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Access Literature

An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama

文学基础教程

小说部分

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什么是文学？

陈永国

　　英语中 literacy（读写能力）一词在 19 世纪末刚刚出现，在此之前，literature（文学）代替 literacy 指代一种既能够阅读的能力（读）又能被阅读的能力（写），具备这种能力的人也就是人们通常所说的"有文化"的人。而我们现在所说的这种"文学"，即由诗歌、小说、戏剧、散文、寓言、讲演等文类（体裁）构成的艺术样式，则始终由"诗歌"来指代。

　　作为"文学"的这种读写能力从古代出现伊始就具有功利性。比如，人们担心忘记了做过的事情，就把它刻在岩石上或洞穴的墙上；当人们打了胜仗回来，聚集在篝火周围欢快地唱着、舞着的时候，第一首战争歌曲诞生了；当人们感到某种冲动，要向冥冥中某种超自然的力量表示感激、恐惧、祈福、忏悔等各种情感和内在需求时，祈祷也随之出现了；而当这种祈祷一代一代地接续下去，关于神的故事也便口传下来，古老的神圣经典形成了。据说基督教《圣经》中记载的大洪水的故事在公元前 4000 年时就发生了，最初是迦勒底人用"楔形文字"刻在泥匾上的，后来经过多少世纪的铭刻和抄写，才以最后的形式进入《圣经》。

　　世界上最早的"书"在摩西诞生 2000 年之前就出现了，比荷马史诗和所罗门的《箴言》还早 2500 年，比印度的《吠陀经》早 2000 年，这就是古埃及人写在卷轴上的《卜塔－霍特普的箴言》。埃及的芦苇、欧洲的牛皮、中国的竹简和丝绸都是用来制作古书的原材料。当中国的造纸技术和活版印刷（比西方的活版印刷早 300 年）出现之后，我们才有了现在的纸制书。但是，即使在古代，也并非所有的书都是"文学"。古埃及人写了大量的书，但大部分属于宗教、道德、法律、修辞、代数、测量、几何、医学、旅游等，只有少数属于"文学"，而我们上面提到的那本《箴言》却是以小说的形式写成的，或许可以称为世界上最早的一部小说。

　　文学的功利性不仅体现为人对神的祈祷，以期过上更好的生活或度过一次平安的旅行，而且有更大的用途。柏拉图认为诗歌（文学）是模仿之作，离他所说的现实（理念）隔了两层，是对模仿的模仿，因此诗人是说谎者，有害于社会的伦理道德，所以他才要把这些

说谎者逐出他的"理想国"。到了贺拉斯时代，诗歌的功用被规定为娱乐和教化，但和柏拉图一样，无论是娱乐还是教化，诗歌的真正目的在于传达真理。在这个意义上，文学始终是手段，是传达思想的一种方式，而文学的目的则在别处，即我们现在所说的文学的伦理性、意识形态性、政治性等。文学作为一种艺术，从一开始就不是纯粹的"为艺术而艺术"，它必然有某种其他用途。在欧洲中世纪的宗教法庭上，如果犯人可以背诵几句《圣经》里的诗篇，便可以因为"有文化"而保住性命。而在 21 世纪的今天，据说哪怕是在商务谈判席上，深厚的文学修养也能帮助促成大笔的生意。

文学的这种功利性既阻碍又促进了文学的发展，因为恰恰是这种功利性使社会／国家建立了文学审查制度。有学者把历史上的两次"焚书"事件看做是最早的文学审查运动：一次是中国秦始皇的"焚书坑儒"，另一次是古罗马恺撒的"焚书"，他于公元前 48 年烧毁了藏于亚历山大图书馆的部分书籍。文学的审查制度衍生于政治的审查制度，从根本上说是文学政治性和意识形态性的具体体现和克星——文学作品之所以要经过审查，是因为它具有"颠覆性"，因此需要克服。这种"颠覆性"虽然是漫长的，但它对社会权力关系的破坏有时比暴力反抗和武力征服还要彻底。所以，世界史上历代统治者都为了维护自己的政权而压制包括文学在内的"新学"的发展。除上面提到的秦始皇和恺撒的"焚书"外，还有古希腊对政治家、哲学家、艺术家的迫害，古罗马对犹太人、基督徒的迫害等，这些迫害都是由于被迫害者的著作被认为具有颠覆当下权威和世俗习惯的危险。然而，这种审查也可能是由于对文本的不同理解和解释造成的：如印度佛教中大乘、小乘之争，犹太人关于托提法典的解释，基督教徒对教义的阐释，伊斯兰教关于《古兰经》的诠释等。这种审查制度一旦落实到具体的文学创作上来，原本自由的文学创造便有了限制，如道德和习俗对文学内容的限制。从这个意义上说，文学对现实的反映和表现只能是部分的、偏颇的，而不是全面的、彻底的。文学也因此往往受到了不公正的待遇。

