

# Overview

## RESPONSE AREAS

### Likes and Dislikes

- Analytical Communication
- Broadening Preferences

### Plot

- Story development
- Character Motivation

### Characters

- Outstanding Traits
- Round vs. Flat

### Setting

- Time, Place and Culture
- Objects / Backgrounds
- Used for Organization
- Establishing Credibility
- Relation to Characters
- Statement / Meaning
- Creating Atmosphere
- Using Symbolism

### Literary Themes

- Central Ideas
- Assertions
- Implied Values
- Symbolism
- Relevance

### Point of View

- Means of Expression
- Personal Interest
- Authorial Voice
- Perspective

# Analyzing Literature

## Analytic Approaches

### **Moral / Intellectual Approach**

Students consider the content and values of literary works and how they are applicable to their own lives.

### **New Critical/Formal Approach**

Pupils focus on literary works as formal works of art.

### **Structuralist Approach**

Readers look for relationships and connections among elements by applying patterns.

### **Psychoanalytic Approach**

Students consider what might be motivating the behavior and speech of a story's characters.

### **Archetypal Approach**

Pupils look for the various archetypes that have become common in literature through the ages.

## To the Teacher

This publication was written to provide the home-schooling parent-educator with a number of generic worksheets that can be used in conjunction with virtually any literary work of art.

More specifically, the activities were designed to make it easier for Christian families to deliver instruction that incorporates biblical principles and the wisdom of Scripture as they pertain to the development of an appreciation for some of the world's most beloved written works of art.

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# To the Teacher

## A Moral/Intellectual Approach to Literature

The purpose of this book is to make the job of assigning meaningful work with respect to literature a whole lot easier. Generally speaking, the only reason most students ever bother to read a given piece is because it was assigned by their instructor, which is (when you think about it) not all that great a reason. In fact, reading works of art with such a mindset might reasonably be considered a virtual waste of time.

We have not forgotten that literature is traditionally been a mode of imparting morality, philosophy and religion, and given that this publication is geared primarily for the Christian home-school community, it will often ask students to respond to written works in terms of content and values, looking beyond mere records of events to discover lessons or messages hidden beneath the surface and determine whether those messages are *true* and *significant*.

Authors usually *want* readers to take something away from the works they've created – to leave them with much to think about and remember – so good educators help their students recognize (and consequently, avoid missing out on) the fantastic opportunities afforded by quality literature to contemplate the key issues of life and their related “truths.”

Of course, no one wants to demean or reduce a work's artistic value with “message hunting” that treats the piece like a mere sermon or political speech.

But on the other hand, discussions based on such questions hardly require the teacher to take a position, sermonize or exhort his or her students who, after all, should be guided in forming their *own* conclusions about whether they wish to assimilate the content of a work, or whether they find a given story's message personally or morally acceptable.

Indeed, well-written prose offers an abundance of possibilities in terms of growth and understanding, which can help readers who view literature as applicable to their own lives to create a better life for themselves and those around them, and improve their grasp of how the world works. Therefore, the basic purpose of this publication is to provide students with a healthy dose of "activities" designed to awaken them to the treasures that await those able to extract insight and revelation from the pages of a good book

The best way to use this publication is to assign (or have your students select) the particular activity sheet or sheets they will complete in response to a given selection *before* they actually begin reading the assignment. Not only will this provide additional motivation for reading the work, but it will also help to focus them on the pertinent aspects of the piece so they will be better able to respond appropriately after they finish with the text.

By the way, many of the ideas and topics to which the students will be asked to respond are rather substantive in nature and likely to require significant responses, calling for more space than that offered on the activity sheets provided. If such is the case, you might want to direct your students to continue their responses on the back of their papers, or to copy and respond to each prompt on a separate sheet (where they will have ample space for their reactions). I have even included a template for printing lines on the back of the activity sheets as an Appendix at the end of the book.

# Chapter 1

## Making Connections

### Personal Responses to Literature

Constructing, revising and challenging one's ideas about the world, others and one's self based on situations encountered inside a good book is at the crux of what can make literature, and life itself, more enjoyable and meaningful. These can be life-altering considerations that make any given reading assignment more than simply a perfunctory task dictated by a teacher.

By identifying elements in a story, poem or article related to issues in your own life you can use them to help form your thoughts and opinions on controversial topics or to make important decisions you find yourself having to face. This process of recognizing the aspects of a story that are similar to aspects of your own life is called: *making text-to-self connections*.

The whole point of making such connections is to respond to literature in a manner that is *real, genuine and authentic*. It's a way to enhance your comprehension of text – to better understand and appreciate the messages the author is trying to communicate – by connecting with the work's central ideas.

Making connections is an extremely useful activity when it comes to synthesizing information, building understanding, and developing your own unique interpretations of text; using books and stories to think about important issues in new ways and begin processing ideas that will enrich and deepen not only your experience in the text, but your experience in life as well.

# Making Connections

# 1

## Literary Analysis

### Text-to-self Connections

**Directions:** Below are a number of questions/items regarding possible reactions to a given literary work of art. You are to respond to each of the prompts using complete sentences, explaining the reasons for your responses as appropriate.

1. Identify the title and author of the selection you read:

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2. What issue(s) are you or someone you know dealing with that are the same or similar to those facing a character (or characters) in this selection?

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3. What “truths” can be learned from what happened in the story in terms of dealing with the situation(s) you described above?

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4. What new insight(s) did you gain from reading this selection that you can use in your own life or when counseling your friends or family members?

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# Making Connections

# 2

## Literary Analysis

### Text-to-text Connections

**Directions:** Below are a number of questions/items regarding possible reactions to a given literary work of art. You are to respond to each of the prompts using complete sentences, explaining the reasons for your responses as appropriate.

1. Identify the title and author of the selection you read:

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2. Identify at least one biblical truth (or principle) illustrated in this story.

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3. Were the decisions and actions of the main character in agreement with or opposed to the truth(s) you identified above – or both? Please explain.

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4. How might things have turned out differently had certain characters allowed themselves to be guided by key teachings in scripture? (Explain)

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# Like and Dislikes

## Personal Responses to Literature

When it comes to analyzing literature, more important than whether or not you liked or disliked a particular work is whether or not you are engaged in the process of developing your analytical skills and ability to express yourself clearly.

