

Illuminating Literature: *Characters in Crisis*

Student Sample



 Writing with
Sharon Watson

Illuminating Literature: Characters in Crisis

For Christian High Schools, Homeschools, and Co-ops

Sharon Watson

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Special thanks to research assistants Hannah Ihms, Debbie, Emily, Anna, Esther, and Terry for letting me borrow their wise and elegant minds.

Chapter Art Deco images: Dover Publications.

Women jurors: *Studies in Expression: When Women Are Jurors*. Drawing. Charles Dana Gibson. Published in *Life*, October 23, 1902.

Susan Glaspell: by Nickolas Muray, circa 1915. Public domain.

Companion books in this series:

Illuminating Literature: Characters in Crisis, Teacher's Guide

Illuminating Literature: Characters in Crisis,
Quiz and Answer Manual

Illuminating Literature: Characters in Crisis, Novel Notebook
Download this FREE at WritingWithSharonWatson.com/illuminating-literature-characters-in-crisis-gateway.

The approved versions of books students read in this course are available at
WritingWithSharonWatson.com/illuminating-literature-characters-in-crisis.

Also by Sharon Watson:

[*Illuminating Literature: When Worlds Collide*](#)

Voted *The Old Schoolhouse's* Favorite High School Product 2015

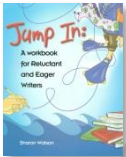
"Right away, my daughter commented on how easy to read and friendly the format was. She liked that Ms. Watson seemed to be speaking directly to her, in a casual tone, yet it was very instructional from the very first page. –Linsey K., mom



[*Jump In*](#)

Middle school writing curriculum published by Apologia and featured in Cathy Duffy's *102 Top Picks for Homeschool Curriculum*.

"Jump In . . . has revolutionized the way we learn writing, literally one skill at a time." –Heather, mom



[*The Power in Your Hands: Writing Nonfiction in High School*](#)

"The dread is dead and my son is loving this course!"

–Kathy D., homeschoolbuzz.com



[*Writing Fiction \[in High School\]*](#)

"This course was one of the most entertaining and useful classes I took all year, if not one of my favorites from my entire high school career." –Phillip, senior

[*Their Blood Tinged*](#)

Introduce your junior high students to the captivating world of literature with the eBook *Their Blood Tinged*. In 26 lessons, they will learn literary terms and story-writing techniques and discover the secret power of the author to grab their hearts.

Based on C. S. Lewis's *The Magician's Nephew*.



Approved versions of the literature read in this course:

| <u>Title and Author</u> | <u>Publisher</u> | <u>ISBN</u> |
|--|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| "A Jury of Her Peers" by Susan Glaspell | in the textbook | |
| <i>Frankenstein</i> by Mary Shelley | Dover Publications | 0-486-28211-2 or 978-0-486-28211-4 |
| <i>Silas Marner</i> by George Eliot | Dover Publication | 0-486-29246-0 or 978-0-486-29246-5 |
| <i>Much Ado About Nothing</i> by Shakespeare | Dover Publications | 0-486-28272-4 or 978-0-486-282725 |
| "A White Heron" by Sarah Orne Jewett | in the textbook | |
| "The Garden of Forking Paths" by Jorge Luis Borges | link provided in the textbook | |
| "Haircut" by Ring Lardner | link provided in the textbook | |
| "The Lady, or the Tiger?" by Frank Stockton | in the textbook | |
| "Of the Passing of the First-Born" by W. E. B. Du Bois | in the textbook | |
| "A Child's Christmas in Wales" by Dylan Thomas | link provided in the textbook | |
| <i>Sense and Sensibility</i> by Jane Austen | Dover Publications | 0-486-29049-2 or 978-0-486-29049-2 |
| Biography/Autobiography | student's choice | |
| <i>The Hobbit</i> by J. R. R. Tolkien | Mariner Books | 978-0-547-92822-7 |

The approved versions of books students read in this course are available at WritingWithSharonWatson.com/illuminating-literature-characters-in-crisis.

Why use the approved versions? Chaos ensues when some of the students do not have the suggested version of each book. Students who use books from the library or from home are lost as we turn to specific pages and passages because the material in their books does not appear on the same pages as in our books. They spend so much time trying to keep up that they become frustrated and learn less than their peers do. Avoid this disaster.

Students reading the stories from a tablet will be able to keep up if they know how to use the Search function.

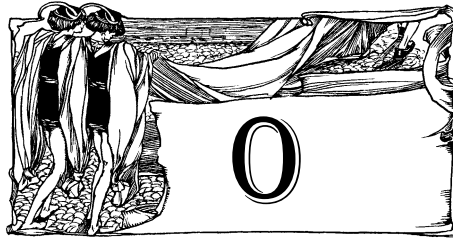
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SAMPLE

*“Finally, from so little sleeping and so much reading,
his brain dried up and he went completely out of his mind.”*

-Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra



Start Here

Lesson 1

The Fun and Confusion of Literature

Literature. Do you love it? Dread it? Or do you plow through it because you need the credit?

Welcome to a year of reading insightful, illuminating literature. You'll be reading the books, play, and short stories below as we concentrate on characters and their crises. In addition, we'll be exploring literary terms and the devices authors use to influence your heart and mind. Here's the list. Ever read any of them before?

"A Jury of Her Peers" by Susan Glaspell

Frankenstein by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley

Silas Marner by George Eliot

Much Ado About Nothing by William Shakespeare

An Assortment of Short Works:

"A White Heron" by Sarah Orne Jewett

"The Garden of Forking Paths" by Jorge Luis Borges

"Haircut" by Ring Lardner

"The Lady, or the Tiger?" by Frank Stockton

"Of the Passing of the First-Born" by W. E. B. Du Bois

"A Child's Christmas in Wales" by Dylan Thomas

Sense and Sensibility by Jane Austen

A biography or autobiography of your choice

The Hobbit by J. R. R. Tolkien

To add to the fun and confusion of reading literature, your opinion and someone else's may differ widely concerning a story you've just read. For example, here are some real reactions by students to *The Invisible Man* by H. G. Wells:

- It was just odd, it moved slowly, and I never truly connected with the characters.
- Strange (in a good way)
- A little disturbing
- Thrilling and scary
- Didn't seem very realistic
- Action-packed and fun

You may be in for some lively discussions this year!

