

EXPLORING AMERICA

# LITERARY ANALYSIS

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# Who, What, How, Why, and Why Not: A Primer for Literary Analysis of Fiction

People read books. Some books (think Shakespeare, Charles Dickens, and Jane Austen) are still widely read decades and even centuries after they were written. Many, many books (think of the highly forgettable ones you see in used book sales—over and over) are a flash in the pan or are even less noticeable. What's the difference? Is it just that most people like this book and most people dislike that one? Sort of, but it is more nuanced than that.

**Literary analysis** is studying the parts of a work of literature (such as plot, setting, characters, and narration) to see how the author uses them to create the overall meaning of the work as a whole. Professors, teachers, students, critics, and everyday people analyze works of literature: novels, short stories, poems, and non-fiction. They think about the story or plot of the book, how it develops, the characters in the book, the words and structure that the author uses, and other elements of the work.

People who analyze literature have developed standard methods. Primarily, this involves looking for elements that are found in most literary works. The purpose of literary analysis is to understand how a piece of literature works: how the writer constructs his or her story, and why the work affects readers the way it does.

Did you ever see yourself doing literary analysis? Does the phrase “literary analysis” make washing dishes or chopping firewood seem exciting? I understand. But it is more interesting than it might sound. Think of it as finding the answers to some big questions: “What makes a story good?” “What are the building blocks of great writing?” “Why do I keep thinking about that book and want to read it again?” “What is the difference between a book you stay up late to read and one that should be re-purposed as a fire starter?” Even if you don’t want to make a lifelong habit of literary analysis, as an educated person you should know the basics of how it works. It can also be kind of fun.

Literary analysis can help you appreciate the power of a work of literature. It can provide you with insights for a deeper appreciation of the next novel (or poem or history) you read. On a practical level, literary analysis is often what a classroom teacher wants students to do in order to understand a book. So literary analysis is good as long as it is a means to a good end and achieves a worthy goal. However, if literary analysis becomes an end in itself, or a way to show how much someone knows or thinks he knows about literature, or something that gets in the way of enjoying a work of literature, it no longer serves a good purpose. In other words, literary analysis has its place; but it is not the purpose of literature.

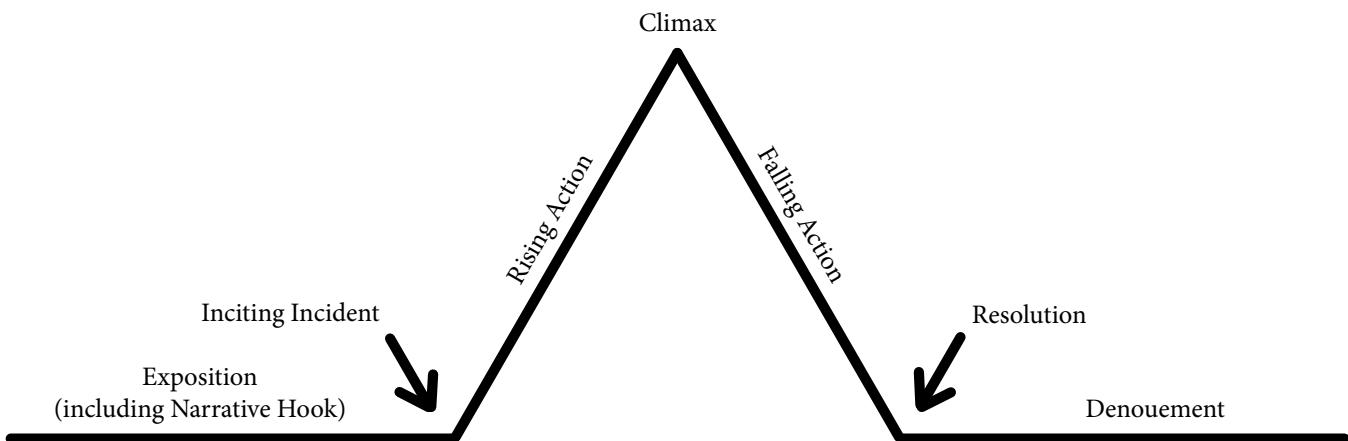
Writers do not write in order to have their work subjected to literary analysis. Nathaniel Hawthorne did not write *The Scarlet Letter*, nor did Charles Dickens write *A Tale of Two Cities*, for English teachers to analyze them to death or so that professors would have material for exams. They wrote because they had stories to tell; they wanted to connect on an emotional level with readers. These authors were successful because they did that well, and this is why their books are considered classic works of literature.

Here are some standard elements of literary analysis.

## Plot

The **plot** is the story of a piece of **fiction**. Fiction is a work of imagined narrated prose, usually either a novel or a short story. The plot is what happens to make it a story.

Gustav Freytag was a nineteenth-century German novelist who found a typical pattern of plot development in Greek and Shakespearean dramas. The same pattern is found in most fictional literature. Freytag depicted it as a pyramid.



The examples below refer to *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*.

**Exposition:** laying out the situation and background, introducing the characters. (Within this element will often be a **narrative hook**, an event or description that gets you interested in the story and wanting to read more.) Four children come to stay in a professor's country home. The narrative hook is when Lucy finds a magic wardrobe in a back room and visits Narnia: what will happen next?

**Inciting incident:** something that gets the story moving.

*Lucy meets the faun, who expresses inner conflict over what he is doing.*

**Rising action:** building drama; each significant event is called a complication.

*All four children go to Narnia, they meet the Beavers, Edmund betrays his siblings to the White Witch, and so forth.*

**Climax:** the single key event or turning point; the moment of greatest tension.

*Aslan sacrifices his life on behalf of Edmund.*

**Falling action:** events that occur as a result of the climax.

*The good and evil creatures in Narnia have a battle.*

**Resolution:** the event in which the main issue is resolved.

*Aslan's side wins. The four children are established as kings and queens.*

**Denouement** (day-new-maw): the finishing out and tying up of the details of the story.

*The four children grow up, rule Narnia, and then return to their own world.*

Freytag's Pyramid is only a typical plot development. It accurately describes the plots of many pieces of fiction, but there are many variations and exceptions. Writers do not necessarily write to the Freytag Pyramid. Don't try to force a work into the pyramid if it doesn't seem to fit. In addition, people will sometimes have different ideas about what is the narrative hook, inciting incident, resolution, or even the climax in a really dramatic story.

The key question to ask about the plot of a piece of literature is, "What is the **conflict**?" What is the issue that the main character needs to resolve? Is it conflict within himself, perhaps between what he wants and what he actually has? Is it a conflict between himself and another character, or between himself and the expectations of others? Is it the conflict of wanting to reach a goal but being unable to do so? What keeps or moves the character out of stability and causes tension? The tension between Pip and Estella is one conflict in *Great Expectations*. The quest for the ring is a continuing conflict in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. A skillful writer might

have several lines of conflict in a work and interweave them into a gripping **narrative**. Conflict and struggle are how we grow as persons, so the conflict in a story is an important way for us to identify with the characters in the story.

The time, place, and social environment of a story is the **setting**. The plot unfolds in these surroundings. Is the story set among the working class of early nineteenth-century England, among fishermen of first-century Israel, among slaves in the southern United States just before the Civil War, or among homeschooling families of twenty-first century America? The setting will affect what characters know, their assumptions and aspirations, and how they act and speak. The geographical setting always impacts the development of the story: isolated mountain villagers will act and speak differently from urban dwellers.

Another key element of the plot is the **structure** of the story, how it is told. A straight **chronological narrative** is simplest, but an author might want to use **flashbacks** (descriptions of events that happened earlier, out of chronological order) and **foreshadowings** (hints at things that will come later) to convey attributes of characters or particular feelings to the story.

**Archetypes** (ARK-eh-types) are typical or standard plot elements, such as a character on a quest, the pursuit of an elusive goal, the loss of innocence, or an initiation into a new situation. Many of America's most famous works of literature include one or more of these elements because these situations make for a good story. Everyone goes through these times or has these dreams.

## Characters and Characterization

- The **characters** are the people in a story.
- The **protagonist** is the main character of the story (Jo in *Little Women*).
- The **antagonist** is the character who works against the protagonist and provides some degree of conflict (the White Witch in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*).
- The **confidant** is someone to whom a character reveals his thoughts and motives (Margaret plays this role for Bessy and Mr. Bell plays this role for Margaret in *North and South*).
- The mentor teaches another character about life (Marmee in *Little Women*).
- A **foil** is often a minor character who by being a contrast illuminates another character (for instance, the slick operator who serves to highlight the integrity of the protagonist).
- Other typical characters are the **hero** (Sir Percy Blakeney, the Scarlet Pimpernel), the **scapegoat** (Tom Robinson in *To Kill a Mockingbird*), and the **buddy pair** (Don Quixote and Sancho Panza).
- A **round character** is three-dimensional, one whose personality is well-developed and who has some internal struggles expressed. In other words, he is believable and realistic. David Copperfield is a round character. A **flat character** is not developed in the story (Jethro in *The Cat of Bubastes*). A **stock character** portrays a stereotypical role, such as the cruel stepmother in *Cinderella*, the slow and dimwitted policeman, or the unemotional accountant. A stock character might be round or flat. A **dynamic character** changes during the story (matures or regresses, as Margaret Hale does in *North and South*), while a **static character** does not change (Fanny in *North and South*). A good author uses each character to advance the story in some way, not just to clutter the pages.

**Characterization** is the way that the author reveals the nature and personality of the characters. This is how the author makes a character real. What do you learn about a character in the course of the story? How do you learn about him or her? The narrator might tell the reader about a character (**direct characterization**), or the author might reveal a character's attributes by what the character says or does (**indirect characterization**). Typical methods of indirect characterization include a character's actions and his effect on others, a character's dress and appearance, how he talks and what he says, and the thoughts he reveals. The author might convey information about a character through his interactions with others, by what others say about the character, or by discrepancies between the character's reputation and his real actions or between what he says and what he does. A narrator (and through the narrator the author) might express an evaluation of a character by comments he or she makes. If a character grows or changes, how does the author show this: insights that she gains, experiences that teach her lessons, or by demonstrating different ways of acting or speaking over the course of the story?