Also, while you should be honest when it happens to turn out that you dislike a particular piece, it is just as important that you work on broadening your tastes, though obviously, this should always be done in concert with the guidance provided by Scripture. For by expanding your perspective in this open-minded way, you may find yourself redefining your dislikes, and consequently, developing your ability to appreciate more kinds of literature.

Also, keep in mind that an author's creation of an unlikable character, situation, attitude or expression may be deliberate, so try to maintain an open mind despite your initial dislikes, and then see if your initial unfavorable reactions can be more fully or broadly considered in the context of what the author is trying to accomplish or communicate.

# Likes or Dislikes

# 1

## Literary Analysis

### Personal Responses to Literature

**Directions:** Below are a number of questions/items regarding possible reactions to a given literary work of art. You are to respond to each of the prompts using complete sentences, explaining the reasons for your responses as appropriate.

1. Identify the title and author of the selection you read:

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2. Which character in the selection did you admire the most, and why?

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3. What was something new you learned from reading this selection or something you never thought about before?

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4. What new insight(s) did you gain into something with which you were already somewhat or relatively familiar?

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# Likes or Dislikes

# 2

## Literary Analysis

### Personal Responses to Literature

**Directions:** Below are a number of questions/items regarding possible reactions you might have to a given literary work of art. Respond to each of the prompts in complete sentences, explaining the reasons for your responses as appropriate.

1. Identify the title and author of the selection you read:

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2. What is something new you learned about the people and/or customs of a different place, different time or different way of life?

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3. What was it about this story or literary work (if anything) that made you so interested in its ideas and/or so involved with its outcome that you didn't want to put the piece down until you had finished the whole thing?

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4. Give an example of an idea or an expression from the work that you found to be especially beautiful or worth remembering.

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# Likes or Dislikes

# 3

## Literary Analysis

### Personal Responses to Literature

**Directions:** Below are a number of questions/items regarding possible reactions you might have to a given literary work of art. Respond to each of the prompts in complete sentences, explaining the reasons for your responses as appropriate.

1. Identify the title and author of the selection you read:

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2. What was it about reading this literary work that thrilled you or made you feel happy?

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3. Describe one or two of the events in the selection that amused you or that made you laugh.

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4. What in particular did you like about the author's style or presentation?

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# Likes or Dislikes

# 4

## Literary Analysis

### Personal Responses to Literature

**Directions:** Below are a number of questions/items regarding possible reactions you may have to a given literary work of art. Respond to each of the prompts in complete sentences, explaining the reasons for your responses as appropriate.

1. Identify the title and author of the selection you read:

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2. Which character in the story did you like the least, and why?

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3. What do you feel the author could or should have done differently to make this story or selection better? What significant change or changes do you believe would have improved the quality or effectiveness of the piece? (Be sure you justify your answer.)

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# Analyzing Plot

## Reactions to Literature

The word *plot* not only refers to incidents that follow each other in sequential or chronological order, but it also involves the way those events control or govern how the action develops in a story, including what motivates or causes the participants in the story to do the things they do.

In a well-plotted story, things precede or follow each other not simply because time is ticking away, but more importantly, because *effects* follow *causes*. In a good work nothing is irrelevant or accidental, but rather, everything is related and causative.

### CONFLICT

Of course, every good story needs conflict (people or circumstances that the main character must face and try to overcome), and such conflict can present itself in many different ways. Some stories contain a major conflict from which a number of related conflicts develop. These conflicts lead to attitudes, choices, and outcomes that serve to make a story interesting. Even if the story is a total fantasy, it's best if the situations are life like, with conflicts rising out of realistic aims and hopes and with an outcome that is "true to life."

# Plot 1

## Literary Analysis

### Responding to Conflict

**Directions:** Responses to literature in terms of plot require an analysis of conflict and its development, which in turn, calls for an awareness of the elements of conflict. Below are a number of questions/items regarding these elements. You are to respond to each of the prompts using complete sentences, explaining the reasons for your responses as appropriate.

1. Identify the title and author of the selection you read:

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2. Who are the protagonist and antagonist, and how do their characteristics put them in conflict?

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3. If the conflict stems from contrasting ideas or values, what are these, and how are they brought out?

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4. How does the action develop from the conflict?

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# Plot 2

## Literary Analysis

### Responding to Conflict

**Directions:** Responses to literature in terms of plot require an analysis of conflict and its development, which in turn, calls for an awareness of the elements of conflict. Below are a number of questions/items regarding these elements. You are to respond to each of the prompts using complete sentences, explaining the reasons for your responses as appropriate.

1. Identify the title and author of the selection you read:

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2. Does the main character in this selection face any dilemmas? If so, give at least one example and explain how the character deals with it.

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3. How do the main characters achieve (or not achieve) their major goals? What obstacles do they overcome and what obstacles overcome them?

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# Plot 3

## Literary Analysis

### Responding to Conflict

**Directions:** Responses to literature in terms of plot require an analysis of conflict and its development, which in turn, calls for an awareness of the elements of conflict. Below are a number of questions/items regarding these elements. You are to respond to each of the prompts using complete sentences, explaining the reasons for your responses as appropriate.

1. Identify the title and author of the selection you read:

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2. Which scenes (or events) do you believe were most important in terms of bringing out the major conflict in the story?

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3. How did the characters and setting of the story contribute to the development of its plot?

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Plot **4**

Literary Analysis

Responding to Conflict

**Directions:** Responses to literature in terms of plot require an analysis of conflict and its development, which in turn, calls for an awareness of the elements of conflict. Below are a number of questions/items regarding these elements. You are to respond to each of the prompts using complete sentences, explaining the reasons for your responses as appropriate.

1. Identify the title and author of the selection you read:

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2. Identify the major theme or themes of this selection. Then explain the relationship of each of the main characters to that/those theme(s)?

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3. From your personal point of view, which aspect of this piece seems to be the most socially and politically significant? (Be sure to explain how you came to your conclusion.)

