

THE FUSION OF LITERATURE, GRAMMAR, AND  
COMPOSITION AS ILLUSTRATED BY  
WRITING ESSAYS ABOUT  
SHORT STORIES

By

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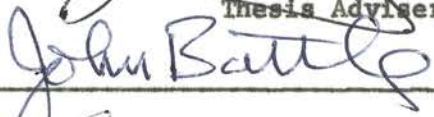
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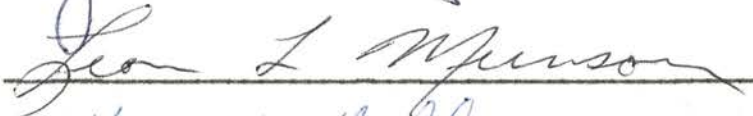
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## PREFACE

Assignments in the high school English classroom relate to at least one of the three major areas--literature, grammar, or composition. A very real problem occurs when the teacher attempts to teach one of the areas in isolation. The challenge, then, is to fuse the three areas into a concise, meaningful exercise.

The genre most adaptable for illustrating the fusion of literature, grammar, and composition is the short story. After a careful reading and thorough discussion of the story, the student is ready to express in the form of an essay his ideas about one of the story elements--plot, character, setting, theme, or style. In preparing the essay through the use of satisfactory sentence structures, grammar is no longer merely a list of rules but a tool useful in the expression of ideas. The basic concept behind this paper is that a fused unit of study will enable the learner to read a short story and to write an essay about it using clear and concise sentences.

Indebtedness is acknowledged to Drs. Carroll D. Lavery, Harry P. Kroiter and Harrison E. Hiorth, and to Professor J. S. Jernigan for their inspiration and guidance during the NDEA Institute in English, Texas A. & M. University, Summer 1967; and to Drs. D. Judson Milburn and Leon L. Munson for their assistance in preparing this study.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Students in high school seldom reach the understanding that language is a system of sounds and symbols used by writers and speakers to convey a message, and that they use a particular system, English, when speaking or writing. Instead, through small units of study, they tend to divide English into three areas--literature, grammar, and composition --with little transfer of learning from one area to the other. The purpose of this unit, on the other hand, is to use the short story genre to show how literature, grammar, and composition can be fused into a concise, meaningful study.

#### Statement of Purpose

This paper has three primary objectives:

1. To present an outline for examining the short story that will show that a literary work is a conscious creation by its author, and that plot, character, setting, and style are significant in the development of theme.
2. To propose a method for the grammatical study of the short story paragraph and sentence structure as it reflects the individuality of the author.
3. To suggest topics for student essays that concern either or both the literary work and the grammatical analysis.

Illustration of the Fusion of Literature, Grammar, and Composition

The following illustration lists six elements of the short story and suggests ways by which the study of literature, grammar, and composition may be unified.

	The Short Story	Grammar	Composition
Point of View or Speaking Voice	Purpose Narrator Tone	Levels of Grammar Diction	Purpose Narrator Tone
Theme or Thesis	Dominant Idea Comment of Values, or Human Nature Moral View	Levels of Grammar Diction	Dominant Idea Comment on Values, or Human Nature Moral View
Plot or Structure	Exposition Complications Climax Denouement Epiphany		Exposition Complications Climax Denouement Epiphany
Development	Character Static Developing Narration Description Paragraph Sentence	Paragraph Sentence	Character Static Developing Narration Description Paragraph
Setting	Physical Spiritual		Physical Spiritual
Style	Word Usage Organization Rhetorical Devices Total Impression	Word Usage Organization Rhetorical Devices Total Impression	Word Usage Organization Rhetorical Devices Total Impression

Figure 1. An adaptation of the OVERVIEW. Diagram to suggest six subject contact-points for multipurpose assignments, Texas A. & M. University.

Following the suggestions for interpreting literature, a discussion of the short story, "All Yankees Are Liars" by Eric Knight, would include an analysis of the point of view, theme, plot, character, setting, and style as outlined below, (1).

1. Point of view: Limited omniscient.
2. Theme: Man desire to find things and people as they believe them to be even to preferring fiction to the truth.
3. Plot:
  - a. Exposition: Yorkshire, England; California, USA.
  - b. Complications: Yankee, rain, crops, alfalfa, irrigation, bridges, tunnels, cars, semantics.
  - c. Climax: Laugh.
  - d. Denouement: Cowboys, roundup, buffalo, Indians, gangsters.
  - e. Epiphany: "Us goes to t' pictures and so us knaws whet America's really like."
4. Character:
  - a. Focal: Mr. Smith.
  - b. Developing: Mr. Smith.
  - c. Static: All others with the possible exception of Ian.
5. Setting: The Spread Eagle Inn.
6. Style:
  - a. Use of rhetorical devices.
  - b. Simple and direct.
  - c. Dialect.
  - d. Sentence openers.
  - e. Overall effect.

The discussion of the author's style in a particular short story



overlaps the study of grammatical constructions. From the discussion of style, therefore, it is easy to move to the two important questions of grammar:

1. Was the level of grammar and the word choice appropriate for the story?
2. What level of grammar and word choice would be appropriate in writing about the story?

The final step in fusing the study of literature, grammar, and composition is actually writing about the story. The sample essay that follows is more than most high school students can produce. It includes all of the elements discussed to give the teacher a better concept of writing about a literary work. Later in this paper, the elements of plot, character, setting, theme, and style are isolated and narrowed to the writing capacity of the student. The unifying thread that connects all of the essays is the emphasis placed on theme. Theme is the author's message, and in the short story all of the elements must contribute to theme development.

Sample Essay      US KNOWS WHAT AMERICA'S REALLY LIKE

From direct or indirect experience, every person has a preconceived picture of what a place or group of people is going to be like. When evidence to the contrary confronts an individual, he rationalizes that it is the other person that is out of focus. This concept is the theme of Eric Knight's short story, "All Yankees Are Liars". An American finds what he calls a typical English inn with typical Yorkshire patrons. The conflict arises when this man, Mr. Smith from Southern California, does not describe America as the Yorkshiremen perceive it.

