

Introduction

Dear Student,

Do you know that very few people know how to read?

It is not that they cannot decipher words on a page, but they simply do not know how to place what they read into its proper literary and historical context. They may understand WHAT happened in a story, but they do not know WHY. They may feel strongly about the story, yet they never stop to wonder WHY they feel as they do, or HOW the author made it happen.

If you are wondering why you should care about the HOW and WHY of literature, think about it like this: Reading without understanding is like walking onto a softball field and batting the ball, without any knowledge of what to do next. You may hit the ball out of the park, but if you do not run the bases and complete the play, you have missed the whole point of the activity.

It is the same with reading. In order to complete the process, it is necessary to think analytically about what you read. Reading is a conversation between a reader and a writer. The author creates a world, peoples it with characters, and presents a story. The reader enters the author's world, meets the characters, and follows the story line. When you write about literature, as you will this year, the conversation shifts. It becomes a dialogue between you, as an analytical reader and writer, and the reader of your essay.

In this literature curriculum, I will introduce you to a technique I call “deep reading.” As you work through each assigned story, you will also learn about the historic, literary, and artistic context in which the story was written. I will give you the opportunity and resources to discover more about the story, the author, and the various elements of the text, including plot, setting, characterization, and more. This will help you make sense of each great book and will make the story more enjoyable.

You will find that you like some books and authors better than others, just as I do. Each novel, poem, essay, or play in this literature series has been carefully chosen for its quality and its place in the panorama of literary history. Even if you find you do not enjoy a particular work as much as another, it has been included because it has something important to convey. One thing you will discover is that sometimes the stories you like least stick with you the longest and sometimes even teach you the most.

I love to read, and I am happy to have the opportunity to share some of my favorite great books with you. Some will make you laugh, others may make you cry, but above all, I hope they make you think. When you finish your reading for the year, I know that your mind will be more richly furnished than when you began, and that is a very good thing.

Janice Campbell

www.ExcellenceInLiterature.com

P.S. As you read through this book, you will most likely encounter words you do not know. I am sure you know what to do when this happens. Look it up and write down the word and its definition, and you will be expanding your vocabulary without much effort at all.

Overview and Objectives

Excellence in Literature (EIL) is a college-preparatory course of study. It is my goal to

- Introduce students to great literature from the Western literary tradition.
- Teach students to read with discernment.
- Train independent, self-motivated learners.
- Provide tools students can use to strengthen their writing skills.
- Introduce students to sources for high-quality online and offline research.
- Prepare students for college classes by expecting carefully researched, well-considered material to be presented in standard format, with preliminary proof-reading completed.

In the five levels of this literature series, you will be reading some of the greatest works of literature ever written. They are great not just because they are technically well done, though that certainly is a factor, but also because they reveal truth through the power of story.

EIL uses great literature, studied in its historic, literary, and artistic contexts, to help you learn to think and write analytically. This book is designed for students to use independently, so it contains specific instructions for each assignment, and a suggested schedule, as well as the references you need in order to do the background reading and research for each module.

You may be surprised to find I have not provided a lengthy introduction and a lot of background material for each book and author. This is because you have reached the age when you can assume responsibility for learning. Rather than spoon-feeding you basic, easily researched information (and having you zone out in the middle of paragraph two), I have provided resources and links that will enable you to perform the contextual research needed to fully understand the focus text. This is the kind of research you will be doing for college courses, so if you learn how to do it now, you should be quite good at it by the time you graduate!

How to Benefit from This Guide

To gain the greatest possible benefit from your literature study, you are responsible for reading this entire guide. Read the sections before and after the modules before you start working on the assignments. In the first section, you will find an explanation of how EIL works, suggestions for how to create a study routine and organize your study materials, chapters on how to read analytically and how to write essays. Following this you will find the syllabus section, with a study outline and schedule for each module. In the final section you will find instructions for writing specific types of papers, information for your writing mentor on how to evaluate papers, and sample papers that demonstrate correct MLA format (if you do not know what that is, be patient—it is explained in the samples and the glossary). Be sure to read all the chapters so you can be successful as you work through the assignments.

Each level of EIL has nine modules. Each module is intended to be completed in four relatively brief, but intense, weeks, though your writing mentor may decide to spend more or less time on a particular module. You may choose to group the modules into a traditional nine-month school year, or to use a four weeks on, one week off schedule. For a weekly routine, our family loosely followed a college-style block schedule in which we studied the humanities (literature, history, art, and music) in 2- to 3 hour blocks of time on Tuesday and Thursday; and math, science, and related subjects on Monday and Wednesday, but you are free to do what works best for you and your family.

