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## Lesson Three

### FOCUS: Narrative and Point of View

The narrator tells the story with a specific perspective informed by his or her beliefs and experiences. Narrators can be major or minor characters, or exist outside the story altogether. The narrator weaves her or his point of view, including ignorance and bias, into telling the tale. A first-person narrator participates in the events of the novel, using “I.” A distanced narrator, often not a character, is removed from the action of the story and uses the third-person (he, she, and they). The distanced narrator may be omniscient, able to read the minds of all the characters, or limited, describing only certain characters’ thoughts and feelings. Ultimately, the type of narrator determines the point of view from which the story is told.

*The Thief and the Dogs* is told from third-person point of view by a narrator who does not participate in the novel’s action. Like most of Mahfouz’s work, the novel is realistic fiction that attempts to faithfully reproduce the appearance of ordinary people in everyday situations. However, Mahfouz sometimes chooses to give the reader access to Said Mahran’s private thoughts through interior monologue, an extended presentation of thoughts and ideas that read as if Said is speaking aloud. These thoughts are written in the first person from Said’s point of view. Interior monologue is one of the most common literary devices used in the stream of consciousness technique.

### Discussion Activities

Mahfouz switches between traditional third-person narration and first-person interior monologue from Said’s point of view. In the English version of *The Thief and the Dogs*, the translator signifies the change by putting Said’s thoughts in italics. Still, many readers might have trouble making the transition between the two forms of narration. Encourage your students to share examples of specific places in the novel’s first five chapters where they had difficulty following the narrative. If necessary, read the sections aloud to help students become accustomed to the way Mahfouz transitions between the narrative voices.

### Writing Exercise

Ask your students to examine the differences between the two narrative forms. In their journal, ask them to write three paragraphs considering which narrative technique they prefer to read. Which allows them to feel closer to the action of the story? To Said? To the other characters?

### Homework

Read Chapters Six, Seven, Eight, and Nine (pp. 63–88). Ask students to identify the main characters of the story. How do they influence Said’s actions?