***TNTSJ* In-Class Essay Assignment Hum. 11**

**Essential Question**: How does personal response to literature contribute to a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the text’s meaning?

**Learning Goals:**

* Recognize literature as a record of the human experience.
* Apply strategies for the critical reading of a complex literary text.
* Cite strong and thorough evidence from the texts to support interpretive claims about literature.
* Compose a well-organized 5 paragraph literary analysis essay (750-1,000 words)

**Timeline and Deadlines**

Tuesday, 10/6

* Ashley’s minilessons on “How to Write a Literary Analysis” essay
* Choose your topic
* Begin outlining

Wednesday, 10/7

* Finish outline

Thursday, 10/8

* In-Class essay—due at the end of class

**Instructions**

* Write a 5-paragrah (minimum length) literary analysis essay that explores one of the essay prompts below using your own insights and evidence from The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail and the other texts we read in this unit as they apply.
* 750-1,000 words
* Double-spaced (so Ashley can fit comments between the lines)
* Print the final draft (so Ashley doesn’t have to stare at a glowing screen for hours on end)

**Readings**

* *TNTSJ* by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee
* *Civil Disobedience* excerpts by Henry David Thoreau
* Mexican-American War primary source documents
* “A Letter from a Birmingham Jail” by Dr. Martin Luther King

**Essay Prompts**

1. To what extent does Thoreau truly live his beliefs on Transcendentalism?
	1. To fully answer this question, you would need to demonstrate an understanding of the major elements in transcendentalism as well as an evidence-supported critique of Thoreau’s fulfillment of the philosophy.
2. What do you think is the most important idea that we can take away from Thoreau’s life? Why?
3. On page vi of the play’s introduction, the playwrights write, “The explosive spirit of Thoreau leaps across the years, addressing with power and clarity the perils of his own time and, prophetically, of ours as well”. How does he address our perils? In other words, if Thoreau were alive today, how would he judge America?
4. What are the circumstances that would force you to be like Thoreau?
	1. To answer this question, you would need to first develop an analysis of how Thoreau lived, pulling from both *TNTSJ* and “Civil Disobedience” before explaining what would drive you to live like Thoreau.
5. According to Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee, what is the best way to take a stand against injustice? Does the play ultimately suggest that the individual’s fight for justice is futile and that the government is a more effective tool? And finally, what do you think?
	1. To answer this question, you might compare the methods of Thoreau and Waldo and then take a stand as to whose methods are more effective in bringing about change and/or justice. Then, you might conclude with a personal statement on what you believe.
6. Compare the battle scene at the end of *TNTSJ* to the primary source documents on the Mexican-American War by John O’Sullivan and Frederick Douglas. In what ways does that scene bring to life the main arguments for and against the war and how do we know where the playwrights fall in the spectrum between O’Sullivan and Douglas’s arguments?
7. Choose one of the following themes/binaries and develop your own essay on an original question:
* Conformity v. Nonconformity
* Education (the purpose and function of schooling)
* Pro-government v. anti-government
* Civil Disobedience
* Mind v. Body
* Alone v. Loneliness
* Being v. Living
* Freedom

Reader-Response Criticism (1960s-present)

**What Do You Think?**

At its most basic level, reader response criticism considers readers' reactions to literature as vital to interpreting the meaning of the text. However, reader-response criticism can take a number of different approaches. A critic deploying reader-response theory can use a psychoanalytic lens, a feminists lens, or even a structuralist lens. What these different lenses have in common when using a reader response approach is they maintain "...that what a text is cannot be separated from what it does" (Tyson 154).

Tyson explains that "...reader-response theorists share two beliefs: 1) that the role of the reader cannot be omitted from our understanding of literature and 2) that readers do not passively consume the meaning presented to them by an objective literary text; rather they actively make the meaning they find in literature" (154).

**Tips for Writing a Literary Analysis Essay**

As we examine a work in depth, we formulate opinions about the meaning of that work and about the author’s techniques and intentions. A literary analysis is an essay that makes an interpretative claim (**thesis**) about work of literature in order to deepen our understanding of that work. The essay builds upon its claim with **analysis** and **evidence** from the text, creating a persuasive argument for the essay’s perspective.

**The Thesis Statement (THE CLAIM)**

1. How does a thesis function in a literary analysis?

* The thesis statement makes an interpretative claim about the work.
* The thesis statement is a one or two sentence **condensation of the argument** or analysis to follow in the essay.
* A thesis statement **takes a position** on the topic (or theme) at hand.

SUBJECT + OPINION=Thesis or THEME+INTERPRETATION=Thesis

* It is usually located near the beginning of an essay, often at the end of the intro paragraph (although advanced writing can position it elsewhere).

