A Case for Classics: Problem Handouts

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Problem Statement

Ms. Edwards, the literature teacher, walks into class precisely at her usual 9 am. However, unlike other days she seems somewhat distracted. Instead of moving into the planned activities for the day after roll call, Ms. Edwards surprisingly announces that she would like to speak to the class about an important matter. The class is intrigued since Ms. Edwards can seldom be distracted from the task at hand. Ms. Edwards tells her students that she has just made a commitment, which she can not fulfill without their assistance. Her students' curiosity is piqued by the fact that they are being asked for help and they direct questioning looks at their teacher. Noticing that she has her students' attention, Ms. Edwards describes to them a city-wide initiative involving all school boards that is the result of a shared concern of literature teachers within all school districts. She explains that she and other literature teachers have become increasingly aware of the waning interest of their high school students in literature, which the school board feels are excellent examples of timeless writing. The school boards are not against popular fiction, but want to interest their students with an option that is often stereotyped as boring, ancient, and irrelevant to their lives so that they may be motivated to read these examples too. It appears that students often reject literature if it is very different from their own reality and see it as relevant only in a certain cultural, historical, and geographical context. It seems that these factors may partly come from to their rejection of the texts as archaic. By now there is a distinct murmur in the class as Ms. Edwards continues to explain how the literature teachers within the school districts want to investigate this issue further. She informs them that they have decided to seek the help of the students themselves to explore ways to change this perception and find innovative approaches to stimulate the interest of high school students in literature other than popular fiction.

"So what do we do?" exclaims a student. In response, Ms. Edwards explains that she wants them to develop a creative presentation using books that are examples of classics and showing how these examples can be used to motivate students to read literature besides popular fiction. She mentions that all school districts are participating in this initiative and will be making their presentations at the annual all day school districts' Reading Literature Retreat. Their school board, Walden City, has asked that the presentation be oral but enhanced by visuals or any other means, such as dramatics, to generate interest in consideration of the audience. The Walden City school board is eager about their students' input and is looking forward to their presentation.

The students are excited by Ms. Edwards request and the fact that they are being asked for their contribution. One of the students asks Ms. Edwards, "What kind of books can we use in the presentation?" She thinks about it for a moment and then says, "I think it would be a good idea if we chose a variety of books to show how classics can be found in all kinds of literature, though for now we can focus on literature written in English." The group moves in closer together and the discussion begins regarding what books to choose and how. Ms. Edwards who has anticipated this discussion immediately pulls out a list of books and asks your group to choose books from it to work with for their presentation. She stresses to the students that they are

expected to be creative in their presentation. She offers the following questions to consider as your group begins to discuss the problem and establish guidelines:

1. What elements of popular fiction draw students?
2. What factors impact a reader's interest in literature?
3. Is it true that contemporary readers would rather watch than read?
4. What is a classic?
5. What elements characterize a classic and how does it apply to literature?
6. Why do students perceive classics as irrelevant to their lives?
7. What is common and different between the literary work and examples of popular fiction?
8. What aspects of a literary work may evoke an interest in high school students the most and how?
9. What is role of 'setting' in literature? How does it contribute to a reader's perception of the text?
10. What characteristics of high school students might you need to consider as you plan your presentation?

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Self and Peer Evaluation Form

Your Name_____Group's Name_____

Date_____

Please write below the names of all your group members INCLUDING YOURSELF. Reflect carefully on your experience in our class and select one of the ratings which best describes your work and that of your peers as you work collaboratively at this point in the quarter. (The numbers after the ratings represent point totals. To obtain final ratings, the points will be totaled and averaged.)

Excellent (20) Consistently went above and beyond—tutored other members, carried more than his/her share of the load, clear understanding of his/her role. Very active in Blackboard Groups Area. Demonstrated respect for self and others by always reading assigned materials before class, always completing assigned tasks, always coming to class, always arriving on time. Always took responsibility to inform group if had to miss class/group meeting.

