



Novels Depicting Older Characters Lesson Plan

Introduction

In this activity, students read and discuss a significant novel depicting an older person who confronts a personal challenge or difficult circumstance. After analyzing literature involving older persons who are searching for meaning in life, students write a composition exploring one aspect of the novel - characterization, style, symbolism or theme.

Objectives

Students will:

- analyze characterization, style, symbolism or theme in a novel depicting an older person;
- participate in student cooperative critiquing;
- write a composition on one aspect of the novel; and
- give examples of challenges older people face and positive actions needed in order to meet these challenges.

Procedures

1. Have students read a major literary work depicting an older person. If enough copies are available, the class might read the same work. If not, student groups could be organized around those who are reading the same work, so that class groups of about five students would read, discuss and critique the same book. Examples of books depicting older characters include the following.
 - Alcott, Louisa May. *Little Women*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1868.
 - Amis, Kingsley. *Ending Up*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1973.
 - Beresford-Howe, Constance. *The Book of Eve*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1974.
 - Corbett, Elizabeth. *Our Mrs. Meigs*. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1954.
 - Danska, Herbert. *Street Kids*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970.
 - Greene, Graham. *Travels with My Aunt*. New York: Viking Press, 1970.
 - Greenfield, Josh, and Mazursky, Paul. *Harry and Tonto*. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1974.
 - Hemingway, Ernest. *The Old Man and the Sea*. New York: Charles Scribner, 1952.
 - Higgins, Colin. *Harold and Maude*. New York: Avon Books, 1975.
 - Hilton, James. *Goodbye Mr. Chips*. Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1934.
 - Kazantzakis, Nikos. *On the Greek*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952.

- Lawrence, Josephine. *The Web of Time*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1953.
 - Smith, Robert K. *Sadie Shapiro's Knitting Book*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973. Thompson, Ernest. *On Golden Pond*. New York: Dodd, 1979.
2. After students have read their selected book, ask them to write a 10-minute free-writing response to the novel.
 3. Organize students in groups to discuss their initial responses to the novel. What did they like? Not like? What were the books' strengths? Weaknesses? After initial free-writing responses are shared in small groups, ask students to discuss the thesis of each book. What was the central idea of each book?
 4. For homework, ask each student to write a first draft of a two- or three-page literary analysis, concentrating on one aspect of the book, such as characterization, style, symbolism or theme.
 5. Drafts are shared in class among student group members who make comments and suggestions. Students then incorporate suggested changes in their final copies, which are to be submitted to the teacher.
 6. After the teacher has read final papers, hold a class discussion on how issues facing the older characters in the novels relate to issues facing younger and older people today. (The teacher may ask students to incorporate this into their literary critique.)

Extension Activities

Some novels have been made into films, which are available at video stores. If time permits, show one such film in class. Discuss the character development and the film's interpretation or adaptation of the novel.

Some communities have small groups of older adults who are interested in literature. Locate agencies serving older adults to see if they know of older persons who meet to read and discuss literature. Some adult education programs offer literature courses to adults. These same adults might enjoy participating in a daytime class with secondary students.

Adapt the following discussion questions to the reading assignment.

Problems faced

- What problems were faced by individuals of different ages?
- What caused these problems and why were they important?
- In what ways do young and old people face similar problems?

Decisions

- What important decisions were made by the characters?
- What influenced individuals in their decisions?
- In what ways did family members or peers exert strong influences in decisions?
- What resulted from these decisions?
- In what ways, if any, would the decisions affect them in later life?
- What other choices did individuals have, and would they have changed the results?

- Do you think the same decisions would have been made if the characters were younger? Older?
- What decisions do you or other family members make which are similar to the those in the story?

Physical circumstances

- What did the individual(s) look like?
- How important were physical appearances to the story?
- What were the historical and geographical settings?
- Did the setting make a difference to the story?
- How would the story have been different had it taken place in a different time or setting?

Personal qualities

- What personal attributes, such as kindness or impatience, did individuals have which determined the course of the story?
- In what ways do you see these qualities in younger and older persons you know?

Values and goals

- What did younger and older individuals in the story value most?
- Give examples of behaviors that reflect these values.
- What did younger and older individuals want out of life? What were their goals?
- In what ways do you see people today seeking similar goals?