Each assignment has been carefully chosen and scheduled so that knowledge and skills can build cumulatively, even if your writing mentor changes the order in which you study the modules. It is important that you learn time management skills that will help you complete assignments with minimal stress. If you are working with a writing mentor such as your parent, a writing evaluator, a coach, or a co-op

instructor, be sure to agree in advance on a schedule, so that you can plan your work efficiently. Above all, do not spend three weeks procrastinating; then try to cram the assigned reading and writing into one week. Believe me, it does not work!

Course Format

Excellence in Literature courses are designed to focus in depth on selected great authors or literary movements, while exploring the context of the author's life and work through additional reading and writing. This offers opportunity to practice writing in a number of different formats, as well as the opportunity to grow thoroughly familiar with some of the greatest writers and literary works of all time.

Audio Books

Although many students are visual learners and do well reading each novel, auditory¹ or kinesthetic learners may benefit from listening to unabridged versions of the more challenging works. Epic poems such as *Beowulf* or *Paradise Lost* work especially well in audio, as it becomes easier to appreciate the rhythm and cadence of the language. The goal is for you to thoroughly understand and enjoy the material we cover, so use the learning tools that work best for you.

Context Materials

For each module there will be additional material to read, listen to, or watch. These resources are designed to provide contextual information that will help you understand the focus work. These context resources include links to interesting and informative websites, and recommendations for additional readings. Many of these are hosted or linked at Excellence-in-Literature.com.

Do not feel limited by these resource suggestions. I encourage you to find and include other resources, such as videos, field trips, or other useful books. The more rich and varied the context materials, the more vivid and interesting the focus text will seem. If you find a book or author you particularly enjoy, take the time to read more of his or her writings or broaden your research. EIL is a solid foundation, and it is designed to be flexible, so you can shape it to reflect your own interests.

Study Clusters

You may want to consider planning the high school years in study clusters—grouping American history with American literature, British history with British

¹An auditory learner is one who learns best by hearing; a kinesthetic learner learns by doing.

literature, and so forth. This reinforces learning and increases memorable context for both literature and history. You may mix and match EIL modules to fit the history you are studying.

The Honors Track

In each module, you will find additional reading suggestions under the “Honors” heading. If you would like to earn an honors-level grade (weighted by .5 grade point), you need to read an extra book and do an approach paper for each module. At the end of the school year, you will also write an additional research paper, which is assigned in the Honors chapter. This will complete the honors track.

To earn advanced placement or college credit for the class (weighted by 1.0 grade point), you will also need to take an AP or CLEP exam. You can find complete details on how to assign weighted grades and record advanced classes in my book, *Transcripts Made Easy* (www.TranscriptsMadeEasy.com). Additional information about how and why to earn college credits can be found in *Get a Jump Start on College!* (www.GetAJumpStartOnCollege.com).

Prerequisites for Success

Excellence in Literature is intended for use by students in grades 8–12. For each level, you are expected to have age-appropriate skills in grammar, spelling, and language mechanics. Students should grammar- and spell-check all papers before turning them in, as learning to self-edit is part of the writing process.

If you have not done literary analysis or essay writing, there are two resources I recommend. *Teaching the Classics with Worldview Supplement* by Adam Andrews is a brief DVD-based course that teaches literary analysis using short works to illustrate the principles and methods. For essay writing, *The Elegant Essay Writing Lessons* by Lesha Myers is the best resource I have seen. Both are published by the Institute for Excellence in Writing, and both can be used concurrently with *Excellence in Literature*.

Is it better to own or to borrow books?

I have discovered that if you have books in your home, they will be read. I do not expect you to purchase all the resources I have referenced, but I hope you will consider having a few of the most important on hand. You can find them used at online retailers such as Amazon.com or Alibris.com, or you may even be able to

get them free through PaperbackSwap.com (you may use my referral, “readbx”). I have purchased many books quite cheaply from library sales, thrift shops, and yard sales. Studies have shown that the number of books owned in a family has a direct relationship to the student’s long-term academic success, with measurably higher test scores for book owners than for age mates with fewer books in the home.

For the focus texts, I encourage you to consider purchasing nice, annotated paperback editions because those books will become part of your student’s mental furniture and may be read and reread many times. For most of the books, my favorite editions are Modern Library Press Paperback Classics. You can find links to most of the recommended texts at Excellence-in-Literature.com.

Learning Philosophy

Learn (lârġn) v. 1 To acquire knowledge of or skill in by observation, study, instruction, etc. 2 To find out; ascertain: to learn the facts. 3 To memorize. 4 To acquire by or as by practice: to learn good habits.

—Webster Illustrated Contemporary Dictionary: Encyclopedic Edition 1971

The foundation of the *Excellence in Literature* philosophy is the verb “learn.” I believe the acquisition of knowledge and skills is an active endeavor. The process of learning is focused within one person—the learner. Just as an infant makes the transition from being fed to feeding himself, a student who wants to be successful will begin to take an active role in absorbing and understanding information that will help him interpret his world. Although many students wait until college to make this transition, high school is actually an ideal time to learn how to learn.

