

# Literature, Critical Thinking, & Writing



Literature, Critical Thinking,  
& Writing

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PART I  
FACULTY RESOURCES



# I. Request Access



To preserve academic integrity and prevent students from gaining unauthorized access to faculty resources, we verify each request manually.

Contact [oeer@achievingthedream.org](mailto:oeer@achievingthedream.org), and we'll get you on your way.

## Overview of Faculty Resources

This is a community course developed by an Achieving the Dream grantee. They have either curated or created a collection of faculty resources for this course. Since the resources are openly licensed, you may use them as is or adapt them to your needs.

## Now Available

- Essay Prompts

## Share Your Favorite Resources

If you have sample resources you would like to share with other faculty teaching this course, please send them with an explanatory message and learning outcome alignment to [oer@achievingthedream.org](mailto:oer@achievingthedream.org).

## 2. Essay Prompts

Essay prompts for the final three modules of the course:

Analyzing Short Fiction:

- Write an essay that analyzes a short story that have been covered in class. In the essay, be sure to address at least four elements that include: plot, character, point of view, setting, theme, symbolism, or style. You must incorporate at least one outside piece of literary criticism. (Critical Thinking, Literary Terminology, Literary Analysis, Literary Criticism, Short Story Analysis)

Analyzing Poetry:

- Write an essay that is a close-reading or explication of one of the poems listed. The goal is to demonstrate critical thinking skills by going beyond the obvious. The essay should include a brief summary of the poem. Be sure to include knowledge of poetry elements such as but not limited to: imagery, simile, metaphor, form, lineation, enjambment, caesura, stanzas, the speaker, the listener, rhyme, assonance, consonance, and or meter. You must incorporate at least one outside piece of literary criticism (Critical Thinking, Literary Terminology, Literary Analysis, Literary Criticism, Poetry Analysis)

Analyzing Plays:

- Theme and characterization are important elements in literature. Describe three characters from a play assigned for class and show how their roles contribute to the theme of the play. Clearly explain the theme of the play first. Be sure to use specific examples from the play. Critical Thinking, Literary Terminology, Literary Analysis, Literary Criticism, Plays

Analysis)

### 3. I Need Help



Need more information about this course? Have questions about faculty resources? Can't find what you're looking for? Experiencing technical difficulties?

We're here to help! Contact [oe@achievingthedream.org](mailto:oe@achievingthedream.org) for support.





PART II  
CRITICAL THINKING



## 4. Critical Thinking in College Writing: From the Personal to the Academic

There is something about the term “critical thinking” that makes you draw a blank every time you think about what it means.\* It seems so fuzzy and abstract that you end up feeling uncomfortable, as though the term is thrust upon you, demanding an intellectual effort that you may not yet have. But you know it requires you to enter a realm of smart, complex ideas that others have written about and that you have to navigate, understand, and interact with just as intelligently. It’s a lot to ask for. It makes you feel like a stranger in a strange land.

As a writing teacher I am accustomed to reading and responding to difficult texts. In fact, I like grappling with texts that have interesting ideas no matter how complicated they are because I understand their value. I have learned through my years of education that what ultimately engages me, keeps me enthralled, is not just grammatically pristine, fluent writing, but writing that forces me to think beyond the page. It is writing where the writer has challenged herself and then offered up that challenge to the reader, like a baton in a relay race. The idea is to run with the baton.

You will often come across critical thinking and analysis as requirements for assignments in writing and upper-level courses in a variety of disciplines. Instructors have varying explanations of what they actually require of you, but, in general, they expect you to respond thoughtfully to texts you have read. The first thing you should remember is not to be afraid of critical thinking. It does not mean that you have to criticize the text, disagree with its premise, or attack the writer simply because you feel you must. Criticism is the process of responding to and evaluating ideas, argument,

and style so that readers understand how and why you value these items.

Critical thinking is also a process that is fundamental to all disciplines. While in this essay I refer mainly to critical thinking in composition, the general principles behind critical thinking are strikingly similar in other fields and disciplines. In history, for instance, it could mean examining and analyzing primary sources in order to understand the context in which they were written. In the hard sciences, it usually involves careful reasoning, making judgments and decisions, and problem solving. While critical thinking may be subject-specific, that is to say, it can vary in method and technique depending on the discipline, most of its general principles such as rational thinking, making independent evaluations and judgments, and a healthy skepticism of what is being read, are common to all disciplines. No matter the area of study, the application of critical thinking skills leads to clear and flexible thinking and a better understanding of the subject at hand.

To be a critical thinker you not only have to have an informed opinion about the text but also a thoughtful response to it. There is no doubt that critical thinking is serious thinking, so here are some steps you can take to become a serious thinker and writer.

## **Attentive Reading: A Foundation for Critical Thinking**

A critical thinker is always a good reader because to engage critically with a text you have to read attentively and with an open mind, absorbing new ideas and forming your own as you go along. Let us imagine you are reading an essay by Annie Dillard, a famous essayist, called “Living like Weasels.” Students are drawn to it because the idea of the essay appeals to something personally fundamental to all of us: how to live our lives. It is also a provocative

essay that pulls the reader into the argument and forces a reaction, a good criterion for critical thinking.

So let's say that in reading the essay you encounter a quote that gives you pause. In describing her encounter with a weasel in Hollins Pond, Dillard says, "I would like to learn, or remember, how to live . . . I don't think I can learn from a wild animal how to live in particular . . . but I might learn something of mindlessness, something of the purity of living in the physical senses and the dignity of living without bias or motive" (220). You may not be familiar with language like this. It seems complicated, and you have to stop ever so often (perhaps after every phrase) to see if you understood what Dillard means. You may ask yourself these questions:

- What does "mindlessness" mean in this context?
- How can one "learn something of mindlessness?"
- What does Dillard mean by "purity of living in the physical senses?"
- How can one live "without bias or motive?"

These questions show that you are an attentive reader. Instead of simply glossing over this important passage, you have actually stopped to think about what the writer means and what she expects you to get from it. Here is how I read the quote and try to answer the questions above: Dillard proposes a simple and uncomplicated way of life as she looks to the animal world for inspiration. It is ironic that she admires the quality of "mindlessness" since it is our consciousness, our very capacity to think and reason, which makes us human, which makes us beings of a higher order. Yet, Dillard seems to imply that we need to live instinctually, to be guided by our senses rather than our intellect. Such a "thoughtless" approach to daily living, according to Dillard, would mean that our actions would not be tainted by our biases or motives, our prejudices. We would go back to a primal way of living, like the weasel she observes. It may take you some time to arrive at this understanding on your own, but it is important to stop, reflect, and ask questions of the

text whenever you feel stumped by it. Often such questions will be helpful during class discussions and peer review sessions.

## Listing Important Ideas

When reading any essay, keep track of all the important points the writer makes by jotting down a list of ideas or quotations in a notebook. This list not only allows you to remember ideas that are central to the writer's argument, ideas that struck you in some way or the other, but it also helps you to get a good sense of the whole reading assignment point by point. In reading Annie Dillard's essay, we come across several points that contribute toward her proposal for better living and that help us get a better understanding of her main argument. Here is a list of some of her ideas that struck me as important:

1. "The weasel lives in necessity and we live in choice, hating necessity and dying at the last ignobly in its talons" (220).

2. "And I suspect that for me the way is like the weasel's: open to time and death painlessly, noticing everything, remembering nothing, choosing the given with a fierce and pointed will" (221).

3. "We can live any way we want. People take vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience—even of silence—by choice. The thing is to stalk your calling in a certain skilled and supple way, to locate the most tender and live spot and plug into that pulse" (221).

4. "A weasel doesn't 'attack' anything; a weasel lives as he's meant to, yielding at every moment to the perfect freedom of single necessity" (221).

5. "I think it would be well, and proper, and obedient, and pure, to grasp your one necessity and not let it go, to dangle from it limp wherever it takes you" (221).

These quotations give you a cumulative sense of what Dillard is trying to get at in her essay, that is, they lay out the elements with which she builds her argument. She first explains how the

weasel lives, what she learns from observing the weasel, and then prescribes a lifestyle she admires—the central concern of her essay.

## Noticing Key Terms and Summarizing Important Quotes

Within the list of quotations above are key terms and phrases that are critical to your understanding of the ideal life as Dillard describes it. For instance, “mindlessness,” “instinct,” “perfect freedom of a single necessity,” “stalk your calling,” “choice,” and “fierce and pointed will” are weighty terms and phrases, heavy with meaning, that you need to spend time understanding. You also need to understand the relationship between them and the quotations in which they appear. This is how you might work on each quotation to get a sense of its meaning and then come up with a statement that takes the key terms into account and expresses a general understanding of the text:

**Quote 1:** Animals (like the weasel) live in “necessity,” which means that their only goal in life is to survive. They don’t think about how they should live or what choices they should make like humans do. According to Dillard, we like to have options and resist the idea of “necessity.” We fight death—an inevitable force that we have no control over—and yet ultimately surrender to it as it is the necessary end of our lives.

**Quote 2:** Dillard thinks the weasel’s way of life is the best way to live. It implies a pure and simple approach to life where we do not worry about the passage of time or the approach of death. Like the weasel, we should live life in the moment, intensely experiencing everything but not dwelling on the past. We should accept our condition, what we are “given,” with a “fierce and pointed will.” Perhaps this means that we should pursue our one goal, our one passion in life, with the same single-minded determination and tenacity that we see in the weasel.

**Quote 3:** As humans, we can choose any lifestyle we want. The trick, however, is to go after our one goal, one passion like a stalker would after a prey.

**Quote 4:** While we may think that the weasel (or any animal) chooses to attack other animals, it is really only surrendering to the one thing it knows: its need to live. Dillard tells us there is “the perfect freedom” in this desire to survive because to her, the lack of options (the animal has no other option than to fight to survive) is the most liberating of all.

**Quote 5:** Dillard urges us to latch on to our deepest passion in life (the “one necessity”) with the tenacity of a weasel and not let go. Perhaps she’s telling us how important it is to have an unwavering focus or goal in life.

## Writing a Personal Response: Looking Inward

Dillard’s ideas will have certainly provoked a response in your mind, so if you have some clear thoughts about how you feel about the essay this is the time to write them down. As you look at the quotes you have selected and your explanation of their meaning, begin to create your personal response to the essay. You may begin by using some of these strategies:

1. Tell a story. Has Dillard’s essay reminded you of an experience you have had? Write a story in which you illustrate a point that Dillard makes or hint at an idea that is connected to her essay.

2. Focus on an idea from Dillard’s essay that is personally important to you. Write down your thoughts about this idea in a first person narrative and explain your perspective on the issue.

3. If you are uncomfortable writing a personal narrative or using “I” (you should not be), reflect on some of her ideas that seem important and meaningful in general. Why were you struck by these ideas?

4. Write a short letter to Dillard in which you speak to her about



the essay. You may compliment her on some of her ideas by explaining why you like them, ask her a question related to her essay and explain why that question came to you, and genuinely start up a conversation with her.

This stage in critical thinking is important for establishing your relationship with a text. What do I mean by this “relationship,” you may ask? Simply put, it has to do with how you feel about the text. Are you amazed by how true the ideas seem to be, how wise Dillard sounds? Or are you annoyed by Dillard’s let-me-tell-you-how-to-live approach and disturbed by the impractical ideas she so easily prescribes? Do you find Dillard’s voice and style thrilling and engaging or merely confusing? No matter which of the personal response options you select, your initial reaction to the text will help shape your views about it.

## Making an Academic Connection: Looking Outward

First year writing courses are designed to teach a range of writing—from the personal to the academic—so that you can learn to express advanced ideas, arguments, concepts, or theories in any discipline. While the example I have been discussing pertains mainly to college writing, the method of analysis and approach to critical thinking I have demonstrated here will serve you well in a variety of disciplines. Since critical thinking and analysis are key elements of the reading and writing you will do in college, it is important to understand how they form a part of academic writing. No matter how intimidating the term “academic writing” may seem (it is, after all, associated with advanced writing and becoming an expert in a field of study), embrace it not as a temporary college requirement but as a habit of mind.

To some, academic writing often implies impersonal writing, writing that is detached, distant, and lacking in personal meaning or

relevance. However, this is often not true of the academic writing you will do in a composition class. Here your presence as a writer—your thoughts, experiences, ideas, and therefore who you are—is of much significance to the writing you produce. In fact, it would not be farfetched to say that in a writing class academic writing often begins with personal writing. Let me explain. If critical thinking begins with a personal view of the text, academic writing helps you broaden that view by going beyond the personal to a more universal point of view. In other words, academic writing often has its roots in one’s private opinion or perspective about another writer’s ideas but ultimately goes beyond this opinion to the expression of larger, more abstract ideas. Your personal vision—your core beliefs and general approach to life— will help you arrive at these “larger ideas” or universal propositions that any reader can understand and be enlightened by, if not agree with. In short, academic writing is largely about taking a critical, analytical stance toward a subject in order to arrive at some compelling conclusions.

Let us now think about how you might apply your critical thinking skills to move from a personal reaction to a more formal academic response to Annie Dillard’s essay. The second stage of critical thinking involves textual analysis and requires you to do the following:

- Summarize the writer’s ideas the best you can in a brief paragraph. This provides the basis for extended analysis since it contains the central ideas of the piece, the building blocks, so to speak.
- Evaluate the most important ideas of the essay by considering their merits or flaws, their worthiness or lack of worthiness. Do not merely agree or disagree with the ideas but explore and explain why you believe they are socially, politically, philosophically, or historically important and relevant, or why you need to question, challenge, or reject them.
- Identify gaps or discrepancies in the writer’s argument. Does she contradict herself? If so, explain how this contradiction forces you

to think more deeply about her ideas. Or if you are confused, explain what is confusing and why.

- Examine the strategies the writer uses to express her ideas. Look particularly at her style, voice, use of figurative language, and the way she structures her essay and organizes her ideas. Do these strategies strengthen or weaken her argument? How?

- Include a second text—an essay, a poem, lyrics of a song— whose ideas enhance your reading and analysis of the primary text. This text may help provide evidence by supporting a point you're making, and further your argument.

- Extend the writer's ideas, develop your own perspective, and propose new ways of thinking about the subject at hand.

## Crafting the Essay

Once you have taken notes and developed a thorough understanding of the text, you are on your way to writing a good essay. If you were asked to write an exploratory essay, a personal response to Dillard's essay would probably suffice. However, an academic writing assignment requires you to be more critical. As counter-intuitive as it may sound, beginning your essay with a personal anecdote often helps to establish your relationship to the text and draw the reader into your writing. It also helps to ease you into the more complex task of textual analysis. Once you begin to analyze Dillard's ideas, go back to the list of important ideas and quotations you created as you read the essay. After a brief summary, engage with the quotations that are most important, that get to the heart of Dillard's ideas, and explore their meaning. Textual engagement, a seemingly slippery concept, simply means that you respond directly to some of Dillard's ideas, examine the value of Dillard's assertions, and explain why they are worthwhile or why they should be rejected. This should help you to transition into analysis and evaluation. Also, this part of your essay will most clearly

reflect your critical thinking abilities as you are expected not only to represent Dillard's ideas but also to weigh their significance. Your observations about the various points she makes, analysis of conflicting viewpoints or contradictions, and your understanding of her general thesis should now be synthesized into a rich new idea about how we should live our lives. Conclude by explaining this fresh point of view in clear, compelling language and by rearticulating your main argument.

## Modeling Good Writing

When I teach a writing class, I often show students samples of really good writing that I've collected over the years. I do this for two reasons: first, to show students how another freshman writer understood and responded to an assignment that they are currently working on; and second, to encourage them to succeed as well. I explain that although they may be intimidated by strong, sophisticated writing and feel pressured to perform similarly, it is always helpful to see what it takes to get an A. It also helps to follow a writer's imagination, to learn how the mind works when confronted with a task involving critical thinking. The following sample is a response to the Annie Dillard essay. Figure 1 includes the entire student essay and my comments are inserted into the text to guide your reading.

Though this student has not included a personal narrative in his essay, his own world-view is clear throughout. His personal point of view, while not expressed in first person statements, is evident from the very beginning. So we could say that a personal response to the text need not always be expressed in experiential or narrative form but may be present as reflection, as it is here. The point is that the writer has traveled through the rough terrain of critical thinking by starting out with his own ruminations on the subject, then by critically analyzing and responding to Dillard's text, and finally by

developing a strong point of view of his own about our responsibility as human beings. As readers we are engaged by clear, compelling writing and riveted by critical thinking that produces a movement of ideas that give the essay depth and meaning. The challenge Dillard set forth in her essay has been met and the baton passed along to us.

The image shows a screenshot of a document with three paragraphs of text and three comment boxes on the right side. The first paragraph is titled "Building our Lives: The Blueprint Lies Within" and discusses the lack of a blueprint for living. The second paragraph discusses Annie Dillard's essay "Living Like Weasels" and compares human and animal behavior. The third paragraph continues the discussion on human behavior. Three comment boxes are connected to the text by lines: the first to the end of the first paragraph, the second to the end of the second paragraph, and the third to the end of the third paragraph.

**Building our Lives: The Blueprint Lies Within**

We all may ask ourselves many questions, some serious, some less important, in our lifetime. But at some point along the way, we all will take a step back and look at the way we are living our lives, and wonder if we are living them correctly. Unfortunately, there is no solid blueprint for the way to live our lives. Each person is different, feeling different emotions and reacting to different stimuli than the person next to them. Many people search for the true answer on how to live our lives, as if there are secret instructions out there waiting to be found. But the truth is we as a species are given a gift not many other creatures can claim to have: the ability to choose to live as we want, not as we were necessarily designed to. Even so, people look outside of themselves for the answers on how to live, which begs me to ask the question: what is wrong with just living as we are now, built from scratch through our choices and memories?

Annie Dillard's essay entitled "Living Like Weasels" is an exploration into the way human beings might live, clearly stating that "We could live any way we want" (Dillard 111). Dillard's encounter with an ordinary weasel helped her receive insight into the difference between the way human beings live their lives and the way wild animals go about theirs. As a nature writer, Dillard shows us that we can learn a lot about the true way to live by observing nature's other creations. While we think and debate and calculate each and every move, these creatures just simply act. The thing that keeps human beings from living the purest life possible, like an animal such as the weasel, is the same thing that separates us from all wild animals: our minds. Human beings are creatures of caution, creatures of undeniable fear, never fully living our lives because we are too caught up with avoiding risks. A weasel, on the

**Comment:** Even as the writer starts with a general introduction, he makes a claim here that is related to Dillard's essay.

**Comment:** The student asks what seems like a rhetorical question but it is one he will answer in the rest of his essay. It is also a question that forces the reader to think about a key term from the text—"choices."

**Comment:** Student summarizes Dillard's essay by explaining the ideas of the essay in fresh words.

other hand, is a creature of action and instinct), a creature which lives its life the way it was created to, not questioning its motives, simply striking when the time to strike is right. As Dillard states, "the wasp lives in necessity and we live in choice, hating necessity and dying at the last ignobly in its talons" (Dillard 210).

It is important to note and appreciate the uniqueness of the ideas Dillard presents in this essay because in some ways they are very true. For instance, it is true that humans live lives of caution, with a certain fear that has been built up continually through the years. We are forced to agree with Dillard's idea that we as humans "might learn something of mindlessness, something of the purity of living in the physical senses and the dignity of living without bias or motive" (Dillard 210). To live freely we need to live our lives with less hesitation, instead of intentionally choosing to not live to the fullest in fear of the consequences of our actions. However, Dillard suggests that we should forsake our ability of thought and choice all together. The human mind is the tool that has allowed a creature with no natural weapons to become the unquestioned dominant species on this planet, and though it curbs the spontaneity of our lives, it is not something to be simply thrown away for a chance to live completely "free of bias or motive" (Dillard 210). We are a moral, conscious species, complete with emotions and a firm conscience, and it is the power of our minds that allows us to exist as we do now: with the ability to both think and feel at the same time. It grants us the ability to choose and have choice, to be guided not only by feelings and emotions but also by morals and an understanding of consequence. As such, a human being with the ability to live like a wasp has given up the very thing that makes him human.

Comment: Up until this point the student has introduced Dillard's essay and summarized some of its ideas. In the section that follows, he continues to think critically about Dillard's ideas and argument.

Comment: This is a strong statement that captures the student's appreciation of Dillard's suggestion to live freely but also the ability to recognize why most people cannot live this way. This is a good example of critical thinking.

Comment: Again, the student acknowledges the importance of conscious thought.

Comment: While the student does not include a personal experience in the essay, this section gives us a sense of his personal view of life. Also note how he introduces the term "morals" here to point out the significance of the consequences of our actions. The point is that not only do we need to act but we also need to be aware of the result of our actions.

Comment: Student rejects Dillard's idea but only after explaining why it is important to reject them.

Here, the first true flow of Dillard's essay comes to light. While it is possible to understand and even respect Dillard's observations, it should be noted that without thought and choice she would have never been able to construct these notions in the first place. Dillard protests, "I tell you I've been in that weasel's brain for sixty seconds, and he was in mine" (Dillard 200). One cannot cast oneself into the mind of another creature without the intricacy of human thought, and one would not be able to choose to live as said creature does without the power of human choice. In essence, Dillard would not have had the ability to judge the life of another creature if she were to live like a weasel. Weasels do not make judgments; they simply act and react on the basis of instinct. The "mindlessness" that Dillard speaks of would prevent her from having the option to choose her own reactions. Whereas the conscious-thinking Dillard has the ability to see this creature and take the time to stop and examine its life, the "mindless" Dillard would only have the limited options to attack or run away. This is the major fault in the logic of Dillard's essay, as it would be impossible for her to choose to examine and compare the lives of humans and weasels without the capacity for choice.

