

# English 11: The Independent Novel Study

## Reflective Journal Questions

These questions will give you ideas for a reflective journal on your novel. They are NOT meant to be answered as a set of questions; rather, they are to be used as prompts for reflection. You are not required to answer all the questions. It is NOT necessary to research information.

Include these literary sections in your reflective journal.

- A. Plot, setting, characters, point of view
- B. Theme and other abstract ideas like mood, tone, and irony
- C. Style – use of syntax, diction, language, organization, literary devices to enhance the meaning of the work
- D. Personal relevance
- E. Literary analysis - making connections, synthesizing

Consider: What is the purpose of the novel? That is, what is it that the writer wanted us to think about or understand after reading the book and how did the author communicate the purpose?

### Some General Instructions

- 1) Don't write general entries (Heart of Darkness was an exciting story that I recommend to everyone. I really enjoyed it.) Don't feel required to compliment the author. This is called editorializing.
- 2) List the following: Title of work (underlined); author; date it was written and/or published.
- 3) Provide a biography on the author. Give some background information on the events in the novel, if necessary. This is one of the only places to do some research. Cite your sources. Comment on how the writer's life experiences are reflected in the novel.
- 4) Don't summarize the plot extensively. Keep it to 50 words or fewer.

### First Round of Responses: gut reaction

Immediately after finishing the book, write your reactions. Do not become muddled in the neatness or the words or whether your reader is going to understand all you are saying. Simply write.

#### A. Plot, Setting, Characters, Point of View

a) Plot...you could

- summarize the plot (50 words or fewer)
- do a plot line for the entire story (one sheet)
- identify where the major climax is, what conflict is solved, and the reactions of people in the book to this solution
- list any parallel or recurring events you see
- summarize how the book began (beginning line, chapter, scene, etc.)
- How did the book end? Did you like the ending? Why/why not?

b) Setting: consider the following:

- actual geographic location, physical arrangement of rooms
- the time period, history or season in which the action takes place
- general environment of characters (for example, the religious, mental, moral, social, economic, and/or economic conditions)
- atmosphere/mood

c) Characters: list major characters of book and include the following for each:

- **conflicts** (internal or external) that motivate and shape the character
- two or three words (key personality traits) that characterize each person (example: ambitious, lonely, overprotected)
- include evidence from the text to support

d) Point of View:

- identify point of view used (first person narrator; third person limited; third person omniscient) and assess its effectiveness

### **Commentary on Plot, Setting, Characters, Point of View**

- What is the significance of the title to the work?
- What effect is created by the opening pages? What purpose did the author have in beginning the work this way?
- For each character, consider the following: What values did each hold? What purpose did each character have in the book? How did the society of the book influence each character?
- About the conclusion: Was it a satisfactory ending to the work? Why/why not? If not, how would you have ended the work, and why?
- How did each of the settings make the work more interesting?

### **B) Theme and Other Abstract Ideas**

- What are the major themes (short phrase for each) of the work?
- How is each of these themes portrayed in the book?
- What is the prevailing mood of the novel? How does the author communicate mood?
- What is the prevailing tone of the novel? How does the author communicate tone?
- Sarcasm, irony, satire? Discuss.
- What are the moral and ethical problems explored in the story?
- Archetypal themes or motifs or patterns? Describe.
- List three cause/effect relationships found in the book.
- Does the author use imagery, symbolism, allusions, etc. to develop the themes? How?

**C) Style:**

- Describe the author's overall style and pick several examples that illustrate it (and pick two different but complementary – NOT complimentary ☺- words to describe the style).
- How do the author's diction, grammar, sentence structure, organization, point of view, detail, syntax, and use of irony enhance the meaning of the work and show their attitude?
- What is the structural organization of the novel? Why is this an effective means of development?
- Find examples of literary devices used in the novel. List them with accompanying page numbers. Provide definitions and explain the effectiveness of the literary device.

**D) Personal Relevance of the Work to You:**

- Try to relate the action or outcome of the book to your own life. Did you see yourself in the book? Did you learn a lesson? Did you have an insight into why things are the way they are? Did you remember something from your past you had forgotten? What did you learn that you didn't know before? (This last question is the most important; the earliest ones are to help you generate ideas.)
- Write a different ending to the book. Tell why you changed it.
- Tell five ways in which the main character is like you.
- Did this book remind you of anything that has happened to you? What?
- Did this book give you any new ideas about yourself? What?
- Write a letter to a friend recommending this book.
- Tell about a time when something similar in the story happened to you or to someone you know.
- Pretend you are one of the characters in the book. Write a diary about the happenings in your life for two consecutive days.
- What changes would have to be made if the book occurred 200 years ago?
- What difference did it make to you (in your life) that you read this book? What do you think you will remember about this book in the future? (Don't say, "I liked it" or "I didn't like it.")

**E) Making Connections/Synthesizing:**

- Write five interpretive questions on the whole of the book to bring up during discussion.
- Are there any questions you would like to ask the author? If so, which questions?
- Make a connection between this work and another story with similar plot lines or similar characters, etc.
- Describe the society of the book (the fictional one created by the author).
- What was the author's purpose in writing this book?
- How is this work relevant to our time?