

## How are teachers able to teach classic literary concepts with these contemporary novels?

The problems teachers encounter in discussing literary concepts centers around the fact that most kids don't read the books. With *Players*, this is not an issue. Teachers tell us that, at the end of the silent reading period, they have to force the students to put the books away. Even non-readers ask to take the books home.

With the "I didn't have time to read it" barrier removed, teachers can then proceed to teaching literary concepts. The "literature keys" are imbedded in the novel. The concepts which can be taught from this book include:

*Symbolism* – Reflected in the title of the book and names of the characters. After finishing *Players* with his students, the author likes to ask his students "Who has really been played here?" The answer, of course, is the students. "You've told me you don't like to read, yet you've read and enjoyed this book. You've told me you don't like English, yet we've talked about literature and enjoyed the process." The author, throughout the book, shows the characters looking within themselves to find answers. Likewise, the students can look into the cover of the book to see a reflection of themselves. The names of the characters are symbolic, as well. Hunter hunts his human prey, Heidi is hiding behind her perfect façade, and Jess gets played like a game of chess.

*Motifs* – A series of recurrent patterns that can be identified and evaluated run through the book: game playing, Shakespeare's Macbeth, and questions. Some aspect of Macbeth is revealed in each chapter while parallel events occur in the lives of the characters.

*Themes* – In *Players*, there are four themes: 1. you can't play games all your life 2. you gotta grow up sometime 3. books are important 4. reading is fun

*Irony* – That the players get played is a central thread of irony that runs throughout the book and is reinforced with the ending.

*Humor* – Humor in books for teens is essential. In *Players*, the reader is reminded of the humor in everyday events and situations. In the first chapter of *Players*, the main character is astonished when the new English teacher takes a different approach to how the class is structured:

*"Someone had obviously not explained to this lady how English class was supposed to work.*

*"We all knew the game plan. And it went like this. We come into class. The teacher gives us some boring reading assignment. She introduces it. She assigns it as homework. We don't read it. We read the Cliff Notes. Maybe. Or talk to some other student who has read it. We come back the next day. We fail some reading quiz over the book. She wants to discuss the book but we can't because we haven't read it. The teacher gets mad because we don't care about great literature. She then gives us some notes. And then it's on to the next assignment. It was a pretty simple strategy, but we all knew it, and that's how we all played it."*