Conflict within a character or between characters can be distinct from conflict in the story. In *A Tale of Two Cities*, for example, the conflict between the Defarges and the other French revolutionaries on one hand and the French aristocracy on the other is different from the conflict within Sydney Carton himself. What does a character do about conflict? Does he try to escape it, does he repress it, or does he address it?

## Narrative

**The Narrator.** Who is telling the story? One key element of the narrative is the point of view of the narrator. The narrator might be **first person**, a character in the story. A first person narrator might be a major or a minor character in the story. The character David Copperfield is the first person narrator of the Charles Dickens novel by that name; the first-person narrator Ishmael in *Moby Dick* is a relatively minor character in that book. A narrator might be **third person**, one who is not a character in the story. The narrator might be **omniscient**, meaning that he or she knows the thoughts and motives of each character, or he might be **limited omniscient**, knowing the thoughts and motives of just one person. A narrator might be **objective**, not knowing anything about the inner thoughts of the characters except what the characters themselves reveal. One way to describe an objective narrator is that he knows and conveys only what a camera sees. A rare form of narration is **second person**, by which the author describes the reader himself going through the events of the story. Another rare form of narration is the **stream of consciousness** approach, in which the narrator relates the jumble of his own (or one character's own) thoughts as they occur to him. William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* is told in a stream of consciousness approach.

An author chooses the narrative approach for a reason. In *Great Expectations*, the reader has much more sympathy for Pip, the main character and first person narrator, than he would if the story were told by a third person narrator, although Dickens used third person narrators in many of his works.

**Narrative Mood.** What is the **mood** or **tone** of the narration? Is the narrator light-hearted, angry, skeptical, condescending, or sad and defeated? The mood of the characters might be different from the tone the author conveys. The characters might be harsh and judgmental, but the narrator could be sympathetic to the victims of the harshness. Simon Legree is a harsh character in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; but the author/narrator Harriet Beecher Stowe is sympathetic to Tom, the target of Simon's harshness. The author might have an agenda or cause she is trying to get across through the way the book is narrated. A rare approach is the unreliable narrator

who is so prejudiced that the reader cannot trust what the narrator says and has to filter what the narrator says to determine the truth. It is possible for an author to have a tone or agenda that is different from the tone or agenda of the narrator. For instance, the author might want to condemn the lifestyle of the rich and famous. To do so he makes the narrator so fawning toward and accepting of the rich and famous that it turns the reader off. This is a subtle form of sarcasm as a tone.

**Narrative Style.** An author will use a particular **style**, such as formal or colloquial language, or take a logical or emotional approach to the story. Does the author use **dialog**, which is the recording of direct quotes of conversations between characters, to advance the story?

**Literary Techniques.** How does the author use words to tell his story? He has several tools at his disposal.

- **Imagery** is using descriptive language to convey appearance or other attributes. It is painting pictures with words. Compare “We walked between two large rocks and came to a big field” to “The narrow passage between the towering cliffs opened into a meadow lush with wildflowers.”
- **Simile** is a comparison using like or as. “His encouragement was like a breath of fresh air to me.”
- **Metaphor** is a comparison in which one thing is said to be another. “You are a rock of stability to me.”
- **Symbolism** is the use of one thing to represent another. Literature often uses **archetypical symbols** to convey certain ideas: night often portrays mystery or evil; a mountain can represent an obstacle to overcome; winter and spring can represent death and rebirth.
- **Allegory** is an extended comparison, in which every or almost every character or event represents something else. *Animal Farm* is an allegory of the Russian Revolution.
- **Apostrophe** is addressing someone who is not present or something that is not human. “Caesar, thou are revenged” (from *Julius Caesar*, spoken after Caesar was dead).
- **Synecdoche** (sih-NEK-doh-key) is using a part for the whole. “Ten thousand feet marched down the street to an endless beat of drums” (people marched, not just feet).
- **Metonymy** (meh-TONN-eh-mi) is substituting one term for another because of the close association between the two. “The White House announced a new economic stimulus package today” (meaning the President or an administration official did so, not the physical structure at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue in Washington, D.C.).
- **Hyperbole** is intentional overstatement. “I think of you a million times a day.”
- **Litotes** (LIH-tuh-teez) is intentional understatement. “His donation to the charity was not insignificant” (meaning it was significant).
- **Irony** is a contrast between appearance and reality. Irony can be situational (a man proposing marriage to a woman in a comical setting such as being stuck in a elevator, or characters trying to keep from laughing out loud in a quiet museum), verbal (one character doing something foolish and another character saying the opposite, such as, “That was an intelligent thing to do!”), or dramatic (the reader knows more than the character does, so the reader knows that it is ironic that the character is doing this because it is fruitless or dangerous).

- **Oxymoron** (ox-ee-MORE-on) is a contradiction in terms. “The silence was deafening.”
- **Paradox** is a phrase or statement that appears to be contradictory but in fact might convey a deep truth. “I know that I know nothing at all.”
- **Antithesis** is putting together two opposite ideas to achieve the effect of a contrast. “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.”
- **Personification** is the giving of human traits to non-human things. “The trees waited eagerly for the rising of the sun.”
- **Alliteration** is the repetition of the same initial verbal sound. “Billy bounced a ball by the backyard barbecue.” To be more specific: assonance is the repetition of the same vowel sound; consonance is the repetition of the same consonant sound. Alliteration gives rhythm to a statement or phrase that can increase its emotional impact. “And the raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting/On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door.”

**Topic and Theme.** A book will usually have a topic and a theme. These are two different attributes even though they sound similar. A **topic** is a brief description of the book, such as, “The American Revolution,” “How cattle drives worked,” or “Life in an early twentieth-century Appalachian community.” A **theme** can usually be stated in one sentence and often expresses a universal idea that the story conveys. The theme of *The Giver*, for example, is the discovery and pursuit of truth.

How does the author deal with the conflict and the theme? The author might convey his belief that the conflict is a result of the protagonist’s outdated or irrational mindset; if the character would be more open-minded, he would not have this conflict. The theme might be the privilege of the wealthy, which the author approaches with sarcasm because he thinks the wealthy ought not to have such privilege.

## Your Response to the Story

As you read a work of literature, whether fiction, poetry, or non-fiction, interact with the text. Even more, interact with what the text is saying about life, or history, or whatever the topic is, and what the text says to you and about you. Are the plot and characters realistic and plausible? If they are unreal, does the author intend for them to be unreal and does this approach work? How are the characters products of their time and place and social setting and how do they transcend their setting? What is especially meaningful to you in terms of particular scenes, characters, dialog, or overall impact? How does the story make you feel, which is different from what you think about it? How does it make a difference for you?

Literary analysis is helpful when it clarifies how the author constructed the work. You can more deeply appreciate what he or she did and how the work conveys the intended message and mood. However, literary analysis can sometimes be emphasized to the point of making it seem more important than the work itself; and an analyst can come up with ideas about a work that the author never had in mind. Much of literary analysis is and should be subconscious on the part of the reader, the way we enjoy a good meal without over-analyzing all of the individual ingredients (although you should compliment the cook, and, if you are interested, ask how he or she prepared it). As you give thought to literary analysis, you can better appreciate the mental feast offered to you by what you read.

# What Do You Think About What He Thinks? A Primer for Analysis of Non-Fiction

A non-fiction article, essay, or book has a different approach from a work of fiction. It will likely make an argument, teach, or convey information. Of course, a work of fiction might also be an attempt to make an argument, teach, or convey information; but non-fiction presents the information and the author's perspective in a straightforward manner. The non-fiction piece might be in the form of a story; but it is a story from real life, as in a biography.

Part of education is considering perspectives other than your own and developing your response to them. In a persuasive work, a writer has something to say that he hopes others will at least consider and perhaps agree with. Even the author of a biography writes for a purpose, not only to inform but perhaps also to convince readers about something regarding his subject: that he was instrumental in a war, or influential in Congress, or had some other significant impact.

By reading a work of non-fiction, you might be confirmed in what you believe about something or you might be convinced that you need to change your opinion. You might obtain more information that helps you have a more realistic perspective on an issue. You shouldn't fear this process. You don't want to cast aside basic truth and fall for every new idea you hear, but part of growing and maturing is gaining a more complete understanding of truth. No one has a grasp of all truth or the perfect application of that truth in every situation. Everyone can grow in some areas of life, whether that means learning more truth or learning the application of the truth you know to more situations. This process is part of growing in what the Bible calls discernment (see Hebrews 5:13-14).

A text can be any written material. We analyze every text that we read, whether it is an encyclopedia article, a book of political commentary, or an advertisement, even if only briefly and subconsciously. As with the analysis of fiction, we don't want to lose the joy of reading by over-analyzing, but it is good to do serious and conscious analysis for several reasons. Analysis will help you understand the meaning and purpose of a text; you might even discern a meaning beneath the surface. It can help you connect the text with its background, such as the time in which it was written or something about the author. You can profitably compare the text with other texts to see which are more consistent and believable. Analyzing a text can help you prove a thesis. A summary of a text is a report of its content, but an analysis of a text is an evaluation of its meaning and significance.

In analyzing a work of non-fiction, you want to ask questions of the text. You probably won't answer every question below about every text, but here are things to consider when analyzing non-fiction:

- What is the author's point or purpose?
- What is the argument he is making?
- What is the motivation for the piece? What problem does it address?
- What evidence or logic does he use to support his thesis?
- What is the context from which the author writes (time, place, point of view, background and experience)?

