



## 1

# Different voices – different times

Have you ever described something only to have someone else say it didn't happen like that at all? Books let us experience action, adventures, dilemmas and dramas as characters or narrators tell their stories. In this unit you'll experience different voices telling their stories and create the voice of a character yourself.

**Vocabulary to learn and use:** prologue, preface, perspective, omniscient, ancient, portray, authentic, homograph, rumour, vole, weasel, heron

## 1 What is a prologue?

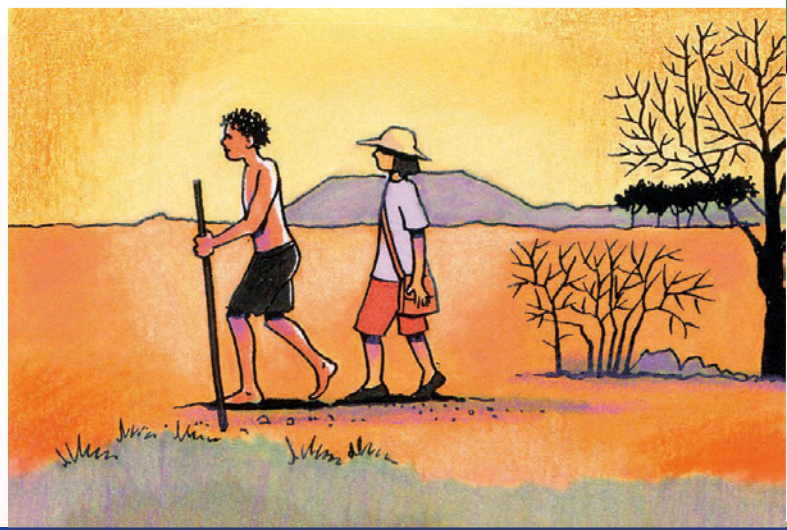
**A**   When tales start with *Once upon a time*, we know what sort of story to expect. But what other techniques can be used to begin stories?

- 1 Read the first paragraph of a library book or your reading book.
  - Does it set a scene or introduce a character?
  - Does it leave you curious to know more?
- 2 Read this opening paragraph of a story.
  - a What images set the scene?
  - b What is the feeling in this opening paragraph?
  - c Is the narrator looking forward or back? How can you tell?
  - d What is your opinion of this opening? Does it make you want to read on?

## The Middle of Nowhere

The piano arrived too late to stop the sky falling in. If it had come earlier, things might have ended on a sweet note. As it was, everything was jangled, unstrung, struck dumb.

*Geraldine McCaughrean*



**B**   Some books begin with a prologue. Work with a talk partner.

- 1 Where do you think the prologue comes in a book?
- 2 What role could it play?
- 3 Does the prologue below match your ideas? How?

## Language focus

The word *prologue* comes from an ancient Greek word, *πρόλογος* (*prológos*), which is made from *pro* ('before') and *lógos* ('word').

pro

logue

## The River Singers

### Prologue

The rumour spread from burrow to burrow down the length of the Great River. The females, eyeing each other over their boundaries, commented on it in hushed tones. The males spoke of it with raised chins and defiant looks, before moving on and away to their own business. The rumour told of a new danger to the Folk. It told of a horror which came in the night. It told of the Great River stripped bare of her people, of entire colonies gone. It told of the end of their world.

