

How to Write Response to Literature

- ‡ **READ:** First read the story for insight. As you read, highlight parts of the selection or write notes in the margin to help you think about what you are reading. For example, you might want to highlight important ideas/quotes, and any ideas related to setting, character, conflict, foreshadowing or other literary elements.
- ‡ **PICK AN APPROACH TO REVIEWING THE STORY:** Read over the list below and pick a category to explore in your response.
- **CHARACTER:** One approach is to analyze one or more characters in terms of their characteristics and development in the story. Reread the story, noting information about the character(s) you have chosen: way of talking; thoughts; actions; values, beliefs, motives, goals; relations with other characters; differences from and similarities to other characters. *Your goal is to understand the character(s) you are analyzing as fully as possible.*
 - **SETTING:** The physical setting of a story often can be a productive starting point for interpreting a story. Think about the physical setting of a story: where and when the events take place; whether the setting changes; how the writer presents the setting; what mood the setting creates; whether the setting causes, reflects, or contradicts the characters' actions, values, or moods. *Your goal is to understand what impact the setting has on the story as a whole.*
 - **THEME:** Many literary themes are familiar and reoccur often. Some themes are: journey for something of value; overcoming an obstacle; coming of age; relations between generations, genders racial or ethnic groups, children and parents, employees and owners; good vs. evil. *Your goal in this approach is to find a theme in the story and then write a response that shows how that theme reveals an understanding of the author's message.*
 - **STRUCTURE:** Exploring the structure of a story can lead to insights about the story. In this approach you will examine what clues, details, or repetitions the author gives to advance the plot of the story. Look for elements such as foreshadowing, conflict, points of suspense, climax and resolution to analyze how the author arranges the story. *Your goal in this approach is to analyze the sequence of events in a story and how the story gets told.*
- ‡ **FIND A THESIS:** Review your notes and list any ideas that you now have that say something about the story's meaning and significance. Write a thesis about the story's meaning. See sample essay for an example of a well-written thesis.
- ‡ **FIND & ORGANIZE YOUR EVIDENCE:** Find evidence that supports your thesis and then organize how you will use that evidence in your writing. Dialogue, events, quotes, descriptive details, key words and images are commonly used as textual evidence in a response to literature essay.
- ‡ **PREWRITE:** Develop a plan for your draft. You might use an outline, a graphic organizer or a list of key points
- ‡ **WRITE:** After you have completed the above steps, you are ready to write. Remember, your essay **MUST BE WRITTEN IN THIRD PERSON ONLY!** The goal of interpreting a piece of literature is to present your interpretation and support the interpretation with textual evidence. **BE DIRECT, USE QUOTES FROM THE STORY and EXPLAIN YOUR IDEAS FULLY.**

Response to Literature Checklist

Quick Check for the Writer

- _____ Essay does not assume the reader has read the story.
- _____ Introduction has one central idea that leads from Hook to GDT to Thesis.
- _____ Summarizes the work for readers who have not read it in the GDT—So, the GDT: Must include Author, Title, and brief summary of the story.
- _____ State your thesis or argument clearly.
- _____ Organize the main parts of your argument in a logical way.
- _____ Build your argument by quoting, paraphrasing, or summarizing specific parts of the story.
- _____ Make clear connections between your ideas and evidence by explaining how you think the evidence illustrates or supports your ideas. Minimum of 2 quotes per body paragraph- put in your examples.
- _____ Organize your essay so it is easy to follow such as forecasting your arguments and providing transitions between paragraphs and sentences.
- _____ End your essay by restating your thesis in new words.
- _____ Use the Sandwich technique with quotes: make some statement, use a quote from the story that shows this, then explain the connection of the quote to the point you are making.
- _____ Did you edit for correct punctuation, capitalization and spelling?

*** Note: Quotes are the words or a phrase you take “word for word” exactly from the story. These do not have to be spoken words from a character. They can be either information/details from the story or what a character says. It depends on what you need to support your point(s).**

[] – use brackets for anything you add to a quote that wasn’t there or change in a quote to make correct

. . . – use ellipsis for anything you take out from the original quote (notice spacing)

“ ” – use triple quotes for anything you take from a story that already has quotes in the story (This is called a quote within a quote)

Just an Illusion

(Hook) “Everything you can imagine is real.” –Pablo Picasso. Does this quote mean that if someone were to assume something about another, that it would be true? Or is it just to show that if someone wants something to be real, it can be real? (GDT) In Lucille Clifton’s short story “The Luckiest Time of All,” Clifton writes about a Great-grandmother, Elzie Pickens, telling her story about how she met her husband, Amos Pickens, at the circus to her Great-granddaughter while also showing that things aren’t always how they appear to be. (Thesis) In “The Luckiest Time of All” appearance and reality are both shown through Mr. Pickens’ facade, Elzie and Ovella going to the Silas Greene show, and how Elzie’s luck stone is portrayed.