Dillard also examines a weasel's short memory in a positive light and seems to believe that a happier life could be achieved if only we were simple-minded enough to live our lives with absolutely no regret. She claims, "I suspect that for me the way is like the weasel's: open to time and death painlessly, noticing everything, remembering nothing, choosing the given with a fierce and pointed will" (Dillard 200). In theory, this does sound like a positive value. To be able to live freely without a list of remembrance as to the results of our choices would be an

**Comment:** Student dismantles Dillard's entire premise by telling us how the very act of writing the essay negates her argument. He has not only interpreted the essay but figured out how its premise is logically flawed.

**Comment:** Once again the student demonstrates why the logic of Dillard's argument falls short when applied to her own writing.

interesting life, one may even say a care-free life. But at the same time, would we not be denying our responsibility as humans to learn from the mistakes of the past as to not replicate them in the future? Human beings' ability to remember is almost as important as our ability to choose, because remembering things from the past is the only way we can truly learn from them. History is taught throughout our educational system for a very good reason: so that the generations of the future do not make the mistakes of the past. A human being who chooses to live like a weasel gives up something that once made him very human: the ability to learn from his mistakes to further better himself.

Ultimately, without the ability to choose or recall the past, mankind would be able to more readily take risks without regard for consequences. Dillard views the weasel's reaction to necessity as an unwavering willingness to take such carefree risks and chances. She states that "it would be well, and proper, and obedient, and pure, to grasp your one necessity and not let it go, to dangle from it long wherever it takes you" (Dillard 211). Would it then be productive for us to make a wrong choice and be forced to live in it forever, when we as a people have the power to change, to remedy wrongs we've made in our lives? What Dillard appears to be recommending is that humans not take many risks, but who is to say that the ability to avoid or escape risks is necessarily a flaw with mankind?

If we had been like the weasel, never wanting, never needing, always "choosing the given with a fierce and pointed will" (Dillard 210), our world would be a completely different place. The United States of America might not exist at this very moment if we had just taken what was given to us, and unwaveringly accepted a life as a colony of Great Britain. But as Cole clearly puts it, "A risk that you assume by actually

**Comment:** This question represents excellent critical thinking. The student acknowledges that theoretically "remembering nothing" may have some merits but then ponders on the larger socio-political problem it presents.

**Comment:** The student brings two ideas together very smoothly here.

**Comment:** The writer sums up his argument while once again reminding us of the problem with Dillard's ideas.

**Comment:** This is another thoughtful question that makes the reader think along with the writer.



doing something seems far more risky than a risk you take by not doing something, even though the risk of doing nothing may be greater" (Cole 145). As a unified body of people, we were able to go against that which was expected of us, evaluate the risk in doing so, and move forward with our revolution. The American people used the power of choice, and risk assessment, to make a permanent change in their lives; they used the remembrance of Britain's unjust deeds to fuel their passion for victory. We as a people chose. We remembered. We distinguished between right and wrong. There are things that a wasael can never do, because a wasael does not have a say in its own life, it only has its instincts and nothing more.

Humans are so unique in the fact that they can dictate the course of their own lives, but many people still choose to search around for the true way to live. What they do not realize is that they have to look no further than themselves. Our power, our weapon, is our ability to have thought and choice, to remember, and to make our own decisions based on our concepts of right and wrong, good and bad. These are the only tools we will ever need to construct the perfect life for ourselves from the ground up. And though it may seem like a nice notion to live a life free of regret, it is our responsibility as creatures and the appointed caretakers of this planet to utilize what was given to us and live our lives as we were meant to, not the life of any other wild animal.

*Comment:* The student makes a historical reference here that serves as strong evidence for his own argument.

*Comment:* This final paragraph sums up the writer's perspective in a thoughtful and mature way. It moves away from Gilliam's argument and establishes the notion of human responsibility, an idea right worth thinking about.

## Discussion

1. Write about your experiences with critical thinking assignments. What seemed to be the most difficult? What approaches did you try to overcome the difficulty?
2. Respond to the list of strategies on how to conduct textual

analysis. How well do these strategies work for you? Add your own tips to the list.

3. Evaluate the student essay by noting aspects of critical thinking that are evident to you. How would you grade this essay? What other qualities (or problems) do you notice?

## Works Cited

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# 5. Critical Thinking Discussion

## Critical Thinking Discussion

1) What does it mean to think critically? Write a definition. If you borrow a definition from someone, make sure to cite the source in MLA format. 2) How good are your critical thinking skills? What do you need to work on?



PART III

# LITERARY TERMINOLOGY



# 6. Literary Terms

## Metre

Metre refers to the rhythmic structure of lines of verse. The majority of English verse since Chaucer is in accentual-syllabic metre, which consists of alternating stressed and unstressed syllables within a fixed total number of syllables in each line. The metrical rhythm is thus the pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in each line. Groups of syllables are known as metrical feet; each line of verse is made up of a set number of feet. Thus:

Monometer: one foot per line

Dimeter: two feet per line

Trimeter: three feet per line

Tetrameter: four feet per line

Pentameter: five feet per line

Hexameter: six feet per line

Heptameter: seven feet per line

Octameter: eight feet per line

Each foot usually consists of a single stressed syllable – though there are some important variations – therefore these patterns correspond to the number of stressed syllables in a line; thus tetrameter has four, pentameter five, etc.

There are two types of metrical feet in English accentual-syllabic metre: duple metre, consisting of disyllabic (2-syllable) feet, in which stressed syllables (x) and unstressed syllables (o) alternate in pairs; and triple metre, consisting of trisyllabic (3-syllable) feet, in which single stressed syllables are grouped with a pair of unstressed syllables. Duple metre is the metre most commonly found in English verse.

The following metrical feet make up the most common rhythmical patterns:

Duple metre:

Iamb (iambic foot): o x

Trochee (trochaic foot): x o

Spondee (spondaic foot): x x

Pyrrhus / dibrach (pyrrhic foot): o o

Triple metre:

Dactyl (dactylic foot): x o o

Anapaest (anapaestic foot): o o x

Amphibrach: o x o

Molossus: x x x

Note that the spondee, pyrrhus and molossus do not usually form the basis for whole lines of verse, but are considered forms of substitution: that is, when a foot required by the metrical pattern being used is replaced by a different sort of foot.

A frequently-found example of substitution is the replacement of the initial iamb in an iambic line by a trochee, e.g. (underlined syllables represent stressed syllables):

In me thou seest the twilight of such day  
As after sunset fadeth in the west  
Which by and by black night doth take away,  
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest  
– Shakespeare, sonnet 73 .

(The first three lines of this quatrain are perfectly iambic; the initial foot of the fourth line is an example of trochaic substitution, also known as inversion.)

Other variations in metrical rhythm include: acephalexia, in which the first syllable of a line that would be expected according to the regular metre of the line, is lacking; and catalexis, in which a line lacks the final syllable expected by its metrical pattern. A masculine ending is a line that ends on a stressed syllable, while a feminine ending is a line that ends on an unstressed syllable.

Free verse is poetry that does not conform to any regular metre.

Examples of different meters and metrical substitutions:



*Iambic pentameter:*

We few, we happy few, we band of brothers  
For he today that sheds his blood with me  
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile  
This day shall gentle his condition  
And gentlemen in England now abed  
Shall think themselves accused they were not here  
And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks  
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day  
– Shakespeare, Henry V, IV.iii .

An example of perfect iambic pentameter. Note the feminine ending in l.1 (in iambic metre a feminine ending adds an extra syllable to the line), and how the stresses follow the sense of the lines.

*Trochaic tetrameter:*

In what distant deeps or skies  
Burnt the fire of thine eyes?  
On what wings dare he aspire?  
What the hand dare seize the fire?  
– Blake, ‘The Tyger’

The first two lines exhibit masculine endings, and thus are catalectic according to the regular pattern of trochaic metre; that is, they lack their final syllable. Arguably, the second foot in l.4 could be read as a spondaic substitution (if ‘dare’ is stressed).

*Spondaic substitution in iambic pentameter (l.3):*

Or if thy mistress some rich anger shows  
Emprison her soft hand, and let her rave,

And feed deep, deep upon her peerless eyes  
– Keats, ‘Ode on Melancholy’.

*Pyrrhic substitution in iambic tetrameter (l.2):*

The woods are lovely, dark and deep  
But I have promises to keep  
And miles to go before I sleep  
And miles to go before I sleep  
– Frost, ‘Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening’.

*Dactylic dimeter:*

Theirs not to make reply,  
Theirs not to reason why,  
Theirs but to do and die  
– Tennyson, ‘The Charge of the Light Brigade’

*Anapaestic metre:*

There was an Old Lady of Chertsey,  
Who made a remarkable curtsey;  
She twirled round and round  
Till she sunk underground  
Which distressed all the people of Chertsey  
– Edward Lear, ‘There was an Old Lady of Chertsey’.  
As is common in limericks, this example includes multiple iambic substitutions, here in the initial syllables of lines 1-3.

### *Amphibrach:*

And now comes an act of enormous enormance!

No former performer's performed this performance!

– Dr Seuss, 'If I Ran the Circus'

### *Molossus:*

Break, break, break

On thy cold gray stones, O Sea!

And I would that my tongue could utter

The thoughts that arise in me

– Tennyson, 'Break, break, break'.

The first line is an example of a molossus; it is also an example of epizeuxis (see below).

## **Stanzas**

When a poem is divided into sections, each section is known as a stanza. Stanzas usually share the same structure as the other stanzas within the poem.

Tercet: a unit or stanza of three verse lines

Quatrain: a unit or stanza of four verse lines

Quintain: a stanza of five verse lines

Sestet: a unit or stanza of six verse lines

Septet or heptastich: a stanza of seven lines

Octave: a unit or stanza of eight verse lines

Decastich: a stanza or poem of ten lines

Note that many of these terms refer to a unit of this number of lines within a larger stanza or within a poem not divided into

stanzas (e.g. a Shakespearean sonnet, which consists of three quatrains followed by a couplet).

Refrain: a line or lines regularly repeated throughout a poem, traditionally at the end of each stanza. Very often found in ballads; it was also used to great effect by Yeats (see for example ‘The Withering of the Boughs’ or ‘The Black Tower’). Usually nowadays printed in italic to distinguish it from the main body of the poem.

Enjambment: when the sense of a verse line runs over into the next line with no punctuated pause. The opposite is known as an end-stopped line. An example of enjambment in iambic pentameter:

A dungeon horrible, on all sides round  
As one great furnace flamed, yet from those flames  
No light, but rather darkness visible  
Served only to discover sights of woe  
– Milton, *Paradise Lost*, I

## Rhyme

End rhyme: rhyme occurring on stressed syllables at the ends of verse lines. The most common form of rhyme.

Couplet: a pair of end-rhyming verse lines, usually of the same length. E.g.:

Had we but World enough, and Time,  
This coyness Lady were no crime.  
We would sit down, and think which way  
To walk, and pass our long Loves Day.  
– Marvell, ‘To his Coy Mistress’

Internal rhyme: rhyme occurring within a single verse line.

Crossed rhyme: the rhyming of one word in the middle of a verse line with a word in the middle of the following line.

Half rhyme: also known as slant rhyme; an incomplete form of rhyme in which final consonants match but vowel sounds do not.

E.g.:

I have heard that hysterical women say  
They are sick of the palette and fiddle-bow.  
Of poets that are always gay,  
For everybody knows or else should know  
That if nothing drastic is done  
Aeroplane and Zeppelin will come out.  
Pitch like King Billy bomb-balls in  
Until the town lie beaten flat.  
– Yeats, ‘Lapis Lazuli’

The first quatrain is an example of full end rhyme; the second quatrain an example of half rhyme.

Para-rhyme: a form of half rhyme; when all the consonants of the relevant words match, not just the final consonants. E.g.:

It seemed that out of battle I escaped  
Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped  
Through granites which titanic wars had groined.  
Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned,  
Too fast in thought or death to be bestirred.  
Then, as I probed them, one sprang up, and stared  
With piteous recognition in fixed eyes,  
Lifting distressful hands, as if to bless.  
And by his smile, I knew that sullen hall, –  
By his dead smile I knew we stood in Hell.  
– Wilfred Owen, ‘Strange Meeting’

Eye rhyme: a visual-only rhyme; i.e. when spellings match but in pronunciation there is no rhyme, e.g. want/pant, five/give.

Double rhyme: a rhyme on two syllables, the first stressed, the second unstressed. E.g.

I want a hero: – an uncommon want,  
When every year and month sends forth a new one,  
Till, after cloying the gazettes with cant,  
The age discovers he is not the true one  
– Byron, Don Juan, l.i

The second and fourth lines are double rhymes; the first and third lines are examples of half rhyme / eye rhyme.

Assonance: the recurrence of similar vowel sounds in neighbouring words where the consonants do not match. E.g.:

For the rare and radiant maiden whom the angels name Lenore –  
Nameless here for evermore.

– Poe, ‘The Raven’

Consonance: the recurrence of similar consonants in neighbouring words where the vowel sounds do not match. The most commonly-found forms of consonance, other than half rhyme and para-rhyme, are alliteration and sibilance.

Alliteration: the repetition of initial consonants in a sequence of neighbouring words. E.g.:

Hear the loud alarum bells –

Brazen Bells!

What a tale of terror, now, their turbulency tells!

– Poe, ‘The Bells’

Sibilance: the repetition of sibilants, i.e. consonants producing a hissing sound. E.g.:

Ships that pass in the night, and speak each other in passing;

Only a signal shown and a distant voice in the darkness

– Longfellow, Tales of a Wayside Inn

Blank verse: metrical verse that does not rhyme. Milton’s Paradise Lost is an example; the majority of Shakespeare is also in blank verse.

## Figurative, rhetorical & structural devices

Metaphor: when one thing is said to be another thing, or is described in terms normally connected to another thing, in order to suggest a quality shared by both. E.g.

Love, fame, ambition, avarice – ’tis the same,

Each idle, and all ill, and none the worst –

For all are meteors with a different name,

And Death the sable smoke where vanishes the flame.

– Byron, Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, IV

Simile: when one thing is directly compared with another thing; indicated by use of the words 'as' or 'like'. E.g.:

I wandered lonely as a cloud

– Wordsworth, 'Daffodils'

Metonymy: when something is referred to by an aspect or attribute of it, or by something associated with it. E.g.:

Now is the winter of our discontent

Made glorious summer by this son of York...

– Shakespeare, Richard III, I.i

Here 'winter' and 'summer' are examples of metaphor; 'son of York' is an example of metonymy, being an attribute of Richard's brother, Edward IV, here the person being referred to.

Synecdoche: a form of metonymy in which something is referred to by a specific part of its whole. 'All hands on deck' is an example, in which the crew are being referred to by one specific part – their hands. E.g.:

Take thy face hence.

– Shakespeare, Macbeth, V.iii

Personification or prosopopoeia: when inanimate objects, animals or ideas are referred to as if they were human. Similar terms are anthropomorphism, when human form is ascribed to something not human, e.g. a deity; and the pathetic fallacy, when natural phenomena are described as if they could feel as humans do. Shelley's 'Invocation to Misery' is an example.

Onomatopoeia: a word that imitates the sound to which it refers. E.g. 'clang', 'crackle', 'bang', etc.

Synaesthesia: the application of terms relating to one sense to a different one, e.g. 'a warm sound';

Odours there are... green as meadow grass

– Baudelaire, 'Correspondences'

Oxymoron: the combination of two contradictory terms. E.g.:

Feather of lead, bright smoke, cold fire, sick health,

Still-waking sleep that is not what it is!

– Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet, I.i

Hendiadys: when a single idea is expressed by two nouns, used in conjunction. E.g. 'house and home' or Hamlet's 'Angels and ministers of grace' (Hamlet, I.iv).

Anaphora: the repetition of the same word or group of words at the beginnings of successive lines or clauses. E.g.:

Is this the region, this the soil, the clime,  
Said then the lost archangel, this the seat  
That we must change for heaven...

– Milton, Paradise Lost, I

Epistrophe: the repetition of the same word or group of words at the ends of successive lines or clauses. E.g.:

I know thee, I have found thee, & I will not let thee go

– Blake, 'America – a Prophecy'

Epizeuxis: the repetition of a word with no intervening words. E.g. Tennyson's 'Break, break, break', quoted above.

Polysyndeton: use of more than the required amount of conjunctions. E.g.:

Havoc and spoil and ruin are my gain.

– Milton, Paradise Lost, II

The opposite of asyndeton, which refers to the deliberate omission of conjunctions.

Anachronism: when an object, custom or idea is misplaced outside of its proper historical time. A famous example is the clock in Shakespeare's Julius Caesar.

Apostrophe: an address to an inanimate object, abstraction, or a dead or absent person. E.g.:

Busie old foole, unruly Sunne,  
Why dost thou thus,  
Through windowes, and through curtaines call on us?

– Donne, 'The Sunne Rising'

Hyperbole: extreme exaggeration, not intended literally. E.g.:

Since Hero's time hath half the world been black.

– Marlowe, Hero and Leander

Adynaton: a form of hyperbole – a figure of speech that stresses the inexpressibility of something, usually by stating that words



cannot describe it. H. P. Lovecraft's short story 'The Unnamable' is essentially a riff on this figure of speech, satirising Lovecraft's own regular use of it in his work.

Meiosis: an intentional understatement in which something is described as less significant than it really is. A well-known example is found in *Romeo and Juliet* when Mercutio describes his death-wound as 'a scratch' (III.iii).

Litotes: a form of meiosis; the affirmation of something by the denial of its opposite, e.g. 'not uncommon', 'not bad'.

Erotesis (rhetorical question): asking a question without requiring an answer, in order to assert or deny a statement. E.g.:

What though the field be lost?

All is not lost...

– *Paradise Lost*, I

In medias res: the technique of beginning a narrative in the middle of the action, before relating preceding events at a later point. *Paradise Lost* is an example (following the convention of epic poetry).

Leitmotif: a phrase, image or situation frequently repeated throughout a work, supporting a central theme. An example is the personification of the mine shaft lift as a devouring creature in Zola's *Germinal*, repeated throughout the novel.

Remember! Simply being able to identify the devices and knowing the terms is not enough. They are only a means to an end. You must always consider: why they are being used, what effect they have, and how they affect meaning(s).

Further reading

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# 7. Glossary of Literary Terms

**Adage** A traditional or proverbial saying.

**Allegory** A story in which the characters and events extend beyond the confines of their story to represent an object lesson to readers.

**Alliteration** The repetition of a consonant sound – “storm strewn sea.”

**Anapaest** The anapaestic meter consists of a series of two unstressed sounds followed by a single stressed sound – “The Assyrian came down like the wolf on the fold” (Lord Byron).

**Antagonist** Character whose dramatic role is to oppose the *protagonist* (q.v.).

**Archetype** Also known as universal symbol, an archetype may be a character (the intrepid hero, damsel in distress, party animal), a [theme](#) (the triumph of good over evil), a symbol, or even a setting. Many literary critics are of the opinion that archetypes, which have a common and recurring representation in a particular human culture or entire human race, shape the structure and function of a literary work.

**Archetypal plot** A sequence of events forming a type of story that has recurred throughout the history of a civilization, and with which most people are familiar; for example, a battle between good and evil.

**Assonance** The repetition of vowel sounds, as in “rapid rattle” (Wilfred Owen).

**Aural** Describes how a poem appeals to our sense of sound, hearing.

**Ballad** A narrative poem, usually written in quatrains with abcb rhyme scheme (q.v.).

**Blank verse** Unrhymed iambic pentameter (q.v.) poetry.

**Blocking agents** In drama, characters who try to prevent other characters from achieving their goals.

**Catharsis** The purging of audience emotion in tragedy, the release of emotion, and final feeling of relief.

**Comedy** Form of drama characterized by some sense of optimism, fellowship, love, and good humour.

**Conceit** A metaphor that is unusually ingenious or elaborate. Common feature in work of metaphysical poets, such as John Donne.

**Contextual symbol** A symbol that has a non-literal meaning only within the context of the work of art in which it is found.

**Dactyl** The dactylic meter is the opposite of the anaepestic. It consists of a series of single hard-stressed sounds followed by two soft-stressed sounds – “Just for a handful of silver he left us” (Robert Browning).

**Deconstruction** An interpretive movement in literary theory that reached its apex in the 1970s. Deconstruction rejects absolute interpretations, stressing ambiguities and contradictions in literature. Deconstruction grew out of the linguistic principles of De Saussure who noted that many [Indo-European](#) languages create meaning by binary opposites. Verbal oppositions such as good/evil, light/dark, male/female, rise/fall, up/down, and high/low show a human tendency common transculturally to create vocabulary as pairs of opposites, with one of the two words arbitrarily given positive connotations and the other word arbitrarily given negative connotations.

**Dramatic monologue** A poem which is “dramatic” because it is a speech presented to an audience (usually of only one person) and a “monologue” because no other character does any talking.

**Dynamic character** Sometimes referred to as a round character, a dynamic character is one whose values, attitudes, and/or ideals change as a result of the experience the character undergoes throughout the story.

**Elegy** A poem written to commemorate the death of a person who played a significant role in the poet’s life.

**Epic** An epic in its most specific sense is a [genre](#) of classical poetry. It is a poem that is a long narrative about a serious subject,

told in an elevated style of language, focused on the exploits of a hero or demi-god who represents the cultural values of a race, nation, or religious group, in which the hero's success or failure will determine the fate of that people or nation. Usually, the epic has a vast setting and covers a wide geographic area, it contains superhuman feats of strength or military prowess, and gods or supernatural beings frequently take part in the action. The poem begins with the invocation of a muse to inspire the poet and, the narrative starts *in medias res*. The epic contains long catalogues of heroes or important characters, focusing on highborn kings and great warriors rather than peasants and commoners.

