Inquiry and the Novel Study:
A Teaching Resource

Lindsay Roland
Stephanie Nicoll
Mo Gray
Table of Contents

1. Why Inquiry?
2. Adaptations for All Reading Levels
3. Pre-Reading Activities
4. During Reading Activities - Formative Assessment
5. Post Reading Activities - Summative Assessment
6. Resources
Why Inquiry?

An inquiry question, as we will use in the context of this teaching resource, acts as a tool to guide the students to thinking about the larger and deeper issues within a novel. The question should be broad and general, yet relate to an important issue or theme covered within the novel. If you choose to embrace differentiated instruction and personalized learning through the use of a selection of novels that meet the needs of your diverse classroom, the question should be one that addresses some overarching issue or theme within the novel, no matter how diverse the novels are. If this is the case, the more like the novels are the easier and more focused the question can be, but even a diverse collection of works can contain a common thread from which to draw an inquiry question.

The question helps to create and maintain a purpose for the novel study. When students ask, “Why are we reading this novel?”, the answer will be clear. You are using this novel as a way to explore some bigger issue, ideally one that can relate to the world that we live in today. Essentially, all questions relate back to the human experience in some way. The ultimate inquiry question behind all other inquiry questions might be, “What does it mean to be human?”. As already mentioned, it is necessary that the question relates to some central theme or issue in the novel to allow the question to have focus. Without a focus the question may begin to feel too overwhelming for many students. Below are sample questions provided by Susan McLean during a Pro D workshop given at Dover Bay Secondary in the spring of 2013 (included are the grade levels she uses for each question):

- Grade 8: How do you develop through encounters with others?
- Grade 9: What influences shape us into responsible, mature young people?
- Grade 10: What influences our choices?
- Grade 11: How do relationships help us to develop?
- Grade 12: How do we develop through conflict?

These questions provide a healthy balance of focus and open endedness so that the students are able to explore different answers as the question relates to each student. By posing the questions in relation to who the students are as individuals, it allows the students to make connections to the novel study and creates relevance to their lives and, therefore, holds more meaning. Any grade level might work with any of these questions (or any other questions) but it was thought that these questions fit the transformations that each age group would likely be going through, further making the questions relevant to the students.

The questions should be posed to the class even before the reading begins so that once the students start their reading, they are already thinking about the inquiry question. As a result, students begin reading the novel looking for and exploring deeper meaning from the text. Adding an inquiry question to the unit can help elevate from a lower level of Bloom’s taxonomy up to higher levels where students are at least able to begin thinking critically and, ideally, begin to transform their thoughts into something new.
Each assignment, whether formative or summative, should relate back to the inquiry question in some way. As a result, transitions between different tasks are easier and the connection between assignments is clear.

It is our hope that this resource can act as a template for any novel study (or literature circle) that you might choose to do with your class. We hope that with the different activities presented and described below, you are able to find something for all learners to both increase understanding and to showcase learning. Some of these skills, tasks, and projects may also cross nicely into units outside of the English Language Arts classroom.
Literature Circles for Novel Adaptations

When choosing the subject of your novel study, remember that within your classroom there are readers of all levels. There are many ways to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of all students, but I will focus on the idea of using multiple books that reflect the reading levels of your students. If your theme was dystopian worlds, you could allow students to choose from book titles such as: “1984” by George Orwell, “Brave New World” by Aldous Huxley, “The Hunger Games” by Suzanne Collins, and “The Giver” by Lois Lowry. Lower level readers can choose between “The Giver” and “The Hunger Games” while readers at grade level could choose between “1984” and “Brave New World.” Advanced readers could read more than one novel, if they chose. In this situation, all levels of readers are able to relate their novel to the dystopian theme.

This idea of using multiple novels is derived from the strategy of Literature Circles, in which groups of students engage in critical thinking and discussion as they read a novel together. This group of students will be able to collaborate ideas and meanings, and construct a deeper understanding of the novel and themes as they go. Guided questioning and structured discussions are integral to a meaningful and personalized understanding.

The class is brought back together by the common theme. Students should be able to discuss the themes of inquiry with any other student, no matter which novel they read. The assignments, formative and summative, need to be adaptable to all the novels. In the end, the use of multiple novels on a theme will enrich the class’ understanding of the theme, and hopefully will have engaged all levels of reader.

It must be noted that this method of adaptation necessitates less teacher led discussion with the whole class, instead focusing on pods of discussion in novel/reader level groups. Note taking strategies and formative activities need to be adaptable to all novels, which can limit your choice of activities.
Pre-Reading

Rationale:
The value of pre-reading activities is in the building and reviewing of prior knowledge that relates to the text in question. We can set the scene, teach new vocabulary or dialects, introduce concepts, and (hopefully) hook the readers.
This section will outline pre-reading strategies.

Sensory Immersion

Evoke the mood, tone, setting and ideas of the novel through sensory based activities in your classroom.

