

# Ideas for Literary Analysis

## Theme

1. Does the author seem to be saying something about ambition . . . courage . . . greed . . . jealousy . . . happiness?
2. Does the selection show you what it is like to experience racism, loneliness, and so on?
3. Does the author have a point to make about a specific historical event?

## Characters

4. How does the main character change from the beginning to the end?
5. What forces or circumstances make one of the characters act in a certain way? (Consider the setting, the conflict, other characters, etc.)
6. What are the most revealing aspects of one of the characters? (Consider his or her thoughts, words, and actions.)
7. Do the characters' actions seem believable within the story?
8. Does the main character have a confidant, someone he or she relies on? (How important or reliable is this person?)

## Plot

9. What external or internal conflict affects the main character?
10. How is suspense built into the story?
11. How does the climax change the story?
12. Are there any twists in the plot? (What do they add to the story?)
13. Does the plot follow a basic pattern of fiction? (See page 169.)

## Setting

14. What effect does the setting have on the characters?
15. Does the setting expand your understanding of a specific time and place?
16. Is the setting new and thought provoking?

## Style

17. How does the writing—descriptive phrases, images, and so on—create an overall feeling or tone in the selection?
18. Is dialogue or description used effectively? (Give examples.)
19. Is there an important symbol that adds meaning to the selection? (How is this symbol represented in different parts of the story?)
20. Are there key figures of speech such as metaphors and similes? (What do these add to the writing?)

## TIPS for Writing an Analysis

### Writing the Opening

Your opening paragraph should gain your reader's attention and identify the thesis of your analysis. Use the suggestions listed below to help you get started.

1. Summarize your subject very briefly. Include the title, author, and the type of book (or other literary form). This can be done with a statement of "what and how" about the book.  
**In his novel *Lord of the Flies*, William Golding writes about [what?] the evil side of man [how?] by describing the actions of a group of young boys who are marooned on a deserted island.**
2. Start with a quotation from the book and then comment on its importance (think in terms of the focus of your analysis).
3. Begin with an explanation of the author's purpose and how well you think he or she achieves this purpose.
4. Open with a few general statements about life that relate to the focus of your analysis.  
**There comes a time when everyone has to . . .**
5. Begin with a general statement about the type of literature you are analyzing. Then discuss your subject within this context.  
**The best science fiction always seems believable and logical within the context of the story line. This certainly is true in . . .**

### Writing the Body

Develop or support your focus in the body, or main part, of the analysis. To make sure that you effectively explain each main point, follow these three steps:

1. State each main point so that it clearly relates to the thesis of your analysis.
2. Support each main point with specific details or direct quotations from the text you are analyzing.
3. Explain how these specific details prove your point.

### Writing the Closing

In the final paragraph, tie the important points together and restate the focus of your analysis. Leave your readers with a final thought that will keep this piece of literature on their minds for some time.

## Starting Points: Responses to Literature

The following questions will help you react personally to the books you read. Use this list only when you can't think of your own starting point. (By changing the questions slightly, you can use this same list to react to other forms of literature—plays, poems, short stories, etc.)

### Making Connections

1. What were your feelings after reading the opening chapter(s) of the book? After reading half of the book? After finishing the book?
2. Did the book make you laugh? Cry? Cringe? Smile? Cheer? Explain.
3. What connections are there between the book and your life? Explain.
4. What is the most important word in the book? The most important passage? The most important event? Explain.
5. Who else should read this book? Why?

### Points of Interest

6. What are the best parts of the book? Why? What are the worst parts? Why?
7. Do you like the ending of the book? Why or why not?
8. What came as a surprise in the book? Why?
9. What parts of the book seem most believable or unbelievable? Why?
10. What makes you wonder in this book? What confuses you?

### Strictly in Character

11. In what ways are you like any of the characters? Explain.
12. Do any of the characters remind you of friends, family members, or classmates? Explain.
13. Which character would you like to be in this book? Why?
14. What would you and your favorite character talk about?

### Careful Reflections

15. Do you think the title fits the book? Why or why not?
16. What was the author saying about life and living?
17. Has this book helped you in some way? Explain.
18. How have you changed after reading this book? Explain.
19. What do you know now that you didn't know before?
20. What questions in this book would you like answered?

## WRITING GUIDELINES

### Book Review

In a review, you express your opinion about the value or worth of a book you have read. However, simply stating that something was good or bad is not enough. You need to support your feelings with thoughtful explanations and specific references to the book itself. (You can use the following guidelines to review short stories, poems, movies, concerts—as well as books.)

#### ■ PREWRITING

1. **Choosing a Subject . . .** Review a book that you have recently read, one that you have strong feelings about.
2. **Gathering Details . . .** Collect your initial thoughts and feelings about your subject through freewriting. Or, if you want to work more systematically, list in one column the book's strong points and in another column its weak points. Continue exploring and collecting ideas as needed.
3. **Focusing Your Efforts . . .** Read through your ideas, and put a check next to the details you would like to include in your review. *Remember:* You can't say everything. Reviewers usually comment on the important parts of a book without giving away too much of the story.

#### ■ WRITING AND REVISING

4. **Connecting Your Ideas . . .** Develop your first draft according to your planning and prewriting. Make sure to identify the book's title and author in one of the opening lines.
5. **Improving Your Writing . . .** As you read through your first draft, make sure that you have stated your ideas clearly and completely: *Will readers be able to follow your main points? Will they know how you feel about the book and why?* Revise your review accordingly.

#### ■ EDITING AND PROOFREADING

6. **Checking for Style and Accuracy . . .** Study your revised writing for style. Make sure that all of your sentences read smoothly and that you have used the best words to express your ideas. Then check for spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors.  
**[HOT LINK]** See “Assessment Rubric,” page 226, for a helpful revising and editing guide.
7. **Preparing a Final Copy . . .** Write or keyboard a neat final copy of your review; proofread the final copy before sharing it.