**Teaching Literature through Writing:   
Weekly Homework Papers in an “Introduction to Literature” Course**

Richard Jewell, Minnesota Writing and English ([www.MnWE.org](http://www.MnWE.org))  
[www.richard.jewell.net](http://www.richard.jewell.net) *(9-17)*

This paper also is available in a slightly different form–for a specific  
class of mine–at [www.richard.jewell.net/1140/HowToDoHomework.htm](http://www.richard.jewell.net/1140/HowToDoHomework.htm).   
In addition, many of the papers are described at more length with additional   
examples in a textbook at [www.richard.jewell.net/WforC/WRITELIT/default.htm](http://www.richard.jewell.net/WforC/WRITELIT/default.htm).

Here, alphabetized, are the assigned rough-draft papers (150-900+ words each) in my sixteen-week “Introduction to Literature.” (“\*” indicates special papers; usually three of each are required.)  
  
   [**ANALYSIS—Basic**](http://www.tc.umn.edu/~jewel001/literature/1140/HowToDoHomework.htm#READING ANALYSES) (Wk. 3 et al.), p. 1

    \*[**ANALYSIS—Expanded**](http://www.tc.umn.edu/~jewel001/literature/1140/HowToDoHomework.htm#EXPANDED ANALYSIS) (Wks. 4-6), p. 3

[**COMMENTS**](http://www.tc.umn.edu/~jewel001/literature/1140/HowToDoHomework.htm#COMMENTS)**—Summary and/or Thoughtful Response** (Misc. wks.), p. 4

    \*[**CREATIVE WRITING**](http://www.tc.umn.edu/~jewel001/literature/1140/HowToDoHomework.htm#CREATIVE WRITING)**—Fiction or Nonfiction** (Wks. 13-15), p. 6

    \*[**CRITICAL ANALYSIS**](http://www.tc.umn.edu/~jewel001/literature/1140/HowToDoHomework.htm#CRITICAL ANALYSIS)**—Using Close Reading** (Wks. 16/17), p. 7

    \*[**INTERPRETIVE THESIS**](http://www.tc.umn.edu/~jewel001/literature/1140/HowToDoHomework.htm#INTERPRETIVE THESIS)**—Literary Argument** (Wks. 7-9), p. 11

**\***[**LITERARY REVIEW**](http://www.tc.umn.edu/~jewel001/literature/1140/HowToDoHomework.htm#LITERARY REVIEW)**—Description, Argument/Interpretation, & Evaluation** (Wks. 10-12), p. 15

[**PERSONAL RESPONSE**](http://www.tc.umn.edu/~jewel001/literature/1140/HowToDoHomework.htm#PERSONAL RESPONSE) (Wks. 3 & 16), p. 18

I tell students that the above are weekly assignments, one per week. I say, “Most are short and relatively easy ‘rough draft’ writings: consider them ‘lab’ papers--written in very rough-draft form--without worrying about grammatical usage, spelling, or punctuation.

“The main purpose of your writing these homework papers is for you to think about the assigned reading on paper. I require this because it makes people think more about, and better remember, the reading. Requiring you to write about the reading also enables me to see that you did the reading. Best of all, the homework papers require you to think more carefully, deeply, or critically about the reading….”

Below are specific descriptions, instructions, and examples for these papers.

**ANALYSIS—Basic**Longer Textbook Instructions: [www.richard.jewell.net/WforC/WRITELIT/LitElements/default.htm](http://www.richard.jewell.net/WforC/WRITELIT/LitElements/default.htm)   
Longer Sample Paper: [www.richard.jewell.net/WforC/WRITELIT/LitElements/Sample.htm](http://www.richard.jewell.net/WforC/WRITELIT/LitElements/Sample.htm)

***Assignment****: Make an Underlined Subtitle of the name of each reading.  Then, under each Underlined Subtitle, provide an analysis using the list below.  As you do so, repeat the CAPITALIZED SUB-SUBTITLES below, with at least 10 w. per subtitle and no more than 50 w. per subtitle.* The following is an example using Shakespeare's play*Romeo and Juliet*:

|  |
| --- |
| **EXAMPLE OF A BASIC ANALYSIS OF LITERARY ELEMENTS**       Romeo & Juliet   * **THEME/SUBJECT/ISSUE:**Young lovers meet, fall in love, die.  It's about young, tragic love. * **TONE/STYLE/POINT OF VIEW:** Typical Shakespeare dramatic flair with many interesting plays on words and poetic twists; all in the first-person voice of each speaker. * **CHARACTERS:**Romeo & Juliet.  His friends.  Her nurse.  Their families.  The priest. * **SETTING:**City of Verona, Italy, summer, late 1500s. Rich people's villas. * **PROBLEM & SOLUTION (PLOT):**Romeo & Juliet come from feuding families; they run away in order to be together (but end up dead). * **SYMBOLS:**Maybe the formal ball or party where Romeo and Juliet fall in love--symbol of the dance of life and how it is half-blind (dancers wearing masks). Maybe also the swords in the sword fight--and the dagger used at the end--which could be symbols of how painful love can be. |

Here are the elements of analysis you must use.  You may do so in sentences or by listing; however, remember to write each Name of Reading and each SUB-SUBTITLE as above in bold.  Respond to at least five of the six numbered questions below for every single reading. Be brief and quick, but respond to everything.

1. What is the main**THEME, SUBJECT, or ISSUE?**
2. What is the **TONE, STYLE,**and/or **POINT OF VIEW?** Tone is like the "music" or feel of the writing--choppy, rational, grand, simple? Style is similar, but has more to do with the flow of words; and the use of dramatic, calm, or humorous/ironic words and punctuation. Point of view means whether the story was from a third-person (he, she, it) viewpoint, a personal viewpoint (I did this, I did that), or a command viewpoint (you do this, you do that).
3. Who are/is the main**CHARACTERS?**If the reading is a poem or story, true or fictional, then who are the main one to four characters, or who is the poem talking to or about?If you have a nonfiction essay without characters, then who do you think the essay is mainly written for--who is its main**AUDIENCE**?
4. What is the **SETTING(S)**(what is the main background or backgrounds--where, when, general type of people in the background/village, city, etc.)?
5. **SYMBOL(S):**What are some physical or other symbols--things that represent or could stand for something greater or wider?
6. What is the**PLOT**(main hero/heroine, main problem, and main solution/resolution)? If you have a nonfiction essay, instead, then state the **ARGUMENT.** If you have a poem, then state the likely **FINAL POINT** or several possible final points or purposes of the poem.

Length of the BA: Keep it short--no more than one or two lines of type per element--and ESPECIALLY don't write a long summary of the plot: the "plot" section is meant to be just one or two lines of BRIEF summary, not a long repeating of everything that happens. Just do one or two lines, maximum.

