

English Workbook
Foster by Claire Keegan



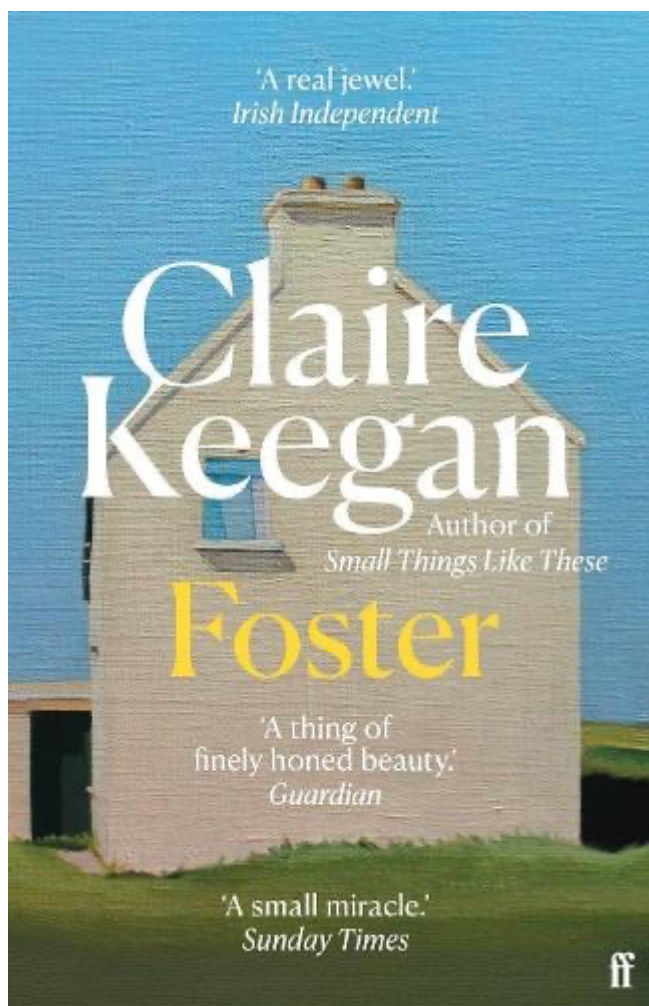
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Pre-Reading Activities

When you read the title 'Foster', what words or ideas spring to mind? Write as many ideas as you can think of in the space below:

Look closely at the book's cover. Can you offer any suggestions about the setting, characters or plot of the story based on the front cover? Label the image below with your ideas.



The Novella as a Form

You may have heard of, or even read, some novellas without realising that they are indeed novellas. Unscramble the titles and authors of the following well-known novellas:

1. FO ICME DNA EMN by NHJO STNBCKEIE

_____ by _____

2. A ISASMRHT LRCOA by HLRSCFA DCKSNII

_____ by _____

3. NMIAAL MFRA by EGEGRF LOLEWR

_____ by _____

4. STOFRE by RECFAL KGENEA

_____ by _____

Put the following 'units' of writing into size order, starting with the smallest:

chapter novel library word volume
sentence novella phrase paragraph article
trilogy epic short story collection

1.	8.
2.	9.
3.	10.
4.	11.
5.	12.
6.	13.
7.	14.

Read the following description from Wikipedia of a novella's characteristics, and the differences between a novel, a novella and a short story.

Novella Characteristics

A novella generally features fewer conflicts than a novel, yet more complicated ones than a short story. The conflicts also have more time to develop than in short stories. Novellas may or may not be divided into chapters (good examples of those with chapters are *Animal Farm* by George Orwell and *The War of the Worlds* by H. G. Wells), and white space is often used to divide the sections, something less common in short stories. Novellas may be intended to be read at a single sitting, like short stories, and thus produce a unitary effect on the reader. According to Warren Cariou, "The novella is generally not as formally experimental as the long story and the novel can be, and it usually lacks the subplots, the multiple points of view, and the generic adaptability that are common in the novel. It is most often concerned with personal and emotional development rather than with the larger social sphere. The novella generally retains something of the unity of impression that is a hallmark of the short story, but it also contains more highly developed characterization and more luxuriant description.

In her 2010 *Open Letters Monthly* series, "A Year With Short Novels", Ingrid Norton criticizes the tendency to make clear demarcations based purely on a book's length, saying that "any distinctions that begin with an objective and external quality like size are bound to be misleading."

Stephen King, in his introduction to *Different Seasons*, a 1982 collection of four novellas, notes the difficulties of selling a novella in the commercial publishing world, since it does not fit the typical length requirements of either magazine or book publishers. Despite these problems, however, the novella's length provides unique advantages; in the introduction to a novella anthology titled *Sailing to Byzantium*, Robert Silverberg writes:

[The novella] is one of the richest and most rewarding of literary forms...it allows for more extended development of theme and character than does the short story, without making the elaborate structural demands of the full-length book. Thus it provides an intense, detailed exploration of its subject, providing to some degree both the concentrated focus of the short story and the broad scope of the novel.

