

HOW TO WRITE A LITERARY ANALYSIS ESSAY

RESOURCE GUIDE

Reading + Writing + Analysis

NO PREP

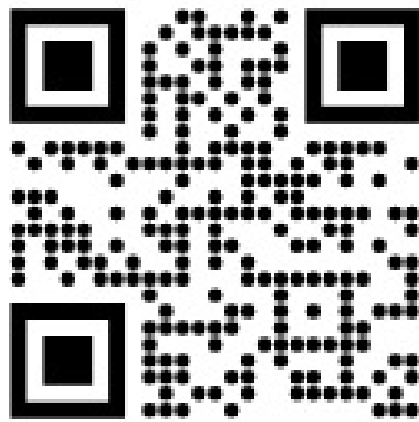
PRINT & GO

MS & HS ELA

WHAT IS A LITERARY ANALYSIS?

A literary analysis essay explains how and why a story works. Instead of just summarizing what happened, you focus on ideas like theme, character, and conflict.

In a literary analysis, you are answering a question about the text and supporting your ideas with evidence.



Scan me!

ESSAY STRUCTURE

Introduction Paragraph

- Hook
- Brief summary of the text
- Thesis statement (your main idea)

Body Paragraph (repeat as needed)

- Topic sentence
- Evidence from the text
- Explanation of how the evidence supports your idea

Conclusion Paragraph

- Restate your main idea
- Summarize your points
- Leave the reader with a final thought

The thesis needs to let the reader know **WHAT** is being written about and **HOW/WHY** it is being written about

SENTENCE STARTERS

The author shows...

This reveals...

This suggests...

One example of this is...

This is important because...

CHECKLIST

Clear thesis statement

Evidence included

Explanation connects to idea

Organized paragraphs

Complete sentences

SAMPLE OUTLINE

Text: The Lottery by Shirley Jackson

Focus: Symbolism

Introduction

1. Hook: Traditions can seem normal, even when they are harmful.
2. Brief summary: In The Lottery, a small town follows a yearly tradition that leads to a shocking outcome.
3. Thesis: Shirley Jackson uses symbols like the black box, the stones, and the lottery itself to show how dangerous blind tradition can be.

Body Paragraph 1: The Black Box

1. Topic sentence: One important symbol in the story is the black box.
2. Evidence: The box is old, worn out, and falling apart.
3. Explanation: This shows that the tradition is outdated, but the villagers still follow it without question.

Body Paragraph 2: The Stones

1. Topic sentence: Another symbol in the story is the stones.
2. Evidence: The villagers, including children, gather stones before the lottery begins.
3. Explanation: This shows how violence has become normal in the community.

Body Paragraph 3: The Lottery

1. Topic sentence: The lottery itself is also a symbol.
2. Evidence: The villagers treat it like a normal event.
3. Explanation: This shows how people can follow harmful traditions just because they have always existed.

Conclusion

1. Restate thesis: The black box, stones, and lottery all show the danger of blind tradition.
2. Final thought: The story reminds readers to question traditions instead of following them without thinking.

SAMPLE ESSAY

Traditions can seem normal, even when they are harmful. In the short story *The Lottery* by Shirley Jackson, a small town gathers for a yearly event that seems ordinary at first but turns out to be violent. Jackson uses symbolism through the black box, the stones, and the lottery itself to show how dangerous blind tradition can be.

One important symbol in the story is the black box. The narrator describes it as “shabbier each year” and “splintered badly along one side” (Jackson). Even though it is clearly falling apart, the villagers continue to use it every year. This shows that the tradition is outdated, but the people still follow it without question. The condition of the box reflects how little the villagers think about what they are doing.

Another symbol in the story is the stones. Before the lottery begins, the children gather stones, and the story says that “Bobby Martin had already stuffed his pockets full of stones” (Jackson). This shows that violence has become normal in the community. The fact that children take part suggests that the tradition is taught and accepted from a young age.

The lottery itself is also a symbol. The villagers treat it like a normal event, even though it leads to harm. At the end of the story, the crowd begins to act together, and it says they were “upon her” (Jackson). This shows how quickly people follow the group without stopping to question what is happening. The lottery represents how dangerous it can be to follow traditions without thinking.

In the end, the black box, the stones, and the lottery all work together to show the danger of blind tradition. The story reminds readers that just because something is a tradition does not mean it should continue.

GRADING RUBRIC

Category	4 – Strong	3 – Good	2 – Developing	1 – Needs Improvement
Thesis Statement	Clear, specific, and directly	Clear but somewhat	Unclear or partially answers	Missing or off-topic
Organization	Clear introduction,	Mostly organized with minor issues	Some organization but	Disorganized and hard to follow
Topic Sentences	Each paragraph begins with a	Most paragraphs have clear topic	Some topic sentences are	Topic sentences are missing or
Use of Evidence	Strong, relevant quotes are used	Evidence is used but may not	Limited or unclear evidence	Little to no evidence used
Commentary (Analysis)	Clearly explains how each piece of	Explains most evidence but may	Limited explanation of	Little to no explanation;
Ideas & Development	Ideas are fully developed and	Ideas are mostly developed but	Some ideas are unclear or	Ideas are minimal or confusing
Grammar & Mechanics	Few to no errors; writing is clear	Some minor errors that do not	Several errors that may distract	Frequent errors that make writing

MLA Reminder

- Use the author's last name in parentheses
- Place the citation after the quote
- Example: (Jackson)

MORE RESOURCES

Looking for more reading and writing support?

Explore full unit studies, writing courses, and
structured ELA resources at:
Teacher Jade's Writing Academy

www.TeacherJade.com



