Writing a Literary Analysis

What Is Literary Analysis?

- It's literary.

- It's an analysis.

- It's--

- An Argument!

- It may also involve research on and analysis of secondary sources.

How Is It "Literary"?

- Usually, a literary analysis will involve a discussion of a text *as writing*, thus the term literary, which means "having to do with letters."

- This will involve the use of certain concepts that are very specifically associated with literature.

Important Literary Concepts *good concepts to research

- *The Basics*
  - Plot
  - Setting
  - Narration/point of view
  - Characterization
  - Symbol
  - Metaphor
  - Genre
  - Irony/ambiguity

- *Other key concepts*
  - Historical context
  - Social, political, economic contexts
  - Ideology
  - Multiple voices
  - Various critical orientations
  - Literary theory

How Can I Learn More?

- There are various handbooks of literary terms available in most libraries.

- There are numerous introductions to literary criticism and theory that are widely available.

- Example: *A Handbook to Literature.* Harmon/Holman

What Is an Analysis?

- An analysis of a literary work may discuss:
  - **How the various components of an individual work relate to each other.**
  - How two separate literary works deal with similar concepts or forms.
  - **How concepts and forms in literary works relate to larger aesthetic, political, social, economic, or religious contexts**.

How is Literary Analysis an Argument?

- When writing a literary analysis, you will focus on specific attribute(s) of the text(s).

- When discussing these attributes, you will want to make sure that you are making a specific, arguable point (thesis) about these attributes.

- You will defend this point with reasons and evidence drawn from the text.

Which is the Best Thesis Statement?

- *Moby-Dick* is about the problem of evil.

- *Moby-Dick* is boring and pointless.

- *Moby-Dick* is about a big, white whale.

- The use of "whiteness" in *Moby-Dick* illustrates the uncertainty about the meaning of life that Ishmael expresses throughout the novel.

How Do I Support a Thesis Statement?

- Examples from the text:
  - Direct quotations
  - Summaries of scenes
  - Paraphrase
- Other critics' opinions
- Historical and social context
- Always remember to read carefully and highlight useful passages and quotes.

What is a Secondary Source?

- A book or article that discusses the text you are discussing

- A book or article that discusses a theory related to the argument you are making

- A book or article that discusses the social and historical context of the text you are discussing

How Do I Find Secondary Sources?

- MLA International Bibliography

- Dictionary of Literary Biography

- Discipline-specific sources

  – Example: America: History and Life for American literature

- Other search engines

- A bibliography that is part of your text

- Ask your instructor

Integrating Secondary Sources

- When you use secondary sources, be sure to show how they relate to your thesis.

- Don't overuse any one secondary source, or for that matter, secondary sources in general

- Remember that this is your paper, your argument—the secondary sources are just helping you out.

- Never, never, never plagiarize. See the OWL handout on plagiarism for more information.

Overview of Literary Analysis

- When writing a literary analysis:
  - Be familiar with literary terms.
  - Analyze specific items.
  - Make an a argument.
  - Make appropriate use of secondary sources
  - Consult instructors and tutors for help when needed.

Where Can I Go for More Help?

- The Purdue University Writing Lab

- 226 Heavilon Hall

- 494-3723

- And visit http://owl.english.purdue.edu

- Or email owl@owl.english.purdue.edu

The End