

Chapter 1

Analyzing Themes

Ideas and Values in Literature

While there is great pleasure to be derived from just savoring a literary work of art; being taken up in the developing pattern of narrative and conflict; following its implications and suggestions; and listening to the sounds of its words...it is also true that ideas are vital to understanding and appreciating literature. Writers have ideas and want to communicate them.

The *theme* of a given selection is the central idea to which the piece returns again and again. When dealing with themes, the term “idea” is always used in reference to an *assertion*. For example, were you to say that the theme of a particular story is “love,” it would be difficult to say much more than that, unless of course you went on to make an assertion, such as...

- Love is so strong that it literally rescues human lives.
- Love is complex and contradictory.
- Love has the power to surmount great obstacles.
- Love is irresistible and irrational.

Assertions such as those above would lead you to explain the process by which you arrived at each conclusion. And while it's true that most written works contain many separate ideas, whichever one seems to be the most prominent is likely to be the selection's *main* theme.

Expressed or implicated in the concept of themes is the belief that certain conditions or standards should be—or should not be—highly valued. Three examples of themes where such value judgments are more readily apparent are presented below:

- There should be equal treatment among all people irrespective of their social class.
- The rights of the individual should be placed above the politics of war.
- Political power is best used in shaping earthly resources for human purposes.

Here are a few additional examples of (common) themes:

- The earth contains grand and mysterious strength.
- Human beings exhibit strength of character regardless of their race.
- Future plans may be destroyed by uncontrollable circumstances.
- The external world of nature is beautiful and not harmful.
- This natural world has moral implications for human beings.
- Human history provides evidence of continual human cruelty.
- By perpetuating cruelty, human beings break the divine plan for universal benevolence.
- Living with cruelty and sensitivity leads to alienation, and happiness, despair and maybe even violence.
- The poses people adopt may mask and contradict their true self interest.
- People refuse to believe the worst even when it is happening to them personally.
- Zealousness leads to destruction.
- People cannot long sustain a potentially destructive anger.

Identifying a story's theme involves more than simply restating the author's descriptions. Rather, it has to do with distinguishing between a work's various situations and its various messages in order to connect the component thoughts that formulate a central idea. Without a doubt, ideas are not as obvious as characters or setting, and require that students consider the meaning of what they read, and then develop explanatory or comprehensive assertions. Therefore, it is important to encourage your pupils to be alert to the different ways in which an author may present ideas as they read. Several such approaches are listed down below.

Authors may present ideas by employing any or all of these methods...

- Direct statements by the authorial voice
- Direct statements by the first-person speaker
- Dramatic statements made by characters
- Figurative language
- Characters who stand for ideas
- The work itself, as it represents ideas

So then, the theme of a given work may be discovered through the action that takes place, the author's depiction of major characters, the circumstances, scenes or settings within which the story unfolds, and/or the effective use of language by the author.

It may be asserted directly, indirectly, dramatically or ironically. It could pertain to individuals and their emotional and private lives, social concerns, social justice, political justice, economic justice, the condition of religion, etc. The ideas may be limited to members of the groups represented by the characters (age, social group, race, nationality, personal status, etc.) or applicable to general conditions in life.

Activity **1**

Novel Unit

Theme

Directions: You will find that most stories have a particular *theme* woven into their structure. The theme is the central idea to which the piece returns again and again. Identifying the theme involves connecting the work's various situations and messages to formulate a central thought. Keep in mind however that, contrary to popular belief, a theme is not merely a topic. It is critical for you to understand that a theme *must* be an *assertion*. For example, *greed* could never serve as a proper theme because it is simply a concept. However, the notorious phrase coined by Gordon Gecko in the Hollywood blockbuster *Wall Street* ("greed is good") could very well serve as a theme, because it makes an assertion.

1. Identify the theme of the selection you have been reading. Explain the values it embodies and their importance to the work. (Please remember to include the title of the piece in your response.)

2. How compelling is this selection's theme? (How germane is it to the story? Could the work be appreciated without reference to this central idea?)

Activity **2**

Novel Unit

Theme

Directions: You will find that most stories have a particular *theme* woven into their structure. The theme is the central idea to which the piece returns again and again. Identifying the theme involves connecting the work's various situations and messages to formulate a central thought. Keep in mind however that, contrary to popular belief, a theme is not merely a topic. It is critical for you to understand that a theme *must* be an *assertion*. For example, *greed* could never serve as a proper theme because it is simply a concept. However, the notorious phrase coined by Gordon Gecko in the Hollywood blockbuster *Wall Street* ("greed is good") could very well serve as a theme, because it makes an assertion.