2. Why does a literary analysis need to have thesis?

* to give your interpretation focus and direction
* to better organize and develop your argument: a strong thesis makes for a strong argument
* to provide your reader with a “guide” to your analysis

3. What makes for a good claim?

* It states *your* conclusions about the work.
* It doesn’t just state the obvious; it expresses an interpretation with which reasonable people could disagree.
* It is specific and focused without being so narrow that there is insufficient evidence.
* It generally expresses one main idea. If compound ideas are stated in a thesis, the relationship between them is very clear.

Examples of thesis statements about literature:

1. “Slip of the Tongue” by Adriel Luis examines how minority women have been oppressed by society’s unrealistic expectations of feminine beauty.
2. In *The Outsiders*, Cherry Valance represents the obligation felt by some members of the upper class to help those less economically fortunate than themselves.
3. In “When I Heard the Learn’d Astronomer,” Walt Whitman uses structure and imagery to contrast the scientist’s perception of the night sky with his own poetic perception.
4. Binx Bolling, the narrator of Walker Percy’s *The Moviegoer,* shows the reader it is possible to contend against the malaise of everydayness by making a choice between wandering and belonging.

**Evidence and Analysis**

The body of your essay should build your argument using textual evidence and your own analysis.

* Go back into the text and find EXAMPLES that support your thesis. Use direct quotes and/or paraphrase the text. Cite page #’s using the proper parenthetical format.
	+ Example of proper citation of quote from the text:
		- David recognizes his own privilege without knowing why; he reflects, “I never consciously traded on the Hayden name, yet I knew it gave me a measure of respect I didn’t have to earn” (126).
* Explain how these examples support your thesis. All textual evidence that you use should be accompanied by YOUR COMMENTARY that connects the evidence clearly to the perspective of the essay.
* Organize your essay into focused TEA paragraphs around CLEAR TOPIC SENTENCES. Each paragraph should elaborate on some element or sub-topic of your greater claim. Make sure each paragraph has a topic sentence and that all the details and textual evidence in that paragraph are related to that topic sentence.

**GENERAL HELPFUL TIPS**

* A literary analysis is not a summary! Assume your reader has read the book. It is okay to give a little bit of concise summary in the intro, but otherwise only summarize briefly for clarification or to give context for your evidence.
* You should introduce the work by title and author early on. Whole works such as books, movies, and paintings are *italicized* for example: *Cat’s Cradle*. Short works such as poems, articles and short stories get quotation marks, as in: “Song of Myself” or “Masters of War.”
* Outline your essay first. Be sure you have textual evidence for each topic sentence.
* **Remember**: everything in the essay should build on the MAIN CLAIM (thesis).
* **Use the LITERARY PRESENT**—the text is a “living” document. So you would write: In *The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail* Jerome Lawrence and Robert Lee ***bring*** to life the story of Henry David’s Thoreau resistance to the Mexican-American War. In the introduction to the play, the playwrights ***write***, “Blah blah blah” (xii). \*Notice how the words in bold italics are in the PRESENT tense.
* **Use third person**: This means you do not say “I” and certainly not “I think” or “I believe”. You could use I in the conclusion when you draw comparisons to your own life or bring in your own philosophy. But in the body of the essay, you should be writing in the 3rd person.

**Additional Resources**

* [Owl at Purdue on Outlining](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/544/02/)
* [Owl at Purdue on MLA Bibliographies](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/)
* [Parenthetical Documentation and Works Cited Page](https://docs.google.com/a/animashighschool.com/document/d/1pRbBjWTIcOe75SgQGDNSbQtM26vHWk3j82dMN1m8o-8/edit)
* [Setting up quotes (refresher!)](https://docs.google.com/a/animashighschool.com/file/d/0B_2nTpwDKG3lOEtKd2JNWGltNDQ/edit)
* **Owl at Purdue on**[Block Quotes](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/03/)**(for quotes that are 4 lines or longer)**
* [Titles: Quotes or Italics?](https://docs.google.com/a/animashighschool.com/file/d/0B5ktO3NLUDlcVUtRc1IzUk9IUDg/edit%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)
* [Passive Voice](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/539/01/)
* [How to write concisely (AKA: Streamlining)](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/572/01/)

Literary Analysis Planning Guide

**Outline #1: Big Picture/Rough Plan**

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| --- |
| Thesis |
|  |
| Claim #1 | Claim #2 | Claim #3 |
|  |  |  |
| Evidence #1 | Evidence #2 | Evidence #1 | Evidence #2 | Evidence #1 | Evidence #2 |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |

**Outline #2: Detailed Plan**

**Introduction:**

* Grab reader’s attention

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* Introduce the title and author & give a brief PLOT summary

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* Thesis (your topic + your opinion) One sentence, last sentence in introduction

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**Body Paragraph #1:**

* Topic sentence for claim #1 in support of thesis

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* Support #1(This is a quote or paraphrase)…Quotes can’t stand alone, and they MUST have page numbers!!

