-logically expresses their actual thoughts and mental processes

STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS

The authentic, untranslated, unfiltered, fragmented, conscious or semi-conscious, recorded thoughts and mental processes of a character or narrator (usually 1st person)

THIRD PERSON OMNISCIENT

Narrator describes any events in the story and the thoughts of *all* the characters and is able to convey voice of the character

THIRD PERSON SUBJECTIVE or THIRD PERSON LIMITED OMNISCIENT

Narrator conveys the thoughts and feelings of one or more of the characters (but not all of them) and is able to convey voice of character

FREE INDIRECT DISCOURSE or NARRATED MONOLOGUE (\*see 3 options below)

Third-person narrator is able to shift points of view from objective narrator to psychonarrator to any character in the story which sometimes makes the various points of view indistinguishable from one another (may be omniscient or limited omniscient narration)

THIRD-PERSON OBJECTIVE (\*1st option)

Narrator tells the external story without relating internal thoughts and feelings of characters (not omniscient)

PSYCHONARRATION (\*2st option)

“Narrator’s description of what a character is thinking” (omniscient narrator but does not convey voice of character)

Dorice Williams Elliot from “Teaching About Free Indirect Discourse”; term from Dorritt Cohn’s *Transparent Minds*

CHARACTER’S POINT OF VIEW IN 3RD PERSON (\*3rd option)

Third person narrator takes on the qualities of a character’s voice (example: Joey’s point of view)

(when you can replace 3rd person pronouns with 1st person)

HOW FREE INDIRECT DISCOURSE WORKS:

The 3rd person omniscient or limited omniscient narrator takes the point of view of any of the following (or makes them indistinguishable from each other):

1. objective narrator – narrator describes external world

“Joey sat down, closed his eyes, and rubbed his temples with his thumbs.”

2. psychonarrator – omniscient narrator describes internal world of characters

“Joey, frustrated with his inability to close the deal, became anxious and worried.”

3. character – omniscient narrator conveys actual voice of any character in the story (has qualities of 1st person narration)

“He came so stinking close to convincing the ignorant balding freak to sign -- but he was just *too* stubborn!”

**INDICATORS OF POINT OF VIEW**

1. STYLE/VOICE

A. Word choice, diction

B. punctuation – quotation marks, exclamation points, question marks, periods, commas, semi-colons, colons, dashes, and ellipses.

C. Any literary devices (grammatical, rhetorical, poetic, literary) that indicate emotion or personality

2. modal auxiliaries (helping verbs) –

can, may, must, ought, shall, should, will, would

(probability, possibility, condition, likelihood, ability, permission, obligation)

3. Hedge words

a word used to help a speaker or writer avoid making an absolute statement

Examples: seems, kind of, imagine, alleged, suppose, sort of, somewhat, perhaps, maybe, nearly, probably, possibly

4. verbal clause process types (M.A.K. Halliday):

(one verb may involve multiple types)

a. **material** (external world): doing and happening (ex: walk, empty, paint, repair, send, burn)

b. **behavioral** (external/internal world): physiological and psychological behavior (ex: laugh, cry, breathe, sigh, blush, burp, stare)

c. **verbal** (external/internal world): saying and the symbolic exchange of meaning (ex: say, tell, warn, argue, yell, praise, insult, report, threaten)

d. **mental** (internal world): sensing and consciousness (ex: perceive, feel, believe, consider, imagine, forget, desire, refuse, adore, enjoy, dread, rejoice)

5. “Gesture … small physical actions, often unconscious or semi-reflexive, including what is called body language and excluding larger, more definite or momentous actions … language – that is, word choice – can function as a gesture … [Gestures] are like windows opening to let us see a person’s soul, his or her secret desires, fears or obsessions, the precise relations between that person and the self, between the self and the world” from *Reading Like a Writer: A Guide for People who Love Books and for Those who Want to Write Them* by Francine Prose

repetition, metaphor or simile, conjunction and punctuation, rhyme, prepositional phrase, parallel structure