Your Opinion

Finish the following statement by checking as many boxes below as apply to you.

The last time I read a novel, short story, or play for class, I . . .

- ☐ fainted.
- ☐ gobbled it up and asked for more.
- ☐ would have liked it better if I could have understood it.
- ☐ wondered what it had to do with me and my life.
- ☐ faked my way through the story.
- ☐ enjoyed watching the author at work.
- ☐ lost the book.
- ☐ wished the teacher or course had selected a different story for me to read.
- ☐ recorded interesting passages in a notebook for future reference.
- ☐ became discouraged by the worldview or message of the author.
- ☐ had trouble believing the story because something in it did not ring true.
- ☐ fell in love with the story.
- ☐ met some new friends in the characters.
- ☐ asked why everyone had to die in the end.
- ☐ recommended it to a friend.
- ☐ tried to guess the ending.
- ☐ dreaded the day when the teacher would ask about the theme or symbols.
- ☐ lost interest because nothing happened until two-thirds of the way through the story.

- ☐ learned something important about life.
- ☐ was so moved or grabbed by the story that I'll never forget it.
- ☐ thought of another book I'd rather read for class.
- ☐ wondered why I was wasting my time and energy reading about someone who is not real.
- ☐ loved the style of writing, figurative language, and word usage. Fantastic!

What other options would you like to add to this list? Jot them down here:

Grades

No course would be complete without grades. Though there will be some variety in the points given in each chapter, here are the basics of what you'll be graded on:

- Online "Yes, I read it" quiz, graded online (1-10 points)
- Online literary terms quiz, graded online (1-10 points)
- Participation in opinion survey online (1-10 points)
- Quality of participation in class discussion (1-20 points)
- Successful completion of lessons and assignments (1-20 points)
- Successful completion of an activity (1-10 points)
- Finishing the novel, play, or short story (1-20 points)

Your Novel Notebook

As you read each book or short story in this course, you will be referred to your Novel Notebook where you'll answer questions, complete worksheets, or record what you liked or didn't like about the story.

To download the free, colorful Novel Notebook with all the questions and worksheets in it, go to WritingWithSharonWatson.com/illuminating-literature-characters-in-crisis-gateway. Have it ready before you read the first story.

This Course's Philosophy

Are these books sacred? No.

Do some people treat the classics as sacred? Yes. And by “sacred,” I mean “Don’t change a word. It is *perfect* the way it is. You are a troglodyte if you didn’t love this book.”

I get it. I really do. If I love a novel, I want everyone to love it, too, and can feel peeved if others do not love it as I do. After all, it spoke to me. Something powerful in it hit the right spot in me, and the story resonated with my life, maybe even changed my life in some way.

And then someone comes along and has no appreciation for it. And then I am not happy.

Here’s the truth about any book you read in this course or in any literature course: These books are written by flawed humans who struggled with—or gave in to—sin and their sin natures, who may or may not have been Christians, whose stories may or may not agree with the truths written in the Bible but reflect some redeeming truth and are, therefore, worth reading.

While literature can be uplifting and spur us to greatness, it also can be a disturbing reflection of our fallen state, sometimes even presenting the need for salvation of sorts without offering any, or suggesting a form of salvation forbidden to us. Hold the stories—any stories you read—up to the light of the truths you find in the Bible. Albert Camus, an atheist author, wrote, “A novel is never anything but a philosophy put into images.” Discover the philosophy hidden in the events and examine its premise in the context of Bible truths. Be an aware reader.

Enjoy the books, find pleasure in them, pick them apart, find the flaws in thinking and worldview, ponder changing a passage or an ending, learn from them, copy out favorite passages and try to imitate them, and love or hate the characters.

No matter how you choose to view literature, dig out the nuggets of truth and appreciate the things that make the selections classics.

You may surprise yourself if you read some of these books years from now. Ones you like today you may find dull then. Ones you fall asleep over may be suddenly full of interest. Your perspective will have changed because of your life experiences and your season of life.

“A classic is a book that has never finished saying what it has to say.”
— Italo Calvino, *The Uses of Literature*

Why Read Literature?

Why can't you just read the books you like and count that as literature?

Good question.

Most of the time, when you read what you like or read popular fiction, you may enjoy the story so much that you do not pause to take a deeper look at it. What is its artistic value? What figurative language, irony, symbols, or lyrical language has the author used, and how do these devices reflect and amplify the theme?

What issues is the author raising, and what is she saying about them? Do we agree or disagree with the author's basic premise? Do we see ourselves in the story? Do we see the person we do *not* want to become?

What truths about life are embedded in the characters and plot? What poignant insights?

As writer Azar Nafisi puts it, "What we search for in fiction is not so much reality but the epiphany of truth."

Maybe the important factor is that for literature you have guides—a teacher and a textbook. These guides are akin to docents in an art museum who reveal secrets behind the works of art, pointing out a dog that becomes a symbol of happy domesticity, showing a hidden figure that angered the artist's patron so much that the artist had to run for his life, explaining that a certain color meant something specific to the original viewers, or elucidating the reason for a saint's square halo instead of a round one.



Modern writers are standing on the shoulders of literary giants. Studying works of literature shows you where ideas come from and inspires your own work. For instance, did you know that Michael Crichton's *Jurassic Park* and *The Lost World* owe a debt to Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Lost World*, or that C. S. Lewis might never have created Narnia if he hadn't read such works as George MacDonald's *Phantastes*?

Reading and understanding literature decodes messages that otherwise would remain frustrating mysteries. As an example, many sea-going adventures contain a character who, metaphorically, has an albatross hanging around his neck. This strange word picture makes no sense until you read Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" in which you'll find a man wearing the large bird around his neck as penance of a sort for shooting it and bringing bad luck on the crew.

Frankly, if someone would be your museum guide and walk you through the popular fiction you read, pointing out the powerful writers' devices and insights, you might be able to say you are studying literature. On the other hand, you would miss the history, depth, and treasures that are your literary heritage today, to say nothing of the amazing characters and stories as well.

