Analyze Character’s Point of View

A reader’s experience of fiction is sharpened through analyzing narrative points of view—for example, first person or third person, omniscient or limited omniscient. But the term point of view may also refer to the characters’ attitudes and the ways they respond to events in a story. When students identify and analyze point of view in both ways, they deepen their understanding of characters and events as well as the main problem and solution, all of which are central to comprehension. As students grapple with the complexities of longer texts, give them the proper tools to think about narrative point of view and character perspective. Explicitly define academic vocabulary, and engage students with comparing multiple points of view in order to determine the narrator’s effect on the telling of the story.

Three Ways to Teach

Distinguish Narrative Points of View 20–30 minutes

Teach students the academic vocabulary they need to distinguish narrative points of view.

Review that a narrator is the person telling the story, and explain that the narrator’s point of view can have a big effect on the way readers hear a story. Then display the following chart, and review it with students. If possible, provide examples of familiar texts to help define each type of narrator.

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<th>Narrator</th>
<th>Knowledge of Characters and Events</th>
<th>Example</th>
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| First Person      | • Knows his or her own thoughts and actions  
|                   | • Knows what he or she is told by other characters                                                 | I saw that the elderly man dropped his keys when he got off the bus. It wasn’t my stop, but I knew what I had to do. |
| Third Person      | • Knows and reports on what characters say and do; may know characters’ thoughts and feelings  
|                   | • Can give readers information the characters do not know                                           | The elderly man dropped his keys when he got off the bus. It wasn’t Roberto’s stop, but he started toward the door anyhow. |
| Omniscient        | • Knows everything about the characters—their actions, thoughts, and feelings  
|                   | • Knows the background of the story; can tell readers some things that the characters may not know  
|                   | • Can update the reader on events that happened prior to or outside the events of the story       | The elderly man didn’t realize he had dropped his keys when he got off the bus. Roberto hesitated for a moment because it wasn’t his stop, but he knew what he had to do. |
| Limited Omniscient| • Knows everything about one character’s actions, thoughts, and feelings                            | Roberto saw that the elderly man had dropped his keys when he got off the bus. It wasn’t his stop, but Roberto worried that the man might not be able to get into his home. |
Distinguish Narrative Points of View  

Play quick games with students to reinforce each narrator’s unique knowledge of characters and events. Choose an event that took place in your classroom to ensure that all students have equal knowledge of it. Then model describing the event from a particular narrative point of view. Have students identify the point of view and explain why they chose their answers.

Finally, guide a discussion about the effect of each type of narrator. For instance, ask, *What is a drawback to having a limited omniscient narrator? What can you learn from a first-person narrator that a third-person narrator might not be able to tell?*

Compare Points of View  

Help students learn that one way readers analyze point of view is by comparing how different characters see the same event.

- Use a brief example to demonstrate. Say, *Suppose I gave you a long study sheet to fill out over the weekend so that you would be well-prepared for Monday’s test, but you already had plans to spend time with friends. How would you describe the assignment? (It is unfair and boring.) How do you think I would describe the assignment? (It is a good way to learn and to study for the test.)*

- Use both answers to explain point of view. Say, *Even though we’re both talking about the same thing—the homework assignment—we view it differently. Another way to say this is that we have separate points of view.*

- Display the term *point of view* and say, *Point of view is the way a particular person feels about, or views, a situation. When we read, we must think about how the narrator views situations because it affects the way the story is told.*

- Revisit your example once more to emphasize that if students told a story about the assignment, they would likely make you seem unfair; but if you told the story, you would make yourself seem thoughtful and concerned about students doing well.

- Read aloud a brief passage from a current text that focuses on a particular event, and model comparing two characters’ views of the event. Point to evidence in the text that supports your thoughts. The following example is based on *Little Women,* by Louisa May Alcott.

  *When Amy begs Jo to take her to the play, Jo says Amy cannot go because she was not invited. Let’s look at this through each character’s eyes. Jo is older and Amy is her little sister. Jo has been invited to do something nice and grown-up with people her age and she probably does not want her little sister tagging along and bothering her. Amy, on the other hand, feels that Jo is being selfish by saying no. She feels that not being invited is a personal insult and that Jo is only saying no to be mean.*

- Have students work with partners to compare characters’ viewpoints in other events. Provide the following prompts to guide their thinking about characters’ points of view.

  *What is the event taking place? Who are the characters involved? How are the characters involved similar to one another? How are they different? Do these differences cause the characters to see this event differently? How so? Does the text give us any clues, prior to this event, about how each character thinks or feels?*
Consider Character’s View of Theme  30–45 minutes

**Connect to Writing** Extend students’ understanding of point of view by having them explore the central message from the viewpoint of different characters. Identify with students the central idea, or theme, of a text. Then have them write a paragraph to examine one character’s view of that statement. To sharpen their understanding, have students write from the character’s point of view. Remind students to include evidence from the story to support their ideas. Provide the following prompts to help students organize their ideas.

- Would the character agree or disagree with the central message?
- What experiences shape the character’s view of the central message?
- How might the character’s view of this central message be different from that of another character?
- If the character would not agree with the central message, what statement might he or she suggest instead?

**Check for Understanding**

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<td>difficulty grasping multiple points of view</td>
<td>using scenes to help students assume different perspectives. Display a picture, such as a crowded city street. Work with students to understand what they might see through the eyes of various people in the picture.</td>
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