As a writer, my goal is to impart not only knowledge, but also the tools and skills you need to take an active part in the learning process. I have always been a reader and an active learner, and I know from experience that the process is fascinating and invigorating. If you are an active learner, you will rarely be bored, and you can be confident in your ability to learn and do almost anything. There is great joy in learning, and this, above all, is what I want to communicate.

The Learning Process: Roles of Excellence in Literature, the Student, and the Writing Mentor

The EIL guide will

- Establish the scope and sequence for the class.
- Assign appropriate readings.
- Provide a suggested schedule for assignments.
- Provide time management and organization tips.
- Provide a rubric for objectively evaluating completed assignments.

The Student will

- Study this book and understand the sequence and timing of assignments.
- Ask questions of the writing mentor when something is not clearly understood.
- Actively seek to learn from each assignment.
- Complete all assignments on time.
- Make no excuses.
- Enjoy great literature.

The Writing Mentor (usually the parent) will

Help the student obtain required books and reference materials.

- Verify that assignments are completed on schedule.
- Use the rubric or select a qualified writing evaluator to provide feedback for the student.
- Provide an evaluation summary for the year, using the form found at the end of this book.

Getting Started

Before you begin, set up a study area and English notebook to help you stay organized. If you learn how to do this now, you will be a step ahead when you get to college and realize that you are completely responsible for creating a time and place to learn. College professors usually hand out a syllabus at the first class, with all the assignments and due dates for the semester. They do not remind you of what is coming up, so if you do not have a method for keeping on top of everything, you can quickly fall behind. You will find the organizational techniques you learn from EIL helpful for any class you take in the future.

What belongs in a study area?

Study area basics are a comfortable chair, bright light, your English notebook and reading log, calendar or datebook, good dictionary, thesaurus, writer's handbook, pens, pencils, paper, sticky notes such as Post-it® notes, and possibly a computer. Being organized will make your study time more pleasant and productive, so be sure to start the school year by pulling together these things.

How to Use Items in Your Study Area

Chair and light: Read here (see the chapter on "How to Read a Book"). You want to be comfortable enough to enjoy the experience, but not so comfortable that you fall asleep. It is pleasant to read near a window, but you should also have a reading light positioned so that the light falls on your book. If you find that your

eyes get tired quickly, you may need a brighter light or even reading glasses. Do not hesitate to get your eyes checked, so you can enjoy reading.

Calendar: Use a calendar or planner to record assignment deadlines, field trips, and other activities. At the beginning of each module, check the number of pages in your focus text and number of context resources; then plan how many you need to read daily in order to finish the focus text before you begin the essay.

English notebook: Organize your English papers in a three-ring binder. You can use page protectors that hold two sheets back-to-back, or you can punch holes and put everything directly into the binder. The first thing you should see when you open the cover is a list of modules and assignments (look for the form right after the evaluation summary). Next, put in a copy of each assignment you do, along with your note pages and the evaluation rubrics you receive. You may want to have a glossary section at the end with lists of new words you have learned, so you can review them easily.

Reading log: List everything you read—not just the books you read for English, but everything. Write the title, author, a one- or two-sentence summary of the book, and a comment or rating. A blank journal is handy for this, or you may prefer to keep the record in a database on your computer. There is even a form in my book, *Transcripts Made Easy*, that you can reproduce and use.

Dictionary: Look up unfamiliar words you encounter. If you can guess their meaning from the context, just write down the word on a small sticky note and stick it on the page. Look it up after you are finished reading. If you cannot guess the meaning from the context, look it up before continuing. Looking up challenging words not only builds vocabulary and helps you remember the word, but also reveals the nuances in meaning that set the word apart from its synonyms. My favorite dictionary is the *Oxford Shorter English Dictionary* because most of the word usage examples are from literature, but most college dictionaries are acceptable as well.

Thesaurus: Use this when you find yourself repeating the same descriptive words over and over. I use *Roget A to Z*, which is organized alphabetically. The English language is fascinating, and there is a perfect word for almost any occasion—please find it and use it!

EIL Handbook for Writers, Writers Inc., or other handbook: Cannot remember when to use a comma or a semicolon? Here is where you go to find out. Need instructions for how to write an expository essay? You will find it in your writer's handbook. A professional writer or editor always has several frequently used handbooks nearby. Writer's handbooks are packed with great information, and the reason professionals have several is that different handbooks have different areas of focus. No matter how competent you are as a writer, there is no way you can remember every tiny detail of grammar, style, or usage, so it pays to check your handbook—chances are, you will find exactly the help you need.

