

How to Read Like a Literature Professor

Summer Assignment and Study Guide

Students are expected to read *How to Read Like a Literature Professor*, by Thomas C. Foster (ISBN-13: 978-0062301673) which will help you understand how we will be analyzing the novels in our AP Literature course. If you would like to borrow a copy, physical books can be picked up from Mrs. Lewis' or Mrs. Schroeder's rooms during the last week of school. Plan on this book taking 1-2 weeks to read. *Students requiring extended time should plan on taking 2-3 weeks to read this book.*

Purpose: This summer assignment is designed to prepare you for the rigorous work awaiting you in the AP English Literature course. Thomas C. Foster's book, *How to Read Literature Like a Professor*, creates a guide to help students understand and interpret any work of literature to its full depth. When the school year begins, you will pair readings from Foster's guide with Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Your first Beta Assessment of the semester will include questions about this summer assignment that can be found within this study guide. We will also be referring back to Foster's ideas throughout the year.

Materials: Please complete this guide digitally using your Chromebook, as it will be turned in via Google Classroom. Again, if you would like to borrow a copy, physical books can be picked-up from Mrs. Schroeder's room during the last week of school. Other versions of the book can be found online, however, if you would like to purchase your own copies so you can annotate (recommended), please make sure to get the correct versions:

[Foster, Thomas C. *How to Read Literature Like a Professor*. \(2014\) Revised Edition. ISBN: 9780062301673](#)

Directions: For each chapter of *How to Read Literature Like a Professor*, you will fill out the following study guide questions and **make an ORIGINAL personal connection to a text you have read (one NOT mentioned by Foster).**

Chapter 1: "Every Trip is a Quest (Except When It's Not)" (1-6)

1. What are the five characteristics of the quest? Label them and give a brief definition of each.
 - a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
 - e.

2. What is the REAL reason for a quest?

Personal Connection: Name a text that has a quest that follows all 5 characteristics. Explain how each characteristic is seen in the text.

What was the REAL reason for the quest?

Chapter 2: “Nice to Eat With You: Acts of Communion” (7-14)

1. Foster says that “break bread” is an act of what?
2. Why does Foster assert that a meal scene in literature is almost always symbolic?
3. What does Foster say about meal scenes that do not go well?

Personal Connection: Choose a meal scene from a work of literature and explain its symbolism. Describe the scene, the relationship between the characters, and how the mood or progression of the meal impacts the plot of the story.

Chapter 3: “Nice to Eat You: Acts of Vampires” (15-22)

1. What are the common characteristics of vampires and vampire-like characters in literature?
2. What are some things, besides literal vampirism, that acts of vampirism in literature are symbolic of?

Personal Connection: Choose a vampire-like character from a book and explain how they fit the profile laid out by Foster.

Chapter 4: “Now, Where Have I Seen Her Before?” (23-31)

1. What does Foster mean when he says “there’s no such thing as a wholly original work of literature”?

2. What is the “*aha!* factor” and how does it link to “intertextuality”?

Personal Connection: Give an example of intertextuality between two texts (poem, play, and/or novel) that gave you an “aha” moment.

Text 1:

Text 2:

Explain how the two stories relate to one another, acknowledging how the author of the later text uses the audience’s understanding of the earlier text to build depth in their own work.

Chapter 5: “When in Doubt, It’s from Shakespeare...” (32-41)

1. Foster lists a series of reasons that so many writers use and quote Shakespeare. Give 3:

-
-
-

2. What does Foster mean when he says that, “Writers find themselves engaged in a relationship with other writers...”?

Personal Connection: Give an example of intertextuality between one of Shakespeare’s poems or plays and a modern or contemporary work.

Shakespeare Play:

Modern work:

Explain how the two stories relate to one another, acknowledging how the author of the later text uses the audience’s understanding of Shakespeare’s work to build depth in their own work.

Chapter 6: “...Or the Bible” (42-51)

1. What do Biblical or other religious allusions do for a piece of literature?

2. Why might an author use a religious allusion ironically?

Personal Connection: Give an example of intertextuality between the Bible or another holy book or religious story and a modern or contemporary text.

Bible/Holy Book Story:

Modern Text:

Explain how the two stories relate to one another, acknowledging how the author of the later text uses the audience's understanding of the religious story to build depth in their own work.

