

## Margaret Atwood: A Canadian Novelist

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### Introduction

Margaret Atwood is a name nearly all Canadians know, and now that she has finally won the prestigious Booker Prize her already considerable international reputation is greatly enhanced. Canadians, however, are often criticized for not celebrating our cultural icons, whether it be from a collective sense of modesty or uncertainty as to the elusive Canadian identity. Be that as it may, we do recognize Margaret Atwood as one of our greatest writers, and this international win for her latest novel, *The Blind Assassin*, certainly gives us reason to reappraise her considerable contribution to that genre of literature referred to as CanLit. The Booker Prize-considered one of the world's most important literary awards-is given each year to what is judged the best original full-length novel written by a citizen of the British Commonwealth or the Republic of Ireland. Atwood's novels have been nominated for the Booker three times, and now *The Blind Assassin* takes its place among the very best literary works of fiction in the world. As Canadians, we have good reason to recognize and validate the talent and achievements of our artists, and we do so. "Canadian content" is a standard qualifier and indicator of success for us, whether in the form of a Jim Carrey movie, the music of Céline Dion, or the comedy of John Candy or Dan Ackroyd. And Canadian literature has produced its own "stars." Writers like Michael Ondaatje, author of the Booker award-winning novel *The English Patient*, upon which the film of the same name was based; Robertson Davies and his well-known Deptford Trilogy; and Margaret Lawrence, renowned for critically acclaimed novels such as *The Stone Angel* and *The Diviners*, are just a few of the authors who have put Canada on the world's literary map and who have contributed to our own distinct cultural life. But some critics and historians say that this has not always been the case and that in the past Canada has frequently failed to recognize the talent it possessed. Canadians, concerned with national identity and prone to doubting whether we can produce art comparable to that of England or the United States, have been accused in the past of thinking that anything well-written must come from somewhere else. When Margaret Atwood was a young woman in the 1950s, this sense of Canadian inferiority was very prevalent. Some suggest this may have been because we saw ourselves as a perennial second best, being citizens of a former colony of Great Britain-the motherland of the English language-and overshadowed as well by the larger and more self-reliant United States. Whatever the reasons, Canadians acquired what the famous Canadian literary critic Northrop Frye called "frostbite at the roots of the imagination" and were reading only what other nations produced as opposed to developing a literature of our own. Naturally this did not encourage Canadians to write. Margaret Atwood has called literature "a map, a geography of the mind," suggesting that a country's literature tells its citizens something about the characteristics of the country itself. Early in her career she became concerned by the tendency of Canadians to ignore their own literature and sought to explain through her work the nature of Canada. Her focus on Canadian events and issues is a hallmark of her career, and is one of the reasons she is considered a quintessentially Canadian novelist.

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Using both the print and non-print material from various issues of News in Review, teachers and students can create comprehensive, thematic modules that are excellent for research purposes, independent assignments, and small group study. We recommend the stories indicated below for the universal issues they represent and for the archival and historic material they contain.

"Robertson Davies: A Literary Legend," February 1996

"W.O. Mitchell: A Canadian Storyteller," April 1998

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### The Range of the Blind Assassin

When fiction is at its best, it appeals to something universal in the human experience even though the particular work may be set in a time or place that is not the direct experience of the reader. Margaret Atwood's 10th novel has won critical acclaim in Canada and internationally, but it also received one bad review, in the influential New York Times Book Review—a rare occurrence for Atwood. The awarding of the Booker Prize to the novel, however, suggests an international appeal, an understanding of the novel that goes beyond Canadian borders. As you view this News in Review report on Atwood's latest work, consider how the novel might appeal to all human beings. What themes, issues, emotions, or experiences are not just Canadian? Use the following questions as focal points.