Theme, tone, and character elements develop through the use of the

limited omniscient point of view. Except for those moments when the author reveals the thoughts of Mr. Smith, the point of view is that of an observer. The observer relates how Mr. Smith rejoices when he finds an inn like the one he has in mind. Later, the observer witnesses; first, the frustration of the Yorkshiremen as Mr. Smith describes his home state and the meaning of Yankee; and, second, the contentment of the Yorkshiremen when their opinions are validated. Through Mr. Smith's thoughts the tone of the story develops. The humor in the story results from his saying what the men want to hear while narrating the problems of selecting details for the episodes. The observer adds, also, to the characterizations of the people by telling what they do and say in this particular incident. Ian, for example, is huge, but he is the first to laugh at what he considers Mr. Smith's joke. The way a reader thinks or feels about the characters in the story depends on the point of view from which it is told.

The story takes place in a rural English inn. Mr. Smith, An American, spends some time observing four village men playing darts. When the game ends and they join him at the fireside, he attempts to start a conversation. Mr. Smith and the men exchange only a few words before Gollicker Pearson calls him a Yankee. Mr. Smith attempts to explain that Yankees live in New England, California farmers use irrigation, and English money does not have an American equivalent of exchange. The last remark, "I think a billion is different in America from here," is too much; and Saw Cooper begins to argue. Ian steps in and brings the action to a moment of decision. A touch of home-sickness from his description of California causes Mr. Smith to laugh. Ian is quiet for a minute and then begins to laugh also. "He's been having us on!" Mr. Smith's friendship with these men depends on what he says next; there-

fore, he tells them what they want to hear. He tells about cowboys, buffalo, Indians, and gangsters. Ian brings the reader to the moment of understanding when he says". . .Us knows whet America's really like."

More than half of the paragraphs in this story are in dialogue; hence, they are short and direct. The paragraphs of exposition are also short and concise. Noun phrases serve most often as sentence openers. The diction of the unassuming Yorkshiremen helps to develop local color delightfully. "Ah knew them theer brigs o' thins'd hev to be big. . ." "That's so's they'd be able to goa ovvr wheat that grows fohteen foot high when ye sprinkle it fro' t' watter tap."

Mr. Smith is the focal character in the story. He is an American tourist who wants to see the parts of England that he has dreamed about. He is forced to make one important decision that strongly affects his visit to the Spread Eagle Inn. The omniscient observer tells that "an inn pushed him over," and that is why he tells about the America of the movies. Perhaps he makes the decision for another reason; Mr. Smith thinks more of enjoying the delightful evening than of being victorious in the argument.

Saw Cooper is an extrovert; He is the first to speak to Mr. Smith, and the Yorkshireman that has the last word in the argument about America. Perhaps his dart game is not as good as his farming since he buys the first round of drinks. Unlike Saw, Sam has little to say and is described only as old and small. All the reader knows about him is that he is curious to hear tales of the buffalo and Indians. Gollicker Pearson calls Mr. Smith a Yankee, and he is curious about the cowboys. He is young, bright-faced, and left handed. These three characters do not change in the story because the action reveals them as they are without showing them in the process of developing.

Ian does show some development in character. When he laughs at the joke about America, the narrator does not tell why. He could be attempting to make peace between the two men. Ian does include Mr. Smith in the dart game, and he is tolerant of one fault. Mr. Smith says, "I did tell some lies." Ian replies, ". . .It's all right as long as tha told us t' trowth finally."

The author uses few rhetorical devices in this selection, undoubtedly because most of the selection is in dialogue where the characters are not too sophisticated. Describing the village as "off the beaten track," is an example of an idiom. "Thwock," is a word that describes the action and suggests the sound of the darts as they hit the cork board. A remark is compared to a coin when the men "look at both sides of it." It is perhaps a bit of an exaggeration to say that during nine months of the year it never rains, even in Southern California. An example of juxtaposition is used to describe a desert plant that produces eight cuttings a year in California. Metaphorically, Mr. Smith holds his "mental breath" as he decides to start his tale. Another example of juxtaposition is evident when the real Indians of Santa Fe are unsatisfactory for his description of a real Indian. Although this story does not have an excess of rhetorical devices, it does provide an excellent example of irony. "But it's all right as long as tha told us t' trowth finally."

The story, told from the limited omniscient point of view in a simple and direct style, uses dialogue in dialect effectively. The episodes are logically presented with an introduction, exposition, climax and denouement clearly defined and leading emphatically to the epiphany. As a unit, this short story is satisfying and complete because it clearly

expresses the thought or idea that the author wanted to express--the  
desire of men to find things and people as they believe them to be.

## CHAPTER II

### METHODS AND PROCEDURE

In the previous chapter, the teacher has seen the fusion of literature, grammar, and composition. As a necessary step in teaching a specific unit the following lesson plan outlines for the teacher the objectives, teacher preparations, presentation, and methods of evaluation. This plan avoids a time schedule for several reasons. While a five-week period is ideal--one short story each week--the ability and interest of the students in any particular class and the unexpected interruptions of regular school hours combine to confuse even the most elaborately designed plans. Clearly, the greatest advantage of this unit is its flexibility.

Grading is kept to a minimum. Oral comments are less personal than red ink marks; in addition, listening to prepared efforts by other students stimulates the listener's thoughts. One student made this comment: "Reading the essays in class helped me to gain more confidence. The class's remarks were good to help me learn to write essays and to accept criticism." Of course, nothing prevents the teacher from reading, discussing and marking paragraphs or essays at any time. This point is simply left to the teacher's discretion.

Notebook evaluation is based on quantity rather than quality. This proposal is based on two assumptions. First, all students can profit from this unit of study regardless of their writing skill if they take the time to complete each exercise as it is presented. And second, personal

pride prevents a student from presenting less than his best in an oral demonstration of his writing skill.

A final test essay that is written in class provides the teacher with a valid sample of the student's ability to write an essay about a literary subject.

