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# The American Novel and the Book: What's to Learn and Why?

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## THE AMERICAN NOVEL AND THE BOOK: WHAT'S TO LEARN AND WHY?

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New methods of teaching literature in English and Language Arts courses are continuously being sought and attempted with the hopes that students will better appreciate the language they speak, read, and write. The purpose of this study is to provide, in the form of a unit plan, a fresh way of teaching eighth grade students literature -- the book for its "bookness", the American novel for its "Americanness" -- while still presenting the fundamentals of literature (genre, characterization, plot, setting, etc.). Such a task entails providing historical and cultural overviews of both the book and the novel, being sure to distinguish between book and novel at all times. Eighth graders are the primary targets for two reasons: 1) Literature, as another facet of the English language, is being introduced in the eighth grade and 2) the desire to learn is still apparent in eighth graders and they think unconditionally because of that desire.

Three methods were used to gather information for this study: 1) Library research to determine the background of the book and the American novel, 2) individual novels were read to confirm the background study results, and 3) a survey of four eighth grade classes was conducted to determine student interest in the topic of the American novel and to gain insight on how best to approach the task of planning a unit suitable for the eighth grade intellect. The results of these methods will be presented.