Very good (18) Consistently did what he/she was supposed to do, very well prepared and cooperative, played his/her group role appropriately. Active in Blackboard Groups Area. Consistently read materials before coming to class, came to class regularly and on time. Usually completed assigned tasks on time. Took responsibility to inform group if missed a class or group meeting.

Satisfactory (15) Usually did what he/she was supposed to do, acceptably prepared and cooperative. Sometimes completed readings ahead of class. Usually came to class and arrived on time. Usually took responsibility to inform group members if missed a class or group meeting. Fairly active in Groups Area of Blackboard.

Ordinary (12) Often did what he/she was supposed to do, but minimally prepared, usually cooperative. Basic contribution to Groups Area of Blackboard. Sometimes contacted group members if needed to miss class or group meeting.

Marginal (10) Sometimes failed to show up or complete assignments, rarely prepared. Limited contributions in Blackboard.

Deficient (6) Often failed to show up for class/group meetings or complete assignments, rarely prepared. Little to no contribution in Blackboard.

Superficial (2) Practically no participation. No contribution to Blackboard.

No show (0) No participation at all.

Your Name_____ Group's Name_____

Date_____

Note: These ratings should reflect each individual's level of participation, effort, and sense of responsibility—not his or her academic ability!

Name of Group Member	**Rating**	**You Must Provide a Comment to Support Your Rating.** *Be Specific!*

Based on Kaufman, D.B, Felder, R.M., &Fuller, H. Peer ratings in cooperative teams.

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Group Ground Rules

Complete the attached document with members of your group. You may include any rule you agree upon, however; you must include specific strategies for addressing the following issues:

- Identify consequences for and how you will address problems with students who do not contribute to the completion of a problem because they do not attend class.
- Identify consequences for students who arrive late to class on a regular basis or are absent from class without prior notification to the group.
- Identify expectations for communicating through e-mail and using the group pages on the course site in Blackboard.
- Identify consequences for students who contribute only minimally to the completion of the problem.
- Identify what happens when a student has your group worksheet/notes/etc. and doesn't come to class.

Your group will use this document during the quarter to assure that you have the most worthwhile learning experience possible.

This document will be submitted by the end of the week and the Ground Rules will be posted on the group pages on Blackboard at the same time

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Group Ground Rules Cover

Group's Name_____

The following ground rules have been discussed and agreed upon by all group members:

Signatures of Group Members: Date:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

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Student Roles Factsheet

Evaluator:
elicits critique from group members and notes level of participation from individuals

Facilitator:
leads discussions; focuses discussion on the purpose of the meeting

Note-taker:
records and summarizes progress

Planner:
outlines where and how the group is proceeding through the problem

Scheduler:
responsible for scheduling group meetings/chats outside of regular class time

Timekeeper:
keeps track of time during group meetings and due dates for problem logs

Others?

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Personal Reflection Log Worksheet

Your Name_____ Group's Name_____

Date_____

Write your version of the problem statement (what you are being asked to think about and do in this problem):

_____

_____

_____

_____

What Do I Know?
Note below facts from the problem statement that you might need to solve the problem. Also identify information you have learned in the past, to be shared with group members, that might help your group solve the problem.

Facts from the problem:	Information I know:

Steps We Might Take to Solve the Problem:

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Guide to the Problem

This group task gives you an opportunity to investigate and understand how the meaning of a text can often be found in the way culture, history, and geography interact in literary text. In group discussion, you may also explore the literary elements which elevate the status of a text to a classic. You will in the process of your discussion as a group discover elements that you think make your particular book a classic. Identify them and then provide a rationale for your evaluation. You will in solving the problem synthesize your reading and discussion while using the critical thinking strategies we have been using in our class discussions toward a greater appreciation of literature as represented in the form of a classic novel. As you engage in solving the problem, practice working collaboratively and thinking critically so you can develop an informed opinion based on research. You will understand that, though literary interpretation may be open, it needs to be based on evidence for credibility. To facilitate your discussion, an electronic discussion board has been established on Blackboard for each group. Use this to share ideas, post group responsibilities, group ground rules, common rules for writing the final comprehensive report, and the elements identified by your group for their chosen book that make it a classic.