- What assumptions does the author bring to writing this piece?
- What words or ideas are repeated? These will often be clues to the author's point.
- What word choices seem significant? Does the author use any figures of speech to make his argument more persuasive?
- What is the structure of the text? How does the author build his argument through the work? How does the structure help make the author's point?
- What are the key passages in the work, and why are they important?
- What is surprising, odd, or troubling in the text? (These parts are likely challenging your current understanding.)
- What contradictions and inconsistencies do you find in the text?
- What assumptions do *you* bring to the text?
- Is the text convincing to you? Why or why not? (It is entirely likely that you will agree with some things and disagree with others.)
- What questions do you have after reading it? What further study do you need to do?

When you write an analysis of a non-fiction work, gather your information, impressions, and answers to these questions, then write a coherent essay that responds to the piece. Depending on the length of your essay, you will probably want to summarize the author's purpose and argument, emphasize the central points as you see them, note where you think the author is correct and where he is mistaken, and where he is effective and where he could have expressed his ideas differently. Keep in mind the nature of your assignment, what the teacher expects from you, and what the reader of your analysis needs to understand about the work you are analyzing and about your response to it.

The author whose work you have read wants you to think. Show that you have thought. Expressing your thoughts on paper indicates how well you understand what he has said and, more importantly, how well you understand your own thoughts about the subject.

## **Analysis of Poetry**

You cannot read poetry the way you read a novel, a newspaper, a textbook, or other non-fiction writing. Poetry aims for the heart, for an emotional response, as well as for the mind. Poetry is concentrated language, so how the poem expresses thoughts is extremely important. Don't be afraid to read a poem aloud and slowly. You will probably have to read it more than once to grasp its message fully.

As you read a poem, ask these questions:

- Who is speaking? Is the poem first-person, or is it a third-person speaker?
- What is the occasion?
- Is it a monologue of one person speaking to another? Is it an elegy or a remembrance honoring the dead? Is it a lyric or an ode that meditates on a particular subject? Is it a narrative poem that tells a story?

- What is the tone, the mood, the atmosphere that the poem expresses? Does it suggest floating through the air? Is it a dirge or lament? Does it have a military beat? Does it express longing or joyful praise?
- Is the language of the poem stately, colloquial, humorous, or mysterious, or can you characterize it in another way?
- What literary techniques does the poet use (see the list in the analysis of fiction)?
- Are there important thoughts that are unexpressed in the poem, such as any background information that it assumes?
- Is it effective in generating the desired emotion, attitude, or memory in you?

Poetry traditionally utilizes the rhythm of words, called meter. The determination of meter is called scansion or scanning the lines. Traditional poetry also uses rhyme to produce a particular emotion. Rhyming can occur at the end of lines (end rhyme) or within lines (internal rhyme). Approximate rhyme uses words that sound similar but do not rhyme exactly. Blank verse has a defined rhythm but does not rhyme. Free verse does not use consistent rhyme or meter. At this point, simply take note of how the poem's use of words, rhyme, and rhythm affect you.

When you are called upon to analyze a poem, use your responses to these questions to write an essay that addresses the main points of the poem. Analysis tends to focus on the mind, but remember to include your heart-response to the poem as well.

# *The Scarlet Letter*

## Nathaniel Hawthorne

What happens when sin enters a community that has been founded on God? We know that sin will enter a community, even one based on faith, because a community is made up of humans and humans sin. The community might be a town, or it might be a church or a family.

The result of sin is always widespread and devastating. Even though people try to hide their motives and actions, the truth will come to light. *The Scarlet Letter* tells the story of adultery and other sins in colonial Boston. The novel focuses on the relationships of four main characters and the effect that sin has on them. This emphasis on individuals is significant because sin always enters a community through the actions of individuals and it always affects individuals. But even in such a setting, the possibility of redemption is always present because God can bring good out of what is bad.

**Plot.** The story of *The Scarlet Letter* is told by an omniscient third person narrator in a chronological narrative. The introductory essay about the custom house gives the story an air of authenticity but also creates a sense of sadness. The mood or tone throughout the book is dark and mysterious because of the great secret hanging over the community: Who is the father of Hester's child? Other questions add to the somber tone: What will happen between Hester and Arthur? What will happen between Arthur and Roger? The judgmental way in which the community deals with the sin of adultery increases the heaviness of the narrative.

The plot hangs on the three scaffold scenes. The first, when Hester and Pearl appear before the community, is the narrative hook that grabs our attention. Roger Chillingworth coming to live with the minister is the inciting incident that increases the conflict in the book. The second scaffold scene occurs at night, when Arthur, Hester, and Pearl assemble on it together. This is the climax of the book, conveying the greatest tension because what should have taken place in the daylight before the entire community only happens at night with no one else there. The final scaffold scene is the resolution, when Arthur confesses his adultery and dies.

The many lines of conflict are an important reason why the book grips us as it does. Arthur and Hester love each other, but they cannot or will not admit it publicly. The common perception of Arthur and the reality about him are in conflict. The supposedly righteous community is filled with hypocrisy and judgmental attitudes. Roger is in conflict with Hester and with Arthur. The conflict within the minister himself is agonizing. We perceive conflict between the way people should act and the way they actually act, a conflict that characterizes much of human life.

The topic is a woman and her illegitimate child in a colonial village. The theme is the response to sin.

**Characters and Characterization.** Hawthorne's portrayal of the characters in the novel is one of its most effective elements. Hester is the protagonist, while Roger is the antagonist. Arthur is caught in the middle because of his sin and his refusal to confess it. The characters are round, well-developed, and believable. They are somewhat static in that they do not change much during the story, except that Arthur does eventually confess his sin. We come to know the characters by what they do and say, but also by what the narrator says about them.

The names of the main characters reflect their identity. Hester Prynne is the central figure. The name Hester is a form of Esther, from the Persian word for star. Prynne rhymes with sin. The narrator notes that Hester had a wild streak when she was younger. She had done wrong earlier in life by marrying another character, Roger Chillingworth, without loving him; and she hurt him again by her immorality with Arthur. Everyone who sins has positive traits, and vice versa. Hester has positive traits. She bore Arthur Dimmesdale's shame as well as his child, for

the child and the shame were hers also. Hester loved her daughter Pearl and saw her as a gift from God. In a sense, Hester is an anti-hero. She is not someone who is larger than life who can do no wrong. She has done great wrong, but she moves beyond her sin to help others.

Arthur Dimmesdale offers dim light as a minister because he is a weak person. His light dims progressively as the story develops. Dimmesdale is a hypocrite plagued by his conscience. He hides his guilt, and instead of openly confessing his wrong he flogs himself and carves an A on his chest as self-inflicted punishment. He loves Hester and Pearl, but he is not willing to be open about himself. His health fails as the story progresses and his guilt eats away his life.

Roger Chillingworth has a chilling effect on the other people in the story. He is cold, calculating, and revengeful toward Dimmesdale, wearing down the minister through his intimidation of the guilt-ridden man. In the novel Chillingworth is called a leech, which is a reference to the common medical practice at the time of bleeding a patient, often by using a leech. Chillingworth feeds on his hatred for others, and he dies when he has no one left to feed on. On the other hand, although Chillingworth demonstrates great evil, apparently he loves Hester; and he leaves a considerable estate to Pearl.

The child Pearl is Hester's pearl of great price, "purchased with all she had,—her mother's only treasure" (Chapter 6). She is seen by some as a child of the devil; but in reality she has a positive, childlike sincerity. This is shown by her asking Dimmesdale to stand with them in the daylight. Pearl provokes adults, but only because she challenges the social games that they play.

The book has a few minor characters who are named. Reverend Wilson and Governor Bellingham exemplify the outwardly proper community. Mistress Hibbins is the personification of the influence of evil. The women of the town described in the opening scaffold scene are harsh in their judgment of Hester, except for one young mother who speaks tenderly about Hester. The governor and townspeople in general are hypocritical in that they condemn Hester for her sin but greatly desire her needlework—or is their willingness to buy her work a mark of compassion for her?

**Irony and Imagery.** Hawthorne uses significant irony in the novel. The townspeople hold Dimmesdale in high regard, but in reality he is an adulterer. People think it is good that Roger and Arthur live in the same house, but in reality this gives Roger an even greater opportunity to be a leech upon Arthur. Dimmesdale is most honest under the cover of the forest and at night, but not in the full view of the people in daylight. The wearing of the scarlet letter is supposed to be a mark of shame for Hester and it is, but in reality she responds to her sin and shame by becoming stronger.

*The Scarlet Letter* uses several metaphors in telling the story. It is important not to go looking for metaphors and symbols everywhere in a novel, but they can help the reader think more deeply about the narrative and perhaps see deeper meaning in what we experience in our own lives. Hawthorne provides the meaning of some metaphors, while we must try to discern others. In the opening chapter, the rose-bush by the prison door, the author tells us, serves to "symbolize some sweet moral blossom" that we might find in this "tale of human frailty and sorrow." Also in that opening scene, when Hester is holding Pearl on the scaffold and the leaders of the community are speaking to her from the balcony above, the baby "held up its little arms" toward her unacknowledged father "with a half-pleased, half plaintive murmur." Thus the baby identifies her father, even if he is not willing to confess his paternity himself. Pearl herself is a metaphor. She is described as "the scarlet letter in another form . . . endowed with life" (Chapter 7), the living badge of Hester's adultery.

Hester's home is outside of town and near the forest. This location represents the separate and dual life that she either chose or was forced to lead. Light and dark are important themes in the book. The daylight scene on the scaffold with Hester and Pearl, when not all of the truth is revealed, stands in contrast to the nighttime scene that includes Arthur on the scaffold in more

complete truth.

The central metaphor is the scarlet letter A itself. The most obvious and direct meaning of the letter is as a badge for Hester's adultery, but it has additional meanings also. In Chapter 13, the narrator notes that some people said it stood for Able, "so strong was Hester Prynne, with a woman's strength." Perhaps it was an advertisement (conscious or unconscious) for her needlework skills that townspeople later utilized. Perhaps the A that Hester wore could also be interpreted as standing for Arthur, a love for whom Hester harbored, or as a silent defiance of the community. The A that appears in the sky in Chapter 12 is seen by some as meaning Angel, for Governor Winthrop.