The terms **literary classics** or **the classics** refer to short stories, novels, poems, and plays that have not been written recently but have stood the test of time. In your opinion, what book written recently will be a literary classic in fifty years? Write your answer here:

Some of the books in this course were written over one hundred years ago and sometimes fail to interest modern teens. Here are a few reasons why this may be true:

1. Older novels were written for adult readers and focus on adult problems, themes, characters, and events.
2. Books for teens today have to have a teen as the main character. Children or adults as main characters do not interest many modern teen readers. In addition, today's books for males have to have a strong male lead; books for females have to have a strong female lead. Literary writers and those of a different era are not concerned with this in the slightest.
3. Many older books don't begin *in media res* ("in the midst of things"). They may begin *ab ovo* ("from the egg," meaning "at the very beginning") and take a loooong time to build up to the story's main action and excitement, which leads us to the next point . . .
4. Readers of other generations did not have TVs, radios, social media, cell phones, or the Internet. Life was lived at a different pace, and they appreciated a good, long story to entertain them.
5. Our language is changing; today's readers may find the words and sentence structures (**syntax**) of older classics difficult to understand or wade through.
6. Visual images accompany many communications today. It is hard for written words to feed a modern mind that is used to a diet of animated or still images.
7. Add your own reason why older books might be dull or difficult for you or other modern readers:

You don't have to *like* the story; you just have to *read* the story. Try to identify why you are not connecting with it, if that is the case. This will give you more patience with the book and will make you a smarter reader.

Lesson 2

Character Labels

This year's emphasis is on characters: character types, how the author characterizes them for us, motivations, dialog, point of view, what conflicts they can encounter, how being squeezed during a crisis reveals or refines their inner character, how they fulfill their deep longings, and so on.

Where do these characters come from? They come from real life. Do you know someone who seemed to be your friend but betrayed you on some level? That type of behavior is similar to the **shapeshifter's**. In old tales, the shapeshifter actually changes physical shape from, say, a man into a bear (as in *The Hobbit*) or into an angry Hulk, switching from one shape to another and back again like the berserkers from Norse mythology.

Do you have an older person in your life who cares about you and gives you solid advice? That person may be your **mentor**, another character that appears in many stories.

Are you trying out for a sports team? Are you auditioning for a part in a play or musical? Then the coach or the director can be considered your **threshold guardian**, barring the way to the team or part until you prove yourself worthy.

The following is a list of character labels. Note that a character can have more than one label. For instance, Peter Pan is a protagonist, is sometimes the viewpoint character, is 3-D, static, and primary—all of which you'll see in the list.

Here goes . . .

Character Labels

Protagonist This is the main character, the one we are rooting for. Some call this character the *lead* or *hero*. Whether male, female, animal, or alien, this character has the strongest goals and encounters the strongest conflicts. This is *his* or *her* story.

Antagonist Often, this character is the “bad guy” because he makes trouble for the protagonist or keeps him from achieving his goals. In “The Three Little Pigs,” where we meet three pigs who just want to be safe at home, the wolf is the antagonist. However, the pigs are also their own antagonists (their own worst enemies, so to speak) when they are lazy and choose poor building materials.

All of these forces that come against the protagonist, whether they be other characters, personal weaknesses, or something else, are called the **forces of antagonism**. (More on this concept in a later chapter.)

Anti-hero What do you call a main character who has almost no heroic qualities? An anti-hero (can be spelled without the hyphen: *antihero*). This character may have unworthy goals, personality flaws that make him unlikeable or untrustworthy, or plans that are illegal or questionable. He's not a villain; he's simply self-serving.

Macbeth, who wants to kill the king and become king himself is an anti-hero. So is a mobster or a serial killer who is hired to help the authorities. Han Solo of the Star Wars movie series can be considered an anti-hero. Especially in movies four through six, he is self-centered and won't help the Rebel Alliance unless he's paid for it or forced into it.

Narrator The narrator is telling us the story. We may be aware of him or her, or the narrator may be completely invisible to the story.

It's easy to see who the narrator is in a first-person story. In Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, Jim Hawkins is our narrator. He begins his story by telling us that certain characters have asked him to "write down the whole particulars about Treasure Island, from beginning to end, keeping nothing back but the bearings of the island." Jim tells us what he did and what others did. He narrates his own story.

In Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*, our narrator is a sailor who calls himself "Ishmael." He begins his tale with "Call me Ishmael," and he is our guide through the story. Though he is not the protagonist, he stands on the sidelines and narrates the story of Captain Ahab and the whale.

Viewpoint character Through whose eyes are we experiencing the story?

If the narrator has identified him or herself, as in Jim Hawkins of *Treasure Island*, then that character is the viewpoint character. Everything we see and experience is through his lens and through his feelings and experiences, as in Jim when he first meets Long John Silver: "I plucked up the courage at once, crossed the threshold, and walked right up to the man where he stood, propped on his crutch, talking to a customer."

On the other hand, if the narrator is invisible and is not a character in the story, then the viewpoint character is most likely the protagonist. This is true of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* by Mark Twain. Tom is not telling the story, and, therefore is not the narrator, but he often is the character through whom we experience events. He is the viewpoint character; we're looking over his shoulder, so to speak, and are privy to his thoughts as he meets the new kid in town: "He had a citified air about him that ate into Tom's vitals. The more Tom stared at the splendid marvel, the higher he turned up his nose at his finery and the shabbier and shabbier his own outfit seemed to him to grow."

In many classics you read for school, there is more than one viewpoint character. For instance, *Peter Pan* by James Barrie features three viewpoint characters, depending on what is going on at the time: Peter Pan, Wendy, or Captain Hook.

Writers today like to keep the viewpoint characters down to one or two. This can give a more focused reading experience.

Round or 3-D If we know the character's name, motivations, thoughts, feelings, and ideas, this is a round or 3-D character. He or she is "fleshed out" for us. Peter Pan is a round character, as is Ebenezer Scrooge. If the main character is not round, the story will be boring or feel like a lesson instead of an adventure. E. M. Forster, author of *The African Queen*, says that a round character "is capable of surprising [us] in a convincing way."