HINT: To save time, you can make a list of the elements below, separated from each other by spaces. Then simply copy them as many times as you need them for the stories you are reading. Then you can write the title of the story above each set, and fill in the blank space after each one, as follows (and you may even copy and paste this):

**[Name of "Story," *Novel,* or *Play*]**

**THEME/SUBJECT/ISSUES:**

**STYLE/TONE/POINT OF VIEW:**

**CHARACTERS:**

**SETTING(S)/BACKGROUNDS:**

**SYMBOLS:**

**PLOT (Hero/ine, Problem, Solution):**

**ANALYSIS—Expanded**

Longer Textbook Instructions: [www.richard.jewell.net/WforC/WRITELIT/LitElements/default.htm](http://www.richard.jewell.net/WforC/WRITELIT/LitElements/default.htm)   
Longer Sample Paper: [www.richard.jewell.net/WforC/WRITELIT/LitElements/Sample.htm](http://www.richard.jewell.net/WforC/WRITELIT/LitElements/Sample.htm)

***Assignment:****Do the same thing as for the “Reading Analysis” above, but longer–for 300+ w. Use five or six of the categories below for 50-75 w. each.*

* **THEME/SUBJECT/ISSUES**(50 w. min. to 75 w. max.)
* **STYLE/TONE/POINT OF VIEW**(50 w. min. to 75 w. max.)
* **CHARACTERS**(50 w. min. to 75 w. max.)
* **SETTING(S)/BACKGROUNDS**(50 w. min. to 75 w. max.)
* **SYMBOLS**(50 w. min. to 75 w. max.)
* **PLOT (Hero/ine, Problem, Solution)**(50 w. min. to 75 w. max.)

However, do so by choosing just **one** reading from the week's readings. Be sure to use the subtitles above at the beginning of each section, each on a line by itself and a line space before it.

**Length**: Write *300*+ words, with 50-75 words per element (e.g., write at least 50 w. for every element; **do not write more than 75 w., especially for "plot"**).

**Audience:** Write this as if someone such as a friend or family member (not me, your teacher) is reading your Expanded Analysis with*out* having ever read the story. Will it be clear to this other person if he/she hasn't read it?

**Writing about "plot":** As you develop "plot," don't just ramble along about what happens. Instead, do remember to describe "plot's" three essential parts, maybe even making sub-subtitles out of them,

* Hero or Heroine
* Problem or Conflict
* Solution or Resolution

**Developing your explanations of the elements:** To develop your word count for your elements more, try using the 5 W's of journalism below, especially for "characters," "settings/backgrounds, "themes/subjects/issues," and even "symbol(s)":

"**Who**?" -- Who is involved in that theme, setting, audience, or symbol?  
"**What**?" -- What is is the object, event, or activity in more detail?  
"**Where**?" -- Where is he/she/it, or what is more 5-senses detail?  
"**When**?" -- What time, year, season, and/or era is it?  
"**Why/How**?" -- Why or how is it happening or true; what is the background in time or the characters' or author's purposes?

**COMMENTS—Summary and/or Thoughtful Response**

***Assignment****: Write**150+ words of comments on your reading for the week.*

**The simplest way** to write your comments is to write a brief summary of every screen/page (or every few screens/pages) of the reading.   For any given screen or two, you can summarize all the information very briefly, or you can summarize or restate an interesting or important idea.  Write the word count suggested for your particular assignment.  Be sure to spread out your comments so they summarize something from most of the pages or web screens--both to better remember what you read and to prove that you read the whole assignment.

**A second way** to write your comments is, instead of summarizing, to thoughtfully respond: describe what the contents make you think of; state what connections you can make to previous experience, reading, or classes; make connections between different parts of this and/or other chapters or readings in the course; explain why you agree or disagree with some points; further develop of explain some points; etc.  In other words, your opinions and memories can be used.  Once again, write the assigned word count, and be sure to spread out your comments so they respond to something from most of the pages or web screens--both to better remember what you read and to prove that you read the whole assignment.

**A third way** to write your comments is to use any combination you want of the first and second way. 

**First Student Example of Comments: on a Reading**

|  |
| --- |
| **From:** Blunt, Tina **Subject:** Lit 2235 Wk #6 *Hero* Comments on Campbell theories  **Chapter 2 – Initiation  Sections 1, 2, 3**  **Section 1 – The Road of Trials**  Not just anyone can be a hero and to prove their worth they must pass a series of tests or trials.  The road of trials represents the transformation from the ignorance of childhood to the self-discovery of adolescence.  These trials can be on both a physical or psychological level.  The hero will not be alone through these trials a supernatural guide or mentor support the hero’s needs with knowledge or tools.  The guide represents the inner voice within us that knows the way.  The trials are specifically designed for each hero’s needs to explore their strengths and weaknesses.  Only by unifying their physical and mental, understand their strengths and overcome their weakness can a true hero succeed at what lies ahead.  **Section 2 – The Meeting with the Goddess**  The meeting with the goddess for the hero represents a re-introduction to love beyond the physical attraction of lust.  This more closely resembles a limitless and unconditional love of a mother.  Many stories depict this emotional phase as “true love,” where the hero finds his perfect match.  The universal mother is the bringer of life, death, and all that exists.  Not all mothers embody the positive as in the case of the “bad mother.”   The “bad mother” may exist in many forms; neglect which fills the hero with resentment, the abusing that creates fear of retribution, smothering that attempts to constrain the hero to an infant state or the forbidden love of desire (Oedipus complex; 92).  These occurrences of the meeting with the goddess symbolize another test to conquer accomplishing self-unification.  The meeting with the goddess in all her forms defines the emotional unification of the hero.  Whether the hero re-discovers unconditional love or discards the false, destructive or repressive conditional love.  The emotional state of the hero reaches equilibrium and the hero has become an adult.  **Section 3- Woman as the Temptress**  The power of the temptress, not necessarily a woman, resides in the actions of illusion, distraction and deceit.  The hero will face the temptations of the seven deadly sins: greed, gluttony, pride, envy, sloth, wrath and/or lust that can distract the hero from his goal.  Overcoming these revulsions raises the hero above the petty desires of mortal man and instills the virtue of purity.  Through this discovered or re-discovered purity our hero will successfully pass beyond the realm of selfishness and embrace the righteousness of their quest. |

