

How to Read Literature Like a Professor

Reading Quiz

This quiz is designed to ascertain whether you have completed the assigned reading and paid attention as you did so. You do not need to get every question correct to earn a high score. Indeed, many people read books completely and attentively and would miss several specific questions if tested on the content. There is some room for memory lapse in the scoring of this quiz. The expectation is that you should be able to answer MOST of these questions accurately if you have read the work fully and carefully.

Introduction: How'd He Do That?

- _____ 1. Foster suggests that there is a “language of reading” made up of a “set of conventions, patterns, codes, and rules that we learn to employ” when analyzing literature. What answer does Foster use to tell students how they can get better at understanding the language of reading?
- “Just like you learn anything else. **Study.**”
 - “Same way you get to Carnegie Hall. **Practice.**”
 - “It takes the right teacher. You just need **good instruction.**”
 - “The best way to learn anything: **research.**”
- _____ 2. Which of these is NOT one of those listed by Foster as the “three items that, more than any other, separate the professorial reader from the rest of the crowd”?
- pattern
 - symbol
 - innovation
 - memory

Chapter 1: Every Trip is a Quest (Except When It's Not)

- _____ 3. In the example story Foster uses to discuss the basic components of the quest, what does he use to represent the “Holy Grail” – that is, the item being sought?
- a sports car
 - a diamond ring
 - a sword
 - a loaf of bread
- _____ 4. What does Foster say is always “the real reason for a quest”?
- to achieve personal fulfillment
 - to discover new ideas
 - to prove someone wrong
 - to achieve self-knowledge

Chapter 2: Nice to Eat With You: Acts of Communion

- _____ 5. According to Foster, eating scenes in literature are generally the author's way of...
- ...exploring characters and relationships between characters.
 - ...providing background information about setting and time period.
 - ...moving from one scene or chapter to the next.
 - ...displaying the author's skill with sensory imagery.

Chapter 3: Nice to Eat You: Acts of Vampires

- _____ 6. According to Foster, vampirism in literature has mostly to do with...
- survival
 - fear
 - exploitation
 - profitability

- ___ 7. Which novella does Foster spend two pages analyzing as a “vampire” story?
- Animal Farm* by George Orwell
 - Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck
 - The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway
 - Daisy Miller* by Henry James

Chapter 4: If It’s Square, It’s a Sonnet

- ___ 8. Why is a sonnet roughly “square,” in geometrical shape?
- each line is 10 syllables long and the whole poem is 14 lines long
 - each line is 14 syllables long and the whole poem is 10 lines long
 - each line is 10 syllables long and the whole poem is 10 lines long
 - each line is 14 syllables long and the whole poem is 14 lines long

Chapter 5: Now, Where Have I Seen Her Before?

- ___ 9. Foster says that we can “go looking for old friends” in works of literature (noticing how a character is a lot like a historical figure or mythical figure or character from another work of art or literature) because...
- “...there’s no such thing as a wholly original work of literature.”
 - “...authors don’t have time to create new characters, so they borrow from others.”
 - “...we find connections between things even when they aren’t actually there.”
- ___ 10. What do literary critics call the “dialogue between old texts and new”?
- plagiarism
 - intertextuality
 - copyright infringement
 - context

Chapter 6: When In Doubt, It’s From Shakespeare...

- ___ 11. Obviously, Foster’s point in this chapter is that Shakespeare’s works are quoted, copied, and alluded to on a regular and frequent basis in Western literature. Why?
- “[Shakespeare’s] stories are great, the characters are compelling, the language fabulous.”
 - “Shakespeare is the end-all/be-all of literature. Every writer hopes to be like him.”
 - “Alluding to Shakespeare lets the reader know the depths of the writer’s intellectuality.”
 - “Shakespeare’s stories are the only truly original ones ever told.”

Chapter 7: ...Or The Bible

- ___ 12. Foster tells us that “...depth is what the biblical dimension adds to the story...the story resonates with the richness of distant antecedents, with the power of accumulated myth.” Specifically, what short story’s Biblical allusions has Foster been discussing in detail for several pages of this chapter?
- “Sonny’s Blues” by James Baldwin
 - “Hills Like White Elephants” by Ernest Hemingway
 - “The Yellow Wallpaper” by Charlotte Perkins Gilman
 - “An Open Boat” by Stephen Crane

Chapter 8: Hanseldee and Greteldum

- ___ 13. What is Foster’s main point in this chapter?
- Naming characters after other literary characters is an ages-old tradition in literature.
 - Only less talented authors rely on simple allusions to “low” literature like fairy tales.
 - Allusions to humble, familiar texts are as effective as those to the Bible or Shakespeare.

Chapter 9: It's Greek to Me

- ___ 14. How does Foster define his use of the term “myth”?
- “Something inherently untrue, passed down orally and in writing through the ages.”
 - “A body of story that matters.”
 - “Original stories told by the ancient Greeks and Romans to explain natural phenomena.”
 - “A story that entertains but is untrue.”

