

How to Read Literature Like a Professor:
A Lively and Entertaining Guide to Reading Between the Lines
by Thomas C. Foster

Completing the following short writing assignments will let you practice your literary analysis.

Whenever I ask for an example from literature, you may use short stories, novels, or plays. If your literary repertoire is thin and undeveloped, use the Appendix to jog your memory or to select additional works to explore. At the very least, watch some of the "Movies to Read" that are listed on pages 318-320. **Please note that your responses should be paragraphs--not pages.**

Regarding length, one paragraph of four to six sentences for each set of questions will do.

Due Tuesday, September 6

Introduction: How'd He Do That?

How do memory, symbol, and pattern affect the reading of literature? How does the recognition of patterns make it easier to read complicated literature? Discuss a time when your appreciation of a literary work was enhanced by understanding symbol or pattern.

Chapter 1 -- Every Trip Is a Quest (Except When It's Not)

List the five aspects of the QUEST and then apply them to something you have read (or viewed) in the form used on pages 3-5.

Chapter 2 -- Nice to Eat with You: Acts of Communion

Choose a meal from a literary work and apply the ideas of Chapter 2 to this literary depiction.

Chapter 3: --Nice to Eat You: Acts of Vampires

What are the essentials of the Vampire story? Apply this to a literary work you have read or a film you have viewed.

Due Monday, September 12

Chapter 4:--Now, Where Have I Seen Her Before?

Define intertextuality. Discuss 2-3 examples that have helped you in reading specific works.

Chapter 5 -- When in Doubt, It's from Shakespeare...

Discuss a work that you are familiar with that alludes to or reflects Shakespeare. Show how the author uses this connection thematically. Read pages 40-41 carefully. In these pages, Foster shows how Fugard reflects Shakespeare through both plot and theme. In your discussion, focus on theme.

Chapter 6 -- ...Or the Bible

Read "Araby" (attached). Discuss two Biblical allusions that Foster does not mention. Look at the example of the "two great jars." Be creative and imaginative in these connections.

Chapter 7-- Hansel and Gretel

Think of a work of literature that reflects a fairy tale. Discuss the parallels. Does it create irony or deepen appreciation?

Chapter 8-- It's Greek to Me--

Discuss a recent novel or film (or even video game) that alludes to a Greek myth.

Due Monday, September 19

Chapter 9-- It's More Than Just Rain or Snow

Discuss the importance of weather in a specific literary work, not in terms of plot.

Chapter 10--Never Stand Next to the Hero

Explain why Foster says "It takes a village to murder a character" (89). What does this quote have to do with the title of this chapter?

Chapter 11 --...More Than It's Gonna Hurt You: Concerning Violence

Present examples of the two kinds of violence found in literature. Show how the effects are different.

Chapter 12 -- Is That a Symbol?

Use the process described on page 113 and investigate a symbolic object in something you've read or watched. Be creative, but don't go overboard.

Chapter 13 -- It's All Political

Assume that Foster is right and "it is all political." Use his criteria to show a literary work is political.

Chapter 14 -- Yes, She's a Christ Figure, Too

Apply the criteria on page 126 to a major character in a significant literary work. Try to choose a character that will have many matches. This is a particularly apt tool for analyzing film -- for example, *Star Wars*, *Cool Hand Luke*, *Excalibur*, *Malcolm X*, *Braveheart*, *Spartacus*, *Gladiator* and *Ben-Hur*.

Due Monday, September 26

Chapter 15 -- Flights of Fancy

Select a literary work in which flight signifies escape or freedom. Explain in detail.

Chapter 16 -- It's All About Sex... & Chapter 17 -- ...Except the Sex

OK ..the sex chapters. The key idea from this chapter is that "scenes in which sex is coded rather than explicit can work at multiple levels and sometimes be more intense than literal depictions" (149). In other words, sex is often *suggested* with much more art and effort than it is *described*, and, if the author is doing his job, it reflects and creates theme or character. Choose a novel or movie in which sex is *suggested*, but not described, and discuss how the relationship is suggested and how this implication affects the theme or develops characterization.

Chapter 18 -- If She Comes Up, It's Baptism

Think of a "baptism scene" from a significant literary work or film. How was the character different after the experience? Discuss.

Chapter 19 -- Geography Matters...

Discuss at least two different aspects of a specific literary work that Foster would classify under "geography."

Chapter 20 -- ...So Does Season

Find a poem that mentions a specific season. Then discuss how the poet uses the season in a meaningful, traditional, or unusual way. (Submit a copy of the poem with your analysis.)

Due Monday, October 3

Interlude -- One Story

Write your own definition for archetype. Then identify an archetypal story and apply it to a literary work with which you are familiar.

Chapter 21 -- Marked for Greatness

Figure out Harry Potter's scar. If you aren't familiar with Harry Potter, select another character with a physical imperfection and analyze its implications for characterization.

Chapter 22 -- He's Blind for a Reason, You Know & Chapter 23 -- It's Never Just Heart Disease. . .And Rarely Just Illness

Recall two characters who died of a disease in a literary work. Consider how these deaths reflect the "principles governing the use of disease in literature" (222-224). Discuss the effectiveness of the death as related to plot, theme, or symbolism.

Chapter 24 -- Don't Read with *Your* Eyes

After reading Chapter 24, choose a scene or episode from a novel, play or epic written before the twentieth century. Contrast how it could be viewed by a reader from the twenty-first century with how it might be viewed by a contemporary reader. Focus on specific assumptions that the author makes, assumptions that would not make it in this century.

Due Monday, October 10

Chapter 25--It's My Symbol and I'll Cry If I Want To

Summarize Foster's ideas in this chapter.

Chapter 26 -- Is He Serious? And Other Ironies

Select an ironic literary work and explain the multivocal nature of the irony in the work.

Chapter 27 -- A Test Case

Read "The Garden Party" by Katherine Mansfield, the short story starting on page 262. What does the essay that follows comparing Laura with Persephone add to your appreciation of Mansfield's story?

POSTLUDE: Who's in Charge Here?

Who is Roland Barthes and what is his article "The Death of the Author" about? Answer the question--"Who's in Charge Here?"

Envoi

Choose a motif not discussed in this book (as the horse reference on pages 304-305) and note its appearance in three or four different works. What does this idea seem to signify? What does "envoi" mean?

