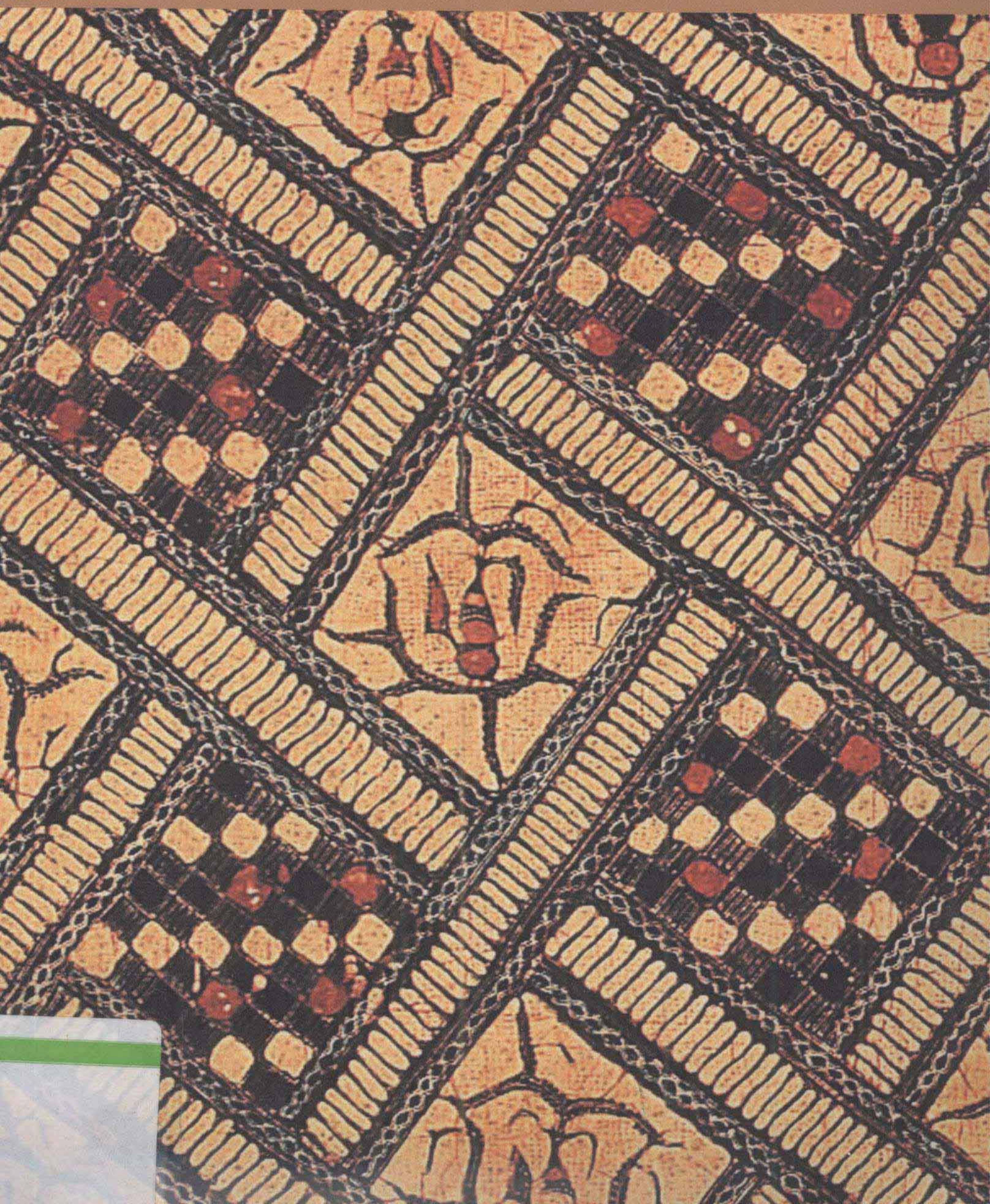


A BRIEF GUIDE TO THE NOVEL

SUSAN NAOMI BERNSTEIN



A Brief Guide to the Novel

Susan Naomi Bernstein
University of Houston—Downtown



New York San Francisco Boston
London Toronto Sydney Tokyo Singapore Madrid
Mexico City Munich Paris Cape Town Hong Kong Montreal