Chapter 10: It's More Than Just Rain or Snow

- ___ 15. In this chapter, Foster discusses the implications of weather in literature. He discusses several different types of weather phenomena and their possible implications. Which does he spend **most** of this chapter discussing?
- snow
 - sleet
 - rain
 - sun

Interlude: Does He Mean That?

- ___ 16. True or False: In this ‘interlude,’ Foster asserts that it is possible to prove that all professional literary writers always intend, and indeed pre-plan, the connections and allusions apparent to readers in their works.
- True
 - False

Chapter 11: ...More Than It's Gonna Hurt You: Concerning Violence

- ___ 17. In this chapter, Foster tells us that “writers kill off characters for the same set of reasons—make action happen, cause plot complications, end plot complications, put other characters under stress.” Which of these does he *also* say?
- “It’s nearly impossible to generalize about the meanings of violence...so we ask questions.”
 - “Violence in literature is always the author’s way of commenting on his or her society.”
 - “Writers sometimes insert violence just to confuse readers, without any real reason.”
 - “Violence, plain and simple, sells books. That’s why it exists in literature.”

Chapter 12: Is That a Symbol?

- ___ 18. What is Foster’s short and immediate answer to the question posed in this chapter’s title?
- “It’s hard to say.”
 - “Probably.”
 - “Maybe, but maybe not.”
 - “Sure it is.”
- ___ 19. Which of these does Foster discuss as a literary symbol for several pages of this chapter?
- a cave
 - a rose
 - a desert
 - a house

Chapter 13: It's All Political

- ___ 20. Foster says, “I hate ‘political’ writing.” Which of these does he mean?
- Literature whose primary intent is to influence politics.
 - Writing published by government institutions or organizations, like the USDA.
 - Writing that engages human problems, including those of the social & political realm.
 - Literature written by elected politicians.

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Chapter 14: Yes, She’s a Christ Figure, Too

- ___ 22. Which famed literary character does Foster spend several pages discussing while attempting to define the characteristics of a “Christ figure”?
- Emma from Gustav Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary*
 - Sancho Panza from Miguel de Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*
 - Santiago from Ernest Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea*
 - Pip from Charles Dickens’ *Great Expectations*

Chapter 15: Flights of Fancy

- ___ 23. In this chapter, Foster asserts that when a character flies, it is always heavily symbolic. What does he say it is symbolic of?
- “flight is freedom”
 - “flight is hope”
 - “flight is love”
 - “flight is aspiration”

Chapter 16: It’s All About Sex...

- ___ 24. Who does Foster say is to blame for sexuality issues explored in literary analysis?
- Shakespeare
 - Freud
 - Sophocles
 - D.H. Lawrence
- ___ 25. Which of these is closest to Foster’s overall main point in this chapter?
- “Literary” writers often include sex scenes as a way to gain more readers & sales.
 - Sex and sexuality are often not overtly mentioned in literature, but symbolically instead.
 - Sexuality is part of human experience and so it also appears in human literature.
 - Only the best and bravest authors tackle sex or sexuality in their writing.

Chapter 17: ...Except Sex

- ___ 26. Which of these most closely summarizes Foster’s main point in this chapter?
- Sex scenes in literature are rarely about the actual sex; they are more symbolic.
 - Sex scenes in literature appear only infrequently because they are so powerful.
 - Sex scenes in literature are usually included to boost readership/sales.
 - Sex scenes in literature always have to do with religion.

Chapter 18: If She Comes Up, It’s Baptism

- ___ 27. Which of these most closely summarizes Foster’s main point in this chapter?
- Characters who fall in water more often drown than experience “rebirth.”
 - It is inherently religious when a character is “reborn” in literature.
 - In nearly every case, a character being submerged in water is symbolic of baptism.
 - If a writer has a character get wet somehow, it probably means something symbolic.

Chapter 19: Geography Matters...

- ___ 28. In this chapter, Foster spends a lot of time discussing the many possible meanings, roles, and implications of geography on a literary work. He gives one rule (in bold). It says, “when writers send characters south, it’s _____.”
- a. so they can find the truth
 - b. so they can face their demons
 - c. so they can run amok
 - d. so they can fix their problems

Chapter 20: ...So Does Season

- ___ 29. In this chapter, Foster spends a lot of time explaining how associations readers have with seasons can affect the meaning and impact of a piece of writing. Which season does he spend the most time (pages) discussing?
- a. spring
 - b. summer
 - c. fall
 - d. winter

Interlude: One Story

- ___ 30. In this interlude, Foster asserts that true originality in writing is impossible because, “There’s only one story.” What idea from an earlier chapter does this recall?
- a. writer’s authority
 - b. symbolism
 - c. intertextuality
 - d. characterization

Chapter 21: Marked for Greatness

- ___ 31. Which of the following famous literary characters is NOT discussed in this chapter, since its main point can’t easily be applied to him?
- a. Quasimodo, the hunchback
 - b. Huckleberry Finn
 - c. Harry Potter
 - d. Frankenstein’s Monster

Chapter 22: He’s Blind for a Reason, You Know

- ___ 32. In making his point about blindness in this chapter, to which famed literary work does Foster repeatedly refer?
- a. *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles
 - b. *Equus* by Peter Shaffer
 - c. *Death of a Salesman* by Arthur Miller
 - d. *The Pig Man* by Paul Zindel

Chapter 23: It’s Never Just Heart Disease...