Hearing
-Play music from the time period of the text
  (For The Outsiders; play the music from the 60’s that young people would have listened to)
-Play music in a language from the text or alluded to in the text
  (For Romeo and Juliet; play Italian opera)
-Play historical speeches
  (For Maus, Night and Diary of Anne Frank, play speeches from world war two)
- Play sounds of nature or nature inspired instrumentals to reflect the setting
  (For Lord of the Flies play the sounds ocean, rain and forests

Sight
- Put up art inspired or from the time of the novel
  (For Julius Caesar; Place Roman sculpture around the room)
- As the teacher, dress up in a costume from the story
  (For Hunger Games; Effie Trinket)
- If the text is also or related to a famous movie, play clips of the film prior to reading
  (i.e The Hobbit, Apocolypse Now for Heart of Darkness)

Touch
- Have examples of items that are key in the text for students to hold and touch
  (ie blood (fake of course) for Macbeth and Dracula and a skull for Hamlet)

Smell & Taste
- Have examples of food that are featured in the text or unique to the setting of the text
  (Persepolis; Iranian food, Kite Runner; Afghani kabobs)
- With incense and other fragranced materials, have students smell key scents from the text
Medium Based Research

Many texts today are referenced in more mediums than ever before. Have students in groups or individually, research a key theme, topic or even scene from the story prior to reading the text, in a particular medium.

Mediums to consider:
- Reference Books
- Biography
- Newspaper articles
- Films
- Television shows
- Internet video clips
- Commercials/advertising base material
- Art
  - Dance
  - Sculpture
  - Photography
  - Paintings
- Blogs
- Twitter feeds
- Facebook

Topics to consider with texts
- Night, Diary of Anne Frank, Maus; WW2
- Persepolis, Kite Runner; War in the Middle East
- The Outsiders; Bullying and social divides in school
- King Lear; Alzheimer's disease
During Reading & Formative Assessments

Rationale:
Teaching students strategies to use while reading can help them to stay focused, comprehend the information, and make connections and apply the reading. Providing a purpose, connection making, and reflection are all practical and beneficial for readers that struggle, as well as for challenging strong readers. During reading activities are also an excellent source for formative assessments. Finding out what students are thinking throughout the novel study process can allow the teacher to formulate questions and further activities to guide the students’ thought process.

During Reading Strategies:

Post-it Notes for Active Reading
Often our students are reading from a school-owned novel, and cannot write in the book. To encourage active reading, and notetaking during reading, provide students with sticky notes to make notations in their novel. This can be suggested or required as an instigation of discussion in class. If the novel is read aloud, the teacher can stop at key points and instruct students to put a sticky note in to remind them to come back to that point.

Response Journals
Informal: Students write reflections at predetermined intervals, which could be on their personal connections to the novel, connections to current events, connections to the Inquiry Question, etc. Essentially, these informal responses are ways to reflect on the chapters to promote active reading.
Formal: Teacher generates questions or topics for students to respond to in their journal, asking students to make connections to specific events, actions or ideas.

- Guiding Question per Chapter
This should be provided before the chapter is read, so as to assist students in reading with purpose. The guiding question should relate to the broad inquiry question, but with the specifics of this chapter in mind. The question should be designed to draw students’ attention to the important theme/message of that chapter, without giving away the events of the chapter. Students can respond to the guiding question in their response journals.
Note Taking Strategies:

Facts and Inferences

Making Inferences

Directions: Inferences involve drawing conclusions and making judgments based on facts and evidence. Write important details and facts in the boxes on the left. Write inferences about those important details in the boxes on the right.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Detail or Fact</th>
<th>Inferences about the Fact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes and Quotes

Students write a quote from their novel on one side of their paper, and on the other side they will analyze the quote (who said it, what it means, why it is important) and write down any questions the quote brings up.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quote (with page number)</th>
<th>Note (Analysis and Questions)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Venn Diagram

A Venn diagram can help to organize your thinking about a text as you read it. Put differences between two books or characters on opposite sides and similarities in the middle.

Example from “The War Between the Classes” by Gloria D. Miklowitz

**Venn Diagram – Amy and her family**

Compare the Sumoto family’s characteristics and values to Amy’s characteristics and values

1. For both the Sumoto family and Amy, write 4 to 6 values or characteristics in the right and left sections of the diagram below.
2. Give an example and a page number for these characteristics from the novel.
3. In the middle section of the diagram, note the similarities between Amy and the Sumoto’s values.