#### The Context

1. Where is the story set? Think in terms of both time and space.
2. What social issues are brought up in the course of the book?
3. How did Atwood find out about the time and place in which her work was set? 4. When asked about why she insists upon historical accuracy Atwood said: "You want to have it be the way that it should be. You want people wearing what they would have worn and eating what they would have eaten." Why is this necessary? What does historical accuracy add to a piece of fiction? It is, after all, fiction.
5. What distinction does Atwood make between the citizen and the artist?
6. According to Atwood what is the danger in an artist structuring his or her art around an ideology or a cause?
7. From what she says in this report, what do you think Atwood believes to be the primary responsibility of an artist?
8. Atwood relates a story about someone doing an experimental video who complained that Canadian celebrities (namely her) were not glamorous enough. What is the implied comparison here? What is Atwood saying about the character of Canadians?

#### Follow-Up Discussion

Why do you think Margaret Atwood set this story in the time and place she did? If you were to write a short story or novel where would you set it? What would affect your choice of the time and space? Why do you think The Blind Assassin won the Booker Prize?

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Most Canadians know that Margaret Atwood writes novels but many are not aware of the diversity of her literary accomplishments. She also writes poetry, short stories, screenplays, literary criticism, and operettas. Throughout her career several themes and interests have developed, including the impact of literature on national identity, the role of the artist, and the relationships between men and women. All of these have to do with people's sense of identity and how they see themselves and others. As is the case with most of us, the environment in which we grow up affects our interests and preoccupations. Often when writing about a writer's works we examine their lives to gain insight into their work. The following is a very brief biography listing some of the key moments in Margaret Atwood's literary life. As you read it, consider what might have shaped her as a novelist. Why might she have become interested in the themes and subjects that are found in her work?

1939

Born in Ottawa, she was the second child of Carl and Margaret Atwood. Her father was an entomologist who worked part of each year in Canada's northern woods. Her mother was a university-trained dietician and reportedly a talented storyteller. Both parents were independently minded and encouraged the same independent thinking in their children.

1944

In *The Red Shoes*, her biography of Margaret Atwood, Rosemary Sullivan notes that at the age of five Atwood created her own book, "cutting pages from her scribbler and sewing them together, copying into it all the poems she had memorized and then adding her own."

Circa 1952

Atwood attends a full year of school for the first time in grade eight. Because her father's job required extensive periods of time in the northern bush she received most of her education from her parents. She has said that this was a definite advantage as she escaped the peer pressure on girls "to be dumb," as she put it. At the time it was not considered chic for a girl to be intelligent. Young women in the 1950s were not expected to have a career. They were expected to marry and have children, which accounts for the fact that in her high school guidance career handbook only five careers were listed for women. Another feature of high school in the 1950s was the lack of Canadian history or literature in the curriculum. "In high school," she said, "students simply took in stride the absence of things Canadian, believing that real history and real literature were made abroad."

1956

At age 16 she decides to become a poet. She describes the moment as follows: "I was scuttling along in my usual furtive way, suspecting no ill, when a large invisible thumb descended from the sky and pressed down on the top of my head, A poem formed . . . it was a gift this poem . . . I suspect this is why all poets begin writing

poetry, only they don't want to admit it. . . ." When she announced this to her female friends they were shocked; most girls of her generation had no career, let alone that of a writer. "When I started to write poetry I had no audience, nor could I imagine one. . . . The year was 1956, the proper stance for girls was collecting china and waiting to get married. . . ." As a woman writer in Canada she faced a double discrimination; as a Canadian she, like other Canadian writers, was often ignored, and as a woman she faced a society that believed that a woman's place was in the home.

1957

She graduates from Leaside High School in Toronto. In the yearbook her classmates write of her: "Peggy's [her nickname] not-so-secret ambition is to write THE Canadian novel-and with those English marks, who doubts that she will?" She enters Victoria College at the University of Toronto, specializing in English. She is strongly influenced by the ideas of a professor by the name of Northrop Frye, who is also a world famous literary critic. Frye took Canadian literature seriously; he was the one who coined the famous phrase about "the frostbite at the roots of the (Canadian) imagination" and regretted Canada's habit of ignoring its own writers. His belief in the quality of Canadian literature, and his moral support of writers encouraged the young Atwood. She remarked, "In a provincial society where writing was either immoral or frivolous, [Frye's affirmation] was protection indeed." He also influenced her thinking by his own work on myth and archetypes, which would influence her first book of poetry, *Double Persephone*.

