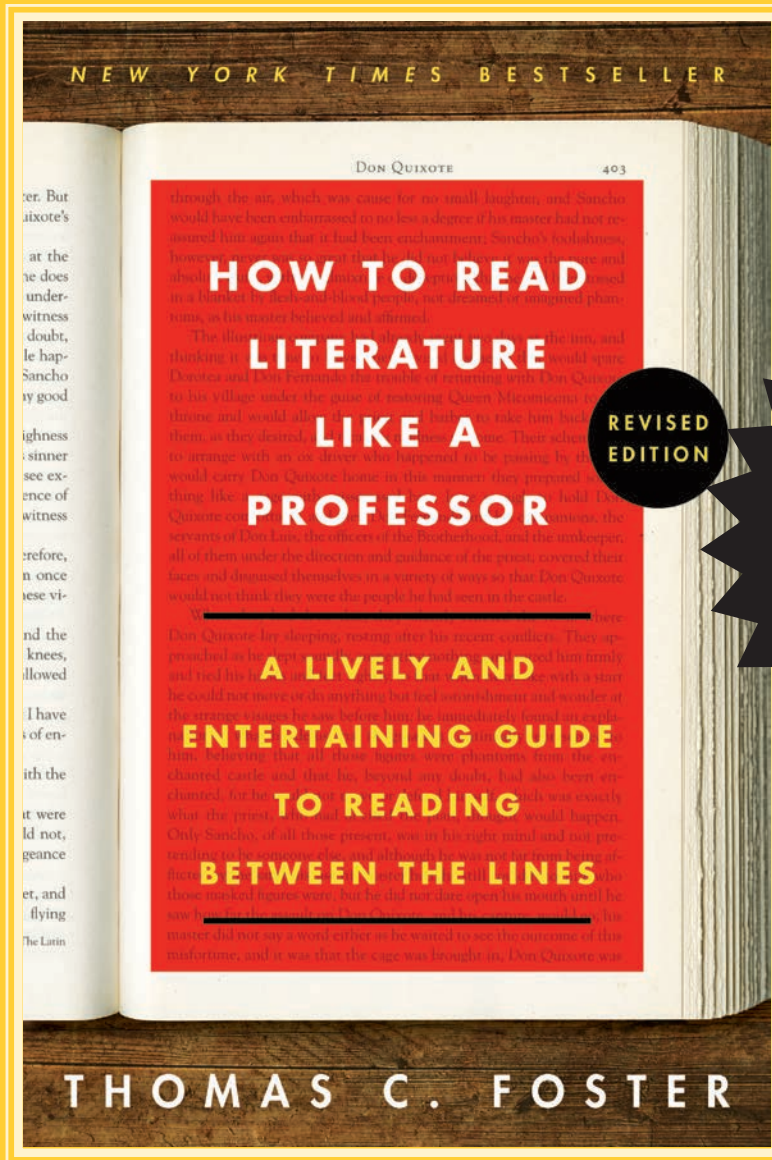


# A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO



“I know of no other book that so vividly conveys what it’s like to study with a great literature professor. In a work that is both down-to-earth and rich in insight, Thomas Foster goes far towards breaking down the wall that has long divided the academic and the common reader.”

—James Shapiro, Columbia University, author of *Shakespeare and the Jews*

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## About This Book

In the revised edition of *How to Read Literature Like a Professor: A Lively and Entertaining Guide to Reading Between the Lines*, Thomas C. Foster manages to improve a book that was already near-perfect. Foster encourages your students to discover possibilities in literature by sharing his insights about memory, symbol, and pattern in order to make sense of the subtext of literary works. He invites us to take up “the language of reading” and to think more deeply about short stories, novels, plays, and movies. Just as he did in the original edition, Foster regales us with his own classroom stories and lesson ideas throughout the book. He also provides ample titles and examples in each chapter to clarify his claims. He manages to do all of this with humor and a naturally engaging style. One might expect a book like this to be didactic or pretentious, but that’s certainly not the case, which is why the book has captured the hearts and minds of so many secondary English teachers and most of their students too. In the preface to this new edition, Foster writes with sincere gratitude and humility about his interactions and conversations with teachers and students, and he describes his astonishment that the book has found a home in high school English classes, not the audience he originally had in mind. Since it was first published in 2003, this *New York Times* bestseller has shown up on countless summer reading lists for *Advanced Placement* literature students across America. This revised edition will certainly find its place on English classroom shelves for decades to come. The book’s accessibility and Foster’s honest voice will inspire your students to read like a professor.