1. Did the author express the theme of this piece forcefully and convincingly, or were there shortcomings and limitations in how it was presented?

2. How relevant do you believe this selection's central theme is to present conditions in the world today or to your own life?

Activity 3

Novel Unit

Theme

Directions: You will find that most stories have a particular *theme* woven into their structure. The theme is the central idea to which the piece returns again and again. Identifying the theme involves connecting the work's various situations and messages to formulate a central thought. Keep in mind however that, contrary to popular belief, a theme is not merely a topic. It is critical for you to understand that a theme *must* be an *assertion*. For example, *greed* could never serve as a proper theme because it is simply a concept. However, the notorious phrase coined by Gordon Gecko in the Hollywood blockbuster *Wall Street* ("greed is good") could very well serve as a theme, because it makes an assertion.

1. Did you discover the theme of the current selection through the action in the story; its depiction of major characters; the circumstances, scenes or settings in which the story unfolds; the author's use of language or by some other means?

2. Did the author of the assigned work assert the central theme directly, indirectly, dramatically or ironically? (Be sure to justify your answer and please include the title of the selection in your response.)

Chapter 2

Making Connections

Finding Relevance in Great Literature

Human beings are the only “animals” that communicate through spoken and written language, which allows us to work together, make plans, share information, discuss ideas, develop our understanding, pass on traditions, and fellowship with our Creator. Consequently, the importance of being able to read, write and speak well cannot be overemphasized. We therefore have a responsibility to help our students develop these skills to the fullest extent possible, which is accomplished in part by working to maximize their understanding of written text, or *reading comprehension*.

Of course, comprehension simply means “understanding” and one of the best ways to help students develop a greater understanding of and appreciation for literature is a comprehension strategy known as *making connections*, which involves identifying elements within a literary piece related to aspects of one’s own life.

Again, the point of making connections is to better understand and appreciate the messages an author is trying to convey by connecting with the work’s underlying or central ideas—enhancing comprehension by responding to literature in a manner that is real, genuine and authentic. It is an extremely useful activity for synthesizing information, building understanding and developing unique interpretations of text—using books and stories to think about important issues in new ways and begin to process ideas that enrich and deepen not only one’s experience in the text, but in life as well.

Making connections may not only help students clarify their thoughts and opinions on controversial topics, but also assist them in making important day-to-day decisions. Indeed, constructing, revising and challenging ideas about the world, others and one’s self based on situations encountered in a good book is at the crux of what can make literature (and life) more enjoyable and meaningful. Such life-altering considerations make any given reading assignment more than a mere perfunctory task dictated by an instructor, which is why making connections is such a vital part any solid reading program.

Novel Unit**Making Connections**

Directions: When you identify elements in a story that are related to aspects of your own life, you can use them to help clarify your thoughts and opinions about controversial topics, or to work through important decisions you have to make. This process of recognizing the parts of a story that are similar to issues present in your own reality is called *making connections*. At its best, making connections is a way of responding to literature in a genuine and authentic manner. It enhances your understanding of the text so you more fully identify with the story's central ideas, and better comprehend and appreciate the messages the author is trying to communicate. Accordingly, when answering the following questions, consider them in the context of real-life situations that you or others have faced in the past, are now facing, or are likely to face in the near future.

1. What problem are you or someone you know dealing with that is similar to a problem faced by the story's main character? (Be sure to delineate those factors responsible for the similarities.)

2. How might things have turned out differently had the main character allowed himself or herself to be guided by a different set of moral values and beliefs? Please explain.

3. Were the decisions and actions of the main character in agreement or opposed to your own values and beliefs? Please explain.

Novel Unit**Making Connections**

Directions: Making connections (recognizing the elements in a story that are similar to aspects of your own life) can make a book more enjoyable and meaningful by helping you to construct, revise and challenge ideas about yourself, others and the world around you based on the events you encounter in the story. Keep this in mind as you answer the following questions.

1. How were the decisions made by the main character in this last chapter different from the decisions you would have made under the same set of circumstances? Please explain.

2. What “lessons” can be learned from this story in terms of dealing with the kinds of situation(s) you identified above?

3. In what ways were the people, customs or way of life in this story different from your own and in what ways were they the same? Do you think the differences made their society better than, worse than, or simply different from yours? Please elaborate.

Activity 3

Novel Unit

Making Connections

Directions: Making connections (recognizing elements in a story that are similar to aspects of your own life) is an extremely useful activity when it comes to synthesizing information, building understanding, and developing your own unique interpretations of text. It is a way to use books and stories to think about important issues in new ways and begin processing ideas that will enrich and deepen not only your experience in the text, but your experience in life as well. With this in mind, please answer the following questions.

