

ENC 1102 – 1500 Word Paper #1: Basic Literary Analysis

Assignment:

In this paper, you will need to do a basic literary analysis. Essentially what this means is that you will be arguing how an author constructs a text in order to eventually arrive at the theme he or she wants to convey. You may find pages 1759-1780 in your Norton Introduction to Literature useful as a reference, as well as pages 97-107 in your Handbook.

You have learned some literary elements such as plot, theme, symbol, setting, character, conflict, tone, narration, point of view, and irony. Now, you have a choice of how to construct your first literary analysis.

1. You can choose a story we have read in class and argue how the author uses three of the literary elements in order to arrive at the theme of the story. For example, what is the theme of “The Birth-Mark?” Once you have a general idea of what the theme is, you need to argue what that theme is and show how the author uses elements like symbolism, irony, and conflict in order to support that theme.
2. You can choose to compare OR contrast (not both) how two stories (at least one must be a story we have read in class, the other must be approved by me) deal with the same theme using the same two literary elements. For example, both “The Cask of Amontillado” and “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge” use elements of irony to achieve a dark gothic theme—how? And what is that theme?

You will find that discussing your paper with me at your conference will help, but you need to come prepared to your conference—think about the stories you liked. Why did you like that story specifically? What did the author do that grabbed your interest and kept it, and how did you relate to the theme? What specific parts of the story (quotes, word choice, etc) illustrate that?

Your paper must be more than a book report—do not summarize the stories for more than 2-3 sentences. You need to hit at analysis—rather than focusing on what is happening, ask yourself “why is what is happening important to the theme the author wants to express to me? How does that author accomplish expressing that?” If you tell me something that happened in the story, your next sentence needs to show me evidence of it. Then you need to explain why that event or sentence or quote is important to your argument (how does it prove the thesis?).

Think about the story or stories you want to analyze, and then ask yourself these questions: Who is the main character? What is the conflict he/she faces? How does he/she develop as a result of that conflict? What dominant idea does that development support or represent (theme)? How does the author construct the story with literary elements in order to support that theme?

Remember, you are explaining and arguing to your reader how the author constructs a story—you are not telling them what happens in the story. You are telling them why what happens is important to the author’s theme.

Possible starter topics:

Kate Chopin's representation of marriage in "The Story of an Hour."

Ambrose Bierce's use of irony, point of view, and character to discuss the tragic helplessness of human beings.

The theme of maturation in "Araby" or in "A&P"

Poe's theme in "The Cask of Amontillado"—what is it? how does point of view, conflict, and characterization support it?

Symbolism in "The Open Boat" as it relates to the theme of humanity.

But of course, we will talk at your conference and you can work on a topic you like—I want you to own your paper, make it yours. Don't just jump through hoops on this one. In wrestling with these topics you are generating your critical thinking skills—your ability to evaluate evidence, judge it, present it, and synergize it into a unified, clear idea that you express to your reader clearly.

Remember—getting your ideas on paper is only half of the point. You are developing your ability to get your ideas out so that other understand clearly what you have to say and can understand your point. That is more challenging than how you may think of "writing a paper." It requires contemplation, evidence, organization, and attention to format, style, and grammar. You are showing me that you are developing these skills with this paper.

To that point, DO NOT GO TO ANY WEBSITES IN ORDER TO "JUST GET AN IDEA OF WHAT THE STORY IS ABOUT." You and you alone must wrestle with trying to figure out what the theme is, and how to explain how the author goes about constructing the written story with elements in order to make that theme happen. I can help you via conferences and office hours, but I cannot help you once you have abdicated the responsibility of an 1101 student. If you plagiarize you will fail the class—as much as lifting one idea or one line without proper citation or context can make this happen—you cannot steal if you do not go looking for it. avoid the internet as a source of inspiration for this paper—you do not need it for this paper.