**Second Student Example: On a Play**

|  |
| --- |
| Attendance at the Guthrie Theater’s *The Tragedy of King Lear* by Catherine and Mary Lebrun, English 1140, Spring 2017 *(Combined from two separate papers)*  We attended the Guthrie performance of *The Tragedy of King Lear* on Friday with our family. It was our first time experiencing a professional play performance, and it was certainly a wonderful experience for us all. We did enjoy reading the play as a family; we all agreed that watching the drama unfold before our very eyes was even more spectacular.  From the opening conversation between the Earl of Kent and the Earl of Gloucester to Edgar’s closing statement, we were completely engrossed in the story as it came alive through the actors and set. We loved everything from the beautiful acting, to the splendid props, to the incredible and classic lines spoken with such true emotion. Since we had previously read the entire play out loud as a family, we were all able to understand and follow the lines, plot, and different characters surprisingly well. Experiencing the play was so much richer than just reading it. The drama and emotion came alive though the actors’ breathtaking performances. The actors’ deep understanding of the lines they were speaking and the beautiful emotion they put into those words really made the characters come to life fully.  In addition, one of the themes that was more apparent to me after watching the play was the theme of failing parents versus controlling children. While this may seem obvious, I was struck by the timeless quality of this theme when watching the play. After all, many parents and children go through the same drama today as King Lear and his daughters went through.  Stephen Yoakam played a convincing King Lear. We were so impressed by his acting skill and the fluency with which all the actors said their lines. The play felt seamless and truly life like; one could have almost believed that everything happening in the play was really occurring right before our eyes. Kate Nowlin and Sun Mee Chomet were entirely convincing as ungrateful and wicked daughters, wives, and sisters. J.C. Cutler said his lines very well and played the role of Kent strongly too. I liked that Edmund was played by Thomas Brazzle in a more comical and ironic way at times; it was different than the Edmund our family had envisioned.  It was remarkable to see the play come to life through the acting skills of the characters. In conclusion, attending *The Tragedy of King Lear* at the Guthrie Theater was an unforgettable experience. |

**CREATIVE WRITING—Fiction or Nonfiction**

Longer Textbook Instructions: [www.richard.jewell.net/WforC/WRITEWORK/DISCIPLINES/Story.htm](http://www.richard.jewell.net/WforC/WRITEWORK/DISCIPLINES/Story.htm)   
Longer Sample Papers: [www.richard.jewell.net/WforC/WRITEWORK/DISCIPLINES/StorySamples.htm](http://www.richard.jewell.net/WforC/WRITEWORK/DISCIPLINES/StorySamples.htm)

***Assignment****: Use the sub-elements and elements of literature to create a true (nonfiction) or made-up (fiction) story. It must be 600+ words in length.*

**1. Length:** It must total 600+ w. by the time you are done revising it. If you end up writing 1200+ words, you can count it as the current week's assignment and the next week's assignment (two weeks). If you end up writing 1800+ words, you can count it as the assignments for the present week and for the following two weeks, as well. However, if you do this, you must still turn in at least 600+ w. on time each week.

**2. How To Start:** Usually it's best to start by simply writing about a problem and solution in rough-draft form. Often it helps to start a story by writing, "Once upon a time, \_\_\_ had a problem with \_\_\_," and fill in the blanks.

Your story can be a true story (nonfiction), or a made-up story (fiction). For the first draft, aim for for the story  to be at least a few hundred words long. Remember: start with a significant **problem**. Then imagine some of the**obstacles**in the way of solving the problem.

Ideas for starting may include:

**Non-fiction (true story) ideas:**

* One of your worst experiences, or that of someone close to you
* A significant experience in which you learned something the hard way
* Dealing with one of your worst enemies
* A time when you crashed and burned, and had to recover

**Fiction (made-up story) ideas:**

* Start with one of your favorite characters in literature (a hero or heroine? a hobbit? a monster?) What is his/her/its big problem? What are some of the obstacles (roadblocks, mountains to climb, rivers to cross, evil characters to vanquish, etc.) he or she has to deal with in solving or resolving the problem?
* Start with a friend or family member, and make up--or partly make up--a problem that he/she has to work on solving. What are some of the obstacles he or she has to deal with in solving or resolving the problem?
* Make up an entirely new character (a person, talking/thinking animal or object, or anything else with free will). Give this character a problem to start solving, and obstacles that get in the way.

**3. Required Revision/Additions:** Build up your story so it is at least 600+ w. You must also add (or already have) the following elements and sub-elements of literature in your story:

**A. Setting**: Describe the main setting for the story in the first paragraph or two by using the "5 W's":

* Who (Who is the story about?)
* What (What happens--this is the problem and/or obstacles)
* Why or How (Why or how is the problem a problem?)
* When (Is it in modern times, ancient times, what year, etc.?)
* Where (Where does the story happen?)

**B. Dialogue**:

* Have, or add, 50 words or more of dialogue between two characters--or of one character speaking to an imaginary other character, to his/her "other self" (as in arguing with oneself), or to an inanimate object that, she imagines, answers her. In other words, there must be two "characters" of some kind talking (or imagining talking) back and forth to each other.
* Use quotation marks (" ") around what they say.
* Start each character's speaking with the name of the person who is saying it, and a word like "said": for example,   
  "John asked, "Your face looks sad. What's up?"   
  Jane replied, "It's nothing!"   
  He answered, "It doesn't sound like nothing. What's bothering you?"   
  She said, "Just mind your own business!"
* If your story is a true story and you can't remember what people said, perfectly, then do the best you can to remember the words, or even make up words for what people may have been thinking (thus partly making your story fictional or made up for the dialogue).

**C. Use of the 5 Senses**: Use--or add--at least four of these five senses somewhere once (more often is better for the story):

* Sight (How do characters' faces, clothing, and movements appear visually; how do surroundings look in the background?)
* Sound (How do people and surroundings sound, what noises are in the background, etc.?)
* Touch (How do the characters' clothes, faces, etc. feel to the touch; how do the surrounding air, surface, walls, etc. feel to the touch?)
* Smell (What smells are there? What smells come from characters? What smells come from the surroundings? What do the characters smell?)
* Taste (What things can you add for the characters to taste, eat, drink, etc.?)

**D. Use of symbols**: Add at least one clear symbol such as a physical object or a part of the surroundings: e.g., "As she began crying, she noticed the wind beginning to howl mournfully," or "When he confronted his bully, he briefly imagined that, like in the Harry Potter books, he had an invisibility cloak around him."

**CRITICAL ANALYSIS Using Close Reading**

Longer Textbook Instructions: [www.richard.jewell.net/WforC/WRITELIT/LitAnalysis/default.htm](http://www.richard.jewell.net/WforC/WRITELIT/LitAnalysis/default.htm)   
Longer Sample Papers: [www.richard.jewell.net/WforC/WRITELIT/LitAnalysis/Sample.htm](http://www.richard.jewell.net/WforC/WRITELIT/LitAnalysis/Sample.htm)

***Assignment****: Write a 900+ w. essay in semi-finished form, well organized, using the elements of literature to explain why a particular page, paragraph, or line in a work of literature represents an important turning point in that work of literature.*

The purpose of this assignment is to help you experience "close reading" of literature (or of any other texts). "Close reading" basically means reading something so carefully that you can take apart the paragraphs, sentences, and even phrases and words to show how they have meaning for an entire book, story, article, or essay.

