



## Literary Analysis

Adapted from Barnet, Sylvan. "Reading and Writing about Literature." *LB Brief*. Ed. Jane E. Aaron. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: Longman, 2011. 120-27. Print.

*What's involved in analyzing a story, poem, or other literary work?*

### Before you write:

- *Write while you read:* Underline or highlight passages that especially interest or confuse you. Annotate the margins, describing what you are thinking as you reading.
- *Reading Journal:* Keep a reading journal to develop and record your reflections on what you read (i.e., answer questions you may have had while reading).

**Note:** In writing about literature, you explain *your interpretation* of the meaning, using evidence from the text to back it up.

### Questions for literary analysis – What can be used as evidence?

- **Plot: the relationships and patterns of events.**
  - What action happens?
  - What conflicts occur?
  - How do the events connect to each other and the whole?
- **Characters: the people the author creates, including the narrator of a story or the speaker of a poem.**
  - Who are the principal people in the work?
  - How do they interact?
  - What do their actions, words, and thoughts reveal about their personalities and the personalities of others?
  - Do the characters stay the same, or do they change? Why?
- **Point of View: the perspective or attitude of the speaker in a poem or the voice who tells a story.**
  - **First person** (participant, uses I) or **third person** (an outsider, uses he, she, it, they).
  - If first person, is the narrator **reliable** or **unreliable** (unable to report events wholly or accurately)?



- If third person, is the narrator **omniscient** (knows what goes on in all characters' minds), **limited** (knows what goes on in the mind of only one or two characters), or **objective** (knows only what is external to the characters)?
- Who is the narrator or speaker?
- How does the narrator's point of view affect the narrative?
  
- **Tone: the narrator's or speaker's attitude, perceived through the language.**
  - What tone (or tones) do you hear? If there is a change, how do you account for it?
  - Is there an ironic contrast between the narrator's tone and what you take to be the author's attitude?
  
- **Imagery: words or details involving the senses of sight, sound, touch, smell, taste.**
  - What images does the writer use? What senses do they draw on?
  - What patterns are evident in the images (for instance, religious or commercial images)?
  - What is the significance of the imagery?
  
- **Symbolism: concrete things standing for larger and more abstract ideas.**
  - What symbols are used by the author? What do they signify?
  - How does the symbolism relate to the theme of the work?
  
- **Form: the shape or structure of the work.**
  - What is the form?
  - What parts of the work does the form emphasize, and why?
  
- **Themes: the main ideas about human experience suggested by the work as a whole. It is not the plot or the subject, but instead what the plot tells us about the subject.**
  - Can you state each theme in a sentence?
  - Do certain words, passages of dialog or description, or situations seem to represent a theme most clearly?
  - How do the work's elements combine to develop a theme?

### **Tips to remember**

- Do not summarize the literary work. Interpret what it means.
- Use quotations from the work to back up your ideas.
- Integrate the quotes into your own sentences.
- Use the present tense of verbs when talking about literature.



- Use MLA in-text citations and a Works Cited page at the end of the paper.