Pens: Use a pen for mind mapping (thinking on paper) rough drafts, illustrations, Venn diagrams, and more. When I was in college, one of my favorite ways to study a long, challenging work was to use an 18" x 24" sketch pad and multi-colored gel pens. I spent one semester in an in-depth independent study of Edmund Spenser's *The Fairie Queene* and found that the best way to see themes and remember what happened where was to summarize each book of the poem with a quick sketch and bullet points illustrating each canto.

Pencils: These are for writing in your books. Yes, I mean it—I want you to underline key passages, talk back to the characters, note thoughts that occur to you as you read, and so forth. This is called annotation, and it is part of active reading (you will read more about this in the "How to Read a Book" chapter). Taking notes in the text will help you get the most out of a story. If you have to use library books for your focus texts, you will not be able to annotate as easily, but you can put a piece of paper in the back of the book and use it for the things you would normally write in the book.

Sticky notes: One of the first things to do is to make sticky-note tabs for your writer's handbook. This helps you turn quickly to key pages. For classes using an anthology, I recommend that at the beginning of the semester you look at the syllabus and go through the anthology and place a sticky-note tab with the author's last name and the title of the work beside each assigned piece. This saves time and helps remind you of what you have covered, and what remains.

Computer: When you reach college or the business world, you will need to know how to use a computer, so high school is the time to become comfortable with its basic functions. Rather than using a word-processing program on your computer, I suggest learning to use the free online word-processing program by Google.

It is accessible through any Internet-connected computer, and your paper can be easily shared with a writing instructor, no matter where he or she is located.

Computer Tips

Formatting papers: Once you are in high school, all written work should be submitted in a college-style format. This means it should be typed in Times New Roman or a similar font, double-spaced, with one-inch margins all around (see the sample paper in the back of this book). Be sure to have the grammar- and spell-check turned on in your word processing program, but do not rely too heavily on these checking tools, because they are often wrong. Always do a “human proofread” by reading your paper aloud to yourself before turning it in. Reading aloud helps you slow down enough to spot typos and hear sentences or phrases that do not flow smoothly.

One space after terminal punctuation: Space only once after any terminal punctuation (period, question mark, etc.). Old typing instruction books used to require two spaces after terminal punctuation because typewriters use what is called a mono-spaced type, and the double spacing helped the eye distinguish the end of a sentence. Computer fonts are proportionally spaced, and proper spacing is programmed in. Double spacing creates unattractive blobs of white down a page and is a dead giveaway that outdated methods are being used.

Saving your document: Always create a computer folder for each class, and use a descriptive file name when you save your papers. For example, if you are writing the essay on Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography* from the first module of American Literature, name the file “eil3-u1-franklin,” and it will be easy to find anytime you need it.

If a paper gets “lost” on your computer: If you are new to the world of computers, you may occasionally think you have lost something on your computer. If you have been typing and your text seems to disappear, try pressing the Command key along with Z. This is the “undo” command, and it will undo the last thing you did, which should bring your paper back into view. If it does not, you can search your hard drive for the file name you used when you saved it. If you are using a Mac computer or Google Docs, any document should easily be found.

Frequently Asked Questions

Be curious always! For knowledge will not acquire you; you must acquire it.

—Sudie Back

If you have questions about any aspect of the curriculum or about studying in general, you may find the answers in this chapter.

Are all assignment instructions contained in this book?

This EIL guide contains the outline of the course, an assignment schedule for each module, models of the type of papers you will be writing, and evaluation information. In addition, you will need a copy of each of the novel-length focus works and a writer's handbook.

It is helpful to have old editions of the *Norton Anthologies* of American, British, and World Literature for additional information and other readings from the historic and literary context of each of the EIL focus works. In addition, you will need access to standard study and reference tools as listed in the "Getting Started" chapter.

You do not tell me how many pages to read each day. How will I know?

It is all about time management! This is a college-prep class, so you will be learning to look ahead and pace yourself. For modules based upon a novel-length work, you have a couple of options: 1) Sit down the first day and read the whole book in several hours; then use the rest of the time to gather supporting information; perhaps read another book by the author; and write your essay; or 2) Divide the book into

two equal parts, and read one part per week, leaving the last two weeks to write and polish your essay. I prefer the first method, as the story is usually more interesting if it is not read in tiny fragments over a long period of time. This also leaves plenty of time to draft, revise, and polish your essay.

C.S. Lewis wrote that “a narrative style is not to be judged by snippets. You must read for at least half a day and read with your mind on the story” (from *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama*). He is a wise guide, because immersion changes the experience of reading from an assignment to a journey into another world, another place, and another time. Whatever you do, start reading the first day of the module, and read every day until the book is finished. Do not procrastinate. And do not forget your context readings!