To briefly summarize the assignment for this literature class, choose a very significant one to three pages of your reading. Examine it using the elements of literature. As you examine it, describe how the elements on these one to three pages. show an important turning point or high point in the plot, in a character, or in an ongoing event.

This assignment is similar in some ways to both an "Expanded Analysis" and an "Interpretive Thesis."  Why is this? A Critical Analysis is both objective (like an Expanded Analysis) and argumentative (like an Interpretive Thesis). You use the elements on just one to three pages to prove that some important turning point or high point in the book has been reached. You are as objective as possible in describing the elements, but you use them to show or prove that an important change/turning point has been reached.

**Instructions Step by Step**:

* Start by reading the assigned chapter on "Critical Analysis."
* Carefully find, in your book, an important turning point, high point, or change in the plot, in a character or group of characters, or in an event, ongoing event, or series of connected events: e.g., when a character leaves the group or a group breaks up, or the moment when people realize they must be completely responsible, or when the hardest difficulty in the plot begins. Choose just one or two pages--at most, three pages--where the important change/turning point happens.
* **Paragraphs**: Use 1 parag. for the intro, one for the conc., and 2+ parags. for each body section (a total of 12+ parags.). Make each parag. start with a topic sentence stating or implying what that parag. will say. A formal academic paragraph is defined as having at least two sentences.
* **Title**: Add a unique (different from what others might write) title, 1-6 or so w.
* **Introduction**: Write a brief Introduction in one paragraph explaining what this important change/turning point is and state that the elements of literature on these 1-3 pp. help explain, show, or highlight this change/turning point. Also add a good example quotation from your reading that helps introduce what/where your turning point is or means in or to the book (a quotation that helps explain, support, or exemplify what you're saying). (1 parag. only)
* **5-6 Body sections:**Write five to six body sections with five to six Underlined Subtitles that use, as the subtitle's name, each of five to six elements of literature, in turn,  for 70+ words each. Describe, in each body section, how that element shows, fits with, or demonstrates the turning point in the 1-3 pp. of text you have chosen. (2+ parags. per body sect.)
* **Quotations:** Use at least one quotation in the intro (your most interesting and applicable one from the 1-3 p. turning point), one quotation in the conclusion (your second most interesting/applicable one from the 1-3 pp.), and five to six or more quotations in the body sections--at least one per body section. The quotations should further explain, exemplify, or otherwise support what you are saying in that body section. Each quotation should have its page number after it in parentheses: e.g.,

Tolkien says, "The gargoyle suddenly came alive" (342).

* **Paraphrases**: Whenever you state something that happens in the text, but you state it in your own words, this is defined as a "paraphrase." You should add a page number at the end of each paraphrase, too:

Tolkien shows the reader the ugliness of the spider's hole (343).

* **Development of each element's body section:**How does the element foreshadow (predict) the change? How does it demonstrate or symbolize the change from the past to the future in that turning point? Why? In what way? Here are the elements to use. Please use five to six, starting with each element as a Subtitle, for at least seventy words each (70+ w.), and a supporting quotation from the text for each one (helping to support, explain, or give an example of what you are talking about):

 - **Theme/Subject Issue**  **- Tone/Style/Voice** (tone--happy, sad, rational, excited, etc.; style--smooth,   
    choppy, literary, practical, etc.; voice--first-person "I/me" or third-person "he/she/it") **- Character(s)**(who, what, why, how for at least one character/group) **- Setting**(where, what, when, how) **- Descriptions**(sights, sounds, tastes, touches, and/or smells) **- Problem & Solution (Plot)**(overall plot or important subplot)  
**- Symbol(s)**(meanings, tie-ins with other parts, effects on characters)

* **Conclusion**: Write a brief conclusion restating the important change/turning point in these 1-3 pp. and how the elements of literature in these pages contribute to showing or making happen this change/turning point. Add to this conclusion (from your reading) an exemplary quotation that helps support, explain, or exemplify your concluding thought. (1 parag. only)
* Note that you need a minimum of seven (7) or more quotations as described above: one in the introduction, one in the conclusion, and five to six in the body sections.
* Total length: 900+ w.

While this paper is counted only as a final weekly homework paper, you may not have a chance to revise it if you turn it in at the end and do it wrong. So, if you want the X's for this, take the time to do it carefully. In this sense, it is a sort of "final paper" for Finals Week, if you want to think of it that way. If you have doubts about it, send it to me early (by Thurs. midnight of Week 16) and ask me how it looks. That will give me time to let you revise it, if need be. Anything sent after the Week 16 homework deadline will be considered final, with no chance to revise.