**Epiphany** A change, sudden insight or awareness revealed to the main character.

**Eye rhyme** Words that look as if they should rhyme but do not – for example “good” and “mood.” Also known as sight rhyme.

**Fable** A short and traditional story, involving archetypal characters and ending with a moral.

**Feminism and literature** Feminist critics aim to examine the relationships between the male and female characters and the distribution of power within those relationships.

**Fiction** Prose text in the form of a story that is primarily a product of human imagination.

**First-person major-character narrator** This type of narrator tells a story in which he or she is the main character, or main focus of attention.

**First-person minor-character narrator** This narrator is typically a gossip. He or she observes the actions of another person, often a friend, and then tells what that friend did, when, and to whom.

**Flashback** The technique of narrating an event that occurred before the point in the story to which the narrator has advanced.

**Flat character** A character, also known as a static character, who is offered the chance for positive change but who, for one reason or another, fails to embrace it.

**Free verse** Poetry without a set rhyme scheme or rhythm pattern.

**Full rhyme** The use of words that rhyme completely, such as “good” and “wood.”

**Genre** A major literary form, such as drama, poetry, and the novel.

**Haiku** The Japanese haiku is a brief poem, consisting of a single image. The haiku consists of three lines of five, seven, and five syllables, respectively.

**Half rhyme** Describes words that almost rhyme such as “time” and “mine.”

**Hamartia** A term from Greek tragedy that literally means “missing the mark.” Originally applied to an archer who misses the target, a *hamartia* came to signify a tragic flaw, especially a misperception, a lack of some important insight, or some blindness that ironically results from one’s own strengths and abilities.

**Horatian satire** Named after the Roman poet, Horace, this is a fairly gentle type of satire used to poke fun at people and their failings or foibles.

**Hyperbole** A metaphor that bases its comparison on the use of exaggeration, for example, “I’d walk a million miles for one of your smiles” (Al Jolson).

**Iambic** The iambic rhythm pattern in poetry consists of one unstressed sound or beat, followed by one stressed sound or beat – “The cúrfew tólls the knéll of pártíng dáy” (Thomas Gray).

**Iambic dimeter** A line with two beats – “I can’t.”

**Iambic pentameter** A line with five beats – “I have been one acquainted with the night” (Robert Frost).

**Iambic tetrameter** A line with four beats – “I wandered lonely as a cloud” (William Wordsworth).

**Iambic trimeter** A line with three beats – “The only news I know/Is bulletins all day” (Emily Dickinson).

**Imagery** In literature, an image is a word picture. It can be a phrase, a sentence, or a line. It is used to enhance the reader’s appreciation of the figurative more than the literal meaning of a poem, story, or play – “The fog comes/on little cat feet” (Carl Sandberg).

**Imagists** A group of poets whose aim between 1912 and 1917 was

to write poetry that accented imagery (q.v.) or, their preferred term, “imagism” to communicate meaning.

**In media res** Latin for “in the middle of the action,” the point at which an epic, such as “The Odyssey,” typically opens.

**Irony** Cicero referred to irony as “saying one thing and meaning another.” Irony comes in many forms. **Verbal irony** is a [trope](#) in which a speaker makes a statement in which its actual meaning differs sharply from the meaning that the words ostensibly express. **Dramatic irony** involves a situation in a narrative in which the reader knows something about present or future circumstances that the character does not know. In that situation, the character acts in a way we recognize to be grossly inappropriate to the actual circumstances, or the character expects the opposite of what the reader knows that fate holds in store, or the character anticipates a particular outcome that unfolds itself in an unintentional way. Probably the most famous example of dramatic irony is the situation facing Oedipus in the play *Oedipus Rex*. **Situational irony** is a trope in which accidental events occur that seem oddly appropriate, such as the poetic justice of a pickpocket getting his own pocket picked.

**Juvenalian satire** Named after the Roman poet Juvenal, this form of satire uses bitter sarcasm more than humour, and is often tinged with cruelty.

**Limited omniscient narrator** A narrator who limits himself or herself to relaying to readers the thoughts and actions of the main character only.

**Litotes** The deliberate use of understatement, usually to create an ironic or satiric effect – “I am not as young as I used to be.”

**Malapropism** A blunder in diction, grotesquely substituting one word with a similar sound for the proper word. Mrs. Malaprop, (Fr. *Mal à propos*), a character in R. B. Sheridan’s comedy *The Rivals*, was famously guilty of such errors in diction: e.g., “As headstrong as an *allegory* [alligator] on the banks of the Nile”; Shakespeare’s Mistress Quickly in *2 Henry IV* (Falstaff “is *indicted* to dinner”); and Capt. Jack Boyle in O’Casey’s *Juno and the Paycock* (“The whole

world's in a state of *chassis*" [chaos]) are earlier and later characters given to malapropisms.

**Marxist literary theory** Like feminist critics, Marxist critics examine the imbalance of power relationships among characters in literature, in terms of social class.

**Metaphor** A comparison intended to clarify or intensify the more complex of the objects of the comparison.

**Metonymy** A form of metaphor in which a phrase is understood to represent something more; for example, to use the phrase "sabre rattling" to mean "threatening war."

**Meter** A term used to describe the rhythm and measure of a line of poetry.

**Narrative** The storyline in a literary work.

**Narrator** Storyteller.

**Non-sequential plot** One in which the author holds back an important incident that occurred before the chronological ending of the story, typically to create suspense.

**Novel** A narrative work of fiction typically involving a range of characters and settings, linked together through plot and sub-plots.

**Novella** A short work of fiction that falls in length somewhere between the novel and the short story.

**Objective narrator** The objective narrator establishes setting in a precise but rather detached style, and then lets the conversation tell the story, using an objective point of view.

**Octave** An eight-line stanza.

**Ode** A long formal poem that typically presents a poet's philosophical views about such subjects as nature, art, death, and human emotion.

**Omniscient narrator** A narrator capable of telling readers the thoughts of all the characters and the actions of all the characters at any time. An omniscient narrator is like a god who can provide readers with all the information they could ever want.

**Onomatopoeia** A word or phrase usually found in a poem the sound of which suggests its meaning – "bang," "thwack."

**Oral** Describes a spoken as opposed to written literary tradition.



**Paradox** A phrase which seems self-contradictory but, in fact, makes powerful sense despite its lack of logic – “I must be cruel only to be kind” (Shakespeare).

**Pastoral** Relating to the countryside, especially in an idealized form.

**Pastoral elegy** A form of elegy that typically contrasts the serenity of the simple life of a shepherd with the cruel world which hastened the death of the poet’s friend.

**Personification** A form of metaphor that compares something non-human with something that is human – “Two Sunflowers/ Move in the Yellow Room” (William Blake).

**Petrarchan sonnet** A sonnet with a rhyme scheme: abbaabbacdecde.

**Plot** In a literary fiction work, “plot” refers to the events, the order in which they occur, and the relationship of the events to each other.

**Poetry** One of the major literary genres, usually written in a series of discrete lines which highlight the artistic use of language.

**Point of view** The stance from which the storyteller or narrator tells the story.

**Prose** The written text of fiction and non-fiction, as distinct from poetry.

**Protagonist** The main character in a literary work. See also *antagonist*.

**Quatrain** A four-line stanza.

**Reader response theory** A theory of literature that asserts that the reader creates meaning and that, because all people are different, all readings will be different.

**Regular verse** A literary work written in lines that have the same rhythm pattern and a regular rhyme scheme.

**Rhyme scheme** The rhyming pattern of a regular-verse poem.

**Rhyming couplet** A two-line stanza in which the last words in each line rhyme.

**Satire** A literary form in which a writer pokes fun at those aspects

of his society, especially those people and those social institutions that the author thinks are corrupt and in need of change.

**Scapgoat** A person who is banished or sacrificed in the interests of his or her community. The term is often applied to a tragic hero.

**Sequential plot** One in which the events are narrated in the order in which they occurred in time.

**Sestet** A six-line stanza.

**Shakespearean sonnet** A sonnet with a rhyme scheme: ababccdefefgg.

**Short story** A prose fiction narrative that usually occurs in a single setting and concerns a single main character.

**Sight rhyme** Words that look as if they should rhyme but do not – for example “mood” and “good.” Also known as eye rhyme.

**Simile** A type of metaphor that makes the comparison explicit by using either the word “like” or the word “as” – “Elderly American ladies leaning on their canes listed toward me like towers of Pisa” (Nabokov).

**Sonnet** A 14-line regular-verse poem, usually written in iambic pentameter.

**Spondee** A double-hard-stressed phrase such as “shook foil” (Gerard Manley Hopkins, “God’s Grandeur”).

**Static character** A static character, also known as a flat character, is one who is offered the chance for positive change but who, for one reason or another, fails to embrace it.

**Stereotype** A recognizable type of person rather than a fully developed character. A stereotypical character is one who can be identified by a single dominant trait; for example, the braggart soldier, the country bumpkin.

**Symbolism** The use within a literary work of an element that has more than a literal meaning – “All the world’s a stage” (Shakespeare).

**Synecdoche** The use of a part to represent a whole, as in the expression “lend me a hand.”

**Tercet** A three-line stanza.

**Theatre of the absurd** A phrase used to describe a group of plays written during and after the 1950s. The term “absurd” is used

because the plots and the characters (though not the themes) are unconventional when examined in the context of conventional tragedy and comedy.

**Theme** The message or insight into human experience that an author offers to his or her readers. Broad themes might include family, love, war, nature, death, faith, time, or some aspects of these.

**Tone** The attitude or personality that a literary work projects; for example, serious and solemn, or lighthearted and amusing.

**Tragedy** A play that tells the story of a significant event or series of events in the life of a significant person.

**Tragic hero** The main character in a Greek or Roman tragedy. In contrast with the [epic hero](#) (who embodies the values of his culture and appears in an epic poem), the tragic hero is typically an admirable character who appears as the focus in a tragic play, but one who is undone by a *hamartia*—a tragic mistake, misconception, or flaw. That hamartia leads to the downfall of the main character.

**Trochaic** The opposite of iambic. The rhythm of the lines of a trochaic poem consist not of a series of soft-stressed-hard-stressed sounds, but a series of hard-stressed-soft-stressed sounds – “There they are my fifty men and women” (Robert Browning).

**Valediction** Bidding farewell to someone or something.

**Verse** A unit of a varying number of lines with which a poem is divided. Also called a stanza.

**Villanelle** A 19-line poem divided into five tercets and one quatrain. Probably the most famous English villanelle is Dylan Thomas’s “Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night.”



PART IV  
LITERARY ANALYSIS



# 8. Writing about Literature

## WHAT DOES MY PROFESSOR WANT?

In 200-level and 300-level English courses, you'll be asked to write a [formal analysis](#) (sometimes called a “research paper,” a “term paper,” or even a “documented literary analysis”). This paper should present an original argument about an aspect or aspects of literature and should engage with [critical sources](#). It is important to keep in mind that **this assignment is not a report**. It should not merely rehearse the critical arguments that have already been made about your topic. Rather, the argument should be based on your own [close reading](#) of your chosen text(s) and, at the same time, demonstrate the scholarly maturity that comes with situating this argument in relation to the work of other scholars. Material from these sources should be carefully documented using the [MLA style of documentation](#).

### **Here are some tips:**

- All professors will want to see a strong [argument](#), cogently advanced and well-supported by [evidence from the literature](#).
- [Organization](#) counts. Make sure you have a focused, detailed [thesis](#) within your [introductory paragraph](#). [Succeeding paragraphs](#) should state a topic and supply evidence and argument to support that topic. Don't forget the [conclusion](#). A strong conclusion leaves your reader with a clear sense of your perspective and helps the reader to recall the most important aspects of your argument.
- Don't let the critics run away with your paper. [Subordinate their views to your own](#), and make sure that the

preponderance of the paper is yours. Never cite a critical view that you do not understand.

- Remember to [revise](#) your work and proof-read carefully. Some professors care more about one aspect of paper writing than others. Some particularly hate to see documentation errors; for others sloppy writing (lots of spelling, punctuation and other mechanical errors) spells doom. Always do your best work, and don't assume that you can neglect any aspect of your essay.
- Your professor will give you specific guidelines for topic selection, but general topics often include: [poetry explication](#), analysis of [theme\(s\)](#), exploration of one or more characteristic(s) of an [author's style and approach](#), placement of a work or works in [literary historical context](#), the [comparison/contrast of works](#) sharing similarities but written by different authors and/or in different literary periods.
- The [English 200-Level Guide](#) at the LND Library website contains links to a variety of research tools, as well as tips on how to locate articles and books. You may find the [MLA Bibliography tutorial](#) particularly useful.
- The [Help guides page](#) at the LND Library website also can help you use the different databases, find articles and books, navigate the library catalog, and cite sources using MLA style.





## APPROPRIATE GENERAL TOPICS

### Analysis of theme(s)

A theme is a recurring idea or concept in a text. It is not explicit; therefore, the writer must look for repeated imagery or symbols, examine the relationships between plot, setting, characters, and structure, and think about the feelings evoked throughout the text. Common themes in literature include love, jealousy, and friendship. If assigned to analyze a theme in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, you could analyze the theme of friendship between Huck and Jim.

### Exploration of one or more characteristic(s) of an author's style and approach

Consider analyzing the author's use of imagery or setting:

#### **Analyzing Setting**

“Setting refers to the natural or artificial scenery or environment in which characters in literature live and move. Seeing also includes what in the theater would be called props or properties—the implements employed by the characters in various activities. Such things as the time of day and the consequent amount of light at which an event occurs, the flora and fauna, the sounds described, the smells, and the weather are also part of the setting. Paintbrushes, apples, pitchforks, rafts, six-shooters, watches, automobiles, horses and buggies, and innumerable other items belong to the setting. References to clothing, descriptions of physical appearance, and spatial relationships among the characters are also part of setting.” (Edgar V. Roberts, *Writing Themes about Literature*)

In order to create an argument about the function of the setting

in a particular work, you need to identify the principal settings and to see how they work. Here are some steps you can take:

1) Read the story and mark references to setting. Start with the place and time of the action and then focus upon recurrent details and objects.

2) Think about what the story is about. What happens? What is its point? Is it a story about love, jealousy, gain, or loss? What is the main experience here?

3) Look through your setting notes and see if they fall into any pattern. What are the interesting shifts and contrasts?

4) Determine how the setting relates to either the main point of the story (step 2) or to some part of it. In other words what does the setting have to do with character or action? What are its effects? Whatever you decide here will be your thesis statement.

5) Make an outline, indicating what aspects of setting you will discuss and what you intend to say about them. Discard notes that are not central to your plan (you don't have to discuss everything). Focus on the four or five key passages in the story that you wish to examine. List them in your outline in the order in which they occur.

### **Analyzing Imagery**

As distinct from character, theme, and plot, imagery occurs primarily in language, in the metaphors (i.e. comparisons), similes (comparisons with “like” or “as”), or other forms of figurative (pictorial) language in a literary work. Sometimes setting, i.e., the locality or placing of scenes, or stage props (like swords, flowers, blood, winecups) can also be considered under the rubric of imagery. But whatever the expression, images primarily are visual and concrete, i.e., things which the reader sees or can imagine seeing. Some examples are flowers, tears, animals, the moon, sun, stars, diseases, floods, metals, darkness and light.

In order to create an argument about the significance of an image in a particular work, identify a principal image or image cluster and to see how it works by following these steps:

1) Read the work and mark recurrent images or image clusters. If you are seeing references to roses, e. g., references to other thorns

or to other flowers might also be pertinent parts of a cluster. Look at notes to the images carefully. Take out your microscope. You may also track down occurrences of related words with the help of a concordance (See Marvin Spevack's *Concordance to Shakespeare* in the library) or electronic word searches. You can use secondary sources for this assignment as well.

2) Think about what the play is about. What happens? What is its point? Is it a play about love, jealousy, gain, or loss? What is the main experience here? Look through your images and image clusters and see if they fall into any pattern. What are the interesting shifts? Do they generally appear in the speeches of certain characters? in certain scenes? Do we have a progression or development? Significant contrasts?

3) Determine how the images or image clusters (step 3) relate to either the main point of the play (step 2) or to some part of it. In other words what do the images have to do with character or action? What are their effects? Whatever you decide here will be your thesis statement.

4) Make an outline, indicating what your image pattern is and what you intend to say about it. Discard images that are not central to your plan (you don't have to discuss everything). Focus on the four or five key passages in the play that you wish to examine. List them in your outline in the order in which they occur.

5) Read Criticism and watch films to deepen understanding and refine your thesis. Compile a bibliography. Adjust outline as necessary.

## Placement of a work or works in literary historical context

By placing a work in its literary historical context, one can trace the influences a historical period had on an author and/or the creation of his/her work(s). In doing this, a literary historical critic gains

insights about the nature of a particular historical period. Using the historical context as a lens through which to read literature allows one to gain an understanding of both larger social issues, as well as the personal struggles that everyday people endured. As Janet E. Gardner explains in *Writing about Literature*,

“We may be able to learn from parish burial records, for example, how common childhood mortality was at a particular time in English history, but only when we read Ben Johnson’s poem “On My First Son” do we begin to understand how this mortality may have affected the parents who lost their children. Likewise, the few pages of James Joyce’s story “Araby” may tell us more about how adolescent boys lived and thought in turn-of-the-century Dublin than several volumes of social history” (Gardner 147-8).

## Comparison/contrast of works sharing similarities but written by different authors and/or in different literary periods

While there are many forms of compare-and-contrast essays, the best ones use the points of comparison and contrast that they identify between the works in order to make a claim about how one text illuminates the other or how they illuminate each other. Rather than a simple delineation of differences and similarities, your essay should use those differences and similarities to make a larger argument about how comparing the two texts reveals some unexpected or non-obvious about one or both of the works.

Most often, such claims work to show how texts do similar things differently. Therefore, often the best structure for this kind of argument is to detail enough similarities between the works (especially works written by vastly different authors and/or in different literary periods) to justify your comparison and to narrow the scope of your discussion. In other words, first show how your two vastly different texts are attempting similar things. Then, focus

the remainder of your essay on the nuanced differences between each text's approach to those similar things and the way in which juxtaposing them illuminates our understanding of one or both.

## Poetry Explication

Explication, from *explicare* meaning “to unfold,” is an exercise in analysis. In it, the writer shows that he or she can read a poem and explain how it the various choices a poet makes shape its message and affect the reader. One writes an explication by paying close attention to the meaning of words, to their sounds, to their placement in lines and sentences. One then explains how the parts contribute to the whole. This exercise trains the ear, eye, and mind. It develops critical faculties and discipline.

1) Read the poem out loud several times. Look up in a dictionary at least 10 words in it for meanings, alternate meanings, and for shades of meaning. Take notes. Jot down some general observations about the poem and your initial reactions.

2) Ask yourself who is the speaker? What is the situation and what is the poem about? Be as precise and as specific as possible. What about tone, diction [level of word choice—high, medium, low, or slang], mood? Jot down your answers.

3) Underline all repetitions or devices of sound that you notice. Pay attention to any surprising shifts of sound or meaning. Ask yourself what effects they have? Jot down your answers.

4) Type the poem out (double-spaced) on a separate sheet of paper. Number the lines and mark all stressed and unstressed syllables. Mark also significant devices of sound: caesuras [breaks within a line, usually signalled by punctuation], alliteration, or assonance (“significant” means important enough for you to discuss later). This does not count in the four pages and must be handed in with the poem.

5) Write in your first paragraph a brief summary of the poem, i.e.

a notice of its central statement and constituent parts. Show some emotion or interest here; don't be flat or effusive (avoid general and meaningless praise: "this is a wonderful or incredible or brilliant poem").

6) Quote the first few lines of the poem (1-4, or whatever you're comfortable with). Talk about the speaker and situation, about what is said, how, and why. Note connotations and overtones, how sound creates or enhances sense. Don't ever notice a poetic device without explaining its effect. Pay attention to sound and sense, to music and meaning.

7) Repeat step 3 for the rest of the poem, working your way through slowly and carefully. Note instances of repetition and their effects; note development of phrases or ideas. Note images and be account for shifts in tone, sound, rhythm, diction, or subject. Discuss the ending of the poem separately.

8) For a conclusion write a brief, specific statement about the effect or meaning or artistry of the poem, about structures or patterns or insights that your analysis has revealed. Look through your opening paragraph for hints that you can now develop in closing. Or revise opening in light of what you have discovered.

## ARGUMENTATIVE THESIS

Your thesis must make an argument, not an observation.

An "observation" suggests something that is generally true about the text, like an objective element of the plot or an image used by the author. For example, if we are writing about the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* we might make an observation about the way animal imagery seems to function for the Geat warriors. We might observe that while the Geats feature an image of a boar on their battle helmets (thus seemingly identifying with this ferocious animal), there are other moments in the text when the Geats shun vicious monsters (when they are reluctant to fight the dragon, for example.)

