

Literary Analysis Introduction – What is Literary Analysis For, and How Would I Do That, Anyway?

Why do we study Literature? A question I've answered countless times as a High School English teacher. And here is my answer: Literature has value because it speaks about our REAL lives. A good story or poem or song or play allows each person who encounters it at any level to leave with a new way of seeing himself or herself.

If Literature didn't give new glimpses of truth, it would just be entertainment. Wait! It needs to be that, too! And, truth be told, the more the reader knows about it, the more entertaining it can be.

It's true that not every story written 'deserves' deep study, but...well....you can't be SURE of that until you have done the studying. I've been surprised MANY times myself, I must admit!

Just like the systematic study of anything, the study of Literature breaks down the subject into its component parts, and then examines how they fit together to make the entire piece WORK. Then the student can stand back and marvel at the newly understood, intricate beauty of the whole.

Let me push along to the HOW.

When studying a piece of literature for any purpose, settle your mind on reading it at LEAST twice. OH, HORRORS! I know, I know – you didn't really want to read it the first time, huh? But if you didn't care about the analysis process, you wouldn't be reading this article in the first place, so I'm counting on you to roll up your figurative sleeves and get on with that reading. I predict you'll end up liking a story you know very well, and you will definitely remember it!

There are nine steps we'll use in deconstructing and understanding a piece of literature. As a preview of all that's ahead, I'm including an outline of the entire process:

Literary Analysis Steps

- A. Focus on Story
 - 1 Stop and predict

- B. Focus on Vocabulary
 - 1 Vocabulary



C. Focus on Scenes

- 1 The Structure of Fiction
- 2 Plot Details



D. Focus on Characterization

- 1 Types of Characters
 - a. Dynamic/Static
 - b. Round/Flat
 - c. Developed/Stock
- 2 Major Characters
 - a. Protagonist
 - b. Antagonist
 - c. Conflicts
- 3 Subordinate Characters
 - a. Foil
 - b. Move the action along

E. Focus on Narrator

- 1 Narrator
- 2 POV

F. Focus on Plot Twists

- 1 Irony
- 2 Ambiguity

G. Focus on Language

- 1 Words and Style
- 2 Rhetorical Devices
- 3 Symbols
- 4 Sound

H. Focus on Sources

- 1 Historical Period
- 2 Author

I. Focus on Theme

- 1 What the Protagonist learns
- 2 How the Conflict is resolved
- 3 Clues in the Title
- 4 Summarizing statements

Don't be daunted. I'll be RIGHT here all the way through!

See you in Literary Analysis #1

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