

PART I: INTRODUCTION

A. What is a literary essay?

- 1) In the literary essay, you are exploring the meaning and construction of a piece of literature.
- 2) A literary essay focuses on such elements as structure, character, theme, style, and tone.
- 3) You are taking a piece of writing and trying to discover how and why it is organized the way it is.
- 4) You must adopt a viewpoint on the work in question and show how the details of the work support your viewpoint.
- 5) A literary essay may be your own interpretation, based only on your reading of the piece, or it may be a mixture of your opinions and references to the criticism of others, much like a research paper.

B. Introduction:

- 1) The first paragraph in your essay.
- 2) Some essays start with a creative opening: a fact, a metaphor, a quote, etc. However, please jump right into your essay.
- 3) Includes author and title and an explanation of the theme to be discussed.
Use an active voice (present tense).
- 4) Provides essential background about the literary work: setting, plot summary, introduction of main characters, and definition of terms.
- 5) Prepares the reader for the major thesis: at the end.

C. Punctuating Titles: if you are citing or quoting a written piece

Longer written pieces are underlined or *Italicized* and may stand on their own

A play (e.g. <u>Death of a Salesman</u> or <i>Death of a Salesman</i>)	A TV series
A film	An encyclopedia
A painting	A magazine
A CD	A newspaper
	A pamphlet

Shorter written pieces are written with “Quotation marks” and are dependent on or part of a group

A poem (e.g. “Sonnet 14”)	An individual episode in a TV series
A short story (e.g. “The Painted Door”)	A chapter
A skit	A newspaper story
A commercial	An article

Some titles are capitalized and not given additional punctuation

Religious works (e.g. The Bible)
Buildings
Monuments

D. Thesis

- 1) Provides the subject and overall opinion (your argument) of your essay.
- 2) Must relate to the theme of the work.
- 3) Must suggest how this theme is revealed by the author.
- 4) May suggest the organization of the paper.
- 5) Is placed at the end of the introduction paragraph; it is composed of 1 or 2 sentences.
- 6) Must be specific.

Student thesis examples

E.g.1 In a Tale of Two Cities, Charles Dickens shows the process by which a wasted life can be redeemed. Sidney Carton, through his love for Lucie Manette, is transformed from a hopeless, bitter man into a hero whose life and death have meaning.

E.g. 2 Throughout the play, *Death of a Salesman*, by Arthur Miller, the author's commentary reflects his negative views of the American Dream and his definition of success.

* if you have already stated the novel and author in your introduction, you do not need to re-state it in your thesis.

E. Student Samples of a well-written Introduction

For centuries philosophers have debated the question of whether man is innately evil. William Golding poses this question in his realistic novel Lord of the Flies. Set on a tropical island during World War II, the novel begins when schoolboys from Great Britain are being flown to safety and their plane is shot down. No adults survive, and the boys are left to govern themselves and get rescued. William Golding uses symbolism in the form of the conch to represent the concept of society. The boys' evolving relationship with the conch illustrates Golding's theme that humans, when removed from the pressures of civilized authority, will become evil.

Arthur Miller's ground breaking play, *Death of a Salesman* inspired audiences to take a good hard look at what is important to them. "In the play, the audience is made painfully aware that Willy Loman's need to be materialistically successful is what is driving him into severe depression. Miller himself experienced the effects of always wanting, first hand, the purpose of his play is to fully explore its outcomes. Miller felt that he needed to show Americans that not everyone will live the American Dream. The hubris of man and his dishonesty to himself and others regarding his income and worth, drives him to become increasingly unsure of himself, eroding his mental health and perception of self-worth.

Review a quick summary of Of Mice and Men (chapters one to three) to pull the novel into perspective.

Of Mice and Men Penguin summary of chapters one to three

The central element of this novella is its plot. Like most tragedies, it has a climax and a tragic resolution. In chapter one we meet George and Lennie as they are leaving one migrant job and moving to the next. They are camped beside a stream. Early in the book we learn that Lennie is not like everyone else and that George, the tragic hero, is caring for Lennie. Lennie loves soft things, he loves to find a little mouse and put it in his pocket so he can pet it, but he is so strong that he kills the mouse with love. We learn of George's frustration with Lennie again forcing them to run. "You do bad things and I got to get you out...You crazy son-of-a-bitch. You keep me in hot water all the time." Lennie replies, "Jus' wanted to feel that girl's dress-jus' wanted to pet it like it was a mouse." We learn in this chapter that Lennie is constantly seeking George's approval. They have a dream, and George uses this dream to try to keep Lennie in line. Lennie keeps begging George to tell him what it will be like when they have their own little place. George tells Lennie that if he gets in trouble to come back here to this place by the river and he will find him here. Now, the reader knows that the trouble is about to begin, and may have discovered George's tragic flaw.