Someone who has read the work carefully probably wouldn't disagree with this observation; it refers to an image used by the narrator and a specific plot point. This observation does, however, pose a question or "problem" for the careful reader: what do we as readers make of this apparent contradiction? Why is this juxtaposition important for the narrative more broadly? What are the consequences of this juxtaposition on plot, theme, or character? *So what?*

An "argument"—your thesis statement— is your solution to this problem. The thesis answers the "so what" question by explaining the significance of the observation and explaining why an invested reader should care about this detail. For example, one might argue that the juxtaposition of the Geats ferocious helmets and their subsequent unwillingness to approach the dragon suggests an inherent difference between the warriors' appearance (outward show) and their actions. This seems to be a theme in the work. The Danish coastguard who greets the Geats when they arrive in Denmark remarks that there is often a difference between "what is said" and "what is done," and at the end of the epic, Wiglaf says that this discrepancy between word and action will ultimately impair the Geats' ability to protect their kingdom. A thesis statement could read: "The difference between the Geats ferocious appearance and their later unwillingness to fight fearful monsters like the dragon suggests a devastating discrepancy between their appearance and their actions—a discrepancy that is responsible for the deterioration of the warrior culture in the epic."

It is important to keep in mind that your thesis statement should argue something with which a reader can disagree. If I argued the thesis above, the body of my essay would not only need to prove that there is, in fact, a contradiction between the Geats' appearance and action, but would also necessarily provide additional textual examples of how this discrepancy contributes to the deterioration of the warrior kingdoms in the epic. And, I'd need to be aware that other readers might not see the same contradiction. For example, another viable thesis statement could read: "As clear from biblical

references in the text, humans identify with animals over monsters because animals are more like humans. Both humans and animals were created by God and thereby remind men of Divinity; whereas, monsters are perversions of God's nature and thereby indicate a diabolic presence." Rather than suggesting a contradiction, the imagery on the helmet suggests a righteous identification with God's creation and an equally righteous aversion to things that are not "of God." These two thesis statements offer opposite solutions to the problem posed above; both are viable and could be supported with textual evidence; and both make points with which a careful reader could disagree.

## CLOSE READING

Before a literary scholar can begin writing about a piece of literature, one must engage in the exercise of close reading. As the term suggests, "close reading" means closely examining the words on a page in order to come up with a reading or an interpretation about the greater meaning of a work.

How does one "read closely"?

- The first task involves dissecting a passage or phrase by analyzing literary elements that stick out. For instance, is the tone, diction, syntax, style, imagery, figurative language, theme(s), cultural/historical/religious references, rhyme, rhythm and meter, etc. significant in the passage or stanza? Take notes on whatever seems significant by writing in the margins of your text or keeping a reading journal.
- After taking notes, the second task in close reading is looking for patterns or interruptions of patterns. Gather the evidence collected and think about how each one works together to create the work as a whole or how these elements contribute



to or complicate larger issues such as theme, setting, characterization.

- Finally, think about the purpose and the effect of these significant elements/patterns in the work as a whole. This means asking *why* and *how*: Why is an author using a particular metaphor, tone, diction, etc. and how does it affect one's understanding of the passage? How are they all related to one another? How do they help us understand the larger work?

The steps listed above are a pre-writing exercise, designed to help you identify a potential thesis. Once you have formulated a thesis about how to read a larger work, you can use the smaller significant elements as evidence. This evidence will then need to be analyzed in order to support that thesis.

## CRITICAL SOURCES

### *Defining Literary Criticism*

Literary criticism is a disciplined attempt to analyze some aspect or aspects of one or more works of art—for our purposes, mostly literary art (plays, novels, short stories, essays, poems). Serious literary critics study their primary materials very closely and repeatedly, examine the contexts in which the works they are studying were produced, and read widely in the work of other literary critics on their subject before producing their own original analysis of a work or works of literature. Generally, literary criticism is published in one of three forms: in a book; in an article published in a professional journal, whether print-based or online; or in an article published in a book as part of a collection. These formats insure that experts in the appropriate field(s) have reviewed the literary criticism and judged its accuracy in points of fact, its attention to scholarship in the field, etc. These formats are **peer-**

**reviewed sources**(also known as “refereed sources”). Peer-reviewed means that a source has been rigorously scrutinized by other experts before publication.

*Why consult and cite literary criticism?*

- Reading a variety of views increases your knowledge of your subject and helps you to demonstrate to your reader that you have considered views other than your own.
- Reading literary criticism enables you to weigh your conclusions against others’ to check your logic and to see whether you have covered all significant aspects of your argument.
- Citing others’ views makes you appear a more knowledgeable writer to your readers.
- Citing literary critics whose views agree with yours can strengthen your case (although you must still supply the appropriate evidence).
- Taking issue with a critic with whom you disagree can also strengthen your case if you present your counterargument effectively.
- Literary criticism can enable you and your readers to see how evaluations and analyses of literature have changed over time.

*Where do I find literary criticism?*

Encyclopedia articles do not offer true literary criticism, nor do Cliff’s Notes, Spark Notes, or “overviews” of authors, works, or literary topics available online. Some websites post serious scholarship, but many are run by fans or students who may or may not know more than you do(!) Wikipedia, for example, is not a peer-reviewed source; any one can post and update information on this site and, as a result, it is not a reliable resource. If you find your sources either through the SHARC catalogue or the MLA Bibliography database online (the bibliographical resource of the Modern Language Association), you are unlikely to go wrong:

- Use books and articles from the Loyola/Notre Dame Library or other libraries and articles located via the library databases. Internet material must have been published in a book or journal before being placed online. (Recall your library workshop.)
- Good sources can be found through Project Muse and the MLA

Bibliography database, but avoid the “Biographies” and “Overview” tabs in the Literature Resource Center. This information can be useful to provide background for your research, but you should not use it in your paper as one of the documented sources.

- The MLA Bibliography database is the primary research database for researchers in literature. If a this database doesn’t supply a .pdf of an article you want to look at, write down the full publication information, and search for the journal in the ejournals section of our library’s homepage.

## FORMAL ANALYSIS

Formal analysis involves a close reading of the literary elements of a text. A formal analysis examines elements such as setting, imagery, characters, tone, form/structure, and language. The goal of a formal analysis is to create meaning by exploring how these elements work together in any given text. You can compare parts of a text or you can analyze how parts of a text relate to the whole text.

## MLA STYLE OF DOCUMENTATION

Follow the MLA style of documentation, which is a parenthetical style. Remember that you need a “Works Cited” page and a “Bibliography” page, and these should follow MLA format, not one you create on the spur of the moment or borrow from some other discipline. The “Works Cited” page lists all works you cite in the essay, the “Bibliography” lists all the works you consulted, including all of those cited. You should always note your professor’s requirements as to minimum number of sources.

The Department’s handbook (*A Writer’s Reference* by Diana Hacker) provides information under the MLA tab about how to

provide parenthetical documentation and prepare a bibliography and list of works cited. You may also consult [dianahacker.com/resdoc/](http://dianahacker.com/resdoc/) for online help. Use the “Humanities” resources tab. A quick look at the sample MLA paper in the *Hacker’s A Writer’s Reference* will give you a general sense of how MLA documentation works.

## ORGANIZATION

Every paper must contain an **introduction** (which states the argumentative thesis), **subsequent argument paragraphs**, and a **conclusion**.

## INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH

As Janet E. Gardner writes in *Writing About Literature*, “Essentially, an introduction accomplishes two things. First, it gives a sense of both your topic and your approach to that topic, which is why it is common to make your thesis statement a part of the introduction. Second, an introduction compels your readers’ interest and makes them want to read on and find out what your paper has to say. Some common strategies used in effective introductions are to begin with a probing rhetorical question, a vivid description, or an intriguing quotation. Weak introductions tend to speak in generalities or in philosophical ideas that are only tangentially related to the real topic of your paper. Don’t spin your wheels: get specific and get to the point right away.”

Your introduction is your opportunity to catch your reader’s attention and involve that person in the ideas you put forth in your paper. Imagine riding in an elevator with someone you’d like to strike up a conversation with about a specific topic. How do you do

it? How do you catch that person's attention before the ride is up? You can't just immediately throw your claims and evidence at that person, yet at the same time, he or she is unlikely to be compelled by vague general statements about "the history of time" or where and when a certain person was born. And you can't stand there all day getting to the point. Instead, you look for compelling point of interest that is both related to where you'd like to go with your discussion, and is of shared interest between you and that person. After raising the topic through this point of common ground, you can then put forth what you will claim about it.

## SUCCEEDING PARAGRAPHS

A complete argument paragraph consists of the following components:

1. **Topic Sentence:** Suggests generally what the paragraph is talking about; often includes a transition from previous paragraphs.

2. **Claim:** Makes a very specific claim that the paragraph will argue is true; you'll likely derive this claim from your thesis statement (together, all your paragraph claims will work to prove your thesis).

3. **Evidence:** Provides the textual support for the claim.

4. **Analysis:** Explains how the evidence actually relates to the argument. This is typically the most challenging part of composing your

paragraph, and it is often forgotten (much to the peril of both reader and writer!). Here, you must articulate how the passage you've just cited supports

the paragraph claim/argument premise. You must explain how the textual evidence means what you think it means. Never rely on the reader to be able to

interpret the evidence on his or her own. That is, if your argument is a statement with which the careful reader can disagree, this means

that the evidence you provide can likely be interpreted in many different ways. You need to guide your reader in interpreting the evidence so as to argue why your claim is true.

5. **Conclusion:** Offers implications of the argument and evidence, often transitions to the next paragraph. This often answers the “so what?” question. It articulates why what you’ve just proven matters and usually articulates how your argument claims relates to/proves the thesis statement.

After the explanation of evidence, a well-developed paragraph might also include:

**Additional Evidence/Explanation:** What other evidence is there to support your claim?

**Concession/ Nonclusion** (these are an inseparable pair!): What evidence might contradict your claim? (The concession acknowledges the perceived opposition (perhaps in the form of another critic) or the skeptical reader). And, why, despite this evidence, is your argument still more effective than the concession? (The nonclusion is essential—never end a paragraph with a concession; take the concession into account while further proving your argument!)

## CONCLUSION

As Janet E. Gardner points out in *Writing About Literature*, “Your conclusion should give your reader something new to think about, a reason not to just forget your essay. Some writers like to use the conclusion to return to an idea, a quotation, or an image first raised in the introduction, creating a satisfying feeling of completeness and self-containment.... Some writers use the conclusion to show

the implications of their claims or the connections between literature and real life. This is your chance to make a good final impression, so don't waste it with a simple summary and restatement."

This doesn't mean that your conclusion should not restate your thesis. Your conclusion is the place in which you draw together all the threads of your argument and neatly tie them up. When Gardner says not to "waste" your conclusion with "simple summary and restatement," she means don't ONLY summarize and restate. Your should absolutely recap your main points, but a good conclusion ALSO does more. Additionally, treading the path between not giving your reader anything new in the conclusion and introducing more unsupported claims can be tricky. The conclusion is a good place to SUGGEST the further implications of your argument, for life, for literature, for an author's body of work, etc., but be careful that you don't find yourself making new claims your reader is unlikely to agree with. These implications should follow naturally from the structure of your argument and often are best expressed with less-definitive phrasing (i.e. "perhaps," "implies," "suggests," "hints," "may," etc.).

## POST-WRITING

1) Revise again and again. All good writing is rewriting. Clarify, define, smooth-out rough spots. Work to develop ideas, and round out paragraphs. Try to be more accurate and graceful, to clean up mistakes, and to correct embarrassing errors. Look hard at your evidence. Be tough and cut out the nonsense.

2) Proofread carefully, by means of spell-check and by your own reading. Make sure you have supplied a title, page numbers for the paper. (No decorative bindings; use 12-point type, double spaced, with standard page margins.)

3) Make sure you have provided accurate documentation for every quotation and outside source cited or consulted.

## QUOTING CRITICS

- It is a good idea to include a full quotation when the critic says something particularly well. Paraphrase when the idea is important, but the wording is nothing special. (Document both.)

- Don't let the critics run away with your paper. Instead, keep their ideas subordinated to your own and use them to support your own claims. Typically, your paragraphs should begin with your topic sentence, then provide your evidence from the text, and then (perhaps) include a comment or comments from critics. A rare exception might be when you are disagreeing with a critic. In this instance, you may wish to state the opposing idea first, and then follow up by expressing your disagreement and presenting the evidence for your point of view.

- Cited passages should be integrated into your text and be attributed to their originators. For example, "Elgin Slapworthy has observed that 'Dickens remembered this period in his boyhood as both painful and humiliating' " (237). Don't just pop in a quotation without making the context and source of the quotation clear. Attribution in the text makes the essay read more smoothly and cuts down on the amount of parenthetical documentation that must be provided.

- Quotations of more than three lines should be indented and set off in the text. Setting off indicates quotation, so quotation marks are not needed, unless you have a quotation within a quotation.

As Prof. Bladderstock argues:

Austen's prose has often been imitated but never matched. Even my own brilliant Austen parody, *Sense and Susceptibility*, fell short in regard to dialogue.

Austen's uncanny ability to combine sense and wit, while suiting



words and phrasing to character, is difficult, perhaps impossible to reproduce. (132)

- A quotation within a quotation—say you quote a critic who quotes a passage from Dorothy Sayers—this should be indicated by using single quotation marks: According to Evangeline Pink, “Sayers’ use of the line, ‘So, you’re one of them,’ echoes a statement in the trial of the infamous Madeline Smith” (299).

## EVIDENCE FROM LITERATURE

Just as scientists provide data to support their results, literary critics must use evidence from literature in order to convince their audience that they have a cogent argument. Evidence must be provided in every body paragraph in order to support your claims. Where will you find evidence? First, you must do a close reading of the text. It is much easier to first analyze and think about how the smaller literary elements work together to create the whole work, rather than randomly thumbing through a work to find support for your thesis. When you provide evidence, you are providing proof from the text that shows your audience that your thesis is valid. Critics most commonly provide evidence by quoting a line or a passage from a work. When you provide evidence, it is imperative not to take it out of context. For example, if a character is joking with another character that he will kill himself if he fails his chemistry test and there’s no other mention of death in the work, it would be unfair to represent this character as suicidal by eliminating the context of him joking. Accurately quoting and fairly representing events/characters/etc. adds to your credibility as a writer. If you find evidence that counters your thesis, you should still engage with it. Think about what your critics would say and come up with a response to show how that particular piece of evidence might still support your stance. Once you’re done

gathering evidence, you can move on to the analysis portion in which you explain how the evidence supports your claims.

# 9. Thesis Examples

## **SAMPLE THESIS STATEMENTS**

These sample thesis statements are provided as guides, not as required forms or prescriptions.

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The thesis may focus on an analysis of one of the elements of fiction, drama, poetry or nonfiction as expressed in the work: character, plot, structure, idea, theme, symbol, style, imagery, tone, etc.

### **Example:**

In “A Worn Path,” Eudora Welty creates a fictional character in Phoenix Jackson whose determination, faith, and cunning illustrate the indomitable human spirit.

Note that the work, author, and character to be analyzed are identified in this thesis statement. The thesis relies on a strong verb (creates). It also identifies the element of fiction that the writer will explore (character) and the characteristics the writer will analyze and discuss (determination, faith, cunning).

### **Further Examples:**

The character of the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* serves as a foil to young Juliet, delights us with her warmth and earthy wit, and helps realize the tragic catastrophe.

The works of ecstatic love poets Rumi, Hafiz, and Kabir use symbols such as a lover’s longing and the Tavern of Ruin to illustrate the human soul’s desire to connect with God.

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The thesis may focus on illustrating how a work reflects the

particular genre's forms, the characteristics of a philosophy of literature, or the ideas of a particular school of thought.

**Example:**

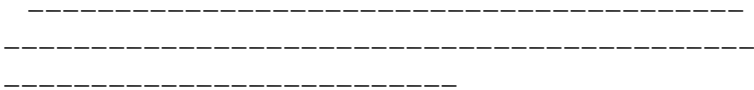
“The Third and Final Continent” exhibits characteristics recurrent in writings by immigrants: tradition, adaptation, and identity.

Note how the thesis statement classifies the form of the work (writings by immigrants) and identifies the characteristics of that form of writing (tradition, adaptation, and identity) that the essay will discuss.

**Further examples:**

Samuel Beckett’s *Endgame* reflects characteristics of Theatre of the Absurd in its minimalist stage setting, its seemingly meaningless dialogue, and its apocalyptic or nihilist vision.

A close look at many details in “The Story of an Hour” reveals how language, institutions, and expected demeanor suppress the natural desires and aspirations of women.



The thesis may draw parallels between some element in the work and real-life situations or subject matter: historical events, the author’s life, medical diagnoses, etc.

**Example:**

In Willa Cather’s short story, “Paul’s Case,” Paul exhibits suicidal behavior that a caring adult might have recognized and remedied had that adult had the scientific knowledge we have today.

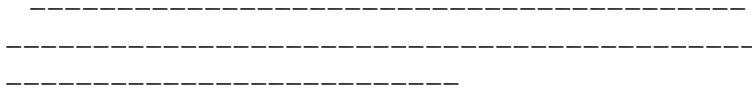
This thesis suggests that the essay will identify characteristics of suicide that Paul exhibits in the story. The writer will have to research medical and psychology texts to determine the typical characteristics of suicidal behavior and to illustrate how Paul’s behavior mirrors those characteristics.

**Further Examples:**

Through the experience of one man, the Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, accurately depicts the historical record of slave life in its descriptions of the often brutal

and quixotic relationship between master and slave and of the fragmentation of slave families.

In “I Stand Here Ironing,” one can draw parallels between the narrator’s situation and the author’s life experiences as a mother, writer, and feminist.



**SAMPLE PATTERNS FOR THESES ON LITERARY WORKS**

**1. In (title of work), (author) (illustrates, shows) (aspect) (adjective).**

Example: In “Barn Burning,” William Faulkner shows the characters Sardie and Abner Snopes struggling for their identity.

**2. In (title of work), (author) uses (one aspect) to (define, strengthen, illustrate) the (element of work).**

Example: In “Youth,” Joseph Conrad uses foreshadowing to strengthen the plot.

**3. In (title of work), (author) uses (an important part of work) as a unifying device for (one element), (another element), and (another element).** The number of elements can vary from one to four.

Example: In “Youth,” Joseph Conrad uses the sea as a unifying device for setting, structure and theme.

**4. (Author) develops the character of (character’s name) in (literary work) through what he/she does, what he/she says, what other people say to or about him/her.**

Example: Langston Hughes develops the character of Semples in “Ways and Means”...

**5. In (title of work), (author) uses (literary device) to (accomplish, develop, illustrate, strengthen) (element of work).**

Example: In “The Masque of the Red Death,” Poe uses the

symbolism of the stranger, the clock, and the seventh room to develop the theme of death.

**6. (Author) (shows, develops, illustrates) the theme of \_\_\_\_\_ in the (play, poem, story).**

Example: Flannery O'Connor illustrates the theme of the effect of the selfishness of the grandmother upon the family in "A Good Man is Hard to Find."

**7. (Author) develops his character(s) in (title of work) through his/her use of language.**

Example: John Updike develops his characters in "A & P" through his use of figurative language.

PART V  
LITERARY CRITICISM





# 10. Working with Literary Criticism: Discussion Assignment

## Critical Thinking Discussion

1) What does it mean to think critically? Write a definition. If you borrow a definition from someone, make sure to cite the source in MLA format. 2) How good are your critical thinking skills? What do you need to work on?

## Literary Criticism Discussion

1) Define literary criticism in your own words. 2) Of the forms of criticism you've read about for this class, which one best aligns with how you think about literature? Why? Are you simply falling back on what is familiar?

## II. How to Read Like a Writer

In 1997, I was a recent college graduate living in London for six months and working at the Palace Theatre owned by Andrew Lloyd Webber.\* The Palace was a beautiful red brick, four-story theatre in the heart of London's famous West End, and eight times a week it housed a threehour performance of the musical *Les Miserables*. Because of antiquated fire-safety laws, every theatre in the city was required to have a certain number of staff members inside watching the performance in case of an emergency.

My job (in addition to wearing a red tuxedo jacket) was to sit inside the dark theater with the patrons and make sure nothing went wrong. It didn't seem to matter to my supervisor that I had no training in security and no idea where we kept the fire extinguishers. I was pretty sure that if there was any trouble I'd be running down the back stairs, leaving the patrons to fend for themselves. I had no intention of dying in a bright red tuxedo.

There was a Red Coat stationed on each of the theater's four floors, and we all passed the time by sitting quietly in the back, reading books with tiny flashlights. It's not easy trying to read in the dim light of a theatre—flashlight or no flashlight—and it's even tougher with shrieks and shouts and gunshots coming from the stage. I had to focus intently on each and every word, often rereading a single sentence several times. Sometimes I got distracted and had to re-read entire paragraphs. As I struggled to read in this environment, I began to realize that the way I was reading—one word at a time—was exactly the same way that the author had written the text. I realized writing is a word-by-word, sentence-by-sentence process. The intense concentration required to read in the theater helped me recognize some of the interesting ways that authors string words into phrases into paragraphs into entire books.

I came to realize that all writing consists of a series of choices.

I was an English major in college, but I don't think I ever thought much about reading. I read all the time. I read for my classes and on the computer and sometimes for fun, but I never really thought about the important connections between reading and writing, and how reading in a particular way could also make me a better writer.

## What Does It Mean to Read Like a Writer?

When you Read Like a Writer (RLW) you work to identify some of the choices the author made so that you can better understand how such choices might arise in your own writing. The idea is to carefully examine the things you read, looking at the writerly techniques in the text in order to decide if you might want to adopt similar (or the same) techniques in your writing.

You are reading to learn about writing.

Instead of reading for content or to better understand the ideas in the writing (which you will automatically do to some degree anyway), you are trying to understand how the piece of writing was put together by the author and what you can learn about writing by reading a particular text. As you read in this way, you think about how the choices the author made and the techniques that he/she used are influencing your own responses as a reader. What is it about the way this text is written that makes you feel and respond the way you do?