1961

She graduates from the University of Toronto, and with the encouragement of Northrop Frye continues graduate study at Radcliffe College, the all-woman college at Harvard University. She ends up taking her Master's degree, but does not finish her doctorate. The same year she designs and prints her first book of poetry, *Double Persephone*. The poems deal with images of women in myth and literature.

1967

She wins the Governor General's Award for Poetry for her book *The Circle Game*. This is the most prestigious literary award in Canada. She is now 27 and the youngest person to ever win the award.

1969

Her first novel, *The Edible Women*, is published and deals with the theme of women's alienation, which is also found in her poetry.

1970

*The Journals of Susanna Moodie* is published. In this book of poetry she takes the literary work of an early pioneer Canadian woman as her inspiration. The poems and the afterword that come with it deal with the theme of Canadian culture and its characteristics.

1971

Her poetry collection, *Power Politics*, is published. This is actually a cycle of poems about love. It criticizes the romantic notion of love that encourages women to find meaning in life by finding a husband, a notion of love Atwood believes keeps women too dependent upon men. Her biographer Sullivan points out, "When she called her sequence about love 'Power Politics' she was signalling that, in a culture whose engine is power, and which is structured on the principle of domination through race, class, gender, to pretend that power does not function in personal relationships seems a deliberate and wilful blindness. Women should take a harder look." In this work, Atwood explores how people use power in personal relationships, much as they do in business or political relationships.

1972

*Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature* is published. This is a reader's

guide to Canadian literature, but Sullivan considers that it is more than that: "Survival, in fact, was a kind of political manifesto telling Canadians to get over their waffling and value their own [art, literature]." This was, and continues to be, an influential book that has affected the way Canadians think about themselves. It is frequently studied in university literature courses and when it came out it was considered to be the most startling book ever written about Canadian literature.

#### The early 1970s to present

This is a period when the arts in Canada explode. Margaret Atwood both contributes to, and derives strength from, the atmosphere of creative talent. She teaches, writes, and edits during this period. One of the publishers she edits for is the newly created House of Anansi, a cutting-edge nationalist company that is created to highlight the talent of Canadian writers. In the mid-1970s Atwood is finally able to earn a living as a professional writer. In this time period she writes 10 novels and numerous short stories and poem collections. She becomes a national icon and Canada's most famous living author.

#### Follow-Up Discussion

Power Politics suggests that the idea of romantic love where a woman searches for a soulmate to complete herself is a cultural tool for keeping women in place, and that relationships, even romantic love, involve power. Do you agree with this point of view? Why is a keen understanding of and appreciation for human relationships so important to a novelist?

