 Text structure, language features and stylistic choices

Craig Silvey effectively integrates a range of language forms, features, and structures into the narrative of Jasper Jones to convey his ideas. Some of these (metaphor, repetition, simile) you may already be familiar with. However, Silvey has also made sophisticated use of several other techniques that shape meaning. Some of these are:

* Dialect
* Truncated Sentences
* Ellipsis
* Foreshadowing

As you look at each one in combination with examples from Jasper Jones you will be asked to consider what Silvey’s intention is in constructing his novel in this way.

Dialect

A dialect is a particular form of a language that is used in a specific region or by a social group. There may be multiple dialects within a language that are distinguished by differences in vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Craig Silvey uses variations of English throughout Jasper Jones, playing with language in several ways to show the way particular groups relate to each other. Consider the following:

Malapropism – when someone uses a wrong word or phrase (accidentally or deliberately) that sounds similar to the word they should have used. Common malapropisms:

* I pacifically meant to say that. (specifically)
* For all intensive purposes. (intents and purposes)
* He must of meant something else. (must have / must’ve)

Jasper Jones features a few of these, mostly in conversations between Jeffrey Lu and Charlie. Jeffrey seems especially fond of them. Instead of the well-known phrase ‘a woman’s scorn’ (meaning the anger of a woman who has been wronged), Jeffrey prefers the nonsensical ‘a woman’s corn’.

An Invented Lexicon – People who know each especially well will have certain words and phrases that they share. Some of these can be invented. Jeffrey and Charlie share several of these, such as ‘Love tummy’, ‘sassytime’ and the aforementioned malapropisms.

Colloquialism – Slang or everyday language. Jasper Jones’ dialogue is often displayed colloquially, with Australianisms like ‘carn’, ‘fersure’, ‘unnerstand’, ‘nuthin’, ‘somethink’, and ‘orright’.

Portmanteau – This is when two words are collided together to create a new one. Think ‘Brangelina’ to describe Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie. This is used at some points in Jasper Jones, an example would be at the beginning of Chapter 6 when Charlie coins the word ‘factitious’ to describe a mixture between fact and fiction .

1. What is Silvey’s purpose in having Jeffrey Lu use malapropisms?
2. How does an invented lexicon influence the way we interpret Charlie and Jeffrey Lu’s relationship?
3. What do Jasper Jones’ colloquialisms reveal about him?
4. Are colloquialisms the same in every novel? Why/ Why not?
5. What does Charlie’s creation of portmanteaus reveal about him?
6. Create three of your own portmanteaus.
7. “You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view…until you climb into his skin and walk around in it” Atticus Finch

Write a letter from Jasper Jones to Charlie, explaining why he left Corrigan and what he is doing now. Refer to the prejudice he encountered and how it made him feel. Adopt the voice of the character, using the Australian dialect of his context he uses in the novel.

Truncated sentences

Firstly, here’s an example:

* Laura Wishart is dead. Look. Dead. She is right there, hanging from that tree. Right there.

What do you think this technique is?

Definition:

Highlight for more information:

* Can be used to make writing sound more casual and conversational.
* Can create tension. Haste. Urgency.
* Can be used for emphasis. Or. To. Make. An. Impact.
  + Don’t overuse them like this though, it just looks like you don’t know how full stops work.
* Can be combined with an ellipsis (…) Gives a lingering, unfinished

Ellipsis

You might know an ellipsis as those three dots… They signal a point where something has been cut out or omitted from the text. Sometimes it means a character has left something unsaid, “I wonder what…” or has been interrupted before they could finish.

Ellipsis can be bigger than just three dots though. When Eliza finally tells the story of Laura Wishart’s tragedy there are a few key details left unsaid. These have been deliberately ellipsed by Craig Silvey.

What details are left unsaid?

Why might he have left these details out?

To what extent do you agree with Silvey making this choice as the writer?

Foreshadowing

What is it?

Foreshadowing is a warning or hint that something is going to happen. It is a literary and film technique that helps the composer build their narrative.

In films it is sometimes referred to as ‘plant and payoff’, because something that is referred to early on will come back later with more significance.

Foreshadowing can sometimes be quite immediate and just a sentence, as seen in these quotes from Jasper Jones:

“And I see it.” – Page 9

“In my room, he takes up a book from my nightstand” – Page 118

This creates an expectation from the reader, “We wanna see it too!” or “what book?”, and then the suspense is immediately relieved when the following sentences reveal what is being referred to.

Why foreshadowing?

In literature, it lets the author build suspense or arouse the reader’s interest in something. It can also be used to avoid disappointment.

Sometimes, something can be heavily foreshadowed (such as Mad Jack Lionel being a murderer) only for it to turn out not to be true. This ‘false’ foreshadowing is sometimes called a Red Herring.

Examples of Foreshadowing

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Some more significant examples of foreshadowing from Jasper Jones

In Chapter 1, Charlie muses; “I’m not sure what they’d do if they found my room empty. Sheets bunched, bed pared bare, louvres stacked”. We later find out exactly what they would do!

Chapter 1 also features a big Red Herring that misleads the reader; “Laura WIshart is gone… she was killed, in a strange clearing known only to Jasper Jones… that’s irrefutable. That’s truth. That’s what we know”. By the end of the novel, we know that this isn’t the truth at all.

On Page 302, Charlie describes entering Mad Jack Lionel’s home; “On my left is a wall-hanging of butterflies with pins through their bodies. They don’t look very comfortable” This metaphor of lives-cut-short foreshadows Jack’s trapped existence inside the house.

And in Chapter 9, Eliza says of her father, “He’ll get his”, foreshadowing her revenge.

Task

Experiment with using foreshadowing. This can be done through metaphor, symbolism, a piece of dialogue, or anything else. Write at least a page uses clues and/or references to tie the piece together.

Once you are done, annotate your piece of writing by highlighting each reference and linking it to the part of the story that it foreshadows