

College Prep ELA: Modernist Narrative Structure & Stream of Consciousness



Use the matching sheet ID when checking answers.

Read the excerpt below adapted from Virginia Woolf's modernist masterpiece *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). Analyze how Woolf utilizes free indirect discourse and shifting temporal awareness.

1. How does Woolf's structural choice to transition seamlessly from Clarissa's sensory memory of Bourton ('What a lark! What a plunge!') to London street traffic ('waiting for Durtnall's van to pass') challenge traditional Victorian narrative conventions?

Answer: B. It dismantles rigid chronological plot progression in favor of psychological temporality, where past memory and present sensation coexist simultaneously in human consciousness.

Modernist literature subverts linear chronological time by mimicking the natural fluidity of the human mind, blending vivid sensory memories with immediate physical reality.

2. In the second paragraph, the narrative perspective fluidly slips from Clarissa's private thoughts into the external observations of her neighbor Scrope Purvis ('A charming woman, Scrope Purvis thought her...'). This literary technique is termed:

Answer: B. Free indirect discourse / fluid focalization, blurring the boundaries between narrator, protagonist, and bystander

Free indirect discourse allows the third-person narrator to inhabit the interior emotional and perceptive worlds of multiple characters without formal dialogue tags or artificial transitions.

3. The contrast between the joyful exuberance of 'What a lark! What a plunge!' and the ominous premonition 'that something awful was about to happen' primarily foreshadows:

Answer: A. The psychological trauma, mortality, and existential alienation lingering across European society in the immediate aftermath of World War I

Woolf juxtaposes vibrant sensory appreciation of life with an underlying dread of trauma and mortality, reflecting the psychological scars of post-WWI society embodied later in the shell-shocked Septimus Smith.

Identify one piece of evidence from paragraph 1 or 2 that supports the psychological interiority of Clarissa:

Exemplar Evidence: Clarissa notes the air was "chill and sharp and yet solemn, feeling as she did, that something awful was about to happen."

How does Woolf's narrative technique reflect the post-war psychological climate?

Exemplar Reflection: Woolf demonstrates the fluid nature of memory and psychological interiority amidst post-WWI London.