

Language Arts Guide for Adult Education or University Students

Prepared by
Julie Larade and Barbara Le Blanc Ph. D.
Created in 2015
Revised and updated in 2024

for the novel

Laura's Story
by
Julie Larade

Contact info:
juliarade.com
[facebook/juliaradeauthor](https://facebook.com/juliaradeauthor)

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A) Introduction

Synopsis

Laura's Story is a novel about the life, struggles and triumphs of an Acadian woman born in Chéticamp, Cape Breton, Nova Scotia in 1920. When she is widowed, penniless and alone with three small children, she takes a job at a convent in Montreal. She returns with a beleaguered body and spirit but with a firmer resolve than ever to keep her family together. Yet, when she develops tuberculosis, she is taken away again, this time for two and a half years to the sanitorium in Kentville. While Laura struggles to hold on to her boys and find her place in the world, the family members' stories develop, weave, and unfold. Over the years of their lives, we see courage and perseverance firsthand, and we are moved by the true meaning of family and love.

***Laura's Story* as an educational tool**

Laura's Story weaves together the themes linked to finding meaning in one's life with the challenge of holding a family together, often under the most trying circumstances. As the characters evolve and age, many are tested through addiction, poverty, and the restraints of the historical period. If held against our contemporary era, these challenges, and their potential solutions, illustrate how far we have progressed, or perhaps, how much we have not advanced, as a people, a community, and a society.

The work is literary historical fiction with a clear, clean writing style. It has a strong female protagonist, is set in the Canadian Maritimes with a focus on Acadian culture and showcases a pivotal time in Canada's recent history. *Laura's Story* is a character-driven work, set in 20th century Cape Breton as well as part of mainland Nova Scotia, whose themes deepen as the characters develop over a period of nearly 100 years.

Because of its applicability to young people and its accessibility in theme, character, and tone, the novel is a valuable educational resource and would lend itself well to a Language Arts (Literature & Writing) curriculum.

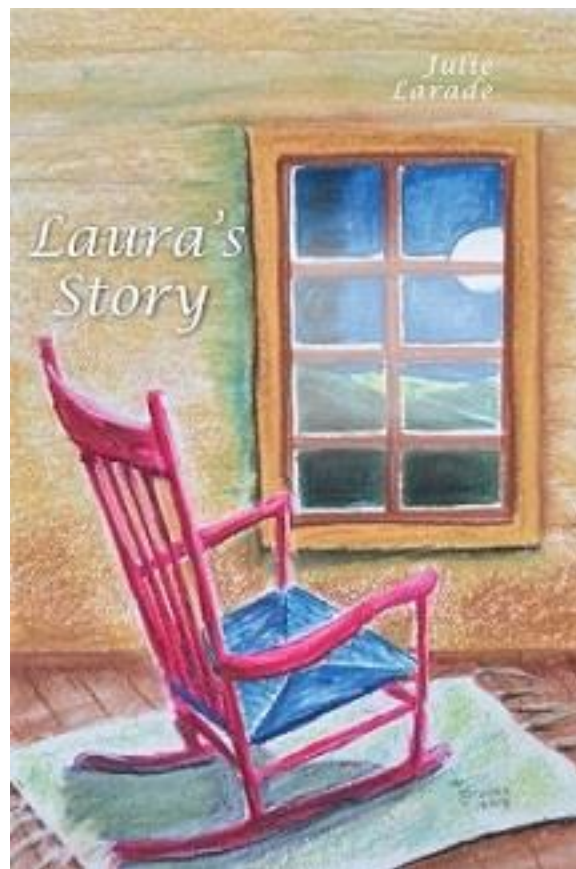
B) Learning Outcomes

- Students explore and interpret the themes and sub themes.
- Students examine the plot and characters.
- Students examine the literary devices used by the author.
- Students practise creative writing.

C) Literature Aspects

1) Interpretations of Themes and of Sub Themes

Interpretation of the Cover Art



C) Literature Aspects (continued)

Interpretation of the Cover Art

Suggested activities:

- 1) **Before** reading the book, discuss the following question:

Based on the cover, what do you think the story will explore?

- 2) **After** reading the book, create an alternate book cover that you feel could also represent the story. Explain (written or verbally) why you chose to specifically create this cover.

C) Literature Aspects (continued)**Interpretation of the opening Line**The writing - the opening sentence

It could have been fate, or an accident, but while climbing a ladder to wash her English employer's second story windows during the summer of 1938, Laura's mother, Joséphine Boudreau, slipped and fell hard onto the ground, slipping quickly into delirium, then coma, and finally death.

This opening line establishes the time, the place and the situation for the reader. For some readers, this first line of the book is simply about Laura's mother, a woman, who falls off a ladder. For other readers, this line is symbolic. Here is one reader's perspective of interpreting the symbolic nature of the sentence:

Laura Boudreau, a young Acadian woman, was the descendant of Acadians, who had been deported from the colony of *Acadie* between 1755-1763. In the book, which begins in the year 1938, Laura's mother is working for an English master, a descendant of the group who had deported the Acadians from their original homeland in the 18th century.

