

Mr Bruff

ONLINE REVISION

MR Bruff's Guide To

'The Curious Incident Of The Dog In The Night-Time'

(PLAY VERSION)



COPYRIGHT 2017 ANDREW BRUFF

SAMPLE

STRUCTURE:

The structure of the text is the way in which it is organised. You must consider the structure of the play in any exam answer. Initially you might want to consider the order of events and how information is revealed to the audience but you can then go on to think about other structural devices such as repetition. By repeating a word or phrase the writer adds emphasis to it. You could also think about the way events have been foreshadowed in the play, the use of stage directions and, in the case of *Curious Incident*, how different voices achieve different effects. Unlike in most plays, there are no regular act and scene changes in *Curious Incident*. In this play the scenes run into one another without interruption. Despite this the playwright does manage to include several different places and times within the story. The audience are required to be active participants and piece everything together as they watch the play.

So let's begin by thinking about when the main events happen in *Curious Incident*... does the story begin at the beginning and end at the end? The answer to this question is, of course, no!

Chronology

The order and use of time is known as the "chronology" of the play. *Curious Incident* is written in two parts (rather than the usual acts and scenes we so often see in playscripts) and has a non-linear structure; events are revealed in a different order to which they occurred. For example, we find out who killed Wellington the dog after it happened and we find out that Christopher's mother Judy went to live in London with Mr Shears part way through the play whereas we initially believe the same as Christopher, that she had died. There are also flashbacks such as when Christopher explains how his father told him that his mother had been admitted to hospital (when, in fact, she had left to go to London with Mr. Shears). Remember, none of these structural features occur by accident. The non-linear nature of the text could well reflect the way Christopher's mind works. The audience often see him struggle to maintain a logical approach to the difficulties he encounters. Just as his mind easily wanders off track, so we the audience also have to work at piecing the parts of the mysteries together ourselves.

Curious Incident has a fairly dramatic opening as the first scene we see contains a dead dog with a pitchfork sticking out of it, followed by Mrs. Shears asking Christopher, "What in Christ's name have you done to my dog?" This whodunit/murder mystery is set up as a driving force for the action but the text is more an exploration of Christopher's character and his ability to overcome the difficulties he has with communication and with his family situation, rather than the focus being on who actually killed Wellington the dog. This opening scene does effectively grab the attention of an audience however as they too begin by wondering who could be cruel enough to kill an innocent animal using a pitchfork. Violence is a theme which is further explored as the play progresses.

Journeys

Just as Christopher embarks on a challenging physical journey to London, so he also goes on a psychological journey. It can appear as if Christopher is struggling with the physical aspects of the journey, but the play's focus is also on his ability to accept that his parents are fallible; his father lied to him and his mother had an affair. Christopher must battle with his emotions as much as his physical reactions to the environment around him. By the end of the play there is still work to be done by Christopher and his family but the future is looking more positive for those relationships. Remember in an exam to focus on what is revealed in the play and how it is left. It is fine to say that unanswered questions remain for the audience but you should avoid speculating on what might happen next. Focus instead on why the playwright might have chosen to leave the audience with those questions...

If you are analysing an extract from the play, consider whereabouts in the play that scene occurs. Is it the opening? (See the end of this ebook for a sample essay on the first two pages of the playscript). Is it the end of the play? Is it setting up any future events? Examiners will choose an extract which is of importance in the play. Re-reading the play several times (and seeing it on stage if possible) will help you to recognise quickly when and where that scene occurs. You must get to know the plot thoroughly. See "Ways of remembering the plot" for revision techniques which focus on this skill. Do not rely on reading short summaries as your revision, you need to be able to recognise where extracts are from so you need to be very familiar with the play.