Can I use library books, or do I have to buy them?

I encourage active reading that includes annotation, especially of the focus works. This means underlining and making notes in the margin, and librarians really hate that. So I recommend you buy the focus books. You can probably find used copies fairly cheaply.

Do you recommend a particular edition of each book?

It is important to have books that are pleasant to hold and read so that you enjoy the process and do not suffer from eyestrain. I do not recommend mass-market paperbacks, since they usually have too-small type, very small margins, and no scholarly introduction or discussion questions. Many are so hard to hold open that the spine is soon broken.

My favorite editions are the Modern Library Paperback Classics. They are designed to lie open like a hardback, and they have insightful introductions and good discussion questions at the end. Norton, Penguin, and Oxford also offer good editions. You will find links to each of my recommended editions on the Excellence-in-Literature.com site.

Can I read the focus texts on an e-reader?

You can read the texts on an e-reader such as the Kindle® or Nook®, but it is not always easy to annotate as you are reading or to page back to look up a character or event. In addition, if you use free versions from the public domain, be aware that the

available translations may not be of the best quality. If you decide to use an e-reader, be sure to learn how to highlight and add notes and bookmarks.

The assignment said to write a 500-word essay. I accidentally wrote 603 words. What shall I do?

You can edit to make your work tighter, which will usually make your paper better. As Strunk and White admonish in *Elements of Style*, it is best to “omit needless words.” The second option is to not worry about it. The word count is a minimum rather than a maximum requirement. It is stated as number of words rather than number of pages so that teachers will not receive essays with 16-point type and 2” margins, because someone had to fill three pages and had no ideas. Word count allows no fudging.

What should go into the assignment header?

Every paper you turn in should have a proper heading as shown in the sample papers in the Formats and Models chapter. The heading should include your first and last name, the class name with the instructor’s name on the same line, the date, and the essay prompt. The essay prompt is included to make it easy for the evaluator to determine whether your essay is on topic, and it is especially important for modules in which you have a choice of topics.

How do I download and print items from the Internet?

If you have done some Internet research, or if I have provided a link or URL to a resource you need to download and print, you can follow these steps:

1. Copy (control + c) the entire underlined URL, and paste (control + v) it into the address window of your browser, and click “enter.”
2. If the page that appears offers a link to a printable copy, click the link to print directly from the screen.
3. If there is no link to a printable copy, hold down the left button of your mouse, and drag to select the text you want to copy.
4. Copy and paste the text into a blank TextEdit or Notepad file, and save it to your English folder or to your Evernote.com account online.
5. Go back to the webpage where you found the information. Select the URL in the address line, and copy and paste it at the end of your text. Type in the date you accessed the website and any other information you think may be important. You may need some of this information for your Works Cited page. Remember that it is never okay to copy material from anywhere and turn it in as your own work.

Why are there a lot of Internet resources?

First, they are free and globally available. If you do not have a computer with Internet access, chances are that you can use one at your local library or at a friend's house. Second, you need to know how to use a computer responsibly, and how to find the kind of resources you will need for the future, whether that future involves college, business, or teaching your own children. My goal is to introduce you to a lot of useful sites and resources, and to make you aware of what is available. As an ongoing project, we have begun to host many of these resources at our own Excellence-in-Literature.com website, so they will always be easily available.

What happens if a link does not work?

The Internet is an ever-changing place, so if a link is not on our website, there is a chance it will change. I have tried to choose resources from stable sources, so link moves should not be a major problem. If you type in a link and do not reach the resource, check to see if the resource is available on the Excellence-in-Literature.com website, categorized under "Resources" for your book level.

If you do not see the link on EIL, double-check each character you have typed, and make sure it exactly matches the link provided. If you are using an e-book and you copy and paste the link, be sure not to pick up any punctuation near the link because that will keep it from working.

Finally, if you are sure you have typed the link correctly, and you are not getting to the page, try doing a Google search for some of the keywords in the resource. For example, if the link for the Mark Twain House and Museum does not work, type "mark twain house museum" into the Google search box, and the correct resource should come up in the results. If it does not, you can try different combinations of keywords from the link description.

Do I have to read everything?

There are two things you absolutely must read, and they are this entire guide and each of the focus texts. I would like for you to read most of the context materials, but in a few cases there are more than you need. I have often included more than one suggested biography, simply because there are several good ones to choose from, and you may pick whichever one is easily available. The goal is for you to learn what you need to know in order to understand the author and the text and to write a thoughtful essay, not to just check off a random bunch of stuff.

I thought this was English class. Why do I have to look at art and listen to music?

Literature is a unique representation of its culture. Each great work was written by an author who was influenced by books, people, art, music, and events of his day. These influences, coupled with the author's education and family life, shaped the worldview that is inevitably reflected in his work.