Flat or 2-D This character may or may not be named, and his or her goals may not be mentioned or may not even be important. Captain Hook's pirates are flat or 2-D characters. So is Scrooge's nephew. Forster helps us again by saying that flat characters "are constructed round a single idea or quality." For instance, Hook's Smee is always ingratiating himself with Hook, and Scrooge's nephew is always generous-hearted toward his uncle.

Dynamic Dynamic characters change throughout the story. Ebenezer Scrooge is a good example of this category, as is Jim Hawkins, who becomes an older and wiser young man.

Static Static characters do not change. Examples of this type of character are Peter Pan, Long John Silver, and the madly knitting Madame Defarge (from *A Tale of Two Cities*).

Stereotype How many times have you watched a movie or television show in which the boss is mean, the business owner is greedy, or the priest is corrupt? These broad generalizations make up stereotypical characters like the dumb blonde or the socially backward genius.

Stock Each **genre** (kind of story) has expectations about its characters. For instance, mysteries are going to have either a professional detective or a private citizen searching for clues. This character will likely have an assistant or sidekick, much like Sherlock Holmes has in Doctor Watson. If the mystery is also a comedy, the detective will be a buffoon, like the clueless Inspector Clouseau of the Pink Panther series.

Many Shakespearean plays have a stock character or two that provide comic relief, as the constable Dogberry who adds humor by using the wrong words in *Much Ado About Nothing*.

Foil This character provides a contrast to the main character or to the theme of the story. For instance, in Jane Austen's *Sense and Sensibility*, Marianne and Elinor are foils to each other. The one sister lives by spontaneity and her heart while the other controls her emotions and lives by proper expectations and her mind.

On one level, Doctor Watson is Sherlock Holmes's foil because his character is there to give Holmes someone to speak his thoughts to. On a deeper level, he is a foil because his laid-back character provides the contrast to Holmes's strictly logical mind.

Christ figure A Christ figure sacrifices himself or herself for others. Sometimes the sacrifice is demanded of him, as Billy Budd's death in Herman Melville's *Billy Budd*. Other times, the sacrifice is voluntary, as in Sidney Carton's death in *A Tale of Two Cities*.

You may disagree with this term because no person or character is truly innocent, as Christ is, and you would be correct. However, this is the literary term given to this type of character.

Threshold guardian This character stands in the way of the protagonist or the adventure, guarding it against the protagonist. Here's a real-life example from the Bible: When the teenage David visits his brothers on the battlefield and hears the giant Goliath shout his taunts, he turns to his brothers for more information. What do they do? They demean him. They question his motives. They react angrily. David has to get through their insults and united front to find more answers and get to the king.

The threshold guardians of *Peter Pan* are Tinker Bell and the lost boys as they shoot down the Wendy bird at Tink's instructions. They are guarding the island against all comers.

Mentor Just as in real life, this character gives important advice. Gandalf is Bilbo Baggins' mentor in J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, dispensing wisdom and advice to the luckless adventurer.

Shapeshifter These characters can be literal or figurative. A literal shapeshifter can change physical shape, as a man into a werewolf; a figurative one can change sides or betray another, as a character who pretends to be a friend one moment but is revealed later as a betrayer.

Primary or Major These are the main characters. They have names. They are 3-D and most likely dynamic. Their goals and heart longings drive the story forward. They are the ones who have to battle against the odds.

Secondary or Minor These characters are considered supporting actors, like the lost boys or Smee in *Peter Pan* or the old father in *A Tale of Two Cities*. We may care about what happens to them, but this truly is not their story.

Tertiary These, too, are minor characters, and while they populate every story, they are in the background. They rarely have names, for that would raise them to a level of importance they do not have. Orson Scott Card, author of *Ender's Game*, calls these types of characters "walk-ons and placeholders."

Some examples of tertiary characters from real life and literature are the soldiers at Jesus' tomb, store clerks, pirates, party goers, Scrooge's other clerks (we only know Bob Cratchit), servants in various stories, and villagers.

Forces of Antagonism

The protagonists are the ones with the most conflicts because their longings and goals are the strongest. A whole host of antagonistic forces are aligned against them. Some of those forces of antagonism are **internal**, as in a character's desire for more power (*Macbeth*), and some are **external**, as in someone stealing another's life savings (*Silas Marner*).

Familiarize yourself with this list of conflicts or forces of antagonism that characters encounter:

- **Troubles with himself or herself.** These are personal problems like fear, anger, or a mistrust of others. Frodo must overcome his desire for the ring and its power in J. R. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. As Robert Louis Stevenson says, "You cannot run away from a weakness; you must sometimes fight it out or perish."
- **Troubles with others.** Jim Hawkins at first believes that Long John Silver is his friend in Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*. How wrong he is! Silver is a wily antagonist.
- **Troubles with society or The System.** Jean Valjean is thrown into prison for years for stealing a piece of bread for his starving sister and her family in Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*. Though he eventually serves out his harsh sentence, society never lets him forget that he was a convicted criminal.
- **Troubles with nature.** Robinson Crusoe, in Daniel Defoe's book of the same name, is cast away on a deserted island and must find ways to conquer cold, hunger, storms, and powerful ocean currents.
- **Troubles with God/the gods/fate.** Silas Marner questions God's goodness when he is betrayed by his best friend in George Eliot's *Silas Marner*. The gods and/or fate often figure large in ancient Greek plays.
- **Troubles with technology/biotechnology/The Machine.** Two words: Jurassic. Park. Another two words: Iron. Man. These stories and others are replete with struggles against technology, biotechnology, and The Machine. Even as far back as H. G. Wells' *The Invisible Man*, characters have been struggling with these issues.

Where do these struggles come from? They mirror our own lives and the problems we encounter. Who among us hasn't had a worthy goal only to find someone standing in our way? Who has had to overcome problems with nature? Who hasn't had questions about God when things go very badly?

These categories of conflicts are simply reflections of our lives as humans, and the goal, of course, is to overcome them, just as our favorite protagonists do.

