

Name _____

Study guide: How to Read Literature Like a Professor by Thomas C. Foster

Ch. 1 pgs. 1-6 “Every Trip is a Quest (Except When It’s Not)”

1. What are the five characteristics of the quest?

2. Choose a book you have read or a movie you have seen that contains a quest and identify the characteristics and explain. Use Foster’s explanation of the setup in The Crying of Lot 49 on pages 4 & 5 as your guide- meaning yours should be as detailed and clear as his.

Ch. 2 pgs. 7-14 “Nice to Eat With You: Acts of Communion”

3. Complete this sentence about communion “... breaking bread together is an act _____”

4. Why does Foster assert that a meal scene in literature is almost always symbolic?

5. List the things, according to Foster, that eating in literature can represent.

6. Think of an example of a positive “communion” scene in a book you have read or a movie you have seen. Describe the scene and explain its symbolic meaning.

7. Think of an example of a negative “communion” scene in a book you have read or a movie you have seen. Describe the scene and explain its symbolic meaning.

Ch. 3 pgs. 15-21 “Nice to Eat You: Acts of Vampires”

8. What are the essentials of the vampire story?

9. What are some things besides vampirism that vampires and ghosts represent in literature?

Ch. 4 pgs. 22-27 “If It’s Square, It’s a Sonnet”

10. Explain the title of this chapter- what does Foster mean “if it’s square, it’s a sonnet”?

11. What are some of the ways in which a poet works his magic on you?

12. Define/ describe a Petrarchan sonnet.

13. Research Petrarchan sonnets and write down the title and author of one here and attach a copy of the poem to this packet.

14. Define/describe a Shakespearean sonnet.

15. Research Shakespearean sonnets and write down the title of one here and attach a copy of the poem to this packet. (You may not use any that are mentioned in Foster's book. Bonus points will be given for a Shakespearean sonnet by a poet other than William Shakespeare!)

16. Why, according to Foster, is it more difficult to write a short poem than a long one?

Ch. 5 pgs. 28-36 "Now, Where Have I Seen Her Before?"

17. What is the "big secret" Foster reveals in this chapter?

18. How does recognition of these allusions in literature change the reading experience for a reader?

19. What is "intertextuality"?

20. How does Foster say a literature professor can help a beginning reader?

Ch. 6 pgs. 37-46 “When in Doubt, It’s from Shakespeare...”

21. Why do so many writers use and quote Shakespeare?
22. “_____ features prominently in the use not only of Shakespeare but of any prior writer.” Pg. 44

Ch. 7 pgs. 47-56 “...Or the Bible”

23. What do Biblical allusions do for a piece of literature?

Ch. 8 pgs. 57-63 “Hansel and Gretel”

24. What is the literary canon?
25. What does Foster suggest on pg. 59 as the reason so many writers choose to allude to fairy tales in their works?
26. For what purpose do writers often use “readerly knowledge of source texts” pgs. 60, 62-63
27. Think of a book you have read or a movie you have seen that draws parallels to a familiar fairy tale. Briefly describe the plot and how the fairy tale allusion plays out. To what effect? (Irony? To mess around with the story? To make what point?) Explain.

Ch. 9 pgs. 64-73 “It’s Greek To Me”

28. How does Foster define “myth” on pg. 65?

29. What are the four great struggles of the human being?

Ch. 10 pgs. 74-81 “It’s More Than Just Rain or Snow”

30. Foster says “weather is never just weather”. What are some things rain can represent in literature?

31. What does a rainbow represent in literature?

32. What does fog represent in literature?

33. What does snow represent in literature?

Interlude pgs. 82-86 “Does He Mean That?”

34. Summarize Foster’s argument in this chapter.

Ch. 11 pgs. 87-96 "...More Than It's Gonna Hurt You: Concerning Violence"

35. What are the implications of violence in literature?

36. What are the two categories of violence in literature? Describe and define each.

37. What are the four reasons that authors kill off characters in literature?

38. What questions should readers ask themselves when they encounter an act of violence or a death in a piece of literature?