1. What is something with which you were already somewhat or relatively familiar, but that you now look at from a slightly different angle or perspective after having read the assigned selection or passages?

2. What was something totally new you learned from reading the assigned selection/passages, or something you never thought about before?

Activity **4****Novel Unit****Making Connections**

Directions: When you identify elements in a story related to aspects of your own life, you can use them to help clarify your thoughts and opinions on controversial topics, or to work through important decisions you have to make. This process of recognizing the parts of a story that are similar to issues present in your own reality is called *making connections*. At its best, making connections is a way of responding to literature in a genuine and authentic manner. It enhances your comprehension of the text so that you more fully understand and appreciate the messages the author is trying to communicate, and better connect with the story's central ideas. Accordingly, when answering the following questions, consider them in the context of real-life situations that you or others have faced in the past, are now facing, or are likely to face in the near future.

1. What new insight did you gain from reading this selection, preferably one you can now use in your own life, or to counsel a friend or family member?

2. Do you share any of the main characters' hopes or desires? If so, what are they, and how are you attempting to act on them at this point in your life?

Like and Dislikes

Personal Responses to Literature

When it comes to analyzing literature, more important than whether or not students liked or disliked a particular work is whether they were engaged in the process of developing their analytical skills and ability to express their selves clearly.

Also, while one should obviously be honest when it turns out he or she dislikes a particular piece, it is also important to work at broadening one's tastes, since by expanding one's perspectives in an open-minded way, an individual may find himself or herself redefining likes and dislikes, and consequently, developing the ability to appreciate a wider variety of literary works.

Also, students need to be aware that an author's creation of an unlikable character, situation, attitude or expression may be deliberate, and so try to maintain an open mind despite their initial dislikes to then see if their initial unfavorable reactions can be more fully or broadly considered in the context of what the author is trying to accomplish or communicate.

Activity **1**

Novel Unit

Likes and Dislikes

When it comes to analyzing literature, more important than whether or not you liked or disliked a particular work is whether or not you are engaged in the process of developing your analytical skills and ability to express yourself clearly. While you should be honest in expressing your reactions, it is sometimes good to expand your perspective in an open-minded way and broaden your tastes, thus redefining your dislikes and preferences, and consequently, developing your ability to appreciate more kinds of literature.

1. Which character did you admire the most, and why?

2. Give an example of an idea or an expression from the work that you found to be especially beautiful or worth remembering.

3. What was it about this story that got you so interested and involved that you didn't want to put the book down until you had finished the whole chapter/novel?

Activity **2****Novel Unit****Likes and Dislikes**

Directions: When it comes to analyzing literature, more important than whether or not you liked or disliked a particular work is whether or not you are engaged in the process of developing your analytical skills and ability to express yourself clearly. While you should be honest in expressing your reactions, it is sometimes good to expand your perspective in an open-minded way and broaden your tastes, thus redefining your dislikes and preferences, and consequently, developing your ability to appreciate more kinds of literature.

1. What was it about reading this book that thrilled you or made you feel happy?

2. Describe one or two of the events in the story that amused you or that made you laugh.

3. What in particular did you like about the author's style or presentation?

Activity 3

Novel Unit

Likes and Dislikes

Directions: When it comes to analyzing literature, more important than whether or not you liked or disliked a particular work is whether or not you are engaged in the process of developing your analytical skills and ability to express yourself clearly. While you should be honest in expressing your reactions, it is sometimes good to expand your perspective in an open-minded way and broaden your tastes, thus redefining your dislikes and preferences, and consequently, developing your ability to appreciate more kinds of literature.

1. Which character in this story did you like the least, and why?

2. What do you feel the author could or should have done differently to make this a better novel? What significant change or changes do you believe would have improved the quality or effectiveness of the work? (Be sure you justify your answer.)

Chapter 3

Analyzing Plot

Reactions to Literature

The word *plot* not only refers to incidents that follow each other in sequential or chronological order, but also involves the way those events control or govern how the action develops in a story, including what motivates or causes the participants in the story to do the things they do.

In a well-plotted story, things precede or follow each other not simply because time is ticking away, but more importantly, because *effects* follow *causes*. In a good work nothing is irrelevant or accidental, but rather, everything is related and causative.

CONFLICT

Of course, every good story needs conflict, people or circumstances that the main character must face and try to overcome, and such conflict can present itself in many different ways. Some stories contain a major conflict from which a number of related conflicts develop. These conflicts lead to attitudes, choices, and outcomes that serve to make a story interesting. Even if the story is a total fantasy, it's best if the situations are life like, with conflicts rising out of realistic aims and hopes and with an outcome that is "true to life."