### The Teacher's Lesson Plan

**JOB OR SUBJECT:** Writing Essays About Short Stories.

**OBJECTIVE:** To combine the study of literature, grammar, and composition into a meaningful unit of study.

**INTRODUCTION OR PREPARATION:**

1. Duplicate the following:
  - a. List of Sentence Errors.
  - b. Style Suggestions.
  - c. Analysis Questions.
  - d. Notes for Writing Essays.
2. Select from the student's test short stories that clearly illustrate each of the five elements to be studied.

**PRESENTATION:**

1. Introduction:
  - a. Discuss the history of the short story.
  - b. Listen to the record, "Understanding the Short Story" and discuss its message, (2).
2. Work the assignment for review of sentence errors in the notebook purchased for this unit of study.
3. Copy the style suggestions in the notebook and discuss their importance.

4. Exercise 1:

- a. Read and discuss the short story selected for plot development following the suggestions in Figure 1, page 2.
- b. Emphasize the use of plot in the development of theme by specific questions to solicit answers that will aid in writing an essay on plot.
- c. Explain detailed ideas and examples of ways to write an essay on plot.
- d. Assign an essay that shows how plot in a specific short story develops theme.
- e. Ask students to read their essays to the class and discuss their efforts.

5. Exercise 2:

Follow the teaching outline in Exercise 1. Substitute character for plot.

6. Exercise 3:

Follow the teaching outline in Exercise 1. Substitute setting for plot.

7. Exercise 4:

Follow the teaching outline in Exercise 1. Emphasize that theme is the result of plot, character, and setting.

8. Exercise 5:

Follow the teaching outline in Exercise 1. Substitute style for plot.

**EVALUATION:** Have the students exchange notebooks and evaluate on amount of work completed in the notebook and on the number of essays read in class.



Questions and answers on plot	5 points
Notes on essay on plot	3 points
Essay on plot	7 points
Reading essay to class	<u>5</u> points
Total points for each exercise	20 points
Total value of notebook	100 points

**TEST:** Assign a short story for independent study. Have the students write essays in class analyzing the story element of their choice as it is developed in the assigned short story.

**REFERENCES:** Three very fine books by Sylvan Barnet (3), Harry Fenson and Hildreth Kritzer (4), and Edgar V. Roberts (5) offer many helpful suggestions for writing about literature.

## CHAPTER III

### GRAMMAR AND COMPOSITION REVIEW

Composition is not the strongest field for most high school students; therefore, a general review of sentence structure and of essay form can eliminate many errors that discourage students and teachers long before they glean the message from student writing.

#### Sentence Errors

This grammar review is completed by the student on his own. It may be for better students left simply to an outside assignment, or for average students a classroom exercise. One effective method of presentation consists of student demonstrations using the overhead projector.

Sentence errors are called to the student's attention in the belief that a better understanding of good sentence structure will lead to better writing. The errors are not listed in any order. Those listed were included because they appear on standardized tests required for college entrance and college tests for advanced standing credit. Perhaps in the discussion of grammar, it is best to point out to the student that he must make the level of grammar appropriate for the occasion.

#### Instructions:

Listed below are sentence errors that plague good writing. Define each error either mentally or in the notebook. Next, make a sentence that

contains that error. Finally, correct the sentence by eliminating the problem isolated.

### Problems

1. Construction errors:
  - a. Fragments.
  - b. Comma splice.
  - c. Run-ons.
2. Pronoun errors:
  - a. Vague reference.
  - b. Ambiguous reference.
  - c. General reference.
3. Diction errors:
  - a. Repetitiousness.
  - b. Misuse.
4. Modified errors:
  - a. Dangling participles.
  - b. Split infinitives.
  - c. Misplaced modifiers.
5. Faulty parallelism.
6. Subject shift and verb shift.
7. Incorrect sequence of tenses.
8. Lack of agreement.
  - a. Subject and predicate.
  - b. Pronoun and antecedent.
9. Faulty subordination.

## Style Suggestions

Copying this list of questions in the notebook is just the first step in using this student evaluation. It can profitably be reviewed before the final draft of every essay is prepared. Its purpose is to stress the importance of unity, coherence, and emphasis in good writing.

### Questions

1. Unity:
  - a. Does the title anticipate the thesis statement?
  - b. Does the first paragraph introduce the subject and narrow it to one area adequate for the length of the paper?
  - c. Does the thesis statement anticipate the major points to be discussed and the author's attitude toward the subject?
  - d. If the topic presents an argument, when are the losing points to be conceded?
  - e. Does the essay contain at least one paragraph for every major point?
  - f. Does the conclusion reflect the introduction by restating the thesis and broadening to a general statement?
2. Coherence:
  - a. Do the sentences link together?
  - b. Do the paragraphs flow together smoothly?
  - c. Does the essay contain linking devices, repetition of words and ideas, and pronouns?
3. Emphasis:
  - a. Are the paragraphs arranged in a logical order?
  - b. Is the strongest point discussed last?

## CHAPTER IV

### WRITING ESSAYS ABOUT SHORT STORIES

The fusion of literature, grammar, and composition must begin with reading. For most students this is a delight. It opens the door to many experiences that could never be known directly. Good literature with its timely message clothed in word pictures suggestive to the imagination urges the reader to joy, sadness, self-examination and creativity. While any genre could be the subject for an essay study, the short story because of its brevity, unity, and availability appeals to most high school students.

In a few thousand words, the reader experiences vicariously the mood, frustration, and success of the central character. The story line, however, is only the beginning. The author has a message; and he carefully uses every tool available to emphasize that theme.

Most literature books contain a wide variety of short stories. The teacher's responsibility is to select examples that clearly develop the element--plot, character, setting, theme, or style--the student is to examine in each essay.

After reading and discussing the content of the assigned short story, the student through an examination of the author's form can develop an awareness of levels of grammar, diction, and paragraph and sentence structure. At this point when the student has an opinion about his reading that he can express in the form of an essay; literature,

grammar, and composition represent the communication of ideas.

