Analyzing the Text—From Mississippi Solo

Author’s Style

The author’s style is the manner of writing—how something is said rather than what is said. Readers can analyze an author’s style by making observations about these elements:

• word choice  • sentence types  • repetition of one or more words
• sentence length  • sentence fragments  • descriptive details

An author’s style can be **formal**, using complex language and sentence structures, or **informal**, using simpler language, sentences, and fragments.

Figurative language is an imaginative use of words to express ideas that are not literally true but that are meaningful and can have an emotional impact. This chart shows three common kinds of figurative comparisons.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comparison</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Effect</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>simile:</strong> a comparison of two unlike things using the word <em>like or as</em></td>
<td>Clouds rolled overhead in wild swirls like batter in a bowl. (lines 26–27)</td>
<td>vivid image of changing sky</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>metaphor:</strong> a comparison of two unlike things that have qualities in common, without using <em>like or as</em></td>
<td>. . . the far curtain of the insulated air . . . (lines 35–36)</td>
<td>warmth that is trapped inside a barrier</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>personification:</strong> the giving of human qualities to an animal, object, or idea</td>
<td>The river was talking to me . . . (line 14)</td>
<td>a feeling of connectedness</td>
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</table>
Find another example of a simile in this memoir. What does it help you understand?

A: “sprinkles passed over like army scouts;” The comparison connects sparse drops that hint at the full “army” of rain to come.

Cite Text Evidence

Support your responses with evidence from the text.

1. **Interpret:** Reread lines 85-100. What seems unexpected about the author’s reactions during this experience?
   
   A: It’s surprising that the author is “not worried,” even though drowning or other harm seems possible. He is “more amazed than anything” at feeling protected by the river. His feeling of being “one with this river” is unexpected, because experiencing a severe storm while being vulnerable in a canoe usually creates the feeling of fear.

2. **Compare.** Reread lines 13-20 to find what the author compares with walking with a favorite niece or nephew. What does that comparison suggest?
   
   A: The author compares his figurative conversation with the river to a pleasant experience with a young niece or nephew jabbering away on a walk to “no place in particular.” The comparison suggests a familiar, easy, friendly experience.

3. **Cite Evidence.** Reread lines 1-10. What does the author reveal about himself?
   
   A: The author is in a relaxed, philosophical frame of mind, thinking about what is important in life. He reflects on “hard days” and “scary times” in the past, and he is appreciating the “peaceful, easy, glorious days” of the present.
4. **Analyze.** Reread line 25. What kind of figurative language is the author using, and what does it suggest about his connection to his environment?
   
   A: The author is using personification to develop his idea that the river has human qualities. The river is talking to him and is warning him to prepare for danger.

5. **Analyze.** Find an example of one or more sentence fragments. Why might the author have chosen to use sentence fragments instead of complete sentences, and what does it suggest about the style of his writing?
   
   A: In lines 81-82, the author strings together these fragments: “The heavy winds, the amount of water, the warmth of the air, and the cold rain.” The author uses fragments here and elsewhere to reflect his thinking at the moment that he is experiencing events. Thoughts and images come to mind in incomplete sentences, as they often do in life. The author also uses fragments, which are more conversational, to create a more informal style.

6. **Analyze.** Reread lines 62-70. What word choices and figurative language help you picture the scene?
   
   A: Examples of figurative and descriptive language: “the sky split open with a loud crash”; “a splintery crackle of lightning”; the bent treetops were “like fishing rods hooked on a big one”; the rising water was “like the tide rushing upstream”; “trees swooshed loudly”; rain “poured down in bucketfuls.” All of this imagery comes in a rush, suggesting a flood and conveying the sounds, sights, and feelings of the storm.