Novel Unit**Plot**

Directions: The word *plot* not only refers to incidents that follow each other in sequential or chronological order, but also involves the way those events control or govern how the action develops in a story, including what motivates or causes the participants in the story to do the things they do.

1. What do you believe are the one or two most significant motivating factors behind the main character's actions throughout this story? Be sure to justify your answer by citing thoughts, actions or dialogue from the work that led you to your conclusion.

2. Explain how the characters and setting in the piece contribute to the development of its plot. Be sure to cite passages from the text that illustrate your points.

Novel Unit**Plot**

Directions: In a well-plotted story, things precede or follow each other not simply because time is ticking away, but more importantly, because *effect* follows *cause*. In a good work nothing is irrelevant or accidental, but rather, everything is related and causative.

1. What do you believe to be the main cause of conflict in this story? Be sure to justify your answer by clarifying the relationship between the cause and its corresponding effects based on the book's action, dialogue, etc.

2. Keeping in mind what you identified (above) as the main cause of conflict, speculate as to what might have originally brought about this condition, situation or set of circumstances, or if it is clearly stated in the book, rewrite it below.

Novel Unit

Plot

Directions: Every good story needs conflict (people or circumstances that the main character must face and try to overcome) and such conflict can present itself in many different ways. Some stories contain a major conflict from which a number of related conflicts develop. These conflicts lead to attitudes, choices, and outcomes that serve to make a story interesting. Even if the story is a total fantasy, it is best if the situations are lifelike, with conflicts rising out of realistic aims and hopes and with outcomes that are “true to life.”

1. Does any of the conflict in this story stem from contrasting ideas or values? If so, identify them and give examples from the text to illustrate how they are brought out or made evident.

2. Explain how the action in the story develops from the conflict.

Novel Unit

Plot

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1. Which “scenes” or events do you believe were most important in terms of bringing out the major conflict(s) in the story?

2. How did the characters and setting in the story contribute to the development of its plot?

Activity 5

Novel Unit

Plot

Directions: Every good story needs conflict (people or circumstances that the main character must face and try to overcome) and such conflict can present itself in many different ways. Some stories contain a major conflict from which a number of related conflicts develop. These conflicts lead to attitudes, choices, and outcomes that serve to make a story interesting. Even if the story is a total fantasy, it is best if the situations are lifelike, with conflicts rising out of realistic aims and hopes and with outcomes that are “true to life.”

1. What were the aims and hopes held by the main character and what effect did they have on his or her attitudes and choices?

2. Did the main character in this story face any dilemmas? If so, give at least one example and explain how he or she dealt with it.

Activity 6

Novel Unit

Plot

Directions: Every good story needs conflict (people or circumstances that the main character must face and try to overcome) and such conflict can present itself in many different ways. Some stories contain a major conflict from which a number of related conflicts develop. These conflicts lead to attitudes, choices, and outcomes that serve to make a story interesting. Even if the story is a total fantasy, it is best if the situations are lifelike, with conflicts rising out of realistic aims and hopes and with outcomes that are “true to life.”

1. Who are the protagonist and antagonist in this story, and how do their characteristics put them in conflict? (Remember, not all stories have an antagonist.)

2. How does the main character achieve (or not achieve) his or her main goal? What obstacles are overcome by this individual, and what are the obstacles that overcame him or her (if any)?

Novel Unit

Plot

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- 1. At the end of the book, are the characters happy or unhappy, satisfied or dissatisfied, changed or about the same, enlightened or ignorant, etc.? (Please support your response with details.)

- 2. What role did the resolution of the main conflict play in producing the results you described above?

Chapter 4

Analyzing Characters

Populating a Narrative

Authors try to portray characters that are worth caring about, rooting for, and maybe even loving. Of course, there are also those you may laugh at, dislike, or perhaps even hate. Writers create them through the use of action, dialogue, description, and commentary. Each action or speech, no matter how small, is part of the total presentation of both the inner and outer “self” of those participants, and an author will ideally make such actions interesting to help the reader understand and appreciate the major characters.

When analyzing the protagonists and antagonists in a story, it makes sense to begin by determining the characters’ outstanding traits, which refers to their quality of mind or habitual modes of behavior such as never retaining borrowed money, avoiding eye contact, or always making one’s self the center of attention.

Characters may be ambitious or lazy, serene or anxious, aggressive or fearful, thoughtful or inconsiderate, open or secretive, confident or self-doubting, kind or cruel, quiet or in lazy, visionary or practical, careful or careless, impartial or biased, aboveboard or underhanded, winners or losers, etc.