**Student Example of a Critical Literary Analysis Using Close Reading**

|  |
| --- |
| Harry’s First Letter from Hogwarts Critical Analysis Paper by Ryan Clemens English 1140 Week 17 Final  In the novel “Harry Potter: And the Sorcerer’s Stone” by J.K. Rowling, the presence of magic in the story is brought into the spotlight when Harry receives his first letter from Hogwarts. Rowling says,  “The envelope was thick and heavy, made of yellowish parchment, and the address was written in emerald green ink. There was no stamp. Turning the envelope over, Harry saw a purple wax seal bearing a coat of arms, a lion, an eagle, a bear, and a snake, surrounding the large letter *H.*” (42)  It is this coat of arms which is later revealed to be the symbol for Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. This vital moment in the story is a turning point due to its confirmation of the magical world of Hogwarts, where the rest of the story takes place, and occurs primarily on pages 42-44. The importance of this letter to the rest of the plotline is shown through characters specific reactions, the setting of the turning point, the specific descriptions of the letter, the rushed tone, and its overall importance to the plotline before and after the turning point.  Character  Strangely enough, the importance of this turning point is not necessarily embodied by the main character, Harry Potter, but rather by his incompetent muggle ("non-magical") relative Aunt Petunia. The presence of the letter is strange enough as it is, since Harry doesn’t even get overdue notices from the library (42). But it is the dramatic reaction from Aunt Petunia that signifies the importance of this letter. Rowling says, “Aunt Petunia took it curiously and read the first line. She looked at it as though she might faint. She clutched her throat and made a choking noise ‘Vernon! Oh my goodness Vernon'“(43)! This reaction, while dramatic, shows that this letter is important to the overall plot of the story.  The reaction of Petunia is later justified as it is revealed that she knew that this letter was Harry's acceptance letter into Hogwarts, while the whole time his aunt and uncle, the Dursleys, are attempting to escape the continuous stream of letters about magic by moving to a small island shack. Aunt Petunia says, “Of course we knew [about such letters]! How could you not,...my dratted sister [Harry's mother] being what she was [a wizard]? Oh she got a letter just like that and went off to that -- that *school*“ (66). Overall, Rowling does an impeccable job of showing the importance of Harry’s reception of this letter almost solely through the reactions of Aunt Petunia in this section of the story.  Setting  The setting of this turning point in the story takes place at the Dursleys' residence, Number Four Privet Drive. This setting is ridiculed by Rowling to be the epitome of the muggle average, and that the Dursleys are very proud of it (1). The setting gives Rowling the perfect opportunity to show the contrast between the whimsical magic world of Hogwarts and the mundane muggle world of Privet Drive.  One of these odd signals that shows how this letter came from the wizarding world is in the setting of who it was mailed to: “Mr. H. Potter the Cupboard under the Stairs 4 Privet Drive” (42). The specificity of the letter stirs up much concern in the Dursleys and causes them to question the origin of this letter, shown through Aunt Petunia: “‘'Vernon,’ Aunt Petunia was saying with a quivering voice, ‘look at the address – how could they possibly know where he sleeps? You don’t think they’re watching the house'" (44)? This point certainly was made to raise the eyebrows of the reader and signify that this was no ordinary letter, and the appearance of it in the muggle setting of Privet drive must certainly mean that big things are about to happen.  Descriptions  Another thing that signified the importance of this turning point is the description of the feeling of the letter itself. Rowling says, “The envelope was thick and heavy, made of yellowish parchment, and the address was written in emerald green ink. There was no stamp” (42). This quotation, previously mentioned, does an amazing job at underlining the importance of this letter. Saying that the letter was thick and heavy makes it stand out as no ordinary letter.  The letter's importance to the plotline is further exemplified by the use of the words, "emerald green ink." While Rowling could have simply used the word green to describe the writing, the words "emerald green ink" give the reader a clear visual image of the letter, giving them an idea of how regal this letter looks. This serves to underline, once again, the importance of the letter to the plot.  Rowling also uses imagery to help visualize the importance of the turning point by describing the changing colors of Uncle Vernon’s face. “His face went from red to green faster than a set of traffic lights. And it didn’t stop there. In seconds, it was the grayish white of old porridge…” (43). This reaction clearly communicates that the contents of the letter are shocking to Uncle Vernon, showing once again that this is an important turning point.  Tone  The tone of this turning point is very urgent. This sense of urgency catches the reader’s attention. The chapter starts out with a somewhat normal description of Harry’s life in the Dursleys' house, with Aunt Petunia showing Harry his horrid hand-me-down school uniform (40).  But once the letter is thrown into play, a scramble is made by Vernon and the Dursleys, and the use of loud descriptions and all capital letters for dialogue show that yelling is occurring. Rowling says, “Harry didn’t move. ‘I WANT MY LETTER!’ he shouted. ‘Let *me*see it’ demanded Dudley [the Dursley's natural son]. ‘OUT!” roared Uncle Vernon” (44). The use of all capital letters and rapid dialogue gives the passage a tone of urgency, and highlights the possible importance of the letter to the plot. The urgent tone well shows to the reader that Harry’s life could be changed by this letter.  Plot  The event of Harry receiving the letter could be argued to be one of the first turning points in the book that happens specifically to Harry. What makes it so important to the plot is not only that it serves as a confirmation to the reader that Hogwarts exists, but that Harry is a wizard. These hints of Harry being a wizard are mentioned earlier in the novel when Harry’s hair grows back the day after it is sheared off by Aunt Petunia, and when a sweater progressively shrinks when Aunt Petunia attempts to fit it over Harry’s head (30). These events are undeniably magical and could be seen as foreshadowing the strange appearance of the magical letter itself to Harry. Harry is, in fact, later revealed as a wizard by Hagrid, the Hogwarts groundskeeper, who says to him, “Harry – yer a wizard” (63).  The event of Harry receiving the letter and, specifically, the retention of the letter by the Dursleys serves a key plot point later in the book, when Harry is first visited by Hagrid, who has come to rescue Harry from the persecution of the Dursleys, and introduce him to his new life as a wizard. Hagrid says, “I knew yeh weren’t getting your letters, but I never thought you wouldn’t even know about Hogwarts for cryin out loud” (61)! It can be argued that the appearance of Hagrid was first caused by this retention of letters from Harry. Showing the cause-and-effect relationship between these two events further suggests that the initial appearance of the letter was a vital turning point in the overall plot.  Conclusion  The receiving of Harry’s first letter from Hogwarts serves as a vital turning point for the plotline of *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*” Rowling says, “Harry picked it up and stared at it, his heart twanging like an elastic band. No one, ever, in his whole life had written to him. Who would” (41)? It is the answer to that question, posed in this turning point, that would change Harry’s life -- and all of those in the novel -- forever. This would spring him into the magical world of Hogwarts, where the amazing, fantastical story of Harry and his friends would unfold. |

**INTERPRETIVE LITERARY THESIS—Literary Argument from Theory**

Longer Textbook Instructions: [www.richard.jewell.net/WforC/WRITELIT/LitThesis/default.htm](http://www.richard.jewell.net/WforC/WRITELIT/LitThesis/default.htm)   
Longer Sample Papers: [www.richard.jewell.net/WforC/WRITELIT/LitThesis/Sample.htm](http://www.richard.jewell.net/WforC/WRITELIT/LitThesis/Sample.htm)

See also these other, related resources:

Online Student Discussion on Writing Literary Thesis Papers:  
[www.richard.jewell.net/1140/HowToDoInterp.Thesis--A%20Discussion.htm](http://www.richard.jewell.net/1140/HowToDoInterp.Thesis--A%20Discussion.htm)

[Thesis Worksheet for Starting a Thesis Paper](http://www.tc.umn.edu/~jewel001/CollegeWriting/ARGUE/StartThesis.htm):  
[www.richard.jewell.net/WforC/ARGUE/StartThesis.htm](http://www.richard.jewell.net/WforC/ARGUE/StartThesis.htm)

Possible Theories to Use for Interpreting Your Literature:  
[www.richard.jewell.net/1140/Books&Webs.htm#THEORIES](http://www.richard.jewell.net/1140/Books&Webs.htm#THEORIES)

Some students find the "interpretive thesis" to be the most difficult literary writing of the semester. For this reason, you should read these instructions very carefully and also look carefully at the sample interpretive theses by other students that are in the "Ch. 47: Literary Thesis" chapter of *WritingforCollege.org*.

Please do not try to write this type of paper without first reading the required "Ch. 47: Literary Thesis" assignment, and also reading the instructions below.

***Assignment****: Name a theory about which you know something. Then write 300+ w. showing how this theory applies to a literary work.*

**First**, please note thateach time you write the interpretive thesis, you MUST have a specific theory or idea developed by a specific author. You MUST avoid using a theme in the work--a general idea that, most people would agree, is in the work. And you MUST argue why the theory (or some part of it) applies to your reading (or some part of it).