The goal as you read like a writer is to locate what you believe are the most important writerly choices represented in the text—choices as large as the overall structure or as small as a single word used only once—to consider the effect of those choices on potential readers (including yourself). Then you can go one step further and imagine what different choices the author might have made instead, and what effect those different choices would have on readers.

Say you're reading an essay in class that begins with a short quote

from President Barack Obama about the war in Iraq. As a writer, what do you think of this technique? Do you think it is effective to begin the essay with a quote? What if the essay began with a quote from someone else? What if it was a much longer quote from President Obama, or a quote from the President about something other than the war?

And here is where we get to the most important part: Would you want to try this technique in your own writing?

Would you want to start your own essay with a quote? Do you think it would be effective to begin your essay with a quote from President Obama? What about a quote from someone else?

You could make yourself a list. What are the advantages and disadvantages of starting with a quote? What about the advantages and disadvantages of starting with a quote from the President? How would other readers respond to this technique? Would certain readers (say Democrats or liberals) appreciate an essay that started with a quote from President Obama better than other readers (say Republicans or conservatives)? What would be the advantages and disadvantages of starting with a quote from a less divisive person? What about starting with a quote from someone more divisive?

The goal is to carefully consider the choices the author made and the techniques that he or she used, and then decide whether you want to make those same choices or use those same techniques in your own writing. Author and professor Wendy Bishop explains how her reading process changed when she began to read like a writer:

It wasn't until I claimed the sentence as my area of desire, interest, and expertise—until I wanted to be a writer writing better—that I had to look underneath my initial readings . . . I started asking, how—how did the writer get me to feel, how did the writer say something so that it remains in my memory when many other things too easily fall out, how did the writer communicate his/her intentions about genre, about irony? (119–20)

Bishop moved from simply reporting her personal reactions to the things she read to attempting to uncover how the author led her

(and other readers) to have those reactions. This effort to uncover how authors build texts is what makes Reading Like a Writer so useful for student writers.

## How Is RLW Different from “Normal” Reading?

Most of the time we read for information. We read a recipe to learn how to bake lasagna. We read the sports page to see if our school won the game, Facebook to see who has commented on our status update, a history book to learn about the Vietnam War, and the syllabus to see when the next writing assignment is due. Reading Like a Writer asks for something very different.

In 1940, a famous poet and critic named Allen Tate discussed two different ways of reading:

There are many ways to read, but generally speaking there are two ways. They correspond to the two ways in which we may be interested in a piece of architecture. If the building has Corinthian columns, we can trace the origin and development of Corinthian columns; we are interested as historians. But if we are interested as architects, we may or may not know about the history of the Corinthian style; we must, however, know all about the construction of the building, down to the last nail or peg in the beams. We have got to know this if we are going to put up buildings ourselves. (506)

While I don't know anything about Corinthian columns (and doubt that I will ever want to know anything about Corinthian columns), Allen Tate's metaphor of reading as if you were an architect is a great way to think about RLW. When you read like a writer, you are trying to figure out how the text you are reading was constructed so that you learn how to “build” one for yourself. Author David Jauss makes a similar comparison when he writes that “reading won't help you much unless you learn to read like a writer. You must look at

a book the way a carpenter looks at a house someone else built, examining the details in order to see how it was made” (64).

Perhaps I should change the name and call this Reading Like an Architect, or Reading Like a Carpenter. In a way those names make perfect sense. You are reading to see how something was constructed so that you can construct something similar yourself.

## Why Learn to Read Like a Writer?

For most college students RLW is a new way to read, and it can be difficult to learn at first. Making things even more difficult is that your college writing instructor may expect you to read this way for class but never actually teach you how to do it. He or she may not even tell you that you’re supposed to read this way. This is because most writing instructors are so focused on teaching writing that they forget to show students how they want them to read.

That’s what this essay is for.

In addition to the fact that your college writing instructor may expect you to read like a writer, this kind of reading is also one of the very best ways to learn how to write well. Reading like a writer can help you understand how the process of writing is a series of making choices, and in doing so, can help you recognize important decisions you might face and techniques you might want to use when working on your own writing. Reading this way becomes an opportunity to think and learn about writing.

Charles Moran, a professor of English at the University of Massachusetts, urges us to read like writers because:

When we read like writers we understand and participate in the writing. We see the choices the writer has made, and we see how the writer has coped with the consequences of those choices . . . We “see” what the writer is doing because we read as writers; we see because we have written ourselves

and know the territory, know the feel of it, know some of the moves ourselves. (61)

You are already an author, and that means you have a built-in advantage when reading like a writer. All of your previous writing experiences—inside the classroom and out—can contribute to your success with RLW. Because you “have written” things yourself, just as Moran suggests, you are better able to “see” the choices that the author is making in the texts that you read. This in turn helps you to think about whether you want to make some of those same choices in your own writing, and what the consequences might be for your readers if you do.

## What Are Some Questions to Ask Before You Start Reading?

As I sat down to work on this essay, I contacted a few of my former students to ask what advice they would give to college students regarding how to read effectively in the writing classroom and also to get their thoughts on RLW. Throughout the rest of the essay I’d like to share some of their insights and suggestions; after all, who is better qualified to help you learn what you need to know about reading in college writing courses than students who recently took those courses themselves?

One of the things that several students mentioned to do first, before you even start reading, is to consider the context surrounding both the assignment and the text you’re reading. As one former student, Alison, states: “The reading I did in college asked me to go above and beyond, not only in breadth of subject matter, but in depth, with regards to informed analysis and background information on context.” Alison was asked to think about some of the factors that went into the creation of the text, as well as some of the factors influencing her own experience of reading—taken together these constitute the context of reading.

Another former student, Jamie, suggests that students “learn about the historical context of the writings” they will read for class. Writing professor Richard Straub puts it this way: “You’re not going to just read a text. You’re going to read a text within a certain context, a set of circumstances . . . It’s one kind of writing or another, designed for one audience and purpose or another” (138).

Among the contextual factors you’ll want to consider before you even start reading are:

- Do you know the author’s purpose for this piece of writing?
- Do you know who the intended audience is for this piece of writing?

It may be that you need to start reading before you can answer these first two questions, but it’s worth trying to answer them before you start. For example, if you know at the outset that the author is trying to reach a very specific group of readers, then his or her writerly techniques may seem more or less effective than if he/she was trying to reach a more general audience. Similarly—returning to our earlier example of beginning an essay with a quote from President Obama about the war in Iraq—if you know that the author’s purpose is to address some of the dangers and drawbacks of warfare, this may be a very effective opening. If the purpose is to encourage Americans to wear sunscreen while at the beach this opening makes no sense at all. One former student, Lola, explained that most of her reading assignments in college writing classes were designed “to provoke analysis and criticisms into the style, structure, and purpose of the writing itself.”

## In What Genre Is This Written?

Another important thing to consider before reading is the genre of the text. Genre means a few different things in college English classes, but it’s most often used to indicate the type of writing: a poem, a newspaper article, an essay, a short story, a novel, a



legal brief, an instruction manual, etc. Because the conventions for each genre can be very different (who ever heard of a 900-page newspaper article?), techniques that are effective for one genre may not work well in another. Many readers expect poems and pop songs to rhyme, for example, but might react negatively to a legal brief or instruction manual that did so.

Another former student, Mike, comments on how important the genre of the text can be for reading:

I think a lot of the way I read, of course, depends on the type of text I'm reading. If I'm reading philosophy, I always look for signaling words (however, therefore, furthermore, despite) indicating the direction of the argument . . . when I read fiction or creative nonfiction, I look for how the author inserts dialogue or character sketches within narration or environmental observation. After reading *To the Lighthouse* [sic] last semester, I have noticed how much more attentive I've become to the types of narration (omniscient, impersonal, psychological, realistic, etc.), and how these different approaches are utilized to achieve an author's overall effect.

Although Mike specifically mentions what he looked for while reading a published novel, one of the great things about RLW is that it can be used equally well with either published or student-produced writing.

## Is This a Published or a Student-Produced Piece of Writing?

As you read both kinds of texts you can locate the choices the author made and imagine the different decisions that he/she might have made.

While it might seem a little weird at first to imagine how published texts could be written differently—after all, they were good enough to be published—remember that all writing can be

improved. Scholar Nancy Walker believes that it's important for students to read published work using RLW because "the work ceases to be a mere artifact, a stone tablet, and becomes instead a living utterance with immediacy and texture. It could have been better or worse than it is had the author made different choices" (36). As Walker suggests, it's worth thinking about how the published text would be different—maybe even better—if the author had made different choices in the writing because you may be faced with similar choices in your own work.

## Is This the Kind of Writing You Will Be Assigned to Write Yourself?

Knowing ahead of time what kind of writing assignments you will be asked to complete can really help you to read like a writer. It's probably impossible (and definitely too time consuming) to identify all of the choices the author made and all techniques an author used, so it's important to prioritize while reading. Knowing what you'll be writing yourself can help you prioritize. It may be the case that your instructor has assigned the text you're reading to serve as model for the kind of writing you'll be doing later. Jessie, a former student, writes, "In college writing classes, we knew we were reading for a purpose—to influence or inspire our own work. The reading that I have done in college writing courses has always been really specific to a certain type of writing, and it allows me to focus and experiment on that specific style in depth and without distraction."

If the text you're reading is a model of a particular style of writing—for example, highly-emotional or humorous—RLW is particularly helpful because you can look at a piece you're reading and think about whether you want to adopt a similar style in your own writing. You might realize that the author is trying to arouse sympathy in readers and examine what techniques he/she uses to

do this; then you can decide whether these techniques might work well in your own writing. You might notice that the author keeps including jokes or funny stories and think about whether you want to include them in your writing—what would the impact be on your potential readers?

## What Are Questions to Ask As You Are Reading?

It is helpful to continue to ask yourself questions as you read like a writer. As you're first learning to read in this new way, you may want to have a set of questions written or typed out in front of you that you can refer to while reading. Eventually—after plenty of practice—you will start to ask certain questions and locate certain things in the text almost automatically. Remember, for most students this is a new way of reading, and you'll have to train yourself to do it well. Also keep in mind that you're reading to understand how the text was written—how the house was built—more than you're trying to determine the meaning of the things you read or assess whether the texts are good or bad.

First, return to two of the same questions I suggested that you consider before reading:

- What is the author's purpose for this piece of writing?
- Who is the intended audience?

Think about these two questions again as you read. It may be that you couldn't really answer them before, or that your ideas will change while reading. Knowing why the piece was written and who it's for can help explain why the author might have made certain choices or used particular techniques in the writing, and you can assess those choices and techniques based in part on how effective they are in fulfilling that purpose and/or reaching the intended audience.

Beyond these initial two questions, there is an almost endless list of questions you might ask regarding writing choices and

techniques. Here are some of the questions that one former student, Clare, asks herself:

When reading I tend to be asking myself a million questions.

If I were writing this, where would I go with the story? If the author goes in a different direction (as they so often do) from what I am thinking, I will ask myself, why did they do this?

What are they telling me?

Clare tries to figure out why the author might have made a move in the writing that she hadn't anticipated, but even more importantly, she asks herself what she would do if she were the author. Reading the text becomes an opportunity for Clare to think about her own role as an author.

Here are some additional examples of the kinds of questions you might ask yourself as you read:

- How effective is the language the author uses? Is it too formal? Too informal? Perfectly appropriate?

Depending on the subject matter and the intended audience, it may make sense to be more or less formal in terms of language. As you begin reading, you can ask yourself whether the word choice and tone/ language of the writing seem appropriate.

- What kinds of evidence does the author use to support his/her claims? Does he/she use statistics? Quotes from famous people? Personal anecdotes or personal stories? Does he/she cite books or articles?

- How appropriate or effective is this evidence? Would a different type of evidence, or some combination of evidence, be more effective?

To some extent the kinds of questions you ask should be determined by the genre of writing you are reading. For example, it's probably worth examining the evidence that the author uses to support his/ her claims if you're reading an opinion column, but less important if you're reading a short story. An opinion column is often intended to convince readers of something, so the kinds of evidence used are often very important. A short story may be intended to convince readers of something, sometimes, but probably not in the

same way. A short story rarely includes claims or evidence in the way that we usually think about them.

- Are there places in the writing that you find confusing? What about the writing in those places makes it unclear or confusing?

It's pretty normal to get confused in places while reading, especially while reading for class, so it can be helpful to look closely at the writing to try and get a sense of exactly what tripped you up. This way you can learn to avoid those same problems in your own writing.

- How does the author move from one idea to another in the writing? Are the transitions between the ideas effective? How else might he/she have transitioned between ideas instead?

Notice that in these questions I am encouraging you to question whether aspects of the writing are appropriate and effective in addition to deciding whether you liked or disliked them. You want to imagine how other readers might respond to the writing and the techniques you've identified. Deciding whether you liked or disliked something is only about you; considering whether a technique is appropriate or effective lets you contemplate what the author might have been trying to do and to decide whether a majority of readers would find the move successful. This is important because it's the same thing you should be thinking about while you are writing: how will readers respond to this technique I am using, to this sentence, to this word? As you read, ask yourself what the author is doing at each step of the way, and then consider whether the same choice or technique might work in your own writing.

## What Should You Be Writing As You Are Reading?

The most common suggestion made by former students—mentioned by every single one of them—was to mark up the text, make comments in the margins, and write yourself

notes and summaries both during and after reading. Often the notes students took while reading became ideas or material for the students to use in their own papers. It's important to read with a pen or highlighter in your hand so that you can mark—right on the text—all those spots where you identify an interesting choice the author has made or a writerly technique you might want to use. One thing that I like to do is to highlight and underline the passage in the text itself, and then try to answer the following three questions on my notepad:

- What is the technique the author is using here?
- Is this technique effective?
- What would be the advantages and disadvantages if I tried this same technique in my writing?

By utilizing this same process of highlighting and note taking, you'll end up with a useful list of specific techniques to have at your disposal when it comes time to begin your own writing.

What Does RLW Look Like in Action?

Let's go back to the opening paragraph of this essay and spend some time reading like writers as a way to get more comfortable with the process:

In 1997, I was a recent college graduate living in London for six months and working at the Palace Theatre owned by Andrew Lloyd Webber. The Palace was a beautiful red brick, four-story theatre in the heart of London's famous West End, and eight times a week it housed a three-hour performance of the musical *Les Miserables*. Because of antiquated fire-safety laws, every theatre in the city was required to have a certain number of staff members inside watching the performance in case of an emergency.

Let's begin with those questions I encouraged you to try to answer before you start reading. (I realize we're cheating a little bit in this case since you've already read most of this essay, but this is just practice. When doing this on your own, you should attempt to answer these questions before reading, and then return to them as you read to further develop your answers.)

- Do you know the author's purpose for this piece of writing? I hope the purpose is clear by now; if it isn't, I'm doing a pretty lousy job of explaining how and why you might read like a writer.

- Do you know who the intended audience is? Again, I hope that you know this one by now.

- What about the genre? Is this an essay? An article? What would you call it?

- You know that it's published and not student writing. How does this influence your expectations for what you will read?

- Are you going to be asked to write something like this yourself? Probably not in your college writing class, but you can still use RLW to learn about writerly techniques that you might want to use in whatever you do end up writing.

Now ask yourself questions as you read.

In 1997, I was a recent college graduate living in London for six months and working at the Palace Theatre owned by Andrew Lloyd Webber. The Palace was a beautiful red brick, four-story theatre in the heart of London's famous West End, and eight times a week it housed a three-hour performance of the musical *Les Miserables*. Because of antiquated fire-safety laws, every theatre in the city was required to have a certain number of staff members inside watching the performance in case of an emergency.

Since this paragraph is the very first one, it makes sense to think about how it introduces readers to the essay. What technique(s) does the author use to begin the text? This is a personal story about his time working in London. What else do you notice as you read over this passage? Is the passage vague or specific about where he worked? You know that the author worked in a famous part of London in a beautiful theater owned by a well-known composer. Are these details important? How different would this opening be if instead I had written:

In 1997, I was living in London and working at a theatre that showed *Les Miserables*.

This is certainly shorter, and some of you may prefer this version.

It's quick. To the point. But what (if anything) is lost by eliminating so much of the detail? I chose to include each of the details that the revised sentence omits, so it's worth considering why. Why did I mention where the theater was located? Why did I explain that I was living in London right after finishing college? Does it matter that it was after college? What effect might I have hoped the inclusion of these details would have on readers? Is this reference to college an attempt to connect with my audience of college students? Am I trying to establish my credibility as an author by announcing that I went to college? Why might I want the readers to know that this was a theater owned by Andrew Lloyd Weber? Do you think I am just trying to mention a famous name that readers will recognize? Will Andrew Lloyd Weber figure prominently in the rest of the essay?

These are all reasonable questions to ask. They are not necessarily the right questions to ask because there are no right questions. They certainly aren't the only questions you could ask, either. The goal is to train yourself to formulate questions as you read based on whatever you notice in the text. Your own reactions to what you're reading will help determine the kinds of questions to ask.

Now take a broader perspective. I begin this essay—an essay about reading—by talking about my job in a theater in London. Why? Doesn't this seem like an odd way to begin an essay about reading? If you read on a little further (feel free to scan back up at the top of this essay) you learn in the third full paragraph what the connection is between working in the theater and reading like a writer, but why include this information at all? What does this story add to the essay? Is it worth the space it takes up?

Think about what effect presenting this personal information might have on readers. Does it make it feel like a real person, some “ordinary guy,” is talking to you? Does it draw you into the essay and make you want to keep reading?

What about the language I use? Is it formal or more informal? This is a time when you can really narrow your focus and look at particular words:

Because of antiquated fire-safety laws, every theatre in the



city was required to have a certain number of staff members inside watching the performance in case of an emergency.

What is the effect of using the word “antiquated” to describe the firesafety laws? It certainly projects a negative impression; if the laws are described as antiquated it means I view them as old-fashioned or obsolete. This is a fairly uncommon word, so it stands out, drawing attention to my choice in using it. The word also sounds quite formal. Am I formal in the rest of this sentence?

I use the word “performance” when I just as easily could have written “show.” For that matter, I could have written “old” instead of “antiquated.” You can proceed like this throughout the sentence, thinking about alternative choices I could have made and what the effect would be. Instead of “staff members” I could have written “employees” or just “workers.” Notice the difference if the sentence had been written:

Because of old fire-safety laws, every theatre in the city was required to have a certain number of workers inside watching the show in case of an emergency.

Which version is more likely to appeal to readers? You can try to answer this question by thinking about the advantages and disadvantages of using formal language. When would you want to use formal language in your writing and when would it make more sense to be more conversational?

As you can see from discussing just this one paragraph, you could ask questions about the text forever. Luckily, you don’t have to. As you continue reading like a writer, you’ll learn to notice techniques that seem new and pay less attention to the ones you’ve thought about before. The more you practice the quicker the process becomes until you’re reading like a writer almost automatically.

I want to end this essay by sharing one more set of comments by my former student, Lola, this time about what it means to her to read like a writer:

Reading as a writer would compel me to question what might have brought the author to make these decisions, and then decide what worked and what didn’t. What could have

made that chapter better or easier to understand? How can I make sure I include some of the good attributes of this writing style into my own? How can I take aspects that I feel the writer failed at and make sure not to make the same mistakes in my writing?

Questioning why the author made certain decisions. Considering what techniques could have made the text better. Deciding how to include the best attributes of what you read in your own writing. This is what Reading Like a Writer is all about.

Are you ready to start reading?

## Discussion

1. How is “Reading Like a Writer” similar to and/or different from the way(s) you read for other classes?

2. What kinds of choices do you make as a writer that readers might identify in your written work?

3. Is there anything you notice in this essay that you might like to try in your own writing? What is that technique or strategy? When do you plan to try using it?

4. What are some of the different ways that you can learn about the context of a text before you begin reading it?

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## 12. Literary Criticism

By reading and discussing literature, we expand our imagination, our sense of what is possible, and our ability to empathize with others. Improve your ability to read critically and interpret texts while gaining appreciation for different literary genres and theories of interpretation. Read samples of literary interpretation. Write a critique of a literary work.

Texts that interpret literary works are usually persuasive texts. Literary critics may conduct a close reading of a literary work, critique a literary work from the stance of a particular literary theory, or debate the soundness of other critics' interpretations. The work of literary critics is similar to the work of authors writing evaluative texts. For example, the skills required to critique films, interpret laws, or evaluate artistic trends are similar to those skills required by literary critics.

### *Why Write Literary Criticism?*

People have been telling stories and sharing responses to stories since the beginning of time. By reading and discussing literature, we expand our imagination, our sense of what is possible, and our ability to empathize with others. Reading and discussing literature can enhance our ability to write. It can sharpen our critical faculties, enabling us to assess works and better understand why literature can have such a powerful effect on our lives.



An interactive or media element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://library.achievingthedream.org/westhillscenglish1b/?p=32>

“Literary texts” include works of fiction and poetry. In school, English instructors ask students to critique literary texts, or works. Literary criticism refers to a genre of writing whereby an author critiques a literary text, either a work of fiction, a play, or poetry. Alternatively, some works of literary criticism address how a particular theory of interpretation informs a reading of a work or refutes some other critics’ reading of a work.

### *Diverse Rhetorical Situations*

The genre of literary interpretation is more specialized than most of the other genres addressed in this section, as suggested by the table below. People may discuss their reactions to literary works informally (at coffee houses, book clubs, or the gym) but the lion’s share of literary criticism takes place more formally: in college classrooms, professional journals, academic magazines, and Web sites.