Vice President/Editor-in-Chief: Joseph Terry
Senior Acquisitions Editor: Steven Rigolosi
Development Editor: Jennifer Krasula
Marketing Manager: Melanie Craig
Supplements Editor: Donna Campion
Senior Production Manager: Eric Jorgensen
Project Coordination, Text Design, and Electronic Page Makeup: UG / GGS Information Services, Inc.
Cover Design Manager: John Callahan
Cover Designer: Maria Ilardi
Cover Photo: Shambhala Publications, Inc.
Photo Researcher: Julie Tesser
Senior Manufacturing Buyer: Dennis J. Para
Printer and Binder: Courier Corp.
Cover Printer: Phoenix Color Corp.

For permission to use copyrighted material, grateful acknowledgment is made to the copyright holders on the pages where the material appears.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Bernstein, Susan Naomi.

A brief guide to the novel / Susan Naomi Bernstein.

p. cm. — (The Longman literature for college readers series)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-321-08165-X (pbk.)

1. English language—Rhetoric—Problems, exercises, etc. 2. Fiction—History and criticism—Problems, exercises, etc. 3. Criticism—Authorship—Problems, exercises, etc.

I. Title. II. Series

PE1479.C7 B47 2001

808.3—dc21

2001038740

Copyright © 2002 by Addison Wesley Longman, Inc.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher. Printed in the United States.

Please visit our website at <http://www.ablongman.com>

ISBN 0-321-08165-X

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10—CRS—03 02 01 00

Preface

TO THE INSTRUCTOR

Many students become more engaged readers, writers, and critical thinkers when they can relate classroom materials to their own lives. Conversely, students can challenge their own growth as learners when they gain access to experiences quite different from what they already know.

It was with these dual intentions that *A Brief Guide to the Novel* was conceived. I wanted to write a book for students who were new to reading and writing about novels, a book that could be used in developmental reading and writing and first-year composition classes as well as in introductory literature courses. Of course, reading a novel doesn't only involve studying literature or English. A good novel often deals with the same issues that students will encounter in psychology, sociology, or history classes. The beauty of language and the complications of human relations unfold for the reader in the very same text.

A Brief Guide to the Novel examines the many purposes of studying novels. Throughout, the focus is on critical and creative thinking, and the culturally diverse contexts in which novels are written by their authors and received by their readers. Along the way, students learn how to read and write about the novels themselves.

Features

A Brief Guide to the Novel has been designed for maximal flexibility and ease of use. The text offers:

- Two distinct sections: Part I covers such *strategies* as how to break the novel into parts, how to identify different novelistic genres, how to analyze cultural contexts, and how to write about novels. Part II introduces a series of *discussion guides* based on ten different literary texts, including both novels and nonfiction narratives.
- Coverage of *basic reading concepts*: Throughout the text will be found explanations of basic concepts of understanding and analyzing novels, such as structure, characters and names, symbolism, metaphor, and dialogue.
- Introduction to *cultural diversity*: Cultural contexts are explained by providing examples from novels that deal with race, social class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and religion.
- Attention to *historical contexts*: The text shows students how to read for historical contexts in both historical novels and nonfiction narratives.