The narrator says that the letter, as a constantly visible reminder of her sin, takes her "out of the ordinary relations with humanity, and enclosing her in a sphere by herself" (Chapter 2). But how are we to take the elaborate needlework that Hester used to make the A?

**Historical Significance.** *The Scarlet Letter*, published in 1850, was an immediate success. The book helped to establish American literature, which had long dwelt in the shadow of its British counterpart. The novel is generally considered to be the first great American novel, and some still believe it to be the greatest American novel. One distinctive feature of the story is the strong female character portrayed in Hester. Such a figure was unusual in this period of American literature. The novel reflected Hawthorne's—and America's—ambivalence about our Puritan background: thankful that the Puritan settlement was based on faith, but troubled by its harshness. The book can encourage us to be true to the way of Christ, both in our own lives as we see the effect of sin, and in how we relate to others who fail to follow the way of Christ and who need redemption just as we do.

## Assignment

Define: narrator, tone, protagonist, climax, resolution

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# *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett* **Davy Crockett**

Picture a strong, energetic, adventurous young man in a T-shirt and jeans. He is good-hearted and helpful, and he doesn't stand for any foolishness from anyone. He works hard and likes driving his pickup truck. He is friendly and always has a story to tell. People in the South often call such a man a good old boy. Many of those who know him like him and look up to him as their ideal of what a man should be. Stories circulate about his performing humorous, kindly, and even amazing deeds.

Now imagine this man being elected to Congress, wearing his T-shirt and jeans to the Capitol, writing his life story, and thinking of himself as a presidential candidate.

Such a person would be a modern-day version of Davy Crockett and the image that people had of him in the 1820s and 1830s. The Crockett legend began to develop in his own lifetime, encouraged by Crockett himself as well as others. *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett* played an integral part in Crockett's reputation.

**Historical and Political Context.** Today we do not have many geographic frontiers in the United States. Our modern pioneers pursue new realms in such fields as science, communication,

and computers. In the early days of the country, however, the frontiers were real and huge; the adventurous heroes who explored the vast wilderness were held up as the embodiment of the American spirit. James Fenimore Cooper's Natty Bumppo character (who appeared in books published in Crockett's era and later) carried this aura and fueled the image of the noble frontiersman. David Crockett was a real-life frontiersman.

Crockett was born in eastern Tennessee in 1786, a year before the Constitution was written and ten years before Tennessee became a state. As an adult, he and his family moved several times within Tennessee, but always toward the west. Crockett served in the state militia (under Andrew Jackson at times) and was a local official before being elected to the state legislature in 1821 and re-elected in 1823. He was known to attend meetings of the legislature in his frontier buckskin clothes. Crockett was defeated in 1825, moved further west in Tennessee, and was elected to Congress from that area in 1827 and 1829.

His political persona was that of an honest and able frontiersman. When Andrew Jackson was elected President in 1828, Crockett was a Jackson man. This was the time when eastern politicians were aghast at the backwoods ruffians who invaded Washington during Jackson's time in office. However, Crockett later split with the President over such issues as land reform and Indian removal. Crockett was defeated in 1831, but he won back his House seat in 1833.

Crockett became a national figure, even though his career in the U.S. House is not considered especially notable. In 1831, James Kirke Paulding wrote the play, *The Lion of the West*. The main character, Nimrod Wildfire, was modeled after Crockett. The play premiered in New York City, and Crockett attended a performance in Washington. Crockett was also the subject of several books and articles that appeared during this period. Some of these portrayed Crockett in larger-than-life, Paul Bunyan-like terms.

**The Book.** In this context *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett* was published in 1834. Crockett claimed authorship; but he was greatly assisted by Thomas Chilton, a Congressman from Kentucky. Crockett said that he was forced to write the book to counter the erroneous and outlandish claims of others. However, Crockett knew what he was doing. He was grooming his image as a man of the people, as opposed to that other Tennessean, Andrew Jackson, whom Crockett portrayed as a tool of wealthy interests.

Crockett's political biography is a window on the early years of the Crockett phenomenon. It is important not because of its literary merit but because it is an example of the influence a book can have. Crockett portrays himself as independent, resourceful, trustworthy, and good-hearted. He lived a simple life, filled with everyday things and understandable motivations. He might have worn plain clothes; but to Crockett, a person's character, not his clothes, was most important. The rough clothes of the everyday man were not merely acceptable; they were even preferable to the deceptive finery of the wealthy.

In the book Crockett takes several jabs at Andrew Jackson, including the description in Chapter VI of a mutiny against Jackson by some of his troops in late 1813. Crockett claims to have taken part in it, although historian Paul Andrew Hutton says that Crockett was already heading home when the revolt occurred. Crockett might have stretched the truth at this point, but anything that emphasized Crockett's differences with Jackson Crockett deemed appropriate to his purpose. Notice the two times in the book when Crockett defiantly states that he does not have a collar around his neck which says, "My dog. Andrew Jackson." Crockett also drops broad hints about the possibility of occupying the presidential chair himself, if the people of the country so desired it.

In and of itself, the book is fun and entertaining, although some descriptions of hunting and of Indian attacks are somewhat bloody. As one piece of a larger mosaic, the book reveals how the frontier hero ideal captured the American imagination in the era before the Civil War. The Whig Party promoted (perhaps we should say invented) the log cabin image for William

Henry Harrison in the 1840 election. But the appeal of the frontier is not just legend. In the late nineteenth century, historian Frederick Jackson Turner developed the frontier thesis of American growth and expansion, an idea which we will discuss later in the curriculum.

**After Publication.** Members of the Whig Party seriously considered Crockett as a presidential candidate for the 1836 election. However, he was defeated in his bid for re-election to Congress in 1835 and as a result lost his national standing for the 1836 contest. This was the time when thousands of Americans, including many from Tennessee, were moving to Texas to seek their fortunes. Crockett joined the exodus, hoping that the new land would rekindle his political career. He joined Colonel William Travis at the Alamo in February of 1836. Later that month, Mexican general Santa Anna began a siege of the Alamo; and on March 6, 1836, Mexican forces overwhelmed the Texans defending the tiny mission. Crockett was one of the fatalities.

With this heroic end to his life, the Crockett myth grew even larger. Crockett Almanacs, which had begun publication in 1835, offered fictional stories of Crockett unfreezing the sun, riding an alligator up Niagara Falls, and accomplishing other amazing deeds. Conveniently, Crockett himself was not around to refute them. The almanacs were published until 1856.

The Crockett legend continued to be a subject for entertainment from time to time. In 1872, Frank Mayo wrote and starred in the play, *Davy Crockett: Or, Be Sure You're Right, Then Go Ahead* (one of Crockett's famous sayings). The play was performed around the country for 24 years until Mayo's death. In the early twentieth century, Crockett was the subject of a silent movie. Honors for the fallen hero went beyond the world of entertainment. Crockett County in West Tennessee, formed in 1871, was named for the frontiersman. The county seat is the town of Alamo.

In the 1950s, the Crockett craze reached its height. Fess Parker portrayed Crockett in a popular Walt Disney television series, and those episodes were made into a movie. The song "The Ballad of Davy Crockett," coonskin caps, Davy Crockett lunch boxes, and other paraphernalia generated millions of dollars in sales. The song begins, "Born on a mountaintop in Tennessee," although Crockett himself said that he was born next to a river, and the replica cabin in David Crockett Birthplace State Park is in a river valley. John Wayne portrayed Crockett in the 1960 movie *The Alamo*, which Wayne also produced and directed.

Crockett's book has been almost continuously in print since its publication, and it is currently available in several editions. Politicians still write books to promote themselves, although now most of those books set forth the author's views on current political issues. The purpose of *A Narrative of the Life of Davy Crockett* was primarily to promote the man himself. That promotion has seen several incarnations through the years, so be warned: if the cycle of history is any indication, the Crockett myth might be due for a reprise any time now. Have your coonskin cap ready.

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## Assignment

Answer these key questions for analyzing non-fiction regarding *A Narrative of the Life of David Crockett*:

What is the structure of the text?

What is the author's point or purpose?

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# *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*

## **Frederick Douglass**

This book helped change my life.

I was in transition from one phase of my life to another. I felt that I had not been treated well by people who had been in authority over me. I had endured this treatment for many years, but I was not sure how to handle the situation and uneasy about making a fresh start. I finally decided to make that fresh start, but I was still finding my way in the new course I had chosen. During that time of transition, I read *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*.

Here was a man who had been born into slavery and who, even with its misery, had every reason to go along with the slave system as his best chance for survival. But he didn't go along with it. Deep in his soul, at a young age, Douglass said, "I'm not going to take this anymore." There came a time when mere survival as a slave was not a worthy life for him. He set his course toward freedom, and his life and the lives of many others were made better because of his determination. In reading this book I was confirmed in my decision to make a fresh start, and I have received many blessings as a result of that decision.

Frederick Douglass was born in Maryland about 1818, the son of a slave woman and a white man. In 1838 he escaped from slavery and was later able to purchase his freedom. Douglass became a well-known speaker who denounced slavery and all those who practiced it or tolerated it. His critics expressed doubts that a black man who was so eloquent could have ever been a slave. To support his claim, Douglass wrote this story of his life, which was published in 1845. The preface by William Lloyd Garrison and the letter from Wendell Phillips, both well-known abolitionists, give additional credence to Douglass' story. Douglass later wrote longer accounts of his life, but this is the book that helped Douglass become an influential spokesman for abolition.