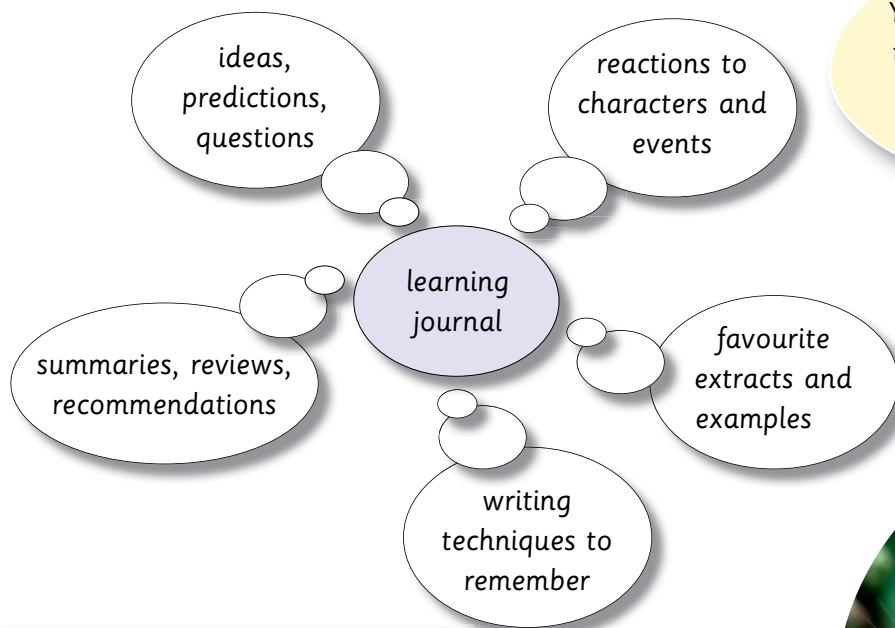
But perhaps, they thought, a rumour is all it was. The ancient enemies – the fox, heron, weasel – had always been there, awaiting the unwary or unlucky. And still the Folk prospered. The Great River sang, her grasses were plentiful, and her waters were warm and bustling with life. No, perhaps rumours were only rumours and the lives of the Folk would continue as before. But even so the mothers turned an eye to their young, and slept more lightly than they had. And the males scented the breeze more carefully before straying into the open, ran more quickly, fed more watchfully.

Sylvan and the others, nestling in their chamber, knew nothing of the rumours. They knew nothing of the outside. They knew their mother, the scents of their home, and the rhythms of the Great River. They knew hunger which could be quenched with milk. But one day they would learn that sometimes a rumour is more than a rumour. Sometimes a rumour is a life which has yet to come.

Tom Moorhouse

**C** Start a learning journal to record this year's reading, your ideas and writing techniques you encounter and want to remember.

- 1 Add *The River Singers* to your learning journal.
- 2 Make notes on what the prologue suggests about the story.
- 3 List any questions you have about the story.



You can draw and stick things in your learning journal, and use it to practise your ideas.



## 2 Delve into detail

**A** The prologue for *The River Singers* contained important clues about the story to come. How many did you pick up?

- 1 Use these questions to find out how good a detective you are. Use evidence from the text in your answers.
  - a What clues show that the characters are not human?
  - b Who are the 'Folk'?
  - c What could the 'horror' be?
  - d What do you think is behind the rumour?
  - e Who lurks as 'ancient enemies'? Why are they 'ancient'?
  - f Are the Folk still wary? How can you tell?
  - g Why do Sylvan and the others know nothing of the rumours?
  - h What do the last two lines suggest about the rumours?

### Tip

Look in more than one place for answers – scan the whole text for details that build up your ideas.



2 Choose a word to describe the mood of the prologue.

suspense tranquillity foreboding excitement  
menace hilarity anxiety

- a Which words in the text support your choice?
- b How could you change the mood of the prologue?

3 Summarise your predictions about the story in your learning journal. Note the genre and whether you might enjoy the book.

4 Which of these descriptions matches the prologue in *The River Singers*?

- It is a flashback giving the readers clues to help them understand the story events and characters.
- It is a 'flash forward' revealing later events to build suspense – foreshadowing.
- It is spoken by an all-knowing narrator who gives hints of things the characters cannot know.

5 In your own words, explain what a prologue is and suggest why authors might use one.

### How did I do?

- Did I find clues to answer the questions?
- Can I explain what a prologue is?

**B**  **Many words in English come from ancient Greek.**

1 **Pro** has two meanings when it is used as a prefix. Which meaning fits each of these sentences?

**pro** prefix 1 before in time, place or order; 2 favouring or in support of

- a I am very pro-homework because it helps me learn more!
- b The aardvark has a prominent nose – it sticks right out.

2 **Logos** is Greek for 'word'. Many English words have the suffix **ology** or **logy**, meaning 'the study of'. For example, *biology* is the study of living things, because *bio* is Greek for 'life'.



- a Tell a talk partner how the suffixes **ology** and **logy** could be related to *logos* meaning 'word'.
- b Find and list words that end in **logy** or **ology**.