Of course, writers do not sit around and think, "Hmm. My protagonist doesn't have enough trouble with nature. It must be time to throw in a tornado." No. Authors look at novels and stories from a completely different perspective.

Authors ask themselves: What is my protagonist yearning for? What is his deep, deep need or longing? Acceptance? Love? Freedom from pain? This is at the heart of any meaningful novel.

They also ask what their protagonist's main goal is. This is different from the character's yearning. The heart's yearning may be for security and safety, as in "The Three Little Pigs," while the concrete goal is to build a house strong enough to keep out the wolf. Again, the heart's yearning may be to rejoin the human race, to not live with the pain of betrayal any longer, but the main goal may be to keep the little girl who has wandered into your lonely home. This you will find in *Silas Marner*.

When dealing with concrete goals, authors cleverly devise ways to keep their protagonists from getting to their goal. Silas Marner is betrayed not once but three times in three different ways. How will he feel about God then? Scrooge likes his life as a miser, but, doggone it, those spirits keep showing up. Tony Stark's goal in *Iron Man* (2008) is to remain a successful, self-centered arms dealer at the top of his game, but he is physically bombed, kidnaped, must find a mechanical way to stay alive, is forced to build a weapon against his will, is threatened with the loss of his company, and is betrayed by a friend. And don't forget Dorothy, who just wants to get back to Kansas.

Famous author Kurt Vonnegut writes, "When I used to teach creative writing, I would tell the students to make their characters want something right away—even if it's only a glass of water. Characters paralyzed by the meaninglessness of modern life still have to drink water from time to time."

Characters have to want something. That's the author's job. And, it turns out, it's also the author's job to keep them from getting it, as you see in this advice from author Lavonne Mueller: "Make sure your main character wants something, and make sure somebody is keeping him from getting it."

"Keeping him from getting it" are the forces of antagonism.

Lesson 3

Investigate!

Grab a book or movie you enjoy. Write the name here:

Fill out the blanks on the following page with characters from the book or movie. Then use the labels to describe the characters.

14 Illuminating Literature: Characters in Crisis SAMPLE

Narrator • Viewpoint character • Round or 3-D • Flat or 2-D • Dynamic • Static •
Stereotype • Stock • Foil • Christ figure • Threshold guardian • Mentor • Shapeshifter •
Primary • Secondary • Tertiary

Main character or protagonist: _____

Other labels that apply:

Antagonist: _____

Other labels that apply:

One secondary character: _____

Other labels that apply:

One tertiary character: _____

Other labels that apply:

Write one sentence to explain the conflicts, problems, or troubles the protagonist in your book or movie encounters for each category below. In other words, who and what are keeping your protagonist from getting what he (or she) wants?

- Troubles with himself or herself (personal problems like fear or anger):
- Troubles with one other character:
- Troubles with society or The System:
- Troubles with nature:
- Troubles with God/the gods/fate:
- Troubles with technology/biotechnology/The Machine:

What is the main character's deep longing? Is this yearning fulfilled? Jot your musings here:

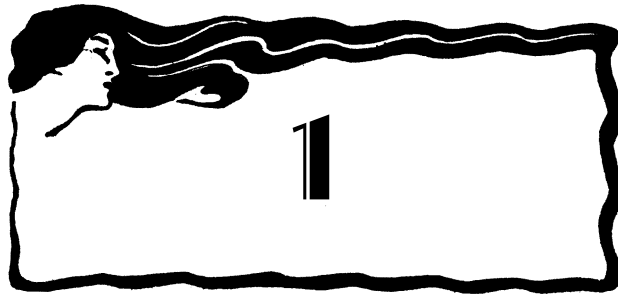
What is his or her concrete, “I have to do this” goal? Is the goal met? Partially met? Abandoned and substituted for a worthier goal? Scribble here:

Another way to measure the level of conflict a protagonist is experiencing is to ask this question: What is at stake or what happens if he fails?

If we are in an arena watching a bicyclist ride around the performance area, there’s not much excitement or conflict there. Not much could go wrong. The conflict goes up a notch as we watch a unicyclist. A little more is at stake because of the unstable nature of a unicycle. Now we turn our eyes to the bicycle balanced thinly on the tightrope. Suddenly, the anxiety is high. There’s much more at stake if the rider fails.

What is at stake for the protagonist in your chosen book or movie? What happens if he or she fails in any scene or in the story as a whole? Ponder here:

Chapter 1



A Jury of Her Peers

Before You Read the Story

Lesson 1

Before we get into our first story of the year, I'd like to ask you a strange question: Do you think it is acceptable for a wife to kill her abusive husband if it is not in self-defense?

Please write your answer here:

Okay. Now on to less life-threatening things . . .

Suggested Reading and Homework Plan

Below is a four-week plan that will make it easy for you to complete all the tasks in this chapter, including reading the short story.

Use the boxes to check off assignments as you finish them, if you wish.

Week 1:

- ☐ Complete lessons 1-2.
- ☐ Hand in your Investigate! assignment from lesson 1. Your teacher will tell you when this is due.

Week 2:

- ☐ Complete lesson 3 (read “A Jury of Her Peers”) and lessons 4-5. Complete the pages in your Novel Notebook for “A Jury of Her Peers.”

Week 3:

- ☐ Decide on one activity and begin work on it. You’ll find the list of activities at the end of this chapter. Your teacher will tell you when this is due.
- ☐ Complete lesson 6.
- ☐ Hand in your activity and sing a song of freedom.

Empathetic Characters

The author’s first job in any story is to hook you into the story so you’ll be intrigued and keep reading. Writers from years ago didn’t always care about that, but all modern writers give great attention to hooking their readers.

The author’s second job is to present a main character that is empathetic. That is, you’ll be so interested in what happens to him or her that you’ll keep reading to find out.

What does **empathetic** mean? It means you feel what another is feeling, that you care about what happens to him or her and identify in some way with the character. Is he in trouble? You feel anxious. Does he achieve some success? You are relieved for him. Is someone mean to him? You feel the injustice. That’s empathy.

