

ACADEMIC STUDIES

ENGLISH

**Support Materials and Exercises
for**

IAU - READING COMPREHENSION PART D : THE NOVEL



SUMMER 1999

**IAU READING COMPREHENSION
PART D : THE NOVEL**

ACADEMIC ENGLISH

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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OBJECTIVES

Upon successful completion of this unit, the learner will be able to

1. recognize and read with understanding and enjoyment a variety of written genres.

TEACHING POINTS			Level
Journalism	1	Parts of newspapers (e.g. editorial, features, hard news, etc.)	7
	2	Masthead	7
	3	Attention getters: headlines, placement, fonts, photos, colour	7
	4	Recognize fact and opinion (objective vs. subjective)	7
	5	Pyramid style of writing	7
	6	Writing leads (who, what, when, where, why, how)	7
	7	Parts of magazines: table of contents	7
	8	editorials	7
	9	feature stories	7
	10	columns	7
	11	ads and abbreviation, etc.	7
Short Story	12	Narrator: (point of view) 1st, 3rd limited, 3rd omniscient	7
	13	Plot: introduction, rising action, climax, denouement	7
	14	Character: central/minor; round /flat);methods of development	7
	15	Setting/mood	7
	16	Theme: central message or lesson	7
	17	Also myth, legend, fable	7
Poetry	18	Style: traditional & modern (free & blank verse)	8&9
	19	Types: ballad, limerick, narrative, sonnet, other	8&9
	20	Rhyme and rhythm (in general)	8&9
	21	Literary devices: simile, metaphor, personification	8&9
	22	alliteration, onomatopoeia	8&9
Non-fiction	23	define essay and prose; contrast with fiction	8
	24	Types: diary/journal, autobiography, biography, memoir, essay	8
Drama	25	Special Conventions: e.g. stage directions, dialogue/monologue,	9

	26	scenes and acts	9
	27	Plot, character, setting, theme in a one act play or modern play	9
Novel	28	Narrator: 1st, 3rd limited, 3rd omniscient	9
	29	Plot: introduction, rising action, climax, denouement	9
	30	Character: central, minor (round, flat)	9
	31	Setting/mood	9
	32	Theme: central message or lesson	9

Note: Continue to build the comprehension skills presented in BAU_ENG 3.1 -3.7.

NOTE TO FACILITATORS AND LEARNERS:

1. This module presents information and exercises to accompany the objectives of IAU-ENG 3.2 : READING COMPREHENSION.
2. Facilitators are free to use any support materials appropriate to their learners' needs.
3. Additional resource materials will probably be required for those wanting more information on this topic or for those needing more practice mastering certain areas. Reading materials can be drawn from any source and should be chosen to meet the individual interests and needs of each learner.
4. Alternate support materials may be appropriate. The Internet provides a wide variety of written materials, both the printed word and literature, at many reading levels.
5. Learners should participate in daily silent reading practice.
6. Learners should be encouraged to read all types of materials so they can develop their critical faculties for deciding which are examples of good writing, which deserve to be classified as literature, and which are unacceptable.
7. The purpose of reading literature is for more than investigating plot, character, setting or theme. Literature can be an invaluable tool for providing learners with writing models which they can emulate, often without conscious effort.
8. Reading widely is the basis for acquiring the broad general knowledge so important to future learning situations. It also provides a platform for discussions of life experiences, values, morality, decision-making, and many other topics useful to adult learners.
9. It is the learner's responsibility to search out additional reading materials to supplement the practice work included in this module by consulting with his/her facilitator.
10. Do **NOT** write in this module. Please make your notes and complete the exercises in your own notebooks so that other learners may also use these booklets.

Note to learners: Before beginning this section of the reading comprehension objectives, consult with your instructor about which novel you would like to read. Not all novels are appropriate for study as part of a literature course. Some are much too long and complicated; others may contain little of value, even though they may have spent many weeks on the best seller list. The last page of this section contains a short list of *some* novels appropriate to the IAU level. With your instructor's approval, you may, however, read any novel you choose.

Begin your study of the novel by reading this section through, including the questions. Next, read the novel itself. Finally, demonstrate that you understand what a novel is and how it works by using references from the novel you read to answer the general questions included in this module.

The purpose of this section of the course is to begin to provide you with the skills and knowledge you will need to understand and interpret any novel you will ever read. There is no one right answer to any question in literature. Any answer which is supported by logical references to the author's words and ideas will be considered correct.