## Note to Teachers

Perhaps the biggest challenge in teaching this text is to find ways to help students contextualize the ideas that Foster explains in each chapter. Foster does provide numerous examples of titles to clarify the claims and key ideas, but students can better internalize these ideas and make sense of them by applying them to literature and films that they have read.

Encourage your students to compile lists of sample titles that reflect the ideas in each chapter. As Foster mentions in the preface, one popular approach for encouraging students to apply his ideas is to assign individual chapters to students who can “take ownership” and track that subject as it surfaces in a range of titles that students read throughout the year. Students can make a poster or hand out for their assigned chapter. Then, when a topic from one of the chapters comes up in the reading, the “owner” of that chapter can take the lead in discussing that element. This teacher’s guide includes a [graphic organizer](#) assignment that can be used for each chapter. These graphic organizers can be compiled in a notebook or posted throughout the classroom; this way, titles and examples can be added as students discover more literature that they can connect to the concepts in Foster’s book.

A “test case” is another way to establish connections between the content of each chapter and a shared text. Foster offers a “test case” story near the end of his book, inviting readers to demonstrate what they have learned and providing examples of exemplary analysis samples. You can provide students with their own “test case” story before and during reading—not just at the end. In this way, you can guide students to apply concepts to a shared, single text and gauge students’ understanding as they read.

## About This Guide

*How to Read Literature Like a Professor* is a collection of ideas and strategies to inform literary analysis. As such, chapters can be read individually and in any order. Teachers may choose to read chapters alongside course literature that is relevant to specific topics covered in each chapter. This guide, however, is designed to read the text holistically and includes instructional strategies for pre-reading, during reading, and post-reading.

The **pre-reading** strategies are designed to be revisited throughout the text and after students finish reading.

The **during reading** activities include a list of vocabulary words from the book to encourage vocabulary acquisition and use in context. There are also suggestions for synthesis and analysis of the material. The guided reading prompts move beyond summary and encourage students to discuss and engage with specific ideas as they are presented in the book.

The **post reading** assignments are designed to consider the book in its entirety. All of the post reading prompts can be used to generate discussion, and all of them can also be extended into writing assignments.

This teaching guide was written based on the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts. *How to Read Literature Like a Professor* meets the **Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity for grades 11-12**. [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.10](#)

Most of the content, including the guided reading prompts, is aligned with the ELA standards for **Reading: Informational Texts** for grades 11-12. However, many of the suggested activities also cover ELA standards for **Reading: Literature** because students can apply the ideas from Foster's book to a range of literature. The guide also includes instructional activities that meet standards in the **Speaking and Listening** strand, the **Language** strand, and the **Writing** strand for grades 11-12.

You can view all of the ELA Common Core Standards at <http://www.corestandards.org/>.

## Pre-Reading

1. Have students consider the title of the book. Discuss what it means to “read literature like a professor” or “to read between the lines.” Guide students to predict topics that might be covered in the text.
2. Ask students to think about the purpose of the text based on the title: to inform, to entertain, to persuade. What does the title suggest about the author's purpose? What do students make of the insertion of the words “lively and entertaining”?
3. Choose a short story to use as a “test case.” You can use the test case that Foster uses in chapter 27, *A Garden Party* by Katherine Mansfield, or another short story from your course curriculum. **Before students read Foster's book**, have them annotate the story you select to read between the lines and to note elements for analysis. Also, have them answer the two questions Foster poses on page 282: What does the story signify? How does it signify? Continue to use this story during reading and post-reading to encourage students to rethink their initial responses and to apply Foster's ideas. [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1](#) [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.3](#) [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.5](#)

## During Reading

1. Have students periodically revisit the “test case” story assignment from pre-reading. Guide them to add new insights and apply new ideas from the chapters based on their reading of the text. [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1](#) [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1](#)
2. For each chapter, have students compile a graphic organizer (You'll find a sample here.) that includes:
  - A. The title and an image to represent the chapter content
  - B. The claim/thesis of the chapter
  - C. A brief summary of key ideas
  - D. Questions inspired by the chapter; questions about the content or questions to ask about reading and viewing literature based on the content
  - E. A list of examples of books, movies, plays, that reflect the chapter's main ideas.

