

## Student learning

### Guidelines for effective reading

As a student of a humanities discipline, you will spend a large portion of your time working with written sources of information, both of a literary nature and of a non-literary nature. Because there is a great deal of material to be covered in the courses that comprise your major, it is essential that your reading is both purposeful and efficient. Since the basic genres of fiction and non-fiction have certain predictable forms and structures, we can identify some essential questions that when answered, further our comprehension of the text.

### Grid for the reading and interpretation of narrative texts:

All readers react to the texts that they read, and your personal reaction will certainly influence your interpretation of a text. However, reading at the collegiate level involves more than just absorbing information and then reacting to the content. Interpretation of a narrative text involves analysis of narrative technique and artistic design. The questions that follow will help you focus on the technique and design of a narrative work. When reading seems difficult or problematic, these questions will be especially helpful as you interpret a narrative text.

#### Who?

Who narrates or tells the story?

Is the narrator reliable?

Can you, as the reader, identify any assumptions that the writer has brought to the text (whether they be overt or covert)?

What is the range of emotional involvement of an author?

#### To whom?

Can you identify the intended audience of the work?

What assumptions do we the readers bring to the text that affect our reception of what we read or our reaction to it?

#### What?

What is the theme or main idea of the work?

What does the title have to do with the theme or content?

If the author uses an epigraph, what is his or her purpose for employing it? Does the epigraph contain any hints about how you should read the text or does it somehow illuminate the overall theme?

## **When? Where?**

Where does the action take place?

Where are the characters from?

What time frame are the circumstances placed in?

Does the temporal and spatial placement have any impact on the action?

What is the narrative “now”?

How long does it take for the significant actions of the novel to occur?

Describe or quantify the temporal distance between the moment in which the narration takes place and the time in which the events occurred.

Is the technique of flashback employed?

Is the technique of foreshadowing employed?

Can you identify any cultural codes that function within the novel (for example: catholic beliefs)

What are the implications of the historical context of the work? Are they of a social or political nature?

## **How?**

### **How are the characters formed?**

What type of language do the characters employ?

What are their characteristics?

Are these characters developed psychologically (round-out characters), or are they stock characters?

Do the characters have names?

Can you distinguish between principal and secondary characters?

Can you identify a protagonist?

Can you identify an antagonist?

### **How is the plot structured?**

If the work being analyzed is a novel, what are the formal divisions?

(books, sections, chapters, prologue, epilogue)

How are the events arranged?

Does the plot of the work under consideration follow the scheme of the traditional narrative or dramatic plot?

(structure of the traditional plot: exposition, conflict or complication, climax, resolution or *denouement*)

Is the plot primarily comprised of completed actions or incomplete actions?

### **How is narrative point of view established?**

Is the predominant point of view that of one single character or that of multiple characters?

Which of the following terms best describe the point of view of the narration?

- S omniscient narrator
- S narrator who is also the protagonist
- S a witness that narrates and participates in the action, but is not the protagonist
- S a witness that narrates, but is not an agent in the action
- S the dramatic mode of narration (scenes without the intervention or imposition of a narrator)

Identify the **narrative voice** of the selection

### **The Medium and Mode of Expression**

Which words or phrases signal or indicate the theme or principal message of the story or plot, or which words or phrases serve as clues as you try to unravel the the central enigma?

Which words or phrases serve to establish the temporal context of the work?

Are there figurative expressions that you are unfamiliar with?

Consider the implications of the chosen lexicon of the work.

What is the discourse level of the characters?

How does language use contribute to the overall tone of the work?