

How to identify techniques and devices in an essay

Before you begin

What you need:

Related text: **“Dance with a Giraffe” by Christine Jurzykowski**

Approximate time this exercise should take you: **30 minutes**

Reminder

In the “Writing Guidelines” that are part of the Exit Exam instructions, you will be given a list of techniques and devices that authors may use when writing short stories and essays. When analysing the text prior to writing your essay, note the most obvious techniques and devices that the author has used to develop the main idea or thesis of the essay. Remember that you must be able to show **how** the writer uses techniques and devices. Also remember that **literary devices are any specific aspect of the text that can be recognized, identified, interpreted and analysed**. Keep in mind that there are certain techniques and devices that are specific to the essay genre, such as the technique of argument or the use of facts and statistics to defend a point. The techniques and devices you are working with in this module are often found in **non-fiction**.

Instructions

In these exercises you are going to be working on how the author employs the interesting **use of particular vocabulary/diction** in the text “Dance with a Giraffe” in order to develop her thesis.

Exercise 1

1. **Circle** the following words in the essay. How does the author's **repetition** of these words help with your comprehension of the text? State your interpretation of the connotation of each of the words in the space provided. Compare your answers to those in the **Answer key** below. Although your ideas might be slightly different, they should be comparable to those suggested in the **Answer key**.

Word	Connotation / Interpretation
relationship	
nature	
dance	
death	
partner	
giraffe	
honour	

Word	Connotation / Interpretation
knowing	
circle/cycle	
energy	

2. Now that you have identified the connotation of each word in the context of the text, write a few sentences to explain how your interpretation connects to the central idea or thesis of the text. (To review main ideas for this text, refer to the **Answer key** for **Module 5, Exercises 1 and 2.**)

3. In this section you will continue to work with diction. Highlight the following word pairs in the text. Compare and contrast Jurzykowski’s use of these interesting word pairs (parallel structure). State the meaning or connotation of each. Compare your answers to those in the **Answer key** below. Although your ideas might be slightly different, they should be comparable to those suggested in the **Answer key**.

Central topic within each paragraph	Comments
Paragraph 4 creation/destruction	

Central topic within each paragraph	Comments
Paragraph 10 interact/interrelate	
Paragraph 12 precarious/precious	
Paragraph 14 rise/fall	
Paragraph 15 energy level rise/energy level drop	
Paragraph 16 arching back/lunging forward	
Paragraph 16 throwing their heads back/dropping their heads forward	
Paragraph 18 their dancing/my breathing	
Paragraph 22 push/pull (of death)	
Paragraph 23 energy/matter	

4. Now that you have identified the connotation of each **parallel word pair** in the context of the text, write a few sentences to explain how your interpretation connects to the central idea or thesis of the text. (To review main ideas for this text, refer to the **Answer key** for **Module 5, Exercises 1 and 2.**)

Answer key

Remember that your answers will probably vary.

1.

Word	Connotation / Interpretation
relationship	<i>This word refers to the relationship and interconnection between all living things in nature. In the story, the relationship explored specifically is between the author and the giraffe.</i>
nature	<i>The writer is clearly a nature and animal lover. Through this love of nature, she is exploring life and death and the importance of respecting the life cycle of all living beings.</i>
dance	<i>The dance is a metaphor for the dance-like steps and synchronization of body and spirit that exists between man and nature. Additionally, the writer points out how the herd of giraffes appear to “dance” in response to Old Nick’s dying and death.</i>
death	<i>The text is about the process of dying and the exploration of this event as part of nature and as part of the cycle of life.</i>
partner	<i>Again, through the use of this word, the author is suggesting that all living beings are partners in life and in dying, as well.</i>
giraffe	<i>Old Nick, the giraffe, is central to the story because the author is exploring the interconnection between animals and humans and all living things. Interestingly, the powerful giraffe intensifies our understanding of the author’s message about this relationship because of its massive size and weight, and yet its helplessness.</i>
honour	<i>This word is intended to point out the importance of respect between all living things.</i>
knowing	<i>This is a word used to point out the power of the web of relationships. The herd of giraffes know Old Nick is dying, Old Nick knows he is dying, and of course the various animal caretakers know the giraffe is dying. There is a common knowledge.</i>
circle/cycle	<i>The cycle of life and the circle of life are referred to throughout the text. This represents the text’s focus on living and dying.</i>
energy	<i>The energy mentioned in the text is both tangible and intangible—the writer explores this notion both scientifically and spiritually.</i>

2. **Connection to the thesis:** The **repetition** of certain words in the text is related to an exploration of the connection between all living things and the greater responsibility to take care of each other.
3. (Each word pair acts as a metaphor to connect to the thesis of the text.)

