

Words - The Tools of the Novelist

Similar to when we looked at the nuts and bolts of drama and the techniques that are adopted by a dramatist, a review of prose fiction reveals that the novelist's craft is hinged on **words**. Where the dramatist can utilise costume, sound, props, lighting and music for stage presentation and effect, the novelist on the other hand engages the reader through words. The novelist invites the readers to embark on an interpretive journey to bring life to characters and the story. How is this done?

Novels are thus built on six major pillars or building blocks:

1. **Plot** - the chronological series of events or details or happenings in the story;
2. **Themes** - the major ideas discussed in the story;
3. **Characters** - the speakers in the story (can be people or animals);
4. **Setting** - the time, place, scenery associated with the story;
5. **Conflict** - opposing forces discussed in the story. It can be between two characters, between an individual and society/environment or within the individual.
6. **Style** - the diction or choice of words, the imagery, the voice, point of view used in the novel.

The narrative technique is the important device that propels the storyline in a novel. It allows for **flashback** (looking in the past to supply more information) and **foreshadowing** (foretelling the future) to fill particular gaps in the storyline. In some cases information is withheld to create **suspense**. The angle from which the story is told is considered as the point of view. The point of view becomes directly related to how informed the perspective will be when the story is told. Generally stories are told from the perspective of the **first person narrator** or the **third person narrator**.

The first person narrator is usually associated with a person telling the story who refers to himself or herself as "I" or sometimes collectively as "**We**". He or she tells the story from his or her impressions and can be somewhat limited. On the other hand, the third person narrator or the **omniscient narrator** presents an all-knowing perspective. This perspective allows the reader to examine the psyche of the characters and the situations that face them. We are able to fully understand the characters' background and what motivates them. There are also instances when the omniscient third person narrator can be limited. The narrator's knowledge, in this case, is limited to just one of the characters in the novel - that

character that the narrator knows intimately.

Did you know that a writer can opt to end a story deliberately leaving a main character in a threatening situation? This dramatic concept/style is known as a **cliffhanger**. What takes place next is left to the reader's imagination.