Aboriginal literature

Texts (often oral) created by the indigenous peoples of Australia.

These texts are usually about Aboriginal life and culture. Many of them are stories from the Dreamtime.

Aboriginal songs and chants are about particular places and spaces, and include such things as long-held cultural myths, maps to find significant sites, and directions on how to go about daily matters of life.

Student example

Aboriginal literature is a difficult term, since most of the texts are oral and they do not follow the usual conventions of poetry or narrative. Like most writers, Oodgeroo Noonuccal has had to adapt her poetry to be understood and have it considered as 'literature'.

absurdism

The literary movement that grew from the disillusion after the Second World War.

This was a rejection of the traditional values and beliefs that humankind was a rational creature who lived in a universe that was mostly comprehensible, and that social order, civilisation and dignity were possible. So, absurdist literature represents humankind as alone in a random and incomprehensible universe, leading a meaningless, even laughable, existence without hope or dignity. Some of the best known works are Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea* and Albert Camus' *The Outsider*.

Camus, in his *The Myth of Sisyphus*, draws a parallel between the fates of the Ancient Greek King Sisyphus and humankind. The Ancient Greek myth explains that the king, when confronted by Death, cheated him several times so that he was able to live to a ripe old age and die of natural causes. When he finally entered the Underworld, Hades set him a terrible punishment. He had to roll a large and heavy rock up a hill, trying to get it to sit on the very top of the hill. But every time he got the rock near the top of the hill it would roll back down again, and he would have to start all over again. Some commentators see this as symbolic of our attempts to gain knowledge.

See Theatre of the Absurd, existential philosophy.

acronym

An acronym is a word or abbreviation formed from the initial letters of a group of words; for example: EFTPOS is an acronym for 'electronic funds transfer at point of sale' and WACA is an acronym for West Australian Cricket Association.

Test your understanding

What are the acronyms for:

1 World Health Organisation?
2 Compact Disk-Read Only Memory?
3 Agnetha Bjorn Benny Anni-Frid?

act

A major section of a play.

In Elizabethan drama, plays were generally written in five acts. Ibsen and Chekhov wrote their plays in four acts. Many modern plays are written in three acts: the first act is seen as the exposition, the second is the complication, the third is the climax and resolution.

Scenes are smaller sections within acts and are usually divided from each other by a change of setting. Acts are divided from each other by a change in the development of the plot. Some modern dramas have abandoned act and scene divisions altogether, seeing them as unnecessary or artificial pauses. However, only short plays can avoid giving the audience an intermission break somewhere near the middle of the action!

See scene.

active voice/passive voice

Writing that uses the forms of verbs which create a direct and active relationship between the subject and the object. For example: 'We had fun' is written in the active voice; 'Fun was had' is written in the passive voice.

Usually it is best to use the active voice because it is livelier and more direct. But sometimes the passive is unavoidable—even preferable. If we write 'The whole class supported my idea' that is active and specific. But if we don't know how many students supported it (perhaps it was only the vocal ones) then we would be more justified in writing 'My idea was supported'.

Test your understanding
Write these active sentences into the passive voice.

1 The principal will prosecute trespassers.
2 Board members have reserved these seats.

aesthetics

The philosophy of our responses to works of art and literature.

Aesthetics considers such questions as: What is beauty? Is beauty and artistic merit only in the eye of the beholder? Can critical judgements of art and literature be objective?

affective fallacy

The error of judging a text by the effect it has on its readers.

This idea was proposed by the new critics Wimsatt and Beardsley in 1946. They have subsequently retracted the notion, since, Beardsley agrees, there can be no objective criticism.

See reading, objective/subjective.

affect/affective response

Texts affect readers, that is, they produce an intellectual and emotional response in their readers.

An affective response can be contrasted to a critical response, that is, the affective response focuses on describing the reader's reactions to the text without concern for the way in which they arose. The critical response will add to this an analysis of the way the text is working to position the reader through its use of various techniques.

Student example A
I was greatly affected by the final scenes of Titanic. The huge loss of life was itself a reason to grieve, but the noble and dignified way that most people faced their death made me feel a sense of pride in being human.

Student example B
I was deeply moved by the end of the film—the way the director focused on the tearing apart of family groups with close-ups of the women's and children's faces as they were lowered away from their husbands and fathers; this really increased the impact and pathos of those final scenes.