文学的审查制度显然与统治阶级的利益直接相关，这只从一方面使文学具有了鲜明的社会性和阶级性。文学的社会性和阶级性还以社会阶层的分化为体现。在 18 世纪，文学基本上是一个社会概念或阶级概念，是教育的标志，属于受过完好教育的高雅社会的特权：只有上层社会识文断字的男人们和女人们才能读懂那些"印刷成册的书"。文学并不是社会各阶层所共同拥有的财产。随着工业革命的发展，剧烈的资本主义竞争促成了帝国主义的掠夺和殖民地的占领，以浓厚的民族意识为基础的民族主义应运而生。换言之，大工业对农业和手工业的改造也促成了文化的改造和进步，这在文学上体现为用本族语言写作，用普通大众的语言写作，或者，科学技术的进步提高了社会的文化和教育水平，从而使文学走出高雅文化的殿堂，进入了大众文化的领域。其实，这种转变并不是在现代才开始的。但丁、薄伽丘和乔叟就是欧洲文艺复兴之前和之初的例子。

实际上，从高雅向通俗的转变涉及到文学标准的制定，"识文断字"（读写能力）和"印刷成册的书"显然不是判断文学的标准。一方面，写在纸上的不都是文学；另一方面，未

写在纸上的也未必不是文学。就前者而言，电话簿、菜单、说明书等不是文学；就后者而言，在文字出现之前，在印刷技术普及之前，就有悠久的口传文学传统，而且至今仍有一些口传文学没有文字记载。由此可见，我们不能根据特定阶级、特定社会、特定历史时代的需要来界定文学和制定文学的标准，而必须从文学的表现力、语言结构和文学作为自治性客体的审美统一性来界定文学。这样，文学的标准便具有了审美的维度：即审美趣味、审美感性、想象力、创造性，最后是经典、传统和文学制度的形成。这些是文学的本质属性，它们直接决定着文学的文学性。

文学的文学性直接关系到文学对世界的认识，它对这种认识的再现，它用什么样的语言进行这种再现，以及这种再现创造了什么样的文本或话语。文学的文学性在于它能使用某种创造性语言来表达人对世界的最深切感受，通过与世界的艺术性接触，揭示亘古不变的真理。古典主义和新古典主义都把文学看做反映现实、照给自然的一面镜子，文学与世界处于一种模仿与被模仿的关系；文学创造的资源是外部世界。表现主义认为文学表达人的内在感受，揭示人的内心世界，把作者对外部世界的认识、洞见、智慧甚至先见通过文学手段表达出来；在此，文学创造的资源是内心世界和内化了的外部世界。这是看待文学的两个不同视角——模仿论和表现论，如果把这两个视角与说教的视角结合起来，我们就可以给文学一个简单的概括：文学既描写外部世界又反映内在世界，通过这种描写和反映来传播思想和抒发感情。

如果说这样一个简单概括回答了文学是什么的问题，但却没能回答人为什么写作、为什么创作文学和艺术的问题。从人的本体角度来看，人是展示世间万物之本；没有人，世间万物就无法被认识，被揭示，人也因而无法认识和揭示自身。古典主义向来认为人对世界的认识就是认识人自身，人通过揭示世界而揭示自身。从这个意义上说，人是认识工具、感知工具，而认识和感知的结果都是对自然和存在的揭示，都是在个别的独立存在和无序中建立某种关系和秩序，都是给多样性的世界强加某种统一性。在人与世界的关系上，人显然把自己放在一个关键的、主导的、决定一切的位置。人想要成为这个世界的主宰，或者，人要感觉到自己是世界的主宰，要成为这个无序世界的组织者，或者成为新世界的缔造者，于是，人便有了创造的冲动。而归根结底，这股冲动是"一种充满激情的要说话的自由，[是]作者僭取自由的结果"（萨特语）。作家要揭示世界，向其他人揭示自身，从而使自己和他人承担在世的某种责任，在爱、恨、愤怒、恐惧、快乐、尊严、赞赏、希望和绝望等情感状态中揭示真理。由此看来，写作纯然是一种伦理行为，这种伦理行为本身就是有约束的。

