Major Works Journal

A guide for Novels and Plays

Name:

Title:

Author:

Date of Publication:

Genre:

Note: All information in this journal is expected to be the reader’s thoughts and ideas. Any information acquired from outside sources MUST be cited in MLA format.

Binaries

Look for **binary opposites**. List and state their significance. Related to this, look for **antitheses** (persons or things that are the direct opposite of someone or something else), **juxtaposition** (a literary technique in which two or more ideas, places, characters and their actions are placed side by side in a narrative or a poem for the purpose of developing comparisons and contrasts), and **paradoxes** (statements that appear to be self-contradictory or silly but may include a latent truth). Note what universal **themes** come about from these.

Tone and Shifts

Identify the **tone** (speaker’s attitude), **explain** why you believe this to be so, and explain its **significance** to the work. **Identify** places (use page numbers and specific passages for evidence) where the tone shifts. What **techniques or literary devices** were used to achieve these shifts?

Historical Significance

What is the historical significance of the **period of publication or setting** of the text? Discuss influences present. Remember to **cite** any outside sources. While researching, this might be a good time to note **professional criticisms** of the work and find information about the **author**.

Characterization

Keep a character **chart**. Note any **symbolic associations** the names might have, their roles and interactions with other characters, and a description. Note what **type** of character they are (hero, sage, lover, caregiver, magician, explorer, rebel, etc.) **Family trees** might be helpful, too.

Keep in mind the **eight ways** authors develop character. If there are **morally ambiguous** characters, explain their roles here.

Dialectical Journaling

Look for short **passages** (5-6 lines) that seem significant, thought-provoking, or puzzling. **Analyze** the passages. Note effective or creative use of stylistic or literary devices, structural shifts, examples of patterns (recurring images, ideas, colors, symbols), confusing language or vocabulary. You should have a **minimum of 10 passages with several sentences of commentary.**

First and Last Lines

Write down the first and last lines of the work. Explain how these lines connect to the larger theme—to the meaning of the work as a whole.

Imagery

As you read, note use of imagery. What is the function of the images used throughout the text? How do the images used throughout the text relate to one another? What happens to the imagery throughout the text? Does it lack imagery?

Structure

How is the text organized? Identify exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution. How does the author develop themes and ideas? Is the structure linear or fragmented? Is there a **Hero’s Journey**? If so, identify the shifts and parts (call, threshold, challenges, abyss, atonement, return).

Diction and Syntax

Notice your author’s **word choice**. Why is one word chosen over another? (*see vs. observe vs. notice vs. spot*) No two words are ever perfectly interchangeable: some are formal, some are euphemistic, some are clinical, some are vulgar, etc. Does the novel ever **shift** from formal to colloquial diction? **Note examples** of the author’s diction and **explain the significance**. Note the arrangement of the words in the sentences. Are the sentences simple or complex? Is there a rhythm? Are there interesting inversions, parallels, oppositions, repetitions, etc? Does the syntax allow for ambiguity or double meaning? **Note examples** of the author’s syntax and **explain the significance.**

Sound and Rhythm

Note examples of **alliteration, assonance, rhyme, consonance, onomatopoeia**, etc. Acquire a feel for the author’s sound, meter, and rhythm. Even punctuation can be crucial. **Explain** how these devices add to the novel and are **important to the work as a whole.**

Point of View

Narratives have to be told from some point of view. The narrator might be a central character, secondary character, omniscient, or there may be multiple perspectives. Narrators might be **reliable or unreliable**. Stay conscious of these POVs. Look for changes in POV (**shifts** in POV are worth noting). **Note** the POVs used in your work and **explain the significance.**

Themes

How are the themes developed? Are they explicitly stated or implicitly evoked? How do they contribute to the meaning of the text as a whole? (You may reference the first and last lines here). Thoroughly **explain** the themes and their meanings.

Figurative Language

Note here any and all figurative language (similes, metaphors, allusions, etc.) not already discussed. Especially note ones that recur or are developed throughout the text. How do they work with the themes or the text as a whole? What are their functions, implications, and meanings? Do they give visual insights? Are there patterns, oppositions, or overlapping meanings? **Discuss each one**.

Vocabulary

Write down words you do not know. Look up the definitions. What parts of speech are they? Will you now use this word in your speech and writing?

Symbols and Motifs

A symbol is an object, character, figure, or color that is used to represent an abstract idea or concept. It may have different meanings in different contexts. A motif is a recurring structure, contrast, or other device that develops or informs a work’s major themes. A motif may relate to concrete objects, or may be a recurrent idea, phrase, or emotion. Motifs occur throughout a work as opposed to only appearing once, and they must hold significance to the plot. **Identify** symbols and motifs and **explain** their significance.

Setting

Setting indicates the time and place, the when and where, of a literary text. It includes objective facts such as the nation or town, date and time, weather and season, in which the story occurs. **Note** the setting(s) of your work and **explain** how it relates to the meaning of the work as a whole. Concepts to help with this: the historical context, the cultural environment, and the geographical setting. What details of the setting does the author use to create atmosphere or mood? How does the setting relate to the themes?

Final Thoughts

Note here any other information not covered above. Why does the work have **literary merit**? Could you use it to answer an open question on the test? Could you write a **three-sentence thesis** for an essay from this work? Do you understand the **Meaning of the Work as a Whole**? What is it?