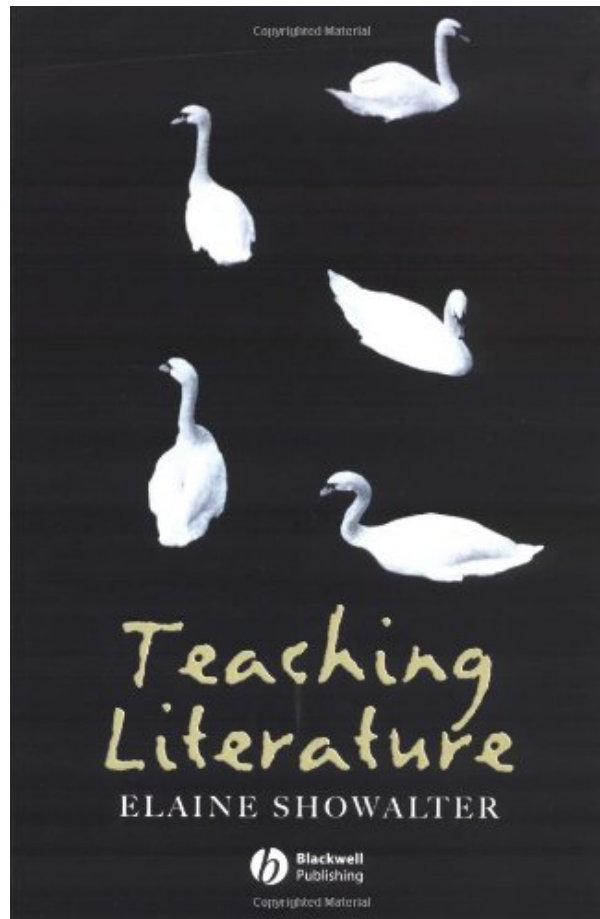
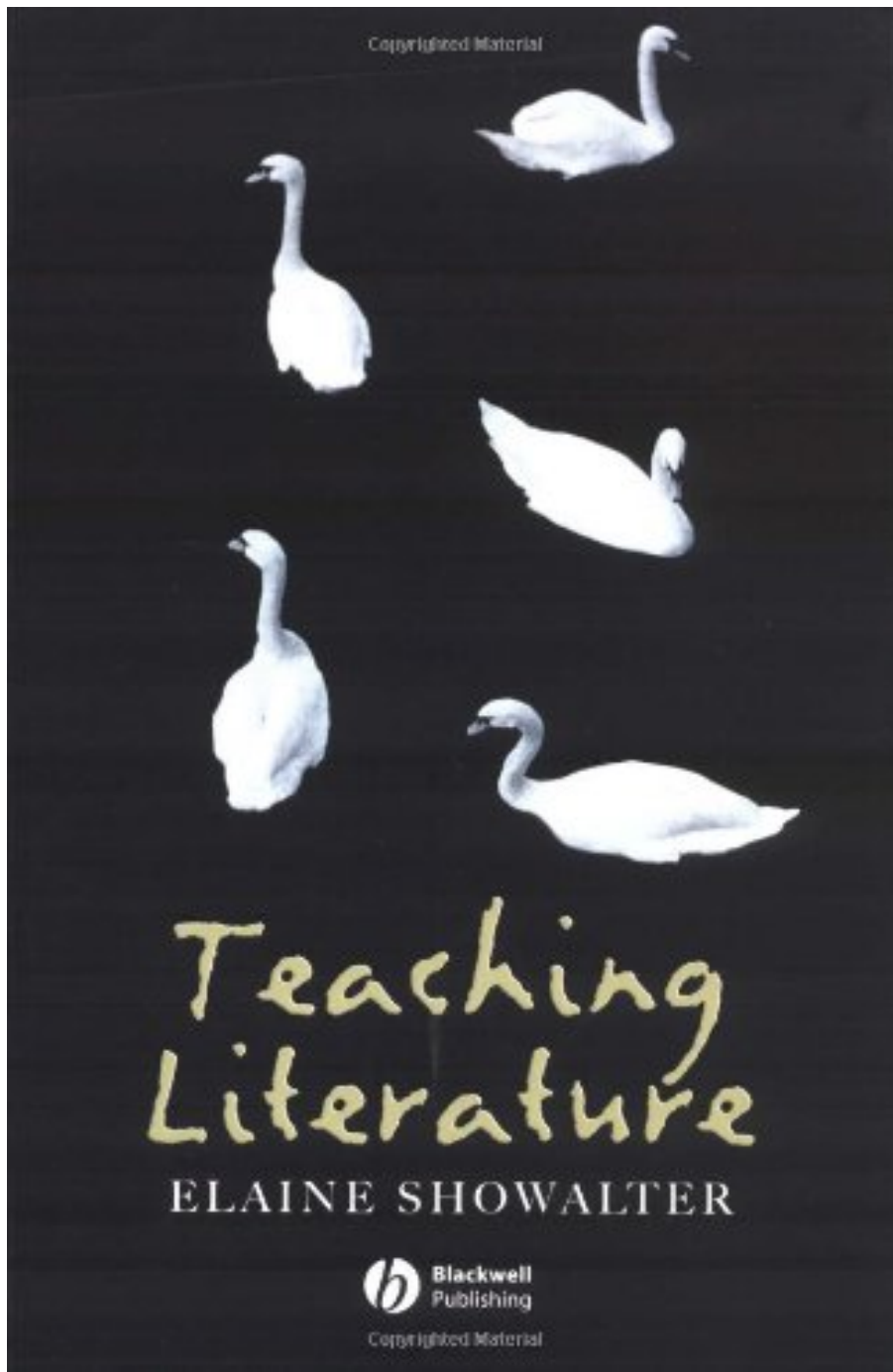


