Literary Criticism Overview
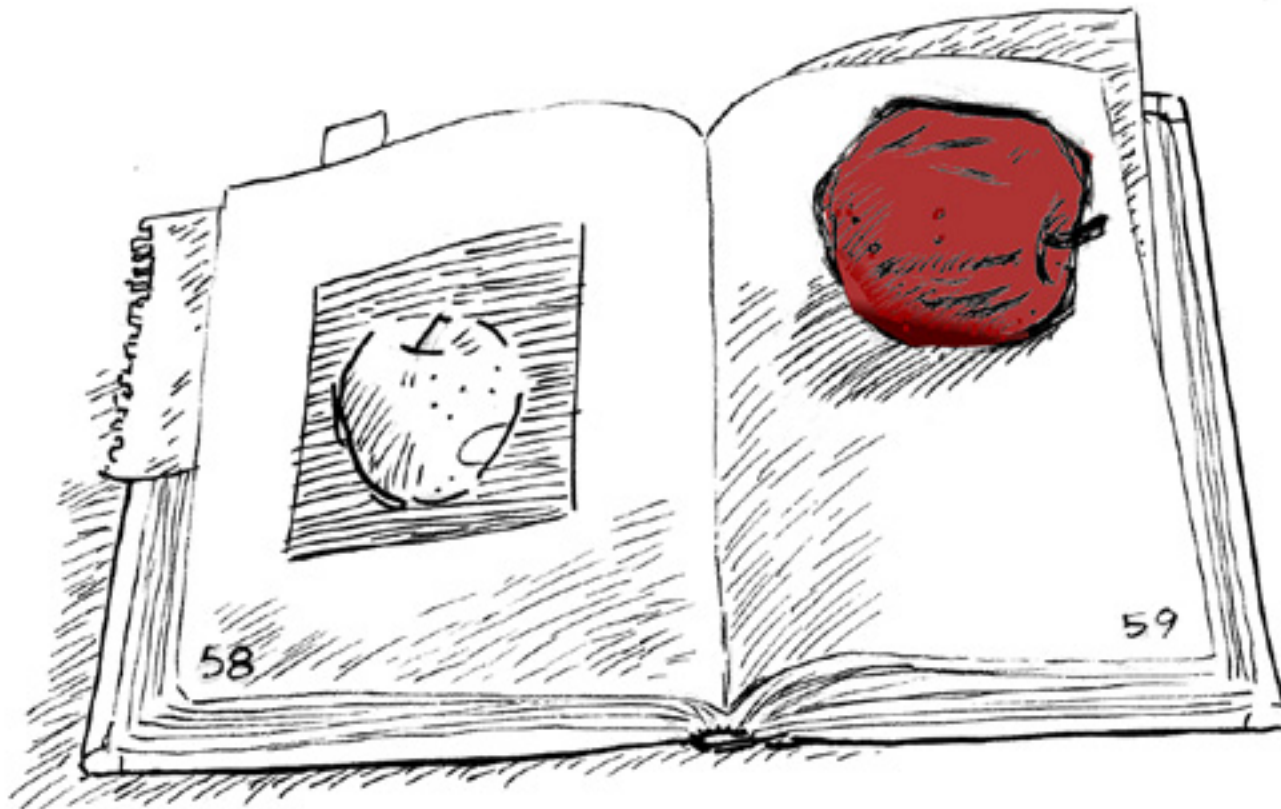
Six Types of Analysis

[See *Portable Legacies*, page 35-41 "Forms of the Essay about Literature" for more info.]

1. Response Essay—emotional reaction to work

2. Explication Essay—primarily for poetry analysis; break the poem apart line by line

3. Historical/Social/Cultural Analysis Essay—explore the background developments from a perspective of history, society, or culture of the times

4. Comparison-Contrast Essay—take two characters or two themes and compare and/or contrast them

5. Critical Analysis Essay—analyze a literary work according to a single principle or element within the story: characterization, theme, style, or technique

　• judge its effectiveness

6. Research Essay—a writing assignment which researches beyond the text itself

　• expands your understanding of the story

　• use library databases to find critics; show how their opinions fit your observations

　• paper should include elements of:

　Historical/Social/Cultural Analysis, Comparison-Contrast, and Critical Analysis

What is a Thesis?

The thesis statement is:

- is the unifying force in the paper

- it is the point you are arguing; the thesis defines your position on a subject; your paper will provide convincing evidence to support the thesis

- a declarative statement, composed of one to two sentences, answering "why" or "how."

