

LITERARY ANALYSES

Matt Turner / Multicultural American Literature / Fall 2011

Assignment Description

In your literary analyses, you will choose a story, poem, memoir, play or novel (or a combination of these) we've read and provide an argument for your "reading" or interpretation of the meaning of that piece. Your goal is to make an argument about the meaning of events of the piece or about the characters. I want to see you exploring, with a focused literary argument, an aspect of something that we've read.

One of your literary analyses must include at least 3 secondary sources. Citation to, and integral use of, sources beyond your primary story, poem, drama, novel will help you make your argument.

Your argument should be convincing and supported by a close reading of the selected pieces. You are not summarizing but explaining to us what the piece means. Your analyses are delving into complex topics and figuring out what questions to ask and what possible answers are available. It is an argument because you are focusing on questions that don't have easy answers. Your goal is to enlighten the reader and to help them better understand the literature.

Your critical analyses could focus on the following themes. I'm particularly interested in your ability to analyze how these themes are traced across different cultural groups:

- themes of "identity," "family," or "heritage"
- themes of "language," "transition," or "belief"
- themes of "community," "home," or "borders"

Once you've chosen a piece (or pieces), you could use these themes to guide you in making a literary argument.

If you have any questions or problems concerning your essay—about sources, organization, style, use of sources—don't hesitate to see me. I will not hand you a topic, but I'll be happy to discuss possible topics with you.

Audience

Typically with literary analyses you can assume the audience is familiar with your chosen readings and has an interest in understanding the literature, but they haven't read it as recently or as closely as you have. Therefore, you'll need to provide a brief summary to remind them of the basics of the story's plot. Most important, you should include direct quotations from your readings because the audience won't remember every sentence. Any literary analysis that does not incorporate direct quotes will be considered unsuccessful. These quotes will help support your analysis and show how your literary argument comes from a close reading of the selection. Your paper will help them gain an in-depth and thought-out understanding of the issues and meanings involved in the literature you are analyzing.

Argument Statement

Your statement has two parts. First, write a paragraph that presents your literary argument. Your argument statement includes the following:

- The title, author, and copyright year of the story, poem, essay, drama or novel that will be the focus of your analysis.
- A brief summary of the literature in a few sentences.
- The literary argument you will be presenting, explained in several sentences.

Below is an example of an argument statement.

I will be exploring the theme of “beliefs” through an analysis of the poem “The Eagle-Feather Fan” by N. Scott Nomaday published in 1976. The poem describes the narrator’s eagle-feather fan and the power the author feels when holding it. I will answer the questions raised by the editors of our textbook: “Is there a way of reading the description in these lines that gives a more ‘realistic’ or secular sense to the lines? Must you believe in the literalness of the ritual in order to appreciate the poem?” (845). I will argue that Nomaday’s goal, in how he uses the image of the eagle feather in this poem, is to engage non-Indian audiences in understanding the connection between nature and humanity in the belief system of Kiowa Indian.

The second part of your statement will be a formal outline of the structure of your paper. This is a proposed outline, so it may change as you actually draft the paper, but it must include specific details. The longer and more detailed your outline, the more I can help you.

Drafts

You will turn in two drafts—a rough draft and a revised draft. I will give you verbal feedback on your rough draft, if you submit it on time. You should then work on revising the content, organization, and mechanics of your rough draft to create a revised draft that you’ll submit for a final grade.

Research

You will conduct research to find outside sources to help you make your argument in one of your literary analysis. For every outside (non-anthology) source, you must include a copy of the entire source when you turn in your analysis. I will not evaluate an analysis that does not have copies of outside sources. You must use the current MLA documentation system to cite your sources (in-text and in works cited). Any essay turned in that does not include MLA documentation will be returned until it is included and will be graded according to the late paper guidelines.

Evaluation

I’ll be looking for how well you support your thesis and flesh out your argument, using your primary texts as well as secondary sources as needed. I will also be looking at how you organize and express yourself, and how thoughtfully you present your analysis. Last but not least, correctness counts.

You must include a copy of the evaluation rubric on the next page with each one of your critical analysis. You must also upload a digital copy of each of your literary analysis to Turnitin.com before I can evaluate your analysis.

Name _____ Grade _____ Points _____

Evaluation rubric for literary analyses¹⁸	Excellent	Strong	Emerging	Undeveloped
Essay provides a literary analysis (requirements x2)				
Analysis is reasonably thorough and thought-out (critical thinking)				
Analysis demonstrates a close reading of the primary source (critical thinking)				
Analysis provides a focused, specific literary argument (ideas)				
Analysis directly references the primary selection (ideas)				
Analysis has well-organized and coherent paragraphs (paragraphs and structure)				
Analysis introduction is engaging, establishes a clear literary argument, and sets up the analysis (paragraphs and structure)				
Analysis provides a relevant conclusion (paragraphs and structure)				
Analysis is focused on a main theme and organization is logical (organization x2)				
Analysis uses correct in-text format for quotations and citations (documentation)				
Analysis uses required 3 secondary sources to support analysis (documentation)				
Analysis accurately documents sources in a Works Cited page (documentation)				
Analysis uses a formal tone appropriate to academic writing (word choice)				
Analysis uses appropriate and correct language and sentence structure (sentence fluency)				
Analysis contains few errors in correctness (mechanics and grammar x2)				