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* Explain how support #1 relates to claim #1

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* Support #2(This is a quote or paraphrase)…Quotes can’t stand alone, and they MUST have page numbers!!

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* Explain how support #2 relates to claim#1

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* If you haven’t already, explain how claim #1 relates to thesis, and transition to next claim #2

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**Body Paragraph #2**

* Topic sentence for claim #2 in support of thesis

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* Support #1(This is a quote or paraphrase)…Quotes can’t stand alone, and they MUST have page numbers!!

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* Explain how support #1 relates to claim #2

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* Support #2(This is a quote or paraphrase)…Quotes can’t stand alone, and they MUST have page numbers!!

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* Explain how support #2 relates to claim#2

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* If you haven’t already, explain how claim #2 relates to thesis, and transition to next claim #3

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**Body Paragraph #3**

* Topic sentence for claim #3 in support of thesis

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* Support #1(This is a quote or paraphrase)…Quotes can’t stand alone, and they MUST have page numbers!!

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* Explain how support #1 relates to claim #3

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* Support #2(This is a quote or paraphrase)…Quotes can’t stand alone, and they MUST have page numbers!!

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* Explain how support #2 relates to claim#3

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* If you haven’t already, explain how claim #3 relates to thesis, and transition to conclusion

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**Conclusion**

* Restate thesis & claims using NEW words

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* Final thoughts for reader (relation to real world or what readers should learn from the work, etc.)

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Literary Analysis Self-Check

**Run your essay through this battery of questions and revise accordingly.**

* Is your claim clearly understood by the readers? How can you make your claim clearer?
* Is your essay organized logically? Are your points connected with strong transitions to help the reader follow your argument?
* Does every paragraph have a clear topic sentence that lists the main claim/interpretation of that paragraph and connects back to the thesis in some way?
* Does every paragraph have evidence from the text?
* Is every paragraph coherent? (That is, does everything in the paragraph belong together?)
* Does every paragraph support the main claim (thesis)?
* Do you use sufficient evidence to support your claim? Do you need more evidence?
* Have you integrated your quoted material smoothly into the text?
* Did you follow proper MLA format for parenthetical citations?

**Read your essay aloud.** Are there any sentences that seem difficult to get through or confusing? **Refine them!**

Literary Analysis Rubric

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **10**Brilliant execution of the standard; exceeds expectations | **9**Strong execution with some room to improve | **8**Meets the standard | **7**Approaching the standard | **5**Below the standard | **0**Standard is not present in the paper |

**Perspective/Claim \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_(out of 10)**

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Does the thesis make an interpretive claim that is focused, reasonable, debatable, and clearly stated?

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Is the essay written in the third person using the literary present?

\_\_\_\_\_\_Is your perspective/interpretation reveal keen insights and critical thinking?

**Organization\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_x1.5\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_(out of 15)**

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Are your paragraphs focused around clear ideas that are anchored in topic sentences?

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Do your ideas and paragraphs logically flow in a TEA paragraph format?

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Is the overall perspective of the paper supported in every paragraph?

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Is the essay properly framed in with an introduction and conclusion?

**Development \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_x1.5\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_(out of 15)**

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Do you make specific and clear connections between the textual evidence and the perspective of the paragraph or paper?

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Are you making commentary and connections between your ideas for your reader?

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Are your arguments well-supported, without vague generalizations or misinterpretations?

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Do you avoid plot summary except to clarify and give context for your evidence?

**Evidence\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_x1.5 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ (out of 15)**

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Does every ***body*** paragraph contain evidence from the text?

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Does your evidence make sense in the context of your argument?

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Is all evidence cited parenthetically with page numbers?

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Are all direct quotes set up correctly?

**Sentence Craft\_\_\_\_\_\_\_/2\_\_\_\_\_\_ (out of 5)**

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Are you writing sentences that are grammatically correct?

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Is the meaning of your sentences clear and easy to follow?

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Do you use simple and complex sentences for a varied effect?

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Are you using concise, streamlined word choice?

**Proofreading and formatting\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_/2=\_\_\_\_\_\_(out of 5)**

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Are there errors in your paper that spellcheck could catch?

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Did you carefully read through your paper for proofreading errors?

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Did you **DOUBLE-SPACE your essay and PRINT it for Ashley?**

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Does it have a title that is cleverer than “*The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail* Literary Analysis”?

\_\_\_\_\_\_ Is your name on it?

**Final Grade: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_/65**