39. Choose an act of violence or a death from a piece of literature you have read and using the information in this chapter, identify its literary purpose. Be sure to include specific details to make your answer clear and complete.

Ch. 12 pgs. 97-107 "Is That a Symbol?"

40. What is the difference between symbolism and allegory?

41. What are the tools we must use to figure out what a symbol might mean?

42. Why is symbolic meaning different for each individual reader? What are some of the factors that influence what we understand in our reading?

43. Symbols in literature can be both objects and _____ pg.
105

44. What are the questions readers should ask of the text when trying to determine symbolic meaning?

Ch. 13 pgs. 108-116 "It's All Political"

45. Foster asserts that, "Nearly all writing is _____" pg.
111

46. On page 115 Foster explains why most literature can be called "political." Summarize his argument.

Ch. 14 pgs. 117-124 “Yes, She’s a Christ Figure, Too”

47. Foster writes on pg. 118 “... 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.

48. 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.

49. How is reading a piece of literature a conversation with the author? (even if the author has been dead for a thousand years)

*** Be sure you know the list on pgs. 119-120! Copy it into your literature notebook if necessary!

Ch. 15 pgs. 125-134 “Flights of Fancy”

50. If you come across a character flying in a piece of literature, they are one or more of the following:

51. What does it mean when literary characters fly?

52. Does a character always have to actually fly in order for there to be “flying” in a piece of literature? Explain.

Ch. 16 pgs. 135-142 “It’s All About Sex...”

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

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

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

Ch. 17 pgs. 143-151 “... Except Sex”

56. Foster writes “When they’re writing about other things, they really mean sex, and when they write about sex, they really mean something else.” Pg. 144
What are some of the other things that a sex scene can mean?

Ch. 18 pgs. 152-162 “If She Comes Up, It’s Baptism”

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

58. What are some of the things that drowning can mean in literature?

Ch. 19 pgs. 163-174 “Geography Matters...”

59. What are some of the roles geography plays in literature and what are some of the effects of geography on literature?

60. What does it mean when an author sends a character south?

61. How can a writer’s personal geography inform his/her work?

Ch. 20 pgs. 175-184 “...So Does Season”

62. What are the symbolic meanings of the seasons?

63. Choose a piece of literature you have read in which season is important or symbolic. Give title and author and briefly describe and explain the symbolic season.

Interlude pgs. 185-192 "One Story"

64. Summarize Foster's point in this section of the book.

65. What are the two words Foster uses to define this concept?

66. Define *intertextuality*

67. Define *archetype*

Ch. 21 pgs. 193-200 "Marked For Greatness"

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

69. Choose a book you have read recently and identify a main character who has some physical marking. Describe and explain why you think the author chose to give him/her that physical trait- what does it mean?

Ch. 22 pgs. 201-206 "He's Blind for a Reason, You Know"

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

Ch. 23 pgs. 207-212 "It's Never Just Heart Disease..."

71. What things can "heart trouble" signify in literature?

Ch. 24 pgs. 213-225 "...And Rarely Just Illness"

72. What are the "principles governing the use of disease in works of literature"?

Ch. 25 pgs. 226-234 “Don’t Read With Your Eyes”

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

74. About what does Foster warn readers?

Ch. 26 pgs. 235-244 “Is He Serious? And Other Ironies”

75. Explain what Foster means by “irony trumps everything”

76. Foster defines irony on pg. 240 like this: “What irony chiefly involves, then, is

Explain what he means by this.

77. There are three types of irony in literature:

Verbal irony (character says opposite of what is expected)

Situational irony/Structural irony (situation or event plays out in an opposite or abnormal way- not like expected)

Dramatic irony (audience/reader knows more than characters know)

Identify one example of each type of irony that Foster has presented in this chapter or earlier in the book and write it here.

Ch. 27 pgs. 245-277 "A Test Case"

78. Complete the task that Foster sets out for you on pgs. 265 & 266. Write on a separate sheet of paper and be prepared to participate in a class discussion about it.

Envoi pgs. 278-281

79. How does Foster suggest that readers learn to identify trends? Why are trends important?

80. What is Foster's parting advice for his reader?