

# 101 Literature Activities

## LANGUAGE ARTS CLASSROOM

## LITERATURE FREEBIE ONE

### PURPOSE:

Students need a variety of activities to engage with literature and to understand the depths of literature. Since students can show how they understand a story in a variety of ways, these methods will provide inspiration for individual students.

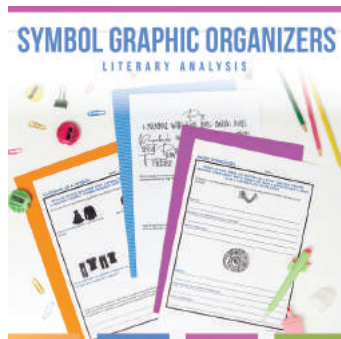
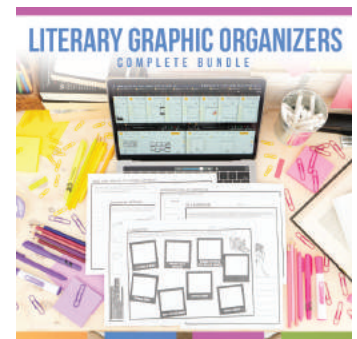
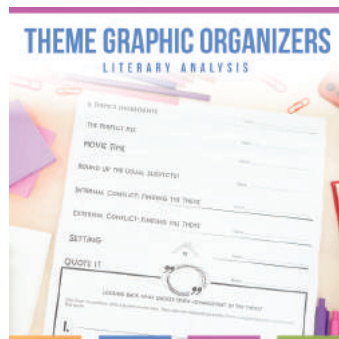
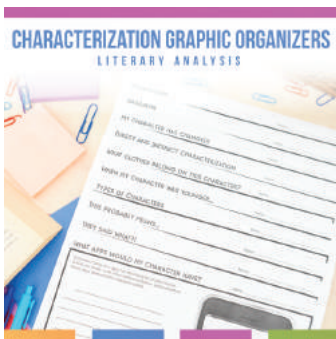
Increasingly, teachers are providing student choice with literature. To meet standards, use several or one of these activities as a springboard into deeper analysis of many stories.

### IDEAS FOR IMPLEMENTATION:

Use the list of activities for inspiration in creating activities for your classroom.

Pull out several of the activities to give students options in showing their understanding of a story.

### MORE LITERATURE ACTIVITIES:



101

# LITERATURE ACTIVITIES



**BRAIN-BASED LEARNING TO  
ENCOURAGE LITERARY ANALYSIS**  
*use with any piece of literature*

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# PRE-READING ACTIVITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT

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- Look at the cover.  
*What colors are used? What images? Explain if these ideas given an inkling to the tone of the story. Do students spot a potential symbol? The colors used throughout a story might indicate pieces of the message.*
  
- Discover the genre.  
*Some genres require definitions. Dystopian literature, for example, contains specific details. Provide this structure for students to understand the story more.*
  
- Look at the pictures.  
*Who is the story about? What does the setting look like? Sometimes the font can give the reader a clue. A romantic story may have 'pretty' font.*
  
- Read the table of contents.  
*I love finding excitingly labeled chapters. Are the chapters telling readers anything? Do they seem to follow the plot structure?*
  
- Draw conclusions from the title.  
*As I Lay Dying is my favorite book to do this with. Dying? For an extended period of time? We often discuss the title and what it could mean.*
  
- Give students the setting.  
*Research ideas about the time period and location. This works well because students can find a portion that interests them: maps, fashion, politics.*
  
- Read the summary on the book jacket.  
*The book jacket is intended to get a reader to buy or read the book. Is the book jacket persuasive? The "selling" point of a book might be on the jacket. Ask students to evaluate the effectiveness.*
  
- What can the author's background tell us?  
*Look at significant events in the author's life. Would these events shape his or her writing?  
For a modern take, find the author on social media. Show a few clips of the author's life and messages.*
  
- Analyze sentence structure.  
*I enjoy doing this with older pieces of literature. I pull a few sentences that will not give away key parts of the story. We look at the writing with a grammatical lens. What slang is unfamiliar?*
  
- Brainstorm the central topic.  
*If the central topic is not a secret, pre-reading activities can include developing students' interest about a theme.*

# PRE-READING ACTIVITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT

CONTINUED



Research a fact.

*Sometimes students read literature with which they may not be familiar. Learning about a 'factual' part of life intrigues them and can get them interested in the story.*

Create a web.

