ACTIVITY 2: this extract has been taken from your book An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory Third edition ANDREW BENNETT AND NICHOLAS ROYLE(2004) Stories are everywhere: in movies, sitcoms, cartoons, commercials, poems, newspaper articles, novels.The narrative theorist Peter Brooks has studied ways in which readers' desires are directed towards the end, ways in which narratives are structured towards, or as a series of digressions from, an ending: we are able to read present moments – in literature and, by extension, in life – as endowed with narrative meaning only because we read them in anticipation of the structuring power of those endings that will retrospectively give them the order and significance of plot.Science is composed of stories: astronomy attempts to narrate the beginnings of the universe; geology seeks to tell the story of the formation of mountains and plains, rivers, valleys and lakes; and like Rudyard Kipling's 'Just So' stories, evolutionary psychology purports to tell us the story of how we came to be as we are.But narratives also invariably involve what the narratologist Gerard Genette has called anachronisms – flashbacks, jumps forwards (or prolepses), the slowing down and speeding up of events and other distortions of the linear time–sequence (Genette 1986).These levels have been given different names by different theorists – the Russian formalists call them fabula and sjuzhet; the French structuralists call them either recit (or histoire) and discours, and so on. 'Story', in this sense, involves the events or actions which the narrator would like us to believe occurred, the events (explicitly or implicitly) represented.But in each of these exchanges we are also presented with a kind of strangeness as well: in the context of Eliot's novel, for example, we may reflect on the irony of the fact that what the mother recognizes in her children, what it is in their voice that confirms the persistence of their identity, is something that cannot be heard, a lisp perceived only by the mother.Similarly, while Seamus Heaney's 'bog poems' from North (1975) might dig up buried narratives of victimization, sacrifice and atonement, their lyric tone gives a sense of an individual poet responding, now, to what he sees. The beginning–middle–end sequence of a narrative also tends to emphasize what is known as a teleological progression – the end (in Greek, telos) itself as the place to get to. A lyric poem does not seem to rely on its ending to provide coherence: the end is not typically the place where all will be resolved.Alain Robbe–Grillet's novels, such as The Voyeur (1955) and Jealousy (1957), also recount the 'same' series of events over and over again, but from the 'same' narratorial perspective: each telling, however, is subtly different, thus dissolving our sense of any one, true, narrative of events.Rather than reading such texts simply as exceptions or aberrations, we might consider ways in which they metafictionally reflect on the multiplicity of any narrative – its susceptibility to different readings, its differing narrative perspectives, its shifting senses of place and time.Percy Bysshe Shelley's 'To a Sky–Lark' (1820) recounts no events, but is an effusion of the poet's sense of the bird's 'unpremeditated art' which he attempts both to define and in some ways to reproduce.A text such as Robert Coover's short story 'The Babysitter' from Pricksongs and Descants (1969), for instance, presents several slightly different accounts of what appears to be the same evening from a number of different perspectives: the contradictions and dislocations produced within and between these accounts, however, make it impossible, finally, to determine the precise nature or order of the evening's events.For an excellent, if difficult, argument for the deconstruction of character which challenges the humanist perspective of a unified self and argues for 'an esthetic and ethic of the fragmented self ', see Leo Bersani's important

book A Future for Astyanax: Character and Desire in Literature (1978).Despite this and many other distortions of chronological order, however, Woolf 's text is only readable insofar as it exploits our expectations of narrative sequence. Much of the work in narrative theory has involved attempts to discriminate among different kinds of narrators (first person or third person, objective or subjective, reliable or unreliable, so-called 'omniscient' or not, together with questions concerning his or her 'point of view', his or her 'voice' and so on).Disagreements, arguments, even wars, are often the result of conflicting stories concerning, for example, the rights to a piece of land: the real reason for both the first Gulf War (1991) and the second Gulf War (2003) may have been oil, but the technical justification for going to war turned on the story of who owned or should own a particular piece of Kuwait in the first instance and the existence or otherwise of Weapons of Mass Destruction in the second.One of the ways in which lyric poetry is defined, in fact, is by the absence of any such representation of events – lyric poems characteristically use the present tense and exploit a sense of the presence of the speaker in the act of meditating or speaking.The narrator appears to make his proposal seriously but we necessarily conceive of an 'implied author' who has very different views and motives, and who is making a political point about the immorality of the English government in its attitude towards poverty in Ireland.A very different kind of approach is exemplified in Thomas Docherty's Reading (Absent) Character (1983), which focuses in particular on the nouveau roman and postmodern writing generally, in order to move beyond a 'mimetic' theory of character to one in which characterization is seen as 'a process of reading and writing'.Narrative 55 Likewise, Brooks has elaborated the paradoxical ways in which the denouement or tying up of a story is worked towards through the paradox of digression.Although Jonathan Swift's essay 'A Modest Proposal' (1729) would not usually be considered as a narrative, it does provide one of the classic examples of narratorial irony.J. Hillis Miller's chapter on 'Character' in Ariadne's Thread (1992) brilliantly