

# **How to Read Literature Like a Professor Book Summary, by Thomas C. Foster**

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## **1-Page Summary of How to Read Literature Like a Professor**

### **Overview**

How to Read English Like a Professor is a nonfiction literary guide that aims to help readers and students in their engagement with literature. The book identifies certain literary conventions that guide literature, which can help beginners become professionals by learning how professors read books. A basic premise of the book is that there are different reading levels ranging from basic response level to more advanced analysis. In order for readers to achieve this level of reading, they need to learn what the author Thomas C Foster calls key characteristics of literature, which will enable them to develop analytical skills.

The writer then goes on to discuss the different elements of literature, such as tradition, older texts, and allusions. He also discusses how these are important in creating a work of art. In addition to this, he talks about setting and weather and organizational structure (sonnets). Then he focuses on themes like blindness, food and supernatural creatures.

As the book progresses, it also considers broader questions of what literature is and how we respond to it. The author explains his creative process and the purpose of reading itself. He concludes by analyzing Katherine Mansfield's short story "The Garden Party" to provide an example of practical analysis.

## Introduction

Summary: In his introduction, Thomas Foster explains why he wrote the book and what it is about. He also states that this book will help you understand literature better by explaining how to read literature like an English professor. The author hopes that you will enjoy your reading experience even more by learning to interpret literary works in a new way.

Foster opens his chapter by recalling a classroom experience where the students couldn't understand how he had reached a particular conclusion about a character in Lorraine Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959). His primary intent is to show that there are many layers of meaning embedded within literature. Foster's students were surprised when he drew parallels between the Faust legend and Walter Lee Young, but Foster argues that this connection is not unfounded as it contains traces from German folklore dating back to 15th century. Such connections demonstrate how complex literature can be.

In order to understand literature, one must read a lot of it. Literature has its own rules and codes that you can learn by reading more and more books. Therefore, the best way to get better at understanding literature is simply to practice reading more of it.

Foster differentiates between two types of readers. The first is the reader who reacts to a book emotionally and instinctively, without thinking about it in other ways. The second type of reader asks questions such as "Where did that effect come from? Whom does this character resemble? Where have I seen this situation before?"

According to Foster, three key features of literary works are memory, symbols and patterns. Memory is the recollection of previous works that might spur you to make connections between them. Symbols are mantras that prevent you from taking things merely on face value. Identification of patterns within a work enables you to distance yourself from it as you engage with it, so that you can take a broader and clearer perspective of things.

Foster also says that the guide works on the premise that literature is like any other science or social science in terms of requiring a set of skills to be appreciated. This idea isn't surprising from an academic point of view, but it's not entirely clear who Foster's audience is and whether he intends for his work to be used by students across fields or anyone interested in picking up a book.

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