"Well. Now I've heard it all," said a voice behind us. This was another musician, and a friend of Sonny's, a coal-black, cheerful-looking man built close to the ground. He immediately began confiding to me, at the top of his lungs, the most terrible things about Sonny, his teeth gleaming like a lighthouse and his laugh coming up out of him like the beginning of an earthquake. And it turned out that everyone at the bar knew Sonny, or almost everyone- some were musicians, working there, or nearby, or not working, some were simply hangerson, and some were there to hear Sonny play. I was introduced to all of them and they were all very polite to me. Yet, it was clear that, for them I was only Sonny's brother. Here, I was in Sonny's world. Or, rather: his kingdom. Here, it was not even a question that his veins bore royal blood. They were going to play soon and Creole installed me, by myself, at a table in a dark corner. Then I watched them, Creole, and the little black man and Sonny, and the others, while they horsed around, standing just below the bandstand. [The light from the bandstand spilled just a little short of them and watching them laughing and gesturing and moving about, I had the feeling that they, nevertheless, were being most careful not to step into that circle of light too suddenly; that if they moved into the light too suddenly, without thinking, they would perish in flame.](https://genius.com/James-baldwin-sonnys-blues-annotated#note-5114226) Then, while I watched, one of them, the small black man, moved into the light and crossed the bandstand and started fooling around with his drums. Then-being funny and being, also, extremely ceremonious- Creole took Sonny by the arm and led him to the piano. A woman's voice called Sonny's name and a few hands started clapping. And Sonny, also being funny and being ceremonious, and so touched, I think, that he could have cried, but neither hiding it nor showing it, riding it like a man, grinned, and put both hands to his heart and bowed from the waist.  
  
Creole then went to the bass fiddle and a lean, very bright-skinned brown man jumped up on the bandstand and picked up his horn. So there they were, and the atmosphere on the bandstand and in the room began to change and tighten. Someone stepped up to the microphone and announced them. Then there were all kinds of murmurs. Some people at the bar shushed others. The waitress ran around, frantically getting in the last orders, guys and chicks got closer to each other, and the lights on the bandstand, on the quartet, turned to a kind of indigo. Then they all looked different there. Creole looked about him for the last time, as though he were making certain that all his chickens were in the coop, and then he jumped and struck the fiddle. And there they were.  
  
[All I know about music is that not many people ever really hear it. And even then, on the rare occasions when something opens within, and the music enters, what we mainly hear, or hear corroborated, are personal, private, vanishing evocations.](https://genius.com/James-baldwin-sonnys-blues-annotated#note-5115258) But the man who creates the music is hearing something else, is dealing with the roar rising from the void and imposing order on it as it hits the air. What is evoked in him, then, is of another order, more terrible because it has no words, and triumphant, too, for that same reason. And his triumph, when he triumphs, is ours. I just watched Sonny's face. His face was troubled, he was working hard, but he wasn't with it. And I had the feeling that, in a way, everyone on the bandstand was waiting for him, both waiting for him and pushing him along. But as I began to watch Creole, I realized that it was Creole who held them all back. He had them on a short rein. Up there, keeping the beat with his whole body, wailing on the fiddle, with his eyes half closed, he was listening to everything, but he was listening to Sonny. He was having a dialogue with Sonny. He wanted Sonny to leave the shoreline and strike out for the deep water. He was Sonny's witness that deep water and drowning were not the same thing-he had been there, and he knew. And he wanted Sonny to know. He was waiting for Sonny to do the things on the keys which would let Creole know that Sonny was in the water.  
  
And, while Creole listened, Sonny moved, deep within, exactly like someone in torment. I had never before thought of how awful the relationship must be between the musician and his instrument. He has to fill it, this instrument, with the breath of life, his own. He has to make it do what he wants it to do. And a piano is just a piano. It's made out of so much wood and wires and little hammers and big ones, and ivory. While there's only so much you can do with it, the only way to find this out is to try; to try and make it do everything.  
  
And Sonny hadn't been near a piano for over a year. And he wasn't on much better terms with his life, not the life that stretched before him now. He and the piano stammered, started one way, got scared, stopped; started another way, panicked, marked time, started again; then seemed to have found a direction, panicked again, got stuck. And the face I saw on Sonny I'd never seen before. Everything had been burned out of it, and, at the same time, things usually hidden were being burned in, by the fire and fury of the battle which was occurring in him up there.  
  
Yet, watching Creole's face as they neared the end of the first set, I had the feeling that something had happened, something I hadn't heard. Then they finished, there was scattered applause, and then, without an instant's warning, Creole started into something else, it was almost sardonic, it was *Am I Blue*? And, as though he commanded, Sonny began to play. Something began to happen. And Creole let out the reins. The dry, low, black man said something awful on the drums, Creole answered, and the drums talked back. Then the horn insisted, sweet and high, slightly detached perhaps, and Creole listened, commenting now and then, dry, and driving, beautiful and calm and old. Then they all came together again, and Sonny was part of the family again. I could tell this from his face. He seemed to have found, right there beneath his fingers, a damn brand-new piano. It seemed that he couldn't get over it. Then, for a while, just being happy with Sonny, they seemed to be agreeing with him that brand-new pianos certainly were a gas.  
  