Students can compile their own set of graphic organizers, or (as described above) you can assign individual students responsibility for one-two chapters of the book. You can have students present their graphic organizers, and then display them throughout the classroom. As particular topics surface in the course readings, students who have “taken ownership” of the relevant chapters can lead class discussions about those topics. [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.4](#)

Alternatively, these presentations can be expanded into a digital media form where students integrate graphics and audio to create a presentation of the information compiled on the graphic organizer. [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.5](#)

You can view a PREZI created by a high school student for chapter 18 [here](#).

3. For each chapter, have students identify a song that connects to the chapter's content. Students should be able to explain the song they select by combining textual evidence and lyrics to support their claim. To extend this project, you might consider compiling a soundtrack for *How to Read Literature Like a Professor* that includes students' songs and “liner notes” that explain the connections. (See guided reading prompt #10 below for an example) [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1](#)

**Vocabulary:** apocryphal (p. 7), liturgical (p. 8), sublimation (p. 17), dictum (p. 18), ubiquity (p. 37), clandestine (p. 57), exigency (p. 84), ostensibly (p. 88), prurience (p. 156), gravitas (p. 97), repudiate (p. 102), perfidy (p. 109), titular (p. 119), incommode (p. 206), tawdry (p. 211), verisimilitude (p. 225), dialectic (p. 246), idiosyncratic (p. 249), hapless (p. 253), subservient (p. 257)  
[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.4](#)

## Guided Reading Prompts

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1](#) [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.2](#) [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.4](#)

1. Describe what Foster means by a “language of reading” (p. xxv). Describe how memory, symbol, and pattern are important for a “language of reading.” Describe “symbolic imagination” (p. xxviii) and how it is significant for a “language of reading.” How do your responses to these questions align with some of the ideas you wrote in about pre-reading question #1?
2. Foster writes, “There’s no such thing as a wholly original work of literature” (p. 24) and “there’s only one story” (p. 27). Describe what Foster means by these statements. To what extent do you agree or disagree with these statements? Provide textual evidence from chapters 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 to support your claims.
3. Foster writes, “We want strangeness in our stories, but we want familiarity too” (p. 58). Explain this paradox. How does this idea help you to think more about the significance of allusions in literature?
4. Explain how rain and snow are often paradoxical symbols (see pages 71-73). Explore some of the different atmospherics and mood that are created by rain and snow, and explain how they often have contradictory effects.
5. In chapter 11, Foster describes “lateral thinking” (p. 93) and its impact on literary composition. What does this phrase mean? How does this help you to (re)think the role of writer’s intentionality and what readers can discover in a work?
6. Foster says, “I hate political writing” (p. 116) and then also says, “I love political writing” (p. 117). Explain this love-hate relationship. What are the differences between the political writing he hates and the political writing he loves? Can you think of contemporary examples for each? He also says that, “nearly all writing is political on some level” (p. 118). To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement? Explain.
7. After you finish chapters 19-20 (pp. 171-192), read the short story, *Ripe Figs*, by Kate Chopin. The story is only 288 words total, and yet manages to say so much. You can find an online copy of the story [here](#). What do you make of the significance of geography and season in this short story? How do they “matter?” Apply some of the ideas from chapters 19-20 to gain insights into this story.
8. What is intertextuality? Foster introduces this idea early on (see pp. 29-30, 38) and clarifies it in the *Interlude* (p. 196-199). Identify and explain some examples of “this dialogue between old texts and new” (p. 29). What is an archetype? (see pp.198-200) Explain how intertextuality and archetype support the statement: “There’s only one story.”
9. Read the lyrics to *One Little Song* by Gillian Welch. The lyrics are available [here](#). How do these lyrics help you to think more deeply about intertextuality and Foster’s premise that “there’s only one story?” What other song lyrics or poems can you think of to illustrate some of the big ideas in the text? Brainstorm some titles and explain the relationships and connections.
10. Respond to this quotation by Clifton Fadiman: “When you reread a classic you do not see more in the book than you did before; you see more in you than there was before.” How does this quote inspire and/or clarify your thinking about some of Foster’s assertions, particularly the ideas he presents in chapter 24, “Don’t Read with Your Eyes?”
11. In chapter 25, Foster encourages us to discover possibilities “beyond the literal” (p. 243) to interpret texts. Apply this idea in explaining some of the literary terms used throughout the book. Create or find images and symbols to figuratively represent these words: allegory, archetype, intertextuality, irony, paradox. Explain the symbolic representation you chose.
12. Foster sums up irony as “deflection from expectation” (p. 256) and concludes that *irony trumps everything*. What do these phrases mean? How do these ideas shed light on your understanding of irony? Can you think of a movie or television show that you have “read” recently where irony was present? What layer(s) did irony add to the film—comic, tragic, wry, perplexing, etc.? Explain.