Age of Reason

The Restoration and Augustan periods. So called because it was a time in which reason and rational thinking was greatly revered.

Alexandrine

A line of poetry of twelve syllables.

This is a very popular meter in French poetry. In English poetry it seems too long as Pope pointed out in his 'Essay on Criticism':

a needless Alexandrine ends the song;
That, like a wounded snake, drags its slow length along.

allegory

An allegory can be seen as an extended metaphor—a text which invites interpretations on at least two levels.

Student example
This student response to George Orwell's well-known novel *Animal Farm* illustrates the idea.

One reading of this novel is at the level of subject matter. An entire farmyard of animals overthrow their human master and attempt to run the farm themselves, treating every animal as equal. The text also invites another reading at the historical level. I can read this story as an exploration of the events and ideas involved in the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the end of Orwell's novel might even be seen as a forecast of the downfall of Russian Communism...

So it can be said, an allegory invites the reader to make intertextual connections between large sections (or even the whole) of the text and some other text. These connections can be at different levels such as political, historical or cultural.

alliteration

The repetition of the consonant sounds at the beginnings of words.

It is often used to produce a sound that adds to the atmosphere or mood of the words, or perhaps even echoes their meaning. For example:

> The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,
> The furrow followed free

from 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' by Samuel Taylor Coleridge; and 'Fish, flesh or fowl, commend all summer long…' from 'Sailing to Byzantium' by W. B. Yeats. Both use the 'f' sound to evoke a sense of activity and perhaps reinforce the sound of the wind. Adrienne Rich uses a whirl of 'w's' as an epigraph for her poem 'Implosions':

> The world's
> not wanton
> only wild and wavering

allusion

A reference to another text, person, place or event.

This is usually used to clarify an idea or enhance meaning. The playful advertisement for a brand of bathers showed pictures of their new products with the voice-over warning us: 'Just when you thought it was safe to go back in the water…'. Most people in the TV audience understood the allusion to the promotional line for the film *Jaws 2* and laughed (or at least smiled).

Allusions can be the fairly obvious and direct kind such as Anthony Hecht's poem 'The Dover Bitch' which is clearly alluding to Matthew Arnold's poem 'Dover Beach'.

Sometimes allusions can be indirect and fairly difficult to pick up; for example: Lewis Carroll's narrative poem 'The Hunting of the Snark' is subtitled 'An Agony in Eight Fits'. The 'Agony' refers to the ancient usage of the word meaning 'a struggle that involves anguish and pain'. It could also be an allusion to Coleridge's poem 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' and the 'woeful agony' that grips the old sailor as he retells his tale. This would be a useful connection to make, since Carroll's poem is also about a long voyage that ends in death and angst.

See intertextuality.

Test your understanding

What is being alluded to in the following examples:

1 Prince was a great fighting dog but he met his Waterloo last week.
2 Mr Johnson won't sponsor you. He's a real Scrooge.
3 Robert Frost's poem 'Out, Out—' creates a sense of the absurdity and brevity of life.
4 'look!
up in the sky.
it's a bird.
it's a plane.
no…
it's Superwog'
(extract from 'Superwog' by Komninos)

alternative reading

A reading of a text that takes a different approach to the dominant reading, but does not challenge the assumptions of that reading.

Student example A

'The Three Little Pigs' is a story that warns us to make sensible provisions for the future. The first two pigs are victims of their own laziness and lack of forethought. Only the third little pig has put in the thought and the work that protects it against the wolf.

Student example B

'The Three Little Pigs' shows us that some cultures are superior to others due to their technological advancement. Only brick buildings are permanent enough to withstand the wild and savage forces of nature. Cultures that haven't made that progress will not survive.

Test your understanding

Which of these is the dominant reading? Which do you think is the alternative reading? Explain your reasoning.

ambiguity

A word or phrase that invites at least two interpretations.

In act 2, scene 2 of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the prince deliberately misinterprets Polonius's words (not taking 'matter' to mean 'printed matter' but 'problem'):

Polonius: What do you read my lord?
Hamlet: Words, words, words!
Polonius: What is the matter, my lord?
Hamlet: Between who?
Polonius: I mean the matter that you read, my lord.