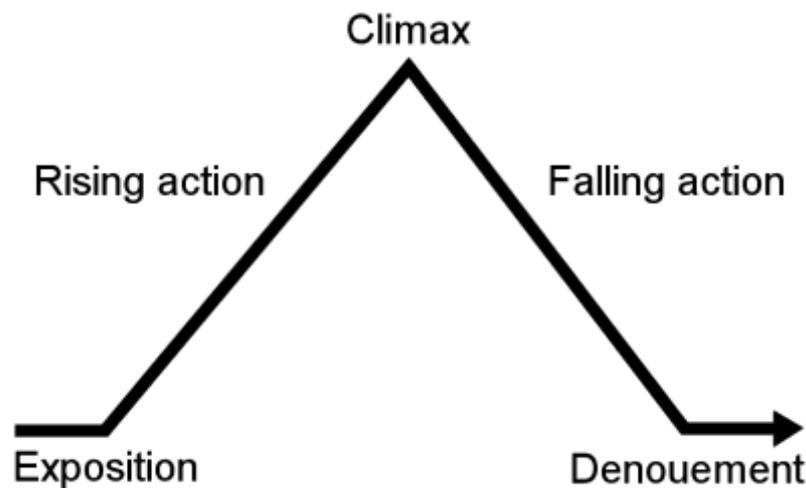
Voices

Again in the early part of the play we hear Christopher's inner thoughts and feelings courtesy of Siobhan (his teacher) who reads aloud from his book. We hear Siobhan read from the book in the opening scene so we are seeing the action on stage at the same time as hearing about it from Christopher's book. This book is written in the style of a diary and it is an effective structural device which allows us an insight into Christopher's mind at times when he might find it difficult to communicate (such as when he is being blamed for the death of the dog). In Part Two we learn that Christopher's book has been turned into a play by his school so it can be thought of as a "play within a play."

Other voices are used at different times in the play in addition to the main characters which would be seen on stage. They are used in the play to narrate what we are seeing such as Voices 1-6 that reveal the contents of Christopher's pockets as he empties them for the policeman after his arrest. This is somewhat unusual but does remind the audience of Christopher's love of details.

Freytag's Pyramid

Freytag's Pyramid is a theory of dramatic structure. Freytag was a German novelist who examined the plots of stories and discovered a common structure (see diagram).



Exposition is the setting of the scene in the first place. The tension rises and builds towards a main event, otherwise known as the “climax” of the story before the suspense gradually reduces as we get to denouement, the ending where any remaining issues are resolved and questions are answered.

In *Curious Incident*, the Exposition sets the scene: we are in Swindon with Christopher having discovered the dead body of his neighbour Mrs. Shears's dog. The Rising Action is when, as he is investigating the murder of Wellington the dog, Christopher discovers the letters written to him from his mother who his father had told him had died. The climax of the story occurs when, after a difficult journey, Christopher arrives in London to confront his mother. The Falling Action is the time that Christopher spends with his mother in London whilst he begins to repair the relationship with his father. By the end of the play the mystery of who killed the dog has been solved, but so has the mystery of what had happened to his mother. The play ends with hope for the future that the family relationships will have been repaired (the denouement).

Stage Directions

Whether analysing an extract or a theme or character in the play, consider the playwright's use of stage directions. There are very few stage directions in *Curious Incident*. The playwright leaves it to the characters to tell the story with little interference. Despite being sparse, the stage directions do show how Christopher or other characters use non-verbal communication. Christopher can rely on non-verbal communication to express himself or, in this part of the play, to block out the situation he is finding challenging to deal with (being falsely accused of the murder of Mrs. Shears's dog). “Christopher puts his hands over his ears. He closes his eyes... He starts groaning.” Like Mrs. Shears, the stress of the situation has caused Christopher's linguistic abilities to crumble. He resorts to blocking his senses.

