

Should it stay or go?

Critical Challenge

Critical Challenges

Critical Task

Write a letter to the provincial Ministry of Education arguing for the inclusion of *My Left Foot* (or some other novel) in the curriculum.

Overview

Every teacher has been faced with the question: “Why are we studying this novel?” This lesson attempts to work students through this question by asking them to generate criteria for selecting resource materials and then testing a book against these criteria. This lesson is developed in the context of *My Left Foot* by Christy Brown, which is most suitable for senior high students; however, the approach can be used with any novel at any grade level. The culminating activity is a letter to the Ministry of Education arguing for or against inclusion of the novel in the curriculum for their grade level.

Requisite Tools

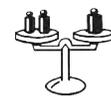
Background knowledge

- familiarity with *My Left Foot*



Criteria for judgment

- qualities of an appropriate novel for use in school (e.g., interest to audience, rich use of language, universal message, appropriateness to audience)
- qualities of a well written formal letter



Critical thinking vocabulary



Thinking strategies

- data chart



Habits of mind



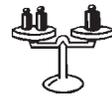
Suggested Activities

- ◆ As part of the closing activities after a short story or novel study (in this case, Christy Brown's *My Left Foot*), students will develop arguments in defense of its place in the provincial curriculum. Introduce the lesson by asking students the following questions and recording their responses on the board:
 - What is your favourite book/story you've read for school?
 - What is your favourite "all time" book/story?



familiarity with the novel

- ◆ Once students have collectively made a list of favourite books organize students into small groups to compile a list of attributes of a good book. This is best be done on chart paper so that the lists can be displayed for comparison among groups.



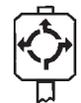
qualities of an appropriate novel

After all groups' charts have been displayed, discuss the common criteria of a good book and reduce this list to approximately five criteria. Some criteria may include:

- interest to audience;
- rich use of language;
- universality (an important message with broad appeal).

Explain to students the curriculum resource selection in the province with a specific focus on the criteria which students believe ought to be established by the Ministry of Education for including a book in the curriculum. It may be valuable to present some of the social considerations such as gender equity, political or ethnic biases, portrayal of violence and language use. Encourage students to re-assess their criteria for a good book in light of the considerations that ought to govern provincial selection of reading materials.

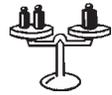
- ◆ Distribute and assign students groups to complete *Student Activity: Curriculum Selection* (Blackline Master). It may be helpful to begin this activity as a class, completing the first criterion as follows:



data chart

Key features of a good novel	Looks like? Sounds like?	Example from novel
<p><i>Interesting to audience</i></p> <p>very weak fair satisfactory good excellent</p> <p>1 2 3 3.5 4 5</p>	<p><i>Looks like a book you can't put down</i></p>	<p><i>Pregnant mom falls down stairs while caring for her disabled son; disabled son has to get help for the mom</i></p>

- ◆ After groups have evaluated the novel, organize a class discussion to determine whether or not this novel should be placed on the provincial curriculum. Coach students to develop arguments for or against its inclusion. Require that students make explicit references to the criteria for selection they are relying upon when offering reasons for their position.
- ◆ Once students are confident in their arguments and have generated sufficient criteria to support their positions, introduce the letter writing assignment and discuss the importance of audience when writing and developing arguments.
- ◆ Present the critical task:
 - Write a letter to the provincial Ministry of Education arguing for the inclusion of *My Left Foot* (or some other novel) in the curriculum.
- ◆ Use *Transparency: Formal Letter Template* (Blackline Master) to provide the format of a formal business letter on the overhead projector. Discuss the following evaluation criteria to assist students in drafting this letter:
 - clear explanation of criteria used for judging curriculum selection;
 - appropriate, specific examples from the novel to support the conclusion reached;
 - polite tone;
 - error-free (i.e., spelling, grammar and style).



qualities of a formal letter

Evaluation

- ◆ Use the *Assessment Sheet: Formal Letter Evaluation* (Blackline Master) to involve students in peer and self assessment prior to submitting a final draft of their letter for teacher evaluation.
- ◆ Evaluate group work on effort and initiative taken to complete task and thoroughness of the completed chart work.

Extension

- ◆ Obtain a copy of the provincial resources selection criteria from the Ministry of Education and ask students to compare their criteria to the provincially-approved criteria.

Reference

Brown, Christy. (1995). *My Left Foot*. London: Mandarin Paperbacks. (ISBN 0 7493 9177 4).

Curriculum selection

Key features of a good novel	Looks like? Sounds like?	Examples from text
Interesting to audience very poor fair satisfactory good excellent 1 2 3 4 5		
Rich use of language very poor fair satisfactory good excellent 1 2 3 4 5		
Important universal message very poor fair satisfactory good excellent 1 2 3 4 5		
Appropriateness to general audience/ age of audience very poor fair satisfactory good excellent 1 2 3 4 5		
 very poor fair satisfactory good excellent 1 2 3 4 5		
 very poor fair satisfactory good excellent 1 2 3 4 5		

Student Activity

Formal letter template

[your address - header on top of page]

Date

Name & address
of person
receiving letter

Dear _____:

Introductory paragraph (introduce yourself, purpose of letter)

Body (present arguments and provide examples)

Concluding paragraph (call for action, thank-you)

Salutation (Respectfully, Yours truly, Sincerely,)

[hand written signature]

Your name type-written

Transparency

Formal letter evaluation

very poor fair satisfactory good excellent 1 2 3 4 5			
Criteria	Self evaluation	Peer evaluation	Teacher evaluation
Clear explanation of criteria for judging curriculum selection	1 2 3 4 5 Explanation:	1 2 3 4 5 Explanation:	1 2 3 4 5 Explanation:
Appropriate, specific examples which support points made	1 2 3 4 5 Explanation:	1 2 3 4 5 Explanation:	1 2 3 4 5 Explanation:
Error free (i.e., spelling, grammar or style)	1 2 3 4 5 Explanation:	1 2 3 4 5 Explanation:	1 2 3 4 5 Explanation:
Polite tone	1 2 3 4 5 Explanation:	1 2 3 4 5 Explanation:	1 2 3 4 5 Explanation:

Assessment Sheet