As a result of the deportation, some Acadians, after the 1763 Peace Treaty of Paris, had been permitted to settle in what is today called the Maritime Provinces. One of the communities where these exiled wandering Acadians settled was the Chéticamp region located on Cape Breton Island. What symbolic irony that Laura's mother, descendant of the Acadian deportees, was working for a descendant of the group who had sent her ancestors into such a tormented exile.

Laura's mother falling from a ladder doing work for her English master, going from delirium to coma and finally to death could be seen as a symbol of what her ancestors had lived. Their deportation and exile could be seen as a falling into a surreal delirium, a coma, and a death of their life as they had known it. Fate? Accident?

Suggested activities:

- 1) Write down some of your favourite lines from *Laura's Story*. Why do you like them? Explain.
- 2) What are some other first lines in books you admire? Write them down and share. Why do you think they are successful?
- 3) Write one potential first line that could possibly be the start of a new story and share with the class.

C. Literature Aspects (continued)

2) Crafting Characters

Suggested activities:

- 1) Who is your favourite character in the novel and why? What does Larade do in constructing this character that makes him or her interesting?
- 2) Who is your least favourite character? Why?
- 3) Place your favourite character in the novel in a present-day situation. Describe the situation and write a scene with description and dialogue involving another character.
- 4) Discuss the following situations and choices made by the characters listed below. Specify if you agree with their choice(s) or not. What would you have done in their situation? Explain and justify your answer.
 - a) Johnny's decision to hide his infirmity from Laura.
 - b) Sam's wife gives up her child for adoption and keeps it a secret.
 - c) Laura leaves her two elder sons with her sister and brings baby Ben with her when she goes to work at a convent in Montreal.
 - d) Tom drowns his sorrows in alcohol. Then, without any warning, runs away from his family.
 - e) George suffers trauma from fighting in the war. He suffers alone and in silence (drinking, smoking ...)
 - f) Sam's wife is cold and unfriendly toward Laura, even belittling her in front of her friends.
 - g) Laura plays word games during difficult times and later when she learns to read and write, keeps a journal.
- 5) Choose two of the situations in activity 4 and write about alternative choices the character(s) could have made in the situation.
- 6) Give an example of someone (real or fictive) who was in a situation in which he or she had to make a difficult choice. What was the situation and what choice did the person make and why? Do you agree with their choice? Why or why not? Explain.

C. Literature Aspects (continued)

3) The novel structure: Its arc

One definition of “a narrative arc” is as follows:

“A narrative arc provides a visual map of a story showing how writers typically build up tension to a climactic moment and then allow the tension to decrease to the story’s resolution.” Susan Blau

Source : “Arc”, “What are story arcs in fiction writing?”

www.freelancewriting.com consulted February March 6, 2015

Suggested activities:

- 1) Discuss one or more events in the story that move from a problem (tension) to a resolution (release).
- 2) In these moments, what holds the reader’s interest as tension builds up to a climactic moment for the characters?
- 3) Create an entirely new scenario and put one of the characters from *Laura’s Story* in it. It can be anything: history, the future, fantasy, modern life, etc. Write a minimum one-page story that follows this model of beginning, challenge (problem), tension building, climactic moment, and resolution.

C. Literature Aspects (continued)

4) Literary Devices:

Simile, Metaphor, Alliteration and Foreshadowing

Simile

Examples:

“Fit as a fiddle” (p. 117)

“like a shock of cold water” (p. 126)

Suggested activities:

- 1) Discuss why you think Larade chose to use similes. Then, find a few of your favourites in the novel and share.
- 2) a) Create two of your own similes.
b) Add a visual representation to correspond with each simile.

Metaphor

Example:

“... she realized resting was for the greater good and more productive than arguing with her bull in a china shop sister.” (p. 129)

Suggested activities:

- 1) Discuss why you think Larade chose to use metaphors.
- 2) a) Create two of your own metaphors.
b) Add a visual representation to correspond with each metaphor.

C. Literature Aspects

4) Literary Devices (continued)

Alliteration

Examples:

“fall’s first frost” (p. 352)

“perfect parallel parking” (p. 339)

Suggested activities:

- 1) Discuss why you think Larade used alliteration. Then, find a few of your favourites in the novel and share.
- 2) Create two of your own examples of alliteration.

Foreshadowing

Example:

Peg’s face was awash in heat spots beneath her blazing freckles. “He’s probably out in the barn, smoking. I give him hell for it, but it goes in one ear, out the other. Tom smokes with him, you know!” she looked accusatorily at Laura. p. 228

Suggested activities:

- 1) Find two to three other examples of foreshadowing throughout the novel, moments that indicate something is about to come/happen. Indicate the page number. Justify and explain your choice.
- 2) Choose a minimum of three literary devices (simile, metaphor, alliteration or foreshadowing) and incorporate them in a short story.