- *Review of the writing process*: A brief review of the writing process is offered. Also included is an overview of the different parts and rhetorical features of an essay as well as how to write about novels.
- *Discussion guides for ten novels*: A variety of novels and nonfiction narratives have been selected for cultural diversity and varying levels of difficulty, including: *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros, *The Pearl* by John Steinbeck, and *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. These texts, and others, can be shrink-wrapped and ordered together with *A Brief Guide to the Novel*. All the texts chosen for the discussion guides reflect current trends in the teaching of reading and writing. In other words, many of the books with discussion guides included in *A Brief Guide to the Novel* are already being taught across the nation. Each discussion guide includes information about the book, information about the author, a bibliography of other works, useful Websites, study questions, a critical thinking and personal response section, and writing prompts for longer essays.
- *Suggestions for further reading*: In addition to the ten novels listed in the discussion guides, a list of works cited in the main body of the text has been included in the appendix. Using the works cited list, or choosing their own personal favorites, instructors can select novels for inclusion on the course syllabus, in addition to the novels covered by the discussion guides.
- *A book-specific Website*: For additional novel-related resources, I've prepared a Website to accompany this book. Please visit *A Brief Guide to the Novel's* Website at <http://www.ablongman.com/bernstein>.
- *A complete instructor's manual* includes teaching tips, answers to questions, and other resources for classroom use. Ask your sales representative for ISBN 0-321-08164-1.

SPECIAL OFFERS

Most of the books included in the discussion guides can be shrink-wrapped with this text at a heavily discounted price through the Longman/Penguin alliance. For more information on how to bundle a Penguin title with this text, please consult your Longman sales representative. Also ask for information on *The Longman Reader's Journal* and other free ancillary materials.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my editors, Steven Rigolosi (acquisitions), for believing in and supporting this project from its inception, and Jennifer Krasula (development), for offering expert guidance and suggestions from beginning to end. I would also like to thank family, friends, colleagues, and students who sent e-mails, took me out for tea and sympathy, and otherwise added thoughtful perspectives and recommendations. Included among the many are Aaron Bernstein, Missy Starcher, Ann Green, Linda Fellag, Angela Graham, James Wrable, Amy Winans, Francie Blake, Tom Ott, Deb Meem, and Michelle Gibson. Michael Bibby offered invaluable suggestions for the Tim O'Brien discussion guide. Debbie Schick introduced me to the work of Gish Jen. Melvin and Maria Metilits and Julie Greenberg provided quiet writing spaces in the summer of 1999, when this book was in its germinal stages.

Most of all, I would like to thank my spouse, Stephen Cormany, a writer himself, who understands the pressures and joys of creating something new with words—and who willingly gave a listening and patient ear when it mattered most of all.

In addition, I would like to thank the reviewers at several institutions, who read the initial proposal and added their expertise for revision suggestions for *A Brief Guide to the Novel*:

Kathy Albertson, Georgia Southern University
 Patty Baldwin, San Francisco State University
 Chauna Craig, University of Arkansas at Monticello
 Nicole Pepinster Greene, University of Louisiana at Lafayette
 Barbara Hughes, Rio Hondo College
 Billi J. Johnson, University of Cincinnati
 Deborah T. Meem, University of Cincinnati
 Carol Norton, Mount San Antonio College
 Tom Ott, Community College of Philadelphia
 Denise Rogers, University of Louisiana at Lafayette
 Kari Sayers, Marymount College
 Eileen Smith, Marymount College

Susan Naomi Bernstein
 Houston, Texas

TO THE STUDENT

Mirrors and Windows

Imagine the world beyond your classroom—a world that you probably know all too well. Consider your relationships with family, neighbors, and strangers, in times of celebration and in times of conflict. Now reflect for a moment on the book you hold in your hands, *A Brief Guide to the Novel*. Think of this book as holding a mirror, of sorts, of your own world—and a window overlooking a world of new and potentially mind-opening experiences.

For many people, a novel can serve as both a mirror and a window. You can see aspects of your own life reflected back to you, while at the same time you have a chance to observe lives, times, and experiences quite different than anything you have ever known before. *A Brief Guide to the Novel* will assist in this process by introducing you to reading and writing about novels and nonfiction narratives.