(TS) To begin with, Amos Pickens’ exterior shows that things aren’t always what they seem to be in several ways. (1st Pt.) First, in the beginning of the story, Amos is described as a rough and tough cowboy, but later on he is shown as an angel. (Ex. A) Lucille Clifton wrote, “‘He had a length of twine in his hand and was twirlin it around in the air just like the cowboy at the Silas Greene and grinnin fit to bust’” (362). (Ex. B) Although Elzie described Mr. Pickens as rugged, she also made him appear as an angel when she states, “‘the sun shined on him and made him look like an angel come to save a poor sinner girl’” (Clifton 361). This shows that although some things may look as though they will go one way they could always go another. (2nd Pt.) Second, when Mr. Pickens was in the process of walking Elzie and Ovella home, he claimed it was to see them back safely, however it was actually for a much more romantic reason. (Ex. A) Although it was extremely generous of Amos to walk the girls back home, that wasn’t his main intention. (Ex. B) In Clifton’s short story she shows this when she writes, “‘And a good little way, the one who was gonna be your Great-granddaddy was walkin on behind. Seein us safe. Us walkin kind of slow. Him seein us safe. Yes ’” (362). This shows that although Amos may actually be trying to protect the girls, his main reason for walking home with them was to be with Elzie. (CS) Thus, Amos Pickens’ motions and visage make him a way to show that the first look is not everything.

(TS) In addition, when Tee’s grandmother and Ovella travel to Silas Greene show, it looks like they are going there to sign up for the show to see the world, but a twist of events lead them to a different ending, making it seem like one thing, but appearing to be another. (1st Pt.) To start with, when they first arrive at the fair ground, they decide not to sign up right away. (Ex. A) “‘Me and Ovella thought we’d walk around for a while and see the show before goin to the office to sign up and join’” (361). (Ex. B) They seem to still be holding off on signing up, but that does not mean that they won’t sign up. However much they hold it off, at the end of the story, the girls never end up signing up for the Silas Greene show, proving that things may not always end how they are supposed to. (2nd Pt.) Furthermore, after meeting Mr. Pickens, the Ovella and Elzie decide not to jump on into the circus, pushing on the thought that situations don’t always follow through with what is appearing to be happening. (Ex. A) When Clifton writes, “‘Ovella and me lost heart for shows then and we walked on home’” (362), it proves that things won’t always turn out the way they’re supposed to. (Ex. B) Throughout most of the story, it had shown that Elzie and Ovella were going to join the Silas Greene show, yet in the end, they decided against their idea. Proving that even when someone has looked at something and decided that it will turn out one way, that’s not always going to be the case. (CS) Therefore, Ovella and Elzie desiring to get into the circus showed that things aren’t always how they appear to.

(TS) Last, the lucky stone Elzie threw has multiple ways of appearing one way, but actually being another. (1st Pt.) One, When Elzie reached into her bag, it seemed as though she was going to grab just another one of her pennies, however, she actually grabbed her lucky stone. (Ex. A) When she tossed out her lucky stone it was almost as if Ms. Pickens was trying to grab the stone back, but she was too late. (Ex. B) As the stone flew out of her hand it hit the dancing dog in the nose. For example, when Clifton writes, “‘Soon as it left my hand it seemed like I reached back out for it to take it back. But the stone was gone from my hand and Lord, it hit that dancin dog right on the nose!’” (361). This shows that although some of the most simple things could lead to some terrifying experiences, if they’re guessed incorrectly. (2nd Pt.) Two, as Clifton wrote about the stone seemed like just another thing that people carried with them in bad situations, but never really helped them. (Ex. A) Even though it’s her grandmother, even Tee thought that the stone was just another thing to hold when a situation got bad.

(Ex. B) This is made noticeable when Tee asks, “‘Grandmama, that stone almost got you bit by a dog that time. It wasn’t so lucky that time, was it?’” (362). Most wouldn’t have expected the rock to have helped Elzie in this situation, but it actually assisted her in finding her future husband. This shows that the first glance isn’t always how it seems. (CS) All in all, Elzie Pickens’ stone is a way of showing that things aren’t always how they appear to be because it seemed as if it was a penny and it also helped her find the love of her life out of a seemingly bad situation.

(RT) In conclusion, Mr. Pickens’ actions and physical looks, Ovella’s and Elzie’s circus phase, and Ms. Pickens lucky stone all showed appearance and reality in some way or another. (Summary) Although most people judge everything in life based on the way it looks, that view isn’t always as realistic as it could be. Even if the guess is close, it doesn’t mean that judging things is always the most accurate thing to do. (Clincher) Sometimes the outside shell of something is not always how they really are. Could it all just be an illusion to peoples’ demanding eyes?