In the second chapter, they arrive at the new ranch and are taken to the bunk house. They meet the old swamper Candy, who is too old to work in the fields and now cleans the bunk house. Lennie and George meet the boss who is angry because they are late. He keeps asking Lennie questions, which George answers. George tells the boss about Lennie, "He's my...cousin. I told his old lady I'd take care of him. He got kicked in the head by a horse when he was a kid. He's awright. Just ain't bright. But he can do anything you tell him." But, Lennie does talk, nothing important, but he talks. We learn that Lennie was not kicked in the head by a horse and that Lennie is not George's relative. We also learn that Candy has an old dog he's had since a pup and that the boss is "a nice fella." But, then Lennie and George meet the boss's son Curley, and we know quickly that he will play a role in whatever trouble is to come. Curley tries to make Lennie talk, telling him to talk when he's spoken to; Lennie looks to George for help. Candy tells the boys that Curley hates big guys and has a "purty" wife who has an eye for the ranch hands. George warns Lennie to watch out for Curley and his wife. Not long after the warning, Curley's wife comes into the bunkhouse claiming to be looking for Curley. She flirts with George and Lennie. Slim, a tall skinner who is the leader of the ranch hands, enters and tells her she's not looking very hard, he just saw Curley heading toward home. Lennie keeps repeating over and over, "Gosh, she was purty." Slim wonders aloud about George and Lennie traveling around together, and Carlson, another ranch hand, asks Slim about his dog who "slang her pups last night" suggesting that he encourage Candy to kill off his good-for-nothing old dog and take one of the pups. At the end of the chapter, Lennie begs George to ask Slim for one of the pups and Curley reappears looking for his wife. The setting for the story, the important characters, and impending doom of the tragedy have all been introduced.

The next chapter begins with George thanking Slim for giving Lennie a pup. We learn more of Lennie's strength in the same conversations when Slim says, "Say, you sure was right about him. Maybe he ain't bright, but I never seen such a worker. He damn near killed his partner buckin' barley. There ain't nobody can keep up with him. God awmighty I never seen such a strong guy." We also learn more about George and Lennie's story. Lennie enters the bunk house hiding the pup he is carrying. Like the mouse in chapter one, Lennie denies he has it and finally tells George, "I didn't mean no harm, George. Honest I didn't. I jus' wanted to pet'um a little." George warns him to put it back in its nest. Slim remarks that Lennie is just like a kid, and George replies, "Sure he's jes' like a kid. There ain't no more harm in him than a kid neither, except he's so strong." The men try to convince Candy to shoot his old dog to keep it from suffering. Slim tells Candy he can have the pup if he wants to and agrees that it is time to shoot the old dog. We learn that Lennie is in the barn messing around with the pups. Curley again comes in looking for his wife and thinks she is with Slim. Some of the other ranch hands leave, looking for a fight. Lennie tells George that Curley's wife was not in the barn with Slim and again asks, "how long's it gonna be till we get that little place an' live on the fatta the lan'-an' rabbits?" Old Candy who is still on his bunk overhears and offers to contribute his savings so that the three of them can get a place together. George tells him, "I gotta think about that. We was always gonna do it by ourselves." The ranch hands and Curley reenter the bunk house with Slim scowling at Curley about his wife. Lennie is still smiling over his delight at their ranch and Curley thinks he's laughing at him. At first Lennie tries to avoid a fight, hiding his face in his hands as Curley pummels him. But soon George tells him, "Get him, Lennie. Don't let him do it." Finally, Lennie grabs Curley's hand and won't let go. George keeps slapping Lennie in the face trying to get him to, "Leggo of him, Lennie. Let go." When he does it is clear Curley is badly injured. They decide to take Curley to the doctor and to warn him to say that "you got your han' caught in a machine." The chapter ends with Lennie feeling bad about the fight and asking George, "I can still tend the rabbits, George?"

At the beginning of chapter three we meet Crooks, the Negro stable buck. Crooks lives in a room in the stable, not in the bunk house with the other men. Lennie does not understand that the white ranch hands do not enter Crooks' room and he wanders in. At first Crooks tries to kick him out, but then decides that talking to him is better than having no one to talk to. Lennie tells Crooks about the ranch they are going to buy with Candy. Candy comes to Crook's door looking for Lennie. Crooks tells him to come in but he hesitates never having been in Crooks' room before. When he enters Lennie begins to talk to him about the rabbits, but Candy quickly changes the subject. After some ribbing from Crooks, Candy admits that they're going to get their own place. All of a sudden Curley's wife is at the door claiming to be looking for Curley. They tell her to leave, but she stays at the door flirting with them, telling them how hard her life is, and asking about Curley's hand. Lennie keeps watching her "his mouth half open." When she sees the bruises on Lennie's face, she realizes how Curley got hurt, "OK Machine," she says to Lennie, "I'll talk to you later. I like machines."