What You'll Find

Throughout the first section of this book, you'll find excerpts or summaries of a variety of novels that may be of interest to you. These novels are listed in a works cited list in the appendix. In the second section, you'll discover ten discussion guides that introduce you to novels that you may or may not read in class. Take a look at these discussion guides to see which of these books you might be interested in reading on your own.

What would it be like to grow up in Brooklyn or Chicago or Minnesota or South Carolina? How do families deal with poverty and hunger? What is it like to emigrate to a new country and to try to communicate in a new language? How do people and societies deal with such catastrophic and dehumanizing events as slavery in the United States or the Holocaust in Eastern Europe? How does reading about these experiences help you to learn more about your own life and times? Look in a mirror or through a window—read a novel!

Susan Naomi Bernstein
Houston, Texas

Brief Contents

Preface xi

Part I Overview of the Novel 1

Chapter 1	Getting Started: Why Readers Read Novels	3
Chapter 2	Breaking It Down: Steps for Reading a Novel	8
Chapter 3	Parts of the Whole: Structure and Elements of a Novel . .	18
Chapter 4	Cultural Contexts: Struggling with Identity	28
Chapter 5	Re-Creating History: Nonfiction Narratives and Historical Novels	34
Chapter 6	Writing as a Process: Developing Your Own Writing Process	37
Chapter 7	What Is an Essay? A Brief Review	44
Chapter 8	Writing about Novels: What to Keep in Mind	51

Part II Discussion Guides 59

Bastard Out of Carolina by Dorothy Allison (1992)	61
O Pioneers! by Willa Cather (1913)	68
The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros (1984)	79
The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave by Frederick Douglass (1845)	88
Typical American by Gish Jen (1991)	94
The Color of Water by James McBride (1996)	107
The Things They Carried by Tim O'Brien (1990)	115
The Pearl by John Steinbeck (1947)	124
The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain (1885)	128
Night by Elie Wiesel (1958)	141

*Appendix Bibliography of Novels and Nonfiction Narratives
Mentioned in A Brief Guide to the Novel 147*

Glossary 153

Index 157

Detailed Contents

Preface xi

Part I	Overview of the Novel	xi
Chapter 1	Getting Started: Why Readers Read Novels	3
	READING FOR ENJOYMENT	3
	<i>Novels and Nonfiction Narratives Based on Historic Events</i>	3
	<i>The Immigrant Experience</i>	4
	<i>Genres of the Novel</i>	5
	READING FOR IDEAS	6
	<i>First Clue—Language and Dialect</i>	6
	<i>Second Clue—Chronology</i>	6
	<i>Third Clue—Nature as a Symbol</i>	7
Chapter 2	Breaking It Down: Steps for Reading a Novel	8
	GETTING READY: PREVIEWING A NOVEL	8
	IN PROCESS: WHAT TO EMPHASIZE	14
	<i>Realistic Novels</i>	14
	<i>Romantic Novels</i>	14
	<i>Postmodern Novels</i>	14
	READING AND RESPONDING TO THE NOVEL: GETTING INVOLVED . . .	15
	FULL CIRCLE: TIPS FOR COMPLETING THE NOVEL	16
Chapter 3	Parts of the Whole: Structure and Elements of a Novel	18
	STRUCTURE: THE BARE BONES	18
	<i>Introduction</i>	19
	<i>Plot</i>	20
	<i>Conflict</i>	21
	<i>Conclusion and Resolution</i>	22
	CONTRIBUTING ELEMENTS: ADDING TO THE STORY	22
	<i>Theme</i>	22
	<i>Narrator and Point of View</i>	23
	<i>Characters and Names</i>	24
	<i>Dialogue</i>	25
	<i>Symbolism, Imagery, and Metaphor</i>	26