### Writing an Essay on Plot

Discussing the plot of a short story would seem to be the easiest and most familiar essay that the student is asked to write since most reading is for entertainment. The problem, though, is that the student often simply tells the story line. The most difficult step in explaining this assignment is in making the student aware that events in the story are selected for this essay only if they are important for theme development.

As with all essay projects in this study, examine the selected short story thoroughly. Read it, discuss it, and analyze it by following the suggestions in Figure 1, page 2. Next, ask the student to answer the following questions as they apply to the story assigned.

#### Plot Analysis

1. Plot:
  - a. What background details are necessary to understand the story? (places, people, events, conditions)
  - b. What are the main incidents in the story?  
(complications, crises)
  - c. What is the climax?  
(the highest point of action)
  - d. What is the purpose of the details after the climax?  
(the working out of the problem)
  - e. What is the new understanding gained by the characters?  
(a sudden realization of the truth)
2. Point of view:

- a. Who tells the story?
  - b. Could the story be told by anyone else?
3. Theme:
- a. What emotional effect does the author want to create?
  - b. What generalization about life can be made from this story?

This analysis should help the student to understand that plot is a planned series of interrelated actions progressing because of the interplay of one force upon another, through a struggle of opposing forces to a climax and a denouement, (6).

Now that the students are thinking of plot, not as the story, but as one element of the story, ask them to consider the following suggestions and write an essay illustrating how specific incidents combine to develop the theme of the assigned story.

#### Notes on Writing an Essay on Plot

1. Trace the action in the story to indicate an understanding of the reading and a grasp of essential details.
2. Decide what the author is trying to do.
3. Select the key incidents that lead to the climax.
4. Look for the relationship between the details and the main idea.
5. Do not interpret actions or symbols; simply tell the events in the story that develop the theme and show how they relate to each other.

Since this is probably the students' first exposure to writing about literature, they may still need an explanation or example. To meet that need the following essay illustrates the development of theme through plot. Whether it is used before or after the students attempt writing their essays is left to the teacher's discretion. Each class must be

treated independently.

Samuel Keay

WHEN TASTE AND TRADITION WERE IMPORTANT

Evelyn Waugh contrasted the days of splendor and luxury with the signs of technological progress in his short story "Bella Fleace Gave a Party," (7). Bella Fleace was nearly ninety and about to become a tradition. While the residents of Fleacetown did make jokes about her eccentric habits, they fondly recalled how "she used to hunt--went like smoke, too." Bella, like Fleacetown, symbolized life as it was for the aristocratic few when taste and tradition were of prime importance.

Because Bella Fleace had been very ill, she had become "increasingly occupied with the prospect of death." In fact, she had invited Archie Banks, a very distant cousin and her heir, to visit her. During his visit, Bella was aware of three particular activities. He spent his time either writing "long and very amusing letters to all his friends describing his visit," photographing the Fleacetown chimneys, or admiring "a pile of calf-bound volumes from the library." When he later wrote to thank her for his visit, he again mentioned the books which could easily be identified as valuable first editions. "Why should that young puppy go poking around the house putting a price on everything?" Bella Fleace decided that Archie Banks should not profit from her treasures.

When a Dublin bookseller offered a thousand pounds for the six first editions, Bella accepted. She would use the money to give the grandest party in the last twenty-five years. Bella liked parties; the noise, the music, the gossip, the drink and "having things brought to her by men in pink evening coats." Certainly, the party was no small undertaking. Seven new servants began dusting, cleaning, and polishing. Paperhangers, painters, and plumbers regaled the capitals of the pillars



in the hall, repaired the banisters, and shifted the stair carpet. Bella gave directions, selected silver and china from the attic, hired the caterers and the dance band; but "most important of all, . . . (she) drew up her list of guests." Many old friends were dead or bedridden and "some whom she just remembered as small children were reaching retiring age." But the most serious decisions were the deliberate omissions. Lady Gordon, the draper's daughter, and Lady Mockstock, the American, were certainly not to be included. Bella's party would include only the right people.

The evening for the ball finally arrived, and Bella dressed in a "magnificent gown of crimson satin; to this she added long white gloves and satin shoes." "The hair dresser. . . brushed and coiled her hair. . . until it became orderly and formal." She put on all her jewelry, and "standing before the cheval glass in her room, could not forbear a gasp of surprise." As she went downstairs and looked around, she realized it was after eight o'clock and no guests had arrived. Bella sat quietly and "looked steadily before her with blank, blue eyes." Finally at half-past twelve, she slowly sat down at the dining table. "Give me a stuffed quail and a glass of wine. Tell the band to start playing." Presently she rose. "I am afraid there must be some mistake. No one seems to be coming to the ball. It is disappointing after all our trouble." But someone did come. Lord and Lady Mockstock, Sir Samuel and Lady Gordon--these two--the only ones that she had not invited. "I had not expected this honor," she said. Please forgive me if I am unable to entertain you." Overcome with disappointment, stoic Bella Fleace still would not compromise.

Exhaustion forced Bella to let two hired footmen help her to a sofa. "A day later she died." Archie Banks came for the funeral and sorted out

her effects. In her desk he found "stamped, addressed, but unposted, the invitations to the ball." This significant detail spoiled the party.

Bella Fleace closely resembled Fleacetown. Both were old, not particularly well kept, but basically dependable. In contrast, Lady Gordon, Lady Mockstock and Archie Banks were offensive. Bella's rejection of social climbers as well as those who place a monetary value on everything brings nostalgic reminders of the aristocratic life of comfort.

### Writing an Essay on Character

Second only to the plot in familiarity, character development represents high interest and involvement for the students. This is only natural since most readers can vividly recall the hero or heroine of at least one series of mystery stories so popular with young teenagers. In writing an essay about character development, however, the student must concentrate not only on the story line, but also on all the other elements. In addition to the three principal questions about character--What does he do? What does he say? What does he think?--point of view, symbolism, narration, setting and dialogue spoken by other characters add depth and understanding to the interpretation of a fictional character.

After reading the assigned short story, answer the questions below.