Students interpret literary works for English instructors or for students enrolled in English classes. In their interpretations, students may argue for a particular interpretation or they may dispute other critics’ interpretations. Alternatively, students may read a text with a particular literary theory in mind, using the theory to explicate a particular point of view. For example, writers could critique *The Story of an Hour* by Kate Chopin from a feminist theoretical perspective. Thanks to the Internet, some English classes are now publishing students’ interpretations on Web sites. In turn, some students and English faculty publish their work in academic literary criticism journals.

Over the years, literary critics have argued about the best ways to interpret literature. Accordingly, many “schools” or “theories of criticism” have emerged. As you can imagine—given that they were developed by sophisticated specialists—some of these theoretical approaches are quite sophisticated and abstract.

Below is a summary of some of the more popular literary theories. Because it is a summary, the following tends to oversimplify the theories. In any case, unless you are enrolled in a literary criticism course, you won’t need to learn the particulars of all of these approaches. Instead, your teacher may ask you to take an eclectic approach, pulling interpretative questions from multiple literary theories.

# 13. Literary Theory and Schools of Criticism

## Introduction

A very basic way of thinking about literary theory is that these ideas act as different lenses critics use to view and talk about art, literature, and even culture. These different lenses allow critics to consider works of art based on certain assumptions within that school of theory. The different lenses also allow critics to focus on particular aspects of a work they consider important.

For example, if a critic is working with certain Marxist theories, s/he might focus on how the characters in a story interact based on their economic situation. If a critic is working with post-colonial theories, s/he might consider the same story but look at how characters from colonial powers (Britain, France, and even America) treat characters from, say, Africa or the Caribbean. Hopefully, after reading through and working with the resources in this area of the OWL, literary theory will become a little easier to understand and use.

## Disclaimer

Please note that the schools of literary criticism and their explanations included here are by no means the only ways of distinguishing these separate areas of theory. Indeed, many critics use tools from two or more schools in their work. Some would define differently or greatly expand the (very) general statements given here. Our explanations are meant only as starting places for

your own investigation into literary theory. We encourage you to use the list of scholars and works provided for each school to further your understanding of these theories.

We also recommend the following secondary sources for study of literary theory:

- *The Critical Tradition: Classical Texts and Contemporary Trends*, 1998, edited by David H. Richter
- *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*, 1999, by Lois Tyson
- *Beginning Theory*, 2002, by Peter Barry

Although philosophers, critics, educators and authors have been writing about writing since ancient times, contemporary schools of literary theory have cohered from these discussions and now influence how scholars look at and write about literature. The following sections overview these movements in critical theory. Though the timeline below roughly follows a chronological order, we have placed some schools closer together because they are so closely aligned.

## Timeline (most of these overlap)

- Moral Criticism, Dramatic Construction (~360 BC-present)
- Formalism, New Criticism, Neo-Aristotelian Criticism (1930s-present)
- Psychoanalytic Criticism, Jungian Criticism(1930s-present)
- Marxist Criticism (1930s-present)
- Reader-Response Criticism (1960s-present)
- Structuralism/Semiotics (1920s-present)
- Post-Structuralism/Deconstruction (1966-present)
- New Historicism/Cultural Studies (1980s-present)
- Post-Colonial Criticism (1990s-present)



- Feminist Criticism (1960s-present)
- Gender/Queer Studies (1970s-present)
- Critical Race Theory (1970s-present)

# 14. Literary Criticism Discussion

## Literary Criticism Discussion

1) Define literary criticism in your own words. 2) Of the forms of criticism you've read about for this class, which one best aligns with how you think about literature? Why? Are you simply falling back on what is familiar?

PART VI  
ANALYZING SHORT  
FICTION



# 15. How to Analyze a Short Story

## What is a Short Story?

A short story is a work of short, narrative prose that is usually centered around one single event. It is limited in scope and has an introduction, body and conclusion. Although a short story has much in common with a novel (See How to Analyze a Novel), it is written with much greater precision. You will often be asked to write a literary analysis. An analysis of a short story requires basic knowledge of literary elements. The following guide and questions may help you:

## Setting

Setting is a description of where and when the story takes place. In a short story there are fewer settings compared to a novel. The time is more limited.

- How is the setting created? Consider geography, weather, time of day, social conditions, etc.
- What role does setting play in the story? Is it an important part of the plot or theme? Or is it just a backdrop against which the action takes place?

Study the time period which is also part of the setting.

- When was the story written?

- Does it take place in the present, the past, or the future?
  - How does the time period affect the language, atmosphere or social circumstances of the short story?
- 

## Characterization

Characterization deals with how the characters in the story are described. In short stories there are usually fewer characters compared to a novel. They usually focus on one central character or protagonist.

- Who is the main character?
  - Are the main character and other characters described through dialogue – by the way they speak (dialect or slang for instance)?
  - Has the author described the characters by physical appearance, thoughts and feelings, and interaction (the way they act towards others)?
  - Are they static/flat characters who do not change?
  - Are they dynamic/round characters who DO change?
  - What type of characters are they? What qualities stand out? Are they stereotypes?
  - Are the characters believable?
- 

## Plot and structure

The plot is the main sequence of events that make up the story. In

short stories the plot is usually centered around one experience or significant moment

- What is the most important event?
  - How is the plot structured? Is it linear, chronological or does it move around?
  - Is the plot believable?
- 

## Narrator and Point of view

The narrator is the person telling the story.

Is the narrator and the main character the same?

By point of view we mean from whose eyes the story is being told. Short stories tend to be told through one character's point of view

- Who is the narrator or speaker in the story?
  - Does the author speak through the main character?
  - Is the story written in the first person "I" point of view?
  - Is the story written in a detached third person "he/she" point of view?
  - Is there an "all-knowing" 3rd person who can reveal what all the characters are thinking and doing at all times and in all places?
- 

## Conflict

Conflict or tension is usually the heart of the short story and is

related to the main character. In a short story there is usually one main struggle.

- How would you describe the main conflict?
  - Is it an internal conflict within the character?
  - Is it an external conflict caused by the surroundings or environment the main character finds himself/herself in?
- 

## Climax

The climax is the point of greatest tension or intensity in the short story. It can also be the turning point where events take a major turn as the story races towards its conclusion.

- Is there a turning point in the story?
  - When does the climax take place?
- 

## Theme

The theme is the main idea, lesson or message in the short story. It is usually an abstract idea about the human condition, society or life.

- How is the theme expressed?
  - Are any elements repeated that may suggest a theme?
  - Is there more than one theme?
-



## Style

The author's style has to do with the author's vocabulary, use of imagery, tone or feeling of the story. It has to do with his attitude towards the subject. In some short stories the tone can be ironic, humorous, cold or dramatic.

- Is his language full of figurative language?
- What images does he use?
- Does the author use a lot of symbolism? Metaphors (comparisons which do not use "as" or "like", similes (comparisons which use "as" or "like")?

Your literary analysis of a short story will often be in the form of an essay where you may be asked to give your opinions of the short story at the end. Choose the elements that made the greatest impression on you. Point out which character/characters you liked best or least and always support your arguments.

# 16. Assigned Reading: Kafka's "A Hunger Artist"

This translation, which has been prepared by Ian Johnston of Malaspina University-College, Nanaimo, BC, Canada, is in the public domain and may be used by anyone, in whole or in part, without permission and without charge, provided the source is acknowledged, released October 2003.

In the last decades interest in hunger artists has declined considerably. Whereas in earlier days there was good money to be earned putting on major productions of this sort under one's own management, nowadays that is totally impossible. Those were different times. Back then the hunger artist captured the attention of the entire city. From day to day while the fasting lasted, participation increased. Everyone wanted to see the hunger artist at least daily. During the final days there were people with subscription tickets who sat all day in front of the small barred cage. And there were even viewing hours at night, their impact heightened by torchlight. On fine days the cage was dragged out into the open air, and then the hunger artist was put on display particularly for the children. While for grown-ups the hunger artist was often merely a joke, something they participated in because it was fashionable, the children looked on amazed, their mouths open, holding each other's hands for safety, as he sat there on scattered straw—spurning a chair—in a black tights, looking pale, with his ribs sticking out prominently, sometimes nodding politely, answering questions with a forced smile, even sticking his arm out through the bars to let people feel how emaciated he was, but then completely sinking back into himself, so that he paid no attention to anything, not even to what was so important to him, the striking of the clock, which was the single furnishing in the cage, merely looking out in

front of him with his eyes almost shut and now and then sipping from a tiny glass of water to moisten his lips.

Apart from the changing groups of spectators there were also constant observers chosen by the public—strangely enough they were usually butchers—who, always three at a time, were given the task of observing the hunger artist day and night, so that he didn't get something to eat in some secret manner. It was, however, merely a formality, introduced to reassure the masses, for those who understood knew well enough that during the period of fasting the hunger artist would never, under any circumstances, have eaten the slightest thing, not even if compelled by force. The honour of his art forbade it. Naturally, none of the watchers understood that. Sometimes there were nightly groups of watchers who carried out their vigil very laxly, deliberately sitting together in a distant corner and putting all their attention into playing cards there, clearly intending to allow the hunger artist a small refreshment, which, according to their way of thinking, he could get from some secret supplies. Nothing was more excruciating to the hunger artist than such watchers. They depressed him. They made his fasting terribly difficult. Sometimes he overcame his weakness and sang during the time they were observing, for as long as he could keep it up, to show people how unjust their suspicions about him were. But that was little help. For then they just wondered among themselves about his skill at being able to eat even while singing. He much preferred the observers who sat down right against the bars and, not satisfied with the dim backlighting of the room, illuminated him with electric flashlights. The glaring light didn't bother him in the slightest. Generally he couldn't sleep at all, and he could always doze under any lighting and at any hour, even in an overcrowded, noisy auditorium. With such observers, he was very happily prepared to spend the entire night without sleeping. He was very pleased to joke with them, to recount stories from his nomadic life and then, in turn, to listen their stories—doing everything just to keep them awake, so that he could keep showing them once again that he had

nothing to eat in his cage and that he was fasting as none of them could.

He was happiest, however, when morning came and a lavish breakfast was brought for them at his own expense, on which they hurled themselves with the appetite of healthy men after a hard night's work without sleep. True, there were still people who wanted to see in this breakfast an unfair means of influencing the observers, but that was going too far, and if they were asked whether they wanted to undertake the observers' night shift for its own sake, without the breakfast, they excused themselves. But nonetheless they stood by their suspicions.

However, it was, in general, part of fasting that these doubts were inextricably associated with it. For, in fact, no one was in a position to spend time watching the hunger artist every day and night, so no one could know, on the basis of his own observation, whether this was a case of truly uninterrupted, flawless fasting. The hunger artist himself was the only one who could know that and, at the same time, the only spectator capable of being completely satisfied with his own fasting. But the reason he was never satisfied was something different. Perhaps it was not fasting at all which made him so very emaciated that many people, to their own regret, had to stay away from his performance, because they couldn't bear to look at him. For he was also so skeletal out of dissatisfaction with himself, because he alone knew something that even initiates didn't know—how easy it was to fast. It was the easiest thing in the world. About this he did not remain silent, but people did not believe him. At best they thought he was being modest. Most of them, however, believed he was a publicity seeker or a total swindler, for whom, at all events, fasting was easy, because he understood how to make it easy, and then had the nerve to half admit it. He had to accept all that. Over the years he had become accustomed to it. But this dissatisfaction kept gnawing at his insides all the time and never yet—and this one had to say to his credit—had he left the cage of his own free will after any period of fasting.

The impresario had set the maximum length of time for the fast

at forty days—he would never allow the fasting go on beyond that point, not even in the cosmopolitan cities. And, in fact, he had a good reason. Experience had shown that for about forty days one could increasingly whip up a city's interest by gradually increasing advertising, but that then the people turned away—one could demonstrate a significant decline in popularity. In this respect, there were, of course, small differences among different towns and among different countries, but as a rule it was true that forty days was the maximum length of time.

So then on the fortieth day the door of the cage—which was covered with flowers—was opened, an enthusiastic audience filled the amphitheatre, a military band played, two doctors entered the cage, in order to take the necessary measurements of the hunger artist, the results were announced to the auditorium through a megaphone, and finally two young ladies arrived, happy about the fact that they were the ones who had just been selected by lot, seeking to lead the hunger artist down a couple of steps out of the cage, where on a small table a carefully chosen hospital meal was laid out. And at this moment the hunger artist always fought back. Of course, he still freely laid his bony arms in the helpful outstretched hands of the ladies bending over him, but he did not want to stand up. Why stop right now after forty days? He could have kept going for even longer, for an unlimited length of time. Why stop right now, when he was in his best form, indeed, not yet even in his best fasting form? Why did people want to rob him of the fame of fasting longer, not just so that he could become the greatest hunger artist of all time, which he probably was already, but also so that he could surpass himself in some unimaginable way, for he felt there were no limits to his capacity for fasting. Why did this crowd, which pretended to admire him so much, have so little patience with him? If he kept going and kept fasting longer, why would they not tolerate it? Then, too, he was tired and felt good sitting in the straw. Now he was supposed to stand up straight and tall and go to eat, something which, when he just imagined it, made him feel nauseous right away. With great difficulty he repressed mentioning

this only out of consideration for the women. And he looked up into the eyes of these women, apparently so friendly but in reality so cruel, and shook his excessively heavy head on his feeble neck.

But then happened what always happened. The impresario came and in silence—the music made talking impossible—raised his arms over the hunger artist, as if inviting heaven to look upon its work here on the straw, this unfortunate martyr, something the hunger artist certainly was, only in a completely different sense, then grabbed the hunger artist around his thin waist, in the process wanting with his exaggerated caution to make people believe that here he had to deal with something fragile, and handed him over—not without secretly shaking him a little, so that the hunger artist’s legs and upper body swung back and forth uncontrollably—to the women, who had in the meantime turned as pale as death. At this point, the hunger artist endured everything. His head lay on his chest—it was as if it had inexplicably rolled around and just stopped there—his body was arched back, his legs, in an impulse of self-preservation, pressed themselves together at the knees, but scraped the ground, as if they were not really on the floor but were looking for the real ground, and the entire weight of his body, admittedly very small, lay against one of the women, who appealed for help with flustered breath, for she had not imagined her post of honour would be like this, and then stretched her neck as far as possible, to keep her face from the least contact with the hunger artist, but then, when she couldn’t manage this and her more fortunate companion didn’t come to her assistance but trembled and remained content to hold in front of her the hunger artist’s hand, that small bundle of knuckles, she broke into tears, to the delighted laughter of the auditorium, and had to be relieved by an attendant who had been standing ready for some time. Then came the meal. The impresario put a little food into mouth of the hunger artist, now half unconscious, as if fainting, and kept up a cheerful patter designed to divert attention away from the hunger artist’s condition. Then a toast was proposed to the public, which was supposedly whispered to the impresario by the hunger artist,

the orchestra confirmed everything with a great fanfare, people dispersed, and no one had the right to be dissatisfied with the event, no one except the hunger artist—he was always the only one.

He lived this way, taking small regular breaks, for many years, apparently in the spotlight, honoured by the world, but for all that his mood was usually gloomy, and it kept growing gloomier all the time, because no one understood how to take him seriously. But how was he to find consolation? What was there left for him to wish for? And if a good-natured man who felt sorry for him ever wanted to explain to him that his sadness probably came from his fasting, then it could happen that the hunger artist responded with an outburst of rage and began to shake the bars like an animal, frightening everyone. But the impresario had a way of punishing moments like this, something he was happy to use. He would make an apology for the hunger artist to the assembled public, conceding that the irritability had been provoked only by his fasting, something quite intelligible to well-fed people and capable of excusing the behaviour of the hunger artist without further explanation. From there he would move on to speak about the equally hard to understand claim of the hunger artist that he could go on fasting for much longer than he was doing. He would praise the lofty striving, the good will, and the great self-denial no doubt contained in this claim, but then would try to contradict it simply by producing photographs, which were also on sale, for in the pictures one could see the hunger artist on the fortieth day of his fast, in bed, almost dead from exhaustion. Although the hunger artist was very familiar with this perversion of the truth, it always strained his nerves again and was too much for him. What was a result of the premature ending of the fast people were now proposing as its cause! It was impossible to fight against this lack of understanding, against this world of misunderstanding. In good faith he always listened eagerly to the impresario at the bars of his cage, but each time, once the photographs came out, he would let go of the bars and, with a sigh, sink back into the straw, and a reassured public could come up again and view him.

When those who had witnessed such scenes thought back on them a few years later, often they were unable to understand themselves. For in the meantime that change mentioned above had set it. It happened almost immediately. There may have been more profound reasons for it, but who bothered to discover what they were? At any rate, one day the pampered hunger artist saw himself abandoned by the crowd of pleasure seekers, who preferred to stream to other attractions. The impresario chased around half of Europe one more time with him, to see whether he could still re-discover the old interest here and there. It was all futile. It was as if a secret agreement against the fasting performances had developed everywhere. Naturally, it couldn't really have happened all at once, and people later remembered some things which in the days of intoxicating success they hadn't paid sufficient attention to, some inadequately suppressed indications, but now it was too late to do anything to counter them. Of course, it was certain that the popularity of fasting would return once more someday, but for those now alive that was no consolation. What was the hunger artist to do now? A man whom thousands of people had cheered on could not display himself in show booths at small fun fairs. The hunger artist was not only too old to take up a different profession, but was fanatically devoted to fasting more than anything else. So he said farewell to the impresario, an incomparable companion on his life's road, and let himself be hired by a large circus. In order to spare his own feelings, he didn't even look at the terms of his contract at all.

A large circus with its huge number of men, animals, and gimmicks, which are constantly being let go and replenished, can use anyone at any time, even a hunger artist, provided, of course, his demands are modest. Moreover, in this particular case it was not only the hunger artist himself who was engaged, but also his old and famous name. In fact, given the characteristic nature of his art, which was not diminished by his advancing age, one could never claim that a worn out artist, who no longer stood at the pinnacle of his ability, wanted to escape to a quiet position in the circus. On the contrary, the hunger artist declared that he could fast just as well



as in earlier times—something that was entirely credible. Indeed, he even affirmed that if people would let him do what he wanted—and he was promised this without further ado—he would really now legitimately amaze the world for the first time, an assertion which, however, given the mood of the time, which the hunger artist in his enthusiasm easily overlooked, only brought smiles from the experts.

However, basically the hunger artist had not forgotten his sense of the way things really were, and he took it as self-evident that people would not set him and his cage up as the star attraction somewhere in the middle of the arena, but would move him outside in some other readily accessible spot near the animal stalls. Huge brightly painted signs surrounded the cage and announced what there was to look at there. During the intervals in the main performance, when the general public pushed out towards the menagerie in order to see the animals, they could hardly avoid moving past the hunger artist and stopping there a moment. They would perhaps have remained with him longer, if those pushing up behind them in the narrow passage way, who did not understand this pause on the way to the animal stalls they wanted to see, had not made a longer peaceful observation impossible. This was also the reason why the hunger artist began to tremble at these visiting hours, which he naturally used to long for as the main purpose of his life. In the early days he could hardly wait for the pauses in the performances. He had looked forward with delight to the crowd pouring around him, until he became convinced only too quickly—and even the most stubborn, almost deliberate self-deception could not hold out against the experience—that, judging by their intentions, most of these people were, again and again without exception, only visiting the menagerie. And this view from a distance still remained his most beautiful moment. For when they had come right up to him, he immediately got an earful from the shouting of the two steadily increasing groups, the ones who wanted to take their time looking at the hunger artist, not with any understanding but on a whim or from mere defiance—for him these

ones were soon the more painful—and a second group of people whose only demand was to go straight to the animal stalls.

Once the large crowds had passed, the late comers would arrive, and although there was nothing preventing these people any more from sticking around for as long as they wanted, they rushed past with long strides, almost without a sideways glance, to get to the animals in time. And it was an all-too-rare stroke of luck when the father of a family came by with his children, pointed his finger at the hunger artist, gave a detailed explanation about what was going on here, and talked of earlier years, when he had been present at similar but incomparably more magnificent performances, and then the children, because they had been inadequately prepared at school and in life, always stood around still uncomprehendingly. What was fasting to them? But nonetheless the brightness of the look in their searching eyes revealed something of new and more gracious times coming. Perhaps, the hunger artist said to himself sometimes, everything would be a little better if his location were not quite so near the animal stalls. That way it would be easy for people to make their choice, to say nothing of the fact that he was very upset and constantly depressed by the stink from the stalls, the animals' commotion at night, the pieces of raw meat dragged past him for the carnivorous beasts, and the roars at feeding time. But he did not dare to approach the administration about it. In any case, he had the animals to thank for the crowds of visitors among whom, here and there, there could be one destined for him. And who knew where they would hide him if he wished to remind them of his existence and, along with that, of the fact that, strictly speaking, he was only an obstacle on the way to the menagerie.

A small obstacle, at any rate, a constantly diminishing obstacle. People got used to the strange notion that in these times they would want to pay attention to a hunger artist, and with this habitual awareness the judgment on him was pronounced. He might fast as well as he could—and he did—but nothing could save him any more. People went straight past him. Try to explain the art of fasting to anyone! If someone doesn't feel it, then he cannot be made to

understand it. The beautiful signs became dirty and illegible. People tore them down, and no one thought of replacing them. The small table with the number of days the fasting had lasted, which early on had been carefully renewed every day, remained unchanged for a long time, for after the first weeks the staff grew tired of even this small task. And so the hunger artist kept fasting on and on, as he once had dreamed about in earlier times, and he had no difficulty succeeding in achieving what he had predicted back then, but no one was counting the days—no one, not even the hunger artist himself, knew how great his achievement was by this point, and his heart grew heavy. And when once in a while a person strolling past stood there making fun of the old number and talking of a swindle, that was in a sense the stupidest lie which indifference and innate maliciousness could invent, for the hunger artist was not being deceptive—he was working honestly—but the world was cheating him of his reward.