Here’s best-selling author Dean Koontz explaining the importance of empathy:

The initial reaction that a story must elicit from the reader is empathy—the vicarious experiencing of the feelings, thoughts, and attitudes of another person. The first person with whom the reader should have empathy is the novel’s lead character, the protagonist.

Below are some attributes authors give their protagonists so that we'll have empathy for them. This list contains generalizations. For instance, even though Batman is wealthy, he is viewed as an underdog because his parents were murdered when he was young, and he still seeks their killers. Authors are creative with how they build their empathetic protagonists:

- He or she is the underdog in some way. He's not rich, he suffered a great crisis or loss earlier, he tries and tries but fails, he is worthy but people misjudge him, he was abandoned, he is not the firstborn, and so on.
- He has a heart wound. His parents were killed, he is living with people who do not love him, he was rejected by someone important, and so on.
- He is bravely trying to overcome these obstacles. He does not complain unless it is with humor.
- His name endears him to us. Bilbo Baggins (*The Hobbit*) is a much sweeter name than Gríma Wormtongue (*The Lord of the Rings*). The name Hester sounds nicer than her nemesis Roger Chillingworth (*The Scarlet Letter*).
- He is being threatened or attacked. He is in trouble. Great odds are aligned against him.
- He has a worthy goal.
- The stakes are high: He has much to lose or much to gain.
- At least one other character loves or respects him.
- He is competent at doing something even if he does not realize it.
- He has some sort of code of honor, even though it may not be similar to ours, and, for the most part, he sticks to it.
- He has attributes that we admire, like a sense of humor, a sense of justice, courage, sacrifice, looking out for the little guy, and so on.
- His motivation is something we admire: curiosity, a desire to prove oneself, love, self-preservation, a yearning for adventure, and so forth.

As you read through that list, did you see some of these qualities in characters you love?

Orson Scott Card, author of *Ender's Game*, maintains there are two ways to gain empathy for the lead:

1. Sacrifice: "Self-chosen suffering for the sake of the greater good—sacrifice, in other words—is far more intense than pain alone."
2. Jeopardy: "The more helpless the character and the more terrible the danger, the more importance the audience will attach to the character."

Here's Card again in his own words:

If somebody says, "I've got a miserable, nasty job here that has to be done," then a character gains [empathy] by volunteering. If somebody says, "If you succeed in this task, your name will be remembered for ten thousand years," then a character gains [empathy] by modestly waiting to be drafted.

This is why Tolkien made sure that Frodo never volunteered to be the ringbearer in *The Lord of the Rings*; rather Frodo tried to give the ring to someone else until it became absolutely clear that he was the only one who could carry it. If Frodo had *wanted* to carry the ring, the audience wouldn't have felt anywhere near as much [empathy] for him—all his troubles from then on would have been the result of his own hubris in thinking he could measure up to the task."

We feel Frodo's anxiety much more because he gets stuck with the ring and has to deal with it.

This may seem too obvious to mention, but here goes: Characters and stories do not spring to life from the vacuum of nothingness. They have an author who is weaving characters, events, and meanings together, working on the back side of the tapestry so we can enjoy the front side without any thought of what the messy side looks like.

This course aims to show you the messy side. We'll go behind the scenes and learn how the author weaves her fabric of enchantment, pulling us into the story as though we were famished waifs and she were the witch with the cottage made of candy.

Investigate!

Grab a favorite book or think of a movie you've enjoyed lately. Write your choice here:

Now write at least three things the author does to make the main character empathetic so you'll be on his or her side. Use the list in the section Empathetic Characters or identify other methods the author uses.

1.

2.

3.

Were you surprised by anything you found? Write it here:

Lesson 2

Literary Terms: Text and Context

When you read a novel or short story, you're reading the primary source or what is called the **text**. The word *text* simply refers to the story you are reading. The **context** is all the stuff outside the story that may color it and put it in a different light:

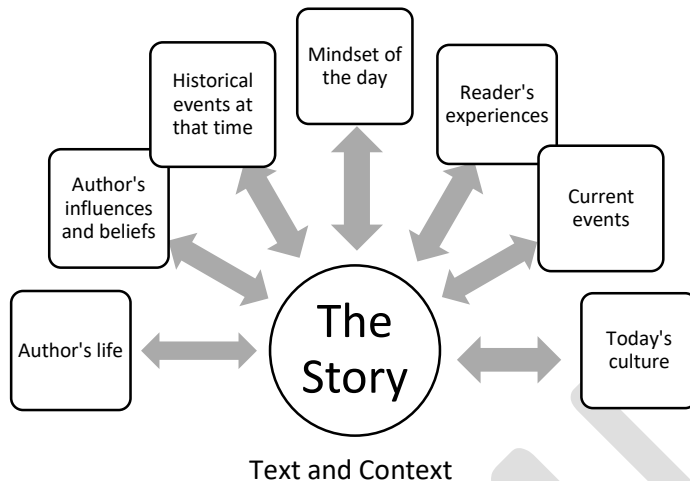
- the author's upbringing,
- events that were shaping the author and the world at the time,
- the moral, spiritual, or ethical temperature of those first readers,
- your life experiences, and so forth.

Books have a parent (the author), a family tree (its kind or *genre*), and a family history (where it fits in literary history). Additionally, the authors have been reading other authors. They have been paying attention to what critics and other authors say of other writers. As Jane Smiley in *13 Ways of Looking at the Novel* writes, "Every novel that now strikes us as original itself originated in a social and artistic network of some sort, because the canon is always being made, remade, and expanded by novelists themselves out of the present stock of available books." From what soil did any particular novel germinate and emerge? A careful reading of the text is important, but so is the book's context.

You may be familiar with the word *context* being used in a slightly different way, as in "Hey, I didn't mean that! You took my statement out of context" or "That's not what those Bible verses mean. He took them out of context."

When you take something “out of context,” you perhaps misinterpret the speaker’s original meaning or do not take into account the verses surrounding the ones you are talking about.

In the figure below, the story is the *text*, and the boxes are the *context* through which it is viewed or interpreted.