如上所述，文学的伟大性首先在于它的创造性，但创造本身就意味着打破传统的束缚，抛弃文学既定的语法、规则和律法，把现实的变成虚构的，把"真经正传"变成"伪经外传"，把凝固的时间和地点变成流动的状态，把普遍的和一般的落实在特殊的和具体的个人身上。归根结底，文学描写的是个体的人，讲述的是瞬间发生的事件，呈现的是栩栩如生的生活

世界。文学不是历史。文学叙述过程中的现在，历史叙述经验中的过去；文学参与流动的今日世界，历史凝固于不变的昔日辉煌。然而，如果你仔细审视作家笔下的过去，不管它多么黄金和荣光，都免不了人生的困境，都躲不过痛苦和悲伤，即便是美好的记忆也是令人伤感的，即便是伟人的丰功伟绩也只能面临人类的普遍悲剧。所以，伟大的作家最终面对的只是现实问题：战争、物欲、金钱、权力，人终究要被这些物质的东西所毁灭。所以，真正的作家所必须描写的，值得为之流血流汗的，如福克纳所说，必然是人与人的心灵的冲突，人与人的生存困境的冲突，这才是文学的内涵，这才是为什么写作的真正原因。

我们必须在这样一种理解的基础上来"接近文学"，通过具体的阅读和书写体验来理解文学，体味文学，鉴赏文学，实践文学，这也正是 access literature 的真正意思。而 access literature 就是 access life。小说家、诗人和剧作家用他们的作品展现栩栩如生的生活，那是一个既平凡普通又光怪陆离的世界。那里有天堂的极乐，也有地狱的景象；有灿烂的星光和月色，也有血腥的屠杀和死亡；有市井小民琐碎的日常生活，也有英雄人物的厮杀疆场。在视觉、听觉乃至嗅觉的感知中，作家笔下编织的是反映哲学问题、社会问题、心理问题、政治问题、伦理问题甚至作家的个人问题的一幅全景图。

如何理解文学、如何正确领悟作家所赋予其作品的内在含义，并不能仅凭阅读者自身的感觉来实现。普通大众读者对文学作品的理解常常流于作家在故事中所渲染的气氛以及或喜或悲的结局，而无法深刻理解作家的思路和情感，从根本上说，这是因为普通读者缺乏对作品中所运用的文学手法、历史背景、情节设计等等文学要素的把握能力。

作为文学的学习者和研究者，文学专业的学生和教师必须脱离这一低级层次而进入更高的境界，所以他们必须具备深刻理解文学要素的能力，从而准确地把握作家所赋予其作品的或浅显或深刻的意义。本书的写作初衷，就是要使读者具备这种专业能力。

对文学概念的阐释是文学教材不可或缺的重要部分。作为入门级的文学教材，Access Literature 极具特色：无论是小说、诗歌还是戏剧部分，每一章的开头都采用学生所熟悉的图片，引导出与之有密切内在关联的文学概念，成功地把令初学者望而生畏的文学概念关联到浅显、生动的日常生活图景上，从而使读者轻松地理解和把握。

对例文的选择同样独具匠心：本书所选用的 53 篇小说、314 首诗歌和 12 部戏剧，既让学生领略到传统文学宝库的经典篇章，又使他们能够欣赏到令人兴奋而且丰富多彩的当代文学，包括前卫派、超小说等等。

本书可以作为高等学校英语专业文学课程教材。在文学概念的阐释、作品的选择、思考问题的设置等方面较国内现有自编教材有突出的优越之处，值得学习和借鉴。

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PREFACE

Why Another Literature Anthology?

Access Literature is a compact, three-genre literature textbook designed for the Introduction to Literature, Writing About Literature, or Literature for Composition course. It covers fiction, poetry, and drama, and introduces students to the elements of literature they need to understand in order to analyze and write critically about literary texts. *Access Literature* provides students with a grounding in the traditional canon that is a vital part of our literary heritage, while at the same time presenting the diverse voices that are an essential part of our cultural record and an exciting force in contemporary literature.