1. Begin by first defining the problem in your own words and filling out your individual reflection logs. Discuss together and take notes on your ideas. Assign responsibilities through group discussion and consensus. A final personal reflection log completed neatly for the entire group derived from each team member's individual personal reflection of the problem should be submitted early next week.
2. Group members may assume the roles of a note-taker, leader, and time keeper before they begin their discussion of the problem (refer to group roles handout) if they feel it will help them to function more effectively as a group. One possibility is to revolve these roles for each group meeting. If you choose to establish group roles, you should post them on the discussion board of the group. Ms. Edwards will be using the discussion board to evaluate the group members' participation.
3. The group also needs to determine together through consensus some ground rules on how they will function as a team, a timetable, and member responsibilities. Follow the directions on the Group Ground Rules sheet and then fill out the Group contract attached to it. Submit the sheet by the end of the week. The information on the Group Contract also needs to be posted on the group discussion forum at the same time. The group will also have to plan their oral presentation. Please establish timelines for each task that is assigned.
4. Once the group rules and member roles (if applicable) have been established, the team needs to brainstorm on how they are going to solve the problem. Share ideas in class group discussion time or via your discussion board on Blackboard. Identify and post elements that you all agree make the book an example of literature other than popular fiction.
5. Because Ms. Edwards wants to avail herself of everyone's opinion, she requests that each of you write a one and half page argument describing how the work is a classic based on

an element you identify within the text and to describe some aspect of the text which would help engage current students. She notes that these written statements can then serve an ongoing reference for the school board in the future. Ms. Edwards notes that you can then plan your oral presentation based on a comprehensive written document that emerges from the group members' collective work.

6. The elements you finally plan to use as a group for the purpose of writing your individual argument paper must be discussed within the group and posted on the discussion forum for your group by the beginning of the second week. The elements on which the group plans to base their justification should be different for each group member within the group. This means that the final number of identified elements in a group depends on the number of members in that group. Ms. Edwards will be following the team's discussion on Blackboard discussion pages.
7. Finally, determine some of the common rules/standards that all members will adhere to when they write their part of the report, so that when all papers are put together then the report is comprehensive and coherent. These common rules or guidelines should be discussed and established by consensus before being posted on Blackboard (beginning of the third week)) and before the writing begins.
8. Ms. Edwards does not require you to do any research for the writing of the analysis in journals of literary criticism, but she does insist that you research social, cultural, and historical contexts relevant to your text and use the discussions in the class, discussion within your group, and your own insight to guide you in this process.
9. The evaluation sheets, personal reflection log sheets, the group ground rules, and the group roles handout are attached to the problem statement. Please submit them as required during the course of your problem solving process.

Each group will submit a folder containing the following items at the conclusion of the oral presentation:

1. The blue self and peer evaluation forms documenting your evaluation of each member of your group and for yourself.
2. The complete written report, which will be a collection of the individual reports from the team members with the list of elements that your team has identified to justify that their text exemplifies literature other than popular fiction.
3. A paragraph written by each team member describing how they contributed to the group effort.
4. If you are using a powerpoint or other visuals for your oral presentation, then a copy should be included in your submission folder.

Oral Presentation

In an oral presentation of 15 minutes, each group will share their solution to the problem. They will use their designated book to present how the high school students' interest in literature other than popular fiction can be stimulated and sustained. The oral presentation should not be each group member reading of their individual paper, but should be designed and presented in a way that is based of the elements identified and agreed upon by the group together initially and then written about in their individual papers. The presentation should be made in a way that would

appeal to the target audience as requested by the school board while meeting its purpose of motivating the high school students to read books other than popular fiction.