By analyzing the actions, words, and thoughts of the characters encountered, students can draw conclusions about their qualities and strengths, so when reading about fictional characters, learners should be encouraged to look *beyond* circumstances, actions, and appearances to determine what these things *show* about the character. Encourage them to try to get from the outside to the inside (since it is *internal* qualities that determine *external* behaviour).

Basically, there are two main types of characters: “round” and “flat.”

ROUND CHARACTERS

The basic trait of *round characters* is that they recognize, change with, and adjust to circumstances. In other words, they profit from experience and undergo changes and alterations, which may be demonstrated in four different ways:

- An action or actions
- The realization of new strength and therefore the affirmation of previous decisions
- The acceptance of a new condition
- The discovery of unrecognized truths

The *protagonist* in a story (often called the hero or heroine) is central to the action, moves against an *antagonist*, and exhibits the ability to adapt to new circumstances. Round characters are often *dynamic*, in the sense that they are individual, unpredictable, and undergo change or growth.

FLAT CHARACTERS

Flat characters are static (as opposed to being dynamic) and do not grow. Rather, they end up where they began. They remain the same, possibly because of stupidity, insensitivity, or lack of knowledge and insight. Flat characters include what is known as stock characters—characters that appear in repeating situations and have common traits representative of their class or group. Examples of stock characters are the insensitive father, the interfering mother, this sassy younger sister or brother, the greedy politician, the resourceful cowboy or detective, the overbearing or hen-picked husband, the submissive or a nagging wife, the angry police captain, the lovable drunk, the town do-gooder, and so on. When stock characters possess no attitudes except those of their class, they are called *stereotype* characters.

SUMMARY

The ability to grow and develop and to be altered by circumstances makes characters round. The absence of these traits makes characters flat. In literature, character is disclosed by...

1. Actions
2. Both personal and environmental descriptions
3. Dramatic statements and thoughts
4. Statements by other characters
5. Statements by the author speaking as storyteller or observer

In judging characters, students should use probability, consistency and believability as the main criteria. It would probably help to take notes to form an overview, listing as many traits as they can, and determining how the author presents details about the character through actions, appearance, dialogue, comments by others, and authorial explanations. If there are unusual traits, students should determine what it is about the character that they reveal.

Activity **1**

Novel Unit

Characters

Directions: Authors use a combination of action, dialogue, descriptions and commentaries to create characters that readers will care about, root for, laugh at, dislike or even hate. By using these elements to portray both the inner and outer “workings” of their characters, writers help their audiences better understand and appreciate the inhabitants of their stories. You should therefore look beyond mere circumstances or appearances and try to analyze the thoughts, words and actions of a character to figure out what these things tell you about that individual’s *core* personality. Always try to get from the outside to the inside, since it is a person’s *internal* qualities that determine their *external* behavior.

1. Briefly describe how the author uses such strategies as dialogue, suspense, and specific actions (like movements, gestures and expressions) to develop a complex main character.

2. What does the way in which the main character accepts or deals with the situations or circumstances that occur reveal about his or her personality?

Activity 2

Novel Unit

Characters

Directions: Authors use a combination of action, dialogue, descriptions and commentaries to create characters that readers will care about, root for, laugh at, dislike or even hate. By using these elements to portray both the inner and outer “workings” of their characters, writers help their audiences better understand and appreciate the inhabitants of their stories. You should therefore look beyond mere circumstances or appearances and try to analyze the thoughts, words and actions of a character to figure out what these things tell you about that individual’s *core* personality. Always try to get from the outside to the inside, since it is a person’s *internal* qualities that determine their *external* behavior.

1. A character’s quality of mind or habitual modes of behavior (like never returning money, constantly avoiding eye contact, or always trying to be the center of attention) are referred to as the character’s *outstanding traits*. What are one or more outstanding traits of the main character in this story?

2. What would you say is the main character’s *core* quality – the one quality with which *everything* that he or she does is consistent?

Activity 3

Novel Unit

Characters

Directions: There are two main types of characters: *round* and *flat*. The basic trait of round characters is that they recognize, change with, and adjust to circumstances. In other words, they profit from experience and undergo changes and alterations. These changes may be demonstrated in a number of ways, such as their actions, the discovery of previously unrecognized truth, accepting something they once resisted, etc. However, while round characters are *dynamic* (adapt to new situations and undergo change or growth), flat characters are *static* (do not grow) and end up where they started off. They remain the same, possibly due to stupidity, insensitivity, or a lack of knowledge or insight.

1. How does the main character in this selection change over the course of the story, and what did he or she learn or experience that brought about these changes.

2. Does the author use any “flat” characters to affect the story in a significant way? If so, please identify such characters and describe how they were used.