weaves literary with critical, theoretical and philosophical reflections on character.And ironically, Gloucester is only reunited with Lear thanks to help from his son Edgar, whose voice (disguised as Tom o' Bedlam) Gloucester fails to recognize.The events are recounted more or less chronologically in Joyce's story, in that the order of the telling follows the order of the told: first we learn of Gabriel and Gretta's arrival, then .This suggests that the events recounted span a number of months, but by the end we have the sense that the story follows the wanderings of the narrator's consciousness over only a number of minutes or, at most, hours.Thus, for example, while we may find a novel, film or play frustrating if it contains too many digressions from the main plot, we enjoy the suspense involved in delaying a denouement.But this 'answer' to the question simply parodies those conventional realist endings that seem to clear up our confusions and satisfy our curiosity.As Jonathan Culler has suggested, a fundamental premiss of narratology is that narrative has a double structure: the level of the told (story) and the level of telling (discourse) (Culler 1981).By contrast, texts such as Emily Bronte's Wuthering Heights and Woolf 's 'The Mark on the Wall' move forward and backward in time and shift from the level of telling to that of the told in complex and unnerving ways.Many modernist and postmodernist texts experiment with the relation between these two levels, to denaturalize or defamiliarize our sense of how narratives function.In addition to this linearity, we might consider another important aspect of narrative, namely the relation between teller and listener or reader.The significance

of this proposition is that it redirects our focus from the events or actions themselves to the relationship between the author or teller and the reader or listener.Moreover, it is often very important to discriminate between the narratorial point of view and that of the so-called implied author – a particularly important distinction in certain ironic texts, for example.In this essay, the narrator proposes that in order to deal with poverty and hunger in Ireland and to prevent children of the poor from being a burden to their parents, such children should be sold to the rich as food – a solution that would be 'innocent, cheap, easy, and effectual' (509).Our understanding of the ironic force of the text necessitates a discrimination between the two voices or personae of the narrator and the implied author.In these classical Arabic narratives, Scheherazade has been sentenced to death by the king but is able to stave off her execution by telling him stories.A classic if somewhat reductive account of character may be found in Chapters 3 and 4 of Forster's Aspects of the Novel (1976), first published in 1927.For many centuries, millions of people have come to understandings about their place in the world, the meaning of their lives and the nature of politics, ethics and justice through stories about the lives of Christ, Buddha or the prophet Mohammed.The narrative of class struggle and emancipation from peasant society to the dictatorship of the proletariat has had a profound influence in the past 150 years.To say that Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Marxism and psychoanalysis involve stories is not to suggest that they are merely fictive.By contrast, lyric poems, for example, are not typically thought to express or depict a series of temporally ordered series of events.Texts such as Virginia Woolf 's 'The Mark on the Wall' (1921) dislodge our sense of temporal sequence.But as the novelist E.M. Forster recognizes in Aspects of the Novel (1927), the temporal ordering of events is not the whole story.While the first 'narrative' includes two events related in time, he proposes, the second includes another 'connection', the crucial element of causality.The logical or causal connections between one event and another constitute fundamental aspects of every narrative.(We may find out in more detail below, in Chapter 32.) Brooks and others have suggested that narratives move from a state of equilibrium or stasis through a disturbance of this stability, and back to a state of equilibrium at the end.To say that the mark is a snail is an example of what is called an aporia – an impassable moment or point in narrative, a hermeneutic abyss.Thus Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre and Joyce's 'The Dead', for example, present the events of the narrative more or less in the order that they are alleged to have occurred.In both of these examples we have what appear to be confirmations of the persistence of identity, expressed in the singular or peculiar nature (the 'trick') of a person's voice.In the example from Shakespeare, on the other hand, it is difficult for us not to be aware of the terrible precariousness of recognition and, by implication, of identity: Gloucester may believe that he recognizes, and may indeed recognize, the trick of the king's voice, but we are all too aware of the fact that he can never again see the king, never confirm the king's identity by sight.Roland Barthes suggests that falling in love involves telling ourselves stories about falling in love: in this sense, he argues, 'mass culture is a machine for showing desire' (Barthes 1990c, 136).The historian Hayden White has given special emphasis to the fact that history is written in the form of certain kinds of narrative, that the task of the historian is to 'charge .And in the twentieth century, Sigmund Freud produced a new and scandalous story about the nature of childhood.Indeed, these distortions themselves can only be conceived against a background of linear chronological sequence.They produce