In act 3, scene 2, Hamlet uses ambiguity at poor Ophelia's expense. He seems to deliberately invite Ophelia to interpret 'lie in your lap' with a sexual overtone:

Hamlet: Lady, shall I lie in your lap?
Ophelia: No, my lord.
Hamlet: I mean my head upon your lap?
Ophelia: Ay, my lord.
Hamlet: Do you think I meant country matters?
Ophelia: I think nothing my lord.

anachronism

Something which is out of its time.

One of the classic examples is Shakespeare's mention of billiards in *Antony and Cleopatra*. The play is set around 30 BC. Billiards (as we know the game) was first described in the seventeenth century AD. A popular example of anachronism is in the comic 'Asterix the Gaul'. Here it is used for humorous effect, as the scene when Asterix has a cup of tea with the ancient Briton Boadicea is set around 50 BC, and tea was not brought to Europe until the late sixteenth century AD.

In Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* (act 2, scene 1, lines 193–4) Brutus is a nervous conspirator and asks his friend Cassius for the time:

Brutus: Peace! Count the clock.
Cassius: The clock has stricken three.

The first mechanical clocks were seen in Rome about 1400 years later, although some defenders of Shakespeare might argue that Brutus was referring to a water clock, which was in use at the time.

anagram

A word or phrase whose letters have been rearranged to form a new word or phrase.

Two famous anagrams are Samuel Butler's novel title *Erehwon* (the name of an imagined land) and Dylan Thomas's name for the town in *Under Milkwood*—'Llareggub'. Both of these only need to be read backwards. Another anagram is 'Flit on cheering angel' for Florence Nightingale.

anagnorisis

The moment in a tragedy when the tragic hero realises what they have done and what the irreversible consequences will be.

This occurs in *Macbeth* when he realises that all the witches' prophecies have come true and that they have tricked him by their 'double talk'. In *Oedipus Rex*, this is when Oedipus realises that it is he who killed his own father and that he must bear the punishment that he, as king, decreed.

See tragic hero.

analogy

A comparison made between two things that share something in common.

Earth might be compared to a soccer ball to illustrate the idea of rotation about an axis. Analogy is often used in poetry to help us see something familiar in a new light. Seamus Heaney, in his poem 'Digging', compares his pen to a spade and makes us think again about the way his poetry works by concluding: 'I'll dig with it'.

analysis

Literally, this means taking something apart to see how it works.

The opposite of analysis is synthesis, combining elements to see what it looks like as a whole. The analysis of text involves looking at the way it has been constructed in terms of its use of techniques or conventions, and examining the way those techniques influence the overall interpretation and response. A good analysis does not mean 'killing' the text by leaving it lying around in bits and pieces, but it should bring the text more into the light so that we can see exactly how it is operating and understand more clearly the version of the world it is presenting to us.

One method of analysing a poem might go like this:

- examine a meaning and your initial response
- expose the techniques used (persona, sound devices, structure, imagery, etc.)
- show how these techniques influence your response (how they position you as a reader)
- state the values that the poem presents
- outline your acceptance or rejection of that position and your final response to the poem.

If you use a model like this one, you will avoid one of the major problems students encounter in writing analyses of texts—merely identifying the techniques the text uses without being able to show what effect such techniques have on the reader's response. The first student has fallen into that trap.

Student example A

In the poem 'Nightfall in Soweto' Oswald Mbuyiseni Mtshali personifies the night to be something frightening that is hunting him down. He uses a lot of metaphors and similes to back this up: his house is a matchbox, the hunter is like a rabid dog, and it has become a marauding beast to run him down. The poem does not rhyme, but keeps up a rapid rhythm and pace because of its short lines and short stanzas.

All these are valid observations to make in an analysis, but they are not telling us anything about the way the reader is responding to the text—it is merely observing techniques and labelling them. This second student does better.

Student example B

Mtshali personifies the night. It becomes 'cruel', hunting the persona down—even to his home which is described as a 'matchbox house', something small and easily crushed. The power and determination of nightfall, and the powerlessness of its victims makes this a frightening and compelling poem about the violence experienced by Blacks in South Africa.

See critical analysis.

anecdote/anecdotal evidence

An anecdote is a small story that illustrates a point.

Anecdotes are often used to introduce essays or newspaper feature articles. Sue Chessborough begins her feature article about grandparents who have lost their grandchildren like this:

> It all began when my daughter, Kris, went to visit a remote Greek island for three days...

