

Workshop
CSET Multiple Subject Test
Subtest I: Reading, Language and Literature

Presentation on Literature

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RESOURCES:

Main CSET website: <http://www.cset.nesinc.com/index.asp>
Register for the exam and obtain basic information here

CSET test guide: http://www.cset.nesinc.com/PDFs/CS_testguide_geninfo.pdf
Helpful general info on taking the test

Content Specifications for the Subject Matter Requirement for the Multiple Subject Teaching

Credential: Don't get this mixed up with the content domains for the Single Subject Credential, which you will also find on the CSET website. Each of those is listed separately (Agriculture, Art, Business, English, etc.) while the multiple subject requirements are grouped together under this single link:

http://www.cset.nesinc.com/PDFs/CS_multisubject_SMR.pdf

It's an eye-opening list of the things you are expected to know. The lists are also available in the CSET book, in the opening section of each Subtest discussion.

Books:

Barnet, Sylvan and William E. Cain. *A Short Guide to Writing About Literature*. New York: Pearson, 2006. Part three of this book is particularly useful as the authors look closely at such basic issues as plot, theme, character, figurative language, poetic structures, rhythm, meter, etc. It's also often used for English 355 so should be relatively easy to find at the campus bookstore (depending on what time of the semester you look).

Foster, Thomas C. *How to Read Literature Like a Professor: A Lively and Entertaining Guide to Reading Between the Lines*. New York: HarperCollins, 2003. The title says it all. Should be readily available at local bookstores.

Hall, Donald. *To Read Literature: Fiction Poetry Drama*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1987. This book is similar to Part three in Barnet and Cain in that it covers much the same ground but it has more examples and more in-depth discussion.

Huck, Charlotte, et.al. *Children's Literature*. Boston: McGraw Hill, 2007. This is an excellent basic text on children's literature, and any edition after the fifth will be useful. Chapter two covers similar ground as Barnet and Cain's book but specifically targets the elements of children's literature. There is useful information on poetry, folklore, nursery rhymes, realistic fiction, fantasy,

historical fiction and the history of children's literature. Also covers evaluating children's literature from a developmental perspective. Available at the bookstore just about every semester. There are also many copies available in the TCC, listed under my English 428 course. Please feel free to use these copies—they aren't just for students in my courses.

Iona and Peter Opie. For decades, this husband and wife team collected and analyzed children's nursery rhymes, games, jokes, and general playground culture. The Oviatt has more than a dozen of their books (some written jointly, some just by Iona, so I recommend a catalog search by their last name and then check out the lists under both of their first names). In particular, take a look at the introduction to *The People in the Playground*, *The Lore and Language of Childhood*, *I Saw Esau* and/or any of their Oxford collections.

Using the Test Prep Book

1. Take a look at the general strategies for taking the exam (starting on page 4).
2. Try out the Sample Questions and Strategies starting on page 16. Be sure to try out the strategies noted in the strategies section. After scoring, make note of any areas or concepts that gave you particular problems.
3. To study those areas, first go to the Review of Exam areas, starting on 161 and pinpoint the concepts that you were weakest on. This section of the test book is particularly useful for brushing up on key terms and ideas.
4. Then, for more in-depth help with these key concepts, turn to the suggested resources. For example, if you are having trouble identifying uses of personification, the review section of the test book will remind you of the basic definition of personification, while the books by Hall and by Barnet and Cain will delve further into how personification works and offer examples and discussion.
5. Most of the texts that you will come across on the CSET will be classic British and American literature and of course you should take every opportunity to read and enjoy and appreciate the "great works." But, speaking practically, you can't read them all—particularly not before you will need to take the exam. Instead, it is more useful to focus on practicing analytical reading—and you can do that with just about any piece of text you come into contact with. Do you listen to music? Pick out the songwriter's use of imagistic language or think about how the music helps to create a particular tone. Do you read Danielle Steele, Robert Ludlum or Dick Francis? Consider how the author of your latest pleasure read creates character: how do we come to know the character? Does he or she act believably? Complexly? Does he or she change over time? Do you buy these changes? Do they grow out of recognizable circumstances? Or perhaps the author is more interested in creating a tension-filled plot. If so, how does he or she do so? What, specifically, makes you want to keep reading? (or no, as the case may be?) Do you prefer non-fiction? Consider the writer's tone and use of language: how is he or she seeking to persuade you?

Remember that literature and literary concepts are all around us, in everyday life—start looking for them and thinking about how they are working. Not only will this help you on the CSET, but it will also make you a more informed and skeptical consumer of the texts that permeate our world.

In fact, after going through some of the suggestions on the next page, we'll try this out on a song by the Boomtown Rats, "Rat Trap." As the song (lyrics on the back page) plays, mark down the various literary elements that you see at work. After discussing such issues as metaphor, speaker, situation and tone, we should be able to come up with some themes that the Rats are trying to impart to us.