To understand how a story’s context can completely change its meaning, let’s look at Jonathan Swift’s “A Modest Proposal” (1729). Swift’s pamphlet proposes to fix problems the English perceived they had with the Irish: too many poor people, too much crime, and growing population concerns. One of his ideas is to sell one-year-old Irish babies to wealthy English families who will eat them, for “a

young healthy child well nursed is at a year old a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled; and I make no doubt that it will equally serve in a fricassee or a ragout.”

We read this and shudder. How cruel. How unthinking. How inhumane.

Which is exactly the point Swift is trying to make. The English were proposing outlandish ideas of their own, solutions that were based on expediency, formulas, and unproven theories, not taking into account that they were dealing with real people. Instead of viewing the Irish through the lens of humanity, they considered them a problem to be fixed. Thus the satirical proposal of Swift’s is meant to be a wake-up call to readers, to show them how barbaric their schemes are.

Unless we have this historical context, we may be tempted to think Swift is a sick ogre of monstrous proportions. Incidentally, his subtitle is this: “For Preventing the Children of Poor People in Ireland, from Being a Burden on Their Parents or Country, and for Making Them Beneficial to the Publick.”

You can read “A Modest Proposal” by going to <http://www.online-literature.com/swift/947/>.

Even your own experiences can color the story you’re reading and become part of the context. For instance, many readers enjoy the Little House series by Laura Ingalls Wilder, but what if a particular reader had moved often in her life? And what if she read about Pa always moving his family from location to location and became perturbed with him, viewing him as a restless, reckless adventurer who constantly

tore his family from their comfortable surroundings and friends? Others may enjoy the stories of Laura, Ma, and Pa, but this reader would view them negatively. As author Flannery O'Connor observes: "It takes readers as well as writers to make literature." Your vote counts.

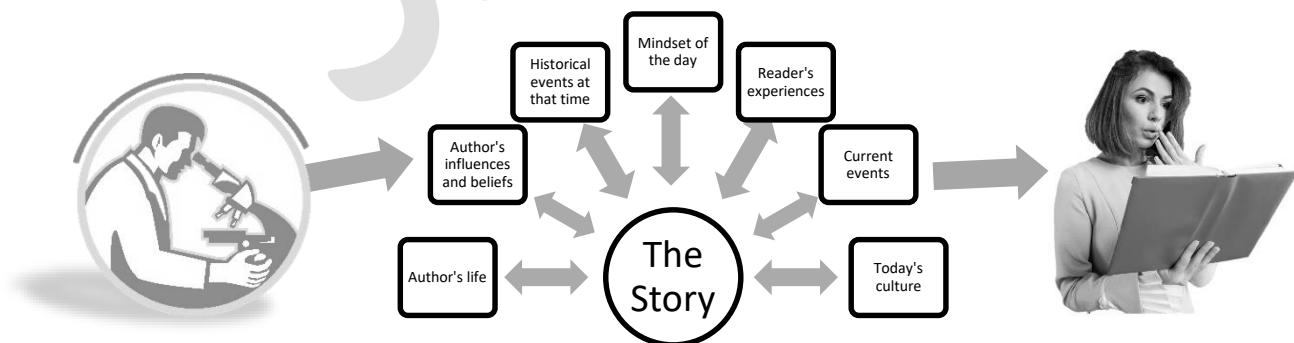
Here are some questions to help you place any story in its proper context:

- What was the author's worldview? What was his or her upbringing like? What were his or her influences?
- How are the author's life and beliefs reflected in the novel?
- What was going on in the world at that time? How does that affect the novel?
- When was this book first published?
- How did readers and critics view the book when it was originally published?
- Is it the first book of its kind? In what way?
- Why are today's reactions to the novel different from those of the first readers?
- How would our culture view some events and characters differently from those first readers?
- What personal life experiences and beliefs color the way you view the book?

Is it wrong to read a story without knowing anything about the author or the book's context? No. On the other hand, knowing these things will greatly enhance your understanding or enjoyment of the book. And it makes you a smarter reader.

Christian readers will develop discernment when they evaluate everything they read through the filter of the truths in the Bible. This is an oversimplified graph, but it shows the mental process I'm referring to:

"The best book is a collaboration between author and reader."
-Barbara Tuchman



Text and Context through the lens of the Bible

To help you understand some of the context of the books in this course, you'll read short biographies of the authors, their influences, and the time period.

As you read any book, whether for school or for pleasure, note how your views of the story are affected by your knowledge of the author's life.

What Is the Writer's Aim?

H. G. Wells wrote in his autobiography that he was surprised when people liked his stories because he considered himself a teacher, not a story teller. In his mind, he was aiming to change people's minds about certain issues.

Today's writers and the great writers of yesterday know that their writing has a dual purpose: Aim for the head so people will learn something, and aim for the heart so readers will feel or react to something.

G. K. Chesterton reveals that "there is a road from the eye to the heart that does not go through the intellect." From the written page to your heart, bypassing your brain. Think about how great art moves you, how your throat ached at the sad part of the movie, how a beautiful vista fills your heart with joy, how happy you feel when you hear your favorite song, or how excited you are when your team scores a goal.

These are heart reactions. They did not go through your intellect but made you *feel* something.

This heart reaction is the secret of every beloved story, and it is powerful. It can change the way you feel about something and, therefore, how you think about it.

When people want to change something in society, they often turn to fiction to do it. In the early 1970s before abortion-on-demand was legalized, screenwriters wrote TV movies about worthy, college-bound young women who made this one-time mistake of getting pregnant and whose lives would be ruined if they couldn't obtain an abortion. Writers set up the protagonist's plight—being ill-equipped to raise a child, missing out on friends and a higher education, having her choices in life narrowed drastically, being ostracized by friends and relatives for getting pregnant, and so on. With this array of troubles against her, viewers would have empathy for her and admit that she deserved happiness as much as the next person. In this way, hearts were changed. This was a powerful method that appealed to viewers' senses of fairness and compassion, making abortion-on-demand seem acceptable.

The Confession by John Grisham is a powerful story against capital punishment. How does Grisham engineer *The Confession* to have the maximum impact on readers' feelings?