# TEACHING LITERATURE BY ELAINE SHOWALTER



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From Publishers Weekly

Showalter's distillation of her half-century of teaching (along with the experience of scores of other teachers) in this jargon-free blend of manual and memoir will appeal to readers with a general interest in education as well as to professionals. Provocative, evocative, spirited in tone and lucid in structure, the volume offers everything readers might want to know about teaching undergraduates. Showalter, an English professor at Princeton University, opens with practical matters (e.g., the anxieties that can plague teachers, lack of training, isolation, performance, evaluation) and then moves to the theoretical, exploring subject-centered, teacher-centered and student-centered teaching theories. Throughout, she addresses nitty-gritty matters, from preparing syllabi and lectures and leading discussions to grading and "housekeeping." On teaching literature classes (including poetry, drama, fiction and theory), Showalter offers a cornucopia of approaches, peppered with brief reflections from teachers about actual practice. She addresses the teaching of teachers, the issues raised in "dangerous subjects" (freshly, not the usual race and gender, but suicide and explicit sexual language) and "teaching literature in dark times." Differences and disagreements flourish, and the chorus of voices Showalter shares with readers, along with her own expertise and knowledge, makes this book particularly appealing as well as useful.

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Review

"It is to Showalter's great credit that she has written a book that exemplifies many of the virtues she associates with literature: curiosity, empathy, compassion. It is also a deeply personal work. People say that reading literature does not make you a better person. True. But reading this book will make you a better teacher. And maybe make you think better of literature too." Times Higher Education Supplement

"Grounded equally in narrative anecdotes and in published scholarship, Teaching Literature is admirably accessible and reader-friendly... I'd recommend it to anyone looking to enliven his or her classroom".  
Literature and History

From the Back Cover

Teaching Literature is an indispensable guidebook for all teachers of English and American literature in higher education. Drawing on 40 years of international teaching experience, author Elaine Showalter inspires instructors to make their classroom practice as intellectually exciting as their research.

Showalter's wide-ranging reflections address practical, theoretical, and methodological issues. She starts out by describing the anxieties of teaching literature and by outlining the major theories and methods circulating in the field. She then goes on to look separately at teaching drama, fiction, poetry, and theory, and to explore ways to teach teaching. Finally, she investigates the moral issues involved in teaching, and the practical ethics of handling touchy subjects, from sexuality to suicide.

Examples from real classes and careers are cited throughout, generating an unusual degree of authenticity and immediacy.

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Teaching Literature is an inspirational guidebook for all teachers of English and American literature in higher education.

- Written by leading academic, prolific author and cultural journalist, Elaine Showalter
- Original and provocative reflections on teaching literature in higher education
- Encourages teachers to make their classroom practice intellectually exciting
- Wide-ranging - covers the practical, theoretical, and methodological aspects of teaching literature
- Highly practical - employs real examples from real classes and careers throughout
- Draws on 40 years of international teaching experience

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- 176 pages

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#### Most helpful customer reviews

27 of 28 people found the following review helpful.

And Gladly Teach

By A Customer

Professor Showalter's book about the teaching of literature is the most honest, realistic, directly applicable work in the field. Avoiding the jargantuan language of the educational establishment, she has put together a most readable work that should aid the beginning instructor as well as the most experienced. Her mind is open to a wide range of pedagogical techniques, recognizing the need for flexible and pragmatic solutions to a highly complex activity. While it is aimed at teachers of literature much of it applies to all areas and levels of teaching. Her background of experience and the range of her interests make the advice she gives credible. I only wish I had been able to read such a work when I began teaching over fifty years ago.

26 of 28 people found the following review helpful.

A bit disappointing

By Leanne

I purchased this book hoping to get more practical, concrete advice about how to plan for and teach my literature classes. While Showalter's book does contain some useful ideas, most of those ideas exist at the abstract level.

