

# The Novel

## ASSIGNMENT 8

Read the following “Introduction to the Novel” and the background to *The Call of the Wild* by Jack London. Then read pages 1–24 in the novel. When you finish your reading, study the analysis that follows.

### Introduction to the Novel

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Simply put, a *novel* is a long story. The novel and the short story share certain similarities, and yet each of these common elements is used differently. Let’s examine some of the characteristics of these two genres.

#### Plot

Short stories tend to focus on one particular episode. For example, Bernice bobbed her hair, and Paul went to New York City. Novels, on the other hand, include many such episodes.

Novels may also include *subplots*, which are like stories within the novels. For example, if the short story “Paul’s Case” were a novel, Cather might have written a long biography of Paul’s father, devoted chapters to describing New York City, and so forth.

Each episode can be described in infinitely greater detail as well. Cather devotes two paragraphs to Paul’s night in the basement. The freedom offered by the novel might have inspired her to devote a whole chapter to Paul’s reflections that night.

#### Character

Short stories generally include a limited number of characters, and the protagonists are often present in each scene, or at least they’re the subject of each scene. Novels usually include many more characters than short stories, and each of these characters tends to be more fully developed. Characters in novels may have lives and stories of their own.



## Action

Like the short story, the novel is made up of rising action, a climax, and falling action. But to sustain interest over so many pages, most novels usually have a number of climaxes, or *subclimaxes*. Each of these subclimaxes is followed by falling action, which is actually the rising action to the next climax. To help you understand the difference, think about short stories and novels like waves rolling in at the beach. A short story is like one wave rolling in (rising action), cresting (climax), and then suddenly fading away (falling action). A novel is like wave after wave rising and cresting. Each wave is an episode in the novel. As one wave disappears, it becomes part of the next wave (episode), and so on.

## Setting

Most short stories have only one or two settings. Novels often have many more. As you read novels, think about each setting. Try to determine why the author is using each one. You'll find that setting is extremely important in *The Call of the Wild*. In fact, some of the settings and what they represent are as important as the characters themselves.

## Theme

Like short stories, novels contain themes, which are the authors' reflections on their subjects or their point. These themes are often grander, more varied, and more complex than those of short stories.

## Narrative Point of View

One of the first decisions an author must make in writing a short story or a novel is who is telling the story. Making this determination is an extremely important part of creating a story, because it determines how much the author reveals to the reader.

Generally, novels are written in either the *first person* or the *third person*. If you recall your grammar lessons, you'll remember that the first person refers to *I* and *we*. The third person refers to *he*, *she*, *it*, or *they*. (Authors could write stories in

the second person using the word *you*. In this situation, the reader becomes a character in the book. “As you walk down the hall, you see a shadowy figure disappear into a bedroom.” Writing in the second person, however, is difficult to sustain throughout an entire book.)

In addition, both the first and third person approaches can be further divided as follows:

### **First Person**

- *First person major participant*: the character who tells the story—the *narrator*—is the central character or is deeply involved in the action.
- *First person participant*: the narrator is involved in the story, but isn’t a major player.
- *First person reporting*: the narrator tells the story, but doesn’t play a part in it.

### **Third Person**

- *Third person dramatic*: the narrator has a limited perspective. He or she reports on what the characters are doing but not what they’re thinking. The author functions like a videocamera, which can record only what it sees and hears.
- *Third person restricted omniscient*: the narrator can report on the thoughts and feelings as well as the speech and action of a particular character, but can’t get into the heads of other characters.
- *Third person unrestricted omniscient*: the narrator can describe at will the inner lives (thoughts, feelings, and sensations) experienced by any number of characters.

The ability of an author to describe the feelings and thoughts of a character is called *negative capability*. This phrase was first used by the poet John Keats to describe Shakespeare. Among his many other outstanding talents, Shakespeare, perhaps better than any other author, was able to speak from the viewpoints of a wide range of characters, from servants and criminals to kings and queens.

In using the phrase *negative capability*, Keats meant that Shakespeare was able to negate himself. He stopped seeing the world through the eyes of a young sixteenth-century English poet (that is, his own eyes) and instead saw the world through the eyes of his characters.

## History of the Novel

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The word *novel* means “new.” This term was first used in the 1800s, because novels were new at that time. Prior to that time, people read collections of short fiction and romances, which were usually based on legends and included elements of fantasy. What made the novel different from these other types of fiction was that the novel tried to be *mimetic*—that is, it attempted to imitate reality. Although some novels aren’t realistic, most give the impression that “this could really happen.” People act and talk as they do in real life, even if some episodes seem wild and unbelievable.

As you read novels in the future, ask yourself how realistic the author is trying to be.

## Novel Genres

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Although the novel is itself a literary genre, it can be broken into *subgenres*, such as horror, fantasy, romance, mystery, and comedy. The list goes on and on. Each genre has certain conventions that allow readers to recognize it as a certain type of story soon after they begin reading it. These conventions involve both content and style. For example, if you read a story that begins “It was a dark and stormy night,” you immediately develop certain expectations. You assume that the book is probably a work of mystery or suspense.

However, if a book begins with “The sun danced on the wildflowers on this beautiful June morning,” you develop a very different set of expectations.

Novel genres can be categorized in various ways. Here are some examples:

### **Effect on Its Audience**

- Comedies make readers laugh.
- Tragedies makes readers sad.
- Horror stories scare readers.
- Satires make readers laugh and think.

### **Plot**

- Adventures
- Love stories
- War novels

### **Audience**

- Children's novels
- Young adult novels
- Adult novels

### **Country of Origin**

- France
- Germany
- Russia

### **Period**

- Early modern
- Victorian
- Postwar

Most novels fall into more than one of these subcategories. For example, a novel may be a postwar English love story for young adults. When you complete your reading of *The Call of the Wild*, try to determine into what categories it falls.