PART II: BODY PARAGRAPH

A. TOPIC SENTENCE/SUPPORT THESIS

- 1) First sentence of a body paragraph.
- 2) Identifies one aspect of the thesis and states a primary reason why the thesis is true.

Student topic sentence examples

E.g. 1 The theme of the American Dream is used to demonstrate the negative side of materialism.

E.g. 2 The race for material goods is severely detrimental to one's mental health.

E.g. 3 When he first appears in the novel, Willy Loman is helpless and sees little worth in himself or in others.

B. BODY

- 1) Topic sentence
- 2) PEE
- 3) PEE
- 4) Concluding Sentence

C. PEE: Point – Example

Point - A specific idea is provided to support the thesis.

Example – Provide an example from the work that gives evidence for your topic sentence and thesis. Supply a direct quote of 4-5 words for your example.

Explain – Explain how the example and the quote support your paragraph point.

Student example

E.g. In Miller's play, Willy's goal to be successful consumes him. His drive is first illustrated when Willy says to Linda that he earned "...five hundred gross in Providence" and even more money in Boston (Miller 42).

D. EXPLAIN – from your own ideas

- 1) Your explanation and interpretation of the concrete detail.
- 2) Tells the reader what the author of the text means or how the concrete detail proves the topic sentence/thesis.
- 3) May include interpretation, analysis, argument, insight, and/or reflection.

Student example

E.g. Willy makes this statement as if he were excusing his rude behaviour to Linda. Willy, however, is only pretending to be polite, perhaps to amuse himself. With this seemingly off-the-cuff remark, Willy reveals a deeper cynicism and his emotional isolation.

E. TRANSITIONS

- 1) Words or phrases that connect one idea to the next.
- 2) Can be found, in between or within paragraphs.

Examples:

Another example...

Later in the story...

Not only...but also...

Finally, in the climax...

In contrast to this behaviour...

Furthermore....

F. CONCLUDING SENTENCE

1) Last sentence of the body paragraph.

2) Concludes the paragraph by tying the concrete details and commentary back to the major thesis.

E.g. Thus, before Willy experiences success, he must be able to convince himself that the world has no meaning.

G. INTEGRATING QUOTATIONS (Vanier College)

1) Phrase or sentence that prepare the reader for concrete detail by introducing the speaker, setting, and/or situation.

2) A quote should never appear in a sentence by itself, because there is no context for a quote.

Use Signal Phrases:

A quote can be smoothly integrated into the sentence by using a signal phrase. A signal phrase can be set up in three ways:

1. Using a colon and then the quote

Example: Demeter is not actively responsible for the plants' growth, but passively so: When Demeter felt quite inspired "shoots of barley ... would spring" from her footprints (110).

2. Using a comma and then the quote

Example: The author shows that Demeter is passively responsible for the plants' growth, stating that when Demeter felt quite inspired "shoots of barley ... would spring" from her footprints (110).

3. Using *that* or a signal phrase and then the quote

Example: Demeter's passive responsibility in the plants' growth is clear when the author states that when Demeter felt quite inspired "shoots of barley ... would spring" from the footprints she left (110).

Verbs you can use to help you build your own signal phrase:

adds	asserts	observes
claims	denies	points out
admits	believes	reasons
comments	emphasizes	says
agrees	illustrates	states
compares	implies	suggests
argues	insists	thinks
demonstrates	notes	writes

PART III: CONCLUDING PARAGRAPH

A. Conclusion

- 1) Last paragraph in your essay.
- 2) Minimum of 3 sentences.
- 3) It should begin by echoing the thesis without repeating the words verbatim.
- 4) The conclusion should broaden from the thesis statements to answer the “SO WHAT?” question your reader may have after reading your essay.

The Conclusion should

- Reflect on how your essay topic relates to the book as a whole.
- Evaluate how successful the author is in achieving his or her goal or message.
- Give a personal statement about the topic.
- Make predictions.
- Connect back to your creative opening.
- Give your opinion of the novel’s value or significance...but don’t use “I”.

B. Don’t use “I”

Refer to the author = “this writer” or “this author”.

Make statements directly instead of explaining that they reflect your own thoughts = “X and Y show Z”

NOT “I believe that X and Y show Z”.

Find sources that make your argument your POV (University style) = “Smith argues that....”.

Student Example

In conclusion, Jack’s developing characterization is seen through his many actions and experiences on the island, that lead up to his change in being barbaric, cruel, and ominous. Jack portrays the effects of society, and how one can begin to change when placed somewhere without any rules or laws to follow. What began as an average choir boy, drastically changed to a boy to whom the instinct to kill and be in power was what was most important. Jack’s new role on the island ultimately resulted in the loss of innocence and the never ending battle between civilization and savagery within the boys.