13. In chapter 10, Foster reminds us that “characters are not people” and clarifies: “characters are products of writers’ imaginations—and readers’ imaginations” (p. 80-81). Towards the end of his book, Foster reminds us that, “no one in the world can read” any piece of literature exactly the same way (p. 300). To what extent is literary analysis dependent on both the writer’s intent and/or on the reader’s interpretations? Discuss the role of the reader in literary analysis. Use evidence from Foster’s book to support your claims.
14. Towards the end of his book, Foster encourages his readers to “take ownership of your own reading” and “to read confidently and assertively” (p. 301). Discuss how the contents of his book have strengthened your ability to read “confidently and assertively.” What are the most important lessons you have learned for forming opinions and interpreting literature? What lessons about “reading between the lines” resonate with you the most and will stick with you?

## Post Reading

### PROMPTS FOR DISCUSSION & WRITING

1. Revisit the “test case” story. Ask students to notice anything they might have missed before reading Foster’s book. Encourage them to add new ideas and to apply the topics covered in his book. Have students compose an essay about the test case modeled after the ones in chapter 27. [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.11-12.1](#) [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.9](#)
2. Revisit the first two pre-reading questions.
  - What topics were covered from students’ original lists? What topics were new or surprising? Ask students which topics resonated with them? Which ones gave them fresh eyes for reading and for viewing? Did they list topics that Foster didn’t cover?
  - Discuss to what extent Foster’s book meets these goals for these purposes for writing: to inform, to entertain, to persuade. Identify examples/quotations from the text to support all three goals. Which of the three goals do you think is most evident? Explain. Compose an argument and support your claim(s); analyzing how style and content contribute to the writer’s purpose. [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.6](#) [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1.a](#)
3. What is the tone of the book? Have students brainstorm a list of adjectives that could be used to describe the tone. Some suggestions include: humble, arrogant, insightful, simplistic, accessible, pretentious, didactic, engaging, witty, etc. Note that many of these descriptors are contradictory. There is no single answer. Encourage students to discuss the uncertainty and complexities and to choose the word(s) that they think best describes the tone. Ask them to support their claim(s) with examples from the text. [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1](#) [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1.a](#) [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.1.a](#) [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.6](#)
4. There are some who argue that learning about literary analysis and “reading between the lines” takes all of the joy out of reading literature. What are your thoughts about this? Is there a difference between reading for pleasure and reading for analysis? In what ways are they similar? In what ways can readers find joy in reading between the lines? Ask students to take a stance on this topic and to support their claims in a class debate or paired conversations. [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1](#) [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1.c](#)
5. Foster writes that “literature is something much more alive” and compares literature to a “barrel of eels” (p. 27). Review his simile and description (pp. 27 – 28) and discuss how he describes literature through this simile. He also describes reading as “a full-contact sport” (p. 82). Discuss what he means by this. Then, write your own simile, metaphor, or personification to describe literature and/or reading. Be prepared to explain how your comparison hints at the nuances and complexities of reading literature. [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.5](#)
6. Literary analysis eschews absolutes. Foster writes, “Always and never are not words that have much meaning in literary study” (p. 6). Thoughtful readers embrace uncertainty and ambiguity since “proof is nearly impossible” (p. 92). Explore the words *ambiguity* and *uncertainty*. What connotations do these words have? Are they generally positive or negative? What have you learned about these words? How do you feel about them? Choose one of the words and describe it through synesthesia—what it tastes and sounds like, its scent, what it feels like, its texture and weight, what it looks like, its color, shape, etc. Draw

the word and write a few sentences or a short verse with sensory details. Discuss to what extent you embrace uncertainty and ambiguity or how you can learn to. [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.4](#) [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.11-12.5.b](#)

7. Write a review of the revised edition of *How to Read Literature Like a Professor*. You can read several sample reviews of the earlier edition [here](#) and [here](#).

Discuss some of the critiques and praise for the book. Explain to what extent you agree or disagree with some of the commentary. Then, compose your own review of the new edition. [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.10](#) [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.4](#)

8. In his preface, Foster tells us about some of the questions students have asked over the years. What questions would you like to ask the author? How do you think he would answer?

