

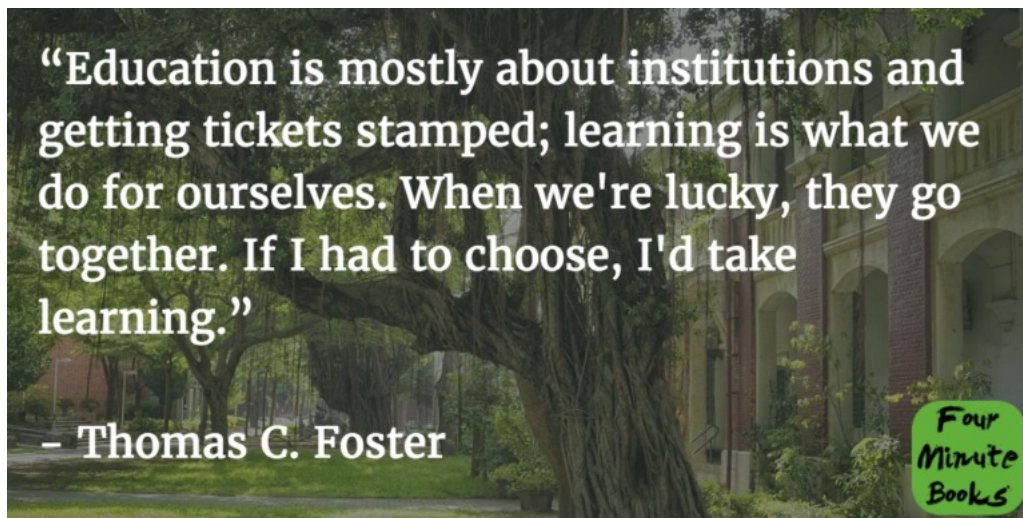
How To Read Literature Like A Professor Summary

 fourminutebooks.com/how-to-read-literature-like-a-professor-summary

1-Sentence-Summary: *How To Read Literature Like A Professor* shows you how to get more out of your reading, by educating you about the basics of classic literature and how authors use patterns, themes, memory and symbolism in their work to deliver their message to you.

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



I randomly came across *How To Read Literature Like A Professor*, and found out it was really popular. I'd love to help you read more and better, and my gears are constantly churning how I can help you do that (hit me up if you want to hear my product ideas so far). Summarizing this book is surely a good start.

Thomas C. Foster is an English professor (surprise), and he uses many examples from classic books to show you how you can unlock what you read and figure out what lies beneath the basic level of the story. This book will not only make your reading more fun and more satisfying, you'll also be able to harness what you learn in a much more professional way.

Here are 3 lessons to help you master the craft of reading:

1. Memory, symbols, and patterns are what hide the deeper message in any book.
2. One of the most common patterns is the quest structure.
3. Look for universal messages in books to discover which symbols authors use.

Want to read literature like a professor? Let's take a literature trip!

Lesson 1: Most books hide their message using memory, symbols and patterns.

The majority of people falls into the category of shallow readers. When they read books, they only pay attention to the basic story level, but not much more. If you want to go beyond that and actually *interpret* what you're reading, Foster says there are three things you need to watch out for.

1. **Memory.** This has happened to you for sure. You've read a chapter in a book and thought: "Wait, don't I know this scenario? Haven't I read about this before?" Clever readers don't brush off that gut reaction. Instead, they dwell on it and draw an actual comparison between what they just read and how it's different from a similar book they've read in the past.
2. **Symbols.** The scar on Harry Potter's forehead is much more than just a scar. Its shape, the way it hurts, the visions he has because of it. It stands for much more than an accident, it's a symbol, and only if you can interpret it you'll get the full picture of the story.
3. **Patterns.** Sometimes trivial and seemingly meaningless details pop up again and again. Just like the story itself most often follows a pattern, so do certain characters, items and even words people use. Authors often use patterns to communicate hidden messages.

But spotting these and interpreting them correctly is hard, so let's look at two things you can do to improve.

Lesson 2: The quest structure is one of the most common patterns in literature.

One of the most universally applied structures in novels, which you can find anywhere in life (even in your latest trip to the grocery store), is the quest structure. It's sometimes also called the hero's journey and it always contains the five following things:

- A quester
- A destination
- A stated reason to go
- Some challenges along the way
- An unexpected revelation

Take *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho, for example. Santiago, a shepherd, is the quester. His destination are the pyramids of Egypt. He says his reason to go is that he must find his destiny and explore the vision from his dream (about a treasure in Egypt). Of course he faces many challenges on his journey, such as finding love, but having to leave it behind. At the end, there's an unexpected revelation, showing Santiago that the treasure was right in front of him all along.

But if you run out of bread, and it becomes your reason to go to the grocery store, a destination, you become a quester too. A challenge might be to find a parking spot, or arrive at the store before it closes. Eventually, you'll unexpectedly find you still have a loaf at home after you come back.

See, it has all the elements of a quest, even though it's a very trivial scenario. Now you can pay attention and find the quest structure in other books and events!

Lesson 3: Look for universal messages in books to discover which symbols authors use.

Do you sometimes feel like books are a rip-off? That they're just blatantly copying from another author? Well, actually it's tough to find a book that *doesn't* copy from a previous one. In truth, no book is 100% original, whether the author knows he or she is copying, or not.

This phenomenon is called *intertextuality* – **all texts depend on one another** – and it's a good thing! When the same ideas appear again and again it turns them into symbols. You can then rely on interpreting them correctly, because the same symbol usually stands for the same idea.

For example, whenever a storm is seen on the horizon, this is usually a symbol for trouble lying ahead, whether in the form of an actual storm or a plot twist.

Often, the hero's home is destroyed, and he or she has to start all over. This is usually meant to show that even in destruction, there is a liberating power.

Ask "What's the universal message behind this event?" as you read, and you'll be able to spot symbols and some of the big ideas, which have been around for centuries.

Note: Another thing that helps you develop this skill is reading a wide variety of books, especially classics, because these have popularized most of the symbols we use today.

How To Read Literature Like A Professor Review

I want more of this. More reading about reading. If reading a lot is good, then reading a lot about reading is great. Every tiny improvement you make in how you read will be with you for the rest of your life and therefore help you get more out of *every* next book you pick up.

This is highly recommended. *How To Read Literature Like A Professor* is a great book and the summary on Blinkist is a very good starting point, with most of the big ideas explained well and plenty of examples.

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What else can you learn from the blinks?

- Which questions help you get to the emotional level of a book
- What one book *all* other books connect to

- How the Mississippi river is a symbol for more than one thing, in just one book
- Why settings profoundly shape how we perceive a story (and what role seasons play in it)
- What makes irony one of the most powerful tools of an author

Who would I recommend the How To Read Literature Like A Professor summary to?

The 16 year old, who struggles with English class, the 44 year old, who wants to get more out of his reading for his job, and anyone who's read their favorite book more than once.