In order to think intelligently about a poem, play, or story, you need to understand a bit about the author and his or her worldview. There is no easier or better way to do it than by sampling the art and music he or she might have seen or heard. The sights and sounds of an era can also help to illuminate the pervasive worldview that framed the focus text. You can think of content exploration as a virtual field trip!

How much time will EIL take each day?

The amount of time you spend depends on the length of the focus text. As an average, plan to spend at least one hour per day reading or writing about the focus text. Separate context reading or vocabulary work may add an additional 20–45 minutes per day.

Our family is different—do we have to follow the schedule exactly as it is written?

The schedule I have provided is the one my students followed when I taught these courses online (which I no longer do). It works efficiently and will help you cover a lot of material over the course of the school year. However, I completely understand that every family is unique. You may change the schedule, drop a module, take two years to cover the book, or alter it in any way that will help it better serve your family.

If you are teaching EIL in a co-op or school, you have the same liberty, though students who are following along in the book can probably be counted on to remind you that “That’s not what Mrs. Campbell said to do!” Whatever you do, I promise that the EIL Enforcement Department will *not* stop by to rap your knuckles. The curriculum is here to serve you, and I want you to enjoy using it.

Why read old books?

There are many reasons to read old books, but author and apologist C.S. Lewis simply suggests that it is necessary in order to “keep the clean sea breeze of the centuries blowing through our minds” in order to escape the “characteristic blindness of the twentieth century.” He writes:

It is a good rule, after reading a new book, never to allow yourself another new one till you have read an old one in between. If that is too much for you, you should at least read one old one to every three new ones.

Every age has its own outlook. It is specially good at seeing certain truths and specially liable to make certain mistakes. We all, therefore, need the books that will correct the characteristic mistakes of our own period. And that means the old books. All contemporary writers share to some extent the contemporary outlook—even those, like myself, who seem most opposed to it . . . The only palliative is to keep the clean sea breeze of the centuries blowing through our minds, and this can be done only by reading old books . . . Two heads are better than one, not because either is infallible, but because they are unlikely to go wrong in the same direction. (From an introduction by C.S. Lewis to a translation of *Athanasius: On the Incarnation*. Read the entire essay online at <http://www.spurgeon.org/~phil/history/ath-inc.htm>.)

In another good essay on this topic, Professor Dominic Manganiello, D.Phil., explains to his students, “We will read old books, then, because in the past lie the foundations of our present and future hope. We will discover that the writings of the masters deal with ‘primal and conventional things . . . the hunger for bread, the love of woman, the love of children, the desire for immortal life.’” The remainder of this essay can be found at http://www.augustinecollege.org/papers/DM_7Sept98.htm.

Finally, in perhaps the most compelling reason of all, Alexandr Solzhenitsyn pointed out that “literature conveys irrefutable condensed experience in yet another invaluable direction; namely, from generation to generation. Thus it becomes the living memory of the nation. Thus it preserves and kindles within itself the flame of her spent history, in a form which is safe from deformation and slander. In this way literature, together with language, protects the soul of the nation.” You may read his entire 1970 Nobel Lecture at http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1970/solzhenitsyn-lecture.html.

How to Read a Book

Some books are meant to be tasted, some swallowed, and some few digested . . .

—Francis Bacon

No, you have not picked up the wrong course by mistake—this is indeed high school English! I know you have been reading for years, but I want you to learn to read actively and analytically. I will review the basics of reading fiction and poetry here, so that you will have an idea of how to read and analyze throughout each of the Excellence in Literature courses.

If you are using any level of EIL and you have not thoroughly studied literary analysis, I recommend going through Adam Andrews' excellent *Teaching the Classics* DVD course, including the *Worldview Supplement*. This brief course uses short pieces of literature to teach the fundamentals of literary interpretation and analysis, and the Supplement teaches how to analyze literature from a worldview perspective. This course is brief enough that it can be used over the summer before you begin EIL, or even concurrently.

If you are studying English III, IV, or V, I also recommend reading the books by James W. Sire and Gene Edward Veith or Mortimer Adler and Charles Van Doren (see details of these recommendations in the Resources chapter). Sire and Veith approach literary analysis from a Christian worldview perspective, while Adler and Van Doren wrote a comprehensive, classic guide to the art of reading. Each is an excellent resource for learning how to explore and appreciate literature.

Reading great literature takes much more than just skimming over the words on a page. It is a process that involves absorbing, understanding, and making decisions about what the author is communicating. Reading is active and can be as richly rewarding as you want it to be. Quick, fun reading can help to hone your basic reading skills, but you will need to add analysis in order to grow as a reader and writer. I hope you will enjoy the learning process.

