

YEARS 6–8

ADVANCED
READING
INSTRUCTION
IN THE MIDDLE YEARS

A Novel Approach

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Overview

If you want to raise the level of student engagement in your reading program, this book is for you. If you want to challenge your advanced students and offer them some new ways of thinking while improving reading comprehension, this book is for you. If you want book recommendations for not-yet-so-mature students who are able to read at an adult level, this book is for you.

Introducing the novel discussion circle as a focus, this book provides a structured process for getting advanced readers in the middle years involved in:

- + reading a variety of novel genres,
- + analysing the elements of a novel,
- + understanding the author's craft,
- + conceptualising and using words and phrases purposefully,
- + expanding vocabularies,
- + developing and responding to thought-provoking questions,
- + learning and using effective discussion skills,
- + actively engaging in critical and creative thinking, and
- + identifying and reflecting on general themes and universal ideas.

Sections of the book offer the teacher guidance in:

- + selecting appropriate novels;
- + teaching students to prepare for novel discussions, including:
 - vocabulary and concepts,
 - questioning and
 - discussing;
- + engaging students in discussion circles, including:
 - preparation,
 - classroom setting,
 - the art of discussion,
 - reflections and
 - assessments; and

- + directing learning activities to promote cognitive and affective growth.

The book provides information and instructional materials for multiple novel genres including realistic fiction, historical fiction, science fiction, fantasy, mystery and graphic novels. A section on developmental bibliotherapy suggests the use of novels in support of the unique social and emotional needs of advanced learners. Finally, a section on technology offers ideas for incorporating electronic resources into your Novel Approach to reading.

Chapter

1

Introduction to the Novel Approach

Fiction is the lie that illuminates a greater truth. – Kevin Fox

Reading a good novel is like entering a fictional world where the familiar intersects with the unfamiliar, where what characters think and feel becomes part of your own thinking. Reading a good novel lets you live inside the lives of others while reflecting on your own life in new ways. The “greater truth” that comes from the reading of a novel is your own “greater truth”.

This book is about reading novels in the classroom. Specifically, it is written for you, a middle-years teacher, supporting your reading instructional program for advanced students, helping them to find their own “greater truths”. In the process, you will teach them to become better at thinking independently, developing confidence in their own reasoning abilities and transferring insights to new contexts. As presented in this book, the process of advanced reading is one that supports inferential comprehension, language complexity, vocabulary precision, critical listening and collaborative, reasoned discussion. In this book, you will find purposeful and practical ideas for supporting instruction in each of these areas.

Of course, the first criteria for improving reading skills in advanced readers is to select books that are engaging, rich in figurative language and complexity, present characters who are relatable to young adolescents, and offer intriguing plots and important themes. Advanced adolescent readers are a challenging bunch. Often able to conceptualise at the adult level and comfortable with complex ideas, they nevertheless have limited life experiences. Their social and emotional maturity levels are a mismatch for their cognitive abilities. Selecting good reads can be quite a challenge for you as their teacher, for parents and for the students themselves. You will find more details about the specific nature and needs of your gifted learners in Chapter 2.

This book includes suggestions for specific novels in multiple genres including realistic fiction, historical fiction, science fiction, fantasy, mystery and graphic

novels. Each novel has been chosen for its complex storylines, richness of language and highly interesting content. Each will offer you much content for critical and creative thinking and thoughtful discussion. You will also find guidelines for choosing additional novels suitable for advanced middle-years readers. You will discover that the reading, discussion, personal engagement and reflection activities included in this book can be used with any novel you select for your students.

Getting advanced readers to pick up a book is easy. The challenge for you as the teacher is in getting them to become thoughtful about what they read, how they read it and how they share the messages they receive from the reading. This reading can occur at three levels: the first between the reader and what is read, the second between the reader and responses to the reading, and the third between the reader and others who have read and reacted to the same book. You will find the Novel Approach a particularly effective method for engaging your gifted learners in all three levels of interaction with novels: reading for enjoyment, digging deeper in completing personal responses to their reading and, finally, preparing for and participating in a meaningful discussion about the reading. The discussion circle, a regularly scheduled gathering of the small group of students reading the same novel, is the key element in the Novel Approach. It offers students an opportunity to synthesise their understanding of the novel and its underlying meaning and messages in a seminar-like setting.

To support your use of the Novel Approach, this book provides ideas for:

- + engaging advanced learners in reading specific genres,
- + guiding student preparation for novel circle discussions,
- + supporting vocabulary and concept development,
- + activities to strengthen reading comprehension,
- + activities to support critical and creative thinking, and
- + assessment of student learning.

In other sections of the book, you will also find:

- + annotated lists of novels of appropriate interest and complexity for advanced readers in specific genres,
- + instructional guides for understanding general elements of a novel,
- + specific details about each novel genre,
- + use of developmental bibliotherapy in support of advanced learners, and
- + possibilities for blending reading with technology.

I hope your reading journeys and those of your students will be fruitful and enjoyable. May the “greater truths” found in each novel both interest and support new learning for your advanced students.