Anecdotal evidence is usually thought of as a poor substitute for 'real evidence'—it relies on an individual case to make a point, and as the listeners or readers may respond: 'It's the exception that proves the rule'. An argument in favour of smoking that relies on anecdotal evidence like 'My grandfather smoked for 47 years and he never developed cancer' is pretty easy to dismiss.

See argument.

annotation

A comment on the text.

This might be made by a reader in the margins of a book. The term 'marginalia' also describes these notes. An editor who wishes to explain the meaning of a text or provide background information may write annotations and publish them as an addition to the original text. Martin Gardner's editions of *Alice in Wonderland* and *The Hunting of the Snark* are excellent examples of texts with very entertaining annotations. Students might also be familiar with some Shakespearean texts with annotations on facing pages.

antagonist

The character or agent in a narrative play or film who opposes the main character or protagonist.

The words antagonist and protagonist are derived from Greek: *agon* means contest, *pro* means for, or in favour of, and *anti* means against. So the contest between these two elements is the conflict between good and evil. Darth Vader is the antagonist to Luke Skywalker (the protagonist) in *Star Wars*. Farfrae is the antagonist to Henchard in *The Mayor of Casterbridge*.

One way of looking at the functions of these two characters is to regard the protagonist as someone who wants to solve a problem and the antagonist is the force that opposes those efforts.

See conflict.

Test your understanding
Who is the protagonist, who is the antagonist, and what is each trying to achieve in the following stories?

1 'The Three Little Pigs'
2 'Little Red Riding Hood'
3 'Jesus in the Wilderness'

anthology
A collection of texts.

This term comes from the Greek meaning 'a collection of flowers', which perhaps explains the effect most editors would hope to achieve with their anthologies. Originally, in Ancient Greece, anthologies were collections of epigrams (wise sayings). Nowadays, they can be collections of poems, stories, jokes, almost anything.

anticlimax
A point in a narrative that promises to be the climax and then fails to deliver.

In anticlimax, as opposed to climax, issues and problems are not resolved, the truth is not revealed, and perhaps certain characters who we thought were going to change, do not.

Anticlimax can be used to delay the real climax, but it must be used carefully or it will result in a comic deflation. The popular usage of the term conveys this feeling of disappointment.

Student example
When Chrissy is about to go on national TV to tell the world about the STARK conspiracy she is introduced as a 'daft dingo'—an anticlimax since we know she will convince no-one with that introduction.

anti-hero
A protagonist or main character who does not provoke admiration or sympathy in the reader because their dominant qualities are not attractive.

Thomas Covenant (in Stephen Donaldson's *The Chronicles of Thomas Covenant, The Unbeliever*) is an anti-hero because he does not believe that the world in which he finds himself is real, and is consequently alienated from, and indifferent to, the world and people around him.

Other well-known examples of characters who do not display the qualities we would expect from a 'hero' are Yossarian in Joseph Heller's *Catch 22*, Jimmy Porter in John Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger* and Charles in the film *Four Weddings and a Funeral*.

See hero/heroine.

Test your understanding
Contrast the qualities of an anti-hero you have encountered with these well-known heroes:

1 Luke Skywalker: idealistic, self-sacrificing, quick to learn, fighting for freedom
2 Indiana Jones: intelligent, brave, ingenious, fighting for good and democracy
3 Romeo: impulsive, brave, passionate, fighting for love and justice

antithesis
Setting up an opposition of contrasting ideas in a phrase or sentence. For example: 'Help yourself, and Heaven will help you' (Jean de la Fontaine); and 'Marriage has many pains, but celibacy has no pleasures' (Dr Johnson).

antonym
Antonyms are words with opposite meanings; for example: black/white, positive/negative, brave/cowardly.

See binary opposition.

aphorism
A short and pithy statement, for example: 'knowledge is power'.

apocalypse
A vision of the end of the world, often involving war and great natural disasters.

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse are four horrible humanoid figures on horseback representing war, famine, pestilence and death.

apostrophe
This word has two meanings: a punctuation mark (usually used to show ownership or to indicate a contraction); or a figure of speech.

As a figure of speech, it is used to address

someone dead or absent, or some thing, as if they were capable of understanding. A well-known example is Wordsworth's appeal to the dead poet in his poem 'London 1812': 'Milton! Thou shouldst be living at this hour…'.

See invocation.