- ___ 33. According to Foster, why is the heart symbolically important in literature?
- a. “The heart is the symbolic repository of emotion.”
 - b. “Without a beating heart, human beings cannot survive.”
 - c. “Next to the brain, the heart is the most important organ.”

Chapter 24: ...And Rarely Just Illness

- ___ 34. According to Foster, which of the following diseases showed up most frequently in literature prior to the twentieth century?
- a. Cholera
 - b. Tuberculosis (TB)
 - c. Cancer
 - d. Smallpox

- ___ 35. To what modern-day illness does Foster devote a couple of pages near the end of this chapter?
- a. “swine flu”
 - b. HIV/AIDS
 - c. “bird flu”
 - d. cancer

Chapter 25: Don’t Read With Your Eyes

- ___ 36. True or False: Foster’s main point in this chapter is metaphorical. He means that you should read with your mind and heart rather than with your eyes.
- a. True
 - b. False

Chapter 26: Is He Serious? And Other Ironies

- ___ 37. In this chapter, Foster is careful to explain what he means by “irony trumps everything.” He says, “Every chapter in this book goes out the window when irony comes to the door.” In other words, if a reader detects that a writer is using something ironically, the reader can no longer rely on what he or she knows about conventional symbolism. The reader will have to figure out what is meant by the ironic use, instead.

According to Foster, what is the difficulty/problem with this?

- a. Not every reader “gets” irony. Irony doesn’t work for everyone.
- b. It takes a lot of extra time to figure out irony and not everyone wants to invest that time.
- c. Irony demands a level of patience that not all readers possess.
- d. Most readers see irony immediately and therefore the effect is diminished.

Chapter 27: A Test Case

- ___ 38. What short-short story does Foster use as the basis for the test case in this chapter?
- a. “Janus” by Ann Beattie
 - b. “The Story of an Hour” by Kate Chopin
 - c. “Popular Mechanics” by Raymond Carver
 - d. “The Garden Party” by Katherine Mansfield
- ___ 39. True or False: Foster’s student read the short-short story in a different symbolic way than Foster, himself, did.
- a. True
 - b. False

Envoi

- ___ 40. In his parting words to the reader, Foster admits that his discussion of symbolism in literature has not been exhaustive. In particular, he laments not getting to a discussion of the potential meanings of fire in literature. But then he concludes that the reader does not need him to explore every possible code/symbol/pattern. What is the reason he gives?
- a. The only symbols/codes/patterns that really matter are the ones included in the book.
 - b. There really aren’t too many other codes/symbols/patterns to be explored, anyway.
 - c. Once the reader practices looking for patterns/codes/symbols, it becomes second nature.
 - d. Only literature professors need to know the symbols/codes/patterns he has left out.

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Quiz Answer Key

1. B
2. C
3. D
4. D
5. A
6. C
7. D
8. A
9. A
10. B
11. A
12. A
13. C
14. B
15. C
16. B
17. A
18. D
19. A
20. A
21. C
22. C
23. A
24. B
25. B
26. A
27. C
28. C
29. C
30. C
31. B
32. A
33. A
34. B
35. B
36. B
37. A
38. D
39. A
40. C

For Teachers: A Word about Grading This Quiz

The purpose of this quiz, as stated in the introductory comments on the first page, is to determine whether students have done their assigned reading.

As the introductory comments on the quiz indicate, it's not necessarily fair or just to demand that students have absolute recall of a book in order to determine whether they have completed assigned reading. I've read a lot of books with devoted attention, yet I'm sure I'd miss several questions on a 40+ question quiz.

Therefore, some latitude on the part of the instructor is warranted when it comes to grading. Since every school has its own grading scale, I can't tell you how many correct responses should equal any given letter grade. I will, however, suggest the following:

Number correct	probably indicates...
38-40	Student may have written the book!
34-37	Student has completed reading with a great deal of care
29-33	Student has completed the reading, but possibly not as carefully as he/she could have
20-28	Student probably didn't complete all of the reading
15-19	Student didn't complete the reading, but may have read some of it
Under 15	Student didn't complete the reading and may have gotten lucky guessing on some of the questions