![Venn Diagram Image]
Post Reading & Summative Assessments

Rationale: Post reading strategies are an opportunity for the students to take the knowledge that they have gained throughout the pre and during reading stages and to transform it into something new. Post reading strategies can and should be used throughout the course of the novel study whenever and wherever summative assessment is needed. The goal of these post reading, summative pieces should be to answer the inquiry question in some way, as that is the focus of the unit. The formative/during reading strategies that you use during this unit should help the students work toward their summative piece. Your students will greatly appreciate you if each task they complete builds on the final summative assessment piece. This will make the summative assessment pieces easier to complete for the students since they will already have built a foundation for the project and it should also insure a fairly high success rate in summative projects, since you have had a chance to give related formative assessment beforehand. As a final note, it is also helpful to have students complete one final reflection at the end of the project, allowing them to reinforce their learning.

Facebook Profile

Have students create a Facebook profile for a character. Depending on your school's stance on Facebook, you may need to have students create this on paper. This is a great way to have students explore characters and their identities. Facebook is a medium that many students can relate to. It is often an important part in displaying their own social identity. This project can be kept very basic and be a brief, topical character description. To have students go much deeper into the project, have them put more thought into each piece on the profile page. For example, an easier assignment might require a picture of the character that illustrates the characters physical appearance in the book while a more challenging assignment might be to have the student give careful consideration to what type of picture this character would use as a profile picture, based on the student’s understanding of the character. Similarly, you can require more or less deep thinking for what sorts of information you would like conveyed through the wall posts.

This template can be found at:
http://www.teachone2one.com/teaching-with-technology/facebook-templatefor-education/
Create a Playlist

Have students create a playlist. The playlist will be required to represent something specific. You might have the student create a playlist for a particular character, writing a rationale for the inclusion of each song. As an added form of enrichment, you could have students analyse the songs as poetry. Another option would be to have students create a playlist that could be used as a soundtrack for a particular part of the story, or perhaps the book as a whole. Again, the reflection or rationale piece to accompany this assignment is incredibly important since it is what allows the teacher to understand the student’s thought process.

A Poster or Other Graphic Representation

Have the students create some sort of visual art piece that addresses the inquiry question and provides some sort of an answer to the inquiry question using the information that was learned throughout the process of completing the novel study. As mentioned above, a rationale for the piece or a reflection is a very important part of the process to make sure that you are interpreting the student’s learning correctly.

Ideagram:
An ideagram is a specific type of graphic representation that touches on the inquiry question in multiple ways, typically making use of the notes that were created during the reading. The image and info below is adapted from a Pro D presentation given by Susan McLean.

The following are contained in each box:
Smallest: The Inquiry Question
Second: 8 quotes with descriptions of how they relate to the them or question
Third: one image each that relates to the quotes and comments in the previous box
Fourth: 8 connections the student has made (with another text, to their own experiences, or to the world) as well as 8 related questions that they have
Have an Interview with a Character

Having students conduct a fictitious interview can be a good project because it can be presented in different ways depending on the preferred learning styles of each of your individual students. Students could write their interview, possibly in the form of a magazine or newspaper article, or writing it out as the dialogue of a play would be written. It can be performed as a skit or play and presented to the class or it could be recorded and played as a movie.

Creative Writing

Students can be given creative writing pieces that relate back to essential question in some way. Taking what they have learned they could write their own short story that answer the inquiry question. The students could write an additional chapter to the book or perhaps a chapter that takes place much further into the characters’ future.

Travel Guide:
Another example within the idea of creative writing is to have the students write a travel guide that in some way relates to the essential question and to the novel. In the case of the inquiry question “How do we develop through conflict?” the students might write a travel guide or an article as if they were aliens visiting from another planet. How do these aliens perceive the way that the character in the novel and people in general deal with conflict.

Newspaper:
Students could create the front page of a newspaper or perhaps a two page newspaper. Like many of these projects, you can adjust the amount of depth you expect the students to go into depending on their abilities. A more advanced newspaper would give careful consideration to each headline, the types of advertisements that are in the paper, and even the name of the newspaper. If the students were completing a dystopian novel they might be given choice to decide what kind of paper they would be publishing. They could create some kind of underground newspaper, or they could create a government censored newspaper. Both would look different and include different content, yet allow the students to address the greater themes within the novel, bringing it back to the inquiry question posed.

Essay

Of course, the class final project for an English Language Arts novel study might be an essay. If this is the case, remember to give the students choice so that they may find something that interests them. The essay question should grow out of the inquiry question. Each student will take that question and transform it in his or her own way, as they make their own connections to the novel and to their lives. It would be helpful to develop a list, as a class, of topics to write on or ways to approach the essay question. If this is an option for a final summative form of assessment, many, if not all of the notes created throughout the during reading activities should be directly relevant to the assignment.
References & Notes

One of the reasons for creating this resource is that it is difficult to find such ideas for a novel study all in one place. It is even harder to locate scholarly journal articles relating to inquiry and novel studies and other related details. As a result, for this project we have not accessed or cited any formal documents. We have however used information that has been shared with us from very knowledgeable and educated teachers and credit is due to them for many of these ideas. In particular, many of these ideas came from or were inspired by the teachings of Susan McLean and Mary Ann Richards.