Chapter 7: "Hansel and Gretel" (52-58)

1. What is the literary canon?
2. What does Foster suggest as the reason so many writers choose to allude to fairy tales in their works?

Personal Connection: What is a book that you have read outside of school that you think deserves a spot in the literary canon?

Title and author:

Brief summary of the plot:

Explain what about the book makes it so powerful and universally important:

Chapter 8: "It's Greek To Me" (59-68)

1. How does Foster define "myth"?
2. What are the four great struggles of the human being?
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - 4.

Personal Connection: For each of the four great struggles of the human being, give an example from a poem, play, or novel. Name the text and the characters involved, and explain how the example links to Foster’s definition of the struggle.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Chapter 9: “It’s More Than Just Rain or Snow” (69-75)

1. Foster says “weather is never just weather”. What are some things rain can represent in literature?
 - What does Foster say might be the symbolism of a character walking through the rain?
2. What does a rainbow represent in literature?
3. What does fog represent in literature?
4. What does snow represent in literature?

Personal Connection: Pick an element of weather from a text you have read and explain what it represents and what it adds to the mood and meaning of the scene.

Chapter 10: “Never Stand Next to the Hero” (76-89)

1. Why is it dangerous to stand next to the hero?
2. How is this seen in the example of Patroclus?
3. What does Foster mean by the assertion, “characters are not people”?
4. When creating a character, what 3 “elements” do the author and the reader use reciprocally?

Personal Connection: Pick a poem, play, or novel in which a character who “stands next to the hero” suffers repercussions. Explain the relationship between the character and the hero and what happened to them.

Interlude: “Does He Mean That?” (90-93)

Personal Connection: Yes...that question is meant to be rhetorical...but this one is not: What is the function of a rhetorical question? How does Foster’s use of rhetorical questions throughout this book guide the reader?

Chapter 11: “...More Than It’s Gonna Hurt You: Concerning Violence” (94-103)

1. What are the implications of violence in literature?
2. What are the two categories of violence in literature? Describe and define each.
 - a.
 - b.
3. What are the four reasons that authors kill off characters in literature?
 - 1.
 - 2.
 - 3.
 - 4.

Personal Connection: Think of an example of violence from a poem, play, or novel. Explain the circumstances, labeling the type of violence, and then analyze the author’s purpose in using that violence in the text in terms of Foster’s theories.

Chapter 12: “Is That a Symbol?” (104-114)

1. What is the difference between symbolism and allegory?
2. Symbols in literature can be both objects and _____.
3. What are the questions readers should ask of the text when trying to determine symbolic meaning?

Personal Connection: Think of a symbol in pop culture today (school appropriate). What is it? What does it represent? Who is the target audience? Would others outside of that audience interpret it the same way?

Chapter 13: “It’s All Political” (115-123)

1. Foster explains why most literature can be called “political.” Summarize his argument.
2. When does he say “*loves ‘political’ writing*”?

Personal Connection: Think of a poem or song that is “political”.

Poem/Song:

Author/Musician:

What is the poem/about?

How does it seem political?

Does it meet the criteria for the type of “political” writing that Foster loves? Why or why not?

Chapter 14: “Yes, She’s a Christ Figure, Too” (124-132)

1. Foster writes, “... to get the most out of your reading of European and American literature, knowing _____ is essential. Similarly, if you undertake to read literature from an Islamic or a Buddhist or a Hindu culture, _____.” Why? Explain.
2. Foster asserts that a character need not have all of the distinguishing characteristics of

Jesus Christ in order to be considered a Christ figure in literature. Why? Explain.

Personal Connection: Think of a Christ figure you have encountered in a work. What was the work?

What characteristics of this character lead you to think they are a Christ figure? Reference the list given by Foster.

Chapter 15: “Flights of Fancy” (133-142)

1. If you come across a character flying in a piece of literature, they are one or more of the following:
2. What does it mean when literary characters fly?
3. Does a character always have to actually fly in order for there to be “flying” in a piece of literature? Explain.

Personal Connection: Think about a time a character “flew” in a poem, play, or novel. Explain both how this worked as a function of the plot and how it worked on a metaphorical or symbolic level.

