

Teaching Literature

Reasons Why Teaching Literature Is Important

- Through literature, students gain experiences that are wider than just their own history or experiences in life. They are exposed to other worldviews, cultures, and perspectives.
- Stories often help students understand things they know at a head level, but come to feel more deeply by experiencing it in a story. This begins to actually change their values and decisions. Literature fosters wisdom.
- Helping the students engage with a literary work can impact how they live their lives from that day forward. (Good literature will influence a student's attitudes, thinking, or understanding in some way, even if they don't always remember later that they've read it).
- When you discuss literary pieces, it gives you opportunities to deal with things of substance that make life what it is, opens doors for discussion, develops the skills in students to talk about what they're thinking, and helps students learn from each other's insights.
- Teaching literature helps to develop students' critical thinking skills, which is part of building thoughtful Christians and kingdom citizens.

General Advice and Teaching Tips

- Use questions to explore stories. This leads students to discover the truth for themselves (instead of you simply telling them what you think the meaning of the text is).
- Some students struggle to understand what they're reading. Teaching them the following tools may be helpful:
 - Think aloud
 - Model for your students how you can have an internal dialogue while reading a text. Project the first page of a story or a difficult section of a textbook. Read the text aloud, stopping often to share your thoughts. Point to the words in the text that trigger your thinking. Ask questions. Connect information from one concept to the next.
 - Mark the text
 - If a student has a personal workbook, the marking can be done directly in the book; if the student is using a shared textbook, the marking can be done on sticky notes and placed in the text.
 - Have students mark main ideas, background knowledge, or questions they have about the text.
- Utilize pre-reading activities, which prepare students for what they are going to encounter in the text and get them interested in the story before they even start reading. Pre-reading activities may include:
 - Vocabulary—make sure that students are equipped to understand unfamiliar words or concepts.

- Brainstorming—very quickly allow students to interact with a question that introduces the theme of the story.
- Hooks—give a question that has no answer, share a personal anecdote, show a picture prompt, use an object that is related to the story, predict what may happen in the story based on the title, etc.
- Graphic organizer—use something like a KWL chart (letting students fill in what they already *Know* about a subject and what they *Wonder* about. After reading, they can fill in what they have *Learned* about the story). Bubble maps or Venn diagrams work well also.
- When it comes to vocabulary, be aware that there is a lot of academic-specific vocabulary that students will only interact with in the classroom. In addition, there will be a vast span in the known vocabulary of your students based on their language exposure up to this point. It is the responsibility of the teacher to address these discrepancies so that every child can understand what they're reading.
- Use literature class as an opportunity to develop the following skills:
 - Summarizing
 - Identifying the main idea
 - Inferring (reading between the lines)
 - Distinguishing fact from opinion
 - Applying wisdom principals to life
 - Narrating (retelling the story from memory)
- Use a variety of oral reading methods to maintain engagement:
 - Round robin—students read assigned portions in order, going around the room
 - Pulling sticks—randomly select readers using popsicle sticks with names
 - Chain reading—set a timer (e.g. 45 seconds) for each reader
 - Readers' theater—assign dialogue or narration roles
 - Fill-in-the-word—teacher reads, students chime in with specific words
 - Popcorn reading—students read one sentence each
 - Group/pair reading—small groups read together
- Encourage deeper discussion through book clubs, literature workshops, Socratic seminars, etc., where students must prepare and study on their own before engaging with the content as a class

Recommended Resources

- Ideas for literature class: [Ideas for Teaching Literature - The Dock for Learning](#)
- High school book clubs: [Guidelines for Book Clubs - The Dock for Learning](#)
- Detailed definition of poetry: [What Is Poetry? - The Dock for Learning](#)
- Responding to literature assignment: [Responding to Literature - The Dock for Learning](#)
- Template for a literature workshop: [Literature Workshop Template - The Dock for Learning](#)
- Study guide for works of literature: [Study Guide for Works of Literature - The Dock for Learning](#)
- Tips for improving reading comprehension: [How to Read: Improving Reading Comprehension - The Dock for Learning](#)

- List of suggested online resources: [Reading/Language Online Resources - The Dock for Learning](#)
- Poetry response prompt: [Poetry Point & Ponder - The Dock for Learning](#)
- Strategies for increasing and developing vocabulary:
 - [Increasing the Vocabulary of Our Scholars - The Dock for Learning](#)
 - [Giving Our Students Strategies to Expand their Vocabulary - The Dock for Learning](#)

Sources

- Why and How Do You Teach Literature? By Kendall Myers [Why and How Do You Teach Literature? - The Dock for Learning](#)
- To Understand and Do: Teaching Literature for Life Change by Jonas Sauder [To Understand and Do: Teaching Literature for Life Change - The Dock for Learning](#)
- Understanding Reading by Karen Birt [Understanding Reading - The Dock for Learning](#)
- Pre-Reading 101: Strategies to Get Your Students Ready for the Story by Sharon Yoder [Pre-Reading 101: Strategies to Get Your Students Ready for the Story - The Dock for Learning](#)