Arcadia

Originally a mountainous region of Greece used by poets as the symbol for the ideal pastoral life.

In its early white settlement, Australia was thought to be an Arcadia.

archetypes

Characters or ideas that share a recognisable pattern.

Some well-known archetypes are the hero fighting for a good cause, against all odds; the innocent, uninitiated boy; and the important object that must be rescued from evil.

See stereotype.

Student example

Iago is the archetypal villain. He is manipulative, deceitful and lacks a conscience.

Test your understanding

Identify the characters from *Star Wars, Episode 1* that best fit the archetypes described above.

argument

There are two useful definitions: a summary of the plot or content of a chapter in a book; and the series of reasoned steps that lead from several premises to a conclusion.

The first definition was a popular technique used in seventeenth and eighteenth century writing.

Referring to the second definition, an argument in an essay must be logical, clearly explained or reasoned, supported by evidence (either facts and figures or quotes and references to texts), and aptly sequenced (the points should be in a suitable order).

See evidence, conclusion.

article

A short piece of prose, often found in newspapers or magazines.

Most articles are based on fact or actual events, but they will present a particular view of their subject, depending on the writer's perspective.

See feature article.

aside

Words or lines spoken for the benefit of the audience or a particular character but which other characters on stage cannot hear.

These lines reveal the character's thoughts, feelings or motivations. This is an excellent example of a convention since, clearly, all the characters on stage would be able to hear the aside. As an audience we understand the rules of this technique and accept the idea. In act 1, scene 3 of *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare, Macbeth is stunned by the predictions of the witches and separates his reactions for different audiences. The first aside is only for himself and the audience to hear:

Macbeth:	(Aside) Glamis and Thane of Cawdor: The greatest is behind.
(To Ross and Angus):	Thanks for your pains.
(Aside to Banquo):	Do you not hope your children shall be kings…

Student example

One of the most effective methods used to reveal the thoughts and feelings of Macbeth is in the aside. We are able to hear his alarmed reaction to the witches' prophecies when he says: 'This supernatural soliciting cannot be ill, cannot be good…'. Whereas the other characters can only see his behaviour; Banquo makes this clear when he says: 'Look how our partner's rap't' (line 142) which means that the other characters on stage have noticed Macbeth thinking (or talking to himself?) and wonder what he is doing.

assonance

The repetition of a vowel sound to create a particular effect.

One of these effects may be to produce a pleasant sound pattern as in, 'Those who have seen thee seeking know thee well'. The 'ee' sound in 'seen', 'thee' and 'seek' are in assonance and create a pleasant effect on the ear.

Another effect of assonance can be to lengthen the sound of a line or to slow down its pace. Seamus Heaney uses this technique in his poem 'Death of a Naturalist':

> Right down the dam gross-bellied frogs were cocked
> On sods; their loose necks pulsed like sails. Some hopped:
> The slap and plop were obscene threats...

The student (Rita) in *Educating Rita* has a more humorous view of such repeated sounds. Here she discusses 'assonance' with her tutor (Frank):

> **Frank:** ...there's a Yeats poem, called 'The Wild Swans at Coole'. In it he rhymes the word 'swan' with the word 'stone'. There, you see, an example of assonance.
> **Rita:** Oh. It means gettin' the rhyme wrong.

This is even more humorous since the teacher has quoted an example of consonance, getting it wrong himself.

See consonance.

assumptions

Things that are taken for granted, suppositions that are used as an often unstated basis for an argument or a reading position.

Texts make assumptions about many things; for example: who is reading it, the subject and people under discussion, and the codes and conventions of the culture it presents.

Test your understanding

Read the text from *Coping with Computing* on page 86. Write down some of the assumptions the writers have made about the reader. If you need help to do this, *see* reading.

atmosphere

The mood created by the language of a text.

In film, the images and soundtrack can be used to create a particular atmosphere. The opening scenes of *Edward Scissorhands* show an over-run, neglected garden and a dilapidated castle with its walls and roof in a state of collapse. The music reinforces our growing anxiety, and the extended pan and dolly shots keep our view restricted; the atmosphere is tense and eerie. The same effect can be achieved in print texts.

Student example

Sonya Hartnett creates an eerie atmosphere of wilful neglect, something like the feeling of Haversham house in Dickens's *Great Expectations*, when she describes what has happened to the house on the Willow's farm:

> When the house was grand...
> (Now) The walls are scribbled upon...the (lino) is rucked and split like wounds.

