

GENRE

The Longest Memory is a historical fiction novel. It is a fictional story, set during America's slave period of the 18th and 19th centuries.

In historical fiction the setting is the most important feature. As the author has based their writing on a historical event, it is very important that the portrayal of the time period is accurate and authentic. D'Aguiar's setting in *The Longest Memory* will be explored further in the setting section of this text.

Features of historical fiction

- Setting

As mentioned above, the setting is the most important feature of historical fiction. The setting needs to be accurate and authentic.

- Characters

All the characters need to behave in an appropriate manner to the time period. Characters may be fictional, real or based on a person who lived at the time the novel is set.

- Description

Description is very important in a work of historical fiction. Places, events and people may be unfamiliar to the reader and therefore need to be vividly explained to enable the reader to fully grasp what is happening.

- Plot

The plot is based on real events, but can include fictional events. Any fictional events must remain accurate to the time period.

- Dialogue

As with the portrayal of characters, any dialogue must be appropriate to the time period.

- Conflict

The conflict experienced by the main characters also needs to be realistic to the time period.

STRUCTURE

The Longest Memory has thirteen chapters as well as a prologue and an epilogue. The title of each chapter reveals whose point-of-view the chapter is written from, for example, Chapter 1 is titled “Whitechapel” and is told from the point-of-view of the elderly slave Whitechapel, while Chapter 2 is titled “Mr Whitechapel” and is told from the point-of-view of the plantation owner Mr Whitechapel. The prologue, called “Remembering” and the epilogue, called “Forgetting” are also told from the perspective of Whitechapel.

Within each chapter the structure can vary. Generally, the chapters are written as personal reflections, however in some chapters there is prose poetry, letters to the editor and journal entries. These variations enhance the reader’s experience and further develop their understanding of the main event, the whipping and death of Chapel, as it does seem like they are learning about it from a range of perspectives.

STYLE

Just as there are variations in the structure of the text in each chapter, the style also varies. D’Aguiar has done this to ensure his characters are authentic. The style used to portray Lydia’s character is formal and reflects her level of education, while Sanders’ chapters are more informal reflecting his comparative lack of education.

SETTING

The Longest Memory is set on a plantation in Virginia, owned by Mr Whitechapel. The Whitechapel family have owned the plantation for at least a generation. The action of the novel almost entirely takes place within the boundary of the plantation.

Make sure you are familiar with the historical context of the novel to provide you with further information about the setting.