Central topic within each paragraph	Comments
Paragraph 4 creation/destruction	<i>life and death</i>
Paragraph 10 interact/interrelate	<i>the connection of man and nature</i>
Paragraph 12 precarious/precious	<i>the instability and delicate balance of nature</i>
Paragraph 14 rise/fall	<i>life and death</i>
Paragraph 15 energy level rise/energy level drop	<i>life and death</i>
Paragraph 16 arching back/lunging forward	<i>exploring the margin between life and death</i>
Paragraph 16 throwing their heads back/dropping their heads forward	<i>exploring the margin between life and death</i>
Paragraph 18 their dancing/my breathing	<i>the harmony of man and nature</i>
Paragraph 22 push/pull (of death)	<i>exploring the margin between life and death</i>
Paragraph 23 energy/matter	<i>the complexity of nature</i>

4. **Connection to the thesis:** Each **word pair** connects to the idea of the cycle of life and the close connection between all living things.

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Reminder

In the “Writing Guidelines” that are part of the Exit Exam instructions, you will be given a list of techniques and devices that authors may use when writing short stories and essays. You should be familiar with some of these, but it is not necessary to know all of them. When you are analysing the non-fiction text, one way to understand how the author has employed certain techniques and devices is to build the discussion or argument by asking yourself a series of questions such as the ones in the exercise below. Searching for the responses to these questions will help you develop a clear understanding of this criterion in connection to the text.

Instructions

Answer the following questions about techniques and devices in complete sentences, using examples from the text to support your interpretation. Compare your answers with those in the **Answer key**. Although your answers may vary slightly from those in the **Answer key**, they should reflect the same general ideas.

Exercise 2

I Questions

1. Explain how Jurzykowski uses **personal anecdote** to develop her essay.

2. Examine the **structure** of the essay. Look at the beginning, middle and end of the text. How does the essay's structure parallel the thesis?

3. The author uses vivid **description** in the essay. Find three descriptive passages. Explain how each passage contributes to the overall **tone** of the essay.

4. It is interesting to note that Old Nick, the giraffe, dies on a winter's day. Additionally, there are other references to "cold" and "chilly" conditions. How does **diction** add to the overall effect of the **description** of Nick's death?

5. One of the most obvious techniques the writer uses in her essay is **comparison** and **metaphor**. What does she compare and how is this comparison a major component in understanding the essay?

Answer key

1. The author uses personal examples of how she originally became involved in caring for animals and began appreciating the interconnection between man and nature. She explains some details of her childhood experience first, and then tells about how she and her husband set up Fossil Ridge. Additionally, she explains the intense relationship with the giraffe in order to illustrate her personal experience with the balance and cycle of nature. (To support this response you could take examples from the introductory paragraphs and/or any other paragraphs containing details that provide suitable supporting evidence.)
2. The structure of the essay starts with Jurzykowski's childhood, then moves into the establishment of her ranch after she and her husband married, and then ends in the middle of her life when she is totally immersed in the care of a huge number of different animal species. At the end of the essay she is thinking about the cycle of life and the complexity of nature. This structure, which follows the writer's life path, shows how humans are part of the life cycle—the beginning (her childhood), the middle (growing and experiencing) and the end (her reflection on life and death).
3. [Make sure your three descriptive passages – whether they describe the giraffe, the dance with the giraffe, the metaphors related to the dying of the giraffe – all reflect the philosophical tone of the work and the author's pondering on the life cycle.]
4. Cold is often associated with the arrival of death. This adds to the tone and atmosphere of the work and its questions about the mysteries of life and nature.
5. The writer uses many metaphors in her text. Most are related to the giraffe's struggle with life on the margin that lies between life and death. Through the use of such metaphors she is showing, once again, the circle of life – the balance of nature – the web of relationships. She also compares her participation in comforting the giraffe in the process of dying with the actual process itself, to illustrate her idea of harmony.