

all of them rise to the challenge. The visual act of diagramming encourages students who are less comfortable with written and spoken language to get their ideas about a story into a form in which they can literally see what they think. And for students who *are* adept at written or verbal analysis, the assignment requires that they temporarily set aside the tools with which they're comfortable and conceptualize more abstractly how texts function.

When I use this exercise with Virginia Woolf's short story "Slater's Pins Have No Points," I ask students to diagram its structure and then, if they need more prompting, encourage them to think specifically about how time works in the story: it begins and ends in almost the same second, and the entire body of the story consists of flashbacks and mental associations. Some students end up drawing two fixed points connected by squiggly lines or large tangled loops. Others have drawn parallel lines representing "real time" and "internal time" and have added elements suggesting how they're connected. Some have shown external reality as a very small element contained within a much larger figure representing the psychological interpretation of reality. Within the short space of a fifty-minute class period, students can go from being baffled by Woolf's elliptical methods to working out quite successfully how she weaves in and out through time and memory.

For a variation useful for small classes (under fifteen students), you can have each student draw an individual diagram and, again, if you prefer, eliminate the step in which they pass around the drawings. Instead, go straight to asking a few students to share with the whole class. Done in this fashion near the beginning of the class, the exercise is a more concise way of starting off discussion and close reading of the text, rather than a task occupying the entire hour.

.....

Bridges

Joseph Fruscione

A flexible exercise that teaches narrative structure.

Genre: *fiction*

Course Level: *any*

Student Difficulty: *moderate*

Teacher Preparation: *low to medium*

Class Size: *small to medium*

Semester Time: *any*

Writing Component: *in class, optional after class*

Close Reading: *high*

Estimated Time: *45 to 50 minutes*

EXERCISE

Assign any fictional work with an interesting or innovative structure. Novels are best, but short stories with sufficiently complex narrative designs also work nicely. Consider, for example, Joyce's "The Dead" (layers of consciousness and flashback), Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (parallel perspectives in a novel spanning only one day), Melville's "Benito Cereno" (flawed narrative consciousness, flashbacks, and a plot twist), Chopin's *The Awakening* (internal harmony and repetition, layers of memory, and subtle flashbacks), Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (postmodern metafiction with a hybrid structure), or any other work that plays with time and structure but can challenge first-time readers.

In class, you might begin by mapping out on the board with students what appear to be the different sections or larger movements of the work at hand. This part of the exercise can be a quick, general overview of the text's main chapters or sections, or it can be a slow, more careful diagramming of its many structural parts. (A useful starter exercise for "Bridges" could be the abbreviated version of the previous exercise, "Diagram This.") This opening step is not essential, but for introductory classes in which students may not know much about narrative structure, it can be helpful.

Invite students to choose any two consecutive sections, review them quickly, and write in response to this three-part prompt: What is each section doing individually? How are the two narrative pieces linked stylistically or thematically? What is new or clearer through rereading them in sequence? Give students fifteen to twenty minutes for this in-class writing component, which will strengthen and specify the group discussion to follow (the writing component can also function as prewriting for an eventual essay). If you like, you can pair students off and ask them to perform the exercise together, keeping a more casual record of their findings.

After the students have done their rereading and writing, have them share the *what* and *why* of their choices. Encourage them to read out loud the key lines or passages that capture the links they've identified, and help keep them focused on what they most want the class to see about their structural pairing. Highlight those fortuitous moments when students pick the same pairing but draw very different conclusions, or when they choose overlapping sections (one's second piece is another's first)—a happy coincidence that can add considerable momentum to the discussion.

Conclude by posing a set of more general questions about narrative structure and about the exercise itself: How exactly do authors create textual

bridges, and what is their relation to other literary devices like plot, characterization, point of view, or theme? How are a text's internal motifs and connections easier to identify by locating and examining these narrative bridges? What can we learn from this method that we might have missed otherwise?

REFLECTIONS

"Bridges" focuses on the always important, often invisible, and sometimes complex structures of literary narratives. It pointedly directs students' attention to how an author connects and perhaps counterpoints a story's individual pieces to advance a larger unified purpose. Studying a narrative's consecutive clusters helps students identify internal tensions or ironies, explore complementary themes or images, understand narrative pacing or movement, and analyze narration or shifting points of view.

The exercise can work well for eighteenth- or nineteenth-century novels and stories, though I find it tailor-made for modernist texts, in which a narrative's internal transitions or overall cohesiveness may at first strike students as disjointed, even confusing. I have tried it on a number of story collections and novels from the early twentieth century, including Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1923), Ernest Hemingway's *In Our Time* (1925), and William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying* (1930). In Toomer's *Cane*, one student group examined the juxtaposition of "Harvest Song" (a narrative poem) and "Bona and Paul" (a story) to ask why Toomer sequenced, side by side in the collection's urban section, characters of such different cultural and racial experiences. In linking this poem and story of this rich but challenging text, they concluded that Toomer deploys repetition, revision, and region to capture the richness of interracial voices and identities. For Hemingway's *In Our Time*, the juxtaposition of the seemingly different narratives "Indian Camp" and "Chapter 2" ("Minarets stuck up. . .") struck one group as, in truth, variations on a set of common themes: interpersonal struggle, parent-child relations, gender fluidity, and strained childbirth.

Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*—with its fifteen narrators—posed to students a difficult challenge but also offered one of the strongest examples of how authors construct meaning by creating narrative bridges. For example, Vardaman's "My mother is a fish" chapter, placed back-to-back with Cash's methodical, thirteen-step description of making his mother's coffin ("I made it on the bevel," he begins), highlights how Faulkner presents the Bundrens as foils for each other throughout the novel. Here the students argued, quite insightfully, that Faulkner showcases Cash's meticulousness in counterpoint to Vardaman's confusion to illustrate different kinds of grief. I like to end my course section on narrative structure by noting how Toomer, Hemingway, and Faulkner all shared a common mentor, Sherwood Anderson, whose short-story cycle *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) may have influenced their stylistic innovation, flexible handling of time, and broader identity as artists of the avant-garde.

As this example intimates, the exercise can also work progressively. For courses that arrange the readings chronologically, like mine, instructors can revise the exercise and heighten its level of difficulty when they get to later texts: by asking students to connect *three* consecutive sections in one work or by requiring them to make thematic pairings across texts (for example, a race-gender-place juxtaposition in Faulkner might echo yet complicate one from Toomer). I like this cumulative, more advanced version of “Bridges” because it goes beyond a single day and can yield for students deeper critical insights about both period (the avant-garde form of modernist texts) and genre (the forms of fictional works). In my experience, these kinds of fictional texts have worked particularly well because we often approach modernist works in nontraditional ways, while uncovering how fiction can be distinctive in its embrace of nonlinear structure and reading practices.

Intersectional Reading

Maureen Meharg Kentoff

A comparative exercise that examines character through the theory of intersectionality.

Genre: *fiction*
Course Level: *any*
Student Difficulty: *moderate*
Teacher Preparation: *low*
Class Size: *small to medium*
Semester Time: *any*
Writing Component: *none*
Close Reading: *high*
Estimated Time: *45 to 50 minutes*

EXERCISE

Intersectionality is an approach to literary analysis that invites students to consider how a range of identity factors, such as gender, race, nationality, class, sexuality, age, physical ability, corporeality, role, or setting, interact to shape character. Novels with richly rendered social worlds—texts like Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*, Edith Wharton’s *The House of Mirth*, Nella