



TEACHING THE CLASSICS

by Adam and Missy Andrews

Second Edition
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Teaching the Classics: A Socratic Method for Literary Education

Second Edition, 2017

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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

This syllabus is designed as a supplement to the eight-hour DVD seminar *Teaching the Classics*. You should plan to follow along in the syllabus as the DVD sessions unfold, taking notes in the spaces provided.

The DVD seminar will teach you how to study literature with students of all ages. Through discussions of several short stories, it presents the basics of literary analysis in a step-by-step progression. The seminar is normally given over a two-day period, but you may view it over a longer period if you wish.

The seminar is divided into eight one-hour sessions corresponding to the first eight sections of this syllabus. Each session focuses on one area of literary analysis, as summarized in the table of contents above, and features a model discussion of a classic short story. Sessions include live readings of each story, followed by lectures, discussions and practice sessions for teachers. Students in middle school and above may enjoy watching the seminar with their teachers as the sessions are lively and engaging.

After you complete the seminar, you can practice what you have learned with any other piece of literature. The principles of *Teaching the Classics* apply to picture books, historical readers, biographies, classics, poetry, movies and plays – anything, in fact, that tells a story. If you need some suggestions, this syllabus provides graded book lists for students of all ages.

Content of the DVD seminar:

- Disc 1: **Tools for Literary Analysis** (50 minutes)
Syllabus Section 1
- Disc 2: **Style & Context** (1 hr. 13 minutes)
Syllabus Section 2
- Disc 3: **Setting** (50 minutes)
Syllabus Section 3
- Disc 4: **Characters** (52 minutes)
Syllabus Section 4
- Disc 5: **Conflict & Plot** (52 minutes)
Syllabus Section 5
- Disc 6: **Theme** (52 minutes)
Syllabus Section 6
- Disc 7: **Practicum** (48 minutes)
Syllabus Section 7
- Disc 8: **Curriculum & FAQ** (1 hr. 6 minutes)
Syllabus Section 8

A Word About Sectarian Content

Teaching the Classics is not a faith-based curriculum. The techniques presented here may be used by any teacher with any work of literature, regardless of religion.

The authors discussed in *Teaching the Classics* include Leo Tolstoy, Rudyard Kipling, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Beatrix Potter, and Mark Twain, among others. Like all artists of the Western tradition, these authors addressed religious themes from time to time in their works. The seminar discusses such themes when they appear in the works themselves, in the same way that a sixteenth-century history course might mention the Protestant Reformation. At no time, however, does *Teaching the Classics* assume or advocate any religion.

SECTION 1: TOOLS FOR LITERARY ANALYSIS

Why Literature?

To experience literature is to see the world through new eyes. As C. S. Lewis stated in his *Experiment in Criticism*, “Those of us who have been true readers all our life seldom fully realise the enormous extension of our being which we owe to authors. . . My own eyes are not enough for me, I will see through those of others.” When we read, we broaden our perspective, so that we are no longer trapped within the limits of our own experience. “In reading great literature,” Lewis says, “I become a thousand men and yet remain myself. . . I see with a myriad eyes, but it is still I who see. . . I transcend myself; and am never more myself than when I do.”

This broadening of perspective is a necessary and crucial part of a strong education. The ability to interact gracefully with important ideas is one mark of a truly educated person, and exposure to such ideas is the only way to become conversant with them! Great literature provides models and examples by which students can hone both their knowledge and expression of the great ideas. Education, however, represents only half of the reason to read.

The other half is that great literature, because it beautifully portrays the tragedy, pathos, and wonder of the human condition, is an end in itself. Literature is not just a textbook of transcendent ideas or a tool for teaching the skill of debate; it is art that richly rewards contemplation. It represents the contributions of its authors to what Mortimer Adler called the Great Conversation about the eternal things. These are the universal ideas that man has contemplated throughout the ages, regardless of his place in space and time. The pleasure and fulfillment that come from reading literature are part of what it is to be human, in the fullest sense. Participation in this conversation sets thinking man apart from the animals.

Why should you want your student to read and understand Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*? So that he will get the chance to think critically about literature and about life, of course, but also so that he will have read *Hamlet*. In it he will see and understand, in all its beauty and tragedy and glory, the plight of the human soul. As he reads he will see himself mirrored in Hamlet’s nobility and heroism, in his anxiety and indecision, in his glory and his destruction. The student’s mind will be uplifted beyond the facts of his own experience to the world of ideas, which will eventually bring to his own life a depth of understanding and a sense of perspective that would otherwise prove unavailable to him.