*Pull out large pieces of butcher paper and place them around the room. Add main ideas that you'd like students to know about and let them show you what they know.*

Look at the movement.

*Understanding literary movements can be challenging. Their effects and causes require extensive prior knowledge. You can build initial knowledge by defining the movement in which your literature takes place.*

Frontload information.

*Some stories contain difficult concepts that students simply must understand. When students might not know a concept, event, or problem, define it and provide a timeline.*

The hook, the anticipatory set.

*Capture students' attentions with an interesting piece from the story. Think of revealing information about the author or startling facts about the time period.*

Find art.

*You can add art in meaningful ways to a literature lesson plan. Start with the story's setting. Look for famous art pieces that will make the setting real to students. Music and fashion can also make the setting alive.*

Brainstorm an element.

*Whenever possible, I provide student choice for students to show me their understanding. Let students choose a literary element to aid in their analysis of the story.*

Show a video clip.

*Youtube is a wealth of information, and junk. Be aware that videos can have cuss words or present dangerous points of view. Once you find decent videos, show clips to intrigue students, to introduce concepts.*

Food!

*Food can bring a scene or the setting alive. If a character eats something unique, bring in samples. If a type of food was common during a time period, ask students to sample it.*

Design stations.

*If you cannot decide what pre-reading activity to present because you found so many awesome and interesting ones, create stations. Set up your favorite pieces at individual stations, and ask students to rotate around the room.*

# CHARACTERIZATION ACTIVITIES FOR ANALYSIS

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## Design license plates.

*Which characters would have vanity plates? What would the plates say? Would a character have randomly assigned plates? Does a character have such bad luck that she would have goofy plates on accident? Is a character so absent minded that he would forget to apply for license plates?*

## Build puppets.

*Create comical, cartoonish puppets of a few characters. If students particularly enjoy this, ask them to write a quick script and act out a scene.*

## Post on social media.

*Facebook pages, Instagram pics, Twitter feed, Snapchat. Ask students to create a social media profile for a character and then post as that character.*

## Write a resume.

*Look at what the character has accomplished. What personal skills would this character showcase on a resume? What education does this character have? (Would a certain character lie on a resume? What would he lie about?)*

## Create a wardrobe.

*Decide what a character or a family should wear. This works well for artistic students who want to stretch their imaginations. Students could even create a Pinterest board for a character.*

## Design a house or bedroom.

*Mathematical-logical students? This is for you. Measure the dimensions of a character's house or living space, and show what furniture and decor will fit in that space.*

## Shop for a vehicle.

*If a character is hard working, perhaps she has saved for a practical car. If a character is a 'talker,' maybe she talked the car dealer into a great deal. Which character would drive a truck? Why? A character who insists on driving a new car is also different from a character who shops for a used car, for the best deal.*

## Plan a couple's prom night, wedding, or vacation.

*Many young adult novels include romance. Which person in the couple would ask the other to prom? Would there be an elaborate way of asking?*

## Create a book jacket for a character's autobiography.

*An autobiography is a story about a person's life told by that person. The tone and approach that a character would bring to his or her autobiography explains a lot about that character.*

## Create infographics.

*Students love infographics because they can sort the information. Plus, students can focus on the most important parts of a character where they find the most meaning. By honing on specific characteristics, students can then explore those pieces.*

# CHARACTERIZATION ACTIVITIES FOR ANALYSIS

CONTINUED

- Write a food journal for the character.  
*Coffee drinks? Favorite restaurant? Menu requests? If your character is picky, write a dialogue where he asks for food prepared a certain way.*
  
- Experiment with interaction.  
*Have characters interact in ways they don't in the story, but be sure to maintain the consistency of that character's actions. Write letters between two characters. Do they follow each other on social media? Who sends the friend request?*
  
- Write a journal entry for a character.  
*When writing a journal entry, students should use the same tone and inflections that are natural to the character. Decide if the character would write, "dear diary" or simply start writing.*
  
- Study a character from a new perspective.  
*Many characters have different beliefs and interactions about the main character. What do readers learn from looking at this character from other points of view?*
  
- Design a dating profile.  
*What would a dating profile look like for your character? Would they be shy and reserved? Would they brag?*



# CONFLICT ACTIVITIES FOR ANALYSIS

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Is this a real conflict?

*Reread earlier portions of the story, not only to review, but to find seemingly innocuous events between characters and forces that we now know have conflicts. Read these events with a fresh set of eyes. If the story is long, you might list out pages and jigsaw the activity.*

File a police report.