Then Creole stepped forward to remind them that what they were playing was the blues. He hit something in all of them, he hit something in me, myself, and the music tightened and deepened, apprehension began to beat the air. Creole began to tell us what the blues were all about. They were not about anything very new. He and his boys up there were keeping it new, at the risk of ruin, destruction, madness, and death, in order to find new ways to make us listen. For, while the tale of how we suffer, and how we are delighted, and how we may triumph is never new, it always must be heard. [There isn't any other tale to tell, it's the only light we've got in all this darkness.](https://genius.com/James-baldwin-sonnys-blues-annotated#note-5114959)  
  
And this tale, according to that face, that body, those strong hands on those strings, has another aspect in every country, and a new depth in every generation. Listen, Creole seemed to be saying, listen. Now these are [Sonny's blues](https://genius.com/James-baldwin-sonnys-blues-annotated#note-3930992). He made the little black man on the drums know it, and the bright, brown man on the horn. Creole wasn't trying any longer to get Sonny in the water. He was wishing him Godspeed. Then he stepped back, very slowly, filling the air with the immense suggestion that Sonny speak for himself.  
  
Then they all gathered around Sonny and Sonny played. Every now and again one of them seemed to say, amen. Sonny's fingers filled the air with life, his life. But that life contained so many others. And Sonny went all the way back, he really began with the spare, flat statement of the opening phrase of the song. Then he began to make it his. It was very beautiful because it wasn't hurried and it was no longer a lament. I seemed to hear with what burning he had made it his, and what burning we had yet to make it ours, how we could cease lamenting. [Freedom lurked around us and I understood, at last, that he could help us to be free if we would listen, that he would never be free until we did.](https://genius.com/James-baldwin-sonnys-blues-annotated#note-5114947) Yet, there was no battle in his face now, I heard what he had gone through, and would continue to go through until he came to rest in earth. He had made it his: that long line, of which we knew only Mama and Daddy. And he was giving it back, as everything must be given back, so that, passing through death, it can live forever. I saw my mother's face again, and felt, for the first time, how the stones of the road she had walked on must have bruised her feet. I saw the moonlit road where my father's brother died. And it brought something else back to me, and carried me past it, I saw my little girl again and felt Isabel's tears again, and I felt my own tears begin to rise. And I was yet aware that this was only a moment, that the world waited outside, as hungry as a tiger, and that trouble stretched above us, longer than the sky.  
  
Then it was over. Creole and Sonny let out their breath, both soaking wet, and grinning. There was a lot of applause and some of it was real. In the dark, the girl came by and I asked her to take drinks to the bandstand. There was a long pause, while they talked up there in the indigo light and after awhile I saw the girl put a Scotch and milk on top of the piano for Sonny. He didn't seem to notice it, but just before they started playing again, he sipped from it and looked toward me, and nodded. Then he put it back on top of the piano. For me, then, as they began to play again, [it glowed and shook above my brother's head like the very cup of trembling.](https://genius.com/James-baldwin-sonnys-blues-annotated#note-2313867)

**Day 4**

Students read and take notes on “Bad Girls” by Joyce Carol Oates (2003).

Teacher leads a debate style conversation (or a mock trial) about what really happened and if Isaak Drumm is innocent. Consider the following questions:

Why is the reason for the narrative mode of the story?

What is the significance of appearances in the story?

What do the girls discover as they go through Isaak Drumm’s apartment?

How does Orchid react to seeing Isaak Drumm in Rochester?

Is he innocent?

How are the girls impacted by moving?

What role does class play in the story?

**Day 5**

Students read and take notes on “A Hunger Artist” by Franz Kafka (1922). Students should note where the narrative voice takes on the voice and thoughts of the hunger artist.

Students work in pairs to discuss the story. They then write a significant quote on a piece of paper using markers. They then use the projector to show the quote and present an interpretation of the quote to the class. The rest of the students take notes on the presentations on the handout.

Questions to consider:

What does “professional fasting” symbolize?

Why is there a clock in the cage?  What does it represent?

How is the hunger artist an artist?

What is purpose of the Biblical allusion to 40 days?  Is this a spiritual act?

What does the audience represent?

Why do people lose interest in the hunger artist?

What motive does the hunger artist have to fast?

What does the panther represent?

**Day 6**

Students read and take notes on “Together and Apart” by Virginia Woolf (1925). Students should underline and identify when the 3rd person narration takes on the voice of Mr. Serle or Ms. Arming (or both). Students can then create a t-chart graphic organizer on the board with quotes from each character (in the 3rd person).

Final discussion questions:

What is the significance of the title?

What kind of thoughts do Mr. Serle and Ms. Arming have as they talk?

How do Mr. Serle and Ms. Arming feel about each other and do their feelings change?

What is the narrative mode of this short story and what is the purpose of it?

**Day 12**

PROMPT:

Pick one of the short stories we read in class and explain the reason for the narrative mode of the story.  You may also compare stories.   What essential information in the story do we not know and why do we not know it?  What information do the characters not know and how do they try to understand the full story?  Why is the point of view important in the story?