Chapter 4	Cultural Contexts: Struggling with Identity	28
	RACE	28
	ETHNICITY	29
	RELIGION	30
	SOCIAL CLASS	31
	GENDER	32
	SEXUAL ORIENTATION	33
Chapter 5	Re-Creating History:	
	Nonfiction Narratives and Historical Novels.	34
	NONFICTION NARRATIVES	34
	HISTORICAL NOVELS	35
Chapter 6	Writing as a Process: Developing Your Own	
	Writing Process.	37
	QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT YOUR WRITING PROCESS	37
	<i>Why?</i>	37
	<i>What?</i>	37
	<i>How?</i>	38
	<i>Where?</i>	38
	INVENTION	39
	<i>Brainstorming</i>	39
	<i>Mapping</i>	40
	<i>Freewriting</i>	40
	<i>Keeping a Reading Journal</i>	41
	MOVING FROM INVENTION TO ESSAY	42
	<i>Identifying Important Ideas</i>	42
	<i>Outlines</i>	42
	<i>Drafting and Revising</i>	43
	<i>Editing and Proofreading</i>	43
Chapter 7	What Is an Essay? A Brief Review.	44
	THESIS STATEMENTS	45
	TOPIC SENTENCES	45
	PARAGRAPHS	46
	WRITING THE INTRODUCTION	47
	WRITING THE BODY	48
	WRITING THE CONCLUSION	48
Chapter 8	Writing about Novels: What to Keep in Mind	51
	UNDERSTANDING WRITING PROMPTS	51
	<i>Analysis</i>	51
	<i>Cultural Critique</i>	52
	<i>Comparison/Contrast</i>	53
	<i>Research Papers</i>	54
	DEVELOPING IDEAS FOR YOUR ESSAY	56
	<i>Searching for Ideas</i>	56
	<i>Deciding on a Topic</i>	56
	USING THE NOVEL AS YOUR PRIMARY SOURCE	56
	<i>Summary</i>	56
	<i>Quotation</i>	57
	<i>Paraphrase</i>	57
	A WORD ABOUT CREATIVE WRITING	57

Part II	Discussion Guides	59
Bastard Out of Carolina by Dorothy Allison (1992)		61
ABOUT THE BOOK		61
AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY		61
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF OTHER WORKS		61
USEFUL WEBSITES		62
STUDY QUESTIONS		62
PERSONAL RESPONSE AND CRITICAL THINKING		66
WRITING PROMPTS		66
O Pioneers! by Willa Cather (1913)		68
ABOUT THE BOOK		68
AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY		68
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF OTHER WORKS		68
USEFUL WEBSITES		69
STUDY QUESTIONS		69
PERSONAL RESPONSE AND CRITICAL THINKING		76
WRITING PROMPTS		77
The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros (1984)		79
ABOUT THE BOOK		79
AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY		79
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF OTHER WORKS		79
USEFUL WEBSITES		80
STUDY QUESTIONS		80
PERSONAL RESPONSE AND CRITICAL THINKING		86
WRITING PROMPTS		86
The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave by Frederick Douglass (1845)		88
ABOUT THE BOOK		88
AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY		88
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF OTHER WORKS		88
USEFUL WEBSITES		89
STUDY QUESTIONS		89
PERSONAL RESPONSE AND CRITICAL THINKING		92
WRITING PROMPTS		92
Typical American by Gish Jen (1991)		94
ABOUT THE BOOK		94
AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY		94
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF OTHER WORKS		94
USEFUL WEBSITES		95
STUDY QUESTIONS		95
PERSONAL RESPONSE AND CRITICAL THINKING		104
WRITING PROMPTS		104
The Color of Water by James McBride (1996)		107
ABOUT THE BOOK		107
AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY		107
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF OTHER WORKS		107
USEFUL WEBSITES		108