Reading a poem*

1. Determining the Primary Meaning:

Unscramble confusing syntax. If necessary paraphrase to figure out what is going on. Determine what the main interest is: is it in a story? A character? A character's state of mind? Is the poem a meditation? Is it descriptive? What does the description reveal?

2. Thinking about the Speaker and the Situation:

Identify the speaker: age, gender, occupation, values, personality, frame of mind. Is the speaker fully aware of what he is saying? Is he revealing things to the reader inadvertently? Is he sentimental? Ironic? Angry? Why and what does this suggest?

Identify the situation: Is there a definite time and place? What is going on? How does this knowledge help you to understand what the speaker says or the way he is saying it or why he is saying it?

Identify the dramatic audience: Is the audience a group? A single person? Is the speaker addressing you, the reader, directly? Is the speaker just speaking aloud?

Identify the tone: What is the speaker's attitude toward him or her self? Toward the audience or the situation? How do you know?

Identify irony and tension: Are there discrepancies between how the speaker sees things and the way we see them? If so, what does this suggest?

3. Thinking about Form and Structure

Form and meter: what is the effect of the form? Keep in mind that the meter (or the rhythm or beat) of a poem carries meaning. One would not, for example, want to deliver a eulogy in the bouncy form of the limerick (well, probably not anyway—it would depend on the person being eulogized and the audience for the eulogy—but probably not). Similarly, you are unlikely to find a slow, heavy meter in a nursery rhyme. One famous example of an apt use of form is in Tennyson's "Charge of the Light Brigade." In it, the meter of the opening lines echoes the galloping of the horses as the infantry charges and then ends on a down note that foreshadows the doom that awaits them: "Half a league half a league/half a league onward,/All in the valley of Death/rode the six hundred."

Structure: Is the structure repetitive? Narrative? Logical? What does the structure do for the meaning?

4. Thinking about Figurative Language:

Note instances of metaphor, simile, personification. What do these uses of figurative language do? (Just consider, for example, the difference between calling someone a rat or calling him/her a mouse. Or saying that someone is waspish or saying that s/he is like a mosquito. Or comparing your love to a summer's day or comparing him/her to a shrew.)

Also note instances of repetition, patterns or clusters of images. What do these patterns suggest in terms of meaning?

5. Thinking about Meaning and Theme

What is the purpose of the poem? To stress an idea? To offer insight into human nature? To express an emotion? To bring about social change? To create a mood or atmosphere? To satirize something or someone?

How does the author achieve this purpose? What kinds of poetic devices lead us to understand the purpose? In other words, use the material that you uncover with all of the questions above to consider how the poem ultimately has some specific meaning that you now understand.

*adapted, with many thanks, from Dorothy Clark's CIPS seminar. You may note some overlap with the guidelines in the CSET study guide, but there are also some different ideas and approaches.

The Boomtown Rats
"Rat Trap"
1978

There was a... lot of rocking going on that night,
Cruising time for the young bright lights,
Just down past the gasworks, by the meat factory door,
The five lamp boys were coming on strong.
The Saturday night city beat had already started
The pulse of the corner boys just sprang into action
And young Billy watched it all under the yellow street light
And said "tonight of all nights there's gonna be a fight"

Billy don't like it living here in this town
He says the traps have been sprung long before he was born
He says "hope bites the dust behind all the closed doors"
And pus and grime ooze from its scab crusted sores.
There's screaming and crying in the high rise blocks"
It's a rat trap Billy but you're already caught
But you can make it if you want to or you need it bad enough
You're young and good looking and you're acting kind of tough
Anyway it's Saturday night time to see what's going down.
Put on the bright suit Billy, head for the right side of town
It's only 8 o'clock but you're already bored
You don't know what it is but there's got to be more
You'd better find a way out, hey kick down the door
It's a rat trap and you've been caught

In this town Billy says "everybody tries to tell you what to do"
In this town Billy says "everybody says you gotta follow rules."
You walk up to those traffic lights,
Switch from your left to right
You push in that button, and when that button comes alight
It tells you
"Walk don't walk
Talk don't talk"
Hey Billy take a walk...with me.
Little Judy's trying to watch "top of the pops"
But mum and dad are fighting don't they ever stop,
She takes up her coat and walks out on the street,
It's cold on that road, but it's got that home beat,
Deep down in her pockets she finds 50p.,
Now is that any way for a young girl to be,
"I'm gonna get out of school work in some factory,
Work all the hours God gave me get myself a little easy money"
Now, now, now na na.

Her mind's made up, she walks down the road,
Her hands in her pockets, coat buttoned 'gainst the cold,
She finds Billy down at the Italian cafe
And when he's drunk it's hard to understand what Billy says
But then he mumbles in his coffee and suddenly roars,
"It's a rat trap Judy; and we've been caught!"
Rat trap
You've been caught in a rat trap...