Study Area 1: Literary Analysis

The first study area that you will be studying focuses on reading and, more specifically, the reading of literature. When you are at university, you will be expected to read widely and deeply and to demonstrate your understanding in written form. And, although most of you will probably not be studying literature at university, the reading and analysis of literature offers many tangible benefits.

Here are some of the benefits:

1. Imagination: Reading literature cultivates the imagination. From the ancient Greeks to the present day, cultures steeped in literary study have thrived on creativity and innovation.

2. Communication: Writing and talking about literature helps prepare you to write and talk about anything. Not only are you working with words and with carefully considered language, but you are also considering how different kinds of people think and react to and understand words.

3. Analysis: Literary works—whether fiction, poetry, drama, creative nonfiction—challenge readers to make connections, to weigh evidence, to question, to notice details, to make sense out of a rich experience. These analytical abilities are fundamental life skills.

4. Empathy: Because literature allows us to inhabit different perspectives in different times and places, we learn to think about how other people see the world.

5. Understanding: We think in terms of stories. People who've experienced more stories are better able to think about actions and consequences.

6. Agility: Literary works often ask us to think in complex ways, to hold sometimes contradictory, or apparently conflicting ideas in our minds.

7. Meaningfulness: Literary works often challenge us to think about our place in the world, about the significance of what we are trying to do. Literary study encourages an "examined" life—a richer life. It provides us with an almost unlimited number of test cases, allowing us to think about the motivations and values of various characters and their interactions.

8. Travel: Literature allows us to visit places and times and encounter cultures that we would otherwise never experience. Such literary travel can be profoundly life-enhancing.

9. Inspiration: Writers use words in ways that move us. Readers throughout the ages have found reasons to live, and ways to live, in literature.

Introduction to Literary Analysis

In the second week of your study you will be introduced to various topics that relate to reading. The first topic that you will be looking at relates to why we read and the benefits that can be gained from reading. Identifying how reading can have a positive impact on your life will help you to see the transferable skills you can gain from reading.

You will be given many opportunities to discuss the texts that you encounter and to share your ideas and insights. You may not agree with everything you read; however, that is not the point. Reading challenges our understandings and beliefs and forces us to confront situations and topics that we have not come across before. By articulating and defending our opinions about what we read, our critical thinking skills are developed and sharpened.

Another benefit of reading widely is that our knowledge of vocabulary is enhanced. Reading will introduce you to new words in new contexts which will, in turn, provide you with an opportunity to start using this new vocabulary.

Moreover, you will be introduced to common misconceptions about reading. The video that you will be watching compares reading and exercise and how reading is fitness for the mind. The author of the video argues that reading is more important than exercise, sleep or even eating. His argument may be something that you disagree with, but his opinion will make you think about why he believes reading is such an important part of our lives.

Next, you will read a text that highlights the transferable academic skills you can acquire through reading fiction. This is research-based study that shows the relationship between reading, empathy, and decision-making. The study points to the fact that through reading we are more likely to be open-minded and amenable to other belief systems and opinions.

Another video that we have included in the course features a variety of successful people and their relationship with reading. They point out that reading is big part of their lives and that they owe much of their success to their sustained and continuing reading habits.

Finally, this week will focus on how to approach a text. What should we look for? How can we read it better? How to find evidence in a text? What does literary analysis look like? How do we analyse a work of fiction?

Thus, before we even start to read any fiction we will consider the following questions:

1. Why do we read?
2. What benefits can be gained from reading?
3. Why do successful people read?
4. Are reading skills transferable?
5. How do we analyse fiction?

Introduction to Textual Analysis

One of the best ways to approach a literary text is to understand the general structure of the text. And, although not all stories adhere to a common textual structure, there are certain things that are contained in all narratives.

Characters

Plot

Point of View

Setting

Theme

This is a great way to start textual analysis as these things are easily identifiable.

Further Terminology

Every subject that you study has specific terminology. Terminology helps us be more concise and precise with our words and helps our readers better understand what we are trying to say.

Here are a few more terms that will help you interpret meaning from your reading:

Plot: Exposition, Conflict, Climax, Resolution

Infer-inference

Protagonist

Symbol

Motif

Characterisation

Mood

Tone

Questioning a Text

1. An essay that responds to literature usually includes some summary; however, a writer's own views about the literature are also needed, as well as analysis, evaluation, and/or interpretation.

