

## POINT OF VIEW

### Participant Point of View

The participant point of view is also called the *first-person point of view* because first-person pronouns (I, me, my, we, us, our) are used to tell the story.

The participant point of view can be further subdivided into two types:

- The narrator as a *major character* in the story (the story is told by and is chiefly about the narrator).
- The narrator as a *minor character* (the narrator tells a story that focuses on someone else, but the narrator is still a character in the story).

A special type of participant narrator is called the *innocent-eye narrator*. The character telling the story may be a child or a developmentally disabled individual; the narrator is thus naïve. The contrast between what the innocent-eye narrator perceives and what the reader understands may produce an ironic effect.

*Stream of consciousness* (interior monologue) is a narrative method in modern fiction in which the author tells the story through an unbroken flow of thought and awareness. The technique attempts to capture exactly what is going on in the mind of a character.

Another special type of first person or participant narrator involves different time in a character's life (e.g., Scout in *To Kill a Mockingbird* or David in *David Copperfield*).

### Nonparticipant Point of View

The nonparticipant point of view is also called *third-person point of view* because third-person pronouns (he, him, she, her, they, them) are used to tell the story.

The nonparticipant point of view can be subdivided into three types:

- *Omniscient narrator*. The author can enter the minds of all the characters.
- *Selective (limited) omniscient narrator*. The author limits his omniscience to the minds of a few of the characters or to the mind of a single character.
- *Objective narrator*. The author does not enter a single mind, but instead records what can be seen and heard. This type of narrator is like a camera or fly on the wall.

*Note: A rarely used point of view in literature is the second-person point of view. This narrative technique uses second-person pronouns (you, your, yourself, etc.). Use of second-person point of view is uncommon because it directly involves the reader in the story, and the reader may be unwilling and unable to identify with the "you" in the story.*

*An author may choose to use more than one point of view in a given work.*

## **Purposes of Participant Points of View**

The first-person point of view offers immediacy. The reader sees what is perceived by the individual "I."

- The first-person narrator can approach other fictional characters as closely as one human being can approach another.
- The first-person narrator can be an eyewitness, observing what other characters say and do.
- The first-person narrator can summarize events and retreat from a scene to meditate on its significance.

The first person point of view allows the reader to be discerning; the reader must determine whether the narrator is trustworthy.

- The first-person narrator understands other characters only by observing what they say and do, this narrator cannot enter the minds of the other characters and is unable to grasp their inner thoughts.
- The first-person narrator outlines what a character observes and feels, and thus the narrator's conclusions may be inaccurate.
- The reader may question the validity and accuracy of the narrator's opinions.
- The first person point of view may contribute to dramatic irony; there is a discrepancy between what the narrator knows and what the reader understands.

## **Purposes of Nonparticipant Points of View**

### ***Omniscient Point of View***

The omniscient point of view allows great freedom in that the narrator knows all there is to know about the characters, externally and internally.

- The third-person narrator describes what characters are feeling and thinking,
- The third-person narrator describes what characters do,
- The narrator may shift focus from the close view to the larger perspective.
- The narrator may comment on events and characters, thus explaining their significance to the reader.
- The narrator may offer multiple perspectives on the same event.

### ***Limited Omniscient Point of View***

The author knows everything about a particular character.

- The story is portrayed through the eyes of one character, and there is a sense of distance from the other characters.
- The limited omniscient point of view approximates conditions of life in that only one character's thoughts are known. The story is more unified through the use of this point of view.

### ***Objective Point of View***

The objective point of view allows inferences to be made by readers through their observance of dialogue and external action. Readers are not directly influenced by the author's statements. Readers' perceptions are influenced more subtly by the author's selection of diction and details.