*A police report works well if a physical conflict is involved. As a slight alternative, students have also created an insurance report for a car accident.*

Draft a break-up song or poem.

*Is a conflict a broken heart? Write a song or poem from the distraught character's point of view. Include key elements from the story as lyrics.*

Brainstorm about a particular conflict.

*Choose a conflict, or have students pick a conflict for further study. Have students decide which character (or force) from the story is 'correct.'*

Add sticky notes.

*Give every student one or two sticky notes. Have them write one conflict per note. Organize different sections around the room—man vs. man, society, and on—and have students file their sticky notes in the appropriate area.*

Research authentic parallels.

*A conflict might be in a book because real events inspired the author.*

Provide a big picture.

*Choose one type of conflict to look at throughout history. (This works well for human vs. government.) Students will throw down wars, prohibition, witch trials, voting rights, and segregation. Create a master list from students' ideas.*

Write a literary analysis.

*Provide a variety of writing prompts for students that will inspire them to connect pieces of literary analysis together. Not every writing prompt will inspire students, so allow them to choose what make sense to them.*

Write a correspondence.

*I see students use this choice to examine the history behind famous events. For instance, if a novel is set during World War II, students can draft letters between officers from the story.*

Exclude a conflict.

*List conflicts in the story. What happens if a conflict were to disappear, big or small: How would the story change? Would readers understand a character less? Would the story be less interesting? Was the conflict unnecessary? (Are you sure?) Could it have been more interesting? Involved another character? Connected to the theme?*

# CHARACTER ARC ACTIVITIES FOR ANALYSIS

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- Discuss superheroes.

*Superheroes have massive character arcs. Some students read comic books and others are more familiar with movies. Either way, you can teach the literary term 'character arc' through a student's beloved superhero.*

- Find regular characters.

*Characters who overcome an obstacle probably have a character arc that you can find meaning in sharing with students. Look for characters from childhood that most students remember.*

- Cover anti-hero.

*Teaching the anti-hero can be tricky—it goes against the norm and students may not initially see a character as the antihero. Some of my best class discussions with literature have surrounded what makes a character an anti-hero and if they cross over to antagonist.*

- Show the monomyth.

*The monomyth from Joseph Campbell's research is present in most characters. Students generally understand the hero's journey and enjoy mapping it out after they finish a story.*

- Build on prior knowledge.

*Students are probably familiar with terms that deal with character arcs: flat characters, round characters, static characters, and dynamic characters. In a way, students have learned about character arcs before. Does a flat character have a tremendous character arc? No. Dynamic characters, characters who change somehow in the story, probably have larger character arcs.*

# PLOT STRUCTURE ACTIVITIES FOR ANALYSIS



- Draw the triangle.

*Define the terms of the plot structure: exposition, initial incident, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution. Some teachers use different terminology, and students should know what you expect.*

- Use a well-understood story from pop culture.

*If students struggle with applying the concept and terms to a new story, find a story students understand and map it out for them.*

- Clarify the story through the plot structure.

*I will draw the triangle on the board or project it digitally. As students enter the room, I'll hand them a sticky note and ask them to write a part from the story. Then, they'll add the sticky note to the appropriate part of the plot structure. Doing this is a scaffolding technique. Students can take a risk in a low-pressure way, and you can easily fix errors.*

- Introduce analysis in groups.

*After students identify the plot structure, you can begin introducing literary analysis questions. Ask questions that encourage students to see how other devices and elements are shaped by the plot structure.*

- Free-write.

*Ask students to write about the story. As students write and finish, read their free-writing. Start to outline what students write about on the plot structure as a group.*

