

TEACHING THE NOVEL BEFORE, DURING & AFTER

- A. Select the novels and place them appropriately in the school calendar.
1. Select the novels
 - a. Two summer novels, both accessible
 - b. Four in-class novels: two pre-WW I, two post-WW I
 - c. Most of the novels should be “of literary merit”
[rich language / reward rereading / multiplicity of interpretation]
 2. Place the novels in the syllabus
 - a. Consider putting the novels in order of accessibility.
 - b. Consider the ‘traps’ in your school’s calendar.
 - c. Know what your students will be doing in other classes and activities.
 3. Use a planning page or the like to set the learning outcomes for each novel.
 4. Search the novel on line.
 - a. Find what resources offer ideas for teaching the novel.
 - b. Find what resources can help your students; know what sites are available for them.
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- B. Model a “way into the novel,” a pre-reading strategy.
1. Look carefully at the title—one word at a time.
 2. Look at the organization.
 - a. Is the novel divided into chapters?
 - b. How many are there? Are they about equal length?
 - c. Are they numbered? grouped into sections?
 - d. Do they have epigraphs? titles?
 - e. Watch to see what design the writer is using, what logical reasons underlie the structural organization: patterns of repetition that establish a narrative rhythm
 3. Devise a reasonable strategy for reading the novel, including a schedule. Leave some “elbow room.”
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- C. Model a close reading of the opening passage of the novel—the writer uses this piece to separate the real world we live in from the world of the novel. Include the title.
1. Read at least the first page or two aloud, signaling students what kinds of notes they can be making as they read. Be sure they can pronounce the proper nouns.
 2. Help students identify the setting and the point of view.

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D. Model a close reading of a narrative passage early in the novel [to signal what elements students should be attending to]

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| 1. the setting | 5. the characters |
| 2. in time [year, season, and the like] | 6. who they are and how they relate to the others |
| 3. in place [country, city or country, and the like] | 7. techniques the writer uses to reveal them |
| 4. social and historical environment | |

E. Annotating

- Work out a system to offer students for marking the text. At the least, they should indicate:

the entrance of new characters	plot elements (complications, crises, climaxes, reversals)
shifts in setting (place or time) or mood	
changes in characters (softening, hardening, epiphanies) or changes in relationships between or among characters	predictions
	questions
patterns, including repetition or echoing	memorable lines or passages
- Stop to review the annotations frequently, using the questions students bring in to start discussion, constructing a class-wide set of “memorable lines,” and the like

F. Some Activities

Make a list of a character’s actions in one column and the consequences of those actions in the other.

Stop in the middle, or at the end of each third, to identify and discuss the “big issues” to that point. How can they be identified? How will the author have the characters work them out?

Find a poem (or a song) that echoes or can be said to comment on a part or passage of the novel. Explain how the two are related.

Decide to what extent the names of the characters seem to suggest meanings.

In a complex novel, keep a family tree.

Trace graphically the conflicts in the novel.

Which pit characters against their environment, natural or social? Which set characters against each other? Which create a clash within a character? Which characters want what they wish they did *not* want?

For one chapter/section of the novel, write a review of the analysis given at one of the popular “literature help” web sites: Enotes, SparkNotes, BookRags, or the like. Explain what is included, what is left out, any special insights the site offers, any questionable readings, and anything else that helps evaluate the site.

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1. **Add a chapter**

Write a short new chapter to follow the novel's last chapter or come before the first one or to fit at a specific place in the midst of the novel. The new chapter needs to appear to be part of the original novel, so it must match in style, tone, and theme.

[adapted from Frazier L. O'Leary, Jr.; Cardozo High School; Washington, D.C.]

2. **Design a Game**

The students' first job is to make notes as they read (mind map form is great for this) under the headings of character, setting, landmarks of the journey/events, goal/treasure to be attained, as appropriate to the novel. The game *must* stay consistent with the themes and tone of the novel.

From there they design a proposal for their game - this must include at least six pieces: (1) Name of the game, (2) Playing pieces—including any cards or devices accompanying it (3) Written rules, (4) Board design, and (5) Written instructions for how the game is to be played.

Once the students have written these notes out fairly fully, they draft a layout for the front of box for the game. This will then be labeled with at least three visual and verbal features they intend to include and the effect they want these features to have. i.e. use of trendy lettering to attract teenage buyers.

Once students have discussed their proposal with the teacher, and both are happy with any needed changes, additions or compromises, students bring the final production.

[adapted from Sharon Stewart; Whitianga, New Zealand. (rsalisbury@xtra.co.nz)]

3. **Rewrite a passage**

Students rewrite a passage, either imitating the style of a different writer (a piece of Hemingway as Faulkner might have done it) OR changing the point of view.

4. **Prepare a movie treatment**

Students prepare a movie proposal for a film of the novel. They are to include, with specific written explanation for each:

- a) a complete cast (actual actors—living or not),
- b) a director
- c) a detailed description and rendering of two set designs
- d) a description of the music, specifying the composer(s)
- e) a poster or full-page newspaper ad
- f) a story summary, specifying what will be included and what will be omitted