

How To... read a novel



One of the biggest problems students have in English Literature is getting through a whole nineteenth century novel. Different schools approach this differently but if you are relying solely on classroom reading then you can't hit those highest levels. If you know what novel you are going to be studying, do yourself a favour and read it before you start looking at it in class. It is daunting but if you follow these steps, it is totally achievable. The following steps are illustrated using A Christmas Carol but you can do this with any novel.

1



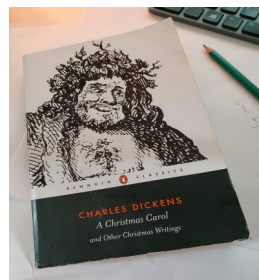
Watch the film.

Yes I know, English teachers shouldn't be saying this sort of thing but if you find reading difficult then getting a sense of the themes and plots before you start will help enormously. If you know where the story is going then you are free to enjoy the language and structure. Disclaimer: if you only watch the film then you will fail – many films have crucial moments in the plot re-written to fit the constraints of movie-making.

Only read a single chapter at a time.

2

Read the chapter through once without making notes. When you have finished the chapter quickly write a synopsis of what has happened. If you're not sure, make a list of questions you have and write the answers when you find them.



3

Now go back through the chapter (you don't have to do this straight away), this time with a pencil and a pad of paper.

Note down: characters, themes, plot points. Make a mind-map for the chapter with branches for character, themes, plots. It should look something like the one below. If you prefer working on a computer I recommend Ayoa. This is a free app that you can use in a browser or as an app on Android or a Mac.



Now add quotes and references from the chapter which tell you something about those themes and characters. It's a good idea to include the page number so you can find it again easily. It should look a bit like this one.



4

Follow these steps until you have read the whole book and have a mind-map for every chapter. This should stand you in good stead for your lessons.