

The CLOSE READING Handbook

Reading Plan and Resources

How to Read Literature Like a Professor (HTRLLAP)

Section 1

- **Quests** – as Foster explains, a quest isn't just a trip, it is a heroic journey of self-discovery. Take a look at this video for modern examples:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KGV1BvnyvGo&list=PLcGteHoy9WAlSnoB10kvfw-bzQSCPNE2&index=4>
- **Eating** – it's not just food, it's an opportunity to show relationships; here is a great video about meal scenes in films
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sLEdi49XEhA>; and here's a little video about drinking milk <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iKDtMv5xSv0> that is pretty interesting, especially if you've seen *Mad Max*, *Fury Road*
- **Vampires** (not the sparkly kinds) – Think of Christoff from *The Truman Show*, President Snow from *The Hunger Games*. The vampire archetype typically involves the theme of a loss of innocence
- **Sonnets** – here are a couple of handsome British actors reading Shakespearean sonnets https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b6Q_Ioj6AhQ and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xP06F0yynic>
- **Recycled works** – remember how Foster talks about the rabbit hole archetype? Take a look at this scene from *The Matrix*:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TbYirSi08m4>

Section 2

- **Shakespeare** – we'll be studying the Bard specifically in *Hamlet* and *Othello*, and once you recognize his style, you will see his influence everywhere, even in weird places like Star Trek! And did you know that *The Lion King* is based on the play *Hamlet*? See more examples:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dihWoH1j0nI>
- **Bible** – if you ever went to Sunday school, you'll see Biblical allusions everywhere, especially Edenic imagery (from the Garden of Eden) and Christ figures; for those who aren't as familiar with the Old and New Testaments, try these two videos: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oggODgb9K2U> (part 1), and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TfVSikoglw4> (part 2)
- **Fairy Tales** - think about *Cinderella* paired with movies like *Pretty Woman*, *Ella Enchanted*, and *Cinderella Story*; you can also see much more subtle uses of fairy tale archetypes; for a fun twist on those archetypes, re-watch the original *Shrek*

- **Greek Myths** – if you don't know your basic gods and goddesses, you really need to review them! Try this little 8-minute video on YouTube:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N5gRZ-C0vOc>
- **Rain/Snow/Water:** Remember, AUTHORS MAKE THE WEATHER! Take a look at this little video with rain scenes:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uf34E1BZduo>
- **Violence:** they're scenes that are hard to read (or watch), but scenes of violence can play an important symbolic function; I'm not going to post videos here, but think of all the violent scenes you've seen in various movies and consider WHY they're there

Section 3

- Symbols – it's not enough to notice a symbol; you have to consider how it's being used. Foster talks about Robert Frost and how that poet uses symbols. Woods are not just woods. Snow is not just snow. Fire is not just fire. Take a look at these two videos of Frost poems:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IEtMLqP7tpA> and
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P3c0hD6qvZc>
- Politics: As Foster says, almost all writing can be read with an eye to politics because authors don't write in a social vacuum. Some texts, however, are more overtly political than others. Think about the dystopian satire, for example. *The Hunger Games* series takes on a larger meaning when you consider the social context of the 1% vs. the 99% in American society and the opulence and plenty of the capitol juxtaposed with the hardship and squalor of the districts. Want to see more? Consider why everyone is talking about *The Handmaid's Tale*, a series on Hulu, based on Margaret Atwood's novel from the 80's:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PJTonzXTjTs>
- Christ Figures (see Bible videos from section 1)
- Flights of Fancy: remember that archetypes can often be layered (like a parfait), so we can get a flight archetype layered with a Greek allusion to Icarus -
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vddEvqS6M4o>
- Sex – take a look at this video about the use of symbolic sex images in movies; you might giggle uncomfortably, but there is not actual sex depicted. Promise. But, you will see and hear lots of references to penises.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HV5jcXT3USw>
- Baptism (see Bible videos from section 1 and rain video from section 2); also, Foster references the film *Ordinary People*. Take a look at the movie trailer:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mKkcyK1VpGY>

Section 4

- Geography – take a look at this video about how setting becomes a symbolic character in a film <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1K-vq936KjU>
- Seasons – “Winter is coming.” Yes, seasons are more than just seasons. This is a short video with a lady who is into astrology talking about the symbolism of seasons <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NOSUgJTIEZw&t=21s>
- Marks and scars AND blindness – Here’s a funny little video that illustrates how explicit and overt Harry’s scar is and how often it is referred to: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LthAipQiRIE> and then here is a video of the disfigured and blind characters from movies: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T0IMbcIGTDY> Remember to ask yourself WHY they are disfigured and how the marks and scars function symbolically and to characterize them
- Heart disease and illness – Just go reread “The Story of an Hour” by Kate Chopin. Here’s a short video with a reading of it: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U9cnCw0Kw00> You can also think about *Me and Earl and the Dying Girl* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2qfmAllbYC8> and *The Fault in Our Stars* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ItBvH5J6ss>
- Chapters 25-27 are pretty self-explanatory with regards to entering the world of a text, and respecting irony, and you should ABSOLUTELY take some time with chapter 27 and the short story “The Garden Party.”

The following list of patterns comes from the book *How to Read Literature Like a Professor* by Thomas C. Foster who teaches at the University of Michigan. If you are serious about literary analysis, then I highly recommend buying this book. It goes into detail what I just briefly mention and is written in such a lively, witty voice that it does not read like a textbook at all! It will be well worth your time and effort to read it.

Trips tend to become quests to discover self.

Meals together tend to be acts of communion/community or isolation.

Ghosts, vampires, monsters, and nasty people and sometimes simply the antagonists are not about supernatural brew-ha-ha; they tend to depict some sort of exploitation.

There's only one story. Look for allusions and archetypes.

Weather matters.

Violence and be both literal and figurative.

Symbols can be objects, images, events, and actions.

Sometimes a story is meant to change us, the readers, and through us change society.

Keep an eye out for Christ-figures.

Flying tends to represent freedom. What do you think falling represents?

Getting dunked or just sprinkled in something wet tends to be a baptism.

Geography tends to be a metaphor for the psyche.

Seasons tend to be traditional symbols.

Disabilities, Scars, and Deformities show character and theme.

Heart disease tends to represent problems with character and society. So do illness and disease.

Read with your imagination.

Irony trumps everything!

Remember the difference between public and private symbols.