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THE NOVEL

The novel has a lot in common with the short story, but because it is so much longer, all of the elements (character, plot, theme, narrator, setting, etc.) can be dealt with in more detail and in a more complex way. In order to thoroughly understand the novel you choose for this section of the course, you should read it more than once. A second reading always allows you to pick up certain details which were missed in the first reading. As well, you will gain a better understanding of the work as a whole because you now know all of the “surprises” from your initial reading. In other words, once you know how the story will turn out, you can pay more attention to how the story works and how the author has produced the effects he has.

Before reading the novel you have chosen, review the terminology in Reading Comprehension: Narrative, and read through this unit’s notes and questions. Then, read the novel and work through the exercises. The questions you will answer are all generic, which means that they can apply to any novel.

By answering these questions in detail and supporting answers with quotes from the novel itself, you will be making a detailed study of the novel you read and clarifying your reactions and conclusions concerning the book. Be sure to work closely with your instructor as you work through this section. He/she will be able to guide you and help you decide whether you are on the right track, as you work towards creating *your own* interpretation of the novel.

Author and Background Information

Take the time to do a little research on the author of the novel you are reading and the period in which he/she lived; you may gain insight into the work itself. At the very least, you will pick up interesting information which help you understand the life and times of the writer. Answer as many of these questions as you can.

Exercise 1

1. What are the dates of author's birth and death? (Use an encyclopedia or the Internet, if necessary)
2. Where is the author from? Where does he/she live now? Where did he/she grow up?
3. What level of education does the author have? What social class does he/she belong to?
4. Are there any interesting experiences in the author's life which may have influenced him/her in the writing of the novel?
5. Why do you think he/she wrote the novel? Did he/she have a special audience in mind?
6. Can you find anything about family, friends, school or work environment of the author?
7. What are the other books or works this person has written? Is the novel you read an earlier or a later work in the author's career? When was the novel published? What major events were taking place in the world when the novel was written? How was the novel received by the reading public? Was it popular? Appreciated? Awarded? Condemned?
8. What was life like for ordinary people at the time the author wrote? What were the contemporary social attitudes and values. Are these reflected in the novel?

Setting

The setting can play a major role in the novel, or it can be merely a backdrop against which the events and characters take place. Remember that setting involves both time and place.

Novels, unlike short stories, can be set in many places and the events can stretch across a time span of days, weeks, years, decades, or even generations. In some novels, the setting (place and time in which the characters live) actually shapes their lives and actions (i.e. they are products or victims of their surroundings and the time they live in.) For example, in a novel set in the Canadian Prairies during the Depression, the failed crops, intense heat, and thick dust storms may have turned a character into a bitter, selfish individual who sees the world through a filter of hatred and resentment towards anyone who dares to be happy. In cases like these, the setting may also be closely tied to the theme. Determine the setting of your novel by answering as many of the following questions as you can.

Exercise 2 (Every answer must be supported by proof from the novel)

1.
 - a. What is/are the place(s) in which the novel is set? List them.
 - b. What is the time span of the novel? In what period is it set?
2. You have answered questions about the author's life and background. Is the novel set in the author's time period, or has he/she chosen to write about different era? Is the novel set in a place which the author would be familiar with, or is it entirely fictional?
3. If the novel's setting is different from the time and place of the author's life, do a little research to fill in details of historic and social background.
4. If the setting is fictional (does not exist) where is the imaginary place and when is the time? Is the setting created to seem real, or are we aware that it is totally "made up"?
5. If the setting is real, what details of local colour are mentioned in the novel? (e.g. names of cities, towns, and countries; occupations and professions, customs, pastimes; scenery, landscape, etc.)
6. How detailed are the descriptions of landscapes, cities, interiors of buildings? Can you picture the places described, or do you have only a general impression of their appearance?

7. Choose a few scenes from the novel that you found most striking or interesting. Explain why you are impressed with these scenes.
8. What is the most important setting in the novel? Why? Which events take place there?
9. Does the setting (the time and place they live in) influence the lives of the characters or their actions in any way? Explain.
10. Could the novel have been set in another place and time and still be as effective, or is the setting crucial to the novel?

Mood

The setting can have a powerful influence on the mood or atmosphere of the novel. The **mood** is the emotional effect on the reader created by the events and setting of the novel. For example, the bleak moors of England are the setting for famous novels written by Emily Brontë (*Wuthering Heights*) and Thomas Hardy (*The Return of the Native*), which you may study in Senior Academic Upgrading. Moors are high, wind-swept plateaus whose soil is so poor that they can be used for little other than raising sheep. In general, they are usually remote and subject to a lot of bad weather. These moors are harsh, unfriendly, sometimes dangerous to the characters who live there, but they are such integral parts of their lives that they cannot imagine living elsewhere. Their destinies are controlled to a certain extent by the whims of nature. The atmosphere created is dismal and forbidding for the characters and the reader as well.

Exercise 3 (Every answer must be supported by proof from the novel.)