You must also have a thesis sentence and three "reasons why" at the beginning of your interpretive thesis. They should be structured something like this:

\_\_\_\_ theory says, "\_\_\_\_\_\_."  Three ways in which (or places where) this applies to \_\_\_\_ reading are: First, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_. Second, \_\_\_\_\_\_. Third, \_\_\_\_\_\_.

**Second**, each interpretive thesis must be 300+ w. and be about interpreting your reading for that week--not about any other readings.  
  
**Third**, here are some very thorough instructions for writing the interpretive thesis. Please read them carefully.

(a) The interpretive thesis should have an introductory paragraph starting with an interpretive theory and three reasons why--or ways or places in which--it is true in your reading.  The paragraph should simply state your reading, its author, the basic theory (interpretation), and your three reasons how/why it applies to your reading.

(b) Next, there should be three separate body sections.

Each body section should have (i) an underlined Subtitle (name all three subtitles what you want or just call them Reason 1, 2, & 3), (ii) a topic sentence that states the section's new "reason why" your the theory you are using is true, and then (iii) some discussion of that reason for at least 100 words--quotations are allowed but not required.  Write on a new subject (a new reading) each week.  So, total length for this paper must be 300+ words, but you must have at least 100+ w. in each of the three body sections.

(c) Write some kind of brief conclusion of your choice in one brief paragraph.

**Fourth**, please do NOT write about a theme/subject/issue from the literary work.  A theme (or subject/issue) is just a general idea that, most people would agree, is something the work of literature is about, or that it contains within it.

Also, don't try to invent your own thesis sentence idea--that usually ends up just being an analysis of a theme, too. Instead, state a theory developed by a specific person (or a specific school of thought): your argument IS your theory--which you can apply to your reading. For example, if my theory were "Freudian psychology," then my argument would be "Freudian psychology can be applied to this reading in three ways: \_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_."

Again, DON'T pick a theme/subject/issue. A theme (or subject or issue) in the work of literature is just a type of general idea--one that most readers would agree is present in the work. For example, DON'T try to argue that *Romeo and Juliet*is about love. That's way too obvious, it's something everyone would agree with in part, and "love" is not a specific academic or professional theory.  Similarly, don't try to argue about any work of literature that there is "a lot of psychology" in it, or it expresses political or feminist ideas.

Instead, you can choose a specific theory of psychology/politics/feminism that was developed/invented by a specific man, woman, or school of thought--but you must be able to state the very specific theory by the very specific person.

Alternatively, you can take an idea by another author (for example, the Adam and Eve story by the author who wrote it in the Bible) and argue that you can interpret your work of literature using that story. Or you can even argue that a specific object in your work of literature is an unusual or unexpected symbol. For example, you could argue that "flowers in Romeo and Juliet always symbolize caution," or "each sword in Hamlet symbolizes a danger about to happen." However, don't argue that Romeo or Juliet is a symbol of love, or that a sword is a symbol of hate; rather, use an OBJECT (not a person) and argue it is something unexpected, not something everyone would agree it symbolizes.

The safest choice you can make, in most cases, is to choose one of the specific theories you named and turned in for the Week 2 assignments, or another very specific theory like them by a specific author.

Our writing textbook, [www.*WritingforCollege*.org](http://www.writingforcollege.org/), defines theory vs. theme for you in "[Chapter 47: Literary Thesis](http://www.tc.umn.edu/~jewel001/CollegeWriting/WRITELIT/LitThesis/default.htm)" (required reading for your first week of trying to write an interpretive thesis).  It says that to write an interpretive thesis, you generally need to go entirely outside of the story--perhaps even entirely forgetting about the story itself--to choose some kind of entirely separate, abstract theory you know or find interesting.

You may choose any theory: for example, a type or part of a psychological theory, philosophical belief, political position, or even something a bit off the wall like an economic or physics theory.  A list of links to potential, optional theories is available in this website: go on the navigation bar to "Books & Webs" and look for "Optional Interpretive Theories."

It's okay to stretch your wings, try something unusual, explore, be creative, etc.--but find a specific outside theory from a specific academic or professional discipline. Don't just choose some theory in general such as "Freedom is good" or "Women should be equal." These are general statements and, no matter how true they may be, they are not specific theories. Find a specific theory from your other courses or in the websites listed in "Books & Webs" under "Optional Interpretive Theories."

For this homework assignment, you only need to do so for 300+ w.  If your first attempt doesn't work, you've not wasted too much time, and I'll give you extra credit for time spent attempting it. If your first attempt  does work, even if it seems silly or strange, you've stretched your mind a bit, provided something new and possibly interesting, and learned a little bit better how to apply an abstract theory or idea to a specific story.

That is literary criticism.  And that is an interpretive thesis.

Here is the organizational pattern:

|  |
| --- |
| **Organizational Pattern for an Interpretive Thesis**  Title  Introduction           (State your interpretive theory and your 3 reasons/ways/places for applying it.  You may have a very *brief* background summary here--no more than 50 w.)  Reason #1           (State the first part of your interpretation you will use, and why/how it applies to your own reading.  Then explain, with facts/examples  from your reading, why/how it is true. Conclude with a final sentence tying your facts from your reading to the part of the theory you are using.) Do NOT just simply state events/facts from your reading. Instead, talk about the part of the theory you are using--at least at the beginning and end.)  Reason #2           (See above.)  Reason #3           (See above.)  Conclusion           (Restate your interpretation, at the least, and add, if you want, some comment about what you think of this interpretation or story.) |

To see how a group of my student learned – and struggled with -- their literary theses, go to their online discussion with each other here:

[www.richard.jewell.net/1140/HowToDoInterp.Thesis--A%20Discussion.htm](http://www.richard.jewell.net/1140/HowToDoInterp.Thesis--A%20Discussion.htm).