#### Character Analysis

1. Describe the main character or characters.
2. What does the main character do and say?
3. What does he think about his own actions?
4. What does he think about the other characters and events.
5. What do the other characters say and think about him?
6. What does the author through general comment say about him?

7. Is he growing, maturing, developing in his outlook on life?
8. Is he a character type?
9. Why do you like or dislike him?
10. How does this characterization relate to the theme of the story?

Characterization is the explicit presentation by the author of the character through direct exposition, the presentation of the character in action in the expectation that the reader will be able to deduce the attributes of the actor from the action, and the representation from within a character of the impact of actions and emotions upon his inner self, (6).

Choose one of the following ideas and write an essay about the main character in the assigned short story. Remember to show how character development relates to the overall message or theme.

Notes on Writing an Essay on Character

1. Central characteristics--Choose three adjectives that judge the character; then, by quoting from the story, develop one paragraph for each evaluation.
2. Central incident--Make a judgement of the character; then, select incidents that support your judgement.
3. Development of character--Survey the various sections of the work that show the character undergoing changes and growth; then select the key incidents and relate them.

The third suggestion is used in the sample essay that follows. This essay may serve as an example for the students before or after they write their essays, or as ideas for the teacher to use. In this short story, the main character in spite of a tendency to be selfish curbs her impulse to flaunt her new status and finds her way to a new normalcy.

Sample Essay

## MOLLY FINDS HER WAY

Most people feel insecure at one time or another. Molly Maguire, the central character in Sean O'Faolain's "The Fur Coat," is certainly no exception, (7). When her husband becomes the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Roads and Railways, Molly argues with Paddy and calls him "mean" rather than admit her own selfishness in asking for a fur coat. In spite of her tendency to be rather selfish, Molly curbs her impulse to flaunt her new status and finds her way to a new normalcy.

Admittedly, the first thing Molly says to her husband when he tells her about his new job is, "Now Paddy, I must have a fur coat." This, however, is modified with, "You think I'm extravagant!" As soon as Molly voices her secret desire, she begins to realize that she is selfish in asking for the coat. This realization upsets her; and rather than admit the situation, she deliberately chooses to misinterpret Paddy's cold analysis of the situation. "The question is: shall we or shall we not purchase a fur coat?. . .It is warm. . .It will keep you from getting cold." Here Molly loses her temper and calls Paddy "mean" suggesting that he cannot afford for her to have the coat. Still, four days later when Paddy gives her the money to buy the coat, she refuses saying, "You're not mean. You never were. It's me that's mean." She does want the coat, but something will not permit her that luxury.

Molly cannot permit herself to have the new fur coat because she is ashamed of her desire to show off. "Paddy,. . .do you know what you'd pay for a mink coat?. . .a broadtail?" Since Paddy obviously does not, she adds, "One thousand guineas. . .a whole year's salary." I sincerely hope you don't think I'm being vulgar?" Molly does not need a response from Paddy for she has answered her own question. Like many who quickly

become rich, she recognizes her desire for grandeur.

In contrast to her dream, Molly thinks of herself as a "busy housewife." After putting the children to bed, she "begins to patch one of the boy's pajamas." "I suppose when I'm dead and gone they'll invent plastic pajamas that you can wash with a dish cloth and mend with a lump of glue." The practical homemaker's mind begins to wander--"a dozen pajamas. . .underwear for the whole house. . ." Her good sense is the reason that she cannot buy the coat.

Clearly, Molly's first impulse is selfish in wishing for the expensive coat for herself, but her strength of character is evident as she works her way to a new normalcy. The really hard times are over, and she is facing new social demands; nevertheless, she will be able to cope with her desire to be competitive socially.

#### Writing an Essay on Setting

Few students have ever given much thought to the setting of a fictional creation much less realized that it too is a conscious contrivance used by the author to develop his central idea. This assignment, therefore, can be one of the most imaginative in the study. Significance drawn from such minute details as furnishings in a single room or from sweeping periods in history enlivens the written page by giving the reader as many experiences as he is able to perceive.

After reading and discussing the assigned short story, answer the questions below.

#### Setting Analysis

1. Where does the story take place?

2. Was the setting realistic?
3. Could the story take place in any other place?
4. Does the setting change?
5. What elements of nature are described?
6. Does the setting symbolize the characters?
7. How does the setting reflect the tone?
8. How does the setting relate to the theme?

Setting is the physical, and sometimes spiritual, background against which the action of a narrative takes place. It may include any or all of the following: geographical location, occupations and daily manner of living, the time or period in history, and the general religious, mental, moral, social and emotional conditions, (6).

Select ideas from the following and discuss how setting is used to advance the theme of the story.

Notes on Writing an Essay on Setting

1. The author's use of weather.
2. The influence of the social environment.
3. Characterizations through interior settings.
4. Conflicts mirrored by physical nature.
5. Symbolic use of details.

The above ideas are incorporated into the sample essay that follows.

Sample Essay

ESCAPE BY CHANCE

The belief that Fate rather than God or Nature rules man's life accounts for Thomas Hardy's pessimistic view of life. This view finds expression in his short story "The Three Strangers," (7). It is chance

that brings the honest, hard-working farmers together with the three travelers. Their meeting in an isolated location, in a heavy rain storm, and on the occasion of a christening celebration is surely co-incidental.

Higher Crowstairs is certainly a solitary cottage. In the southwestern part of England "the high, grassy and firzy downs, combs" change very slowly. It is not that the inhabitants are such a great distance from a town, but rather that the terrain is exceedingly irregular. In addition to distance, clumps of trees and hedges are so rare that the shepherds "take advantage of (them) in the erection of. . .forlorn dwelling(s)." The location of this solitary cottage can be explained only by its nearness to "the crossing of two footpaths at right angles hard by, which may have crossed there and thus for a good five hundred years."

At this crossing, sleet, snows, rains, and mists add to the isolation. On the occasion, "the level rainstorm smote walls, slopes, and hedges." As the first stranger approaches the cottage, the rain becomes exceedingly violent. In his moment of escape the elements of nature present another struggle that he must endure until shepherd Fennel invites him to enter his cottage where friends have gathered to celebrate the christening of the youngest Fennel child.

