 Narrative voice

Before looking at Jasper Jones, examine a completely different kind of text as a point of comparison.

Text 1: Extract from ‘The Drowned World’ by JG Ballard

As the sun rose over the lagoon, driving clouds of steam into the great golden pall, Kerans felt the terrible stench of the water-line, the sweet compacted smells of dead vegetation and rotting animal carcases. Huge flies spun by bouncing off the wire cage of the cutter, and giant bats raced across the heating water towards their eyries in the ruined buildings. Beautiful and serene from his balcony a few minutes earlier, Kerans realised that the lagoon was nothing more than a garbage-filled swamp.

‘Let’s go up on the deck,’ he suggested to Riggs, lowering his voice so that the others would not hear ‘I’ll buy you a drink.’

Working in pairs, complete the following activities:

1. What is the lexical density of the above extract? [to calculate, divide the total number of words by the lexical items (also known as content words)]
2. Calculate the grammatical intricacy [how many clauses are there per sentence?]
3. What kind of language is used in this passage and why would the author choose to write this way?
4. What perspective is being used and how can you tell?
5. What tense has been used and how can you tell?
6. What do you think this novel is about? What clues are there that let you know this, and why did Ballard choose to write in this particular narrative voice?

Text 2: Extract from Jasper Jones by Craig Silvey

We walk for an age, but I don’t ask questions. Some way out of town, past the bridge and the broad part of the Corrigan River and into the farm district, Jasper pauses to feed a cigarette into his mouth. Wordlessly, he shakes the battered pack my way. I’ve never smoked before. I’ve certainly never been offered one. I feel a surge of panic. Wanting both to decline and impress, for some reason I decide to press my palms to my stomach and puff my cheeks when I wag my head at his offer, as if to suggest that I’ve smoked so many already this evening that I’m simply too full to take another.

Jasper Jones raised an eyebrow and shrugs.

Working on your own, complete the following activities:

1. What is the lexical density of the above extract? How does this compare to Text 1?
2. Calculate the grammatical intricacy. Likewise, how does it compare?
3. What kind of language is used in this passage and why does the author choose to write this way?
4. What perspective is being used and how can you tell?
5. What tense has been used and how can you tell?
6. How does narrative voice link to the subject matter of Jasper Jones? In other words, why did Silvey decide to write his novel in this narrative voice?
7. Rewrite the following extract from Jasper Jones from a third person perspective.

I trust him. I have to. I’ve come too far. If he were to leave me here and now, I’d never make it back.