Many days went by once more, and this, too, came to an end. Finally the cage caught the attention of a supervisor, and he asked the attendant why they had left this perfectly useful cage standing here unused with rotting straw inside. Nobody knew, until one man, with the help of the table with the number on it, remembered the hunger artist. They pushed the straw around with a pole and found the hunger artist in there. “Are you still fasting?” the supervisor asked. “When are you finally going to stop?” “Forgive me everything,” whispered the hunger artist. Only the supervisor, who was pressing his ear up against the cage, understood him. “Certainly,” said the supervisor, tapping his forehead with his finger in order to indicate to the spectators the state the hunger artist was in, “we forgive you.” “I always wanted you to admire my fasting,” said the hunger artist. “But we do admire it,” said the supervisor obligingly. “But you shouldn’t admire it,” said the hunger artist. “Well then, we don’t admire it,” said the supervisor, “but why shouldn’t we admire it?” “Because I had to fast. I can’t do anything else,” said the hunger artist. “Just look at you,” said the supervisor, “why can’t you do anything else?” “Because,” said the hunger artist, lifting his head

a little and, with his lips pursed as if for a kiss, speaking right into the supervisor's ear so that he wouldn't miss anything, "because I couldn't find a food which I enjoyed. If had found that, believe me, I would not have made a spectacle of myself and would have eaten to my heart's content, like you and everyone else." Those were his last words, but in his failing eyes there was the firm, if no longer proud, conviction that he was continuing to fast.

"All right, tidy this up now," said the supervisor. And they buried the hunger artist along with the straw. But in his cage they put a young panther. Even for a person with the dullest mind it was clearly refreshing to see this wild animal throwing itself around in this cage, which had been dreary for such a long time. It lacked nothing. Without thinking about it for any length of time, the guards brought the animal food. It enjoyed the taste and never seemed to miss its freedom. This noble body, equipped with everything necessary, almost to the point of bursting, also appeared to carry freedom around with it. That seem to be located somewhere or other in its teeth, and its joy in living came with such strong passion from its throat that it was not easy for spectators to keep watching. But they controlled themselves, kept pressing around the cage, and had no desire to move on.

# 17. Assigned Reading: Chopin's "The Story of an Hour"

Knowing that Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with a heart trouble, great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband's death. It was her sister Josephine who told her, in broken sentences; veiled hints that revealed in half concealing. Her husband's friend Richards was there, too, near her. It was he who had been in the newspaper office when intelligence of the railroad disaster was received, with Brently Mallard's name leading the list of "killed." He had only taken the time to assure himself of its truth by a second telegram, and had hastened to forestall any less careful, less tender friend in bearing the sad message. She did not hear the story as many women have heard the same, with a paralyzed inability to accept its significance. She wept at once, with sudden, wild abandonment, in her sister's arms. When the storm of grief had spent itself she went away to her room alone. She would have no one follow her. There stood, facing the open window, a comfortable, roomy armchair. Into this she sank, pressed down by a physical exhaustion that haunted her body and seemed to reach into her soul. She could see in the open square before her house the tops of trees that were all aquiver with the new spring life. The delicious breath of rain was in the air. In the street below a peddler was crying his wares. The notes of a distant song which some one was singing reached her faintly, and countless sparrows were twittering in the eaves. There were patches of blue sky showing here and there through the clouds that had met and piled one above the other in the west facing her window. She sat with her head thrown back upon the cushion of the chair, quite motionless, except when a sob came up into her throat and shook her, as a child who has cried

itself to sleep continues to sob in its dreams. She was young, with a fair, calm face, whose lines bespoke repression and even a certain strength. But now there was a dull stare in her eyes, whose gaze was fixed away off yonder on one of those patches of blue sky. It was not a glance of reflection, but rather indicated a suspension of intelligent thought. There was something coming to her and she was waiting for it, fearfully. What was it? She did not know; it was too subtle and elusive to name. But she felt it, creeping out of the sky, reaching toward her through the sounds, the scents, the color that filled the air. Now her bosom rose and fell tumultuously. She was beginning to recognize this thing that was approaching to possess her, and she was striving to beat it back with her will—as powerless as her two white slender hands would have been. When she abandoned herself a little whispered word escaped her slightly parted lips. She said it over and over under her breath: “free, free, free!” The vacant stare and the look of terror that had followed it went from her eyes. They stayed keen and bright. Her pulses beat fast, and the coursing blood warmed and relaxed every inch of her body. She did not stop to ask if it were or were not a monstrous joy that held her. A clear and exalted perception enabled her to dismiss the suggestion as trivial. She knew that she would weep again when she saw the kind, tender hands folded in death; the face that had never looked save with love upon her, fixed and gray and dead. But she saw beyond that bitter moment a long procession of years to come that would belong to her absolutely. And she opened and spread her arms out to them in welcome. There would be no one to live for her during those coming years; she would live for herself. There would be no powerful will bending hers in that blind persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellowcreature. A kind intention or a cruel intention make the act seem no less a crime as she looked upon it in that brief moment of illumination. And yet she had loved him—sometimes. Often she had not. What did it matter! What could love, the unsolved mystery, count for in face of this possession of self-assertion which she suddenly recognized as the

strongest impulse of her being! "Free! Body and soul free!" she kept whispering. Josephine was kneeling before the closed door with her lips to the keyhole, imploring for admission. "Louise, open the door! I beg; open the door—you will make yourself ill. What are you doing, Louise? For heaven's sake open the door." "Go away. I am not making myself ill." No; she was drinking in a very elixir of life through that open window. Her fancy was running riot along those days ahead of her. Spring days, and summer days, and all sorts of days that would be her own. She breathed a quick prayer that life might be long. It was only yesterday she had thought with a shudder that life might be long. She arose at length and opened the door to her sister's importunities. There was a feverish triumph in her eyes, and she carried herself unwittingly like a goddess of Victory. She clasped her sister's waist, and together they descended the stairs. Richards stood waiting for them at the bottom. Some one was opening the front door with a latchkey. It was Brently Mallard who entered, a little travel-stained, composedly carrying his grip-sack and umbrella. He had been far from the scene of accident, and did not even know there had been one. He stood amazed at Josephine's piercing cry; at Richards' quick motion to screen him from the view of his wife. But Richards was too late. When the doctors came they said she had died of heart disease—of joy that kills.

# 18. Assigned Reading: Bloom's "Silver Water"

[http://producer.csi.edu/cdraney/2011/175/etexts/Bloom\\_Silver-Water.pdf](http://producer.csi.edu/cdraney/2011/175/etexts/Bloom_Silver-Water.pdf)



# 19. Assigned Reading: Reed's "Birds and Other Things We Placed in Our Hearts"

[http://pov.imv.au.dk/Issue\\_27/section\\_1/artc2A.html](http://pov.imv.au.dk/Issue_27/section_1/artc2A.html)

## 20. Assigned Reading: Wolff's "Bullet in the Brain"

[http://pov.imv.au.dk/Issue\\_27/section\\_1/artc2A.html](http://pov.imv.au.dk/Issue_27/section_1/artc2A.html)

## 2I. Assigned Reading: Bradbury's "The Veldt"

"George, I wish you'd look at the nursery.

"What's wrong with it?"

"I don't know."

"Well, then."

"I just want you to look at it, is all, or call a psychologist in to look at it."

"What would a psychologist want with a nursery?"

"You know very well what he'd want." His wife was standing in the middle of the kitchen watching

the stove busy humming to itself, making supper for four.

"It's just that it is different now than it was."

"All right, let's have a look."

They walked down the hall of their HappyLife Home, which had cost them thirty thousand dollars

with everything included. This house which clothed and fed and rocked them to sleep and played

and sang and was good to them. Their approach was sensed by a hidden switch and the nursery light

turned on when they came within ten feet of it. Similarly, behind them, in the halls, lights went on

and off automatically as they left them behind.

"Well," said George Hadley. They stood on the grass-like floor of the nursery. It was forty feet

across by forty feet long and thirty feet high; it had cost half again as much as the rest of the house.

"But nothing's too good for our children," George had said.

The room was silent and empty. The walls were white and two dimensional. Now, as George and

Lydia Hadley stood in the center of the room, the walls made a quiet noise and seemed to fall away into the distance. Soon an African veldt appeared, in three dimensions, on all sides, in color. It looked real to the smallest stone and bit of yellow summer grass. The ceiling above them became a deep sky with a hot yellow sun. George Hadley started to sweat from the heat. "Let's get out of this sun," he said. "This is a little too real. But I don't see anything wrong." "Wait a moment, you'll see," said his wife. Now hidden machines were beginning to blow a wind containing prepared smells toward the two people in the middle of the baked veldt. The hot straw smell of lion grass, the cool green smell of the hidden water hole, the strong dried blood smell of the animals, the smell of dust like red pepper in the hot air. And now the sounds: the thump of distant antelope feet on soft grassy ground, the papery rustle of vultures. A shadow passed through the sky. George Hadley looked up, and as he watched the shadow moved across his sweating face. "Horrible creatures," he heard his wife say. "The vultures." "You see, there are the lions, far over, that way. Now they're on their way to the water hole. They've just been eating," said Lydia. "I don't know what." "Some animal." George Hadley put his hand above his eyes to block off the burning light and looked carefully. "A zebra or a baby giraffe, maybe." "Are you sure?" His wife sounded strangely nervous. "No, it's a little late to be sure," he said, with a laugh. "Nothing over there I can see but cleaned bone, and the vultures dropping for what's left." "Did you hear that scream?" she asked.

“No.”

“About a minute ago?”

“Sorry, no.”

The lions were coming. And again George Hadley was filled with respect for the brilliant mind that

had come up with the idea for this room. A wonder of efficiency selling for an unbelievably low

price. Every home should have one. Oh, occasionally they frightened you with their realism, they

made you jump, gave you a scare. But most of the time they were fun for everyone. Not only your

own son and daughter, but for yourself when you felt like a quick trip to a foreign land, a quick

change of scenery. Well, here it was!

And here were the lions now, fifteen feet away. They looked so real, so powerful and shockingly

real, that you could feel the hairs stand up on the back of your neck. Your mouth was filled with the

dusty smell of their heated fur. The yellow of the lions and the summer grass was in your eyes like a

picture in an expensive French wall hanging. And there was the sound of the lions quick, heavy

breaths in the silent mid-day sun, and the smell of meat from their dripping mouths.

The lions stood looking at George and Lydia Hadley with terrible green-yellow eyes. “Watch out!”

screamed Lydia.

The lions came running at them. Lydia turned suddenly and ran. Without thinking, George ran after

her. Outside in the hall, after they had closed the door quickly and noisily behind them, he was

laughing and she was crying. And they both stood shocked at the other’s reaction.

“George!”

“Lydia! Oh, my dear poor sweet Lydia!”

“They almost got us!”

“Walls, Lydia, remember; glass walls, that’s all they are. Oh, they look real, I must admit – Africa in

your living room. But it’s all created from three dimensional color film behind glass screens. And

the machines that deliver the smells and sounds to go with the scenery. Here’s my handkerchief.”

“I’m afraid.” She came to him and put her body against him and cried as he held her. “Did you see?

Did you feel? It’s too real.”

“Now, Lydia…”

“You’ve got to tell Wendy and Peter not to read any more on Africa.”

“Of course – of course.” He patted her.

“Promise?”

“Sure.”

“And lock the nursery for a few days until I can get over this.”

“You know how difficult Peter is about that. When I punished him a month ago by locking it for

even a few hours – the way he lost his temper! And Wendy too.

They live for the nursery.”

“It’s got to be locked, that’s all there is to it.”

“All right.” Although he wasn’t happy about it, he locked the huge door. “You’ve been working too

hard. You need a rest.”

“I don’t know – I don’t know,” she said, blowing her nose, sitting down in a chair that immediately

began to rock and comfort her. “Maybe I don’t have enough to do. Maybe I have time to think too

much. Why don’t we shut the whole house off for a few days and take a vacation?”

“You mean you want to fry my eggs for me?”

“Yes.” She nodded.

“And mend my socks?”

“Yes.” She nodded again excitedly, with tears in her eyes.

"And clean the house?"

"Yes, yes – oh, yes!"

"But I thought that's why we bought this house, so we wouldn't have to do anything?"

"That's just it. I feel like I don't belong here. The house is wife and mother now, and nurse for the

children. Can I compete with an African veldt? Can I give a bath and clean the children as

efficiently or quickly as the automatic body wash can? I cannot. And it isn't just me. It's you.

You've been awfully nervous lately."

"I suppose I have been smoking too much."

"You look as if you didn't know what to do with yourself in this house, either. You smoke a little

more every morning and drink a little more every afternoon, and you are taking more pills to help

you sleep at night. You're beginning to feel unnecessary too."

"Am I?" He thought for a moment as he and tried to feel into himself to see what was really there.

"Oh, George!" She looked past him, at the nursery door. "Those lions can't get out of there, can they?"

He looked at the door and saw it shake as if something had jumped against it from the other side.

"Of course not," he said.

At dinner they ate alone, for Wendy and Peter were at a special plastic fair across town. They had

called home earlier to say they'd be late. So George Hadley, deep in thought, sat watching the

dining-room table produce warm dishes of food from the machines inside.

"We forgot the tomato sauce," he said.

"Sorry," said a small voice within the table, and tomato sauce appeared.

As for the nursery, thought George Hadley, it won't hurt for the children to be locked out of it a

while. Too much of anything isn't good for anyone. And it was clearly indicated that the children

had been spending a little too much time on Africa. That sun. He could still feel it on his neck, like a

hot paw. And the lions. And the smell of blood. Remarkable how the nursery read the thoughts in

the children's minds and created life to fill their every desire. The children thought lions, and there

were lions. The children thought zebras, and there were zebras.

Sun – sun. Giraffes – giraffes. Death

and death.

That last. He ate the meat that the table had cut for him without tasting it. Death thoughts. They

were awfully young, Wendy and Peter, for death thoughts. Or, no, you were never too young, really.

Long before you knew what death was you were wishing it on someone else. When you were two

years old you were shooting people with toy guns.

But this – the long, hot African veldt. The awful death in the jaws of a lion. And repeated again and

again.

“Where are you going?”

George didn't answer Lydia... he was too busy thinking of something else. He let the lights shine

softly on ahead of him, turn off behind him as he walked quietly to the nursery door. He listened

against it. Far away, a lion roared. He unlocked the door and opened it. Just before he stepped

inside, he heard a faraway scream. And then another roar from the lions, which died down quickly.

He stepped into Africa.

How many times in the last year had he opened this door and found Wonderland with Alice and the



Mock Turtle, or Aladdin and his Magical Lamp, or Jack Pumpkinhead of Oz, or Dr. Doolittle, or the cow jumping over a very real-looking moon. All the most enjoyable creations of an imaginary world. How often had he seen Pegasus the winged horse flying in the sky ceiling, or seen explosions of red fireworks, or heard beautiful singing.

But now, is yellow hot Africa, this bake oven with murder in the heat. Perhaps Lydia was right.

Perhaps they needed a little vacation from the fantasy which was growing a bit too real for ten-yearold children. It was all right to exercise one's mind with unusual fantasies, but when the lively child mind settled on one pattern..?

It seemed that, at a distance, for the past month, he had heard lions roaring, and noticed their strong smell which carried as far away as his study door. But, being busy, he had paid it no attention.

George Hadley stood on the African veldt alone. The lions looked up from their feeding, watching him. The only thing wrong with the image was the open door. Through it he could see his wife, far down the dark hall, like a framed picture. She was still eating her dinner, but her mind was clearly on other things.

"Go away," he said to the lions.

They did not go. He knew exactly how the room should work. You sent out your thoughts.

Whatever you thought would appear. "Let's have Aladdin and his lamp," he said angrily. The veldt remained; the lions remained.

"Come on, room! I demand Aladdin!" he said.

Nothing happened. The lions made soft low noises in the hot sun. "Aladdin!"

He went back to dinner. “The fool room’s out of order,” he said. “It won’t change.”

“Or...”

“Or what?”

“Or it can’t change,” said Lydia, “because the children have thought about Africa and lions and

killing so many days that the room’s stuck in a pattern it can’t get out of.”

“Could be.”

“Or Peter’s set it to remain that way.”

“Set it?”

“He may have got into the machinery and fixed something.”

“Peter doesn’t know machinery.”

“He’s a wise one for ten. That I.Q. of his...”

“But...”

“Hello, Mom. Hello, Dad.”

The Hadleys turned. Wendy and Peter were coming happily in the front door, with bright blue eyes

and a smell of fresh air on their clothes from their trip in the helicopter.

“You’re just in time for supper,” said both parents.

“We’re full of strawberry ice-cream and hot dogs,” said the children, holding hands. “But we’ll sit and watch.”

“Yes, come tell us about the nursery,” said George Hadley.

The brother and sister looked at him and then at each other. “Nursery?”

“All about Africa and everything,” said the father with a false smile.

“I don’t understand,” said Peter.

“Your mother and I were just traveling through Africa.

“There’s no Africa in the nursery,” said Peter simply.

“Oh, come now, Peter. We know better.”

“I don’t remember any Africa,” said Peter to Wendy. “Do you?”

“No.”

“Run see and come tell.”

She did as he told her.

“Wendy, come back here!” said George Hadley, but she was gone. The house lights followed her like fireflies. Too late, he realized he had forgotten to lock the nursery door after his last visit.

“Wendy’ll look and come tell us,” said Peter.

“She doesn’t have to tell me. I’ve seen it.”

“I’m sure you’re mistaken, Father.”

“I’m not, Peter. Come along now.”

But Wendy was back. “It’s not Africa,” she said breathlessly.

“We’ll see about this,” said George Hadley, and they all walked down the hall together and opened the door.

There was a green, lovely forest, a lovely river, a purple mountain, high voices singing. And there

was Rima the bird girl, lovely and mysterious. She was hiding in the trees with colorful butterflies,

like flowers coming to life, flying about her long hair. The African veldt was gone. The lions were

gone. Only Rima was here now, singing a song so beautiful that it brought tears to your eyes.

George Hadley looked in at the changed scene. “Go to bed,” he said to the children.

They opened their mouths.

“You heard me,” he said.

They went off to the air tube, where a wind blew them like brown leaves up to their sleeping rooms.

George Hadley walked through the forest scene and picked up something that lay in the corner near

where the lions had been. He walked slowly back to his wife.

“What is that?” she asked.

“An old wallet of mine,” he said. He showed it to her. The smell of hot grass was on it... and the

smell of a lion. It was wet from being in the lion’s mouth, there were tooth marks on it, and there

was dried blood on both sides. He closed the door and locked it, tight.

They went to up to bed but couldn't sleep. "Do you think Wendy changed it?" she said at last, in the dark room.

"Of course."

"Made it from a veldt into a forest and put Rima there instead of lions?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"I don't know. But it's staying locked until I find out."

"How did your wallet get there?"

"I don't know anything," he said, "except that I'm beginning to be sorry we bought that room for the children. If children are suffering from any kind of emotional problem, a room like that..."

"It's supposed to help them work off their emotional problems in a healthy way."

"I'm starting to wonder." His eyes were wide open, looking up at the ceiling.

"We've given the children everything they ever wanted. Is this our reward – secrecy, not doing what we tell them?"

"Who was it said, 'Children are carpets, they should be stepped on occasionally'? We've never lifted a hand. They're unbearable – let's admit it. They come and go when they like; they treat us as if we were the children in the family. They're spoiled and we're spoiled."

"They've been acting funny ever since you wouldn't let them go to New York a few months ago."

"They're not old enough to do that alone, I explained."

"I know, but I've noticed they've been decidedly cool toward us since."

"I think I'll have David McClean come tomorrow morning to have a look at Africa."

"But it's not Africa now, it's South America and Rima."

"I have a feeling it'll be Africa again before then."

A moment later they heard the screams. Two screams. Two people screaming from downstairs. And

then a roar of lions.

"Wendy and Peter aren't in their rooms," said his wife.

He lay in his bed with his beating heart. "No," he said. "They've broken into the nursery."

"Those screams – they sound familiar."

"Do they?"

"Yes, awfully."

And although their beds tried very hard, the two adults couldn't be rocked to sleep for another hour.

A smell of cats was in the night air.

\* \* \*

"Father?" asked Peter the next morning.

"Yes."

Peter looked at his shoes. He never looked at his father any more, nor at his mother. "You aren't

going to lock up the nursery for good, are you?"

"That all depends."

"On what?" said Peter sharply.

"On you and your sister. If you break up this Africa with a little variety – oh, Sweden perhaps, or

Denmark or China..."

"I thought we were free to play as we wished."

"You are, within reasonable limits."

"What's wrong with Africa, Father?"

"Oh, so now you admit you have been thinking up Africa, do you?"

"I wouldn't want the nursery locked up," said Peter coldly. "Ever."

"Matter of fact, we're thinking of turning the whole house off for about a month. Live sort of a

happy family existence."

“That sounds terrible! Would I have to tie my own shoes instead of letting the machine do it? And

brush my own teeth and comb my hair and give myself a bath?”

“It would be fun for a change, don’t you think?”

No, it would be horrible. I didn’t like it when you took out the picture painter last month.”

“That’s because I wanted you to learn to paint all by yourself, son.”

“I don’t want to do anything but look and listen and smell; what else is there to do?”

“All right, go play in Africa.”

“Will you shut off the house sometime soon?”