**Student Example of an Interpretive Thesis**

|  |
| --- |
| Beowulf in Campbell's Hero Cycle by Hannah Schwietz  Introduction  *Beowulf*,a book-length poem and one of the oldest major works of literature we are able to study today, is an excellent example of a story that follows Joseph Campbell's "Hero Cycle monomyth."  The poem follows the incredible journey of the main character, Beowulf, as he proves his loyalty and strength by fighting against the evils that plague different kingdoms, including, ultimately, his own.  Call to Adventure and Crossing the Threshold  The first two parts of the Hero Cycle are the Call to Adventure and Crossing the Threshold. These are seen in the poem when Beowulf first learns that Hrothgar, a king who lives in Denmark, needs help killing Grendel the demon.  After 12 years of attempting to fight him off with little luck, Hrothgar becomes desperate.  Because his father owed a debt to Hrothgar, Beowulf gladly accepted the challenge to kill Grendel and prove his strength and loyalty to the king; this was his Call to Adventure.  Crossing the threshold is shown when Beowulf leaves his home for Denmark  Trials, Allies, and Enemies  The point of a hero story is for the main character to overcome trials, and this is shown well in the character Beowulf.  He successfully fights off Grendel, keeping his promise to kill the demon without the use of weapons, but is surprised when Grendel's mother approaches the kingdom seeking revenge.  Rather than returning home after he had officially completed his task, he willingly stays to aid Hrothgar in killing Grendel's mother. These are two examples of Beowulf's enemies, as well as the dragon in the second half of the poem, and some of his allies include Hrothgar as well as his own men, who all provide him with support.  Innermost cave, Ordeal, and The Road Back  In the hero cycle, the Innermost Cave is the place in the story where the character will face the Ordeal, or central confrontation.  In *Beowulf*, the Innermost Cave is the home of the dragon, and the Ordeal is when Beowulf fights the dragon.  Despite his best efforts, the dragon wounds him and he is unable to survive.  Therefore, the Road Back is actually Beowulf's death.  Conclusion  Despite being one of our oldest pieces of written literature, Beowulf still follows pretty closely the monomyth format that is seen and used in present day hero stories,  The plot includes details such as Call to Adventure, Crossing the Threshold, Trials, Allies and Enemies, the Innermost Cave, Ordeal, and Road back.  These are all elements that are seen in present day literature, and they make for an enjoyable, although sometimes predictable, hero story. |

If you need help or have questions about your interpretive thesis--or just want to ask me by email whether your main theory, thesis, and/or three reasons why are okay--it's fine to drop me an email!

**LITERARY REVIEW—  
with Description, Interpretations/Arguments, and Evaluations (D.I.E.)**

Longer Textbook Instructions: [www.richard.jewell.net/WforC/WRITELIT/LitReview/default.htm](http://www.richard.jewell.net/WforC/WRITELIT/LitReview/default.htm)   
Longer Sample Papers: <http://www.richard.jewell.net/WforC/WRITELIT/LitReview/Sample.htm>

***Assignment****: Write a logical, step-by-step review of a literary work for 300+ w. using three body sections: (1) summary of elements, (2) interpretations/arguments, and (3) evaluations.*  
Your review should start with a brief introduction describing your reading and your basic, overall evaluation of it.

Then there should be three separate body sections:

(a) The first body section should be **50+ w.**in length and start with the underlined subtitle Summary of Elements. It should, very logically, describe each of the literary elements in the reading in a paragraph, avoiding your own opinion as much as possible. Use most of these elements of literature: theme/subject/issue, characters, setting, problem & solution (plot), symbols, tone, viewpoint [1st-person writing, third-person limited--from one character's viewpoint--or omniscient viewpoint (from God's point of view)].

(b) The second body section should be **100+ w.**in length and start with an underlined subtitle sayingInterpretations. In this section, offer your own or possibly the public's likely interpretations of the reading. Do not compare or contrast it with other readings. What might you or the public think the reading means in its contents?

(c) The third body section should be **150+ w.** in length and start with the underlined subtitle Evaluations. It should contain your evaluations of the **quality** of the reading, of the author's work, and/or of how the elements of the reading are accomplished or not accomplished. You are the judge, above it all, judging well and wisely in this section. Here are some evaluative categories to use: what is **poorly done, missing, in need of improvement, obviously appealing to readers, dislikable to readers**; the **general or specific quality of the author's work or abilities**, **comparisons/contrasts**in the **quality or value of this work compared to one or two other such works**, and/or **how one or more of the elements of the reading are well or poorly accomplished**.  Write on a new subject (a new reading) each week.

**Total length**: 300+ words divided into segments with 50+ w. for the summary of elements, 100+ w. for interpretations, and 150+ w. for evaluations.

Here is the pattern for the literary review:

|  |
| --- |
| **Brief Summary of the Organizational Pattern for a Literary Review**  Title  Introduction           Author,*Title*, and your overall evaluation in 20-100 w.  Summary of Elements (50+ w.)           Use the elements of literature: theme/subject/issue, characters, setting, problem & solution (plot), symbols, tone, viewpoint (see immediately above for a definition of "viewpoint"). Write 50+ words. Use no opinion or evaluation of your own, just the facts using the elements.  Interpretations (100+ w.)           Write a mini-IT (interpretive thesis) using *at least three* interpretative theories and/or comparisons/contrasts to other mythic stories or books in 100+ w. Interpretations are your own best guesses.  Evaluations (150+ w.)           Offer *three or more* evaluations of the quality of the reading--see the description immediately above for the evaluative categories. Write 150+ w.  Conclusion           Author, *Title,*and a final comment on its quality |

**Important Note**: The middle section--Interpretations--is **not** supposed to be the author's arguments/interpretations. It also should **not** be themes that are in the reading.  Instead, it should be written more as several different ideas for a literary interpretive thesis paper: try to develop the middle section with readers' or your own arguments or interpretations that are **debatable**--that some people might disagree with.  For example, you could apply the Oedipus complex, Marxist theory, or laissez-faire capitalist theory to the reading or, perhaps, demonstrate how three or more theories apply--or how one of his theories applies in at least three different ways.Or you can ask yourself, "What might large segments of the reading audience theorize or think that this reading represents, and what conflicting theories or ideas might the public see in it?"