[Listen to an interview](#) where he answers questions from a high school AP literature class.

Which questions were similar to yours? Did he answer as you expected? Which of his answers did you find most interesting or most surprising? Explain. [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.3](#)

## TOPICS FOR RESEARCH

1. Conduct some research to learn more about some of the prominent literary figures and historical allusions that Foster refers to throughout his book. Present a synthesis of your findings and describe how the information extends your understanding of Foster's ideas. Use the index in Foster's book to remind yourself of where he uses the references, and then look up additional resources to make connections and respond to the prompts. [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.7](#)

Some of the other authors Foster refers to most often throughout his book include: James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, Toni Morrison, Shakespeare, and Virginia Woolf. Review the index and trace his references to these authors throughout the text. Conduct research to learn more about the biographies and works of these authors. Locate and read reviews, critiques, and literary essays about these writers and their influence. Synthesize your research and make connections to Foster's ideas. Explain how the information you find enhances your understanding of the big ideas presented in Foster's book.

2. Look up information about Northrop Frye and his 1957 book, *The Anatomy of Criticism* or his "theory of archetypes." Provide some information about his biography. Describe his influence on literary analysis. Compare and contrast his work(s) with Foster's book.
3. Look up information about Freud and his book *Interpretation of Dreams*. Provide some information about his biography. Describe his influence on literary criticism and analysis. How does his work enrich your understanding of some of the ideas presented in Foster's book?
4. Look up information about the Irish novelist, Edna O'Brien. Provide some information about her biography, and report some of the details about the banning of her books. What are some arguments for banning her books? How does this information enhance your understanding of some of the points Foster makes, especially concerning writing about sex and politics?

Extend your research: Conduct some additional research about banning books and censorship. You might start with the American Library Association's list of [frequently challenged books](#). What are some commonly banned titles? What are some arguments for banning books? What do you think about censorship and banning books? Support your claims with evidence from your research.

5. Research Heraclitus and his theory about the "unity of opposites" and his "apothegms of change." How does this information enrich your understanding of some of the concepts Foster presents in his book? In particular, how does it help you to think more about the content of chapter 18, but also how does it enhance your thinking about paradox and about the complementary role of the reader and writer in interpreting literature?
6. Research Homer and his influence on Western literature. Foster refers to him and his works eleven times throughout the book. Provide some details and examples to illustrate the impact Homer's works have had—and continue to have—on literature. How does this information enrich your thinking about intertextuality, Greek allusions, and Foster's claim that "there is only one story?"

## Books by Thomas C. Foster

*How to Read Literature Like a Professor, Revised Edition*  
*A Lively and Entertaining Guide to Reading Between the Lines*

[Paperback](#): ISBN 9780062301673

[ebook](#): ISBN 9780062344205

[Large Print](#): ISBN 9780062326522

*How to Read Novels Like a Professor*  
*A Jaunty Exploration of the World's Favorite Literary Form*

[Paperback](#): ISBN 9780061340406

[ebook](#): ISBN 9780061977701

[Digital Audio](#): ISBN 9780062266330

*Twenty-Five Books That Shaped America*  
*How the White Whales, Green Lights, and Restless Spirits Forged Our National Identity*

[Paperback](#): ISBN 9780061834400

[ebook](#): ISBN 9780062092076

[Digital Audio](#): ISBN 9780062072702

*How to Read Literature Like a Professor: For Kids*

[Paperback](#): ISBN 9780062200853

[ebook](#): ISBN 9780062200877

## About Thomas C. Foster

Thomas C. Foster is a professor of English at the University of Michigan-Flint, where he teaches contemporary fiction, drama, and poetry as well as creative writing and composition. He is the author of *Twenty-five Books That Shaped America* and several books on 20th-century British and Irish fiction and poetry. He lives in East Lansing, Michigan. You'll find his official website [here](#).

## About This Guide's Author

Michelle Knotts is currently a doctoral candidate in Curriculum and Instruction at Pennsylvania State University where she also teaches undergraduate courses in English Education. Prior to pursuing her Ph.D., she spent fifteen years as a secondary English teacher and department chair in Arizona public schools. She holds a B.A. from Penn State University and an M. Ed. from Northern Arizona University.



Chapter Summary

Examples that reflect the chapter's  
main ideas

Chapter Title  
& Image

Questions Inspired  
by the Chapter

Chapter Thesis