“We’re considering it.”

“I don’t think you’d better consider it any more, Father.”

“I won’t have any threats from my son!”

“Very well.” And Peter walked off to the nursery.

\* \* \*

“Am I on time?” said David McClean.

“Breakfast?” asked George Hadley.

“Thanks, had some. What’s the trouble?”

“David, you’re a psychologist.”

“I should hope so.”

“Well, then, have a look at our nursery. You saw it a year ago when you dropped by; did you notice anything unusual about it then?”

“Can’t say I did; the usual violences, a tendency toward a slight paranoia here or there. But this is

usual in children because they feel their parents are always doing things to make them suffer in one way or another. But, oh, really nothing.”

They walked down the hall. “I locked it up,” explained the father, “and the children broke back into it during the night. I let them stay so they could form the patterns for you to see.”

There was a terrible screaming from the nursery.

“There it is,” said George Hadley. “See what you make of it.”

They walked in on the children without knocking. The screams had stopped. The lions were feeding.

“Run outside a moment, children,” said George Hadley. “No, don’t change the mental picture.

Leave the walls as they are. Get!”

With the children gone, the two men stood studying the lions sitting together in the distance, eating with great enjoyment whatever it was they had caught.

“I wish I knew what it was,” said George Hadley. “Sometimes I can almost see. Do you think if I brought high-powered binoculars here and...”

David McClean laughed dryly. “Hardly.” He turned to study all four walls. “How long has this been going on?”

“A little over a month.”

“It certainly doesn’t feel good.”

“I want facts, not feelings.”

“My dear George, a psychologist never saw a fact in his life. He only hears about feelings; things that aren’t always clearly expressed. This doesn’t feel good, I tell you. Trust me. I have a nose for something bad. This is very bad. My advice to you is to have the whole damn room torn down and your children brought to me every day during the next year for treatment.”

“Is it that bad?”

“I’m afraid so. One of the original uses of these rooms was so that we could study the patterns left on the walls by the child’s mind. We could study them whenever we wanted to, and help the child.

In this case, however, the room has become a means of creating destructive thoughts, instead of helping to make them go away.”

“Didn’t you sense this before?”

“I sensed only that you had spoiled your children more than most.  
And now you’re letting them

down in some way. What way?”

“I wouldn’t let them go to New York.”

“What else?”

“I’ve taken a few machines from the house and threatened them,  
a month ago, with closing up the  
nursery unless they did their homework. I did close it for a few  
days to show I meant business.”

“Ah, ha!”

“Does that mean anything?”

“Everything. Where before they had a Santa Claus now they have  
a Scrooge. Children prefer Santa.

You’ve let this room and this house replace you and your wife in  
your children’s feelings. This

room is their mother and father, far more important in their lives  
than their real parents. And now

you come along and want to shut it off. No wonder there’s hatred  
here. You can feel it coming out

of the sky. Feel that sun. George, you’ll have to change your life.  
Like too many others, you’ve built

it around creature comforts. Why, you’d go hungry tomorrow if  
something went wrong in your

kitchen. You wouldn’t know how to cook an egg. All the same, turn  
everything off. Start new. It’ll

take time. But we’ll make good children out of bad in a year, wait  
and see.”

“But won’t the shock be too much for the children, shutting the  
room up without notice, for good?”

“I don’t want them going any deeper into this, that’s all.”

The lions were finished with their bloody meat. They were  
standing on the edge of the clearing

watching the two men.

“Now I’m feeling worried,” said McClean. “Let’s get out of here. I  
never have cared for these



damned rooms. Make me nervous.”

“The lions look real, don’t they?” said George Hadley. I don’t suppose there’s any way...”

“What?”

“...that they could become real?”

“Not that I know.”

“Some problem with the machinery, someone changing something inside?”

“No.”

They went to the door.

“I don’t imagine the room will like being turned off,” said the father.

“Nothing ever likes to die – even a room.”

“I wonder if it hates me for wanting to switch it off?”

“Paranoia is thick around here today,” said David McClean. “You can see it everywhere. Hello.” He

bent and picked up a bloody scarf. “This yours?”

“No.” George Hadley’s face set like stone. “It belongs to Lydia.”

They went to the control box together and threw the switch that killed the nursery.

The two children were so upset that they couldn’t control themselves. They screamed and danced

around and threw things. They shouted and cried and called them rude names and jumped on the

furniture.

“You can’t do that to the nursery, you can’t!”

“Now, children.”

The children threw themselves onto a sofa, crying.

“George,” said Lydia Hadley, “turn it on again, just for a few moments. You need to give them some

more time.”

“No.”

“You can’t be so cruel...”

“Lydia, it’s off, and it stays off. And the whole damn house dies as of here and now. The more I see

of the mess we've put ourselves in, the more it sickens me. We've been thinking of our machine assisted selves for too long. My God, how we need a breath of honest air!"

And he marched about the house turning off the voice clocks, the stoves, the heaters, the shoe cleaners, the body washer, the massager, and every other machine he could put his hand to.

The house was full of dead bodies, it seemed. It felt like a mechanical cemetery. So silent. None of the humming hidden energy of machines waiting to function at the tap of a button.

"Don't let them do it!" cried Peter to the ceiling, as if he was talking to the house, the nursery.

"Don't let Father kill everything." He turned to his father. "Oh, I hate you!"

"Saying things like that won't get you anywhere."

"I wish you were dead!"

"We were, for a long while. Now we're going to really start living. Instead of being handled and massaged, we're going to live."

Wendy was still crying and Peter joined her again. "Just a moment, just one moment, just another moment of nursery," they cried.

"Oh, George," said the wife, "it can't hurt."

"All right – all right, if they'll just shut up. One minute, mind you, and then off forever."

"Daddy, Daddy, Daddy!" sang the children, smiling with wet faces.

"And then we're going on a vacation. David McClean is coming back in half an hour to help us

move out and get to the airport. I'm going to dress. You turn the nursery on for a minute, Lydia, just a minute, mind you."

And the three of them went off talking excitedly while he let himself be transported upstairs through

the air tube and set about dressing himself. A minute later Lydia appeared.

"I'll be glad when we get away," she said thankfully.

"Did you leave them in the nursery?"

"I wanted to dress too. Oh, that horrible Africa. What can they see in it?"

"Well, in five minutes we'll be on our way to Iowa. Lord, how did we ever get in this house? What

made us buy a nightmare?"

"Pride, money, foolishness."

"I think we'd better get downstairs before those kids spend too much time with those damned beasts

again."

Just then they heard the children calling, "Daddy, Mommy, come quick – quick!"

They went downstairs in the air tube and ran down the hall. The children were nowhere in sight. "Wendy? Peter!"

They ran into the nursery. The veldt was empty save for the lions waiting, looking at them. "Peter,

Wendy?"

The door closed loudly.

"Wendy, Peter!"

George Hadley and his wife turned quickly and ran back to the door.

"Open the door!" cried George Hadley, trying the handle. "Why, they've locked it from the outside!

Peter!" He beat at the door. "Open up!"

He heard Peter's voice outside, against the door.

"Don't let them switch off the nursery and the house," he was saying.

Mr. and Mrs. George Hadley beat at the door. "Now, don't be silly, children. It's time to go. Mr.

McClellan'll be here in a minute and..."

And then they heard the sounds.

The lions were on three sides of them in the yellow veldt grass. They walked quietly through the dry grass, making long, deep rolling sounds in their throats. The lions!

Mr. Hadley looked at his wife and they turned and looked back at the beasts edging slowly forward, knees bent, tails in the air.

Mr. and Mrs. Hadley screamed.

And suddenly they realized why those other screams had sounded familiar.

\* \* \*

“Well, here I am,” said David McClean from the nursery door. “Oh, hello.” He looked carefully at

the two children seated in the center of the room eating a little picnic lunch. On the far them he

could see the water hole and the yellow veldt. Above was the hot sun. He began to sweat. “Where are your father and mother?”

The children looked up and smiled. “Oh, they’ll be here directly.”

“Good, we must get going.”

At a distance Mr. McClean saw the lions fighting over something and then quietening down to feed

in silence under the shady trees. He put his hand to his eyes to block out the sun and looked at them.

Now the lions were done feeding. They moved to the water hole to drink. A shadow moved over

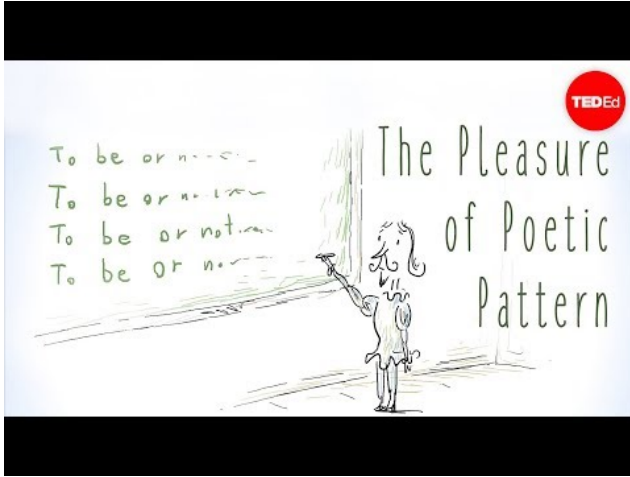
Mr. McClean’s hot face. Many shadows moved. The vultures were dropping down from the burning sky.

“A cup of tea?” asked Wendy in the silence.

PART VII  
ANALYZING POETRY



## 22. The Pleasure of Poetic Pattern



A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://library.achievingthedream.org/westhillscenglish1b/?p=44>

## 23. Assigned Reading: Collins' "Introduction to Poetry"

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/46712>



24. Assigned Reading: Lee Upton's "And Though She Be Little, She Be Fierce"

[https://www.poetrysociety.org/psa/awards/annual/winners/2005/award\\_2/](https://www.poetrysociety.org/psa/awards/annual/winners/2005/award_2/)

# 25. Assigned Reading: Monica Ferrell's "The Coin of Your Country"

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/57922>

## 26. Assigned Reading: Shankar's "Contraction"

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/53693>

## 27. Assigned Reading: Shakespeare "Sonnet 73"

Sonnet 73: That time of year thou mayst in me behold

By William Shakespeare

That time of year thou mayst in me behold

When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang

Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,

Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.

In me thou see'st the twilight of such day

As after sunset fadeth in the west,

Which by and by black night doth take away,

Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.

In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire

That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,

As the death-bed whereon it must expire,

Consum'd with that which it was nourish'd by.

This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong,

To love that well which thou must leave ere long.

## 28. Assigned Reading: Everwine's "Back from the Fields"

[https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/  
detail/54473](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/54473)

## 29. Assigned Reading: Everwine's "After the Funeral"

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/56582>

30. Assigned Reading:  
Komunyakaa's "Ghazal, After  
Ferguson"

[https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/  
detail/58753](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/58753)

# 31. Assigned Reading: Levine's "What Work Is"

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/52173>



## 32. Assigned Reading: Rossetti's "After Death"

The curtains were half drawn, the floor was swept  
And strewn with rushes, rosemary and may  
Lay thick upon the bed on which I lay,  
Where through the lattice ivy-shadows crept.  
He leaned above me, thinking that I slept  
And could not hear him; but I heard him say,  
'Poor child, poor child': and as he turned away  
Came a deep silence, and I knew he wept.  
He did not touch the shroud, or raise the fold  
That hid my face, or take my hand in his,  
Or ruffle the smooth pillows for my head:  
He did not love me living; but once dead  
He pitied me; and very sweet it is



PART VIII  
ANALYZING PLAYS



# 33. Appendix 5: Writing an Analysis of a Poem, Story, or Play"

If you are taking a literature course, it is important that you know how to write an analysis—sometimes called an interpretation or a literary analysis or a critical reading or a critical analysis—of a story, a poem, and a play. Your instructor will probably assign such an analysis as part of the course assessment. On your mid-term or final exam, you might have to write an analysis of one or more of the poems and/or stories on your reading list. Or the dreaded “sight poem or story” might appear on an exam, a work that is not on the reading list, that you have not read before, but one your instructor includes on the exam to examine your ability to apply the active reading skills you have learned in class to produce, independently, an effective literary analysis. You might be asked to write instead or, or in addition to an analysis of a literary work, a more sophisticated essay in which you compare and contrast the protagonists of two stories, or the use of form and metaphor in two poems, or the tragic heroes in two plays.

You might learn some literary theory in your course and be asked to apply theory—feminist, Marxist, reader-response, psychoanalytic, new historicist, for example—to one or more of the works on your reading list. But the seminal assignment in a literature course is the analysis of the single poem, story, novel, or play, and, even if you do not have to complete this assignment specifically, it will form the basis of most of the other writing assignments you will be required to undertake in your literature class. There are several ways of structuring a literary analysis, and your instructor might issue specific instructions on how he or she wants this assignment done. The method presented here might not

be identical to the one your instructor wants you to follow, but it will be easy enough to modify, if your instructor expects something a bit different, and it is a good default method, if your instructor does not issue more specific guidelines. You want to begin your analysis with a paragraph that provides the context of the work you are analyzing and a brief account of what you believe to be the poem or story or play's main theme. At a minimum, your account of the work's context will include the name of the author, the title of the work, its genre, and the date and place of publication. If there is an important biographical or historical context to the work, you should include that, as well. Try to express the work's theme in one or two sentences. Theme, you will recall, is that insight into human experience the author offers to readers, usually revealed as the content, the drama, the plot of the poem, story, or play unfolds and the characters interact. Assessing theme can be a complex task. Authors usually show the theme; they don't tell it. They rarely say, at the end of the story, words to this effect: "and the moral of my story is..." They tell their story, develop their characters, provide some kind of conflict—and from all of this theme emerges. Because identifying theme can be challenging and subjective, it is often a good idea to work through the rest of the analysis, then return to the beginning and assess theme in light of your analysis of the work's other literary elements. Here is a good example of an introductory paragraph from Ben's analysis of William Butler Yeats' poem, "Among School Children."

"Among School Children" was published in Yeats' 1928 collection of poems *The Tower*. It was inspired by a visit Yeats made in 1926 to school in Waterford, an official visit in his capacity as a senator of the Irish Free State. In the course of the tour, Yeats reflects upon his own youth and the experiences that shaped the "sixty-year old, smiling public man" (line 8) he has become. Through his reflection, the theme of the poem emerges: a life has meaning when connections among apparently disparate experiences are forged into a unified whole.

In the body of your literature analysis, you want to guide your

readers through a tour of the poem, story, or play, pausing along the way to comment on, analyze, interpret, and explain key incidents, descriptions, dialogue, symbols, the writer's use of figurative language—any of the elements of literature that are relevant to a sound analysis of this particular work. Your main goal is to explain how the elements of literature work to elucidate, augment, and develop the theme. The elements of literature are common across genres: a story, a narrative poem, and a play all have a plot and characters. But certain genres privilege certain literary elements. In a poem, for example, form, imagery and metaphor might be especially important; in a story, setting and point-of-view might be more important than they are in a poem; in a play, dialogue, stage directions, lighting serve functions rarely relevant in the analysis of a story or poem.

The length of the body of an analysis of a literary work will usually depend upon the length of work being analyzed—the longer the work, the longer the analysis—though your instructor will likely establish a word limit for this assignment. Make certain that you do not simply paraphrase the plot of the story or play or the content of the poem. This is a common weakness in student literary analyses, especially when the analysis is of a poem or a play.

Here is a good example of two body paragraphs from Amelia's analysis of "Araby" by James Joyce.

Within the story's first few paragraphs occur several religious references which will accumulate as the story progresses. The narrator is a student at the Christian Brothers' School; the former tenant of his house was a priest; he left behind books called *The Abbot* and *The Devout Communicant*. Near the end of the story's second paragraph the narrator describes a "central apple tree" in the garden, under which is "the late tenant's rusty bicycle pump." We may begin to suspect the tree symbolizes the apple tree in the Garden of Eden and the bicycle pump, the snake which corrupted Eve, a stretch, perhaps, until Joyce's fall-of-innocence theme becomes more apparent.

.....

The narrator must continue to help his aunt with her errands, but, even when he is so occupied, his mind is on Mangan's sister, as he tries to sort out his feelings for her. Here Joyce provides vivid insight into the mind of an adolescent boy at once elated and bewildered by his first crush. He wants to tell her of his "confused adoration," but he does not know if he will ever have the chance. Joyce's description of the pleasant tension consuming the narrator is conveyed in a striking simile, which continues to develop the narrator's character, while echoing the religious imagery, so important to the story's theme: "But my body was like a harp, and her words and gestures were like fingers, running along the wires."

The concluding paragraph of your analysis should realize two goals. First, it should present your own opinion on the quality of the poem or story or play about which you have been writing. And, second, it should comment on the current relevance of the work. You should certainly comment on the enduring social relevance of the work you are explicating. You may comment, though you should never be obliged to do so, on the personal relevance of the work. Here is the concluding paragraph from Dao-Ming's analysis of Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

First performed in 1895, *The Importance of Being Earnest* has been made into a film, as recently as 2002 and is regularly revived by professional and amateur theatre companies. It endures not only because of the comic brilliance of its characters and their dialogue, but also because its satire still resonates with contemporary audiences. I am still amazed that I see in my own Asian mother a shadow of Lady Bracknell, with her obsession with finding for her daughter a husband who will maintain, if not, ideally, increase the family's social status. We might like to think we are more liberated and socially sophisticated than our Victorian ancestors, but the starlets and eligible bachelors who star in current reality television programs illustrate the extent to which superficial concerns still influence decisions about love and even marriage. Even now, we can turn to Oscar Wilde to help us understand and laugh at those who are earnest in name only.



Dao-Ming's conclusion is brief, but she does manage to praise the play, reaffirm its main theme, and explain its enduring appeal. And note how her last sentence cleverly establishes that sense of closure that is also a feature of an effective analysis.

You may, of course, modify the template that is presented here. Your instructor might favour a somewhat different approach to literary analysis. Its essence, though, will be your understanding and interpretation of the theme of the poem, story, or play and the skill with which the author shapes the elements of literature—plot, character, form, diction, setting, point of view—to support the theme.

### **[A Model Analysis]**

Now read the short poem by Siegfried Sassoon, “Base Details,” reprinted in Project Bartleby, and then read the sample essay with comments:

Let's have a look at Sassoon's poem of World War I: “Base Details”: <http://www.bartleby.com/136/11.html>

First let's try to determine who is the speaker, the “I” of the poem. Notice that the speaker speculates: “If I were fierce, and bald, and short of breath...” Might we assume he is none of the three adjectives? So how old would he be? Start with a hypothesis and stick with it unless further details make your guess seem untenable. Then try a different hypothesis. For now let's assume that the speaker is young. What is his rank? Is he an officer? Unlikely, probably an unlisted man, since his tone toward the majors is angry and sarcastic.

He calls them “scarlet.” What is the denotation of “scarlet”? What are some connotations of “scarlet”? What does “petulant” mean? Why are the faces of the majors described as “puffy”? What is the main meaning here of “scrap”? Are other meanings intended?

What is the purpose of the poem? Look up the brief biographical details for Sassoon on the online “Oxford World War I Poets” website. <https://www.oucs.ox.ac.uk/ww1lit/education/tutorials/intro/sassoon>

After reading the poem three times (you should print a copy of the

poem from Project Bartleby), have a look at the following student essay on diction in “Base Details.”

**The Diction of “Base Details”** (Student Essay adapted from Edward J. Gordon, *Writing About Imaginative Literature*, Harbrace: 1973).

Old men make and run wars; young men fight and die in them. In “Base Details,” Siegfried Sassoon reveals through his diction a bitterness toward the fact that young men die in wars while the officers live safely behind the lines. The speaker in the poem is an ordinary soldier talking about the majors at the army base. By pretending what he would be like if he were an officer, he condemns war.

Through his choice of words, the soldier expresses an attitude of contempt for the officers behind the lines who “speed glum heroes up the line to death.” He speaks with sarcasm of their fierceness and goes on to describe them as “bald, and short of breath.” If he were a major, he, too, would have a “puffy petulant face,/Guzzling and gulping in the best hotel.” The connotations of these words suggest men who are overweight and out of shape from drinking and eating too much. The reference to “scarlet Majors” recalls the red dress uniforms of British officers and the colour of blood.

**[Coherence would be even better here if the student could perhaps go on to point out explicitly how the majors figuratively have blood on their hands—the blood of the young soldiers under their command. One brief sentence would do. JS]**

The speaker then goes on to describe the attitude toward soldiers that is held by the officers. One speaks of losing many men in “this last scrap.” The understatement of that last word contrasts sharply with the mention in the same line of a heavy loss in battle. **[Here the student should state the other meanings of “scrap” and point out their thematic significance. JS]**In the last two lines of the poem, a further contrast is set up between “youth stone dead” and the officer who will “toddle safely home and die—in bed.” **[Here the student could improve the essay by discussing the connotations of the verb “toddle” and then relating the diction to theme. JS]**

When the entire poem is read, the title becomes ambiguous. The apparent meaning refers to the details of a military base. But “base” can also mean low and contemptible. “Detail” also has two meanings. It can mean a detachment of men sent out on a particular mission—“speed glum heroes up the line”—but it can also mean a minor matter, as if sending people off to die is not important to the officers. So the apparent meaning that we see as we begin reading turns into a second meaning when we finish reading the poem.

The diction, then, makes a comment on the theme of the poem: old men who direct wars at a safe distance behind the lines seem to have little understanding of what it means to die in battle and appear on “the Roll of Honor.”

## 34. Assigned Reading: Trifles

<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/10623/10623-h/10623-h.htm#TRIFLES>