

Historica Canada Education Portal

Remembrance: Understanding Canadian History Through Literature

Overview

A book club novel study for senior academic English and/or History students focusing on Canada's role – at home and abroad - in the two world wars.

Aims

The purposes of this unit are to allow students:

- to share, with a small group of peers, their experience with a Canadian war novel
- to learn how literature serves as a valuable expression and record of history
- to recognize and express how literature presents the stories of Canada differently from historic records or history texts
- to appreciate literature's function in describing Canada's response to world conflict and revealing the direct or indirect impact war has on shaping an individual a community and a country

Background

A. Teachers must express how they recognize and appreciate how students present in the class may have survived, endured, and experienced war. The teacher then needs to clarify that this project will look at Canada's role in the first two world wars.

B. Ask students if they have ever read a novel recommended to them by a friend. How did this 'shared reading' feel....did you like discussing characters? The action of the plot? What was the experience like? Did you disagree?

C. Ask students how many of their parents belong to a book club. Are they familiar with book clubs, and what they do, their purpose? What would be the advantages of reading a book with a small group of your peers?

Activities

Teacher: Novel Preview

Have a couple of copies of each novel on display. Introduce each novel speaking about the author and giving a bare-bones summary of plot, reading an excerpt. After presenting each novel, hand them to students to look at and pass along to others while you continue to preview.

When the novel preview is concluded, all the novels should be in the hands of the students. Allow students to browse novels and talk among themselves

Instruct students that they will form 5-6 book clubs (groups) of 4-5 members each to present one novel of their choosing to the class. They

will read the novel, and prepare to present the novel to the class using the following framework.

Book Club Preparation

Club members will share equally in the discussion, study, interpretation and preparation of the following aspects of their chosen novel.

1. Plot summary handout: a plot summary will be written and prepared as an attractive handout for the class. This will also include a 'character tree' – an explanation of the characters and their relations to each other. The hand out will naturally state the name of the novel and the author.

2. Character analysis and interpretation of role in the plot: 2 characters – one main, one secondary with key readings directly from the novel which reveal character qualities (intellectual, emotional, behavioral, spiritual traits) and prove the groups' interpretation of the character

3. Setting Analysis and interpretation: a discussion of 3 aspects of setting – geographic (with appropriate maps) epoch with appropriate graphics/illustrations, moral, with appropriate readings from the novel, social and intellectual aspects – with appropriate readings from the novel.

4. Language Analysis and interpretation – analysis and author's purpose in using several registers of language: poetic, common, profane, comic, poignant, with appropriate readings from the novel. What does the author achieve with these different registers of language and which characters are they associated with and what does the language reveal about the character

5. Major metaphor – using the novel's cover imagery as a starting point,

present the major metaphor used by the author with appropriate readings from the novel which demonstrate your interpretation of the metaphor and what the author achieves.

6. History and Literature – your club’s opinion of how credibly, realistically and creatively the author presented the story of this moment in history. Also, how reading the novel altered your understanding of ordinary Canadians’ significance in history and in relation to larger events.

7. The club will seek and study a short poem which expresses a theme in the novel which your club felt was the most important theme, or the theme that most connected to you . Prepare a copy of the poem for each student in the class.

Book Club Presentation

The book club will present their prepared findings and interpretations in a creative shared manner in a comprehensive presentation running 25-30 minutes. Along with the required handout, clubs may wish to enhance their presentations with historic props, appropriate costumes and background music appropriate to their novels epoch. Every interpretation and point will be supported by dramatic readings read directly from the novel.

The club will include in their presentation a shared dramatic reading of their chosen poem and an explanation of their selection.

Finally, the club members will speak about the impact the novel had/has on their understanding of Canada’s role in the war presented in the novel, their feelings about the sacrifices made by Canadians and how their knowledge of Canadian history changed after studying the novel.

Resources

The Teacher will pre-select from 5 or 6 of the following novels, dependent on class numbers. Groups (book clubs) will be formed based on the students' selection of titles. Each club will have between 4-5 'members'.

[Deafening](#), Francis Itani

[The Stone Carvers](#), Jane Urquhart

[The Wars](#), Timothy Findley

[Three Day Road](#), Joseph Boyden

[La Guerre, Yes Sir](#), Roch Carrier

[Obasan](#), Joy Kogawa

[Fault Lines](#), Nancy Houston