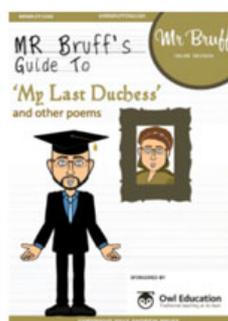
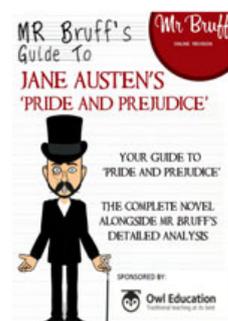
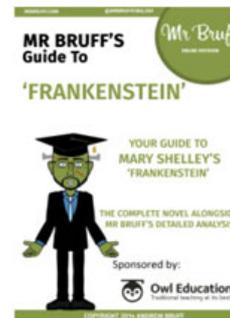
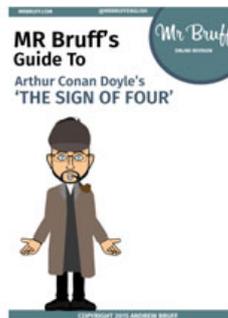
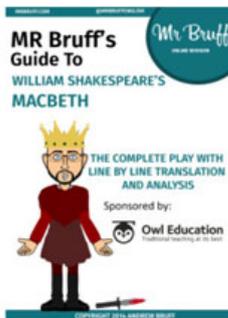
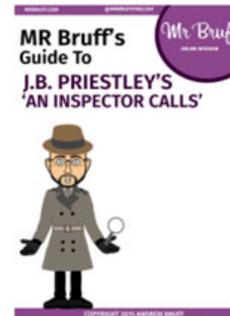
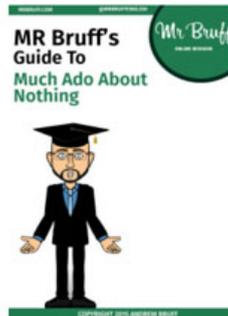
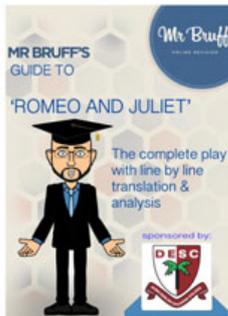
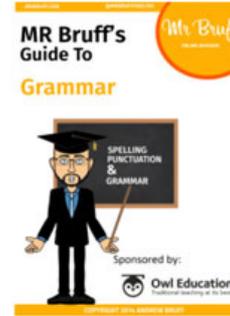
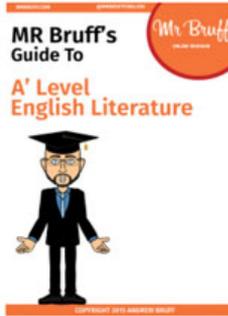
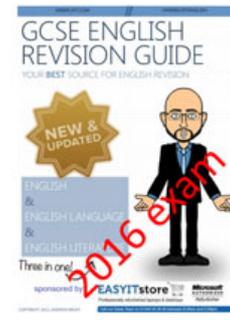
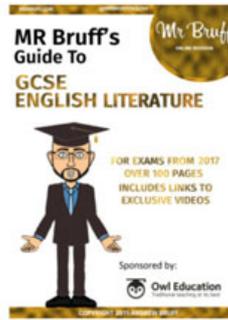
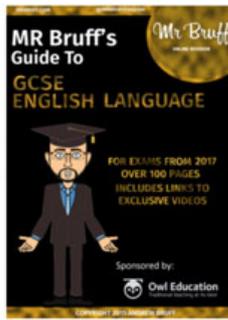
Christopher relies on physical methods of communication at other points in the play too such as when he gets into a fight with his father, “Ed shakes Christopher hard... Christopher punches Ed repeatedly in the face.” Non-verbal communication is also used between Christopher and his parents as due to his dislike of physical touch, they spread their fingers and touch those together instead, rather than giving hugs which might be the preferred means of comfort from other parents to their children. Make sure you look out for the stage directions and learn some quotes from them as you are then also showing an awareness of the form of the text (it’s a play!).

Sentence length and Punctuation

The length of the sentences and the use of punctuation can reveal more about the way in which a character is feeling when those lines are delivered. An example would be when Judy refers to Ed as “Bastard.” The short sentences sum up her thoughts about him as she finds out Ed had told their son that she’d died, rather than telling the truth (that she had had an affair with Mr. Shears and gone to live with him in London). On stage, the use of these short sentences with expletives could actually be used for comic effect depending on how those lines are delivered. If this is the case it could offer a moment of light relief and provide a contrast to the difficult situation Christopher finds himself in in London.

Look out for exclamation marks, use of ellipsis etc. to show whether lines are delivered with vigour and enthusiasm or whether the character is struggling to find the right words (such as when Ed repeatedly uses ellipses when trying to explain to Christopher how he needs to regain his trust near the end of the play). Repetition is another technique which is used to add emphasis to the words being used. There are many examples of repetition being used throughout “Curious Incident” including when, near the end of the play, Ed requests a talk with Christopher, his son initially repeats the word “No” seven times to emphasise his lack of desire to enter into a conversation with his father at that time.

Don’t forget to include the word “structure” in your exam answer. Revise the different techniques thoroughly and if necessary write down key words such as repetition, flashbacks, voices etc. as soon as you get into the exam. That way you won’t have to remember them, they’ll be there on your page as a prompt to include them in your answer.



Check out the full range of books at www.mrbruff.com