Chapter 16: “It’s All About Sex...” (143-150)

Who does Foster accuse of teaching writers to encode sexual messages in their writing and of teaching readers to decode sexual messages in literature?

What are some things that can represent male sexuality in literature?

What are some things that can represent female sexuality in literature?

Chapter 17: “...Except Sex” (151-159)

Foster writes “When they’re writing about other things, they really mean sex, and when they write about sex, they really mean something else.” What are some of the other things that a sex scene can mean?

Chapter 18: “If She Comes Up, It’s Baptism” (160-170)

1. What are some of the things that baptism (or immersion in water) can mean in literature?
2. What are some of the things that drowning can mean in literature?

Personal Connection: Think of an example from a poem, play, or novel in which there is either a baptism OR a drowning. Explain both how this worked as a function of the plot and how it worked on a metaphorical or symbolic level.

Chapter 19: "Geography Matters..." (171-182)

1. What are some of the roles geography plays in literature and what are some of the effects of geography on literature?
2. What does it mean when an author sends a character south?
3. How can a writer's personal geography inform his/her work?

Personal Connection: Think of a story in which geography mattered. What is the significance of the geography and how does it impact the plot of the story?

Chapter 20: "...So Does Season" (183-192)

What are the symbolic meanings of the seasons?

Fall--

Winter--

Summer--

Spring--

Personal Connection: Think of a story in which a change of seasons occurs. How does the change of seasons impact the plot of the story? What is the symbolic meaning of that change?

Interlude: “One Story” (193-200)

1. What does Foster mean by “there’s only one story”?
2. What is an archetype?

Personal Connection: This chapter generally functions as a philosophical interlude, linking chapters 1-20 together. Take a moment to go on your own philosophical interlude: What truths about life are on your mind these days?

Chapter 21: “Marked For Greatness” (201-208)

For what reason(s), do authors give characters deformities, scars or other physical markings in literature?

Personal Connection: Think of an example of a character from a poem, play, or novel that is “marked for greatness”. What is their mark, what is the significance of that mark, and how does that character function within the story?

Chapter 22: “He’s Blind for a Reason, You Know” (209-214)

For what reason(s) do authors choose to make characters blind in literature?

Personal Connection: Think of a character from a story who is blind or becomes blind. How does this blindness impact the plot of the story? What other type of “sight” does the character have or gain?

Chapter 23: “It’s Never Just Heart Disease...And Rarely Just Illness” (215-231)

1. What things can “heart trouble” signify in literature?
2. What are the “principles governing the use of disease in works of literature”?

Personal Connection: Think of a poem, play, or novel in which a character or group of people

suffer from an illness. What is the illness and how does it impact the plot of the story? What is the metaphorical or symbolic meaning of the illness?

Chapter 24: “Don’t Read With Your Eyes” (232-239)

1. Explain what Foster means by “don’t read with your eyes.”

Personal Connection: In this chapter Foster warns us both about the “deconstruction” of a work, and, conversely, the blind acceptance of an author’s viewpoint. Which do you think can be more harmful, and why? How can we approach literature in a way that avoids both?

Chapter 25: “It’s My Symbol and I’ll Cry If I Want To” (240-251)

1. What is Foster’s point in regards to the primary meaning of a text vs. the secondary meaning?
2. What is figuration?
3. What does foster mean by “every work teaches us how to read it as we go along”?

Personal Connection: Pick a novel or series of novels that have a recurring symbol aka a motif. Explain the motif and how it builds depth of meaning as it appears throughout the story.

Chapter 26: “Is He Serious? And Other Ironies” (252-261)

1. Explain what Foster means by “irony trumps everything.”
2. Foster defines irony like this: “What irony chiefly involves, then, is _____” Explain what he means by this.
3. Define the three types of irony.
 - a. verbal irony:
 - b. situational/structural irony:
 - c. dramatic irony:

Personal Connection: Think of an original example (not mentioned by Foster) of each type of irony and explain its impact on the audience.

verbal irony–

situational/structural irony–

dramatic irony–

Postlude: “Who’s in Charge Here?” (295-301)

Personal Connection: How can you “own the books you read” this year? What would make this year in AP Literature the most meaningful to you?