

Emily Hausman  
Mrs. Rutan  
AP Literature and Composition  
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### I Can Now Read Literature Like a Professor

Reading literature throughout middle school and high school, most students say and think they understand what they are reading. In reality, they are missing so many important points that will not only help you understand literature better but it will also help you enjoy it more. There are so many hidden finds and discoveries. Without the help, theories and examples from Thomas C. Foster, many students would still be in the dark on these brilliant finds. Some theories are known to be hard to understand but when you see Foster's incredible writing skills in How to Read Literature Like a Professor, you will understand them so much more with his detailed examples. Some will automatically turn away when hearing the title but when reading further into the book, they will see Foster has laid out the book perfectly just for their understanding.

Foster gives such in depth descriptions of his theories throughout the book—there are so many to choose from! One that may have caught many of the reader's attention is the *Every Trip Is a Quest (Except When It's Not)* chapter. When first reading this, some may have been thinking exactly what myself as a reader was thinking, "Why the heck is this guy going on and on about what elements make a quest a quest? Isn't a quest just a quest?" Foster teaches us the more important parts to look for when reading a book. This not only helps you read better but also helps you write better. Right out of the gate Foster talks about Kip and his trip to the store to get Wonder Bread. When Kip is on his way he has many different encounters. Foster goes into depth about how those encounters made a simple trip to the store a quest. He tells us the five things a quest consists of, "(a) a quester, (b) a place to go, (c) a stated reason to go there, (d) challenges

and trials en route, and (e) a real reason to go there” (Foster, 2). This is so incredibly useful, and definitely helps you apply that to different reads.

In Markus Zusak’s book The Book Thief, Liesel is the main character. Liesel is an orphan living in Nazi Germany who witnessed her brother die and was put up for adoption by her mother. During the whole book, readers see her progressing as a person and discovering who she really is. She climbs many obstacles and it is noticed that even Liesel was on a quest during this story. It was just never mentioned, so it never occurred to us. Evaluating the book and applying Foster’s five things a quest consists of, the five things that make up Liesel’s quest are: (a) Liesel the quester, (b) discovering herself and learning to read—place to go or something to accomplish, (c) to be like the other kids and feel normal—the stated reason to go there, (d) getting made fun of and feeling sad and confused—challenges and trials en route, and (e) to be able to write about her story and the amazing people she got to spend it with—a real reason to go there. Now, this example isn’t exactly like Mr. Foster’s but it has many similarities and includes his bolded theory, “The real reason for a quest is always self-knowledge” (Foster, 3). He explains that that is why “questers are often so young, inexperienced, immature, sheltered” (Foster, 3). When looking back at The Book Thief, we see that Zusak explains Liesel as an innocent little girl with hair a “close enough brand of German blond, but she had dangerous eyes. Dark brown” (Zusak, 31). This reassured Foster’s theory, and made Liesel’s quest fit his standards.

In Chapter five of How to Read Literature Like a Professor, Foster talks about patterns. He wants us to begin to recognize recurrences, archetypes, and patterns when reading literature. The Book Thief shows us many examples of patterns, recurrences and archetypes. An essential pattern seen frequently in the book is the mentioning and description of “Schiller Strasse—the road of yellow stars—which was still awaiting its renovation, was ransacked one last time, to

find something, anything, to burn in the name of the Fuhrer's glory" (Zusak, 102). The mentioning of Schiller Strasse isn't always in that exact context, but it pops up frequently in Liesel's mind which is interesting because she understands it, just not fully—even though she is living in Nazi Germany. Many recurrences appear in the book that were obvious, while some were not. In the beginning of the book, the creation of Rudy and Liesel's friendship begins to form and after racing Rudy, he tries to persuade Liesel to kiss him and Liesel insists "she would never kiss that miserable, filthy *Saukerl*, especially not *this* day" (Zusak, 55). The recurrence of Rudy and Liesel having to kiss may have been overlooked, but it was mentioned throughout the book and definitely helped readers understand the close relationship the two had. We see several archetypes in The Book Thief, especially in the characters. One that was most likely a favorite to readers was Hans Hubberman who was always there for Liesel and Liesel recognized the "strangeness of her foster father's eyes [...] they were made of kindness and silver" (Zusak, 34). Hans Hubberman plays the mentor; his mentoring abilities constantly appear in the book and readers will always have the reassurance that he will take care of Liesel. Thinking about archetypes, recurrences and patterns is so incredibly simple and would have never been noticed if not thought through—so once again Foster was right when he told us that, "if you read enough and give what you read enough thought, you begin to see patterns, archetypes, recurrences" (Foster, 29).

When a student reads through How to Read Literature Like a Professor, what do you think goes on in their minds? They are reading about how to critically read literature and understand it and all its hidden factors at the same time. They never think about how a certain sentence or paragraph could actually mean more than what it says. Foster tells us that, "rain is never just rain" (Foster, 75). Weather is such a big determiner in how the chapter or scene is going to play

out. There were many occurrences in The Book Thief where weather was described, it was just never noticed that it played a part in what happened later. In the very beginning of the book, Liesel and her mother are at Liesel's brother's funeral where it is snowing and freezing. Liesel is devastated and "somewhere in all the snow, she could see her broken heart, in two pieces" (Zusak, 24). The weather, snowy and cold, fit the sad, devastating moment perfectly. Zusak knew this and most definitely uses Foster's theory, "Rain is never just rain" (Foster, 75), or in this case snow is never just snow. Of course rain and snow are two different things, but "it can mean as much as rain" (Foster, 80). Foster points out the symbolism of snow and includes how snow "like death, is the great unifier, that it falls, in the beautiful closing image, "upon all the living and the dead""(Foster, 80). This of course represents the scene in Zusak's book of Liesel losing her brother impeccably.

In Chapter 12, Foster talks about symbols. After reading a book do you ask yourself, "What would be some symbols in this book?" Probably not, but Foster mentions how the "more you exercise the symbolic imagination, the better and quicker it works" (Foster, 107). So reading through a book, The Book Thief for example, readers should practice their ability to identify symbols. A symbol noticed in The Book Thief were books. Liesel loved them, all "three of her books were the most precious items she owned" (Zusak, 109). Books are mentioned constantly in the book, and that makes for an obvious reason of why they are a symbol of happiness, safety and strength.

Foster opened up many doors to discovering more about the literature we read in our everyday lives. Reading seemed so easy for several years, but the truth was discovered that there is so much more. Reading Foster's book does teach you to look at not just the words but beyond them. Hopefully it teaches you how to "read like a professor" too.

