

JOHNSON COUNTY COMMUNITY COLLEGE
Critical Analysis of Literature

The process for writing a critical analysis of literature should be based on the instructor's instructions, but generally you can follow these steps:

- I. Read the assignment carefully more than once. Look for the outstanding characteristics of the piece.
- II. Focus on some aspect of the literature: theme, character, conflict, style
- III. Incorporate the aspects not chosen as support for the focus.
- IV. When possible, use direct quoting from the book to support points made.
- V. Consider the following suggestions as a basis on which to develop the focus:

A. Character

1. Compare/contrast to other literary characters, real people, or stereotypes.
2. Analyze the character through what he does (action), what he says, and what others say about him. How is the character disclosed in the story?
3. Classify the character—put the character in a category and explain why.
4. Is the character true-to-life? That is, are the actions, statements and thoughts what a real person in the same circumstances would do?

B. Theme

1. What is the theme and how did you come to this decision?
2. How is the theme supported?
3. Compare/contrast this theme with themes of other literary works.
4. Is the theme universal? Explain.

C. Conflict

1. What is the conflict?
2. Is it a universal conflict?

3. Who is/are the protagonist(s)? Who is/are the antagonist(s)?
4. How is the conflict resolved?
5. Is there a turning point or climax?
6. Do any of the characters change in the story?
7. Is there any comic relief?

D. Style

1. Does the author use imagery?
2. Is there any symbolism? What is it?
3. Diction—Discuss the meaning of the words as related to the speaker's background and state of mind.
4. Are there lengthy descriptive passages or does the author use action and dialogue for story movement?
5. Is there humor injected or comic relief to balance or off-set the drama?

VI. Arrange or organize your paper in **evaluative** or **descriptive** (break-down) mode.

A. The **introduction** should be at least one paragraph. Make clear what the focus of your paper is. Set up your criteria, such as good character portrayal, realistic conflict, or universal theme.

B. The **body** of the paper will support the focus given in the introduction. Break up the aspects of the subject (character, theme, etc.) and discuss each element in a different paragraph, using specific examples from the literature. Be sure to use quotation marks around directly quoted material.

C. The **conclusion** of the paper should reassert the focus and bring the paper to closure.

Evaluation Paragraph Checklist

YES //NO

- ___ ___ 1. Chooses topic:
 limited
 focused
 appropriate
 significant
 addresses audience
- ___ ___ 2. Sets the standards criteria by which the literary piece is being
judged
- ___ ___ 3. Identifies the literary piece and acknowledges the author
- ___ ___ 4. Relates the criteria to the subject
- ___ ___ 5. Uses examples/illustrations to support points
- ___ ___ 6. Has a meaningful conclusive paragraph
- ___ ___ 7. Has an effective variety of sentence patterns and lengths
- ___ ___ 8. Is proofread carefully
- ___ ___ 9. Has used quotations appropriately and punctuated them
correctly