

English 12 Unit 1 SS Notes: Escape and Interpretive Lit.

Intro: Famous last words, “It’s only English I’ll fake it on the test”. The unit test assumes you know these notes, especially vocabulary and lists of criteria.

- The question is why read fiction when there are so many other things to do?
- The answer is twofold: for **entertainment** that is pleasure and for **understanding**.
- If fiction doesn’t yield some sort of understanding about the world around us, it’s not much different than watching some of the terrible empty programs on the tube.
- Note: Often with TV which is a non-interactive experience, there is not a lot of mental stimulus, so not much storage in long term memory. What did you watch last night, last week, a month ago?
- Reading tends to remain in your conscious mind to a much greater extent.
- If you read it there is a greater level of retention and if you write about it after this there is an even greater level of retention.
- This is especially true for stories as there is something about good stories that stick in our minds for years.
- Many authorities suggest this comes from centuries of human oral story telling that is passed down from generation to generation.

Fiction may be divided into two broad categories:

1. Escape Literature:

- Written purely for entertainment in order to help us pass the time.
- Takes us away from the real world to help us forget about our troubles.
- Limited development of the stock characters. The good guy or girl always dresses in white.
- Simple story line, with perhaps a few surprise twists.

2. Interpretive Literature:

- Written to broaden, deepen and sharpen our awareness of life.
- Takes us deeper into the real world, enabling us to better understand our troubles.
- Through understanding we can begin to work towards solutions.
- Teaches us that we are not the only ones in the world with problems that need solving.
- Usually extensive development of the characters in the story.
- Can have a complex plot, climax and conclusion.

Note: Like any generalization all literature doesn't neatly fit into one of these two baskets.

Some stories may be a bit of both and there are various shades in between.

There are differences between the two types of writers as well.

1. **Escape Writer:** This writer is full of tricks and surprises as they pull a rabbit out of the hat, saves the day with a flick of their finger and snatches balls out of mid air.
2. **Interpretive Writer:** This writer takes you behind the scenes showing the props and mirrors in order to make clear the illusions.
This writer gives shapes and form to the material with the intent that we may see, feel and understand to a higher level.

While there are two kinds of fiction there are also generally two kinds of readers.

1. The Immature or Inexperienced Reader

-this reader seeks only escape

-doesn't mind a moral or interpretation as long as it returns them to their pleasant or exciting image of the world and a flattering image of themselves (the Hero)

-any fiction which does not do this is dismissed as “boring”(Talk about Grade 7,8,9,10.

NOTE: This is not to suggest that there are not good and bad pieces of literature in both categories, for even seasoned readers find poorly written pieces tedious.

- Seems stuck at the fairy tale stage as the beautiful prince or princess always lives happily ever after.
- The inexperienced reader makes fixed demands of every story they read and are disappointed or frustrated unless these demands are met.
- This reader usually sticks to one type of story, romance, crime, fantasy or sports.
- If they try other types of stories, the story must conform to a set of criteria or it will be quickly set aside.

These criteria are as follows:

1. A sympathetic hero or heroine who the reader can imagine themselves as, sharing in their adventures, difficulties and triumphs.
2. A plot in which something exciting is always happening and which has a high level of suspense.
3. A happy outcome which leaves the reader undisturbed and optimistic about the world.
4. If there is a theme it must conform to already held opinions of the world.

The problem here is that elevating these requirements into a rigid set of requirements reduces and restricts the reader’s ability to experience or broaden their insights.

This reduces literature to a formula. (Talk about Harlequin Romances)

2. The Experienced or Discriminating Reader

- This reader takes deeper pleasure in fiction that deals with life rather than the formula of escape.

- This reader does not reject escape literature out of hand, as it is not always cheap or trite. Examples: Lord of the Rings, Treasure Island.
- This reader knows that too much escape may:
 1. leave us with a superficial attitudes towards life
 2. may actually distort our view of reality, giving us false concepts and false expectations.(Talk about sport)

THE IMPORTANT STUFF

- a. The experienced or perceptive reader is a critical reader and thinks about what they are reading.
- b. They have an opinion about what they have read and why they did or did not like it.
- c. They can discuss the story's strengths and weaknesses even though, their personal response to the story may not have been positive.
- d. The depth of the reader's literary experience also affects their response to allusions, structure, form, technique and style.
- e. They are willing to experience growth in their understanding and judgement of what they read.

Last Point:

This brings us full circle for this is the purpose of both the short story unit of this course and indeed the course in total.