It is an odd and somewhat disturbing thought, but statistics say that most of us will be utterly forgotten by history within fifty years of our deaths. Achilles, however, still lives, three thousand years later. Hamlet lives. Huckleberry Finn, Augustine of *The Confessions*, Hawthorne’s Hester Prynne, Dostoyevsky’s Grand Inquisitor – they are all immortal, in a manner of speaking. Why? Because there is something about them, be it the bitterness of Achilles, the repentance of Augustine, the tortured humanity of Hamlet or the earthy wisdom of Huckleberry Finn, that calls out to us at some deep level and makes us answer – that touches us in our humanness, that

mirrors our own glorious potential and our own sinful wretchedness. These characters have the power to move and inspire us, to ennoble us.

This is why we study our past, our traditions, our cultural heritage; this is why we read great literature. The world is filled with gifts of beauty, truth, and goodness, and among these gifts are authors, philosophers, and poets. To understand their work is to experience these gifts firsthand.

This seminar is presented with the conviction that even young students can embark on this journey to understand and appreciate literature. They need not wait until they go to college to begin the process; they can start right now. The techniques are easy to learn and easy to teach, and much pleasure and fulfillment awaits him who would apply them.

The following lessons present a model for teaching the skills of literary analysis and interpretation. They are organized according to three important principles, which together form the heart of the *Teaching the Classics* approach to literature:

Principle #1

All works of fiction possess common elements, including Context, Style, and Structure.

Principle #2

Because of their clarity, children's stories provide the best opportunities for learning these elements.

Principle #3

The best classroom technique for presenting and analyzing literature is the Socratic method.

Principle #1 – The Common Elements of Fiction

Tool: The Story Chart

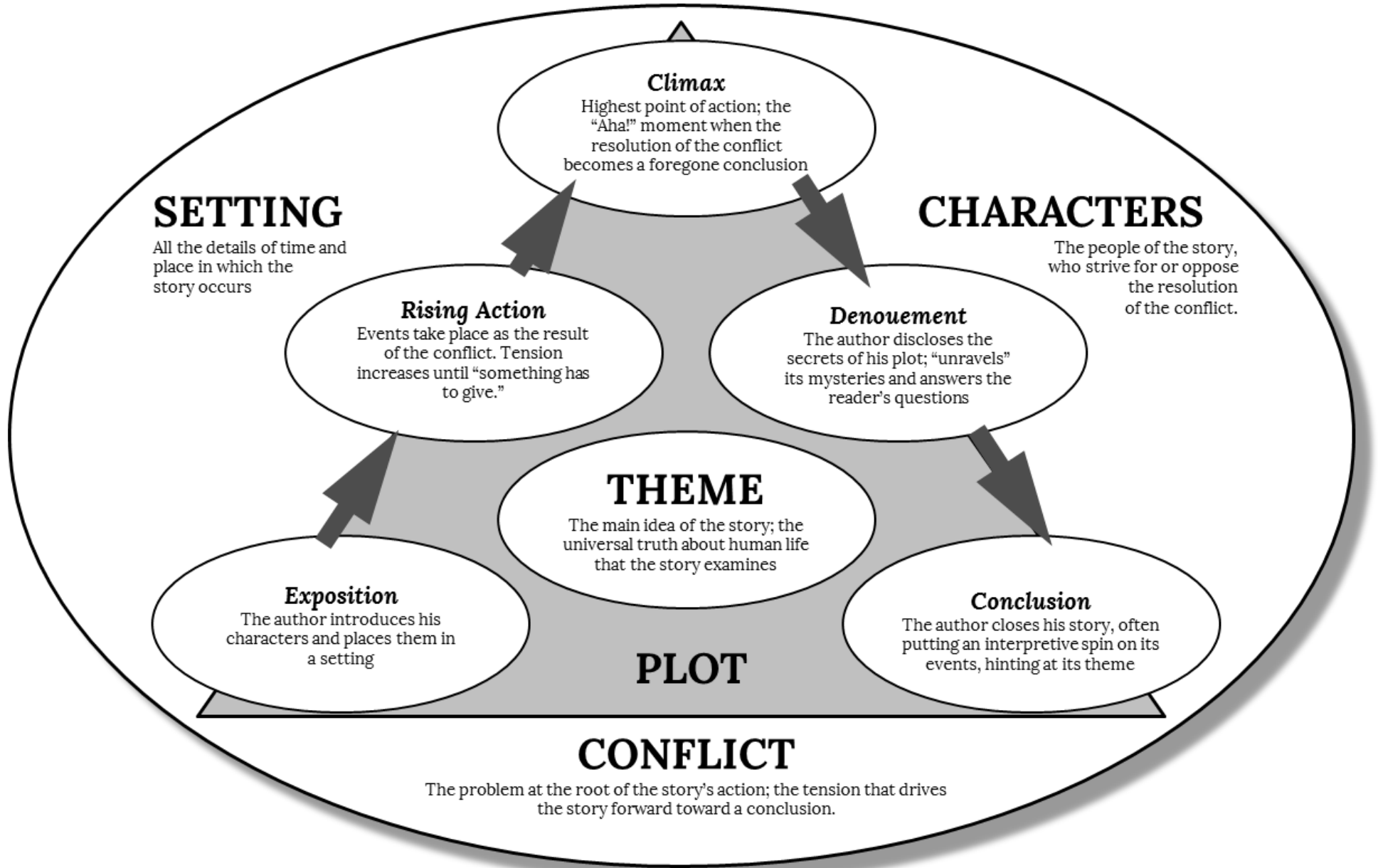
The key to understanding literature lies in recognizing its structure. All stories are composed of five basic elements: Setting, Characters, Conflict, Plot, and Theme.