**Themes in the Book.** The overriding theme in the book is Douglass' description of the brutal and dehumanizing nature of slave life. He expresses his disgust at "proper" white society and how it dominated the miserable, impoverished lives of slaves. Slaves were largely powerless to control their own lives, while slave owners held complete power over their slaves. Slaves were not allowed to enjoy even the most basic pleasures of life, such as having a stable family and being able to learn to read. Douglass especially emphasizes the physical cruelty that he and other slaves endured at the hands of slave owners. In some of the descriptions of abuse, the book quotes the foul language that whites used. The book is a reminder of the fact that, just as slavery caused people to be treated like animals, the slave system led slave owners and overseers to become animals in their behavior.

Douglass develops several other themes in this brief book. One important theme is the value of education. Because as a child Douglass was denied the education that he so desperately wanted, for him education was a key to escaping slavery. Another theme is the importance of the city for slaves in obtaining freedom. As long as Douglass lived on a rural plantation, freedom was difficult; but when he had new opportunities provided for him in an urban setting, he was able to learn new information and skills and to draw closer to freedom. Still another theme in the book is Douglass' condemnation of the cruelty and hypocrisy of professed Christians who were also slave owners. "Between the Christianity of this land, and the Christianity of Christ, I recognize the widest possible difference" (Appendix).

**Response to the Book.** What is your response to the book? Are you convinced by his narrative? What parts do you find troubling? What questions do you have? What further study do you want to undertake?

Slaves could either accept their lot or fight against it. The same is true for each of us: we can either live as victims or decide to do something to change our situation. Douglass was a person of intelligence, thoughtfulness, and strength of will who responded to his situation by confronting injustice and overcoming it, first in his own life and then through exposing and condemning the slave system as a whole.

Frederick Douglass lived through the bitter irony of slavery in the land of the free. After slavery had finally ended, Douglass lived through the bitter legacy of discrimination and segregation in a land built upon the self-evident truth that all men are created equal. He continued to be a leading spokesman for the rights of blacks until his death in 1895.

*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* is an important work of American literature for a number of reasons. It describes first-hand the treatment that slaves endured. It helped to establish Douglass as an influential spokesman for abolition. It offers real-life evidence that a person can use his abilities to overcome external limitations. It shows what a person can accomplish when he decides that he is not going to live under an unjust system any longer. As you think about the book, identify as much as you can with Douglass; but also be ready to think about what you can do in your situation to further what is good and to oppose injustice.

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## *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Harriet Beecher Stowe

What do you think about slavery? Do you believe that the race-based slavery once practiced in the United States was wrong? Does it trouble you that the Bible does not speak strongly against slavery but only regulates its practice? If you believe that states in our country have the right to deal with issues that are not specifically assigned to the Federal government by the Constitution, were states justified in accepting slavery before it was outlawed by the Thirteenth Amendment? Can you imagine owning another human being as a piece of property?

Whatever you think about slavery, step back into the mid-1800s when slavery was practiced in the United States and the subject was hotly debated throughout the country. Were slave states (and non-slave states and other countries that benefited from their labor) truly dependent on the peculiar institution for their economic well-being? Should slavery have been allowed in the

territories and in any new states that might be formed? Could the white race and the black race live together peaceably?

Then, in the midst of that cauldron of political, social, moral, and spiritual debate, a story in serial form appeared in an abolitionist journal and subsequently was published as a novel. The book exposed the realities of slavery and put the issue in personal terms. Slaves were real persons, with names and families. Slave owners were real persons also, which meant that some were kind, others were detached, and still others were cruel. Everyone, from an innocent child to a cruel slave hunter, was affected by the institution of slavery. What was the nation to do?

*Uncle Tom's Cabin* is probably the most influential novel ever to be published in the United States. It forced people to confront the meaning of slavery for the country and for every person affected by it, which meant every person in the country. Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote the book in great measure as a response to the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which forbade giving assistance to runaway slaves and required all citizens to assist in capturing and returning runaways. That law, however, was only the culmination of a long-running controversy over slavery, a controversy that eventually led to disunion and war.

This is a difficult book to read. It is difficult because through it all, over every scene, hangs the heavy specter of slavery. But then, that is how life was in the United States in the 1850s. Hanging over every political debate was the issue of slavery. Hanging over the conscience of a growing number of Americans was the burden of slavery. Most important, hanging over the lives of some four million human beings in this country was the reality that they were slaves themselves. Reading about slavery, difficult as it is, is a far cry from being a slave.

The topic of the book is expressed in its subtitle, "Life among the lowly." It showed northern white readers what slavery was really like so that they would be moved to work for its abolition. The theme is that slavery is bad. Even in "good" situations, with owners such as Arthur Shelby and Augustine St. Claire who are kindly and not cruel, slaves are victims. Slavery not only treats other humans as beasts; it has a negative effect on slave owners, who become uncaring and sometimes become beastly themselves.

**Plot.** The novel has two plot lines. The central characters are two slaves who are sold by a Kentucky slaveholder in order to pay off his debts. Uncle Tom goes with the slave trafficker in a docile manner, committed as he is to living a submitted Christian life. Tom endures the vagaries of his life that are brought on by the actions of his different owners and is eventually killed by the hateful actions of his final owner. The other slave who is sold, Eliza, escapes with her young son by a daring flight across the Ohio River. She is cared for by various people in the North, while enduring skepticism by some people and the pursuit of slave hunters. She is reunited with her husband and they begin a new life in Canada.

The narrative hook is the selling of the slaves on the Shelby plantation. The inciting incident is Eliza's escape, which symbolizes the conflict over slavery. She makes the transition from slavery to freedom with great difficulty by crossing the Ohio River, which was the border between the slave state of Kentucky and the free states to the north of it. The climax is the confrontation between Tom and the cruel Simon Legree, which results in Tom's death. Each plot line has a resolution. Eliza and her husband are reunited with family members on their way north. Young George Shelby frees his slaves on what had been his father's plantation in Kentucky and points to Tom's cabin as a reminder of Tom's goodness and commitment to Christ.

Conflict exists on several fronts, primarily with the conflict between slaves and slave owners. Slaves also have conflict with slave hunters. Several whites have conflicts within themselves, such as Augustine St. Claire and the northern legislator who dislikes slavery but lacks the political courage to take a clear stand for abolition. The conflict between Uncle Tom and Simon Legree is deadly.

**Characters and Characterization.** Tom is the central protagonist in the book. Eliza and George are also protagonists. The leading antagonists are the slave owners and slave hunters. Even the kindly slave owners are antagonists because they keep the slaves from being free. Eva St. Claire is a confidant for Tom in their conversations.

Some characters are round and well-developed. We know a great deal about Uncle Tom's internal thoughts and struggles. Augustine St. Claire is perhaps the most complicated character in the book. He is thoughtful, but he is in anguish about slavery. He decries it, but he is unwilling to do anything about it because his lifestyle depends on his owning slaves. Does he care about people, or is he a hypocrite? Tom Loker is a ruthless slave hunter who is wounded, then he is cared for by Quakers. Having a change of heart, he begins to work against slavery.

Many characters are fairly flat and stereotypical. They are what you would expect from people in those roles. For instance, the wives of slave owners are haughty and uncaring. Legree is the embodiment of evil. The more important question, however, is whether these characters are believable to any significant extent; and I believe they are. All of the characters represent people who filled various roles with regard to slavery, such as those who own slaves, those who mistreat slaves, those who help slaves, and those who are well-meaning but leave slaves in their plight. It is this last group whom Stowe wants to move to action.

Characterization takes place both indirectly, as we see what characters do and say, and directly by the narrator's comments and descriptions. Stowe leaves little doubt as to where characters stand on the issue of slavery.

**Narrator.** The narrator is third person omniscient. The mood or tone is one of sadness about the practice of slavery that builds to a resolve to do something about it. One literary technique that the author uses is melodrama, which is a style of drama or literature that seeks to bring about an emotional response to dramatic scenes. The death of young Eva St. Claire is the most vivid example of this technique. Eliza's escape across the icy Ohio River is melodramatic, but Stowe claims that such an escape actually took place. The author is appealing to the reader's emotions to generate a response about slavery. The author also sprinkles her narrative with direct comments to the reader, ending in the last chapter ("Concluding Remarks"), all of which emphasize her desire to elicit a response. However, Stowe has some prejudiced ideas about blacks; and her proposed solution to slavery of sending freed slaves to Liberia is unrealistic and avoids the question of whether blacks and whites can live in peace together in the United States.

**Other Issues. Symbolism.** Identifying elements in a work that are symbols of other things can be tricky and subjective, but some elements of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* do serve to symbolize major points. For instance, it is no coincidence that the escaped slaves who move ever further north obtain freedom and ever-greater hope and are treated more humanely, while the enslaved Tom moves ever further south and becomes increasingly dehumanized and hopeless in this life even to the point of losing his life. Faithful Tom, dying at the hands of his evil oppressor because Tom did what was right, is a Christ-figure, as is Eva St. Claire, who dies in innocent youth and has a redeeming effect on others. Tom Loker symbolizes the change that Stowe wants her readers to experience, going from one who profits from slaves to one who works to end slavery. The closing scene of Uncle Tom's empty cabin symbolizes the sadness of slavery and specifically Tom's death but also the hope that all slave cabins would one day be emptied when slavery is abolished.

**Christianity.** The supernatural is an important element of the book. When Eliza is crossing the Ohio River, she is imbued with "strength such as God gives only to the desperate." Tom and Eva have visions of better things that give them hope. By contrast, Simon Legree is terrified by what he thinks is a vision of ghosts. The Quakers let their faith lead them to action. The larger question is how Christian Americans will see slavery after reading the book. Will they continue to condone slavery, or will their faith move them to action? A comfortable neglect of the issue is

not an option that Stowe wishes to leave open to people.

**Women.** Slave women are strong and decisive. Some southern women are detached and even cruel. Women in the Underground Railroad are dedicated servants who help fugitive slaves. Significantly, it was a concerned woman who cared enough to write the book. All this was true at a time when women could not vote. They could only seek to influence men to do the right thing in their roles as family and political leaders.