Reading Challenging Literature

There is a general sequence that I have found helpful for reading the classics or any other challenging literature, and it is the sequence you will find in many of the EIL modules. If you need to use a different sequence, it will be noted in the week-by-week plan. Here is an overview:

- Read brief contextual information about the author and the historical time in which the book, poem, or play was written.
- If possible, listen to a bit of music that the author may have listened to, read at least one poem of the period, and look at an art history book or online to see what sort of art was being created at the time the book was written. This helps you gain an understanding of the author's artistic influences and can help you understand what you are reading.
- For the most challenging books, you may begin by reading a children's version or a brief synopsis of the work, such as those found in SparkNotes® or Cliff-Notes®. This is not necessary for most works, but I recommend it for those with archaic language, such as Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* or for epic poetry such as Dante's *Inferno*. Although many people associate study guides with cheating, these guides are simply intended to help the student understand a work, just as a parent or teacher would do. Using them is cheating only if you read the guide, rather than the novel or poem. Once you have read the synopsis or children's version of a difficult book, you will be ready to read or listen to the complete text.
- Read the work all the way through, at a comfortable pace. Read fast enough to sustain interest, but slowly enough to understand what is happening. Focus on enjoying the story or poem.
- If the assignment is poetry or a play, listen to it (even if you have to read it aloud in order to do so) or watch it as suggested in the assignments. Poetry is meant to be heard, and plays are meant to be seen and heard, so you must do this in order to fully appreciate them.
- As you read, keep an index card or piece of paper tucked into the back of the book, or write on the blank end pages. Write down any words you do not know, look them up, and write down the definition. If you understand the basic mean-

ing from the context, do not interrupt the flow of the story—just look up the word later.

- In your English notebook write down interesting insights that occur to you, as well as quotes that seem significant. Feel free to mark important or interesting passages in the book (I use a pencil, rather than a highlighter) so that you can easily find them to use as quotations while you are writing your essay.
- Once you have read the book, start the writing assignments. If you are working with a book not listed in this guide, write an approach paper according to the instructions in the Formats and Models chapter. The approach paper should include a brief summary, character analysis, discussion questions, key passage, and an explanation of the key passage. This will help you think through the book and prepare you for writing an essay.
- Write the assigned essay, answering the assigned essay prompt.

Reading Fiction

If you are reading fiction, you will need to notice how the five elements of **plot, theme, character, setting, and style** work together to create the alternate world of the story. However, while you are reading, it is also important to allow yourself to be immersed in the fictional world, to the point that when you stop reading, you feel as if you have just returned from a long journey. Immersion allows you to experience the author's creation as he or she intended. It also helps you to see the story as a whole when you begin to analyze the elements of the text.

As you read and try to understand, not just the surface meaning of the text but also the underlying theme and worldview, refer to the list of questions at the end of this chapter. Thinking about these can help you move deeper into the text.

As you look through the questions, you may find terms you do not know. Look them up in the Glossary of this guide, and if you need more information, consult your writer's handbook, or go to Google and type in "define:" (without the quotes) followed by the word or phrase you are looking for.

Reading Poetry

If you are reading poetry, there are a few other things to consider. Poetry uses structure, sound, and syntax to awaken the reader's imagination and to convey an image or message in a vivid and memorable way. A beautifully written poem can convey an idea in just a few unforgettable lines. If you have not studied the analysis of poetry, it is especially important to review the process in one or more of the resources I have recommended above, such as *How to Read Slowly* or your writer's handbook.

To begin understanding a poem, read it through slowly and carefully at least once or twice. Read it aloud, and listen to the sound of the words and pacing of the lines and syllables. Once you have the sound of the poem in your head, try paraphrasing it in prose. Think about each element and how the structure of the lines and the sound of the words contributes to the poem's theme. Examine the images, the rhyme scheme, and the sound patterns of the poem to help you understand the poet's message. Above all, read it through in its entirety often enough so that you see and remember it as a whole, just as you would look at a great painting as a whole before beginning to study the brushstrokes.

Comedy and Tragedy

Although we sometimes think of comedy as something funny and tragedy as something sad, each word has a slightly different meaning in classic literature. Comedy is a story that begins with a conflict or suffering and ends in joy, such as *Jane Eyre* or *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Tragedy is a story that begins at a high point and ends in pain, such as *Romeo and Juliet* or *Oedipus Rex*. Aristotle further defined tragedy as the downfall of a noble human, in a disaster of his own making (*King Lear*). You will find a very enlightening chapter on comedy and tragedy in the Veith book, suggesting that in comedy can be seen an image of salvation, while in tragedy can be seen the shadow of damnation.

