

Thesis Questions for the Literary Essay

courtesy of Prof. Richard Kroll

Character

- Does the character reveal the meaning of the work? In what way(s)?
- What technique does the author use to reveal the character?
- Can the characters be classified?
- Is there a purpose to including two or more character classifications in the work?
- Does the character change?
- How does the character's change relate to the author's overall purpose?
- Are any of the characters symbolic?

Theme

- What idea does the work develop, and how is the idea made clear?
- What is the purpose of the work, and how is that purpose achieved?

Imagery and Symbolism

- Is there an image or a pattern of images which helps convey the purpose of the work or a central idea?
- Is there an image or a pattern of images which helps portray a character?
- Does the imagery change in the course of the work?
- Is there a purpose to the change in imagery?
- Are there any symbols which reveal character?
- Are there any symbols which reveal the theme?

Setting

- Does the setting help convey the theme?
- Does the setting help portray a character?
- Does the setting create a mood which complements or ironically contrasts with the action?
- Does the setting change?
- What is the purpose of the change in setting; how does the change relate to theme or character?
- Is the setting symbolic?

Structure

- How does the structure of the work serve the author's purpose?
- If the story, play, or poem is not told chronologically, what is the purpose behind

the arrangement of events in the work?

- What is the rationale behind the divisions in a story, play, or poem?
- How is the conclusion foreshadowed by the author?

Point of View

- What are the advantages and/or disadvantages to the point of view the author has chosen?
- How does the point of view affect the theme of the work? *tone & theme*
- How does the point of view affect the characterization in the work?
- How does the point of view affect the structure of the work?
- What is the effect of the point of view?
- Does the point of view change in the work?
- What is the purpose for the change in point of view?

From Rosanna Grassi and Peter DeBlois, Composition and Literature

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