**Your Response.** This was Stowe's whole purpose. She says in her "Concluding Remarks" that she wants all people to "feel right," that is, to have the right thoughts and emotions about slavery that will prompt action. She wants people to pray. She wants people to take up the cause of helping freed slaves become educated so that they can move to Liberia and establish a successful nation. She warns of God's judgment coming upon the church and the nations for failing to act in justice and mercy.

Injustice is around us today. The current term for the practice is human trafficking. Will we stand idly by, or will we put our faith into practice to help right wrongs and to take action to help people receive justice and mercy?

## Assignment

Write a one-paragraph character sketch of one of the main characters in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

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## *Co. Aytch* Sam Watkins

In May of 1861, twenty-one-year-old Sam Watkins of Columbia, Tennessee, enlisted in Company H, First Tennessee Regiment, Army of Tennessee, to fight for the Confederacy in the War Between the States. It was a glorious time. The people cheered and the soldiers were eager for battle. Sam's unit hurried by train to Bull Run Creek in Virginia. They just missed the Confederate victory there and feared that the war would be over before they saw any Yankees.

Over the next four years Sam's unit fought in many of the major battles of the war. In April of 1865, a bedraggled and battle-weary Company H, now part of the Army of the South, surrendered to Union forces in North Carolina. Of the 3,200 men who were part of the First Tennessee Regiment at some point during the war, sixty-five were present at the surrender. Of the 120 men who began the war in Company H, only seven were still alive at the surrender. No one could have gone through what Watkins did without being profoundly affected by it.

In 1881-1882, Watkins, back in Columbia since the war's end, middle-aged, married, and the father of several children, published his recollections of his service in the Confederate army in a series of articles in the Columbia *Herald* newspaper. He soon collected them into book form and published them as *Company H: A Side Show of the Big Show*. After its initial publication, the book went out of print until 1900. It has been published in several editions since then.

Watkins' purpose was not to write a history of the war. He left that to the generals and the other "big bugs" who participated in the conflict. Instead, he conveyed what he saw himself, what it was like for the everyday foot soldier, the men who shot and were shot at, who marched and did sentry duty and slept in the rain and sometimes went hungry. He reminisces cheerfully about the lighter side of army life, but he also feels profound sadness regarding his war experiences.

Watkins' purpose in this non-fiction work is to lessen any hatred and division that might be lingering years after the war. Sam says that the southern cause was lost from the beginning. It was, he says, an unholy war. Sam is not bitter, however; only sad and thoughtful. He respects the southern cause and the men who bravely sacrificed for it, but now the time has come to get over the war and for all Americans to live as a united people. He mentions the issue of slavery only once; why open that old wound again? For him the question was one of states rights, of north and south. But even that issue is not as important as the nation's unity. "We are one and undivided," he says, with the italics in the original. He had learned some important lessons from his experience.

What assumptions do you bring to the reading of this book? Do you believe that participation in war is a glorious endeavor? Sam Watkins will teach you the realities of war generally and the tragic War Between the States specifically if you are as willing to learn from him as he was willing to learn from his experiences.

How are you affected by the book? Surely it is a reminder that wars are not fought by impersonal armies sent by political leaders and led by decorated generals but by individual soldiers who are separated from their loved ones and who see their friends maimed and killed. Perhaps the realities of war are the reason why so many veterans are reluctant to talk about their wartime experiences. We should be grateful that Sam Watkins wanted to share his.

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## *Humorous Stories and Sketches* Mark Twain

Proverbs 17:22 tells us that, "A joyful heart is good medicine." We like to laugh, and the best target for humor is ourselves: our foibles, our boasts, and our accepted ways of doing things that look ridiculous when we hold them up for examination. Mark Twain had a gift for making people laugh at themselves. It is unfortunate that he tainted this gift at times with a cynical and irreligious view of life, but when he set that aside Twain's humor is priceless. This collection of humorous stories and sketches spans thirty years of Twain's prolific career.

A story is different from a literary sketch, but sometimes the distinction is difficult to determine. A short story is an account of an event. It has a plot; something happens. A story has fewer characters and a less complex plot than a novel. A sketch, on the other hand, is a short, static description of something. Think of a sketch of a person or scene rendered by an artist: it has less detail than a painting. A sketch might have a plot, but it is minimal. Identifying the distinction between a story and a sketch is important in doing detailed literary analysis, but it is not important in enjoying a piece of writing.

Knowing the context of each piece helps you appreciate what Twain does in each one and makes it funnier. Workers discovered gold on John Sutter's property in California in early 1848. Later that year, the United States acquired California through the treaty that ended the Mexican War. President Polk announced the discovery of gold in his annual address to Congress in December, which led to the gold rush of 1849. California became a state in 1850. In 1865 California was still growing but the rush was over; some mining camps had even then become dilapidated ghost towns. The new state, still largely a frontier, intrigued Americans and was

the subject of many songs, stories, and travel narratives. Twain wrote "The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" that capitalized on this interest in the West. It was his first big literary success. Twain actually wrote more than one version of the story over several years. The story combines several elements of the way that Americans viewed western life: men sitting around and telling stories, outlandish behavior, an eagerness to make bets, and one man tricking another.

"Journalism in Tennessee" is humor by exaggeration. In those days newspapers were not vehicles of straight reporting; most papers existed to promote one political party and bash the other. Some editors and publishers could get down and dirty about people they didn't like. Some names of newspapers had a funny ring; sometimes violence did erupt because of what a paper said. What Twain describes, however, is over the top. Two uses of irony are (1) the respectable-sounding profession of "journalism" was in reality nothing more than hack-and-slash attacks on political enemies, as Twain describes it; and (2) going south did not help the narrator's health but in fact almost killed him.

The traditional barber shop was a peculiar male institution that included certain accepted expectations: men were served in the order they came in, sometimes a man passed on his turn to wait for his favorite barber, the magazines were old, and barbers offered more products and services that the customer wanted. Male readers of Twain's day would have found something decidedly familiar as they enjoyed Twain's exaggeration "About Barbers".

Have you ever gotten a song in your head that you can't forget? Isn't it often a song that you don't like? "A Literary Nightmare" tells of an awful, silly ditty that the narrator cannot forget. The narrator transfers it to a minister friend who, in his worst-case scenario, ruins a funeral service because he can't get it out of his head. By the way the minister speaks, he transfers the rhythm to the attendees. Finally the minister speaks to students at a university and makes it stick in their minds. In this story Twain takes an everyday occurrence and applies its frustrating consequences in a humorous way.

"The Stolen White Elephant" turns all of the common features of detective stories on their heads. Edgar Allan Poe is credited with writing the first detective story in 1841. English author Wilkie Collins published a detective novel in 1868. By 1882 detective stories were a common genre of popular literature. Sherlock Holmes stories began appearing in 1887. In these stories the detective always has brilliant insights and amazing skills of logic. The heroes in regular detective stories are the buffoons in Twain's story. How could you steal a white elephant and hide it? Who couldn't locate it? In this story, detectives can't. Inspector Blunt asks pointless questions; other detectives ignore obvious clues and make erroneous assumptions about what they think is evidence; and the elephant turns up right under the detectives' noses.

"The Private History of a Campaign That Failed" begins with humor but ends on a much more serious note. It appeared twenty years after the end of the Civil War. Many veterans of the conflict published recollections of their experiences (*Co. Aytch* appeared in book form in 1882). Some were genuine heroes and some were merely legends in their own minds. The local militiamen in this story don't do much of anything beyond play at soldiering, except that they shoot and kill a man who isn't an enemy soldier after all. What started out as a rollicking good time becomes a tragedy, and the men realize it. The story is a picture of military service for many men at the time: cheers, bravado, and expectation of glory that turned into hardship and loss.

James Fenimore Cooper, who died in 1851, was one of the first widely popular American novelists. Mark Twain didn't understand why. "Fenimore Cooper's Literary Offenses" offers Twain's humorous critique of Cooper's work. This essay is a reminder to all writers to be careful about what you put into print. Someone might mercilessly take apart what you think is your best writing.

The sketch “How to Tell a Story” plays with the uncomfortable truth that some people don’t know how to tell a story. Twain makes some valid points about how to tell stories for maximum effect. His continued renown as a writer indicates that he is a person to attend to on this subject. Unfortunately, Twain uses demeaning African American dialect in telling one of the stories.

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## *In His Steps*

### Charles M. Sheldon

*In His Steps* is a classic Christian novel. I’ll be asking for your ideas on some of the elements of the analysis of this book. Refer to the introduction to literary analysis at the first of this *Student Review* if you need reminders of the definition of these elements. My suggested answers are in the Answer Key that accompanies this *Student Review*.

**Plot.** The topic is the story of a church that is transformed when its members rethink how they should live. The theme is that the church members begin asking “What would Jesus do?” in every situation, and then do that regardless of the consequences.

1. What do you think is the narrative hook in the book?
2. What do you think is the inciting incident?
3. The rising action involves the stories of what happens when various church members follow through on their pledge. What do you think is the climax to the story?
4. What do you think is the resolution in the plot?
5. What is the denouement?
6. What are some sources of conflict in the story?

**Characters and Characterization, Narration and Mood.** Some characters are stock and static (such as Grandmother Page), but many are dynamic and experience significant changes (for instance: Henry Maxwell, Alexander Powers, Edward Norman, Rachel Winslow, and Rollin Page). The author uses both indirect and direct characterization.

1. Who is the main protagonist in the novel?
2. The antagonist is somewhat harder to identify. Who do you think causes the greatest conflict with the protagonist?
3. What two friends are confidants?
4. What is the point of view of the narrator?
5. How would you describe the mood or tone of the book?

