

AP English Literature
How to Read Literature Like a Professor

If you had to sum up the advice in this book in a tweet (140 characters or fewer), what would you say?

Chapter 1: Quest

1. What are the five aspects of the Quest narrative?

2. Write one in 500 words or fewer.

Chapter 2: Communion

1. What are some meanings inherent in meal scenes? While some meals are sexual (*Tom Jones*) and some are more companionable (“Cathedral”), what is the final outcome? How does this idea work in James Joyce’s “The Dead”? What are the structures that make a meal literarily a stand-in for a kind of communion?

Chapter 3: Supernatural elements

1. What does a vampire stand for?

2. What are some of the purposes of ghosts in literature?

3. Give the essentials of the vampire story.

4. What are some uses of the vampiric figure?

5. What is the bottom line of the vampire figure? List three examples from three different texts.

Chapter 4: Archetypal Characters and Allusion

1. How does Tim O’Brien use allusion to enrich *Going After Cacciato*? To what end? Foster uses this example to introduce the chapter and then later. Consider both discussions.

2. Foster asserts, “There is only one story” (27). What does he mean by this assertion?

3. What is “intertextuality”?

4. What does missing the allusions cost the reader?

Chapter 5: Shakespeare

1. What is the value of Shakespearean allusion or use of a Shakespearean plot or character?

2. Consider answers Foster gives early and late in the chapter.

3. What does it mean to write against Shakespeare?

4. How do “Prufrock” and *Hamlet* illuminate each other?

5. How does Athol Fugard use *Henry IV, Part 2* for his own ends?

Chapter 6: The Bible

1. How does Toni Morrison use our knowledge of Revelation in the opening of *Beloved*? What does the allusion add? What degree of knowledge of the Bible is needed to understand this key scene?
2. How is every Bildungsroman a story of the Fall? Consider Bildungsromans we know.
3. Why, according to Foster, are Fall stories so affecting?
4. How do *Beowulf* and *Sir Gawain* relate to the Bible?
5. What does a biblical allusion add to a text? Look where this idea is introduced and then in the end of the chapter. Give a couple of examples.
6. What is Foster's "resonance test"? (49).

Chapter 7: Fairy Tales

1. What is the literary canon?
2. Why do you think Hansel and Gretel is such a prominent source of allusion?
3. What is the effect of a small reference to a well known fairy tale?
4. What is the role of irony in the project of allusion?

Chapter 8: Greek Mythology

1. How does myth work? What particular definition of "myth" does Foster offer?
2. What does this notion of myth and the further idea of "there is only one story" add to your idea about the purpose and scope of literature? (And what are the implications of the dissolution of the literary canon?) Answer based on material both early and late in the chapter.
3. What is the value of allusion to myth? What is the value of Walcott's reference to *The Iliad*? What about the title of *As I Lay Dying*?
4. As we think about Aeneas' relationship to Homer, what about Virgil's relationship to Dante?
5. Think back to Anouilh's *Antigone*. How does Anouilh use Sophocles' play?
6. What is the role of irony in Classical allusion?
7. Cross-stitch this on a pillow: "The recognition makes our experience of literature richer, deeper, more meaningful, so that our own modern stories also matter, also share in the power of myth" (68).

Chapter 9: Weather

1. Consider the effect of rain in the text in question and then also the more symbolic aspects of rain. How does it work in Hardy's "The Three Strangers"?
2. Give two major symbolic meanings of rain. (How does rain function in "The Copper Beech" by Marie Howe?)
3. How can spring work ironically in a modernist text?
4. How does fog work in literature?
5. What about snow? (Remember Stevens' "The Snow Man" from 10th grade and of course the snow in *Dead Poets' Society* and the end of "The Dead.")

Chapter 10: Friend of the Heroes

Let's skip this chapter, unless you are moved to discuss it.

Interlude: Does He Mean That?

1. How do you answer the title question for the modernists? For earlier writers?
2. What use is it to obsess on authorial intention? Can you tell when you are wandering into this very unproductive territory?
3. What is lateral thinking?

Chapter 11: Violence

Violence is generally personal, but it is also at times symbolic.

1. Choose two situations to explore:
Consider the symbolism of the violence in *The Great Gatsby*. How does it resonate symbolically? Consider the symbolism of the peasant's death at the beginning and Anna's suicide in *Anna Karenina*. What about Raskolnikov's murders in *Crime and Punishment*? What about the capture of Darl at the end of *As I Lay Dying*? The murder of William in *Frankenstein*?
2. What about violence that comes from the plot/narrative? What does death, such as the death of Nikolay Levin, add to *Anna Karenina*? Consider this answer structurally as well as symbolically. Is it significant that Nikolay dies of consumption?
3. How does violence restore balance?
4. What questions should we ask about violence in the text?

Chapter 12: Symbolism

1. Is it a symbol?
2. How do symbols work? Is literature algebra? How do you know?
3. What is allegory? Is allegory algebra? How do you know?
4. What is the process Foster undertakes to interpret the symbol of the cave? Apply it to your favorite symbol in *The Scarlet Letter* (scaffold, flower, forest...).
5. How can symbols invoke part of the characters' psychologies? Can you think of such a symbol in *As I Lay Dying* or *Invisible Man*?
6. Consider river symbolism. What does the brook in *The Scarlet Letter* symbolize? What about the Lethe and Eunoe in *Purgatorio*? How do these rivers relate to the more archetypal meanings Foster invokes?
7. Foster reads *The Waste Land* from a historicist point of view. How can you read *Gatsby* in that way? What do you emphasize in that sort of reading?
8. What is symbolic action? How does it work in Frost?
9. What process of interpreting symbolism does Foster recommend?

Chapter 13: Political Readings

1. What is the political reading of *A Christmas Carol*? How are political readings still literary?
2. What are the problems with overtly political writing?
3. What kind of political writing does Foster valorize?
4. How do you, based on what Foster has to say, respond to the notion that all writing is political?

Chapter 14: Christ Figures

1. Consider various literary heroes you know and the degree to which they are productively read as Christ figures. Make a spectrum with *Billy Budd* on one end and *Holden Caulfield* on the other. Or dispute these spectrum ends. Include at least 8 different AP-worthy characters.

Chapter 15: Flight

1. What is the fundamental symbolism of flight?
2. Aside from actual, physical flight, in what ways can a writer use imagery or motifs that suggest flight? What should you be attuned to as a reader looking for these image patterns?