Group 5
2-12-14
Period C

Greed Blinds Rich Men While Poor Men See the Truth

(Hook) “Inflamed by greed, incensed by anger, confused by delusion, obsessed by these, overcome by these, man causes his own suffering.” In life greed often destroys the greatest of people. The strong desire for something somebody else has causes countless misfortunes. Why is it that people desire what others have? (GDT) In Teresa Bateman’s short story “Both Sides of the Fence” the main character, Alberto, was consumed by the curse of greed. Alberto loved and took pride in his apple tree; hence he became greedy and wanted nobody else to profit from what was rightfully his. When Alberto learned his neighbor, Juan, benefited from his tree his greed turned to rage. Although Juan could have stolen the apples on the tree he decided to give all the apples back to Alberto but in an even better way. In the end Juan’s wife made an apple cake for Alberto in an attempt to thank him for what the apple tree provided. (Thesis) Throughout the storyline it’s evident that the theme “Appearance vs. Reality” exists due to Alberto believing that Juan stole his apples, Alberto being more fortunate than Juan, and townsfolk’s thinking Alberto was incapable of change.

(TS) To begin with, Alberto was overtaken by wrath and accused Juan of stealing his apples, but what Alberto didn’t realize was that Juan actually returned the apples in the form of a cake. (1st pt) First, Alberto claimed that Juan was guilty, “of stealing [apples from Alberto’s tree] and left proof of it on my doorstep” (Bateman 1), obviously Alberto accused him because he didn’t want anybody to have something that belonged to him. (Ex) After finding an apple cake on his doorstep, Alberto decided that he should bring Juan to ‘justice’ and immediately consulted with the mayor about his problems. He told the mayor that, “This was made with apples from my tree. Juan’s guilty of stealing and left proof of it on my doorstep,” (1). The mayor decided to give this case a trial and advised Alberto to find out what was on the other side of the fence and to, “Come back tomorrow and present me with Juan’s point of view” (1). Alberto ignored his advice and went back the next day stating, “He will say the apples fell onto his property and that makes them his, but if a dog wandered into his yard, the dog would not be his” (2), the mayor discovered that Alberto didn’t take his advice so he repeated his advice. Alberto took the mayor’s advice and found out that though things may appear one way, if he looked at it from a different angle they appear different too. (2nd pt) Second, when Alberto went to the other side of the fence his theory was proven wrong. (Ex) It appeared that Juan stole his apples but in reality, Alberto learned that, Juan gave them back to him. After his third meeting with the mayor Alberto went to Juan’s house. When he arrived he was surprised to learn that Juan’s wife “baked all of them [the apples] into a cake” (2). This surprised Alberto because Juan didn’t steal but instead returned Alberto’s apples back to him. After his encounter with Juan, Alberto learned the valuable lesson of ‘looking on both sides of the fence’ because appearance isn’t always reality. (CS) To sum up, Alberto’s misjudgment of Juan

shows Alberto that everything is not what it seems and he should look past his anger and hatred to see things for what they really are.

(TS) In addition, Alberto's possessions made it seem that Juan has less than Alberto, but Juan's outlook on life makes Alberto the poor man. (1st pt) To start with, it looked as if Alberto had more than Juan because, "both houses were much alike, [but] Alberto had a splendid apple tree, puffed with pink blossoms each spring and bent low each autumn with fruit both red and ripe. His neighbor, Juan, had little and nothing except his family and his good nature" (1). (Ex) It also looked as though Alberto had more because Alberto claimed to be "the finest man in the pueblo" (1), and if Alberto was in fact the 'finest man in the pueblo' (1), there really couldn't be anyone better than he, including Juan. Though Alberto claimed to be the best because of his apple tree, he didn't realize that greatness isn't always measured simply by monetary wealth, popularity, or even an apple tree. Sometimes it is measured by fulfillment in life. (2nd pt) Similarly, it was actually Juan who had it better than Alberto because Juan, unlike Alberto, was content with his life and was happy with his family. (Ex) Juan said, "My family so enjoyed the branch of your tree that comes over the fence-blossoms in the spring, shade in the summer" (2). While Juan was gaining enjoyment from the tree, Alberto, "fretted and fumed through the pink-blossomed spring. He pondered and puzzled through the green-leafed summer" (1), that reveals that through the seasons while Juan was enjoying the tree, Alberto was perplexed and anxious. The richest man doesn't need possessions but satisfaction in his life. Though it appears as though Alberto had more, he didn't because Juan was enjoying his life while Alberto was worrying. (CS) All in all, it looks as if Alberto possessed more than Juan. However, through the story it is revealed that Juan was actually the more fortunate person.