In your own words, complete the table below to summarise the differences between novels, novellas and short stories.

Short Story	Novella	Novel

Chapter 1: Setting

Let's start by considering the setting of the story. In order to understand the setting of a story, the reader needs to know as much about the following four features as possible:

1. The geographical location(s) where the story takes place
2. The environment (atmosphere/description) of the place
3. The time period or year the story takes place
4. The time of year the story is set.

Complete the activity below but filling in as much detail as you can from Chapter 1 and from your own knowledge/research.

<p>Where is the story set?</p>	<p>What do you learn about the setting of the Kinsella's house, particularly their garden and kitchen. What does this suggest to you about the Kinsellas?</p>
<p>What year is the story set? What do you know about the context (i.e. what was going on in the real world in this place at this time in history)?</p>	<p>What time of year does the story take place? Why might this be significant for the story itself?</p>

Narrative Perspective

There are different perspectives from which a story can be told. Can you complete a definition for each of the following:

- 1. First person narrator:

- 2. Third person limited narrator:

- 3. Third person omniscient narrator:

- 4. Multiple narrators:

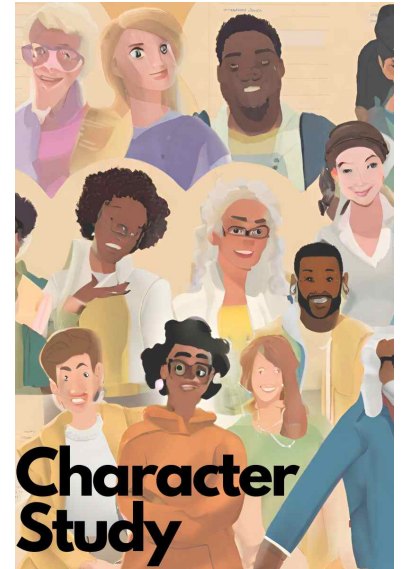
Who is the narrator of 'Foster' and which narrative perspective is used?

What is the effect of the narrative perspective for the reader and our understanding of the story as it unfolds, and why do you think Keegan chose this particular narrator?

Character Study

When we explore characters, we look closely at the following features of the text:

- The character's physical appearance
- Their background story
- Their speech
- Their actions
- The clues the narrator gives about them
- The way other characters respond to them.



Make a list of your first impressions of the four characters introduced in Chapter 1.

The girl	Her dad, Dan
Mr Kinsella	Mrs Kinsella

Character Analysis: The Girl

For each of the following descriptions, find a quotation from Chapter 1 to support the idea, then add some analysis or further detail. Check out the study notes for help at www.thinklit.co.uk/foster-claire-keegan-chapter-1/

Description	Quotation to support	Explanation and analysis
Young		
Untidy		
Curious		
Imaginative		
Perceptive		
Trusting		
Vulnerable		
Innocent		

Character Analysis: Mr Kinsella

Description	Quotation to support	Explanation and analysis
Older gentleman		
Kind-hearted		
Helpful in the house		
Chatty and pleasant		
Seems wary of Dan on first greeting him		
Avoids confrontation		
Generous		
Happy to look after the child		

Character Analysis: Mrs Kinsella

Description	Quotation to support	Explanation and analysis
Homely		
Welcoming		
Puts people at ease		
Generous		
Stubborn		
Dislikes Dan, the girl's father		
Has a 'no-nonsense' approach		
Inquisitive and curious		

Character Analysis: Dan, the Girl's Dad

Description	Quotation to support	Explanation and analysis
Casual		
Selfish		
Unhelpful in domestic matters		
Unreliable		
Uncaring		
Stubborn		
Boastful		
Insensitive		

Comprehension Questions: Chapter 1

1. What are some details about the historical and geographical setting of the novel, particularly the year 1981?
2. How does the narrator describe her father, especially his actions and demeanour, both in the car and at the Kinsella's?
3. What expectations does the narrator have about living with the Kinsellas, and how are these expectations portrayed?
4. Are there any hints or foreshadowing about potential challenges or conflicts in the story?
5. What significance do the weeping willow trees hold, and how do they contribute to the atmosphere?
6. Explore the symbolism behind the rhubarb and the interaction between characters when the rhubarb is given.
7. Describe the relationship dynamics between the narrator's parents as hinted in the chapter.
8. Discuss the domestic details presented in Mrs. Kinsella's kitchen. What do these details reveal about the Kinsella household?
9. Why does the narrator's father leave abruptly without saying goodbye, and what impact does it have on the narrator?
10. How do Mrs. Kinsella and Mr. Kinsella respond to the narrator's discomfort, and what does this reveal about their characters?
11. In what ways does the chapter provide insights into rural Irish life in the 1980s?
12. How do the characters' attitudes and behaviours reflect the cultural expectations and norms of the time?
13. How does the first-person point of view contribute to the reader's understanding of the story, and how might the story be different if it were told from a third-person perspective?