What makes *Access Literature* different from other introduction to literature texts is the inclusion of images from everyday culture in order to show students how much they already know about literary concepts such as irony, point of view, and symbolism, for example. Students already savvy to the importance of setting in other media (even if only intuitively), will more easily understand how setting functions in a work of literature when presented with a photo of a bookstore pretending to be a comfortable study, and when the workings of that artifice are made clear. Students already familiar with plot will appreciate that even the television commercials use plot in ways similar to literature. Movie posters, tattoos, urban street murals, computer icons—all are visual texts our students interpret with ease every day. In *Access Literature*, we have found visual gateways into discussion of more difficult literary concepts as well. The way a student understands irony as presented visually in a movie poster, for example, becomes a gateway to understanding irony in literary texts.

Each chapter begins with visual images related to the students' everyday world, followed by a brief commentary explaining how the images reflect the concepts being taught in that chapter. For example, Chapter 6 (covering point of view in fiction) begins with screen shots from popular video and computer games. The commentary explains how the perspective of a narrator in a work of fiction resembles the perspective of the video game player's persona in the narrative of an interactive electronic game. Thus the student's familiar activity of choosing a character to "be" in a video game becomes a gateway to understanding what we mean by first person narration or third person limited omniscient narration in fiction.

A Student-Centered Approach

We believe that helping students learn to read, think, and write well is one means by which we empower them to go out and become engaged, to take an active part in their world. Quite often we find that students present themselves for college

instruction with little background in or understanding of literature in a formal sense, but with a hunger for storytelling and a love of the rhythms of music. These existing interests, with the right approach, can be translated into an understanding of complex narratives, poems, and works of drama. A student who realizes—through our real-world and pop culture examples and visuals—that her interest in and knowledge of movies and music is also transferable to an interest in short stories or plays is well on her way to being able to participate in the kind of literary discourse we would like our students to be capable of.

Flexibility for Instructors

We are concerned not only about individual students and how they learn, but also about individual instructors and the need for flexibility compatible with different teaching styles and various ways of organizing the course syllabus. *Access Literature* offers a progressive balance of traditional texts and diverse voices—a variety of selections to ensure that our book is flexible enough to be adapted to different teaching styles and emphases. Chapters as well as reading selections can be taught in any order, and we have included a thematic table of contents in the instructor's manual for those who would prefer to organize the syllabus thematically. The thematic listing is also useful for generating essay topics.

Features of Access Literature

Chapter Openers from Everyday Culture That Engage Students

Chapter openers begin with visual images drawn from a wide range of familiar places, from TV commercials to graffiti, from NASCAR to the World Wrestling Federation. *Access Literature* welcomes students into literary discourse by helping them realize that the elements of literature they discuss in the classroom simply reflect concepts and ideas that we encounter in our daily lives. In other words, literature itself is simply a reflection of human experience, and everyday culture is the access point from which students can begin to understand literature:

- In Chapter 1, movie posters serve to visually represent elements such as setting, characterization, and irony.
- Computer icons help to explain metaphor and symbolism in Chapter 8.

- In Chapter 20, advertisements help illustrate open form in poetry.
- Protest and performance poetry are introduced in Chapter 22 using graffiti.
- In Chapter 26, WWF scenarios provide an illustration of conflict and climax in the discussion of plot and form in drama.

Literature and Its Access Points

Access Literature offers instructors and students a full array of readings, and information on the authors who bring this literature to life.

- **The Readings**—We have sought a rich diversity of works to represent characters and voices from various socioeconomic backgrounds as well as diverse racial and cultural experiences. Our students increasingly need a sense that literature's interests and themes are cross-cultural, that our world community is growing closer, that there is more and more cultural cross-fertilization. We believe that it is important for this to be represented accurately not only to students at urban and remarkably international campuses like our own, but also at campuses where the student population may not yet be as diverse.
- **The "Bookshelf" Chapters**—In addition to the carefully-selected readings used to illustrate literary concepts in each element's chapter, there are also collections of additional readings in fiction (Chapter 12), poetry (Chapter 23), and drama (Chapter 31).
- **Author Pictures and Biographical Information**—Author photos and their bios help students realize that these works of literature were written by real people with real lives. In the poetry unit, biographical notes on 59 poets are collected in a separate chapter.
- **In-depth Author Profile Chapters**—Profile chapters of Flannery O'Connor in fiction, Langston Hughes in poetry, and David Ives in drama lead off each unit. In choosing these three authors, we liked the mix of a contemporary writer, a modern poet and an avant-garde playwright. We feel the thematic balance is optimum here too: O'Connor raises profound moral questions, Hughes brings to the fore the importance of racial history and progress in American society, and David Ives' irreverent, cutting-edge comedies never fail to delight students. These profile chapters not only give students a close look at the three writers' lives and work but also serve to introduce students to discourse in each genre.
- **"Talking Lit" Readings**—At the end of most chapters, we have included reading selections that include excerpts from critical articles, interviews, reviews, and other materials that help illuminate the literary texts in each chapter.

