9.1: Narration and Narrative

What is Narration?

Narration may serve a variety of purposes in writing. It may serve as the primary mode in a narrative. Narration may also be used just like reasons and examples to support a thesis, based on either fact or invention. Often, it is used to increase reader interest or dramatize a point the writer wants to make. For example, Aesop wrote fables for his clients to use in their legal defense. They were short, easy to remember, and illustrated the client’s argument. Traditionally, narration was used to recount the facts of a legal case, in order to put them into context and structure them in the best possible light for the speaker’s purpose. Plutarch used narration as the basis for his comparison of Greek and Roman notables. In his 1989 history of the Civil War, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, James MacPherson uses narration to support the theme of the contingency of history. In short, narration has been used as proof for a long time.

What is Narrative?

A narrative is a constructive format (as a work of speech, writing, song, film, television, video games, photography or theatre) that describes a sequence of non-fictional or fictional events. The word derives from the Latin verb narrare, “to tell,” and is related to the adjective gnarus, “knowing” or “skilled.”

- First Person Narrative: A mode of narration where a story is told by one character at a time, speaking from their own perspective only. “I” “My”
- Second Person Narrative: A mode of narration where a story is told with the use of “You” “Your” EXAMPLE: You went to the store before you bought yourself a flower.
- Third Person Narrative: A mode of narration where a story is told with the use of “She” “He” “They” “They’ll”
- Multiple Narratives: A mode of narration where a story is told with the use of several narrators which tell the story
from different points of view. The task, for readers, is to decide which narrator seems the most reliable for each part of the story.

- **Unreliable Narratives:** An unreliable narrator is a narrator whose credibility is in question or has been compromised. This narrative mode is one which is developed by an author for various reasons, but is usually done so as to deceive the reader or audience. In most circumstances, unreliable narrators are first-person narrators, but third-person narrators can also be unreliable.

**Elements**

The minimum requirements of narration include:

- A beginning, middle, and end
- A main character, perhaps others as well
- A setting in time and place
- Motivated (or caused) action
- Supports the thesis (“It is best to prepare for the days of necessity.”)