



Reading Literature

Reading with a Historical Lens

Grades 9-12

Standards:

- RL.9-10.6. Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature.
- RL.9-10.9. Analyze and reflect on (e.g. practical knowledge, historical/cultural context, and background knowledge) how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from mythology or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare).
- RL.11-12.9. Demonstrate knowledge of and reflect on (e.g. practical knowledge, historical/cultural context, and background knowledge) eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century foundational works of literature, including how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics.

Focus: Demonstrate knowledge of eighteenth-, nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century foundational works of literature, including how two or more texts from the same period treat similar themes or topics.

Goal: This lesson can be incorporated easily into the instruction regarding whatever foundational literary work the students are currently reading in your class.

Procedures: Day One

1. Tell students that readers all bring their own cultural “baggage” with them everytime they read something. We are limited in our understanding by the roles that define us. Have students list some of filters through which they see the world (e.g. age, gender, education, prior experiences, family, birthplace, etc.) and discuss.
2. Tell students that sometimes when they read historical documents with their own worldviews, it can be quite confusing and frustrating. The language and syntax, for example, can be a barrier to understanding. Explain that there are many strategies readers can employ to help them read with a historical lens.
3. Distribute a historical text and guide students through it. Provide a handout like the attached one for students to complete while they read. Explain that they will need to read the text more than once.

Procedures: Day Two

1. After the first reading and analysis of the historical text, divide students into small

research groups. Assign each group a different aspect of the historical period to study. Some examples might include cultural values, cultural struggles (e.g. economic depression), language, questions of the day (e.g. should women be allowed to vote?), and styles and conventions (e.g. clothing, hobbies, lifestyles).

2. Give students time to research their assigned areas. Explain that they will be responsible for presenting what they learned to the class. During each presentation, students should take notes using a graphic organizer like the one attached.

Procedures: Day Three

1. On the third day, students will re-read the text. This time, they will read using a historical lens, so that they can understand it in context. Encourage students to take on the mindset of someone in this time period.
2. Consider giving students extra credit if they participate in a cultural immersion on day three. To earn the extra credit, students must approach the class as a member of the time period. In other words, they try to speak as someone from that time period would, within reason. You could also consider allowing students to bring in items from the time period, like clothing, music, or household items.
3. After re-reading the text and discussing it, ask students to write a reflection paper using the attached handout to brainstorm their ideas.

During Reading Questions: Day One

1. How is the language different? Which words seem to mean something different from today's meanings?
2. How is society described? What do you learn about the time period based on these descriptions?
3. Who do you think is the intended audience? How do you know?
4. What are some of the conflicts of the day?
5. What is the main concept of the text?
6. What values of this time period are shown?
7. Is there any offensive language (words that we no longer use because they are offensive)?
8. How important was this text during the time period in which it was written?
9. What biases do you notice?
10. What questions do you have about the time period or issues in the text?

Notes: Day Two

Topic	What I Learned about the Time Period

Reflection: Day Three

My Understanding of the Historical Text

First Reading	Final Reading