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In literature, and art in general, diverse opinions may abound regarding the same artist and his or her work. Unlike science or mathematics, for example, literature does not have an exact scale of measurement whereby we can say, "This is a 9 out of 10 on the novel scale." You have probably heard someone say in English class something like, "This is stupid!" or "This is boring!" when asked what they thought of a piece of literature. Although everyone is entitled to an opinion, in a discussion of literature one is expected to back up an opinion of the merit of a work with a careful explanation of why a work is "poor," "mediocre," or "brilliant." By examining both the ideas in the text and the way in which those ideas are conveyed, the reader forms a carefully considered educated opinion that substantiates his or her subjective point of view. Such is the job of the professional critic. Although we may be trained to be better judges of literature by having a thorough understanding of the conventions used by writers and other artists, and thereby judge the author's mastery of the conventions, good literature is more than just a set of conventions. There is a subjective, personal element that makes us like or dislike a given work, and this may depend on many different factors. The same novel may be both loved and loathed by equally intelligent and educated people. If this is the case then can there be any right and true evaluation, or are all opinions equally true and valid? Perhaps the only, although imperfect, test of the merit of a literary work is the test of time. By this standard, Shakespeare's work probably has considerable value and merit because we are still reading him and seeing his plays performed. Margaret Atwood has been very successful as a writer and has received many rewards for her work. But not everybody likes her style. Consider the range of opinion about her work expressed below. Express in your own words what you think each critic is saying. On *The Blind Assassin*: "Three days in a row, reading it gave me a headache, but it did so because I was forced so hard to think. Atwood's prose is so expert, so clear and unimpeding, that not for a moment does one escape the feeling of being in the author's supervising company." - Noah Richler, *The National Post* "I can't help feeling that the book may be just a little too easy somehow, that it covers its ground expertly but without really breaking into new imaginative territory." - Michael Dirda, *The Washington Post* "The book, although vexing at times, is Atwood at her familiar best; clever, carping, and wonderfully astute." - Nancy Schiefer, *The Toronto Sun* *The New York Times Book Review*, a prestigious literary magazine, put out two reviews of *The Blind Assassin*; one was very critical, the other was positive. The critic and novelist Thomas Mallon said the novel was: "flat as a pancake" and "overlong and badly written." In all, he listed at least 20 criticisms, and accused Atwood of "sloppy wrap-it-up writing." The other reviewer, Michiko Kakutani, praised Atwood's "virtuosic storytelling" and her writing's "uncommon authority and ease."

#### Follow-up Assignments

1. Choose a short story, poem, or novel that you have already read or studied in class. Your task is to write two critical reviews of the piece, one positive and one negative. The reviews should be short, no more than 100 words each, but in each you must make one point, and back it up with evidence from the text. Consider the language and terms used by the critics above.

2. Working in small groups, create a list of criteria for (a) a good novel and (b) a great novel. Compare your criteria with those of other groups. 3. Read *The Blind Assassin* and write your own review. Then, using magazines, newspapers, or the Internet, locate other reviews of the novel and create a clipping file in which your review will be included. Compare the review package that you have created with that created by a classmate.

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From the biography on page 20 of this resource guide you will have noticed that there have been certain themes that reoccur in Margaret Atwood's work. Two of these relate to Canadian culture and identity, and the challenges that women face in determining their roles. Atwood came to maturity at a time when issues of Canadian cultural identity and the role of women were drastically changing. As you read the following material, consider how these changes and Margaret Atwood's role in them helped make her a novelist especially adept at depicting a Canadian social and cultural context. The Canadian Identity When Atwood began her studies at the University of Toronto she sought to determine why there were no Canadian writers. She soon found out that there were indeed Canadian writers. She is quoted as saying, ". . . but the colonial culture remained indifferent to their presence." As an aspiring writer herself, Atwood found this indifference of Canada to Canadian talent puzzling and disappointing. The Great Canadian Lie At university in the U.S. she noted a tendency among Canadians to become aggressive nationalists when living there. She explained the behaviour as "The Great Canadian Lie" because urban Canadians reinvented themselves as Great White Hunters and rugged naturalists. When Americans dropped remarks about Canadians being boring and grey, she and other expatriates invented stories about man-eating polar bears and the adventures of northern life. Atwood explained, "It wasn't the American national identity that was bothering us; nor was it our absence of one. We knew perfectly well we had one, we just didn't know what it was. We weren't even insulted that 'they' knew nothing about us; after all, we knew nothing about ourselves." Survival Atwood was not the only one to notice the sense of inferiority that plagued Canadians. In the early 1960s there was debate as to why Canada suffered from such inferiority. Her mentor Northrop Frye noted in 1965 that "Canada began as an obstacle [referring to the explorers' original goal of finding a trade route to China], blocking the way to the treasure of the East, to be explored only in the hope of finding a passage through it." Thus a mood emerged in Canada, "the feeling of apology for being so huge and tedious an obstacle on the way to somewhere more interesting." Atwood began to study Canada's literature in order to find the roots of this feeling. She came to a conclusion when she published Survival in which she suggested that every country has a single unifying symbol at its core, and for Canada that symbol was survival. For early explorers this meant bare physical survival, later for French Canadians-after the English took power-it meant cultural survival, and later again English Canada itself had to fight for cultural survival in the face of the overwhelming influence of the United States. Our central idea is not of the excitement and adventure that the frontier offers, as we see in the United States, rather our stories are likely to be tales not of those who made it, but of those who made it back, from "the awful experience"-the north, the snowstorm, the sinking ship. The tradition of the survival mentality has been handed down from pioneer writers like Susanna Moodie, who struggled for physical, external survival, to more modern writers where the obstacle to survival becomes internal, psychological. This was a rather depressing conclusion to come to; however at the same time there was room for hope. The late 1960s and early 1970s was a period of tremendous cultural growth in Canada. Canadians were beginning to look beyond bare survival. Beyond Survival Right up to the mid 1960s