Chapter | 3 |

The Art of Questioning

All our knowledge results from questions, which is another way of saying that question-asking is our most important intellectual tool.
– Neil Postman

You want your students' novel group discussions to be successful. You have selected a novel that will appeal to most of your students and now you are ready to assign sections of the novel in preparation for the discussions. After the selection of the novel, the next most important thing is the questions used in the discussion. These are more important than the answers, because it is in thinking about and responding to the questions that real changes in the students' thinking occur. Questions posed for the reading should provoke deep thought and interpretations of the author's words supported by evidence from the reading. This type of thinking requires careful reading and analysis. Thus, with the right questions, students are engaging in higher-level thinking involving analysing, evaluating and creating. These three levels of the revised Bloom's taxonomy are keys to critical and creative thinking. Because responses are interpretive, they have the capacity to offer new insight into the author's creativity as much as firmly supported conclusions. This chapter offers guidance and practice in developing higher-level questions. Additional student activities begin on page 39.

Questions should *not* be about basic information or those whose answers are right there, specific and precise. These are called *closed questions*. Once the correct response has been offered, thinking stops. Examples of closed questions include:

- + Who was Ana's best friend?
- + What did Orion have in his left hand?
- + When did Mitchell move?
- + Where did the story take place?

Practice Lesson Part A

The Art and Practice of Effective Group Discussion

As students read and prepare for the discussion group they should be taught how to engage in a thoughtful small-group discussion. The following lesson is a good start.

Objective

Prepare students to participate in an effective novel discussion through learning the key elements of a successful group discussion and practising their use.

Lesson at a Glance

- + Students discover key factors in a good discussion.
- + Students generate a list of important guidelines for an effective novel circle discussion.

Key Ideas to Develop

1. Different forms of classroom talk have different purposes.
2. Effective discussions require specific actions from each member of the group.
3. Thoughtful sharing of ideas in a group requires conversational style of speech.
4. In thoughtful discussions students build upon each other's ideas.

Instructions

1. Prepare a set of large cards with the following words:

+ Bored,	+ Silent member	+ Reciting to
distracted	+ Off topic	teacher
+ Interrupter	+ Unprepared	

Prior to the lesson, select six students to simulate a poor discussion. Show each student one of the six cards and tell him or her to remember that this is the role he or she should play in the poor discussion. Let students know that everyone in the class will read a brief article, but only the group of six will have an opportunity to discuss it. Tell the six that when it is time for the discussion, they should act their roles out in an exaggerated way so the class can notice what they are doing as ineffective group members. Provide all students with a brief article to read (see 5 Elements That Make Fantasy Fiction Feel Real handout).

1. Tell students to read the article, highlighting interesting words and ideas. Allow time for the reading and highlighting.

REPRODUCIBLE

SCIENCE FICTION NOVELS LIST

The following science fiction novels have been chosen as good examples of outstanding use of novel elements as well as for their popularity with adolescents. Note that many science fiction novels do not sugar-coat language, personal experiences or violence, or may include beliefs and actions that may be offensive to some people. Always consider the appropriateness of the entire novel for your particular class, school and community in terms of content. You may want to seek the guidance of your librarian as you consider the selections. With thousands of excellent selections, you are sure to find books quite suitable for your advanced readers. A source of information about the appropriateness of content and maturity levels of books, films and other media is www.commonensemedia.org. This is an independent, non-profit organisation dedicated to providing guidance in media use with children.

- + ***Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury (1951):** In this future American world, books are banned and firemen are charged with burning books. Most people just mindlessly continue their lives, watching TV and shunning anyone who secretly keeps books. Montag, a fireman, wonders why some people will even sacrifice their lives to secretly keep books.
- + ***Cinder* by Marissa Meyer (2012):** In the futuristic New Beijing, new empires have been formed and the moon has been colonised. Here Linh Cinder lives as a cyborg, working as an engineer. Cinder meets Prince Kai when he seeks her help in fixing his android. When a plague attacks Cinder's stepsister, she is accused by her stepmother of causing her illness. When her stepmother volunteers Cinder for plague research, scientists uncover Cinder's immunities and her unique makeup. Meanwhile, Prince Kai is seeking to thwart the intergalactic struggle for power. Of course, there is a ball where secrets are discovered and the fate of the Earth hinges on Cinder, who must uncover secrets in her past to protect her world's future.
- + ***The Maze Runner* by James Dashner (2009):** Thomas wakes up in an elevator with no memories except his own name. He is quickly transported to a world of about sixty teenage boys living in a completely enclosed self-sustaining environment. Thomas joins the boys in unsuccessful attempts to escape through the maze that surrounds their living space. But then a girl arrives with a note and things in their world suddenly begin to change – and not for the better.
- + ***The Testing* by Joelle Charbonneau (2013):** Sixteen-year-old Malencia Vale is about to graduate, but all she can think about is whether she will be selected for the Testing, a program to select outstanding candidates for the University, where they will be trained to become leaders in revitalising their post-war civilisation. Her father has dim memories of horrible experiences