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# Plot 5

## Literary Analysis

### Responding to Conflict

**Directions:** Responses to literature in terms of plot require an analysis of conflict and its development, which in turn, calls for an awareness of the elements of conflict. Below are a number of questions/items regarding these elements. You are to respond to each of the prompts using complete sentences, explaining the reasons for your responses as appropriate.

1. Identify the title and author of the selection you read:

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2. At the end of the story, are the characters happy or unhappy, satisfied or dissatisfied, changed or about the same, enlightened or ignorant, etc.?

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4. What role did the resolution of the major conflict play in producing the results you described above?

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# Analyzing Characters

## Reactions to Literature

Authors portray the characters in a story that are worth caring about, rooting for and even loving; as well as those you may laugh at, dislike, or even hate; through the use of action, dialogue, description, and commentary. And each action or speech, no matter how small, is part of the total presentation of both the inner and outer “self” of those participants. Of course, ideally, an author will make such actions interesting to help you understand and appreciate the major characters.

So, when analyzing the protagonists and antagonists in a story, begin by determining the characters’ outstanding traits, which refers to their quality of mind or habitual modes of behavior such as never retaining borrowed money, avoiding eye contact, or always thinking oneself the center of attention.

Characters may be ambitious or lazy, serene or anxious, aggressive or fearful, thoughtful or inconsiderate, open or secretive, confident or self-doubting, kind or cruel, quiet or in lazy, visionary or practical, careful or careless, impartial or biased, straight board or underhanded, winners or losers, etc.

By analyzing the actions, words, and thoughts of the characters you encounter, you can draw conclusions about the qualities and strings. So, when reading about fictional characters, look *beyond* circumstances, actions, and appearances to determine what these things *show* about the character. Always try to get from the

outside to the inside, since it is the *internal* quality that determines the *external* behavior.

Basically, there are two main types of characters: “round” and “flat.”

## ROUND CHARACTERS

The basic trait of *round characters* is that they recognize, change with, and adjust to circumstances. In other words, they profit from experience and undergo changes in alterations, which may be demonstrated in any of four different ways:

- An action or actions
- The realization of new string and therefore the affirmation of previous decisions
- The acceptance of a new condition
- The discovery of unrecognized truths

The *protagonist* in a story (often called a hero or heroine) is central to the action, moves against an *antagonist*, and exhibits the ability to adapt to new circumstances. Round characters are often *dynamic*, in the sense that they are individual, unpredictable, and undergo a change or growth.

## FLAT CHARACTERS

Flat characters are static as opposed to being dynamic, and do not grow, but rather, end up where they began. They remain the same, possibly because of stupidity, insensitivity, or lack of knowledge and insight. Flat characters include what is known as stock characters – characters that appear in repeating situations and that have common traits representative of their class or group. Examples of stock characters are the insensitive father, the interfering mother, this sassy younger sister or brother, the greedy politician, the resourceful cowboy or detective, the overbearing or hand-picked president, the submissive or a nagging wife, the angry police captain, the lovable drunk, and the town do-gooder.

When stock characters possess new attitudes except those of their class, they are called *stereotype* characters.

## SUMMARY

The ability to grow and develop and to be altered by circumstances makes characters around. The absence of these traits makes characters flat. In literature, character isn't disclosed by...

1. Actions
2. Both personal and environmental descriptions
3. Dramatic statements and thoughts
4. Statements by other characters
5. Statements by the authors speaking as storyteller or observer

In judging characters, your best criteria are probability, consistency and believability. To analyze a character, try taking notes to form an overview. List as many traits as you can and determine how the author presents details about the character through actions, appearance, dialogue, comments by others, and authorial explanations. If there are unusual traits, determined what it is about the character that they reveal.

# Characters **1**

## Literary Analysis

### Responding to Characters

**Directions:** Below are a number of questions/items regarding story characters. You are to respond to each of the prompts using complete sentences, explaining the reasons for your responses as appropriate.

1. Identify the title and author of the selection you read:

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2. How did the main protagonist and antagonist interact with each other?  
How did their qualities produce reactions and changes?

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3. What were the actions that brought out the most important traits of the main character and to what degree was the main character *creating* or just *responding* to events?

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# Characters **2**

## Literary Analysis

### Responding to Characters

**Directions:** Below are a number of questions/items regarding story characters. You are to respond to each of the prompts using complete sentences, explaining the reasons for your responses as appropriate.

1. Identify the title and author of the selection you read:

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2. Characterize the protagonist's actions: Were they good or bad, intelligent or stupid, deliberate or spontaneous, etc.? How did they help you judge or understand the protagonist? What is your judgment of this character?

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3. What descriptions (if any) of the main character's appearance do you discover in the story? What does his or her appearance demonstrate about the individual's character?

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# Characters **3**

## Literary Analysis

### Responding to Characters

**Directions:** Below are a number of questions/items regarding story characters. You are to respond to each of the prompts using complete sentences, explaining the reasons for your responses as appropriate.

1. Identify the title and author of the selection you read:

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2. In what ways is the main character's major trait a strength? In what ways is it a weakness? Also, as the story progresses, to what degree does this trait become more (or less) prominent?

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3. Describe what makes the main character dynamic. How does he or she recognize, change with, and/or adjust to situations and circumstances?

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# Analyzing Setting

## Time, Place and Culture in Literature

The concept of setting includes descriptions of places, objects, and backgrounds—everything that goes into the making of the environment in which the characters of a story operate. Characters may be either help or hurt by their surroundings, and as they interact with each other, they reveal the degree to which they share the customs and ideas other times.

Just as painters include backgrounds and objects to render ideas, authors use setting to create statement and meaning. The way characters respond and adjust to, or interact with the setting can reveal their strengths and weaknesses. Moreover, setting may intersect with character as a means by which authors underscore the importance of place, circumstance, and time on human growth and change.

Setting also create atmosphere for mood the action that is to take place. Descriptions of bright colors may contribute to a mood of happiness, whereas dark colors may invoke gloom or hysteria. References to smells and sounds further bring the setting to life by drawing additional sensory responses from the reader.

# Setting 1

## Literary Analysis

### Time, Place and Culture in Literature

**Directions:** Below are a number of questions/items regarding story characters. You are to respond to each of the prompts using complete sentences, explaining the reasons for your responses as appropriate.