1. Does the setting contribute to creating a mood in the novel you read? If so, explain.
2. What is the overall mood or impression that you come away with after reading the book? Is it generally happy, sad, or uplifting? Is the book disturbing in some way? Are you left feeling that events should have unfolded differently, or are you satisfied with the outcome?

Narrator/Point of View

Obviously, your first task is to establish the point of view of the narrator. Use the questions in Reading Comprehension: Narrative (how to determine the type of narrator) to do this. Then, answer the questions on the next page.

Exercise 4 (Every answer must be supported by proof from the novel.)

1. Who is the narrator in your novel? Is he/she a character in the story, or an unbiased observer? Is the narration first person, third person limited or omniscient?
2. How involved is the narrator in the story? Does he/she simply tell you what happens and leave the judgements to the reader, or do you detect a bias - is the character supplying opinion and interpretation of the events?
3. If you detect some bias, how reliable are the narrator's observations? Do you trust that you are learning the truth?
4. Are events being related as they happen, or are they being recalled as the narrator looks back in time? If the latter is the case, can you detect whether the narrator is merely retelling things as they happened? Or, does he/she change the way the story is told because the events happened in the past and he/she can now interpret them in light of how things worked out. (In other words, "Is hindsight 20/20"?)

Plot

The novel follows the same basic plot structure as other literature, but has the extra advantage of length. One or more sub-plots can be added to the narrative. Sub-plots are sequences of events that are happening at the same time as the main action but that are not as important. A sub-plot can run parallel to the main plot, or there can be several sub-plots that start and end at various time throughout the novel. For example, if the main plot of the novel is the story of a murder investigation and finding out "who done it", the author may have included several sub-plots that relate to the main character's marriage break-up, his assistant's drinking problems, etc.

A sub-plot can be directly linked to the main plot, producing complications in the main action and providing opportunities for major characters to interact with minor characters. In the case of the “whodunit” above, the investigator’s concern with his failing marriage may make him miss an important clue which might have lead to the murderer’s early arrest.

On the other hand, sub-plots may exist independently of the main plot, serving functions such as to provide interest, excitement or comic relief (a “break” from a serious or heavy main plot.)

The main plot usually follows the introduction, rising action, climax and dénouement sequence. As you can imagine, a novel, which can be as long as 500 pages or more, has the luxury of providing much detail in every aspect: lengthy introductions; thorough development of character; multiple conflicts and sub-plots to be resolved; a gradual build-up of suspense towards a climax which may come very late in the novel, or possibly a series of climaxes, as well as time for all loose ends to be tied up in the dénouement.

There is much more opportunity for an author to manipulate the time-line in a novel than in a short story. Instead of straight chronological development, devices such as *flashbacks* can be used to great effect. Entire chapters or segments of a book can be related through flashbacks. *Foreshadowing* can also be employed to build suspense over a period of time, as the reader wonders what will happen next or how the problems of the plot will be solved.. To provide a variety in the way the events unfold, an author can use dreams, diaries, and letters to relate relevant information.

Exercise 5

1. Chart the plot of the novel you read by arranging the major events along the diagram of introduction, rising action, climax and dénouement. Do not try to add too much detail; restrict yourself to the most important events of the story.
2. What are the major and minor conflicts in the novel? Arrange these according to the types of conflicts you have studied: man vs man; man vs society; man vs nature; man vs himself.

3. Are events in the plot strictly chronological? Are there gaps in time, or flashbacks to previous times? Give examples of flashbacks or foreshadowing. What effect did they have on you as you read? Did you note peculiar detail or events that seemed strange at the time, but were later explained?
4. Are there any sub-plots in the novel? Briefly outline them. Do they exist as separate entities from the main plot, or do they intersect? Are characters from the main plot and sub-plot overlapping? Do the sub-plots connect to each other in some way? Are the sub-plots there for a definite reason or just for entertainment? If they were omitted, would it have any effect on the novel?
5. Is the plot fast-moving or slow? Is it realistic or unbelievable?

Character

Character is developed in the novel using the same methods as used in other literature, with the added advantage of the length of the work. In addition to having a most extensive list of characters, there is plenty of room for development of the major character(s) into realistic people, and more importantly to show the changes the character undergoes. Without change and development, all of the characters would remain static, minor characters.

Exercise 6

1. Make a list of every character in the novel, dividing the list into **MAJOR** and **MINOR** characters. In some cases, you may find you need a third category, in between major and minor. These characters are more than flat and stereotyped, but not quite important enough to be considered major, dynamic characters.
2. Who is the main character (or *protagonist*)? Answer the following about that character
 - a. Is he/she a credible (believable) character? Explain your answer.
 - b. Describe this person, both physical characteristics and personality/behavioural characteristics.

