

In the first chapter of the novel, the narrator creates suspense from the very first paragraph. In this way, he engages the reader, making him feel curious and eager to turn the page.

Firstly, the narrator refers to an “embarrassingly familiar breath of sweetness” that comes from “one of the gardens”. He cannot name the plant that gives it off but we can clearly determine that this smell triggers very strong emotions in him. Consequently, this creates suspense as we want to know what this smell is and why, for instance, it gives him contradictory feelings: “a kind of homesickness for where I am” and at the same time, a desire to be “away away”.

Apart from the reference to this mysterious smell and the anxiety it generates, the narrator arouses even more curiosity in the reader when he enlarges on his feelings of unrest: “I have a feeling that something, somewhere has been left unresolved, that some secret thing in the air is still waiting to be discovered.” In this quotation, we can see how he uses indefinite pronouns (“something”, “somewhere”) and vague words like “secret thing” so as to hold information back and leave the reader with a lot of questions: What is the secret that needs to be resolved? Where is it hidden?

Moreover, the reference to place is extremely mystifying. In a sentence, the narrator equates place and time: “(...)the place where I should like to be off to is my childhood”. This quote seems to suggest that travelling in space will not be enough for him, as he would like to go back in time as well. Then, he speaks of a “far-off nearby land”. The oxymoron in this phrase makes us wonder: where is this place? Why is it far off but at the same time nearby?

Finally, the narrator gives us some unconnected details of the plot. On the one hand, he introduces two characters: Keith and his mother. We can determine something awful happened to Keith’s mother since he remembers her “sitting in the dust” “weeping”. As a result, we feel eager to learn more: Why should a woman cry in the dust in front of a child? On the other hand, he reveals fragmentary elements of the story, as they crop up in his memory: “Glimpses of different things flash into my mind, in random sequence, and are gone. A shower of sparks... A feeling of shame... Someone unseen coughing, trying not to be heard... A jug covered by a lace weighted with four blue beads” On a first reading, these elements don't seem to make sense, and we don't understand how they connect. Consequently, we feel eager to read the rest of the story to find out more.

In conclusion, the narrator engages the reader by introducing the story in a vague way. As the story stems from very old memories, which

seem to be at the back of his mind, he discloses information little by little, recreating the way in which he retraces the memories. This gradual disclosure of information arouses the reader's interest. It is necessary to make progress in the book to learn how the mysteries introduced in the first chapter are solved, and to see how the elements presented there are finally interwoven in the plot of the story.