The words 'rusted', 'rucked' and 'split' create a feeling of neglect and decay. Underneath this, words like 'scarred' and 'wounds' suggest a sense of threat and possible violence.

attitude

Literally, this means orientation, the manner in which something is positioned (a physical or mental position).

A spaceship has an attitude to an approaching planet. This is helpful when you need to distinguish attitudes from values. Values (the ideals or standards upon which actions are based) will usually determine your attitude to a subject. For example: one of your key values might be 'the fundamental importance of life above all other considerations' which produces predictable attitudes towards abortion and war. In Hans Peter Richter's novel *I Was There*, set in Germany in the days leading up to the Second World War, Heinz expresses his attitude towards the work of the Brown Shirts, the S.A. Sturm: 'The Brown Shirts, they know how to get things done!' This attitude arises from his belief that the Brown Shirts are working for the good of all Germans. Perhaps he values the security of the State above the rights and safety of individuals in it.

Because of this relationship between values, beliefs and attitudes it is important for readers to interrogate texts and explore their attitudes to the subject matter. Only then can readers challenge and accept or reject the value-position they are being asked to participate in while they are reading the text.

In the following examples of student writing one student has done this. The other has allowed the text to 'operate' on him without challenge.

Student example A

The poem 'Spring and Fall' by Gerard Manley Hopkins is a lesson for the young girl, Margaret, who is crying over the trees losing their leaves... The poem ends by explaining to Margaret the real reason for her tears: 'It is Margaret you mourn for'.

Student example B

This poem is an address from an adult to a child, Margaret. The adult assumes that he understands the reasons for the child's tears and condescends to explain this to her. Whether he is right or not we cannot judge (the poem invites us to assume he is) but I think it is misuse of power to blight a childhood with stories of her own death.

audience

Those to whom a text is addressed.

However, this idea is not as simple as it sounds. A poem like 'My Last Duchess' by Robert Browning has at least two kinds of audience: the messenger to whom the Duke is speaking and the readers who read the written text. To distinguish these different audiences the first might be called the addressee—the person or persons being directly addressed by the addresser, the person assumed to be speaking. The audience reading the text can be considered in more detail too. To understand more about this kind of audience read the text from *Coping with Computing* on page 86.

Now the reading audience of this text can be anyone who chooses to read it. But, who is the imagined audience? For example: is the text addressed to young women? Or, to left handers? Clearly the text has a preferred reading audience of right-handed married men.

The following student example shows how this idea can be used productively.

Student example

Robert Browning's poem 'My Last Duchess' is a dramatic monologue delivered by the Duke of Ferrara. It appears that he is addressing a messenger from the Count on the matter of marriage to his daughter. We, as the reading audience, are allowed to eavesdrop on his monologue, which becomes more and more frightening as it progresses.

audience expectations

Things that the readers of a text anticipate that they will encounter in that text, usually generated from past experiences with similar texts.

A reader generates expectations of a text from all sorts of sources: the cover and blurb of a book, previews of TV shows and films, advertising about the text, other readers' responses, and previous experiences with texts of the same type.

A good reader usually holds many expectations when reading a text. Part of the enjoyment of reading is in forming expectations and finding out if they are fulfilled or not, later on in the text. The most obvious example of this occurs when we read a detective novel, a 'whodunit'. We are constantly evaluating the suspects and forming notions about who did it and why, until finally it is revealed at the end: and our guesses, hypotheses and expectations are rewarded or disappointed.

Another set of expectations arise from our previous experiences of reading texts of the same genre or type, for example: when we are reading an article in *Time* magazine or the *Australian* newspaper we expect the facts and figures to be reasonably accurate, although that expectation does not transfer to other newspapers such as a tabloid newspaper like the *Sun*, especially when their headline announces that a statue of Elvis has been found on Mars! The kind of expectations that we hold about different newspapers means that we will read them differently.

See intertextuality.

Augustan age

The period in English history around the end of the seventeenth century to the middle of the eighteenth century when the writers (such as Dryden, Swift, Pope and Johnson) imitated the style of the Roman poets who flourished in the reign of the Emperor Augustus (27 BC–AD 14).

Australian culture

The order, law, communication, art and social practices of the Australian community.