1. Identify the title and author of the selection you read:

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2. What does the setting tell you about the lives of the main characters?

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3. How does the setting interact with the main characters behavior? To what degree are the actions of the main character due to the setting?

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# Setting **2**

## Literary Analysis

### Time, Place and Culture in Literature

**Directions:** Below are a number of questions/items regarding story characters. You are to respond to each of the prompts using complete sentences, explaining the reasons for your responses as appropriate.

1. Identify the title and author of the selection you read:

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2. How does the author use setting to emphasize or underscore key aspects of the main characters qualities, traits or personality?

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3. Does the author use the setting to help establish the story's credibility? If so, please explain how this is accomplished.

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4. Is the setting used by the author to symbolize something s/he wants to communicate? If so, please explain:

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5. Is the setting used to create a certain mood or atmosphere, and if so, in what way?

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# Setting **3**

## Literary Analysis

### Time, Place and Culture in Literature

**Directions:** Below are a number of questions/items regarding story characters. You are to respond to each of the prompts using complete sentences, explaining the reasons for your responses as appropriate.

1. Identify the title and author of the selection you read:

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2. How extensive are the visual descriptions? Does the author provide such vivid and carefully arranged detail about surroundings that you could draw a map or plan, or is the scenery vague and difficult to imagine?

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3. What connections, if any, are apparent between locations and characters? Do the locations bring characters together, separate them, facilitate their privacy, make intimacy and conversation difficult, etc.?

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4. How fully are objects described? How vital are they to the action? How important are they in the development of the plot or idea? How are they connected to the mental states of the characters?

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# Setting **4**

## Literary Analysis

### Time, Place and Culture in Literature

**Directions:** Below are a number of questions/items regarding story characters. You are to respond to each of the prompts using complete sentences, explaining the reasons for your responses as appropriate.

1. Identify the title and author of the selection you read:

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2. How important to plot and character are shapes, colors, times of day, clouds, storms, light and sun, seasons of the year, conditions of vegetation, etc.?

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3. Are the characters poor, moderately well-off, or rich? How does their economic condition affect their actions and attitudes? How does their economic lot determine what happens to them?

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6. What cultural, religious, and political conditions are assumed in the story? How do the characters accept and adjust to these conditions? How do the conditions affect characters' judgments and actions?

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# Setting 5

## Literary Analysis

### Time, Place and Culture in Literature

**Directions:** Below are a number of questions/items regarding story characters. You are to respond to each of the prompts using complete sentences, explaining the reasons for your responses as appropriate.

1. Identify the title and author of the selection you read:

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2. What is the state of houses, furniture, and objects (e.g., new and polished, old and worn, etc.)? What connections can you find between these conditions and the outlook and behavior of the characters?

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3. How important are sounds or silences? To what degree is music or other sound important to the development of character and action?

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4. Do characters respect or mistreat the environment? If there is an environmental connection, how central is it to the story?

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5. What conclusions do you think the author expects you to draw as a result of the neighborhood, culture, and larger world of the story?

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## Analyzing Themes

### Ideas and Values in Literature

While there is great pleasure to be derived from just savoring a literary work of art; from being taken up in the developing pattern of narrative and conflict; from following its implications and suggestions; and from listening to the sounds of its words; it is also true that ideas are vital to understanding and appreciating literature. Writers have ideas and want to communicate them.

The *theme* of a given selection is the *central* idea to which the piece returns again and again. When dealing with themes, the term “idea” is always used in reference to an *assertion*. For example, were you to say that the theme of a particular story is “love,” it would be difficult to say much more than that, unless of course you went on to make an assertion, such as...

- Love is so strong that it literally rescues human lives
- Love is complex and contradictory
- Love has the power to surmount great obstacles
- Love is irresistible and irrational

Assertions such as those above would lead you to explain the process by which you arrived at each conclusion. And while it’s true that most written works contain many separate ideas, whichever one seems to be the most prominent is likely to be the selection’s *main* theme.

Expressed or implicated in the concept of themes is the belief that certain conditions or standards should be – or should not be – highly valued. Three examples of themes where such value judgments are more readily apparent are presented below:

- There should be equal treatment among all people irrespective of their social class.
- The rights of the individual should be placed above the politics of war.
- Political power is best used in shaping earthly resources for human purposes

Here are a few additional examples of (common) themes:

- The earth contains grand and mysterious strength.
- Human beings exhibit strength of character regardless of their race.
- Future plans may be destroyed by uncontrollable circumstances.
- The external world of nature is beautiful and not harmful.
- This natural world has moral implications for human beings.
- Human history provides evidence of continual human cruelty.
- By perpetuating cruelty, human beings break the divine plan for universal benevolence.
- Living with cruelty and sensitivity leads to alienation, and happiness, despair and maybe even violence.
- The poses people adopt may mask and contradict their true self interest.
- People refuse to believe the worst even when it is happening to them personally.
- Zealousness leads to destruction.
- People cannot long sustain a potentially destructive anger.

Identifying a story's theme involves more than simply restating the author's descriptions. Rather, it has to do with distinguishing between a work's various situations and its various messages in order to connect the component thoughts that formulate a central idea. Without a doubt, ideas are not as obvious as characters or setting, and require that you consider the meaning of what you read, and then develop explanatory or comprehensive assertions. Therefore, as you read, be alert to the different ways in which the author presents ideas. Several such approaches are listed down below.

Authors may present ideas by employing any or all of these methods...

- Direct statements by the authorial voice
- Direct statements by the first-person speaker
- Dramatic statements made by characters
- Figurative language
- Characters who stand for ideas
- The work itself, as it represents ideas

So then, the theme of a given work may be discovered through the action that takes place, the author's depiction of major characters, the circumstances, scenes or settings within which the story unfolds, and/or the effective use of language by the author.

It may be asserted directly, indirectly, dramatically or ironically. It could pertain to individuals and their emotional and private lives, social concerns, social justice, political justice, economic justice, the condition of religion, etc. The ideas may be limited to members of the groups represented by the characters (age, social group, race, nationality, personal status, etc.) or applicable to general conditions in life.

