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FL 222

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1/13/14

A Short Guide to Writing about Literature:

Chapter 10: "Writing about Fiction: The World of the Story"

Plot and Character

- Plot has 2 meanings:
 - what happens, the basics of the narrative
 - the writer's arrangement or structuring of the material in a story
- a plot has an **introduction, complication, resolution**:
 - gets under way, difficulty/problem/complexity happens, settling down
- "Plot is the tying and then the untying of the knot is the **dénouement**"
- Unstable situation, rising action, climax, falling action, stable situation
- Causality rooted in **character**
 - Best guide is by analyzing *what they do*
- "Plot and character are inseparable. Plot is a series not simply of happenings, but of happenings that come out of character, that reveal character, and that influence character."
- For a character sketch:
 - What the person says
 - What the person does
 - What others say about the person
 - What others do and what they think about others
 - What the person looks like

Writing about Character

- An essay on a character is an interpretation

Organizing an Analysis of a Character

- Write down notes as they come to mind
- Keep looking at the text for supporting evidence and counterevidence
- Brainstorm → evaluation → tentative outline → supporting evidence = BODY OF ESSAY
- The summary of the character into one or two sentences = thesis

- Let the organization of the essay follow the sequence of the story
- Write early in the essay the character's strengths and weaknesses and then study the traits listed
- "For the conclusion, relate the character's character to the entire literary work; give the reader a sense of the role that the character plays."

Foreshadowing

- Eliminates surprise by preparing us for what is to come later in the story
- To write about foreshadowing: reread the story, underline/highlight details, write key phrases/annotations/comments

Organizing an Essay on Foreshadowing

- work through the evidence in order (chronologically)

Setting and Atmosphere

- foreshadowing makes use of **setting**: the physical surroundings (furniture, architecture, landscape, climate) and a point, or points, in time (morning, night, spring, summer)
- the setting provides an **atmosphere**: an air that the characters breathe, a world in which they move

Symbolism

- writers use **symbols**: concrete embodiments that give the story its content
- use of symbols is to make readers perceive that certain characters, places, seasons, or happenings have rich implications, stand for something more than what they are on the surface
- writers help us perceive symbols by: emphasizing them, introducing them at times when they might not seem necessary, or by calling attention to them repeatedly

Point of View

- "We hear the story from a particular **point of view**, and this point of view in large measure determines our response to the story
- 2 categories:
 - 3rd person: in which the **narrator** is not a part of the story
 - 1st person: "I" who narrates the story plays a part in it

3rd Person Narrators

- 3rd person, non-participant point of view has subdivisions:
 - **Omniscient narrator:** knows everything that is going on and can tell us the inner thoughts of all the characters. May editorialize, pass judgments, reassure the reader, may sound like the author
 - **Selective omniscient:** “center of consciousness”, reveals thoughts of one character but sees the rest of the characters from the outside
 - **Effaced narrator (dramatic/objective point of view):** doesn’t seem to exist because he/she doesn’t comment in his/her own voice and doesn’t enter any minds (has a kind of personality: cold, scientific, objective, etc.)

First Person Narrators

- To turn to first person, the “I” who narrates the story may be a major character in it, or a minor character or even a witness
- First person narrators may not fully understand their own report
- **Innocent eye**, a device in which a good part of the effect consist between the narrators awareness and readers superior awareness
- **Unreliable narrators** can be due to them being naive children, senile people, or morally blind people. A first person narrator is not likely to give us help that an editorially omniscient narrator gives.

The student’s analysis analyzed

- The **title** is engaging, the **organization** is reasonable with beginnings and ends (writing a thesis, not a summary), the **proportions** are good, and the **quotations** are used to let the reader know exactly what the writer is talking about

Theme: vision or argument?

- The theme is what the story is about
- We distinguish between the story and theme is that the story is concerned with “how does it turn out?” while the theme is concerned with “what does it add up to?”

Preliminary notes

- Good writers realize that a topic and an outline do not appear by magic
- Writers must become engaged with the text and take notes

- To write well, you have to be an active reader and an active question-asking writer

Basing the paper on your responses

- Basing the paper that you write on your own response to the literary work:
 - Have faith in your instincts
 - Make use of your skills

Secondary Sources

- For any paper, you need to cite your sources
- Do not use random books but instead look for the ones you need
- There are levels of reference material
- **General works**
 - Reference, bibliography, overview
- **Reference works and bibliographies for the author or topic**
- **Important books on the author or topic**
 - These will lead you to the most important books
- **Biographies**
 - They can be helpful for an interpretive essay
- **Primary sources**
 - These can help to illuminate features of a story

The student's analysis analyzed

- The introductory paragraph briefly summarizes, it's a retelling of the plot
- The body of the essay introduces the evidence to support the writers thesis
- The concluding paragraph clarifies the interpretation of the story

Getting ideas for writing about fiction

- **Title**
 - Is the title informative?
- **Plot**
 - Did something at first strike you as irrelevant and are conflicts resolved
- **Character**
 - Which character is the most interesting and why?
- **Point of view**

- Does the narrator help to construct a picture of the narrator's character, class, attitude, limitations
- What is the relation of the setting to the plot?
- **Symbolism**
 - So characters stand for something more than themselves, does the setting have extra dimensions?
- **Style**
 - This is how the writer says what he/she says
 - Does the point of view determine the style?
- **Theme**
 - Is the meaning of the story embodied in the whole story?
- **Documentation**
 - Give credit to all of your sources that you used

Getting ideas for writing about a film based on a literature of work

- **Preliminaries**
 - Is the title significant?
- **Plot, main characters, setting, theme**
 - How faithful is the film to the story in plot and in character?
 - Is the setting of the film conveyed correctly?
 - Does the film closely follow the original?
- **Symbolism**
 - Are the same objects in the movie and the film both showing the same kind of the symbolism?
- **Overall effect**
 - What is your response to the film?
 - Is the film or the story more compelling?
 - Which medium is better, the story or the film?