## Did you know?

Some books have a preface where the author explains how the book came to be written. *Preface* comes from the Latin words *pre* ('before') and *fari* ('speak'). An etymological dictionary gives the origins of words. There's an example on page 169.

## 3 Focus on technique

**A**   The *narrative voice* that authors choose helps them present characters and settings in a particular way.



- 1 The prologue of *The River Singers* is written in third person narrative. How can you tell? Discuss examples from the text.
- 2 Scan the prologue for clues about the type of narrator in the prologue.

## Language focus

There are two types of third person narrative.

- The *third person narrator* tells the story from the outside but gives no information that the characters cannot know.
- The **omniscient** *third person narrator* tells the story from the outside but seems to know everything about the characters and events – past, present and future. It often gives clues and comments to the reader.

**omniscient** *adj.* having or seeming to have unlimited knowledge

**B**   Sometimes authors write about things they feel strongly about, such as friendship, loyalty or protecting the environment.

- 1 Do you think you can tell from the prologue what the author of *The River Singers* feels strongly about?
- 2 Is the opinion of the author the same as the opinion of the narrator of the prologue? What makes you think this?
- 3 Should authors let their opinions and feelings come out in a book? Discuss your views.




**C**  **Repetition can make a point or create an atmosphere.**

- 1 Which key word is repeated in the prologue? Why?
- 2 Do you find the repetition in the last paragraph effective? Why?
- 3 Practise describing something by using repetition followed by a contrast. Add it to your learning journal.

**D**  **Most of the prologue is in the same tense; but not all of it is.**

- 1 What tense is it mainly in? Why is this tense often used in narrative?
- 2 Where and why does the tense change? What is the effect?

**E**  **Proper nouns have two important characteristics: they name specific (one of a kind) items and they always begin with a capital letter.**

- 1 Is *folk* a common noun or a proper noun? Check in a dictionary.
- 2 Use *folk* in a sentence to show what it means.
- 3 Why does *Folk* have a capital letter in the prologue? How does this change its meaning?
- 4 Find and explain any other unusually capitalised words in the prologue.

## 4 Write a short prologue

- Flashback to much earlier events?
- Someone looking back long after the events?
- Different narrator perspective?
- Flash forward giving clues about the story?
- Something else?



- Type of book (genre)?
- First or third person narrative?
- Who is in it?
- What happens (summary)?



**Plan and write a prologue for your reading book. Ask yourself questions about your book using the suggestions in the picture on page 11.**

- 1** Jot down notes on what your prologue will include.
- 2** Write a prologue of two or three paragraphs, using some of these techniques:
  - repetition of key words or phrases
  - carefully chosen words to create the mood you want
  - clear narrative voice (third person or omniscient third person)
  - consistent tense (only change it for dramatic effect)
  - variety of short and long sentences.
- 3** Review your paragraphs for flow, check for errors, and make any improvements or corrections.
- 4** Swap prologues with a talk partner. Ask questions and make predictions about your partner's prologue. Did your partner pick up your clues?

**Any volunteers?**

I love prologues that give little hints and clues. Who would like to read out theirs?



## 5 Meet the River Singers

### The River Singers

#### Chapter 1

Setting scene and introducing main character

Expanding on main character, giving clues about his personality

The dawn was grey and the waters quiet. Sylvan was the first awake, lying with his brother and sisters in a pile of cosily intertwined limbs. Their breathing lulled him even as lightness spread up the tunnel and into the chamber, bringing with it the scent of the morning. He yawned. He opened his eyes. He grinned. Today was the day. At last.

Sylvan extracted himself, ignoring the others' sleepy protests, and sat with twitching whiskers at the entrance to the chamber. He should wait for them, he knew. They were supposed to go out all together. But the air stirred with a promise of new things and, with a final glance at his **siblings**, he stole away down the tunnel, paws

Explaining how strongly Sylvan is drawn to explore the river

A change of mood as Sylvan's mother interrupts

padding on the soil. He had known the way for ages now. A left, a right, loop around a knot of roots, then pause at the place where the roof had fallen. One eye to the sky. Quiver. Listen. Check the scents. Then onwards and downwards to the lower places, the entrance to the Great River and the gateway to the world.