# Themes **1**

## Literary Analysis

### Ideas and Values in Literature

**Directions:** Below are a number of questions/items regarding story characters. You are to respond to each of the prompts using complete sentences, explaining the reasons for your responses as appropriate.

1. Write the title and author of the selection you read:

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2. Identify the theme of this selection. Explain the values it embodies and their importance to this work.

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3. How compelling is this selection's theme? (How germane to the story is it? Could the work be appreciated without reference to this central idea?)

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# Themes **2**

## Literary Analysis

### Ideas and Values in Literature

**Directions:** Below are a number of questions/items regarding story characters. You are to respond to each of the prompts using complete sentences, explaining the reasons for your responses as appropriate.

1. Write the title and author of the selection you read:

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2. Did the author express the theme of this piece forcefully and convincingly, or were there shortcomings and limitations in how it was presented?

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3. How relevant do you believe this selection's central theme is to present conditions in the world today or to your own life?

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# Analyzing Point of View

## Reactions to Literature

Practically speaking, *point of view* involves the physical location of a story's narrator in terms of his or her position to see and record what events take place in a story. Of course, most stories are either written in first-person or third-person narrative.

However, for our purposes here, when we speak of point of view, we are referring to its more abstract meaning. For "point of view" can also refer to the "unnamed voice" or "persona" adopted by the author to communicate values, judgments, or positions on certain issues, behaviors or beliefs. It's kind of like the "mind" that filters the fictional experience and present only the most important details to tell the story, present arguments, and express attitudes in a way that will create the maximum possible impact.

An author not only tries to make his or her writing vital and interesting, but will also, whether consciously or unconsciously, bring a certain *perspective* to works he or she creates. The words an author chooses will often communicate subtle messages, betraying some "personal interest" which the narrator has in the story (as opposed to simply being an impartial reporter).

More generally, point of view is intertwined with the many interests and wishes of humanity at large and linked to the enormous difficulty of uncovering and determining truth.

When analyzing point of view, consider whether the narrator's words seem to be totally objective or are instead “colored” in some way. Does the narrator seem to have any persuasive purpose beyond serving as a recorder or observer? Does he or she seem sympathetic to a particular cause, stance or position on some issue? Look for the narrator's position, prejudices, or self-interests in his or her interper comments and in the way he or she judges or describes the characters in the story and the events that transpire.

# Point of View

# 1

## Literary Analysis

### Responding to the Position or Stance of the Narrator

**Directions:** Below are a number of questions/items regarding story characters. You are to respond to each of the prompts using complete sentences, explaining the reasons for your responses as appropriate.

1. Identify the title and author of the selection you read:

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2. How do the subject, characterization, dialogue and/or form of this literary work help to establish the author's "point of view?"

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3. In what way or in what ways does the author's point of view make this work interesting and effective or uninteresting and ineffective?

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# Point of View **2**

## Literary Analysis

### Responding to the Position or Stance of the Narrator

**Directions:** Below are a number of questions/items regarding story characters. You are to respond to each of the prompts using complete sentences, explaining the reasons for your responses as appropriate.

1. Identify the title and author of the selection you read:

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2. How well did the author establish this story's point of view? Was it consistent, effective, truthful, etc.; and what did the author gain or lose by adopting this particular point of view?

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3. Explain the ways in which this work might have been affected had the author taken an alternative (or opposite) point of view?

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# Analyzing Structure

## Using the Outline of a Story

Most authors carefully plan what they write before they begin filling in the details. You can probably develop a clearer understand of the basic idea an author had in mind by writing your own synopsis of a story in terms of the situation, problem and solution.

Of course, a synopsis is an outline or brief summary of the *plot*, which is all of the important events that happen during the beginning, middle and ending of a story, and which move the story along as the characters struggle to get what they want.

Though not a plot in and of itself, you will find that most stories also have a particular *theme* woven into their structure, along with a number of other elements, such as *cause and effect*, *suspense*, *characterization*, and *conflict*.

Virtually every story you will ever encounter structured around one of five basic plot patterns, which are as follows:

### 1. INCIDENT STORY

An *incident story* is usually less than 1000 words long. It can either take the main character into familiar territory and situations (also referred to as an *incident-*

*excursion story*), or it can take the main character into unfamiliar territory and situations (known as an *incident-adventure story*).

## 2. STORY OF PURPOSE ACHIEVED

In a story of *purpose achieved*, the main character has a well-defined purpose or desire at the very beginning of the story and struggles throughout the story to achieve that purpose, which is brought about (in the end) through courage, ingenuity, special ability, or some combination of these three characteristics.

## 3. MISUNDERSTANDING, DISCOVERY AND REVERSAL

At the beginning of a story of *misunderstanding, discovery and reversal*, the main character misunderstands something. The misunderstanding continues through the middle of the story, but in the end, the main character discovers his or her mistake and reverses his or her beliefs and actions.

## 4. WISH FULFILLMENT

At the beginning of a story of *wish fulfillment*, the main character has a strong desire or wish that seems impossible to get, and eventually accepts the fact that he or she cannot have his or her wish, though he or she may feel unhappy about it. Then, as a (natural) result of what the main character is, or because of something the main character does that was *not* done in an effort to get his or her wish, the character gets the wish anyway, or an equally acceptable substitute, or a *better* substitute.

## 5. STORY OF DECISION

At the beginning of a *story of decision*, the main character is faced with a moral decision in which it seems the (morally) right decision will bring unpleasant results, whereas the other choice will bring immediate gain and satisfaction. In the end, the main character makes the right choice and finds that the moral choice was the better one and that he or she has grown as a person.

## Beginning, Middle and Ending

Most well-written works have a beginning, middle and ending. It comes to stories, this usually entails a standard plot line that incorporates all of the ideas, observations and memories the author includes through a thoroughly developed sequence of significant events. Most writers use the beginning of a story to establish the setting, which is the time and place in which the events happen or transpire. It is also where the author introduces the main characters and sets up the stories of situation or problem (i.e. conflict).

The middle of the story is where the author develops and expands on the plot by complicating events and by using dramatic action to build to a climax.