The powerful “secret” of literary interpretation is really no secret at all: All stories have these components, even the children’s stories you read to your second graders at night! What is more, the elements of fiction are easily perceived in children’s literature, even for the children themselves. Children’s stories are therefore powerful tools for explaining the elements of fiction to students of all ages. Once grasped, an understanding of these elements may then be applied with great results to the works of the masters.

The lessons in this seminar demonstrate the parts of a story and the techniques used by authors to assemble them into a beautiful whole. The story chart on the next page is a graphic representation of this assembly of components and the relationships that exist between them.

This story chart is the foundational tool of the Teaching the Classics approach to literature. You will be encouraged in the sessions that follow to put each and every story “up on the chart,” and through continuous repetition to develop a habit of thinking in these categories. In this way the story chart will become a template for interpretation that you can apply to any work of fiction.

The Story Chart

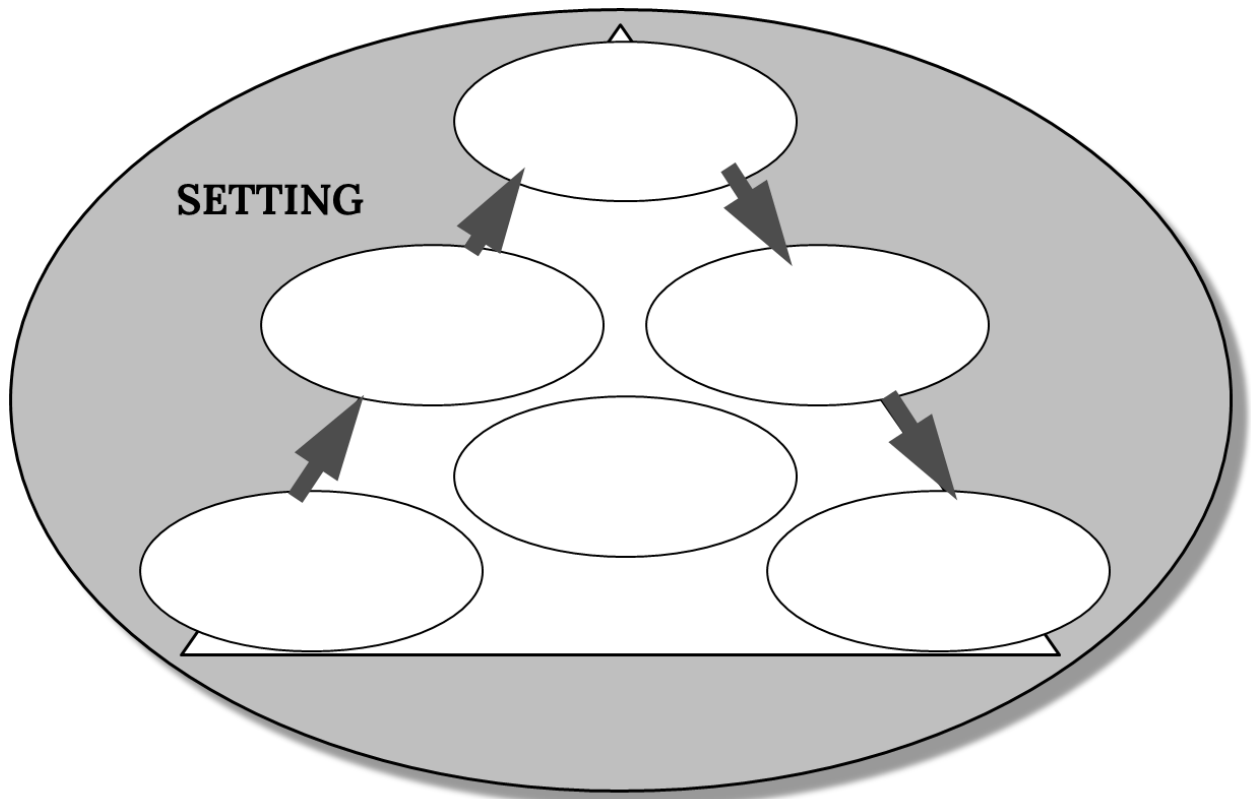


SECTION 3: SETTING

The setting of a story includes all the details of time and place in which the story occurs. Understanding setting and how it relates to the other elements of fiction enables the reader to enter the world of the story quickly and experience it firsthand, as the author intended.

As the following diagram illustrates, setting stands behind the story's plot and themes to provide a spatial and temporal frame of reference that can drive home the author's message with subtle power. The setting of Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, for example – a changing South seething with racial tensions and coming to a kind of maturity – mirrors the changes taking place in the main character and enables the author to stress themes like Lost Innocence and Coming of Age.

Stylistic devices (such as those appearing in “Paul Revere’s Ride”) are particularly important for establishing the time, place, and mood of a story, and the more we understand their role, the more keenly we will observe their use in the story.



“Rikki-Tikki-Tavi” by Rudyard Kipling

Adapted by Adam Andrews

This is the story of the great war that Rikki-Tikki-Tavi fought single-handed, through the bathrooms and gardens of the big bungalow in Segowlee province in far off India when Victoria ruled.