**Response.** *In His Steps* is a convicting book. The power of Jesus to change lives is real, and His followers have had a profound impact in the world when they have taken seriously His call to follow Him. God can do more than we can ask or imagine; only He knows what will happen when we follow Jesus with our whole hearts and regardless of the consequences. The only thing we can do is make this commitment individually, follow through on it, and support others who have made the same commitment; the results belong to God.

Write a paragraph describing your response to *In His Steps*.

# *Up from Slavery*

## Booker T. Washington

*Up from Slavery*, Booker T. Washington's story of being born in slavery, enduring much hardship to obtain an education, working tirelessly to overcome many obstacles, and becoming the leading black educator and spokesman in the late 1900s is remarkable. The book provides valuable insights into Washington's life. From his earliest years, Washington wanted to learn to read and to obtain an education. He understood the value of education for himself, and he wanted to make it available to others. When he first began teaching blacks, he was overcome with the realization that he was in a sense teaching an entire race, a large group that had no experience or background of being educated. This was a huge challenge, but Washington believed that the effort was worth it. He knew that many blacks wanted an education so that they would not have to work with their hands, but Washington patiently taught his students the value and honor of diligent labor.

The tone of the book is positive, hopeful, and conciliatory. He expresses no bitterness toward the white race or for the experience of slavery. He mentions the experience of the Ku Klux Klan only to note how much better conditions were for blacks in the South. He spares no praise and appreciation for General Samuel Armstrong, the founder of Hampton Institute, and the many other people who provided assistance and support.

The book offers much of the wisdom that Washington learned in life. He said that because he didn't have an ancestry, he wanted to leave a record of which his children would be proud. He learned that success was not to be defined by the position he had reached but the obstacles he has overcome. He observed that great men cultivate love; only little men cherish a spirit of hatred.

On its own, the book is an inspiring triumph and worth reading. In its historical context, however, *Up from Slavery* has even greater significance. Washington had published a book about his life, *The Story of My Life and Work*, in 1900. His intended audience for that book was largely black readers. This work appeared first as a series of articles in the national magazine *The Outlook* beginning in 1900 and then as a book in 1901 in order to reach a wider audience.

1901 was a generation after slavery had ended, but only five years after the U.S. Supreme Court had decided in *Plessy v. Ferguson* that racial segregation was acceptable public policy. For decades, whites, especially in the South, had feared and subjugated blacks, resisted providing education for them, and considered them competitors for jobs held by whites. These attitudes had held back economic advancement for the black population as well as the economic development of the South as a whole. A huge untapped pool of talent could have increased productivity in southern industry and agriculture, but those in power devoted much energy to keeping blacks outside of the political, social, and economic system.

Washington believed that blacks could learn, could improve their own well-being, could contribute to American society and the economy, and could accomplish great things with their God-given abilities. This is why he began and worked so hard to develop Tuskegee Institute. He believed in what he was doing, but whites wondered how they should see him, Tuskegee, and the black population: were they a threat to or a potential source of help in building a stronger America?

Washington wanted to use his own story and the story of Tuskegee to show that his approach was working. He wanted to promote Tuskegee, attract more white contributors, and give greater opportunities to blacks. But what did this mean for the social integration of the races, something that many whites feared and that a few black leaders such as W. E. B. Du Bois were demanding?

On this Washington was willing to compromise. Let us work, he said. Give us the opportunity to learn and earn, and we will work alongside the whites even if we must endure segregation in society. Washington believed that this would accomplish the greatest practical result for the black population of the country as a whole. He hoped that social integration would come at some point, and he used his influence quietly to help African Americans achieve greater equality; but if they had to choose social integration or economic opportunity, the economic opportunity was needed then. The time had come to move beyond fear, discrimination and animosity and to work together.

Tuskegee Institute provided evidence of Booker T. Washington's success at what he set out to do. It wasn't a complete step, but it was a step toward where the country would go in later decades. Du Bois' influence kept the issue of complete equality before the country. Though some in his day criticized him for his compromise, Washington's influence helped blacks advance in meaningful, practical ways.

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## *Mama's Bank Account* Kathryn Forbes

One of the most common piece of advice from a successful to an inspiring writer is "write what you know best." This is what Kathryn Forbes does in *Mama's Bank Account*, and she did it so well that her collection of stories about Mama is still in print and still enjoyed over seventy years after its publication in 1943. The book inspired a play, a movie, and a long-running television series.

Kathryn Forbes was the pen name of Kathryn (or Katrin) Anderson McLean (1908-1966). She was the granddaughter of Norwegian immigrants. Forbes grew up in San Francisco and married Robert McLean, a carpenter. The couple had two sons. This explains the dedication of the book to Mama, Bob, and the McLean boys. The book is fiction, but Forbes based the book loosely based on her own family's story. The topic of the book is a description of life with Mama in San Francisco in the 1920s. The theme is that Mama is an amazing parent and usually saves the day in whatever situation she faces. Forbes writes in first person limited omniscient narration. We learn about the incidents she describes as they unfold before her.

The protagonist is clearly Mama. The antagonist role is filled by different characters: school personnel, Mama's four aunts, the doctor's wife, and others who bring conflict into the family's life. Sometimes the source of conflict is American society, and sometimes the cause is a member of the family. Forbes' characters are definitely round and well-developed. They are fascinating and sometimes surprising, as are the members of any real-life family and the people with whom we come into contact. The aunts serve as Mama's most common foil. Their doubts and criticisms highlight Mama's optimism and determination. Sitting back and finding fault (what the aunts did) is much easier than taking charge and making something good out of something bad (what Mama did). The mood is happy, as the narrator fondly and joyfully remembers incidents from her youth and young adulthood. Forbes moves the plot along with a significant use of dialog. These interactions are crucial in how Forbes tells the stories.

Forbes uses irony to make her stories effective. Mama believes that the children will feel secure if they think that the family has an account at the bank. In actuality, they have no such

bank account; and the children really feel secure because of the loving, attentive parents they have. Mr. Hyde gives much of great value to the family even though he fails to pay his rent. Because Mama recognizes what he has given them, she can wisely and calmly say that he owes them nothing when he leaves. Kathryn's great uncle Chris appears to be a rascal, but behind his bluster he quietly paid for surgeries to help many children be able to walk.

The book is enjoyable because of its engaging stories, but it also has value for our study of American history. Through it we learn what it was like for immigrant families in the early twentieth century. They had adjustments to make, they had to deal with prejudice against them, and they could be proud of their heritage and proud to be Americans at the same time.

What is your response to the stories? What do you learn about family, about loyalty, and about refusing to let circumstances and disappointments throw you off-track? If you wrote about your family, what would you say? Have you had any incidents of selfishness or sibling rivalry that now look childish? Do you have any family members who are especially colorful characters?

The short stories add up to portray Mama as wise, resourceful, kind, firm but patient, self-sacrificing, someone who makes the best of any situation and is rarely flustered by people or circumstances. She is a mother who places family above all. Because of her indomitable spirit, Mama can look back at everything that happened and say with peace, joy, and satisfaction, "Is good."

## Assignment

Give two examples from the book of how Forbes used dialog as a key turning point in the stories.

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# *Miracle in the Hills*

## Dr. Mary Martin Sloop

Someone has to lead.

If we are going to get anywhere, someone has to be out front: taking risks, overcoming obstacles, fighting bad attitudes, believing that something better is possible, encouraging others, showing love and commitment. You will never know what one person can do, what one person can accomplish, until you try.

In Crossnore, North Carolina, the people who led for forty years were Drs. Eustace and Mary Martin Sloop. *Miracle in the Hills* is Mary Martin Sloop's memoir that summarizes their remarkable and inspiring story that meant so much to so many people. The legacy of their work continues today.

For forty years the Sloops served, challenged, and loved the people of the western North Carolina mountains. In 1951 the National Federation of Women's Clubs named her Mother of the Year. This memoir was published in 1953 to tell and preserve her story.

Mary responded to the missionary impulse which she felt from childhood. She wanted to honor God, help others, and live a life that mattered. She overcame many obstacles. The medical college she attended did not allow women to take anatomy, so she continued her studies in Philadelphia. Her denomination said the Sloops were too old to learn a foreign language, so

they became domestic missionaries. In the Carolina mountains the Sloops overcame prejudice, harmful traditions, opposition to growth and change, isolation, poverty, and a constant shortage of funds. They led in the expansion of educational opportunities, the construction of a hospital, the introduction of electricity and better roads, the rekindling of local interest in the craft of weaving, and the blessing of many lives.

Mary Sloop's statement of her philosophy of life at the end of the book is worth the reading of the entire story. Her philosophy centered on work, prayer, and faith. She had determination that reflected a will of iron, she worked hard, but she also had great faith and believed in prayer. The evidence of the impact of work, prayer, and faith is in what the Sloops accomplished and in what is still being done today at Crossnore School. Their story is relatively simple and straightforward in the telling of it, although it was anything but simple and straightforward in the living of it.

The memoirs that you have read during this course have had different purposes. Every author wanted to tell his or her story. David Crockett wanted to promote himself, ultimately as a presidential candidate. Frederick Douglass wanted to defend himself, to prove that he had indeed been a slave, and to promote the abolition of slavery. Douglass resented how he had been treated by whites. He wanted to change his situation and the situation of the other slaves in America. As Booker T. Washington told his story, he did not express resentment against whites; but then his situation was different from what Douglass faced. Washington wanted to give hope and guidance to millions of African Americans on how they could make their lives better. Sam Watkins wanted to tell what it was like to be a Confederate soldier for four years during the Civil War and how he grew in faith and in his understanding of the nature of the Union. Mary Sloop wanted to tell what God had done through her and her husband as they served the people of Appalachia for forty years.

These inspiring memoirs reveal to us some remarkable Americans. Many other Americans who did not write their memoirs have also done remarkable things. How have these memoirs changed your thinking? What dreams do you have for your life? What obstacles will you have to overcome to fulfill those dreams? How will you make a difference in the lives of those around you?

If good is going to be done, if things are going to change, someone has to lead.

