

AQA AS Level English Literature Activities and Exam Practice

Michael Frayn's

Spies

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(Sample pages)

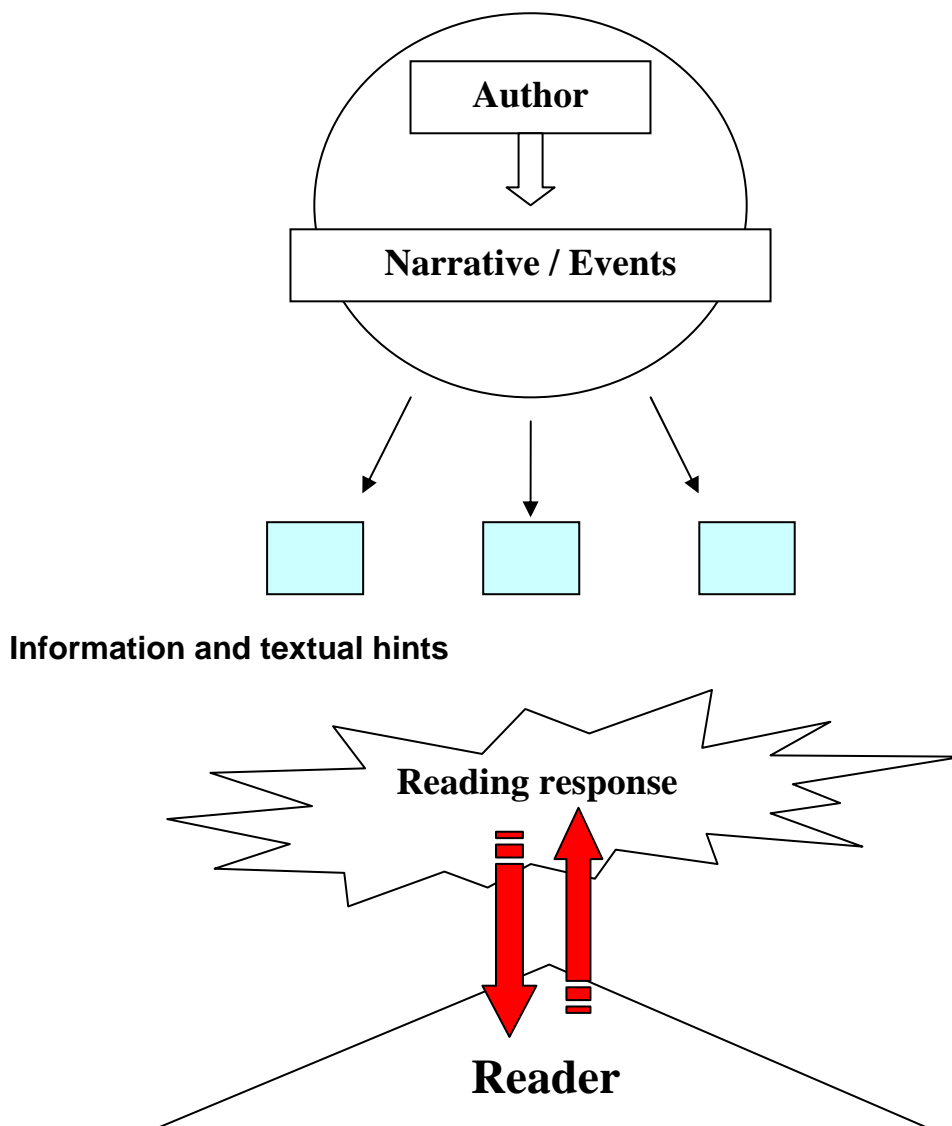
Relationships

Chapter 2

The key to understanding how a story works often lies in the reader's understanding of the pivotal relationships in the text. Characters often have complex relationships which are the result of many different influences.

Relationships can be complicated by factors such as social class, education, personal desires or ambitions and the relationship between Stephen and Keith certainly has this element of complexity. Of course the other

ingredients in this complex mix are the author and you the reader who will bring specific values and experiences to the writing and reading of the text. Your response to the text and Keith and Stephen's relationship will also depend on your reading of other material and its impact on your understanding of *Spies*. So your analysis of the relationships in a book may depend on a process which looks something like this:



Stephen and Keith

The author focuses the attention of the reader on the interaction between the boys from the early chapters of the book. A link between Keith and Stephen, as the mature narrator, is established in Chapter 1. However, it's in Chapter 2 that we're given more information about them.

Although the information points the reader to an understanding of the individual characters it does also provide a key to understanding how the boys relate to each other. The information about Stephen and Keith is fed to the reader in a number of ways:

- Through direct statements made by the narrator, as the older Stephen and through the eyes of his younger self
- Through references to the setting i.e. their homes, their rooms
- Through descriptions of their clothes
- Through a focus on the way each boy behaves, with each other when they play and with each other's families, other children and adults
- Through references to their families, their behaviour and attitudes.

The narrator describes Keith and Stephen for the first time in Chapter 2. There is a clear description of the way the boys are dressed (pages 14–15).

'Stephen waits at the front door. Now, too late, he becomes aware of his appearance. He pulls up the sagging sock, and bends down to tie the untied tennis shoe.'

Compare

'His [Keith's] grey socks are neatly pulled up to half an inch below his knees, and his brown leather sandals are neatly buckled.'

The description is from the Stephen's viewpoint, so what we learn is how *Stephen* feels about himself in relation to Keith.

The details about Stephen and Keith allow the reader to understand that this is an unusual relationship and friendship, given the differences in their background and character. Look at the example given in the grid in **Activity 1** and see how conclusions can be drawn from the simple descriptions of the boy's clothes. As you study Chapter 2, collect further information which will help you to develop a clear picture of the way

the boys interact. Some details have already been selected for you. Complete these and use the blank grid provided to collect more details about Stephen and Keith.

Remember you should focus on their relationship

In order to understand their interaction you should prepare by considering the social and political context of 1940's Britain and consider the impact this has on their behaviour throughout this chapter and the story as a whole.