Teaching the Novel

**BEFORE**

## Select the novels and place them in the calendar.

### Select the novels

1. Two summer novels, both accessible
2. Four in-class novels: two pre-WW I, two post-WW I
3. Most of the novels should be “of literary merit”   
   [rich language / reward rereading / multiplicity of interpretation]

### Place the novels in the syllabus

1. consider an order of accessibility.
2. consider your school’s calendar.
3. consider your students’ other classes and activities.

### Set the learning outcomes for each novel.

### Search the novel on line.

1. Find teaching resources
2. Find student resources

## Model a “way into the novel,” a pre-reading strategy.

1. Look carefully at the title—one word at a time.

### Look at the organization.

### Is the novel divided into chapters?

### How many are there? Are they about equal length?

### Are they numbered? grouped into sections?

### Do they have epigraphs? titles?

### Watch to see what design the writer is using, what logical reasons underlie the structural organization: patterns of repetition that establish a narrative rhythm

### Devise a reasonable strategy for reading the novel, including a schedule. Leave some “elbow room.”

## 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.

**DURING**

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

### the setting—in time [year, season, and the like]; in place [country, city or country, and the like]; social and historical environment

### the characters—who they are and how the relate to the others; techniques the writer uses to reveal them

## Annotating

1. Offer students a system for marking the text. Indicate:

### character entrances, changes in characters or in characters’ relationships

### shifts in setting (place or time) or mood;

### patterns, including repetition or echoing

### plot elements (complications, reversals)

### predictions; questions

### memorable lines or passages

### Review the annotations frequently

## Some Activities

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

### Stop periodically to discuss the “big issues.” 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.

### 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 part, write a review of the analysis at one of the “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.

### Keep a dialectical journal.

**AFTER**

## 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.

## Design a Game

Students make notes on character, setting, landmarks of the journey/events, goal/treasure to be attained, and the like. The game must stay consistent with the themes and tone of the novel.

A proposal for the game will 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, and (6)  a layout for the front of box for the game.

## Rewrite a passage

Students rewrite a passage, either imitating the style of a different writer or changing the point of view.

## Prepare a movie treatment

Students prepare a movie proposal for a film of the novel. They are to include a director; description and rendering of two set designs; description of the music, specifying the composer(s); poster or full-page newspaper ad; a story summary specifying what will be included and what will be omitted

## Construct a test

Build a test that both rewards perceptive reading and teaches.