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Identifying and Exploring a Literary Question [English]

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Dr. Cristy Bruns

Composition II/ ENG 102 – Writing through Literature

Essay 2: Identifying and Exploring a Literary Question (600 – 1200 words/ 2 – 4 pages) After working on reading and noticing elements of the literary text you chose, using the Close Reading Worksheet to prompt your thinking, you will identify a question about the text that seems both puzzling and important for understanding the text, and you'll analyze some of the text's elements that you consider key to begin answering your question. Then you'll write an essay in which you attempt to answer your question, drawing evidence for your answer or answers from the text. In this way, your essay should start building an interpretation of the text based on your analysis, making the text more meaningful. Use no outside sources for this essay, only the story or poem itself.

Close Reading Worksheet

Title and author of your focus text:

Preliminary hypothesis (a guess)

After reading the text once or twice, what do you think the author is trying to show or convey?

Analysis (noticing and wondering)

Read the text again, maybe a few times, with the following areas in mind. Write down anything that catches your attention. (Most texts won't have striking features in all these areas, just some areas.)

Selection—what's included or left out of the text (including whose point of view)

Arrangement—the order of the telling of events, images, or details, including where it starts and ends

Emphasis—what seems important or carries greater emotional weight in the text

Diction—word choices and sentence structure, including punctuation

Mood or tone—the feeling or attitude of the text or the world the text creates

Imagery—what the text prompts you to visualize (or hear or smell or touch or taste)

Gaps in coherence—what portions of the text seem unrelated to each other

From this analysis, what **questions** remain that need answers in order to work out more fully what the author is trying to show?

1.

2.

3.

Informed by this analysis, are there changes or additions to your preliminary hypothesis?

Essay 2: Identifying and Exploring a Literary Question

Worksheet

Title and author of your focus text:

The **question** you have chosen as the topic of Essay 2:

One option is this question: What is [author] trying to show (or say) through [title of text]? This means that in your essay you would work out an interpretation of the entire text. However, if there is a narrower supporting question (one of those from your Close Reading Worksheet) that you need to work out before you can address this main question, then choose that narrower question as your topic.

Why is this question puzzling?

If it's a supporting question, why is this question important for making sense of the text overall?

What are some possible answers to this question? (hypotheses or educated guesses)

Re-read your focus text with this question in mind. What specific portions of the text (**evidence**) might help you answer this question?

List brief quotes from the text or mention events that happen or specific parts of the text. Include page numbers or, if your text is a poem, line numbers.

After reading over your list of evidence, look back at your hypotheses. Are there some that are better than others? Do you now see a possible answer to your question that you didn't see before (a new hypothesis)?

Below list the 1 – 2 hypotheses (possible answers to your question) that best fit the evidence, adding the evidence or reasoning that supports it and that is against it.

Hypothesis 1:

Evidence or reasoning supporting it (phrases or line numbers/page numbers to remind you):

Evidence or reasoning against it:

Hypothesis 2:

Evidence or reasoning supporting it:

Evidence or reasoning against it:

Of these hypotheses, based on the strength of the evidence, the best hypothesis is this:

Criteria for Essay 2: Identifying and Exploring a Literary Question
ENG 102 – Prof. Cristy Bruns—Fall 2017

Writer: _____

The essay should be **600-1200 words or 2-4 pages**, typed, double-spaced, with page numbers, following MLA format for page layout (but no Works Cited needed).

Self **Instructor**

Scale: 1 (weak) - 5 (strong)

Purpose

1. The essay effectively explores a question central to a literary text, supports a hypothesis that answers the question, and makes the text more meaningful.

Content

2. The essay focuses on a question that is important for making meaning from the text.
3. The essay explores 1 or 2 hypotheses that answer the question.
4. The essay supports its hypotheses with specific evidence from the text, including formal or stylistic elements, and uses quotes from the text. It also mentions evidence against a hypothesis, if any.

Structure

5. The introductory paragraph introduces the text (and author) and explains why the question is puzzling, and this paragraph's last sentence is the question in place of a thesis.
6. Each body paragraph has a main idea that clearly relates to the question that is the focus of the essay.
7. The topic sentence of each body paragraph states the paragraph's main idea and includes a transition from the previous paragraph, and each body paragraph ends with a return to the main idea of the paragraph.
8. The concluding paragraph begins with a sentence that states the best (or only) hypothesis, and then it briefly sums up the essay's evidence. It also mentions any remaining uncertainties or questions about the text.

Style

9. The essay communicates through wording that is clear, smooth, and succinct.
10. Its grammar and punctuation are correct.