Activity **4**

Novel Unit

Characters

Directions: Below are two items regarding characters from the story. You are to respond to each of the prompts using complete sentences, explaining the reasons for your responses as appropriate.

1. What are the primary motivating factors of the main character?

2. Select one of the major characters in the story for analysis. List all of the character's traits based on his or her actions, appearance and dialogue. Make sure you consider comments by other characters and authorial explanations as well. Then judge the character in terms of criteria such as *predictability*, *consistency* and *believability* along with any other criteria you deem relevant.

Novel Unit

Characters

Background Information: Flat characters include what are known as *stock* characters. They appear in repeating situations and have common traits representative of their class or group. Examples are the insensitive father, the interfering mother, the sassy little sister, the greedy politician, the nagging wife, the lovable drunk, the cranky desk sergeant, the hen-pecked husband, etc. When stock characters possess few qualities beyond those of their class, they are called *stereotypes*..

1. Who were the “flat” or “static” characters populating the most recently assigned selection of passages?

2. Describe what about each of the above characters classifies him or her as a flat, static or stock character. (How is the individual stereotyped?)

Chapter 5

Analyzing Setting

Time, Place and Culture in Literature

The concept of setting includes descriptions of places, objects, and backgrounds—everything that goes into the making of the environment in which the characters of a story operate. Characters may be either helped or hurt by their surroundings, and as they interact with each other, they reveal the degree to which they share the customs and ideas of other times.

Just as painters include backgrounds and objects to render ideas, authors use setting to create statement and meaning. The way characters respond and adjust to, or interact with the setting can reveal their strengths and weaknesses. Moreover, setting may intersect with character as a means by which authors underscore the importance of place, circumstance, and time on human growth and change.

Setting also creates atmosphere and sets the mood for the action that is to take place. Descriptions of bright colors may contribute to a mood of happiness, whereas dark colors may invoke gloom or hysteria. References to smells and sounds further bring the setting to life by drawing additional sensory responses from the reader.

Novel Unit

Setting

Directions: The concept of *setting* includes descriptions of places, objects, and backgrounds—everything that goes into the making of the environment in which a story takes place. Following are two items regarding the setting of the assigned story. You are to respond to each of these prompts using complete sentences, explaining the reasons for your responses as appropriate.

1. Similar to the way a painter might use objects or background to render ideas, writers use setting to render statements and meaning. Give an example from the story in which the author accomplishes this.

2. Give an example of how the author uses the intersection between the setting and the characters to underscore the importance of this story’s specific location, circumstance or time on the behavior of the characters.

Novel Unit

Setting

Directions: The concept of *setting* includes descriptions of places, objects, and backgrounds—everything that goes into the making of the environment in which a story takes place. Following are two items regarding the setting of the assigned story. You are to respond to each of these prompts using complete sentences, explaining the reasons for your responses as appropriate.

1. Based on their interactions with one another, to what degree do you think the characters in this story share the customs and ideas of their times. Be sure to use specific examples from the selection to support your answer.

2. What does the setting tell you or reveal about the lives of the main characters?

Activity 3

Novel Unit

Setting

Directions: The concept of *setting* includes descriptions of places, objects, and backgrounds—everything that goes into the making of the environment in which a story takes place. Following are two items regarding the setting of the assigned story. You are to respond to each of these prompts using complete sentences, explaining the reasons for your responses as appropriate.

1. How is the main character in this story helped and/or hurt by his or her surroundings? Please use examples from the story when stating your answer.

2. What does the way in which the main character interacts with and responds or adjusts to the setting reveal about his or her strengths and weaknesses?

Activity **4**

Novel Unit

Setting

Directions: The concept of *setting* includes descriptions of places, objects, and backgrounds—everything that goes into the making of the environment in which a story takes place. Following are two items regarding the setting of the assigned story. You are to respond to each of these prompts using complete sentences, explaining the reasons for your responses as appropriate.

1. How does the author use the setting to establish the atmosphere or mood in which events take place? (*For example, descriptions of bright colors can contribute to a mood of happiness, while dark colors may invoke gloom or hysteria.*)

2. References to certain sights, smells, sounds, etc. can help bring a setting to life by drawing sensory responses from the reader. Give at least two examples illustrating how the author uses such descriptions in this way.

Chapter 7

Analyzing Point of View

Reactions to Literature

Practically speaking, *point of view* involves the physical location of a story's narrator in terms of his or her position to see and record what events take place. Of course, most stories are either written in first-person or third-person narrative.

