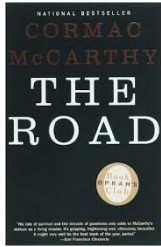


English 4 Summer Reading 2018



The Road

by Cormac McCarthy

ISBN 9780307387899

Use this number to purchase your book.

Reading literature

Before you read *The Road*, consider why we read literature.

American writer Flannery O'Connor once received a letter from a student at Hollins College asking her "just what enlightenment" she intended in her stories. "I suspect she had a paper to write," O'Connor said. "I wrote her back to forget about the enlightenment and just try to enjoy them."

"A story isn't any good," she wrote, "unless it...hangs on and expands in the mind. Properly, you analyze to enjoy, but it's equally true that to analyze with any discrimination, you have to have enjoyed already...."

For O'Connor, enjoyment and analysis work cog and wheel. We understand best what we enjoy first.

Read *The Road* in this spirit.

Begin by enjoying the story. It's about fathers and sons, about morality in a stark universe, about how cruelty threatens to crook the human heart.

Then analyze with *discrimination*.

Reading *The Road*

Begin with this quote from McCarthy

"I don't think goodness is something that you learn. If you're left adrift in the world to learn goodness from it you would be in trouble. But people tell me from time to time that my son John is just a wonderful kid. I tell people that he is so morally superior to me that I feel foolish correcting him about things, but I've got to do something—I'm his father. There's not much you can do to try to make a child into something that he's not. But whatever he is, you can sure destroy it. Just be mean and cruel and you can destroy the best person."

Cormac McCarthy, interview with [The Wall Street Journal](#).

The big questions for reading *The Road*

Central questions

What does it mean in *The Road* to be good? What does it mean to be moral? Are goodness and morality the same?

Must goodness be innate, as McCarthy suggests, or can it be learned? If not from the world, then how?

How does the world threaten goodness? How might the world destroy goodness? Can goodness be maintained? How?

Do the man and the boy teach each other goodness? How?

What is the ultimate source of goodness?

What role do stories play in maintaining goodness?

*Tracking the big questions in *The Road**

As you read and reread *The Road*, always be thinking about the big questions.

How might you come to see the way a novel thinks about big questions?

While you want to let the novel work on you however it does and to be open to its many facets, eventually you want to concentrate your attention.

Choose one of the big questions to explore; then choose one recurring element in *The Road* to track.

Possible recurring elements to track through *The Road*.

- 1) Biblical allusions, religious diction. References to religion, religious ways of thinking, understanding. Allusions and diction convey meaning by contextualizing characters and events.
- 2) The man teaching the boy goodness, or the boy teaching the man goodness.
- 3) Times when setting is described in great detail and the ways setting motivates the characters.
- 4) Encounters the man and boy have with others.
- 5) Moments when the man's and the boy's moral views conflict.
- 6) The boy acting as a voice of conscience.
- 7) The boy's maturation.
- 8) One of your own.

Track one element through the novel. Write your choice of element on a Post-it note and stick it to the inside flap of your book.

Then follow the element through the novel, attaching Post-it notes to each instructive passage and writing a comment/reaction to the moment, defining what it shows you about your topic, how it shapes your understanding, how it fits into the overall pattern you see in the novel. (These notes will be invaluable when you write about *The Road*.)

Think of this exercise as finding and commenting on the interesting examples of your topic, on learning how the novel thinks about your topic.

When you finish reading and annotating, review the passages you marked and write a clear statement about your understanding of what the novel says ABOUT the big question. You want a rich thematic statement. (Read [this document about theme](#) for reference).

Then use [this document](#) to record and analyze 6 rich passages spanning the novel. [Sample passage and analysis](#).

Closely reading the passages, really thinking about what they convey and how, will take some time. That's normal. Close reading is a process of noticing and understanding. Be patient. Let insight come.

Finish your response with a question or two that still lingers.

You will turn in your Post-it note-annotated book and upload your list of passages and analysis to turnitin on the second of class. The Post-it note annotations and the passage analysis will each count one quiz grade.

What books to have right away in August

In addition to *The Road*, have *The Bedford Handbook* and *Writing with Style* to hand when you arrive to school in August. Along with *The Road*, they are the books you will need right away.