This definition already highlights some of the problems in using a concept like this. For example: which laws—Aboriginal tribal laws? Or, the laws of state or federal governments? Whose art—American TV soaps? An ABC TV documentary? The Country and Western Hour on ABC radio? Or, the music on Triple J? There are so many different groups with different customs and backgrounds in Australia that it must be impossible to describe them all in one simple definition of Australian culture.

The important things to remember, if you use this term, are that Australian culture is made up of many different peoples and groups and not all members of that culture share the same values, and that the Australian culture is continually changing.

It is, however, still possible to make some broad generalisations about the dominant culture in Australia in the twentieth century: the majority of its peoples are white of European origins, they share Christian values and beliefs, their laws are based on British law, and their art has grown from European roots. Just keep in mind that such descriptions can actually obscure more than they reveal. The student example illustrates one of the problems you might encounter when using this term.

Student example

In his poem 'The Not-so-good Earth' Bruce Dawe criticises one of the typical aspects of Australian culture. He describes the family as apathetic about the problems of the rest of the world...

Of course, Dawe might reply to this student that he wasn't making this criticism of all Australians—especially those that have come from other parts of the world, maintain close links with their homelands and take great interest in what is going on there.

See culture.

author

The creator of a text or object.

The process by which authors create texts is worth considering. Authors construct texts. They make choices about what things or ideas to put into their texts, and what things or ideas they will leave out. They also select the words and phrases they will use to express these ideas. In all these cases, they are selecting from a paradigm, that is, from the group of all the possible choices available to them. The choices they make will depend on the kind of effect they are hoping to have on their audience. A simple example can be seen in the film *Titanic*. The American director/ writers had a large number of facts to choose from when they made the film. One of the more interesting facts that they left out was that an American ship, *Californian*, was drifting less than 12 miles away from the sinking *Titanic*. This ship did not respond to the distress calls and flares. These facts were included in an earlier film version (*A Night to Remember*) of the sinking of the *Titanic*. Why might this have been left out of the 1997 version? Perhaps the authors didn't want the audience to see Americans portrayed in such a tragic and embarrassing situation? Whatever their reasons, their choice to omit this material has affected the way we respond to the sinking of the ship and the huge loss of life.

Student example

In Ken Kirby's documentary *Savagery and the American Indian*, our first impression from the title may be that this will be a documentary about some of the savage practices of the American Indians, like scalping. However, after we've seen the film, we realise that the savagery he was referring to was that of the invading Europeans. This explains his choice of the word 'and' in the title, rather than 'of' and reminds us, very simply, of the position from which he wants us to view these issues.

See intentional fallacy.

authority

The credibility that an author creates or claims through the statements that are made in a text.

Most texts try to create the sense that their writers know what they are writing about, whether they do or not. Readers will judge whether the text creates and maintains this sense of authority or not.

author's context

The situation or surrounding circumstances in which the author creates the text.

These circumstances can be seen as:

- historical (the time when it was written)
- geographical (the place and/or country where it was written)
- cultural (the author's background, for example: is she an English working class writer who has often written about women's rights and issues?)
- religious (does the religion of the writer have any effect on the text?).

There are other factors to consider depending on the author who is in focus, for example: social context, economic circumstances, age, gender, etc. The author's context is often worth exploring when we read a text. Although we would not do this to figure out what the author meant when they wrote the text (*see* intentional fallacy), we can come to a better understanding of how some factors in the author's circumstances have contributed to the way the text was created. For example: this student has been able to see a connection between John Donne's poem 'Elegie: To his Mistris Going To Bed', and the historical context of the writer.

Student example

The speaker of the poem is an Englishman of the seventeenth century. His excitement mounts when he compares his mistress to America: 'my America, my new found land'. This is a reflection of the tenor of the times. Such discoveries as America and the other new British colonies brought exotic new products into British homes and a consequent pride in Britain's power. Donne feels a similar power in his relationship with his mistress.

See new historicism.

autobiography

An account of a person's life, written from their perspective.

This contrasts with a biography which is written by someone other than the subject of the text. Autobiographies are narrative because they tell the story of the person's life (or part of it).

avant garde

Those in the front.

In art and literature this is applied to those making bold experiments or pushing at the known boundaries of their art.

axiom

A basic principle—often taken as given, not requiring proof.

Student example

That a documentary presents us with a particular version of reality is axiomatic.