“Together and Apart” by Virginia Woolf

“Sonny’s Blues” by James Baldwin

“Bad Girls” by Joyce Carol Oates,

“The Hunger Artist” by Franz Kafka

“Together and Apart” by Virginia Woolf

**Day 7 and 8**

[optional activity if you have the following texts, online short stories, or a set of any anthology of short stories]:

*Norton Anthology of Short Fiction*

*Introduction to Fiction*

*A Pocket of Short Stories*

*Short*: *An International Anthology of Five Centuries of Short-Short Stories, Prose Poems, Brief Essays, and Other Short Prose Forms*

Students pick and then read a short story. They then pick a passage worthy of a close reading.   In groups, students pick the best passage from the group (they may decide to read the same short story), type it up or take a picture of it, discuss the passage, and then present their close reading to the class. Before presenting, they should present the context of the passage and then read the passage out loud.

Directions for the close reading:

Provide the title and author of the story and the context of the passage:  What happens before and after the passage?  Why is it an important moment?  Are there metaphors, symbols, sensory imagery or similes that add to the meaning of the passage? What is the narrative mode and why is it the narrative mode?  What ideas, emotions, or thoughts develop in the passage? What is the tone (emotions of the writer/speaker) of the passage?  What is the mood or atmosphere?  Who is the protagonist of the story and does the passage speak to their development?

**Day 9, 10, and 11**

[If you decide not to do the Dubliners activity below, here is a prompt to write a short story:

Write a short story. Imagine the events and plot of the story (consider the entire life story or backstory of the characters) and then decide on the narrator and what information they do and don’t know. What’s the full reality of the story and what’s the reality presented by the narrator?]

[*Dubliners,* by James Joyce](https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2814/2814-h/2814-h.htm):

https://www.gutenberg.org/files/2814/2814-h/2814-h.htm

Free website to create a short 2-minute video: www.wevideo.com

Remind students to shoot in landscape (not portrait), and to be mindful of the sound quality and the light.

Students can work in four groups to read and take notes on one story each from *Dubliners* by James Joyce, or the entire class can read four different stories (I suggest “An Encounter”, “Araby”, “Eveline” and “A Little Cloud”). The groups will discuss the story and the plot, and then create a modern adaptation of the story by writing a short story or creating a film set in the current year and town where they live.

Short Story/Film Prompt:

Write a short story (1 page minimum) or create a film that modernizes *Dubliners*. Start with a quote from *Dubliners*. Consider writing in the style of James Joyce. You must use the town you live in as your setting – consider it’s culture, geography, politics (class, race, religion), institutions (schools, businesses), and people. Put your protagonist in a similar type of situation to the character in *Dubliners*. Also consider: narrative mode, thematic and character development, and the title. Imagine your character’s experiences before and after the events in your story.

Topics:

“The Sisters” (childhood and religion)

“An Encounter” (cutting school)

“Araby” (young love)

“Eveline” (leaving home for love)

“After the Race” (entertainment, sports)

“Two Gallants” (two teenage boys)

“The Boarding House” (mother and daughter)

“A Little Cloud” (reunion of two old friends)

“Counterparts” (work, social, home life)

“Clay” (single female)

“A Painful Case” (affair)

“Ivy Day in the Committee Room” (political conversation)

“A Mother” (mother, father, daughter)

“Grace” (bars, religion)

“The Dead” (family gathering, married life)

Here are discussion questions for each short story:

“The Sisters” What was “wrong” with Father Flynn?

“An Encounter” What does the man the boys meet represent? How is this a story about education?

“Araby” What is the nature of childhood and adulthood? Why doesn’t the narrator buy the girl a gift?

“Eveline” Was Eveline’s decision wise?

“After the Race” What makes the characters so happy and energized?

“Two Gallants” How do Lenehan and Corley talk about and treat girls?

“The Boarding House” Does Mr. Doran love Polly?

“A Little Cloud” Does Chandler want Gallaher’s life?

“Counterparts” Why does Farrington beat his son?

“Clay” What does the Hallow Eve game represent?

“A Painful Case” Why doesn’t Mr. Duffy pursue a relationship with Mrs. Sinico?

“Ivy Day in the Committee Room” How do the characters talk about politics?

“A Mother” What role does gender play in the story?

“Grace” What relationship do Kernan’s friends have with Catholicism?

“The Dead” What is the problem in Gretta and Gabriel’s relationship? Do they love each other?

Adaptation of *Dubliners* to Short Story or Film

Story in *Dubliners*:

Idea for modernizing story (setting, characters, plot):

Description of scenes (plot, dialogue, key lines):

Take notes:

“Sonny’s Blues” by James Baldwin (1957)

**“Bad Girls” by Joyce Carol Oates (2003**)

**“A Hunger Artist” by Franz Kafka (1922)**

**“Together and Apart” by Virginia Woolf (1925)**

***Dubliners* by James Joyce**