

Literary Elements

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Let's Work Together Teaching Guide

Dear Teacher,

Students love reading fiction and narrative biographies, and I'm hoping you and I can add deeper meaning, thought, and enjoyment to their reading. This guide invites you to have students think about their reading and then share their thinking with you and/or a reading partner. Then, I suggest that you show students how an understanding of literary elements can further enrich their reading and their discussions about different books. I'm also hoping you'll consider asking students to reflect on or self-evaluate their reading progress. Let's give students voice in their reading!

Laura Robb

START WITH YOURSELF:

Model for students how to think about reading

As you read aloud, pause and think aloud to show how the story's events and characters make you feel and what you're learning about the protagonist based on his/her inner thoughts, decisions, interactions with others, and ability to solve problems. Point out some themes as well. Involve students by making the read aloud interactive and asking them to add their thoughts to yours.

MOVE TO STUDENTS:

Invite Them to Think About Their Books

Make sure students have read a large enough chunk of text to have a meaningful conversation. You can ask one or two questions during a short conference to learn about students' comprehension and enjoyment of the text. You can have reading partners discuss questions they choose and then write about these discussions in a reader's notebook. Or, you can do both! Readers' notebooks can be spiral or marble-covered composition books that are safe places for learners to try out ideas, interpret texts, adjust thinking, jot notes about their reading, and ask questions.

TEACHING TIP:

Model the kinds of thinking and writing you want students to do with your daily read aloud texts. When you build students' mental model of how to think and write about reading, you can improve comprehension and literary talk.

Pose the following questions when students are halfway through a chapter book and/or after they've completed it.

- How does this book make you feel?
- What have you learned about the main character (protagonist)?
- How has the book changed your thinking about people? About friendship? About solving problems? About decisions?
- What big ideas did you notice?
- What are your opinions about a character's decision and/or motivation?
- Assess how the protagonist handles conflict.
- Share words, phrases, and figurative language from the book that you found memorable and jotted on a page in your notebook.

INTRODUCE LITERARY ELEMENTS

Use questions and prompts about literary elements to foster discussion about the same or different books and invite students to select specific details from their texts as examples. When students use these elements to discuss different books, their conversations can create a desire to read a book their partner enjoyed.

TRY IT

You can introduce literary elements using a picture or chapter book you're reading aloud. Think aloud and explain protagonist, antagonists, setting, plot, and other elements by connecting them to details in the book you're reading. Then, ask the partners to discuss examples of a few elements in their books.

THUMBNAIL DEFINITIONS, QUESTIONS, AND PROMPTS FOR KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

Protagonist: The main character who has problems to solve.

Who is the protagonist? What have you learned about him or her?

Problem: Something that gets in the way of a character's desire or goal and requires an action or decision to resolve or overcome.

Discuss a big problem the protagonist faces and actions taken to resolve it. Why was or wasn't it resolved?

Setting: The time and place in which a story happens.

How does setting affect the protagonist's decisions? Interactions with others? Problems that arise?

TEACHING TIP:

Have students discuss literary elements with a partner before writing about them in their notebooks. Talk is an oral text that allows students to clarify their ideas and develop understandings prior to writing. Remember, students will develop an understanding of elements at different points, and that's okay!

Antagonists: Forces working against the protagonist. Can be external such as nature or other characters; can be internal, such as a character's thoughts and emotions. *How do external and/or internal antagonists affect the protagonist's personality and ability to resolve problems?*

Plot: Events that occur in the text, enabling readers to observe characters in different situations. Plot supports theme, setting, and characters' personalities. *Choose two plot events and show how each one shapes a character's personality.*

Climax: The point of great intensity in the plot. The major climax is near the end. *What does the climax show about problems being resolved?*

Theme: Statements about people and life the author makes with the text. *Identify two themes and use text evidence to support your ideas.*

Notebook Writing:

Invite students to choose a text to think and write about. Then, ask them to explain a few literary elements using the completed text.

Assessment:

Once you feel that students "get" literary elements and can apply each one to a text they've read, you can assess their level of understanding. Ask them to connect a text they've read to some or all of the elements. Primary students can be assessed in a short conference, while students with writing fluency can record their thinking on notebook paper. More important than a grade is what you learn about each student's knowledge as well as the feedback and support you offer to ensure all students comprehend each element.

INTRODUCE REFLECTING ON READING

Reflection is a powerful learning and imagining tool. It enhances reading by reclaiming related memories, deepening insights, helping students make sense of their progress, and making it possible to use prior knowledge to create new understandings. Students who practice reflection experience joy in reading and learning, and develop critical thinking skills and agency.

ENCOURAGE STUDENTS TO REFLECT ON THEIR READING LIVES

Near the end of each semester, ask students questions that encourage them to reflect on a book they enjoyed or their overall progress in reading. This reflection time can also include reviewing the writing about reading in their notebooks.

QUESTIONS/PROMPTS TO ENCOURAGE REFLECTION

- How do you think you've grown as a reader?
- What did you notice and learn from this text?
- What kinds of books will you choose to read next? Explain why.
- Did this book make you want to do or change something? Explain.
- How has reflecting and writing improved your notebook responses?
- Why do you believe this text is important for others to read?

NOTEBOOK WRITING

Let students choose a reflective question to write about or compose their own. Have students talk about this question with you or a partner. Next, ask them to draw, draw and write, or write their reflections in their notebooks.

TEACHER'S NOTES:

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