And finally, the end of most narratives, which should be as good as possible, rounds off the story and ties up any loose ends.

## Conflict

Every good story has conflict, which is the struggle of the character against himself, against another person or against nature. Is created by taking a character from a place or situation where s/he is reasonably happy, and placing the individual in another place or situation where s/he is no longer happy. The unhappiness will cause problems, and if you have a problem, you have conflict. Conflict is good because it creates suspense and keeps the audience turning pages.

# Structure **1**

## Literary Analysis

### Responding in Terms of Organization

**Directions:** Below are a number of questions/items regarding story characters. You are to respond to each of the prompts using complete sentences, explaining the reasons for your responses as appropriate.

1. Identify the title and author of the selection you read:

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2. What is the form of fiction, or literary genre, that you believe best describes this selection?

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3. Which of the five basic plot patterns does the structure of this story follow?

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4. If you truly have a clear understanding of the story an author has told, you should be able to capitalize it in a single statement. On the lines below, write a “story-in-one-sentence” that succinctly describes the entire narrative. Keep the sentence reasonably short and, if you can, try to make it show the story’s plot pattern as well.

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# Structure **2**

## Literary Analysis

### Responding in Terms of Organization

**Directions:** Below are a number of questions/items regarding story characters. You are to respond to each of the prompts using complete sentences, explaining the reasons for your responses as appropriate.

1. Identify the title and author of the selection you read:

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2. Describe what happens at the beginning of the story, where the author establishes the setting, introduces the main characters, and sets up the stories of situation or problem.

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3. Describe the middle of the story in terms of how the author expands on the plot, complicates events, and uses dramatic action to build to a climax.

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4. Describe the end of the story in terms of how the author ties up any loose ends and brings everything to a conclusion.

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# Structure **3**

## Literary Analysis

### Responding in Terms of Characterization

**Directions:** Below are a number of questions/items regarding story characters. You are to respond to each of the prompts using complete sentences, explaining the reasons for your responses as appropriate.

1. Identify the title and author of the selection you read:

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2. How does the author accomplish the task of making the main character likable?

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3. But when you identify as the main characters *core* quality (with which everything he or she does is consistent)?

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4. What supporting characters affect the story in a significant way and how?

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# Structure **3**

## Literary Analysis

### Responding in Terms of Characterization

**Directions:** Below are a number of questions/items regarding story characters. You are to respond to each of the prompts using complete sentences, explaining the reasons for your responses as appropriate.

1. Identify the title and author of the selection you read:

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2. What are the primary motivating factors of the main character?

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3. How does the main character change over the course of the story, and what did s/he learn or experience that brought about these changes?

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# Structure **4**

## Literary Analysis

### Responding in Terms of Plot

**Directions:** Below are a number of questions/items regarding story characters. You are to respond to each of the prompts using complete sentences, explaining the reasons for your responses as appropriate.

1. Identify the title and author of the selection you read:

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2. What is the main source of conflict – the internal or external force against which the main character struggles? What is it that prevents the main character from obtaining whatever it is that s/he wants or desires?

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3. What is the immediate action taken by the main character in his or her effort to remove the main source of conflict, and what happens because of what the main character does?

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4. To what “black moment” (or crisis) does all of the above lead?

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Structure **5**

Literary Analysis

Responding in Terms of Plot

**Directions:** Below are a number of questions/items regarding story characters. You are to respond to each of the prompts using complete sentences, explaining the reasons for your responses as appropriate.

- 1. Identify the title and author of the selection you read:

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- 2. What does the way that the main character accepts or deals with the situations or circumstances that occur reveal about his or her personality?

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- 3. What does the main character do in the end that finally enables him or her to achieve his or her purpose? (This is the climax.)

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- 4. Briefly describe how the author used such strategies as dialogue, suspense, and specific actions (such as movements, gestures and expressions) to develop a complex main character.

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# Structure 5

## Literary Analysis

### Responding in Subtle Aspects of Structure

**Directions:** Below are a number of questions/items regarding story characters. You are to respond to each of the prompts using complete sentences, explaining the reasons for your responses as appropriate.

1. Identify the title and author of the selection you read:

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2. Does the author begin the story with an opening that “hooks” the reader by introducing the main character and his or her problem through some kind of interesting activity? If so, please describe:

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3. Was dialogue ever used to build excitement or to foreshadow future events that would be important to the plot question mark? If so, please explain:

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4. Briefly describe one example of how the author used vivid descriptive language or sensory details to help the reader “visualize” events and experiences.

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## Chapter 9

# Writing a Book Review

## Analyzing What Authors Do

Analyzing the work of successful author's using the format presented on the next few pages is a surefire way to give you a better handle on exactly what components go into the creation of an effective literary publication. To facilitate the process of analyzing exactly what it is that authors do, you will now learn how to write a book review.

Make sure however that you don't confuse writing a book *review* with writing a book *report*. The only time anyone ever writes a book report is when he or she is required to do so as a class assignment. However, my intention is to equip students, whenever possible, with authentic skills that can be applied to real-life situations. And as you probably know there are a significant number of people who make their living writing book reviews. Their work can be found in newspapers, magazines and other publications. However, I know of no one who's paid to write book reports. So, rather than waste their time with a "useless" task, I'd rather my students learn how to do something that's of actual value in the "real world."

We'll begin by analyzing sample reviews selected from the book review section in the Sunday edition of the *Los Angeles Times*—reviews that would be appropriate for minors to see, since they'll be writing their own critiques in the same style, following the same general format.

## TO THE INSTRUCTOR

Oh, and by the way, if you're an instructor, please note that this presentation might constitute a whole week's worth of lessons, if not a whole month. For it would be unreasonable to expect a significant segment of novice writers to produce a polished book review in a single day.

For example, you might want to spend a whole week just analyzing a variety of book reviews, or you could choose to spend a week on each section reserving the initial week for learners to become relatively familiar with the various approaches to writing an introduction, taking the second week to go over the five reasons for which an author might create a literary work, completing an in-depth look at examples of each, etc...

Also, given the fact that most book reviews are written at a relatively advanced level, you may find it necessary to spend a significant portion of time deciphering the meaning of the reviews you choose for examples as you develop your learners' vocabularies.