2. An essay about literature should have a clear structure, including an introduction, a thesis statement, body paragraphs, and a conclusion.

3. A thesis should state an author's opinion about a work of literature, so the thesis should not be a quotation, a paraphrase, or a summary of someone else's ideas.

4. A thesis in a response paper should be supported with quotations from the work of literature, details from the literature, and quotations/summaries/paraphrases from critical sources.

5. Wherever possible, use present tense verbs.
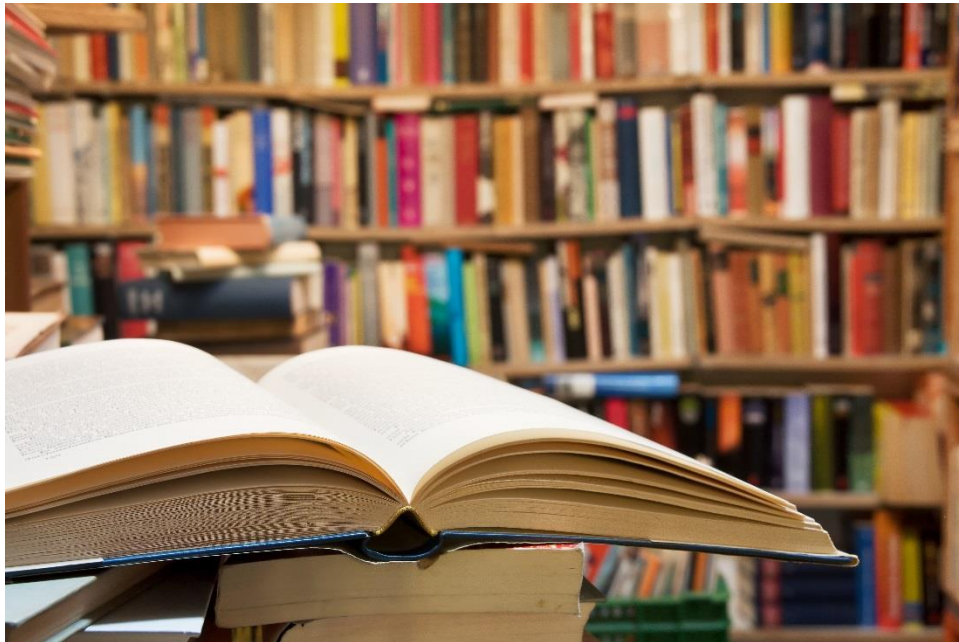
Questions for Analysis of Literature Reader Response

1. Did you like or dislike the story/poem/play? Why or why not?
2. As a reader, how did you initially respond to the work of literature?
3. Did your response to the literature change after reading it a second time, analysing the parts, and/or discussing it in class?

Plot and Structure

1. What happens in the story, play, or poem?

2. What kind(s) of conflict do you see in the work of literature?

3. What do the different parts of the literature contribute to the whole structure?

Setting

1. When and where did the story take place?

2. Are there historical or cultural events that happened at the same time or place as the story?

3. Is the author of the literature making connections between the literary work and real-life?

Tone

1. What is the author's attitude toward the subject area?

2. How does the tone affect the meaning of the literature?

Character

1. Which character does the reader most closely identify with? This character is the protagonist. Is there an antagonist (someone in conflict with the protagonist)?

2. Character evaluation might include the use of adjectives, such as "flat," "stale," "round," and "stereotypical."

3. What are the motives for one or more of the characters' actions?

4. How are the characters interacting with each other and with their environment?

5. Do you see any changes in the characters' actions, motivations, and/or interactions?

Point of View

1. If the words "I," "me," or "my" appear outside of the dialogue in a story, then the first person point of view is being used.

2. Is the narrator biased or unreliable?

3. The third person point of view tells the story entirely by making references to the other characters in the story—there will be no instances of "I" or "you" outside of the dialogue.

4. An omniscient narrator knows the thoughts and ideas of one or more of the characters.

5. A stream-of-consciousness point of view shows a stream of thoughts from one or more characters' minds.

6. An objective narrator may record everything with the objectivity of a news reporter.

Theme

1. What is the thesis or main point of the literature?

2. What is the work of literature saying about humanity, the world, and/or some event?

3. What is the meaning of the literature? How do the other parts (plot, setting, characters, diction, etc.) connect to the meaning?