quite complex routes to a revelation of whodunnit, routes both determined and detected by the logic of cause and effect.'Suspense' movies, thrillers and so on, in particular, exploit this strangely masochistic pleasure that we take in delay.One of the paradoxical attractions of a good story, in fact, is often understood to be its balancing of digression, on the one hand, with progression towards an end, on the other.A part of the equilibrium that endings apparently offer is the satisfaction of epistemophilia, the reader's desire to know.And because of the conventional emphasis on hermeneutic discovery at the end, endings tend to be particularly over-determined places: we look to the end to provide answers to questions that the text has raised.In modernist narratives such as Woolf 's 'The Mark on the Wall', however, these answers tend to be withheld or else treated ironically.56 An introduction to literature, criticism and theory involves the way in which these events are recounted, how they get told, the organization of the telling.Everything that we have said about narrative up to this point has concerned the sense of its linearity: narrative involves a linear series of actions connected in time and through causality.Indeed, rather than appealing to the idea of a sequence of events, Barbara Herrnstein Smith has argued that we need to ground our understanding of narrative in terms of 'someone telling someone else that something happened' (Smith 1981, 228).In George Eliot's Daniel Deronda (1876), a character called Mrs Meyrick observes that 'A mother hears something like a lisp in her children's talk to the very last' (423).In Shakespeare's King Lear (1605), the blinded Gloucester recognizes Lear from his voice: 'The trick of that voice I do well remember; / Is't not the King?'Rather, it is to register the fact that there are few aspects of life which are not bound up with strategies and effects of narrative.One of the most fundamental distinctions in narrative theory is that between 'story' and 'discourse'.Narrative 57 sense of the character, trustworthiness and objectivity of the figure who is narrating.A consideration of the relationship between teller and listener or reader leads in turn to questions of power and property.What makes A Thousand and One Nights so intriguing for narrative theorists has to do with its enactment of forms of power.For a lucid discussion of character in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century novel, see Martin Price, Forms of Life (1983).On the question of identification in psychoanalysis and literature, see Diana Fuss, Identification Papers (1995).We all make use of stories every day and our lives are shaped by stories – stories about what happened in our dreams or at the dentist, stories about how we fell in love or the origins of the universe, stories about war and about peace, stories to commemorate the dead and to confirm a sense of who we are.Stories always have something to tell us about stories themselves: they always involve self-reflexive and metafictional dimensions.Academic, 'objective' or 'scientific' .Narrative 53 discourses are constructed as stories.The simplest way to define narrative is as a series of events in a specific order – with a beginning, a middle and an end.We might think about James Joyce's short story 'The Dead', from Dubliners (1914), to illustrate the point.Put very simply, the story begins with the arrival of Gabriel and his wife Gretta at a party, tells of the events of the party and the couple's walk home, and ends as they fall asleep in their hotel.Narrative, however, is characterized by its foregrounding of a series of events or actions which are connected in time.54 An introduction to literature, criticism and theory of the party, and finally of the hotel.Forster makes a memorable distinction between 'The king died and then the queen died' on the one hand, and 'The king died, and then the queen died of grief ' on the other (Forster 1976, 87).The first simply lists two events, while the second

provides the thread of a narrative by showing how they are related.By contrast, we often think of a good story as one that we just cannot put down, a novel we compulsively read to find out what happens at the end.The end of a narrative, the state of equilibrium, occurs when the criminal is discovered, when the lovers get married, or when the tragic hero dies.The ending of Woolf 's story is paradoxical, in fact, in that it resolves the question with which the story starts out – what is the mark on the wall?In fact, of course, these two levels can never be entirely separated, and much narrative theory has been concerned to describe ways in which they interact.As Jonathan Culler has put it, 'To tell a story is to claim a certain authority, which listeners grant' (Culler 1997, 89).Moreover there is something strange in the idea that an adult's speech should be, in a dream-like or hallucinatory fashion, haunted by the past in this way.The story begins: 'Perhaps it was the middle of January in the present year' (Woolf 1982, 41).Time, then, is crucial to narrative.Detective stories rely, above all, on our expectation and desire for connection.In addition, this end is characteristically the place of revelation and understanding.Our epistemophilia proves to be perverted.Our understanding of a text is pervaded by our .One of the most famous storytellers is Scheherazade from A Thousand and One Nights.As Ross Chambers proposes, 'To tell a story is to exercise power' (Chambers 1984, 50).(IV, vi, 106–7).In this chapter, we propose to circle around the following propositions: 1.The telling of a story is always bound up with power, with questions of authority, property and domination.Stories are multiple: there is always more than one story.events' with 'a comprehensible plot structure' (White 1978, 92).What is important in this description is the temporal ordering of what happens.(Brooks 1984, 94) .– by telling us that it is a snail.So what if it is a snail?If we ask what Woolf 's story is 'about', we realize that it is about itself as a story.'Discourse', on the other hand, .Stories are everywhere.2.Not only do we tell stories, but stories tell us: if stories are everywhere, we are also in stories.3.4.5...What happens at the end of 'The Dead' is determined by what happened earlier.An obvious example would be detective stories.But what is this end which we so much desire?The ending tells everything, it gives us 'the answer', and it tells us nothing: it is not for this 'answer' that we have read the story.By ending her story each night at a particularly exciting point, she is able to delay her death for another day because the king wants to find out what happens next..9.Voice Nothing is stranger, or more familiar, than the idea of a voice.