However, for our purposes, when we speak of point of view, we are referring to its more abstract meaning. For "point of view" can also refer to the "unnamed voice" or "persona" adopted by the author to communicate values, judgments, or positions on certain issues, behaviors or beliefs. It's kind of like the "mind" that filters the fictional experience and present only the most important details to tell the story, present arguments, and express attitudes in a way that will create the maximum possible impact.

An author not only tries to make his or her writing vital and interesting, but will also, whether consciously or unconsciously, bring a certain *perspective* to works he or she creates. The words an author chooses will often communicate subtle messages, betraying some "personal interest" which the narrator has in the story (as opposed to simply being an impartial reporter).

More generally, point of view is intertwined with the many interests and wishes of humanity at large and linked to the difficulty of uncovering and determining truth.

When analyzing point of view, consider whether the narrator's words seem to be totally objective or are instead "colored" in some way. Does the narrator seem to have any persuasive purpose beyond serving as a recorder or observer? Does he or she seem sympathetic to a particular cause, stance or position on some issue? Look for the narrator's position, prejudices, or self-interests in his or her commentary and in the way he or she judges or describes the characters in the story and the events that transpire.

Activity **1**

Novel Unit

Point of View

Directions: Authors not only try to make their writing vital and interesting, but also bring a certain *perspective* to their works, whether consciously or subconsciously. The words they choose will often communicate subtle messages, betraying some “personal interest” which the narrator has in the story. This is referred to as *point of view* and is generally intertwined with some interest or wish of humanity, or linked to the task of uncovering and determining “truth.” When analyzing point of view, look for the narrator’s position, prejudices, or self-interests in his or her comments and in the way he or she judges or describes the characters in the story and the events that transpire. Consider whether the narrator’s words seem to be totally objective or are instead “colored” in some way.

1. Does the narrator in this story seem to have any persuasive purpose beyond serving as a recorder or observer? Does he or she seem sympathetic to a particular cause, stance or position on some issue?

2. Explain the ways in which this work might have been affected had the narrator taken an alternative or opposite point of view.

Novel Unit**Point of View**

Directions: Authors not only try to make their writing vital and interesting, but also bring a certain *perspective* to their works, whether consciously or subconsciously. The words they choose will often communicate subtle messages, betraying some “personal interest” which the narrator has in the story. This is referred to as *point of view* and is generally intertwined with some interest or wish of humanity, or linked to the task of uncovering and determining “truth.” When analyzing point of view, look for the narrator’s position, prejudices, or self-interests in his or her comments and in the way he or she judges or describes the characters in the story and the events that transpire. Consider whether the narrator’s words seem to be totally objective or are instead “colored” in some way.

1. How do the subject, characterization, dialogue and form of this literary work help to establish the author’s “point of view?”

2. In what way(s) does the author’s point of view make this work interesting and effective or uninteresting and ineffective?

Activity 3

Novel Unit

Point of View

Directions: Authors not only try to make their writing vital and interesting, but also bring a certain *perspective* to their works, whether consciously or subconsciously. The words they choose will often communicate subtle messages, betraying some “personal interest” which the narrator has in the story. This is referred to as *point of view* and is generally intertwined with some interest or wish of humanity, or linked to the task of uncovering and determining “truth.” When analyzing point of view, look for the narrator’s position, prejudices, or self-interests in his or her comments and in the way he or she judges or describes the characters in the story and the events that transpire. Consider whether the narrator’s words seem to be totally objective or are instead “colored” in some way.

1. How well did the author establish this story’s point of view? Was it consistent? Effective? Truthful? Please use specific examples from the selection to support your answers.

2. What did the author gain or lose by taking the particular point of view adopted for this story?

Chapter 8

Analyzing Structure

Narrative Outline

Most authors carefully plan what they write before they begin filling in the details. You can probably develop a clearer understand of the basic idea an author had in mind by writing your own synopsis of a story in terms of the situation, problem and solution.

Of course, a synopsis is an outline or brief summary of the *plot*, which is all of the important events that happen during the beginning, middle and ending of a story, and which move the story along as the characters struggle to get what they want.

Though not a plot in and of itself, you will find that most stories also have a particular *theme* woven into their structure, along with a number of other elements, such as *cause and effect*, *suspense*, *characterization*, and *conflict*.

Virtually every story you will ever encounter is structured around one of **five basic plot patterns**, which are described on the next page.

The Five Basic Plot Patterns

1. INCIDENT STORY

An *incident story* is usually less than 1000 words long. It can either take the main character into familiar territory and situations (also referred to as an *incident-excursion story*), or it can take the main character into unfamiliar territory and situations (known as an *incident-adventure story*).

