

Speed Dating Through the Genres

RA in a Day

Hosted by the BCLA Readers Advisory Interest Group

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English Language Classics for Advanced English Language Learners

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Description of Genre:

Newcomers to Canada who are learning English as an additional language may be interested in reading classics of English literature to better understand cultural, historical, and moral traditions. Advanced English language learners, especially those who have a literate background in their own native language, may no longer be interested in abridged or simplified texts. Full text classics can be used for vocabulary building, developing greater proficiency in syntax and grammar, and especially for developing historical and cultural context regarding Western traditions. But there are many challenges to selecting titles.

Often English language classics are first presented to readers within a classroom setting, allowing an instructor to provide greater context to the materials and scaffolding for various challenges. The biggest challenge in selecting these materials outside the classroom is managing the lack of (or the provision of) context for the historical, cultural, and moral traditions. Other challenges include archaic use of vocabulary or sentence structures, old fashioned colloquialisms or slang, dialogue written to resemble dialects, and the physical layout of the text (print too small/not enough white space/tiny print for annotations).

When selecting titles for this purpose:

- Who is the audience & how are you presenting it? (Lists/booklets for patrons or for staff to support RA interactions, discussion groups, displays, etc.)
 - The more support you can offer, the more complex the text can be
- Have a variety of formats of the same text – large print, audiobook (CD & downloadable), ebook, annotated / enhanced, ELL abridged reader
- Themes, tone, and social issues:
 - Consider providing booklets/bookmarks with suggestions for supporting context building for some texts – books/articles on history, Wikipedia articles, author biographies, etc.
- Ask an ELL specialist

Look at the books!!!!!!!

When selecting books for your own list or for recommendations to patrons, make certain you look at the physical copy your library has. If the print is too small, there is not enough white space, or there are other impediments to easily reading the text, select a different book. If possible, match the book to the interest and skill level of the reader. Suggest patrons pick two (or more!) books to try and that they check out audio and physical editions.

Important titles and authors:

** = Canadian

Start Here

- Agatha Christie
- Sir Arthur Conan Doyle
- H. G. Wells
- Chinua Achebe – *Things Fall Apart*
- Ray Bradbury – *Fahrenheit 451*
- Willa Cather – *O Pioneers! & My Antonia*
- Stephen Crane – *The Red Badge of Courage*
- Charles Dickens – *A Christmas Carol*
- Charlotte Perkins Gilman – *The Yellow Wallpaper*
- Ernest Hemingway – *The Old Man and the Sea*
- Aldous Huxley – *Brave New World*
- Joy Kogawa – *Obasan***
- Stephen Leacock – *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town***
- Jack London – *Call of the Wild*
- L. M. Montgomery – *Anne of Green Gables & The Blue Castle***
- George Orwell – *Animal Farm*
- John Steinbeck – *The Pearl*
- Edith Wharton – *Ethan Frome*
- Thornton Wilder – *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*
- John Wyndham – *The Chrysalids & The Day of the Triffids*

A Bit More Challenging

- Robert Louis Stevenson
- Kate Chopin – *The Awakening*
- George Eliot – *Silas Marner*
- F. Scott Fitzgerald – *The Great Gatsby*
- William Golding – *Lord of the Flies*
- Washington Irving – *Legend of Sleepy Hollow & Rip Van Winkle*
- Margaret Laurence – *The Stone Angel***
- Herman Melville – *Billy Budd, Sailor*
- George Orwell – *1984*
- Mary Shelly – *Frankenstein*
- Henry Thoreau – *Walden*
- Oscar Wilde – *The Picture of Dorian Grey*
- Ethel Wilson – *Swamp Angel***

Helpful resources:

Rosow, La Vergne. (2005). *Accessing the Classics: Great Reads for Adults, Teens, and English Language Learners*. Genreflecting Advisory Series. Libraries Unlimited.

Rosow, La Vergne. (1996). *Light 'n Lively Reads for ESL, Adult, and Teen Readers: A Thematic Bibliography*. Libraries Unlimited.