For example, in the sub-section on leading discussion, Showalter lists the types of questions that an instructor generally wants to ask during a discussion. Instead of explaining each of the types, however, Showalter just lists them and mentions the book that they were taken from. The reader of Showalter's book would thus need to track down the original book that she got her ideas from.

Overall, this book does have some good ideas and it's always nice to know that other professors experience the same types of worries and fears at the start of each new semester. As far as as concrete advice goes, however, I felt like this book was lacking.

34 of 38 people found the following review helpful.

Flawed but helpful array of suggestions by many profs

By John L Murphy

I've only taught 20 years, half that Showalter has in her high-profile and productive career, so I was curious to learn from her. The result's a bit awkward--this book appears to have been the culmination of seminars she gave on how to teach, comments culled from dozens of fellow instructors, and her thoughts on teaching and its relation to theory, the academy, research, and the wider issues that intersect with and make up literary content. The book's only 150 or so pages, and extremely pricy, but it's a sensible addition for a library, if not one's own shelf.

Helpful tips on grading, handling student complaints, becoming more active in teaching rather than lecturing, and accounts of failures and successes and stalemates in the classroom all make this a recommended read for TAs, beginning instructors, and veterans searching for inspiration and innovation. Taking the example of Wilbert McKeachie's insistence on active, student-centered learning (I have the 11th ed. of his "Teaching Tips"), Showalter urges teachers to forget about lecturing and to focus more on learning. Making assessments based on defined objectives may sound like educationese, but as she admits, students and profs benefit from clear goals, set each day in class as well as for assignments and projects over the term. Too many instructors forget that students are coming to texts and insights for the first, not the forty-first time, and many comments here remind literature teachers to keep this freshness of the beginner's encounter with the reading in mind constantly.

What disappointed me was the sketchy nature of many of the chapters, of uneven length and depth. For instance, that on teaching fiction assumes that novels will be assigned; short stories are not mentioned. The common Intro to Lit course that combines a bit of drama and poetry with stories for those not majoring in English but taking a class as a breadth requirement gains no special attention. The vast majority of those contributing comments to the book also teach at colleges and universities catering to a privileged class, literally, and perhaps rooms full of more eager if not totally enthralled English or at least humanities majors who, for the most part, chose to take these courses for a degree in the liberal arts.

This lack of connection with the wider college experience, in which students are older, more harried by jobs and family and money responsibilities, and those who (as where I teach) are not only non-English majors but often non-English native speakers, or from the families of immigrants, is not considered at all. One comment is given by an MIT teacher, but his students, obviously not English majors, are considerably distant from those, often first-generation, students at the local community college faced with a required course in literature to complete with little or no comprehension of any but the rudimentary background or cultural contexts with which Prof. Showalter's Ivy League students will have most likely been familiar with, and probably enamored with, long before they entered Princeton's hallowed halls.

In one paragraph, the disparity between academic stars, the "frequent flyers" (such as herself I might add) and the rest of us, "academic drones," "freeway flyers" is noted. Otherwise, the present and future conditions under which many of us who have entered academia in far more precarious and more pragmatic decades than Bryn Mawr grad Showalter did, around the JFK administration, are not addressed. This segregation of those who can afford to study literature at leisure and those who have to cram it in among business or technical courses for their major and who are driven to finish school while working perhaps full time is left out of these pages. For all the lip service paid to the underclass--and those who struggle nights or weekends to get a degree so as to leave such limitations--by those from the overclass, these widening gaps get not a glance. What is the future of literature in a profit-driven, bottom-line, and heedlessly philistine culture that only leaves a literature class in many curricula to satisfy accreditation standards? What this book neglects most of all: how to teach literature to the less motivated and/or far less prepared students in many of our unhallowed,



non-Ivied, institutions today. This mission that many who teach literature today must face is absent from this book, despite all the attention the tenured ranks and the more richly remunerated academic stars give to race, class, cultural, and political issues through the literature they teach and about which they publish so much.

The rest of us are left out of these chapters, but, despite this neglect, any teacher of literature can be benefit from some pages of this book. It should have been more thoroughly prepared for consistency in the various chapters, and expanded so as to give more solutions than it does list problems. For example, TAs list details of difficulties they face, but Showalter merely copies these, leaving remedies to them only generalized, and not given as particularly tied to the specific cases quoted. Still, for lack of a competing book geared directly to teachers of literature (as opposed to the many aids for composition instructors) an instructor does well by reading this. It's essential to be reminded--even if the prof remains untenured, exploited, and debt-ridden--that what's essential in the classroom, no matter where it may be, is that the student be not only graded but guided. We all need to be nagged that we who teach need to not lecture so often as we must remember to learn--all the more since we stand in front of a room full of prospective learners.

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