2. STORY OF PURPOSE ACHIEVED

In a story of *purpose achieved*, the main character has a well-defined purpose or desire at the very beginning of the story and struggles throughout the story to achieve that purpose, which is brought about (in the end) through courage, ingenuity, special ability, or some combination of these three characteristics.

3. MISUNDERSTANDING, DISCOVERY AND REVERSAL

At the beginning of a story of *misunderstanding, discovery and reversal*, the main character misunderstands something. The misunderstanding continues through the middle of the story, but in the end, the main character discovers his or her mistake and reverses his or her beliefs and actions.

4. WISH FULFILLMENT

At the beginning of a story of *wish fulfillment*, the main character has a strong desire or wish that seems impossible to get, and eventually accepts the fact that he or she cannot have his or her wish, though he or she may feel unhappy about it. Then, as a (natural) result of what the main character is, or because of something the main character does that was *not* done in an effort to get his or her wish, the character gets the wish anyway, or an equally acceptable substitute, or a *better* substitute.

5. STORY OF DECISION

At the beginning of a *story of decision*, the main character is faced with a moral decision in which it seems the (morally) right decision will bring unpleasant results, whereas the other choice will bring immediate gain and satisfaction. In the end, the main character makes the right choice and finds that the moral choice was the better one and that he or she has grown as a person.

Beginning, Middle and Ending

Most well-written works have a beginning, middle and ending. When it comes to stories, this usually entails a standard plot line that incorporates all of the ideas, observations and memories the author includes through a thoroughly developed sequence of significant events. Most writers use the beginning of a story to establish the setting, which is the time and place in which the events happen or transpire. It is also where the author introduces the main characters and sets up the stories of situation or problem (i.e. conflict).

The middle of the story is where the author develops and expands on the plot by complicating events and by using dramatic action to build to a climax.

And finally, the end of most narratives, which should be no longer than necessary, rounds off the story and ties up any loose ends.

Conflict

Every good story has conflict, which is the struggle of the character against himself, against another person or against nature. Is created by taking a character from a place or situation where he or she is reasonably happy, and placing the individual in another place or situation where he or she is no longer happy. The unhappiness will cause problems, and if you have a problem, you have conflict. Conflict is good because it creates suspense and keeps the audience turning pages.

Activity **1**

Novel Unit

Structure

Directions: Most well-written novels have a beginning, middle and ending based on a standard plot line that incorporates story elements in the context of a thoroughly developed sequence of events. Keep this basic narrative structure in mind as you answer the following questions.

1. Describe the setting, main characters, and situation (conflict/problem) as introduced by the author at the beginning of the story.

2. How does the author complicate events in the middle of the story to develop and expand on the plot? (Be sure to mention any dramatic action the writer uses to build to a climax.)

3. In what way does the work's ending round off the story (provide closure) and tie up any loose ends?

Novel Unit**Structure**

Directions: Though one finds little agreement as to the total number of plots currently in existence, they can all pretty much be divided into five *basic* plot patterns, as was probably described by you instructor. It is in the context of these patterns that writers establish the story's situation, problem and solution. Consider how these elements relate to the story you just read as you answer the following questions.

1. Into what literary genre would this work best be categorized?

2. Which of the five basic plot patterns does this story follow most closely?

3. Summarize the selection you read as a "story-in-one-sentence." Be sure your sentence is reasonably short and try to make it also show the plot pattern.

4. Explain how the author weaved the elements of cause and effect, suspense, characterization and conflict into the plot of this piece.

Novel Unit**Archetypes and Symbolism**

Directions: One approach to literary analysis is to interpret a text by focusing on recurring symbols, images, and character types with the assumption that a text's meaning is shaped by cultural and psychological myths found in these recurring patterns.

Examples include the *femme fatale*, a female who brings on catastrophic and disastrous events, like *Eve* from the story of Genesis and *Pandora* from Greek mythology; and the *journey* archetype, a protagonist who must overcome a series of obstacles before reaching his or her goal, as in *Homer's Odyssey*. Two other recognizable types include the *trickster* and the *hero*.

The best symbols have their roots deep in a culture's oldest stories, such as the *serpent* in Genesis, the *poisoned apple* in Snow White, and other symbols that, when introduced into a story, come already laden with meaning, (i.e., *white hats*, *black cats*, etc.).

1. Think of the assumptions and expectations you form from things like a springtime setting, a wicked stepmother and so forth. Copy one or two passages from the assigned selection where the author used similar symbolism.

2. What other archetypal images or story patterns did the author use to encourage the reader to participate in basic desires, beliefs, fears, or anxieties? Please cite the image or pattern, as well as the ideas it tapped into or the things it was meant to evoke?