With each downward step the light grew brighter and the air fresher, more exhilarating. Another turn, a slight rise. And there she was: the Great River. Her waters, lapping against the family's trampled little platform, were bright through the shade of the tall grasses. She filled him with her vastness, her movement, her song. He felt the stirrings of hunger, the desire to dive, to twist, to flow with her. He hesitated, one forefoot raised, everything urging him out and into the world.

"And what exactly do you think you're doing, young vole?" A paw was on his tail, pinning it to the floor. Sylvan froze. He placed his foot hurriedly back onto the ground. As his mother removed her paw he turned, radiating guilt.

Tom Moorhouse

Sylvan's journey

**sibling** *n.* a sister or a brother



**The beginning of a novel often has a different mood and voice from the prologue.**

- 1 Read the beginning of *The River Singers* aloud in a small group.
  - As you read, identify the narrative voice.
  - Does the voice seem the same as in the prologue?
- 2 a Choose words to describe the mood in the first paragraph.

expectant sombre optimistic fearful buoyant light-hearted  
relaxed enthusiastic mischievous hopeful menacing humorous

- b Find words and phrases in the passage that give clues.

**Example:** *cosily intertwined limbs* - shows that they are relaxed, don't feel threatened and are not worried about sleeping

- 3 Discuss how the idea of night becoming day helps to set the mood.



- 4 In one sentence, summarise the difference between the mood of Chapter 1 and the mood of the prologue.
- 5 Does this story opening match your predictions from reading the prologue? Give examples.

**B**  **Work on your own before comparing answers with a talk partner.**

- 1 When do you find out what kind of animal Sylvan is? What were the clues?
- 2 What does Sylvan want to do?
- 3 Why do you think he is only supposed to go out with the rest of his family?
- 4 Describe in your own words how Sylvan feels about the river.  
Why might he feel this way?

**C**  **The extract describes Sylvan's journey from his chamber to the edge of the Great River.**

- 1 Draw a sketch of the journey, including the details described.
- 2 Add captions to explain the features.
- 3 Use your sketch to retell Sylvan's journey to a talk partner.  
Compare your sketches and retellings.

**Tip**

Use time connectives, such as *first*, *second*, *after that*, *next* and *finally*.

**How did I do?**

- Did I retell a journey using my sketch and compare it with my talk partner's?
- Did I describe Sylvan's journey in the correct sequence?
- Did I use a variety of time connectives?

**6 Phrases and sentences**

**A**  **Authors use a variety of sentence types to make their writing interesting.**

- 1 **a** In a group, discuss what makes a sentence. Develop a definition to share with the class.  
**b** Create a class definition to display on the wall.



- 2** Reorder the words in these sentences to make sense of them.
- a** The fish caught a heron.
  - b** Underground dens live in foxes.
  - c** Adventure began his river in the Sylvan.
  - d** All their rivers lives in live fish.
- 3** Phrases are groups of words, without a verb, that go together to do a job. What could you add to turn each phrase into a sentence?
- a** on the riverbank.
  - b** before his siblings.
  - c** beyond the burrow.
- 4** Choose a phrase from the box to add to the beginning and end of these sentences.

**Tip**

Sentences need a subject and a verb.

at daybreak   on the riverbank   into the river   beyond the burrow  
after breakfast   with beady eyes   in the undergrowth   without his mother

- a** The young voles ventured out.
- b** The fox hid.
- c** Sylvan did not explore.

**B**   **The author uses both phrases and sentences to describe Sylvan's journey, which is highlighted in the extract on page 13.**

- 1** Re-read each part of Sylvan's journey and with a talk partner decide whether it is a phrase or a sentence and say why. For example, *Quiver* is a very short sentence using the command form of the verb.

**Tip**

Command verbs are used for instructions and commands. You don't write the subject – it is implied: *(You) quiver.*

- 2** What is the effect of mixing phrases and sentences, both short and long? (Here's a hint – think about how a water vole would move.)
- 3** Write a short paragraph using a similar technique to describe the journey of another animal.
- Think about how the animal moves.
  - Copy the pattern of phrases and one-word command sentences, choosing words that are suitable for your animal's style of movement.