STUDY QUESTIONS	108
PERSONAL RESPONSE AND CRITICAL THINKING	113
WRITING PROMPTS	113
The Things They Carried by Tim O'Brien (1990)	115
ABOUT THE BOOK	115
AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY	115
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF OTHER WORKS	116
USEFUL WEBSITES	116
STUDY QUESTIONS	117
PERSONAL RESPONSE AND CRITICAL THINKING	122
WRITING PROMPTS	122
The Pearl by John Steinbeck (1947)	124
ABOUT THE BOOK	124
AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY	124
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF OTHER WORKS	124
USEFUL WEBSITES	125
STUDY QUESTIONS	125
PERSONAL RESPONSE AND CRITICAL THINKING	127
WRITING PROMPTS	127
The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn by Mark Twain (1885)	128
ABOUT THE BOOK	128
AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY	128
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF OTHER WORKS	128
USEFUL WEBSITES	129
STUDY QUESTIONS	129
PERSONAL RESPONSE AND CRITICAL THINKING	139
WRITING PROMPTS	139
Night by Elie Wiesel (1958)	141
ABOUT THE BOOK	141
AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY	141
BIBLIOGRAPHY OF OTHER WORKS	142
USEFUL WEBSITES	142
STUDY QUESTIONS	142
PERSONAL RESPONSE AND CRITICAL THINKING	145
WRITING PROMPTS	145
 <i>Appendix Bibliography of Novels and Nonfiction Narratives</i> Mentioned in <i>A Brief Guide to the Novel</i> 147	
<i>Glossary</i> 153	
<i>Index</i> 157	

Part 1

Overview of the Novel

Chapter 1	Getting Started: Why Readers Read Novels	3
Chapter 2	Breaking It Down: Steps for Reading a Novel	8
Chapter 3	Parts of the Whole: Structure and Elements of a Novel	18
Chapter 4	Cultural Contexts: Struggling with Identity	28
Chapter 5	Re-Creating History: Nonfiction Narratives and Historical Novels	34
Chapter 6	Writing as a Process: Developing Your Own Writing Process	37
Chapter 7	What Is an Essay? A Brief Review	44
Chapter 8	Writing about Novels: What to Keep in Mind	51

GETTING STARTED: WHY READERS READ NOVELS



“It was such a relief not to have to sit in those boring classes, to be able to read as much as I wanted. . . .”

—Dorothy Allison, Bastard Out of Carolina

Why do readers read? Bone Boatwright, the main character in Dorothy Allison’s novel, reads to escape boredom and to find a safer place away from her life in white Southern poverty. Bone is the oldest child of a teenage mother and a sexually abusive stepfather. Through her reading, she imagines a better place.

In his nonfiction narrative, Frederick Douglass writes about how learning to read helped him to escape from slavery. Douglass writes that reading “gave tongue to interesting thoughts of my own soul, which had frequently flashed through my mind and died away for want of utterance.”

Reading opens doors to new and interesting ideas. Reading a **novel** (a long fictional prose story, often divided into chapters) or a **nonfiction narrative** (a story that tells real-life events) can create new worlds and bring old ones to life. In the following pages you will experience many of the possibilities that reading has to offer.

READING FOR ENJOYMENT

In novels and nonfiction narratives, there are many examples of real-world connections. Writers choose to write novels and nonfiction narratives for many reasons. For instance, some writers choose to write about how historical events have affected the lives of ordinary people or how important events, such as immigrating to a new country, can have life-changing results for future generations.

Novels and Nonfiction Narratives Based on Historic Events

Historic events, such as wars, can seem too distant and far away to people who live in the twenty-first century. In novels and nonfiction narratives, writers can take those faraway events and show how ordinary people feel and act when faced with extraordinary situations.

- In *The Things They Carried*, Tim O'Brien writes about how a young man from Minnesota faces the Vietnam War in the late 1960s. The young man is afraid to be drafted and considers running away to Canada. This novel shows how difficult such decisions were for young men at that time. O'Brien writes about what it means to have courage and about how young men face their fears both on and off the battlefield.
- In the nonfiction narrative *Born on the Fourth of July*, Ron Kovic writes about the same subject. He tells a story about his own life and how it changed after he was paralyzed by a war injury.
- Lan Cao gives readers another perspective on the Vietnam War. Her novel, *Monkey Bridge*, concerns a young woman, Mai, who is a high school senior and a refugee from Vietnam. Mai must deal with adjusting to life in Virginia. At the same time, she must also cope with her own flashbacks of the war and with the poor health of her widowed mother.