4. To discover a theme, a writer can begin by stating one of the subject areas that the literature is commenting on (for example: freedom); then, the writer can explain what the work of literature is saying about that subject area (for example: all people should be free.).

5. Is there a moral or a lesson that the author communicates through the work of literature?

6. What does the title suggest about the theme of the story, poem, or play?

Images and Symbols

1. What pictures does a reader create while reading the work of literature?

2. Where in the literature does a reader create these pictures?

3. What characters or objects are symbolic (stand for other things)? For example, a rose may stand for love, and a thorn may stand for a painful aspect of love.

4. What do the images in the work of literature suggest to a reader?

Requirements

The literary analysis essay assessment has two assessment requirements.

Word Limit: 600-800 words (+ - 10%)

Referencing Style: APA

Process:

- Read a variety of texts
- Choose a text to focus on
- Select an essay question
- Find textual evidence
- Complete Outline (5%)
- Complete Draft
- Revise Draft
- Final Version (10%)

Structure:

- Title
- Introduction
- Body Paragraphs
- Conclusion

Approaching a Literary Analysis

The first step is to read the text. Each of the texts in the course will have some essay questions that you can choose from. The questions mentioned above will help you look at the text in different ways, but the essay question you choose will be what you write about.

The next step is to summarise the text. To be able to write about the text, you need to have a good understanding of the plot, characters, theme, and so on.

A Literary Analysis Outline

To make it easier for you to construct a literary analysis essay, you will be required to complete an outline.

Here is an example of a literary essay outline that will assist you with your organisation:

Outline Structure for Literary Analysis Essay

I. Catchy Title

II. Paragraph 1: Introduction (Use HATMAT)
   A. **H**ook
   B. **A**uthor
   C. **T**itle
   D. **M**ain characters
   E. **A** short summary
   F. **T**hesis

III. Paragraph 2: First Body Paragraph
   A. Topic sentence (what this paragraph will discuss, how it will prove your thesis)
   B. Context for the quote
   1. Who says it?
   2. What's happening in the text when they say it?
   C. Quote from the text (cited appropriately)
   D. Analysis of the quote: How does it prove your thesis?
   E. Closing sentence (wrap up the paragraph to effectively transition to the next paragraph)

IV. Paragraph 3: Second Body Paragraph

     A. Topic sentence (what this paragraph will discuss, how it will prove your thesis)

     B. Context for the quote

     1. Who says it?

     2. What's happening in the text when they say it?

     C. Quote from the text (cited appropriately)

     D. Analysis of the quote: How does it prove your thesis?

     E. Closing sentence (wrap up the paragraph to effectively transition to the next paragraph

V. Paragraph 4: Third Body Paragraph

     A. Topic sentence (what this paragraph will discuss, how it will prove your thesis)

     B. Context for the quote

     1. Who says it?

     2. What's happening in the text when they say it?

     C. Quote from the text (cited appropriately)

     D. Analysis of the quote: How does it prove your thesis?

     E. Closing sentence (wrap up the paragraph to effectively transition to the next paragraph

VI. Conclusion (You do not necessarily have to follow this order, but include the following):

     A. Summarize your argument.

     B. Extend the argument.

     C. Show why the text is important.

Writing the Literary Analysis Essay

A Guide to Writing the Literary Analysis Essay

I. **INTRODUCTION**: the first paragraph in your essay. It begins creatively in order to catch your reader's interest, provides essential background about the literary work, and prepares the reader for your major thesis. The introduction must include the *author and title* of the work as well as an explanation of the *theme* to be discussed. Other essential information will include *a brief summary of the text.* The   *major thesis* goes in this paragraph usually at the end.

A) ***Creative Opening/Hook***: the beginning sentences of the introduction that catch the reader's interest. Ways of beginning creatively include the following:

1) **A startling fact or bit of information**
   ✓ **Example:** Nearly two hundred citizens were arrested as witches during the Salem witch scare of 1692. Eventually nineteen were hanged, and another was pressed to death (Marks 65).

