**Literary Analysis Essay**

A good literary analysis essay will retell the essential parts of a story for those that don't know it, explaining piece by piece the symbolism of the big events and smaller details. As far as symbolism goes, all events and details will be symbols of one message from the author.

In other words, your retelling will all be in support of one idea, your thesis, which states the main *message* of the author.

Below are

(1) a **sample structure**/how-to information for doing a literary analysis essay for my class -- including what I expect in the thesis;

(2) the **score sheet** I will use to score these papers, and you will use for peer editing; and

(3) three **sample essays**.

**Literary Analysis Essay Sample Structure**

**Paragraph 1.**

a.    Grabber

b.    Orient Reader to author, book and its context

c.    Thesis

**Body Paragraphs:** In EVERY paragraph, include, in any order:

a.    Evidence

(1)    What happened (context)

(2)    quotes

b.    Commentary

(1)    Connect evidence to thesis

**Conclusion:** End with a gift. Connect to something new and different.

**Here’s what these terms mean, in more depth, along with a few other tips:**

**Grabber.** Grab the reader’s attention with the first line. You can do this with action, a deep thought or question, vivid description, or dialogue.

**Orient Reader.** In 1-3 sentences, identify the title, author, and subject of the book. Don’t summarize the whole book in detail. But write just enough, as if to assume the reader knows nothing yet about the book.

**Thesis.** The thesis is your angle. It is what you will organize all your evidence around.

A thesis can’t be purely true; it has to be able to be argued one way or the other.

In a literary analysis essay, it should mention the author.

It should specifically identify *what* *(specifically)* the author is saying about a *general subject*, like life, relationships, gender, or class.

In other words, it should be a rewording of this formula: **(Author’s name) is making a point about (general subject); the specific point s/he is making is that \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.**

It should suggest that the author is using the characters, setting, plot or voice to make that specific point about a general subject.

For example: “O’Neil uses the protagonist Sydney to argue that rich white men actually can find real happiness not in loving relationships, but in material possessions.”

(The general subject here is happiness.)

**Evidence**—on two levels: one, support your thesis with **events** that happened in the book (This is to show the context of your quotes). But stay focused: don’t summarize the book unless it’s as evidence for an idea of yours.

Two, use **quotes** (with page numbers) from the book. "Quotes" just means excerpts; they don't have to be dialogue. Try to incorporate them into your context, by having quotes and context share sentences. For example:

*Not incorporated:*

Janie’s images for romantic happiness come from nature. “Life should be more

like a pear tree in bloom, she thinks” (p. 67). She thinks this when she is unhappy in her relationships.

*Incorporated:*

Because Janie’s image for romantic happiness comes from nature, she thinks, “Life should be more like a pear tree in bloom” (p. 67) when she is unhappy in her relationship.

Notice, in the examples above, how to punctuate around quotes, and how to mark the page numbers. For marking page numbers, put (p. \_\_\_ ) in parentheses after the quote ends, followed by the period or comma that would be inside the quotes, if the sentence needs one.

More on specific good ways to incorporate quotations is [here](http://drake.marin.k12.ca.us/academics/englishhandbook.pdf): see pages 5-6.

**Commentary.** Make sure that before or after each quote, you point out how it connects to the thesis. As with blending in quotes, you can do this with variety and finesse. (You don’t have to mention the word “thesis,” or say the term, “proves my point.”) For example:

*Repetitious and obvious:* This also proves the thesis because a rich man is happier with an expensive toy than he is when in love.

*Subtle yet effective:* Once again, O’Neil portrays rich men as happier with expensive toys than in love.

**Another tip:**

Avoid pointing out that you are writing an essay. Don’t write, “In this essay I will…” or “I will first describe… and then I will…” or “When I first started to think about this subject…” or “In conclusion, I have proven…”