(TS) Finally, the townsfolk doubted that Alberto could change his greedy nature; however, in the end they were proven wrong when he had a sudden change of heart after talking to Juan. (1st pt) One, the townsfolk, "shook their heads at his foolishness" (1) showing that they believed that Alberto was never going to change. (Ex) The townsfolk's action of shaking their heads showed that they thought he was foolish. They also "left him to his pride" (1) which showed that they thought that he was never going to change. They failed to realize that he had never really associated with anybody as selfless as Juan. The townsfolk didn't realize that, although unlikely, people can change quickly. Before the townsfolk gave him a chance, they gave up on him because it seemed like he was never going to change. (2nd pt) Two, after Juan talked to Alberto, he became a better, less greedy person. "He hurried home, gathered a basket of his finest apples, and carried them to the other side of the fence" (2). Alberto bringing the basket over to the other side of the fence showed that the townsfolk couldn't see the reality that people can change. (Ex) Though it seemed like Alberto would never change, in the end he proved them wrong by becoming less greedy and more reasonable. Alberto was really greedy and proud in the beginning of the story but near the end he ended up being a good person. He eventually realized that he was, like the townsfolk said, too greedy and proud, after that, "Alberto felt no taller than an ant. His arguments dissolved like sugar in water" (2). People often judge each other before hearing their story. When someone takes the time to listen to another person's story they may discover that they have something in common. (CS) In short, Alberto's greed and pride made it seem like he would never change though in the end Juan sees Alberto for what he truly is.

(RT) In conclusion, Alberto thinking that Juan took his apples, being wealthier than Juan, and townsfolk believing Alberto couldn't change is all confirmation that the story's theme is "Appearance vs. Reality." (Summary) "This society is driven by neurotic speed and force accelerated by greed and frustration of not being able to live up to the image of men and women we have created for ourselves. The image has nothing to do with the reality of people." (Clincher) There are over 150,000 deaths every day and over 55 million every year. If that's the case, why spend life in a lonely pool of greed and hatred? It is important to at least attempt to help others because it is impossible to know how much time is left.

Both "it" and "is" should be capitalized and try to be more clever with your title. Maybe: Life Is Least Expected

Sonnybill Williams
1-19-12
D

Your hook is a simple repetition of the title and lacks more than one type.

Life Happens when it is Least Expected

Work on the word choice

(Hook) Sometimes the best things in life happen when people least expect it. (GDT) In

You need a space after the (GDT) identifier.

the story, "The Luckiest Time of All" by Lucille Clifton, Elzie Pickens, the main character,

tells a story about the time she met her husband. Elzie and her friend Ovella were at a

This should be written as , which was call the Silas Green Show, offset with commas

circus called the Silas Greene to join and travel around the world when she met Amos

Pickens. (Thesis) In this story, Elzie's characteristics as a spontaneous, religious, and

compassionate person were evident in many ways.

Your TS is missing either the number of reasons or the specific reasons and you didn't find a synonym for "spontaneous."

(TS) To begin with, Elzie is a spontaneous person because she makes abrupt decisions

Where is the reference to the main topic—Character in you 1st PT?

about the circus. (1st PT) First, Elzie and Ovella left to the circus without telling anyone

Insert "In fact," at the beginning of this sentence

(Ex) Elzie said, "[d]idn't say nothin to nobody but one another. Just up and decided to do

Insert "In other words" at the beginning of this sentence.

it." (Ex) She felt that she did not need to ask for permission from her parents and just got

because she is a person who acts before she thinks.

up and did it. (2nd PT) Second, in the end of the story Elzie and Ovella decided to

Begin with this: due to her knee-jerk decision making approach (change "in" to "by")

randomly go home and not join the Silas Greene show. (Ex) Elzie said, "Ovella and me

lost heart for the shows then and we walked on home..." (Ex) She never explains why she

decided so quickly not to join the circus. (CS) In short, it is clear Elzie is spontaneous

because she easily makes quick decisions.

Change to: Such actions clearly demonstrate that Elzie is not a person who stays on a clear plan and just reacts to a situation.

This CS should be specific because the TS was general. It should read like: it is rather obvious that Elzie is a human being that loves to just go with the flow as seen in her choices to become part of the circus and then shortly after change her mind.

The thesis should be more like, "As Elzie relates her courageous tale to her great-granddaughter Tee, it is clear that she is a person who is spontaneous, religious, and compassionate.

Change to : Elzie Shows her haphazardly nature when she stated, Get rid of the ... at the end of the quote.