Closer Looks at Literature

In addition to the chapters one would expect in a literature text, we have also included chapters designed to offers students a different view of literature:

- **Chapters on Myth**—Within each genre unit, we have included a chapter on myth: Myth and Fiction (Chapter 9), Myth and Poetry (Chapter 21), and Myth and Drama (Chapter 29). We have found that students respond well to a discovery of cross-cultural mythic patterns in literature. The study of mythic patterns— as defined by Carl Jung and later elucidated by Joseph Campbell—leads students to extraordinary recognitions having to do with universal human experience as well as the specifically American experience.
- **Cutting Edge Chapters**—Each genre unit also contains a Cutting Edges chapter that examines works that are avant-garde, provocative, and grassroots: Chapter 11, "Metafiction and Avant-Pop," Chapter 22, "Protest and Performance Poetry," and Chapter 30, "Grassroots Theater."

Assignments That Engage and Teach

- **Your Turn—Talking and Writing about Lit**—Following the works of literature, students will find study questions, writing topics, and DIY (Do It Yourself) creative writing exercises. We find that many students who are difficult to engage respond well when asked to try out the craft of fiction, poetry, or playwriting themselves. Our DIY topics are easy to spot; each is accompanied by an oval DIY icon.
- **"Questions to Ask About"**—Each genre profile chapter, introducing that genre, includes a list of "Questions to Ask About" the works in that genre. These boxes can serve as essay prompts, study guides for exams, or advice to help students when they are exploring reading selections.

Student Essays

Student essays on fiction, poetry, and drama topics appear within the genre units as well as in the writing and research chapters at the back of the book. We have included a total of twelve student pieces that serve not only to model a range of rhetorical modes, but also to demonstrate to students that they can produce literary commentary, that theirs are also voices offering interesting interpretation and discussion of the works of literature we read together.

Sidebars That Speak Students' Language

In our own classes, we find ourselves using frequent examples from film, popular culture, and common culture in order to explain literary concepts to students. This led us to the idea of including such materials in the book in sidebars and boxes and

giving the book a contemporary, magazine-like design that students will find more appealing. Three types of sidebars appear in the book:

- **From Page to Screen Boxes**—As most instructors have learned, references to films are a reliable way to connect with what students already know about plot, characterization, setting, symbolism, metaphor, etc. We have included "Page to Screen" boxes throughout *Access Literature* to help your students realize how much they already know about plot, characterization, setting, symbolism, etc., through their enjoyment and discussion of movies.
- **Pop Culture Boxes**—The material in the Pop Culture boxes draws attention to the similarities between discussion of a work of literature and discussion of music, a comic book, video game, or film, using textual and visual images and examples that make the connection vivid.
- **FYI Boxes**—These informative boxes may contain (for example) further biographical information on the writer, on trends in literature, historical information, interviews, or visual material that relates to one or more of the readings in the chapter.

Critical Thinking, Research, and Theory

Although we have provided a chapter at the back of the text on "Talking and Writing About Lit" (Chapter 32), the teaching of critical thinking skills and writing strategies is not confined to that chapter alone but is present everywhere in the book. Instruction in literary analysis is woven into the chapter material across the span of these pages. This encourages students to think about generating ideas for essays and approaches to organizing them. Perhaps most crucially, it can also be a way to help them learn critical thinking skills in the context of, for instance, explaining characterization in a story, or comparing two poems, or demonstrating how Shakespeare uses dramatic irony in a scene. We believe we should be helping our students learn to think independently at every step, just as a parent who teaches a child to ride a bicycle runs alongside for a time but hopes to be able before long to step out of the way and watch the child ride upright unassisted.