# SETTING ACTIVITIES FOR ANALYSIS

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- Describe the setting from a different point of view.  
*If the story's point of view is third person, ask students to describe a setting from a character's first person point of view. What would the character mention? Does the character enjoy his house? Dislike laws/ societal expectations during the time period?*
- Study other literary devices regarding the setting.  
*How does the setting influence the theme? characters? Is a setting symbolic? Be sure to note the colors used in a setting.*
- Research a specific part of a setting.  
*What was a typical breakfast for people living during that time period? popular music? Examine what people the ages of your students would be doing. Would they be done with school? married? wearing corsets? at war?*
- Design/plan a movie set for the story's setting.  
*Capitalize on students' strengths for this activity. Students can outline what different scenes would look like, others can research what different areas of a house or town would look like, and others can research the weather/ climate/ vegetation. (If it's set in the future, what will the weather be? Why?)*
- Write a welcome brochure/design a town's website.  
*What would the town's chamber of commerce show off about the town? If someone were buying a house in the story, what would the real estate agent highlight?*
- Find quotes that describe the setting.  
*This is like direct characterization: direct setting quotes from the story. Note what is specifically stated about the setting.*
- Find quotes that indirectly describe the setting  
*This is like indirect characterization: find ways that the author reveals the setting, either through objects, characters' dialogue, characters' dress, or events.*
- Divide settings among students  
*Give each group a poster and ask them to draw and describe one setting from the story. Piece the posters together for a visual.*
- Compile important local or national events from the setting.  
*Students may grasp the setting better if they understand the historical context. Identify who was president, if a war was happening, and what laws people considered normal. This works well for both the national and local level of stories.*
- Recall a children's story that has a similar setting.  
*When I teach a story set in the 1870s, it helps to mention the Little Women. Students have a starting point for understanding the setting.*

# SYMBOLISM ACTIVITIES FOR ANALYSIS

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## Explain colors.

*Authors purposely place colors in literature for a deeper understanding of characters, setting, etc. When students associate colors with another component, they have a better connection to their reading. Ask students to search for "color psychology wheel."*

## Explain everyday gestures.

*In our culture, we use the "ok" symbol, "thumbs up" symbol, and the "winding finger" for goofy or silly. Other cultures use different gestures. When politicians or diplomats travel, they are briefed about the culture's expectations for gestures.*

## Explain common symbols.

*Building off students' prior knowledge and proving to them that they do already understand (at least part of) symbols nicely begins discussions. At the start of each school year, images float around the Internet and on advertising. What are they? Why symbols are associated with school?*

## Explain intangible symbols.

*Sometimes, symbols are abstract with intangible symbols. The smell of pine, for example, often symbolizes winter or winter holidays. Bleach or chlorine symbolizes pool water and summer.*

## Explain weather.

*Ask students what emotions an author conveys in literature. Then ask students to identify which piece of weather makes sense with an emotion.*

# THEME ACTIVITIES FOR ANALYSIS



## Find "clean" stories.

*Older students have "clean" movies and stories from childhood, ones that are classroom appropriate and applicable to literary terms. Childhood movies and books have themes.*

## Brainstorm common themes.

*Sometimes students confuse an author's "subject" with the story's "theme." A theme encompasses more of a statement, a human or universal truthfulness. Look at common themes— often ones from childhood fables.*

## Provide a visual.

*Sometimes students need a concrete object to remember the idea of the literary term theme. This can fit to your personality or classroom community. The two common visuals I provide are the megaphone and the message in a bottle.*

## Reverse the process.

*Ask students to think of a message they have learned in their lives. In other words, if a student's memoir had a theme, what would it be?*

## Disagree with a theme.

*When students are not understanding the concept of theme, I check that to see if they simply disagree with the story's theme. Disagreement about a theme is a wonderful opportunity for discussion.*

# EXTENSION ACTIVITIES FOR LITERATURE

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## Host a gallery walk.

*Hang blank "posters" around the room. Label the posters with important concepts for a graffiti activity. As students walk around the room, jot down your ideas as well. If students post an idea that prompts a question, write a sentence starter for other students.*

## Color!

*Color! I give students guidance with literary coloring sheets, but you can ask them to draw pictures, doodle notes, or brainstorm examples on blank paper. I often set a timer and ask students to create.*

## Ask for student feedback.

*Ask for "audience questions." Students can submit their inquiries anonymously, and you can close out the class period with these or begin the next class period with a common theme from the questions.*

## Provide choice with graphic organizers.

*Use graphic organizers as visual note taking sheets. Let students choose their sheets. Student choice with literary analysis is a must for any extension activity.*

## Provide advanced literature concepts.

*Some students are massively interested in our field. Many of these students will become lawyers, marketers, and English teachers. Provide a bigger picture of a concept with advanced work on the topic at hand.*

## Connect to other work.

*Mention connections of literature and nonfiction texts to students based on their interests. You have a larger picture of reading material available than your students. Don't be afraid to spread your knowledge!*

## Model analysis.

*Discuss your reading and be honest about your thoughts concerning the reading. Summarize books, or highlight interesting parts of books. I can model a love of literature for my students.*

*Students might not be comfortable as readers and sometimes, we teachers are their models for loving literature.*

## Give background information.

*A common pre-reading activity includes background information of the author, setting, or allusions. You can easily make background information an extension activity though, especially if an earlier reveal of the information would ruin part of students' discovery of the story.*

## Distribute sticky notes.

*Give students a sticky note as they enter class. Begin a class period by asking students to write one idea from the story: A character they dislike, the most memorable scene, the most maddening conflict; compile the notes.*

## Color-code characters.

*Colors with characters, setting, and more can be fast and meaningful additions to literature discussions. Color-code the characters based on color psychology.*

# EXTENSION ACTIVITIES FOR LITERATURE

CONTINUED



- Analyze mentor sentences.