2) **A snatch of dialogue between two characters**
   ✓ **Example: "**It is another thing. You [Frederic Henry] cannot know about it unless you have it."
   " Well," I said. "If I ever get it I will tell you [priest]." (Hemingway 72).
   With these words, the priest in Ernest Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms sends the hero, Frederic, in search of the ambiguous "it" in his life.

3) **A meaningful quotation (from the book you are analyzing or another source)**
   ✓ **Example:** "To be, or not to be, that is the question" {3.1.57}. This familiar statement expresses the young prince's moral dilemma in William Shakespeare's tragedy Hamlet, Prince of Denmark.

4) **A universal idea**
   ✓ **Example:** The terrifying scenes a soldier experiences on the front probably follow him throughout his life—if he manages to survive the war.

5) **A rich, vivid description of the setting**
   ✓ **Example:** Sleepy Maycomb, like other Southern towns, suffers considerably during the Great Depression. Poverty reaches from the privileged families, like the Finches, to the Negroes and "white trash" Ewells, who live on the outskirts of town. Harper Lee paints a vivid picture of life in this humid Alabama town where tempers and bigotry explode into conflict.

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B) *Thesis*: a statement that provides the subject and overall opinion of your essay. For a literary analysis your major thesis must:
(1) relate to the theme of the work and
(2) suggest how this theme is revealed by the author. A good thesis may also suggest the organization of the paper.

✓ **Example:** Through Paul's experience behind the lines, at a Russian prisoner of war camp, and especially under bombardment in the trenches, Erich Maria Remarque realistically shows how war dehumanizes a man.

Sometimes a thesis becomes too cumbersome to fit into one sentence. In such cases, you may express the major thesis as two sentences.

✓ **Example:** In a *Tale of Two Cities*, Charles Dickens shows the process by which a wasted life can be redeemed. Sidney Carton, through his love for Lucie Manette, is transformed from a hopeless, bitter man into a hero whose life and death have meaning.

II. BODY PARAGRAPHS

A) *Body*: These paragraphs contain supporting information. Example: (concrete detail) and analysis/explanation (commentary) for your topic sentences. Each paragraph in the body includes (1) a topic sentence, (2) textual evidence (a.k.a. quotes from your reading) and commentary (a.k.a. explanation), and (3) a concluding sentence. In its simplest form, each body paragraph is organized as follows:

1. topic sentence
2. lead-in to textual evidence 1
3. textual evidence 1
4. commentary
5. transition and lead-in to textual evidence 2
6. textual evidence 2
7. commentary
8. concluding sentence (optional)

1) **Topic Sentence**: the first sentence of a body or support paragraph. It identifies one aspect of the major thesis and states a primary reason why the major thesis is true.

2) **Textual Evidence**: a specific example from the work used to provide evidence for your topic sentence. Textual evidence can be a combination of paraphrase and direct quotation from the work.

3) **Commentary**: your explanation and interpretation of the textual evidence. Commentary tells the reader what the author of the text means or how the textual evidence proves the topic sentence. Commentary may include interpretation, analysis, argument, insight, and/or reflection. (_Helpful hint: In your body paragraph, you should have twice as much commentary as textual evidence. In other words, for every sentence of textual evidence, you should have at least two sentences of commentary._)

4) **Transitions**: words or phrases that connect or "hook" one idea to the next, both between and within paragraphs. Transition devices include using connecting words as well as repeating key words or using synonyms.

> **Examples:**
> Finally, in the climax…
> Another example: …
> Later in the story…
> In contrast to this behaviour…
> Not only…but also…
> Furthermore…

5) **Lead-In**: phrase or sentence that prepares the reader for textual evidence by introducing the speaker, setting, and/or situation.

6) **Concluding Sentence:** last sentence of the body paragraph. It concludes the paragraph by tying the textual evidence and commentary back to the thesis.

III. CONCLUSION: last paragraph in your essay. This paragraph should begin by echoing your major thesis without repeating the words exactly. Then, the conclusion should broaden from the thesis statements to answer the "so what?" question your reader may have after reading your essay. The conclusion should do one or more of the following:

1) Reflect on how your essay topic relates to the story as a whole
2) Evaluate how successful the author is in achieving his or her goal or message
3) Give a personal statement about the topic
4) Make predictions
5) Connect back to your creative opening
6) Give your opinion of the text's value or significance

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