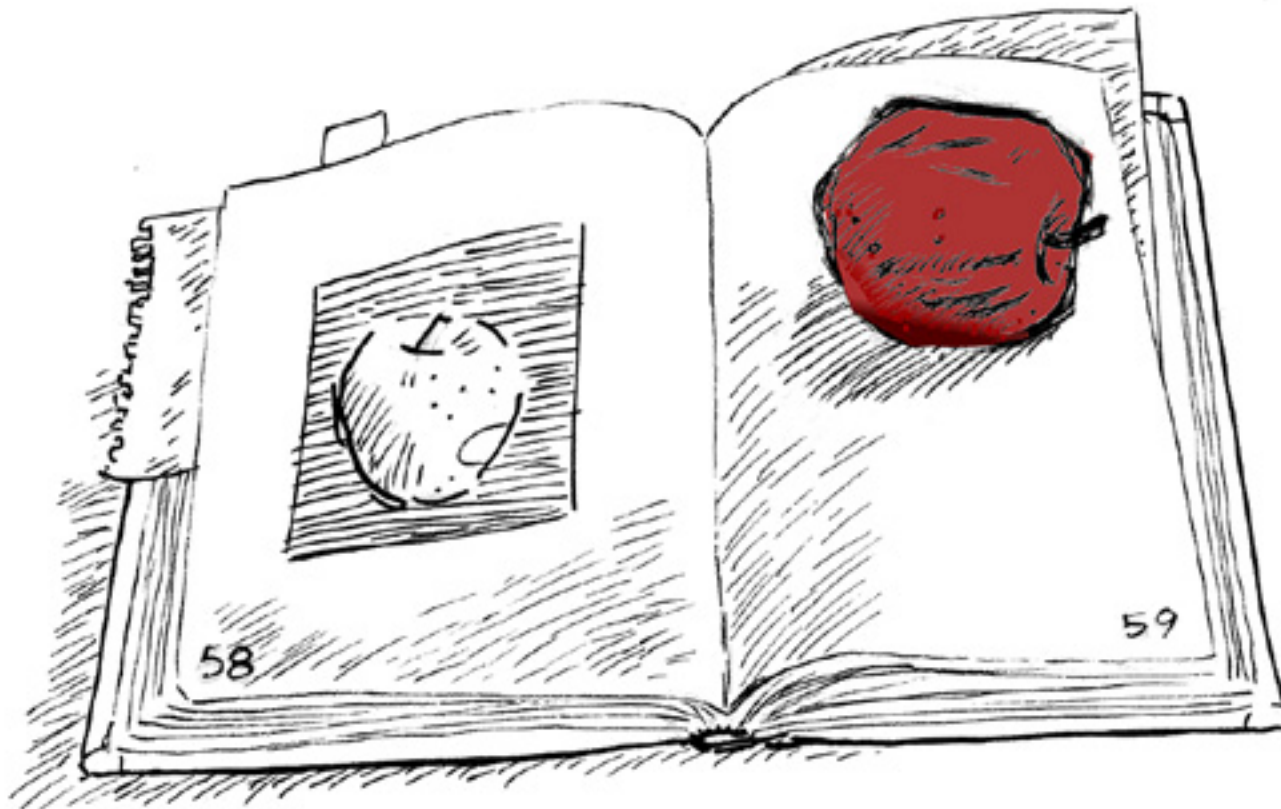# Literary Criticism Overview

Six Types of Analysis

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
See *Literature and the Writing Process*, page 32 "Interpreting and Arguing."

What is Evidence?

- **Direct quotations from the material.** (35%)

  The majority of the paper is observing how a story operates

  and then defending your views with quoted examples from the story.

- **Other critics' opinions and theories.** (35%)

  These defend your observations with theories from established authorities.

- ***Brief* paraphrasing of action and details in story.** (25%)

  One or two sentences maximum of paraphrasing are needed to explain

  your concepts. Over-use of summary does not show *your* analytical process.

  The breakdown of the *full* plot is not important to your paper.

- **Historical facts and events** from the time period. (5%)

Literary Criticism Overview

Components for Analysis

These four sections help develop your critical observations regarding a chosen

literary subject.

1. Basic Interpretation of the Story

2. Elements that Develop Fiction

3. Rhetorical Elements (also called Literary Devices)

4. Structure of the Story

1. Steps of Interpretation

- **Step One: Interpret** the theme of the story; go beyond the basic story topic.

- **Step Two: Explain** how the plot-developments contribute to the theme.

- **Step Three: Identify** the literary devices at work within the story.

    Identify how the following elements work within the story:

    - theme

    - plot

    - point of view

    - narration

    - characters

    - setting

    (*Also see supplied glossary in your daily packet.*)

2. Elements that Develop Fiction

- **Theme:** the focus of story— in the stories collected by the Grimm brothers, the primary themes display a conflict between absolute evil and absolute good. What results, their stories often reflect a theme of how absolute good receives reward; in turn, absolute evil is severely punished. (Remember their primary audience.)

- **Plot:** basic patterns of unfolding events (see Structure of Story, page 11, below).

- **Plot Device:** an element in a story which motivates the development of plot

- **Point of View:** Narration or Voice (*We will discuss this more in-depth later.*)

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

- **Setting:** landscape of story

Characters

Important to determine how the characters are presented:

(see *LWP*: p. 111)

- **Round**: three-dimensional personality-well developed and fleshed out; a believable figure in reality

- **Flat**: limited qualities; one dimensional—all bad or all good; often used for background actors within a story

- **Dynamic**: actor grows and progresses to a higher level of understanding; mainly used for protagonists to show character development and changes in attitudes/personality

- **Static**: actor remains unchanged throughout the story; for better or worse, these qualities develop the plot

To Examine Characters

Ask yourself the following questions:

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 the author present other characters in the story?

How does the protagonist view other characters in the story?

How is the protagonist viewed by other characters?

How do other characters act in the story?

What do your answers tell you about the relationships shown in 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

  (see *LWP* for more information: p. 112)

- A literary device is an element which creatively affects the meaning of a story or a poem; these are manners of expressing creative thought

- 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. Always refer to your glossary for added elements for papers.

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 (metaphors, similes, *et cetera.*).

4. Structure of the Story

No matter how experimental the form, all stories have common structures.

(see *LWP*: p. 109-110)

• examine how a plot develops within the beginning, middle, and end of story

• notice how the plot develops and transforms from the above stages

• watch what changes, and what elements remain constant

• notice the types of conflict which appear throughout the story

• notice which characters transform *or* remain static

• notice how characters transform *or* remain static