*Mentor sentences bring a new depth to literature. What makes a sentence memorable? quotable? Study the literature with language. Not only can you meet language standards, but you can also learn more about the story by looking at individual words and sentences.*

- Create a soundtrack.

*Characters, books, and conflicts can have soundtracks. Students should provide evidence as to why those songs relate to a character (for example).*

- Build infographics.

*Students see infographics on social media, and they can build them on apps like Canva. Infographics might not tell a complete story, but they do allow students to dive deeply into a specific area, like characters.*

- Make a one pager.

*One pagers can provide a closing activity to your literature lesson plan. You can add try a twist by discovering the adjectives the author used.*

- Build a cross-curricular connection.

*Bringing other subjects to English class intrigues students who might not care for a story.*

- Distribute props.

*Giving students a physical object can help connect them to the story. Some of our students are kinesthetic learners, and holding an object helps them connect to a story.*

- Build a bulletin board.

*Many of these extension activities for literature can become part of a bulletin board: sticky notes, one pagers, and coloring sheets can become part of a bulletin board.*

*Another option is for the teacher to add blank paper to a bulletin board, and for students to write notes, ideas, and concepts about the story, almost like a graffiti activity.*

- Read a picture book.

*I keep picture books in my classroom and bring them out for certain stories because they contain beautiful pictures and illustrate difficult facts in meaningful ways.*

- Write to the author.

*Sometimes, students possess strong feeling about literature, both positive and negative. Allow them to question, probe, and argue with the author through a letter or email.*

- Create a book launch.

*When a book is released, a book launch showcases the book and author. A book launch can be a themed party that sells the books to the public. Ask students to outline decor, an invite list, and a PR release.*

# EXTENSION ACTIVITIES FOR LITERATURE

CONTINUED



## Study characterization...

*Studying characterization needn't be neat! Students can flip through the book, finding quotes from the character of study that indirectly characterizes him or her. Students should also look for other characters' comments regarding the character as well as interactions between characters. (Eye rolling? Talking behind someone's back? Dismissive looks? True engagement?) All of those small gestures have meaning. At the end of brainstorming, students should draw conclusions about characters.*

## Study a symbol's meaning...

*Color, history, mythological connections: those components all tell about the symbol. Where is the symbol mentioned, and with whom is it connected? Many symbols connect to a larger picture, often socially or culturally. Discuss if the symbol is still relevant and maybe why it is or is not. What makes a symbol change throughout years?*

## Study conflicts...

*Encourage students to brainstorm circumstances surrounding conflicts. Is the root of a conflict a personality clash? an event that the audience doesn't know about, but might know eventually? the result of a larger force? immaturity or misunderstanding? a hidden belief (that the character may not consciously admit)? Internal and external conflicts bump against each other and shape outcomes.*

*Stories must have conflicts and analyzing them allows students to understand the story better, and eventually the theme. Allow students to freely brainstorm ideas and feelings about the conflicts. This will lead to a greater understanding of the story as a whole.*

## Study themes...

*No one ever reads the same story twice. . . and that is because we all apply our life experiences to our reading. Students might glean similar themes, but they will all express those themes differently. The beauty of literature is that it holds different meanings for all people. Tell students that! As they brainstorm potential themes, encourage individual expression.*

*All components of a story shape and build themes, so brainstorm those concepts with students. Students might not realize the inner workings of a story, but once you reveal some of the secrets, they will be intrigued.*

## Study allusions...

*Ask students to write allusions and to research the reference. Why is the author including a particular allusion? Does it contrast a character or theme? Emphasize one? Does it enhance the reader's understanding? Often, allusions are particular to the setting.*

*I find that researching allusions connects students to the story who might not normally find a connection to literature. Sometimes, students who prefer nonfiction will become more engaged with literature if they explore factual information from allusions.*