Facing Challenging Ideas

Great literature tends to mirror life. A book becomes a classic because it creates an honest and true picture of life and accurately depicts the consequences of various worldviews. In portraying life accurately, complex and sometimes unpleasant issues arise, just as they do in life. Characters do or say things that are deeply wrong, as Macbeth did in giving way to ambition and committing murder, or Peter Rabbit did in stealing carrots from Mr. MacGregor's garden. However, each character experienced appropriate, true-to-life consequences for his actions, which makes it possible for the reader to identify with and learn from the story.

Gene Edward Veith specifically cautions Christian readers not to "seize upon a detail [such as a "bad word"] or a subject dealt with by a book, take it completely out of context, and fail to do the necessary labor of thinking about the work and interpreting it thematically" (72) before they take a stand against the book. He also cautions against stories that do not tell the truth about life. "Stories filled with 'good

people' overcoming all odds may create the dangerous impression that human beings are, in fact, 'good' and capable of saving themselves through their own moral actions" (76). This type of plot is often found in genre fiction—what I call "Twinkies® for the brain"—and is what keeps these books from being great literature even when they tell an enjoyable story.

Annotating

If you annotate your books as you read, you will understand and enjoy them more deeply than if you simply skim the text. Your annotations will also help you quickly locate important scenes in the book as you are doing the writing assignments for each module. Here are some suggestions for effective annotation.

Use a pencil for all writing in your books, as it does not show through and can be erased if necessary. Write on the inside of the covers or on the blank pages at the front and back of your focus text. Use an index card or piece of paper if you are using a library book.

- **Draw a vertical line** or star beside significant paragraphs you would like to remember.
- **Underline** important phrases or ideas.
- **Character List:** List each of the characters in the order in which they appear. Include a brief note about the character's role in the plot or any distinguishing characteristics.
- **Timeline:** List each major event in the story as it happens.
- **Context:** If the focus text mentions a person, a piece of art, literature, or music, or a historic event, make a note in the margin and look up the item. Many classical compositions can be found on YouTube.com. Just search by typing in the composer or composition name.
- **Questions:** If you have a question about something in the text, write it in the margin. Writing it down will help you recognize the answer if it later appears in the text. If it does not appear, the written question will remind you to do a bit more research.

Questions to Consider as You Read

If you are not familiar with the terms used in this list, look them up in the Glossary at the back of the guide or in your writer's handbook.

- Who is the **narrator** of the story, and is he or she reliable?
- What happens, and in what order does it happen (plot)?
- Can you identify the basic stages of the story structure—exposition (background information), rising action (complications), climax, falling action, resolution?
- How is the story told? Possibilities include first-person narrative, a journal, epistolary style (told as a series of letters), etc. How does this method affect your understanding of each of the story elements?
- Does the method of storytelling affect your enjoyment of the plot?
- Who are the major and minor characters, and what kind of people are they? Consider physical, mental, moral, and spiritual dimensions.
- Do the challenges of the main character reflect common struggles of humanity? Is the character intended to portray an archetype?
- What **symbolism** do you see, and how effectively does it enhance your understanding?
- What types of **conflict** do you see? Possibilities include man vs. man, man vs. God, man vs. nature, man vs. society, or even man vs. himself.
- What role does each character play in revealing the story?
- What **plot devices** does the author use to move the story along? Possibilities include flashbacks, narrative frames, foreshadowing, genre-specific conventions, and so forth.
- What are the **themes** or great ideas (justice, friendship, good vs. evil, etc.) addressed in this work? What theme is primary?
- How do the characters bring the theme to life?
- What is the author's vision of the meaning of life? Does he or she believe in the existence of good and evil? Of God? What is his or her view of humanity?
- Why has the author used a specific word rather than a synonym in the way and in the place he has used it? Would a synonym work as well? Why or why not?

How to Write an Essay

The time to begin writing an article is when you have finished it to your satisfaction. By that time you begin to clearly and logically perceive what it is you really want to say.

—Mark Twain

An essay is a short writing assignment on a particular subject. According to the *Oxford Shorter English Dictionary*, the word *essay* is derived from the Latin root *exigere*, which means to ascertain or weigh. It is also defined as “a first tentative attempt at learning, composition, etc.; a first draft.” The essay is sometimes called a position paper, because it must be an expression of the writer’s judgment, rather than a simple report.

Essays can be written to inform an audience, explain something, argue a position, or analyze an issue. Because the writer is expressing an opinion or interpretation, each essay can be seen as an attempt to persuade the reader that your thesis is plausible. Because the essay form involves all steps of the writing process, you will be able to apply the skills learned to any type of writing you do in the future.

In *Excellence in Literature*, you will have the opportunity to write essays, approach papers, literature summaries, and author profiles. The essay prompt in each module will provide an exact subject, and you will find that writing itself will turn into a process of discovery. You will rarely know the answer to the questions in the essay prompt until you begin writing, but as you begin to formulate a thesis and write