This is to be expected. All I'm really saying here is that this is not a race. The ultimate goal is that by the time your learner has finally completed this assignment, he or she should genuinely understand how to write a book review with some level of proficiency and competence.

You should therefore allow the appropriate amount of time necessary to make this a reality. Let the unique strengths and weaknesses of your particular learners dictate how fast or slowly you progress through the assignment and on what particular aspect(s) of the task you allot the most time and attention.

## Writing a Book Review

### Writing the Introduction

As when writing an essay or delivering a speech, you'll want to begin your book review with a sentence or opening paragraph designed to peak the interest of your readers and make them want to finish the rest of your critique.

Consequently, in a moment I'll introduce a number of attention grabbing techniques commonly used in writing—creative introductions that have the ability to catch members of the audience off guard with an opening statement that leaves them smiling or wondering what the rest of the work contains.

As you analyze the critiques written by professional reviewers, see if you can match the approach each author uses to capture the attention of their readers with one or more of the techniques with which you're about to be presented.

Pay special attention to how the writers apply the various techniques to any given situation—or perhaps you'll find that a writer used a technique not listed. If so, record the new technique in your writer's journal if you have one and keep it in mind the next time you're considering how to go about opening a review of your own.

#### **1. Startling Information**

The first attention grabber we'll consider is that of startling information. A startling statement can immediately snap your audience to attention at the beginning of your piece. You might describe an extremely unusual situation, reveal a shocking statistic or vividly portray an alarming problem.

Not only will your readers sit up and take notice, they'll also read carefully to find out more about what you just wrote and why you wrote it.

Make sure however that the information is true and verifiable. Also, it doesn't need to be totally new to your readers. It could simply be a pertinent fact that explicitly illustrates the point you wish to make. If you use a piece of startling information, elaborate on it by following it with another sentence or two.

## **2. Anecdote**

An anecdote is a story that illustrates a point. Be sure your anecdote is short, to the point, and relevant to your topic. This can be a very effective opener for your composition, but use it carefully.

## **3. Dialogue**

An appropriate dialogue does not have to identify the speakers, but the reader must understand the point you are trying to convey. Use only two or three exchanges between speakers to make your point. Follow dialogue with a sentence or two that elaborate on what was said.

## **4. Summary Information**

A few sentences explaining your topic in general terms can lead the reader gently to your main idea. Each sentence should become gradually more specific, until you reach your "thesis."

## **5. Humor**

Including something funny in your introduction can "break the ice," helping to build rapport with your audience from the start. It can also serve to relax your readers to help them remember your message. You might tell a joke, relate a funny story or offer a witty quote that is connected to the main idea of your work.

Unfortunately, there are possible problems with using humor. First of all, not everyone laughs at the same thing. Also, if the humor is not well received, it may cause your audience to lose interest or your piece to lose momentum. Third, humor is not appropriate for every topic, and finally, too much humor can take the spotlight off of the main point you are trying to make.

#### **6. Use a Quote**

Repeat a famous or interesting quote from a text or other source, writing something someone else said using their exact words.

#### **7. Quote a Statistic**

Cite a statistic – give the results of a study, questionnaire, poll or survey.

#### **8. Intriguing Question**

You can get listeners involved in your introduction by asking an intriguing question that leads to your central idea, drawing the readers into your review by stirring their curiosity.

It may be in the form of a *rhetorical question*, one that is asked for effect rather than to elicit an actual answer. When you ask a rhetorical question, you are inviting audience members to think about the question silently and continue thinking about it throughout your composition.

#### **9. Imagine Statement**

Using an “imagine” statement places the reader in your shoes, making him or her more interested in what takes place in the rest of the essay. (The drawback is that its informality gives the essay a slightly hokey or corny tone, so be careful not to take it too far.)

#### **10. Interesting Fact**

Present an interesting fact related to the subject. Or as a variation on this idea, use words to paint an interesting picture.

To repeat, use the introduction to attract your readers' attention and give your audience an idea of the piece's focus.

It should have a topic sentence—a sentence that states the subject or main idea of your work—and at least three supporting detail sentences. That means you will need to write an attention-grabbing introduction that includes your main idea and supporting information.

See if you can identify the attention grabber in the first paragraph of this book review excerpt...

BOOK REVIEW

## When God Judges a Nation by Ed Ross

**Past experience demonstrates that few individuals are astute enough or possess even an inkling of the insight required to recognize when their civilization has begun to fall.**

By Robert Daniels  
January 20, 2010

AMONG TODAY'S liberal thinkers, rejecting "old-fashioned" values is much in vogue. From their perspective, revising the accumulated wisdom of the past is quite a noble endeavor. What objection could anyone possibly have to redefining outdated notions of right and wrong when our modern society offers such rational, mature, better informed, more highly sophisticated standards of decency?

Hopefully you recognized that the attention grabber Daniels chose to use was that of "asking a question."

## Writing a Book Review

### Identify the Aim and Purpose

Follow the introduction with a paragraph describing what you believe to be the function or purpose of the book you're reviewing. For what reason did the author create the work? What is it that the book is trying to accomplish?

Was it written to inform, instruct, or entertain? Is there something the author is trying to say, a message he or she wants to communicate? If the book was written as entertainment, in what way does it want to accomplish its task? Is it trying to scare its readers; make them laugh; take them on an adventure or what?

Note how Daniels uses the second paragraph to let us know that the purpose of Mr. Ross's book is to "shake us out of complacency" and remind us that when new standards of morality were adopted in the past without the kind of scrutiny they deserved, it resulted in some rather undesirable consequences.

In "God Judges a Nation" Pretentious Prize-winning reporter Ed Ross seeks to shake us out of what he calls a "complacent stupor" to recognize that whenever a nation, whether ancient Israel, the Roman empire or Nazi Germany, has abandoned the Judeo-Christian standards of decency set forth in Scripture, it has always met with disaster. New fangled principles of morality, he vividly reminds us, sometimes bubble up from a swamp of unexamined lies to be widely embraced as though they automatically deserved acceptance, with grave and dire consequences.