most publishing companies in Canada had a very bad record for publishing original Canadian books. To get around this, two writers created their own publishing company to feature Canadian talent-it was called the House of Anansi. Atwood contributed financially to this new venture and became an editor and writer for the company. The founders of Anansi wanted to promote a sense of Canadian culture through literature. Atwood later explained that nationalism among Canadian writers wasn't initially ideological; they just wanted to get published. Anansi was a sign of the times, of the birth of Canadian cultural nationalism. More presses publishing Canadian content began to open. As well, more theatres opened, creating venues for Canadian plays and actors. The cultural movement begun by artists was creating a wider sense of nationalism, and this nationalism was not of the artificial "Great White Hunter" variety, but was based on a new sense of pride in Canadian accomplishment. The beginning of this movement coincided with the World Exhibition of 1967 in Montreal, more commonly known as Expo 67. We began thinking deliberately of ourselves as Canadians and about what united and separated us, and Expo, according to Atwood, was the result of a groundswell of nationalism and optimism in Canada during its centennial celebrations. The financial assistance of the Canada Arts Council further helped foster the arts, creating conditions in which writers could write. Atwood herself contributed to this Canadian self-awareness with books like *Survival* and *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*, which explored the Canadian identity, with her work as an editor for the House of Anansi, and with the publication of her own poetry and novels. Her commentary on Canadian culture has triggered debate, but the debate over Canadian issues is in part due to the movement of which she was a part.

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Margaret Atwood has been breaking away from social conventions since she decided to be a writer. In works such as *Power Politics* and *The Edible Women* she has examined the power structures in society that limit women. She has always questioned why women should not be able to have a career and an equal relationship with men. When the second wave of feminism emerged in the 1960s Atwood agreed with a lot of what it said, but at the same time she didn't want her art to become a front for an ideology. Rosemary Sullivan has written, "Margaret would always describe herself as a feminist, but not an ideological one. . . . She sees herself as a feminist on some level, but that is not her major contribution." For Atwood, her first duty is to the art of writing. Commenting that "Being kind to your dog doesn't make you a better painter," Atwood has emphasized the danger of art becoming a tool for a particular ideology, no matter how well intentioned. In her view, the quality of the art suffers when it becomes part of the ideology. Atwood's *Characters Without* espousing any particular ideology Atwood has created female characters who escape or reject the rigid roles that society sets for them. Her characters take action to change their lives and do this by destroying a former identity that was imposed upon them, and in the process, create a new one. In *Survival* Atwood says, "One way of coming to terms, making sense of one's roots, is to become a creator." Her characters often start out as victims of society but by replacing society's imposed values with their own, take control of their lives through their own creativity. Novels such as *Alias Grace*, *The Handmaid's Tale*, and *The Blind Assassin* are very different in terms of genre and subject matter but they share this pattern of women who challenge prescribed social conventions. A *Sense of Self* In her work Margaret Atwood has focused on the theme of identity. Arbitrary and predetermined ideas regarding both the identity of Canadians and women have tended to limit the potential of both; long-held beliefs that Canada was a second-rate culture have been dispelled by the emergence of a vast outpouring of Canadian artistic talent since the 1960s and a new appreciation of artists we had previously ignored. Atwood realized early on that the values of a society could be harmful and set out to explore how people could recreate values to give themselves a more positive sense of identity. *Follow-Up Discussion* In this report Atwood says that if a writer were to structure his or her art around a moral/ideological issue "[He or she] would become a sock puppet for other people's ideologies and desires. . . [and] would be in danger as an artist if [he or she] did so." Explain this comment and discuss its implications in terms of literature, fictional characters, and real or imagined social roles.

