

Literary Analysis

Definition: Analysis is the practice of looking closely at small parts to see how they affect the whole. Literary analysis focuses on how plot/structure, character, setting, and many other techniques are used by the author to create meaning. Always be sure to discuss the significance of your observations to the main idea about life (the theme).

Introduction:

- Begin by establishing the context of your analysis.
 - Include the author's first and last name, the title of the work you are analyzing, and any needed information that will help to preview your thesis and thematic statements.
- Next, state the thematic statement. This is the main idea about life that the author is conveying.
 - This is the why of your analysis.
- End with your thesis statement – this will have the who, the what, and the how.
 - Use parts of the question you are answering when writing your thesis.
- In short, thematic and thesis statements will always include:
 - **Who** – the author
 - **What** – the answer to the question (always answer the question being asked)
 - **How** – the ways meaning is conveyed; the ways the answer is being shown
 - **Why** – an assertion about life; the universal message being sent about people (theme)
- Sample
 - Question: How is the setting in *The Catcher in the Rye* used as a symbol to reveal Holden Caulfield's character? What point about life is the author making?
 - Thematic statement: The author shows that people do not see faults in themselves that they condemn in others.
 - Thesis statement: Salinger uses the school, the hotel, and the museum as symbols to emphasize how Holden has the flaws that he routinely criticizes.
- Where the universal meaning of the literary work is included will be determined by the question you are answering and the complexity of the argument.

- If a question asks “What is the theme of this work,” then the theme will be the “what” part of the thesis.

Body Paragraphs (always at least two):

- Begin each body paragraph with a clear argument (not a fact) that is a part of your thesis statement.
- A body paragraph should have a clear, single focus.
- Create quotation sandwiches (AQC units) for the proof of your argument.
 - Commentary should focus on the how of your analysis, and how it answers the question.
- When you include quotations, be sure to consider examples of both dialogue and narration.
 - A well-constructed analysis includes both.
- Do not just identify a technique and provide an example of it; explain how the use of that technique in the work addresses the specific question you are writing about.
- End with a clincher sentence that restates the focus of the paragraph.
- Include transitions between the body paragraphs in either the clincher or topic sentences.
- At times you should consider bringing up the theme in the commentary of the body paragraphs, but do not get away from the specific question you are answering.

Conclusion:

- Begin by restating your thesis.
- Explain how the ideas in your body paragraphs present the theme. In other words, your conclusion will include an explanation for what the author is saying about life through the examples you write about in your essay. Get to universal applications here: why is what you’ve read important today?

AP Essay Practice 1: Open Question

The Question:

Select a significant character from one of the novels below who is alienated from the society in which he or she lives. Then write a well-organized essay in which you discuss how his/her alienation reveals that society's assumptions and moral values.

Strategies:

1. Read the question carefully.
2. Underline or circle the key nouns and verbs in the question.

Select a significant character from one of the novels below who is alienated from the society in which he or she lives. Then write a well-organized essay in which you **discuss** how his/her alienation reveals that society's assumptions and moral values.

3. Write a brief introduction.
4. Be sure to include the title (correctly punctuated) and the author of the text being discussed.

Note: The titles of novels and plays are *underlined*.

The titles of poems, short stories, and essays are in *quotation marks*.

5. Include key words in the thesis statement.
6. Use adjectives to describe the key nouns.

General Thesis:

The alienation of (character's name) in (title of book and author's name) reveals (adjective) society's (adjective) assumptions and (adjective) moral values.

Specific Example:

The alienation of Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne reveals the Puritan society's false assumptions and hypocritical moral values.

Practice

Remember:

The thesis statement must identify the **who**, the **what**, and the **how**. (Introduction)

Use the key words from the question.

Generic Thesis: In *Sula*, Toni Morrison uses (**two or more** literary techniques) to reveal the narrator's (**adjective**) attitude toward the destruction of the Bottom.

Specific Thesis: In *Sula*, Toni Morrison uses contrasting diction and imagery to reveal the narrator's wistful attitude toward the destruction of the Bottom.

In *Sula*, Toni Morrison uses diction, detail, and irony to reveal the narrator's bitter attitude toward the destruction of the Bottom.

The thematic statement must identify the **why**. (Conclusion)

Thematic Statements:

This passage points out the ironic truth that often what is done in the name of “progress”—such as destroying old neighborhoods and natural settings and replacing them with recreational areas for the wealthy—is destructive to human lives.

The affluent have the power to destroy, but their lives lack color and character.

Human relationships, not construction projects, are what make a strong and beautiful community.

A close connection to the natural world and to people is what makes a good community.

Money and material possessions are not what is most important in life.

With the destruction of historic towns comes the destruction of history itself.

AP Practice Essay Question

(Suggested time—40 minutes. This question counts as one-third of the total essay section.)

Northrup Frye said, “Tragic heroes are so much the highest points in their human landscape that they seem the inevitable conductors of the power about them, great trees more likely to be struck by lightning than a clump of grass. Conductors may, of course, be instruments as well as victims of the divine lightning.”

Explain how the suffering brought upon others by a tragic figure who functions as an instrument of that suffering contributes to the tragic vision of the work as a whole.

Sample Thesis Statements

***Assume that the title (Macbeth) and the author (Shakespeare) have been named in a previous sentence.

***The reader should have a clear idea of the overall organization of the essay.

Includes the what, the how, and the why:

Macbeth’s destruction of his friends and his country contributes to the tragic vision that those who fall prey to ambition ultimately destroy everyone’s faith in loyalty and honor.

The murder of Macduff’s family and the suicide of Lady Macbeth emphasize that the uncontrolled ambition of a tragic hero can destroy not only his countrymen but also his own family.

The suffering of innocent men, women, and children under Macbeth’s rule demonstrates the bleakness of a world dominated by a corrupt leader.

Good:

The suffering of Banquo and Macduff brought on by Macbeth reveals that evil deeds spread.

Suggestion: Use key words from the question:

The suffering of Banquo and Macduff brought on by the tragic hero Macbeth contributes to the tragic vision that evil deeds spread.

Getting there:

Macbeth, the tragic figure, contributes to the tragic vision that violence only begets more violence through his horrible actions and sinister dialogue.

Suggestion: Follow the natural order—what, how, why.

Macbeth's horrible actions and sinister dialogue contribute to the tragic vision that violence only begets more violence.

Misguided:

The suffering Macbeth receives from the three witches and Lady Macbeth contributes to the tragic vision of the play.

Suggestion: Keep the focus on the suffering of others at the hands of the tragic hero.

Doesn't answer the question:

The suffering that is brought upon Macbeth is conveyed through the actions of other characters and the reactions of Macbeth.

Suggestion: Read the question very carefully.

Question 1:

Explain how various literary techniques are used to develop the theme of a story.

Sample Opening Paragraphs:

There was a wide variety of literary techniques used in *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne.

The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne portrays many themes that were very important to society at the time of its publication. The one very dominant literary technique used to give life to these themes is symbolism.

There are many techniques that developed the theme of *The Scarlet Letter*, by Nathaniel Hawthorne. I believe the two most important techniques were symbolism and repetition. I believe the theme of *The Scarlet Letter* is that you can never keep a secret, and deception will always come back to get you.

This summer, students in AP English were required to read two books. One of the books was *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne. In his novel, Hawthorne uses different literary techniques. Hawthorne uses irony and symbolism to help develop the theme of the story, it is better to confess one's sins than to hide them.