Development of critical reading and writing skills through novel, short story, drama, and poetry analysis.

All DVDs are closed captioned.

Lesson 1 - First Sight: An Introduction to Literature
This overview introduces the course content and approach.

Lesson 2 - Ways of Seeing: Responding to Literature
A focus on critical approaches to literature is presented by the scholars who will appear throughout the series. This program also previews selected dramatic scenes from upcoming programs and excerpts from the author interviews which highlight the series.

Lesson 3 - A Personal View: The Art of the Essay
A documentary segment tracing the development of the formal essay and the birth of printing technology, and their impact on the growth of political democracy. The program then turns to the informal essay, through an interview with essayist Willie Morris.

Lesson 4 - Reflected Worlds: The Elements of Short Fiction
A dramatization of Frank O'Connor's "First Confession" and an interview with Ernest Gains demonstrate the elements of fiction.

Lesson 5 - The Story's Blueprint: Plot and Structure in Short Fiction
A dramatization of Stephen Crane's "The Blue Hotel" exemplifies the relationship of plot, structure and conflict.

Lesson 6 - Telling Their Tales: Character in Short Fiction
Techniques of characterization and the importance of point of view become clear in a dramatization of Tillie Olsen's "I Stand Here Ironing."

Lesson 7 - In That Time and Place: Setting and Character in Short Fiction
Setting reveals character in Susan Glaspell's "A Jury of Her Peers" while it magnifies meaning for contemporary short story writer Stephen Dixon, both of whom appear on camera during the program.

Lesson 8 - The Author's Voice: Tone and Style in Short Fiction
An interview with Maxine Hong Kingston highlights this examination of the impact of style on meaning.

Lesson 9 - Suggested Meanings: Symbolism and Allegory in Short Fiction
Symbolism is prominent in a dramatization of D.H. Lawrence's "The Horse Dealer's Daughter," while myth predominates in the work of Native American writer N. Scott Momaday, whose interview highlights the show.
Lesson 10 - The Sum of its Parts: Theme in Short Fiction
Multiple themes are uncovered in "Everyday Use," a dramatization of Alice Walker's short story.

Lesson 11 - The Sacred Worlds: The Elements of Poetry
The role of poetry for the individual and the culture is suggested through visual essays, which include poetry readings as well as dramatizations. An interview with James Dickey includes his reading and analysis of his poems "The Performance" and "The Lifeguard".

Lesson 12 - A Sense of Place: Setting and Character in Poetry
The historical settings of "My Last Duchess," "Theme for English B," and "Dover Beach" convey much about the characters and ideas of these poems. The New England landscapes of Maxine Cumin echo the themes of her poetry.

Lesson 13 - Tools of the Trade: Words and Images in Poetry
Poetry readings, visualizations of poems and an interview with Lucille Clifton, who reads two of her favorite poems, "This Morning" and "Homage to My Hips," reveal the beauty and the workings of poetic language and imagery.

Lesson 14 - Seeing Anew: Rhetorical Figures in Poetry
The power of metaphor, simile and other figures of speech to make the reader see in new ways becomes clear through dramatizations of Anne Bradstreet's "The Author to Her Book," Nikki Giovanni's "Woman," and Daniel Halpern's Snapshot of Hue." Gary Soto is interviewed and reads and comments on his poem "Oranges."

Lesson 15 - An Echo to the Sense: Prosody and Form in Poetry
X. J. Kennedy discusses and demonstrates the importance of rhyme and meter in his poetry. Dramatic readings of poems by Shakespeare, Dickinson and Hopkins and contemporary poets like Dudley Randall and Leonard Adame are analyzed to show how prosody and form contribute to meaning.

Lesson 16 - Distant Voices: Myth, Symbolism and Allusion in Poetry
Four poetic versions of the Icarus myth - those of Sexton, Spender, Williams and field - are dramatized and compared. Marge Piercy discusses the role of myth in her poetry.

Lesson 17 - Artful Resonance: Theme in Poetry
Dramatizations of six poems that share the same subject help clarify the difference between subject and theme. Close analysis of poems by John Donne and Donald Hall explore the interrelationship between poetic form and meaning.

Lesson 18 - Image of Reality: The Elements of Drama
Dramatizations of selected scenes from Oedipus Rex, Hamlet, and The Glass Menagerie, and an interview with Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright August Wilson introduce the origins, structure and purposes of drama.

Lesson 19 - Playing the Part: Characters and Actors in Drama
The development of dramatic character, by playwright and by actor, is illustrated through several interpretations of a single scene from Hamlet and an interview with Shakespearean actor John Vickery.

Lesson 20 - Patterns of Action: Plot and Conflict in Drama
A dramatization of Oedipus Rex demonstrates the classical plot structure. Dramatist A.R. Guerney discusses conflict and plot in contemporary American theater.
Lesson 21 - Perspectives on Illusion: Setting and Staging in Drama
An interview with set designer Chris Barecca, and a documentary overview of types of theaters demonstrate the intertwining of text and technique in dramatic setting.

Lesson 22 - Speech and Silence: The Language of Drama
The artistic director of the Shakespeare Theater at the Folger, Michael Kahn, demonstrates interpretation of dramatic language in a workshop with actors. Director Emily Mann of the McCarter Theater in Princeton discusses her work with contemporary texts, particularly a recent production of The Glass Menagerie.

Lesson 23 - The Vision Quest: Myth and Symbolism in Drama
Alaskan playwright David Hunsaker's dramatizations of Eskimo myth and his productions of Eskimo translations of Greek tragedies, together with scenes from Oedipus Rex, demonstrate the enduring power and meaning of myth in drama.

Lesson 24 - A Frame for Meaning: Theme in Drama
Dramatist David H. Hwang discusses the themes and structure of his plays, which include M. Butterfly. Scholars consider thematic interpretation inherent in the production of a single act of Hamlet.

Lesson 25 - Casting Long Shadows: The Power of Literature
This summary of major course themes reviews the impact of literature on the individual through excerpts of series dramatizations and interviews.

Lesson 26 - Continuing Vision: The Uses of Literature
Through documentary, dramatization and interview segments, this program explores the impact of literature on the society and the culture in the past and present. It then looks into the future to see what forms literature may take and to assess literature's possible influence on society.