The Immigrant Experience

The immigrant experience of past generations is another subject that novels and nonfiction narratives can bring to life for the reader. Sandra Cisneros, Gish Jen, and Anzia Yezierska write about the lives of recent immigrants to the United States. They write these novels in order to show how a variety of characters face the challenges of everyday life in a new country. These novels also present some of the history of immigrants' experiences.

- In *The House on Mango Street*, Sandra Cisneros writes from the point of view, or perspective, of Esperanza, a young girl whose father is an immigrant from Mexico. Esperanza comments on her father's troubles with language:

My father says when he came to this country he ate hamandeggs for three months. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Hamandeggs. That was the only word he knew. He doesn't eat hamandeggs anymore.

- In *Typical American*, Gish Jen writes about Chinese immigrants in New York in the 1950s.
- In *Bread Givers*, Anzia Yezierska writes about Eastern European Jewish immigrants, also in New York, in the early years of the twentieth century.

James McBride also writes about the life of an Eastern European Jewish immigrant to New York—his mother. His mother grew up in an Orthodox Jewish family in rural Virginia. After finishing high school, she moved to New York City and eventually married James McBride's father, an African-American man.

His father died before he was born, and his mother married again, an African-American man who was a supportive stepfather for James. The family grew up poor in Brooklyn. James McBride's mother converted to Christianity and would not admit to her children that she was white. Instead, she said, "I'm light-skinned."

In his nonfiction narrative, *The Color of Water*, McBride includes two different points of view: his mother's and his own. He alternates between them in

each chapter. These stories, presented back-to-back, illustrate the comparisons and contrasts between how James and his mother grew into adulthood.

Genres of the Novel

Novels often fall into many different **genres** (categories or types). Listed below are several genres of the novel.

- **Fantasy:** A fantasy novel deals with the fantastical or imaginative world. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* by J. K. Rowling is an example of a fantasy novel.
- **Historical:** A historical novel is concerned with events in history. *Martha Peake: A Novel of the Revolution* by Patrick McGrath is an example of a historical novel.
- **Horror:** A horror novel shows surprising and frightening situations in order to create feelings of intense fear for the reader. *Misery* by Stephen King is an example of a horror novel.
- **Mystery:** A mystery novel presents a puzzling crime for the main characters (and the reader) to solve. *Gone Fishin': An Easy Rawlins Mystery* by Walter Mosley is an example of a mystery novel.
- **Political:** A political novel takes as its subject the structure or dealings of government or the state. *All the King's Men* by Robert Penn Warren is an example of a political novel.
- **Romance:** A romance novel deals with sexual love, particularly in an idealized form. *Vows* by Rochelle Alers is an example of a romance novel.
- **Science Fiction:** A science fiction novel presents a plot based on imaginary scientific discoveries, environmental changes, space travel, or life on other planets. *The Telling* by Ursula K. LeGuin is an example of a science fiction novel.
- **Western:** A western novel shows some aspect of frontier life in the American West. *Riders of the Purple Sage* by Zane Grey is an example of a Western novel.

Making Connections

As you can see, novels and nonfiction narratives show people from all walks of life faced with many different kinds of life situations. Reading can introduce you to these different worlds and show how characters deal with a variety of both familiar and unfamiliar life issues. Make a list of the different kinds of life situations and issues about which you might enjoy reading. Make a second list of the books in this chapter that sound interesting to you. Ask a librarian or do an Internet search to find a novel or nonfiction narrative that matches your interests. If you are interested in reading any of the novels or nonfiction narratives that are mentioned throughout this text, you can learn more about them in the Appendix on page 147.