Teddy and his Mother and Father, who had just come from England, found Rikki-Tikki wandering through the rooms of the big house when they moved in.

Rikki was a mongoose, rather like a little cat in his fur and his tail, but quite like a weasel in his head and his habits. His eyes and the end of his restless nose were pink. He could fluff up his tail till it looked like a bottle brush, and his war cry as he scuttled through the long grass was: “Rikk-tikk-Tikki-Tikki-tchk!”

Rikki’s cry frightened Teddy and his mother at first, but Teddy’s father reassured them.

“A mongoose will kill snakes,” he said. “Teddy’s safer with that little beast than if he had a bloodhound to watch him.”

And so, Rikki was allowed to stay in the big bungalow with Teddy’s family, and he slept on Teddy’s bed, tucked snugly under Teddy’s chin.

One day Rikki-Tikki went out into the garden to see what was to be seen. It was a large garden, with bushes as big as summer-houses, clumps of bamboos, and thickets of high grass. Rikki-Tikki licked his lips. “This is a splendid hunting-ground,” he said, and his tail grew bottle-brushy at the thought of it, and he scuttled up and down the garden, snuffing here and there, till he heard very sorrowful voices in a thorn-bush.

It was Darzee the Tailorbird and his wife, and they were crying piteously.

“What is the matter?” asked Rikki-Tikki.

“We are very miserable,” said Darzee. “One of our babies fell out of the nest yesterday and Nag ate him.”

“That is very sad,” said Rikki, “but I am a stranger here. Who is Nag?”

Darzee and his wife only cowered down in their nest without answering, for from the thick grass there came a low hiss--a horrid cold sound that made Rikki-Tikki jump back two clear feet. Then inch by inch out of the grass rose up the head and spread hood of Nag, the big black cobra, and he was five feet long from tongue to tail. When he had lifted one-third of himself clear of the ground, he stayed balancing to and fro exactly as a dandelion tuft balances in the wind, and he looked at Rikki-Tikki with the wicked snake's eyes that never change their expression.

“Who is Nag?” said he. “I am Nag. Look, and be afraid!”

Now, Rikki-Tikki had never met a live cobra before, but his mother had fed him on dead ones, and he knew that all a grown mongoose's business in life was to fight and eat snakes. Nag knew that too and, at the bottom of his cold heart, he was afraid.