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Although she was already a world-class novelist, by winning the Booker Prize Margaret Atwood achieved even greater status on the international literary scene. Why is the Booker Prize deemed so important? Consider the following:

- The Booker Prize is worth \$46 000 (Canadian), guarantees a huge increase in sales, including future publishing contracts and, potentially, film and TV rights. A.S. Byatt, who won the Booker for her novel *Possession*, is reported to have spent the money on a longed-for swimming pool at her home in Provence, France. Michael Ondaatje's Booker-winning *The English Patient* and Atwood's previously Booker-nominated *The Handmaid's Tale* were both made into major motion pictures.
- It is one of the most famous and widely discussed literary prizes in the world. Each year English bookies earn large sums of money taking bets on who will win. One bookie said, "I never rode Red Rum [a famous race horse] but I don't suppose many people question my right to express an opinion as to which horse will win the Grand National. Yet every year, as a bookmaker, I face criticism for daring to express an opinion, via the odds I concoct for William Hill [a major bookmaking business] of the outcome of The Booker Prize judges' deliberations."
- This year's judging panel includes a well-known journalist, a professor of Irish history at Oxford University, a writer and broadcaster, a literary editor of *The Sunday Times*, and best-selling author Rose Tremain.
- Established in 1968 by Booker pic, a cash & carry private manufacturing company in the UK with 181 branches nationwide and a turnover of £3.5 billion, the Prize is financed by this private corporation and administered by Book Trust, the independent charity that promotes books and reading. The Booker was inspired by the French Prix Goncourt and, according to the Booker Prize organization, is considered the "ultimate accolade for every fiction writer." The Prize was set up "to reward merit, raise the stature of the author in the eyes of the public, and increase sales of the books." The 1999 Booker Prize winner, J.M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*, sold over 100 000 copies in hardback and remained on the bestseller lists for three months following the awarding of the Prize.
- This year's Booker Prize was announced at an awards dinner in London's Guildhall and broadcast on Channel 4 during an hour-long program devoted to the event.
- The Booker has always engendered debate and some controversy. Writing in *The Observer*, literary editor Robert McCrum said, "Once the shock of the new had worn off, I began to understand that this shortlist, apparently strange and arbitrary, was actually very good indeed . . . in recent years, many commentators, (myself included) have had hours of fun denouncing

the Booker Prize for its irrelevance to the literary process, for its incompetence and its fundamental philistinism. Today, while it remains that oxymoron, a 'literary prize,' Simon Jenkins and his colleagues have rescued it from contempt. The Booker Prize shortlist for the year 2000 is no laughing matter. Roll on 7 November." Boyd Tonkin of The Independent said, "It won't be long before the press pretends to hear the first bat-squeaks of gossip from the judges of the Booker Prize. Most of these "leaks" will be concocted in the office on a slow afternoon. . . . I simply hope the panel keeps up the admirable Booker tradition of resisting corporate hype and taking seriously the finest novels submitted by small firms. . . . Natural bullies, the giant sharks of publishing detest the fact that minnows can compete for the Booker on almost equal terms." Mariella Frostrup, a member of this year's judging panel, said, "I've never felt proud, really proud of anything until I got the letter from the Booker people, inviting me on to the jury. It gave me an internal glow, which lasted . . . oh, at least until I had to start reading the books."