**Student Example of a Literary Review**

|  |
| --- |
| Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis*: The Story of a Childhood by Anonymous, Eng 1140 Online, Spring 2017  Introduction  Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* is a unique and powerful memoir. This graphic novel explores history in a humorous yet educational and carefully crafted way. It is an emotional rollercoaster of a single fragment of history and its deep impact on a childhood. History itself, while explained through the humorous acts of the early teenage years’ rebellion, is also seen as dark and cunning.  Background  *Persepolis*, written in the form of a graphic memoir, explores the upbringing of Satrapi, whose childhood in Iran was not easy. From the perspective of a six- to fourteen-year old, Satrapi describes her life during periods of enormous change in Iran. These sensitive changes in Iran included the overthrow of the Shah, the Islamic revolution, and the war with Iraq in the first half, and in the second half, the story explores the long-term, drastic effects that the war with Iraq had on Satrapi’s adolescent years and her family’s unexpected separation.  Summary of Elements  The story takes place in Iran during critical moments in history. The main characters of the story include Marjane, her mother, her father, and other family members as she ages. The atmosphere surrounding Marjane and her family is filled with anger, violence, and mixed feelings about the changes taking place.  Some of the main themes that this story highlights are the effects of war, religion, politics, and gender inequality.  God can be seen as a symbolic figure, associated with Marjane’s sources of reason and self-exploration. Another symbol was the so called “KEY” used to convince young boys to fight in the war. This idea of a better world within death reveals the level of intensity in which religion was grounded within this war.  The plot in the first half follows Marjane as she processes her own feelings relating to the overthrow of the Shah [political leader], the Islamic revolution, and the effects of war in her country, to her becoming an advocate for herself.   In the second part, the plot follows Marjane as she develops more concise opinions about the politics and dangers of disobedience within her country at this time.  Interpretations  *Persepolis* can be interpreted in many different ways.  One is through the political theory that “is concerned with questions about such concepts as justice, equality, and rights” (“Political Theory”). Throughout the book, the idea of a more democratic society and liberty for the people is often explored (Satrapi 44). The concept of government enforcement also is often explored through the descriptions the guardians of the revolution and provisional acts of what types of activities one could and could not be a part of (105).  Another lens in which this story can be analyzed is through feminist theory, in which gender inequality and subjects that surround women are concerned (Tonella). In the beginning of this story, one of the aspects explored is the idea of whether women should have to wear a veil (Satrapi 3).  An example of this can be found as Satrapi explains her acts of rebellion and often forms a connection between being a teenager and what life is supposed to be like.  From a religious aspect, *Persepolis* explores the idea of being religious while not being considered extremist. The novel also shows the fear of persecution by those who are religious yet aware of their fate. Both views offer a side of Iran’s cultural and religious atmosphere that many people are unable to understand, but now have the opportunity to do so while being carried into this unknown world.  Evaluations  Lara suggests that the key elements that must be included in a memoir include “the desire line, actions and obstacles, emotional beats, the initiating incident and, of course, the ending.” Satrapi does a wonderful job of summarizing key events in her childhood and raising her reader’s attention through emotional beats as a result of key events or leading to them. Emotional twists are also essential components that help to build this melodrama. Filled with action, *Persepolis* uses the equivalent of graphic motion pictures to give readers a clearer picture of the events taking place in Iran during those transitions in history.  One of the ways that *Persepolis* could be improved is to further explore key events that occurred during this early section of the book such as the Shah’s regime and the Islamic revolution. Although the style of this literature is a memoir, adding opinions from both sides of the conflict could provide readers with opportunities to create more educated opinions on these issues.  Conclusion  Marjane Satrapi’s *Persepolis* is undoubtedly a unique, wonderfully crafted, emotion-filled memoir.  Traveling through the history of Iran, *Persepolis* offers a valuable perspective of what childhood can be like in critical moments of war and structural government changes.  Works Cited  Lara, Adair. “The Key Elements of Writing a Good Memoir.” *Readers Digest*, Oct. 14, 2010.[www.writersdigest.com/writing-articles/by-writing-goal/improve-my-writing/elements-of-an](http://www.writersdigest.com/writing-articles/by-writing-goal/improve-my-writing/elements-of-an).  “Political Theory.” Wesleyan University: 2010. <http://govthesis.site.wesleyan.edu/political-theory>. |

**PERSONAL RESPONSE**

***Assignment****: Write a simple 300+ w. response to what you have read, using your own thoughts, feelings, and reactions.*

You may be asked to write this kind of paper occasionally, as a way to discuss what you read and prove that you read it.  When you write it, be sure to cover everything in the reading well enough that I, your professor, can tell that you've read the reading. Write for 300+ words. However, do NOT write a plot/storyline summary--no plot/storyline summary longer than just a couple of sentences, at most. Instead, here's what you can do:

**(1)**Use the "I" voice to say several interesting things about the reading: for example, "I think this," "I feel that," "I would guess this," "I wonder if the author was trying to do that," etc.

**(2)**What are five or ten points that you'd like to make or think were interesting? For example, "One point about the reading is that," "Another idea is," "A third idea is," etc.

**(3)**And/or as you write, you are welcome to answer one or more of these questions so that you can reach your 300 word minimum:

* What did you like the most and/or least and why?
* What characters grabbed you?
* What did one or more readings remind you of?
* What are some comparisons and contrasts between this reading and one or more others you have read in this class or another time?
* If you were writing a diary or journal describing your own feelings and thoughts about the reading(s), what would you say?
* What are some of your critical-thinking reactions, positive and negative?
* What are some of your emotional reactions to one or more parts?
* What was done well and/or poorly and why or how?

Again, be sure your 300+ words not only have some of your thoughts on the above, but also show me that you read the entire reading(s). And don't do a plot/storyline summary.

**Student Example of a Personal Response (PR)**

|  |
| --- |
| Personal Response to *Harry Potter* -- Wk. 16 by Olivia Swenson  In the first chapter of the section I read, *The Mirror of Erised*, I noticed something particularly nice about J.K. Rowling’s writing style. Throughout the entire book, she has made a point to emphasize even the smallest details in the story. In the wizarding world, there are different treats and customs, but there are also very similar customs. For example, Hogwarts still has a holiday break to celebrate Christmas. The way they celebrate is the same, but the presents are sometimes different. When Harry opens his present from Hermione, he gets chocolate frogs, and Ron receives Bertie Bott’s Every Flavor Beans. Rowling could have just said Harry and Ron got chocolates and jelly beans, but making them a part of wizard culture added another layer to the story. Overall, this attention to detail made the book feel so much more real.  There is one passage in particular that really demonstrated how this book is a story, based on the chapter about story writing that we read in class. Rowling is describing Harry walking through the flames after he has taken the potion. It says:  It was indeed as though ice was flooding his body. He put the bottle down and walked forward; he braced himself, saw the black flames licking his body, but couldn’t feel them – for a moment he could see nothing but dark fire – then he was on the other side, in the last chamber. (287)  Last week, I talked about Rowling’s impeccable usage of dialogue, but this week, I think sensory details should be addressed. In this one passage, Rowling uses two of the five senses. This may not seem like much, but this is only a two-sentence paragraph. To me, this is quite impressive, and it is a nice example of how to write using the five senses. Throughout the book she also uses the other senses, such as on page 284 when she describes the fallen troll with a lump on his head. |

---  
Note: All students above have given written permission for their papers to be shown and used in public.

All materials copyright 2017 by Richard Jewell. Permission is hereby granted to anyone to use the contents for nonprofit academic purposes. You do not need to seek permission, but please add a copyright notice and the source. The free website version at [www.richard.jewell.net/1140/index.htm](http://www.richard.jewell.net/1140/index.htm) may also be used in the same way for and with students: it is for a course at Inver Hills Community College, part of Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnState), one of the five largest higher-education systems in the U.S. The author is General Coordinator (and co-founder) of Minnesota’s annual English higher-education conference, MnWE, (Minnesota Writing and English), at [www.MnWE.org](http://www.MnWE.org). If you have questions, comments, or concerns, please email Richard at [richard@jewell.net](mailto:richard@jewell.net).