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## *To Kill a Mockingbird*

### Harper Lee

I grew up in Tennessee in the 1950s and 1960s. When I was in the sixth grade (1963-1964), my Sunday School teacher, whom I liked and respected, got to talking one day about racial integration. He said that if a black family showed up at our church, they would probably be asked to leave. He figured that they would be trying to integrate our church, and he said it just wouldn't be right for them to attend there. I remember thinking that he was probably correct, but at the same time something in me said that it wasn't right. We were a product of our times, and no one I knew wanted to challenge the status quo even if deep down we knew better.

*To Kill a Mockingbird* is a novel about prejudice in a small southern town in the 1930s. A young girl goes down deeper to what is right and learns important lessons through what happens around her. In the story, prejudice is everywhere. When you said someone was a Cunningham

or a Haverford, you said all that you needed to say about those people; everyone knew. The teacher from North Alabama, Miss Caroline, was prejudiced against Atticus reading to Scout; and Scout was prejudiced against the teacher. Everyone thought they had Boo Radley figured out and pigeonholed, even though no one ever saw him.

So people have prejudices; but must we leave things there? The only way to break through prejudice is to challenge the status quo, and that is what Atticus does. He tells Scout, "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view...until you climb into his skin and walk around in it." This seems only reasonable, but reason has a hard time fighting prejudice. Atticus agrees to defend a black man accused of assaulting a white girl, which is a shocking decision for an attorney in south Alabama.

The book is a story about prejudice, but it is also a story about redemption. The fact that redemption is possible gives us hope. Atticus loses the case, but he gains a great deal of respect in the eyes of his children. Boo Radley was kind to Jem and Scout even while they were afraid of him. The children finally have their eyes opened to who Boo really is when he saves them from Bob Ewell's attack.

The novel uses foreshadowing to get the main ideas across. Boo's help to Jem and Scout and the little gifts he leaves for them foreshadow his rescue of them. Burris Ewell's behavior at school foreshadows his father's behavior at the trial. The scene in which Atticus bravely shoots a rabid dog when no one else will foreshadows his bravely defending Tom Robinson when no one else will.

**Plot.** The narrative hook occurs when the children try to make Boo come out of his house. We think, "What will happen? What is Boo really like? How is Boo going to figure in the rest of the story?" The inciting incident occurs when children at school start calling Atticus names for taking Tom Robinson's case. The climax in the book is the trial, verdict, and subsequent events (Tom's death, Bob Ewell's attack). The resolution takes place when Boo saves Jem and Scout and his true character is revealed. The topic is life and attitudes in a small southern town, highlighted by a dramatic trial.

**Narration and Characterization.** Lee uses a generally chronological narrative, but the narrator includes background information from time to time that helps to fill in the story. For instance, she mentions that the Finch family used to own slaves. This knowledge helps the reader see how far Atticus has come in overcoming his background. The narration is first person limited omniscient.

The characters are well-developed and believable, and the narrator tells us about the characters both indirectly by what they say and do and directly by her comments. The mood or tone of the book is a defiant acceptance of the status quo but a willingness to accept new information as it comes to her. This is the process that young Scout goes through, and it is the process any of us goes through to overcome our prejudices.

Atticus and Miss Maudie tell Scout that it's a sin *to kill a mockingbird*. Mockingbirds are innocent; they don't do any harm, they just sing their hearts out. Boo Radley didn't do anybody any harm. Tom Robinson was innocent, too. What people did to them because of prejudice was a sin. In other words, some things, including prejudice and actions that come from it, are just wrong.

Why is the book so powerful? Why is it so popular over a half-century after its publication? The novel is well-written. It is realistic and gives the right amount of detail to hold your attention; you want to find out what happens next and what happens to all of these characters. The author skillfully tells the story through a child's eyes. You are wide-eyed with Scout when Atticus shoots the rabid dog. You sense Scout's innocence when she speaks to Mr. Cunningham at the jail when a mob comes for Tom. But you also sense the maturity she has gained by looking back and realizing what she learned in her youth. Lee makes skillful use of conflict: conflicting attitudes

among white people, conflicts among children, the conflict between attitudes and realities, and the dramatic conflicts portrayed during Tom Robinson's trial. Lee portrays the interaction of the characters so well that it is difficult to identify one protagonist and one antagonist. Scout is the leading protagonist in the book, but Atticus is the leading protagonist in her life. Tom Ewell is the leading antagonist in the story; but at times Scout sees Jem, Atticus, and Boo as her antagonists.

The book was a bombshell when it was published in 1960 for its eloquent portrayal of the way things really were. It continues to hold our hearts not only because of its description of the way things were but because prejudice is still an issue. We all have prejudices about people and situations that we don't really know and don't realize that we don't know. If we do what Atticus says and consider things from another person's point of view, our prejudices will start to come down.

## Assignment

Write a paragraph explaining the theme of *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

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# *The Giver*

## Lois Lowry

Wouldn't it be great to have a life with no problems, no pain, no difficult decisions, no wrong thoughts, and no mistakes or regrets to deal with?

In *The Giver*, Jonas lives in just such a community. The ordeal of childbirth is reserved for just a few designated women. A person's mate is chosen for him or her. Every couple, if approved, can have one boy and one girl. Every person's role in life is selected for him or her when that person is twelve. Everyone shares his or her feelings from the day at supper and dreams at breakfast. Potentially troublesome "stirrings" are quelled with pills. Strict rules have been established to avoid any differences and to eliminate people who might cause problems. When someone makes a mistake, the apology is automatic as is the acceptance of it. Even a family's dishes are washed for them. Everywhere else beyond the community is simply Elsewhere.

The residents of the community do not have to deal with memories, either painful or joyful. All memories are held by the Receiver. When a new Receiver is identified, the old Receiver becomes the Giver and transfers the memories to the new Receiver.

Sounds perfect, doesn't it? The community appears to be a utopia. However, as the story progresses we learn the reality beneath the apparent perfection. When a baby doesn't thrive, when an older person reaches the end of his useful life, or when a resident makes a serious mistake, they are "released," which is the euphemism for being put to death. No one has any freedom to make his own choices or go his own way. A person won't have to take risks or make mistakes; but he won't be able to excel, either. A resident cannot grow by overcoming obstacles or by learning to love. The community chose many years earlier to be guided by elders and to live in sameness; but not having memories, emotions, or conflicts takes away our basic human nature, the way God made us. When we hand over our freedom, we think we gain security; but in reality we lose so much more.

Writers have long produced descriptions of perfect places. The most common term for such a place comes from Sir Thomas More's 1516 novel *Utopia*, from the Greek for no place. *The Giver*, by contrast, is a dystopian novel. This kind of literature describes a place that is supposedly or superficially perfect but in reality is evil and dangerous. Many people have tried to establish real-life utopian settlements, but they always fail. The only perfect place is in heaven. On earth, we have to deal with problems and failings; but doing so can help us prepare for heaven.

**Plot.** The narrative hook comes early in the exposition when a jet flies over the community and everyone is ordered to go inside. Why is the event frightening? Are the people afraid of it? Are they hiding from it? Are they ordered to go inside to shield them from new ideas and experiences?

What do you think is the book's inciting incident? The rising action? See the assignment at the end of this analysis.

Jonas' new role predominates the rest of the book. The climax comes when Jonas discovers the truth about the Nurturing Center and the meaning of being "released." He decides to take Gabriel and leave the community.

The resolution is the journey that Jonas and Gabriel make away from the community. The brief last paragraph is the denouement, but what it describes is not clear.

The main conflict is between Jonas and the ways of the community. Another significant conflict for the reader is the life in the community conflicting with what we believe to be the way things ought to be in a human community. One foreshadowing is the introduction of the practice of releasing. The meaning of that practice becomes clear later in the book.

The topic is life in a supposedly perfect community. The theme is the discovery and pursuit of truth.

**Narration, Mood, Characters, and Characterization.** The narration is third person limited omniscience. The story is presented through the eyes of Jonas, and we only know what is going on in his mind. The narration is basically chronological, but the author uses frequent flashbacks to provide background information.

The mood is ambivalent. The community seems perfect, but something about it is not right to us and eventually is not to Jonas either. The tone changes with his dramatic escape at the end.

Jonas, the protagonist, is a dynamic character; but most of the other main characters, though round, are static. Characterization takes place indirectly for the most part (through what people say or do as opposed to the author's descriptions). The antagonist, though difficult to identify, is probably best seen as the community itself as opposed to any individual. This is the source of the greatest conflict for the protagonist. *The Giver* is a mentor for Jonas.

### **Lessons.**

1) Knowing the past is essential to living as we should in human community. If we don't have memory and a knowledge of history, we miss much of the richness of human life and we are more susceptible to those with power who want to manipulate and possibly even destroy us. The motivation for Jews and others who keep alive the memory of the Nazi Holocaust is, "Never again." If we don't know history, we don't know who we are as humans. If we don't know who we are as humans made in the image of God, human life becomes less valuable, especially the lives of the helpless: the unborn, the infant, and the elderly. If society ever sees people in those categories as inconvenient, they are in danger.

2) We cannot shut ourselves off from our humanness, even at the risk of pain and failure. We are interdependent; we can grow and change; we do not have to be limited by what others think of us. The community's attempt at a better life gave them less of a life.

3) The community makes no provision for God or the spiritual realm. Humans cannot create a perfect community on our own. We can learn and grow in many ways, but only God can truly transform.

What happens? We are left with many questions about the community. What led the people to decide to live this way? Did they realize what they were giving up, or did the leaders take more power for themselves by force? How long had it been this way? Lowry made the ending ambiguous on purpose. She envisioned that Jonas and Gabriel would have a good life after leaving the community. What do you think happened to Jonas, Gabriel, and the community they left behind?

### **Assignment**

Draw Freytag's pyramid (see page 2) and place the plot elements from *The Giver* in the appropriate places on the pyramid.