Here's how: The young man in question has just graduated from high school, is a football hero, and has a girlfriend and a supportive family. His best friend tells lies at

the trial and puts him at the scene because of deep envy. Grisham calls the execution a killing. He slows down the action and shows readers the young man as he is being executed by lethal injection as his grieving family looks on. Then he proves that the executed man is not guilty. We have empathy for this wronged, dead young man.

To those powerful appeals to the heart, add the fact that the murder victim's family is a piece of work: The mother is an overweight drama queen in love with the media; the stepfather a silent nobody. The mother has so many annoying qualities that we have no empathy for the real victim—the murdered girl—but have all sorts of empathy for the wronged boy and his family. Grisham aims for the heart, grabs it, and ends up changing opinions about capital punishment. See what he did there?

This is not a tirade against Grisham or his beliefs. It is meant to be an eye-opening revelation showing you how stories are intentionally constructed to deeply influence readers' hearts and opinions.

Think about the last time you read a book or watched a movie and then changed your mind about something because of it. Write your idea here:

This double whammy of heart and head is extremely potent. Be aware of it when reading stories. Discerning readers will hold story events and characters up against the principles in the Bible. Be that reader.

After all, things in stories don't just happen. They are put in motion by the author, who is pulling the strings.

C. S. Lewis says this of his Narnia stories, but it can be applied to any story we read: Test a story by "how much it compels our participation, how far it enlarges our being, and what sort of window on the world it opens and invites us to look through." Good advice from a pro.

Fun Fact

“A Jury of Her Peers” was originally the play *Trifles* written by Susan Glaspell as in 1916. The part of Mrs. Hale was played by Glaspell, and her husband George Cook played the part of the sheriff.

The idea for the play came to Glaspell from a real murder she’d covered in Iowa as a journalist in 1900-1901 in which an abused wife killed her husband with an axe while he slept. Similar to the circumstances you’ll read in “A Jury of Her Peers,” the original wife, Mrs. Margaret Hossack, testified that she had been in bed with her husband when he was killed but that she had never woken up. No women were on her jury.

After being found guilty of murder, Mrs. Hossack had her verdict overturned on appeal about a year later. A second trial ended in a hung jury (you’ll see how ironic this is when you read the story), and she went home a free woman.



Susan Glaspell, circa 1915

Setting and Point of View

The short story you are about to read takes place in the early 1900s in Dickson County, Iowa. This is a real area in northern Iowa and mostly rural. You’ll notice that the mode of transportation is a horse-drawn buggy.

Author Susan Glaspell grew up in nearby Davenport, Iowa, before moving to Greenwich Village (New York City) and lived from 1882-1948, so she knew this time period and area well.

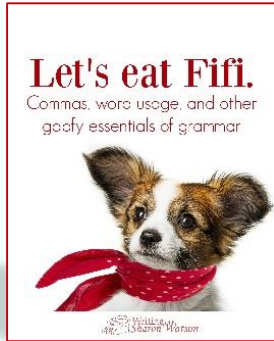
The point of view is third person singular. Almost everything that happens in this story is filtered through the lens of only one character. See if you can guess which one. We’ll discuss more about this after you’ve read the story.

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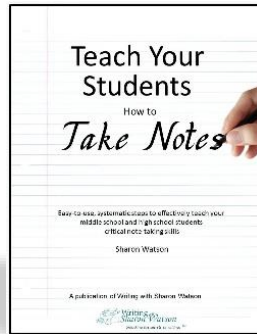
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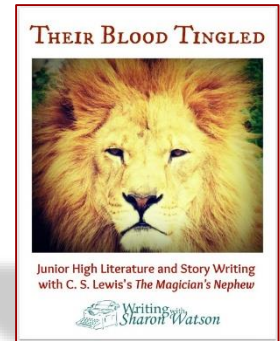
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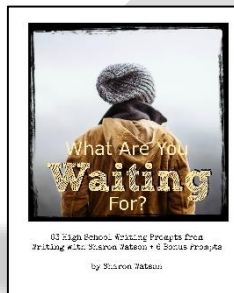
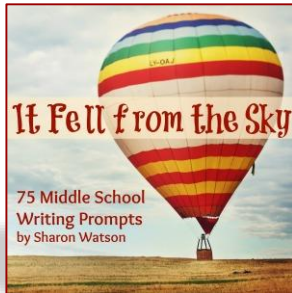
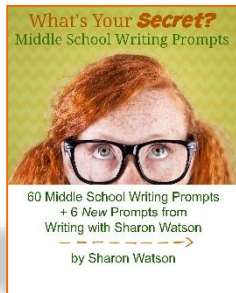
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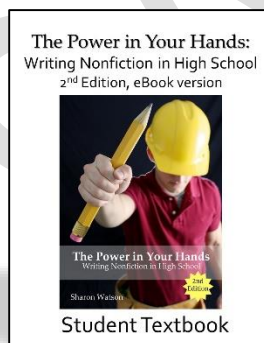
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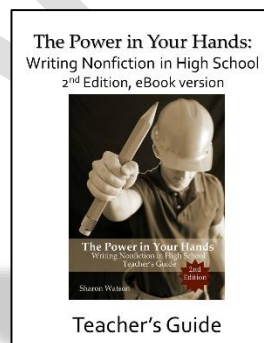


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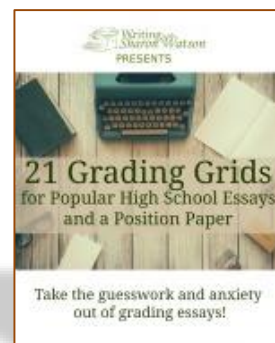
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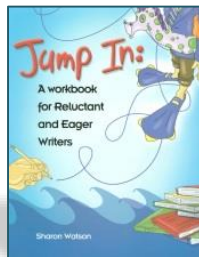
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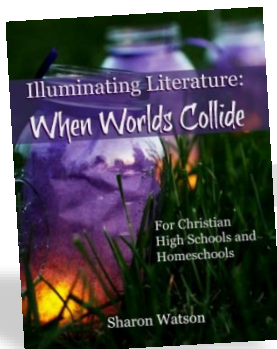
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