A working example:

Both Edgar Allan Poe, in his story "The Cask of Amontillado," and as well Charlotte Perkins Gilman, in "The Yellow Wallpaper," **utilize** common Gothic elements within their stories, such as scenes of dilapidation and developing maniac characters, **in order to** successfully establish the failures of the Nineteenth Century American class system for the average citizen.

What is Evidence?

• <u>Direct quotations from the material.</u>   (35%)
  The majority of the paper is observing how a story operates
  and then defending your views with quoted examples from the story.
  Each body paragraph must show a quote or paraphrase from primary or
  secondary resources.

• <u>Other critics' opinions and theories.</u>   (35%)
  These back up your observations and opinions.

• <u>*Brief* paraphrasing of action and details in story.</u>   (15%)
  One or two sentences maximum of paraphrasing

• <u>*Brief* summary.</u>   (10%)
  Only one or two sentences are needed to summarize the full story
  ***or** to explain a critic's opinion on the story.*

• <u>Historical facts and events from the time period the piece was written.</u> (5%)
  Sometimes, short details of an author's life may provide information.
  *However, the paper revolves around the story **not** the author.*

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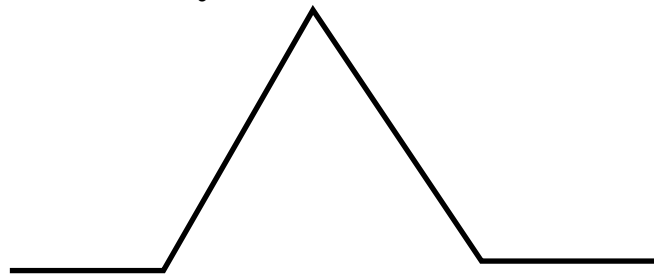**Components for Analysis**

1. Interpretation of the Story

   [see "The Critical Thinking/Critical Reading Connection" *Portable Legacies*, page 4-5]

2. Basic Elements that Develop Fiction

3. Rhetorical Elements *or* Literary Devices

   [see the Glossary of *Portable Legacies*, G-1 to G-12]

4. Structure of the Story

1. Interpretation

- **Interpretation:** determine the theme of the story

  (in other words, *not the topic* of the story).

- **Explain/show** how the plot developments contribute to the theme.

- **Identify** the literary devices at work within the story.

2. Basic Elements that Develop Fiction

- **Theme:** main idea; focus of story

- **Plot:** basic patterns of unfolding events (see structure of story-below).

- **Characters:** actors within the story-line which include the narrator of a story

- **Point of View:** Narration or Voice

- **Setting:** landscape of story

Characters

Important to determine how the characters are presented:

- Round: three-dimensional personality-well developed and fleshed out
- Flat: limited qualities-one dimensional-all bad or all good-
- Dynamic: Grows and progresses to a higher level of understanding
- Static: Remains unchanged throughout the story

Examine:

How does the author present a character to the reader?

How does the character view him/herself?

How does he/she act in the story?

How does he/she view other characters in the story?

How is he/she viewed by other characters?

How do other characters act in the story?

How does the author present other characters in the story?

Answers to these questions will show the characterizations within the story.

Setting

Determine if the following basic elements exist:

- Time period

- Geographical location

- Historical and cultural influences

- Social

- Political

- Spiritual

If any are not determinable, ask yourself why.

Make sure you are not overlooking something essential.

Essential for establishing mood

May symbolize the emotional/mental state of characters

Impacts characters' motivations and/or options

3. Rhetorical Elements

Also referred to as Literary Devices; some of these we already covered

- Every author utilizes these elements in an unique manner.

- Seeking the strategy used by an author helps develop your paper.

- Be able to identify the rhetorical elements in your reading

  to develop your paper.

3. Rhetorical Elements

- **foreshadowing:** a clue or hint which suggests a plausible ending to story. The more obvious images help build suspense and can create a sense of irony.

- **tone:** controlled by the author's words choice and phrases, the tone supplies a sense of the writer's attitude towards a given situation or person.

- **mood:** similar to tone, mood is the atmosphere the author intends the work to offer the reader.

- **symbolism:** abstract ideas. These exist in plenty throughout any story or poem. As already mentioned, if you see a symbol, defend it with correct evidence.

- **irony:** multiple forms of irony. Poe uses this as a means of creating suspense.

- **figurative language:** descriptive phrasing and literary devices which embellish a work of fiction and poetry.

4. Structure of the Story

- how the plot develops within the beginning, middle and end of story

- important that you notice how the plot develops and transforms from the stages

- watch what *changes*, and what elements remain *constant*

- notice the types of conflict which appear throughout the story

- notice how characters *transform* or remain *static*