Activity: Preparing for prose – know the discourse

When candidates present a close reading of a prose piece, there is often a tendency to retell the plot rather than analyse specific prose elements. A strong reading will focus on both ideas and techniques in every paragraph. It is imperative that you understand how prose passages are constructed, so that your reading contains competent analysis. To achieve this, you need to be familiar with a variety of prose concepts and terminology.

Prose terminology	Features	Possible effects
narrative approach	first-person second-person third-person limited third-person omniscient third-person objective multiple narrators character viewpoints	• Position readers to support or reject certain beliefs, attitudes and values. • Give a voice to particular discourses. • Produce irony. • Put readers 'at a distance' from characters and events, or establish emotional closeness. • Seem objective and authoritative.
structural elements	chapter titles the beginning and end of a passage organisation of time shifts of setting oppositions or binaries archetypes	• Support particular values and attitudes. • Establish conflicts between opposing belief systems or ideologies. • Influence the meaning produced. • Invite a reader response.
characters	naming interior monologue choice of verbs for speech connotative words descriptions of appearance actions selection of detail	• Construct an imaginary identity. • Embody stereotypes. • Evoke particular responses. • Undermine or empower particular characters and what they represent. • Invite sympathy or disdain. • Construct oppositions.
setting	geographical physical temporal social cultural economic political	• Establish time. • Function symbolically. • Centralise particular ideas. • Build atmosphere. • Establish a cultural climate. • Contribute to ideas.
stylistic elements	diction syntax sentence organisation figurative language rhetorical devices tone	• Create irony or ambiguity. • Represent particular social groups. • Emphasise emotion (or lack thereof). • Influence readings. • Create imagery. • Construct characters and shape responses to them.