

When I began teaching literature, I assumed my students would love the texts I held dear. However, my first term quickly disproved me of that notion. I discovered that many students believed reading the actual texts was unnecessary – as long as they could access story outlines and prepare a few essay answers using notes from senior students or guidebooks. This realisation was disheartening.

I soon learned that I was not alone in this concern. Many colleagues had similar experiences. Over time, I began to reflect: Was the issue rooted in students' inability to read, or was it a general lack of interest? Gradually, I understood that the problem was not a lack of reading skills but rather an inertia toward reading itself. This led me to question how literature is taught, and more importantly, how we might rekindle genuine interest among students.

Categorisation

An often-overlooked factor in this discussion is the content and approach used in the classroom. English departments in colleges and universities typically organise their syllabi into categories like Romantic poetry, 19th century fiction, or Shakespeare and offer specialised courses such as Literary Criticism that cover critics from Dryden to Eliot and theorists

like I. A. Richards and Derrida. However, these are often treated as discrete, isolated units rather than interconnected frameworks to understand litera-

ture as a totality.

Yet literature is a dynamic tapestry of voices, histories, and ideas. When students complete a literature course, they are rarely con-

cerned with how many children Mrs. Bennet had in *Pride and Prejudice* or how William Empson conceptualised ambiguity. These details may seem tri-

Read for life

How to rekindle the passion for reading in Literature classes



via and, as a result, students may disengage from the larger experience of reading and thinking about literature. The solution lies in re-imagining the way we teach literature: moving from rote learning to critical engagement.

One effective strategy is to encourage students to explore meaning through inquiry. For instance, instead of summarising the plot of *Wuthering Heights*, invite students to investigate the idea of “home” in the novel. When studying Bama, ask students to reflect on how personal struggle shape her memoir. How is valour part of a poem such as Tennyson’s *Ulysses* or *Tithonus*? These prompt deeper analysis and personal engagement.

Equally essential is grounding literature in its geographical, historical, and social contexts. Students should research the era in which a work was written, examine the prevailing social conditions, and discuss its relevance in today’s world. Literature should not be studied in isolation; it must be connected to the lived reality.

Literary theory

Incorporating literary theory into this process is vital. Rather than treating theory as a separate academic requirement, we must integrate it into the act of reading itself. Encourage students to ask how meaning is produced, how interpretations evolve, and how themes are constructed and deconstructed. This ensures

that theory becomes a tool for engagement, not just abstraction.

Students should also be encouraged to write reflectively about their personal responses to texts. Whether analysing a poem or a novel, articulating their thoughts fosters a deeper, more meaningful connection with literature. Without this reflective practice, literature can appear as nothing more than a disconnected compilation of texts.

Moreover, cultural, and philosophical dimensions should be woven into literary studies. Students must be shown how texts help us understand humanity and that this is the broader quest they carry into the world. In our digital age, we can enhance engagement by inviting students to create short films or perform plays based on the texts they study. They can use AI tools to visualise the setting of a play, trace intertextual connections, or retell classic stories in contemporary contexts.

Finally, creating space for classroom debates and discussions is essential, as it fosters independent thinking and helps students see literature as a living dialogue, not a closed book. By adopting these strategies, we can transform the teaching of literature into a dynamic, engaging experience that encourages students to read not just for exams, but for life.

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