



Important American Books for Teachers:

A "Novel" Way to Stimulate the Brain;

EDUO 9202 One Semester Credit

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Introduction

In her article "Your Brain on Fiction" (The New York Times, March 17, 2012) Annie Murphy Paul reveals that neuroscience can illustrate what happens inside the head when one reads stories with detailed descriptions, evocative metaphors and emotional exchanges between characters. According to Ms Paul these fictional writings "stimulate the brain and even change how we act in life"

For this course you will choose a novel to read from this award winning list of American authors and respond with your perceptions of how descriptions, metaphors and exchanges between characters did indeed stimulate your brain.

Objectives, Standards and Grading Rubric

Objectives

1. To be introduced to important books
2. To read important books
3. To become aware of how novels simulate the brain through the following:
 - a. sensory input through words and/or metaphors
 - b. character interactions
 - motivation
 - cause and effect
 - c. social and cultural experiences not otherwise available to the reader that are expanded upon and clarified
4. To see the novel as a vehicle for explaining the complexities of the world
5. To plan strategies to encourage students to experience objectives 1-4

Standards

1. Make connections between self, text and the world
2. Explain the relationships or interactions between two or more individuals, events, ideas or concepts in a historical setting.
3. Respond to literature by employing knowledge of literary language, textual features, and forms to read and comprehend, reflect upon and interpret literary text from a wide spectrum of American and world cultures.

Grading Rubric

Exemplary A+-A-	Acceptable B+- B-	Unacceptable
All text book assignments are complete and accurate.	All text book assignments are complete and accurate.	Textbook assignments are incomplete and/or contain inaccurate or inappropriate responses.
All application assignments are reflective, thoughtful, clearly identifiable and relevant.	All application assignments are complete, identifiable and relevant.	Application assignments are incomplete and/or irrelevant.
Overall appearance is very well organized and free of spelling and grammatical errors	Overall appearance is generally organized with limited spelling and grammatical errors.	Overall appearance shows little organization and has spelling and grammatical errors.

Assignments

1. Read Ms. Paul's New York Times article "Your Brain on Fiction"
http://www.nytimes.com/2012/03/18/opinion/sunday/the-neuroscience-of-your-brain-onfiction.html?_r=2&pagewanted=all
2. Without considering your assignments, enjoy reading your chosen novel from The National Book Awards winners list. <http://www.nationalbook.org/nba77fictionwinners.html#.T5WQLdmQIEM>
3. After completing your novel, make the following lists:
 - A. Words and/or metaphors from the book that involve texture/motion/odor or any other sensory input that entered your awareness while reading.
 - B. Examples to illustrate psychologist Raymond Mar's "theory of mind".
 - C. Major interactions between the novels fictional characters
4. Using the lists you developed for 3A, B & C discuss your novel by responding to the findings from Professor Oatley's University of Toronto study that the brain responds to fictional descriptions of smells, textures and movements as if they are the real thing. This reaction heightens the funny, insightful or profound aspects of the story and helps develop thematic concerns.
5. By employing "Mar's theory of mind:"
 - Describe the main characters; their personality traits, motivations, inner life.
 - Why do they behave as they do? Are their actions justified?
 - Do you admire or disapprove of them?
 - How do they change by book's end? Do they grow, or come to learn something about themselves and how the world works?
 - Do they remind you of people you know, or characters from other books or films?

- Describe how your novel helps the reader understand the complexities of social life. Did it change you or broaden your perspective? Have you learned something new or been exposed to different ideas about people or cultures? Explain.
- Reflect on how your novel stimulated your mind and how it may have changed how you view and/or react to life.

Assessment:

A. Complete a chart analyzing at least 5 books or stories appropriate for your grade level.

Book Name	Author	Grade Level or age	Sensory input	Well Developed characters	Cultural Awareness	Social Awareness	Characters grow in knowledge of the workings of the world	Other

- B. How can you use this information to enhance the fiction reading experience for your students.
- C. Write a brief statement that you could present to your students to convince them that through the activity of reading novels (or stories) not only can they improve their minds but will also have a greater chance of understanding the world in which they live.

For questions about this course, contact the instructor at denos@dominicancaonline.com