- c. What is the change or changes which this person undergoes through the course of the novel? Does the change leave the person better or wiser in the end?
 - d. Do you feel sympathetic towards this character? Why or why not?
 - e. What motivates this character?
 - f. Who is the *antagonist*¹ of the main character? Describe their relationship. Does the relationship change during the course of the novel, or does it remain the same?
 - g. Aside from the antagonist, which other major characters relate the most to the main character? Explain the nature of their relationship.
3. What is the function of each of the minor characters? In other words, why are they in the novel? What purpose do they serve? Could any of them be omitted? If so, which ones? What changes would then have to take place in the story?
 4. Can you detect an attitude on the part of the author towards the characters he/she has created? Is the author totally detached from the story, or can you pick out clues as to which characters are favored and which are not? Give examples, if applicable.
 5. Are the names of characters significant in anyway? Does the character's name indicate the type of person the character is? Explain.
 6. Write a detailed character sketch² of any character in the novel. Include details in the following categories.

¹ Antagonist...the character against which the main character acts and reacts. Although the antagonist is often the "villain" in the story, he/she doesn't necessarily have to be evil. Often the antagonist is the element in the story that forces the central character to change and evolve.

² A character sketch is a specialized kind of writing often encountered when studying literature. It names the personality traits of a major character, gives proof from the story that the character has these traits, and shows how each one affects the outcome of the plot.

OUTWARD CHARACTERISTICS: Appearance

age

size (height, weight)

colouring

unusual features (e.g. scars, manner of walking, physical handicaps, etc.)

PERSONALITY, CHARACTER

how the character reacts in various situations (what he does)

speech patterns, dialogue (what he says)

treatment of other characters

how others react to him/her, what they think and say of him/her

attitudes towards him/herself

strengths

weaknesses

changes he/she undergoes

OPINION

author/narrator's reactions to the character

your attitude to the character - do you like or dislike the character?

how the character's personality influences the outcome of events

Theme

A short story usually has one theme; a novel may have many themes. The theme may be stated directly, but more often it is left to the reader to determine the message. Most novels, no matter what time period they are set in, deal with themes that are true for all eras and all human experience; these are considered "universal" themes or truths. The writers who excel at their craft force us to think about and question our own beliefs. They present their themes in such a way as to challenge us, to shock us, to make us react, either negatively or positively.

Exercise 7

1. What are the major and minor themes in the novel you read? In other words, what comments is the author making about life and human behaviour?
2. Are the themes ones which are pertinent to you and to other readers? Why or why not?
3. Are the themes universal, or only of interest to the time, place and situation the author is writing about?
4. What aspects of human experience are presented - love, war, politics, social relations, family relations, friendship, honour, etc.?
5. By the end of the story, do you feel that the questions raised are answered, or are you left to ponder the answers yourself?
6. Does the writer seem passionately involved with the themes presented? Can you detect his/her interest?
7. Can you determine the author's belief system from his presentation of them, i.e., does he/she seem to have a belief in God, or a feeling that we are all victims of fate and chance, or that we are influenced more by our heredity and our environment?
8. What do you feel is the general outlook of the author in then novel as a whole? Optimistic or pessimistic?
Realistic or idealistic?
Elated or depressed?

EXERCISE 8: OVERALL IMPRESSION OF THE NOVEL

1. Did you like the novel. Explain your answer.
2. What do you think was the author's purpose in writing the novel? Did the author achieve this purpose?
3. Did the novel have relevance to you personally? Explain.

POSSIBLE CHOICES FOR THE NOVEL

A novel read at the Intermediate level should not be intimidating in its length or level of reading difficulty. The following titles are suggestions only. The facilitator and the learner should consult with each other to find a novel which is interesting to the student, but which challenges him or her a little (i.e. no “easy way out” books such as Harlequin romances.) Generally, you can’t go wrong if you choose a “classic” novel.

The Old Man and the Sea Ernest Hemingway

The Pearl John Steinbeck

Animal Farm George Orwell

A Christmas Carol Charles Dickens

The Chrysalids John Wyndham

Canadian Novels

Hangman’s Beach Thomas Raddall

The Dog Who Wouldn’t Be Farley Mowatt

Lost in the Barrens Farley Mowatt

The Pit Pony Joyce Barkhouse

FEEDBACK PROCESS

For feedback, please forward your comments to:

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 - insufficient explanations;
 - insufficient examples;
 - ambiguity or wordiness of text;
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 - others...

Page number	Nature of the problem	Proposed solution (include your text if possible)

FEEDBACK PROCESS

Page number	Nature of the problem	Proposed solution (include your text if possible)
Comments:		