Fortunate indeed is the stranger, for few homes so isolated would readily admit an unknown man. But this is an occasion when "the shepherd himself was in the mood to exhibit the most reckless phases of hospitality." He gladly invites the stranger, an escaped prisoner, to come in and enjoy his mead and tobacco. The second stranger, who arrives shortly, does not suspect that the man he is to hang is a member of the happy crowd. Confusion caused by the stilted actions of a third stranger permits the convict to escape. On such an inclement evening

and in so isolated a spot, the first stranger is lucky to arrive at so opportune a time.

The co-incident escape from jail and the christening of the Fennel child enable the convict to find the shelter he needs from the hangman and the drenching rain. Chance or Fate gives this man the opportunity to return to his family.

#### Writing an Essay on Theme

If theme meant "the moral", the literature teacher would have fewer problems. The tendency to generalize dominates this assignment. Patriotism, courage, devotion to duty are worthy descriptions but inadequate for a statement of theme. The challenge is to make the students aware of the theme as an abstract statement: How one patriot served his country. How one man can be courageous in the face of danger. How one person's life exemplifies devotion to duty. When the student can see one individual doing something worthwhile with his life, then it is relatively easy for that student to select story incidents that develop that theme.

First the student must read and discuss the assigned short story; then, he is to answer the following questions as they apply to his reading in the hope that they will direct his attention to the way plot, character, setting and style develop the theme.

#### Theme Analysis

1. What is the significance of the title?
2. Does the title anticipate the theme?
3. Is the theme easily understood or is it hidden?
4. How do each of the following express the theme: plot, setting, character, style, point of view, and tone.



5. Does the theme achieve universal appeal?

Theme is the central or dominant idea in a literary work. It is an abstract statement summing up the story's dominant idea or moral lesson or its interpretation and criticism of events and experiences. Look for one or more of the following in identifying theme: motif or recurring idea, growth to maturity, or basic thought or idea in a literary work that the reader can grasp, (6).

Remember, in the best literature, theme is never stated, but must be gained by inference. It is the result of everything in the story.

By selecting from the following ideas, show how the theme is developed.

Notes on Writing an Essay on Theme

1. Theme is an outgrowth of plot, character, setting, and style.
2. Look for a statement by a mouthpiece character speaking for the author giving his philosophy.
3. Show how the author uses the elements of the short story to express theme: conflict and character, tone and symbolism.

The above ideas are incorporated into the sample essay that follows.

Sample Essay

A MAN'S DREAM

Within the young Malay a dream burns. While he has known strength, courage, and honor, love demands that he sacrifice everything to be alone with Diamelen. Joseph Conrad's usual theme about the way a man's dream about himself works either to join him with, or cut him off from his fellows controls the action in "The Lagoon," (7). The setting, plot and character development carefully unite to indicate Arsat's utter isolation.

Arsat and Diamelen are utterly deserted by the outside world. To reach their lagoon, the white man follows "the narrow creek. . . tortuous, fabulously deep; filled with gloom." Even the birds cry in a voice that is "discordant and feeble." On the banks the forest throws "slender and distorted shadows" on the water while "immense trees" soar up, "invisible behind the festooned draperies of creepers." In addition, their hut stands alone against the forest just as Arsat and Diamelen stand alone from society.

When Arsat tells his brother about his love for Diamelen, his brother understands and is willing to help him escape with the girl from the ruler's household. Their opportunity comes soon when "the Ruler and all the great people. . . (go) to the mouth of the river to fish by torchlight." With Diamelen in the middle of the canoe, the brothers paddle with all their strength to the land of Arsat's dream; "to the country where death. . . (is) unknown." Unfortunately when they stop to rest, their pursuers reach them. Willingly, Arsat's brother faces the enemy alone to gain enough time for Arsat and Diamelen to reach the canoe. Once they are in the canoe, Arsat pushes it into deep water and turns not to answer his brother's calls for help. At last, far away from trouble, Arsat and Diamelen build a home on the lagoon.

Arsat now separated from his duty, his village, and his family faces Diamelen's illness without comfort. When the white man arrives, he asks for medicine, but Tuan has none. During the long night of waiting, Arsat tells his story. "You, Tuan, know what war is, and you have seen me in time of danger seek death as other men seek life." And after relating the events of their escape from the village, he adds, "Tuan, I loved my brother." Although Arsat has gained his dream, he is not at peace. "She . . . (has) died. . . I am going back now. I left him in the midst of

enemies." To gain his dream, Arsat deserted a comrade in battle, and in payment he must sacrifice his life to regain his honor. The lonely lagoon inhabited by two refugees from society depicts the utter isolation Arsat feels from the moment he rashly deserts his brother to gain his dream. Although he gains the love of Diamelen, he cannot forget the man he was when he knew strength, courage, and honor.

### Writing an Essay on Style

This assignment is by far the most difficult. Although book report questions always include "Describe the author's style," it would be difficult for a student to say anything that was not pertinent in some respect. Style is as simple as the words an author chooses, and it is as complex as the man himself. To narrow such a broad field to the writing abilities of the high school senior demands a clearly stated purpose. With this purpose in mind, the student can select details for examination. To continue the emphasis that this writing project has placed on the central idea or theme of a literary work, the thesis statement might well judge the author's ability to make grammar, rhythm and sound of sentences, and diction contribute to the development of that theme.

After reading and discussing the assigned short story, answer the questions below:

#### Style Analysis

1. What is the author's temperament at the time he wrote the story?
2. What message did the author want to express?
3. What kind of characters did he choose?
4. Why does he or does he not use dialogue?
5. What is his vocabulary like?

6. Describe his sentences?
7. Describe his paragraphs?
8. Are his words, sentences, and paragraphs appropriate for his characters and for his message?
9. How effective is the author's use of repetition?
10. How well does his style advance the theme?

Style is a combination of two elements: the idea to be expressed and the individuality of the author, (6).