Knowing that students at this stage of their development as writers and thinkers still need a guiding hand, our chapter "Talking and Writing About Lit" guides students through the writing process as it also models effective rhetorical modes for literary analysis. It contains student essays in each genre as well as one on fiction and film. The student writers are analyzing and explicating works that appear in the text.

Also in Unit Four of the text is "Sources for Researching Lit" (Chapter 33), which includes instruction in how to find reliable sources (including electronic sources), write the research paper, format in-text citations, and create the Works Cited list (MLA style guidelines are modeled for students). This chapter also contains a student research paper that was written by our son Jake Winn—a college student—whose critical thinking skills frequently surpass our own.

Lastly, Unit Four contains "Access to Lit Crit: Whose Interpretation Is It?" In this chapter various critical approaches to interpretation are explained and modeled through analysis (from the perspective of each of the schools of critical theory) of Eudora Welty's "A Worn Path." A wonderful film production of "A Worn Path" (directed by Bruce R. Schwarz) is available from Wadsworth, for those who would like to combine literary criticism with film criticism.

At the back of the text, we have also included a very usable Glossary of Literary Terms. The words defined there appear in bold type in chapter discussions, and we have provided an index of terms so that students are also referred to the pages in text where these concepts are explained and used in the context of literary analysis.

Ancillaries

The ancillary program for *Access Literature* includes an instructor's manual and DVDs and videos from the Wadsworth Original Film Series in Literature.

The instructor's manual for *Access Literature* includes:

• Suggestions for using each of the chapter features

• Thematic Table of Contents

• Sample Syllabii

• An introduction to using Lit21

• Brief discussions of the "Your Turn" questions, three suggestions for writing projects, and a suggestion for a group activity

• "A Way Into" section for each poem that offers instructors a starting point for discussing each poem

• Suggestions for using the "Talking Lit" selections

In addition, five of the reading selections in *Access Literature* are available on VHS or DVD for any instructor adopting *Access Literature*, including Alice Walker's "Everyday Use," John Updike's "A&P," Langston Hughes' "Salvation," Eudora Welty's "A Worn Path," and Raymond Carver's "Cathedral."

In these pages, we seek to help you, the instructor, establish a conversation with your students in a way that both informs and delights them. We hope, then, that our text is informative, democratic, and inspiring.

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Whose Lit Is It Anyway?

If you thumb through this book, you will see an array of visual images, from movie posters to fine art, from computer icons to subway graffiti, from video game screen shots to famous authors. We hope our book looks interesting to you from the first time you open its cover. In creating works of literature, fiction writers, poets, and playwrights (whose works you will encounter here) are hoping to embody human experience—life itself—within their stories and lyrics. Literature is not the dry and dusty stuff you dread; it is instead like life itself—full of sights, sounds, smells, powerful and quirky characters, blood, death, joy, shock, disappointment and hope.

You may read from many sources of information on a daily basis (the newspaper, a biography of a recent political figure, a recipe book, your biology textbook). Unlike these more strictly informational types of writing, literature is **imaginative writing**. Fiction writers, poets, and playwrights strive in each of these imaginative **genres** (types of writing) to convey not simply information or factual knowledge, but also emotional knowledge, and often even what we call wisdom, or vision. Imaginative writing attempts to reflect the whole of human experience, in all of its various dimensions. The study of literature is an invitation to come along and explore the territory each writer guides us through, and to make discoveries there. Each author's territory is filled with sights and sounds, and vivacious or mysterious characters greet us at every turn. It is a journey of the head and of the heart. Fiction writer Eudora Welty says it this way:

> Both reading and writing are experiences—lifelong—in the course of which we who encounter words used in certain ways are persuaded by them to be brought mind and heart within the presence, the power, of the imagination. This we find to be above all the power to reveal, with nothing barred. (*The Eye of the Story*, 134)

The three **genres** of imaginative writing which we will be studying, then, are fiction, poetry, and drama. Although **fiction** includes short, medium length, and long forms (the short story, the novella, and the novel), we will focus on the short story. Reading shorter fictions allows for greater cultural breadth in our discussion, and it helps illustrate a broad range of fictional techniques and styles. We will also study **poetry**, and you will find that the craft of writing poems has been equally varied. We will read long and short poems, lyric and narrative poems, poems in fixed forms and poems in open form. And we will study **drama** by reading plays which illustrate the general elements of the craft of playwriting. We will explore the work of William Shakespeare, still considered the greatest dramatist in the English language, and works by modern and contemporary playwrights as well.

