

Some strategies for Writing a Paragraph using Affective Approach

Objective:

Your first writing assignment will be a paragraph of affective approach to one of the first three stories we study (“The Story of an Hour,” “Araby” or “A Bird in the House”). The purpose of an affective piece of writing is to identify an unexpected emotional reaction (affect) to one element of a story (ex. a point in the plot or a development in character) and to speculate on the author's artistic intention (theme) in light of these considerations.

Example story: In Shirley Jackson’s “The Lottery,” a lottery is held in the public square of a small town in June as it has been for many generations. One person, Tessie Hutchinson, is late. The lottery proceeds with one family being drawn, then one individual from that family. The “winner” this year is Tessie. Everyone proceeds to pick up large stones to kill her.

Structure of paragraph: The element you choose will help determine the shape of the paragraph, but it will invariably have three parts:

- Topic sentence: this can be some statement summarizing expectations about the story to be read, the name of the story and author, the element and the strong affective response. Prior expectations can come from the title, or the subject matter chosen by the author or the early part of the story (exposition). For example: the title and the behaviour of the people in Jackson’s “The Lottery” make the reader feel a pleasant anticipation of a positive outcome. However, the reader is deeply shocked by the ending.
- Supporting statements: 2 or 3 sentences that explain the unexpected emotional reaction as well as how the story takes a different turn from what is expected. For example, the reader is mildly pleased when Tessie is identified as the winner, but revolted by the twist in plot, in which her neighbours stone her to death, and tends to feel at first that the characters are just monstrous or barbaric.
- Concluding part: 2 or 3 sentences on what point was learned about the story by speculating on the writer's possible intention in creating a specific response. For example, as shocking as it seems, the situation in this story suggests that most people in a democracy are willing to let chance decide when an individual or minority has to be chosen for a negative outcome. Possibly consider one or two real life applications.

Note: In writing up the paragraph, use the first person plural (we/us) or third singular (the reader/he/she) or plural (readers/they) as well as the present tense to refer to details from the story. This helps depersonalize the response.

Remember to include at least two short quotations from the story somewhere in your paragraph.