Select a passage that represents the short story. Copy the passage and number it page one in the essay. Number each sentence in the passage. This number will enable the writer to discuss the sentence in the paper without quoting it. Remember to look for the effect of all the following ideas.

#### Notes on Writing an Essay on Style

1. Describe the passage, its purpose, and its degree of success.
2. Evaluate the passage in relation to the work as a whole.
3. Support the evaluation with examples from
  - a. Grammar:
    - What kind of sentences? simple, compound, complex?
    - How are paragraphs developed? illustration, example, cause-effect?
    - How long are the sentences and the paragraphs?
    - What kind of sentences constructions are used? NVO, inverted.
  - b. Rhythm and sound:
    - How well did the author capture the rhythm of speech?
    - Is sentence length varied?

## c. Diction:

Are any important words repeated?

Are any unusual words used?

Are most of the words A-S? French? Latin?

Are the adjectives before or after the nouns?

Are the words general or specific? concrete or abstract?

What words does the author choose? action, monosyllabic, or polysyllabic?

Does the author use dialect?

Beginning with the paragraph selected for analysis, the following sample essay illustrates the preceding suggestions.

Sample Essay

(1) "I feel like some dowdy, decrepit, horribly dingy old fly," she said, making Robert Haydon stop just to hear her say that, just to reassure herself by furbishing up a poor weak-kneed phrase and so showing how detached she was, how witty, that she did not feel in the least out of anything. (2) And, of course, Robert Haydon answered something quite polite, quite insincere, which she saw through instantly, and said to herself, directly he went (again from some book), "Lies, lies, lies." (3) For a party makes things either much more real, or much less real, she thought; she saw in a flash to the bottom of Robert Haydon's heart; she saw through everything. (4) She saw the truth. (5) This was true, this drawing room, this self, and the other false. (6) Miss Milan's little work-room was really terribly hot, stuffy, sordid. (7) It smelled of clothes and cabbage cooking; and yet, when Miss Milan put the glass in her hand, and she looked at herself with the dress on, finished, an extraordinary bliss shot through her heart. (8) Suffused with light, she sprang into existence. (9) Rid of cares and wrinkles, what she had dreamed of herself was there--a beautiful woman. (10) Just for a second (she had not dared to look longer, Miss Milan wanted to know about the length of the skirt), there looked at her, framed in the scrolloping mahogany, a gray-white, mysteriously smiling charming girl, the core of herself; the soul of herself; and it was not vanity only, not only self-love that made her think it good, tender and true. (11) Miss Milan said that the skirt could not well be longer; if anything the skirt, said Miss Milan, puckering her forehead, considering with all her wits about her, must be shorter; she felt, suddenly, honestly, full of love for Miss Milan, much, much fonder of Miss Milan than of anyone in the whole world, and could have cried for pity that she should be

crawling on the floor with her mouth full of pins, and her face red and her eyes bulging--that one human being should be doing this for another, and she saw them all as human beings merely, and herself going off to her party, and Miss Milan pulling the cover over the canary's cage, or letting him pick a hempseed from between her lips, and the thought of it, of this side of human nature and its patience and its endurance and its being content with such miserable, scanty, sordid little pleasures filled her eyes with tears.

#### SIMPLE YET COMPLICATED

Mabel Waring is an oversensitive, middle-aged housewife who is unable to forget herself and her inadequacies even in the midst of a party. The paragraph for analysis in this paper begins with Mabel's anticipation of rejection because she fears the thought that her dress is inappropriate. After a brief flashback of her delight when she saw the new dress, the selection ends with her acceptance of life and its "scanty, sordid little pleasures." For the stream-of-consciousness technique in "The New Dress," Virginia Woolf presents a simple plot with no external action in a complicated sentence structure, (7). The choice is appropriate for this story because Mabel Waring presents only her subjective view of herself and her acquaintances.

The grammatical constructions carefully suggest Mabel's mental state. Most of the sentences are compound-complex with one example of inversion in sentence 9 and a parenthetical expression in sentence 10. Adjectives abound especially in sentence 1 where the fly is "dowdy, decrepit, horribly dingy (and) old." In sentence 6 the linking verb is followed by three predicate adjectives. In addition, most sentences have two or more parallel constructions presenting almost more images than the reader can comprehend. Nevertheless, this is Mabel's mental state. She is frantically searching for evidence to prove her fear is real and that people are making fun of her dress.

Not only has the author's use of grammar skillfully suggested the context, but she has successfully captured the sound and rhythm of speech also by varying sentence lengths, using both periodic and strung-along sentences, and expanding the sentences to include graphic details. Sentence 4 contains only four words in contrast to the one-hundred-fifty-three words in sentence 11. The short sentences are carefully developed in the middle of the paragraph which begins and ends with two long sentences. The effect is that of completeness. Furthermore, many examples of graphic details are present, especially in sentence 1 where the girl is described as "a gray-white, mysteriously smiling, charming girl, the core of herself, the soul of herself." Because of the author's skill in developing the sound and rhythm of speech, the reader can experience Mabel's confusion.

Clearly, the sentence structure is successful as is the rich symbolism. The metaphor in sentence 1 occurs many times in the story and begins to apply to all mankind. Mabel, however, still believes that she alone is trapped. In sentence 7, Mabel mentions a mirror, the only way that she is able to view herself. It is little wonder then that many of her ideas appear distorted and inaccurate.

For Mabel Waring's view of her own life, Virginia Woolf's style with its complicated sentences rich in imagery is most appropriate. People and things are not concise and clear cut; for Mabel is a woman whose mind jumps from subject to subject without organization or logic.

## CHAPTER V

### INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

"Writing Essays About Short Stories" was presented to ninety high school seniors under the following conditions:

1. The senior high school had a total enrollment of 1200 students with 363 graduating seniors in the twelfth grade.
2. Because of ability grouping, no accelerated or remedial classes were involved.
3. Since complete scheduling by ability is impossible, within the group of ninety students, ability and interest varied greatly.

