

Summative Short Story Analysis

Analysing a Short Story (You are writing an essay structured analysis)

Step 1: Know the Assignment

Literary analysis looks critically at a work of fiction in order to understand how the parts contribute to the whole. When analyzing a short story, you will need to consider elements such as the context, setting, characters, plot, literary devices, and themes. Remember that a literary analysis is not merely a summary or review, but rather an interpretation of the work and an argument about it based on the text. Depending on your assignment, you might argue about the work's meaning or why it causes certain reactions in the reader. This handout will help you analyze a short story. Remember: An analysis is not a simple recitation of the plot. (Your analysis paragraphs become useful here.)

Step 2: Write a thesis statement for your paper – Based on the evidence that relates to your topic and what you anticipate you might say about those pieces of evidence – create a working thesis. Use the example below as a guide.

Examples:

Theses for The Monkey's Paw:

- ★ *The possibility of imminent consequences of temptation and greed create suspense throughout the story.*
- ★ *Suspense is thoughtfully integrated within the short story in order to realize the gravity of temptation.*
- ★ *Jacobs creates patterns within his short story to emphasize the moral of being cautious of trying to change fate.*
- ★ *The greed of the characters leads them to be tempted and blinded by the monkey's paw.*

Step 3: Create an outline

- I. Introductory paragraph (general introduction, summary of the story, thesis statement, outline of arguments)

- II. First body paragraph: First argument /element you will discuss
 - a. Evidence (examples, citations)
 - b. Evidence (examples, citations)

- III. Second body paragraph: Second argument /element you will discuss
 - a. Evidence (examples, citations)
 - b. Evidence (examples, citations)

- IV. Concluding paragraph

Note: Recommended length: 2 pages (MLA format) Longer papers probably will have more than two body paragraphs.

Step 4: Write – Introduce the work in your introductory paragraph by identifying the title and author, possibly using the following format as guide:

Malcolm Aikman's "The Columbus Raid" is a short story illustrating the plight of a young American who volunteers to help a guerilla group during the Mexican Civil War of the early 1900's. At the story's heart is a compelling depiction of the protagonist, Tom Mix, whose sense of duty conflicts with his love for one of the guerillas, Maria. Integrated into the plot is Aikman's real theme of the camaraderie shared by those facing death and the need to sacrifice oneself for the good of many. Aikman achieves this effect through his use of characters, plot, symbolism, and setting.

Step 5: Support – Write your body paragraphs following your outline, making certain that each body paragraph has a topic sentence and specific supports.

Step 6: Conclude – Write the final paragraph, restating the thesis in different words. Do not introduce any new ideas at this point. End with a reflective statement that draws a universal conclusion. For example, you could reflect upon your views of how the author’s ideas shed light on the human condition.

Example:

Aikman successfully utilises four basic tools to illustrate the plight of man torn by love and war: character, plot, symbolism and setting. His combination of these tools in “The Columbus Raid” reveals a greater theme of the story—camaraderie and sacrifice. These two human elements remain timeless and universal, forcing readers to contemplate the tragic consequences of war and duty.

Step 7: Revise – Make certain that your essay provides support for the thesis statement, follows applicable MLA style and flows smoothly from point to point and introduction to conclusion. Remember: Your teacher is expecting your analysis, not a plot summary.

Step 8: Proofread – Edit your paper for spelling, grammar and punctuation. Pay particular attention to the grammatical concepts that will be evaluated in this paper. Make sure your paper is written in the present tense, using the third-person point of view and formal language (no “I”, “you”). It should be double spaced, and written in size 12 font.