
An Inquiry Into How Experienced Readers of Literature Read a Novel

Uncovering Disciplinary Ways of Reading

Reading Process Analysis with *The God of Small Things* by Arundhati Roy

As experienced readers of literature begin a novel they suspend their need to understand where they are or what is happening. They read to enter and explore a world. They read, too, for aesthetic appreciation of language itself. As Judith Langer says, literary readers entertain and explore a broad horizon of possibilities, from possible plots to multiple layers of word meaning. Literary readers know that words signify more than their denotative meaning—they connote things about the plot and characters and relationships among all these. Reading to enter a world means that literary readers will place themselves in the text, living the book. They will attend closely to things that allow them to people that world, to clothe it with scenery and action and finally, themes or larger meanings. All of which means they read to interpret the possible significance of words, relationships, and events.

Experienced readers of literature will FOCUS their attention on:

- Identifying and developing characters: who they are, their ages, their relationships
- Interactions between characters and what they imply about relationships
- The context or scene: where this is taking place, when, in what cultural milieu
- Language (literary devices): alliteration, metaphor, imagistic language, word choice as it sets the mood or tone of the piece, non-traditional sentence structures, poetic language, rich language
- Sensory details: sounds, images, feelings
- Something odd or unexpected: combinations of words, shifts of point of view, shifts of time and place
- Oddities of formatting: gaps in paragraph spacing, use of capitalization
- Non-sequentiality of text (non-chronological ordering of presentation)
- Shifts in perspective, voice
- Emerging patterns or themes: contrasts (Nature prancing, Us/Them, two-egg twins, ancient Baby), losses and grief, small things



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- The central conflict, while wading through sub-plots
- Hints that suggest things about a character or what happened or will happen
- The book or chapter title and references in the text to the title

Experienced readers of literature will ASK QUESTIONS as they read about:

- The world of the novel: Where am I? What is this culture? What is the context? What is the situation? What is important in this world?
- The setting: Where is this? Am I in the Middle East? Am I in India? What do the specific words and names for people or places tell me about where I am?
- The characters: Who is who? How are people related to each other? What do the characters know about each other? How do the characters speak differently?
- The point-of-view: Who's telling the story? Is the character speaking from an adult's perspective or a child's perspective? Do we hear all of the narrator's thoughts?
- The plot: Is this a flashback or is this occurring now? What's the conflict? How are the events unfolding and furthering the story?
- The language: Why are certain words put together in this way (immodest green)? What is being evoked by these choices of words? What does the capitalization signify?
- The relationships between language and character and setting and plot: What does the use of words evoking heat, dampness, sensuality, and darkness signify for the plot? For example, what does the echo of themes of twinning/otherness, alike/different, contrast mean for the novel as a whole?

Experienced readers of literature will form IMAGES and sensory traces (sounds, smells, feelings) as they read of:

- Details about the setting: swollen walls, mossy houses, silver ropes of rain, damp, cologne and coffinwood
- Descriptions about the characters: conscious at first of being unable to "dress" the characters as yet, Elvis babies, twins, an ancient Baby



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- The action in the story, the narrative: e.g. the bat crawling up the sari; the hot, sweaty, uncomfortable bus ride
- Contrasting images: immodest green, ancient Baby, fraternal twins

Experienced readers of literature will make PREDICTIONS about a text as well as how the text will unfold when they give attention to:

- The author's name suggests this will be a book that is about the Middle East or India in which the words will be exotic or unfamiliar
- The title suggests this will be a book about a spiritual journey, about the mundane and everyday, about philosophy, about the blessings of life, about how the small things in life are really the most important
- The language: something bad will happen in this book because the language is evoking a dark mood, one of mystery and foreboding; the sensuous language suggests the plot will focus on sensuality; the shifts between childlike language and adult points of view suggest this will be an epic of discovery about what happened in childhood
- Changes in relationship between characters: the relationships will direct the plot
- Characters knowing and experiencing things we would not ordinarily think are possible to know or feel: this will be a book where things aren't what they seem
- Half-said hints in the text: something bad (molestation?) will happen to Estha, something terrible will tear the inseparable twins apart, something will lead to the mother's early death, there is an attitude of resigned acceptance of how things are (a Viable Die-able age, the love laws)