It is important to study these forms of imaginative writing which we call literature, then, because of what sets them apart from more reportorial and informational

forms of writing. But there are also things which the study of literature has in common with the study of other forms of written expression. Reading fiction, poetry and drama in a context where you are encouraged to think, interpret, discuss, compare ideas, and do your own writing about what you discover will also help you sharpen your analytical skills. Much attention is given today to the importance of developing critical thinking skills, and the study of literature offers an excellent opportunity to do just that. At the same time, you will be sampling stories, poems, and plays that most readers find pleasurable to discover and discuss.

A third reason to value the study of literature is that it provides a window on other cultures, perspectives, ways of life, even other historical periods. All writers are storytellers. Reading the stories told by voices from many cultural backgrounds not only helps us to broaden our understanding and appreciation of our differences and unique attributes, it also helps us to discover how very much we have in common. Among people of every cultural heritage represented in American society, stories are told and remembered. And in every culture in our global community storytellers are at work creating many forms of literature. Human beings need these ways of exploring their experience and trying to explain their environment and their lives to themselves. People who succeed especially well at this task often seem like spokespersons for an entire culture or group or historical period. Examples might be: the African-American dramatist August Wilson, whose cycle of plays about the Black experience of American society spans many decades; William Shakespeare, similarly, for Elizabethan England (and, truly, for all of us); and Chinua Achebe, whose fictions explore tradition and change in post-colonial Africa. In addition to these more familiar examples, new or often overlooked voices will be heard here as well: Bi Shumin, who makes real the experience of contemporary mainland Chinese characters; Junot Diaz, who makes vivid the experience of Latino Americans recently arrived from the Caribbean; and Anna Castillo, the Chicago-born poet of Toltec/Aztec ancestry, who depicts her people's experience, both ancient and modern. Despite the variety of cultural and geographical landscapes represented here, there is nonetheless a common project that all of these imaginative writers are engaged in. Truly, it is the territory of the human heart that they are all exploring first and foremost.

No one needs to be taught to enjoy stories and lyrics and dramas: the desire for them is clearly universal and instinctive. These creative forms existed in one way or another even before written language, and certainly long before Johann Gutenberg's printing press (ca. 1437) began to make the printed word more widely available in the Western world (the Chinese, incidentally, used movable type as early as 970). No, we don't need to be taught the enjoyment of literature or the desire for a story. But we can learn, through study and discussion, how to understand more fully what we are reading. Sharpening one's skills of analysis can help to accomplish this.

Learning to **analyze** and discuss literature simply means learning to ask incisive questions. **Analysis** may sound to some students like a thing to be dreaded; it's a word that, for some, conjures up a notion of a process that is sterile, bloodless, or elitist. Literature, though, is anything but that; it is full of life and noise and

action; it is vivacious; it is rowdy with sights and sounds, smells, unforgettable characters. Literary analysis is simply a matter of taking the story (or poem or play) apart, down to its nuts and bolts, to see what makes it run. Analysis is also exploration and discovery, a journey through each writer's territory, gathering there what meanings, ideas, and insights the writer has worked to reveal to us.

The questions we ask, the discussion we have about a short story or play, are much like the discussions of films, comic books, video game narratives, and even the stories that are the underpinnings of WWF scenarios and rap artists' raps. It's all storytelling.

Furthermore, what we call the "elements" of literature—plot, character, setting, symbolism, metaphor, theme, rhyme, rhythm, conflict, myth, to mention a few—are all present in the everyday world around us. This may sound like a radical statement, but in a sense it's also stating the obvious. In the chapters that follow, you may recognize many things that you already know (the "aha!" factor). These recognitions will hopefully be followed by an assurance and confidence about discussing literature (the "I get it; I already know this stuff" effect). The suggestion of irony in a movie poster or trailer (like that for *Hell Boy*) will translate into confidence in recognizing irony in stories, poems, and plays. The "aha!" that computer icons are actually symbols for things in the real world as well as cyber-metaphors about them will morph into the knowledgeable discussion of symbolism in a Nathaniel Hawthorne story or metaphor in a poem by Langston Hughes.