“Rikki-Tikki-Tavi” by Rudyard Kipling

Discussion Notes on Setting

Question numbers in parentheses refer to the Socratic List, included in this syllabus as Appendix A.

1. What is the mood or atmosphere of the place where the story happens? Is it cheerful and sunny, or dark and bleak? What words or phrases or descriptions does the author use to create this atmosphere? (Question 1d.)
2. In what country or region does the story happen? How does this location contribute to the mood or atmosphere of the story? (Question 1a.)
3. Among what kinds of people is the story set? What is their economic class? How do they live? Are they hopeful? Downtrodden? Depressed? Why? (Question 1h.)
4. How long a period of time does the story cover? A few minutes? A single day? A whole lifetime? (Question 2b)

5. Does the story happen in a particular year, era, or age of the world? What historical events may have just preceded the period of the story? Do these events help explain the actions of characters, the action of the story, or its mood? (For example, this particular story is set in the British Imperial Age when the British are colonizing Africa. This explains Teddy and his family's social position in the story. They are unwelcome strangers in a foreign land, and this social atmosphere affects even the garden and its occupants.) (Question 2d.)

6. Does the author use sound words to tell his story? (Question 14a.)

7. Does the author use words in sequence or in close proximity that repeat the same initial consonant sound? (Question 14e.)

8. Does the author use the words "like" or "as" in making comparisons between two or more dissimilar things? (Question 16d.)

9. Do things or creatures speak with human voices, expressing rational thoughts and ideas? (Question 16f.)

Setting in Adult Literature

The settings of works of adult fiction are as varied, of course, as their juvenile counterparts. Some sample settings from the aforementioned classics are presented here.

The Iliad

The Iliad of Homer is the world's first great epic poem. The story takes place in the tenth year of the Trojan War on the fields between the shores of the Mediterranean Sea and the Walls of Troy. Set in the deep past where history recedes into legend and myth, the story unfolds in a time of monsters, superhuman warriors, and all-too-human deities. The poet calls attention to the gravity of his themes and the greatness of his characters by using stock epithets and epic similes. The supernatural elements of the story punctuate its monumental scope.

Macbeth

William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is the shortest (and perhaps the bloodiest) of the playwright's ten great tragedies. The story takes place in eleventh-century Scotland, a land of foggy moors and "blasted heaths" (*Macbeth* 1.3.78). The action occurs between various nobles (or thanes) of the land, and many of the scenes are therefore set at court and in the various drafty castles of the Scottish nobility. The setting of the play takes on added significance when the context in which it was written is considered. King James I of England and Scotland, patron of Shakespeare's theatrical group The King's Men, reigned when the play was first performed. Allusions to his reign occur predominantly in Act 4, Scene 1. In fact, it is his august lineage the usurper Macbeth foresees in the mirror through divination. This context imbued the subject matter of the play with significance for its first audience. Much of the action of *Macbeth* takes place at night, and the prominence of witches, spells, ghosts, and visions gives the play a dark, spooky mood.

Great Expectations

The greatest novel by the greatest novelist of the Victorian age, Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* tells the story of the career of Pip, a young orphan growing up in the home of his blacksmith brother-in-law. Set in a small village in rural England in the early nineteenth century, the story contains vivid descriptions of the people and customs that made this particular place and time so distinctive. Dickens employs simile, irony, and understatement to create some of the greatest caricatures in the history of literature, proving him one of the great humorists of the age.

To Kill a Mockingbird

Harper Lee's Pulitzer Prize winning novel chronicles a young girl coming of age in rural Alabama during the Great Depression. The story is narrated from the girl's point of view, using a brilliant combination of eight-year-old perspective and adult vocabulary that makes readers instinctively receptive to the deeply perceptive critiques of Southern social mores and racism. Lee's mastery of Southern American dialect and familiarity with the customs of that society allow her to create a believable world so that the shattering events she describes strike us as all too real.

**APPENDIX A:
THE SOCRATIC LIST**

Questions About Setting

1. Where does this story happen?

- a. In what country or region does the story happen?
- b. Does the story happen in the country or the city?
- c. Does the story happen in one spot, or does the action unfold across a wide area?
- d. What is the mood or atmosphere of the place where the story happens? Is it cheerful and sunny, or dark and bleak? What words, phrases, or descriptions does the author use to create this atmosphere?
- e. What is the weather like in the story?
- f. Do you long to climb into the pages of the book to live in its world, or does it repel you? Why?
- g. Is the setting a real or imaginary place? If it is imaginary, is it subject to the same physical laws as our world?
- h. Among what kinds of people is the story set? What is their economic class? How do they live? Are they hopeful? Downtrodden? Depressed? Why?
- i. Is there anything symbolic or allegorical about the place where the story happens?
- j. Is the setting of the story important because of historical events which may have taken place there? How does this help you understand the themes of the story?