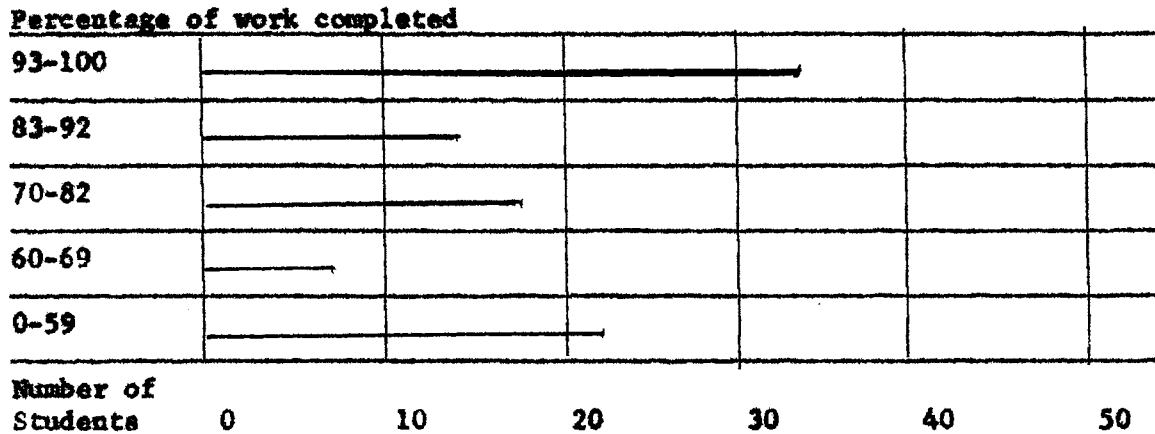
#### Participation

As explained in the Teacher's Lesson Plan, this project was to be completed in a notebook and evaluated on the amount of work completed and presented orally to the class for discussion. As is shown in Table I, the results were as follows:

1. Approximately three-fourths of the students completed the entire project with average or better participation.
2. More than one-third of the students completed 93% to 100% of the project requirements.
3. Approximately one-fourth of the students did not complete at least 60% of the assignments.



TABLE I  
OVERALL PARTICIPATION



Approximately three-fourths of the students completed the project with average or better participation.

#### Ability

Not only good students, but also the average and slow students were successful. When this unit of study was presented to three senior classes of average ability, twenty-four students completed every exercise. An examination of the information contained in Table II clearly shows that interest was not limited to only the better students.

1. Eight boys and sixteen girls completed the project with 100% participation.
2. Only six boys and nine girls ranked in the upper third of the 1970 class of 363 graduating seniors.
3. One boy and four girls ranked in the middle third.
4. One boy and three girls ranked in the lower third.

As illustrated by 100% participation in the study, students of all abilities could succeed.

TABLE II

## ABILITY OF STUDENTS WITH 100% PARTICIPATION

Student	Class Rank	Overall Average	ACT English	ACT Composite	
Boy	A	19	3.712	25	28
	B	43	3.459	18	20
	C	73	3.265	21	24
	D	77	3.256	24	27
	E	91	3.171	21	24
	F	92	3.156	Not Taken	
	Upper 1/3 of Class of 363				
	G	139	2.829	19	22
	Middle 1/3 of Class of 363				
	H	197	2.474	19	19
Lower 1/3 of Class of 363					
Girl	A	54	3.400	Not Taken	
	B	60	3.371	21	24
	C	66	3.333	25	24
	D	68	3.308	18	18
	E	75	3.265	26	26
	F	100	3.128	23	23
	G	105	3.083	16	18
	H	108	3.058	Not Taken	
	I	119	2.972	21	18
	Upper 1/3 of Class of 363				
	J	127	2.941	18	19
	K	137	2.850	19	22
	L	142	2.816	21	21
	M	163	2.667	Not Taken	
	Middle 1/3 of Class of 363				
	N	247	2.194	Not Taken	
O	258	2.118	Not Taken		
P	275	2.029	7	3	
Lower 1/3 of Class of 363					

## Learning

The primary objectives of this assignment were; first, to develop an awareness of the importance of plot, character, setting, theme, and style as it is expressed by the author in grammatical structures; and second, to enable the students to write essays interpreting the meaning and development of those elements. To determine the success the twenty-four students that completed the project demonstrated, eight notebooks were selected for examination. Selections represented four boys, A, E, G, and H, whose abilities as indicated by past performance and by potential performance varied greatly. Four girls, F, G, I, and K, also, represented varying abilities.

The examination analyzed three points:

1. The ability of the students to subordinate three or more ideas to a thesis statement.
2. The ability of the students to create a title that anticipated the thesis statement.
3. The ability of the students to develop a conclusion that included a restatement of the thesis.

The evidence revealed in Table III indicates that this project either teaches or reinforces the learner's understanding of plot, character, setting, theme, and style and how to write essays about each.

## Conclusions

While this project does not insure success for the participants, it does represent some degree of success for all who try. Clearly, then, when a student reads, discusses, analyzes, and writes about a literary work, the study of English becomes an effective method of communication.

TABLE III

THE ABILITY OF STUDENTS TO SUBORDINATE THREE OR MORE IDEAS, TO CREATE A TITLE, AND TO DEVELOP A CONCLUSION THAT INCLUDES A RESTATEMENT OF THE THESIS STATEMENT

	SUBORDINATION					TITLES					CONCLUSIONS				
		Essay					Essay					Essay			
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Boy A	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	o	+	o	+	+	+	+	+
Girl F	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	o	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Girl I	+	+	+	+	-	+	o	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Boy G	o	+	+	+	+	o	o	o	o	o	o	+	o	+	+
Boy H	+	+	o	o	+	+	+	o	o	+	+	+	o	o	+
Girl K	o	+	+	+	o	o	+	+	+	o	o	o	o	+	o
Girl G	-	+	+	+	+	+	+	o	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Boy E	+	o	o	-	o	+	o	o	+	o	+	o	o	+	o

+ Good thesis statement on assigned topic  
 - Good thesis statement not on assigned topic  
 o Inadequate thesis statement

+ Good Title  
 o Poor Title

+ Good Conclusion  
 o Poor Conclusion

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