



Informative/Explanatory Writing

Writing a Literary Analysis

High School

Rationale

- ✚ One of the most important skills students can learn regarding literature is the ability to analyze literature. Writing about literature, whether in criticism or response format, is a critical skill in high school. This lesson will focus on constructing a strong literary analysis based on insightful reading.

Goal

- ✚ To select *relevant* and *sufficient* details to support a thesis and provide effective analysis, which explains *how* chosen details demonstrate the essay's answer to the given prompt

Standards

- ✚ **W.11.9, W.12.9** Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
- ✚ **W.11.2, W.12.2** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

Objective

- ✚ Students will write effective analysis that explains how key details demonstrate the essay's thesis

Materials

- ✚ Writing Prompts from *The Odyssey* (included) or develop some based on the literature currently being read in class

Procedures

Note: This lesson assumes that *The Odyssey* has been read by the class. It is referred to throughout as a model, but you can use whatever literature your students are currently reading. You will need to develop your own prompt.

- ✚ **“Today we will learn how to effectively craft a literary analysis. In a literary analysis, we analyze key elements in a text and use the text to support our ideas.”**
- ✚ Distribute the example prompt to the class, or write it on the board. Ask the class what is necessary to include in the analysis in order for the response to be complete (student should respond with an important theme and elements of the epic that support the theme).

- ✚ Write the following thesis on the board: “In his epic poem The Odyssey, Homer utilizes the relationship between Penelope and the suitors in order to demonstrate the importance of maintaining faith in the face of hardship.” Ask students to identify the part of that thesis statement that provides the theme and the part that provides the elements from the epic.
- ✚ Discuss that the analysis needs to introduce examples of how Penelope suffers hardship but maintains faith. **It is particularly important that you discuss details that should *not* be included and explain why, as many students will have a tendency to engage in undirected plot summary.** First, ask students what details would be relevant for this thesis. Possible answers include:

- ▶ The fact that Penelope has been separated from her husband Odysseus for years.
- ▶ The pressure on Penelope, as queen, to choose a new husband so that Ithaca can return to normal.
- ▶ The fact that the suitors are some of the richest and most respected citizens of Ithaca.

Then, ask for details that would not be included. If students do not volunteer irrelevant details on their own, introduce some of the following and ask why they *wouldn't* be relevant:

- ▶ Meneleus and Helen: clearly not directly related to Penelope and the suitors
- ▶ Telemachus' search for his father: while tangentially related, there is not enough time/space for this essay to include it
- ▶ The Cyclops, Calypso, Circe, or really *any* part of Odysseus' journey: none of this happens to Penelope or has even an indirect impact on her interactions with the suitors. (This is perhaps the most important detail to address, since many students will reasonably think that Odysseus' story is the core of the narrative. Stress that focusing on a particular device often means glossing over key points of the larger narrative.)

- ✚ **“We cannot just list details; we must explain *how* these details relate to our thesis. To do so, ask yourself questions like:”**

- ▶ What about this detail makes it seem relevant?
- ▶ How do I know that this detail relates to our thesis?
- ▶ What seems to be true about the detail's meaning and yet goes unsaid?

- ✚ Discuss potential answers with students and have them write down reasonable responses on their own paper while you write them on the board.

- ✚ Divide students into groups and have them construct a paragraph with the information written on the board. Express to students that their paragraphs should have the thesis statement discussed, include the important details and also include the explanation of *how* the details show the effect. When groups are done, have students share their paragraphs with the class.

- ✚ “Now that we’ve walked through an example together, you’re going to try one on your own.” Have students write down a thesis you have created about another of the sample prompts. Divide students into groups, and have them work for 10 minutes to note the relevant background details. After time is up, discuss as a class each group’s responses.
- ✚ Have students return to groups and give them 15 minutes to identify the key parts of the thesis, write the key details needed to support each part, and to explain *how* each detail does so. After time is up, discuss as a class individual groups’ responses.

Assessment

- ✚ Students paragraphs and group work should demonstrate:
 - ▶ accurate identification of the components of thesis
 - ▶ appropriate selection of details needed to support the analysis
 - ▶ accurate explanation of the details and how they relate to the thesis statement

Follow-up

- ✚ Have students respond to the third prompt on their own. Once students have responded to the prompt, have them evaluate each others’ responses.



Writing Prompts for the Odyssey

Example Prompt (used in lesson):

The Ancient Greeks used epics as entertainment, but also to teach values and morals that were important in their culture. They used the events from their epics to portray important themes to their audience. Choose a theme from The Odyssey that you feel is important. What elements of the epic does Homer use to portray this theme?

Sample Prompts:

The Ancient Greeks lived in a vastly different society than the one we live in today. Heroes in Ancient Greece look much different from the superheroes we see on television or in the movies. Based on the behavior of Odysseus, what character traits or qualities were important for a hero to have? How are these qualities different from what we expect from American heroes?

Examine how women are portrayed in *The Odyssey*. What character traits do the women in the epic share? What does this suggest about the attitude toward women in Ancient Greek times?