2. When does this story happen?

- a. On what day does the story happen? What time of day?
- b. How long a period of time does the story cover? A few minutes? A single day? A whole lifetime?
- c. In what season does the story take place?
- d. Does the story happen in a particular year, era, or age of the world? What historical events may have just preceded the period of the story? Do these events help explain the actions of characters, the action of the story, or its mood? (For example, is the story set in the midst of the Industrial Revolution in England like some of Charles Dickens' works, or is it set in the Roaring Twenties in America like Fitzgerald's work?)
- e. In what time of life for the main characters do the events occur? Are they children? Are they just passing into adulthood? Are they already grown up? How does setting the story in this particular time of the characters' lives affect the story?
- f. In what intellectual period is the story set? What ideas were prevalent during this period? Does the author deal with these ideas through his characters? Do the characters respond to social rules and customs that are the result of these ideas? (Jane Austen's books, for

APPENDIX B: READING LISTS

Here are some of the books we love. This list is by no means exhaustive, of course. We are firmly convinced, in fact, that there is no such thing as an exhaustive list of good books! You will find great pleasure, if you have not already, in building a reading list of your own. To that end, we direct your attention to the booklist resources listed in this syllabus.

If you are new to book-gathering and would benefit from knowing where to start, here are some suggestions.

Stories for Young Children

Aardema, Verna – *Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People’s Ears*

A disturbance in the forest causes an untimely death for one of Mrs. Owl’s owlets. Blame shifting and false witness chase a rabbit trail of disaster back to the creature whose foolishness was the real cause of the tragedy. Repetition enchants the children.

Ackerman, Karen – *Song and Dance Man*

Grandpa used to be a vaudeville man. Enjoy his command attic performance with his grandchildren.

Azarian, Mary and Jacqueline Briggs Martin – *Snowflake Bentley*

A true story of William Bentley, the first man to study snowflakes and capture their images with photography, this story illustrates the rewards of perseverance, and patience in the pursuit of personal dreams.

Bemelmans, Ludwig – *Madeline*

“In an old house in Paris that was covered with vines...” lived Madeline. Join Madeline and her boarding school buddies as they discover the treasures of Paris and trouble their nervous headmistress, Miss Clavel.

Bishop, Claire H. – *Five Chinese Brothers*

Disobedience has drastic consequences for a tyke in this tall tale.

Brett, Jan – *The Mitten*

When a little boy receives new white mittens from his grandmother, he is encouraged not to lose them in the snow. Inevitably, his carelessness overtakes him. In his absence the lost mitten becomes home to more than his hand!

APPENDIX D: ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following resources may help you apply the *Teaching the Classics* method more effectively in your classroom. Ordering information can be found at www.centerforlit.com.

Ready Readers

Bound collections of teacher guides for hand-picked classic books at every grade level. Each teacher guide provides a selection of questions from the Socratic List (with complete answers!) for specific stories, offering teachers a ready-made set of discussion notes.

Reading Roadmaps

A K–12 Scope and Sequence manual that turns the *Teaching the Classics* method into a formal curriculum for reading and literature. *Reading Roadmaps* includes complete annotated reading lists for every grade level with over two hundred recommended titles. Each list entry includes a summary of the conflict, plot, themes and literary devices found in the story, as well as an alternate title.

Worldview Detective

A two-hour teacher training seminar similar in style and format to *Teaching the Classics*, but designed to extend the discussion of literature into worldview analysis. Having learned to ask and answer the question, “what does the story say?” teachers and students can now learn to ask, “what does the author believe?”

The Classics Club

A series of videos presenting classroom discussions of specific stories using the *Teaching the Classics* method. Taught by experienced *Teaching the Classics* instructors, these videos demonstrate our discussion techniques and provide complete treatment of classic works of literature.

Online Academy

Live online literature and writing classes for students in grades 5–12 featuring the *Teaching the Classics* approach to literature, taught by experienced Center For Lit teachers.

The Pelican Society

An online community of teachers, parents, and readers interested in the Center For Lit approach to all things literary. Members receive exclusive access to a variety of resources, including product discounts, classroom resources, audio books, live events, and more.