Introduction to Reading Fiction

Purpose:
- to introduce students to the art of reading a novel
- to prepare students for the complexities of literature.

Students in a developmental reading course are usually quite unfamiliar with the experience of reading novels. Most students are unaware of literary techniques. Also they need suggestions and strategies for having a successful experience with their novels.

Directions:

1. Provide students with the handout Introduction to the Reading Fiction (page 2-3).

2. Discuss each section of the handout clarifying terms and concepts.

3. It is helpful to provide examples from novels to explain flashbacks, foreshadowing, historical settings, flat and round characters, themes, etc. This is one major advantage of starting the semester with a class book that everyone read. You can refer to examples from their class novel when introducing students to the various elements of literature.

4. If you have a more basic reading course, you may want to spend more time with this handout.

5. Many of these concepts are new to students so it is helpful to continue referring to the various elements of literature as you move through the semester. You can point out examples flashbacks, foreshadowing, characterization, themes etc. with a variety of novels. When you refer to literature techniques in diverse novels, you are exposing them to more books at the same time that you provide review of literary elements.
6. **Introduction to Reading Fiction**

**Be an active, reflective reader:** Stay alert as you read. Know what you need to look for in a book. Take time to reflect on what you are reading. Think about the events in your book and what they mean to your life and to society in general.

**Previewing**
- Do you know anything about the author? What type of books does he/she usually write? How might his or her own life be reflected in the story?
- Think about the title- what might it mean in relationship to the story?
- How is the book organized? Is it set up by time periods, locations etc.?

**Opening Scene or Beginning Chapters**
- Read the first part of the book slowly. You are being introduced to a variety of characters. You are discovering how they relate to each other. You are receiving hints as to what has already happened. You are coming to understand the setting- the location and the time where the story is taking place. It is important to get the story straight so bare with it if the story seems to be moving slowly.

**Important things to think about as you read:**

**CHARACTERS:**

What are the characters like? Are they heroes, villains or victims? Are they complex or simple and predictable? You will learn a lot about the characters through their actions and their dialogues with each other. What they say and do will help you form opinions about them and help you predict what they might do next. Pay attention to their physical descriptions as well as their behavior. If there are many characters in your book, make a list for yourself. Name and label characters and how they are related to each other. Put this information on an index card and leave it in the book.

**NARRATOR:**

Who is telling the story? Is it told in first or third person? Is it told through the eyes of a child, a teenager or an adult?

**SETTING**

Think about the geographic and social setting of your story.
- What is the immediate setting? This may be directly stated or it may be implied from the description and events. Are you in a small town or large city? Is the story taking place in the west, the south or the east coast? Is it taking place in the United States or abroad?
- Does the story change locations? Some books take place over a wide variety of locations while others may be limited to one small town, a courtroom, a reservation, a prison, or a single home.
- What is the social setting of the story? Is the story about the upper class, middle class or the poor? Does it focus on a specific age group and/or ethnic group? (young boys in a gang, young single mothers struggling to survive, soldiers in a prisoner of war camp, a Hispanic family of immigrants settling in America, a female detective making it in a man’s world.)

Think about the time period of your story. What is the historic period in which it takes place? What season of the year is it? What world events may have an impact on the story? (i.e. World War II, Civil Rights Movement)
PLOT

Once characters are introduced and the setting has been established, the plot will move forward. You will be learning about the conflicts and problems the characters face. You will reach a turning point or climax where events reach a high point and then things will be resolved. The problems characters face can be quite diverse. Some can be much more life-threatening than others. Some books will develop a plot slowly while others bring you into a story in a rather abrupt way.

- Think about what kind of conflicts the characters face - Internal or External? Man against himself, man against man, man against society in general? ( A man trying to survive in a prisoner of war camp, a teenager trying to stay out of gangs, a detective trying to solve a crime, a single mother trying to raise her kids, a lawyer fighting for justice, a woman trying to find the perfect relationship etc.)
- The **climax** of a story is when the action reaches a high point. The story has come together over time. ( ex. The police have found the guilty party, the lawyer has found the evidence to convict or free a defendant, the woman has to choose whether to marry a certain person, a person who knows the truth about a crucial issue has to decide what to do about it despite the risks involved.)
- The **resolution** of a story is when the author reveals what happens as a result of the climax. Where do the characters go from here? Sometimes this is very specific and other times it is rather vague and open ended.

THEME

- What morals or lessons have you learned from the book? What is the author’s point? What is he/she trying to say?
- What insights, discoveries, ideas or judgments about people have you made as a result of reading this book?
- What have you learned about mankind, specific groups of people, specific cultures as a result of this story?
- How might you apply the lessons of this book to your own life?

LITERARY TECHNIQUES

**Introductions** - These are written to stimulate interest and curiosity. They may appear confusing and frustrating especially to inexperienced readers. Be patient with your book. Keep reading and the various isolated incidents and characters will come together in a meaningful way.

**Flashbacks** - A flashback is an interruption in a story to show an event that has already happened before this event. It provides you with background information so you can better understand the story. However, many times you are moving to a different place and time so it can be confusing.

**Foreshadowing** - This occurs when authors use hints to suggest events that are going to happen later. It is used to build suspense by raising questions and encouraging further reading to find out what happens. It is also provided to prepare you for what will follow. It helps you predict upcoming events.

***Pay attention to things in **italics**, and **different print**. These are used to signal something.

Some books have rather simple and predictable plots, while others are quite complicated and sophisticated with diverse characters and many subplots involved. The more books you read, the easier it will be to read more challenging and thought provoking books.