- On November 1, 2000, the Times Booker Prize Debate was held at the British Library London. At the debate the reading public had the opportunity to put themselves in the place of the judges for the Booker. The debate was led by some of the country's leading authors and literary critics, each arguing the merits of the shortlisted books. Questions from the audience were invited, and the evening was brought to a close with a vote by the audience members. Tickets cost £5 (\$11) and £3 (\$6.60) for students, over 60s and the unemployed (on production of valid ID). Tickets included a glass of wine and all shortlisted books were on sale.

#### **Follow-up Discussion**

1. In your opinion, is the Booker Prize a competition like a sporting event? Is this good or bad for literature?
2. How does the Booker Prize suggest that reading is still a priority and very much part of culture in the United Kingdom? Is this also true for Canada?
3. Why might some people be skeptical of literary awards?
4. Is literature, reading, and writing encouraged and promoted in your school?

### **Comprehensive News in Review Study Modules**

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Using both the print and non-print material from various issues of News in Review, teachers and students can create comprehensive, thematic modules that are excellent for research purposes, independent assignments, and small group study. We recommend the stories indicated below for the universal issues they represent and for the archival and historic material they contain.

"Robertson Davies: A Literary Legend," February 1996

"W.O. Mitchell: A Canadian Storyteller," April 1998

## Margaret Atwood: A Canadian Novelist

### Discussion, Research and Essay Question

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1. Canadian literature is now respected the world over and, most importantly, in Canada itself. Governments and private foundations have established rewards for works of particular merit. At the Web site [www.nwpassages.com/awards.asp](http://www.nwpassages.com/awards.asp) you will find a list of major literary awards. Read the descriptions of the various awards. Why do you think these awards were created? Why are they important? What is unique or distinct about each?
2. Margaret Atwood has also written children's literature. Read one of the following and write a critical review in which you define the theme or themes and the way in which the story is told: *Up in The Tree*, *Anna's Pet*, *For the Birds*, *Princess Prunella* and *the Purple Peanut*.
3. Margaret Atwood has very definite ideas about the role of the writer. Go to her Web site at: [www.web.net/owtoad](http://www.web.net/owtoad) and locate "On Writing." Examine what she says about the art of writing and the writer's function. Present your findings in a written report.
4. On the Web site [www.nwpassages.com/awards.asp](http://www.nwpassages.com/awards.asp) you will find the winners of various literary awards. Choose one of the Canadian authors mentioned, and research and write a biographical essay on him or her.
5. Atwood commented that "After Expo [67], Canadians began to think consciously about themselves as Canadians." Investigate the phenomenon that was Expo 67. Was it a turning point in the history of Canada?
6. How have attitudes about the role of women changed in Canada since the 1950s? Examine the feminist movement in Canada in the last half century. How have perceptions changed regarding the role of women? Research especially "The Famous Five." A commemorative sculpture celebrating these women was recently unveiled on Parliament Hill.
7. In her book *Survival*, Atwood says, "The tendency in Canada, at least in high school and university teaching, has been to emphasize the personal and the universal but to skip the national or the cultural." Has the study of our national heritage in school been neglected? Substantiate your opinion with evidence.
8. "What a lost person needs is a map of the territory, with his own position marked on it so he can see where he is in relation to everything else. Literature is not only a mirror; it is also a map, a geography of the mind. Our literature is one such map, if we can learn to read it as our literature, as a product of who and where we have been" (*Survival*). Select a piece of Canadian literature and write an essay about what makes it Canadian. What does the piece of literature you have chosen tell us about the geography of the Canadian mind?

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