### AIM

Everything that is written has an aim and a purpose. The *aim* is the message that is being communicated. For example, if you wrote a letter of thanks to your

grandparents for the birthday gift they sent you, your aim (or message) would be to let them know how grateful you were.

On the other hand, if you wrote a letter of complaint to the transit company because the bus arrived thirty minutes behind schedule and you were late for school, your aim (or message) would be to let them know how unhappy you were with their poor service.

## PURPOSE

The *purpose* is the reason for writing a piece. There are basically four main reasons an author might have for creating a written work: to entertain, to persuade, to explain or to inform.

- To **entertain** is to do something for other people's enjoyment or amusement.
- To **persuade** is to argue, or prove – to convince others to believe as you do, feel the same as you, or agree to do what you want or with what you have to say.
- To **explain** is to teach or instruct.
- To **inform** is to merely describe, state or create a picture – to simply give or present information.

## Writing a Book Review

### Identify Strengths and Weaknesses

It is in this section that a book review begins to more closely resemble a traditional book report, employing one or two paragraphs to state the publication's greatest strengths, followed later on by its most glaring weaknesses.

It is similar to the previous section in that it touches on the author's purpose for creating the work, but does so in a more expansive and critical manner, supporting the assertions made by providing detailed explanations for the positions taken.

In short, the second section states what was the author's intention or purpose for writing the book, whereas the third section discusses whether or not the writer succeeded and, if so, how well or how poorly he or she was able to do so.

If the publication was written to entertain, did it succeed as intended? If so, how did it go about accomplishing this feat? If not, why, where and how did it fall short? If the book was written to instruct, did it actually do a good job of educating the reader? If the book was written to inform, was it clear, understandable and on the mark?

In the next few paragraphs Mr. Daniels uses expressions like, "*vividly reminds...*" and "*accurately observes...*" to identify some of the author's strong points. These three paragraphs in particular state what Ed Ross was able to do successfully as a writer...

Ross presents pertinent information with an appropriate emphasis on the human element and provides mini-biographies on a number of societies which disappeared soon after abandoning age-old traditions. Ed also pays close attention to an often neglected aspect of leadership—the fact that the decisions of a civilization's governing councils inevitably provide either comfort or pain, sometimes in great measure, to the individuals involved.

The real power behind Mr. Ross's book however comes from the contemporary backdrop against which we read it. Making claims that the U.S. Constitution is a "living document" is the stock and trade of certain members of the judiciary. This justification for "legislating from the bench," as Mr. Ross chronicles, is a particularly favorite of revisionist judges who seem to believe they have greater wisdom than our founding fathers.

Along these lines, Ross cites a number of cases illustrating how contemporary justices have written some of the most legally atrocious decisions in the history of the Supreme Court in order to advance their own personal and political agendas. Ross's criticism, though largely implicit, is unmistakable. He bristles at what he sees as an all-too-familiar combination of a judiciary more concerned with impressing its elite circle of left-wing cronies than with faithfully interpreting the Constitution, coupled with a society that has become so secularized that it almost completely lacks any semblance of a moral compass.

On the other hand, Daniels did not have all that much negative to say about the book and didn't really mention any shortcomings in his review. The closest he came to identifying any weaknesses is this paragraph...

The point is well taken, though it may have been overstated. Modern judicial history shows that the judicial branch has been anything but supine when faced with the ACLU's insistence upon bringing cases that go far beyond the pale.

## Writing a Book Review

### Describe the Book in Detail

It is this fourth section, often several paragraphs long, that is most like a traditional classroom book report. Here is where you explain, in detail, what the book is all about, describing its story or content using lots of examples and numerous excerpts.

In actuality, this part of Mr. Daniels's review was no less than *eleven* paragraphs long! However, your book reviews are likely to be a bit shorter, that is, unless you are an *extremely* insightful young individual (if indeed, you are a young individual).

## Writing a Book Review

### The Conclusion

And here we have the conclusion (final paragraph), which is your last opportunity to reach your audience with the message you wish to send. A good conclusion also provides closure, establishing a sense of completion.

Without closure, readers may feel confused and dissatisfied at the end of your piece. Therefore, use your conclusion to signal that you are ready to finish so your audience will pay close attention to your final words.

Actually, a good conclusion performs three functions. First, it reinforces your central idea and shows how your major ideas fit together. Second, it provides closure, as was just stated.

One way this can be accomplished is by using certain phrases such as: *"The next time you hear about 'such and such,' you will..."* Third, it motivates your audience to take action.

For instance, in the previous quote the author is encouraging the reader to do something the next time he or she hears about *"such and such."* Often, a book review is intended to motivate the reader to either buy or avoid the publication that was just critiqued.

More specifically, the conclusion of a *book review* is often used to repeat or reinforce the purpose of the book and to very briefly summarize how well or how poorly the publication met its goals.

By using a brief but effective summary to review your major points and supporting details, you remind the audience of how these points lead to the

central idea, keeping your readers' attention focused on the issues you want to emphasize until the last moment.

#### **WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR LAST PARAGRAPH:**

- Reinforce your message – the central idea of your piece, showing how the major points fit together.
- Repeat or reinforce the purpose of the book and briefly summarize how well or how poorly the publication met its goals.
- Motivate your audience to take action.
- Provide closure by establishing a sense of completion.

# Writing a Book Review

## Final Summary

1. Begin your book review with a paragraph that serves as an attention grabber.
2. Continue by pointing out exactly what is the aim and function (or purpose) of the book.
3. Now, clarify the book's greatest strengths and weaknesses. Continue to touch on the author's aim and purpose for creating the work, but do so in a more expansive and critical manner, supporting your positions by providing detailed explanations. In other words, discuss whether or not the writer succeeded at meeting his or her goal or goals in writing the book, and if so, how well or how poorly he or she was able to do so.
4. Now, this fourth step is where you finally explain, in detail, what the book is all about, describing its story or content using lots of examples and numerous excerpts.
5. Use your last paragraph to (1) reinforce your central theme, showing how your major ideas fit together, (2) provide closure, (3) motivate your audience to take action, and (4) review the author's reason(s) for writing the book, briefly summarizing how well or poorly s/he met his or her goal(s).